

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/12/2010 07:46 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Uncommon Schools, Inc -- , (U282M100013)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the Eligible Applicant		
1. Eligible Applicant	50	44
Contribution assisting disadvantaged		
1. Contribution	15	13
Quality of Project Design		
1. Quality of design	10	10
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Quality Management Plan	25	23
Overall Comments		
Overall Comments		
1. Overall Comments	0	0
Total	100	90

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - Panel - 2: 84.282M

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Uncommon Schools, Inc -- , (U282M100013)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Eligible Applicant

1. In determining the quality of the applicant, the Secretary considers the following factors:
 - (i) The degree to which the applicant has demonstrated success in significantly increasing student academic achievement and attainment for all students, including educationally disadvantaged students, served by charter schools operated or managed by the applicant.
 - (ii) The degree to which the applicant has demonstrated success in closing historic achievement gaps for the subgroups of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II).
 - (iii) The degree to which the applicant has achieved results for low-income and minority students that are significantly above the average academic achievement results for such students in the State.Applicants are invited to submit objective data that they believe would provide relevant information in support of these three factors, along with comparison data for similar schools, where available. In particular, the Secretary is interested in the following data: (1) Performance (school-wide and by subgroup) on statewide tests of all charter schools operated or managed by the applicant as compared to all students in other schools in the State or States at the same grade level, and as compared with other schools serving similar demographics of students; (2) annual student attendance and retention rates (school-wide and by subgroup), and comparisons with other similar schools; (3) where applicable and available, high school graduation rates, college attendance rates, and college persistence rates (school-wide and by subgroup) of students attending schools operated or managed by the applicant. When reporting data for schools in States that may have particularly demanding or low standards of proficiency (for example, see the report available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/201456.pdf>), applicants are invited to discuss how their academic success might be considered against applicants from across the country.

Strengths:

Strengths: Overall student attendance is high across all schools (96%). The academic achievement data provided by school and by state is very impressive, clearly supporting the statement that they are closing the achievement gap (and in several cases going above their white counterparts). Data is also provided that shows that in 2009 students in grades 3-8 in the applicant's schools in New York state outperformed district, state, and white students in Math Advanced Proficiency. The data also indicates that in most cases it is clear that the scores in all core academic areas improve over time. At the flagship school, North Star Academy, which opened in 1997, the high school most recently outperformed Black students across the country on SAT tests by 140 points and the average national scores by 22 (page 12). This same school has tracked its 130 graduates (since 2004), all of whom were admitted to colleges, and 82% of whom have either graduated or are on track to graduate. Throughout the application it is clear that data is used to improve all aspects of the organization, from curriculum to training to support services and leadership development.

Weaknesses:

Weaknesses: Although students with disabilities are mentioned (11% of the population), no disaggregated data is provided related to their performance, nor specifics provided related to their services, other than to say they are coordinated at the central level. 75% of the total student population comes from low income families but that data is not disaggregated either. The percentage of Hispanics and African Americans is not provided other than to say that 99% of the students are of color, and that data is also not disaggregated. The English Language Learner population is not mentioned. Retention data is not provided, but the total waiting list is very high. High school graduation rates are not provided.

Reader's Score: 44

Selection Criteria - Contribution assisting disadvantaged

1. **The contribution the proposed project will make in assisting educationally disadvantaged students served by the applicant to meet or exceed State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards, and to graduate college- and career-ready.**

Strengths:

Strengths: The overall academic achievement results are very impressive and those include a population that is 75% low economically, 99% students of color, and 11% students with disabilities. Results indicate high expectations for all and very effective curricula.

Weaknesses:

Weaknesses: The data is not disaggregated in order to determine whether some student groups are not succeeding as well as others, and there are not explanations of programs for ELL or special education students.

