

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/03/2015 11:49 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: South Carolina Department of Education (U282A150032)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
State-Level Strategy		
1. State-Level Strategy	15	14
Sub Total	15	14
Selection Criteria		
Policy Context for Charter Schools		
1. Policy Context	5	5
Sub Total	5	5
Selection Criteria		
Past Performance		
1. Past Performance	10	5
Quality of Plan to Support Ed. Dis. Students		
1. Ed. Dis. Students	15	15
Vision for Growth and Accountability		
1. Growth and Accountability	10	8
Dissemination of Information and Best Practices		
1. Dissemination	10	10
Oversight of Public Chartering Agencies		
1. Oversight of Authorizers	15	15
Management Plan and Theory of Action		
1. Management Plan	10	10
Project Design		
1. Project Design	10	10
Sub Total	80	73
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
High-Quality Authorizing and Monitoring Processes		
1. CPP 1	15	13
Sub Total	15	13
Competitive Preference Priority		
Authorizer other than LEA or Appeal Process		

1. CPP 2

	5	5
Sub Total	5	5
Total	120	110

Technical Review Form

Panel #25 - SEA Panel - 27: 84.282A

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: South Carolina Department of Education (U282A150032)

Questions

Selection Criteria - State-Level Strategy

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the State-level strategy for using charter schools to improve educational outcomes for students throughout the State. In determining the quality of the State-level strategy, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The extent to which the SEA 's CSP activities, including the subgrant program, are integrated into the State s overall strategy for improving student academic achievement and attainment (including high school graduation rates and college and other postsecondary education enrollment rates) and closing achievement and attainment gaps, and complement or leverage other statewide education reform efforts;

2) The extent to which funding equity for charter schools (including equitable funding for charter school facilities) is incorporated into the SEA' s State-level strategy; and

3) The extent to which the State encourages local strategies for improving student academic achievement and attainment that involve charter schools, including but not limited to the following:

i. Collaboration, including the sharing of data and promising instructional and other practices, between charter schools and other public schools or providers of early learning and development programs or alternative education programs; and

ii. The creation of charter schools that would serve as viable options for students who currently attend, or would otherwise attend, the State 's lowest-performing schools.

Strengths:

Charter schools are presented as playing an "important" role in the state's overall strategy for "the Profile" because charters are seen as capable of generating varied pathways for students to achieve success. (p. e25-26) SC CS NExT will incorporate charter improvement and innovation into existing systems. Charter success and best practices will be used to drive improvement in traditional public schools. The number of charters will be increased to accomplish this. (p. e26)

In 2010 charter schools received half of the funding non-charter schools received. This discrepancy has been significantly diminished. (p. e29) In 2015 SCPCSD authorized schools received as much or more funding than non-charters. (p. e30)

SCDE plans to travel the state to identify and support innovative practices. The next state's transformation conference will focus on charter schools with the themes of innovation and collaboration. (p. e31) Instructional practices will be shared between charters and non-charters. (p. e31) Competitive priority points will be awarded to schools that are established in the attendance zone of the state's lowest performing schools. Charters will also be used to turn around the state's lowest performing schools. (p. e31)

Weaknesses:

The revolving loan program is unclear.

Selection Criteria - Policy Context for Charter Schools

1. The Secretary considers the policy context for charter schools under the proposed project. In determining the policy context for charter schools under the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The degree of flexibility afforded to charter schools under the State's charter school law, including:

i. The extent to which charter schools in the State are exempt from State or local rules that inhibit the flexible operation and management of public schools; and

ii. The extent to which charter schools in the State have a high degree of autonomy, including autonomy over the charter school's budget, expenditures, staffing, procurement, and curriculum;

2) The quality of the SEA's processes for:

i. Annually informing each charter school in the State about Federal funds the charter school is eligible to receive and Federal programs in which the charter school may participate; and

ii. Annually ensuring that each charter school in the State receives, in a timely fashion, the school's commensurate share of Federal funds that are allocated by formula each year, particularly during the first year of operation of the school and during a year in which the school's enrollment expands significantly; and

3) The quality of the SEA's plan to ensure that charter schools that are considered to be LEAs under State law and LEAs in which charter schools are located will comply with sections 613(a)(5) and 613(e)(1)(B) of IDEA (20 U.S.C. 1400, et seq.), the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (42 U.S.C. 6101, et seq.), title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d, et seq.), title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. 1681, et seq.), and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794).

Strengths:

Charters have the right to abide by the laws or regulations they choose. Also, any public school can convert to a charter. (p. e32) Charters have total control over their budgeting and expenditures, their staffing and their curriculum. (p. e33-34)

SCDE provides direct guidance on funding. SCDE conducts two trainings a year on financial management. SCDE also announces annual funding opportunities through various electronic communications. (p. e35) SCDE will continue to provide funding guidelines that are updated and published annually. SCDE will facilitate discussions between charter schools and authorizers regarding federal formula grants. By law, charters must be considered in any and all state and federal funding grant formula applications. An authorizing LEA must have charter principals verify in writing that they were part of any federal formula grant application. (p. e35) SCDE verifies that the proper amounts are dispersed to charters. Authorizers are held accountable by SCDE for ensuring funds are supplied appropriately to schools.

SCDE will monitor compliance and include it as part of all applications. It will also be incorporated into technical assistance. (p. e36) In applications charter applicants must indicate they understand all legal requirements. Authorizers must sign and submit assurances that their schools will comply. (p. e37)

Weaknesses:

No weakness found.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Past Performance

1. The Secretary considers the past performance of charter schools in a State that enacted a charter school law for the first time five or more years before submission of its application. In determining the past performance of charter schools in such a State, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The extent to which there has been a demonstrated increase, for each of the past five years, in the number and percentage of high-quality charter schools (as defined in this notice) in the State;

2) The extent to which there has been a demonstrated reduction, for each of the past five years, in the number and percentage of academically poor-performing charter schools (as defined in this notice) in the State; and

3) Whether, and the extent to which, the academic achievement and academic attainment (including high school graduation rates and college and other postsecondary education enrollment rates) of charter school students equal or exceed the academic achievement and academic attainment of similar students in other public schools in the State over the past five years.

Strengths:

In some years the number of high quality schools has increased. (p. e38)

Weaknesses:

There is no evidence of a decrease in the number or percentage of academically poor performing charter schools. (p. e38)

There is no evidence that the academic achievement or attainment of charter school students equals or exceeds that of non charter students.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of Plan to Support Ed. Dis. Students

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the SEA 's plan to support educationally disadvantaged students. In determining the quality of the plan to support educationally disadvantaged students, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The extent to which the SEA' s charter school subgrant program would--

i. Assist students, particularly educationally disadvantaged students, in meeting and exceeding State academic content standards and State student achievement standards; and

ii. Reduce or eliminate achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged students;

2) The quality of the SEA 's plan to ensure that charter schools attract, recruit, admit, enroll, serve, and retain educationally disadvantaged students equitably, meaningfully, and, with regard to educationally disadvantaged students who are students with disabilities or English learners, in a manner consistent with, as appropriate, the IDEA (regarding students with disabilities) and civil rights laws, in particular, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;

3) The extent to which the SEA will encourage innovations in charter schools, such as models, policies,

supports, or structures, that are designed to improve the academic achievement of educationally disadvantaged students; and

4) The quality of the SEA 's plan for monitoring all charter schools to ensure compliance with Federal and State laws, particularly laws related to educational equity, nondiscrimination, and access to public schools for educationally disadvantaged students.

Strengths:

In setting objectives for South Carolina Charter Schools NExT:New and Existing Transforming through Quality, Innovation, and Sustainability examined the extent to which current CSP subgrantees are helping educationally disadvantaged students and closing the achievement gap. (p. e40)

Initial plans must specify how charters will attract and recruit educationally disadvantaged students. A charter can be denied if the plan is not adequate. There are also competitive priorities in the CSP subgrant competition that focus on charters which serve these students. (p. e40-41)

The state collaboration conference will focus on charter schools sharing their innovations. (p. e42)

As part of the application, charters must sign assurances to follow the laws. They also must remain in compliance to receive their federal funds. Charters must sign assurances annually. Authorizers must also assure that they are responsible for monitoring compliance with the law. (p. e42-43)

Weaknesses:

No weakness found.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Vision for Growth and Accountability

1. The Secretary determines the quality of the statewide vision, including the role of the SEA, for charter school growth and accountability. In determining the quality of the statewide vision, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The quality of the SEA' s systems for collecting, analyzing, and publicly reporting data on charter school performance, including data on student academic achievement, attainment (including high school graduation rates and college and other postsecondary education enrollment rates), retention, and discipline for all students and disaggregated by student subgroup;

2) The ambitiousness, quality of vision, and feasibility of the SEA' s plan (including key actions) to support the creation of high-quality charter schools during the project period, including a reasonable estimate of the number of high-quality charter schools in the State at both the beginning and the end of the project period; and

3) The ambitiousness, quality of vision, and feasibility of the SEA' s plan (including key actions) to support the closure of academically poor-performing charter schools in the State (i.e., through revocation, non-renewal, or voluntary termination of a charter) during the project period.

Note: In the context of closing academically poor-performing charter schools, we remind applicants of the importance of ensuring adherence to applicable laws, policies, and procedures that govern the closure of a charter school, the disposition of its assets, and the transfer of its students and student records.

Strengths:

Data is collected through both the report card and the portfolio. The report cards include disaggregated data. (p. e43)

The SCDE has designed an application template that is a sound way to create applicants who will eventually open high quality schools. Technical assistance is also provided to developers. There is a reasonable estimate of the number of new charters that will open. (p. e45)

Authorizers have the authority to close charter schools that are not meeting performance measures. (p. e47)

Weaknesses:

There is no evidence of an ambitious plan to close poor performing charters.

