



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0026GA-1 for Fulton County Board of Education

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	7

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The Fulton County proposal begins immediately with a reform vision that postulates a personalized educational experience for on-level, underachieving middle school students in which both pupils and teachers use technology to access standards-based curriculum to prepare students to be college- and career-ready. The district's proposal is for participating middle school students to accelerate their education by taking high school level courses while still in grades 6 – 8, supported by college and career readiness counseling services and virtual tutoring. Economically-disadvantaged, limited English-speaking students, and students with disabilities are said to be particularly targeted in the LEA's proposal so that opportunities for accelerated learning and more rigorous course enrollment are available to presently under-represented students. The design offers a credible approach to having participating students meet the goal of having students meet the standards of the Georgia College and Career Readiness Index (CCRPI).

The district is implementing the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards and has created aligned formative assessments. It is unclear whether the instruments measure growth and success since no sample was included. The district is in the process of selecting a Data Learning Platform that will be used to facilitate its proposed personalized learning environment, thus this critical element of FultonAchieve was not in place at the time of this application and may not be in place by the start of the grant period. RTTD monies will be used to purchase the Platform that is finally selected.

Two educator evaluation tools, Teacher Keys and Leader Keys, are also not presently operational but the LEA plans to use these measures in conjunction with the state's still evolving student growth measures to determine teacher and principal effectiveness. Without prototypes of these tools, their utility for increasing and differentiating teacher effectiveness cannot be discerned. No plans for recruiting, rewarding, or retaining effective teachers and school leaders were included in this district's proposed RTTD project. A new instructional management system, FultonConnect, became operational this school year, with staff training having started in the spring 2013.

The LEA's response to turning around low-achieving schools spoke to the implementation of a college and career readiness system at the middle school level as being essential to keeping students on track to graduate, but not to focused efforts to turn-around identified low-achieving schools among the 19 middle schools included in the grant proposal or other district schools. Further, Fulton's charter school de-centralized system may lessen the influence the district has to direct efforts to turn around low-achieving schools since individual schools may opt out of district reform efforts as they try to craft their own ways of raising achievement. And, to complicate matters further no research base was provided for the proposal's premise that providing opportunities for average students to take high school level courses will positively and significantly impact the achievement of all students in the district, especially the lowest-performing students.

With regard to articulating what Fulton's personalized classroom experience will feel like, look like, or sound like for students and teachers, the applicant provides an overview of program components that it will implement without illustrating how any one element or a collection of the listed elements will provide an integrated personalized education for individual students in FCS.

In summary, the LEA described a vision for reform that was slightly indistinct in painting a clear visual picture of a Fulton County Schools personalized learning environment and the recruitment, evaluation, and retention of effective teachers and administrators with the skills to implement such a teaching-learning environment, but was in all other aspects a credible approach. The initiative's impact on the district's lower performing schools was also unclear.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	7
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(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

This applicant indicates that it will implement its proposed reform in grades 6 – 8 in all 19 of the district's middle schools,

but does not describe the process used to determine its focus on this grade level span. Rather, the district indicates that too many of its middle school students are entering high school unprepared to graduate on time and to take demanding high school level courses. Thus, the district's "theory of action" is that improved middle school instruction and student performance will result in greater numbers of college and career ready high school graduates. While this theory of action may be laudable, it does not provide insight as to why all 19 schools were selected. For example, did some of the middle schools have higher student performance than others and, if so, why were they included in the reform effort. Did an analysis of student performance show that poor student preparation for a rigorous high school curriculum was the result of middle school learning or could it have also been a result of elementary learning. Did the district find consistency in insufficient student performance across all grades of middle school education in the district. Consideration of these kinds of issues would have illuminated the process the district used to select the schools and grade levels for its proposed program. The School Demographics table does list all participating schools, grade levels, and the total number of participating students, as well as the number of low-income and high needs students to be served by the project. The table, therefore, provides evidence that the participating schools individually and collectively meet the competition's eligibility requirements.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)

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(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The RTT-D grant requires that applicant's plans state the theory of change used to develop its proposal and enumerate key goals and the activities for achieving the district's reform objectives, a reasonable implementation timeline, designated and appropriate deliverables and staff responsibilities as a minimum requirement for a high-quality reform plan.

The LEA very specifically states its theory of change as: "Our theory of action posits that by dramatically increasing the level of instruction, creating a systemic culture of high expectations, and providing rigorous learning opportunities, more Fulton middle schools students will be prepared for demanding high school level coursework." The LEA's theory is also visually depicted in a Logic Model with a focus on instruction, placing technology in the hands of students and teachers, and using program components such as professional development, data management, and student supports so that participating students will be college- and career-ready. In fact, this objective is just one of three immediate goals of the grant plan. The LEA states that it is working with an outside consultant to build a "... business case and actionable roadmap" to establish a district-wide personalized learning environment in all its schools, but no details for turning around its low-achieving schools --- a responsibility of all districts --- was included and neither was there a plan for scaling up the RTTD initiative district-wide.

The LEA asserts that the proposed RTTD plan is a major initiative of the present long-range strategic plan of the district. Actions already taken to implement beginning segments of components of the RTTD plan were recently reported in the district publication, Strategic Plan 2017 Highlights, included in the Appendix. The activities for achieving the district's reform goals are embodied in a project plan with timelines and staff responsibilities for virtual learning labs, mobile devices, a college and career readiness system, personalized learning coaches for teachers, and adult advocates for participating students in the nine schools of this initiative. The LEA plans to use its membership in named state-wide and national educational policy and practice organizations to share project learnings and strategies beyond the borders of Fulton County. Specific deliverables were not enumerated in the proposal.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)

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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

As previously indicated, the LEA has three very specific, primary goals to be achieved by the end of the grant period for participating students: (1) 93% of FCS (Fulton County Schools) middle school students will be college and career ready as defined by the Georgia Department of Education's CCRPI; (2) 75% of FCS 8th graders will meet or exceed standards on the state's End of Course Test in Coordinate Algebra; and (3) 80% of FCS 8th graders will meet or exceed standards on the state's End of Course Test of 9th grade Literature and Composition. The first goal is being measured by a new assessment so there is no historical data to predict whether this target, though ambitious is achievable. For goals (2) and (3), at present 46% of the district's high school students meet the state standard for Coordinate Algebra compared to 36% state-wide, and over 50% meet it for Literature and Composition compared to 39% across the statistical data for high school students. But this statistical data on high school student performance cannot be directly inferred to future middle school student performance. Other objectives include:

- Having 90-98% of students meet proficiency standards on the state assessment for reading by 2016-2017 for identified subgroups and overall.
- Having 75-95% of students meet proficiency standards on the state assessment for mathematics by 2016-2017 for identified subgroups and overall.

- 68-92% of students meet proficiency standards on the state assessment for science by 2016-2017 for identified subgroups and overall.

Given that significantly large percentages of Fulton students are already at proficiency in reading, mathematics, and science, the first three bulleted goals seem achievable. For example, 97% of students overall for grades 6-8 met the state reading benchmark in 2011-2012, with 49% exceeding it. Even students with disabilities, the subgroup with the lowest rate of proficiency is reported as having 82% of students meet the standard, with 14% exceeding it. While the proficiency rate in mathematics for Fulton students is lower than the reading rate, it is still high with 86% of students overall meeting the state benchmark in 2011-2012. Again, students with disabilities, the lowest performing subgroup in 2011-2012 with only a 59% proficiency rate, can reach the target of 75% with an average of 4% yearly increase by 2016-2017. On the other hand one might be concerned as to the likelihood of meeting the expectation of an 11% increase in one year for 2013-2014 for students with disabilities and a 12% increase for limited English proficient students. Projected increases for other subgroups of about 3-5 % seem attainable. Further, the LEA's scaled growth targets, overall and for subgroups, are similarly modest.

Projected decreases in the achievement gap are significant over the grant period for all subgroups for reading, math, and science. For example, the gap between students overall and limited English proficient student will be reduced from 12% to 3% and the gap between students overall and those with disabilities is projected to decrease from 15% to 7-8% for reading or about 2% per year. While the absolute gaps in mathematics and science are larger for these two subgroups, the 2% projected decrease per year is also achievable. Data graphs of CRCP results show gaps have closed between 2010-2013 for math, and for some subgroups in reading.

Since 71% of Fulton's students overall graduated on time compared to a state average of 69.7% in 2011-2012, an 80% projection for 2013-2014 is probably reasonable, but since there is no data on subgroup graduation rates, it is impossible to know how each subgroup contributed to the most recent reported rate and therefore how these subgroups will contribute or detract from the projected graduation rate for subsequent years. No explanation of how these targets were arrived at is provided. It is noteworthy though that the LEA is aiming for an 80% graduation rate for both limited English proficient and students with disabilities by 2016-2017, but questionable given cohort proficiency rates in 2012-2013 of only 53% and 44% proficiency in reading.

The accuracy of college enrollment projections is more likely since 73% of FCS students who graduated from high school in 2011 attended a four-year or 2-year post-secondary program. The source of the data for college enrollment is also solid; namely the National Student Clearinghouse which uses student identification data to track students after high school graduation. And, the fact that 71% of Fulton's students taking the recent SAT in reading met the threshold needed for college eligibility in the Georgia University System means that it is very likely that the LEA's goal of 85% of students having scores for admission to the state's colleges and universities will be met, especially since the bar for passing is a low 25th percentile; the most recent mathematics rate is 73%.

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	8

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

As previously indicated the LEA presented data showing relatively high achievement on its state assessments and closing of achievement gaps for some subgroups for a track record of more than moderate success. The district has also already conducted personalized learning pilots and implemented virtual labs in some of its high schools to test these resources that will be used in the proposed plan of action at the middle school level. Unfortunately, data from these year-old efforts is not presented in this proposal so that the results of the pilots and how they informed development of the RTTD grant are not known for this review. Other aspects of the proposed plan have also been tried. For example, 30 students from one of the middle schools took AP Government at a nearby high school last year. This year, students at another middle school are taking high school 9th grade math and English Language Arts. Use of the evaluative data from these programs will be important to inform implementation of the proposed RTTD.

Congruent with the LEA's RTTD plan to give under-represented students opportunities for higher-level coursework, the district has already been recognized by the prestigious Broad Foundation for increasing access of African-American students to AP courses. It is inconsistent however that students in another of the district's middle schools, are unprepared to take advanced and honors classes. Three of the district's 19 schools have been designated as Model Schools by the LEA's state department of education, but evidence that the district used information on how these schools increased

student achievement and closed achievement gaps is lacking. These inconsistencies raise questions about the LEA's affirmative ability to craft a track record of success that can be transferred to the proposed RTTD initiative.

Yet, the LEA can turn to other high marks of success that bode well for positive implementation of the initiative, including passing of a bond referendum that will partially fund the technology needed for the RTTD plan; securing grant funds (from the Glenn Foundation for example) to support complementary social and emotional support efforts to the academic program; having 100 counselors already trained to deliver the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) endorsed College and Career Counseling service; and enacting policy so that students can advance to the next grade or accelerate within grade.

While the LEA has already tackled some of the issues it will face in implementing the RTTD plan through these efforts, significant and ambitious reform has not been achieved across the board in its persistently lowest-achieving schools and among all its students; something the district acknowledges.: Overall, FCS is a high-achieving district which fares better than Georgia averages on nearly every indicator, when considered in the aggregate. "But favorable average data do not tell the whole story; our aggregate data obscures the fact that subgroups of FCS students do not perform at the same level with their peers." In fact, its low-performing schools are identified in the proposal but the LEA did not cite any previous reform efforts that would have kept these schools from being rated as Priority (the lowest achieving schools in the state), Focus (schools with the largest achievement gaps), and Alert (schools with subgroup or all student results below standard) schools. It is being more successful in beginning to build data systems that parents, students, and educators can easily access with its implementation of FultonConnect and Checkpoints. "Checkpoints assesses mastery of Common Core Georgia Performance standards in a pre-test/post-test format each semester." The frequency and quality of teacher use of FultonConnect and Checkpoints was not reported however, so it is difficult to determine whether teachers presently use this resource at all to inform instruction. There is a Home Access Center for parents for student information.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	3
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(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Fulton states that its school system's website is used to post district policies and procedures, as well as district budgets, salary schedules, and financial reports as part of its efforts to increase transparency. Unique to this LEA is a recently-hired Open Records Officer who has the duty of getting requested records to stakeholders in a timely manner. Two public hearings for citizen comment and questions are reported as being held to vet the district budget each year. Members of the 20 Councils established to date are included in building-level budget decisions. Thus, Fulton County meets the minimum requirements for informational evidence of public transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	8
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Sufficient autonomy exists under State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements for this LEA to implement it plan for personalized learning. State statutes are referenced that "... allow school districts to change their operating model to allow for more flexibility from state education laws," including implementing a charter school system model. Fulton County Schools chose the charter school model because it gives the LEA even greater autonomy in organization and management, budget, technology, and instructional delivery. Individual schools can apply to the district for even more autonomy through the Request for Flexibility process for freedom from state categorical expenditure controls; use of different class time, service delivery, and seat time models; and use of staff allocations. It is this last potentiality that could cause problems in implementing the proposed RTTD plan to fidelity as described, since one or more of the middle schools could perhaps decide not to follow the framework. The LEA reports that in such a circumstance the school board "... retains the authority to require school-level interventions" even including dissolution of the Council and revocation of approved Requests for Flexibility. But the criteria for taking such serious steps and how quickly they could be taken to keep the reform initiative from faltering was not shared and is of concern.

