



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0892TX-1 for Austin Independent School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	4
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant presents a reform vision that is partially-responsive to the four core educational assurance areas. With the focus of this proposal being on increasing the availability of virtual and blended instruction, the opportunity to improve the level of instructional standards is present. However, the applicant never specifically addresses college and career readiness standards. Similarly, the applicant does not address how this proposal builds on existing work in terms of data systems or teacher and principal effectiveness. In the sense that the applicant would select schools from those on the low-performance list for participation, the proposal is directed at turning around low-achieving schools. However, the applicant does not describe a process by which schools will be chosen for participation. While an application for schools in the district to complete for subgrant funds is available in the appendix, the process for scoring these applications internally is not described.</p> <p>Overall, the applicant receives a score in the medium range for this section.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	6
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(a) The applicant has a partially-developed plan for selecting schools to participate in the proposed project. Schools have not been selected, but an application for selection has been drafted. While the focus of this proposal is on virtual instruction and blended learning, the application only requires that a minimum of 25 percent of the project be focused on technology. It is possible then for the majority of funding to go to initiatives not described in the proposal. As such, the response to the selection criteria has limited relevance.</p> <p>(b) The applicant has a process in place for selecting schools for participation and includes a list of schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress. While these are not necessarily the schools that would apply for and receive RTTT subgrants from the district, the list highlights the schools with the most pervasive need. As such, the applicant has provided an appropriate overview of the population that would be served by the proposed project.</p> <p>(c) The applicant provides estimates of the number of schools that will be added and students that will be served by the proposed project. Since the application within the district for RTTT funds includes the requirement that schools have at least 45 percent low SES, the applicant would serve a high number of low-income students through the proposed project.</p> <p>Overall, the applicant has some strengths that are offset by gaps in information. As such, this section receives a score in the middle range of points.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	4
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant minimally describes how the proposed project will be implemented and translated into meaningful reform. While the overarching goal is to increase personalized learning environments by increasing the availability of virtual instruction, it is not clear from the narrative what activities will actually be implemented. Also, the applicant refers several times to elements of the reform model developed by the Center for Reinventing Public Education, but it is not clear that the LEA has adopted any of these reform principals. As such, the applicant receives a score in the medium range for this section.</p>		
(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	2
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p>		

The applicant provides baseline data and goals for improvement that are partially responsive to the selection criteria. Where they are provided, they are not ambitious:

(a/b) The applicant provides baseline data showing that currently, 80 percent of district students meet state benchmarks for performance in all tested areas. They propose raising this by only one percent per year. Additionally, no subgroup data has been provided by the applicant. Goals provided for reading and math include the same one percent annual gains. For these subjects, though, subgroup data - showing gaps - are provided. With subgroups gaining one percent as well, the gaps do not change. On the other hand, with social studies and science achievement, the subgroup scores are projected to rise at a higher rate than for the overall population, which closes the achievement gaps. The applicant provides no rationale for either the size of the gains or the fact that math and reading gaps would remain unchanged.

(c) The applicant provides baseline data and goals for increasing the graduation rate but does not include subgroup data. As such, it is unclear whether there are gaps that need to be addressed specifically.

(d) The applicant does not provide a rationale for the goals in college enrollment rates. The baseline data show 50 percent college enrollment in 2010-11 and 55 percent in 2011-12, with goals to increase by 5 percent each year until reaching 75 percent in 2016-17. It is unclear how these goals were established or if subgroup data would show achievement gaps.

Overall, the applicant's response to the selection criteria in this section is poor; accordingly, a score in the low range of points is awarded.

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	3
(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: (a) The applicant partially provides evidence of having raised achievement. Data provided show large gains in all subject areas during the last eight years. However, the gains during the last four years are small. No data showing how high school graduation rates and college enrollment rates have changed during this time are provided. (b) The applicant does not discuss reforms in low-achieving schools. While learning gains have been made over time, it is not clear that these gains are the result of reform initiatives. (c) The applicant does not describe the process for reporting student performance data to the public.. Overall, the applicant's response to the selection criteria for this section is incomplete. As such, a score in the low range of points is awarded.		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: The applicant demonstrates a high level of transparency with financial information by providing access via the district website to information on school-level expenditures, including all school-level instructional and support staff. Publicly available information also includes information broken down by site, employee category, and non-personnel expenditures. As such, the applicant demonstrates a high level of transparency and receives full points for this section.		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10
(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: The applicant demonstrates clearly that the LEA has the autonomy under state regulations to implement the proposed project. Supporting evidence includes an analysis conducted by the district of local, state, and federal rules that either promote or inhibit digital learning. From this guidance, the applicant has shaped its blended learning initiative. As such, the applicant has fully met the criteria for this section and receives full points.		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	2
(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:		

The applicant partially demonstrates evidence of stakeholder engagement. Evidence includes agendas and presentation materials from a meeting with various stakeholder groups. However, the narrative explains that participants were given only 24 hours to provide input on the proposal following the worksession. Also, it is not clear from either the narrative if the stakeholder meeting how parents and students were invited to provide input. In all, one meeting and the brief comment period that ensued does not represent meaningful stakeholder engagement.