Reader's Score: 13

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers--**
 - (i) **The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified, measurable, and attainable. Applicants proposing to open schools serving substantially different populations than those currently served by the model for which they have demonstrated evidence of success should address the attainability of outcomes given this difference.**
 - (ii) **The extent to which the design for implementing and evaluating the proposed project will result in information to guide possible replication of project activities or strategies, including information about the effectiveness of the approach or strategies employed by the project.**

Strengths:

Strengths: The applicant partnered with consultants during the 2007-2008 year to determine their ideal growth strategy which included a plan for financial sustainability and their capacity to replicate schools. This project is a well defined part of the plan that was developed through that study (a five year roadmap for growth). The identified sites will be part of clusters that are already in place, with similar populations of students. Goals include student achievement, graduation rates, and college graduation. They also include further development of effective support and evaluation strategies such as professional development, dashboards, inspection protocols, and balanced scorecards. Schools within the network and members of the management team have already been recognized on the national level and have taken part in presentations at conferences, hosted visits, and published works, so the likelihood of further refinement of practices being effectively disseminated is very high.

Weaknesses:

Weaknesses: None noted.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan and personnel to replicate and expand high-quality charter schools. In determining the quality of the management plan and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers--
 - (i) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.
 - (ii) The business plan for increasing, sustaining, and ensuring the quality and performance of charter schools opened under this program beyond the initial period of Federal funding, including, but not limited to facilities, financials, central office, academics, governance, oversight, and human resources of the schools.
 - (iii) A multi-year financial and operating model for the organization, as well as a demonstrated commitment of current and future partners, and evidence of broad support from stakeholders critical to the project's long-term success.
 - (iv) A plan for closing charter schools supported, overseen, or managed by the applicant that do not meet high standards of quality.
 - (v) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of the project director, CEO/organization leader, and key project personnel, especially in managing projects of the size and scope of the proposed project.

Strengths:

Strengths: The Project Plan has clear Goals, Strategies, Activities, Milestones, Timelines, and "Owners" (attachment). The project budget is very clear and well defined, with most of the money going to directly benefit the new schools. It includes a Leadership Fellowship year for each school leader that is hired to start the chosen school site, marketing and advertisement, professional development, purchase of start up assessments and technology, curriculum and instructional materials, and designing systems to evaluate progress. Throughout the application it is clear that the organization has a very strong focus that results in high performing school replication. Although allowing for schools to develop their own curriculum, the key required elements, success factors, and the guiding professional development for not only teachers but leaders and operations managers assure that the new schools will be high achieving as well. A plan for closing schools, if needed, is included. Systems are in place to grow future leaders within the organization. The management team is very well qualified. Letters of support from key stakeholders indicate strong support for the organization and the project and the organization has a history of strong partnerships.

Weaknesses:

Weaknesses: The explanation on page 42 regarding the Project Manager is confusing. It states that Carolyn Hack, the CFO for the organization, will manage the grant but the statement is then made that the Public Grants Manager will serve as the Project Manager and that person is not named, nor is a resume provided. The multi-year financial spreadsheet (Table 6, attachment) is confusing, for instance, salaries for many directors go up substantially over 10 years (Finance from \$86,000 to \$433,237, Network COO from \$100,000 to \$909,206, Director of Real Estate from \$125,000 to \$442,129) and an explanation is needed of those and other increases.

Reader's Score: 23

Overall Comments - Overall Comments

1. Please provide a summary of comments for this application. There are no points awarded in this section. Please enter 0 for the minimum and maximum scores.

General:

This application is an excellent example of a clearly defined project proposed by an organization that obviously uses data to improve every aspect of its organization and focuses everything on student achievement.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/12/2010 07:46 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/24/2010 06:37 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Uncommon Schools, Inc -- , (U282M100013)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the Eligible Applicant		
1. Eligible Applicant	50	47
Contribution assisting disadvantaged		
1. Contribution	15	12
Quality of Project Design		
1. Quality of design	10	9
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Quality Management Plan	25	23
Overall Comments		
Overall Comments		
1. Overall Comments	0	0
Total	100	91

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - Panel - 2: 84.282M

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Uncommon Schools, Inc -- , (U282M100013)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Eligible Applicant

