



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0325AL-1 for Bessemer City Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	5

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Bessemer City Schools (BCS) and Fairfield City Schools (FCS) have set an ambitious vision for change in both school districts. Their common vision is to improve the number of students graduating high school on time and ready for college and career. In order for this goal to be attained both school districts intend to provide a effective teacher in every classroom, an effective principal on every campus and an effective superintendent in every system.

BCS has met AYP consistently, their efforts culminated in the 3-5th grade group mastering 20 of 21 goals in 2011-2012, the district showed similar achievement in grades 6-8 at a high percentage (94.74%). However the district failed to meet its goals in mathematics and special education. The district has provided intensive professional development for mathematics and special education teachers to increase student achievement. The district does not provide additional information on the type of professional development offered to mathematics and special education teachers nor the number of hours of professional development offered to mathematics and special education teachers. It is therefore difficult to assess the type of professional development implemented in Bessemer school district to assist special education and mathematics in their daily interactions with students. The district indicates that formative assessment recently administered showed improvement in closing the gap between regular education and special education students. Data indicating such improvement is not provided in the application, the number of students tested using formative assessment is also not available.

The district (BCS) indicates that its high school (Bessemer High school) has made progress in the past four years advancing excellence and equity, especially in the areas student outcomes and closing the achievement gap by raising student achievement, high school graduation rates and college going rates. The school adopted a an improvement plan to provide small group instruction in reading, as a result the district reports that a small number of students were able to pass the graduation exam. However, the school district does not provide information on the number students served in this program nor does it specify how many students passed the graduation exam. Due to the lack of information provided by the district it is difficult to provide an accurate assessment of this program's success. The district also implemented an after school tutoring program which appears to have increased achievements rates of students attending the sessions on a regular basis. The district appears to experience some difficulties convincing students to attend after school tutoring "after-school tutoring programs have also increased achievement rate for students who attend regularly" (p.30).

The district reported that counselors and teachers have been working collaboratively in the past four years to improve college-going rates. The district indicates that at least 40 % of high school seniors have requested transcripts to be sent to 2 year/4 year colleges and to the military. Here again, data indicating specifically how many students over the four year period actually enrolled in an institution of higher education and the military is missing. The district indicated that performance data has been available to all stakeholders (the district provided evidence that it shared this information). Bessemer City Schools indicates that RTT-D would be helpful in assisting the district in monitoring student performance and to guide best practices. Overall the district does not provide enough evidence to indicate that its initiatives have improved college-going rates.

The Fairfield City Schools district indicated that it has made progress in the past four years regarding achievement in grades 3-5 and 9-12. The district reported that in grades 9-12, 80 % of students attained 12 out 15 goals, however FCS also indicated that attendance goals were not met for these grades. The district explained that attendance issues were linked to inaccurate attendance accounting, an issue that has since been addressed. The district hopes to meet graduation rates this upcoming school year. Again, the district does not provide specific information indicating how it intends to meet the graduation rates in the coming year.

Fairfield City Schools recently hired a new superintendent of schools and implemented a new 5 year plan aimed at preparing students for college and career. The plan calls for staff training and data driven decision making, a district wide lesson plan format to ensure teachers use effective strategies based on standards. The district also indicates that it would start using the global scholar program to monitor student performance in the districts. Fairfiled School district has implemented a good plan to tackle some of the challenges it is currently encountering.

Both districts want to improve communication with all stakeholders and utilize data to make decisions regarding instruction and leadership effectiveness. The districts have worked in the past to combine resources in serving the needs of students more effectively. The districts have formed a team with an ambitious agenda, the plan (as described in the application) is appropriate and will be useful if/when RTT-D funding is made available

The districts have adopted the Project Care model (Caring about Result Everyday) to promote school improvement through training for teachers and administrators. The changes that would take place through project Care appear to be very ambitious especially since each district would only receive services for 2 years. It appears that the structural changes needed to take place to profoundly bring significant change to Bessemer City Schools and Fairfield City Schools are unrealistic and would not be achieved in two years.

