Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0158CT-1 for Norwalk Public Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

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

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Norwalk Public Schools has developed a proposal with the primary goal of having all students graduate prepared for college, career, and life success. The proposal articulates 4 strategies that will assist in the success of this goal (e.g., creating a teaching and learning culture focused upon personalized learning, creating an environment of rigerous and challenging learning, redesign of space to a Learning Commons focused upon a technology rich environment and personalized opportunities to learn, and collaboration and support of Norwalk ACTS- a network of partners). The proposal outlines a plan to provide a continuum of services and educational opportunities to students for academic as well as life success. The proposal outlines excellent strategies to personalize learning through the strategic efforts of integrating a number of initiatives into the overall plan. By doing this, duplicate efforts are reduced, funding and resources can be utilized in an efficient and effective manner, and evaluation of progress can be intentionally directed and analyzed without multiple variables to consider.

The proposal has clearly articulated goals that link teaching, learning, curriculum, resources and strategies into a cohesive model of reform. The proposal builds and extends previous initiatives such as the K-5 Go Math program with the technology to gain immediate access to data and assessments; this allows for prompt interventions that are just-in-time for students and allow for a personalized approach based upon data. The proposal provides a description of the attributes and qualities that define a personalized approach from multiple perspectives (teacher, student, classroom, school, and curriculum). This is an excellent observation in that the personalized approach is well developed and thoughtful, and is able to be viewed through diverse lens and perspectives. The approach is holistic in that all of the facets of the learning environment are considered.

	Available	Score
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	7

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal outlines a roll out plan using data (e.g., achievement, socioeconomics, school performance) coupled with a readiness for personalization and change. The roll out plan utilized assessments to determine where a school is located on the readiness to implement the approaches outlined in the narrative. The process utilized multiple sources of data to determine an individual school placement on the staged roll out plan. As well, the data will be used to develop personalized strategies for the unique needs of each school. The schools selected include all of district elementary and middle schools. Although the primary focus areas are elementary and middle schools the initiative does include strategies for high school students. The focus is upon early intervention and efforts to improve achievement with directed efforts towards those grade bands. There are also initiatives for the high schools that focus efforts to improve graduation and college and career readiness.

The applicant provides data on student achievement that clearly shows the need for reform efforts. The district data shows that 47% of the families to be low income and achievement data show there is a need to improve. The data is not disaggregated by any subgroup or school performance which would have been useful information to support the need and justification particularly with a high need student population as well as to the staggered roll out plan. The use of a formula to select schools is described although no specific metrics are provided. How schools were ranked for the staged roll out was not made clear nor was the level of their participation in the activities.

The applicant provides data on student achievement that clearly shows the need for reform efforts. The district data shows 47% of the families to be low income and achievement data show there is a need to improve.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	5

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant describes efforts that provide the resources to students and their families, such that the goals of the district and this proposal are met. The proposal outlines a continuum of services beginning with an early learning initiative and extends through graduation. Coordination of all efforts and resources to focus upon the major goal of the project is a strength and one that is an effective and efficient use of all resources such as financial, community support, social, emotional, and academic.

There was no logic model included or an in-depth theory of change that defined the reform efforts succinctly and overtly. The narrative described efforts but with little detail and with no supporting evidence or research. Change of this scope and magnitude requires more than rhetoric but rather explicitly articulated strategies that spiral across the curriculum, the district, and the community. This was noticeably missing.

The project describes a plan to include all of the district elementary and middle schools for a phased roll out plan of interventions, supports, and training. The plan also includes efforts towards high school students to improve graduation and college and career readiness. Thus, all students in the district will benefit from the project. For example, the technology plan includes the use of IPADS for all students and integration of activities into the curriculum. The plan will assist all students in their academic achievement although the plan efforts are centered around early school initiatives.

Although there is no overt articulation as to how these efforts address scale up efforts at the LEA level, there is a description of activities and strategies of grade bands and grade levels across the district. Scale up is discussed as the phased implementation with schools and students with the highest needs in year 1. Subsequent years include one middle and several elementary schools so that over a 4 year period all elementary and all middle schools will benefit from the grant activities and projects. It was not clear as to the level of support that each school would receive and how schools who are phased in towards the end of the grant would be able to make the types of changes that were outlined. Additional details as to how this project will transfer into meaningful and sustained reform was not made evident through an articulation of future plans that extend beyond the grant period.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	9

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides data and charts on multiple indicators such as high needs and low income students by school and by district total. Data finds that all of the K2 students are performing well below proficiency using the DRA assessment for reading; the low reading trend continues for grade 3 through grade 5. Performance on summative assessments such as the standardized state tests was provided. Data for each school in the district provided greater detail and showed the level of academic achievement as well as by ethnicity which was disaggregated. There are specific goals targets set to reduce achievement gaps within subgroup populations as well as with the overall student population.

Graduation data for each high school is provided by ethnicity as well as college enrollment with targets set for future performance. The district has made gains with regard to improving achievement and student outcomes although the improvement is not sustained for all students and subgroups. The project has set forth a plan to provide a consistent approach to making systemic changes that result in sustained improvement. While there are some remarkable strengths in student performance there are substantial gaps across the district and the plan focuses upon closing the gaps through targeted efforts. The graduation performance measures along with college enrollment specifically addresses gaps in subgroups with ambitious and achievable goals. The proposal provides specific targets for performance over the next 5 years and has outlined a model of reform to reach all of the students through a district wide initiative which is a strength; greater detail, examples, and evidence would have been useful to add depth.

The district goals are aligned to state performance targets that clearly establish achievement goals for all students, reduce performance gaps, and improve graduation rates. Based upon the charts on current district and school performance, and linking to established state performance targets, the goals of the project are set to meet or exceed the threshold established by the state for all students in the district as well as for subpopulation performance. The applicant has provided performance goals for each participating school for each year of the grant based upon the individual school student population performance data. This is a strength is that the goals are targeted towards individual schools and thus, able to personalize the intervention efforts to specific student needs.

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**	**13**

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides an excellent summary of the current initiatives that are focused upon development of the Common Core standards and development of supporting curriculum to be fully implemented in all schools by 2015 thus providing a rigorous curriculum for students. As well, grants and other sources have supported literacy efforts with multiple programs across the K12 grade span including PreK students. The data showing the level of improvement in early literacy competencies are provided and aligns with the district priorities. The reading emphasis and efforts towards improving literacy are vital to closing the achievement gap and preparing students for college readiness. As well, the efforts towards ELL students (33% of the district students) show positive results in achievement, attendance and GPA. The mathematics focus provides intensive support for middle school student preparation for Algebra I, a gateway course needed for higher level of preparation and college readiness.

Tools such as Accuplacer and strategies such as PSAT preparation indicate that the district has initiatives and programs in place to prepare and support students beginning in PreK through graduation and college enrollment. Training and support for teachers in data management and analysis provides the opportunity to quickly access student performance and inform or modify the instructional delivery. The district efforts have improved achievement gains in specific population subgroups providing evidence of progress although the district notes there is still much to do in order to close the gaps with select subgroups. The proposal provides many examples of ongoing initiatives that align to district priorities and focused upon achievement that extend across the PreK-12 spectrum. Aligning the current initiatives with this application will focus efforts, reduce duplicate efforts, and intensify the efforts that support student success. The plan to implement strategies and activities begins with the lowest performing schools with high levels of poverty and low achievement. The efforts target those students with the highest need and will provide intensive support over the 4 years of grant activities- this is strength of the proposal.

The applicant has provided charts and tables for some areas and for some years that show the level of previous efforts with regard to improving student achievement; for example, efforts related to student literacy in the early grades shows improvement in early grade reading proficiency. Other district initiatives such as birth to 3 readiness for school, reading efforts that utilize rubrics for ELA and ELL support, and math initiatives show success in improving student outcomes particularly for disadvantaged students. However, the applicant does not provide 4 years of data that clearly demonstrates a clear track record of success across the district; the data provided are limited to some areas of performance, for some areas that were assessed, and for select years. Although there are notable areas of improvement, the applicant does not provide details in terms of the scope of success or impact upon all students.

The application did not provide details on how student performance data is available such that the information is easily accessed and used to inform the parents and students; this would promote greater engagement of both parents and students in achievement, college, career, and workforce readiness. While there many efforts that support students and families, how the data on performance is communicated to parents was not evident.

