

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

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - Non Dissemination: 84.282A

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: New Mexico Public Education Department (U282A090011)

Questions

Summary Comments - Summary Comments

1. Summary Comments

General:

The NMPED/CSD presents a strong proposal with clear goals, appropriate activities, a thorough management plan, and a well thought out evaluation plan.

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - The contribution the charter schools grant program will make.....

1. The contribution the charter schools grant program will make in assisting educationally disadvantaged and other students to achieve State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to provide a description of the objectives for the SEA's charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, including steps taken by the SEA to inform teachers, parents, and communities of the SEA's charter school grant program and how the SEA will disseminate best or promising practices of charter schools to each LEA in the State.

Strengths:

The state has created a new state-level authorizer, the New Mexico Public Education Commission and a new charter school office, the Charter Schools Division. The NMPEC has been proactive in providing workshops to create interest among developers to submit charter applications (p.3). Of the 8 charter schools per year that the applicant would like to open, it intends to open at least two charter high schools for at risk students per year (p.6). The grant process will give competitive preference and incentive funding for those schools that serve secondary at risk students (p.6). Details for a competitive preference and funding are provided on pages 8 and 9. The state has created standards for high-quality charters (p.20). Additionally, charter schools that apply for a CSP must state how their program will help the needs of low income and risk students (p.18).

The application includes clear objectives, activities and measures (p.1-6). It provides a description of how the NMPED and CSD will inform the public about the program through the website, press releases, and through the New Mexico Coalition of Charters (p.7). The CSD has been involved in promoting charter schools to Native American communities (p.8).

The CSD in collaboration with the New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools puts on an annual conference to highlight successful practices. The NMPED maintains a website that will include best practices (p.13).

Weaknesses:

It is unclear what the baseline data is for public school student achievement, particularly at-risk students. This information would provide context for the applicant's student achievement goals.

Reader's Score: 27

Selection Criteria - The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA**1. The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA to charter schools under the State's charter school law.**

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a description of how the State's law establishes an administrative relationship between the charter school and the authorized public chartering agency and exempts charter schools from significant State or local rules that inhibit the flexible operation and management of public schools.

The Secretary also encourages the applicant to include a description of the degree of autonomy charter schools have achieved over such matters as the charter school's budget, expenditures, daily operation, and personnel in accordance with their State's law.

Strengths:

Under the New Mexico law, charter schools prepare their own budgets. Schools have some flexibility with regard to hiring, evaluating, and compensating employees (p.26). Schools have the freedom to contract, acquire and dispose of property, sue and be sued (p.27). The Center for Education Reform rated the New Mexico charter law as a high achiever (p.25). State-sponsored charter schools enjoy more flexibility. They are exempt from district requirements and can receive waivers from state rules and provisions (p.26). Schools are free to design their own educational program (p.30).

Weaknesses:

There is less flexibility with regard to school employees. Charter schools are held to a minimum salary schedule (p.26). Since charter school employees have the same rights and protections as district employees, it is unclear how much flexibility charter schools have with regard to termination (p.29).

Reader's Score: 22

Selection Criteria - The number of high-quality charter schools to be created**1. The number of high-quality charter schools to be created in the State.**

Note: The Secretary considers the SEA's reasonable estimate of the number of new charter schools to be authorized and opened in the State during the three-year period of this grant.

The Secretary also considers how the SEA will inform each charter school in the State about Federal funds the charter school is eligible to receive and ensure that each charter school in the State receives the school's commensurate share of Federal education funds that are allocated by formula each year, including during the first year of operation of the school and during a year in which the school's enrollment expands significantly.

Strengths:

The goal of opening eight charter schools per year is ambitious but realistic (p.5). Of these, the state would like to authorize at least two charter high schools for at risk students per year (p.6).