Overall the Bessemer City Schools and the Fairfield City Schools present an ambitious vision to improve student achievement, increase graduation rate and college enrollment. However, the districts have not showed clear vision to achieve the goals they have set. It appears that the districts have had issues in the past with student attendance and record keeping (attendance). Past achievements by both school districts are not clearly documented with data. The school districts' vision is therefore only partially credible at this time when it comes to accelerating student achievement, deepening student learning. Overall, the districts did not document with data a comprehensive and coherent reform vision.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	8
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(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:
 The applicants explained the decision making process in preparation for applying to RTT-D funding. The LEAs explained that all schools in Bessemer and Fairfield ISD would participate, the applicants provided a list of schools, the total number of participating students, the number and percentage of low income families. However the applicants did not specify how many educators would be participating in grant activities. Overall the LEAs provided most of the information about its approach to implementation.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	6
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(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:
 The applicants presented an ambitious plan divided into four distinct areas (academic content, leadership development, technology tools and infrastructure, parental involvement and cultural redesign, monitoring). This plan is very detailed, however it does not provide specific information or data regarding the current state of the districts. The districts state that to change their schools they must "first evaluate what is working and not working". The applicants explain that based on their self-assessment they have put together the plan detailed in A-3. However, the process that led to the self-assessment/current state of the district is not explained. Another source of concern is the lack of planning regarding monitoring, the applicants stated "all strategies and action steps will be monitored and appropriate adjustments will be made as needed" (page, 41). The group of individuals charged with monitoring the progress of the plan are not identified, the districts do not specify who the individuals charged assessing the plan are. Furthermore, the LEAs do not specify if an instrument will be used to assess the plan. The applicants did not indicate if all stakeholders will be involved in the monitoring nor so they explain how the monitoring process take place. Overall the applicants provided sufficient evidence regarding how reform will be scaled up (through specific interventions and activities) in 5 domains (academic content, leadership development and technology tools and infrastructures, parental involvement). However, as stated above the districts do not provide sufficient information regarding the monitoring of strategies and how it intends to make appropriate adjustments once grant funding has made available. Overall, the LEAs have only provided partial evidence regarding reform and change.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	5
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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:
 The districts indicated that have used the Alabama Reading and 42 Math Test (ARMT Plus) and the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) results to assess student proficiency level on content standards. Their analysis determined that thee largest

achievement gap was between the subgroup of all students and special education students. The districts have set a reasonable five percent per year increase for all subgroups. The districts provided detailed year-long strategic plan involving teachers and administration analyze data leading to the implementation of specific contracts between students teachers and school improvement specialist highlighting students strengths and weaknesses.

The district will also adopt a robust data collection system, however the district does not specify how teachers will be trained in analyzing and disaggregating data. The applicants describe an ambitious plan involving counselors on high school campuses to ensure that students graduate on time and are career and college ready. However, the districts present little detailed information regarding the ways in which “counselors will coordinate parent events including sessions specifically addressing college readiness issues, with presentations on how taking advanced placement classes (AP) makes college more affordable and discussions on the financial aid”. The applicants also explain that they will connect students and families with Upward Bound, Talent Search, Upward Bound Math and Science but did not provide specific steps to achieve these goals. The plan adopted by the applicants to “emphasize the importance of developing a five year plan for graduation for every student which will include rigorous coursework in middle school and high school” is not backed by specific steps to effectively ensure that students graduate on time and career and college ready. The applicants are to be commended for implementing a process to track data related to college enrollment.

Overall the applicants only partially addressed the ways in which they plan to improve student outcomes, critical information is missing about a specific plan regarding teacher training in analyzing data, the vision and steps that would lead to an increase in student graduation and college attendance.

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	8
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>In this section the applicants simply included the information already submitted in section A-1. The applicants only demonstrates limited evidence of a clear record of success in the past four years in improving student learning outcomes, closing the achievement gap, achieving significant reforms. For example, Bessemer school district indicates that it has consistently met adequate yearly progress without providing specific evidence. The district elected to highlight two areas of strength in grades 3-5 and in grades 6-8. However Bessemer school district does not provide data to indicate a clear level of success. The Fairfield school district was forthcoming and provided data for grades 3-5, 6-8 and 9-12. However, the district has a record of making student performance data available to students, educators and parents in ways that inform and improve participation, instruction and services through school and class newsletters, progress reports, report cards and communications between counselors and parents.</p> <p>Overall the applicants partially demonstrate a clear record of success since critical data is missing form Bessemer City Schools.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicants have provided information regarding the ways in which all schools in the state of Alabama follow the code of Alabama, requiring a high level of transparency in budget and personnel matters. The applicants also provided detailed information about the e-gap accounting software, the system of checks and balance in place with key administrators, key staff and stakeholders. The LEAs also explained how expenditures are reported during consortium meetings. The LEAs also indicated that information is disseminated through school and district websites, as well as local newspapers.</p> <p>Overall, The LEA have demonstrated evidence of high level of transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments, including by making public, by school, actual school-level expenditures for regular K-12 instruction, instructional support, pupil support, and school administration.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	8
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p>		