1. In determining the quality of the applicant, the Secretary considers the following factors:
 - (i) The degree to which the applicant has demonstrated success in significantly increasing student academic achievement and attainment for all students, including educationally disadvantaged students, served by charter schools operated or managed by the applicant.
 - (ii) The degree to which the applicant has demonstrated success in closing historic achievement gaps for the subgroups of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II).
 - (iii) The degree to which the applicant has achieved results for low-income and minority students that are significantly above the average academic achievement results for such students in the State.Applicants are invited to submit objective data that they believe would provide relevant information in support of these three factors, along with comparison data for similar schools, where available. In particular, the Secretary is interested in the following data: (1) Performance (school-wide and by subgroup) on statewide tests of all charter schools operated or managed by the applicant as compared to all students in other schools in the State or States at the same grade level, and as compared with other schools serving similar demographics of students; (2) annual student attendance and retention rates (school-wide and by subgroup), and comparisons with other similar schools; (3) where applicable and available, high school graduation rates, college attendance rates, and college persistence rates (school-wide and by subgroup) of students attending schools operated or managed by the applicant. When reporting data for schools in States that may have particularly demanding or low standards of proficiency (for example, see the report available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/201456.pdf>), applicants are invited to discuss how their academic success might be considered against applicants from across the country.

Strengths:

Uncommon Schools' students in New York, 99% of whom are black or Latino, score above the state average in all areas (Narrative, p. 5). The proportion of students scoring proficient or advanced is 98% in math and 89% in ELA - this is above the average for New York and for all significant subgroups (Narrative, pp. 6 - 9). In New Jersey, Uncommon Schools' students also scored above the state average, and the state average for white students: 89% in math, 84% in ELA (Narrative, pp. 10 - 12).

100% of students at North Star HS scored proficient or advanced on the math and English HS proficiency assessment. Total SAT scores for North Star HS students average 1531, compared to the US average of 1509 and the US white average of 1581. In SAT math, North Star HS students average 531, whereas the US white average is 536 (Narrative, p. 13). North Star provides a range of post-college placement services to graduates (Narrative, p. 14).

Roxbury Prep's students score above state and state white student averages in ELA on the MCAS in grade 6 and below state and state white averages in math in grade 6 (Narrative, pp. 15 - 16). In grade 7 and 8, they exceed state and subgroup averages in both subjects (Narrative, pp. 17 - 18). The applicant provides a wealth of achievement data in Section 5 (pp. e0 - e64).

Weaknesses:

The percentage of students scoring advanced in ELA is equal to the state average (9%) and below the average for white students (12%; Narrative, p. 9).

North Star HS students' average score in SAT English is 488, compared to the US average of 501 and US white average of 528 (Narrative, p. 14).

Test scores are not disaggregated by income level. The applicant could have included more detailed data on college acceptance, attendance, and persistence.

Reader's Score: 47

Selection Criteria - Contribution assisting disadvantaged

- 1. The contribution the proposed project will make in assisting educationally disadvantaged students served by the applicant to meet or exceed State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards, and to graduate college- and career-ready.**

Strengths:

On average, Uncommon Schools serves 99% students of color and 75% of their students are low income. 11% of their students have IEPs (Priorities, p. e0). They conduct targeted recruitment of disadvantaged students, in conjunction with local community organizations (Narrative, p. 2).

Disadvantaged students (as measured by ethnicity) perform as well as white students in most instances (Section 5, e0 - e64).

Weaknesses:

Because test scores are not disaggregated by income level, one cannot tell if low income students are being served as well as others, though overall scores lead one to infer that they are. The applicant provides limited data on college acceptance, attendance, and persistence.

Reader's Score: 12

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers--**
 - (i) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified, measurable, and attainable. Applicants proposing to open schools serving substantially different populations than those currently served by the model for which they have demonstrated evidence of success should address the attainability of outcomes given this difference.**
 - (ii) The extent to which the design for implementing and evaluating the proposed project will result in information to guide possible replication of project activities or strategies, including information about the effectiveness of the approach or strategies employed by the project.**

Strengths:

Uncommon Schools currently manages 16 schools in New York and New Jersey and will open eight more this fall, one of which will be in Boston (Narrative, p. 1). They recognize the importance of growing slowly and maintaining a focus on quality (Narrative, p. 19). They partnered with Bain & Co. to develop a viable growth strategy, and have been following this plan for the past three years (Narrative, p. 21).

Each of the networks within Uncommon Schools is distinct, and each school within these networks has its own idiosyncrasies - the organization supports these local variations within a shared vision and philosophy and common structures (Narrative, pp. 23 - 27).

The project goals are clearly connected to student outcomes and include both school opening targets and student achievement targets (Narrative, pp. 43 - 46). They focus on growing the networks as well as building systems to support the expanding networks (Narrative, p. 45).

