

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/15/2023 05:13 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (S411C230165)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	20	20
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	30	30
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Project Personnel	10	10
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	10
Sub Total	70	70
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	0
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. Workforce Diversity	2	0
Sub Total	7	0
Total	77	70

Technical Review Form

Panel #15 - EIR Early-Phase - 15: 84.411C

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (S411C230165)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. The Secretary considers the significance of the proposed project. In determining the significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factor:

Reader's Score: 20

Sub

1. (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. (20 points)

Strengths:

The proposed project is innovative in that it builds Social Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies through mindfulness. The proposed project will leverage school counselors' SEL leadership skills to integrate and coordinate multi-tiered SEL. This project builds upon several projects that address mindfulness-based relationship programming. The project also uses the Be CALM program that has been developed in rural North Carolina. That program is a mindfulness-based SEL program that has a focus on addressing students' needs that may interfere with college readiness. (Page e14 and Pages e15 - e20)

The significance of the proposed project is supported by a focus on Early College High Schools and serving up to 4,800 students in need of improving interventions to address social-emotional needs. (Page e17)

Weaknesses:

No weakness found.

Reader's Score: 20

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: 30

Sub

1. (1) The extent to which there is a conceptual framework underlying the proposed research or demonstration activities and the quality of that framework. (10 points)

Sub

Strengths:

The proposed project's framework is clearly supported by research. For example, to enable teachers to support students, professional development will be developed to use mindfulness to enhance educators' self-awareness, empathy and emotion regulation. (Carsley, et.al, 2018) (Page e23, Pages e48 - e50 and Pages e147 - 148)

The framework of the proposed project is supported by activities that work. Those activities include the interventions from the Be CALM program and mindfulness education.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 10

2. (2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable. (5 points)

Strengths:

The applicant clearly identifies goals, objectives and outcome that are measurable and specific. For example, goal two of the project is to implement the project with fidelity. One of the objectives is to build school counselor capacity to support the schoolwide program. The outcomes include that at least 80% of the schools will have one student support staff member who will obtain certification as a Be CALM coach. (Pages e30 - e31, Pages e135 - e138 and Page e87)

The applicant provides a logic model that includes clearly defined outcomes for teachers, the schools and for students. For example, student outcomes include student college readiness skills. These outcomes link clearly to the objectives of the proposed project. (Page e87)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 5

3. (3) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs. (15 points)

Strengths:

The applicant demonstrates the needs of student populations in the area of stress and mental health issues. The applicant cites several research studies that support the major issues of stress especially in accelerated academic programming. (Page e17-18)

The target population for this grant is to serve students of color and first-generation students. The applicant did assess local needs for mental health supports by speaking to principals and district and state administrators and reviewing a survey of ninth grade students. The findings indicated that there was a local need for more effective mental health supports. (Page e21)

The applicant indicates that there are gaps in current SEL interventions and practices. For example, one of the gaps is confirming the connections between SEL programming and college readiness. Another gap is the connection between SEL programming and mindfulness training. The proposed project has the capacity to fill those gaps. (Page e19)

Sub

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Personnel

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the personnel who will carry out the proposed project. In determining the quality of project personnel, the Secretary considers the following factor:**

Reader's Score: 10

Sub

- 1. (1) The extent to which the applicant encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability. In addition, the Secretary considers the qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel. (10 points)**

Strengths:

The applicant demonstrates that policies and procedures are in place to ensure that applications for employment will come from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented. These efforts will include using listservs and virtual postings that target Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the area. The applicant will also create job descriptions and interview questions that will ensure that lived experiences and diverse perspectives will be considered during employment processes. (Page e33)

There are job descriptions for key open positions such as the Be CALM Program Specialist. The applicant does state that the person will need at least 10 years of experience and a Master's Degree. That is appropriate training and experience for the scope of that position. (Page e23 and Page e32)

The applicant demonstrates clearly that the key personnel responsible for the proposed project have relevant training and experiences. For example, the project director has previous experiences in grant management and developing and implementing SEL interventions. Other key personnel include individuals with relevant backgrounds in social work and youth programs. (Page e32 and Pages e54 - e77)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the adequacy of resources and quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 10