The LEA submitted this RTTD proposal to its state department of education and the mayors of the cities incorporated in the Fulton County school system. The state declined to comment and letters of support from only three of the 14 mayors of the townships served by FCS are included with the proposal. While the mayoral letters do not confirm autonomy, they do suggest some commitment to the proposed project, at least by those who responded.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	7
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

A direct relationship is difficult to corroborate, but the district takes the position that thousands of parents, staff, and

community members who participated in the district's strategic planning process begun in 2010, also provided suggestions through that process that subsequently informed the proposed RTTD projects. The posters included in the application have signatures of Strategic Planning participants, not RTTD planning participants. A letter of support from the district's middle school principals, as well as form letters from the participating school PTAs, letters from three mayors, and form letters from community organizations, were presented as evidence of stakeholder engagement. There was no indication of the specific contribution of the individual entities or how the design was altered by their explicit group input. Additionally, it appears that the greater input into crafting the vision statement and design was not from community stakeholders but from an outside consulting group. Although the consulting group facilitated a vision workshop with 36 Fulton stakeholders, it is difficult to determine Fulton stakeholder influence on the design of RTTD initiatives since it is the consultant who has developed the themes of the RTTD plan. For LEA's without collective bargaining, RTTD grant guidelines require "at a minimum, evidence that at least 70 percent of teachers from participating schools ... support the proposal." This required evidence was not included with the proposal. Thus, overall, this proposal lacked evidence of teachers, students, parents, and community organizations having meaningful input in development of this proposal.

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	13

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The LEA makes a somewhat strong case for its plan to provide services that will "... develop, enhance and expand advanced placement programs and increase the participation rate of all students, especially targeting low income students and underachieving students" in its description of the Digital Learning Environment and College and Career Readiness System it will establish in its 19 participating middle schools if it is awarded an RTTT grant.

First, the Common Core Georgia state Standards will be central to the curriculum. Second, the district has already had success, as previously noted, in having African-American students succeed in advanced placement courses in increasingly greater numbers; this is also true for Hispanic students who were shown to have had an 11% gain in the number of test-takers from 2008-2012. Third, the ACT College and Career Readiness System (CCRS) is research-based, with a rigorous curriculum and embedded performance-based assessments. As a research-based program, it provides credibility to the LEA's contention that students will master critical thinking and problem-solving skills since these are embedded in the program. Fourth, state-of-the art technology such as virtual learning labs and digital learning platforms have the as yet unverified potential to open opportunities to all students for higher-level coursework and acceleration of their learning, while planned educational management data systems will put the tools for needs-based lesson planning in teachers' hands. Fifth, professional development and coaching will be provided teachers to lift their practice to meet student needs for college and career readiness and use of next generation technology for personalized instruction. All of these elements together make for a proposal that suggests realistic possibilities for students to be engaged and empowered to pursue learning and development goals linked to college and career standards.

Yet, specific ways in which each student will have an individualized sequence of instruction and skill development is largely suggested as an outgrowth of a digital learning environment rather than a delineated template that teachers, students, and parents can access and use for long-term personal goal planning. Given the number of participating students in each school, a virtual learning lab with the capacity of only 30 students being able to use it at one time may be problematic. The delay in placing mobile devices in students' hands until teachers are trained and more comfortable with these devices may be understandable, but puts off use of these devices by students until two years into the four years of the RTTD grant, limiting the personalized education that will be provided to only one half of the years of the grant period. The delay also means that virtual tutoring does not become a reality until late in the grant years so students will not get the 24/7 help they may need to succeed when they need it. And, parent engagement will be limited too since they will not have access to this technology either for following their child's progress toward college and career goals and mastery of academic content.

The proposed educational management system that will interface with FultonConnect and recently designed formative assessments and the STAR tests have significant potential for providing frequently updated student data for determining mastery toward college and career standards. From the FultonConnect implementation timeline included in the proposal, this system appears, in origins, to have been a special education services tool for establishing educational plans and keeping achievement data for students with disabilities, but the premise that the system can be used for making accommodations and tracking whether other high-need and limited English proficient students are on track for graduation and meeting post-secondary goals is unconfirmed.

An innovation of this LEA plan is the introduction of Adult Advocates who "... will provide support to students and family members by helping them understand what they are learning is key to accomplishing goals." This innovation is deserving of

its own evaluation as a unique component, the impact of which can have district-wide meaning for future reforms, but impact measures were not identified.

As previously stated, the LEA has also trained a large number of its guidance counselors in the nationally-recognized support services of CCRS so that the likelihood of students being helped to set college and career goals is increased. No evidence was provided of the structures and tools of this aspect of CCRS, nor mention made in this proposal of how students will be exposed to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives that motivate or deepen individual student learning. Several times throughout the proposal the diversity of the student populations and communities of Fulton County is highlighted as a positive attribute of the district, but nowhere in the proposal is this diversity leveraged to build on student interest and learning needs.

The Project Plan embedded throughout the teaching and learning sections of the proposal has activities to get each component established and operating, timelines, and identifies primary staff members responsible for the implementation.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	11
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

As previously noted, this RTTT-D plan is based on the district’s underlying theory of change relative to the three “priorities”: (1) Learning – Instruction; (2) Teaching and Leading – People; and (3) Tools – Technology. With reference to “People” and their centrality in the teaching-learning paradigm, the LEA proposes an extensive professional development program. The plan for professional development is appropriate since the middle school teachers need to be trained in technologies they have not used; for example the still to be determined Digital Learning Platform or the use of mobile devices to accelerate learning and instructional techniques not well-seated in their repertoire of content and skill knowledge. For example, personalized instruction strategies and how to teach for rigor and relevance would need to be supported through professional development. They will also be given training in a proposed new course for students that they will teach focusing on college-ready behaviors and supports. The PD360 system professional development program has already been launched by the LEA. This online professional development program has research that supports its efficacy so that the district’s selection of this tool is justified. Ongoing professional development will also be purchased as part of the College and Career Readiness System to increase ELA and mathematics teachers’ content knowledge and skill in promoting higher-order thinking and student engagement in the classroom. An innovation in the professional development plan in the LEA’s proposal is that each participating school will have a site team of eight members, including an administrator, counselor, lead teacher, and subject area teachers who will learn strategies to support students in building organizational skills for rigorous coursework and college. The team will also engage students in problem-based learning. In addition, each participating school will have a Personalized Learning Coach to further support teachers in their transition to creating personal learning environments and more rigorous and relevant instruction.

But, it may not be possible for teachers and principals to assimilate the plethora of programs, skills, and knowledge that will be presented to effectively use the strategies to increase and accelerate student learning. Plans for principal supervision of teacher use of the large array of strategies seems not have been considered.

The teacher and principal evaluation systems that the LEA proposes to measure and support educator effectiveness also have problems. The Teacher Keys and Leader Keys are not presently operational even though the LEA plans to use these measures in conjunction with the state’s still evolving student growth measures. Further, the evaluations systems will not be in place until 2015-2016 in the second year of the grant period and then only baseline data will be gathered. Therefore, this critical component will certainly not be useful for placing highly effective teachers and principals in front of students before the 2016-2017 year and perhaps beyond. No evidence was presented for determining the kinds of interventions, feedback and recommendations that would be provided to improve teacher and principal practice. Again, the district’s instructional management systems, FultonConnect and Checkpoint will be used to provide data on student progress toward meeting college and career goals and mastery of content.

Thus, the applicant has a plan for the professional development of teachers with clear, though perhaps too numerous, activities, a month by month timeline and some staff assigned for seeing the professional development plan to fruition. The plan for teacher and principal development and evaluation though reasonable is dependent on state actions before it can be put in place.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	8

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

A significant change in four of the RTTD guideline areas relative to policy and practice provide a foundation for facilitating this LEA's plans for a personalized learning environment at the participating schools:

(1) The district's sound deployment of central office staff out of the headquarters office to

"... place more emphasis on supporting schools."

(2) The district's beginning efforts to establish School Governance Councils in all the schools in

the Fulton County School system.

(3) The district's plans for giving participating students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of standards in multiple ways.

(4) The district's efforts to take advantage of state regulations for the enactment of policy to allow students to earn credit based on demonstrated mastery of content.

Staff members of the Academic Division of the district have recently been assigned to four newly-created school district geographic areas, allowing for a decentralized approach to school management while maximizing resources. There are 20 School Governance Councils (SGC) presently operational in the school district. These Councils "... have the authority to develop and propose significant reforms" such as adjusted time for subjects and/or courses within the system calendar or innovative uses of technology for instruction; reforms that parallel those in the RTTD proposal. It is unclear however, whether any of the 20 existing Councils are in the 19 participating middle schools and how soon all of the participating schools will have this structural unit; it has taken a year to set up these first 20 Councils. SGC members have the responsibility to develop the strategic plan for their school. Their specific role in support of the RTTD grant was not spelled out, although SGCs can "... propose resource allocation and instructional innovations to address student needs [of the strategic plan] through the Request for Flexibility process. The Councils can also propose reforms for students; several of which are in keeping with the parameters of establishing personalized learning environments. These include, but are not limited to virtual learning and individual and teamwork learning projects. But, problematically, if all of the middle schools do not have Governance Councils (and councils are not projected to be in place in all of the district's schools for another two years), no other school leadership structure was presented as the decision-making body at the school-level for implementing RTTD reforms. Thus, there is a lack of coherence between having this governing body in place and the avowed ends. Additionally, no track record of success exists for the effectiveness of School Governance Councils or their ability to enact meaningful reforms that will ensure that every student, every educator, and every school and classroom has a personalized environment as envisioned in this proposal and by the intent of the RTTD grant.

The LEA further states that that state's approval for FCS as a charter school system "... provides flexibility within categorical programs" so that it can "... break free of traditional service delivery models to explore alternative instructional strategies for students with disabilities or limited English," but the alternative instructional strategies are not described so that the requirement of impacting every student, particularly these high-need students, is not addressed.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	8
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(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Just as the LEA began testing a different central office infrastructure prior to this application, the district has embarked on piloting of several alternative ways of delivering instruction and accessing and using data. Several school-level pilots have tested the use of instructional technology, including the use of mobile devices, tablet computers, iPhones, and game systems to deliver instruction. As previously noted, the proposal lacks evidence of the outcomes of these pilots and any resulting changes in infrastructure. The LEA has also repeated its plans to use FultonConnect as a resource for student performance data for use by teachers, students, and parents for instructional planning, setting learning goals, and monitoring progress. No evidence was provided of the capacity of FultonConnect to achieve these ends. Technical support for use of FultonConnect and instructional technology will be available to teachers, students, and their parents through various portals, email and phone support, and self-help videos and reference guides. It seems that the LEA has been thorough in considering a number of ways in which technical support and trouble-shooting can occur. The district makes the assurance, which can only be accepted without hard evidence, that the LEA uses interoperable data systems, linking human resources, student information, budget, and student achievement data.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
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(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	9
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(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The LEA describes an already established district process that its Project Management Office uses to manage and monitor other district initiatives and that will also be used to manage and monitor the RTTD grant. This process entails central office staff being assigned and having oversight to specific projects. For the RTTD grant, this duty will be held by both the assistant superintendent – teaching and learning for FCS (called the “Sponsor” by the LEA) and the associate superintendent of academics (called the “Owner” by the LEA). There is also a project director of FultonAchieve. The Owner has the responsibility of “... designing a work plan with clearly stated milestones and deliverables and building a work team to complete the day-to-day activities ... of the initiative.” The project director will “... oversee the work using project management and delivery tools to consult and advise implementation team members.” These overlapping and somewhat conflicting duties present confusion as to who has primary or ultimate responsibility for implementing the RTTD grant specifically. Consultative groups such as the School Governance Council and the FultonAchieve Advisory Team that will provide “... advice and counsel regarding effective practice to help ... continuously improve initiatives” make understanding how the initiative will be managed even more complex. For example, who of the three --- the Sponsor, Owner, or project director --- will meet with these advisory groups and who has the authority to approve advisory group suggestions or actions. There is no evidence to show that the validity and effectiveness of this combination of internal and advisory management structures has been tested by the LEA, although this framework does allow for input from a variety of perspectives as to how the initiative is progressing and how it might be improved. The LEA may need to consider how conflicting perspectives will be resolved so as not to negatively affect management and impact of this grant initiative.

