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Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform -- , - , (U396C101182)

Reader #1:

	POINTS POSSIBLE	POINTS SCORED
Summary Statement		
1. Summary Statement	N/A	N/A
Selection Criteria		
1. A. Need for the Project and Quality of the Project Design (up to 25 Points)	25	23
2. C. Experience of the Eligible Applicant (up to 25 Points)	25	25
3. E. Strategy and Capacity to Further Develop and Bring to Scale (up to 5 Points)	5	3
4. F. Sustainability (up to 10 Points)	10	8
5. G. Quality of the Management Plan and Personnel (up to 10 Points)	10	10
Competitive Preference		
1. Competitive Preference 5: Innovations for Improving Early Learning Outcomes (0 or 1 Point)	1	0
2. Competitive Preference 6: Innovations That Support College Access and Success (0 or 1 Point)	1	0
3. Competitive Preference 7: Innovations To Address the Unique Learning Needs of Students With Disabilities and Limited English Proficient Students (0 or 1 Point)	1	1
4. Competitive Preference 8: Innovations That Serve Schools in Rural LEAs (0, 1, or 2 Points)	2	2

Technical Review Form

Development 63: 84.396C

Reader #1:

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform -- , - , (U396C101182)

Summary Statement

1. Summary Statement

Selection Criteria

1. A. Need for the Project and Quality of the Project Design (up to 25 Points)

In determining the need for the project and quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the proposed project represents an exceptional approach to the priorities the eligible applicant is seeking to meet (i.e., addresses a largely unmet need, particularly for high-need students, and is a practice, strategy, or program that has not already been widely adopted).

(2) The extent to which the proposed project has a clear set of goals and an explicit strategy, with the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project clearly specified and measurable and linked to the priorities the eligible applicant is seeking to meet.

Strengths

The applicant presented a clear case for middle school grade reform and the need for whole school reform within the targeted middle school. The strategies and activities were clearly outlined and comprehensive in targeting whole school reform across three states (North Carolina, Illinois, and California). The applicant clearly explained why the approach was

exceptional in that it builds off of extensive national and state infrastructure with dozen of leaders who work together to improve middle-grades education and in that it addresses school reform through comprehensive, systemic approach in changing schools' culture to be one that supports high expectations, shared leadership and decision making, professional learning, and a sense of shared accountability. Further, the applicant demonstrates that the proposed project in exceptional in that it not only addresses whole school reform but also targets high need students at risk for dropping out and provides specific targeted intervention services to them. Finally, the applicant clearly demonstrates that the approach is exceptional in that it uses a multi-layered system of support that includes school coaches, high-performing mentor schools, and mentor principals. (Pages 1-4). These strategies provide for a strong project to adequately address absolute priority 4 in that the proposed project turns around persistently low performing schools not only through whole school reform but also through targeted intervention for specific high need students.

The applicant clearly lists objectives, activities and strategies to enable them to reach absolute priority four, competitive preference seven, and competitive preference 8. The applicant's objectives are strong in that they relate to improving structures, norms, and processes in the targeted school (for whole school reform), to improving academic excellent (in setting high expectations for students and aligning curriculum with high expectations and standards and in promoting professional development opportunities for teachers to address students' unique needs), to close the achievement gaps, and to foster developmental responsiveness (through providing comprehensive social and mental health services and creating a safe and positive learning environment for students). These project objectives are comprehensive and clearly demonstrate the applicant's plan to address absolute priority four (to turn around persistently low performing schools).

Weaknesses

The applicant did not clearly detail in the project narrative the academic needs of the 18 targeted middle schools for project implementation. The academic data provided in the application's appendices was confusing, as it was difficult to determine what the acronyms represented in the column headings for some of the data. It was also difficult to compare the academic needs both between the 18 targeted schools and between the schools targeted for service (Pages 1-4, Appendix 8). It would have strengthened the application to demonstrate the needs of the students in the schools targeted for services through a comprehensive table or chart provided in the project narrative.

It would have been helpful to see measurable outcomes related to the project goals, objectives, and strategies related to the project goals (Pages 5-9). For example, it would be helpful to detail out what specific percentage of students from each targeted school should obtain reading, math, or science proficiency. Having measurable objectives provide a clearer project vision of anticipated outcomes and allows the applicant to have benchmarks to determine if they are making progress toward anticipated project outcomes.

Reader's Score: 23

2. C. Experience of the Eligible Applicant (up to 25 Points)

In determining the experience of the eligible applicant, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (1) The past performance of the eligible applicant in implementing projects of the size and scope proposed by the eligible applicant.**
- (2) The extent to which an eligible applicant provides information and data demonstrating that -**
 - (a) In the case of an eligible applicant that is an LEA, the LEA has -**
 - (i) Significantly closed the achievement gaps between groups of students described in section 1111(b)(2) of the ESEA, or significantly increased student achievement for all groups of students described in such section; and**
 - (ii) Made significant improvements in other areas, such as graduation rates or increased recruitment and placement of high-quality teachers and principals, as demonstrated with meaningful data; or**
 - (b) In the case of an eligible applicant that includes a nonprofit organization, the nonprofit organization has significantly improved student achievement, attainment, or retention through its record of work with an LEA or schools.**

