U.S. Department of Education - EDCAPS
G5-Technical Review Form (New)
## Technical Review Coversheet

**Applicant:** Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (U411C150082)

**Reader #1:** **********

### Questions

<table>
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<th>Selection Criteria</th>
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Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

   (1) The extent to which the proposed project involves the development or demonstration of promising new strategies that build on, or are alternatives to, existing strategies.

   (2) The national significance of the proposed project.

   (3) The potential replicability of the proposed project or strategies, including, as appropriate, the potential for implementation in a variety of settings.

   Strengths:
   N/A

   Weaknesses:
   N/A

   Reader’s Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan

1. In determining the quality of the proposed project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:

   (1) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the project are clearly specified and measurable.

   (2) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

   (3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.

   (4) The mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.

   Strengths:
   N/A

   Weaknesses:
   N/A
Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. In determining the quality of the project evaluation to be conducted, the Secretary considers the following factors:

   (1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

   (2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well-implemented, produce evidence about the project’s effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards with reservations.

   (3) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths:
The evaluation study is organized around four research questions, with one primary impact research question and three exploratory research questions (p. e37). Table 9 provides a very clear connection between the research questions and the proposed study design.

The evaluation will include up-to 120 5th and 6th grade students recruited for participation in year 1 (p. e38) and identify a matched comparison group from non-GROW STEM schools in the district using propensity score matching (p. e38). The primary impact analysis will be conducted when the students are in 8th grade to evaluate the long-term effects of the program on student performance on the Tennessee state standards test. Assuming baseline equivalence, the study could meet WWC Standards with reservations.

The external evaluation firm has the requisite experience to complete the evaluation study and has conducted evaluations for previous i3 grant projects (p. e41).

Weaknesses:
On page e37, research question 1 indicates that the primary outcome analysis will focus on 8th grade achievement to address the impact of GROW STEM after three years of implementation. However, on page e38, the evaluation plan describes recruitment of 5th and 6th grade students in year 1. Therefore, if 6th grade students will be included, their impact scores will not reflect three years of implementation. This discrepancy should be addressed.

Attrition and potential drop-outs should be addressed. Although consideration for attrition is not a requirement for the WWC Standards with reservations, the power of the study could be impacted as the power analysis is based a sample close to the recruitment sample size.

Reader’s Score: 18
### Technical Review Coversheet

**Applicant:** Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (U411C150082)

**Reader #2:** **********

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**Sub Total**

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**Total**

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Technical Review Form

Panel #5 - i3 Development Panel - 5: 84.411C

Reader #2:  **********
Applicant:  Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (U411C150082)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

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   (2) The national significance of the proposed project.

   (3) The potential replicability of the proposed project or strategies, including, as appropriate, the potential for implementation in a variety of settings.

   Strengths:
   NA

   Weaknesses:
   NA

   Reader’s Score:  0

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan

1. In determining the quality of the proposed project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:

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   (3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.

   (4) The mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.

   Strengths:
   NA

   Weaknesses:
   NA
Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

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   (2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well-implemented, produce evidence about the project’s effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards with reservations.

   (3) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths:
The tables on pp. 12-13 bring forth strong goals and objectives and measurement indicators for each with reliability and validity for the scales. The external evaluation team has strong qualifications and resources to conduct the evaluation per their resumes in the appendix and the description of their qualifications. The applicant builds in a continuous quality improvement plan to ensure movement toward achieving outcomes and management teams to support achievement. Likewise, the discussion on process evaluation using the fidelity implementation index on page 22 ensures monitoring of progress and opportunity for mid-course corrections. Including a discussion on revisiting the logic model semi-annually to reduce drift demonstrates a good understanding of theory based programming and keeping it on course. The mixed methods evaluation approach includes multiple data points and instruments to address the key evaluation questions. The applicant discusses power and effect size in determining the sample size for the project (pg. 22). The use of propensity scoring for the matching of the treatment and comparison group model will yield results that meet the WWC Evidence Standards with reservations. The amount of resources proposed for evaluation appears to be sufficient to conduct a thorough evaluation.

Weaknesses:
The evaluation budget also is the same for all 4 years of the project which seems off balance considering the scope of work appears heavier in the first and fourth years of the project. The proposal would be improved by adjusting the evaluation budget to reflect the intensity of the evaluation activities by year. Also, adding a table with each of the key questions, the anticipated outcomes, the instrumentation along with reliability and validity, type of analysis to address each of the key questions and the timeline for administration would improve the evaluation section. A discussion on retention/drop out and how to address attrition would improve the proposal.