Sub

- (1) 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.**

Strengths:

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. The applicant uses an organizational chart that clearly outlines the management of the proposed project. This team will provide adequate support for the size and scope of the proposed project. For example, the project director will serve .40 FTE during the first year of the project. (Page e34 and Page e107 and Page e127)

Several key milestones are included in the management plan and are linked effectively to specific timelines and persons responsible. For example, to provide school engagement and establish partnerships. Three key steps will be administrated by the Program Delivery Team beginning in the spring of 2024. (Page e34, Page e107 and Page e127 and Page e29)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 10

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

- 1. Competitive Preference Priority 1:**

Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities: Implementers and Partners (up to 5 points)

Under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate how the project will be implemented by or in partnership with one or more of the following entities:

- (a) Community colleges (as defined in the NIA)**
- (b) Historically Black colleges and universities (as defined in the NIA)**
- (c) Tribal Colleges and Universities (as defined in the NIA)**
- (d) Minority-serving institutions (as defined in the NIA)**

Strengths:

Did not apply.

Weaknesses:

Did not apply.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

1. Competitive Preference Priority 2:

**Supporting a Diverse Educator Workforce and Professional Growth to Strengthen Student Learning
(up to 2 points)**

Projects that are designed to increase the proportion of well-prepared, diverse, and effective educators serving students, with a focus on underserved students, through building or expanding high-poverty school districts' capacity to hire, support, and retain an effective and diverse educator workforce, through adopting or expanding comprehensive, strategic career and compensation systems that provide competitive compensation and include opportunities for educators to serve as mentors and instructional coaches, or to take on additional leadership roles and responsibilities for which educators are compensated.

Strengths:

Did not apply.

Weaknesses:

Did not apply.

Reader's Score: **0**

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/15/2023 05:13 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/15/2023 05:08 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (S411C230165)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	20	20
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	30	30
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Project Personnel	10	10
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	10
Sub Total	70	70
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	0
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. Workforce Diversity	2	0
Sub Total	7	0
Total	77	70

Technical Review Form

Panel #15 - EIR Early-Phase - 15: 84.411C

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (S411C230165)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. The Secretary considers the significance of the proposed project. In determining the significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factor:

Reader's Score: 20

Sub

1. (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. (20 points)

Strengths:

The applicant provided a comprehensive description of the proposed project, a promising new strategy to address an often overlooked outcome in the evidence based Social Emotional Learning (SEL) approach in education – college readiness for underserved students. The purpose of the project, Multi-Tiered Be CALM (Cook, Attentive, Logical, Mature – p. e104) (MTBC) is to refine, implement, and test the efficacy of a promising mindfulness-based SEL program using the integrated MTBC approach and a randomized controlled trial that meets What Works Clearinghouse criteria without reservations (p. e17). The project was developed in rural North Carolina to address the academic and developmental challenges caused by the pandemic, particularly for high needs (underrepresented) students – with a focus on addressing their social emotional needs that may potentially get in the way of college readiness.

The importance and significance of the project was summarized in the following areas: Stress and Mental Health Needs in High Schools – Students experienced high levels of stress and decrease in opportunities for social-emotional interaction during the pandemic; and Gaps in Current Practices – The need for research to clarify if and how SEL programming can promote college readiness, including results of recent research that indicated mindfulness was included in only 20% of SEL programs (pp. e17 – e19). In addition, only 1/3 of 2,000 educators reported implementation of evidence-based SEL programs primarily due to the inadequate support for teachers for stress and burnout (p. e19).

Needs were also identified for the target population. For example, most of the interested 12 Early College High Schools have an enrollment of 50%+ students of color (26% Black and 16% Hispanic). However, in North Carolina, only “15% of Black students and 18% of Hispanic students are considered college and career ready compared to 41% of White students” (p. e20). Similar facts are also evident in high school graduation rates (83% Black, 80% Hispanic, and 90% White). In addition, of particular significance are the North Carolina percentages of first generation students (40%), who are significantly less likely to obtain post-secondary degrees and certificates -- 48% vs 67% of those whose parents have a college degree (p, e21).