Strengths

The applicant describes a wealth of experience in implementing projects similar in scope to this project and similar in size. The application has provided on-the-ground technical assistance to the Chicago Middle Grade Project to increase academic rigor and improve outcomes for a cluster of 24 K-8 schools with a school-within-a-school middle grades program. The applicant also operates a "States to Watch" program that works in partnership with multiple LEAs in 19 states and which encompasses over 250 schools. Further, the applicant's partners (Illinois Middle Level Schools, League of Middle Schools, the North Carolina Middle School Association

and the Academy for Educational Development) have a wealth of experience in school reform. (Page 13-15). The applicant also demonstrates experience in grant administration, managing a 4 year \$3.1 million grant from the United States Department of Education aimed at improving math performance for students with disabilities, students who are Limited English Proficient, and students who live in rural communities. (Page 13). The wealth of experience in working in a number of states with multiple LEAs on school reform issues, the wealth of experience that the official project partners bring to the grant, and the experience in federal grant administration clearly demonstrate that the applicant has the capacity to deliver and implement the proposed project (given their experience in implementing programs the same size and scope of the proposed project).

The applicant demonstrates improving student academic performance in working in partnership with LEAs. One Michigan pilot school that was part of their project had students increase math performance by 36% over. Further, the partners of the proposed project have worked with hundreds of schools (which combined in working with middle schools) (Pages 13-15).

Weaknesses

There were no weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 25

3. E. Strategy and Capacity to Further Develop and Bring to Scale (up to 5 Points)

In determining the quality of the strategy and capacity to further develop and bring to scale the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

(1) The number of students proposed to be reached by the proposed project, and the capacity of the eligible applicant and any other partners to reach the proposed number of students during the course of the grant period.

(2) The eligible applicant's capacity (e.g., in terms of qualified personnel, financial resources, or management capacity) to further develop and bring to scale the proposed practice, strategy, or program, or to work with others (including other partners) to ensure that the proposed practice, strategy, or program can be further developed and brought to scale, based on the findings of the proposed project.

(3) The feasibility of the proposed project to be replicated successfully, if positive results are obtained, in a variety of settings and with a variety of student populations. Evidence of this ability includes the availability of resources and expertise required for implementing the project with fidelity, and the proposed project's evidence of relative ease of use or user satisfaction.

(4) The eligible applicant's estimate of the cost of the proposed project, which includes the start-up and operating costs per student per year (including indirect costs) for reaching the total number of students proposed to be served by the project. The eligible applicant must include an estimate of the costs for the eligible applicant or others (including other partners) to reach 100,000, 250,000, and 500,000 students.

(5) The mechanisms the eligible applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.

Strengths

The applicant's statewide networks clearly demonstrates that it has the capacity to reach nearly 18,000 students over the project period (with 10,000 of those student in Year 1 being reach from 18 urban and rural schools in three states. The applicant's network of partners and the States to Watch program will further give the applicant the capacity to bring the project to scale. (Pages 19-21)

The agency has the capacity to scale up the project with partnering organizations. These partnerships are demonstrated by the letters of support provided. The 50 National Forum member organizations and the 80 state-level partners across 19 States to Watch states also demonstrate the agency's capacity to replicate the program, as community stakeholder support is so strong. (Page 20)

It is feasible for the program to be implemented with a variety of students in a variety of populations. The proposed project demonstrates that the school reform will take place in both urban and rural settings with a variety of student populations in schools that are low performing schools. With the right resources from the proposed project, any small rural community, medium-sized cities, or large cities could use the model (Page 21) for whole school reform (and for targeted intervention services to high need students).

Weaknesses

The applicant does not list the cost of the program for 100,000; 250,000 or 500,000 students, as required under this criteria. The applicant only lists the cost per student to by \$100 per student, and that the entire budget per year averages around \$1.5 million (with \$1 million being contracted out to program partners for direct services in the three targeted states of North Carolina, California, and Illinois (Page 21). The applicant fails to list the cost of the project for 100,000; 250,000; and 500,000 students.

The applicant does not clearly describe mechanisms to distribute project

information. (Page 20-21). It would strengthen this section of the application if the applicant listed how they will use their national network of partnerships to creatively disseminate project information and results to schools, communities, and school districts which have persistently low performing middle schools. It would strengthen the application if there were several strategies to disseminate the program results on a local/ regional level for school districts wishing to replicate or adopt the program, on a state-wide level (for statewide agencies who want to be part of the States to Watch program), and on a national level for national-level partnerships and potential service collaboration and coordination of national-level support services provided to schools.

Reader's Score: 3

4. F. Sustainability (up to 10 Points)

In determining the adequacy of resources for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (1) The extent to which the eligible applicant demonstrates that it has the resources, as well as the support from stakeholders (e.g., State educational agencies, teachers' unions) to operate the project beyond the length of the Development grant.**
- (2) The potential and planning for the incorporation of project purposes, activities, or benefits into the ongoing work of the eligible applicant and any other partners at the end of the Development grant.**

Strengths

The applicant has engaged the support of key stakeholders and discussions plan to look for state and local funding, including school funding after the project period ends. The applicant states that funding will be sought in the states of North Carolina, Georgia, New York, and California as much of the "States to Watch" criteria is already deeply embedded in the state's policy and guidance to schools. (Page 21-23). With the program deeply imbedded into policy, it is likely that funding may be obtained to continue project activities as funding is often given from states if it aligns with the state's policies and priorities. (Page 21-23).