The applicants explained that they are "in a unique position to successfully implement career and college ready standards and establish a clearly defined system of assessment and accountability" in part because of the implementation of *Alabama plan 2020*. *Alabama 2020* is a statewide initiative aimed at developing and implementing unified PRE-k through college and career readiness plan, developing and adopting college-and-career ready aligned standards in all subject areas, K-12; creating and implementing a balanced and meaningful assessment and accountability system and aligning available programmatic and fiscal resources to support local school needs in the area of instruction. The applicants provided a significant amount of information about *Alabama plan 2020*, however the LEAs did not provide specific information on how their proposal fits within *Alabama plan 2020* (implementation of the plan, key staff, involvement of stakeholders at the LEA level, level of autonomy).

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

The applicants have demonstrated stakeholder engagement in development of the proposal. Principals, teachers and staff were involved in the development of the application (teachers and staff were surveyed about specific needs for schools). The districts indicated that some of the suggestions gathered through surveys would be implemented in the project. Superintendents received support from school boards, administrators received support from teachers and staff on each campus. Parents were surveyed, some parents even wrote letters. Local community leaders wrote letters of support for the application, several letters are included in the application. Each LEA demonstrated evidence of meaningful stakeholder engagement in the development of the proposal and meaningful stakeholder support for the proposal.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	2
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(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

Each LEA in the consortium conducted a needs assessment to determine what is needed to increase student achievement. Applicants determined that the development of personalized learning plans for students, technology tools to support the implementation of these plans, and professional development to support standards based instruction and integration of technology into all content areas at all grade level was needed in both LEAs.

The implementation plan for the use of technology is ambitious, however it appears that this plan is unrealistic since a majority of the staff will require extensive training in order to operate new technology tools (weekly training sessions, daily side by side coaching). A gradual implementation of the plan would be more effective. For example, piloting the deployment of technology to one campus at each level of instruction (elementary, middle, high school) in each district before a district-wide execution of the plan would be more realistic in achieving the goal of implementing personalized learning environments.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	7

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicants highlighted an ambitious plan involving the examination of data by teachers and the development of an individualized learning plan for students. Such plan is very ambitious and unrealistic based on the amount of work required to implement such a plan with each student district-wide (staff must be trained in in disaggregating, analyzing, interpreting data and making data driven decision, staff must also be trained on drafting individualized learning plan, determine the best strategies and best practices to meet the needs of all students based on students' learning styles/preferences). In their application the LEAs intend to use students' learning style while learning preference would be more appropriate. The districts then explained the ways in which instruction will be driven by students' needs and the various teaching strategies being used, however the applicants do not provide an explicit rationale as to why specific teaching strategies will be utilized (cooperative learning, small group instruction, individual work, and project based experiences). As stated above the plan is ambitious but will require many hours of training, communication with staff, extensive teacher training (and retraining) and computer training. The applicants are not providing sufficient evidence in the steps required to put its plan into action.

Furthermore, the applicants plan to utilize the common core of academic standards for grades K-12 to prepare all students for college and the workforce. The LEAs indicate that they will face challenges in implementing these standards but fail to offer a specific plan to overcome these challenges.

The applicants should be commended for having a plan in place to offer ongoing and regular feedback to students and to assess the performances of teachers and administrators.