Reader's Score: 8

Selection Criteria - Dissemination of Information and Best Practices

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the SEA' s plan to disseminate information about charter schools and best or promising practices of successful charter schools to each LEA in the State as well as to charter schools, other public schools, and charter school developers (20 U.S.C. 7221b(b)(2)(C) and 7221 (c)(f)(6)). If an SEA proposes to use a portion of its grant funds for dissemination subgrants under section 5204(f)(6)(B) of the ESEA (20 U.S.C. 7221c(f)(6)(B)), the SEA should incorporate these subgrants into the overall plan for dissemination. In determining the quality of the SEA s plan to disseminate information about charter schools and best or promising practices of successful charter schools, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

1) The extent to which the SEA will serve as a leader in the State for identifying and disseminating information and research (which may include, but is not limited to, providing technical assistance) about best or promising practices in successful charter schools, including how the SEA will use measures of efficacy and data in identifying such practices and assessing the impact of its dissemination activities;

2) The quality of the SEA' s plan for disseminating information and research on best or promising practices used by, and the benefits of, charter schools that effectively incorporate student body diversity, including racial and ethnic diversity and diversity with respect to educationally disadvantaged students, consistent with applicable law;

3) The quality of the SEA' s plan for disseminating information and research on best or promising practices in charter schools related to student discipline and school climate; and

4) For an SEA that proposes to use a portion of its grant funds to award dissemination subgrants under section 5204(f)(6)(B) of the ESEA (20 U.S.C. 7221a(f)(6)(B)), the quality of the subgrant award process and the likelihood that such dissemination activities will increase the number of high-quality charter schools in the State and contribute to improved student academic achievement.

Strengths:

The Office of School Transformation will use several strategies to inform about promising practices of successful charters including: sharing resources through listservs, public announcement, disseminating through partners, statewide conferences, assistance in person and over the phone. (p. e49)

The SECC, a partner, offers webinars and technical assistance sessions on best practices to use for educationally disadvantaged students. (P. e50)

The SECC provides technical assistance, webinars and resources related to best practices. (p. e49)

The SEA is not utilizing funds for dissemination grants.

Weaknesses:

No weakness found.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Oversight of Public Chartering Agencies

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the SEA 's plan (including any use of grant administrative or other funds) to monitor, evaluate, assist, and hold accountable authorized public chartering agencies. In determining the quality of the SEA' s plan to provide oversight to authorized public chartering agencies, the Secretary considers how well the SEA' s plan will ensure that authorized public chartering agencies are --**
 - 1) **Seeking and approving charter school petitions from developers that have the capacity to create charter schools that can become high-quality charter schools;**
 - 2) **Approving charter school petitions with design elements that incorporate evidence-based school models and practices, including, but not limited to, school models and practices that focus on racial and ethnic diversity in student bodies and diversity in student bodies with respect to educationally disadvantaged students, consistent with applicable law;**
 - 3) **Establishing measureable academic and operational performance expectations for all charter schools (including alternative charter schools, virtual charter schools, and charter schools that include pre-kindergarten, if such schools exist in the State) that are consistent with the definition of high-quality charter school as defined in this notice;**
 - 4) **Monitoring their charter schools on at least an annual basis, including conducting an in-depth review of each charter school at least once every five years, to ensure that charter schools are meeting the terms of their charter or performance contracts and complying with applicable State and Federal laws;**
 - 5) **Using increases in student academic achievement as one of the most important factors in renewal decisions; basing renewal decisions on a comprehensive set of criteria, which are set forth in the charter or performance contract; and revoking, not renewing, or encouraging the voluntary termination of charters held by academically poor-performing charter schools;**
 - 6) **Providing, on an annual basis, public reports on the performance of their portfolios of charter schools, including the performance of each individual charter school with respect to meeting the terms of, and expectations set forth in, the school 's charter or performance contract;**
 - 7) **Supporting charter school autonomy while holding charter schools accountable for results and meeting the terms of their charters or performance contracts; and**
 - 8) **Ensuring the continued accountability of charter schools during any transition to new State assessments or accountability systems, including those based on college- and career-ready standards.**

Strengths:

The SCDE will partner with NACSA to provide better guidance to authorizers. This will help guide development for authorizers. Authorizer's staff will receive support in selecting the best applicants. (p. e50-51) An application rubric is provided to help identify high quality charters. SCDE will provide technical assistance to both authorizers and charter groups applying. (p. e52)

Charter applications must describe the research basis to support their educational plans. A plan to address the needs of educationally disadvantaged students must be included. (p. e52)

Expectations are appropriately outlined in the charter contract. They must focus on student achievement, closing gaps, enabling educationally disadvantaged to achieve higher results than their peers and the plan to remain in compliance with financial management and equitable treatment of students. (p. e53)

Authorizers must annually evaluate through the contract and the annual report. The authorizer must also take appropriate corrective actions. (P. e54)

Authorizers must use increase in student achievement as the most important factor in renewal. (p. e54)

SCDE issues annual report cards and authorizers also are required to compile annual reports in a portfolio. (p. e54)

Charters are exempt from various laws and regulations giving them total control over budget and expenditures. The Charter Schools Act demands they achieve student achievement. (p. e54)

SCDE offers professional development and technical assistance to address transitions in accountability systems. (p. e54)

Weaknesses:

No weakness found.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Management Plan and Theory of Action

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan and the project 's theory of action. In determining the quality of the management plan and the project s theory of action, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The quality, including the cohesiveness and strength of reasoning, of the logic model (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) and the extent to which it addresses the role of the grant in promoting the State-level strategy for using charter schools to improve educational outcomes for students through CSP subgrants for planning, program design, and initial implementation; optional dissemination subgrants; optional revolving loan funds; and other strategies;

2) The extent to which the SEA' s project-specific performance measures, including any measures required by the Department, support the logic model; and

3) The adequacy of the management plan to --

i. Achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including the existence of clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks; and

ii. Address any compliance issues or findings related to the CSP that are identified in an audit or other monitoring review.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to propose a comprehensive management plan and theory of action for assessing the achievement of the objectives, including developing performance measures and performance targets for its proposed grant project that are consistent with those objectives. The applicant should clearly identify the project-specific performance measures and performance targets in its plan and should review the logic model application requirement and performance measures section of this notice for information on the requirements for developing those performance measures and performance targets consistent with the objectives of the proposed project. The applicant may choose to include a discussion of the project-specific performance measures and targets it develops in response to the logic model requirement when addressing this criterion.

Strengths:

The logic model is very sound. The outputs clearly lead to the short and long terms outcomes. It is evident how charters will be used to improve student outcomes, including a significant increase in high quality charters serving students. (p. e56)

The performance structures support the logic model, by presenting the specific steps that need to be taken throughout the process. (p. e56-59).

The plan clearly spells out strategies to meet the objectives. It is thorough and detailed, broken down on a month by month basis. (p. e57-65).

SCDE personnel work closely with staff to ensure grant management. The partnership provides extra accountability. SCDE has taken steps to address the recent concerns in the WestEd monitoring report. A state wide advisory group will also assist with evaluation. (p. e66)

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Project Design

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the SEA 's charter school subgrant program, including the extent to which the project design furthers the SEA' s overall strategy for increasing the number of high-quality charter schools in the State and improving student academic achievement. In determining the quality of the project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The quality of the SEA' s process for awarding subgrants for planning, program design, and initial implementation and, if applicable, for dissemination, including:

i. The subgrant application and peer review process, timelines for these processes, and how the SEA intends to ensure that subgrants will be awarded to eligible applicants demonstrating the capacity to create high-quality charter schools; and

ii. A reasonable year-by-year estimate, with supporting evidence, of

a) the number of subgrants the SEA expects to award during the project period and the average size of those subgrants, including an explanation of any assumptions upon which the estimates are based; and

b) if the SEA has previously received a CSP grant, the percentage of eligible applicants that were awarded subgrants and how this percentage related to the overall quality of the applicant pool;

2) The process for monitoring CSP subgrantees;

3) How the SEA will create a portfolio of subgrantees that focuses on areas of need within the State, such as increasing student body diversity or maintaining a high level of student body diversity, and how this focus aligns with the State-Level Strategy;

4) The steps the SEA will take to inform teachers, parents, and communities of the SEA' s charter school subgrant program; and

5) A description of any requested waivers of statutory or regulatory provisions over which the Secretary exercises administrative authority and the extent to which those waivers will, if granted, further the objectives of the project.

Strengths:

The SEA's process for awarding subgrants is sound. It includes three components. Stakeholder support must be evident in all three components. A peer review process will include those with charter or alternative school experience. All peer

reviewers will receive training that covers the rubric, the application and all applicable laws and regulations. The review process will have three tiers. (p. e67-68) There is a clear outline of the timeline for review. Only those that score at least 80 out of 120 will be considered for funding. (p. e69)

There is a reasonable estimate of the number of subgrants and the number of charters that will be opened. There is also a demonstrated improvement during the last grant period versus before the state was awarded a grant. (p. e70)

The monitoring process is quite comprehensive. It involves activities throughout each phase of the subgrant process with the type of review and the frequency specified. (p. e71)

Additional points will be awarded to subgrantees focusing on areas of need within the state. This will then provide models for other schools which aligns with the state's overall strategy. (p. e72)

To inform, information will be posted on the website, sent via contact lists, included in press releases to newspapers, television and radio, and direct contact with charter developers. (p. e73)

The state clearly explains how the waivers it is requesting will further the objectives of the project. (p. e73-74)

Weaknesses:

None.