The applicant describes how the work will be incorporated into the ongoing work of the States to Watch Network. The applicant describes how the schools will work collaboratively together as a professional learning community as they work together for a shared vision of middle school reform, how schools will receive ongoing support from their state team and other schools in the States to Watch Network, and support from their "redesignation process" which occurs every three years for schools to make

continuous improvement toward their school's individual plan and project goals. (Page 22-23). These three key strategies are strong evidence that the applicant has a clear plan for incorporating project activities into the ongoing work at the targeted schools beyond the period of the grant.

Weaknesses

The applicant does not describe specific sustainability strategies for the national non-profit to provide overall structure and support to the project beyond the period of the grant. (Page 22-23) For example, while the applicant mentions that state funding will be sought to support state level efforts and while the activities will be incorporated into the ongoing work of many schools targeted for services, the applicant provides no specific project sustainability strategies to fund its national non-profit the \$500,000 cost for project management and oversight, which is still an integral part of the program to provide project support and guidance to the States to Watch programs. It would strengthen this section of the application if the applicant had a detailed sustainability plan with specific strategies to cover overhead and management costs beyond the period of the Development grant.

Reader's Score: 8

5. G. Quality of the Management Plan and Personnel (up to 10 Points)

In determining the quality of the management plan and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

(1) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

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

Strengths

The applicant clearly lists a management plan with clearly defined project responsibilities. The applicant provides a detailed Work plan for the Schools to Watch: School Transformation Network, which clearly detail project tasks to be accomplished each quarter of each year of the project. This work plan also lists specifically who is responsible for each project tasks (Appendix H). Further, the applicant's management plan is strong in that it provides strong management practices as a national organization that is proposing to target schools and provide services in three separate states. The applicant's

management plan includes cross-state training, developing electronic platforms and hosting webinars, creating tools for replication, and compiling project reports. The applicant also lists a strong plan for statewide management through using the States to Watch training teams for working with the schools individually through mentoring, coaching, providing professional development, and assisting in leadership. Each school will also assess needs and create an action plan specific to their school and meeting the identified needs.(Page 23). This multi-layered management approach (on the national, state-wide, and school level) provides a strong management plan that clearly demonstrates the applicant has the capacity to implement the large-scaled program.

The applicant clearly demonstrates the capacity of the project personnel for the project director and clearly demonstrates the experience of the States to Watch Director in each state. For example, the Principal Investigator manages the Forum's \$3 million United States Department of Education grant and has experience in working with 24 low-performing middle-grades schools through Chicago's Middle Grades Initiative. The California, Illinois, and North Carolina States to Watch Directors have experience in working with numerous schools for school reform in effort to improve the academic achievement of students in that school. (Pages 23-24).

Weaknesses

There are no weaknesses found in this section.

Reader's Score: 10

Competitive Preference

1. Competitive Preference 5: Innovations for Improving Early Learning Outcomes (0 or 1 Point)

We give competitive preference to applications for projects that would implement innovative practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to improve educational outcomes for high-need students who are young children (birth through 3rd grade) by enhancing the quality of early learning programs. To meet this priority, applications must focus on:

- (a) improving young children's school readiness (including social, emotional, and cognitive readiness) so that children are prepared for success in core academic subjects (as defined in section 9101(11) of the ESEA);**
- (b) improving developmental milestones and standards and aligning them with appropriate outcome measures; and**

(c) improving alignment, collaboration, and transitions between early learning programs that serve children from birth to age three, in preschools, and in kindergarten through third grade.

Strengths

The applicant did not write to this competitive preference.

Weaknesses

The applicant did not write to this competitive preference.

Reader's Score: 0

2. Competitive Preference 6: Innovations That Support College Access and Success (0 or 1 Point)

We give competitive preference to applications for projects that would implement innovative practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to enable kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) students, particularly high school students, to successfully prepare for, enter, and graduate from a two- or four-year college. To meet this priority, applications must include practices, strategies, or programs for K-12 students that

- (a) address students' preparedness and expectations related to college;**
- (b) help students understand issues of college affordability and the financial aid and college application processes; and**
- (c) provide support to students from peers and knowledgeable adults.**

Strengths

The applicant did not write to this competitive preference.

Weaknesses

The applicant did not write to this competitive preference.

Reader's Score: 0

3. Competitive Preference 7: Innovations To Address the Unique Learning Needs of Students With Disabilities and Limited English Proficient Students (0 or 1 Point)

We give competitive preference to applications for projects that would implement innovative practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to address the unique learning needs of students with disabilities, including those who are assessed based on alternate academic achievement standards, or the linguistic and academic needs of limited English proficient students. To meet this priority, applications must

provide for the implementation of particular practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to improve academic outcomes, close achievement gaps, and increase college- and career-readiness, including increasing high school graduation rates (as defined in this notice), for students with disabilities or limited English proficient students.

Strengths

The applicant will address competitive preference 7 by paying special attention to students with disabilities and students who are English Language Learners. Each school's action plan will be tailored to provide services unique to the needs of student populations in these targeted schools (whether it be professional development for teachers or high-level support for students). (Page 2).

Weaknesses

There were no weaknesses found in this section.

Reader's Score: 1

4. Competitive Preference 8: Innovations That Serve Schools in Rural LEAs (0, 1, or 2 Points)

We give competitive preference to applications for projects that would implement innovative practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to focus on the unique challenges of high-need students in schools within a rural LEA (as defined in this notice) and address the particular challenges faced by students in these schools. To meet this priority, applications must include practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to improve student achievement or student growth, close achievement gaps, decrease dropout rates, increase high school graduation rates, or improve teacher and principal effectiveness in one or more rural LEAs.