	Available	Score
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	**5**	**4**

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The district budget information including salary for personnel (instructional, teachers, and staff) is made public on the district website. Information on the annual budget process, expenditures and meetings are on the website and open to the public. Forums are held to seek the input of the community on a regular bases. The processes are open, transparent, and seek input from the stakeholders. However, there were no examples or evidence provided that details the level and scope of their involvement and participation. For example logs, agendas, sign in sheets would have detailed the how the web site, open meetings, and forums were viewed and attended by the larger community including parents and students.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	**10**	**7**

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The state has passed legislation that requires schools and districts to focus efforts on improving student achievement and outcomes such as common core implementation and personalized learning. These efforts align to RTTT-D priorities as well. The state has been given more power and responsibility with respect to low performing schools. The proposal clearly

articulates that districts and superintendents have the autonomy to implement the initiatives and mandates within the context of their community and resource ability. The proposal established the role of local districts to implement and have autonomy over the management and leadership necessary to meet the needs of the local community that is served. A clearer explanation of how the district and state will collaborate on initiatives, their corresponding roles, and specific level of autonomy would be useful in the narrative overview particularly as it relates to low performing schools. It was not clear as to the level and scope of flexibility and latitude the district will have to implement all of the grant activities particularly with low performing schools under state oversight.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	11

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The district has several plans and initiatives (e.g., district technology plan, school improvement plans, Common Core curriculum) that will be integrated with the proposal activities to align and streamline efforts that focus upon student achievement and success. The various committees include parents, teachers, administrators, and community members to develop and transition district efforts for ongoing as well as for this proposal. This proposal builds off current efforts and seeks to form one comprehensive plan that is efficient and effective; this is a strength of the proposal. Strong letters of support are included from community members, the local collective bargaining unit, and local agencies; however, parents and higher education are noticeably lacking.

The plan does not mention student input overtly and does not provide details and depth as to how the community was engaged in this process. Additional details and evidence as to how input was sought and utilized such as forums, focus groups, town hall meetings etc.and a timeline of activities would have been useful. There is a lack of information with regard to meaningful stakeholder engagement that directly aligns to this proposal; rather the information provided is from previous efforts and initiatives. How input is sought, collected, reviewed and incorporated into current planning efforts is not made evident.

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

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

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal outlines a plan that is focused upon providing a high quality setting and atmosphere of learning that promotes student achievement. Goals are articulated with supporting strategies that reinforce a personalized learning environment. This personalized environment will create a change in culture towards learning at the district, school, teacher and student level of performance. For example, the focus upon teacher professional development is a vital step in changing instructional delivery as well as preparing educators to build their repertoire of knowledge and skills. Improving teacher quality through professional learning and collaboration allows educators to learn and to implement strategies, thus building theory to practice in daily planning and delivery.

The emphasis upon professional development personalized to the needs of the individual schools is an excellent and authentic strategy that aligns with the notion of a personalized learning environment. Providing students choice and multiple ways to demonstrate mastery is a direct alignment with RTTT-D goals as well of this proposal. When students have choice, can set their own learning goals, and have multiple ways and opportunities to demonstrate mastery, the likelihood of success is increased; and the same approach holds for educator learning. The development of a specific strategy to place schools along a continuum of readiness for personalized approaches indicates an excellent process to use data to prioritize the implementation plans. The focus upon student achievement using this approach is clearly articulated as a preparation for college and career readiness. Ongoing assessments and communication with parents and students is one strategy to improve family input and engagement in the learning process. The use of technology and providing students with devices and tools for learning using technology prepares students using real world type of tools. As well, educators will be able to access data quickly and develop lessons using technology that develop the 21st century skills needed for student entry into college and the workforce.

There was limited information on how the plan will address diverse learners and different cultures, as well as directly articulating how other needed skills such as goal-setting and critical thinking are implemented in an overt manner- this was addressed from a community action strategy and did not overtly discuss diverse culture implications. Norwalk does have a diverse community therefore; this was an opportunity to further expand upon the strategies. How resources are used to personalize the learning, and deepen and strengthen content and thus improve achievement was not overtly articulated. How students will demonstrate mastery of critical academic content is not made overtly clear. Specific examples and

evidence that demonstrates what a personalized approach would look like for a student in terms of instruction, assessment, and multiple opportunities for mastery would have been useful.

The collaborative community action team does provide support that reinforces the district initiative with respect to summer programs and working with high risk students. This is a strength since community involvement is vital to changing the culture and attitude towards learning. The plan proposed has high quality elements that address the RTTT-D priorities specifically the focus and strategies aligned to personalized learning and supports to improve student outcomes.

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

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal is a well-developed plan with goals, objectives, strategies, and outcomes that are aligned and focused upon improving teaching and learning along a personalized dimension that supports and improves the quality of education and outcomes for students. The narrative describes a professional development plan that centers on building capacity of the district educators to maintain this focus through the use of data, development of common formative assessment and implement a research-based approach to differentiation. The plan articulates a well-grounded approach to professional development that is ongoing, monitored and continuously evaluated, focused with an empirical research foundation (e.g., work of Resnick). The hallmarks of strong model of professional development are described and builds the content as well as the instructional skills of teachers and supported by district leaders (e.g. use of technology, PBL learning, online learning and opportunities for collaboration). The plan utilizes other district initiatives such as the Technology plan to reinforce and further support efforts that improve teacher quality and professional development. The plan is well focused and specifically keeps the articulated goals in the forefront of all of the activities. The process utilized continuously monitors and evaluates progress for both students and the school with a tracking system of evaluation. The teacher/administrator evaluation system described is a high quality plan developed and implemented throughout the state with evaluation ongoing. Specific benchmarks and performance targets are established and includes parent and peer feedback. The plan is high quality plan that focused upon a personalized approach to student learning through the many initiatives that are individualized to improve student achievement. Grounded in a solid framework that utilized a proven model of success, the plan incorporates district efforts such as technology to provide strategies that support student achievement. Strategic planning is evident in the comprehensive approach that addresses students, teachers, parents and community through diverse efforts. The plan will improve the numbers of effective and highly effective teachers by linking student performance to teacher evaluation. Effective and highly effective teachers will have students who demonstrate high performance, high achievement and meet the targets set for student performance on the local, state, and national comparisons of achievement. The plan has detailed specific strategies to improve teacher performance evidenced by student performance.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	13

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal describes an organizational structure that is typical including the Curriculum Office which manages curriculum, special education and ELL. The district administrators collaborate with building leadership to support this initiative as well as other district efforts such as the school calendar and budgets. Building leaders have flexibility and oversight of their individual building with respect to staffing, schedule, personnel thus enabling each school to meet unique student needs. There is sufficient autonomy at the building level to implement strategies and procedures that support the individual needs of their students and staff. The narrative describes multiple ways and opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery and credits though various assessments (state, district, classroom) as well as through multiple comparative forms; however, there were no examples or evidence provided. It would have been useful to have a greater description and supporting examples of what this process would like for a student. The use of co-teaching model of instruction for special education and ELL is an excellent strategy to improve the content mastery as well as to provide a supportive environment for students with special needs or language challenges.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	6

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal describes district emphasis upon collaboration with the community, students, and parents to ensure that all resources needed for success are available. While commitment is evident, there are no specifics provided as to what this means in practical terms. Some description of the types of services that are currently offered or programs that directly

support students would add a level of detail that is not evident.

Support is provided through multiple organizations and initiatives both at the district and community level; however, it was not evident as to what specific types of peer or online support are provided. Providing an example would have added depth and made this point more evident.

There are systems in place and others being implemented that will improve the access to data for parents and students including tools that support learning and home assistance such as tutoring.

The district is currently implementing a data warehouse system that will integrate all data and be usable across multiple platforms. The integration of multiple data sources will assist and support the plans to increase access to data for instructional improvement and to monitor student growth. However, the narrative did not provide specific details of warehouse utility and integration of all data into one system. As well, it was not clear as to how parents will access and utilize data. The proposal did not adequately address a plan for the use of equitable resources such as parent and community resources for example, technology support.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

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

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The district has been engaged in a process of continuous improvement since 2001 using strategic planning and program evaluation. This proposal builds upon those efforts through multiple processes at the district as well as the school level. The efforts are ongoing, systematic, data-driven, and couple the RTTT-D initiatives into that process. The proposal makes an excellent point in that it will focus on the monitoring and evaluation of the RTTT-D efforts and incorporate these processes into the current strategic efforts. Since monitoring will show progress towards set goals and evaluation will demonstrate the success of the efforts implemented, it is vital to keep these points as a priority emphasis which the plan outlines and describes. The district has multiple committees to oversee various aspects of the plan such as the district data team and professional development team. The plan describes how these various teams will become part of a regular and ongoing process and incorporated into the larger strategic efforts. Communication and sharing of progress for this district plan is a priority so that all facets of the plan are addressed and monitored.

