



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0166TX-1 for Houston Independent School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has integrated the core assurance areas named by the application directly into the district's Declaration of Beliefs and Visions. The vision set by the applicant focuses on raising achievement, closing gaps, recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers, and cultivating school autonomy. Applicant has specific goals and learning outcomes in place aligned with each of these areas. There is a clear approach to how the goals will be met through a college and career focus, personalized learning through numerous programs and pathways from K to 12. The personalized learning and real world experience should provide students with deeper learning options as they have the opportunity to focus on things that are of interest to them. Applicant also makes clear the experience students will have in their classrooms throughout their academic careers by outlining the college and career focus that will be in place beginning in the elementary school. The applicant also describes how technology will be integrated into the classroom to help students. Scores highly as all areas are addressed in detail.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant lists all participating schools and students as well as explaining how they assessed each schools' capacity for change using Linked Learning and determined which met the eligibility requirements. The process is based on an assessment of high quality CTE programs, which will eventually lead the way to implementing the program at more schools throughout the district. The section scores in the high range, as it outlines how schools were evaluated to meet the requirement. The evaluation process to determine school's ability shows an intentional focus on improvement and a desire to focus on schools that are capable of making the necessary reforms.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant explains it can scale up the project using outside partnerships to help build internal capacity before being phased out. All teachers are being trained in program-specific strategies at each school. District level meetings are held for principals to assure all schools are on the same page, and programs are being aligned across the district. Section scores highly as the applicant clearly outlines how it intends to make the program district-wide. The applicant creates a high-quality plan for scaling up, as they are looking to implement structural changes in the schools in terms of implementing standards and providing professional development that should be sustainable and replicable at all schools. They also have a timeline for implementation by listing which schools will begin undertaking grant activities for each year of the process, which ensures a steady roll towards district wide implementation by initially focusing on the highest need schools.</p>		
(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has plans in place to address graduation and college enrollment rates and addresses the approach to personalized learning that will help increase these rates throughout the proposal, mostly in section C1, by increasing teacher effectiveness, increasing data collection on student achievement and ensuring educators have the resources necessary to personalize education. The chart in the application has numerous activities relating to the goals outlined in the grant, as well as providing detail as to who will be overseeing the activities. This section lists the major goals of the grant decreasing achievement gaps, and increasing achievement overall. Additionally, the applicant addresses how achievement towards goals will be monitored and effectiveness will be measured. The applicant also addresses the optional goal of postsecondary achievement by setting a goal for degree achievement.</p>		

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	15
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has shown improvement in numerous areas of student achievement, including, increased graduation and college enrollment rates, decreased dropout rates, narrowing achievement gaps between white and African American students, and white and Latino students. State assessment scores have increased and more students are participating in the SAT and ACT. Although some of the increases have been minor, there seems to be a clear trend of improvement. The applicant has made a concerted effort in its lowest achieving schools and has seen state assessment increases at most of them. The district has a strong data system that is available to teachers, parents and students and provides a variety of data to improve instructional services. The district has seemingly made a concerted effort to collect and organize vast amounts of data, and disseminate in a way that is open to students, teachers and parents through various platforms.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	3
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The state makes a number of financial records available, but it seems that detailed records such as individual salaries belong to school principals and they may not be required to make it public. The applicant does not explicitly state whether average salaries are available to view by the public. Non-personnel expenditures are publicly available on the district's website. While the section scores strongly due to the vast amount of data they have available, such as school and district budgets and financial reports, the searchable check register and Finance Procedures manual, it remains unclear what the process is for members of the public to obtain information on non-personnel expenditures at the school level. Although data may be available, it is not completely transparent how available it actually is.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has found no issues that would prevent implementation of personalized learning, and the state actually requires schools to offer individualized instruction plans. The state has mandated the use of college readiness standards, though it is left to the district to determine how to define and implement them. The state has also granted principals the obligation to determine personal graduation plans for all students, which grants them the ability to offer flexible scheduling, alternative classrooms and other interventions that will be necessary for implementing the programs outlined in the grant.</p>		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	14
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Principals were made aware of the grant, and held school wide meetings with their faculty and staff informing them of the program and application process, as well as soliciting feedback. Creating a critical stakeholder group comprised of principals and teachers is important, as it provided a vehicle for school staff to give their input. Parents and community members were invited to forums to provide input as well. The district does not have collective bargaining but has reached the 70% support from teachers as well as support from the teachers' union. Letters of support from numerous organizations are also included showing their interest in the grant and ability to offer feedback during the writing process. The only weakness in this section was the applicant did not state whether feedback from teachers, parents and the community was actually used to revise the proposal.</p>		

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	18
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant scores in the high medium range, as they present a fairly strong plan, but is missing a few minor pieces. The applicant describes a strong program for career based learning, and providing students college and career ready standards. They meet the requirement of helping students understand the need for education in accomplishing goals by introducing career exploration as early as elementary school. The applicant has a plan which would allow students to identify their personal interests in the elementary grades, and create a Personal Graduation Plan in middle and high school which would include monitoring, intervention strategies, and innovative methods to prepare students for graduation. The applicant does not provide much information in regards to deeper learning, as their plan</p>		

is heavily focused on career goals, although the applicant does introduce project based learning as a way to better engage students. The applicant does not provide specifics as to how students will be exposed to multiple cultures and context. They describe Houston as a diverse city, and the role consular corps play in the economy, but do not explain how the city’s diversity and the corps will act in and effect school change. The applicant says they will engage consular corps through linked learning, but provide no additional details. The applicant mentions they have school choice and are looking to increase community engagement, but does not explain what the effects on student learning would be as the result of community engagement and school choice. The applicant does provide a strong plan as to how they will develop career skills and traits in students. At the elementary level, students will work in groups on projects. As students progress to middle and high school, their Personal Graduation Plans will include personal goals for achievement. Linked Learning will be career focused, and allow students to work on skills in real-world contexts. The student’s Personal Graduation Plan will allow for a personalized sequence of instruction, as students will work with advisors to create a plan based on their own goals that will be constantly monitored and evaluated. The applicant also plans to use the Personal Graduation Plan to individualize instruction and provide students with numerous approaches across different contexts, such as blended learning, online courses and flipped classrooms. The applicant describes a rich data system that utilizes numerous platforms which will allow them to track student achievement and individualize instruction. This section meets the requirements of a high quality plan, as the applicant has created a chart in the appendix that includes goals and objectives, strategies for meeting the specific objectives, timelines and who is responsible for each. The chart breaks down activities by the specific goals to ensure the schools are on track with implementation and can easily identify their desired results.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)