The applicant only provides three letters of support, representing few stakeholder groups. As such, the evidence provided does little to meet the selection criteria. Overall, this section receives points in the low range.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	1
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(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant partially describes the impediments to providing personalized learning environments as described in the proposed project. The narrative focuses on the lack of funding within the state and how that has slowed implementation of digital learning in the LEA. The response lacks a thorough analysis of gaps that the proposed project will address. While the applicant includes a list of the eight schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress, the proposal does not include example of how digital instruction will specifically address them. As such, the section is lacking in supporting evidence for how the proposed project will address learning gaps. Overall, this section receives a score in the low range of points.

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	4

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

(a) The applicant partially describes a program that will lead to student behaviors as outlined in the selection criteria. By increasing the availability of online instruction, students will have more access to content that suits their interest and that is delivered in a way best suited to their learning styles. The applicant does not explain, however, how the proposed project will lead to students having a greater understanding of where their learning fits into the bigger picture of being college and career ready at the end of high school. The narrative also does not explain how diversity will be embedded into learning or how students will develop traits such as teamwork and perseverance.

(b) The applicant partially demonstrates that students will have access to a personalized sequence of instruction but does not explain the role of parents and educators in helping to develop it. The proposed project does not represent a variety of high-quality instructional approaches and environments, only virtual learning and blended learning. The applicant has also not described the development and deployment of virtual learning, so the extent to which courses will be taught at a level appropriate to preparing students to be college and career ready is not possible. Also, the applicant does not explain how feedback will be used to improve student performance, course offerings, or the program itself. Finally, no accommodations for high-need students are described in the narrative.

(c) The applicant does not provide a description of mechanisms to support students using virtual learning is described.

Overall, this section receives a score in the low range of points.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	4
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

(a) The applicant partially describes how educators will engage in training through participation in communities of practice. However, the explanation provided is largely the theory behind communities of practice and professional learning communities. The only specific training described in the response is an orientation to be held for educators after the grant is awarded.

(b) Other than information provided in the explanation of the orientation that will be provided, the applicant has not delineated how participating educators will be provided with tools and support for accelerating student progress towards meeting college and career readiness goals.

(c) The applicant provides minimal information explaining how school leaders and leadership teams will be trained to use resources such as the LEA's teacher evaluation system to structure learning environments. No information on how training will also be geared towards continuous improvement is included either.

(d) The applicant does not explain how the proposed project will increase the number of students receiving instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals. The only data provided shows that all students are taught by highly qualified teachers as defined under No Child Left Behind, which is not the same thing.

Overall, the applicant does not provide evidence or narrative explanation in response to many parts of the selection criteria for this section. As such, points are awarded in the low range.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	7
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(a) The applicant demonstrates a governance structure that is conducive to flexibility and would permit expansion of digital learning opportunities as described in the proposed project. Board-adopted policies supporting these practices are described in documents provided in the appendix.</p> <p>(b) The board-adopted policies also permit flexibility in organizing school schedules and calendars, as well as staffing models and budgetary autonomy.</p> <p>(c) Neither the narrative nor the appendix provide evidence that students participating in this project will have the opportunity to progress and earn credit based on demonstrated mastery rather than seat time.</p> <p>(d) Neither the narrative nor the appendix provide evidence that students participating in this project will have the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of standards at multiple times and in multiple comparable ways.</p> <p>(e) Neither the narrative nor the appendix provide evidence that learning resources and instructional practices will be adaptable and fully accessible to all students.</p> <p>Overall, the response partially addresses the selection criteria. Therefore, this section receives a score in the middle range of points.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	5
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(a) The applicant partially responds to the selection criteria by stating that the LEA will examine the extent to which system-wide resources can be used to provide equitable access for students, parents, and educators. Since the applicant is in the investigation stage of this process, it can not be considered fully meeting this element.</p> <p>(b) As with the previous element, the applicant partially responds by stating that the LEA will determine the extent to which stakeholders have appropriate levels of technical support.</p> <p>(c) The applicant fully describes the extent to which existing data systems support parents and students sending and retrieving information. Since the systems in place can help inform students and parents about appropriate learning supports that are in place for the individual student needs, this response fully meets this element.</p> <p>(d) The applicant does not respond to this element of the selection criteria.</p> <p>Overall, the applicant has a similar number of strengths and weaknesses in this section and receives a score in the middle range of points.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	3
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant minimally addresses the selection criteria by providing examples of short-term and medium-term assessments that will be used to evaluate the progress of project implementation. These measures include observations, student scores,</p>		