Information about federal funds is provided at Prospective Applicant training. Each charter school is assigned a budget analyst who reviews the school's budget. The NMPED issues e-mail bulletins to school districts and charter schools about funding opportunities (p.10). The agency monitors the budgets of charter schools and school districts and the Consolidated Applications to ensure that charter schools are receiving their commensurate level of funds (p.11).

Weaknesses:

The application does not describe how it will ensure schools receive their funds when enrollment expands.

Reader's Score: 28

Selection Criteria - The quality of the management plan...

- 1. The quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers 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.**

Note: In addition to describing the proposed objectives of the SEA charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, the Secretary encourages applicants to provide descriptions of the steps to be taken by the SEA to award subgrant funds to eligible applicants desiring to receive these funds, including descriptions of the peer review process the SEA will use to review applications for assistance, the timelines for awarding such funds, and how the SEA will assess the quality of the applications.

Strengths:

The management plan is clear and thorough. It includes descriptions of the responsibilities of the director and others in the office (p.35). The resumes in the appendix indicate that the project leaders have the experience and knowledge to oversee the project. The plan includes a thorough explanation of the subgrant award process (p.40-44), and a grid of activities and a timeline (p.36-39).

Weaknesses:

The timeline does not designate who on staff is responsible for each activity.

Reader's Score: 28

Selection Criteria - The quality of the evaluation plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible.**

The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a strong evaluation plan in the application narrative and to use that plan, as appropriate, to shape the development of the project from the beginning of the grant period. The Secretary encourages the applicant to design the plan so that it includes (a) benchmarks to monitor progress toward specific project objectives and (b) outcome measures to assess the impact on teaching and learning or other important outcomes for project participants. In its plan, we encourage the applicant to identify the individual and/or organization that has agreed to serve as evaluator for the project and to describe the qualifications of that evaluator. We also encourage the applicant to describe, in its application, the evaluation design, indicating: (1) the types of data that will be collected; (2) when various types of data will be collected; (3) the methods that will be used; (4) the instruments that will be developed and when; (5) how the data will be analyzed; (6) when reports of results and outcomes will be available; and (7) how the applicant will use the information collected through the evaluation to monitor progress of the funded project and to provide accountability information both about success at the initial site and effective strategies for replication in other settings. Applicants are encouraged to devote an appropriate level of resources to project evaluation.

Strengths:

The proposal provides a strong evaluation plan. The plan delineates the responsibilities of the CSP and the external evaluator (p.47-52). Data will be collected for each objective. Plan includes qualifications for the external evaluator (p.49-50). It also describes a qualitative and quantitative data the evaluator will analyze (p.50-53). Evaluation activities are even described in the management plan in the timeline (p.26).

Weaknesses:

None noted.

Reader's Score: 30

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 02/11/2010 02:04 PM

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - Non Dissemination: 84.282A

Reader #4: *****

Applicant: New Mexico Public Education Department (U282A090011)

Questions

Summary Comments - Summary Comments

1. Summary Comments

General:

The applicant presented three strong objectives, each with measurable goals and clear activities and performance measures. With the approval of a new authorizer, a state board that gives charters more independence, New Mexico recognizes that this is the time to improve their charter program and increase the number of high-quality schools. Their dissemination or best practices and participation in numerous conferences and technical assistance programs shows that the department is willing to work with applicants to ensure high-quality applications are submitted. The evaluation plan was excellent because it evaluated not only the charter schools, but also the work of the charter schools division, to make sure they are an effective resource.]

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - The contribution the charter schools grant program will make.....

1. The contribution the charter schools grant program will make in assisting educationally disadvantaged and other students to achieve State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to provide a description of the objectives for the SEA's charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, including steps taken by the SEA to inform teachers, parents, and communities of the SEA's charter school grant program and how the SEA will disseminate best or promising practices of charter schools to each LEA in the State.