The LEA addressed the grant guideline requiring public sharing of information on the quality of project investments by indicating that it will have quarterly and annual reports posted on the district website; a minimally sufficient way to meet this obligation. A continuous improvement process for components of the grant such as professional development or staffing issues was not discussed in the proposal. Neither was the very important requirement for outlining a process for ongoing corrections and improvements after the term of the grant. Additionally, other than a reference to its Strategic Initiative Management (SIM) process for administering the district's strategic plan, the LEA was vague in presenting a high-quality plan of activities, timelines, and deliverables specifically for this RTTD grant.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	3
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(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

As previously indicated, the LEA will have quarterly and annual reports posted on the district website and the superintendent will share these reports, for informational purposes and to receive feedback on progress and possible needed improvements, with the existing district Superintendent’s Council of both internal and external stakeholders at the Council’s regularly-held meetings. The LEA also indicated that the FultonAchieve Advisory Council will be involved in providing feedback regarding the grant project and how it is connected to the district’s overall strategic plan. As pointed out in E1, since there are various oversight entities indicated in the proposal for this RTTD project, the LEA will want to be careful that communications about the project are sharing the same and not conflicting messages; there appears to be no plan for addressing this issue. While communications with and by the Councils is described, the LEA does not present how it will communicate the achievements and progress of FultonAchieve with parents of participating students, students themselves, district teachers, and administrators and the wider FCS community. Thus, these plans for ongoing communication are merely adequate since the LEA was imprecise in presenting a high-quality plan of activities, timelines, staff responsibilities, and deliverables specifically for this RTTD grant.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	3
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(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

In addition to age-appropriate student performance measures on summative state assessments in reading and mathematics, the LEA plans to use eleven more assessments from climate assessments to end-of-course tests and college and career readiness indicators that the participating schools might select to measure achievement of grant initiative goals. The LEA appears to be leaving final selection of suggested performance measures to each individual school so it is not possible to know at this time what instruments will ultimately be used. Other than discipline reports referred to elsewhere in the proposal as an indicator of the impact of the project on student behavior, no health or social-emotional indicator is among these measures as required by grant guidelines for this grade span. The LEA gives a rationale for its use of each listed measure, though not all of the proposed assessments seem likely to provide timely, formative leading information in keeping with the proposed plan and theory of change.

For instance, as previously discussed, it will not be possible until the end of the 2015-2016 school year, at the earliest, to determine whether students have “highly effective” teachers and principals as defined by the state since the evaluation

tools for measuring this element, the Teacher Keys and Leader Keys, are still being developed by the state and the LEA has no control over when these evaluation measures will be ready. Thus, there is a gap in timely collection of this data that could have an undesirable effect on student achievement. The LEA's plan for early warning dashboards to alert educators to students who are not on track for college readiness using attendance and course completion data is feasible, but the tools for such dashboards are also still being designed. A deadline for completion of this assessment mechanism was not included in the grant proposal, nor is a prototype of the dashboard for determining the quality of this assessment. Students will be asked to self-report on whether their teachers are using teaching methods that will help them succeed in the future and in the next school year, but rubrics for students to use for valid and reliable reporting were not included in the proposal. Although these are self-reports, they must still be rigorous measures and this could not be determined.

Tables with baseline scores (where available) and performance targets for students for individual grant project components and, in some instances, by subgroup, were provided, although the basis for the benchmarks was not always clear. For example, the targets for 8th graders taking end-of-course tests for the high school Coordinate Algebra course are 10% of students receiving credit for the course this year, 30% by 2015, and 100% by 2017. The rationale for these milestones and increments of from 20% to as much as 45% from one year to the next may not be reasonable or achievable, given that long-term data on these tests, for prediction purposes, would be for past achievements by high school students who took the test and not past performance levels of middle school students. The basis for other baseline data was similarly not explained. For example, the percentage of school leaders rated exemplary for promoting a positive school climate begins with a low baseline of 2.9% and only rises to 11.6% by the end of the grant period. This does not seem to be a particularly ambitious goal, even though it may be an achievable target, but again, the criteria for the target was not presented so that it was difficult to determine whether the target is likely to be met. More problematic is the fact that the Leader Key is referenced as the "proxy" or a substitute for measuring school climate and this tool has not been developed so it is not obvious that it is the appropriate instrument.

To summarize, the LEA has listed approximately a dozen performance measures for evaluation of its RTTD project. Some will likely result in timely, rigorous, and formative feedback, but others clearly may not, and there was no discussion, in any section of the proposal, as to how the LEA will review and improve the measures over time if they prove to be insufficient to gauge implementation progress.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)

5

3

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The LEA will use a combination of quantitative (technology usage statistics) and qualitative measures (case studies) to evaluate the effectiveness of investments. Commendably, the LEA also seeks to identify and investigate "... any variance in implementation" across participating schools. This is important since the collection of this latter kind of data could begin to explain differences in outcomes at the various middle schools at the end of the grant and during implementation and is congruent with the LEA's Logic Model. Variances during implementation could then be addressed in a timely manner.

Four excellent research questions will further guide the LEA's evaluation. As evidenced in the following example, these research questions go to the heart of whether RTTD funded activities are achieving both federal and LEA grant objectives: "Do teachers in the 19 middle schools participate in FultonAchieve professional development, work with their Personalized Learning Coaches, and subsequently do they integrate what they have learned into teaching practices geared toward the goal of providing challenging and innovative instruction?" But, the tools for answering each of the four research questions were at most only generally identified or must still be developed. For a case on point, the LEA indicates that measurement of the effectiveness of professional development embodied in the question above will be assessed using surveys of "... appropriate stakeholders (school leadership, teachers, students, parents, etc.) ... to gauge the level to which personalized instruction is being integrated, the challenges associated with integration, and areas of concern." Since no sample surveys were provided, the ability of the surveys to collect this kind of information could not be distinguished. As previously indicated, the dashboards for measuring if students are on track for graduation are not as yet developed; therefore neither is the evaluation tool for measuring the utility of the dashboard.

As required for a high-quality plan, the grant-funded Research and Evaluation Analyst, the project director, and district Accountability Office staff are identified as having the responsibility for designing and implementing the evaluation process, but timelines for completing the evaluations were not presented and the rigor of proposed and, in some cases, still undetermined assessments, could not be gleaned from the proposal, though evaluation outputs/deliverables are listed in the Logic Model.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

Available

Score

(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	7
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(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant’s budget, including the budget narrative and tables, should identify RTTT-D funds as well as district monies, grants, state and other Federal funds that will be used so that determinations can be made as to the reasonableness and sufficiency of requested monies and the rationale for same. The applicant is applying for nearly \$25 million or at the maximum allowed for a district with between 10,001 to 20,000 students. This LEA has 13,732 students. Nearly \$7 million in funds from unspecified other sources will be used to support the project.

The LEA included a summary Budget Table of overall costs for personnel, travel, equipment, supplies, and contracts, followed by Budget Tables for the same costs for each program component. One-time costs and investments not required over all four years of the grant were also identified in the tables. For example, equipment and supply costs for the mobile devices for students are not included in Years 1 and 2 since these will not be provided to students until Year 3 as proposed in the LEA’s grant plan. But, it is not as understandable that computer hardware and software investments are only one-time investments. Technology changes so rapidly that it might be anticipated that software programs purchased in the first year of the grant would not be as useful in the fifth year of the grant. Certainly, breakage and lost technology resources such as hand-held one-to-one devices would call for replacement costs. The concern previously expressed continues as to whether 30 laptops per middle school will be a sufficient number to allow all participating students’ access to the Virtual Learning Labs when they need it. Some few items not previously indicated in the proposal such as travel to best practice sites are included in the budget without a frame of reference for them in the budget narrative.

Costs not funded through RTTD monies were also identified, such as the license fees for FultonConnect, although the source --- general district funds, grants, or title funds --- of these monies is not identified. The LEA provided a rationale for all costs by line item; only brief descriptions of the responsibilities of project staff were included. The Overall Budget Summary Narrative provides a clear summary with details of budgeted components and expected outcomes for the grant period so that the reasonableness and sufficiency of the budget is justified, with the exceptions noted above.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	7
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The LEA proposes to redirect considerable Title I – III and Title VI funds that it receives each year to sustain this RTTD initiative beyond the grant period. The Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax referendum (SPLOST) that it was successful in securing public approval of for the next five years will end congruent with the RTTD grant, but there is a somewhat valid anticipation that another SPLOST tax will be approved in 2016 since the present SPLOST bond is the fifth for the district; but these funds are, of course, not guaranteed. SPLOST monies will be used to support the technology aspects of this RTTD grant, i.e. the virtual labs, mobile devices, etc. The district is also counting on its track record of securing grant support; it presently has indirect financial support from the Gates Foundation and the Broad Center for the Management of School Systems. The local Glenn Foundation is providing \$500,000 for partial funding of the Competitive Priority Program for this LEA’s RTTD initiatives. It is the only local grant identified. But, the sustainability of the Gates and Broad support is tenuous since “districts cannot apply for this opportunity.” Similarly, the district’s expectation that it will continue to receive \$4 million annually from a state Seed Fund while likely according to the LEA, also cannot be assured given the vagaries of state legislature and funding priorities.

Therefore, given these uncertainties, but also in a proactive way, the district has established its own Fulton Foundation to raise funds in support of LEA initiatives. The LEA’s Office of Grant Development has identified some RTTD program component options that grantors will be asked to consider for funding. Finally, the budget for this RTTD grant includes the use of district monies to fund portions of central office positions that hypothetically will be supporting this grant, so that these staff members’ salaries are automatically sustainable and thus, the availability of these staff members to continue to support the RTTD projects after the grant funding period.

As required by application guidelines, the LEA delineated its budget assumptions in clear language. On the other hand, as with the overall project evaluation plan, ways to evaluate improvements in productivity and outcomes to inform a post-grant budget were not as obvious. Still, the LEA has submitted an otherwise thorough sustainability plan that includes project support from state and local sources and an estimated budget for the three years after the term of the grant.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)**10****7****Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:**

The Competitive Preference Priority calls for districts to integrate public and private resources in partnerships designed to augment school system resources to provide additional social, emotional, and behavioral supports to participating students and their families, who will also be served through the primary RTTT-D grant.

FCS will address this priority by implementing a program it calls the ABC Framework for Acceleration. The program is not so much a partnership with community organizations per se; rather it is a stand-alone component to provide additional student and family supports by using federal categorical funds and contracting with some existing community organizations with which the district already has a service delivery relationship. The program name is a construct to address attendance (the A in the name), behavior (the B), and C (course performance).

This program will be implemented in 11 of the 19 participating middle schools of the primary RTTD grant because funding will be through Title I monies. It will serve 4,775 "bubble students." The district is defining "bubble students" as "... average students who need additional academic, social, and emotional supports to help inspire and motivate them to pursue and be successful in taking more rigorous coursework." These are also their students who just met state standards as measured by the CRCT for 2012-2013 so that the need for academic assistance is theoretically supported by the state assessment data. Other data presented to validate the need for emotional and social supports included having over ten unexcused absences in a school year and over five out of school suspensions. Therefore, the students to be served in the ABC program meet the criteria of being participating students of high-need.