20

18

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

This section scores highly as it presents a fairly strong plan, but is missing a few minor pieces. The applicant plans to provide teachers numerous professional development options to learn about and implement student-centered classrooms. The applicant plans to use Career Academies to create more opportunities for teacher collaboration in specialized environments. However, the applicant does not provide specific details for what “student-centered” means in the context and how students will be both college and career ready. The applicant does describe numerous outlets for individualizing instruction and adapting content and provides numerous data systems and dashboards that can be used to monitor student growth. The applicant has a strong data system in place, that can be used to track students' progress and note areas they struggle, as well as a multi-tiered level system of support which can be used to address any academic or behavioral challenges that may arise. The applicant describes a quality teacher evaluation plan that observes several times each year, and identifies needs. The applicant does not describe a principal evaluation plan. The applicant intends to provide actionable information to help educators identify optimal learning approaches by providing training in using interest inventories and develop student profiles. The applicant plans to increase the high quality and digital resources and train teachers in their use. The applicant also has in place a digital evaluation system with multiple measures of effectiveness as well as a system to identify gaps in student needs.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	14

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has a strong district oversight plan in place, as they have leadership in place to oversee all aspects of schools, including Career and Tech Education and College and Career readiness. These school chiefs are designed to support and find resources for school principals. The district has also established a Career and Tech Education department led by the Assistant Superintendent for College and Career Readiness, who is serving as Project Director for the RTTD program. The applicant is also using an outside evaluator to monitor the effectiveness of leadership. The applicant also describes a system where although there is strong oversight, schools and school leaders are ultimately responsible for innovation and implementation of new programs. The district provides schools autonomy in schedules, personnel, and decision-making. The tiered system of differentiated autonomy will allow the applicant to put the most oversight on struggling schools, and allow successful schools greater flexibility. The applicant describes a strong plan to allow students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery in numerous ways, including online learning, projects through career academies and numerous programs. However, the focus seems mostly on career academies and career exploration with little mention of what is in place for students seeking a more academic track, or who may not know what they would like to do career-wise. The applicant does have numerous strategies in place for working with ELLs and students with disabilities, including a multi-tiered support system.

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

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(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has a strong technology system in place to ensure all participants have access to content, tools and learning resources. The district plans to create a data warehouse, and is using several programs to store data and make available for students and parents, such as

Edmodo. The district has community based computer labs that should allow for students and parents to access information outside of school. They also have a system in place that would engage members of the community and train them in the use of those resources. The applicant also has in place a multi-tiered system of support that students and parents can use and export information in an open format, as well as access numerous instructional programs. This should allow personalization of instruction not only by teachers, but also parents who can monitor their student's learning and remain knowledgeable about their growth and achievement.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	15
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant shows its commitment to continuous improvement through the use of an external evaluator to perform both formative and summative evaluations. The applicant is also involving stakeholders in the data collection and analysis process to enable feedback on multiple levels of the program. Additionally, the applicant's Plan-Do-Study-Act outline not only lists things they would like to do, but puts into place timelines and parties responsible for each aspect of the improvement process. The applicant also outlines the leadership structure to ensure ongoing improvement. The use of an external evaluator along with an internal process shows a commitment to continuous improvement. The leadership structure should lead to ongoing improvement as it creates levels of oversight to ensure strategies are being implemented correctly and provides the authority to make necessary adjustments. The applicant meets the defined requirements of a high quality plan by including a timeline of events, list of oversight responsibility and what deliverables will be created to aid the continuous improvement process. The timeline will aid the applicant in receiving feedback in the form of progress and data reports and will help them remain on schedule and implement any necessary changes to their reform efforts.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	4
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant plans to communicate regularly with stakeholders and describes a process that will allow them to identify the best way to engage different groups. However, the applicant specifically notes they will identify and use social media communications tools, but does not specify any specific activities outside of these for disseminating information. This focus on internet based communication may prevent certain stakeholders from being engaged in the process, though community based computer labs should allow for low-income or those without technology access in their homes should allow parents and community members to access information online. The applicant also makes clear they are committed to "reciprocal communications" which should make sure they are not just disseminating information, but gathering feedback as well. The chart at the end of Section E also outlines timelines for communication and establishes oversight roles to ensure communication activities are being completed.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	5
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant lists many performance measures that are both ambitious and achievable. They also describe the process used to select the measures, the rationale and why they believe those measures are important. The applicant also describes how often it will review measures, and what actions will be taken, and who will be responsible. The plan outlines what will be measured, as well as who is responsible. This approach shows forethought into the data analysis process and should ensure it is occurring properly. The timeline established in the appendix outlines the activities that will occur in order to help the schools reach their performance measures as well as who holds oversight to keep the schools on track.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	5
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant provides an in-depth plan for how they intend to evaluate the effectiveness of investments. The applicant created timelines, responsible parties and deliverables for the major evaluation activities. The deliverables, such as progress reports, should provide leadership with detailed information about the effectiveness of activities which can be continued or modified as necessary. The applicant described how they will conduct both quantitative and qualitative measures and how those measures will be used and what aspects of the program they will be used for, such as college readiness, use of technology or personalization. The mixed-methods approach should allow the applicant to not only monitor what is working, but also provide them with information as to why things are working or why they are not, providing rigorous data to make improvements.</p>		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	10
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Applicant identified external funds which will support the project, as well as what they will be used for and how much will be used over the grant cycle. Budget is broken down to explain funding for personnel, travel, resources and different program aspects. The applicant also describes how much funding will be used for resources and training, as well as what will need to continue following the end of the grant. The narrative of the budget provides detailed explanation of why funding was chosen for those particular aspects. Salaries are broken down into how much will be covered by the grant and or the district. Contracted services are broken down into the services they will provide and why the district deemed them necessary. The applicant also has numerous partnerships with outside funders which should aid in sustainability and continuing the work of the proposal after the grant cycle has ended.</p>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	10
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has committed to a continual process of creating partnerships with businesses in order to continue sustaining the programs of the grant. They have also created a group of educators and parents to analyze funding, and determine cost-effective ways of moving forwards. The applicant has also expressed a commitment for seeking future funding, as well as investing in technology and budgeting federal money in professional development to continue the growth of effective teachers. The applicant believes after initial funding for professional development and infrastructure, they should continue the programs through the normal school budget. This is outlined in the budget they have established for the 3 years following the grant period. The district believes its increasing enrollment will continue, bringing in a larger budget. With the grant focusing on implementing and embedding programs, the district budget should be able to continue sustaining the services necessary to continue those programs. The applicant meets the requirements of a high quality plan, as they established a timeline for identifying and forming business partnerships, created a sustainability partnership coalition that will focus on sustainable practices, and outlines various parties who will be responsible for different aspects of raising funds, through grants, district support, and community relationships.</p>		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	10
<p>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has outlined numerous partnerships with higher education institutions, community, social services and health organizations in order to boost student academic achievement, increase parent engagement, and provide basic health and social service support. The integration of public and private support should allow the district to identify the most important areas of need and allocate funding accordingly. The external evaluation process should aid in this determination as well. They also identify performance measures that will be tracked and measured by an external evaluator, who would provide quarterly reports. Data will be used to inform instruction, and can also be shared on a student by student basis. The applicant also clearly outlines what activities will be taken by the partner types and what they will be focusing on. The applicant plans to use various data sources to assess students and target interventions where they are needed most. A process has been created to regularly assess progress, as well as engage stakeholders.</p>		

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met
<p>Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has in place a very high quality plan that is built on the four assurance areas. The applicant provides letters of support from local government, as well as letters of financial support and an in-depth description of the evaluation and continuous improvement process. The applicant also describes how they intend to monitor effectiveness and inform future investments through data collection and analysis. The district is looking to fully implement college and career ready standards with an emphasis on job training and preparing</p>		

students early to focus on a career. A post-grant budget is supplied as well. The applicant also establishes a strong approach to personalization by utilizing multiple data platforms that can provide high-quality assessment feedback which can be used keep students on track.