Plans to evaluate the data and progress towards goals are clear with all levels of district personnel having a role. For example, teachers monitor student progress with weekly review by school teams, administrators conduct informal as well formal observations with feedback. District meetings are held on a regular basis for communication of progress.

Information is shared via the district and school websites written in parent friendly manner and in multiple languages- this is an excellent way to engage parents whose first language is not English and to build a sense of community with all stakeholders. Partnerships and tutoring with Norwalk community college is a strength.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	**5**	**4**

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal describes key implementation groups that collaborate on each phase and step of the plan and their role in the continuous improvement cycle. Each implementation group will review the data associated with that process and plan component, and work with the larger team to make adjustments as needed; thus, the roles, responsibilities, and what is to be evaluated is clear with respect to continuous improvement processes. This is a strength of the application in that processes are established to monitor and evaluate goal progress.

The process described allows for a continuous loop of information (quarterly and annual reviews) to be shared and for a feedback process that considers how the various plan components cohere and work in tandem. However, a more detailed timeline and specific strategies that provide evidence of plans to monitor, make revisions and changes was not overt with respect to details. The graphic provided provides an excellent visual to explain the process and feedback loop demonstrating a level of engagement, collaboration, and communication with the various stakeholders. Additional information describes how the community and parents will be kept informed and how the evaluator will work in concert with the plan. The plan does not provide in-depth details with regard to a timeline of activities as it relates to a cycle of continuous improvement. It would have been useful to have this aspect outlined with greater specificity since quarterly and annual reviews may not provide the level of communication needed to make adjustments and revisions.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	4

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal provides performance measures for all students as well as by subgroups as well as data targets for grant years. The goals established are ones that move students along a continuum of academic improvement to reach targets that are both achievable as well as indicative of a high performing district. The performance measures address specific targets for at-risk and high need students as well as targets to reduce the achievement gaps for all students and specifically for minority students. Each goal for grade bands is clearly specified along with a description for each measure. Targets address academic achievement, physical fitness achievement, graduation, FAFSA completion as well as students on track for college and career readiness. The measures and targets are aligned to the proposal as well to the RTTT-D priorities. Specific assessments include academic and cognitive measures as well as those that assess non-cognitive outcomes such as physical fitness. There was no rationale provided as to why specific assessments were selected to address the progress of performance measures and outcomes. A justification of why the assessment was considered to be the best measure was not articulated. The data is reviewed at various levels including the teacher, team, school and district. A strength of the proposal was the ability of teachers to access data and use in a timely manner to address student needs. The plan has clear goals set with respect to monitoring and evaluation of student data performance beginning with teacher made and local assessments continuing through state and other national assessments. The goal of providing personalized approaches align with intervention and supports that address each student's strengths and areas of improvement.

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

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The anticipated evaluation team will be highly qualified in terms of experience as well as academic credentials. A strength of the proposal is the clear articulation of the role of the evaluator which is to analyze the impact of the RTTT-D initiative upon student outcomes. This is excellent in that the focus has been and remains on student outcomes. The evaluator will develop surveys, collect and analyze data for each phase and evaluate the each aspect of the plan. The evaluation is excellent in that it is focused upon the major goals and inputs coupled with the impact upon designated outcomes. While the plan does not overtly state the types of analysis that will be utilized (e.g., descriptive statistics or analysis of themes) it does include that both qualitative as well as quantitative data will be collected and evaluated. The plan articulates a high quality scope of work; however, no time line is provided that makes clear how the data will be analyzed for improvement and progress towards goals and targets.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	8

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The budget provides an overview as well as breakdown by the major projects associated with the goals. The budget funding of technology resources/tablets to both teachers and students is an excellent investment in meeting the project goals by providing professional development as well as providing all students access to apps, innovative approaches to learning, and preparing them for real world applications. The budget provides a distinction of funding for major projects associated with the proposal as well as to identify that in-house training and materials will continue to be funded through the district. One time investments such as the tablets or programs to support specific activities such as revamping of the library and resources are excellent investments. The budget includes costs associated with personnel and a heavy administrative layer; however, this level of support may be needed to sufficiently implement and evaluate the grant as outlined.

A strength is that the budget is detailed by projects and activities with supporting goals and activities outlined. For example, a major focus is the use of technology- the plan describes this focus as a project area and provides all of the supporting and ancillary information related to this goal within the budget. This district proposal outlines that the project will have an impact upon all students although the proposal targets elementary and middle school students. While the plan has direct and indirect targets with regard to students it would have been useful to have this information presented in an articulate manner.

The budget expenditures associated with the funding for the community resources and support was not clear as to precisely what would be funded. Greater clarity would be useful and make this transparent in terms of what is funded and

how it aligns and supports the goals of the grant. Future financial supports are not overly evident as to what plans are considered to meet the needs as outlined.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	7

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

There are some aspects that once completed will be sustainable over time such as curriculum development and implementation aligned to Common Core as well as teacher professional development. However, teacher retention and administrative turnover requires that there is always a plan to train new educators as well as to have a plan for keep current educators aware of the educational changes that will occur over the next 5 years. It was not clear that thought was given as to how to sustain over the long term the momentum that will be generated as a result of this plan. District resources or other sources are mentioned however, there was no overt articulation of how this may occur. Future financial supports and anticipated projections of need are not overtly made clear as to how the project goals and activities will be maintained and sustained. The plan to re-appropriate funding to support those schools that are phased in later in the grant was not addressed in terms of support and planning efforts. The plan did not include a time line, narrative or description of activities that would sustain efforts to improve and personalize the learning and achievement of all students specifically subgroups.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	9

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The proposed project has provided a succinct and focused plan to meet the needs of teachers and students in Norwalk Schools. The plan contains strategies and activities that address preparing teachers with a focused professional development model, greater training on content areas in areas with low student achievement such as early literacy and mathematics; and, provides students access to a richer and deeper learning environment through a personalized approach. The needs are clearly presented with data and research that compares progress both locally as well as with state data. The goals, objectives, activities and timeline are reasonable and doable as well as ambitious and achievable. The projects associated with each goal are targeted to meet the student learning outcomes. It was evident that the focus was upon student learning and achievement as a mechanism for preparation for graduation, college and career.

The partnerships were established and impacted the larger community which was a strength. However, how the community services and educational system form a seamless and cohesive partnership was not made overly evident with examples and evidence. Evaluation plans were clear although there was some lack of clarity the administrative roles associated with the grant. This district wide proposal has the potential to impact a large number of students and has the capacity to make changes that will be in place for a number of years.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The proposal is a well-crafted focused plan that has clear goals, objectives, strategies and outcomes. The focus of providing a personal learning environment for student success and achievement is embedded in the plan throughout. For example, the professional development plan for educators provides systematic and ongoing training with a focus upon how to provide students with the experiences and activities that foster deeper learning and critical thinking. The district wide plan is a systemic approach to changing the culture through an intentional and deliberate set of strategies to improve achievement. The collaborative nature of the plan that utilizes a community approach as well as building upon previous and current initiatives such as the Common Core curriculum framework are excellent strategies to engage the community, partners, and parents. The plan is focused upon all students with an emphasis upon subgroups performance. The applicant notes the positive changes that have occurred as a result of previous effort and clearly states that this performance is not satisfactory for all students. The use of data to inform the plan is excellent as are the continuing evaluation of progress.

Total	210	174

Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0158CT-2 for Norwalk Public Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

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

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

(A)(1)

The applicant presented a comprehensive and coherent reform vision. The vision is clear and emanates from the project's core educational assurance areas. The applicant's vision mirrors the mission to create a student-focused culture in each school in the project. The proposal articulates a credible approach to accelerating student achievement, deepening student learning and increasing equity through personalized student learning. One promising approach in the implementation plan include an analysis of socioeconomic and achievement data in each target school, along with a readiness for personalization plan. This process will yield useful data for serving students in the project. Extensive use of technology will be a key part in the success of the project and will enhance student reading, writing, listening and language arts skills. The classroom experience of the students and teachers, who participate in this project will be vibrant and stimulating, because of the redesigned, interactive learning space and the strong support students will receive. Each student will get special, individualized attention, which will help them develop the necessary skills to succeed. The environment will be inviting to project participants and will be enhanced by technology that will open up many possibilities for learning in a virtual learning classroom. The Common Core Standards will be used to guide students to quality learning, that will help them reach their academic and career goals.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	**10**	**8**

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

(A)(2)

The applicant presented a systematic approach to implementing the project. The rationale for identifying and selecting schools to participate in the project seems to be reasonable and equitable because each school will be required to meet eligibility requirements for the project. The process will require schools to go through a personalization readiness analysis and implementation process. The process is rigorous. This process is somewhat intricate but is a fair way to select qualifying schools.The school selection process will identify schools and students with the greatest need as well as those schools that meet the requirements of the grant. Schools that will participate in the project are appropriately listed. There are 47.40% low income families. There is a total of 11,072 students in the school district. There will be 918 educators who will participate in the project. By the end of the project, 47.40% high need students will have participated in the project and received a personalized learning plan. The applicant explained the school selection process.

