

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/05/2015 03:02 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Texas Education Agency (U282A150015)

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	4
Sub Total	5	4
Selection Criteria		
Past Performance		
1. Past Performance	10	6
Quality of Plan to Support Ed. Dis. Students		
1. Ed. Dis. Students	15	13
Vision for Growth and Accountability		
1. Growth and Accountability	10	7
Dissemination of Information and Best Practices		
1. Dissemination	10	10
Oversight of Public Chartering Agencies		
1. Oversight of Authorizers	15	13
Management Plan and Theory of Action		
1. Management Plan	10	9
Project Design		
1. Project Design	10	8
Sub Total	80	66
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
High-Quality Authorizing and Monitoring Processes		
1. CPP 1	15	12
Sub Total	15	12
Competitive Preference Priority		
Authorizer other than LEA or Appeal Process		

1. CPP 2

	5	5
Sub Total	5	5
Total	120	101

Technical Review Form

Panel #16 - SEA Panel - 17: 84.282A

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Texas Education Agency (U282A150015)

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 CSP activities are integrated within the overall Texas state accountability system that rates all schools in four areas: Student Achievement, Student Progress, Closing Performance Gaps; and Postsecondary Readiness (pages 1-2). This focus and coherence will enhance the impact of the CSP grant. The activities are also consistent with the TEA mission in the current strategic plan that will help assure continuation even when the grant funds come to an end (page 14). The TEA philosophy supports local control and having decisions made as close as possible to students, parents and the communities in which they live (page 15 -16).

The Texas Education Code designates the Commissioner of Education (COE) as the state leader responsible among other tasks for administering the distribution of both state and federal funds for ALL schools (page 15). The Foundation School Program allocates funding by formula based on a weighted average daily attendance. The FSP for open-enrollment charter schools is calculated using the state-wide average adjusted to reflect that these schools don't have access to local tax revenue (page 15). In addition, charter schools may receive funds for transportation (page 15). If a child attends a charter school, that child should be worth as much as any child in any public school in the state. Funding equity is important for the overall health of the charter school system.

Charter and traditional schools are encouraged to share best practices through Project Share, an online learning community and forum for sharing best practices. The pooled resources and knowledge of charter and traditional schools is likely to result in improved learning for all students (page 26 - 27). Schools that have been designated High-Performing and High-Progress Title 1 Reward Schools with high percentages of educationally disadvantaged students are being highlighted as part of a new case study project (page 27). Priority points will be awarded to CSP sub grant applications that intend to serve students who would have to remain in poor-performing schools classified as priority or focus schools

(page 23, 53). Strategies to share best practices have the potential to help all schools improve the achievement of all students.

Weaknesses:

There is no indication of charter facilities funding (page 15). Given the requirements charter schools must meet for health and safety, it is important for the state to take responsibility for funding and maintaining facilities.

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:

Charter schools in Texas through their governing boards have a high degree of autonomy over budgets and expenditures, personnel policies, school calendar, daily operations and instructional program, especially the open-enrollment charter schools (pages 16- 18, 34). Developers of the CSP grant have written additional safeguards for autonomy in the sub grant application (pages 17-18). Autonomy is essential to encourage innovation and the creation of new models for the 21st Century.

Robust systems are already in place to assure that charter schools know about the availability of federal funds and are assisted in receiving them so that they receive their fair share (page 18-19, 54-55).

There is a detailed system of monitoring and assistance to assure that charter schools that are considered LEAs comply with all federal and state regulations regarding IDEA and other applicable programs in the Charter FIRST ratings, Accreditation and the Division of Federal Fiscal Compliance and Reporting (pages 2 - 5, 19 -20, 23). Charter schools trade autonomy for accountability and proper use of public money is an essential measure of accountability. Having a robust system of monitoring and assistance for charter schools helps free the charter school to do what it should do best,

educate students.

Weaknesses:

It is unclear whether campus and campus program charters have the same degree of autonomy as the open-enrollment charters. If there are differences in autonomy, then it would be difficult to hold all charter schools to the same high accountability standards. It is also unclear how campus charter and campus program charter schools that are not LEAs will be informed and assured of funds. Because the campus and campus program charter schools are not LEAs, it is not clear how monitoring and assistance applies to them.

Reader's Score: 4

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 provides five years of data that indicate that there has been an increase in the number of high-performing charter schools (page 21). Graduation rates have increased in charter schools that use the standard accountability process and as of 2014 were above those of traditional schools even though charter schools serve a higher percentage of at risk students (page 22). Data are essential to provide feedback to the school, the authorizer, the state and the public.

Poor-performing charter schools have been closed: 2011-2013 from one to seven were closed per year; 7 in 2014; and 14 in 2015 (page 21). In 2014, the legislature significantly strengthened the revocation process (page 5). By closing low performing schools, new charter schools can be created that may demonstrate high quality and achievement.

The system (Public Education Information Management System) collects, analyzes and publicly reports data seems to be in place (page 24). The system helps make all schools accountable to the public to demonstrate achievement. This serves as motivation to improve and also makes it possible for low-achieving schools to identify and then learn from high-achieving schools.

Weaknesses:

It would have been helpful and give a full snapshot of five years of performance by charter schools if the data had been organized into a table that also included comparisons to similar students who attend traditional schools in achievement and graduation rates. The most pressing need for charter schools is to increase student achievement and if charter schools perform no better than traditional schools, they aren't working.

A table indicating year to year closures by charter type (open-enrollment, campus charter, campus program charter) for the past five years would have been helpful and fully addressed Factor 2. If data are to be useful, viewing them in a

friendly readable format is essential.