Based upon the successful foundation of the evidence based practices of social-emotional learning and mindfulness, the identified strategies in the promising practices of MTBC support the significance and need for the proposed project and should facilitate understanding of how mindfulness-based SEL programs may promote

Sub

college readiness in high school.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 20

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: 30

Sub

- 1. (1) The extent to which there is a conceptual framework underlying the proposed research or demonstration activities and the quality of that framework. (10 points)**

Strengths:

The applicant provided a thorough summary of the conceptual framework for the proposed project that is designed to “refine, implement, and test the efficacy of a promising mindfulness-based social-emotional learning (SEL) program” with an integrated multi-tiered approach (Multi-Tiered Be CALM) led by school counselors (p. e14, p. e17). The proposed MTBC program also extends promising practices to a critical outcome sometimes overlooked in social emotional learning programs - college readiness for underrepresented students (p. e21). A randomized controlled trial process will be implemented with fidelity to meet the “without reservations” criteria of What Works Clearinghouse (p. e14, p. e17). Over the past five years, the Be CALM program has been developing in rural North Carolina to address the social-emotional and academic challenges presented by the pandemic.

The proposed project, the MTBC program, is designed to promote student social emotional learning competencies related to academic achievement to enhance college readiness for rural high school students (p. e28). The applicant provided a detailed logic model correlated with the goals and objectives of the project (pp. e28 – e29, p. e87). Examples of this relationship included the following: Activities (Goal 1) - To build capacity for SEL capacity for teachers and counselors - Be CALM Tier 1 curriculum training and Outputs - (Goal 2) - With this increased SEC capacity, there should be evidence of increased teacher well-being and SEL competencies and strengthened relationships with students.

Strategically scheduled activities will support the three-phase framework implementation: Phase 1 - Pilot in four schools (First 18 months; six-month staggered start dates of two schools for each start date) and refinement of models, measures, and tools. Phase 2 – Recruitment of 20 rural schools (Years 2 - 4); Memorandum of Understanding completion; training and consultation with intervention schools. Phase 3 – (Last 18 months; determination of any changes; preparation for dissemination) (pp e28 – e29).

To further support project implementation, the applicant provided a Letter of Commitment from the Director of the Early College Research Center, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, who will serve as a consultant and who supported MTBC as an appropriate match for North Carolina’s Early Colleges programs (p. e79). The detailed and sound description of the conceptual framework with supporting information regarding implementation activities should facilitate implementation with fidelity of project objectives to achieve successful outcomes.

Sub

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 10

2. (2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable. (5 points)

Strengths:

The applicant provided a detailed summary and description of specific and measurable goals, objectives, and expected outcomes for the proposed project (pp. e30 - e31). Five goals were identified for the project that were supported by measurable objectives and outcomes for each phase of the proposed project as evidenced in a table that identified Goals, Activities, Objectives, and Outcomes (Sample Measures) (pp. e30 – e31). An example of the specificity of the goals and objectives is documented in the following: 1) Goal 2 – ECHS (Early College High School) staff implement the MTBC (Multi-Tiered Be CALM) program with fidelity (Phases 1 and 2); Outputs in Logic Model); Objective 2.1 – Build school counselor capacity to support schoolwide MTBC; and 3 Outcomes (Sample Measures) 80% of school counselors will provide individual or group counseling to Tier 2 students using the Be CALM materials (Counselor Log).

Each goal was also supported by relevant references in the project Logic Model (p. e87). For example, Goal 2 in the Project Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes table on p. e30 referenced Outputs in the Logic Model: Outputs (Goal 2) – Implementation Supports – Be CALM implementation rubric, roadmap, and action plans created and utilized (p. e87). The specificity of the goal, objectives and outcomes and coordination between the goals and logic model should facilitate accuracy in monitoring progress and evaluation of activities and outcomes.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 5

3. (3) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs. (15 points)

Strengths:

The applicant provided a brief but comprehensive summary of the strategies to be used to address the needs of the target population - High Needs Students (students of color, underrepresented students, students who are first generation to attend post-secondary education) who are dual-enrolled in college classes and who attend rural North Carolina Early College High Schools (p. e14). The curriculum, Be CALM, is a key strategy to support framework activities and to also address the needs of the target population.