However, overall, the plan presented by the applicants does not meet the high quality criteria based on the evidence presented.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	12
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

LEA's presented an ambitious plan to train and support teachers to implement a rigorous curriculum that includes the common core standards, however the applicants' plan lack specific information on the ways in which the training will be provided to teachers. The applicants do not provide information regarding the amount of training teachers will receive (frequency, amount of training per semester and calendar year). The applicants do not specify how the training sessions will support the implementation of personalized learning environments to meet students' needs. The districts indicate that teachers and administrators will receive training in critical areas aimed at improving student achievement (standards based instruction, how to implement the curriculum...), however the applicants do not provide specific information about the trainings. More information is needed in this section about the weekly meeting for teachers receiving stipends from RTT-D funding. The districts need to provide more information as to how such activities would improve teachers' practice and effectiveness to increase student performance and close the achievement gap.

The plan to recruit new teachers is in part based on a program seeking alternatively certified teachers, however such practice may not be appropriate in attempting to increase the number of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers since alternatively certified teachers may have had limited field experience prior to entering the classroom.

While the applicants provided information about a plan in place to provide school leaders and school leadership with training, policies, tools and data that enable them to structure an effective learning environment that meets individual student academic needs, such plan indicates that staff members "will learn how" to complete specific tasks, here again, the plan calls for initial training, then more training, it appears that the amount of time required to bring teachers and staff up to speed through training will not lead to accelerating student progress in 2 years (in each LEA).

Overall, the LEAs plan for teaching and learning is acceptable and provides appropriate information regarding the use of technology, the ways in which teachers and administrators will work collaboratively and the implementation of learning communities. However, as stated above the LEA's still showed limited evidence on the specific steps needed to implement their project.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

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

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicants indicated that all members of the consortium have organized local staff to provide support to all participating schools. The districts indicate that several individuals will be involved and work collaboratively with contracted personnel to provide seamless support.

Furthermore, the districts are not specific when it comes to indicating how school leadership will be provided with flexibility and autonomy while funded by RTTD. Also, more specific information is needed regarding the ways in which students will be given the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of standards at multiple times and in multiple comparable ways. The districts did not provide information about how they will provide learning resources to all students including students with disabilities and English Learners.

Overall the applicants appear to have a plan in place but did not provide enough evidence that they have a high quality plan in place.

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

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(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAs have indicated that they have enlisted the services of a technology provider to perform an evaluation of technology infrastructures. The districts indicated that the technology provider's recommendations will be implemented once funding is received. The districts also explained that such changes will allow technology to be available 24/7 and 365 days a year and indicated that it looking into the possibility of creating an online portal for parents to access information about their child's progress. The district also indicated that districts in the consortium use an interoperable data system that will be used to communicate with all stakeholders once funding is received.

However, the district provided limited information regarding the ways in which technical support will be available to parents, teachers and teachers and does not provide critical information about the ways in which it will provide reliable and sustained support for the network available 24/7 and 365 days a year. More information regarding the technology provider is needed to determine if the districts will be able to provide technology access and support to all stakeholders.

Overall, the districts did not provide enough evidence to indicate that they have a high-quality plan regarding the ways in which the LEAs will support personalized learning through access to technology by all stakeholders.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	15
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>EPS has provided a strategy for implementing a continuous improvement process that provides timely and regular feedback through a monitoring schedule (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly, yearly) on progress toward project goals and opportunities for ongoing corrections and improvements during and after the term of the grant. The districts have developed a process for assessing continuous progress at schools involved in RTT-D funding and across the district, the districts will evaluate effectiveness at regular intervals: at the school level (with grade level and content specialists), at the district level. The districts has also indicated that it will communicate with all stakeholders using a variety of strategies. The district will communicate information about all grant-funded activities on a quarterly and yearly reports.</p> <p>Based on the evidence presented by EPS the district has a good plan in place to communicate information to all stakeholders to ensure continuous improvement.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	3

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

LEAs have a plan in place to have meaningful two-way communication for all stakeholders through various means of communication (electronic, newsletters, school activities). Leadership teams and parents committees will also be used to disseminate information about new policies affecting schools and students. Meetings will be held to keep all stakeholders up to date with policies and events taking

place within the districts. Here again, the plan is appropriate but some critical information is missing, the frequency and number of times during the year when surveys will be sent out to stakeholders, the number of meetings to be held and the individuals charged with coordinating these events. Overall the applicants do not have a high quality plan in place.