There is no comparison of academic achievement and attainment to indicate how charter school students compare to similar students in traditional schools except a brief mention on page 22 of graduation rates.

Reader's Score: 6

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:

There are systems in place to monitor and analyze data from all schools including program areas such as bilingual/EL learners, special education and Title 1 (page 22). Even more important, poor-performance triggers interventions (Program Monitoring and Intervention) (page 22-23). Additionally, charter schools targeted at areas in which students are stuck in traditional low-performing schools will receive extra points on the scoring rubric for CSP subgrant (page 23). Incentives are needed to encourage developers to locate charter schools where they have the potential to do the most good.

The subgrant application requires that applicant schools serve at least 30% of the students in specified groups in addition to demonstrating high achievement (page 53-54). By having a clear target, it is more likely that the developers will meet that target. Continuing business as usual hasn't worked in the past to provide high quality schools in poverty areas, targeting and incentivizing might.

In general, charter schools in Texas are designed to promote innovation (Abstract). One factor to be considered in dissemination of best practices is innovation, whether it is found in traditional or charter schools and shared through Project Share (page 26). The sub grant application is designed to ensure that innovation and diversity are double counted (page 50).

There are systems in place to monitor and analyze data from all schools including program areas such as bilingual/EL learners, special education and Title 1 that will help make schools and the general public aware of the performance of all students in order to find ways to improve (page 22). Even more important poor-performance triggers interventions that potentially can help improve schools before they fail (Program Monitoring and Intervention) (page 19, 22-23).

Weaknesses:

Efforts to spur innovation are not well articulated. If schools that exist don't work, creating innovative programs becomes imperative. It is not clear how innovation is being defined and operationalized in the application.

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:

One major strength of the TEA and COE is the monitoring systems that are in place and include academic, fiscal and compliance that authorizers must consider as they guide their portfolio of chartered schools (2-8, 18-20, 22-24, 31-33). Monitoring by authorizers and the state can help identify potential problems and solve them before a school is in crisis.

The vision, funded by the CSP grant, is quite modest and would result in 5 high-performing charter schools per year (pages 25, 41). If granted a waiver as requested on page 60, this would result in supporting the planning and implementation of 25 charter schools. More charter schools mean more options for parents and a fertile ground for trying innovative approaches in instruction, staffing, governance and other areas.

The plan is detailed and comprehensive with doable goals to be achieved through well-developed processes that include collaboration with The Network, TEA, the Education Service Center for Region 11 and the Texas Charter School Association (page 25). Additional TA through the Summer Summit and other methods of outreach to districts have the potential to result in improved authorizing and eventually the creation of HQ charter schools (page 25). Oversight and monitoring are absolutely strengths.

Weaknesses:

Given that there are 1,025 districts (counting charter schools that are LEAs 1,200) and the potential to create 240 open-enrollment charters and this number will increase to 305 by 2019 (page 6 & 26) and given the applicant didn't provide any

indication of the number of charter schools now operating, it is difficult to judge if this is ambitious. On page 42 of the project description, the applicant proposes to increase the number of charter school campuses by at least 30 (page 42). It isn't clear if these 30 are the same as the 5 high performing charter schools per year.

Because the applicant didn't describe a plan to reach educationally disadvantaged students in their communities, it is unclear if the plan to increase the number of students by 10% includes and increases the number of educationally disadvantaged students served, and if so by how much (page 42).

Reader's Score: 7

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:

Texas does not propose to fund dissemination sub grants. Instead, it will encourage and use processes in place such as Project Share, cross sector interviews of principals, case studies (pages 26-28). TEA will also reach out to districts through TA and capacity building activities such as Summer Summit (pages 26 - 28). The success of charter schools depends on close ties to the local community and building the capacity of the entire community.

The state accountability processes already in place provide yearly reports to all stakeholders as one form of dissemination (page 1 - 5). Grant funds won't supplant but add to dissemination efforts. A strength of the grant activities is differentiated outreach designed to address different types of charter schools: Open-Enrollment; and Campus Charters/Campus Program Charters that will likely increase the quality of sub grant applications in areas of need (29-31). In the Open-Enrollment charter application, two important factors are whether the program is innovative and whether it serves diverse student populations (page 30).

Project Share and the case studies project include the critical area of school climate. The case studies are already online (page 27). The CSP evaluation will be conducted by an external researcher and add to the identification and dissemination of best practices (page 27-28). In addition the PEIMS will report school discipline and can be

disaggregated by subgroup (page 24). One important factor often overlooked in common assessment is school climate or ethos that can have an impact on whether a student learns or not. Building opportunities for professionals to assess and share their best practices in this area are appropriate and can lead to improving schools.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

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 proposed activities based on past experiences and a strong management plan will likely result in the creation of high-quality charter schools (pages 28 - 31, 52-56, Charter Application Attachment, Summer Summit Attachment, Network School Board Training Session Schedule Attachment, Network Texas Charter School Assistance & Support Attachment).

The chartering authorization processes for Open-enrollment charter schools are rigorous and comprehensive. They are reviewed externally by 5 evaluators to assure that the educational plan, assessment and evaluation are designed to be

effective in serving the community. The final award of the charter is done by the Commissioner of Education (page 9, Open-enrollment Application in the Attachments). Checks and balances in the processes are likely to result in higher quality charter schools that are prepared for the many challenges of creating a school.

Texas has a comprehensive, coherent, rigorous accountability system for charter and all schools. The framework has clear expected performance and multiple measures designed to assure high performance. Components of the program include four indices of student achievement with accountability ratings based on each achievement target: Student Achievement, Student Progress, Closing Performance Gaps; and Postsecondary Readiness (page 2). The more performance feedback from multiple measures a school and authorizer receive the easier it is to identify strengths and weaknesses and devise a plan to move forward to higher achievement.