The applicant included a specific description of the Scope and Sequence of the Be CALM Student Curriculum, which consists of four modules (p. e104). Supporting goals and objectives for each lesson are designed to promote social-emotional skills through mindfulness. The objectives for the curriculum are to learn and execute the Be CALM skills (pp. e104 – e105).

The curriculum, to be implemented in early college high schools in North Carolina, addresses the five Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills). The curriculum also includes all CASEL program components (i.e., youth voice and delivery within supportive environments) (p. e22). In particular, the Be CALM curriculum utilizes inclusive language, videos, and scenarios reflecting the diverse race/ethnicity of the target population, which also reflects the specific culture of rural communities. In addition, there are distinct versions

Sub

based upon grade levels that support continuity and a whole school approach to SEL (p. e22).

The project’s professional development activities for teachers and counselors are also designed to address the needs of the target population. The approach is culturally-responsive and trauma-informed. It is also responsive to the needs of youth who have been exposed to significant adversity as is often present with high needs underserved students. Through the professional development activities, teachers will identify cultural biases and utilize strategies that focus on student strengths. Equity is also promoted with SEL teams by providing specific guidelines for activities to build trust and partnership (p. e25 – e26).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Personnel

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the personnel who will carry out the proposed project. In determining the quality of project personnel, the Secretary considers the following factor:**

Reader's Score: 10

Sub

- 1. (1) The extent to which the applicant encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability. In addition, the Secretary considers the qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel. (10 points)**

Strengths:

The applicant provided a comprehensive description of the key project personnel who will be implementing the proposed project. The description included a concise and focused statement regarding the applicant’s priority and commitment to hire individuals from underrepresented groups. The summary confirmed that two current members of the Implementation Team have “lived experience in rural schools in the southeast” (p. e32). The applicant also included a commitment to recruit additional project staff by advertising in various postings that target underrepresented groups (i.e., Historically Black Colleges and University and the National Latina/o Psychological Association (p. e32). In addition, the applicant will develop job descriptions and interview questions to emphasize the importance of lived experiences and diverse viewpoints reflecting the representation of the target schools.

A focused identification of the key personnel was also included, supported by biographical summaries and resumes that documented their qualifications. Summaries were included for the Implementation Team Members: Project Director and Co-Director, Early College Advisor, Program Manager, and Mindfulness Advisor. Summaries were also included for Evaluation Team Members: Co-Director, Quantitative Advisor and Quantitative Analyst (p. e32). An organization chart was included that further identified the reporting structure of the project teams (p. e107).

Qualifications of the Implementation Team members, documented by resumes, included research, budget management, Social Emotional Learning intervention-development and implementation, program implementation, professional development, and development of culturally appropriate interventions for school staff working with underrepresented students (pp. e55 - e60).

Sub

The project includes a diverse multidisciplinary well-equipped and qualified key project team to lead implementation of project activities, which should facilitate successful outcomes.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the adequacy of resources and quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 10

Sub

- 1. (1) 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.**

Strengths:

The applicant provided a sound and detailed summary of the management plan to achieve expected project outcomes. The plan included an overview of the responsibilities of the Implementation Team and its schedule to facilitate and monitor progress of activities with leadership from the Project Director. For example, the responsibilities of the team will include recruitment of schools and participants and overall grant management (p. e34). The summary was supported by an organization chart that identified the reporting hierarchy and the names, roles, and responsibilities of the leadership and support team members (p. e107).

Of particular note is the defined and distinctly separate responsibilities and roles of the Evaluation Team and the Implementation Team. The Implementation Team will not participate directly in the randomization, analysis, or interpretation of evaluation activities and will not have access to impact data (p. e34, p. e107).