Strengths

The applicant will reach and serve 6 rural schools across two states (California and North Carolina). The applicant will address the challenges that rural schools face in meeting the needs of all students through assisting them in obtaining and retaining highly qualified teachers who can teach high-level math and science courses and in providing professional development activities for the staff. The applicant will also assist these rural schools by providing the tools and targeted resources to assist schools in school reform. The applicant will also incorporate coaching techniques and link the rural schools in the area who are higher performing schools to be a mentor to the rural schools targeted for services. (Page 2).

Weaknesses

There are no weaknesses found in this section.

Reader's Score: 2

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform -- , - , (U396C101182)

Reader #2:

	POINTS POSSIBLE	POINTS SCORED
Summary Statement		
1. Summary Statement	N/A	N/A
Selection Criteria		
1. A. Need for the Project and Quality of the Project Design (up to 25 Points)	25	23
2. C. Experience of the Eligible Applicant (up to 25 Points)	25	25
3. E. Strategy and Capacity to Further Develop and Bring to Scale (up to 5 Points)	5	4
4. F. Sustainability (up to 10 Points)	10	8
5. G. Quality of the Management Plan and Personnel (up to 10 Points)	10	10
Competitive Preference		
1. Competitive Preference 5: Innovations for Improving Early Learning Outcomes (0 or 1 Point)	1	0
2. Competitive Preference 6: Innovations That Support College Access and Success (0 or 1 Point)	1	0
3. Competitive Preference 7: Innovations To Address the Unique Learning Needs of Students With Disabilities and Limited English Proficient Students (0 or 1 Point)	1	1
4. Competitive Preference 8: Innovations That Serve Schools in Rural LEAs (0, 1, or 2 Points)	2	2

Technical Review Form

Development 63: 84.396C

Reader #2:

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform -- , - , (U396C101182)

Summary Statement

1. Summary Statement

Selection Criteria

1. A. Need for the Project and Quality of the Project Design (up to 25 Points)

In determining the need for the project and quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the proposed project represents an exceptional approach to the priorities the eligible applicant is seeking to meet (i.e., addresses a largely unmet need, particularly for high-need students, and is a practice, strategy, or program that has not already been widely adopted).

(2) The extent to which the proposed project has a clear set of goals and an explicit strategy, with the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project clearly specified and measurable and linked to the priorities the eligible applicant is seeking to meet.

Strengths

This application seeks to bring systemic change to low performing schools. The application incorporates the known best practices of high performing schools. The applicant understands the importance of creating a school culture of high expectations, as well as the continual use of data. The important first step is to create a shared vision of what high performance looks like. There are many excellent materials that create a strong foundation - a rating rubric, a comprehensive self assessment for the school,

the use of SMART goals, a curriculum aligned to state standards, the creation and management of an action plan, and a continual focus on closing the achievement gap.

The applicant has a strong plan for achieving the objectives. The objectives are linked to the priority of turning around low-performing schools.

Weaknesses

The application would be enhanced by the listing of specific, measurable project achievement goals. "90% of students will be proficient or above in reading and state assessments by the end of the third project year," for example.

Reader's Score: 23

2. C. Experience of the Eligible Applicant (up to 25 Points)

In determining the experience of the eligible applicant, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (1) The past performance of the eligible applicant in implementing projects of the size and scope proposed by the eligible applicant.**
- (2) The extent to which an eligible applicant provides information and data demonstrating that -**
 - (a) In the case of an eligible applicant that is an LEA, the LEA has -**
 - (i) Significantly closed the achievement gaps between groups of students described in section 1111(b)(2) of the ESEA, or significantly increased student achievement for all groups of students described in such section; and**
 - (ii) Made significant improvements in other areas, such as graduation rates or increased recruitment and placement of high-quality teachers and principals, as demonstrated with meaningful data; or**
 - (b) In the case of an eligible applicant that includes a nonprofit organization, the nonprofit organization has significantly improved student achievement, attainment, or retention through its record of work with an LEA or schools.**

Strengths

The applicants have a successful track record turning around challenged

schools. Three Chicago school are now making AYP and have seen gains in math and reading. The organization is now working in 19 states, with over 250 schools. Evidence of success is presented for each of the grant partners.

Weaknesses

No weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: 25

3. E. Strategy and Capacity to Further Develop and Bring to Scale (up to 5 Points)

In determining the quality of the strategy and capacity to further develop and bring to scale the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

(1) The number of students proposed to be reached by the proposed project, and the capacity of the eligible applicant and any other partners to reach the proposed number of students during the course of the grant period.

(2) The eligible applicant's capacity (e.g., in terms of qualified personnel, financial resources, or management capacity) to further develop and bring to scale the proposed practice, strategy, or program, or to work with others (including other partners) to ensure that the proposed practice, strategy, or program can be further developed and brought to scale, based on the findings of the proposed project.

(3) The feasibility of the proposed project to be replicated successfully, if positive results are obtained, in a variety of settings and with a variety of student populations. Evidence of this ability includes the availability of resources and expertise required for implementing the project with fidelity, and the proposed project's evidence of relative ease of use or user satisfaction.