In addition to annual reporting, charter schools may be periodically reviewed (page 4). Legislation in 2013 established new criteria for charter renewal, an in depth process, that have three possible outcomes: expedited renewal, discretionary renewal and non-renewal/expiration (page 5, 9-12 & see Open-Enrollment Charter Renewal Application for Contract End Date of July 31, 2015 and Renewal Process Flowchart in the Attachments). The Division of Federal Fiscal Compliance and Reporting announce, monitor and oversee the use of federal money (page 19).

One of the most important factors in determining if a charter will be renewed is student achievement (page 8). Expectations concerning academic achievement are clear from the application through the annual reviews and ratings given for performance. One of the reasons charter schools were created was to improve student achievement by being free to use innovative programs and new ways to operate. With clear expectations and multiple valid assessments, charter schools that don't work can be closed and make room for a school that does work.

Clear and appropriate yearly required reports provide the public with detailed information about academic performance through the State Accountability system; fiscal health through Charter FIRST, accreditation, & the overall assessment in the Charter School Performance Framework (page 1). We live in an age of transparency when the public wants to have evidence of how the schools near them or which their child attends are performing so having understandable data that is easily accessible is essential.

Charter school governing boards in Texas have a high degree of autonomy over budgets and expenditures, personnel policies, school calendar, daily operations and instructional program, especially the open-enrollment charter schools, that they have received in trade for more accountability (pages 16- 18, 34). Developers of the CSP grant have written additional safeguards for autonomy in the sub grant application (pages 17-18). Maximum flexibility allows charter schools to try new ideas and function in different ways. Some will work and others won't but without autonomy schools are forced back into the way schools always have been.

Weaknesses:

The application processes for campus and campus program charters are not clear. The application does not mention whether Texas has virtual or alternative schools and if so, if all of the processes and accountability apply to them. It is important to create a portfolio of charter schools that have the potential to meet the diverse needs of students including the educationally disadvantaged students and to provide appropriate oversight and monitoring for each. It is unclear whether campus and campus program charters have the same degree of autonomy as the open-enrollment charters. Without autonomy, the campus charters are not likely to try innovative programs or new ways of operating.

Reader's Score: 13

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 state-level strategies are integrated to assure that the CSP grant is being used as an integral part of the entire system (page 57). The model provides a comprehensive overview of inputs, activities, outputs and short, medium and long-term outcomes that are reasonable and likely to accomplish the goals of the CSP. The logic model is operationalized by the management plan and theory of action including beginning dates, activities/milestones and person responsible (page 36-45).

For each of the two objectives, there are clear and reasonable performance and process measures that are likely to demonstrate whether the objective has been met (pages 41- 45). The activities and timeline for the 2015-16 year are clear and seem appropriate. While the Division of Charter School Administration is the division responsible for most activities, utilizing the expertise of other divisions such as the Division of Financial Compliance is likely to strengthen the program (pages 36-40).

Weaknesses:

The logic model chart would have been more understandable if the Inputs, Activities, Outputs and Outcomes were aligned to show the link and relationship between them. Objective 1 performance measure 4 might be more effective if there was a quality indicated not just the fact that people attended (page 42). The definition of New Designation Charter is unclear.

Reader's Score: 9

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 subgrant process is excellent. It provides for external review by experts, score adjustments for highest and lowest score and compliance review (page 46). The application requires descriptions of the components that must be in place before a charter school can become high performing (page 47-48). Estimates for the number of sub grants to be awarded is based on past experience which is likely the most reasonable and effective predictor (page 48). In the previous CSP grant 14 of 19 applicants were funded (page 48).

The process for monitoring sub grantees is clear and appropriate. It includes an initial site visit followed by monitoring of spending by the DCSA and interim progress reports. The initial visit will be likely to catch any problems early in the cycle so that the charter schools with awards can correct deficiencies (page 49). In addition, these charter schools will be monitored on the regular cycle for all schools (page 50). In general, data collection, analysis and reporting are strengths.

The CSP sub grant objectives reinforce and extend the statewide strategies for improving students and school performance especially for educationally disadvantaged students (page 1-2 and 52-53). The CSP will strengthen the creation of high-performing charter schools that better meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged students through the application that requires a community needs assessment, objectives aligned with the needs and likely to result in improved student achievement (page 47). The application must specify the number of students to be served during the first year of implementation that would otherwise attend a low-performing traditional school designated as priority or focus schools (page 47).

On pages 50 and 51, the processes by which CSP grant information will be publicized are listed. The Activities/Milestones in the plan specify that letters will be sent to superintendents of independent school districts, video conference/webinars will be presented in advance of the subgrant deadline (page 36).

Texas has requested a waiver of PL 107-110 Section 5202 (c)(1) (page 60). If granted, the grant period would be extended from three to five years in length and allow more time to demonstrate success.

Weaknesses:

Results of the previous CSP grant awards were not presented. It was not possible to judge the impact of the grant on the number of high-quality, high-performing charter schools. This application requests \$50,526,315.00 (page e5). However, it is not clear how the funds will be used, how the award sizes were calculated and what the award sizes will be to each school. It is not clear how parents, the community and diverse stakeholder groups would receive information about the CSP.