and teacher-developed products. No information on the process for reporting, monitoring, or sharing any of this information is provided. Overall, this section receives a score in the low range of points.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	1
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(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's plan minimally addresses the selection criteria. The plan described is for communicating outcomes with members of the community of practice for practitioners of blended learning. This does not address strategies for communicating with internal and external stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, and members of the community. As such, the applicant receives a score in the low range for this section.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	1
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(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has only addressed the criteria by stating that performance criteria will be selected by stakeholders after the grant has been awarded. As such, the response merits a minimal score.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	1
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(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides a minimal response to the selection criteria by stating that products of collaboration, such as the number of articulated and published leadership practices, will demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed project. The response includes artifacts rather than outcomes in terms of how this innovative practice improves student learning. As such, this section receives a score in the low range of points.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	0

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has not included budget information. No explanation of the amount of funding requested or how any RTTT funds would be spent is included in the application. As such, no points are awarded.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	0
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has not addressed the selection criteria. As such, no points are awarded.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	0

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has not responded to the selection criteria included in the competitive preference priority. As such, no points are awarded.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not	Not Met

	Met	
<p>Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has not met the absolute priority. The proposed project minimally addresses the core assurances. The project itself includes no details about how students will be served. At best, this proposal could be described as "a plan to plan." While blended learning is an approach to creating more personalized learning environments, the applicant has not made the case for how this one strategy of the grant is appropriate for the student population to be served.</p>		
Total	210	63



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0892TX-2 for Austin Independent School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	4
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The core concepts presented in Austin ISD's proposal in sections A through C comprised a fairly comprehensive and generally sound plan to build upon its prior reform efforts, particularly its use of the Center for Reinventing Public Education reform strategy portfolio and a new Blended Learning Network for improving student learning through personalized student support. The lack of high-quality responses for sections D and E and the complete absence of a budget and budget narrative fatally undermined the coherence of the proposal as a whole resulting in the deduction of six points. The score awarded for this section was a four which falls in the middle range.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	5
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Austin did not provide a list of participating schools but did describe a process it will use to select schools for the project and provided an estimate that over 40,000 students and 300 staff would participate with 63.8% of students being from low income backgrounds. Estimated staff participation numbers were also provided. The appendix included an application that Austin schools can use to apply to be a participating project school implementing either the AISD Project-based Learning 2.0 Model or the Kahn Academy model. The form indicates that documentation must be submitted showing that 70% of teachers support the project. At least 45% of students must be from low income backgrounds, and a minimum of 25% of the budget must be focused on educational technology. The form appears to give schools an option of implementing the program at a single grade level or on a school-wide basis. While there is a selection process, there is also substantial ambiguity regarding who the actual student and staff participants will ultimately be and there was no discussion of how a coherent group of schools and participating students and staff would ultimately be selected. The process is not very strategic and suggests lack of a clear central office vision for the project.</p> <p>Due to these ambiguities, five points were deducted for this section resulting in a section score of five which is in the middle range.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	5
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Austin did not provide a logic model but it did convey the reform-oriented program theory which is the foundation of its proposal. The</p>		

proposal systematically addressed how it would evaluate the feasibility of scale-up of the project strategies within the district and across the region. Some of the proposal strategies such as SEL are district-wide interventions. While the proposal will involve approximately 50% of Austin students, it is unclear what the intentions or goals are ultimately for scaling up the project in the district. The high quality plan components for Austin's proposal are located in section C(1) but do not include persons responsible. The ambiguity regarding scale-up plans and the missing "persons responsible" element resulted in a loss of five points. Austin's response for this section was of medium quality and five of ten points were awarded.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	3
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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Austin's performance goals call for only modest improvements in performance and are not very ambitious. Projections for closing the achievement gap are slightly more ambitious. Subgroup disaggregations for graduation rate were not provided though it seems highly likely they would have revealed equity issues to be addressed. Due to these deficiencies seven points were deducted for this section resulting in a total score of three which is in the middle range.