Total	210	201
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0166TX-2 for Houston Independent School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

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

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) proposal demonstrates a first rate, strong, comprehensive and coherent plan for the reform vision. The plan identified five core initiatives that will improve the educational outcomes for every student which include 1) An Effective Teacher in Every Classroom; 2) An Effective Principal in Every School; 3) Rigorous Instructional Standards and Supports; 4) Data-Driven Accountability; and 5) A Culture of Trust through Action. These five core areas which are correlated to the RTTT-D's Four Core Educational Areas, contribute to provide a learner-centered model which includes personalized instruction based on student needs and backgrounds, which can be accessed anywhere anytime. The narrative includes the beliefs that guide the core areas such as: the dropout rate is unacceptably high and must be reduced; School autonomy must be carefully monitored, supported, and developed; the community has a legitimate voice in reform, and responsiveness to community concerns must be improved and others. The 7 beliefs shape the vision of the district that are as follows: (1) Empowers schools to customize their programs to meet student needs and to be autonomous and accountable for performance; (2) Offers school choice while ensuring equity of resources; (3) Values and cultivates the knowledge and skills of personnel, especially teachers and principals; and (4) Seeks meaningful engagement with the community in all major decisions. The vision is based on 21st Century learning tools along with instruction needed by all students, effective communicators, responsible citizens, problem-solvers and others. Because it combines a model that provides access to the best teachers in the district for all students, increased individual time with teachers with information on all of the student's data and records, and the ability for all students to learn anytime, anywhere, its potential for success is very high. The narrative includes a powerful vision for the proposal and the focus will be on accelerating student achievement, deepening student learning, and increasing equity through personalized student support grounded in common and individual tasks based on student academic interests. The project (Linked Learning Equals Education And Rigor Now! (L2=EARN!)) Have 3 major areas: College and Career Readiness, Personalization and Specialization and Foundation/Exposure and Awareness. Each is explained in detail with description on what the classroom experience will be like for students. Additionally, every high school students will receive a laptop to be used during the school year. Classrooms at the elementary level will be equipped with laptops, computers, whiteboards, etc., to support a student-centered focus. The emphasis will for highly qualified teachers in every classroom to create a safe, accepting environment, where each student is free to experiment in their learning and take risks in order to grow and change. The narrative provides a clear direction for accelerating student achievement by implementing a personalized learning environment and preparation and readiness for college and careers.

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

HISD chose to evaluate the career and technical education (CTE) programming at the high schools to determine their readiness to participate in the Linked Learning high school transformation model. Schools that showed the willingness to participate will be included in the first round of this project. HISD analyzed free and reduced lunch data and chose the elementary and middle schools that typically "feed" into the high schools in this project who met the eligibility criteria of at least 40% of the students receiving free and reduced lunch. The proposal provided a list of schools that will participate in this grant. The Project will serve 37,115 children in grades PK – 12 at the

38 schools. This includes 30,603 (86%) low-income students and 24,079 (65%) high need students who are at risk of not graduating with a diploma on time, which are homeless, in foster care, have been incarcerated, have disabilities, and/or are English Language Learners. There are 2,008 teachers participating in this project in the first stage, with the possibility to reach all teachers by the end of the grant period. The applicant provides clear details on the total number of students participating from low-income families. The plan is focused on making improvements where they are most needed. The narrative includes a large number of students, teachers and school buildings and discusses the process for selection and commitment on the part of the schools.

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

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10

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant included a comprehensive high quality plan that addresses all of the key elements. The proposal describes the four areas that will be addressed in order to demonstrate success. They are: 1. Raise standards for all students; 2. Provide better assessments, 3. Provide a well-rounded 21st century education, and 4. Implement effective family engagement strategies. HISD will focus on a district-based systems of college and career pathways at the high school level that connect core college preparatory academics with rigorous technical learning through project-based and work-based learning. The teacher is the most critical factor in the success of a student and the district will focus on providing well-prepared teachers and effective principals for each classroom and school building. This will be accomplished in a variety of ways outlined in the proposal. The applicant indicates how the program will assist students to increase academic success and become college ready, including district-wide positive changes that will be implemented with this project. HISD will ensure equity of resources for students by removing barriers and data will be collected in order to allow teachers to provide timely feedback to students. Schools will have a data person assigned to help track student data. HISD will identify exemplars, best practices and innovations in teaching and learning to improve student outcomes. HISD also benefits from strong Houston industry partners that are leaders in their fields such as medicine, energy, and technology, who will focus on helping the schools access to technology to increase student engagement. The project will provide intensive professional development to teachers in becoming technology literate and in the integration of technology in teaching and student learning. District-wide changes that are already underway include the creation of a cross-departmental Secondary Transformation Leadership Team at the district level, informational meetings for principals at the secondary level, training offered to teachers at all grade-levels in project-based learning, and the establishment and support of Pathway Design teams of teachers, administrators, support staff, students, parents and community members who collaboratively engage in a design process. All of this will lead to a Student Graduate Profile describing the knowledge, skills and dispositions that all students will possess and demonstrate when graduating from HISD.

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

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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal describes 5 goals that will be used to determine the success of the project. They are: Goal 1: Increase student achievement; Goal 2: Decrease achievement gaps of participating students; Goal 3: Increase the rate of high school graduation; Goal 4: Increase enrollment in post-secondary education; and Goal 5: Increase postsecondary degree attainment. Each goal is described with good details and the proposal uses charts for the goals that include the performance indicator for the success and achievement. A chart is included that delineates the timeline for the project and describes the goals, activities, timeline, responsible parties and Deliverables/Outcomes. The Deliverables/Outcomes uses terms that measure performance to determine the success of the performance. The applicant provides data on the number of students who not only enrolled in post-secondary educational programs but also receive a postsecondary degree. HISD indicated in the proposal that equity for all children is important and acknowledges that in order for the students to succeed, efforts must be focused and purposeful. The goal of the district is to ensure that all HISD students graduate from high school prepared for college or a career. The grant discussed the reduction in achievement gaps and an increase in student achievement. The proposal differentiated the target area of achievement for the different sub-groups.

