

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/11/2010 06:24 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Aspire Public Schools -- , (U282M100020)

Reader #2: *****

| | 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 | 8 |
| Quality of the Management Plan | | |
| 1. Quality Management Plan | 25 | 18 |
| Overall Comments | | |
| Overall Comments | | |
| 1. Overall Comments | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 100 | 83 |

Technical Review Form

Panel #4 - Panel - 4: 84.282M

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Aspire Public Schools -- , (U282M100020)

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:

The applicant has successfully operated charter schools since 1999. The charter schools are located in areas with up to 80% minority and/or free and reduced lunch eligible. Through this timeframe, the CMO has opened 25 schools that collectively score better than similar district schools. Glimpses of this achievement are demonstrated in statistics provided on a few subgroups for a 6 year time period. The academic gains are significant and indicate what a success these charter schools have been. Pg. 5 - 6

The applicant presents graduation rates for high school students that have steadily risen during the reporting period. Pg. 7

The information provided on the state Academic Performance Index (API) indicates that all charter schools in the CMO outscored the surrounding area district schools and had the highest collective average of all districts in California. This is very impressive. Pg. 8 - 9

Data provided indicates that as a whole, the charter schools have made significant progress increasing proficiency among educationally disadvantaged students. Pg. 13-14

The chart presented on pages 18 - 20 indicates the difference between subgroups by school for the 2008-2009 school year as compared to the local district schools. What a testament to the opportunities the CMO is affording these students.

Weaknesses:

While the applicant has done a good job representing academic gains, more specific long term growth should have been demonstrated. The information provided on the tables beginning on page 18 only reports data from 2008-2009. Subgroups should have been reported separately and for school years prior to 2008 -2009. From information gathered in the narrative, this representation could have shown phenomenal growth from the inception of these charter schools.

While the applicant gives overall rates of proficiency by year, the data would have been more effective had it been broken by grade level.

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:

The applicant presents compelling evidence that educationally disadvantaged students are outperforming their district school counterparts by overwhelming margins. For instance 97% of students graduating high school in 4 years compared to 38% in the district. Pg. 21

The applicant has instituted a culture within the charter schools that assumes students will be attending college. This is started in kindergarten and students in high school are required to pass a core set of classes necessary for admittance into the state university system. The graduation requirement of obtaining 15 college credits before high school graduation seals the culture of all will attend college. Pg. 21 -22

By offering a curriculum that is rigorous and demanding the charter school has taken a no excuses approach to the education of its students. Students attend school for longer hours and more days so they will be prepared to move on to the next level of education and be successful when taking their state required tests. Pg. 21

The program described for special education students is comprehensive. All students are given diagnostic tests when enrolling in the charter school. If necessary students are referred to the Child Study Team for placement. Special education services are provided by a consortium. The applicant understands the needs of special education students and has procedures in place to provide for the needs of these students.

Programs are in place throughout the charter school to meet the needs of all educationally disadvantaged students including small classes, longer school days and data driven instruction. Since all students will have a personalized learning plan, gaps in student learning will be identified and remediation will take place to help these students catch up to their peers. These programs are well thought out and necessary if the applicant is going to be successful with these students. Pg. 26-27

Weaknesses:

There is no data given indicating the percentage of special needs student in the population nor is there information given about how the test scores of these students compare to the district and/or state average for like 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:

Objectives and goals are well defined and outcome measures will be easily evaluated. Pg. 28-34

Aggressive academic goals are included in the proposal. By providing longer school days and more school days per year the applicant will have a good chance of meeting these student achievement goals. The applicant has programs in place that will help this goal to be realized. Pg. 29

The applicant has had success replicating charters for the past 10 years. The Theory of Action described in the narrative includes specific points on how to successfully replicate charter schools. Since the applicant now has 25 schools it would seem that their theory is successful. Pg. 35

The logic model presented will guide the applicant through successful replication and could be used as a guideline for other CMOs that wish to replicate. Pg. 38.

Weaknesses:

While the goals are well stated there are no incremental achievements listed. The applicant simply states they will open 15 charter schools by 2015, but no indication of when the planning will start or by what year the charter schools will be opened.