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	11

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Austin Public Schools provided evidence that from 2003 to 2011 its students had posted remarkable improvements in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies state assessments. The largest gains occurred 2003-2007 but substantial gains were also seen in the most recent four year period of focus called for in this section. Progress in closing the achievement gaps shown with this data are also impressive and unusual for a school district of Austin's size and diversity. In its application, Austin described a number of reform strategies that it has been using and the data suggest the strategies have been successful with its lowest achieving and low performing schools.

Four points were deducted because little information was provided concerning how the district makes performance data available to students, educators, and parents. Austin's response for this section resulted in awarding eleven points which is in the middle range.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
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(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Austin reported that it has a link on the district website which makes available individual salaries of personnel at the school level in all four reporting categories identified for this section. The transparency of this approach and the fact that the district is moving to a student level funding model was a high level response earning all five points for this section.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Austin provided documentation concerning systematic state-level efforts that have been undertaken to assess readiness and general conditions supporting online learning initiatives. Some examples include:

- A comprehensive assessment of state readiness to implement new blended learning education programs for high school and college credit funded by Educate Texas, a public-private initiative of Communities Foundation of Texas.
- October 2012, Educate Texas Blended Learning conference for public school educators, defining blended learning as "any time a student learns at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home and at least in part through online delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace".
- Creation of the Texas Teaching, Technology, & Innovation Fund, or T3IF.

It is clear that Texas is serious about Blended Learning models and the Austin region, as a high-technology industry hub, is in an excellent position to move forward with it. Austin's high level response to this section earned full points.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	5
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Austin described an intensive self-assessment and planning process that took place beginning in the spring of 2012 and continued through October. The proposal development was initially undertaken by a broad team of central office staff but later involved district principals. The fully developed proposal was shared with a broader group including deans and department chairs as well as community and teachers' union representatives. No evidence was provided concerning the participation of students or families in this process and a very short 24-hour comment period was provided after the proposal briefing. Only three letters of support were provided and none were by the teachers union. The evidence submitted by Austin shows only moderate engagement of stakeholders in the development of the proposal. The absence of either a support letter from the teachers' union or survey data showing teacher support raises questions about the extent of support to implement the project. Austin did address the support issue in part by making a provision that participating schools would need to complete an application to participate in the project as a strategy to assure buy-in.

The modest level of evidence concerning stakeholder engagement and support for the project resulted in the deduction of five points and a total score of five points for this section which falls in the middle range.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	3
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(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

Austin's submission for this section was not very responsive to the criteria and better information related to the criteria can be found in other sections of the application. For example, the district completed a detailed self-assessment with regard to readiness to implement digital learning and blended learning. A high-quality plan for analysis of needs is not provided anywhere in the application but a high-quality analysis was in fact conducted. The logic behind Austin's proposal was included in an earlier section. Two points were deducted for this section because no information was provided about how needs and gaps would be systematically addressed. The final score awarded was three points which is in the middle range.

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	8

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Austin submitted a plan for a blended learning initiative to be used to improve teaching and learning by personalizing learning environments which is strong conceptually but failed to address many of the section C-1 criteria. The plan (Table 6) also lacked required high-quality elements including goals and parties responsible for implementing the activities. Nowhere in the application does Austin address how students will be provided with ongoing and regular feedback or what mechanisms would be used to provide training and support to students. Due to these limitations, twelve points were deducted for this section and the score of eight was awarded which is in the middle range.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	5
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Austin's response to this section did not include a high-quality plan and was not responsive to many of the C(2) elements. No information was provided regarding how the district would use LEA or teacher and principal evaluations to provide feedback improving teachers' and principals' practice. Austin provided no information about how processes and tools would be used to match student needs with resources and approaches for how it would increase the number of its students receiving instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals. While the general conceptual plan for using blended learning to improve teaching and learning appears to be sound, due to the omissions referenced above, fifteen points were deducted for this section resulting in a score of five which is in the middle range.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	9

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Austin's proposal included no information concerning a management plan or governance proposal to guide implementation of the project resulting in the deduction of three points for this section. Another three points were deducted because no information was provided on how instruction would be adaptable and accessible for disabled and English language learners. With its system-wide commitment to Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) portfolio reform strategies, however, Austin is well-positioned to provide adequate flexibility and autonomy for schools to make success of the project likely. The core concepts of this proposal and the creation of the Blended Learning Network are sound and should provide students with the opportunity to progress and earn credit based on demonstrated mastery at multiple times and in multiple ways. Nine points were awarded for this section which is in the middle range.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)

10

5

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Austin described how its work with integrating a Performance Management platform, an Enterprise Management platform, and a Digital Learning platform provide students, staff, and parents with access to data, tools, and resources supporting the personalization of learning. The proposal did not, however, address the provision of technical support or the extent to which the systems use open data formats or interoperable data systems. These omissions resulted in the deduction of five points for this section and a total score of five was awarded.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	5