(4) The eligible applicant's estimate of the cost of the proposed project, which includes the start-up and operating costs per student per year (including indirect costs) for reaching the total number of students proposed to be served by the project. The eligible applicant must include an estimate of the costs for the eligible applicant or others (including other partners) to reach 100,000, 250,000, and 500,000 students.

(5) The mechanisms the eligible applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.

Strengths

The program intends to serve 10,000 students in year one, and nearly 18,000 students by the fourth year.

The applicant has a large network of support, and the capacity to realize these numbers.

Again, due to the broad support, it is highly probable that the project can be replicated successfully in a variety of settings.

Weaknesses

The applicant did not list the costs of the program when serving 100,000, 250,000 and 500,000 students.

The plan for dissemination could be clearer.

Reader's Score: 4

4. F. Sustainability (up to 10 Points)

In determining the adequacy of resources for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the eligible applicant demonstrates that it has the resources, as well as the support from stakeholders (e.g., State educational agencies, teachers' unions) to operate the project beyond the length of the Development grant.

(2) The potential and planning for the incorporation of project purposes, activities, or benefits into the ongoing work of the eligible applicant and any other partners at the end of the Development grant.

Strengths

The applicant has ample support from stakeholders.

Multiple methods - foundations, state funds, for example, will be sought to support a relatively inexpensive (\$100 per student) transformative change.

Weaknesses

The applicant would be stronger if the cost to continue to program beyond the grant were better explained.

The applicant did not indicate how they would create artifacts, documentation, program manuals, etc., that would aid in continued operation at the school level and for starting programs in new schools.

Reader's Score: 8

5. G. Quality of the Management Plan and Personnel (up to 10 Points)

In determining the quality of the management plan and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

(1) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

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

Strengths

A strong management team is presented.
Electronic platforms and use of webinars to connect program participants is a good strategy.
A work plan is presented.

Weaknesses

No weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: 10

Competitive Preference

1. Competitive Preference 5: Innovations for Improving Early Learning Outcomes (0 or 1 Point)

We give competitive preference to applications for projects that would implement innovative practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to improve educational outcomes for high-need students who are young children (birth through 3rd grade) by enhancing the quality of early learning programs. To meet this priority, applications must focus on:

- (a) improving young children's school readiness (including social, emotional, and cognitive readiness) so that children are prepared for success in core academic subjects (as defined in section 9101(11) of the ESEA);**
- (b) improving developmental milestones and standards and aligning them with appropriate outcome measures; and**
- (c) improving alignment, collaboration, and transitions between early learning programs that serve children from birth to age three, in preschools, and in**

kindergarten through third grade.

Strengths

The Applicant did not write to this competitive priority.

Weaknesses

The Applicant did not write to this competitive priority.

Reader's Score: 0

2. Competitive Preference 6: Innovations That Support College Access and Success (0 or 1 Point)

We give competitive preference to applications for projects that would implement innovative practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to enable kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) students, particularly high school students, to successfully prepare for, enter, and graduate from a two- or four-year college. To meet this priority, applications must include practices, strategies, or programs for K-12 students that

- (a) address students' preparedness and expectations related to college;
- (b) help students understand issues of college affordability and the financial aid and college application processes; and
- (c) provide support to students from peers and knowledgeable adults.

Strengths

The Applicant did not write to this competitive priority.

Weaknesses

The Applicant did not write to this competitive priority.

Reader's Score: 0

3. Competitive Preference 7: Innovations To Address the Unique Learning Needs of Students With Disabilities and Limited English Proficient Students (0 or 1 Point)

We give competitive preference to applications for projects that would implement innovative practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to address the unique learning needs of students with disabilities, including those who are assessed based on alternate academic achievement standards, or the linguistic and academic needs of limited English proficient students. To meet this priority, applications must provide for the implementation of particular practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to improve academic outcomes, close achievement gaps, and increase

college- and career-readiness, including increasing high school graduation rates (as defined in this notice), for students with disabilities or limited English proficient students.

Strengths

This application addresses the unique learning needs of students with disabilities and English Language learners. The program includes universal design principles, differentiated instruction and co-teaching.

Weaknesses

No weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: 1

4. Competitive Preference 8: Innovations That Serve Schools in Rural LEAs (0, 1, or 2 Points)

We give competitive preference to applications for projects that would implement innovative practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to focus on the unique challenges of high-need students in schools within a rural LEA (as defined in this notice) and address the particular challenges faced by students in these schools. To meet this priority, applications must include practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to improve student achievement or student growth, close achievement gaps, decrease dropout rates, increase high school graduation rates, or improve teacher and principal effectiveness in one or more rural LEAs.

Strengths

This program addresses a specific need of rural schools, the limited ability to recruit and retain highly qualified teacher, as well as providing sustained access to cutting edge professional development.

The program has a high likelihood of success in bringing practices and strategies to improve student achievement or student growth, close achievement gaps, decrease dropout rates and increase high school graduation rates to rural communities.