The proposal would be strengthened by including the total number or approximate number of high need students who will participate in the project each year . It is unclear how many students will be fully engaged in the project, each year, at the elementary, middle school and high school levels. More information is needed.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	**10**	**8**

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

(A)(3)

The applicant provided a high quality convincing plan because it is likely to deliver meaningful reform and change in the school district. The applicant's LEA wide vision emanates from a mission to create a student focused culture in each of the schools within the school district. This is a laudable goal because it will empower students and schools to benefit from strong education reforms that will facilitate deeper teaching and learning.Goals are ambitious and attainable because of careful and strategic planning by the applicant. The myriad resources that will be leveraged to support the project are extensive. Examples are: collaborations with the community, families, the Early Learner Initiative, home visits and all Entitlement resources, such as Title I, Title IA and Title III. These resources will improve student learning outcomes. The plan to scale up is believable and reflective. It will likely be implemented, because the project will heavily invest in expensive hardware and other non expendable items, which will maximize student learning. One example is the interoperable data system that will be connected to the State Education Agency and other schools in the school district. This data system will be the center piece for other aspects of the project to scale up and be adapted in other schools in the school district. Rich data will be collected and analyzed to make informed decisions through regular project feedback. Also the applicant has plans to ensure that project activities will be well documented and publicized so that the project can be replicated in some other school districts.

The proposal would be strengthened by including a more identifiable theory of change or a logic model for implementing the project.The rollout process for adding additional schools, each project year is ambiguous. More details are needed about the process.

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

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

(A)(4)

The district-wide goals for improved student outcomes are ambitious and likely to be attained because there are specific goals for math, reading, writing and science. The applicant has identified where there are gaps in academic achievement and have designed a plan that will address ways to close the academic gaps. The State has set the School Performance Index Target for schools in the State. The applicant, as a local education agency, will plan to meet the overall goal of improving academic achievement of 88% by 2024. Data presented in the application indicate that the applicant is making progress toward reaching the goal. The applicant's focus on tracking student academic achievement in the core subjects will provide guidelines and benchmarks on an ongoing basis. Tracking individual student progress toward attaining project goals are in place. The rich experience of the applicant in successfully implementing previous education reform initiatives will be a strength in moving forward and having success with this grant.

There is a table which displays reasonable, incremental increases in academic achievement each year of the grant. For instance in reference to math baseline data, it is 78.5% to 81.7% for four years and 82.5% during the post grant year. This represents steady student academic increase in math proficiency during the years of the project. A table is provided to illustrate these gains. The methodology is clear for analyzing summative student data. The data reveal a steady trajectory toward closing the academic achievement gap for subgroups. The comprehensive tables and charts, presented by the applicant, display data on the graduation rate and college enrollment rate There are baseline data which lay the foundation for measuring increase in student academic achievement each year of the project. The applicant presented college enrollment data on a Table. The data presented will provide baseline data to track future college enrollment and postsecondary attainment. This will be informative to the project and assist in further planning for project success.

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**	**14**

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

(B)(1)

The school district has been making steady progress on Statewide high stakes tests. The data show that this success is documented through an array of charts and tables that illustrate the success. There has been a vigorous outreach effort to the community and funders. The result is that the applicant has been able to receive funding for some successful programs that have raised student academic achievement and have started to close

the academic achievement gaps of sub groups. Examples are the $3,K grant from a foundation to address literacy issues in high schools and a middle school. Data show that students participating in the project raised their reading scores over 100 lexile levels. There have been other successful programs, such as a program to support an English Language Learner program. The proposal would have been strengthened by including how far reaching the outreach effort has been in communicating with the families of the students in some subgroups. For instance how and if the non English speaking families receive the project messages and how many actually attend the community meetings, where project information is shared. More specific information is needed on accommodations for families of the sub groups, such as interpreting services, transportation, or larger print on project handouts.The applicant will attain project goals to serve the persistently lowest performing schools through an annual, rolling school selection process. Data will determine the lowest performing schools, annually. The applicant will make student performance data available through the computer sharing system called Link-It. Link-It has far-reaching capabilities for sharing a wide range of school and student related data. The school district's web site will post the data, as well.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	4

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

(B)(2)

The applicant already practices a high level of transparency in LEA processes, practices and investments. It is sufficiently documented in the proposal narrative. This transparency will continue throughout the years of the project. It will continuously inform the various stakeholders. All salaries are updated on an annual basis during the budget development process. This information is placed on the school district's web site. There is a Budget Book, in hard copy. The contents of these documents and the wide dissemination of the documents will keep stakeholders well informed on project financial and personnel matters.This book is placed on the school district's web site, as well. The Superintendent uses the Budget Book in presentations to legions of civic and parent groups. Another publication of personnel salaries at the school level for instruction staff and actual personnel salaries at the school level is the District School Improvement Plan and Student Achievement Data. It will be posted on the school district's web-site. Because of all of the ways in which personnel information will be made available to a diverse number of stakeholders, the applicant has and will practice a high level of transparency. The Collective Bargaining Agreements include relevant salary information. The Agreements are read by many teachers and administrators. The applicant is very transparent because school personnel keep internal and external stakeholders informed on personnel salaries and related matters. This is an asset to internal and external stakeholders.

The proposal would be further strengthened by including an approximate number of stakeholders who will have access to the data regarding personnel salaries and related financial data. For instance how many groups will the superintendent present the information in the Budget Book? Approximately how many people attend the various meetings to which the superintendent will speak? How many people will receive or have access to the collective bargaining agreement?

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

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

(B)(3)

The State has laid the foundation for school reform, as early as 2010, with legislation to reform high school education. This legislation called for," focus on meaningful learning, rigorous content, supportive environments and 21st Century skills". This proposal includes these goals and will reflect the State mandate.The project will fulfill a long standing State mandate. The likelihood is that this will transfer to strong State support for the project. Also the State has installed a Longitudinal Data System that makes collecting, storing and sharing student and related data, easier. The applicant has used the system to enhance their data collecting and sharing capacity. Also, the professional organization for State public school superintendents issued an action oriented recommendation that revolved around transforming learning for students in the State. This action shows the level of support that the Organization will likely extend to the project. The superintendent of this LEA goes out into the community to share information with stakeholders because it will help build the perception that the school district has the authority and autonomy to implement the project and that their help is needed. As a local education agency the State has inherently given the necessary autonomy for the applicant to implement education reform in the school district. All of these initiatives have created successful conditions and the necessary autonomy to implement the personalized learning environments, which the applicant will implement.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	13

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

(B)(4)

The applicant has involved a wide number of key stakeholders in the preparation of the proposal because it was shared with many stakeholders. First, there was a diverse RTTD task force that elicited meaningful input for the proposal. Drafts of the proposal were circulated for feedback. Conference calls were held to discuss the proposal. Final drafts of the proposal were sent to the Board of Education, teachers unions and associations of supervisors and administrators, the State Department of Education and the Mayor of the city. This process encouraged a range of comments and valuable feedback which was used to finalize the proposal.

The applicant presented letters of support for the project, from key stakeholders. The local teachers union and other groups and organizations are solidly behind the implementation of the project because the letters were included in the application and indicated a high level of approval and support for the project. Involving these entities in the preparation of the proposal at the early stages has resulted in valuable support and additional resources for the project.

The applicant failed to include whether or not students participated in the proposal dissemination process.The project would be further strengthened by including an approximate number of individuals or groups who actually provided input and feedback into the finalization of the proposal.