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

In the proposal, Austin described a number of short-term and intermediate impact measures which it reported would be used by the Blended Learning Network to monitor and improve implementation of the project. It did not, however, report who would review this information or how it would monitor, act on, or publicly share this information. Due to these omissions, ten points were deducted resulting in a section score of five which is at the low end of the middle range.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)

5

2

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Austin reported that communications and engagement efforts would be moderated by the project director and would focus on the Blended Learning Network community of practice. The strategy fails to address the need for informing a broader range of stakeholders than identified, including district management and policy makers. This omission resulted in the deduction of three points and a total score of two which is in the middle range.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)

5

1

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Austin reported that performance measures would be identified in collaboration with stakeholders during the first 100 days of implementation of the grant. The plan for developing the measures was vague. No information was provided on how the measures would be selected or how the performance data would be reviewed. The absence of performance measures resulted in a score of one point being assigned for this section which is in the low range.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)

5

1

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Austin identified a set of measures that it intends to use which it reports have been used nationally by early adopters of digital learning. These measures fall considerably short of addressing all elements identified in the E(4) criteria. The application does not describe a credible and adequate process for evaluating the implementation and impact of the project. Due to these substantial deficiencies, four points were deducted for this section resulting in a score of one which is in the low range.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score

(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	0
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: Austin submitted no information for this section and therefore zero points were awarded which is in the low range.		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	1
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: Austin submitted no information for this section but Table 6 in Section C(1) does include a reference to an activity to "Schedule Network sustainability planning work group" during Phase 2 of the project. No other information concerning sustainability was provided. Due to the limited information, one point was awarded which is in the low range.		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	4
Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments: While Austin included no section in its application addressing the competitive preference priority, the submissions for other sections make it clear that the proposal includes collaboration with outside partners that would provide student and family supports concerning social, emotional, or behavioral needs of participating students. These partnerships are substantial and sustained. Austin did not address targeted indicators related to this work or how it would use the data for improving results over time. These omissions resulted in the deduction of six points and a total score of four which is in the middle range.		

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Not Met
Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments: While the core conceptual aspects of Austin's proposal are comprehensive, well thought-out, and quite compelling, the failure to include budget information or provide narrative addressing sections F(1) and F(2) of the application renders the proposal deeply flawed. Budget information is critically necessary to show there is a credible plan for supporting project activities. The absence of critical budget information undermines the coherence of the proposal in such a deep way that the proposal does not meet Absolute Priority 1.		

Total	210	92
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0892TX-3 for Austin Independent School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
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(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	3
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant desires to establish the Austin Blended Learning Network to increase high quality, technology based education opportunities but they fail to describe how the implementation of this project will build on its work in four core educational assurance areas. While the narrative states that they will create personalized learning environments accelerating student achieving, they do not articulate the approach to accomplish this. The vision explained does not speak to being grounded in common and individual tasks that are based on student academic interests. The applicant scored low in this section due to the lack of clarity in its visions with respects to the NIA.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	4
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant clearly explains that schools will be chosen within the first 100 days through the district's campus grant selection process. They also explains that at least 45 percent of the students to be served are low-income. While the criteria for applications are provided, what is lacking is who will be the body to choose the grantees. An understanding of the composition of the reviewers would have strengthened the application. In addition, while 30 schools, out of 118, will be chosen, a process of this nature would assume that the more progressive schools serving low income would have a stronger chance than those weaker schools. What is lacking is criteria on high need students, achievement data for the school and a strengthening of leadership emphasis. While the applicant provides the district totals concerning numbers of participating students, participating students from low-income families, participating students who are high-need students and participating educators, what they fail to provide is the estimated numbers for each category as specified in the NIA. The applicant scored low in this category because of the lack of focus on the selection criteria of schools and the lack of approximate numbers of participants.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	3
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant fails to include a high-quality plan describing how the reform proposal will be scaled up. The applicant definitively explains the need for reform with 30 schools not meeting AYP along with district for 2010-11 and eight schools being academically unacceptable. More information is needed concerning how the applicant will reach its outcome goals. The applicant does explain that they have implemented a portfolio of schools reform strategy aligned with research from the Center for Reinventing Public Education. Yet, there is no high-quality plan outlined which will guide the reform strategy. The applicant scored low in this section because of the lack of a high-quality plan.</p>		
(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	2
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant's vision is the award sub-grants to 30 schools who apply through a competitive process. Because the schools will set their own annual goals, it is difficult to assess whether the performance on summative assessments, achievement gaps, graduation rates and college enrollment listed on the charts provided are ambitious yet achievable. The increases in performance on summative assessments range from 8 to 12 percent for all subpopulations except special education which has a 25 percent targeted increase with no explanation as to why the special education group will have a larger targeted increase with this not being a criteria in the sub-grant application. The decreased in achievement gaps range from 2 to 16 percent again with no strategic mention in the sub-grant application therefore leaving the evaluation as to these increases not possible. The high school graduation rate increase listed is for the district as a whole at 3.3 percent and the college enrollment is targeted at a 25 percent increase. Evaluation of this is not possible also because there are no assurances that high schools will be chosen for targeting during the grant period. The applicant does not mention that the targets listed are equal to or exceed State ESEA targets for the LEA. The applicant scored low in this category because of the lack of clarity concerning their likelihood in articulating goals equal to or exceeding the State ESEA targeted or the LEA.</p>		