Strengths:

The objectives stated throughout the application are clear and measurable. Each objective focuses on one aspect of charter school development: growth in high quality schools and at-risk schools and high academic achievement. Each objective contains sub-objectives that are quantifiable and attainable, and each performance measure uniquely relates to each measure. New Mexico recognizes the importance of charters on fulfilling the needs for at-risk students due to the individualized attention and relatively small size (p. 17). New Mexico has high standards for their charter schools and require descriptions and demonstration of serving at-risk populations in their application (p.17). Preference is given to applicants working to serve these populations. New Mexico also wants to ensure that charter schools use the majority of their funds to plan the instructional programs and notes that in measures for objective 2.1 (p. 21). They also are working to improve educational opportunities for Native American populations. There is a strong discussion on how others are informed of the grant program (p. 9) and how they will disseminate best practices by working with the NM Coalition for Charter Schools and presenting at various conferences (p. 13).

Weaknesses:

There was a lack of information specifically related to the population of at-risk students and how they are currently, and in the future, will be affected by charter schools. There were no demographics to show the population of minorities or at-risk students and the applicant did not discuss how many of these students are currently in charters or how many they hope will enroll.

Reader's Score: 27

Selection Criteria - The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA**1. The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA to charter schools under the State's charter school law.**

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a description of how the State's law establishes an administrative relationship between the charter school and the authorized public chartering agency and exempts charter schools from significant State or local rules that inhibit the flexible operation and management of public schools.

The Secretary also encourages the applicant to include a description of the degree of autonomy charter schools have achieved over such matters as the charter school's budget, expenditures, daily operation, and personnel in accordance with their State's law.

Strengths:

The New Mexico charter law contains provisions to give charter schools a large amount of autonomy, specifically charters approved by the new Public Education Commission, a state board. Charters sponsored by the Commission are their own LEA and have autonomy in almost all categories, if a waiver is granted, including: curriculum, length of school day, staffing, evaluations, and personnel. Teachers and staff of charter schools are employees of the school, and not the district, which allows charters the flexibility to hire whom they see fit and pay as appropriate (p. 29). Charter schools are responsible for their own budgeting and finances.

Weaknesses:

Charter schools approved by the local school boards do not have the same autonomy as state-approved charter schools, and currently the majority of the schools are locally approved. Waivers from rules and regulations do not appear to be automatic, and applications for these waivers can be time consuming for charters.

Reader's Score: 25

Selection Criteria - The number of high-quality charter schools to be created**1. The number of high-quality charter schools to be created in the State.**

Note: The Secretary considers the SEA's reasonable estimate of the number of new charter schools to be authorized and opened in the State during the three-year period of this grant.

The Secretary also considers how the SEA will inform each charter school in the State about Federal funds the charter school is eligible to receive and ensure that each charter school in the State receives the school's commensurate share of Federal education funds that are allocated by formula each year, including during the first year of operation of the school and during a year in which the school's enrollment expands significantly.

Strengths:

Objective 3 related to this criteria is very thought-out. New Mexico will increase the number of charter schools overall by no less than 24 (p. 31), which based on previous years is a reasonable, and ambitious goal. The discussion on why charter applications and authorization dipped offers a clear explanation and the applicant shows the continual increase in applications, including the current interest at 31 (p. 33). There are numerous ways that the state notifies charter schools of eligible federal funding. In addition to usual ways of web sites and email notifications, New Mexico holds many different training sessions and workshops throughout the year to notify schools and help them understand the process (p. 9). Each charter school is also assigned a Budget Analyst to answer questions and advise them on their budget. There are measures in place for the department to monitor the funds for charter schools to make sure they are receiving the correct funds, and can make corrective action if necessary (p. 11).

Weaknesses:

The application did not address how funds to charter schools would be modified if enrollment changed during the school year, particularly during the first school year.

Reader's Score: 28

Selection Criteria - The quality of the management plan...

- 1. The quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers 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.**

Note: In addition to describing the proposed objectives of the SEA charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, the Secretary encourages applicants to provide descriptions of the steps to be taken by the SEA to award subgrant funds to eligible applicants desiring to receive these funds, including descriptions of the peer review process the SEA will use to review applications for assistance, the timelines for awarding such funds, and how the SEA will assess the quality of the applications.