Reader’s Score: 17

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/16/2015 08:34 AM
# Technical Review Coversheet

**Applicant:** Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (U411C150082)  
**Reader #3:** **********

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Technical Review Form

Panel #5 - i3 Development Panel - 5: 84.411C

Reader #3: **********
Applicant: Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (U411C150082)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

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   (2) The national significance of the proposed project.

   (3) The potential replicability of the proposed project or strategies, including, as appropriate, the potential for implementation in a variety of settings.

Strengths:

The application describes the Academies of Nashville in sufficient detail beginning on p.2 as a successful existing model upon which the proposed project will build. A particularly strong element of the application is that in addition to the project building on an existing strategy, it focuses on addressing the gender enrollment gap, which is of national significance, in the STEM-themed academies. The proposed project's focus a largely minority female student population in the middle grades, as described on p. 3 and p. 9, is an additional strength of the application.

Another strength of the proposed project is its potential for replicability. The program model is clearly described and sufficiently well-planned, to include strategies that are aligned to one another and that support the target population. A particular strength of the model is that it includes a thoughtfully planned professional development component to ultimately support the students’ growth in math and science and to contribute to the likelihood of the project’s success.

The application describes how the entire project model could be replicated or the specific strategies, depending on the context. With descriptions of each of the strategies on pages 3-8 (STEM extended learning, STEM professional development, STEM mentoring, and STEM awareness, recruitment and retention), the applicant succeeds in demonstrating that other sites can use one or more of the strategies to enhance programs already in place.

Weaknesses:

While the program strategies are identified and adequately described, the application would have been strengthened if the mentoring component was described in greater detail, on par with the level of detail provided for the other three strategies described on pages 3-8. With a number of letters of support in Appendix G from partners to supply a pool of mentors and/or help with recruitment, it is not clear that a mentoring recruitment, training and retention plan has been sufficiently developed. Additional details such as the anticipated time commitment of mentors, the types of activities or interactions that would be expected, how mentors would be paired with students, and how mentors would be supported would have strengthened the application. This is critical, given the importance of this component to the success of the proposed program and its potential for replicability.

Reader’s Score: 32

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan
In determining the quality of the proposed project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the project are clearly specified and measurable.

(2) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

(3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.

(4) The mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.

Strengths:

The proposed project’s goals, objectives and outcomes are all measurable and described in detail for all project years, and there is alignment between the program goals and each objective (pp. 12-13). The project staffing, presented in Table 6 beginning on page 13, identifies and describes the roles of key program staff.

The proposed project includes a plan for feedback and continuous improvement that specifies the kind of feedback and guidance the Advisory Council, i3 Management Team, School-based i3 Management Team, and Evaluation Team will provide. Another strength of this proposal is that the applicant has a clear and smart strategy to leverage the applicant’s partnership network and has identified specific and diverse strategies for dissemination that are likely to support broad outreach to a variety of relevant audiences (pp. 20-21). The proposed program website is an example of a smart strategy because it is aligned to the project’s plan to develop a comprehensive marketing and recruitment plan (p. 8).

An additional strength is that within the project timeline, each milestone identifies specific activities with corresponding target completion dates and the individual(s) responsible for each. This makes it clear and easy to understand how the project activities will be executed and by whom.

Weaknesses:

There is an inconsistency between the target number of students who will be served and the number of students able to participate in the Summer Camp. The proposed project intends to impact 210 middle school girls (30 girls from each of the seven Title I schools); however, the summer camp component described in Table 8 indicates that 45 students will be served at each of the three sites, for a total reach of 135 students. It is not explained why only 45 students can be served at each of the sites or why the proposed project does not plan to support more than 135 for the summer component (approximately 65% of the target number of students for the proposed project). This is a weakness because Objective 2 on p. 12 indicates that at least 70% of students will participate in all three extended learning components in Years 2-3 and 80% in Years 4-5, which requires that more than 45 students per site need to be able to participate in the summer camps.

Despite the strength in the number and quality of partners and the commitment for district staff involvement, one of the limitations is that it is unclear how the partnerships and the work of the teams will be aligned, work together, and be managed to ensure that the activities identified in the timeline are successfully executed. For example, it is unclear how often the school-based i3 team will meet, who is responsible for leading those meetings, and if/how the three teams will collaborate to prepare for the summer camp component.