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	3
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p>		

The applicant demonstrated success over the past nine years in AISD TAKS Social Studies, Math, Science and Reading Student Achievement. Evidence is also provided that success has occurred in various subpopulations. Applicant fails to provide information concerning success in high schools graduation rates and college enrollment for the past four years. Applicant fails to provide information concerning their achievement in ambitious and significant reform in persistently lowest-achieving schools or in its low-performing schools. The applicant fails to demonstrate evidence in their ability of making student performance data (as defined in this notice) available to students, educators (as defined in this notice), and parents in ways that inform and improve participation, instruction, and services. The applicant scored low in this section due to the lack of information demonstrating their ability to achieve ambitious and significant reform in its persistently lowest achieving schools or low performing schools, in making student performance data available and in improving high school graduation rates and college enrollment for the past four years .

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
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(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:
 The applicant provides the clear understanding that the AISD’s Finance Office’s web page provides access to information on school level expenditures which includes actual personnel salaries at the school level for instructional staff only; actual personnel salaries at the school level for teachers only and actual non-personnel expenditures at the school level. The applicant scored high in this section because they demonstrated a high level of transparency with the data described in the criteria.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	5
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:
 While the applicant provides an assessment in Attachment F along with summation of the Foundation for Excellence in Education report which explained that Texas has made advances in 45 of 72 metrics for assessing state contexts for digital learning, which when equated to a percentage grade is 62.5 percent, the applicant did not clearly demonstrate that there were successful conditions and sufficient autonomy to implement personalized learning environment described in the applicant’s proposal. A summation of the state legal, statutory and regulatory requirements relating to the proposal would have strengthened the application. The applicant scored in the medium range because of the information provided in Attachment F yet the lack of clarity concerning the legal, statutory and regulatory environment for implementation of proposal.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	4
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:
 While the applicant explains that a work session was conducted on October 9, 2012 with the education sector, union and non-profit organizations the applicant failed to evidence how students and families were engaged in the development of the proposal.
 The applicant fails to evidence the direct engagement and support for the proposal from teachers in the participating schools, which or the sake of application would have been all schools. Evidence that all has opportunity to participate would have strengthened the application. While over 60 people were in attendance at the work session, no reference is given as the number participating. Applicant does provide evidence through ha sign in sheet that 17 principals were provided an overview of project on September 25th, but no explanation is provided as to the discussion or input provide.
 The applicant does not provide letters from such stakeholder groups as parents, parent organizations or student organizations. This would have strengthened the application by explained this stakeholders group support for the project. The applicant does provide a letter from the Chamber of Commerce, but providing a chamber membership number would have strengthened the application showing the business community support of project. In addition, no letter is provided by the union showing at a minimum their engagement in the project development.
 The applicant scored in the lower medium range of points because of the lack of demonstrated evidence of meaningful stakeholder engagement in the development of the proposal as well as meaningful key stakeholder support for the project.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	2
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(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:
 The applicant failed to provide a high-quality plan for analysis of their current status in implementing personalized learning environments. While they provided an environmental scan detailing the financial situation in Texas with respects to education,

the applicant did not provide a high-quality plan for analysis of the current situation. This should have included at a minimum, the goals, activities, timelines, deliverables and responsible parties. For this reason, the applicant scored in the low range of points.