Reader's Score: 8

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 applicant presents a method by which school administrators can be grown from within the organization thereby ensuring that schools will be administered by people that understand the level of quality the applicant desires. A partnership with San Jose State University will be beneficial in training these up and coming administrators. Pg. 49

The applicant has a long range goal that indicates the organization will be self sustainable with 74 charter schools. Until that time additional funds will be sought from philanthropic organizations. The applicant has a well thought out financial plan that includes methods that will be used to ascertain that all schools have the necessary funds to provide facilities and programs to students. pg. 50

In an effort to help individual charter schools reach financial sustainability the applicant will hold Home Office budgets at the current rate until 2013 allowing new charter schools to reach a level of financial stability. This will allow for fluctuations in enrollment and growth that typically happen with new charter schools. Pg. 51

The management team is well rounded in experiences and provides the necessary expertise to operate a successful CMO. Pg. 56 -59

Weaknesses:

There is no timeline presented and responsibilities for all aspects of the project are loosely defined. There should be clearly defined roles for each member of the management team relative to opening 15 new charter schools. Pg. 41-44

The applicant did not fully address the process by which charter schools that are not producing high quality academic results would be closed. The narrative only addresses the process by which schools would be closed. The narrative is more concerned with what to do with the assets and where to send the student records than what to do if one of the replication charters is not meeting the academic standards. Pg. 53 - 55

Reader's Score: 18

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:

The applicant provides a well written narrative indicating success in providing an excellent education to disadvantaged students. More detailed information pertaining to academic gains by specific grade levels and subgroups would have made the application stronger. That being said, the application has, historically, provided excellent academic results for the students.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 08/11/2010 06:24 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/13/2010 09:14 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Aspire Public Schools -- , (U282M100020)

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 | 8 |
| Quality of the Management Plan | | |
| 1. Quality Management Plan | 25 | 18 |
| Overall Comments | | |
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| 1. Overall Comments | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 100 | 83 |

Technical Review Form

Panel #4 - Panel - 4: 84.282M

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Aspire Public Schools -- , (U282M100020)

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:

According to page 4 of the application, 73% of Aspire Public School students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in the 2009-2010 school year, and page 6 states that 80% of Aspire students are ethnic minorities and/or economically disadvantaged. With a population such as this, student achievement often expectantly lags behind; however, Aspire Schools' cumulative Academic Progress Index of 816 (as of 2008-2009) ranked higher than that of California districts serving similar students. Even more impressive, "more than 95% of Aspire graduates have been accepted to four-year colleges," (page 6) and in 2009 Aspire boasted a 97% graduation rate, which had been successively climbing from 89% in 2006. And finally, during the 2008-2009 school year, every Aspire School that had been in existence for more than one year outperformed the surrounding district on the API index, page 8. Clearly, the applicant has demonstrated success in achieving results for low-income and minority students that are above the average academic achievement results for such students in the state.

The chart on pages 13 and 14 of the application provides additional support that the academic achievement of minority students at Aspire has been significantly increasing since 2002. This increase in ELA and math proficiency among Hispanic, African American, and Asian subgroups demonstrates success of the applicant in closing historic achievement gaps.

Weaknesses:

The application would have been stronger had the "comparable schools with similar demographics" been listed alongside the Aspire schools in the chart on pages 18-20, or had more information pertaining to the location, size, etc of these schools been given.

The application lacks consecutive years of data, following one class of students. It is important to show that students are steadily progressing from one year to the next. This could be included in the application in a series tables for three or more consecutive school years, broken down by grade-level.

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:

The chart on page 15 provides evidence that Aspire is offering low-income students with opportunities to achieve that often exceed those offered by schools serving students of higher income levels.

Aspire utilizes the data-driven Response to Intervention monitoring model at both elementary and secondary levels in order to identify and best serve the needs of students with learning disabilities and other special needs, page 16.

The "College For Certain" culture surrounds students as early as kindergarten, as explained on page 21 of the application. This is a fun and creative way to inspire students and develop interest early on. However, the best part of the "College For Certain" culture at Aspire is that it's working. According to page 21 of the application, "97% of (Aspire) students graduate within four years of entering ninth grade," over 90% apply for and are admitted into college, and 78% attend college, page 12. Aspire's Early College High School program also contributes to these impressive statistics. Students earn dual high school and college credit and become comfortable on a college campus. Furthermore, Aspire students must earn 15 college credits in order to graduate high school.