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	15

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

HISD received The Broad Prize for Urban Education for a number of reasons including: 1. highest SAT participation rate among other urban districts around the country for all students and specifically Hispanic and African-American students; 2. increases in participation in Advanced Placement exams for all students; 3. HISD's overall graduation rate improved twice as fast as other urban districts around the country; 4. Houston narrowed low-income and Hispanic achievement gaps; and 5. Scholarships offered to HISD seniors have more than tripled, from \$51.4 million in 2009 to \$186 million in 2013 and other factors that support the success of the district. Concerned with the dropout rate, HISD has initiated the Youth Watch, an incentive program that is part of a comprehensive district-wide effort, is aimed

at reducing the district’s dropout rate. Other programs have been instituted as well to decrease the dropout rate in the district. The four-year graduation rate for all students in grades 9-12 increased by 10.6 percentage points during 2008- 2012 while the longitudinal four-year dropout rate declined by 6.2 percentage points during the same period. College enrollment by HISD graduates increased and in the fall of 2011, the number of HISD students who enrolled in college was 5,244, an increase of 412 students from 2010. The number of scholarship offers increased from 5,952 in 2011 to 7,394 in 2012. From 2008 to 2011 the average of “all students” proficiency rates increased from 75% to 83% in mathematics, from 86% to 87% in reading, and from 70% to 80% in science. The HISD has developed with Harvard’s EdLabs, and based on the work of Dr. Roland Fryer, HISD’s the Apollo 20 Schools program, which uses successful techniques from high-performing urban charter schools to raise achievement in regular public schools. This program includes a longer school year and days and/or intensive 2-to-1 tutoring. Students who are below grade level in math or English Language Arts will double their time in those classes. The HISD Digital Transformation Ecosystem enables educators to monitor critical performance indicators from a variety of sources in a single location. The “Dashboard” provides summary and detailed views of campus and student information to staff in the district. The Digital Teaching Platform (DTP) combines a Curriculum and Learning Management system, and a Learning Object Repository, where learning objects can be catalogued by key work, standards, etc. It provides teachers with additional information about student’s progress. The Parent Student Connect, also known as PSConnect, is a tool available to every HISD parent or guardian. PS Connect gives the parent or guardian instant access to the data, English and Spanish that includes the child’s grades, assignments, progress reports, report cards, class attendance, tardiest, and class schedule. The narrative describes a number of positive trends that demonstrate the success in raising the achievement level of student in the district by implementing various strategies and programs such as longer school years and days, intensive tutoring classes and other approaches.

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

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3

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

HISD describes the effort in the proposal on how the district makes the school information (such as salaries, expenditures, etc.) available to the community at large through their website. Public workshops, community meetings and presentations on request from outside organizations regarding the district budget and the development process are part of this process. The applicant provides narrative showing how the district determines average salaries for each building but did not provide actual salaries (either building averages or personnel costs) and did not provide guidelines, budgets or costs for non-personnel expenditures. Details and distribution of the budgets were left to the discretion of the principals in each of the school buildings. The budgets are available to all stakeholders and the general public. Obtaining and reviewing the actual non-personal expenditures are not explained in the proposal.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)

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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal included a description of the autonomy and indicated that there are no roadblocks to the implementation of personalized learning environments. Students can earn course credit through distance learning technologies, such as satellite, Internet, two-way videoconferencing, online courses, the Texas Virtual School Network (TxVSN), and instructional television, provided the distance learning courses meets the State-required curriculum. The State offers a variety of mechanisms to award credit with variable amounts of instructional contact. There is much autonomy afforded the local school district. The Texas Education Code outlines a principal’s obligation to develop and administer a personal graduation plan (PGP) for each student. A PGP must provide innovative methods to promote the student’s advancement, including flexible scheduling, alternative learning environments, online instruction, and other interventions that are proven to accelerate the learning process and have been scientifically validated to improve learning and cognitive ability.

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

15

15

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

A list of stakeholders and letters of support were included in the grant that demonstrated the steps that were implemented to show how the community, staff and leadership were involved in the development of this proposal. Input into the proposal was requested from the State, local Mayor, teachers, administrators, students, and families, through a variety of approaches. The proposal includes a number of support letters from staff, students, the president of Houston Federation of Teachers (HFT) signed the assurances to affirm support. NAACP and the Association of Hispanic School Administrators and various other community organizations and political leaders also provided support. At all participating Cohort1 schools, at least 70% of the teaching staff approved their school’s participation in the project. Principals and teachers, the important stakeholder groups, received information about the Race to the Top-District grant opportunity in the August 2013 principal’s meeting. Conversations focused on the project, how their schools fit into this process, and the benefits of the program. Principals met with their teachers through faculty meetings, informing them of the proposal elements discussing the initiative and the grant process and securing their input. The discussions with principals and teachers included possible program implications. Based on the feedback of the stakeholders group, the proposal was refined. This demonstrates the commitment on the part of HISD to obtain participation and input from the various stakeholder groups.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	19

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides a high-quality plan for improving learning and teaching by personalizing the learning environment in order to provide all students the ability to master the skills and receive the needed support for college and career ready courses. Students will pursue a specialization in career pathways that offer learning experiences through project and work-based learning. These pathways will help students understand the relevance of what they are learning by placing academic tasks into real life practice. Teachers will receive professional development to link learning to college and career preparation while enhancing the choices available to students. Data will be provided to teachers on the progress of students towards achieving mastery of the various content areas.

The applicant presents a comprehensive plan that includes mechanisms in place to provide training and support that will ensure that the students understand how to use resources provided to them in order to track and manage their learning experience. The students will prepare an individual graduation plan in middle school to plan for grades 9–12 and beyond. Various activities such as College Day, “college talk”, exploring “the world of work” are a few examples of preparing students for the years beyond high schools. The narrative includes a number of programs and strategies that support the effort on the part of HISD to provide programs and alternatives resources to support the students in transitions from elementary to middle and high school to help them design a path that will make the post secondary experience successful. Students will be able to establish their course of study based on interests and guided by both academic and real-world scenarios via work-based learning, internships, and challenging coursework. HISD has a significant population of bilingual students and English Language Learners (ELLs) whose needs also differ. HISD is also using a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) as a Response to Intervention (RtI) strategy to address academic and behavioral challenges. The narrative recommends and provides a number of excellent programs and recommendations for allowing students to personalize their learning and select the approach that best meet their needs. Through personalized instruction, every student will know how they learn best, be able to describe their immediate and long-term goals, and know how to access the resources they need to achieve the goals on their plan towards college and career success. The proposal provides the details and demonstrates the commitment on the part of the district to plan and implement strategies that will increase student achievement aimed at the high needs students. The focus of the narrative was on students becoming career ready and not emphasizing or describing in details the learning and courses necessary to prepare the students for college. Most of the response dealt with career readiness and lacked specifics on how students would prepare themselves to enter a college.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	18
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The narrative describes how the district will support a high quality plan where the teachers develop student-centered learning environments using a variety of approaches and where teachers can deliver a personalized, coherent, relevant, and challenging curriculum. This will be accomplished through school-based professional learning communities, multi-day summer institutes, and school-based-coaching and mentoring. The teacher role will change to that of a facilitator of learning and the student will become a self-directed learner demonstrating mastery of required competencies and formalized learning that happens anytime, anywhere. ConnectEd, the District’s partner in rolling out the Linked Learning initiative, will provide staff with training on incorporating project-based learning and working within curricular teams that teach student cohorts. In particular, teachers will learn strategies related to processes for teaming, running effective meetings, engaging with external partners, developing interdisciplinary units and projects, effective strategies in online curriculum building and online learning as well as parent and community engagement within a linked learning model. Teachers will build an instructional repertoire that includes optimal learning approaches where instruction is interactive or experiential such as reflective discussion and collaborative work, using debates, role playing, problem-solving, simulations, Socratic seminar, case studies, concept mapping, concept attainment, STEM pedagogy, flipped classroom models, and best practices for curriculum delivery. Teachers will be trained on how to incorporate technology so that learners benefit from a learner-centered approach, including flipped lessons, collaborative learning, project-based learning, and the personalization of learning available through formative assessments and adaptive content. The District’s Digital Teaching Platform (DTP) will include a Curriculum Management System, which will contain standards, scope and sequence, and calendars. The teacher evaluation system has been designed to begin each school year with a conference between teacher and appraiser where every teacher will identify 2-3 areas of development, based on prior year individual evaluation scores on the instructional standards set by the District, to create an individualized professional development plan, or IPDP. Parent Student Connect (PSConnect) is an online service launched by HISD in September 2009, which allows registered users (i.e., parents and students) to log in to access a variety of student information, see class assignments and school calendars, and communicate electronically with teachers. Training for different staff will be provided to support this system and to focus on the specific needs in order for the student to be successful in the classroom. HISD will also provide district paid College Access Coordinators at each campus will assist students and parents with the processes to apply for college, scholarships, financial aid, and more.