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

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

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

(C)(1)

The applicant presented a high quality plan, which includes the necessary elements to support students in attaining academic success. The applicant will implement a robust retraining professional development program for teachers and students who participate in the project because students will be taught that learning will be the key to their success. Students will develop a personalized learning plan that will be technology rich. The applicant will set up a Personalization Readiness Team and school leadership teams in each participating school. Both will be instrumental in modifying school and class schedules as well as in the delivery of data in real time. A standout that the project will introduce is the experimental learning center or Commons. The applicant presented an architectural rendering of the layout for the Commons, which is designed to facilitate deep learning in areas of individual student academic interests and college and career readiness.There is space for individual study and group meetings, comfortable seating arrangements and access to a wide array of virtual learning possibilities. It is an inviting space for students to reflect and actualize their own personalized learning plan. It will open vistas to other perspectives. The Family Resource Center will make valuable contributions to the project.through new curricula and new teaching and learning strategies. It will serve as a vehicle for assisting with goal setting, team work, critical thinking and creativity, all of which are cutting edge skills for the 21st Century. Students will be taught to use the newest digital devices. This will lead students to take responsibility for their own learning because they have mastered critical thinking, problem solving and effective communication skills.

There will be clearly developed performance assessments, with accompanying rubrics. There will be a formative evaluation of the project, The applicant will conduct short term and long term assessments. Data from these frequent assessments will serve to signal the need to intervene and make timely intervention for project improvements, if needed. Early College courses will be available to students who, through their individualized learning plans, indicate readiness to take a college level course. There will be frequent feedback using report cards, conferences and other means. Because students will have wireless access to tablet-like digital devices and other technology tools, they will be better prepared to pursue and reach their academic and career goals. Teachers will be trained to assist students in the use of the new technology because it will help students track and manage their own learning.

All of the above will prepare students for college and career readiness.

The proposal would be strengthened by including special strategies designed particularly to meet the needs of high need students.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	**20**	**17**

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

(C)(2)

The applicant presented a high quality professional development plan that appropriately concentrates on four key structures: curriculum, instruction, assessments and results.Teachers will be trained in inquiry based teaching; project-based learning; performance assessments; community based learning, online course work and independent projects because these pedagogical strategies have been proven to support deep learning. These strategies have been included in many reform education plans. It has worked for others and will likely work for this project. Teachers will then use these methods and strategies with the students because they will have been trained to do so. They will ensure that students know how to fully understand and engage in these new and promising strategies. The applicant will use a research based evaluation model by the Gates Foundation.The research based model has been properly vetted and proven to be rigorous and effective. It is designed to support and improve employee effectiveness.This includes teachers and administrators. This process is likely to produce effective and highly effective teachers and principals. There will be constant project monitoring and revisions, when needed. With the proper implementation of the rich supports, strategies and methods, the number of students will increase who have effective and highly effective teachers and principals.

The applicant will use high quality digital devices, especially in the Commons area, where students will be encouraged to experiment with various technology. Teachers will be trained to support them in this effort. Another resource that will be used are the varied resources which partners will contribute to the project.

The proposal would be strengthened by providing more specific information about the school district's teacher and principal evaluation process. More details are needed regarding the support the school district will provide to develop effective and highly effective teachers and administrators.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	**15**	**13**

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

(D)(1)

The applicant presented evidence that the Central Office administrators are committed to working closely with local school-based building administrators.That has been the practice in the past and will continue. It is organized to provide support and services to the local schools. Duties and responsibilities of Central Office personnel are defined. Major duties of the school based administrators are identified. There is sufficient flexibility and autonomy with the local school leadership and school leadership teams to successfully implement this project. Past experiences with the applicant implementing similar education reform grants have set the precedence for the applicant to provide school leadership, flexibility and authority.

Students who participate in the project will be given the chance to demonstrate content mastery multiple times and in comparable ways through the Common Formative Assessment. Students who show readiness, may enroll in college level courses. The project resources and instructional practices will be accessible to all students in the qualifying schools. Accommodations are made for students with disabilities and English Language Learners. In an effort to level the playing field, classrooms for the latter two sub groups are staffed with two teachers, who co-teach, and aides. This will double the classroom support for these two sub groups.

The proposal would be strengthened by including more information and details on the process by which students have the opportunity to progress and earn credit based on demonstrated mastery not the time spent on a topic. More information is needed about how this will work for students in elementary, middle or high school. For instance will blended learning be a part of the process?

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	**10**	**9**

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

(D)(2)

The applicant has ensured that students, parents, educators and other groups serve on various committees associated with the project. Some examples are the diverse membership of the District Improvement Team, Budget Committee, Teacher/ Administrator Evaluation Team, High School Program of Studies Team. and the School Data Team. These teams and their contributions are referred to often throughout the proposal. It is clear that the applicant practices a philosophy of inclusion because subgroups and myriad stakeholders are represented on these teams and committees. This has served the school district well. The result of having various perspectives and viewpoints on committees, task forces and work groups has yielded wide support for education reform.

The applicant has ensured that students, parents, educators and others have the proper level of technical support because it will further underscore wide participation and support for the project. The budget supports this commitment. Online technical support will be available. There will be technical support from various groups such as the Parent Teachers Organization, the District Parent Council, the Early Childhood Council and a community group. The applicant has a track record of successful use of technology in school reform, so there is experience in providing technical support to stakeholders. Because of that previous experience it is likely to transfer over and enrich this project.

The funding from this grant will be used to further develop an internal data warehouse which will give access to parents and families. It will be accessible "anywhere, anytime". This will build on the existing technology and further enhance data access for parents and families.

The applicant is committed to expanding the capability of collecting and sharing data because it is made clear in the project narrative. This will be done by establishing an interoperable data system. This effort will be the Linked-In data warehouse. After implementation this new and improved system will integrate all data from student to State level. Also students, families and educators will be able to access college and career data. As the the applicant stated in the project narrative, the enhanced data will contribute to the applicant's mission to collect data that support "cradle to career" services to the target population.

The proposal would be strengthened by including a more comprehensive discussion about how parents and other stakeholders will be trained to use the new technology. More information is needed about how students will successfully export their information to an open data format and to use the data in other electronic learning systems, such as electronic tutors, homework help and blended learning opportunities.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

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

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

(E)(1)

The applicant presented a high quality plan, with a formative evaluation that will provide regular feedback on progress toward the project and school district's goals. The project is data driven and data will be used appropriately in decision making regarding project progress. There will be committees that will collaborate and contribute to continuous project improvement. Data will be used to measure project progress.The committees are the Decision Making Team and the Curriculum Committee.There will be constant monitoring of student and project progress because this is necessary to ensure that the project will be tracked closely. There will be surveys distributed to numerous stakeholders because the data from the surveys will gather data for timely project feedback. The fact that the feedback will be conducted by teams that have ten years of prior related experience will be useful to the success of this project. Also the applicant will use an automated telephone system to solicit project feedback.This system is likely to reach many stakeholders. It is an effective use of technology because it will inform many stakeholders about the project progress.

	Available	Score
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	**5**	**5**

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

(E)(2)

The applicant will ensure that there is ongoing communication and engagement between the applicant and numerous stakeholders. There will be key implementation groups that will monitor the project. The process was described and clearly illustrated on a chart. Data collected will be useful because it will be measured and analyzed by an experienced evaluation team. The project evaluator will be responsible for collecting and interpreting the collected data. Surveys will be sent to students, parents and teachers on a quarterly basis. The results of the surveys will inform project administrators about project progress.The evaluator will use the assessment data, survey information and outreach to families and the community about recommendations for determining satisfaction and whether or not there are project issues that need attention. The strategies used will support the project in meeting the goals in a timely manner. The use of interdisciplinary professionals to comprise the evaluation team is an excellent strategy to ensure a richer and fuller evaluation process because it will incorporate different perspectives.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	4

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

(E)(3)

The applicant presented explicit charts.There are columns for rationale, performance and resources. The information in the charts are believable and appropriate for the project because the data used in the project will be rigorous. Project performance measures will provide the data needed for project success. The project goals are ambitious and attainable because of the rich resources, quality of teacher training and diverse technologies available to students. High school performance measures are included and are specific to the criteria. The students will have effective and highly effective teachers, because of the high quality training teachers will receive.The applicant 's rigorous planning has resulted in achieving a total of at least 12 of the performance measures.

The proposal would be strengthened by including a stronger rationale for the selected performance measures.The applicant indicated how it will improve the measures over the length of the project. There is evidence of improvement in student academic achievement durung the grant period.

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

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

(E)(4)

The applicant presented a high quality plan of a rigorous evaluation process because of a highly skilled evaluation team, which will bring objectivity to the evaluation process. The team will be comprised of members from different academic disciplines such as applied statistics, social science and education. This interdisciplinary evaluation team will bring diverse experience and add depth to the evaluation process. The evaluator will be given a scope of work linked to the project goals, which will guide and provide focus for the evaluation. A formative and summative evaluation will be conducted and provide data that will determine the extent to which the project is meeting goals. The reports of project progress will be constant, ongoing and frequently shared with staff and stakeholders.