Strengths:

The management plan outlines the roles of the staff in the Charter Schools Division and the staff is sufficient to handle the influx of responsibilities if they receive the grant (p. 34). Each activity related to either the charter application, the grant or monitoring and evaluation are clearly detailed in a chart on pages 36 through 39, with major dates associated with each activity. There is a very thorough explanation of the process of awarding subgrant funds to applicants, including dates and a timeline, the review process, how applications will be measured, and key milestones which relate to the objectives of increasing the charter numbers by 24 over the course of the grant (p. 44). The milestones listed are not only about increasing the number of schools, but also ensuring schools are compliant and high-quality.

Weaknesses:

The management plan chart did not directly relate to the objectives presented throughout the application. The applicant listed its activities that would relate to objectives but it was not clearly connected. The chart concentrated on activities and dates, but did not lay out the comprehensive plan. The achievement objectives were not addressed clearly in the activities' plan.

Selection Criteria - The quality of the evaluation plan

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible.

The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a strong evaluation plan in the application narrative and to use that plan, as appropriate, to shape the development of the project from the beginning of the grant period. The Secretary encourages the applicant to design the plan so that it includes (a) benchmarks to monitor progress toward specific project objectives and (b) outcome measures to assess the impact on teaching and learning or other important outcomes for project participants. In its plan, we encourage the applicant to identify the individual and/or organization that has agreed to serve as evaluator for the project and to describe the qualifications of that evaluator. We also encourage the applicant to describe, in its application, the evaluation design, indicating: (1) the types of data that will be collected; (2) when various types of data will be collected; (3) the methods that will be used; (4) the instruments that will be developed and when; (5) how the data will be analyzed; (6) when reports of results and outcomes will be available; and (7) how the applicant will use the information collected through the evaluation to monitor progress of the funded project and to provide accountability information both about success at the initial site and effective strategies for replication in other settings. Applicants are encouraged to devote an appropriate level of resources to project evaluation.

Strengths:

The applicant clearly identifies the evaluator's qualifications and their involvement in the evaluation. The evaluation analyzes not only charter school achievement to ensure they are meeting objectives, but it also analyzes the state's progress through the technical assistance workshops, quality of applicants, and other measures. This is an evaluation plan of the entire program. Performance measures on page 48 are clear and measurable by looking at the number of charters created or the improvement of academic achievement. This evaluation proposal will look at quantitative and qualitative data, both from the charter schools and the charter school division of the state (p. 50-52). The evaluator will provide an annual report and a comprehensive program report, which the state will use to improve their charter school program. The department understands the importance of the evaluation and on page 53 identifies that they will use this evaluation to modify its activities to better reach their goals and objectives, if the evaluator finds they are not being met.

Weaknesses:

The evaluator is instructed to analyze previously written evaluations by the department, and are not instructed to do their own independent evaluations on the department's activities and training.

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - Non Dissemination: 84.282A

Reader #5: *****

Applicant: New Mexico Public Education Department (U282A090011)

Questions

Summary Comments - Summary Comments

1. Summary Comments

General:

The applicant has done a wonderful job on the overall grant proposal. Most of the components of the application are clear and address the criteria as stipulated by the Secretary Of Education.]

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - The contribution the charter schools grant program will make.....

1. The contribution the charter schools grant program will make in assisting educationally disadvantaged and other students to achieve State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to provide a description of the objectives for the SEA's charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, including steps taken by the SEA to inform teachers, parents, and communities of the SEA's charter school grant program and how the SEA will disseminate best or promising practices of charter schools to each LEA in the State.