Reader's Score: 10

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - High-Quality Authorizing and Monitoring Processes

1. Competitive Preference Priority 1: High-Quality Authorizing and Monitoring Processes

To meet this priority, an applicant must demonstrate that all authorized public chartering agencies in the State use one or more of the following:

a) Frameworks and processes to evaluate the performance of charter schools on a regular basis that include--

1) Rigorous academic and operational performance expectations (including performance expectations related to financial management and equitable treatment of all students and applicants);

2) Performance objectives for each school aligned to those expectations;

3) Clear criteria for renewing the charter of a school based on an objective body of evidence, including evidence that the charter school has (a) met the performance objectives outlined in the charter or performance contract; (b) demonstrated organizational and fiscal viability; and (c) demonstrated fidelity to the terms of the charter or performance contract and applicable law;

4) Clear criteria for revoking the charter of a school if there is violation of law or public trust regarding student safety or public funds, or evidence of poor student academic achievement; and

5) Annual reporting by authorized public chartering agencies to each of their authorized charter schools that summarizes the individual school 's performance and compliance, based on this framework, and identifies any areas that need improvement.

b) Clear and specific standards and formalized processes that measure and benchmark the performance of the authorized public chartering agency or agencies, including the performance of its portfolio of charter schools, and provide for the annual dissemination of information on such performance;

c) Authorizing processes that establish clear criteria for evaluating charter applications and include a multi-tiered clearance or review of a charter school, including a final review immediately before the school opens for its first operational year; or

d) Authorizing processes that include differentiated review of charter petitions to assess whether, and the extent to which, the charter school developer has been successful (as determined by the authorized public chartering agency) in establishing and operating one or more high-quality charter schools.

Strengths:

The process to evaluate the performance of charter schools includes a focus on both rigorous academic and financial expectations. Schools must meet or exceed goals. (p. e22) Performance objectives are included in each initial application. (p. e 22). There is clear criteria for renewal that encompasses meeting performance objectives, demonstrating organizational and fiscal viability and fidelity to the charter and the law. (p. e21) The authorizing process has a multi-tiered clearance that includes benchmarks during the planning period. Individual authorizers have the ability to develop differentiated reviews. (p. e24)

Weaknesses:

There is no evidence of a final review immediately before the school opens for its first operational year.

Reader's Score: 13

Competitive Preference Priority - Authorizer other than LEA or Appeal Process

1. Competitive Preference Priority 2:One Authorized Public Chartering Agency Other than a LEA, or an Appeals Process

To meet this priority, the applicant must demonstrate that the State--

a) Provides for one authorized public chartering agency that is not an LEA, such as a State chartering board, for each individual or entity seeking to operate a charter school pursuant to State law; or

b) In the case of a State in which LEAs are the only authorized public chartering agencies, allows for an appeals process for the denial of an application for a charter school.

Note: In order to meet this priority under paragraph (b) above, the entity hearing appeal must have the authority to approve the charter application over the objections of the LEA.

Strengths:

South Carolina has chartering agencies that are not LEAs including the Board of Higher Education, the Board of Trustees.

Weaknesses:

No weakness found.

Reader's Score: 5

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Reader #2: *****

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1. CPP 2

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Total	120	111

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Panel #25 - SEA Panel - 27: 84.282A

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: South Carolina Department of Education (U282A150032)

Questions

Selection Criteria - State-Level Strategy

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the State-level strategy for using charter schools to improve educational outcomes for students throughout the State. In determining the quality of the State-level strategy, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The extent to which the SEA 's CSP activities, including the subgrant program, are integrated into the State s overall strategy for improving student academic achievement and attainment (including high school graduation rates and college and other postsecondary education enrollment rates) and closing achievement and attainment gaps, and complement or leverage other statewide education reform efforts;

2) The extent to which funding equity for charter schools (including equitable funding for charter school facilities) is incorporated into the SEA' s State-level strategy; and

3) The extent to which the State encourages local strategies for improving student academic achievement and attainment that involve charter schools, including but not limited to the following:

i. Collaboration, including the sharing of data and promising instructional and other practices, between charter schools and other public schools or providers of early learning and development programs or alternative education programs; and

ii. The creation of charter schools that would serve as viable options for students who currently attend, or would otherwise attend, the State 's lowest-performing schools.

Strengths:

The applicant shares that SCDE's vision is that all students graduate prepared for success in college, careers, and citizenship. The state agency cites they are committed to leading and supporting innovation, personalization, and flexibility to create options, flexibility, and opportunities for students and families. They created a profile of a SC graduate to focus the overall strategy for improving student academic achievement and attainment on the goal that all students graduate prepared for success in college careers, and citizenship.

The applicant states that charter schools play an important role in the state's strategy and acknowledge that some of the skills needed to succeed may be missing in some traditional public schools. The strategy is to generate multiple and varied pathways students, families and educators need to achieve the vision. (p. 10)

The applicant states that in 2015, charter schools identified in need of improvement have been brought into the SCDE cycle of improvement which includes support for planning and evaluation, funding, deployment of transformation coaches in the schools to support leadership and improvement implementation, and access to professional learning and collaboration with the SCDE, schools, and educators across the state. The ESEA Waiver allows SCDE to make additional funding available to assist charter schools identified as federal focus and priority schools as well and SC is including state focus schools. (p. 13)

South Carolina has also responded to requests to support the credibility of charters through a more rigorous accreditations system through annual reporting to the OST.

In 2010, support for increasing state funding for charter schools increased and changes were made to provide equitable

funding for charter schools authorized by the statewide authorizer the SCPCSD. A chart on p. 14 details the increase and equalization of school per pupil finding by the state.

The applicant notes the difficulty in funding charter school facilities. The higher funding charters receive must provide for building rent and upkeep, something public schools have provided for them. To address this issue, the SC Charter Schools Act created a facility revolving loan program. (p. 14)

The applicant cites that their State Superintendent's return signaled the SCDE's renewed commitment to innovation. They note that the agency has partnered with TransformSC, an initiative of the Council on Competitiveness and its members to transform the public education system. (p. 15) This partnership will fund an associate to travel the state to identify and support innovative practices and will collaborate and share with the state's next school transformation conference. They provide an example of innovation and collaboration practice where partnering and sharing data about promising instructional practices and other effective practices occur with the providers of early learning and development programs, charter schools, and other public schools and alternative education programs.

The applicant states it is committed to supporting low-performing schools and districts and sees the opportunity and innovation the charter system can provide. They also note that a high quality and innovative choice is important for families in the area of the state where that child is not an option. To address this, they will provide competitive priority appointments to planning and subgrant that propose to physically locate charter schools in the attendance zone of the state's lowest performing school and to serve the same grade levels.

Weaknesses:

While providing equal funding for charter schools is a big step, the applicant shares that the SCPCSD is a separate line item in the state's budget so it must petition the legislature each year for funding. This process could prove problematic as politicians and legislators change and the support may not always be present. (p. 14)

Reader's Score: 14

Selection Criteria - Policy Context for Charter Schools

1. The Secretary considers the policy context for charter schools under the proposed project. In determining the policy context for charter schools under the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The degree of flexibility afforded to charter schools under the State's charter school law, including:

i. The extent to which charter schools in the State are exempt from State or local rules that inhibit the flexible operation and management of public schools; and

ii. The extent to which charter schools in the State have a high degree of autonomy, including autonomy over the charter school's budget, expenditures, staffing, procurement, and curriculum;

2) The quality of the SEA's processes for:

i. Annually informing each charter school in the State about Federal funds the charter school is eligible to receive and Federal programs in which the charter school may participate; and

ii. Annually ensuring that each charter school in the State receives, in a timely fashion, the school's commensurate share of Federal funds that are allocated by formula each year, particularly during the first year of operation of the school and during a year in which the school's enrollment expands significantly; and

3) The quality of the SEA's plan to ensure that charter schools that are considered to be LEAs under State law and LEAs in which charter schools are located will comply with sections 613(a)(5) and 613(e)

(1)(B) of IDEA (20 U.S.C. 1400, et seq.), the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (42 U.S.C. 6101, et seq.), title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d, et seq.), title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. 1681, et seq.), and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794).

Strengths:

The applicant states that the law providing charter school flexibility has contributed to the 78% increase in the number of charter schools since 2010. The state provides that the charter has the freedom to innovate or modify the school's structure without undue restriction. Several examples are provided on page 16.

The applicant demonstrates that the SC charter school is an autonomous entity that operates as a public school and has total control over their budgeting and expenditures. Information is shared about the planning phase and how the charter committee plans to open and operate a charter and execute a charter contract with the authorizer. (p. 17)

The SCDE has set procedures for announcing the annual CSP P&I funding opportunity that include the agency's grant opportunities website, press releases, and numerous postings to listservs. Efforts are also made to announce the funding opportunity to potential applicants.

Funding guidelines are updated annually to initiate annual discussions between the charter and its authorizer to ensure that charter schools are considered in the authorizers applications for federal formula education grants.

Any public school can convert to a charter e32

The Charter Schools Act makes charters part of the school system, thus making them eligible for inclusion in any and all state funding and federal formula grant applications. Charter principals must verify in writing that the authorizer consulted the charter when preparing the application for the federal funds.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Past Performance

1. The Secretary considers the past performance of charter schools in a State that enacted a charter school law for the first time five or more years before submission of its application. In determining the past performance of charter schools in such a State, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The extent to which there has been a demonstrated increase, for each of the past five years, in the number and percentage of high-quality charter schools (as defined in this notice) in the State;

2) The extent to which there has been a demonstrated reduction, for each of the past five years, in the number and percentage of academically poor-performing charter schools (as defined in this notice) in the State; and

3) Whether, and the extent to which, the academic achievement and academic attainment (including high school graduation rates and college and other postsecondary education enrollment rates) of charter school students equal or exceed the academic achievement and academic attainment of similar students in other public schools in the State over the past five years.

Strengths:

The applicant shares a table on page 22 detailing high quality and poor performing charter school data for the last five years. The data indicated a decrease in the percentage of charter schools in SC categorized as academically poor-performing but an increase in the 2013-2014 school year. They cited a variance resulting from a change in methodology

and reporting for the ESEA waiver accountability as the cause.

Charters have shown an overall increase from 37 schools to 58 schools in 5 years demonstrating growth as shown on page 38.

The applicant comments that the emphasis in the past had focused on increasing the number of charter schools in operation and little attention was paid to the quality of charter schools. The focus has now shifted from quantity to quality of public school charters. The State Charter School Accreditation Plan in Appendix E provides evidence of the emphasis on quality charter schools.

The efforts in SC to focus on increasing the quality now takes into account the level of performance of charter schools compared to the performance of all SC student achievement.