The proposal would be strengthened by a fuller discussion about the methods, strategies, formats and venues where data will be shared with specific stakeholders, namely, students, administrators, the SEA (State Education Agency) and community members. More information is needed on this matter.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

(F)(1)

The applicant presented a detailed budget and a clear budget narrative because it justifies budget items. The total funds requested is $21,147.936. This will be subsidized by funds from other sources. The budget is thoughtful and include necessary items to ensure project success. Funds are identified that will be used for one time investment, such as a video camera, a sound system and a wireless cart. This is a testament to the applicant paying close attention to budget details. The budget presented, will cover the four years of the project. The budget is sufficient to support a personalized learning environment. The applicant will seek other funding. This is credible, given the past successful experience of the applicant in acquiring grants from foundations, philanthropic organizations and other generous sources. The applicant presented a long term strategy to raise additional funding, which is believable, based on past success in fund raising for education reform. However, more information and specifics on future financial project support that will complement RTTD funding is needed. Details are missing. A plan that explains the possible sources of funds needed to carry on the project after federal funding ends would strengthen the proposal.

	Available	Score
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	**10**	**9**

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

(F)(2)

The applicant presented a plan for sustaining the project's goals after the grant. Successful parts of the project that will likely be sustained is the deep and enduring professional development for teachers, the interoperable data system and the technology students will use in the teaching and learning process. Even though technology is constantly changing, the creative use of technology in teaching and learning is likely to be sustained because of the capability and commitment of the applicant to upgrade and maintain cutting edge technology. The students will benefit from the personalized learning consultant whose duties will be to guide and oversee the development of individualized learning plans. An intangible sustainable part of the project will likely be the philosophy of "cradle to career" student services and support. The applicant will seek other funding sources for three years after the grant has ended. There is evidence that the applicant could be successful in future fundraising efforts, given past success in acquiring grants and funding.

More details are needed about future fundraising after the grant ends. More details, about the source and amount of funding after federal funding ends, are needed.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	**10**	**7**

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant will maintain a sustained partnership with several groups, such as the City Children 's Foundation, a local community college and a local foundation. Performance measured were placed on a Chart. Some information on how the partnerships work.to support the applicant is provided. An overall budget is presented. It is detailed and is adequate to

cover projected project activities. The applicant will engage in meaningful activities that will involve students, families and stakeholders in the project activities. The plan to constantly monitor the project and provide timely feedback to students, teachers and stakeholders in the project progress will further strengthen the project.The applicant presented a plan that will scale the model up. It will be suitable for replication inside and outside of the school district..Goals are ambitious and with the project resources, the goals will be attainable.

The proposal would be strengthened by describing a more comprehensive approach to ways in which partnerships or the many community groups will integrate education and support services for students who participate in the project. There is some indication in the proposal that there exists a relationship between several community based groups and the applicant, but the information provided in the project narrative does not specify a level of services that clearly links education and the support services provided by partners and community based organizations.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		**Met**

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant met the Absolute Priority 1. The applicant addressed how it will build on the core educational assurance areas, because the project was described with necessary specificity. Students will significantly improve their learning and teaching because of the personalization of strategies, tools and support. This level of learning will be aligned with college and career readiness. The applicant will meet the needs of students by deepening their experiences in personalized learning. The professional development that teachers will receive will increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The students will benefit because students will learn in an environment with numerous options and diverse pathways to learning and content mastery. The students will be well prepared to enter and complete college or pursue a career. The project is data driven, because the data gathering process and feedback loop is clearly described. The graduation rate will increase after four years because of the incremental increases that will occur each year, across groups.The overall budget is detailed with subparts, which breaks down the various parts of the budget and clarifies the budget.

	Available	Score
Total	**210**	**187**

Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0158CT-3 for Norwalk Public Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

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

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Norwalk Public Schools presents a comprehensive and coherent reform vision anchored in RTT-D's four core educational assurance areas. Norwalk's plan uses standards and assessments, data systems, effective teachers and principals, and it's turn-around plan to: create personalized learning environments, provide support to teachers and students, and use community resources to extend learning opportunities.

The applicant's approach to meeting the goals inherent in personalized learning environments focuses on establishing

district wide benchmark goals and using technology to support teachers and students in meeting these goals. The reform vision includes important supporting elements that have been identified over time as critical to the successful implementation of improvement strategies including building staff capacity and effective use of time. The applicant also proposes to restructure learning spaces to further support students and teachers.

The description of the classroom experience for students and teachers demonstrates a deep understanding of how personalized learning experiences need to be linked to clear content goals, based on college- and career-ready standards, and guided and supported by teachers. The applicant provides a thorough description of the necessary pre-cursors to implement an effective program, such as developmentally appropriate learning, aligned curriculum, and on-going feedback, as well as strategies to extend the program to families and the community.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	8

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant proposes to implement the program in all of its 16 elementary and middle schools; high schools are currently participating in another reform initiative that is aligned to the RTT-D plan. There are, however, supplementary programs available for high school students that are supported by the RTT-D project but specific numbers of participating students are not provided for all these projects.

All the elementary and middle schools meet the eligibility requirements. The applicant has grouped the targeted elementary and middle schools by achievement and reduced and free lunch status which will serve as the starting point for selecting cohorts (one middle, 3 elementary schools) each year over the four years of the grant. It is unclear how the applicant intends to use its proposed triangulation approach to further select cohorts. The applicant describes the personalized readiness analysis and how it will be used to determine which schools/cohorts will be selected in each year of the grant. It is not clear how the triangulation will actually be used to determine which cohort will be served first and whether or not ready for personalization will be the first consideration or if academic need will be the primary concern. The application presents a Year 1 through 4 chart of the cohorts based on achievement and poverty but does state that this might change. This final step in the selection process is left incomplete in the application.

The applicant provides a complete list of the schools, i.e. elementary, middle, and high, with the required data elements.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	5

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant intends to eventually serve all elementary and middle schools by the end of the four year grant period and will provide some services to high schools over the four years. The applicant states that the current on-going high school reforms are aligned with the proposed RTT-D project, therefore no specific scale-up plans are presented in the application. The applicant does not provide a plan that describes how the four year scale-up of the plan in the elementary and middle schools will take place. It is not clear how the applicant will provide the full range of reforms to all the schools in the district given its proposed phase-in approach.

The applicant has taken the broad vision and broken it into actionable elements that will, if implemented, reach its outcome goals. The applicant has focused its plan on providing resources to students and teachers and families to personalize the learning environment as each cohort begins the reform process as well as ensuring that the necessary support continues. The applicant states that all the entitlement resources and foundation programs in the District are working toward the same goals and outcomes.

The applicant's actual plan to meet the learning outcomes provides clear goals and supporting strategies but lacks a timeline and general deliverables. It is difficult to determine if this level of generality is sufficient to guide the project over 4 years without a clear logic model or more specific theory of change.

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

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant intends to use the performance targets for the next four years that were set by the SEA (CT State Department of Education) for the district, schools, content areas, subgroups, achievement gaps, and graduation rates. The targets vary by school and are ambitious and achievable. The improvement goals are presented for each school in the district including the performance, achievement gaps, and graduation rates for high schools not directly targeted by the RTT-D program. Each of the targeted schools has different performance goals based on their current performance levels

as do the subgroups within each school. The state-set targets reflect these different starting points and do not result in meeting absolute targets but focus on growth over time.

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	12

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant presents state assessment data that indicate increasing student achievement results in grades 3-8 from 2006 to 2013 in math and reading as well as in many subgroups as compared to overall state gains during the same time period. While the results are not consistent for all sub-groups, there is an upward trend. The data are presented as total 3-8 results so it is difficult to determine if the District is having a different impact at some of the targeted grade levels and not at others that might impact the RTT-D implementation plan.

There are numerous reform efforts underway in Norwalk targeted at increasing student achievement and improving the education for all students that account for some of the improvements over time. The applicant describes these diverse initiatives, from sheltered instruction for English Language Learners to strengthening family community partnerships at the birth to grade 3 level as part of its focus on its lowest-achieving schools. The applicant articulates these on-going reform efforts in a consistent and comprehensive manner indicating an across-the-board view of the various educational and community support systems that are necessary to impact school and student performance. Some of the initiatives lay the foundation for the proposed RTT-D project. For example, the District's data warehouse to improve technology use and data driven decision-making processes support current reform efforts and will be part of the proposed RTT-D project.