The implementation of the District’s teacher evaluation program has supported and assisted in making some critical retention or dismissal

decisions. The goal is to have only effective or highly qualified teachers in the classroom. In the past year, HISD piloted a teacher leadership program as a part of the Effective Teachers Initiative that was designed to recognize and retain high-performing teachers by offering additional responsibilities, training, and compensation. Principals are screened and an on-line assessment is used to measure values and beliefs in an urban district. Principals have to demonstrate skills in leadership, decision-making, data analysis, and written communication in order to be employed in the district. HISD is also building leadership capacity through university partnerships with Rice University, University of Texas, Harvard University, and University of St. Thomas. HISD has a number of data systems that will provide information on student progress but the narrative did not provide a process for the coordination of various systems and explain the unique data each will provide. The proposal did not provide information on whether the principal would be observed as part of their evaluation system.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	15
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The narrative describes the applicants' comprehensive and high quality plan to address the practices, policies and rules to facilitate personalized learning. The College and Career Readiness Department, which also houses the District's Career and Technical Education Department, will be the core central office departments supporting the work of this proposal within HISD. The Project Director for Project L2=EARN! will be the Assistant Superintendent for College and Career Readiness, who will be responsible for successfully implementing the entire scope of the Project L2=EARN! Initiative. There will be additional involvement from the grants department, Research and Accountability Department, Accounting, Budgeting, and Purchasing Departments, Legal Department, Information Technology Department, Curriculum and other departments. HISD is fully committed to school empowerment through a decentralized system of schools, where principals are CEOs of their schools. HISD Board of Education remains accountable to the public for high-quality educational services for all children. The development of authentic assessments that will allow students to demonstrate mastery of standards is integral to HISD's proposed Project L2=EARN! Students will have the opportunity to earn credit through demonstrated mastery based on the knowledge and competence. Students will have regular opportunities to demonstrate understanding and mastery through assessments, from Kindergarten through high school, such as capstone projects, performance tasks, and cornerstone assessments. HISD offers three types of testing programs; these include: (1) District Funded Programs; (2) State Funded Programs and (3) Special Test Programs. These standards are all aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), which are the state's standards for what students should know and be able to do, and the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), which is the state assessment instrument used by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to gauge how well schools and districts educate children.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	10
(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>HISD is currently implementing K-12 blended-learning strategies that will transform how the instruction and learning takes place for all students and teachers but did not mention or discuss other stakeholders. The proposed project is strongly infused with online content, tools, and other learning resources, both in and out of school that will be accessible to students, parents, teachers, and campus administrators. HISD will implement a new learning management system that will provide 24-7 access to content, a digital device checkout system for at-home use, and Web portal that includes resources based on student interests and needs. HISD has developed a data warehouse to deliver all pertinent data to the District via board, superintendent, principals, school support officers and teachers' dashboards, and to students and parents via a secure Internet connection. The data warehousing system will ensure interoperability for the purposes of retrieving data from multiple systems.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	14
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The applicant clearly indicates it will build on the continues improvement project monitoring and evaluation process. The applicant describes a thorough and continuous improvement process in which the district will be utilizing qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods. An external evaluator will implement a comprehensive evaluation plan that will entail both the formative/process elements and summative elements of the program. The data will be collected quarterly and reviewed regularly by semester, and every year to assist the</p>		

Project Director in completing the Annual Performance Reports. The evaluator will meet with program administrators quarterly, by semester, and at the end and the beginning of each project year to discuss findings from the annual assessments of the program’s implementation (Process Evaluation) and summative milestones (Summative Evaluation). The district will use Plan, Do, Study, and Act (PDSA) framework to sustain the project after the grant funding has been completed. The communications plan is detailed in the proposal the methods and strategies for communicating the progress and outcomes of the project. Examples include sharing awareness-building materials, Showcase students’ product, conduct regular meetings with the Mayor, other elected officials and the Greater Houston Partnership and other approaches. The use of social media can be an issue since some parents and students may not have access to the Internet.

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

The communications plan is detailed in the proposal and includes the methods and strategies for communicating the progress and outcomes of the project. Examples include sharing awareness-building materials, showcase students’ product, conduct regular meetings with the Mayor, other elected officials and the Greater Houston Partnership and other approaches. The proposal includes the goals they were going to achieve through their communications efforts. The input from the various stakeholders will provide for ongoing feedback on the progress of the program and support the continuous improvement process so that the project can be successful in the district. It is beneficial for the project to receive input so changes (if necessary) can be made in a timely manner in order to improve the achievement levels of the students.