Information is shared on SC high school graduation rates comparing charter schools with all public schools and the charter schools are significantly lower. Poor performing charter schools will now receive financial and systematic support which was not available in the past to charter schools. (p. 23)

The information in the chart will serve as a baseline for comparison in the future which is good as it shows a reset and using their activities in their detail of Objective 2 on page 11 should bring results to increase high quality schools.

Weaknesses:

The application would be strengthened with an explanation for the increase in poor performing schools in 2013 and why they went up 14%. Mention is made of a change of methodology but more specificity is needed. (p. 22)

On page 23, the chart showing the SC high school graduation rates shows that the public schools graduate a higher percentage of students - 27%- than the charter schools, showing that charter school academic performance does not exceed public school academic achievement or attainment.

Reader's Score: 8

Selection Criteria - Quality of Plan to Support Ed. Dis. Students

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the SEA 's plan to support educationally disadvantaged students. In determining the quality of the plan to support educationally disadvantaged students, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The extent to which the SEA' s charter school subgrant program would--

i. Assist students, particularly educationally disadvantaged students, in meeting and exceeding State academic content standards and State student achievement standards; and

ii. Reduce or eliminate achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged students;

2) The quality of the SEA 's plan to ensure that charter schools attract, recruit, admit, enroll, serve, and retain educationally disadvantaged students equitably, meaningfully, and, with regard to educationally disadvantaged students who are students with disabilities or English learners, in a manner consistent with, as appropriate, the IDEA (regarding students with disabilities) and civil rights laws, in particular, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;

3) The extent to which the SEA will encourage innovations in charter schools, such as models, policies, supports, or structures, that are designed to improve the academic achievement of educationally disadvantaged students; and

4) The quality of the SEA 's plan for monitoring all charter schools to ensure compliance with Federal and State laws, particularly laws related to educational equity, nondiscrimination, and access to public schools for educationally disadvantaged students.

Strengths:

The applicant identifies that the Office of Standards and Learning works cross-divisionally with the Office of Special Education to deliver professional development on serving educationally disadvantaged students. This partnership is an effective way to collaborate and reduce duplication of services.

Additionally, the Office of School Transformation works specifically with low-performing schools and districts on improvement planning, resources, and evaluation to reduce or eliminate the achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged students. They note that schools identified as needing improvement often have high populations of students who are educationally disadvantaged so special attention is paid to these students including specially designed professional development.(p. 24) This strategy provides extra support in increasing innovation in charter school.

The SCDE states they use multiple strategies to ensure that charter schools bring in educationally disadvantaged students equitably and meaningfully. In plans for developing a charter school, the plan must include a strategy to attract and recruit students to their school. The authorizing agency may deny the charter if the plan does not adequately or appropriately outline the strategies and methods needed to equitably enroll educationally disadvantaged students. (p. 25)

South Carolina also has a provision to designate a charter school as an Alternative Education Campus if their mission explicitly identifies criteria on page 25 which provides for high percentages of students on IEP's, high risk students who have been adjudicated, dropped out, been expelled, are homeless, or behavioral disorders.

Other strategies to attract educationally disadvantaged students are identified including the inclusion of specific competitive priorities in the CSP subgrant competition for proposing to address closing targeted achievement gaps based on the needs of student projected to attend the charter school.

Methods of innovation and collaboration have been shared in this application in section A.3.I. The applicant notes that innovations in all schools focus on the improvement of the academic achievement of educationally disadvantaged student.

The applicant shares processes and criteria to ensure that all federal and state laws are followed and charter school authorizers are required to sign a statement of assurances indicating they will comply with all federal and state laws.

Weaknesses:

No information is shared about the results subgrantees are getting in their efforts to close the learning gap. The application would be strengthened with information shared on findings and results from the subgrantees work.

Reader's Score: 13

Selection Criteria - Vision for Growth and Accountability

1. The Secretary determines the quality of the statewide vision, including the role of the SEA, for charter school growth and accountability. In determining the quality of the statewide vision, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The quality of the SEA' s systems for collecting, analyzing, and publicly reporting data on charter school performance, including data on student academic achievement, attainment (including high school graduation rates and college and other postsecondary education enrollment rates), retention, and discipline for all students and disaggregated by student subgroup;

2) The ambitiousness, quality of vision, and feasibility of the SEA' s plan (including key actions) to

support the creation of high-quality charter schools during the project period, including a reasonable estimate of the number of high-quality charter schools in the State at both the beginning and the end of the project period; and

3) The ambitiousness, quality of vision, and feasibility of the SEA' s plan (including key actions) to support the closure of academically poor-performing charter schools in the State (i.e., through revocation, non-renewal, or voluntary termination of a charter) during the project period.

Note: In the context of closing academically poor-performing charter schools, we remind applicants of the importance of ensuring adherence to applicable laws, policies, and procedures that govern the closure of a charter school, the disposition of its assets, and the transfer of its students and student records.

Strengths:

The applicant shares that they collect data on charter school performance through the annual state-issued report card, and the annual portfolio that authorizers submit to the agency as required by the Charter Act in South Carolina. All data is publicly reported and published annually on the government website. The data shared is disaggregated and provides information on graduation rate, number of diplomas for charter high schools.

The portfolio of all charter schools contains the annual report for each school. This portfolio is shared the SCDE and is used for analysis of the progress of the charter school and authorizers around the state. Charter school profiles will be published to give an overview of each school's achievement, attainment, retention and discipline data.

Weaknesses:

The application would be stronger with a plan for what to do when a charter school is closed. No information is given about what happens to the students and families and how they are relocated to assure for maximum learning time.

In the last five years, only five schools have been closed. In light of the lack of academic achievement being equal to or better than the public schools, the support to close poor performing charter schools does not appear to be "ambitious."

Reader's Score: 8

Selection Criteria - Dissemination of Information and Best Practices

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the SEA' s plan to disseminate information about charter schools and best or promising practices of successful charter schools to each LEA in the State as well as to charter schools, other public schools, and charter school developers (20 U.S.C. 7221b(b)(2)(C) and 7221 (c)(f)(6)). If an SEA proposes to use a portion of its grant funds for dissemination subgrants under section 5204(f)(6)(B) of the ESEA (20 U.S.C. 7221c(f)(6)(B)), the SEA should incorporate these subgrants into the overall plan for dissemination. In determining the quality of the SEA s plan to disseminate information about charter schools and best or promising practices of successful charter schools, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The extent to which the SEA will serve as a leader in the State for identifying and disseminating information and research (which may include, but is not limited to, providing technical assistance) about best or promising practices in successful charter schools, including how the SEA will use measures of efficacy and data in identifying such practices and assessing the impact of its dissemination activities;

2) The quality of the SEA' s plan for disseminating information and research on best or promising practices used by, and the benefits of, charter schools that effectively incorporate student body diversity, including racial and ethnic diversity and diversity with respect to educationally disadvantaged students, consistent with applicable law;

3) The quality of the SEA' s plan for disseminating information and research on best or promising

practices in charter schools related to student discipline and school climate; and

4) For an SEA that proposes to use a portion of its grant funds to award dissemination subgrants under section 5204(f)(6)(B) of the ESEA (20 U.S.C. 7221a(f)(6)(B)), the quality of the subgrant award process and the likelihood that such dissemination activities will increase the number of high-quality charter schools in the State and contribute to improved student academic achievement.

Strengths:

The applicant lists numerous strategies to inform LEAs, charter schools, and charter school developers about promising practices of successful charter schools including PSAs, through the Public Information Offices, Listservs and shared resources to identify potential charter applicants, providing technical assistance and training, highlighting best practices partnerships with state and national charter school organizations to share information through their webpages, and more.

Surveys are given annually to collect and compile best practices from charter school leaders to facilitate discussion and serve as guidance for planning future professional learning opportunities.

The applicant does not have direct authority to oversee charter school authorizers, however, regular technical assistance and advice to authorizers is provided. Through these assistance sessions, the SCDE has identified needs for more detailed guidance for authorizers.

Principles and standards will be developed to provide quality assistance and better monitoring to charter school authorizers. These standards will also promote equal access to schools, appropriate services and fair treatment, accountability, transparency an effective administration of the program while giving charter school operators the autonomy that lies at the heart of the charter school concept. (p. 35)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Oversight of Public Chartering Agencies

The Secretary considers the quality of the SEA 's plan (including any use of grant administrative or other funds) to monitor, evaluate, assist, and hold accountable authorized public chartering agencies. In determining the quality of the SEA' s plan to provide oversight to authorized public chartering agencies, the Secretary considers how well the SEA' s plan will ensure that authorized public chartering agencies are --

- 1) Seeking and approving charter school petitions from developers that have the capacity to create charter schools that can become high-quality charter schools;**
- 2) Approving charter school petitions with design elements that incorporate evidence-based school models and practices, including, but not limited to, school models and practices that focus on racial and ethnic diversity in student bodies and diversity in student bodies with respect to educationally disadvantaged students, consistent with applicable law;**
- 3) Establishing measureable academic and operational performance expectations for all charter schools (including alternative charter schools, virtual charter schools, and charter schools that include pre-kindergarten, if such schools exist in the State) that are consistent with the definition of high-quality charter school as defined in this notice;**
- 4) Monitoring their charter schools on at least an annual basis, including conducting an in-depth review of each charter school at least once every five years, to ensure that charter schools are meeting the terms of their charter or performance contracts and complying with applicable State and Federal laws;**

5) Using increases in student academic achievement as one of the most important factors in renewal decisions; basing renewal decisions on a comprehensive set of criteria, which are set forth in the charter or performance contract; and revoking, not renewing, or encouraging the voluntary termination of charters held by academically poor-performing charter schools;

6) Providing, on an annual basis, public reports on the performance of their portfolios of charter schools, including the performance of each individual charter school with respect to meeting the terms of, and expectations set forth in, the school 's charter or performance contract;

7) Supporting charter school autonomy while holding charter schools accountable for results and meeting the terms of their charters or performance contracts; and

8) Ensuring the continued accountability of charter schools during any transition to new State assessments or accountability systems, including those based on college- and career-ready standards.