The applicant not only prepares students to apply for and become admitted into college, but Aspire's research-based educational program is designed to foster the skills needed to succeed in college as well. These necessary skills come from a Center for Educational Policy Research's study, see page 23 for details, and include things like critical thinking, willingness to accept critical feedback, and openness to possible failures.

Weaknesses:

The percentages of Aspire students who have applied for and been admitted into colleges is inconsistent within the application. Page 12 states that 98% of Aspire students apply to college and 95% are accepted to one or more schools; however, page 21 states that 97% of students apply for and are admitted into college. Though this is a small discrepancy, any inconsistencies in data raise a concern surrounding the validity of the application.

Reader's Score: 13

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

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 - (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:

The goals, objectives, and outcomes that are listed on page 28 are clear, well organized, and often contain quantitative and qualitative outcome measures.

One of the outcomes listed for Goal 2: Fidelity of Model is the use of a School-Family-Student Compact. The compact is signed by the teacher, parent, and student at the beginning of the school year and it outlines the rights and responsibilities of each party, as well as affirms mutual accountability for student success, staff development, and parent satisfaction, pages 31 and 32. This is a fantastic element of the project. Lines of communication are created from the very beginning and clarity is established.

The design of the new charter programs is clearly articulated. The application explains concrete elements of its schools, such as Aspire's Theory of Action, multi-grade classrooms, small class size, 15% more learning time, and the Rights of Passage project, all of which contribute to a basic "recipe" of its school design. This clarity and structure will significantly aid in future replication.

Weaknesses:

The application lacks annual goals and annual outcomes, such as "at the end of year 1, the locations of all 15 new charter programs will be known."

According to the application abstract, the grant monies would be used to "open 15 new charter schools in primarily low-income districts in California by 2015," however never does the application explicitly state the anticipated date of these openings. Because of this, having an outcome of Goal 1 state "4,500+ students achieve positive academic advancement," followed by the use of student achievement as a measure, is confusing. The application is ambiguous enough to provide itself the entire fiscal period to plan the school's openings, without actually doing so until 2015. Yet, the application still includes a goal to provide a high-quality educational experience to 4,500 students, as shown through student achievement. Additional information is needed to justify this goal.

Reader's Score: 8

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

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 - (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 applicant has designed a strong organizational structure which includes regional offices and central support functions. Responsibilities will be divided between the Regional Offices and the Home Offices, creating clarity in function and explicit lines of communication, page 41.

There is an emphasis placed on the applicant's business plan beyond the grant period. A significant amount of thought and planning has been put toward continued funding sources. The applicant understands the imperative role of funding, and by creating a plan this early in the process, more time and energy can go toward the students later.

The application lists an impressive group of stakeholders who have committed to supporting the project's long-term success, if funded (page 53).

Aspire has been awarded a Statewide Benefit Charter that enables it to open up to 20 campuses under the auspices of the State Board of Education rather than requiring local authorization, page 48. This will help the project attain its CSP goals during the grant period.

The selection of quality teachers is described on pages 48 and 49. Not only do teacher applicants need to interview with a hiring committee (which includes principal, teachers, and parents), but applicants must submit a writing sample and demonstrate a lesson plan with students as well. In this way, Aspire can fully evaluate each prospective educator.

The closure plan includes a notification to parents and students, with information on assistance in transferring the students to another appropriate schools and a process for the transfer of all student records, page 54. The failing school would also notify other entities responsible for providing education services to assist in student transfers.

The experience and training of the project's CEO, COO, CAO, and CFO are appropriate and impressive. This team of four individuals, along with the three area superintendents, has a wealth of knowledge and practice to contribute.

Weaknesses:

The application would be stronger with a more detailed timeline of the annual tasks to be completed and the party responsible for them. It is extremely important to include the specific responsibilities of key personnel, as it makes the implementation, management, and monitoring of the project much easier.

On page 50 of the application, it states "the total operating budget for new schools will vary depending on number and type (elementary vs. secondary) of new schools and the facility costs. The application would be stronger if the applicant knew its population's needs already.