Strengths:

The applicant indicates in the proposal that Both the evaluation criteria and the operational requirements were designed to insure a high level of quality among state-chartered schools and propose to delineate the expectations of the Commission and the Secretary of Education for charter school excellence. Pp-18

The applicant in response to the Spring, 2008 CSP Office Monitoring Report, conducted by West Ed, as well as to establish a consistent level of expectations for new and existing charter schools, these criteria have been used as the basis to create New Mexico's standards for high-quality charter schools listed and reflect the state's actual practices for charter authorization.

pp 18

The applicant will focus on improving student academic achievement, identifies a target student population, and clearly states what the school hopes to accomplish. Pp-18

The applicant will provide a curriculum that addresses scope and sequence and sets student performance standards that are aligned with the school's mission, student needs, the New Mexico Content Standards with Benchmarks and Performance Standards, and that are specific, measurable, and time bound. Pp18

The applicant has a trained governing body that has been approved as a Board of Finance. pp 20

The applicant's Charter Schools Division of the NMPED will work in close collaboration with the New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools by combining information, contacts and opportunities to disseminate best practice information. Pp e -41

The applicant's in connection with New Mexico's Charter Schools Act provides parents, students, and community members with an additional educational opportunity within the existing public school system to assist educationally disadvantaged and other students to achieve state academic content standards and state student academic achievement standards. P-e-45

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly state the demographics on minority or disadvantaged students to be served.

The applicant could be a little more specific regarding best practices the are used in the project.

Reader's Score: 27

Selection Criteria - The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA

1. The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA to charter schools under the State's charter school law.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a description of how the State's law establishes an administrative relationship between the charter school and the authorized public chartering agency and exempts charter schools from significant State or local rules that inhibit the flexible operation and management of public schools.

The Secretary also encourages the applicant to include a description of the degree of autonomy charter schools have achieved over such matters as the charter school's budget, expenditures, daily operation, and personnel in accordance with their State's law.

Strengths:

In 2008, the Center for Education Reform rated the applicant's New Mexico's Charter School law as a high achiever, and rated it as the 13th strongest charter schools law in the nation out of 41 states that have charters. pp 46

The applicant specifies that the Charter Schools Division is led by an Assistant Secretary of Education, appointed by the Governor, who also serves as a member of the NMPED executive team. Effective July 1, 2007, the new law allowed for dual authorizing of charter schools by either a school district or the Public Education Commission (PEC). Pp-e-55

The applicant's Locally-chartered schools are also responsible for the design and operation of their own programs, subject to local school board approval of the charter. The approved charter becomes a contract between the charter school and the district school board and must contain any requests for waivers from the Public School code which are transmitted by the authorizing district to the Secretary of Education for approval. Denial of a charter by a local school board is subject to the same appeal rights indicated above. Pp-e-56

All charter schools in the applicant's state receives 98% of the student generated program cost provided by New Mexico's State Equalization Guarantee (SEG) formula. Two percent of the schools allocatable state funds are retained by the authorizing agency to cover the costs of administrative support to the charter school. P-e-58

Weaknesses:

There appeared to be limitations on staff salaries.

The majority of the charter schools do not have the same autonomy as state public school.

The applicant does not detail a description of school closure process.

Reader's Score: 24

Selection Criteria - The number of high-quality charter schools to be created

1. The number of high-quality charter schools to be created in the State.

Note: The Secretary considers the SEA's reasonable estimate of the number of new charter schools to be authorized and opened in the State during the three-year period of this grant.

The Secretary also considers how the SEA will inform each charter school in the State about Federal funds the charter school is eligible to receive and ensure that each charter school in the State receives the school's commensurate share of Federal education funds that are allocated by formula each year, including during the first year of operation of the school and during a year in which the school's enrollment expands significantly.