The summary was further supported by a chart of the project timelines, responsibilities, and milestones organized by Program Delivery Team, Evaluation Team, Grant Year, School Year, and School Semester. Each major milestone included supportive activities for each grant year (i.e., 4 and 5), school year (i.e., 2026 - 2027), and school semester (Fall '26 and Fall '27) (p. e106). The plan provided detailed guidelines to monitor project activities toward achievement of expected outcomes.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 10

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. Competitive Preference Priority 1:

**Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities: Implementers and Partners
(up to 5 points)**

Under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate how the project will be implemented by or in partnership with one or more of the following entities:

- (a) Community colleges (as defined in the NIA)
- (b) Historically Black colleges and universities (as defined in the NIA)
- (c) Tribal Colleges and Universities (as defined in the NIA)
- (d) Minority-serving institutions (as defined in the NIA)

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

1. Competitive Preference Priority 2:

**Supporting a Diverse Educator Workforce and Professional Growth to Strengthen Student Learning
(up to 2 points)**

Projects that are designed to increase the proportion of well-prepared, diverse, and effective educators serving students, with a focus on underserved students, through building or expanding high-poverty school districts' capacity to hire, support, and retain an effective and diverse educator workforce, through adopting or expanding comprehensive, strategic career and compensation systems that provide competitive compensation and include opportunities for educators to serve as mentors and instructional coaches, or to take on additional leadership roles and responsibilities for which educators are compensated.

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/15/2023 05:08 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/15/2023 05:09 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (S411C230165)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	20	20
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	30	30
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Project Personnel	10	10
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	10
Sub Total	70	70
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	0
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. Workforce Diversity	2	0
Sub Total	7	0
Total	77	70

Technical Review Form

Panel #15 - EIR Early-Phase - 15: 84.411C

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (S411C230165)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. The Secretary considers the significance of the proposed project. In determining the significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factor:

Reader's Score: 20

Sub

1. (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. (20 points)

Strengths:

The applicant has proposed a model to address stress management and social-emotional skills in Early College High Schools (ECHSs), which are schools that allow students to dual enroll in high school and post-secondary classes simultaneously. The Multi-Tiered BE CALM program is a mindfulness based SEL curriculum, and the applicant notes that Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have shown considerable feasibility and acceptability in schools and colleges in the past two decades (p. e23).

Research cited by the applicant demonstrates both the increase in stress experienced by adolescents post-pandemic, as well as stress that is exacerbated for students in accelerated academics (such as ECHSs). These schools serve historically underrepresented students in post-secondary education, for example, students of color and students who are first in their families to attend college or are low-income.

Research has shown there have been positive effects on post-secondary attainment from attendance in ECHS programs, but there remains a question of the challenges that students may face from the increased pressures of the rigor of the coursework. Furthermore, the most recent North Carolina ECHS report noted that staff described significant stressors in their students' lives that could impact their academic success, which included poverty, immigration, food insecurity and geographic isolation (p. e21).

The applicant will be utilizing school counseling staff in a leadership and coordination role, noting that "even when schools offer Tier 2 interventions, they may not be integrated and coordinated with Tier 1 strategies, reducing their effectiveness," and that leveraging the school counselors in this way will "help address this mental health gap and other issues impacting college readiness for marginalized youth" (p. e20). The applicant's proposal thoroughly identifies the extent to which the program builds upon existing strategies, most notably an overlooked outcome of SEL programming which is college readiness for underserved students (p. e21).

Sub

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 20

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: 30

Sub

- 1. (1) The extent to which there is a conceptual framework underlying the proposed research or demonstration activities and the quality of that framework. (10 points)**

Strengths:

The conceptual framework is a mindfulness-based program promoting SEL, (BE CALM), which addresses five SEL competencies identified by the Center for Academics and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL). It includes all CASEL recommended program components, such as inclusion of youth voice, practices integrated into daily activities, delivery within supportive environments, and school-family partnerships which are highly relevant to adolescents in a high-demand academic setting. These address stress management and emotion regulation, self-awareness and perspective taking, and mindful communication and conflict resolution (p. e22).