It is commendable that the LEA has zeroed in on providing services to a sometimes neglected segment of the student population that schools and districts may not normally give attention. The appropriateness of focusing on this group of students is underscored by the LEA's theory of change for the ABC program, even though no separate theory of change is required by grant application guidelines. The theory of change for the ABC program is that "by increasing the level of academic, social and emotional supports, creating a culture of high expectations, and providing rigorous learning opportunities, bubble students ... will be better prepared for demanding, high-school level course work." This theory, which is consistent with the tenets of the primary RTTD proposal, but like the theory of change of that proposal, this theory too has no research to support it.

The ABC Framework for Acceleration offers the participating schools a menu of options to address the identified needs of their bubble students, including but not limited to: Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports services and elements of their elementary Truancy Intervention Project to address attendance; components of their WINGS for Kids, an after-school program, and peer mediation, and advisory programs to address student behavior issues; as well as STAR reading and STAR math assessments to target instruction for student content recovery and enrichment. The use of STEM and other community resources that the LEA already uses and were not developed for the RTTD grant are also listed as menu options. Thus, the ABC program seeks to leverage already operational community organization like The Youth – Atlanta partnership. This partnership will give parents of RTTD grant program students an opportunity to attend family workshops on how to assist their children with learning. Similarly, the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System gives families access to online tutoring, test preparation, and educational resources. Contractual costs for use of these adjunct community program services are included in the budget for this Competitive Preference Priority. Portions of a \$500,000 grant from the Glenn Family Foundation fund the Truancy Intervention and WINGS initiatives.

This menu approach for schools to decide how to address bubble student raises concern that a cohesive, effective program may not be implemented at individual schools, but the LEA says that school selections of the ABC components must be evidence-based and meet the district's contracting and procedural requirements to be funded. A Project Plan lists activities, timelines and deliverables, and staff responsible for implementing the Competitive Priority activities. A strength of the activities listed is the requirement for school-wide attendance program plans so that attendance improvement efforts have the potential of impacting more than just the participating students in the RTTD project schools. Performance measures include a reduction in the number of students with high poor attendance, reductions in out-of-school suspensions, and increases in student achievement/growth. The STAR assessments are used in both the primary RTTD and the ABC program. These assessments align with the applicant's broader RTTD proposal, and some have their aforementioned limitations. A Georgia Student Health Survey was also cited as a performance measure for the ABC program, but the focus of the survey could not be determined. Monthly Unexcused Absence and Discipline Reports from the schools, monthly student growth reports, and twice annually Parent Engagement Reports give district leaders important oversight data and will be submitted frequently enough that timely interventions can be made to improve.

The LEA did not describe a specific strategy to scale the model beyond the participating students and schools over time, except for development of school-wide attendance plans in the participating schools. School leadership teams are listed in the Project Plan as having operational and decision-making responsibility for several activities for this Competitive Preference project, but the membership of these teams and team member experience was not delineated. Overall however, the LEA articulated a plan for a reasoned, if not integrated, program for delivery of additional academic, emotional, and

social supports to a segment of students already participating in some of the primary RTTD program middle schools.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The LEA makes a sufficient case that its proposal builds on the four core educational assurance areas by documenting its adoption of the Common Core State Standards, development of formative and summative assessments, expansion of existing college- and career-ready programs for students, use of state and district data systems to measure student growth and performance, and establishment of still-to-be-established new district and state teacher performance systems for improved teaching for participating students. The LEA has also established target goals based on the state’s growth model to decrease achievement gaps among student subgroups. The district has a vision for increased high school and graduation rates as a result of raising student achievement of middle school students and their preparation for high-school course work embedded in the proposed project.

This application generally made effective use of the template for RTTT-D proposals and had cross-references from one component of the proposed plan to other components, as well as to the appendices. The proposal was often not completely coherent and comprehensive, but proposal intentions were reasoned, if sometimes unevenly convincing.

Total	210	134
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Race to the Top - District Technical Review Form

Application #0026GA-2 for Fulton County Board of Education

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	6

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The extent to which the applicant has set forth a comprehensive and coherent reform vision...

(a) Builds on its work in four core educational assurance areas:

As referenced by the applicant, the Fulton County Schools has embarked on developing a personalized learning system to provide customized programs of study for all its students and teachers. The programs design and title is called FultonAchieve, a framework of personalized learning strategies that addresses the gap between on-level and accelerated learners in middle school. The district has built its program on the four core educational assurances:

- Standards and Assessments: the district is implementing the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) in English, language arts and mathematics as well as literacy standards in grades 6-12 social studies,

science, and technology curricula. The applicant has created a new formative assessments aligned to CCGPS that is designed to challenge students, target instruction, and support interventions to help ensure success. The plan will provide the district's middle school students more flexibility on how they demonstrate standards mastery and when they can take state mandated assessments.

Weakness: The district didn't identify or describe strategies or methods that will contribute to how students will be challenged; how instruction will be targeted; and examples of support interventions that will be implemented. In addition, an example of the types of student flexibility on how students could demonstrate standards mastery relevant to the state's mandated assessments was not indicated.

- Data Systems: The district has invested in two data systems that support personalized learning environments. The applicant is in the process of selecting a Digital Learning Platform that will power the new virtual courses.

Weakness: The applicant didn't describe or identify how the new data systems would actually support a personalized learning environment.

- Effective Teachers and Principals: The district is implementing the Leader Keys program that is an effective instrument and program to assist principals and assistant principals and the Teacher Keys for teachers to help these educators improve their skills. The Georgia Department of Education is in the process of implementing new effectiveness measures for principals and teachers that will include the Student Growth Percentile, the Achievement Gap Reduction, and Teacher Keys.

Weakness: The district failed to identify research-based information to support the effectiveness of the Leader Keys program relevant to impacting effective teaching, student achievement, and improved administrative skills and competence.

- Turn around strategies: The FultonAchieve plan focuses on credit acceleration and closing the opportunity gap in middle schools. In addition, implementing a college and career readiness system in middle school is essential to keep students on track to graduate prepared for post-secondary success.

Weakness: In regards to credit acceleration, the applicant didn't provide supportive information that described this concept, its structure, and how it would be implemented. In addition, the applicant didn't clearly identify academic areas and strategies that would contribute to increased rigorous classes and standards.

(b) Articulates a clear and credible approach to the goals of accelerating student achievement, deepening student learning, and increasing equity through personalized student support grounded in common and individual tasks that are based on student academic interests:

FCS has the components to effectively implement a successful and robust personalized learning system. The following areas have been identified that will contribute to the plan's success: A supportive board of education, adherence to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards that have increased the level of rigor in each classroom, charter systems status that has provided flexibility to create and implement innovative approaches, a personalized roadmap that is being designed by Gartner Consulting, and the implementation of an approved funding sales tax (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) designed to fund new technology plans.

Weakness: The applicant didn't provide specific examples that supported the acceleration of achievement, deepening student learning, and how equity would be established. In addition, there weren't indicators of how the applicant was going to determine the academic interests of students in regards to the impact this would place upon the present or proposed curriculum. In regards to the charter status providing flexibility while creating and implement innovative approaches, the applicant didn't describe or indicate any examples to support this influence/charter status.

(c) Describes what the classroom experience will be like for students and teachers participating in personalized learning environments:

A summary of a strategic initiative that has already been implemented complements the FultonAchieve Plan:

- Continuous achievement and customized learning; coordinate algebra as an on-level option for Grade 8 and Grade 9 ELA as an accelerated option for Grade 8.
- Tailored support; trained counselors endorsing College and Career Readiness counseling' implement a new technology system to provide a system-wide early warning system to identify struggling students.
- Support of staff development, launched PD 360 a transformational blended learning platform.
- Student Access; a mobile device for students, bring your own device concept, and hybrid use of technology.
- Data-driven decision making; launched FultonConnect for all teachers providing access to online lesson planning, curriculum, assessments, Response to Intervention monitoring, IEP management, and student data dashboards.

WEAKNESS

The applicant was not clear in addressing the description to what the classroom experience will be like for students and teachers participating in personalized learning environments upon the full implementation of the plan.

In summary, the district didn't present supportive evidence that displayed how equity would be achieved in this proposal as its initial focus was upon a limited group of students, on-level students, in their middle schools, but not the entire school population, which would include more disadvantaged and lower level (academic performing) students. In addition, the plan lacked support toward addressing how student academic interests would be determined and achieved.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)

10

6

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

As indicated, the applicant provided a descriptive process in their selection process that included clarity; all middle schools will participate. The district has invested in significant resources on dropout prevention programming for at-risk middle school students and through their own admission have neglected the on-level middle school student. The focus of the plan will be to improve access to rigorous coursework, provide more effective personalized learning opportunities, and close the opportunity gap of on-level students with accelerated students at each of the district's 19 middle schools. The plan creates a systemic culture of high expectations, and provides rigorous learning opportunities that will better prepare students for high school level coursework and success. The Georgia Department of Education to measure the new Georgia Common Core Standards have developed three performance levels: Exceeds the Standards, Meets the Standard, and Does Not Meet the Standards. The plan is designed or targeted for those students who meet the standards and have scale scores in the 800-860 range on Reading CRCT and either Math or Science CRCT. The district has indicated that 13,732 students will participate along with 2,639 educators. A chart was enclosed that identified the schools and significant raw data that pertained to low-income and high-needs student information in each school.

WEAKNESS:

The applicant didn't provide supportive information that conveyed that the plan would be high-quality LEA level and school level implementation, while serving their highest-needs students. Documentation that conveyed a collaborative and supportive commitment from the faculty was not evident. In addition, the sequence of leadership the implementation of the plan in coherent stages didn't appear to be evident.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)

10

6

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

According to the district, the design of the plan is centered upon the district's focus to invest in a personalized learning system at the middle school level. An effort to obtain funding through two foundations has been successful toward the district contracting with Gartner Consulting to design a personalized learning business case and roadmap. The consultants are assessing the current capabilities of FCS stakeholders to implement a personalized learning system enabled by technology. A series of learning themes (e.g., student-centric focus, flexible pacing, tailored instruction, shared ownership for learning, continuous monitoring of student progress, and formative and summative assessments). A personalized learning system framework has been developed by the consultant that includes a focus on vision and strategy (e.g., curriculum, instruction, tools and support, and implementation). In addition, the framework includes elements of communication with an emphasis toward monitoring and continuous improvement. In addressing the needs for Fulton Achieve the following initiatives have already been identified by the consultant:

- Schools can provide a variety of curricular options, through the use of digital technologies, as well as multiple learning pathways both in and out of the classroom.
- There is increasing use of freely available curated resources and resource collections such as through Open Education Resource initiatives that provide greater content options.
- The use of software deploying sophisticated adaptive tutors is increasing and supports personalized learning.
- Personalized learning settings place focus and attention on frequent formative assessments and periodic summative assessments to inform instruction.
- Assessments can include online features.
- Major policy observations include graduation requirements, seat-time and Carnegie credits, report cards and grading practices, extended school hours, and teacher work schedules.
- Students taking a proactive role.

- Professional development considerations with focus on student achievement.
- Application of summative and formative data by educators.
- Classrooms and learning spaces being large and flexible.
- Distributed leadership.
- District engagement of personalized learning.

The three primary goals of the plan include the following:

1. College and career readiness for middle school students 93%
2. Eighth grade students meeting or exceeding standards on the end of course test in coordinate algebra 75%
3. Eighth grade students meeting or exceeding standards on the end of course test in 9th grade literature and composition 80%

WEAKNESS

The primary goals of the plan don't address the population of the plan (mid-level students), but seem to specify the general school population. The design and structure of the plan in accordance with the district's proposal appeared to lack high-quality in its basic intent and structure. In addition, the district's effort to support district-wide change through the plan wasn't evident.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)

10

6

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

(a) Performance on summative assessments (proficiency status and growth):

The district (FCS) has calculated student growth as the change in a student's standardized test score from year to year. The goals of the plan are based on the percentage of students who meet and exceed performance levels.

(b) Decreasing achievement gaps:

Student achievement gap is defined as the present difference between the target population and the comparison population described within the subgroup categories.

(c) Graduation rates:

The district has a goal of a 90% overall graduation rate in the fourth year of the plan.