Strengths:

Because the Charter Schools Act does not give authority to oversee school authorizers, an evaluation rubric is provided to help authorizers assess applications to determine the developer's ability to create a high quality charter school. Technical assistance will accompany this template as well as targeted assistance to charter groups to help with development of their application and their plans to serve their identified student populations.

The SCDE does not have authority to oversee charter school authorizers, so the charter associates of the SCDE provide guidance to authorizers and technical assistance. (p. 34) They also have partnered with the NACSP to develop standards and principles to guide their work and ensure high quality charter schools. The school have autonomy with support as they implement their schools.

Using the technical assistance provided by the SCDE, authorizers will use the rubric developed to assess the charter applications in determining how well the programs and curriculum will serve the student body they hope to attract. (p. 36) The applicant expects the selection of educational programs, achievement standards, and curriculum to meet or exceed the district's programs and results.

The SCDE partners with the Southeastern Comprehensive center to help with processes and provide technical assistance, as in a lottery selection process. The lottery was used to ensure a racially and ethnically diverse student population. To further support charter schools to understand and include racial and ethnic diversity and best practices for educationally disadvantaged students, technical assistance is provided and disseminated. (p. 33-34)

Authorizers, using a rubric to assess charter applications will make determinations about how well a charter school program will serve the student body the school will likely attract. Information is provided about the specificity of the requirements to address the needs of struggling learners through a response to intervention or child study process and must be included as well as indicators that the application shows understanding of education for students with disabilities as detailed in IDEA and Section 504. (p. 36)

Performance goals are established that reflect the focus on increasing student academic achievement, the plan to close or eliminate any achievement gaps, the plan to enable educationally disadvantaged students to achieve higher results than other such students in the state, the plan to exceed criteria as outlined in the framework, and remain in compliance in areas of safety, management and equitable treatment of students. (P. 37)

Authorizers evaluate their charter schools using both a contract and annual report, which is submitted annually. These reports help determine whether charters remain open or whether they should be non-renewed. The charter is expected to make reasonable progress towards meeting or exceeding the performance goals stated in the contract.

The applicant notes the difficulty in collecting student data with transitions and changes in assessments administered each year. They state they will use the definition of high-quality charter schools as a guide for requesting data from schools, authorizers, and SCDE's Office of Data Research and Analysis. (p. 22) They will also provide technical assistance to schools to address shifting standards and accountability systems. (p. 38)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses seen.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Management Plan and Theory of Action

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan and the project 's theory of action. In determining the quality of the management plan and the project s theory of action, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The quality, including the cohesiveness and strength of reasoning, of the logic model (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) and the extent to which it addresses the role of the grant in promoting the State-level strategy for using charter schools to improve educational outcomes for students through CSP subgrants for planning, program design, and initial implementation; optional dissemination subgrants; optional revolving loan funds; and other strategies;

2) The extent to which the SEA' s project-specific performance measures, including any measures required by the Department, support the logic model; and

3) The adequacy of the management plan to --

i. Achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including the existence of clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks; and

ii. Address any compliance issues or findings related to the CSP that are identified in an audit or other monitoring review.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to propose a comprehensive management plan and theory of action for assessing the achievement of the objectives, including developing performance measures and performance targets for its proposed grant project that are consistent with those objectives. The applicant should clearly identify the project-specific performance measures and performance targets in its plan and should review the logic model application requirement and performance measures section of this notice for information on the requirements for developing those performance measures and performance targets consistent with the objectives of the proposed project. The applicant may choose to include a discussion of the project-specific performance measures and targets it develops in response to the logic model requirement when addressing this criterion.

Strengths:

The management plan offers an interesting approach to framing their plan. They want more, better and wider. The vision is for charter schools to be added while sustaining the 66 current schools, have better charters by improving SCDE service and authorizer performance and capacity, with a wider dissemination of successes and innovation to drive improvement in the public schools system. (p.39)

Stakeholder participation and rigorous continuous evaluation are critical to the SC effort. The logic model on page 40 and chart on page 41 show resources that will be used, short term, medium term and long term outcomes, and follows up with a clear timeline of each area providing details of what by when and who is responsible. Their specificity and clarity provides a complete and thorough view of the project.

The management plan offers an interesting approach to framing their plan. They want more charters that are better at school achievement, authorizer performance and capacity and sustainability and a wider dissemination of successes and innovation to drive improvement in the public schools system. (p.39) Their identification of quality over quantity and the shift to better trained authorizers who are aware of the rules and requirements of charters provides a clear picture of their intent.

The management plan shares information about goals and activities on a very specific timeline that shows month to

month activities. (p. e57) The specificity shared increases the likelihood that the project will meet timelines and efficiently use their budget.

A monitoring review conducted by West Ed identified areas of concern and SCDE has taken appropriate actions in responding to each of the findings listed.

A statewide advisory group will be established who will address and hear discussion on issues or concerns related to the CSP. South Carolina's efforts to receive external feedback with follow up action on the issues that are identified will support them remaining in compliance as well as grow in their skill and abilities in developing a managing an effective charter schools system.

Stakeholder participation and rigorous continuous evaluation are critical to the SC effort. The chart on page 40 and 41 show resources that will be used, short term, medium term and long term outcomes, and follows up with a clear timeline of each area providing details of what by when and who is responsible. Their specificity and clarity provides a complete and thorough view of the project.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses seen.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Project Design

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the SEA 's charter school subgrant program, including the extent to which the project design furthers the SEA' s overall strategy for increasing the number of high-quality charter schools in the State and improving student academic achievement. In determining the quality of the project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The quality of the SEA' s process for awarding subgrants for planning, program design, and initial implementation and, if applicable, for dissemination, including:

i. The subgrant application and peer review process, timelines for these processes, and how the SEA intends to ensure that subgrants will be awarded to eligible applicants demonstrating the capacity to create high-quality charter schools; and

ii. A reasonable year-by-year estimate, with supporting evidence, of

a) the number of subgrants the SEA expects to award during the project period and the average size of those subgrants, including an explanation of any assumptions upon which the estimates are based; and

b) if the SEA has previously received a CSP grant, the percentage of eligible applicants that were awarded subgrants and how this percentage related to the overall quality of the applicant pool;

2) The process for monitoring CSP subgrantees;

3) How the SEA will create a portfolio of subgrantees that focuses on areas of need within the State, such as increasing student body diversity or maintaining a high level of student body diversity, and how this focus aligns with the State-Level Strategy;

4) The steps the SEA will take to inform teachers, parents, and communities of the SEA' s charter school subgrant program; and

5) A description of any requested waivers of statutory or regulatory provisions over which the Secretary exercises administrative authority and the extent to which those waivers will, if granted, further the

objectives of the project.

Strengths:

The applicant identifies a process to effectively ensure that all new charter schools have an equal opportunity to apply for subgrant funds. They will focus on new entities that have notified the SCDE or their authorizer of their interest and may already have received favorable consideration.

They detail a multi-tiered process including a timeline and a review process for initial vetting by the CSP staff. There is also an independent review of the subgrant application by three peer reviewers and a review of the budget and awarding of competitive priorities.

Teachers, parents, and communities of the SEA's charter school subgrant program will be informed of the availability and awarding of grants on a webpage and the announcement of the subgrant opportunity on the SCDE Grant Opportunities web page. Announcements will also be released via the contacts of the PCSASC and the SCPCSD groups mailing lists. (p. 56-57)

An estimate of the CSP grants is included on page 54 detailing how many planning grants will be awarded, the average amount of the grants, and a three year projection of how the subgrants will be distributed.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses seen.

Reader's Score: 10

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - High-Quality Authorizing and Monitoring Processes

1. Competitive Preference Priority 1: High-Quality Authorizing and Monitoring Processes

To meet this priority, an applicant must demonstrate that all authorized public chartering agencies in the State use one or more of the following:

a) Frameworks and processes to evaluate the performance of charter schools on a regular basis that include--

1) Rigorous academic and operational performance expectations (including performance expectations related to financial management and equitable treatment of all students and applicants);

2) Performance objectives for each school aligned to those expectations;

3) Clear criteria for renewing the charter of a school based on an objective body of evidence, including evidence that the charter school has (a) met the performance objectives outlined in the charter or performance contract; (b) demonstrated organizational and fiscal viability; and (c) demonstrated fidelity to the terms of the charter or performance contract and applicable law;

4) Clear criteria for revoking the charter of a school if there is violation of law or public trust regarding student safety or public funds, or evidence of poor student academic achievement; and

5) Annual reporting by authorized public chartering agencies to each of their authorized charter schools that summarizes the individual school 's performance and compliance, based on this framework, and identifies any areas that need improvement.

b) Clear and specific standards and formalized processes that measure and benchmark the performance of the authorized public chartering agency or agencies, including the performance of its portfolio of charter schools, and provide for the annual dissemination of information on such performance;

c) Authorizing processes that establish clear criteria for evaluating charter applications and include a multi-tiered clearance or review of a charter school, including a final review immediately before the school opens for its first operational year; or

d) Authorizing processes that include differentiated review of charter petitions to assess whether, and the extent to which, the charter school developer has been successful (as determined by the authorized public chartering agency) in establishing and operating one or more high-quality charter schools.

Strengths:

Charter schools are authorized by their local school district, an institution of higher education, or the statewide authorizer, the SCPCSD. Annual review processes are used to regularly evaluate progress toward the performance goals set in the school's charter application. Student academic achievement is checked for improvement and evidence must be provided showing increased student academic achievement for all students. (p. 6)

A template is provided on page 1 that details the information that must be reported to its authorizer at least annually. A template was developed and provided in Appendix E, p. E26 to inform charter school authorizers the minimum of what must be included in their annual report. Items include students enrolled, achievement results, analysis of achievement gaps among groupings in both proficiency and growth, financial performance and sustainability of the sponsor's charter schools, and board performance and stewardship including compliance with laws.

Authorizers must use clear criteria when deciding to review a charter or revoke a charter school. A portfolio will be prepared that compiles all of the charter school reports into a single report that is submitted to SCDE.