Strengths:

The applicant specifies that the number of high-quality charter schools to be created in the State provide individual attention to students and allow for increased involvement of parents and community in the education of children. These are essential elements of New Mexico's charter school law that assure attainment of high student academic achievement, particularly for students with diverse learning needs. The interrelated state policies and programs work together to provide a positive climate to assist all students, including those determined to be educationally disadvantaged. The applicant's Grant Program carries out the intent of the New Mexico Charter School Act by funding schools that address innovative methods and strategies for assessing and improving student achievement for all students as shown in the charter applications that meet New Mexico's Standards for High-Quality Schools. pp-45

In the applicant's state, The Charter Schools Division (CSD) of the NMPED, in collaboration with the New Mexico's Coalition for Charter Schools, will provide Prospective Applicant Training and technical assistance for potential charter school developers annually. pp-e- 60

The Division and the Coalition in the applicant's state, will provide no less than 5 Prospective Applicant training sessions between January 1 and May 30 of each year of the CSP Grant. Pp-e-61

The applicant's Division now offers Prospective Applicant training and technical assistance for developers during the six-month period prior to the required date for submission of applications. P-e 62

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not detail how they will adjust the federal funding for schools who open in their first year.

Selection Criteria - The quality of the management plan...

- 1. The quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers 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.**

Note: In addition to describing the proposed objectives of the SEA charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, the Secretary encourages applicants to provide descriptions of the steps to be taken by the SEA to award subgrant funds to eligible applicants desiring to receive these funds, including descriptions of the peer review process the SEA will use to review applications for assistance, the timelines for awarding such funds, and how the SEA will assess the quality of the applications.

Strengths:

The applicant's project director will participate in all non-grant-related division activities such as the analysis and evaluation of new and renewal charter applications, charters school site-visits, and prospective applicant and planning Year training. The Division Program Manager serves as the alternate project director as needed. P 63

The applicant's administrator's will participate in on-site CSP sub-grantee compliance reviews. Each Educational Administrator is assigned to serve as liaison (i.e., a first-line contact person) to a group of state and locally chartered schools. The Business Management Coordinator monitors the budgets and financial status of state-chartered schools. The Division Attorney advises the Assistant Secretary and Division staff on all applicable legal issues, including state and federal grant eligibility and management issues. p-e-64

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not provide enough information on the qualifications of staff.

Selection Criteria - The quality of the evaluation plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible.**

The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a strong evaluation plan in the application narrative and to use that plan, as appropriate, to shape the development of the project from the beginning of the grant period. The Secretary encourages the applicant to design the plan so that it includes (a) benchmarks to monitor progress toward specific project objectives and (b) outcome measures to assess the impact on teaching and learning or other important outcomes for project participants. In its plan, we encourage the applicant to identify the individual and/or organization that has agreed to serve as evaluator for the project and to describe the qualifications of that evaluator. We also encourage the applicant to describe, in its application, the evaluation design, indicating: (1) the types of data that will be collected; (2) when various types of data will be collected; (3) the methods that will be used; (4) the

instruments that will be developed and when; (5) how the data will be analyzed; (6) when reports of results and outcomes will be available; and (7) how the applicant will use the information collected through the evaluation to monitor progress of the funded project and to provide accountability information both about success at the initial site and effective strategies for replication in other settings. Applicants are encouraged to devote an appropriate level of resources to project evaluation.

Strengths:

The applicant's management plan includes benchmarks or milestones to monitor progress, and outcome measures to assess the impact on teaching and learning and on other important outcomes . The Evaluation Plan describes the Milestones referenced. pp-e-75

The applicant's data and findings of the Division staff will be provided to the external contractor for review and confirmation as a part of the annual evaluation process. P-e-76

The applicant's state department will contract with an external contractor to perform additional evaluation over a wide range of areas, particularly those directly connected with the stated objectives of the grant. By contracting with an external provider, New Mexico will receive unbiased and professional evaluations of its success in achieving the grant objectives. Pp-78

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score: 30

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 02/11/2010 02:04 PM

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - Non Dissemination: 84.282A

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: New Mexico Public Education Department (U282A090011)

Questions

Summary Comments - Summary Comments

1. Summary Comments

General:

This application was generally strong; the deficiencies noted were primarily due to a lack of evidence to demonstrate the appropriateness of the proposed project recommendations and the insufficient descriptions of some of the technical assistance and other major functions to be performed.

|

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - The contribution the charter schools grant program will make.....