(d) College enrollment rates:

FCS had a a rate of 62% of graduating students in the base year of 2011 who enrolled and attended college. The goal of the plan is to increase this rate in the fourth year of the plan to 73.2%.

In summary of these measures that were conveyed by the district, I believe that these target goals are ambitious for the entire school population, and they are not ambitious for the plan's focus group who have already met the standards.

WEAKNESS

The applicant didn't provide information within a narrative format that adequately and clearly addressed these components as identified in **(A)(4)** LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes. In addition, there didn't seem to be indications that the applicant's vision is likely to result in achieving **ambitious** yet annual goals that are equal to or exceed state ESEA targets for the LEA. Data was not provided reflecting comparisons with the state (Georgia).

As the identified target group has been identified as middle school students who have **met the standards**, an explanation was not provided by the applicant that addressed elements and methods toward decreasing the achievement gaps in this group.

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	11

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

(a) Improve student learning outcomes and close achievement gaps, including by raising student achievement, high school graduation rates, and college enrollment rates:

According to the applicant, they have a long history of high student achievement success as indicated by the percentage of students who have met state standards in core subjects within the past several years. Based on criterion-referenced competency tests for reading and math, FCS has made progress closing achievement gaps with students who meet or exceed these benchmarks in grades 6-8 during the school years 2009-10 to 2012-13. FCS has implemented data-driven tools and revised board policies to increase student achievement and student gaps in achievement. As indicated by the applicant, Checkpoints is a benchmark assessment tool that has contributed to better assessing student mastery of the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS). Also, the FultonConnect is a data-driven tool that maintains student portfolios standards. While implementing the CCGPS, the district's Continuous Achievement Framework has been beneficial for economically disadvantaged students that allows for more acceleration opportunities while leveraging technology.

The FCS graduation rate ranks higher than the state average according to both the 2011 and 2012 years. In addition, the district's SAT average scores top both the state and national averages. The recent results for seniors demonstrating college readiness in all four test areas (e.g., English, math, reading and science) was significantly higher than the state and national averages. Lastly, based on 2013 EOCT (End of Course Tests) more than half of the district's students scored in the Exceeds category on the 9th Grade Literature and Comprehension tests as compared to only 39% of the state population.

b) Achieve ambitious and significant reforms in its persistently lowest-achieving schools or in its low-performing schools:

FCS is in the process of implementing Flexible Learning Programs in schools that have been identified by the state as Priority, Focus or Alert schools. These programs are designed to provide alternative supplemental instructional interventions that allow schools greater flexibility in designing an extended learning programs; such as personalize instruction based on the needs of low performing schools and high-needs students.

(c) Make student performance data available to students, educators, and parents in ways that inform and improve participation, instruction, and services:

FultonConnect, Checkpoints, and the Statewide Longitudinal Data System are tools that enable the monitoring and tracking of student performance that are utilized by teachers. FCS plans to close the achievement gaps and support the lowest achieving schools by making data easily accessible, creating personalize instruction, and using data to inform stakeholders. Parents have access to data (e.g., grades, program participation, and discipline reports) through the student information system, the Home Access Center. Parents without home computer access can access the Internet through parent resource centers or in local branches of the Atlanta Fulton County Library. The success of these data systems have earned FCS as a best practice district in data-based decision making by the American Productivity and Quality Institute. The Balanced Scorecard, which is a research-based method of measurement and tracking, is used by FCS to direct and monitor performances of the school system. As each school has its own strategic plan aligned to Building Our Future (District's Strategic Plan). Stakeholders must work together to analyze data and develop school strategic plans to meet the individual needs of students.

WEAKNESS:

The district has extensive gaps that remain among subgroups such as the limited English proficient students and students with disabilities. It was stated in a positive manner that 47 percent of students scored at the meet or exceeds category in coordinate algebra, yet this number reflected less than half of their students actually meeting success, which I believe should be a major concern.

Though the district has stated that data is available to stakeholders, there wasn't evidence that performance data is being retrieved, interpreted and utilized.

The district mentioned that board policies have been revised to increase student achievement, yet there weren't any policies identified or noticed that positively impacted student achievement as noted. Additionally, the district referenced the need to create schedules accommodating students, but they indicated no plan on how scheduling and staffing issues would be successfully addressed.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
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(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

FCS has made efforts to build internal capacities to improve transparency with its stakeholders. A significant amount of

resources and support has been provided to help schools elect, train, and certify School Governance Councils (SGC). A modified zero-based budgeting process has been implemented to start in 2014 that will establish management control systems that can be easily help managers plan, coordinate, and control their budgets. Principals are required to make efforts to include their staff, community members, and SGCs in their school's budget making process.

FCS is in compliance of posting all salary schedules on the district's Website including schedules for all professional and non-professional personnel in the district. In accordance with state policy, the district provides salary information for all school district personnel to the Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts. FCS has staffed an Open Records Officer in 2013 to further demonstrate a commitment to transparency.

In summary, it is evident that the district makes efforts to promote a high level of transparency as it provides disclosure for all school personnel in areas of salary, job descriptions, and schedules.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

As indicated by FCS, the Georgia Legislature passed Senate Bill 39, in 2008, to provide school districts the autonomy to change their operating model to allow more flexibility from state education law. As the largest charter system in the state, a wavier has been granted to allow sections of Georgia education law to be exercised under the discretion of the local board of education. The School Governance Council system that has been implemented is designed to promote student achievement through innovative practices through the Request for Flexibility practice, as indicated. The School Governance Councils flexibility to customize the personalized learning systems at the local school level supports the FultonAchieve vision.

I am convinced that the charter system status has assured the district has the autonomy and support to implement their plan.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	8
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

FCS provided supportive evidence that seven community forums were held with numerous parents and staff members in attendance and conducted focus groups at four middle and four high schools engaging 70 students that centered on their strategic plan during the fall of 2010. As referenced by the district during this timeframe, key stakeholders included principals, administrators, school board members, elected officials, community members, PTA associations and parents.

In regards to the plan, the middle school principals in the district did meet and have rendered their support. Also, FCS provided documentation that the 14 mayors in each community confirmed their support of the plan. In addition, the board of education's president endorsed the plan.

WEAKNESS

In a narrative format, the plan didn't include supportive documentation or references that addressed evidence that indicated the support of collective bargaining representation or that at least 70% of the teachers in the participating schools support the proposal.

In addition, I am not totally convinced that the district has provided meaningful evidence that conveys the specific and true involvement of all stakeholders. The district's use of focus groups does not verify or indicate accurate or overwhelming commitments from those represented stakeholders. Also, the district referenced that in there meetings that "numerous people" were in attendance. This descriptive term doesn't provide specific information on the exact numbers in attendance and their respective capacity (e.g., parent, community member, teacher, etc.).

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	13

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The district conveyed that the FultonAchieve plan builds upon the district's personalized learning system framework. In regards to assessment, the data system (FultonConnect) that will be used will support the new instructional management system that enables the maintenance of student portfolios of standardized, formative and rubric-based assessment results.

FultonConnect will include modules to manage documents and monitor compliance related to Individualized Education Programs, Student Support Teams, Response to Intervention, and Section 504.

A Digital Learning Platform will be selected and implemented to assist in administrating, tracking, and delivering the plan's virtual learning courses. Also, this platform will be used in conjunction with Virtual Learning Labs, where students will be able to access new virtual courses such as advanced coursework to accelerate their learning to meet their individual needs while empowering learners. Participating students will be provided mobile devices to ensure access to effective instruction that is adaptive to their needs. These various learning strategies will help to ensure that students are exposed to different high-quality instructional approaches. In regards to high-quality content, students will have access to virtual AP and high school level coursework; math, ELA, science, social studies, foreign languages, and career tech courses.

The project plan included three charts that addressed the following areas:

- Virtual Learning Labs
- Mobile Devices
- Virtual Tutoring

In each of these three component areas a description of the project activities, timeline/deliverables, and the owner or responsible parties were listed.

Personalized learning will enable students to increase their achievement by empowering them with the skills to use higher-order thinking skills toward becoming global citizens and marketable employees. The Digital Learning Platform will help to facilitate multiple sections of courses and alleviate capacity concerns. FultonAchieve will provide learning support and strategies to increase student competence and achievement, while providing supportive infrastructure to implement.

Through personalized learning options, the plan will help to close the opportunity gap by allowing students the same access to rigorous course offerings.

WEAKNESS

The applicant didn't identify accommodations and high-quality strategies for high-need students to ensure college and career readiness. In addition to lacking in the area of diversity issues as requested, the plan didn't appear to reflect evidence or information that indicated a focus upon the interest of students in their courses.

The plan did not address or identify mechanisms that will be in place to provide training and support to students and parents that will ensure their understanding how to use the tools and resources provided to them to track and manage their learning. Also, the method of delivering deep learning experiences was not identified.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	14
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

According to the district, FCS's plan is designed to integrate performance-based assessments, rigorous instruction, and professional development for teachers based on the strategies used to teach students in the Advanced Placement classroom. The plan is designed to make rigor of the CCGPS accessible to all students. Students and teachers will engage in this rigorous coursework through the Digital Learning Platform accessible on desktops, laptops, tablets, and mobile devices. The platform affords teachers the advantage of continuous engagement with struggling, underperforming and advanced students.

The plan targets all 19 middle schools and provides services that will develop, enhance and expand advanced placement programs and increase the participation rate for all students. The district will launch a College and Career Readiness System focusing on math and ELA to empower middle schools students to build skills to succeed in rigorous coursework and create a college-going culture. Teachers will build partnerships within the community and strong familial support. Critical thinking skills will be a focus of the plan along with emphasis on time management and organizational skills.

The district's College and Career Readiness System's curriculum will provide tools and support for teachers to make shifts that the Common Core demands to improve their pedagogy and to authentically engage a diverse classroom. The district will measure the curriculum's success by the participation rate and performance of 8th grade students taking two high school level courses: Coordinate Algebra and Literature & Composition. The district will also re-map the ELA curriculum to take advanced LEA courses in high school.

FCS has developed staff development that extends throughout the grant period that aligns with the various project activities within the focus of college and career readiness. A series of charts was utilized to reference the specific project activities,

timeline deliverable and owner or responsible individual to implement. A specific focus in staff development defines an interactive model where teachers will be able to strengthen their skills for preparing students to do the following:

- Respond to texts and text content
- Employ critical and higher order thinking skills
- Unpack embedded assessments
- Work collaboratively
- Interpret and analyze communication context
- Reflect of and direct processes for constructing meaning
- Engage ideas and audiences through texts
- Conduct research

A Personalized Learning Coach will be staffed in each middle school to assist teachers. Teachers will receive mobile devices for the delivery of instruction. By the project's third year, teachers will be able to personalize learning through holistic teacher-designed, project-based learning or student-centered, problem-based learning. Through utilizing the Digital Learning Platform, students and teachers will be provided the resources for collaboration and creativity. FultonAchieve is designed to ensure an educational environment that provides students with the individualized instruction and personalized delivery methods necessary to meet their learning goals. The PLCs will transform the school's culture that will impact the administration, teachers and students. The professional development will center upon best practices of project-based learning, blended learning and personalized instruction to customize a school plan and to transform its culture. The most significant function of a PLC will be to support and coach teachers in such areas that will impact the development of tech-rich lesson plans, promote digital storytelling, utilize formative assessment data and to develop effective classroom management strategies.

WEAKNESS:

A high-quality plan to support all students wasn't addressed as the plan focused upon a select group of middle school students; therefore, the lowest level students in the middle school were not directly included or identified in the plan. As indicated, the applicant didn't actually address that an increase in the number of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals will be addressed. In addition, the element of what is considered **highly qualified** when referring to educators wasn't clarified by the applicant.

In addition, a reference to provide high-quality learning resources wasn't clearly defined by the applicant.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	8

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

As a strength indicator, FCS has developed a centralized approach to school management that has aligned the district into four communities that comprise the various geographic regions (e.g., north, south, east and west); each managed by a superintendent and staff according with professional and non-professional personnel, which has contributed to their success in governance of such a large and diverse district.