Authorizers must adopt a national industry standards of quality charter schools and authorize and implement practices that are consistent with those standards. Partnerships will be developed with NASCA to develop Principles and Standards. Additionally, the portfolios of charter schools' annual reports will be submitted to the SCDE and shared on the charter program website along with the charter school's report card.

Charter school authorizers will review the charter school applications to determine whether to approve or deny the charter following the process flowchart contained in Appendix E. (p. 7) The experience of the authorizer in creating high-quality schools will determine the process of review, allowing for a multi-tiered review of charter schools.

The authorizer may develop benchmarks during the planning period. If a benchmark is not met, the charter school may be delayed in opening until all criteria are met.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not provide for a preoperational review prior to opening to assure a smooth opening and that all rules, regulations and policies are developed and met.

Reader's Score: 13

Competitive Preference Priority - Authorizer other than LEA or Appeal Process

1. Competitive Preference Priority 2: One Authorized Public Chartering Agency Other than a LEA, or an Appeals Process

To meet this priority, the applicant must demonstrate that the State--

a) Provides for one authorized public chartering agency that is not an LEA, such as a State chartering board, for each individual or entity seeking to operate a charter school pursuant to State law; or

b) In the case of a State in which LEAs are the only authorized public chartering agencies, allows for an appeals process for the denial of an application for a charter school.

Note: In order to meet this priority under paragraph (b) above, the entity hearing appeal must have the authority to approve the charter application over the objections of the LEA.

Strengths:

The law in South Carolina provides for three types of charter school authorizers: the SCPCSD Board of Trustees, the school board of the local school district where the charter will be located, and a public or institution of higher education that has registered with the SCDE to serve as a charter school authorizer. The authorizer is designated as the LEA. Only LEA's can authorize charter schools in South Carolina. (p. 10)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses seen.

Reader's Score: 5

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 08/05/2015 12:13 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/05/2015 03:09 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: South Carolina Department of Education (U282A150032)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
State-Level Strategy		
1. State-Level Strategy	15	11
Sub Total	15	11
Selection Criteria		
Policy Context for Charter Schools		
1. Policy Context	5	5
Sub Total	5	5
Selection Criteria		
Past Performance		
1. Past Performance	10	8
Quality of Plan to Support Ed. Dis. Students		
1. Ed. Dis. Students	15	15
Vision for Growth and Accountability		
1. Growth and Accountability	10	8
Dissemination of Information and Best Practices		
1. Dissemination	10	10
Oversight of Public Chartering Agencies		
1. Oversight of Authorizers	15	15
Management Plan and Theory of Action		
1. Management Plan	10	10
Project Design		
1. Project Design	10	10
Sub Total	80	76
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
High-Quality Authorizing and Monitoring Processes		
1. CPP 1	15	13
Sub Total	15	13
Competitive Preference Priority		
Authorizer other than LEA or Appeal Process		

1. CPP 2

	5	5
Sub Total	5	5
Total	120	110

Technical Review Form

Panel #25 - SEA Panel - 27: 84.282A

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: South Carolina Department of Education (U282A150032)

Questions

Selection Criteria - State-Level Strategy

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the State-level strategy for using charter schools to improve educational outcomes for students throughout the State. In determining the quality of the State-level strategy, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The extent to which the SEA 's CSP activities, including the subgrant program, are integrated into the State s overall strategy for improving student academic achievement and attainment (including high school graduation rates and college and other postsecondary education enrollment rates) and closing achievement and attainment gaps, and complement or leverage other statewide education reform efforts;

2) The extent to which funding equity for charter schools (including equitable funding for charter school facilities) is incorporated into the SEA' s State-level strategy; and

3) The extent to which the State encourages local strategies for improving student academic achievement and attainment that involve charter schools, including but not limited to the following:

i. Collaboration, including the sharing of data and promising instructional and other practices, between charter schools and other public schools or providers of early learning and development programs or alternative education programs; and

ii. The creation of charter schools that would serve as viable options for students who currently attend, or would otherwise attend, the State 's lowest-performing schools.

Strengths:

The applicant states strong support for charter schools as a provider of options that generate the multiple and varied pathways for stakeholders. On pages 9 and 10 the state proposes to:

- incorporate charter improvement and innovation into schools statewide
- expand support for charters
- invigorate innovation efforts within state public schools
- increase the number of charter schools –
- assess and supporting high quality charter schools
- share and sustain innovation statewide throughout the public school system based on charter school success
- increase charter school success
- bolster the accreditation system to ensure charter school credibility

The SEA indicates plans are in place to expand staffing for implementation of a sound plan to disseminate charter school best practices to schools statewide. Strategies for this initiative include:

- Innovation collaboration
- sharing data and charter school promising practices among charter schools and other public schools (Page 15)
- reporting provides of the effectiveness of innovative practices throughout the state.
- professional learning opportunities

The applicant discusses a commitment to reduce the number of low performing schools as an effort to expand opportunity for quality school choice for students who are likely to attend low performing schools. Additionally, the SEA will give competitive priorities as a component of the subgrant process for applicants who indicate an intent to create effective

schools for these targeted communities. (page 17)

Weaknesses:

Charter schools authorized by the state Charter School Department do not currently receive equitable funding. (Page 29-30) More detail on efforts to reduce or eliminate this discrepancy during the grant cycle would improve the response in this area.

The application lacks details on plans to develop and implement a facility revolving loan program that was mandated by state law (Section 59-40-175) three years ago. (Page 29) The applicant would be strengthened in this area with the addition of details of a comprehensive plan to establish a facility loan program that includes elements such as timelines, criteria, and selection process, as well as a description of efforts to reduce an extensive debt burden on schools who receive the loans.

Reader's Score: 11

Selection Criteria - Policy Context for Charter Schools

1. The Secretary considers the policy context for charter schools under the proposed project. In determining the policy context for charter schools under the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The degree of flexibility afforded to charter schools under the State's charter school law, including:

i. The extent to which charter schools in the State are exempt from State or local rules that inhibit the flexible operation and management of public schools; and

ii. The extent to which charter schools in the State have a high degree of autonomy, including autonomy over the charter schools budget, expenditures, staffing, procurement, and curriculum;

2) The quality of the SEA's processes for:

i. Annually informing each charter school in the State about Federal funds the charter school is eligible to receive and Federal programs in which the charter school may participate; and

ii. Annually ensuring that each charter school in the State receives, in a timely fashion, the school's commensurate share of Federal funds that are allocated by formula each year, particularly during the first year of operation of the school and during a year in which the school's enrollment expands significantly; and

3) The quality of the SEA's plan to ensure that charter schools that are considered to be LEAs under State law and LEAs in which charter schools are located will comply with sections 613(a)(5) and 613(e)(1)(B) of IDEA (20 U.S.C. 1400, et seq.), the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (42 U.S.C. 6101, et seq.), title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d, et seq.), title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. 1681, et seq.), and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794).

Strengths:

The application indicates a recent 78% increase in state charters is likely attributed to the flexibilities and autonomy afforded to charter schools under the state's Charter Schools Act of 2010. Charters function as independent public schools under a non-profit management structure and independent control of all school operations. An example is provided as evidence of changes, such as charters schools being exempt from maintaining a school improvement council. (State Charter School Act. section 59-40-50(A). Additionally the fact that state charters have the flexibility autonomy to

--innovate programming

--modify the organizational structure

--convert charter status

--choose an authorizer (Page 16)

The applicant reports specific procedures are in place to ensure charter schools are notified regarding federal funding opportunities. The procedures appear to indicate a sound process is in place and notification efforts include press releases and listserve posts. The process includes timely notification of federal entitlement grants to which the schools are eligible. The state's charter schools act supports this effort by mandating authorizing district includes these schools in federal formula grant applications.

Additionally, the proposal describes the process for stakeholders to establish a charter school through the transformation of an existing public school through a charter school conversion process is clearly described. This initiative is embedded in state law and is an indication of strong charter school support. (Page 16)

Weaknesses:

There were no weaknesses evident in this area.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Past Performance

1. The Secretary considers the past performance of charter schools in a State that enacted a charter school law for the first time five or more years before submission of its application. In determining the past performance of charter schools in such a State, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The extent to which there has been a demonstrated increase, for each of the past five years, in the number and percentage of high-quality charter schools (as defined in this notice) in the State;

2) The extent to which there has been a demonstrated reduction, for each of the past five years, in the number and percentage of academically poor-performing charter schools (as defined in this notice) in the State; and

3) Whether, and the extent to which, the academic achievement and academic attainment (including high school graduation rates and college and other postsecondary education enrollment rates) of charter school students equal or exceed the academic achievement and academic attainment of similar students in other public schools in the State over the past five years.

Strengths:

The proposal states the SEA's evaluation of charter school performance over the previous past five years is informed by a variety of data sources including (Page 21-22)

--state assessment results,

--ESEA accountability system scores,

--graduation rates, and

--composite data from the state's value-added assessment system

The data chart found on page 22 indicates significant effectiveness in key areas and supports SEA goals to increase the number of charter schools. Additionally, the data reveals that over the most recent five year period the total number of charters has increased from 37 to 58. This data reveals a solid history of past performance and indicates the charter schools have likely had a positive impact on education in comparison to traditional public school students throughout the state, particularly in the areas of academic achievement, graduation rates, and post secondary enrollment.

While the table indicates the number of high quality charter schools fell in 2012-2013 and the number of poor performing charter schools increased, the applicant provides an acceptable reason for this weaknesses and plans indicate solutions are in place to rectify these issues. (page 25)

The data table also reveals the baseline to be used for measuring the state education department's progress toward

meeting goals to decrease in the number of academically poor-performing charter schools. Additionally, an increase in the number of high-quality charter schools . These outcomes ensure the SEA has effective strategies in place based on data to make informed decisions regarding the closing or improving charter schools throughout the state.

Weaknesses:

The graduation rate for charter school students remains well below that of all students in traditional public schools throughout the state.