The Logic model (p. e87) demonstrates clear inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes – for both teacher and student. The MTBC Program is designed to promote both teacher and student SEL competencies that will enhance students' college readiness, defined as academic behaviors (e.g., class participation and assignment completion), self-determination, and life skills like self-advocacy (p. e28).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

- 2. (2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable. (5 points)**

Strengths:

The goals are specified and measurable. Criterion 2.2: "Build teacher capacity for mindful teaching and delivering the Tier 1 student curriculum with fidelity" has three defined outcomes, or sample measures. The outcomes are described as the following: "80% teachers delivering curricula will complete self-study mindfulness training (record review), 80% of teachers participating in Foundation Training will report .20 SD increase in their application of mindfulness (Mindfulness in Teaching), and teachers delivering curricula will provide at least 80% of core skills instruction and activities to their classes (Lesson Checklists)" (pp. e30-31).

Sub

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

- 3. (3) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs. (15 points)**

Strengths:

The applicant provides evidence that their project will address the needs of the target population, which is dual-enrolled students who are underserved, defined as students of color and first-generation students. The applicant demonstrates evidence of the mental health benefits of a mindfulness program, and more specifically of a pilot project implementing Be CALM: "Pilot work with the Be CALM program over the past 6 years demonstrates its feasibility and promise for both teachers and students. The program has been delivered by more than 30 middle and high school teachers and counselors to over 2,600 students in 6 rural NC school districts." Their small pre-post results included change in students' emotion regulation, conflict resolution, and academic efficacy, with even greater benefits experienced by students of color (p. e26).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Personnel

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the personnel who will carry out the proposed project. In determining the quality of project personnel, the Secretary considers the following factor:**

Reader's Score: 10

Sub

- 1. (1) The extent to which the applicant encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability. In addition, the Secretary considers the qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel. (10 points)**

Strengths:

The applicant provides evidence of multiple means of encouraging applications from people in traditionally underrepresented groups. "Using resources to promote diversity in alignment with HPDP and EPIC Strategic Plans, we will recruit additional project staff (including the Be CALM Program Specialist) using diversity recruitment resources, which includes paid advertising in listservs and virtual postings that target underrepresented groups such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (5 of which are within one hour of our Center), the National Latina/o Psychological Association (NLPA) and IMDiversity." Additionally, the applicant indicates that they will create job descriptions and develop interview questions that prioritize lived experience and diverse perspectives, especially

Sub

those represented in our schools (pp. e32-e33, e127).

The applicant provides extensive documentation of their highly qualified team, with representation from multiple disciplines such as education faculty, mental health clinicians, program developers and education policy. (p. e31).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the adequacy of resources and quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 10

Sub

- 1. (1) 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.**

Strengths:

The project narrative clearly defines staff roles and responsibilities, and a timeline for activities is included. The level of detail included indicates that the plan is appropriate to completing the project tasks on time and within budget. For example, (1) they will hold monthly Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) meetings to review data and initiate improvement strategies as needed, (2) they will share CQI data with schools (quarterly) and (3) they will share implementation reports and obtain feedback from interested/affected/relevant groups (annually) (pp. e31-e32, e106-e10, e127).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

- 1. Competitive Preference Priority 1:**

Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities: Implementers and Partners (up to 5 points)

Under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate how the project will be implemented by or in partnership with one or more of the following entities:

- (a) Community colleges (as defined in the NIA)
- (b) Historically Black colleges and universities (as defined in the NIA)
- (c) Tribal Colleges and Universities (as defined in the NIA)
- (d) Minority-serving institutions (as defined in the NIA)

Strengths:

CCP1 not addressed.

Weaknesses:

CCP1 not addressed.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

1. Competitive Preference Priority 2:

**Supporting a Diverse Educator Workforce and Professional Growth to Strengthen Student Learning
(up to 2 points)**

Projects that are designed to increase the proportion of well-prepared, diverse, and effective educators serving students, with a focus on underserved students, through building or expanding high-poverty school districts' capacity to hire, support, and retain an effective and diverse educator workforce, through adopting or expanding comprehensive, strategic career and compensation systems that provide competitive compensation and include opportunities for educators to serve as mentors and instructional coaches, or to take on additional leadership roles and responsibilities for which educators are compensated.

Strengths:

CCP2 not addressed.