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	4
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant provides many of the components of a high-quality plan for improving learning and teaching. The goal of this plan is to increase high quality, high tech education options for PK-12 students. This goal aligns with the purpose of the RTT-D grant. The activities outlined drive towards preparing students to graduate prepared for college, career and life. Table Six: The Austin Blended Learning Network Activities Timeline by Month appears realistic and achievable for the first 18 months, but leaves off the remaining 20 months of the project. What is missing from the plan are the responsible parties for the activities. More information is needed concerning who is responsible for what to achieve success. The applicant needed to provide information on the approach to explain that all students understand that what they are learning is key to their success in accomplishing their goals. The partnership with Rice University to create the STEMScopes2.0 on-line curriculum will help prepare students with college- and career-ready standard or college- and career-ready graduation requirements. Applicant does not explain the mechanism for students to understand how to structure their learning to achieve their goals and measure progress towards those goals. In addition, no explanation is given concerning students opportunities to be involved in deep learning experiences in areas of academic interest or access and exposure to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives that motivate and deepen individual student learning. The Network proposal doesn't address the opportunity for students to master critical academic content and develop skills and traits such as goal-setting, teamwork, perseverance, critical thinking, communication, creativity, and problem-solving. The applicant needed to provide information concerning how the personalized sequence of instructional content and skill development will enable to student to achieve his or her individual learning goals and ensure he or she can graduate on time and college- and career-ready. The proposals variety of high-quality instructional approaches and environments is a strength with the partnership with Rice University. More information is needed concerning high-quality content, including digital learning content being aligned with college- and career-ready standards or college- and career-ready graduation requirements. The applicant fails to address ongoing and regular feedback, including, at a minimum frequently updated individual student data that can be used to determine progress toward mastery of college- and career-ready standards, or college- and career-ready graduation requirements; and personalized learning recommendations based on the student's current knowledge and skills, college- and career-ready standards or college- and career-ready graduation requirements (as defined in this notice), and available content, instructional approaches, and supports. The applicant does not address accommodations and high-quality strategies for high-need students to help ensure that they are on track toward meeting college- and career-ready standards or college- and career-ready graduation requirements. An example of this would have included a section on high need students in the sub-grant application and how schools would have addressed accommodations concerning high-need students. The applicant also failed to provide explanation that mechanisms are in place to provide training and support to students that will ensure that they understand how to use the tools and resources provided to them in order to track and manage their learning. The applicant scored low in the point range because of the lack of information being asked by the criterion. Applicant scored points because of the portion of high-quality plan provided in addition to the described partnership with Rice University, although no support letter or letter of commitment if provided by Rice University.</p>		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	4

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant failed to provide a high-quality plan for improving learning and teaching by personalizing the learning environment in order to provide all students the support to graduate college- and career-ready. While the goal of the Network community was provide as sharing best practices and creating new knowledge to advance blending learning instructional technology platform, no activities, timelines, deliverables or persons responsible is provided. The applicant describes the support for ongoing PLCs and training will enable teachers to adapt content and instruction for blended learning and implement student progress by mastery of content areas. This is described as a support or student achievement and progress toward the TX College Readiness and career readiness standards. While the applicant states they will increase the capacity of educators to create personalized learning models they fail to address whether the applicant will frequently measure student progress toward meeting college- and career-ready standards or college- and career-ready graduation requirements. The