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

The overall design employs a scientifically sound evaluation plan to assess the implementation and impact of Project. The theory of action is clear and the variables are defined. The evaluation design incorporates formative and summative components, as well as quantitative and qualitative data gathering, analysis, reporting, and mechanisms for sharing results to guide implementation. HISD will review the measures identified in the proposal to measure the success of implementation. If a particular measure does not provide sufficient the narrative indicated that another, more rigorous measure will be used or adopted. HISD will make every effort in the K-12 system for every student to make sure the performance measures are aligned to not only increasing the academic achievement of students, but to improve the personalized education and keep students on track to graduate from high school and be ready for college and a career.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	5
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(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The project’s impact on students’ academic achievement will be measured and reported using multiple data sources, including state-mandated and standardized achievement tests, such as the Stanford Achievement test, STAAR assessments, and end-of-course (EOC) exams. Other performance data will include graduation, college enrollment, and college completion statistics. Trends will be tracked over the four- year grant period and beyond. The narrative describes the effort on the part of HISD to track the progress in meeting project goals and objectives of the grant. HISD will document staff professional development and parent activities by showing schedules with dates, workshop descriptions, and presenters. Activities will be monitored and reviewed to describe the scope and frequency of activities for program participants (i.e., number of hours teachers spent in literacy-based instructional professional development, support services partnerships, and parent participants), as well as assessing impacts and outcomes for students at all the participating schools.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The grant describes the budget expenditures for all of components in the proposal. The budget appears to be reasonable and correlates to the expenditures and goals of the project. The project identifies the private funds that have also been raised. The Laura and John Arnold Foundation awarded HISD a five-year grant in the amount of \$6,000,000 to support the four key strategies – recruitment, development, appraisal and compensation of educators in HISD. HISD has also secured a commitment of \$1,500,000 from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The total amount of private money secured in support of the Apollo 20 program was \$13,170,000 in a little over one year including funding through The Bank of America grant that the District received. The District was also awarded more than \$28,000,000 in

state and federal grant funds to support school reform at several of the high schools. The schools used these funds to extend the school day and year, pay for tutors to work with the students during the school day, and provide extra supplies and technology to support the work. As a result, the schools, all of them identified as a school in need of improvement, advanced academically.

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

The applicant provides narrative on how the District will be able to sustain the program once the grant has been completed. The applicant shows how internal and some external funding will be used to maintain the focus of this program in the school buildings. It also presents the estimated three-year budget after the grant has been concluded. The results from this program will be used to sustain the project in future years. The applicant has implemented evaluations and assessment procedures to ascertain the goals and outcomes that meet the needs of the students and has strategies in place that will support the sustainability of this grant.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

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

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The narrative provides convincing data showing how it will meet the requirements of the competitive preference priority. The proposal describes the different partnerships that exist with HISD such as United Way of Greater Houston (UWGH), Houston Food Bank and its Backpack Buddy program and the Greater Houston Partnership (Chamber of Commerce) and assembled a large cadre of partners to support the students and family needs. HISD will hire an external evaluator who will implement a comprehensive plan that will entail both the formative/process elements and summative elements of the program. Four biannual reports will be completed and a 5th final report at the close of the grant. HISD has implemented a system for monitoring student academic progress that will be used to advance the goals of this initiative and enhance instruction. The narrative discusses the sharing and use of student information that will be administered in accordance with privacy laws (e.g. FERPA). HISD will use schools as the primary point for service delivery to address students' most basic needs and resolve major issues, such as student attendance. Throughout the project, HISD will provide wrap-around physical, health, counseling, social work, mental, and medical services for children and their families. HISD has made progress in developing systems to provide student performance data to students, educators, administrators, and parents. The use of student data will support and guide teachers and parents in helping the child achieve in school and prepare for the 21st century.

The applicant thoroughly describes the decision making process and infrastructure used to select, implement, and evaluate supports that address the individual needs of participating students. The district has clearly defined how it will be engaging every parent and family in the monitoring and planning of educational and career opportunities of every student. This will include the development of teacher training, providing electronic access and using student data system that will effectively engage families in the support of the academic and career development of every student. The applicant using the chart on Population Level Desired Results did address the desired results of the different populations, students and partners.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

Through the narrative, the applicant demonstrates a willingness to employ the latest technology and research to improve and enhance the learning environment for the schools. The application indicates a transparency of objectives and goals and a desire to involve parents, educators, teachers and the community as a group in the creation of the program, implementation and responsibility to the students. The applicant shows creative and innovative approaches in it approach to increase success in the educational experience of the target population.

The applicant provides much support and documentation through the application that it will meet the core educational assurances to significantly improve learning and teaching through personalization, support for students and educators, accelerate student achievement and deepen student learning and increase the effectiveness of the educators.

Total	210	204
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0166TX-4 for Houston Independent School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant provides a chart clearly demonstrating the relationship between the district's Five Core Initiatives and the Race To The Top - District Four Core Educational Assurance Areas. • The vision describes how students in selected schools would participate in personalized pathways based on 21st Century Personalized Learning Outcomes, which were described in detail. These outcomes involve skills to intentionally prepare students for both postsecondary success and career success, such as communication, problem-solving and cultural awareness. The Linked Learning approach infuses the Personalized Learning Outcomes throughout the career-oriented pathways to ensure that all students learn these skills, regardless of the pathway selected. • Classroom experiences for both students and teachers were described for students in grades Kindergarten through twelfth grade. These classroom experiences include career exploration at developmentally appropriate levels, project-based learning and the use of technology in a safe, accepting environment. 		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The process that the applicant used to select participating schools involved Career Technical Education reviews for readiness indicators at each high school. The applicant then looked at feeder schools that would support the successful implementation at the high school level. • The applicant provided the list of participating schools, total number of students to be served and the total number of teachers to be included in the project. The project identified that it would implement the plan using cohorts of students beginning in different years of the project. • The processes for determining which schools should participate included two-way communication with a variety of stakeholders, including teachers, students and family members. The applicant collected feedback from the stakeholder groups to increase the likelihood of success of the proposal. 		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant provided plans for how the various components would be implemented in order to support LEA-wide implementation of the L2=EARN program (proposal), indicating thoughtful and intentional development of each 		

component. Goals were developed and described. Each activity was cross-referenced with the goals, and a timeline, person(s) responsible and deliverable(s) was identified. Cross-referencing the activities with the goals using a table provided a comprehensive view of the activities involved in the proposal, and supported the understanding that a single activity can support more than one goal.

- The applicant provided a solid explanation for each initiative, demonstrating how each initiative would raise achievement levels for all students, personalize the learning environments and close the achievement gaps. The applicant provided evidence that work towards these initiatives is already in progress, including existing partnerships, strategies and accountability measures.
- The applicant clearly described a process to scale up the proposal in order to promote district-wide reform. This process identified tools, trainings and a cross-departmental Secondary Transformation Leadership Team.
- The applicant developed a table aligning the major activities of the project with the project goals, including the timeline, responsible parties and deliverables or outcomes for each activity. The components of the table represented a reasonable and credible proposal. This table explicitly meets the requirements for a high quality plan.

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

10

10

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- The applicant described annual goals that were differentiated by subgroups. Goals and targets were developed for reading, math, science, graduation rates, college enrollment rates and postsecondary degree attainment rates. For each goal area, yearly targets for specific subgroups were differentiated in order to support a greater likelihood of attainment. This resulted in different post-grant goals for each subgroup. Some subgroups, such as English Language Learners, begin with lower baseline rates, but targets reflect a faster rate of growth compared to other subgroups. This approach to the development of yearly goals resulted in thoughtful and attainable, yet still ambitious, subgroup goals.
- If achieved, the applicant's goals would demonstrate decreased achievement gaps through incremental goals. Each subgroup's goals were achievable and ambitious. Students with disabilities, for example, have a yearly target to increase graduation rates of approximately 4 percentage points for the first few years, and then an increase of approximately 5 percentage points for the last few years of the grant proposal.
- Specific goals were set by grade level to close the achievement gaps between subpopulations for math and reading.
- Graduation rates, college enrollment rates and postsecondary completion rates were included as goals in this proposal. Increasing postsecondary degree attainment is an ambitious goal for a K-12 school district to strive for, as many K-12 districts do not see their impact as extending two or more years beyond completion of students' high school careers. This goal allows the district to consider the long-term impact of their students' K-12 education and strive for greater impact on students' lives.