The applicant presents a limited discussion of the school performance data currently available to teachers and administrators through its LinkIt system but does not indicate that parents and students have access to these data. It is difficult to determine in the application if the expansion of these systems provides a proactive strategy for parents and students to receive performance data in ways that inform and improve participation and engagement with school-based programs.

	Available	Score
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	4

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant states that it makes all expenditure information available annually including actual personnel salaries at the school level instructional staff and non-personnel expenditures through its public budget documents and on the district's website. However, no evidence is provided of the extent of the data provided. The process the District uses to inform the public of the availability of the data include standard reporting, public announcement, and meeting requirements. The District also convenes focus groups to discuss the budget but the application does not include specific numbers of attendees at these meetings. Without more definitive information, the applicant appears to have a passive strategy for communicating LEA processes, practices, and investments.

	Available	Score
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	7

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides evidence of State level initiatives and authority to intervene in low achieving schools as well as implement personalized learning environments at the secondary level. The state level secondary level personalized learning initiatives appear to provide some ideas and recommendations for implementation at the applicant's proposed elementary and middle school level but it is difficult to determine if these are advisory documents or mandates or set conditions. The applicant does provide a list of the areas for the personalization of learning that have been included in recent legislation but it is unclear how these areas will support the applicant's plan. The applicant provides little evidence of specific sufficient autonomy under State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements to implement personalized learning environments at its proposed middle and elementary levels.

The District does provide a clear statement on its authority to develop individualized autonomous plans to transition to Common Core Standards from K-12.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	6

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's process to develop this application included using the work of previous task forces for the technology plan, the district and school improvement teams, and the transition team for the common core standards to inform and guide its development. The applicant indicates that a Race to the Top District Task force with district, school and community representatives developed the application but provides no evidence indicating the number of participants or their affiliations. Without more details on the make-up of the committee, the degree of stakeholder involvement remains ambiguous. The application was developed through an iterative process with numerous school-based task forces, the school board, and teacher and administrator groups but there is no indication of the comments received nor any changes that might have been made as a result of this feedback. The failure to document the degree to which the applicant listened to its stakeholders and community leaves the question of meaningful engagement unanswered. There is little information in the application to indicate a proactive engagement with the community or the staff and parents at the targeted schools in the development and review of the application.

The Norwalk Federation of Teachers (NFT) has signed the application and the applicant states that the NFT commented on the application and that changes were made as a result but there is no direct discussion of the comments and edits the NFT made to the document. Lacking specific information on the type and range comments the NFT as well as additional documentation regarding its engagement with the application raises questions about the degree of support for the RTT-D application.

There are letters from the Mayor and a number (5 total) of community foundations and organizations in support of the application. There are no indicators of support from parents or parent organizations including the district level parent council. It should be noted that there is no requirement on the number of letters of support or the organizations that could submit them, but the absence of letters from parents may reflect their lack of involvement with the RTT-D application.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	16

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's Year One plan to translate its reform vision into meaningful change to prepare all students to meet college- and career-ready standards is described in sufficient detail in terms of four main goals, appropriate strategies and activities, reasonable timelines and deliverables, and responsible parties for the first year of each of the four cohorts. The goals of the project focus on providing students with personalized learning opportunities with strategies and activities focused on training teachers, providing additional resources, and extending community support mechanisms.

Student personalization is to be guided by each student's personalized learning plan which is inadequately described in the application. The specifics on the development of these plans and their relationship to understanding how learning is key to success and setting learning goals is not thoroughly explained. The applicant does, however, provide for deep learning and engagement in the learning process by allowing for student choice in how to engage in content and how to demonstrate mastery. The applicant also provides for the development of such non-cognitive skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking.

The applicant provides a thorough description of the learning environment and instructional resources that will be available to students, such as access to tablets and wireless acess at school and in the community as a result of the RTT-D project. A key component of the project will be the revamping and remodeling of the school media resource centers which the applicant contends will be the centerpiece of the interactive learning space for teachers and students. The applicant does not provide an overview or analysis of the current web-based and instructional resources in the district to measure the need for tablets and new media centers and how these resources will fill an unmet need in personalizing the learning environment for Norwalk students.

The applicant presents specific details in support of the strategy to provide teachers with "real time" assessment data to meet the individual needs of students. The applicant's activities in support of this strategy are extensive for the early literacy assessment, reading program, new math program, and assessment of college and career readiness. These four programs should provide students, teachers, and parents with important on-going feedback on student progress.

It is not clear in the application how the applicant will specifically address the needs of high-need students. The applicant does describe using the community support network to address Pre-K, summer activities, student behavior, and academic

difficulties but does not provide a sufficient explanation or justification for the activities of this community partnership and how it will support high-need students in a comprehensive manner.

The applicant provides for training and support for students in the use of technology. It is not clear if this support will be sufficient in terms of 24/7 availability and adequate technical resources in and out of school.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	16

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant presents a plan for the first year of implementing the RTT-D plan which provides a broad outline of the goals, strategies and activities, timeline, deliverables, and responsible parties for the professional development of teachers and other educators. The rationale for improving instruction by building the capacity of educators is well-articulated in the application but the on-going professional development process to deepen teacher understanding and improve beyond the first year is lacking. The applicant has identified the key attributes of effective professional development plans, such as job-embedded, consistency, and occurs over time which will guide the implementation of the professional development plan but fails to provide specific examples of what the district intends to provide over the 4 years of the RTT-D project.

The key organizing principle for the applicant's plan to implement instructional strategies for all participating students is the Readiness for Personalization Team and the Best Practices Continuum assessment activity to identify and prioritize the needs within each school. This is an important activity that reflects a personalized professional development approach to accommodate different levels of understanding and skills within the teaching force. The applicant identifies the essential teaching strategies needed to provide a personalized learning environment that will be assessed and used as the plan is implemented. The applicant did not, however, provide sufficient information in the application to demonstrate how the results of this assessment activity will be actualized at the school level, such as differentiated professional development.

The applicant describes the current status of the teacher and administrator evaluation system including how it will be used to improve educator performance. However, the applicant does not provide a plan for increasing the number of highly effective teachers beyond this very general discussion. It is unclear if the applicant intends to initiate a new recruiting plan or if there are additional supports it intends to implement to increase the number of effective and highly effective teachers in hard-to-staff schools or subjects.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	**15**	**12**

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant clearly describes the organization of the the central office including the offices for curriculum and instruction and human resources and finance. The applicant states that these offices support operations at the school site. There appears to be autonomy at the school level to develop budgets, staffing plans, and personnel decisions. The approval process for the district in terms of personnel and the School Board for the budget may, however, limit that autonomy. The applicant did not provide additional information to clarify the level of autonomy in terms of the actual development and approval process for budgets and staffing.

The applicant presents affirmative statements for students earning credit based on demonstrated mastery on regularly administered classroom, school, district and state level assessments but does not provides specific examples of how and when students are able to do so. There is a system of Common Formative Assessments that allows students to demonstrate mastery at multiple times in comparable ways but the results are analyzed in the Professional Learning Community Model without a description of a formal structure for granting credit or determining mastery.

The applicant provides for adaptable and accessible resources and practices for students with disabilities and English language learners. The district uses co-teaching and instructional aides to ensure that these students are well-served.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	**10**	**5**

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides affirmative statements ensuring that all students, parents, educators, and stakeholders have access to the necessary resources to support personalized learning. To support that statement the applicant provides examples of various school and district committees and work groups that include representatives from all applicable stakeholders. It

does not, however, provide a plan to ensure equitable resources in and out of school during the implementation of the RTT-D project including any committees or workgroups it might establish. There is a Parent Community Staff Advisory Committee referenced in other parts of the plan but the support for this group is unclear.

The applicant provides affirmative statements ensuring that all students, parents, educators, and stakeholders have access to technical support provided through a range of strategies. To support that statement that applicant describes school level parent teacher organizations, the district level parent council, the early childhood council, and the community coalition (ACTS) which currently provide technical, peer, and online support to the District's children and families. It does not include examples of the types of technical support currently provided. The applicant does not provide a plan to ensure that all relevant parties have specific technical support over the life of the RTT-D project.