applicant fails to provide understanding that they will improve teachers' and principals' practice and effectiveness by using feedback provided by the LEA's teacher and principal evaluation systems. No reference is made to the evaluation systems. The applicant explains that they will conduct ongoing training for educators and will use Educause Community of Practice Framework for developing practices as an application of knowledge. What they fail to explain is that the educators will have access to, and know how to use, tools, data, and resources to accelerate student progress toward meeting college- and career-ready graduation requirements. The applicant clearly articulates that an orientation to blended learning will occur within the first 100 days. This orientation will provide actionable information that helps educators identify optimal learning approaches that respond to individual student academic needs and interests. An example of this is the supporting of identifying new strategies to maximize currently technology on campus in classroom instruction. More information is need concerning processes and tools available to educators to match student needs with specific resources and approaches along with a plan to provide continuously improving feedback about the effectiveness of the resources in meeting student needs. While the applicant addresses ongoing training for the educators there is no assurance that All participating school leaders and school leadership teams will have training, policies, tools, data, and resources that enable them to structure an effective learning environment that meets individual student academic needs and accelerates student progress through common and individual tasks toward meeting college- and career-ready standards or college- and career-ready graduation requirements (as defined in this notice). The applicant fails to provide a high-quality plan for increasing the number of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals, including in hard-to-staff schools, subjects, and specialty areas. No reference is made to increasing the number of students beyond the ones served in the schools receiving the sub-grant. The applicant scored low in the point rage for this section because of the lack of information provided concerning the criterion. It appears that much of the planning will occur after sub-grants are made. This would have been more acceptable if the sub-grant applications would have included more information about the RTT-D criterion along with more information concerning the districts oversight to ensure the criterion would be met.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	5
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: The applicant fails to provide the overall governance structure to provide support and series to all participating schools. No high-quality plan is provided to support project implementation through comprehensive policies and infrastructure. The applicant explains that they will grant school autonomy when it is earned based on student performance and that autonomy is a condition of performance. No mention is made concerning ensuring schools leadership is improved and then granting autonomy over factors necessary to see improvement in the school. By keeping performance in a low-achieving school as the overriding factor for autonomy without seeking change in leadership is seen as counterproductive. The applicant fails to provide understanding that students will be given the opportunity to progress and earn credit based on demonstrated mastery, not the amount of time spent on a topic nor is narrative given which explains that students are given the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of standards at multiple times and in multiple comparable ways. The applicant fails to provide understanding that they will provide learning resources and instructional practices that are adaptable and fully accessible to all students, including students with disabilities and English learners. This section scored low due to the lack of information provided concerning the criteria.		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	3
(D)(2) Reviewer Comments: The applicant fails to provide a high-quality plan which has the required components – goals, activities, timelines, deliverables and responsible parties. While an overview is provided concerning what they will examine and assess what is missing is the definite support to be provided to every student, educator and level of the education system. While the district will assess the existing resource allocation system, what is lacking is the commitment that resources will be provided based on need and when they are needed. The applicant provides that students and parents have access to online programs and content available rom any computer available to them. This online content allows students to work in an open data forma and to use the data in other electronic learning systems. Applicant explains that the students and parents have acess to computers before and after school on the campus. No narrative is provided explaining that students, parents, educators, and other stakeholders will have appropriate levels of technical support, which may be provided through a range of strategies (e.g., peer support, online support, or local support). The applicant fails to ensure that LEAs and schools use interoperable data systems. The applicant scored low in this criteria due to the lack of information provided based on the criterion in the NIA.		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	5
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant provided the short term and mid-term impact assessments which will be evaluated. These assessments are clearly articulated and provides the goal of maximizing student outcomes. What is lacking is the strategy to monitor and measure the outcomes. Clarity on how the evaluations will be handled, whether at the school level or the district level, would have strengthened the application. In addition, no mention is given to how the district will publicly share information on the quality of its investments funded by Race to the Top – District. The applicant scored in the low range of the medium points. While the assessments are clearly given, information on how they will be measured and how their success will be communicated out in the community is lacking.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	2
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>While the applicant provided the metrics to be evaluated, no strategy is provided for ongoing communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders is provided concerning how they may require adjustments and revisions during implementation. More information about what will be done with data once metrics are measured would have strengthened the application. This application scored in the medium range of points because of this.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	1
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>While the applicant provided the performance measures they would be evaluating, no targets are listed for the 4-8 or 9-12 grade levels. It is unclear if the performance measures listed for (a)(b) & (c) are estimates for the sub-grant schools or district wide. In addition, no rationale is given for selecting that measure. No discussion concerning how the measure will provide rigorous, timely, and formative leading information tailored to its proposed plan and theory of action regarding the applicant's implementation success or areas of concern; and no discussion on how the applicant will review and improve the measure over time if it is insufficient to gauge implementation progress. Applicant was given a point only because they listed measures.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	2
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant provides metrics to measure which are designed to gauge the effectiveness of the Network. The metrics listed appear to be designed for a higher level and more long term review. The metrics are not designed for evaluating specific activities such as professional development and activities that employ technology, and to more productively use time, staff, money, or other resources in order to improve results, through such strategies as improved use of technology, working with community partners, compensation reform, and modification of school schedules and structures (e.g., service delivery, school leadership teams, and decision-making structures). Applicant would have strengthened the narrative by providing plans to measure effectiveness of activities. Applicant scored in the medium range of points because of this.</p>		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	0
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Applicant failed to provide budget information therefore section is scored as a 0.</p>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	1
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>In Table Six: The Austin Blended Learning Network Activities Timeline by Month, the applicant explains their plans in Phase</p>		

Two: Months 19 - 36 to develop a Network sustainability planning work group but no high-quality plan for sustainability is provided. For this reason the applicant scored low in the point range.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	0

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

While the applicant listed Competitive Preferences in Table Six on page 32 and in Quadrant 2 of Attachment F, no narrative is provided answering the questions listed in the criterion. For this reason, the applicant scored 0.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Not Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant does not describe how they will build upon the core educational areas. Their vision is to establish the Austin Blended Learning Network to increase high quality, technology based education opportunities and they state they intend to award sub-grants to foster this. They do not provide strategies that are aligned with college- and career- ready standards or college- and career-ready graduation requirements. They are basically leaving the development of the plan to the schools applying with no overarching criteria which will lead to the intent of this funding. Because of this the applicant did not meet the Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments.

Total	210	58
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