Weaknesses:

CCP2 not addressed.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/15/2023 05:09 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 10/06/2023 07:38 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (S411C230165)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	20
Sub Total	30	20
Total	30	20

Technical Review Form

Panel #5 - Early-phase Tier II Panel - 5: 84.411C

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (S411C230165)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

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

Reader's Score: 20

Sub

1. (1) 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 standards with or without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in this notice). (20 points)

Strengths:

Although not a requirement for RCTs to meet WWC standards without reservation, the applicant's plan to match the treatment and control schools prior to the intervention will increase the power of the design (page e38).

Consistent with best practices for RCTs meeting WWC standards without reservation, the applicant described the handling of missing data and provided a justification for expecting low attrition (page e40). The plan also clearly states why joiners will not be an issue in the evaluation. (page e40).

Although not a requirement for RCTs, the applicant plans to examine baseline equivalency of the treatment and control conditions prior to treatment, a sensible precautionary approach given that some differences may remain even after randomization (page e40).

The data analysis plan accounts for the nested nature of the data including accounting for the possibility that some teachers will teach multiple classes of participating students (page e41). This is accounted for in the 3-level HLM model that includes the clustering of students (level 1), teachers (level 2), and schools (level 3). The use of baseline scores as covariates is appropriate and consistent with best practices.

The plan to use structural equation modeling to test for potential mediators/moderators is a strength (page e41). Another strength is the plan to analyze subgroups of students by variables with well-documented influence on the outcome measures (page e41).

Weaknesses:

A stronger proposal would provide evidence of the established reliability and validity of the various evaluation metrics so that psychometric soundness can be independently judged.

The most significant area of concern about the proposed project is the lack of explanation around the use of waitlist controls. The use of waitlist controls is mentioned in the project abstract (page e14) and implementation plan (page e21), but it is not elaborated in the most relevant section, that is, the evaluation plan. Table J2 (page 106) provides

Sub

the most detailed information about their use but it is not explained in the evaluation plan itself. Moreover, even the treatment of the waitlist controls in Table J2 is not clear. One possibility it raises is the waitlist control data will be collected the year after the treatment group. It is unclear how the two cohorts of waitlist schools would be handled in 2026-27 (cohort 1) and 2027-28 (cohort 2) academic years.

Some of the measurable student outcomes linked to the logical model are not feasible given the timeline for the project. For instance, it is unclear how “better academic functioning in high school and college courses” would ever be established during the proposed evaluation (page e87).

Reader's Score: 15

2. (2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes. (5 points)

Strengths:

The FOI measures are generally appropriate given the goals of the evaluation. The emphasis on FOI measures for participating teachers and counselors is a strength. Use of an established schoolwide SEL metric (SchoolWide SEL Implementation Tool) is another strength (page e37).

Weaknesses:

The idea of a composite implementation index measure (page e43) is sensible, but it needs to be better described in the evaluation plan.

While the inclusion of a schoolwide SEL metric is laudable, it is unclear how the SchoolWide SEL metric will be used to define the business-as-usual control group (page e37). A stronger application would clearly explain how the business-as-usual control group would be defined by the SchoolWide SEL metric.

Reader's Score: 3

3. (3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation. (5 points)

Strengths:

A strength of the application is the clear delineation between implementation and impact evaluations. The independence between the evaluations would mitigate some common threats to internal validity that can arise when they are commingled.

Weaknesses:

The evaluation plan does not clearly articulate the key project components, mediators, and outcomes. It also does not describe measurable thresholds for acceptable implementation. A stronger proposal would include a table that clearly describes the key components with their associated outcome measures. It would also state measurable threshold for acceptable implementation on these measures. A stronger proposal would also provide concrete examples of “implementation and contextual factors” (Table 4, page e37) potentially associated with the outcome variables.

Reader's Score: 2

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 10/06/2023 07:38 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 10/09/2023 09:07 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (S411C230165)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	20
Sub Total	30	20
Total	30	20

Technical Review Form

Panel #5 - Early-phase Tier II Panel - 5: 84.411C

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (S411C230165)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

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

Reader's Score: 20

Sub

1. (1) 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 standards with or without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in this notice). (20 points)

Strengths:

The applicant is proposing a two-phase study. First, a pilot program with 4 schools to develop components, and assess implementation. A mixed-method approach will be used to evaluate program implementation (e14).