Reader's Score: 8

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:

Texas has a comprehensive, rigorous accountability system for charter schools. The framework provides clear expected performance and multiple measures designed to assure high performance. Clarity at the beginning of the chartering process is more likely to result in higher quality charter schools and assure a no excuses accountability. Components of the program include four indices of student achievement with accountability ratings based on each achievement target:

Student Achievement, Student Progress, Closing Performance Gaps; and Postsecondary Readiness. The Charter School Finance Integrity Rating System of Texas (Charter FIRST) is a comprehensive financial accountability process that results in a financial accountability rating based on multiple indicators. Academic and financial health is combined in TEA accreditation which, in addition to indices used above monitor program effectiveness and compliance (pages 1- 3). High performing charter schools must be both academically and fiscally sound in order to become sustainable. The purpose of charter schools is integrated into the mission of the TEA and strategic plan (page 14).

Since 2013, Texas has worked with NACSA to develop the Charter School Performance Framework based on best practices in many areas which will be used to evaluate charter schools annually and publish results (pages 3 - 4). The charter application is comprehensive, clear and well publicized (see Open Enrollment Charter Application in the Attachments). Strengthening authorizers will help improve the portfolios of charter schools and result in a higher performing system of charter schools.

In addition to annual reporting, charter schools may be periodically reviewed (page 4). Legislation in 2013 established new criteria for charter renewal that have three possible outcomes: expedited renewal, discretionary renewal and non-renewal/expiration that provide flexibility for authorizers (page 5, 9-12 & see Open-Enrollment Charter Renewal Application for Contract End Date of July 31, 2015 and Renewal Process Flowchart in the Attachments).

Weaknesses:

It isn't clear if all of the district authorizers have rigorous standards and processes for soliciting applications, judging applications, monitoring compliance and renewing contracts (page 5). This is a difficulty for the state because it may result in uneven instead of a high performing charter schools.

Reader's Score: 12

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:

There are two routes applicants might take to become chartered: 1) independent school districts which authorize campus charters and campus program charters; and 2) the Commissioner of Education who can award charters (open-enrollment) to public colleges, universities and junior colleges. Both routes lead to legally binding charter or performance contracts (page 6). Open-enrollment charter schools are considered LEAs but campus charters and campus program charters are a part of their school district authorizer that is an LEA. Having more than one authorizer is likely to lead to the creation of more innovative and creative models and so provide a testing ground for best practices. Multiple authorizers make it possible to meet the needs of a diverse set of applicants and result in a variety of charter schools, not one size fits all.

Weaknesses:

None noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/05/2015 03:02 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/03/2015 11:44 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Texas Education Agency (U282A150015)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
State-Level Strategy		
1. State-Level Strategy	15	13
Sub Total	15	13
Selection Criteria		
Policy Context for Charter Schools		
1. Policy Context	5	3
Sub Total	5	3
Selection Criteria		
Past Performance		
1. Past Performance	10	7
Quality of Plan to Support Ed. Dis. Students		
1. Ed. Dis. Students	15	11
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	14
Management Plan and Theory of Action		
1. Management Plan	10	9
Project Design		
1. Project Design	10	7
Sub Total	80	66
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
High-Quality Authorizing and Monitoring Processes		
1. CPP 1	15	15
Sub Total	15	15
Competitive Preference Priority		
Authorizer other than LEA or Appeal Process		

1. CPP 2

	5	5
Sub Total	5	5
Total	120	102

Technical Review Form

Panel #16 - SEA Panel - 17: 84.282A

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Texas Education Agency (U282A150015)

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:

Texas Education Agency (TEA) has integrated the purpose of charter schools into the agency's mission and strategic plan (p. 14). The agency mission clearly addresses student achievement and attainment, including high school graduation and post-secondary enrollment. Texas FSP funding is equivalent for charters based on attendance with supplements for additional student needs and transportation funding is also available to charters from TEA (p. 15). Texas describes a best practices case-study project, which includes two charter schools, designed to showcase how High Performing and High Progress Title I Reward Schools effectively serve economically disadvantaged students and disseminate this information to other schools (p. 27). The state also encourages all LEAs to use Project Share, an online learning community for all LEAs (p. 27). Texas plans to allow subgrant preference points for charters planning to serve students who would attend priority or focus schools (p. 16).

Weaknesses:

The state does not provide information on quantifiable state goals for charters in the areas of student achievement and attainment, and the state plan does not address closing achievement gaps. There is no mention of the state providing charter school facilities funding.

Reader's Score: 13

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:

Texas charter schools are provided with a high degree of autonomy and flexibility, with clear exemptions for charters from areas of statute. There is some variation by charter type, but all charters authorized by SBOE and COE have autonomy over budgets, expenditures, personnel policies, school calendar, and school operations and management (p. 17). The application provides clear evidence that both LEA charters and those under LEA authorizers provide strong notification regarding available funding (p. 18-19). TEA also provides information on how they fund strong technical assistance for charter LEAs, which much provide and manage special education services, at 20 Service Centers.

Weaknesses:

The application provides insufficient information to evaluate the level of autonomy and flexibility offered to campus charters (p. 17). The applicant is not clear in describing the proportion of charters granted autonomy vs. campus charters with lesser autonomy. This makes it difficult to assess the response to the factors, as it is unclear how many charters are applying for federal funding directly to TEA. There is no information from the applicant on how funding information is provided to campus charters or how funding is reliably passed through to campus charters by the LEAs. Texas clearly describes how charters receive information about their share of federal funding allocated by formula (p. 19), but does not describe if or how the funds are distributed to schools in a timely fashion.

Reader's Score: 3

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 provides data on the steady increase in the number of high-quality charters (p. 21) The applicant provides data on increased school closures from 2013 to the present and links this ability to reduce the number of low performing schools in the state. The state strengthened its revocation law and increased the authority for the commissioner to require the closure of consistently low-performing charter schools (p. 21). This statutory authority to close low-performing schools suggests the state's plan to more quickly reduce the number of poor-performing charter schools is feasible.