The following bullets are opportunities for improvement with regard to the Management Plan:

• The key personnel (e.g., Project Director, STEM Coordinator, Project Specialist, and STEM Lead Teaches) required for executing the project have not yet been hired. These key staff are projected to be hired in the 1st Quarter, by 3/15/16, within the same timeframe as a number of other important activities are expected to occur. The management plan would be strengthened if key staff were anticipated to be in place before these activities. It is also unclear when the Project Director will be hired, despite the PD being responsible for hiring the SC, PS, and SLTs—this information could not be found in Table 8 on p. 17.
The narrative does not provide sufficient information to determine how the two STEM Lead Teachers, who will be “current teachers within the school and will participate in an ongoing professional development program” (p. 14) will have time and capacity to continue their teaching responsibility while also taking on the responsibility for leading the afterschool, Saturday and Summer Camp activities, serving on the school-based i3 management team, as well as one of the teachers taking on the additional responsibility of participating on the Advisory Council (p. 16).

It is unclear how the role of the STEM Coordinator and the roles of the STEM Lead Teachers will be mutually supportive. It may be prudent for some of the leadership responsibility assigned to the STEM Lead Teachers to be transferred to the Coordinator, who is 1 FTE, to achieve greater balance in the distribution of responsibilities.

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. In determining the quality of the project evaluation to be conducted, the Secretary considers the following factors:

   (1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

   (2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well-implemented, produce evidence about the project’s effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards with reservations.

   (3) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths:
N/A

Weaknesses:
N/A

Reader's Score: 34
### Technical Review Coversheet

**Applicant:** Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (U411C150082)

**Reader #4:** **********

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Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

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   (2) The national significance of the proposed project.

   (3) The potential replicability of the proposed project or strategies, including, as appropriate, the potential for implementation in a variety of settings.

Strengths:

The project addresses Absolute Priority #2 (improving STEM education) through educational activities that particularly target middle school girls. Women are substantially underrepresented in STEM career fields; research and empirical evidence suggests that the gender-specific fall-off often begins in middle school. The project takes a comprehensive approach, and would implement four core strategies, each of which is supported by research identifying gender-specific barriers. The project will involve professional development for two teachers at each school who will lead STEM activities (p. 6), a strong mentoring program (p. 7) with support from more advanced students and practicing STEM professionals, and outreach to educate families (p. 8) as a support system to the benefits of a STEM achievement. While these activities should be beneficial for all students, they are particularly designed to break down social and cultural barriers that girls face in STEM education.

Specific plans for each strategy are provided in the application, and include use of proven third-party inquiry-based curricula, deployment of a wide partner network for one-on-one mentoring, and an engaged marketing and recruiting approach to reach students’ families as a necessary support structure.

The application would support a high needs student population, as a high percentage of students in the seven district schools identified for the program are identified as low income and minority. Thirty (30) girls per school will be served, for a total of 210 students (p. 3), so the project would reach a significant number of students.

The applicant has demonstrated success in improving student achievement through academic interventions in the past, notably through the establishment of high school career academies. Career academies focused on STEM disciplines play an important role in the current project.

If successful, the comprehensive approach could lead to significant improvements in engagement and achievement among an underrepresented STEM group, which would be nationally significant. The potential for replicable results in a similar urban setting (with strong support from industrial and other community partners) is good.

Weaknesses:

Professional development opportunities for teacher responsible for leading the STEM out-of-school activities would benefit from further details about both content and process.
Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan

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   (3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.

   (4) The mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.

Strengths:
The overall goal, namely to increase student achievement in and engagement for STEM learning, and to close achievement gaps, is supported by 13 measurable objectives (Table 5). The objectives include both qualitative objectives related to progress in development of educational programs, and quantitative objectives related to student (and teacher) performance and participation. Target measures of success are provided for each objective.

The district will hire a project director, STEM coordinator, and project specialist to organize and direct activities with existing staff (lead teachers and STEM teams at the middle schools, high school academy Directors and Coaches). The management plan also involves coordination with a wide range of industry, academic, and private sector partners (the applicant presents an impressive list of partners who have committed to support this project).

Monthly meetings of the Project Director and management team, as well as frequent meetings of the school-based teams should support feedback about program development. Ongoing meetings with the external project evaluator will also be useful in dynamically improving the project (p. 19).

The timeline appears reasonable and the budget adequate to support the proposed activities.

Applicant presents a reasonable plan for wide dissemination through a website, federal clearinghouse and other educational networks, and participation in state- and nation-wide STEM conferences.