The subsequent cluster randomized controlled trial will include 200 teachers, from 20 randomized schools, 10 of which will serve as waitlist controls. Students will be eligible to participate if their schools choose the program. The sample size is large enough for meaningful findings.

There will be a multi-level analysis for both teacher and student outcomes, consistent with WWC standards. Teacher outcomes will be analyzed in a two-level hierarchical linear model (HLM) with the levels being teachers nested within RCT schools. Student outcome analysis will be a three-level HLM; students, students clustered within teachers, and within schools. If variation is low across classes, researchers will evaluate student outcomes with a two-level HLM (student and school) (e41).

Because all students are enrolled in an Early College High School, school type would not be a confounding factor. Furthermore, the study is projected to have a low attrition rate, based on the low dropout rate in the early college high schools. Assuming the schools are randomly selected, the low attrition rate would meet the WWC without reservation standard.

Consistent data will be collected from student surveys at specified times, before and after the program, consistent with WWC requirements (e9). The use of administrative records (e.g. grades, attendance) is valid, reliable, and consistently collected measures, per WWC standards.

After transcripts have been coded using a qualitative coding program, two evaluators will independently code 20% of the transcripts to measure inter rater reliability (e38).

The external evaluator, EPIC, has substantial experience with state data, and maintains datasets with variables on every student, school and district in the state (e33). The evaluator also has expertise in mixed methods studies (e32).

Weaknesses:

The proposal's impact questions will be evaluated using a cluster RCT, but it is unclear how assignments will be random across the Early College High Schools, a requirement of WWC (e35). Applicant states they will recruit 20 schools, and has identified 12 interested schools already (e29). No information is provided about how the schools will be randomly selected, or what criteria are required to be in the selection pool. There's no evidence the school units are assigned by chance, per the WWC requirements for a cluster RCT.

Baseline equivalence will be measured on demographics and pre-tests, but the proposal does not detail the pre-tests they intend to use (e40).

The proposal includes outcomes for both teachers and students. While bibliography references are provided, no evidence is included that the proposed measures for teacher well-being, and SEL competencies are reliable and valid (e31)

Likewise, students in the RCT will complete surveys two times on mindfulness, SEL skills, school connectedness, stress, resilience, behavior, and college readiness. However no evidence is provided regarding the validity and reliability of student well-being and SEL competency measures (e31). Because SEL and college readiness measures are not defined, the corresponding composite variables are also not defined (e40, e110).

Reader's Score: 15

2. (2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes. (5 points)

Strengths:

Feedback data will be collected at least 4 times a year from diverse stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, parents and students (e136), providing consistent input and varied points of view.

The monthly planning meetings will have a structured agenda, using CASEL's SEL Planning Guide, including an Implementation Rubric, Road Map, and Action Plan that will be adapted for MTBC (e25).

Weaknesses:

Actionable implementation data will be shared with school SEL teams annually (e136), but no detail is provided and who will determine what is actionable and how that determination is made.

Reader's Score: 3

3. (3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation. (5 points)

Strengths:

The evaluation plan clearly articulates what will be measured in both the implementation evaluation and outcome evaluation.

Teacher and counselor fidelity implementation (Goal 2) will be measured using multiple sources, including verifiable coaching logs, lesson checklists, and training completion (e37). Target thresholds are clearly defined (e30).

Sub

Threshold targets for teacher and student SEL outcomes are defined (e31).

There is no impact of bias by joining students, due to Early College High Schools only admitting at the start of the school year (e40).

Weaknesses:

A key outcome of college readiness will be measured by high school teachers and college instructors (e39). This seems very subjective, and difficult to manage when students transition to higher education. A more objective measure like Freshman Year College GPA, or remedial coursework might be more appropriate and manageable.

The long-term outcome is vague by not specifying what "better academic functioning" means (e.g. grades, attendance, homework completion) (e87).

Reader's Score: 2

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 10/09/2023 09:07 PM