Reader's Score: 8

Selection Criteria - Quality of Plan to Support Ed. Dis. Students

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the SEA 's plan to support educationally disadvantaged students. In determining the quality of the plan to support educationally disadvantaged students, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The extent to which the SEA' s charter school subgrant program would--

i. Assist students, particularly educationally disadvantaged students, in meeting and exceeding State academic content standards and State student achievement standards; and

ii. Reduce or eliminate achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged students;

2) The quality of the SEA 's plan to ensure that charter schools attract, recruit, admit, enroll, serve, and retain educationally disadvantaged students equitably, meaningfully, and, with regard to educationally disadvantaged students who are students with disabilities or English learners, in a manner consistent with, as appropriate, the IDEA (regarding students with disabilities) and civil rights laws, in particular, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;

3) The extent to which the SEA will encourage innovations in charter schools, such as models, policies, supports, or structures, that are designed to improve the academic achievement of educationally disadvantaged students; and

4) The quality of the SEA 's plan for monitoring all charter schools to ensure compliance with Federal and State laws, particularly laws related to educational equity, nondiscrimination, and access to public schools for educationally disadvantaged students.

Strengths:

The SEA has incorporated a rigorous process intended to strengthen the system of support for educationally disadvantaged students, students with disabilities (SWD), and English language learners (ELL) into its plan for implementing academic standards in all schools, including charter schools (Page 24)

The proposal discusses a variety of sound strategies to ensure that the charter schools throughout the state attract, recruit, admit, enroll, serve, and retain educationally disadvantaged students equitably and meaningfully. Strategies include:

--charter application requirement to include a viable plan to attract and recruit students to enroll targeted student populations

--creating alternative education campus to meet the needs of significantly educationally disadvantaged student populations including students with disabilities and students with severe academic challenges

--the inclusion of specific competitive priorities in the CSP subgrant competition plans aimed at closing targeted achievement gaps based

--competitive priority points charters established in low performing districts or regions.

According to the narrative on pages 26-27, the SEA has a solid process in place to ensure charter schools and their

authorizers remain in full compliance with state and federal laws in key areas. These requirements are embedded in the subgrant application, annual reporting, and authorizers' Statement of Assurances (page 26-27)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were evident in this area.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Vision for Growth and Accountability

1. The Secretary determines the quality of the statewide vision, including the role of the SEA, for charter school growth and accountability. In determining the quality of the statewide vision, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The quality of the SEA' s systems for collecting, analyzing, and publicly reporting data on charter school performance, including data on student academic achievement, attainment (including high school graduation rates and college and other postsecondary education enrollment rates), retention, and discipline for all students and disaggregated by student subgroup;

2) The ambitiousness, quality of vision, and feasibility of the SEA' s plan (including key actions) to support the creation of high-quality charter schools during the project period, including a reasonable estimate of the number of high-quality charter schools in the State at both the beginning and the end of the project period; and

3) The ambitiousness, quality of vision, and feasibility of the SEA' s plan (including key actions) to support the closure of academically poor-performing charter schools in the State (i.e., through revocation, non-renewal, or voluntary termination of a charter) during the project period.

Note: In the context of closing academically poor-performing charter schools, we remind applicants of the importance of ensuring adherence to applicable laws, policies, and procedures that govern the closure of a charter school, the disposition of its assets, and the transfer of its students and student records.

Strengths:

According to the narrative the state Department of Education gathers data from the annual state-issued report card and the authorizers 'annual portfolio to monitor charter school performance. The SEA publishes the outcomes of this effort to the public annually on the webpage. (Pages 27-28) These strategies indicate a robust process is in place to inform the accountability process. Report cards data includes:

- disaggregated assessment data on overall student performance
- disaggregated assesement data for students by subgroups,
- attendance and discipline data
- graduation rate

This process reveals a sound foundation to monitor growth and accountability. Additionally the applicant discusses the responsibilities of charter authorizers to support these efforts including

- compiling a portfolio of all of their charter schools' annual reports.
- annual reporting that includes data as evidence of academic performance
- annual reporting on retention and discipline

The annual report appears to be appropriately to determine the level of effectiveness in terms of the charter contract. (page 27)

The table on page 29 outlines an ambitious state plan to award 114 subgrants during this grant cycle.

Weaknesses:

Plans to close poor performing charter schools are not clearly evident. (Criteria 3) The response in this area would be improved with the addition of a detailed summary of strategies expected to be implemented to support the closure of academically poor-performing charter schools in the State.

Reader's Score: 8

Selection Criteria - Dissemination of Information and Best Practices

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the SEA's plan to disseminate information about charter schools and best or promising practices of successful charter schools to each LEA in the State as well as to charter schools, other public schools, and charter school developers (20 U.S.C. 7221b(b)(2)(C) and 7221(c)(f)(6)). If an SEA proposes to use a portion of its grant funds for dissemination subgrants under section 5204(f)(6)(B) of the ESEA (20 U.S.C. 7221c(f)(6)(B)), the SEA should incorporate these subgrants into the overall plan for dissemination. In determining the quality of the SEA's plan to disseminate information about charter schools and best or promising practices of successful charter schools, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The extent to which the SEA will serve as a leader in the State for identifying and disseminating information and research (which may include, but is not limited to, providing technical assistance) about best or promising practices in successful charter schools, including how the SEA will use measures of efficacy and data in identifying such practices and assessing the impact of its dissemination activities;

2) The quality of the SEA's plan for disseminating information and research on best or promising practices used by, and the benefits of, charter schools that effectively incorporate student body diversity, including racial and ethnic diversity and diversity with respect to educationally disadvantaged students, consistent with applicable law;

3) The quality of the SEA's plan for disseminating information and research on best or promising practices in charter schools related to student discipline and school climate; and

4) For an SEA that proposes to use a portion of its grant funds to award dissemination subgrants under section 5204(f)(6)(B) of the ESEA (20 U.S.C. 7221a(f)(6)(B)), the quality of the subgrant award process and the likelihood that such dissemination activities will increase the number of high-quality charter schools in the State and contribute to improved student academic achievement.

Strengths:

The SEA appears committed to the creation of high quality charters and has developed a clear plan to disseminate best practices and provide training and technical assistance throughout the project period. It appears evident this process is likely to ensure high quality planning while building the capacity of schools throughout the state to identify and utilize promising practices.

The applicant describes a strong plan to communicate innovation and promising practices to key stakeholders. In particular, the SEA's plans to use a webinar focused on using charter school innovations, to meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged students is evidence of the SEA ensuring efforts in this area are targeted in pertinent ways that meet overall plan objectives. The applicant also describes various resources to be used to disseminate information on best practices (Pages 49-50) Additional strategies include a community partnership to facilitate technical assistance activities such as webinars, resource and research surrounding best practices.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses evident in this area.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Oversight of Public Chartering Agencies

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the SEA 's plan (including any use of grant administrative or other funds) to monitor, evaluate, assist, and hold accountable authorized public chartering agencies. In determining the quality of the SEA' s plan to provide oversight to authorized public chartering agencies, the Secretary considers how well the SEA' s plan will ensure that authorized public chartering agencies are --**
 - 1) **Seeking and approving charter school petitions from developers that have the capacity to create charter schools that can become high-quality charter schools;**
 - 2) **Approving charter school petitions with design elements that incorporate evidence-based school models and practices, including, but not limited to, school models and practices that focus on racial and ethnic diversity in student bodies and diversity in student bodies with respect to educationally disadvantaged students, consistent with applicable law;**
 - 3) **Establishing measureable academic and operational performance expectations for all charter schools (including alternative charter schools, virtual charter schools, and charter schools that include pre-kindergarten, if such schools exist in the State) that are consistent with the definition of high-quality charter school as defined in this notice;**
 - 4) **Monitoring their charter schools on at least an annual basis, including conducting an in-depth review of each charter school at least once every five years, to ensure that charter schools are meeting the terms of their charter or performance contracts and complying with applicable State and Federal laws;**
 - 5) **Using increases in student academic achievement as one of the most important factors in renewal decisions; basing renewal decisions on a comprehensive set of criteria, which are set forth in the charter or performance contract; and revoking, not renewing, or encouraging the voluntary termination of charters held by academically poor-performing charter schools;**
 - 6) **Providing, on an annual basis, public reports on the performance of their portfolios of charter schools, including the performance of each individual charter school with respect to meeting the terms of, and expectations set forth in, the school 's charter or performance contract;**
 - 7) **Supporting charter school autonomy while holding charter schools accountable for results and meeting the terms of their charters or performance contracts; and**
 - 8) **Ensuring the continued accountability of charter schools during any transition to new State assessments or accountability systems, including those based on college- and career-ready standards.**

Strengths:

The SCDE's charter associates offer regular technical assistance and advice to authorizers. Through these state department of education identified needs for more detailed guidance for authorizers. Additionally, an evaluation rubric template is provided by the state to guide the authorizers' development of charter applications. Outcomes from this rubric determine the developer's capacity to create a high-quality charter school.

The SEA will partner with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to develop a set of Principles and Standards (P&S) for Quality Charter School Authorizing and an accompanying authorizer evaluation tool. (Page 36-38) The SEA provides a template that includes the elements required to ensure the creation of high-quality charter schools. Authorizers can use this rubric in seeking, reviewing and approving charter school applications. (Page 35)

The proposal discusses ways in which the SEA will support authorizers to assist with the requirements for high quality

charter applications and provides an example of targeted technical assistance currently provided to charter groups to bolster charter application development in ways that improve plans to address the educational needs of their identified student populations. The SEA will also facilitate meetings to offer guidance for planning and organizational development of strong practices, differentiated for experienced and new chartering entities. (Page 35-36) These actions will bolster the authorizers' capacity to create and maintain high quality charter schools. This rigorous process indicates academic achievement is a key factor in the chartering process that informs the monitoring activities.