The applicant is developing an internal data warehouse as well as working to ensure that all of its data systems are interoperable. The data warehouse will eventually provide access to parents and families but details on the types of data to be included and the level of accessibility are not included in the application. This lack of specificity also pertains to the data warehouse. While the applicant specifies that all student data will be available, it does not specify if human resource data, budget data, and instructional improvement system data are to be integrated into one system.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	14

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant proposes a high quality plan for a rigorous continuous improvement process that provides for on-going feedback and possible mid-course corrections that is based on the State's District Improvement Planning process. The plan includes numerous data review and analysis opportunities from a variety of perspectives including teachers, administrators as well as district level staff. The applicant proposes differing strategies to collect and analyze results that are grounded in the proposed implementation plans. For example, there is a separate technology planning team that will monitor and measure technology use as the professional development team monitors curriculum and assessments. The District's ability to collect all these different data points will be a challenge that rests with District Data Driven Decision Making Team which has established appropriate timelines for reviewing the implementation of the project. It was, however, unclear in the application how the RTT-D District team will coordinate with these standing committees to capture the most meaningful and important information on program implementation. The applicant includes a survey process for gathering additional feedback from teachers, parents and students to provide additional perspectives and improvement opportunities.

The applicant has also established a public reporting process for quarterly reports on the District's website to highlight "learning success." While this process will focus on the success of the project, it has the potential to provide additional information to parents and stakeholders to improve the RTT-D project. In addition to the new quarterly reports, the applicant will provide deliverables such as annual reports.

	Available	Score
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	3

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant proposes a limited plan in conjunction with the continuous improvement process for on-going communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders. The management plan for this project implies an inherent communication process from the school implementation sites to the District leadership but specific channels are not articulated within the proposed feedback loop. The project evaluator does appear to be responsible for some data elements as well as the quarterly reports to external audiences but a specific plan is not articulated.

The applicant does provide for the Parent Community Staff Advisory Council to develop outreach strategies to engage and communicate with parents but no timeline for the development and implementation of these strategies is included in the application.

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

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant proposes 11 performance measures that reflect key points at elementary, middle, and high school levels as

well as including a non-cognitive measure and a teacher quality measure. It does not , however, provide the rationale for selecting these 11 performance measures including how the measure will provide rigorous, timely and formative information or how the District will review and modify the measure(s) over time. Without this critical information on the thinking behind the proposed measures and how they will be used, it is difficult to determine their impact on the continuous improvement process.

It should be noted that many of the measures are included within the evaluation plan and provide important data comparison points, but it is unclear how the measures may be reviewed and improved over time if they are insufficient to guage implementation progress.

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

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant presents a high quality scope of work to evaluate the effectiveness of RTT-D funded activities. The scope of work includes the elements of a high quality plan including the goals of the evaluation, strategies to be employed, deliverables and the responsible party. A specific timeline is not addressed other than the quarterly and annual deliverables rather than intermediate steps.

The scope of work focuses on the two main aspects of the project: implementation and impact with extensive supporting evaluation tasks that focus on key elements of the project with an appropriate combination of both qualitative and quantitative measurement tools. The evaluator will use a mix of experimental and quasi-experimental designs which will provide the District with a comprehensive picture of both implementation over time and its impact. Of particular note in the design is the proposal to develop a student evaluation that analyzes the results of state assessments, teacher effectiveness measures, student growth, and college- and career-readiness. The comparisons across teachers, training schedules will provide the applicant as well as others a clear picture of what is happening as a district implements personalized learning plans.

The applicant will also evaluate different aspects of the program to measure the efficacy of certain interventions, such as the early childhood program, offering college classes, and the community based online resource program.

The to-be-hired outside evaluator will be responsible for quarterly and annual reports which will inform and better structure the continuous improvement process. The use of an outside evaluator will add credibility to the evaluation and the findings.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Norwalk is requesting approximately $21M over the four years of the project based on its total student enrollment (K-12) of approximately 11,000 students. It is unclear in the application if all high school students will be participating in the project and if the total enrollment within the district is the appropriate baseline. It should be noted that there are approximately 7,800 elementary and middle school students in the targeted schools but some services will be provided to high school students over the course of the project. It is difficult to determine the actual number of participating students for each year of the project.

Within the budget, the applicant proposes 4 main projects in addition to the management and oversight costs which are sufficient. Many of the costs are reasonable given the intense professional development, the need for additional consumable resources to support personalized learning, and expansion of community support resources. However, some of the costs seem poorly timed or high compared to the potential benefit to the project, its participating students, and/or the proposed implementation plan. For example:

- purchasing 11,000 tablet computers the first year for students (10,000) and teachers (1,000) to support a plan that will be phased in 4 schools at a time over four years appears premature. An additional concern is the nature of the technology and if the initial purchase will be what is wanted, needed, or useful over the course of the phase-in process. The cost is not an issue, but the timing might be.
- remodeling the school libraries at each targeted school (4 per year) including the physical plant, furniture, and computer upgrades at a cost $200,000 per school per year for a total of approximately $3.3M for a meeting place and learning lab is not explained in terms of specific current resources.

The applicant's budget includes only the requested RTT-D funds although the narrative states that all entitlement funds will be used to support the project. It is also clear throughout the narrative that there are a number of foundations supporting aspects of Norwalk's reform plan, i.e. high schools, but those funds are not included in the budget. Given the confusing information on the extent of services to high school students, it is important to factor in the total funding currently available at the high school level to determine the adequacy of the budget.

The applicant states that is has structured the budget to be primarily one-time costs. The professional development, equipment, and teacher time will not be necessary in the long-term to sustain the personalized learning environments. The management costs (4 staff) may also be trimmed over time as the project moves into its on-going implementation although the applicant states that it may look for local funds to support those positions at the end of the grant.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	5

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's limited plan for the sustainability of the project is built into the project design. The applicant states that the early and intense support for professional development and expenditures for resources are one time investments that the District will be able to sustain once program funds are gone. While there are some areas that will not be needed again, such as the library media center, it is unclear in the application if the capacity of the district has actually been consistently increased with the four year phase-in plan.

The applicant does propose a reasonable strategy to establish a committee to review re-purposing of other funds to support the RTT-D project. This on-going committee may provide the applicant with a sustainability plan to provide support after the RTT-D project funds are gone. The plan to establish such a committee seems to contradict the applicant's claim that sustainability is not an issue given the project's design and that future funds are unnecessary.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	7

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant proposes three community partnerships to support students and families from early childhood through preparation for college including academic and social and emotional health aligned with its RTT-D plan. Each of the three partnerships have been sustained over a number of years providing a continuum of services to high-need students. The programs are as follows:

- Early Childhood Family Action Plan coordinates the implementation a family education plan to ensure students are ready to meet school demands and that parents are aware of children's needs as well as a health initiative which is closely related to one Norwalk's performance measures and state requirements. The school district is part of the larger group of community based agencies. The action plan is not directly related to RTT-D personalization goals but does function as part of a larger support network focused on non-cognitive needs.
- Carver Foundation provides a variety of extended services to students at the four targeted middle schools as well as District high schools. This project focuses on parents and their high need students to provide direct services that range from homework help, tutoring, and Career Fairs. The partnership with Carver has a direct relationship to RTT-D's goals and activities. The applicant does not provide information on how many students might be served by this partner beyond the general result of 100% of Norwalk students having access to learning beyond the classroom.
- Norwalk Community College - Early College provides 40 high school students an opportunity to experience college coursework as a motivational experience. The recruitment process for students is not clear, nor is the possible focus on high-need students. It is also not clear the relationship between this program and the RTT-D targeted students and grade levels. The applicant did not provide a direct link between RTT-D and the early college experience.

The applicant presents a set of population level desired results that align with the general RTT-D proposal. The desired results include both educational and non-cognitive results. The applicant does not articulate how it will track each of these results over time to better target its resources to improve the results for children. Of particular concern are the measures for teen-age pregnancy and child abuse as well as the access to out-of-school technology resources. These are very impressive goals that may not be supported by the interventions. It is unclear if the applicant has a strategy to scale the

model beyond the participating students or to share the results within the LEA or with other Districts.

The applicant provides insufficient information on how it intends to build the capacity of the educators in participating schools to assist in the implementation of these partnership activities across the spectrum of needs identification, decision-making process, or engaging parents and families. The partnership projects appear to be stand alone activities that will provide valuable supports to the participants and their families. It is unclear if the partnership projects are well-integrated with the schools.

The performance measures match the RTT-D program purposes and are included in the general performance measures for the RTT-D program.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		**Met**

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides a coherent and comprehensive vision to respond to the core educational assurance areas. There are, however, various aspects of the program that may need further refinement to successfully implement personalized learning strategies. The overarching approach reflects a clear understanding of personalization strategies and tools as well as the supports students and teachers need to succeed in this environment but the applicant has not provided a clear set of high-quality plans to move its vision into the schools. This lack of clear high-quality plans is especially problematic given the many different areas that the applicant intends to improve over the four years of the project and its implementation strategy. A more systematic approach may lead to greater increases in student achievement.

Total	210	153