1. The contribution the charter schools grant program will make in assisting educationally disadvantaged and other students to achieve State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to provide a description of the objectives for the SEA's charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, including steps taken by the SEA to inform teachers, parents, and communities of the SEA's charter school grant program and how the SEA will disseminate best or promising practices of charter schools to each LEA in the State.

Strengths:

The clear and attainable objectives related to secondary, at-risk pupils is very positive and within the state's power to deliver.

The high-quality charter school standards are a national model and really add a tremendous amount of confidence to the state's charter school program. Coupled with the initial decline in the number of state-approved charters, which shows a commitment to adhering to those quality standards, it is very clear that the state is going to ensure its growth does not occur at a pace that sacrifices quality in any way. This is a very strong aspect of the application as a whole.

The 10% incentive provided to schools that work with "at-risk" students (page e32) is a real innovation and will support the state's objectives in a meaningful way.

The partnerships with the NGA and native communities (page e37) are positive and will lead to additional change.

Outreach efforts relative to students, parents and communities are described and represent a good starting point.

Some information about dissemination is provided, and appears to provide a good starting point.

The "caveat" described on page e52 allowing the state to terminate grant awards under certain conditions is a strong component of this initiative.

Weaknesses:

The sub-objectives included in this application (on pages 1-6) are actually more akin to performance measures and should be renamed as such - they make the number of objectives less manageable.

No meaningful evidence is provided to help the reviewer ascertain the attainability or relative ambition of the objectives and performance measures included on pages 1-6 and again on pages 21 and 22. Some form of basic "needs assessment" would have been useful.

The state should consider broader, more proactive communication opportunities relative to the availability of the grant. These activities described on page 7 are too limited and passive.

Dissemination of best practices described on page 13 does not extend far beyond the charter school community, or about the basic principles of charter schooling. Deeper forays into best practice are not explored among traditional LEAs, and most other activities appear to be rather passive.

Reader's Score: 26

Selection Criteria - The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA

1. The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA to charter schools under the State's charter school law.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a description of how the State's law establishes an administrative relationship between the charter school and the authorized public chartering agency and exempts charter schools from significant State or local rules that inhibit the flexible operation and management of public schools.

The Secretary also encourages the applicant to include a description of the degree of autonomy charter schools have achieved over such matters as the charter school's budget, expenditures, daily operation, and personnel in accordance with their State's law.

Strengths:

Multiple authorizing agencies and an appeals process are permitted. Waivers may be requested and granted in a wide array of areas.

There is a high degree of autonomy for charter school boards. They have complete control over their budgets.

A description of administrative relationships is provided in detail and appears to be sound.

Weaknesses:

It would have been helpful for the applicant to describe in greater detail how the daily administrative relationship between LEA authorizers and their schools actually operates. Presumably there were problems there that led to legislative action creating (and subsequent demand by schools to be authorized by) a state-level board as described on page 1; some description of how these schools are functioning would have been useful.

No description of school closure or other accountability provisions have been included.

The waiver request process described on page 26 may be a cumbersome and unduly problematic process; more detail about how this has worked in the past would be useful to demonstrate its efficacy.

It is not clear how much autonomy locally-authorized schools have, since they are not their own LEA under state law (see page 26).

Reader's Score: 22

Selection Criteria - The number of high-quality charter schools to be created

1. The number of high-quality charter schools to be created in the State.

Note: The Secretary considers the SEA's reasonable estimate of the number of new charter schools to be authorized and opened in the State during the three-year period of this grant.

The Secretary also considers how the SEA will inform each charter school in the State about Federal funds the charter school is eligible to receive and ensure that each charter school in the State receives the school's commensurate share of Federal education funds that are allocated by formula each year, including during the first year of operation of the school and during a year in which the school's enrollment expands significantly.