Each charter school is held accountable to the same state and Federal academic standards as all other public schools. The SEA issues annual report cards for charters. The results are posted on the organizations website and include school performance on state assessments. Authorizers are mandated to compile annual reports for schools it oversees in a portfolio for submittal to the state department of education and the outcomes are published on the SEA webpage. The schools are reviewed on an annual basis and annual reports are generated from this data. (page 36) Authorizers must use a two pronged process to evaluate their charter schools:

- the charter contract
- the annual report (Page 37)

Also, the results of authorizer evaluations are used to determine charter renewal or revocation. The SEA allows corrective actions or exercise sanctions in lieu of charter revocation in cases of where charter school performance or legal compliance is deficient. (Page 37)

The applicant discusses charter school autonomy and reveals strong state support to ensure charter schools are autonomous entities with flexibility provided through legal exemptions that apply to public schools and total control over their budgeting and expenditures in exchange for accountability and clear indications of student achievement. (Page 38)

According to the narrative, the SEA offers professional learning opportunities and technical assistance sessions to a broad group of stakeholders to address changes in statewide standards and accountability systems. These sessions are open to all school leaders, teachers, and instructional staff throughout the state to include charter schools and authorizers. (Page 38) These strategies are likely to ensure stakeholders are aware of pertinent changes in a timely manner.

Overall, these strategies and initiatives are an indication of strategies that are likely to ensure rigorous and continuous monitoring of the authorizing entities.

Weaknesses:

There are no weaknesses in this area.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Management Plan and Theory of Action

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan and the project 's theory of action. In determining the quality of the management plan and the project s theory of action, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The quality, including the cohesiveness and strength of reasoning, of the logic model (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) and the extent to which it addresses the role of the grant in promoting the State-level strategy for using charter schools to improve educational outcomes for students through CSP subgrants for planning, program design, and initial implementation; optional dissemination subgrants; optional revolving loan funds; and other strategies;

2) The extent to which the SEA' s project-specific performance measures, including any measures required by the Department, support the logic model; and

3) The adequacy of the management plan to --

i. Achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including the existence of clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks; and

ii. Address any compliance issues or findings related to the CSP that are identified in an audit or other monitoring review.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to propose a comprehensive management plan and theory of action for assessing the achievement of the objectives, including developing performance measures and performance targets for its proposed grant project that are consistent with those objectives. The applicant should clearly identify the project-specific performance measures and performance targets in its plan and should review the logic model application requirement and performance measures section of this notice for information on the requirements for developing those performance measures and performance targets consistent with the objectives of the proposed project. The applicant may choose to include a discussion of the project-specific performance measures and targets it develops in response to the logic model requirement when addressing this criterion.

Strengths:

The SEA states their plan to continue to use the CSP grant project to:

- focus on increasing public interest and understanding of charter schools and
- using funds to create more charter schools;
- sustain the 66 established charter schools.
- add more authorizers,
- generate more stakeholder involvement
- establishing a statewide advisory group
- improving SEA service
- increasing school achievement
- improving authorizer capacity to sustain successful school programs
- share charter school successes and innovation statewide
- used charter school innovation to inform improvements in the public school system (Page 39)

A comprehensive logic model is provided. The information within the chart indicates a solid plan to address the role of the grant in promoting state-level strategies. The connections are clear and the activities align well with expected outcomes over time. Also, a comprehensive, detailed timeline is provided that indicates a robust management plan that has the elements likely to support the meeting of state goals.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were found in this area.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Project Design

The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the SEA 's charter school subgrant program, including the extent to which the project design furthers the SEA' s overall strategy for increasing the number of high-quality charter schools in the State and improving student academic achievement. In determining the quality of the project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:

1) The quality of the SEA' s process for awarding subgrants for planning, program design, and initial implementation and, if applicable, for dissemination, including:

i. The subgrant application and peer review process, timelines for these processes, and how the SEA intends to ensure that subgrants will be awarded to eligible applicants demonstrating the capacity to create high-quality charter schools; and

ii. A reasonable year-by-year estimate, with supporting evidence, of

a) the number of subgrants the SEA expects to award during the project period and the average size of those subgrants, including an explanation of any assumptions upon which the estimates are based; and

b) if the SEA has previously received a CSP grant, the percentage of eligible applicants that were awarded subgrants and how this percentage related to the overall quality of the applicant pool;

2) The process for monitoring CSP subgrantees;

3) How the SEA will create a portfolio of subgrantees that focuses on areas of need within the State, such as increasing student body diversity or maintaining a high level of student body diversity, and how this focus aligns with the State-Level Strategy;

4) The steps the SEA will take to inform teachers, parents, and communities of the SEA' s charter school subgrant program; and

5) A description of any requested waivers of statutory or regulatory provisions over which the Secretary exercises administrative authority and the extent to which those waivers will, if granted, further the objectives of the project.

Strengths:

The proposal describes a comprehensive subgrant application process with three key components: the School and its Stakeholders, Financial Sustainability and the Management Plan (Appendix E, page E155). Each component is expected to be in place to ensure charter school success. Applications undergo peer review with a scoring rubric and an expectation of applicable state Charter School laws, federal laws and regulations, and guidelines. The review process will have three tiers

--Tier one will be the initial vetting of the subgrant applications

--Tier two will be the independent review of the subgrant application by three peer reviewers

--Tier three will be the review of the budget and awarding of competitive priorities to eligible applications (Page 52)

This application model is appropriately rigorous and is likely to ensure the recruitment of a pool of applicants capable of creating and sustaining high quality charter schools throughout the state.

On page 55 The applicant includes a chart outlining the monitoring process. It reveals a comprehensive plan to provide oversight of grant awardees for the duration of the grant cycle.

The applicant reports a process to support the creation of charter school options using the CSP subgrant funding. In particular, the proposal states subgrantees who create charter school options in areas where quality options are unavailable will form a portfolio of schools who will be awarded priority points on the CSP SEA application. Additionally, the SEA will use project funding to support subgrantees who focus on schools located in regions that provide quality choices to under resourced communities and/or low performing schools. Finally, a robust indicator of a strong project plan is the effort to utilize high quality charter schools as a strategy to improving low performing schools. (Pages 55-56)

The SEA has developed a comprehensive plan to inform teachers, parents, and communities of the charter school subgrant program that includes:

--Posting information to the charter website

--Announcements released via charter alliance contact lists

--Press releases

--Direct contact with charter developers

The state is requesting a waiver to extend the three year grant limit to provide additional time for charter developing stability for charter authorizers and applicants. This request appears appropriate to meet the goals of project design.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses are evident in this area.

Reader's Score: 10

Priority Questions**Competitive Preference Priority - High-Quality Authorizing and Monitoring Processes****1. Competitive Preference Priority 1: High-Quality Authorizing and Monitoring Processes**

To meet this priority, an applicant must demonstrate that all authorized public chartering agencies in the State use one or more of the following:

a) Frameworks and processes to evaluate the performance of charter schools on a regular basis that include--

1) Rigorous academic and operational performance expectations (including performance expectations related to financial management and equitable treatment of all students and applicants);

2) Performance objectives for each school aligned to those expectations;

3) Clear criteria for renewing the charter of a school based on an objective body of evidence, including evidence that the charter school has (a) met the performance objectives outlined in the charter or performance contract; (b) demonstrated organizational and fiscal viability; and (c) demonstrated fidelity to the terms of the charter or performance contract and applicable law;

4) Clear criteria for revoking the charter of a school if there is violation of law or public trust regarding student safety or public funds, or evidence of poor student academic achievement; and

5) Annual reporting by authorized public chartering agencies to each of their authorized charter schools that summarizes the individual school's performance and compliance, based on this framework, and identifies any areas that need improvement.

b) Clear and specific standards and formalized processes that measure and benchmark the performance of the authorized public chartering agency or agencies, including the performance of its portfolio of charter schools, and provide for the annual dissemination of information on such performance;

c) Authorizing processes that establish clear criteria for evaluating charter applications and include a multi-tiered clearance or review of a charter school, including a final review immediately before the school opens for its first operational year; or

d) Authorizing processes that include differentiated review of charter petitions to assess whether, and the extent to which, the charter school developer has been successful (as determined by the authorized public chartering agency) in establishing and operating one or more high-quality charter schools.

Strengths:

The applicant reports there is a template in place to serve as a framework to evaluate the performance of charter schools on a regular basis. The process appears appropriate to meet stated goals and includes the review and analysis of key indicators for success including: (Page 1)

--the number of students enrolled annually

--the student performance based upon goals specific to the school

-- a review of achievement gaps

--teacher quality

- financial performance

--board oversight

--evident of effectiveness regarding academic performance (Page 5)

There are clear and specific standards in place as established by the state department of education, and I alignment with national standards regarding the establishment of high quality schools. Authorizing processes described in this application indicate a clear criteria for evaluating charter applications that includes a multi-tiered review processes and flexibility for authorizers to differentiate eligibility based on goals to expand high quality schools. (Page 5-7)

Weaknesses:

It is not clearly evident that reviews are a mandated before a charter school opens. The addition of a brief statement that indicates the SEA or other governing entity requires an final review immediately before the school opens for its first operational year would improve the response in this area.

Reader's Score: 13

Competitive Preference Priority - Authorizer other than LEA or Appeal Process

1. Competitive Preference Priority 2:One Authorized Public Chartering Agency Other than a LEA, or an Appeals Process

To meet this priority, the applicant must demonstrate that the State--

a) Provides for one authorized public chartering agency that is not an LEA, such as a State chartering board, for each individual or entity seeking to operate a charter school pursuant to State law; or

b) In the case of a State in which LEAs are the only authorized public chartering agencies, allows for an appeals process for the denial of an application for a charter school.

Note: In order to meet this priority under paragraph (b) above, the entity hearing appeal must have the authority to approve the charter application over the objections of the LEA.

Strengths:

The applicant indicates there are three authorized public chartering agencies in the state, state charter school, Board of Trustees, local school boards, and institutions of higher education. Only LEAs can authorize charter schools. The proposal verifies a process exists for charters to appeal LEA authorizer decisions and that the appeals review body, which is the state's Administrative Law Court, has the power to override the LEA decisions regarding charter applications.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were evident in this area.

Reader's Score: 5

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