Noteworthy in the district's infrastructure is the flexibility that is grated to the district through their charter system status. The applicant conveyed areas which the School Governance Council can propose reforms that included the following:

- Adjust times for scheduling subjects and courses within the school calendar
- Blended learning to include online or virtual components
- Blended learning to include field experiences such as outside research, internships, and job shadowing
- Additional elective courses at the high school and middle school levels
- Use of non-certified teachers for specific subjects and courses
- Restructuring of gifted and remedial services
- Modifying class sizes
- Allocation of resources, including staff position
- Innovative uses of technology for instruction

WEAKNESS:

According to the applicant, these mentioned reforms can be implemented; however, there was no indication that they have

been successfully implemented in the district. In addition, these reforms were stated in a non-specified and vague manner as they each lacked clarity in their design. Also, the project didn't include research-based references that provided support to any of these reform considerations. There didn't appear to be in place a high-quality plan to support the project implementation that would impact every student, educator, and level of the education system; including the allocation of learning resources and instructional practices that demonstrated an adaptive and accessible approach to meet the individual needs of all students including those with disabilities and English learners.. Also, the district's efforts to address a focus on facilitating personalized learning components were not adequately addressed.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	5
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(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The district has been exploring personalized learning options with mobile devices though on a limited basis (three elementary schools). A separate pilot at two middle schools was conducted using Apple for the devices and Discovery Education for the content. In launching these programs the district has demonstrated a concerted effort to provide technological support to all families/parents; particularly the focus on providing off-site access to those parents who don't have internet access in their home. The International Society of Technology in Education (ISTE) has identified 14 conditions that were included in these pilot programs.

WEAKNESS:

In regards to the development of a high-quality plan that renders support to implement the project through a comprehensive infrastructure that provide every student and educator, at all levels, the support and resources they need didn't appear to be evident in the applicant's efforts to address this topic. The district seemed to still be in an exploratory or pilot stage when it involved an actual technology plan and a clearly established infrastructure. In addition, the district has not established set electronic learning systems or identified the software or programs that would be used to implement the plan while supporting individual learning environments.

In addition, FCS didn't provide the leadership and responsibility alignment regarding who would oversee these various components that relate to the infrastructure and technology support that would be needed to ensure the plan's success.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	9

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

In addressing this component of the plan, the district referenced the various positions (e.g., Project Director, Professional Assistant, Assistant Superintendent, Executive Sponsor, Initiative Owner, etc.) of responsible individuals who will be responsible to help implement various aspects of the project and its structure, outcomes, milestones and benchmarks.

WEAKNESS:

In addressing this area establishing the applicant's best thinking, ongoing program assessment, revision considerations and improvements that that would indicate a clear and high-quality approach to continuously improve the plan, there were no indicators of the criteria that would be established to identify the qualifications of each of these positions relevant to their role. Also, a formal job description that specifies the duties and expectations of each position was not included in this area. In regards to the applicant's efforts to monitor, measure, and publicly share information a reference was made to strategic reviews, public website postings and quarterly and annual reports that would be the methods utilized. These listed efforts to disseminate information did not include any method to personalize this information and to target specific stakeholders (e.g., parents, students, teachers, community members, local/state officials, etc.).

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	3
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(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The district intends to establish a FultonAchieve Advisory Team to review and implement progress and evaluation results. This team will include internal and external experts. The district plans to be transparent about the work of the district and the findings of the Advisory Team.

WEAKNESS:

A highly-qualified plan to ensure that ongoing communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders has not been developed. In addition, the structure and specific functions and purposes of the members of this Advisory Team, including a structured chain-of-command, also have not been clearly developed. As an example, the reference to securing internal and external experts is non-specific and vague as the applicant has not defined what constitutes experts in either of these categories. In addition, a reference was made to provide information and updates utilizing regularly scheduled presentations, though a planned or set schedule has yet been developed. Lastly, there doesn't appear to be a described method, policy, or approach to follow regarding how adjustments and revisions will be implemented once the plan is in effect.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)

5

2

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The district listed performance measures that align with their Strategic Initiative Management framework. However, this reference to its Strategic Initiative Management does not address directly supportive rationale in regards to this area; performance measures.

Also, the testing measures to assess highly effective teachers and principals will be measured as a proxy that was indicated on an Exemplary Teacher Keys' and Exemplary Leaders Keys' charts. In accessing this information, the data was exceptionally limited and vague which rendered little support and clarity to obtaining these performance goals.

In regards to rigor and timely feedback, there appeared to be limited references to these areas in the plan.

The district in addressing the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) indicates levels of achievement required to enroll in colleges, universities, and technical colleges; therefore, this indicator of college preparedness reflected contrasting results within the middle schools' data. However, there were no references to how these discrepancies would be addressed by the district and within the plan.

The plan failed to address at least one age-appropriate non-cognitive indicator of growth (e.g., physical well-being and motor development, or social-emotional development) as requested.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)

5

5

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The district has developed a comprehensive evaluation process that centered upon the evaluation team, the Research and Evaluation Analyst, the Project Director and district staff in the Accountability Office. A collaborative approach that collects and analyzes data would be used throughout the project period with a focus on technology utilization and the successful implementation of creating personalized learning environments for students.

A series of four research questions were applied to this component that helped to set clear and a high-quality approach to continuously make improvements of its plan. These research questions addressed the following aspects of the plan:

- Changes in classroom practices
- Changes in student indicators
- Changes in student outcomes
- Increased academic rigor

In summary, a formative and summative evaluation will help to determine the progress that is being made toward attaining the established performance measures. The evaluation team will be responsible to review and make any required course corrections. The applicant's plan to evaluate the plan effectively appears to be in place and evident.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	6

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

In addressing the applicant's budget, a series of tables were included that included just a brief narrative description of aspects of the budget project, overview of the initiatives, and the expected outcomes. The stated reference were non-specific and vague as items and outcomes were stated in the following manner:

- A culture of high expectations
- Rigorous coursework
- Install virtual learning labs
- Provide mobile devices to teachers and students
- Strategies to improve attendance

The district in addressing their budget request and amounts appeared to fairly relate reasonable cost or projected allocations for marked budgeted items as noted.

There were not any indications where the district expected to receive state and or federal funds to help implement and support the proposal beyond the grant time.

An informative narrative to describe the budget and related information was lacking in this category as this would have provided clarity to various components of the budget process; therefore, the plan didn't focus upon strategies that would ensure long-term sustainability.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	6
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The district has identified anticipated funding sources through Title I, Title II-A, Title III, and Title VI-B that will provide evaluation data that can contribute to data-decision making that will help support the plan. FCS intends to pursue relationships with local and national foundations to help support the plan.

In addition to Title funding, the district has access to Seed Fund that is financed by the Georgia Legislature. These grants support local initiatives as defined within strategic plans; therefore, the district hopes to pursue this funding. The Office of Grant Development has created the Menu of Giving to support the district's strategic plans. A substantial gift from the Hilda and Wilbur Glenn Family Foundation was noted.

In regards to the evaluation the effectiveness of past investments, the district will utilize diagnostic visits or formal consulting assessments of the overall effectiveness of the organization and plan.

The district included summaries of the four major projects within the grant that centered upon sustainability elements. These projects vary with their need to sustain financial support. It appears that in two cases the cost to maintain these projects will be absorbed by the district.

In regards to creating an estimated budget for three years after the grant, budget assumptions, potential sources, and the usage of funds were limited. There does not appear to be in place evidence that ensures the sustainability of the grant beyond its period. In reference to the district stating that categories will be absorbed in the budget, it was not indicated at what sacrifice to other expenditures will this absorption process impact.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	6

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The district has identified bubble students in this area of high needs. The district provided data and charts that identified the number of these students reflecting a need to improve their reading and math CRCT scores and those students with attendance issues due to unexcused absences and out of school suspensions.

The project area displayed a Framework for Acceleration chart that identified activities, timelines, and responsible parties. The activities that were described in this framework appeared to align well with the goals of the plan well focusing upon data collection, stakeholder input, parenting support/engagement and supportive leadership in the program's design.

The reference of partnerships that will support the plan was identified with funds that will promote improved academic performance and improved attendance was addressed in this area of the plan.

The plan did identify what appeared to be intervention efforts that will contribute to improvement in these areas of concern. It was evident that technology will be a focus area that will contribute to programs and initiatives that will be designed to support academic growth in a personal learning environment that will be developed in the district.

WEAKNESS:

As a focus will be on these bubble students, it is obvious that more at-risk and higher-priority students attend the school. In an effort to provide enhance services and focus on these bubble students, it is quite possible that other students who would be as or even more worthy of support will be neglected.

In regards to the data that was referenced addressing attendance and behavioral issues, there was no comparative data included that contrasted these students to the remainder or balance of the various schools population.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met
Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:		
<p>In identifying the focus and intent of this project, it was apparent that the plan does minimally address those components and indicators that meet the standards identified in the selection criteria process. Therefore, the applicant provided information and evidence that ensures that the design of their project will contribute to improved learning of those targeted students through the establishment of personalized strategies that will align with college and career readiness outcomes.</p>		

Total	210	135
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0026GA-3 for Fulton County Board of Education

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	5
(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The "FultonAchieve" RTT/D application builds on the district's strategic plan, "Building Our Future, 2012-2017." For instance, this plan provides the foundation for more work in areas such as customized/continuous learning, tailored supports, student access to tailored supports and appropriate technology, and data-driven decision-making.</p> <p>Specifically, the vision for school reform is focused on closing the opportunity and achievement gaps and accelerating student learning at each of its nineteen (19) middle schools, a sensible focus in a district that had previously targeted its largely remedial improvement efforts at the elementary and high school levels. More than 13,700 middle school students will participate in the RTT/D funded projects. 49% of all students are from low income homes, with the percentage of economically disadvantaged students in different schools ranging from less than 5% to more than 95%.</p>		

In order to provide more autonomy and more flexibility in its ability to implement innovative reforms, the district has been re-structured as a large, shared governance charter system. This RTT/D proposal, as required in (A)(1)(a), builds on the four core educational assurance areas. That is, it is implementing the state's Common Core performance standards and a variety of criterion-referenced and formative assessments, investing in data systems that measure student growth in order to inform instruction (FultonConnect and an additional Digital Learning Platform that is yet to be selected), improving teacher and principal effectiveness (using Leader Keys and Teacher Keys), and using credit acceleration and implementing a middle school college and career readiness system as its choice for a school turn-around strategy.

The vision includes a variety of components to address the needs of on-grade level or above students -- that would then hopefully raise the aspirations and achievement of those below grade level, especially those in low performing sub-groups. This strategy may be theoretically appealing, but it lacks a strong research-base (or a justification) for how this approach would increase equity or for address the needs of those students and schools that are the lowest performing in the district. For instance, there is a need for more specifics about how personalized student support for students in low performing sub-groups would accelerate their learning based on their particular academic interests.

Beyond a general expectation that on-level students will participate in more accelerated, competency-based learning options, there is a lack of information about what the classroom experience will actually be like for students and teachers participating in RTT/D funded projects

For these reasons, the score for this section is a 5.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)

10

8

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant meets the requirements of (A)(2)(a) as it will involve all 19 of the district's middle schools in the RTT/D project; that is, the selection process was all inclusive without the selection of specific schools within those nineteen. The focus will be on supporting students who are on or above grade level.

To address (A)(2)(b) & (c), the applicant lists its middle schools that includes information about the number of participating educators and the number and percentage of students in each school who are from low income families. Collectively, the district meets the RTT/D eligibility requirements as 49.1% of all middle school students are from low income families; however, the percentage of participating students from low-income families ranges from a low of 10% at River Trail Middle School to four schools with over 92% of students from low-income families. The table does not include information on the percentage of students at each school from other high need groups, such as the percentage of students attending high minority schools, or those who have disabilities, or who are English language learners.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)

10

7

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The key goals of FultonAchieve are clear: that 93% of the district's middle school students are college and career ready; that 75% of its 8th graders meet or exceed state standards in Algebra; and that 80% of 8th graders meet or exceed state standards on the 9th grade state test in Literature and Composition. With more high achieving middle school students, the applicant predicts that this will translate into a far higher rate of success for high school students who will then graduate college/career ready. It is not clear to what extent the lower achieving students in middle school Algebra and ELA/Reading/Writing will be successful when they reach high school.

The particulars of the applicant's high quality plan (re: timeline, deliverables, parties responsible, etc.) will be guided by information and recommendations generated by Gartner Consulting and its Blue Ribbon panel based on their study of national and international educational 'bright spots.' In the meantime, the applicant will launch a "Challenging and Innovative Instruction" initiative to improve teaching and learning for under-achieving middle school students while expecting to implement its RTT/D funded FultonAchieve plan to improve access to rigorous coursework, provide more effective personalized learning opportunities, and to close the 'opportunity gap' between on-level students and accelerated students at all 19 middle schools.