The overview of the growth plan is well laid-out and reasonable (Section 7, pp. e0 - e2). The activities are well aligned to the goals (Section 7, pp. e13 - e16).

Uncommon Schools has learned from their early experiences, and adjusted their approach to anticipate particular challenges, such as facilities acquisition and recruiting talented leaders (Narrative, pp. 39 - 41). They have built robust systems to share processes, tools, and practices across schools (Narrative, p. 51).

Weaknesses:

The project plan does not include enough detail, in particular regarding how it might be differentiated by region.

Reader's Score: 9

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan and personnel to replicate and expand high-quality charter schools. In determining the quality of the management plan and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers--**
 - (i) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.**
 - (ii) The business plan for increasing, sustaining, and ensuring the quality and performance of charter schools opened under this program beyond the initial period of Federal funding, including, but not limited to facilities, financials, central office, academics, governance, oversight, and human resources of the schools.**
 - (iii) A multi-year financial and operating model for the organization, as well as a demonstrated commitment of current and future partners, and evidence of broad support from stakeholders critical to the project's long-term success.**
 - (iv) A plan for closing charter schools supported, overseen, or managed by the applicant that do not meet high standards of quality.**
 - (v) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of the project director, CEO/organization leader, and key project personnel, especially in managing projects of the size and scope of the proposed project.**

Strengths:

The functions of Uncommon Schools, as a CMO vis-a-vis its schools, are clearly specified (Narrative, p. 29 - 35). Individuals' roles are relatively clear (Narrative, p. 42). The management team has a wealth of experience, and they have substantial bench depth (Narrative, p. 47 and Section 1, pp. e0 - e7).

Uncommon Schools commits significant attention and resources to teacher and principal recruitment and selection, preparation, and ongoing professional development (Narrative, pp. 49 - 50). They have forged a number of partnerships to support them in these human capital-based endeavors (Narrative, p. 54).

Uncommon Schools has developed partnerships with over 100 community organizations (Narrative, p. 54). Uncommon Schools has garnered significant financial support over the years, and has identified significant matching funds for this project (Narrative, pp. 47 & 55). They have letters of support from district leaders, government leaders, education officials, and reform partners (Section 2, pp. e0 - e11).

Frequent assessments and meaningful accountability are built into the design of each school (Narrative, p. 57). Their dashboard enables ongoing review of each school's performance (Narrative, p. 58).

They have developed a plan for closing underperforming schools (Narrative, p. 30).

Weaknesses:

The networks-within-a-network model undoubtedly presents some logistical challenges.

The key responsibilities of those leading this effort are not explained in detail.

The management team is primarily composed of former school leaders - a more diverse team might support increased innovation.

Uncommon Schools' will benefit from reviewing the data collected for its dashboards and associating that data with student outcomes. To make the most of this opportunity, they also need to review and refine the dashboards, in respect to the literature and their own experience, ensuring that what is captured is most highly correlated with student learning (Section 7, p. e3 - e12). For example, rigor, joy, urgency, and 100% may not be the most meaningful measures of the quality of instruction (Section 7, p. e7).

Reader's Score: 23

Overall Comments - Overall Comments

- 1. Please provide a summary of comments for this application. There are no points awarded in this section. Please enter 0 for the minimum and maximum scores.**

General:

Uncommon Schools has demonstrated extraordinary success with its schools, and has developed a thoughtful and measured plan for expanding its networks.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 08/24/2010 06:37 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/17/2010 12:26 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Uncommon Schools, Inc -- , (U282M100013)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the Eligible Applicant		
1. Eligible Applicant	50	48
Contribution assisting disadvantaged		
1. Contribution	15	15
Quality of Project Design		
1. Quality of design	10	10
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Quality Management Plan	25	25
Overall Comments		
Overall Comments		
1. Overall Comments	0	0
Total	100	98

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - Panel - 2: 84.282M

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: Uncommon Schools, Inc -- , (U282M100013)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Eligible Applicant