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	15

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- The district provides substantial amounts of data demonstrating improved student outcomes, including a 10.6 percentage point increase in the four-year graduation rate during 2008-2012. Achievement gaps in graduation rates were closed for both Hispanics and African-Americans. Data showed improvement in participation in both SAT testing and Advanced Placement exams.
- The district has processes in place to support persistently low-achieving schools, including regular review and problem-solving meetings with principals of the lowest achieving schools. School-level strategies involve longer school years, longer school days, and intensive tutoring services. Students at these schools increased performance on state assessments, increased graduation rates and decreased dropout rates.
- The applicant has multiple dashboards in place to support access to student performance data, including the Principal Dashboard, Teacher Dashboard, Chief School Officer Dashboard, Naviance, PSConnect and more. Use of these dashboards is designed to improve instruction and participation in the learning process by providing timely data to inform educators and family members about performance strengths and challenges. Systems can support automatic notifications to stakeholders when assignments are missing or a grade falls below a certain threshold, for

example.

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

5

3

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- The district has processes and practices in place to provide transparency for budgets, including salary information. These processes include posting information on websites and publishing information in hard copy.

Weaknesses:

- The applicant did not clearly describe how personnel salaries at the school level are made public.
- The applicant described its process for supporting schools in providing guidelines for non-personnel budget expenditures, but it is unclear as to how actual non-personnel expenditure information listed by each school is made available to stakeholders.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)

10

10

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- The applicant has several conditions for success in place already, including college readiness standards, Personal Growth Plans, and opportunities for early graduation and credit awarded based on mastery. These conditions are based on a balance between state regulations and autonomy: state regulations promote high expectations and outcomes for students, while allowing districts and schools to determine the most appropriate methodology to achieve those outcomes.
- Sufficient autonomy exists to support the implementation of the applicant's proposal. Schools currently use Site-Based Decision Making Committees to direct and monitor school goals and operations. Evidence provided includes an example of schools starting the school year earlier than normally accepted.

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

15

14

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- The applicant described in detail the process that the district followed in ensuring significant stakeholder buy-in to the proposal. Teacher votes were collected at the proposed schools, and the results of those votes were included in the applicant's proposal indicating 70% or higher approval ratings. The applicant made it clearly apparent that it developed and implemented a process that valued stakeholder input and feedback in the development of this proposal.
- Documentation in the form of letters was provided demonstrating support from students, families and community members. Letters from students, particularly elementary students, and parents indicated an understanding of the applicant's proposal and support for the implementation of the proposal. This reflects the applicant's commitment to ensuring that stakeholders at all levels understand the proposal.

Weaknesses:

- Information was not provided regarding how the district collected suggestions and concerns about the proposal from stakeholders and responded to those suggestions and concerns.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	18

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- The pathways created through the applicant's proposal would assist students in understanding the relevance of their learning. These pathways include development of a sequence of learning activities and/or courses based on each student's career interest.
- Career exploration, awareness and planning opportunities were described for students from elementary school to high school. Although career exploration and planning for middle and high school students is becoming more common, regular and on-going career awareness activities beginning with elementary students is considered best practice and is commended.
- Gaps would be identified through a variety of programs, including Renzulli, Naviance and Personal Growth Plans. Students would develop personalized SMART goals beginning in pre-kindergarten. This represents an ambitious but achievable standard of practice in involving students in analyzing their own learning.
- Opportunities for deeper learning would exist through Project-Based Learning opportunities. Possible examples of project-based learning resulting in deep understanding and learning were described, including the relationship between mathematical concepts and building fences.
- Data for student/parent, teacher and principal dashboards is updated nightly, which is considered best practice, to ensure timely use. Supports for the use of the data, as well as digital learning opportunities, were described for various stakeholders.
- Elements of a high quality plan were included in the Action Plan provided in the applicant's appendix. The Action Plan included objectives, strategies, deliverables, timelines, and responsible parties. Each element appears reasonable and credible.

Weaknesses:

- Opportunities appear to exist for exposure to diverse cultures, but there does not appear to be a systematic approach to encourage and ensure that all students are exposed to diverse cultures. The sole strategy that the applicant mentioned was that teachers would be able to design learning opportunities that engage students from different cultures. No information was given regarding how students at all levels of the proposal would have access and exposure to diverse cultures that motivate and deepen learning. Additionally, no information regarding how cultural awareness would be monitored for implementation in the learning opportunities or impact on learning was provided.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)

20

17

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- The applicant identified ConnectEd as the primary partner in implementing the proposal, thereby utilizing the expertise of an experienced organization to further contribute to the success of this program.
- Educators would use the Video Exemplar Project and be supported through various departments in central office. The Video Exemplar Project offers digital support that models excellence in instructional practices and virtual collaboration among educators at participating schools.
- The proposal describes how this project would support the gradual phase-out of EdPlan, an externally created bank of formative assessments, with its own collection of formative assessments using the district's Digital Teaching Platform. The gradual replacement of EdPlan with the Video Exemplar Project demonstrates a well thought-out plan to ensure that educator support is personalized to the district's own teachers, and is sustainable beyond the grant program.
- Educators develop Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDPs) to promote growth. The IPDPs are reviewed by school administrators and personalized to support individual educators with identified needs. Professional development can be tailored to the needs of each educator in accordance with the IPDP, and can include various delivery methods including job embedded coaching and summer institutes. Participation in professional development is tracked.
- Educators have access to a variety of high quality college- and career-ready aligned resources, including AVID information and resources, to support instructional practices that promote achievement of the College and Career Readiness Standards.
- The applicant provides an Action Plan in the appendix addressing components of a high quality plan. The Action Plan includes objectives, strategies, deliverables, timelines and responsible parties. The components are reasonable, resulting in a credible high quality plan.

Weaknesses:

- Although the monitoring of principal effectiveness occurs through the evaluation system, minimal information was given regarding the use of feedback, recommendations and interventions to increase principal effectiveness.
- The use of school counselors in inappropriate duties, such as master schedule development, detracts from their impact in other areas, such as college and career preparation for students. School counselors would be more appropriately and effectively used in accordance with their graduate training by implementing college and career preparation programs for all students. The applicant describes additional college access personnel, which is one of the primary responsibilities of a school counselor.
- Although Personal Growth Plans are described for secondary students, information was not provided regarding how learning would be personalized beyond course selection.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	14

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- A variety of existing district departments, including the College and Career Readiness Department, were described in terms of the support they would provide the participating schools. Leveraging these departments to actively support the proposal will further the possibility of successfully reaching its goals of personalized learning.
- The applicant described a tiered system of differentiated autonomy. This would ensure support for struggling schools while allowing greater autonomy for schools demonstrating success through data. This tiered approach ensures that schools that need more support get more support.
- Students have the opportunity for both remediation and acceleration through the APEX program. This allows students to progress at their own pace, as opposed to progress based on seat time.
- Students have the ability to demonstrate mastery through a variety of assessments, including capstone projects and performance tasks.
- The applicant provides multiple action plans that address the components of a high quality plan, including strategies, timelines, deliverables and responsible parties, for the implementation of policy and infrastructure surrounding personalized learning.