Weaknesses:

The state provides only four years of data on charter school performance and does not provide information on percentage of high-quality charters. There is missing data on post-secondary enrollment rates. Overall, Texas provides inadequate data to make a comparison of the performance of charter schools with traditional public schools (p. 22).

Reader's Score: 7

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:

Both the PBMAS and PMI provide clear and predictable systems for monitoring student data and progress on multiple student indicators (p. 22-23). The plan also includes offering priority points in subgrant competitions to schools planning to serve Focus/Priority school students (p. 23).

Weaknesses:

Despite the description of the PBMAS and the PMI staff, the state does not provide specific information on the indicators that are tracked, such as achievement gaps. The plan here is pretty directive and would seem to work against autonomy described earlier in the application. The application notes if “non-compliance, student performance, or program effectiveness concerns are identified, school districts and charter schools are required to participate” in targeted activities as determined by the state (p. 23). The application also does not address a plan to ensure that charter schools are recruiting and retaining educationally disadvantaged students.

Reader's Score: 11

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:

Texas provides great details on data systems and available information on charter schools within the PEIMS, including specific indicators of achievement and attainment, retention, and discipline (p. 24). The state provides an ambitious vision for expanding charter schools (p. 25). Texas also plans outreach to LEAs that have not yet authorized charters to increase the number of high-quality campus charters (p. 26). Texas also provides a quality plan for supporting the closure of low-performing charters, including the revised statute on revocation and non-renewal and the role of the conservator in closing schools (p. 26).

Weaknesses:

Texas does not clearly articulate data to help evaluate the vision for growth in the state. At various places, the applicant notes growing the number of high-performing charters by 5 per year (15 in the 3 year grant period or 25 if granted the

requested waiver) (p. 25). On p. 42, the applicant notes a planned expansion by 30 campuses per year. It is unclear if this is a definitional issue in the meaning of charter and campus or if the state expects 25 non-high-quality charters to be approved annually. Since the exact number of charter schools the state expects to fund as part of this plan is unclear, it makes it difficult to evaluate the feasibility of the state plan for growth and accountability.

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 application describes many examples of TEA leadership in identifying and disseminating information and research. "Project Share," the online learning platform for all TX schools and students is one key example. The best practices case study project, and case studies created from interviews with school leaders through Texas Comprehensive Center (Austin), are also great examples of how the state will disseminate information about school climate, academic performance of students from economically disadvantaged families, and leadership effectiveness (p. 27). TEA and the Texas Charter Schools Association also host an annual Summit as an opportunity for collaboration (p. 25). The TEA Research Division will issue an RFP to evaluate the grant and the dissemination practices (p. 28).

Weaknesses:

None noted

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 state provides a highly detailed oversight plan, including oversight of LEA authorizing practices (p. 30). The state provided a thorough appendix on open-enrollment application process, including the role of external reviewers, and a brief description of campus charter application processes. Texas provides clear expectations for student achievement and inclusion as a major factor in renewal decisions (p. 10). TEA ensures that monitoring of charter schools occurs annually and includes on-site monitoring and a program of corrective measures (p. 32). Annual evaluation of all charter schools by authorizers is required by state statute and all ratings are published on the TEA website. The state also requires annual reporting on open-enrollment charter schools with comparison to traditional schools (p. 31). Texas explains that it does not plan to change its assessment or accountability system during the grant period (p. 35).

Weaknesses:

The state does not provide information on the campus charter authorizing process. While the application acknowledges the autonomy of charter schools, it does not clearly describe a plan for how the SEA will ensure that authorizers preserve that autonomy while holding schools accountable (p. 34).

Reader's Score: 14

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 state provides a highly detailed logic model (p. 57), which is supported by and aligned with thorough performance measures that describe the role of the grant in supporting the state plan to increase high-performing charter schools and improving educational outcomes (p. 41-45).

Weaknesses:

The management plan does not provide adequate information to evaluate the efficacy of the staffing model, which is only briefly overviewed on p. 35. The timeline of activities is sparse and ends in 2016, despite a waiver request to extend the grant period through 2020 (p. 40). The management plan does not address how the state will handle any audit or monitoring findings.

Reader's Score: 9

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:

Texas provides a detailed plan for the subgrant RFPs, evaluation criteria and consideration process. The state describes the proposed plans for subawards using evidence from prior years' experience with the grant program. TEA provides adequate detail on monitoring and site visits (p. 49-50).

Weaknesses:

While the state grounds their plan for subawards in historical data on the size of applicant pool versus awards made, they do not provide any information on the quality of the outcomes for those past awardees. This makes it difficult to evaluate whether the large size of sub-awards is reasonable. Texas provides limited information on notification of parents, teachers and seems to rely on website information only (p. 51)

Reader's Score: 7

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:

All charter schools in Texas undergo annual evaluation on a financial integrity rating system (FIRST), an academic accountability system, and the charter school performance framework (CSPF) (p. 10). Each school is issued an "accreditation status" based on the reviews. Charter renewals occur at an initial five year term and then on 10 year terms thereafter (p. 10). Charter schools may earn expedited renewal based on prior high-quality performance (p. 10). Texas also provides for automatic expiration of a charter based on consistent low performance (p. 11). Reasons for revocation are clearly indicated in the state statute (p. 12) and the public is able to access accountability data for charter schools on the TEA website. Texas also described a clear and rigorous charter application and authorization process used by the COE, including an external review of applications by qualified reviewers (p. 9).

Weaknesses:

None noted

Reader's Score: 15

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:

Texas has two categories of authorizers: LEA authorizers, which authorize campus charter schools, and universities and the SBOE, which authorize open enrollment charter schools (p. 13).