Weaknesses

No weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: 2

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 06/26/2010 5:50 AM

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Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 07/02/2010 5:38 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform -- , - , (U396C101182)

Reader #3:

	POINTS POSSIBLE	POINTS SCORED
Summary Statement		
1. Summary Statement	N/A	N/A
Selection Criteria		
1. A. Need for the Project and Quality of the Project Design (up to 25 Points)	25	24
2. C. Experience of the Eligible Applicant (up to 25 Points)	25	25
3. E. Strategy and Capacity to Further Develop and Bring to Scale (up to 5 Points)	5	4
4. F. Sustainability (up to 10 Points)	10	8
5. G. Quality of the Management Plan and Personnel (up to 10 Points)	10	10
Competitive Preference		
1. Competitive Preference 5: Innovations for Improving Early Learning Outcomes (0 or 1 Point)	1	0
2. Competitive Preference 6: Innovations That Support College Access and Success (0 or 1 Point)	1	0
3. Competitive Preference 7: Innovations To Address the Unique Learning Needs of Students With Disabilities and Limited English Proficient Students (0 or 1 Point)	1	1
4. Competitive Preference 8: Innovations That Serve Schools in Rural LEAs (0, 1, or 2 Points)	2	2

Technical Review Form

Development 63: 84.396C

Reader #3:

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform -- , - , (U396C101182)

Summary Statement

1. Summary Statement

Selection Criteria

1. A. Need for the Project and Quality of the Project Design (up to 25 Points)

In determining the need for the project and quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the proposed project represents an exceptional approach to the priorities the eligible applicant is seeking to meet (i.e., addresses a largely unmet need, particularly for high-need students, and is a practice, strategy, or program that has not already been widely adopted).

(2) The extent to which the proposed project has a clear set of goals and an explicit strategy, with the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project clearly specified and measurable and linked to the priorities the eligible applicant is seeking to meet.

Strengths

Applicant is addressing low performing schools across several states focused on middle level learning,, culture, and environment, an area often overlooked.

Applicant expands on model used by several schools in network with solid

infrastructure and based on current research.

Project goals are clear and strategy is easily identified in matrix of goals, objectives and outcomes.

Description of project is thorough and clear with references to appendices that provide expanded detail.

Weaknesses

Did not clearly specify goals and the measures to determine if outcomes are met.

Reader's Score: 24

2. C. Experience of the Eligible Applicant (up to 25 Points)

In determining the experience of the eligible applicant, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (1) The past performance of the eligible applicant in implementing projects of the size and scope proposed by the eligible applicant.**
- (2) The extent to which an eligible applicant provides information and data demonstrating that -**
 - (a) In the case of an eligible applicant that is an LEA, the LEA has -**
 - (i) Significantly closed the achievement gaps between groups of students described in section 1111(b)(2) of the ESEA, or significantly increased student achievement for all groups of students described in such section; and**
 - (ii) Made significant improvements in other areas, such as graduation rates or increased recruitment and placement of high-quality teachers and principals, as demonstrated with meaningful data; or**
 - (b) In the case of an eligible applicant that includes a nonprofit organization, the nonprofit organization has significantly improved student achievement, attainment, or retention through its record of work with an LEA or schools.**

Strengths

Applicant lists projects similar in size and scope, that have been successfully managed and completed.

Applicant gives evidence of closing the achievement gaps for targeted students.

Applicant has established broad network of schools and leaders to dig into what works for schools, providing training, research, mentors, and support.

Weaknesses

There are no weaknesses identified.

Reader's Score: 25

3. E. Strategy and Capacity to Further Develop and Bring to Scale (up to 5 Points)

In determining the quality of the strategy and capacity to further develop and bring to scale the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

(1) The number of students proposed to be reached by the proposed project, and the capacity of the eligible applicant and any other partners to reach the proposed number of students during the course of the grant period.

(2) The eligible applicant's capacity (e.g., in terms of qualified personnel, financial resources, or management capacity) to further develop and bring to scale the proposed practice, strategy, or program, or to work with others (including other partners) to ensure that the proposed practice, strategy, or program can be further developed and brought to scale, based on the findings of the proposed project.

(3) The feasibility of the proposed project to be replicated successfully, if positive results are obtained, in a variety of settings and with a variety of student populations. Evidence of this ability includes the availability of resources and expertise required for implementing the project with fidelity, and the proposed project's evidence of relative ease of use or user satisfaction.

(4) The eligible applicant's estimate of the cost of the proposed project, which includes the start-up and operating costs per student per year (including indirect costs) for reaching the total number of students proposed to be served by the project. The eligible applicant must include an estimate of the costs for the eligible applicant or others (including other partners) to reach 100,000, 250,000, and 500,000 students.

(5) The mechanisms the eligible applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.

Strengths

Applicant identifies strong network with infrastructure that has expanded project across numerous states and schools with success.

Qualified and experienced personnel are employed and support the network and schools in the past projects listed. Demonstrated scale up abilities are shared.

Replication strategies are shared and address variety of student populations with minimal cost per student.

Dissemination plans include the various networks the schools and project are members of and online sharing mechanisms

Weaknesses

Applicant does not share information on the cost to scale up to 100,000 to 500,000 students, although the cost per student is included in narrative.

Reader's Score: 4

4. F. Sustainability (up to 10 Points)

In determining the adequacy of resources for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the eligible applicant demonstrates that it has the resources, as well as the support from stakeholders (e.g., State educational agencies, teachers' unions) to operate the project beyond the length of the Development grant.

(2) The potential and planning for the incorporation of project purposes, activities, or benefits into the ongoing work of the eligible applicant and any other partners at the end of the Development grant.

Strengths

Applicant will use success to leverage future funding.

Applicant shows that committed individuals have sustained through resources shifting to other initiatives; yet, committed and talented people have donated time, money, and effort to sustain and grow the network and work of the project.

Applicant's framework is embedded in many states' education agendas providing optimism for funding as results show the effectiveness of the program.