1. In determining the quality of the applicant, the Secretary considers the following factors:
 - (i) The degree to which the applicant has demonstrated success in significantly increasing student academic achievement and attainment for all students, including educationally disadvantaged students, served by charter schools operated or managed by the applicant.
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 - (iii) The degree to which the applicant has achieved results for low-income and minority students that are significantly above the average academic achievement results for such students in the State.Applicants are invited to submit objective data that they believe would provide relevant information in support of these three factors, along with comparison data for similar schools, where available. In particular, the Secretary is interested in the following data: (1) Performance (school-wide and by subgroup) on statewide tests of all charter schools operated or managed by the applicant as compared to all students in other schools in the State or States at the same grade level, and as compared with other schools serving similar demographics of students; (2) annual student attendance and retention rates (school-wide and by subgroup), and comparisons with other similar schools; (3) where applicable and available, high school graduation rates, college attendance rates, and college persistence rates (school-wide and by subgroup) of students attending schools operated or managed by the applicant. When reporting data for schools in States that may have particularly demanding or low standards of proficiency (for example, see the report available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/201456.pdf>), applicants are invited to discuss how their academic success might be considered against applicants from across the country.

Strengths:

This project plan clearly supports the goals of the grant, not just through the creation of high performing schools and expansion of seats in high performing schools, but also through the leveraging of success in support of other schools working to replicate Uncommon successes with historically disadvantaged student in their schools. This external modeling dramatically increases the impact of the project for students beyond the Uncommon Schools.

Weaknesses:

The quality of the applicant would have been further proved by demonstration of specific SPED and ELL gap closing performance. The lack of disaggregated data in these areas would be of greater concern if the school-wide successes had been less than perfect; however, all students are succeeding.

Reader's Score: 48

Selection Criteria - Contribution assisting disadvantaged

1. The contribution the proposed project will make in assisting educationally disadvantaged students served by the applicant to meet or exceed State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards, and to graduate college- and career-ready.

Strengths:

This project plan clearly supports the goals of the grant, not just through the creation of high performing schools and expansion of seats in high performing schools, but through the leveraging of success in support of other schools working to relocate Uncommon successes in their schools.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses worthy of note.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers--**
 - (i) **The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified, measurable, and attainable. Applicants proposing to open schools serving substantially different populations than those currently served by the model for which they have demonstrated evidence of success should address the attainability of outcomes given this difference.**
 - (ii) **The extent to which the design for implementing and evaluating the proposed project will result in information to guide possible replication of project activities or strategies, including information about the effectiveness of the approach or strategies employed by the project.**

Strengths:

Uncommon Schools has a proven replication model presented in the description of the project design which is clear, specific, measurable and attainable. This project design clearly supports the goals of the grant, not just through the creation of high performing schools and expansion of seats in high performing schools, but also through the leveraging of success in support of other schools working to replicate Uncommon successes with historically disadvantaged student in their schools. This external modeling dramatically increases the impact of the project for students beyond the Uncommon Schools.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses worthy of note.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan and personnel to replicate and expand high-quality charter schools. In determining the quality of the management plan and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers--**
 - (i) **The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.**
 - (ii) **The business plan for increasing, sustaining, and ensuring the quality and performance of charter schools opened under this program beyond the initial period of Federal funding, including, but not limited to facilities, financials, central office, academics, governance, oversight, and human resources of the schools.**
 - (iii) **A multi-year financial and operating model for the organization, as well as a demonstrated commitment of current and future partners, and evidence of broad support from stakeholders critical to the project's long-term success.**
 - (iv) **A plan for closing charter schools supported, overseen, or managed by the applicant that do not**

meet high standards of quality.

(v) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of the project director, CEO/organization leader, and key project personnel, especially in managing projects of the size and scope of the proposed project.

Strengths:

The detailed articulation of the management plan included all of the required elements in a coherent format. The implementing team is outstanding and the inclusion of a closure plan where none would likely be needed is inspiring. Great job!

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses worthy of note.

Reader's Score: 25

Overall Comments - Overall Comments

1. Please provide a summary of comments for this application. There are no points awarded in this section. Please enter 0 for the minimum and maximum scores.

General:

Uncommon Schools is a shining example of what public education needs to be in the United States. Uncommon Schools are superior in their clarity of vision, strength in execution, and commitment to the success of all students to uniformly high academic standards. They deserve to be replicating this model on a much larger scale and have the talent, systems and strategies to succeed in consistently closing achievement gaps by educating all of their students to the highest levels.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/17/2010 12:26 PM