Weaknesses:

None noted

Reader's Score: 5

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/03/2015 11:44 AM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/03/2015 11:44 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Texas Education Agency (U282A150015)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
State-Level Strategy		
1. State-Level Strategy	15	13
Sub Total	15	13
Selection Criteria		
Policy Context for Charter Schools		
1. Policy Context	5	4
Sub Total	5	4
Selection Criteria		
Past Performance		
1. Past Performance	10	7
Quality of Plan to Support Ed. Dis. Students		
1. Ed. Dis. Students	15	13
Vision for Growth and Accountability		
1. Growth and Accountability	10	10
Dissemination of Information and Best Practices		
1. Dissemination	10	10
Oversight of Public Chartering Agencies		
1. Oversight of Authorizers	15	13
Management Plan and Theory of Action		
1. Management Plan	10	10
Project Design		
1. Project Design	10	7
Sub Total	80	70
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	105

Technical Review Form

Panel #16 - SEA Panel - 17: 84.282A

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: Texas Education Agency (U282A150015)

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:

According to the proposal, charter schools are embedded in the the state's overall strategic plan with a strong set of goals. It appears evident the SEA has developed processes to support the state's commitment to charter schools state wide. Particularly well developed are the areas of funding and monitoring, and overall there is evidence that indicates the state level strategy is integrated in the SEA goals for charter schools. Key strategies include: (Page 14)

- enhanced student achievement
- expanded school choice options
- recruiting new teacher
- implementing new public school accountability
- innovative learning

The proposal indicates a clearly articulated state strategy guided by the SEA initiative "Putting Schools First", (Page 7), and the SEA has developed processes to support the state's commitment and supports charter schools state wide. The processes are particularly well-developed in the areas of funding and monitoring, all of which indicate the state level strategy is integrated in the SEA goals for charter schools.

The proposal indicates funding for charters and traditional schools are disbursed from a common funding source. The model for funding charters appears robust and includes: (Page 15)

- weighted attendance based on the type of student served
- state-wide averages
- transportation funding

Collaboration to share data among pertinent stakeholders (Page 27) is encouraged and appears to be robust. Particularly

unique is the SEA initiative to use 2 charter school campuses, along with 9 other non-charter schools as case studies for best practices along with posting promising practices on a popular online forum as a key platform to disseminate best practices. This effort supports SEA objectives to encourage local strategies for improving academic achievement and key strategies include:

- a focus on high quality school goals
- effective operations
- leadership input
- dissemination of the case studies for public review via the SEA website

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not address funding strategies to bridge the lack of tax funding for charter schools. Due to this it is unclear if an equitable formula for the allotment of funds for charter schools is in place. (Criteria 2)

The proposal does not clearly describe how the SEA addresses funding for facilities. (Criteria 2) The response in this area would be improved with the addition of a brief description of strategies or initiatives expected to be in place to ensure equitable funding for charter schools state wide.

Reader's Score: 13

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 describes examples of ways in which charter schools are afforded flexibility that is supported by state law while remaining in keeping with regional and national requirements. The summary indicates a state wide commitment to charter school autonomy in key areas including: (Pages 15-17)

- financial management
- operations including personnel policy

- learning environments
- curriculum

Additionally, school districts are accountable for providing evidence that autonomy is upheld among the charter schools operating in the district and it appears evident the flexibility exceeds the autonomy generally afforded public schools throughout the state. (Page 17)

The proposal cites state law, S.S. TEC 12.106(b), as evidence of the state's commitment to ensuring charter schools receive available federal and discretionary funding. The state Division of Charter schools is accountable for ensuring charters are notified of funding to which they are entitled and the proposal describes a set of procedures to support this effort including: (Page 18)

- updating information regarding new charters
- weekly disbursement of formal notifications
- website posting of formal notifications

It appears evident that the state has established a comprehensive process to support the timely allocation of federal formula funding. (Pages 18-19) The process incorporates:

- direct charter school notification of entitlement grant opportunities, including additional steps for 1st year charter schools
- a robust e-Grants online platform for submitting funding request
- direct notification and instructions to apply for additional funding opportunities for charter schools

The applicant discloses specific charters the state considers LEAs and provides an description of strategies to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The process appears adequate and in compliance with sections 613(a)(5) and 613(e)(1)(B) of IDEA (20 U.S.C. 1400, et seq.) Strategies are in place to support these efforts include (Page 20)

- site based special education staff who collaborate external professionals to provide services
- a two pronged process for reporting students with disability academic achievement based on state assessments
- annual SEA monitoring of district various results for students with disabilities
- SEA funding for technical assistance

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly articulate the level of autonomy of non-LEA campus schools, therefore, this ambiguity impacts the determination of the level of flexibility and autonomy for all factors.

Reader's Score: 4

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 indicates the state has experienced recent increases in the number of high quality charter schools state wide and cites a growth from 35 high performing charters to 57 high performing in the last five years. (Page 21) Additionally, state law was recently bolstered to support efforts to reduce the number and percentage of academically poor-performing charter schools, (Page 21) This indicates solid efforts that are likely to ensure a continuance of positive trends in this area.

The narrative states SEA policy for the previous two years has mandated charter revocations for schools failing to meet academic performance goals and/or failing to meet fiduciary requirements. As evidence of the improved effort, the applicant compares years 2014 and 2015 which indicates the number of poor performing school closures has doubled from 7 to 14 annually. (Page 21) This is likely an indication of committed efforts to ensure a reduction of poor performing schools in the previous five years.