Weaknesses

No visible support is present at this point. Applicant references success in sustaining the work as resources diminish and plans to use success and results to leverage more support and funds.

Reader's Score: 8

5. G. Quality of the Management Plan and Personnel (up to 10 Points)

In determining the quality of the management plan and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

(1) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

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

Strengths

Management plan is clear and specific with duties assigned and goals clearly stated.

Exemplary personnel to direct project and manage projects with experience to support size and scope of project.

Weaknesses

No weaknesses are identified.

Reader's Score: 10

Competitive Preference

1. Competitive Preference 5: Innovations for Improving Early Learning Outcomes (0 or 1 Point)

We give competitive preference to applications for projects that would implement innovative practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to improve educational outcomes for high-need students who are young children (birth through 3rd grade) by enhancing the quality of early learning programs. To meet this priority, applications must focus on:

- (a) improving young children's school readiness (including social, emotional, and cognitive readiness) so that children are prepared for success in core academic subjects (as defined in section 9101(11) of the ESEA);**
- (b) improving developmental milestones and standards and aligning them with appropriate outcome measures; and**
- (c) improving alignment, collaboration, and transitions between early learning programs that serve children from birth to age three, in preschools, and in kindergarten through third grade.**

Strengths

This competitive preference was not addressed.

Weaknesses

This competitive preference was not addressed.

Reader's Score: 0

2. Competitive Preference 6: Innovations That Support College Access and Success (0 or 1 Point)

We give competitive preference to applications for projects that would implement innovative practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to enable kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) students, particularly high school students, to successfully prepare for, enter, and graduate from a two- or four-year college. To meet this priority, applications must include practices, strategies, or programs for K-12 students that

- (a) address students' preparedness and expectations related to college;**
- (b) help students understand issues of college affordability and the financial aid and college application processes; and**
- (c) provide support to students from peers and knowledgeable adults.**

Strengths

This competitive preference was not addressed.

Weaknesses

This competitive preference was not addressed.

Reader's Score: 0

3. Competitive Preference 7: Innovations To Address the Unique Learning Needs of Students With Disabilities and Limited English Proficient Students (0 or 1 Point)

We give competitive preference to applications for projects that would implement innovative practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to address the unique learning needs of students with disabilities, including those who are assessed based on alternate academic achievement standards, or the linguistic and academic needs of limited English proficient students. To meet this priority, applications must provide for the implementation of particular practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to improve academic outcomes, close achievement gaps, and increase college- and career-readiness, including increasing high school graduation rates (as defined in this notice), for students with disabilities or limited English proficient students.

Strengths

Applicant identifies this as a focus of their grant with plans to support the priority.

Weaknesses

No weaknesses identified.

Reader's Score: 1

4. Competitive Preference 8: Innovations That Serve Schools in Rural LEAs (0, 1, or 2 Points)

We give competitive preference to applications for projects that would implement innovative practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to focus on the unique challenges of high-need students in schools within a rural LEA (as defined in this notice) and address the particular challenges faced by students in these schools. To meet this priority, applications must include practices, strategies, or programs that are designed to improve student achievement or student growth, close achievement gaps, decrease dropout rates, increase high school graduation rates, or improve teacher and principal effectiveness in one or more rural LEAs.

Strengths

Applicant identifies rural schools to participate in the network and has strategies that will support improvement and achievement in rural districts.

Weaknesses

No weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 2

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 07/02/2010 5:38 PM

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Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 07/23/2010 10:05 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform -- , - , (U396D101182)

Reader #1:

	POINTS POSSIBLE	POINTS SCORED
Evaluation Criteria		
1. B. Strength of Research, Significance of Effect, and Magnitude of Effect (up to 10 Points)	10	10
2. D. Quality of the Project Evaluation (up to 15 Points)	15	14
<i>SUB TOTAL</i>	25	24
TOTAL	25	24

Technical Review Form

Development Tier 2 Panel 06: 84.396D

Reader #1:

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform -- , - , (U396D101182)

1. B. Strength of Research, Significance of Effect, and Magnitude of Effect (up to 10 Points)

The Secretary considers the strength of the existing research evidence, including reported practice, theoretical considerations, and the significance and magnitude of any effects reported in prior research, on whether the proposed project will improve student achievement or student growth, close achievement gaps, decrease dropout

rates, increase high school graduation rates, or increase college enrollment and completion rates. Eligible applicants may also demonstrate success through an intermediate variable that is strongly correlated with improving these outcomes, such as teacher or principal effectiveness.

In determining the strength of the existing research evidence, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (1) The extent to which the eligible applicant demonstrates that there are research-based findings or reasonable hypotheses that support the proposed project, including related research in education and other sectors.
- (2) The extent to which the proposed project has been attempted previously, albeit on a limited scale or in a limited setting, with promising results that suggest that more formal and systematic study is warranted.
- (3) The extent to which the eligible applicant demonstrates that, if funded, the proposed project likely will have a positive impact, as measured by the importance or magnitude of the effect, on improving student achievement or student growth, closing achievement gaps, decreasing dropout rates, increasing high school graduation rates, or increasing college enrollment and completion rates.

Strengths

The applicant demonstrates that the proposed intervention is research based. Four hypotheses supporting the proposed project are provided on pp. 2 & 4. The theory behind the proposed project is stated on p. 5. The research base supporting these hypotheses is outlined on pp. 9-11.