The plan for closing charter schools that do not meet high standards of quality, as discussed on pages 53 and 54, does not include any remediation plan. The "safety net" strategies described on page 34 could assumedly be this remediation, but the application would be stronger had the proposal stated this in the closure plan on page 53.

The fact that self-sustainability will not be reached until 74 schools are created adds a high level of risk to the financial future of the applicant. In the current economic climate, it is difficult to bank on any expectations for the year 2020, let alone ambitious ones.

Reader's Score: 18

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:

No overall comments.

Reader's Score: **0**

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/13/2010 09:14 AM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/12/2010 02:29 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Aspire Public Schools -- , (U282M100020)

Reader #3: *****

| | Points Possible | Points Scored |
|---|-----------------|---------------|
| Questions | | |
| Selection Criteria | | |
| Quality of the Eligible Applicant | | |
| 1. Eligible Applicant | 50 | 43 |
| Contribution assisting disadvantaged | | |
| 1. Contribution | 15 | 13 |
| Quality of Project Design | | |
| 1. Quality of design | 10 | 8 |
| Quality of the Management Plan | | |
| 1. Quality Management Plan | 25 | 19 |
| Overall Comments | | |
| Overall Comments | | |
| 1. Overall Comments | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 100 | 83 |

Technical Review Form

Panel #4 - Panel - 4: 84.282M

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: Aspire Public Schools -- , (U282M100020)

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).
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Strengths:

To an excellent degree the applicant has demonstrated success in significantly increasing student academic achievement and attainment for all students, including educationally disadvantaged students. To establish whether the applicant is serving educationally disadvantaged students, it is necessary to evaluate the reported student characteristics. The applicant reports that the network serves 67 percent low-income students on average and 80 percent of minority students (p. 13 of 59) on average. In addition, at the school and district level, Aspire is, in most cases, serving higher percentages of underrepresented and low-income students than nearby districts on average in its Oakland, East Palo Alto, Sacramento, and Los Angeles. Applicant reports that "when compared to California districts serving similar students, Aspire Schools cumulative Academic Progress Index of 816 (2008-09 California DoE) would represent the highest 'district' score in the state for institutions serving similar students (65% free or reduced price lunch [FRPL] and 65%+ underrepresented students" (p. 6 of 59). The more impressive statistics are those regarding growth. Applicant reports that "from 2003-09, the percentage of its African-American students reaching a level of proficient or better on the CA standards test rose from 18% to 52% in ELA and from 18% to 57% in math; percentages for Hispanic students rose from 21% to 50% in ELA and from 27% to 60% in math" (p. 6 of 59). College acceptance rates are also high, as more than 95% of Aspire graduates have been accepted to four-year colleges (p. 6 of 59). Moreover, the graduation rate of Aspire students has risen from 89 percent in 2006 to 97% in 2009 (p. 7 of 59).

Weaknesses:

Despite the network averages, there is some concern that the network is not uniformly serving educationally disadvantaged students. Claims that the applicant is serving large percentages of educationally disadvantaged students are undermined somewhat when analyzing the student populations in Aspire schools in comparison to their nearby districts. The claims of superior performance are also somewhat weakened with the hedges (p. 6 of 59; p. 8 of 59; p. 10 of 59) that network schools cannot be guaranteed to be particularly effective in their first years of operation. Moreover, not

all schools continue to improve, as one school did experience a 6 point drop in API (p. 8 of 59). Applicant describes the inclusive approach it takes to special needs students but does not provide good data to substantiate claims that these students are particularly well served.

Reader's Score: 43

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:

The applicant reports that the network serves 67 percent low-income students on average and 80 percent of minority students on average and states that it intends to create schools that will serve the same types of students. Highlights of the project that will assist educationally disadvantaged students served to meet or exceed state academic content standards and state student academic achievement standards include: 1) implementing a rigorous core curriculum with extended learning time and supports; 2) having a Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) for all students that provides teachers, parents, and students with a common understanding of each student's learning style and objectives; 3) using dual-language strategies and teaching the second language through content; 4) encouraging small class sizes where possible; and 5) reviewing IEPs for special needs students annually, at a minimum. The college focus for all students, including educationally disadvantaged students, begins in kindergarten. When students reach 9th grade, they participate in an individualized college counseling program that guides students and parents through the college admissions process. Applicant reports that "Across Aspire, 98% of students apply to college, with 95% accepted to one or more schools. Of these students 78% attend college, with 52% enrolling in four-year institutions and 26% enrolling in two-year institutions" (p. 12 of 59). Applicant reports that only 38 percent of students even graduate from high school in Los Angeles, as a point of comparison.