Weaknesses:

Based on the data provided in the application, the state has failed to implement a process to ensure graduation rates meet or exceed those of traditional public schools. The response in this area would be improved with a brief description of models, strategies, or initiatives to be implemented during the grant cycle to address the graduation gap. (Page 22)

Past performance indicates significant fluctuations in the area of expanding the options for high performing charter schools during the previous five years. Additionally, the proposal indicates there are only slight increments of increase overall. Due to this it is unclear whether the state has been effective at increasing the number of high-quality charters over the previous five years. (page 21)

The applicant does not clearly indicate comparisons between traditional and charter schools, nor does the proposal clearly articulate specific comparisons between traditional schools and the three different types of LEA and non-LEA schools. This lack of information impacts evaluation of all three criteria in this area. Additional information comparing LEA and non-LEA charters schools to traditional schools would provide a better understanding of the state's efforts in this area.

Reader's Score: 7

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 narrative indicates the SEA uses a comprehensive, data driven process to assist educationally disadvantaged students meet achievement goals. The details provided indicate a targeted commitment to ensure objectives are met in ways that address the needs of the targeted student population. Additionally, the proposal indicates the SEA uses data gathered from the state's Program Monitoring and Interventions System to guide these efforts including:

- identify targeted intervention activities.
 - improve student performance and
 - improve program effectiveness
 - impact planning decision making
 - mandate intervention for struggling schools
 - conduct site reviews for struggling schools
- (Pages 22-23)

The applicant states extra priority points will be awarded to charters seeking to serve students with disabilities, English Language Learners and educationally disadvantaged students who would otherwise attend low-performing public schools. This is a sound initiative that is likely to ensure a strong pool of candidates with a track record of effectiveness meeting the needs of the this targeted student population. (Page 23)

The applicant describes a clear and robust plan for monitoring all charter schools in ways that are likely to ensure compliance with regional and federal laws. This process includes:

- an automated data system performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System
- annual reporting on school performance of charter schools in bilingual education, career and technical education, special education, programs
- district-level data for performance indicators
- onsite visits for struggling schools (Pages 25

Weaknesses:

Efforts to encourage innovations in charters schools who serve the academic needs of educationally disadvantaged students is not clearly articulated. (Criteria 3). The response in this area would be improved with the addition of a summary of efforts to encourage charters schools to implement models, policies, supports or structures designed to improve the academic performance of educationally disadvantaged students.

Reader's Score: 13

Selection Criteria - Vision for Growth and Accountability

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 proposal describes a comprehensive platform to collect, analyze and report charter school performance data and it appears evident the overall process provides a robust platform to report pertinent information in the key indicators of progress for the state. In particular, the SEA utilizes a combination of the Public Education Information Management System and the states Academic Performance Records to reveal insights on a variety of school areas including outcomes on: (Page 24)

- academic performance
- graduation rates
- student sub group performance
- post-secondary enrollment
- discipline
- school operations

Additionally, the system can generate a variety of annual reports that are available to inform decision making for all stakeholders and data is used to track charter school performance to determine whether charters schools are meeting state's definition of a high-quality school. (Page 24)

The narrative reveals a plan to increase the number of high quality schools by a total of 15 over the grant cycle. This goal appears reasonable and in keeping with overall state goals. Key actions include:

- new charters are mandated to attend an annual state charter school summit for guidance and training in key areas of charter school operations.
- on-site visits are provided for new charter schools
- expanded technical support during the initial three years (page 25)
- SEA CSP subgrants will be used to replicate effective schools,
- increased staffing to expand outreach efforts (Page 25-26)

According to the narrative on page 21, the state has an appropriate plan to reduce the number and percentage of academically poor-performing charter schools and a plan is in place to guide the charter school closure process. (Page 26) This plan appears to be feasible and includes the description of a conservator to oversee closures--a unique initiative that indicates procedures are in place to guide key areas of school closure including:

- the disposition of the charter's assets
- the transfer of the charter's students and student records
- the transfer of staff records
- the closeout of all financials
- the transmission of all final data

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were evident in this area.

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 proposal describes a robust plan to disseminate best practices to a broad group of stakeholders. The plan ensures there is wide dissemination of charter school best practices by pooling promising innovation of all schools, both traditional and charter. (Page 26) In particular, the collected body of knowledge is made available to a broad range of stakeholders through multiple formats including: (Page 27)

--Project Share, an online learning community hosted by the SEA

--SEA best practices case studies project

--Efforts to include schools that have a history of effective educational programs to meet the needs of academically disadvantaged students.

Additionally, the proposal provides extensive detail on the State's plan to utilize an innovative case study process to identify, quantify, and share promising practices within the plan mentioned above. The case study process focuses on the effectiveness of regional schools using evidence based elements to guide the process. This initiative addresses best practices related to discipline and school climate, and is targeted to address the needs of the targeted student population. It is evident the SEA has a strong focus on racial and ethnic diversity, and, if implemented with fidelity, this process is likely to ensure the identification of targeted best practices that meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged students across racial and ethnic lines.

The SEA will hire an external evaluator to identify best practices in successful schools as a component of the CSP grant project with a focus on analyzing the impact of SEA dissemination statewide. (Page 28) This effort is likely to ensure the state's goal to disseminate information on promising practices to disparate stakeholder groups during the cycle of the grant. (Page 28)

Weaknesses:

There were 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 applicant explains an application process for charter developers that will focus on efforts to draw applications from developers with the capacity to implement effective charter programs. Additionally, the SEA seeks to improve the application process to ensure the recruitment and selection of developers most likely to create high quality charter schools.