The abstract indicates that state Schools to Watch (STW) programs operate in 19 states. The applicant also provides on p. 9 the results of a study in Kentucky using STW. These results are promising and suggest that a more formal and systematic study is warranted.

The applicant demonstrates through the research supporting its hypotheses and on other similar programs that the proposed intervention is likely to improve middle school achievement.

Weaknesses

The applicant does not have any weaknesses in Section B.

Reader's Score: 10

2. D. Quality of the Project Evaluation (up to 15 Points)

In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the following

factors.

(1) The extent to which the methods of evaluation are appropriate to the size and scope of the proposed project.

(2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide high-quality implementation data and performance feedback, and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes.

(3) The extent to which the evaluation will provide sufficient information about the key elements and approach of the project to facilitate further development, replication, or testing in other settings.

(4) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths

The applicant will use matched, quasi-experimental design for the evaluation. The research hypotheses to be investigated are listed on p. 16. The sample will include 18 treatment schools in 3 states, as well as 18 comparison schools, with the matching criteria outlined on p. 16. The analyses will use t-test, ANOVA, and HLM (p. 19). All of these factors contribute to an evaluation that is appropriate to the size and scope of the proposed project.

The evaluation will provide high-quality implementation data due to its use of a school rating rubric, SISS surveys, focus groups with school leadership teams and teachers, and the tracking of coaching activities via coach logs (pp. 16-17). Progress toward achieving the intended student outcomes will be evaluated through the use of SISS quantitative data and other student achievement data (p. 18).

The surveys, focus groups, and coaches' logs, in particular, will help provide information about the key elements and approach of the project to facilitate further development and replication.

The evaluation will be led by Nancy Flowers of CPRD. Her CV demonstrates her evaluation expertise. The budget for the evaluation will be \$140,000 per year (p. 19). This seems sufficient given that the evaluation will take place in 18 schools.

Weaknesses

The evaluation plan does not include information on the number of teachers and administrators to be included in the sample. This information would be

helpful for ascertaining the exact extent to which the evaluation plan is appropriate for the project.

Reader's Score: 14

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 07/23/2010 10:05 PM

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Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 07/23/2010 3:26 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform -- , - , (U396D101182)

Reader #2:

	POINTS POSSIBLE	POINTS SCORED
Evaluation Criteria		
1. B. Strength of Research, Significance of Effect, and Magnitude of Effect (up to 10 Points)	10	10
2. D. Quality of the Project Evaluation (up to 15 Points)	15	14
<i>SUB TOTAL</i>	25	24
TOTAL	25	24

Technical Review Form

Development Tier 2 Panel 06: 84.396D

Reader #2:

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform -- , - , (U396D101182)

1. B. Strength of Research, Significance of Effect, and Magnitude of Effect (up to 10 Points)

The Secretary considers the strength of the existing research evidence, including reported practice, theoretical considerations, and the significance and magnitude of any effects reported in prior research, on whether the proposed project will improve student achievement or student growth, close achievement gaps, decrease dropout

rates, increase high school graduation rates, or increase college enrollment and completion rates. Eligible applicants may also demonstrate success through an intermediate variable that is strongly correlated with improving these outcomes, such as teacher or principal effectiveness.

In determining the strength of the existing research evidence, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (1) The extent to which the eligible applicant demonstrates that there are research-based findings or reasonable hypotheses that support the proposed project, including related research in education and other sectors.
- (2) The extent to which the proposed project has been attempted previously, albeit on a limited scale or in a limited setting, with promising results that suggest that more formal and systematic study is warranted.
- (3) The extent to which the eligible applicant demonstrates that, if funded, the proposed project likely will have a positive impact, as measured by the importance or magnitude of the effect, on improving student achievement or student growth, closing achievement gaps, decreasing dropout rates, increasing high school graduation rates, or increasing college enrollment and completion rates.

Strengths

The applicant provides research-based evidence in support of their proposed project.
On p. 12-14, the applicant describes a previously conducted study using the proposed intervention with promising results.
On p. 13, the applicant predicts positive results based on the proposed intervention specifically in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups.

Weaknesses

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

2. D. Quality of the Project Evaluation (up to 15 Points)

In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the following factors.

- (1) The extent to which the methods of evaluation are appropriate to the size and scope of the proposed project.
- (2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide high-quality

implementation data and performance feedback, and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes.

(3) The extent to which the evaluation will provide sufficient information about the key elements and approach of the project to facilitate further development, replication, or testing in other settings.

(4) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths

Proposed study design, a matched quasi-experimental mixed methods, is appropriate for the project. Main unit of analyses is identified. Research hypotheses are well defined on p. 17-18. The applicant proposes three sets of analyses for initial group matching, longitudinal, and qualitative, in line with the study design. Potential nesting effect is accounted for by the proposed hierarchical linear modeling analysis approach.

On p. 18-19, the applicant identifies quantitative as well as qualitative measures for periodic assessment and performance feedback, i.e. STW, Rating Rubric and focus groups.

Description of results reporting on p. 20 suggests enough detail for replication purposes. The applicant proposes to report back to the schools, STW teams as well as to the USDOE on student and school outcome data. Sufficiency of resources for evaluation is addressed on p. 20.

Weaknesses

On p. 17, the applicant specified that school will be the unit of analyses. Because power calculations are not included, it is not clear if they will have enough power to detect an effect.

Reader's Score: 14

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 07/23/2010 3:26 PM