Since FultonAchieve will target students who already meet the state's performance standards in Reading and either the Math or Science, it is not clear how its theory of action/change will support meaningful district-wide reform and actually improve learning outcomes for all middle school students so that they will be fully prepared for demanding, high school level coursework that will lead to graduation and college/career success.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	6
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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

This section again outlines highly ambitious goals for its students, including that by 2017-18, 99% of 6th, 7th, & 8th graders will meet or exceed state standards in Reading (96% in Math); 90% of students will graduate on time; and eventually 100% of students will be certified as "work ready." These goals are exciting and impressive; however, because the implementation plan is still in development, there is not yet enough information provided to substantiate their achievability. Also, proficiency status data for middle school students is shown as averages for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students altogether (as one statistic for all grade levels at all schools) rather than disaggregated by grade level and/or by school). As a result it is very difficult to make an in-depth analysis of the percentages as presented -- or to understand if the applicant's vision is likely to result in improved student learning and performance and increased equity at each grade level and each school.

The expectation for student growth is more modest, with post grant averages expected to be in the range of 60% - 68%. Achievement gaps between subgroups and all students is expected to significantly decrease in the next six years, and 80 to 90% of students are expected to graduate by 2017-18. College enrollment rates for the applicant's high school students is among the highest in its entire state, with 72.9% of students expected to enroll in 2013-14, but only a very modest increase (up to 73.3%) is projected for 2017-18; in this case, the goal for improvement appears achievable but too limited to be considered ambitious. College enrollment data by subgroup is not provided.

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	8

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The graphs provided demonstrate that for the past three years (not four as required by B/1/1), middle school students, overall and by subgroup, have made consistent progress in Reading and rather inconsistent but still an upward trend of progress in Math. However, significant gaps remain when comparing middle school subgroups, particularly students with disabilities and limited English proficient students with the overall student population.

The district utilizes tools such as FultonConnect and Checkpoints to provide student data to teachers who use this for formative instructional planning as well as placement of students. It is, however, not clear what percentage of middle school teachers actually use these tools or how useful they are in advancing sub-groups' progress and achievement. Although the district's school board adopted a policy in June, 2013, that will allow students to progress in math and/or language arts at his or her own pace, this does not support the requested evidence of success in the past.

Because the information provided collapses data from all nineteen middle schools (and put together data from grades 6, 7, and 8), it is difficult to discern the extent of implementation of ambitious and significant reforms in its persistently low and lowest performing schools. For instance, although three of the participating 19 middle schools have been designated by the state as "Focus" schools due to the large size of the achievement gap between highest and lowest performing students, there is a lack of compelling information from the past four years about how ambitious and significant reforms have decreased that gap in those specific schools. Although the applicant notes that analyzing data to personalize instruction will close achievement gaps in general, there is a need for more specific information about its track record over the past four years to demonstrate the applicant's ability to do so for all subgroups in all of its middle schools.

Student performance data is made available to educators, and to parents through the parent portal of the on-line Home Access Center information system. This allows parents to track their children's grades, program participation, and discipline incidences. There is no information about what percentage of parents actually access this system, or how they might do so if they lack internet access in their homes. Also, there is a lack of information about if or how students access this data on-line, and the extent to which the system actually improves parental participation, instruction, and services. That is, making student performance data available is not likely to be helpful for parents and student if they are unable to access this 'Home Access Center' tool when away from the local libraries or school sites. Teachers and principals, on the other hand, are more likely to have access to the district's tools such as FultonConnect, Checkpoints, and the statewide Longitudinal Data System.

Based on a lack of specific information about the applicant's record of success in the past four years that demonstrate its ability to address (1)(a)(b)&(c), this section is rated with a mid level score of 6.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	3
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(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant is transparent in its disclosure of salary schedules, but does not provide actual and specific personnel and non personnel salaries to the public; unspecified "salary information" is available on a state Dept. of Audits and Accounts website. Information is provided to the public about the total of personnel and non-personnel expenditures through School Board meetings (which are open to the public) and budget hearings where proposed budgets are explained and discussed. This budget information may include detailed school-level expenditures, but there is no description of that school-based information in this section of the RTT/D application.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	9
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant operates in a state where, for the past five years, school districts are allowed more flexibility from state education laws and in fact are encouraged to design and implement innovative educational programs. School Governance Councils will be created at each school; there is no information provided as to whether the twenty schools where these are already operational include middle schools. The state allows Governance Councils to request flexibility in a wide variety of areas,

including service delivery models and seat time, but there is no information on the use or status of such requests among the district's middle schools.

Thus it appears that there is successful conditions and sufficient autonomy under the state's requirements to implement personalized learning environments as described in the applicant's proposal. Within the increased state flexibility, the applicant district will monitor the rate of progress of student achievement at each school.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)

15

7

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has had involvement of staff and community members in the development of its 2010 strategic plan and has tried to continue this engagement in the development of its RTT/D proposal, FultonAchieve. Middle school principals supported the proposal's emphasis on investing resources in accelerating the progress of on-level and above grade level students, hoping this raise the expectations and achievement levels of below grade level students. For instance, at one middle school, eligible students can now take AP courses.

It is not clear how students, families, and teachers in the middle schools were engaged in the development of the proposal or how it may have been revised based on their feedback. Letters of support are very limited. Of the thirteen mayors who were emailed requesting letters of support, only two responded. The state's Dept. of Education declined to respond. The two letters of support from PTA Presidents are signed individually but are identical in their text. There is a lack of documentation of informed support from a broad array of civil rights organizations, advocacy groups and local civic and community-based organizations. Although there are copies of posters with various signatures in support of the proposal, it is not clear if those who signed understood the goals and content of the RTT/D proposal, or who the signatures actually represent.

In summary, this section earns a score of 7 due to its lack of demonstrated evidence of meaningful, broad-based stakeholder engagement throughout the development of the proposal and the lack of evidence of meaningful, broad-based stakeholder support for the proposal among middle school students, families, teachers, and their local communities.

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	11

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant believes that by enhancing effective teaching and increasing rigorous learning opportunities, supported by technology, for on grade level and advanced students, then all other students (such as those below grade level) will jump forward in their own growth and achievement. This is an untested theory of action that ignores the specific needs of underperforming subgroups in each middle school -- particularly those schools with the lowest levels of achievement and the highest percentages of economically disadvantaged students.

Addressing (C)(1)(a), the district will expose eligible middle school students to a rigorous and 'deep learning' early high school curriculum, augmented with content that will become available through mobile labs and mobile devices, that will prepare them for college-level coursework in high school. A not-yet-selected Digital Learning Platform and Virtual Learning Labs of 30 laptops on a cart will provide students with school-based access to digital content, videos, and other skill-building resources. There is no information provided regarding whether students will understand that what they are learning is key to their college/career goals or whether they will be exposed to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives that will motivate and deepen their individual learning. This

section is also silent regarding how the new content and delivery systems will help develop skills and trains such as teamwork, perseverance, critical thinking, communication, creativity and problem solving.

Addressing (C)(1)(b) and (c), the applicant describes how access to AP courses (by eligible middle school students) and advanced digital coursework, along with more rigorous classes for on-level students, will provide a personalized sequence of instructional content and skill development. However, it is not yet clear what percentage of students will actually be prepared and willing to undertake even more advanced work at schools such as McNair Middle School, where over 92% of its students are from economically disadvantaged families, and where it is difficult to fill the already offered honors and advanced level classes. It is also not evident that all students in such schools will be provided with the on-going feed-back, accommodations, high quality instruction, and appropriate training and support, necessary to ensure they will be on track for managing their own learning in ways that will lead to college/career readiness.

Note that providing an Aide and "Virtual Learning Labs" of 30 laptops that reside in a mobile cart is unrealistic for providing students in large middle schools with on-going, regular access to digital content and virtual learning. It is helpful that participating students will be provided with mobile devices, but there is a lack of a high quality plan for providing the necessary training and support for students and teachers to effectively utilize such devices to accelerate learning. Teachers will not be receiving their mobile devices until August 2015, and students will not get theirs until August of 2016; although this provides extra time for teachers to learn how best to utilize such devices to integrate high quality digital resources and approaches, this plan appears inappropriate for a proposal that relies extensively and immediately on digital learning opportunities to personalize learning environments. It is also not clear how participating students will benefit from the Virtual Tutors and on-line learning starting in Sept. 2014 when they are not provided with mobile devices until 2016.

Overall, given that the applicant has underperforming subgroups in its middle schools, one would expect a specific plan for learning that engages and empowers all participating learners, particularly high need students living in poverty, to be provided with access to a wider variety of high quality content, specified instructional approaches, and powerful, innovative supports.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	10
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant intends to launch an RTT/D funded College and Career Readiness System to support middle school teachers in developing engaging Common Core-aligned instructional activities that help create a college-going culture -- and to help their students build skills to succeed in rigorous coursework. Since this System is not yet developed, It is difficult to evaluate its ability to support the effective implementation of personalized learning environments that meet each student's academic needs, adapt content and instruction, and ensure college/career readiness. It is to the applicant's credit that their plan provides for professional development in the new system for teachers, beginning in the summer of 2014. The drawback is that this initial summer institute is designed to include each school's System site team of eight members, only five of whom are subject area teachers. However, [per chart in (A)(2)] there are 114 to 199 participating educators per school.

Starting in the fall of 2014, each middle school will have an RTT/D-funded Personalized Learning Coach to help teachers transition to develop effective technology-rich instruction and integrate project/problem-based learning activities; if appropriately selected and trained, these coaches have the potential to be very helpful for teachers as the applicant address the requirements in (C)(2)(a) &

(b).

The new teacher and principal evaluation system is also designed to provide feedback to improve educator effectiveness. There is a need for more information about the details of their plan for implementing these evaluation programs (e.g., the timeline, activities to be undertaken, deliverables, parties responsible, etc.) so that it would indeed increase the number of of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals, including in hard-to-staff schools, subjects, and specialty areas.

It is a worthy goal to promote 8th graders taking Coordinate Algebra and Literature & Composition, rigorous courses designed for 9th grade students. More information is needed about what changes will take place in the math curriculum/instruction for sixth and seventh graders so that they will be fully prepared to succeed in these new opportunities. Also, it is an ambitious 2017 goal for 100% of 8th grade students to be enrolled in 9th grade Algebra with 75% of those students scoring in the meets or exceeds ranges on the state's end of course test -- and 100% of 8th graders will be similarly enrolled in the 9th grade Literature and Composition course with 80% scoring in the meets/exceeds categories. However, it appears unlikely that the participating educator and school leaders will have the necessary training, tools, and resources to continuously improve 8th graders' student performance to this level in all nineteen middle schools to this level by 2017.

Additionally, there is a lack of information as to what happens to those 8th graders enrolled who are not successful course completers; there is a distinct possibility that this new initiative could actually increase the gap between successful completers of these 9th grade courses in 8th grade, and those high risk/high needs students who are not successful.

The applicant district plans to launch a new Digital Learning Platform as a a key resource for increasing student performance and closing achievement gaps.will be thoughtfully utilized by teachers and administrators to personalize learning since the specific platform (with loaded content) has not yet been selected. And although it is an innovative idea to offer AP courses to eligible middle school students, it seems unlikely that many students at these grade levels will be academically able and mature enough to undertake the required preparation for the AP exams. Access to the Digital Learning Platform holds great promise; however, it will be a few years until both teachers and students are provided with these devices.

To help ensure that students master critical content and develop skills in goal-setting, teamwork, perseverance, critical thinking, communication and problem-solving, the applicant intends to select and train teachers to work with students and their families as "Adult Advocates." These teachers have the potential to serve as mentors and liaisons to the families of under-achieving students. However, there is a lack of information on how many will be selected, what curriculum and strategies they will use, and how they will fit into an overall plan for personalizing learning and supporting student success for students in nineteen middle schools. Instead, they appear to be an "add-on" whose roles, responsibilities, selection and training, are not specifically described.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	10

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

(D)(1)(a) To help with the implementation of the proposed RTT/D project, the applicant has created a more decentralized reorganization of its Academic Division; a variety of staff positions have been out of the central office and placed in four area "learning communities," each of which provides support

services to schools in a given geographic area of the district. This appears to be a positive step in providing schools with the support they need, when and where they are needed.