The process includes

- open enrollment annually
- enrollment track for university and college applicants
- application evaluation (Page 29)

The applicant provides detail on the Open Enrollment and Campus Based chartering authorities. There is appropriate differentiation and strong oversight of these authorizing entities is evident. The monitoring process includes: (Page 29-30)

- a multi-tiered selection process
- annual evaluations
- a focus on improving school performance
- providing innovative instructional programming
- the capacity to serve a disparate student population
- evaluation of the chartering approval policy (Campus authorizers only)

The state's existing monitoring plan for charter schools is established by state law and includes: (Pages 31-32)

- measurable indicators of success in key performance areas including academic achievement, finances, and operations.
- annual monitoring in several different formats.
- onsite visits for newly established charter schools
- interim and final progress reporting

Additionally, the SEA has a plan in place to monitor compliance with regional and federal laws that is supported by the state sponsored monitoring and intervention system, including performance of English Language Learners, and special education students.

The narrative indicates the chartering authorities will monitor 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.

The proposal indicates increases in student achievement are a key factor in determining charter renewal and revocation is mandated by state law [TEC § 12.059 Subchapter C]. Academic achievement is measured using the state's comprehensive framework. The state measures to strengthen the process for corrective measures are likely to ensure the reduction of poor-performing charter schools in the state.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly address 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.

Reader's Score: 13

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 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 proposal includes a table that outlines a management plan including expected activities and for assessing the attainment of the objectives for the subgrant process. The table serves as clear evidence of a robust management to be used plan will be used to meet overall SEA goals in this area. The table includes: (Page 35-40)

- a timeline
- expected activities
- milestones
- accountable agencies.

The performance measures are very well articulated and include details on various performance measures and targets for the state's proposed grant project that are consistent with the objectives in the management plan. The performance measures are appropriately targeted in ways that indicate there will be rigorous evaluation that will inform the determination of both authorizer and individual charter school effectiveness. In particular, the applicant provides a table (Page 36-40) that outlines the timeline, activities, milestones and expected human resources that are expected.

Additionally, the narrative includes discussion of the project-specific performance measures and targets in ways that indicate an alignment with the project logic model (Pages 40-45) and will utilize a various strategies to address compliance issues. These strategies, if implemented with fidelity, are likely to provide rigorous project monitoring that informs the State on overall project effectiveness. Significant strategies in this area include:

- an external evaluator
- outcomes from accreditation status
- annual evaluations
- interim progress reports

Weaknesses:

There are no weaknesses 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 includes a comprehensive project design for the selection and awarding of subgrants. This plan, if implemented with fidelity, is likely to provide solid support for efforts to expand high quality charter school options throughout the state. The project design also has a well-developed review process that includes:

- an initial review of the applications
- an external review committee
- timeline for external review
- applicant notification
- SEA review for to ensure eligibility
- negotiation of fiscal and programmatic changes to the application with awardees
- budget review for awardees (page 46)

The applicant will use the established statewide monitoring process to measure overall school effectiveness, but will provide additional oversight of federal grant compliance and adherence to competitive priority goals to create and sustain a high-quality charter school. (page 50) The robust statewide monitoring process is likely to ensure rigorous oversight overall during the grant cycle that informs decision making as he Sate seeks to create high quality charter schools throughout the state. (Page 50)

The competition indicators clearly align with state strategy in key areas, particularly those indicators supporting the creation of charters that meet the needs of students who would otherwise attend low performing schools. (Page 50) The description clearly aligns with overall objectives (Pages 41-45) The indicators of success in this area reveal the State's strong commitment to meeting the objectives in this area.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not provide a clear description of a how the grant process will create a portfolio of subgrantees who focus on areas of need within the State, such as increasing student body diversity or maintaining a high level of student body diversity. (Criteria 3) The response in this area would be improved with the addition of a summary of how the state will ensure selected subgrantees will address student diversity, and details on the strategies or initiatives expected to be embedded into the project to ensure these issues are addressed throughout the grant cycle.

The description of previous awardees lacks clarity. (Criteria 1) The response in this area would be improved with the addition of a detailed description of the number and/or percentage of eligible subgrant awardees that includes evidence of how the subgrant awards are aligned with the quality of the applicant pool.

The response would be improved in this area with the addition of greater detail to explain the process or model expected to be used to inform key stakeholders. Examples include efforts such as face-to-face presentations or print material in multiple languages. (Criteria 4)

Reader's Score: 7

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:

A performance framework is in place to evaluate the effectiveness of charter schools statewide annually. (Page 3) State law mandates the performance outcomes be submitted to an education research center annually to compare the performance of the various school settings in the state. The outcomes are shared with the public within a required timeline. Comparisons are comprised of the performance data of: (Page 12)

--open enrollment schools

--campus charter schools

--traditional public schools

The applicant describes an appropriate charter authorizing process that is supported by state law and includes:

- preliminary review by State charter school division
- external review
- high minimum application target score of 90%
- interviews
- recommendation for approval
- on-site visit for 1st year charter schools (Page 10)

The proposal includes details indicating well-defined criteria for charter renewal that includes a stated contract termination date for some charters. The five year charter contract is in keeping with the requirements of this grant. The criteria is supported by state law and allows for a multi-tiered renewal designation model that is based on school performance. (Page 11)

Results of performance evaluations are determined by the SEA charter school framework and outcomes are shared with stakeholders online. (Page 12)

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly articulate how charter applicant review process will be differentiated to determine the level of applicant effectiveness (Criteria 5.d) Clarification in this area would require a statement and evidence describing strategies expected to be integrated in the monitoring and/or authorizing process. Said strategies should reveal the capacity of developers to create and sustain high quality charter schools.

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 state charter school laws support the provision for two chartering entities, one of which is a non-LEA. The majority of charters were authorized by 15 LEA school districts. Colleges and universities serve as non-LEA chartering authorities.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were evident in this area.

Reader's Score: 5

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 08/03/2015 11:44 AM