Weaknesses:

Claims that the applicant will focus on educationally disadvantaged student may be somewhat undermined by the fact that some existing campuses serve these students at lower percentages than surrounding districts. It is particularly noteworthy that all three of the Aspire schools are serving lower percentages of both underrepresented students and low-income students than the nearby Lodi schools (powerpoint appendix, p. 9). Similarly, the Aspire school near Sylvan Unified is only serving 14 percent low-income students compared to the district's 41 percent and only 27 percent underrepresented students compared to the district's 44 percent (p. 9). The Aspire school near Ceres serves only 44 percent underrepresented students compared to the district's 67 percent and only 40 percent low-income students compared to the district's 74 percent. Applicant claims that the plan is to serve similar populations to those served now but does not specify the locations for the 15 new schools. If the applicant models its target population after Los Angeles or Oakland, then it will likely serve large percentages of educationally disadvantaged students. If, however, the populations served in the new schools are more similar to those in schools near Lodi, Ceres, and Sylvan Union, there is no assurance that large or disproportionate percentages of educationally disadvantaged students will benefit from this project.

Reader's Score: 13

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

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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:

To a very good extent the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are generally clearly specified, measurable, and attainable. The focus on increasing student achievement is reflected in the goal of having an increase of 10 percent each year of students scoring proficient or advanced proficient based on STAR (p. 29 of 59). Additionally, although the applicant does not clarify the time frames for accomplishing these goals, the applicant has set high standards by having outcome targets of "95+% attendance rate, 90% student participation in co- or extra-curricular activities, 100% promotion rate, and 100% college acceptance rate" (p. 29 of 59). High-quality aspects of the model to be implemented faithfully include: longer school days, longer school years, diversified instructional methods, and rigorous and continual assessment.

Weaknesses:

The applicant states that it will conduct an evaluation of the project but does not provide sufficient details about the research questions, how the study will be conducted, or the resources devoted to the evaluation. As such, it is not clear that the plan for 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. In addition, the applicant did not specify as clearly as it might have the annual goals.

Reader's Score: 8

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 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 is generally well defined. The applicant has clearly modeled the financial and personnel requirements needed to make this project successful and has demonstrated experience in replicating successfully across California. The applicant's training programs for teachers and school leaders to develop personnel to generate good academic results with students are exemplary. 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 projects are excellent. The use of logic models was also helpful for organizing the projects inputs, outputs, and outcomes.

Weaknesses:

The business plan and the multi-year financial and operating model for the organization are cause for concern from the standpoint of the project's sustainability. In order to get its program to sustainability, the applicant states it needs to have a network of 74 schools. If the applicant adds these proposed schools, it will have 45 schools. To get to 74 schools, would mean that the applicant needs to grow by over 60 percent, adding 29 schools above and beyond the 15 it wants to add as a part of the proposed project. The applicant's model appears extremely expensive and relies heavily on grant support. The per student amounts requested in this grant alone are over \$3000 per student, and the applicant will still need extensive philanthropic support to reach sustainability. Additionally, the plan for closing charter schools supported, overseen, or managed by the applicant that do not meet high standards of quality lacks some detail regarding what level of performance will be required to trigger the closure process. The goals of the application would be stronger if the geographies were laid out and the number of elementary, middle, and high schools to be added were specified.

Reader's Score: 19

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:

Aspire has shown itself to be a very strong charter management organization. Students who attend these school appear to be better off than they would be were they to attend alternative public schools. The academic model is strong and student-centered. Moreover, it is encouraging that the applicant wishes to play a role in advocating for better charter school policies. Student achievement growth is very good, though the attainment figures indicate there is still some room for improvement. The largest concern is the apparent lack of sustainability and ability to operate on public revenues alone for the foreseeable future. Perhaps, this overreliance on grant funding and philanthropy may indicate that the model is overbuilt.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

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