Strengths:

The number of new charter schools to be created appears attainable, particularly given the high attention to quality.

Efforts to inform charter schools about federal funds, even at the applicant stage, are extensive. Assignment of a budget analyst (page e38) is a very positive added step.

Weaknesses:

The number of high-quality schools to be created could be more ambitious, perhaps; it is difficult to tell as no evidence of parent/student/community demand is provided (e.g., survey results, waiting lists). It is difficult to discern how realistic this number is, given that no evidence of need is provided.

The state's efforts to ensure federal funds distribution is on the monitoring end, rather than on the front end of the activity. Thus, timeliness of fund distribution may be an issue. Also, the applicant did not discuss how funds would be distributed in case of a significant expansion.

Reader's Score: 24

Selection Criteria - The quality of the management plan...

1. The quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers 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.

Note: In addition to describing the proposed objectives of the SEA charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, the Secretary encourages applicants to provide descriptions of the

steps to be taken by the SEA to award subgrant funds to eligible applicants desiring to receive these funds, including descriptions of the peer review process the SEA will use to review applications for assistance, the timelines for awarding such funds, and how the SEA will assess the quality of the applications.

Strengths:

A staffing plan is provided, and activities related to sub-grant application, award, monitoring and evaluation are laid out in a clear, understandable format.

Project milestones are included and relate back to program objectives.

Altogether, this is well-organized, clear and consistent.

Weaknesses:

The management plan should be more closely tied back to project objectives as described in Selection Criteria I. There are a great many activities, particularly related to Objective 2 as described on page 3, that are never fully described. Improvement of academic achievement is a big objective; it is necessary for the state to describe how it will ensure that this goal is met, by detailing the types of technical assistance and other resources that will be provided.

Distribution of incentive funds (pages 6 and 9) and the nature of the technical assistance to be provided (pages 37 and 38) also are not sufficiently detailed. Technical assistance in particular can take many forms, ranging from a single class to hands-on consulting over time, and that should be detailed here.

Staff assignments may not be sufficient to perform the level of work described, particularly on the technical assistance and monitoring side, but again that may not be an issue depending on the nature of the work proposed. More detail is needed to ascertain this.

Reader's Score: 24

Selection Criteria - The quality of the evaluation plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible.**

The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a strong evaluation plan in the application narrative and to use that plan, as appropriate, to shape the development of the project from the beginning of the grant period. The Secretary encourages the applicant to design the plan so that it includes (a) benchmarks to monitor progress toward specific project objectives and (b) outcome measures to assess the impact on teaching and learning or other important outcomes for project participants. In its plan, we encourage the applicant to identify the individual and/or organization that has agreed to serve as evaluator for the project and to describe the qualifications of that evaluator. We also encourage the applicant to describe, in its application, the evaluation design, indicating: (1) the types of data that will be collected; (2) when various types of data will be collected; (3) the methods that will be used; (4) the instruments that will be developed and when; (5) how the data will be analyzed; (6) when reports of results and outcomes will be available; and (7) how the applicant will use the information collected through the evaluation to monitor progress of the funded project and to provide accountability information both about success at the initial site and effective strategies for replication in other settings. Applicants are encouraged to devote an appropriate level of resources to project evaluation.

Strengths:

The plan allows for internal staff performance of many evaluative functions, along with the utilization of a qualified outside evaluator.

Evaluation occurs regularly over time, allowing the state to determine its progress toward achieving its objectives.

Data to be collected and reviewed appears to be appropriate. Validation and analysis of the data is straightforward and methods described are sufficient to show that objectives are either on track or being met.

Clear information will be available for reporting and use.

Both project and outcome measures are included.

Weaknesses:

Role of external evaluator should be to do their own independent work, not just to validate work done by someone else.

Reader's Score: 28

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 02/11/2010 02:04 PM