(D)(1)(b) To address this RTT/D requirement, the district intends to generate, oversee, and certify site-based School Governance Councils that will serve as school leadership teams. Such councils will be able to propose reforms in areas such as budget development, the allocation of staff positions as well as non-personnel resources, adding additional subjects &/or courses at each school, recommending innovative uses of instructional technologies, etc. Members will include administrators, teaching staff, parents, and community members. The School Governance Councils can also be dissolved by the district, so although they may provide more school-based autonomy and increased flexibility, it is not clear to whom they make their recommendations, and for what reasons they might be dissolved.

(D)(1)(c) & (d) The applicant's strategic plan and its FultonAchieve proposal include sound competency-based initiatives for students to progress based on demonstrating mastery rather than seat time. Year long courses could be completed in half that time, and students can demonstrate their mastery of standards at multiple times and in multiple comparable way. Options might include community projects, apprenticeships, independent projects, virtual course participation, &/or work experiences.

(D)(1)(e) The applicant intends to explore non-traditional alternative resources and adaptable teaching practices that will facilitate full accessibility for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners.

Although the policies are now in place for the above changes to take place, and the new School Governance Councils have been implemented in some of the district's schools, there is a lack of a comprehensive and coherent high quality plan for the implementation of each of the described components. That is, although these proposed changes in the district's infrastructure, governance, and practices are likely to be helpful if and when they are fully implemented, the applicant does not specify the activities, timeline, deliverables, and parties responsible for implementing the activities involved. There is a diagram outlining the personnel in each area "learning community" with its Title 1 staff, ELA and Math Coaches, and four Program Specialists, but these positions are not described in terms of their relationship to the various FultonAchieve initiatives. Thus there is a lack of coherence and connection between and among the infrastructure's goals, staffing, governance, and specific RTT/D funded initiatives.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)

10

9

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

(D)(2)(a) To expand the number of participating students having greater access to engaging and relevant curriculum resources, the applicant piloted a number of interesting and worthwhile personalized learning initiatives that involved tools such as mobile devices, web-based resources, and game systems. These included a Bring Your Own Device pilot at three elementary schools, and Amplify pilots in two middle schools (tablets preloaded with content), and a pilot at two other middle schools with Apple devices loaded with Discovery Education content. Thus four of the nineteen middle schools have had experience (from January - May, 2013) with leveraging technology for learning; fifteen middle schools have yet to do so. Parents and teachers will have more information available about students' assessment results once FultonConnect is up and running. Class schedules, podcasts of lessons, on-line resources and assessments, and other resources will be made available. Access for households with children who receive free or reduced school lunches are eligible for \$9.95/month internet service through the Comcast Internet Essentials program; there is no information provided regarding how many or what percentage of eligible families are participating in this program.

(D)(2)(b) The district plans to provide appropriate levels of tiered technical support for FultonConnect to students and parents through self-help videos, reference guides, and FAQs as well as through email and phone support; educators were provided training during the spring of 2013. There is need for more information as to what personnel will be available and trained to provide such support during and after school hours.

(D)(2)(c) FERPA-compliant access to secure and confidential student information will be provided in an open data format. Parents will have the option of exporting their students' data into formats such as PDF or Excel.

(D)(2)(d) There is a sensible plan for FultonConnect to be able to pull information from the present Data Warehouse to populate dashboards (that provide a quick visual as to a student's progress) and facilitate reporting for use by principals and, when fully operationalized, by parents and students, as appropriate. Data systems are generally interoperable though it is not clear the extent to which human resources data, budget data, and instructional improvement system data will be included.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	12

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

This section describes in helpful detail the staff members (by title/role and name) who will be monitoring, measuring and publicly sharing information about RTT/D initiatives, including the impact of changes in areas such as professional development, technology, and staffing. Each project component will have an assigned 'owner' who will be responsible for designing an implementing a work plan with clearly stated milestones and deliverables as well as progress on achieving the given initiative's stated outcomes. Each of these owners reports to an initiative Executive Sponsor who reports to division heads and the superintendent with monthly updates to the full Cabinet.

Since nineteen large middle schools will be involved in the RTT/D projects, there are many staff members involved at each level. This structure appears complicated, but has the potential to provide a high degree of accountability and the opportunity for a continuous improvement process with timely and regular feedback on progress toward project goals along with on-going corrections and improvements.

Status reports and both quarterly and annual reports on the implementation of RTT/D action plans will be shared publicly on the district's website. There is a need for information concerning other ways that information will be shared, for instance through articles in the newspaper, public meetings, letters to parents, presentations to community organizations and businesses, and so forth.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	3
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(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

On-going communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders will be provided through presentations at monthly, quarterly, and semi-annual meetings with the Superintendent's Councils; there are separate advisory councils of parents, students, principals, teachers, and community leaders. The Superintendent will seek feedback from each stakeholder group on their perceptions of the effectiveness of RTT/D initiatives' implementation, and ask for recommendations for improvement. In addition, the district will establish a FultonAchieve Advisory Team, including both internal and external stakeholders and experts. This team will provide advice on how to continuously improve initiatives and maximize results.

While there is a constellation of groups involved in on-going communication, oversight, and making recommendations for improvement, this section does not include some of the specifics of a high quality plan, such as a description of the parties responsible, and the individual roles and responsibilities of each person and group involved in the supervision of the project's implementation and any needed adjustments and revisions during the implementation. For instance, it is not clear who or what body has the authority to actually make any needed changes to project components, staffing, budgets, etc. This can cause confusion and a negative impact on the overall efficiency and credibility of the project.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)

5

3

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

In this section the applicant provides information on the performance measures it intends to use to provide information relative to its proposed plan, theory of action, and implementation success (or areas of concern); the rationale for selecting each measure is appropriately described in the (E)(3) narrative. A few of the tables have no data included, such as the number and percentage of participating middle school students, by subgroup, whose teacher and principal are either effective or highly effective.

The percentage of participating 6th - 8th grade students presently on track is expected to increase by about 20% by 2017-18 for all students, and for each sub-group. However, it is confusing that at that time 100% of all participating students are projected to be on track for college/career readiness, yet only 91.6% of economically disadvantaged students are expected to be so.

The percentage of participating middle school students who exceed the state math standards on the CRCT is expected to about double between 2012-13 and 2017-18. This is laudable -- except that this does not 'close the gap' between all students and sub-groups of students. For instance, in those five years (on this same measure) the percentage of all students jumps from 30.6% to 61.1%, and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students is expected to increase from 14.9% to 29.7%. Thus the ratio continues and the same gap persists.

There is also concern that the percentage of FultonAchieve 8th grade students receiving credit in Coordinate Algebra will jump from 10% in 2013-14 to 100% in 2017-18 -- an ambitious goal yet not one substantiated in the narrative to be achievable. By the same token, the percentage of FultonAchieve participating 8th grade students who meet or exceed standards on the End of Course Test in 9th grade Literature & Composition is expected to sharply increase from 25% in 2013-14 to 100% in 2017-18.

As a sidebar, it is distressing to see that on the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System Rating, only 5.4% of all participating students are in classrooms with teachers rated exemplary for creating an academically challenging environment in the baseline year (2012-13), and it is projected that only 27% of all participating students will have such a teacher by 2017-18. Similarly, only 2.9% of all students are considered to have an Exemplary Principal in 2012-13, which is projected to increase to 14.5% of all students five years hence. (In both categories, there is no data provided for sub-groups of students). An exemplary school leader is described as promoting the success of all students by developing, advocating, and sustaining an academically rigorous, positive, and safe school climate for all stakeholders -- a rather low bar for effectiveness, yet only a relatively small percentage of students are considered to have such a principal. This is also a concern regarding the applicant in regards to (E)(3)(c). These statistics indicate that this is an area of concern (that most students do not have either an effective/highly effective teacher &/or principal); the data generated, and in this case its relationship to improving personalized learning environments to promote student success, is to most external evaluators of more importance than the adequacy of the instrument/tool/measure itself.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)

5

3

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

In this section the applicant describes how it will utilize a clear and high-quality approach to continuously improve its plan to evaluate the effectiveness of RTT/D funded activities such as professional development and those components that employ technology. There will be a fully operationalized FultonAchieve evaluation team that includes a RTT/D funded Research and Evaluation Analyst, the FultonAchieve Project Director, and district Accountability Office staff. This team will collaborate with the FultonAchieve Advisory Team to document progress and highlight successes.

The (E)(4) narrative outlines the key research topics and questions that the evaluation team will address; these are appropriate and clearly stated. These include questions formulated around the issues of changes in teachers' instructional practices; changes in student indicators for being on track for graduation and career/college readiness; changes in participating students' academic achievement outcomes; and positive increases in participating students' enrollment and successful completion of more rigorous coursework (e.g., Coordinate Algebra and Literature & Composition).

While the proposed research questions and overall plan for evaluation are solid, there is a need for more information concerning the time-line for evaluative activities and how the changes in classroom practice/ instruction (including the impact of technology integration) will be assessed and reported. Further, there is a lack of detail concerning the evaluation strategy for assessing school leadership support for the applicant's project, district and school-level changes in policies and procedures, and the involvement of community partners and stakeholders.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	9

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's projects involve a total budgeted amount (over four years) of \$31,966,589.63. Of this amount, \$24,987,858.35 is requested from RTT/D funds, and \$6,978,731.28 is projected to be funded from other sources. By far the greatest amount of RTT/D funds requested, \$17,249,744.20, will be utilized to staff Personalized Learning Coaches in each middle school; to install Virtual Learning Labs in each participating school; and to provide mobile devices to teachers and students. About \$4.4 million dollars will be invested in college and career readiness systems, and about \$1.1 million dollars will be used for project management and evaluations. Overall, this appears to be a reasonable and sufficient budget to support the development and implementation of the applicant's proposal, with thoughtful rationales provided for investments and priorities. However it is not clear in the information provided which non-RTT/D funds will be provided by specific external foundation grants and which will be provided by other sources.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	5
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant is thinking ahead to plan for on-going sustainability of the project's objectives in the years following the RTT/D investments. Portions of federal funds (Title I, II-A, II, and VI-B) will be re-allocated to sustain support of FultonAchieve after the grant period. The Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax is expected to raise \$912 million for school improvements over its five-year lifetime, and a significant portion of these funds will be dedicated to technology enhancements for students and teachers, thus complementing the FultonAchieve RTT/D funding. Foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Broad Center for the Management of School Systems will continue to provide funding for highly qualified Harvard Fellows and executive management and data analysis Residents. Other non-RTT/D funding that will support the project's sustainability comes from

the state's Seed Fund, the Hilda and Wilbur Glenn Family Foundation, and other sources such as e-SPLOST funds. It is difficult to project funding for sustainability for five years in the future, but the applicant has the outline of a plan to evaluate improvements in productivity and student outcomes to inform an immediate post-grant budget. There needs to be more specific information provided concerning an estimated budget for the three years after the term of the grant that includes budget assumptions, potential funding sources, and actual uses of such funds.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	6

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant proposes an ABC Framework for Acceleration as its Competitive Preference Priority. This initiative will serve eleven of its targeted Title I middle schools with mentoring and coaching, as well as enrichment opportunities, for students who fall just above the cut scores for meeting state mandated standards in reading and mathematics or science ("bubble students"). The project intends to build the capacity of existing personnel and expand community partnerships for targeted service delivery. Additional supports and on-going partnerships will help such students improve their attendance, reduce their truancy, reward their more positive behavior, enhance their academic performance, and accelerate their learning. The narrative describes a long list of optional programs that participating schools can adopt to meet their particular priorities. Overall, the proposal for this project and its budget are sensible and worthwhile, with the potential for improving the success of participating students. However, there is a lack of specific information in regards to the requirements of (5)(a) through (e).

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

Although somewhat limited in its quality, the applicant does provide sufficient and adequate responses to the RTT/D requirements to meet Absolute Priority 1 as described above. The applicant's intentions are reasonable in trying to improve the personal learning environments for the participating students in its nineteen middle schools so that they will be more prepared for rigorous high school coursework and graduate college and career ready. The weakness in the overall responses is that they often lack in the extent to which they are complete, justified, coherent, and/or comprehensive.

Total	210	134
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