Weaknesses:

- Although the district described support for English Language Learners through Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), no information was provided on how the program would ensure that learning resources and instructional practices are fully accessible, especially to students at all grade levels with limited English skills.

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

Strengths:

- Educators and students currently have access to content, tools and support. Additionally, the applicant has a plan to address how parents will have access to content, tools and support. The applicant plans to support more fully developed infrastructure by ensuring that all stakeholders, including parents, have access to these necessary components that support student achievement. Family members can more fully participate in the learning process as equal partners with educators and students when they have access to necessary information.
- The Instructional Technology department has a four-tiered plan of support, demonstrating a differentiated model that maximizes resources to provide technical support.
- The applicant described a system that allows data to follow the student when transferring between schools. This promotes more consistent learning plans for students that do not need to be redeveloped each time a student transfers between schools.
- The applicant provides a Program Timeline of Major Activities for LEA Policy and Infrastructure that includes elements of a high quality plan, including activities, alignment with goals, timelines, responsible parties and deliverables or milestones.
- The Digital Transformation Ecosystem involves interoperable data systems, which include the ability to export information in an open data format, for all data streams and software applications used by the district.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	15
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant has a plan to contract with an external evaluator. This plan included a timeline for data collection, reports and sharing of information. Use of an external evaluator allows the district to seek specialized expertise in evaluation processes. • The Plan -Do-Study-Act continuous improvement cycle was developed for both project -level and school-level implementation reviews. Applying the Plan-Do-Study-Act model at both district- and school-levels allows for continuous improvement to happen at both levels, thereby providing a more comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of the project. • The proposal includes an Executive Steering Committee with specific responsibilities to ensure the project stays on track. The committee provides a high level evaluative perspective that can be valuable to those that are immersed in the project implementation. • The applicant includes a Program Timeline of Major Activities for Continuous Improvement which meet the requirements of a high quality plan, including activities, alignment with goals, timelines, responsible parties and deliverables or milestones. The table represents a credible and reasonable plan. 		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	4
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant describes a commitment to developing a Communication and Engagement Plan. Specific goals that this plan needs to achieve are developed and specified in the proposal. Goals support communication with key stakeholders, such as the mayor, as well as reciprocal communication strategies. The plan includes social media tools as one way to foster two-way communication, demonstrating an awareness of current best practices in engaging students, families and community members. <p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the plan includes information regarding key goals, deliverables and some activities, it does not provide specific information regarding timelines or responsible parties for each goal or activity. 		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	5
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant provided rationales, information on how measures will provide information, and how measures will be reviewed and improved in the narrative. Rationale provided was aligned with the current district strategic plan and in addition to assessment data, addressed key indicators for student success, such as attendance and behavior. • Multiple performance measures were described in this proposal, including achievement tests, achievement-related indicators such as attendance and behavior, social-emotional indicators, and college and career readiness indicators. • Targets appear to be ambitious and achievable, including differentiated measures for each subgroup. For example, students in subgroups that traditionally have an achievement gap, such as students with disabilities, have targets that represent attainable increases in achievement. However, these targets are ambitious enough that the achievement of the targets will require focused and coordinated support from educators and stakeholders. 		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	5

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- The applicant will contract with an external evaluator to evaluate the effectiveness of funded activities. Use of an external evaluator allows the district to seek specialized expertise in evaluation processes, as well as an 'outside' perspective regarding the success of the various components of the proposal.
- The evaluation methodology will align with the district's Strategic Plan. Evaluation strategies will involve both qualitative and quantitative measures to monitor trends, perceptions and efficacy of programs.
- The applicant provided a program implementation timeline for evaluating the effectiveness of investments, including alignment with goals, activities, timelines, responsible parties and deliverables or milestones.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	10
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The budget identifies all funds that will be used to support the implementation of the proposal, including grant funds and local funds. • It provides a description of all funds and focuses on strategies, such as the Digital Teacher Platform, that will support long-term sustainability. These funds appear reasonable given the large numbers of students that applicant will serve through this proposal. • The budget includes a step-down model for funding, involving schools gradually paying for increased percentage of staff throughout the grant period. This is an effective strategy to further promote sustainability. • Funds were identified for one-time investments as well as on-going operational costs. Some operational costs were identified as only being needed through part of the entire grant period, as opposed to all four years. 		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	10
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan identifies several strategies to ensure sustainability, including working with partners and the Sustainability Partnership Coalition. Beginning the grant program with a focus on sustainability beyond the program through the development of a coalition is innovative and should yield a higher level of success. • Primary strategies include professional development, innovation and garnering support. These strategies can lead to various components of the proposal being sustained beyond the grant period. The plan identifies several strategies to ensure sustainability, including working with partners and the Sustainability Partnership Coalition. • The applicant identifies a high quality plan, including strategies, timelines, responsible parties and activities, for sustainability of the project's goals after the term of the grant. 		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	10
<p>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant describes numerous existing partnership that support the proposal, including partnerships with Houston Community College, the United Way and the Texas Medical Center. These partnerships include organizations that support student and family needs regarding physical and mental health, family-school 		

engagement, and postsecondary readiness.

- Population-level desired results were included involving academic outcomes and family participation in school events. The applicant describes a plan for the evaluator to track and report indicators. The plan would also use data to inform, improve and scale the program beyond existing students. The district's use of achievement data to inform the work of its community partners is considered a best practice and innovative.
- The applicant describes using the school as the primary point of delivery for community services, demonstrating a commitment to coordinated services for students and families.
- The applicant describes a plan to develop a communication plan involving two-way communication. The goals for this communication plan are clearly articulated and ensure that privacy laws, especially FERPA, are followed.
- The district has already identified and inventoried partnerships that align with the project's goals, indicating intentionality in selecting community partners as opposed to simply maintaining all existing partnerships.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant described a well thought-out and planned proposal that comprehensively builds on the four core educational assurance areas. The proposal, when implemented, would support significant improvements in personalized teaching and learning, using career relevancy for students beginning in elementary school. Pathways allow students to further personalize learning beginning as early as the middle grades. Students work towards Texas College and Career Readiness Standards, supported by families and community organizations. This proposal uses digital learning to support increased academic achievement for all students, and accelerating growth for high-needs students, thereby closing achievement gaps. Ambitious goals for academic achievement, including postsecondary degree attainment, are differentiated for student subgroups so that they are attainable for each subgroup. Increased educator effectiveness would be supported by differentiated professional development and supported through district-developed tools and departments. Evaluation methods support on-going monitoring and mid-course corrections to further ensure successful program implementation.

Total	210	200
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