Weaknesses:
Because the key personnel to lead this project are not yet identified, it is difficult to assess their qualifications in advance. The guidelines for the positions presented on p. 14 do not require familiarity with the Nashville public school system, so there is a concern that the Project Director, STEM Coordinator, and program specialist may not be able to hit the ground running and may need time to understand a complex public school system.

The number of students expected to participate in the after-school program (7 schools with 30 students each as stated on p. 1) is much larger than the capacity for the summer camp (3 sites with 45 students each as stated on p. 5), so it is not clear that all students will be able to participate in the summer camps.

The applicant has not address major risks to the project in the management plan, so that potential mitigation strategies can be developed. For instance, there would appear to be risks concerning recruitment and retention of students, teachers, mentors, etc. over the course of the project. It would be wise to consider strategies to minimize risks such as these.
Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

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   (3) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

   Strengths:
   N/A

   Weaknesses:
   N/A

   Reader's Score: 0
### Technical Review Coversheet

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Panel #5 - i3 Development Panel - 5: 84.411C

Reader #5: **********
Applicant: Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (U411C150082)

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   (2) The national significance of the proposed project.

   (3) The potential replicability of the proposed project or strategies, including, as appropriate, the potential for implementation in a variety of settings.

Strengths:

The project has national significance given the focus on middle schools girls and STEM. Enrollment data and national statistics shared clearly indicate that girls are not enrolling in STEM or pursuing STEM careers nationally (p1-2). The project will be of interest to other school systems with high poverty and low numbers of students scoring proficient or advanced in math and reading (p1). Replicability will be facilitated by the use of free, established curricula already proven to increase STEM efficacy (e.g., Engineering is Elementary, Engineering Everywhere) and the development of a project-specific implementation and replication guide (p3-4,11). Beyond personnel costs, teacher stipends, training and transportation, implementation costs associated with actual delivery of the curriculum is relatively low (budget). Most project activities can be completed in an hour, which supports the time constraints of standard afterschool programs and may increase the likelihood of project component replicability (p3). The project includes both business and college partners and offers a focused, extended approach throughout the school year to engaging girls in STEM.

Weaknesses:

The model may not be replicable in systems at the scale noted in the narrative. For example, the proposed project requires senior capstone project class, engaged college partners and a roster of business partners willing to commit 36 hours of in-person meetings throughout the school year (p7).

Reader’s Score: 31

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan

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   (3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.
(4) The mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.

Strengths:
The applicant presents a clearly worded program goal and a structured set of project objectives. The objectives are clearly specified and measurable. For example, at least 60% of students will participate in all three extended learning program components (afterschool, Saturday, Summer) in year 1, 70% in years 2-3 and 80% in years 4-5 (p12-13). A strength of the application is that objectives are aligned with targeted instruments and reliability/validity data. The management plan is equally detailed with key personnel and time commitments, partners aligned with project commitments, and timeline with persons responsible and activity deadlines (p12-18). The approach to continuous improvement is logical and includes monthly and quarterly feedback from various project partners and staff through the planned Advisory Council and i3 Management Teams (p13-14,16,19). The plan to disseminate project results is also sound, given the intent to distribute feedback to national groups engaged in afterschool programming and the creation of a implementation guide for the entire model (p20-21). For example, results shared with the Afterschool Alliance has the potential to be viewed by schools across the country in its network (p21).

Weaknesses:
The narrative states that college partners will support the recruitment of female STEM college students to serve as mentors (p5,7,17), but does not provide evidence of this commitment from all higher education partners nor the degree to which female college mentors will be represented in the project (appendix G-p7, appendix G-19). This is a particularly critical commitment given the required 4 hours of mentoring each month for the project’s 210 students (p7). Clarity regarding the ability to provide the number of mentors needed from the list of partners in appendix J may have strengthened this section of the application (p7). Moreover, the applicant does not clearly indicate how often i3 School-based Teams will be required to meet to ensure project timely feedback is shared (p19). Also, the project indicates that students must be engaged throughout the project to have significant impact (p5), but does not indicate how they will provide student-level incentives to decrease the likelihood of student attrition (p5-6). Finally, the applicant does not clearly indicate that it intends to serve all 210 students in the project’s summer component. For example, the narrative states that the project will serve 45 students at each of the three high school Academy sites (p17), which does not clearly reflect the planned 210 students.

Reader’s Score: 40

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. In determining the quality of the project evaluation to be conducted, the Secretary considers the following factors:

   (1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

   (2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well-implemented, produce evidence about the project’s effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards with reservations.

   (3) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths:
NA
Weaknesses: NA

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
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