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

The applicants have explained that they will use the ARMT scores in Math and reading, the percentage of students who pass all grade level/course requirements, as well as percentage of discipline referrals, percentage of students in grade 9 with no more than one semester "F" in a core course (English, mathematics, science and social studies). The measure are appropriate to provide a timely, and formative leading information matching the proposed plan. The district also indicated that its use of ARMT scores was also motivated by the fact that the the Alabama department of education will use this measure to assess student progress starting in 2013.

The applicants selected 13 measures to assess student achievement. However the applicants offer little explanation as to the process to review and improve the measure over time. The applicants stated "we will continually review the measures over time and will make changes if and when they are needed", this explanation is insufficient and does not provide adequate information on the ways in which the review and improvement of the measure will take place.

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

The district indicates that it will use multiple measures in evaluating the effectiveness of RTT-D funded activities, specifically in the areas of: Professional development, use of technology, parental involvement, community involvement, scheduling and infrastructure. The district will be surveying all stakeholders including how technology is used for productivity and how it supports learning in subject areas. This plan meets the criteria.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	9

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's budget identifies all funds that will support the project and is reasonable since it provides clear information about the ways in which funding will be allocated and sufficient since it matches the scope of the proposal. This budget as described would support the development and implementation of the district's proposal; In its description the applicants clearly provided a thoughtful rationale for investments and priorities. The district also indicated which funds will be used for one-time investment versus those that will be used over the duration of the grant. One-time and ongoing operational expenses are described with a focus on strategies that will ensure the long-term sustainability of the personalized learning environments, for example the district is investing funds in training and professional development. Overall the plan is strong.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	5
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

It appears that the applicants did not provide this information in the application. However based on letters of supports received with this application, it appears that the applicants have secured support from local agencies for sustainability of project's goals after the term of the grant. However, the evidence provided by the applicants is not sufficient to earn a high rating in this category it does not appear that a high quality plan is in place.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	7

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicants are committed to the development of sustainable partnership with public and private organizations, they also noted the support (evidenced by the letters included with this application) of local officials, chamber of commerce, local institutions of higher education, local businesses, health and social services as well as churches. The evidence provided here is strong and show significant support for these applicants.

However the letters supporting the application did not indicate how partners would specifically be involved in the project. The applicants also explained in their narrative that their resources are very limited in large part because the school districts are located in poverty-stricken area of the city of Birmingham where crime rates are high and employment rate is low. For these reasons, the applicants are not able to address subsections 3, 4, 5 and 6 in-depth and therefore cannot receive points for these subsections. Based on the evidence provided and because of the circumstances detailed by the applicants (and their inability to address subsections 3, 4, 5 and 6 in depth) the applicants can not earn a top rating for this section.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

Bessemer City Schools (BCS) and Fairfield City Schools (FCS) have set an ambitious vision for change in both school districts. Their common vision is to improve the number of students graduating high school on time and ready for college and career. In order for this goal to be attained both school districts intend to provide a effective teacher in every classroom, an effective principal on every campus and an effective superintendent in every system.

Both districts want to improve communication with all stakeholders and utilize data to make decisions regarding instruction and leadership effectiveness. The districts have worked in the past to combine resources in serving the needs of students more effectively. The applicants' plan will provide a personalized learning environment and prepare students for college and career through the use of data to drive instructional practices, teacher and leader effectiveness.

Overall the Bessemer City Schools and the Fairfield City Schools presented an strong vision to improve student achievement, increase graduation rate and college enrollment.

The district is to be commended for its efforts in wanting to change students' lives. Overall the district has met absolute priority 1.

Total	210	138
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0325AL-2 for Bessemer City Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	3

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

There are strong aspects of the proposal. For instance, the proposed five-level plan engages many different stakeholder groups simultaneously to implement standards-based instruction, data driven instruction and effective technology integration to improve student engagement, decrease discipline problems, and increase transparency and accountability. Additionally, the applicants describe a focus on changing the instructional cultures of their schools and building capacity to support sustainability. They propose an accountability system for the change process that monitors both implementation progress and progress toward defined goals.

However, several other criteria are either missing or not developed in sufficient detail. For instance, the applicants describe some current work in place around some of the four core educational assurance areas:

- Standards and assessments: Some current efforts to implement standards based instruction, a unified lesson plan format and progress tools to guide instruction.
- Data systems: Data teams focused on every student, a system to monitor student performance and a website to provide student performance progress.
- Effective teachers and principals: No information is provided on how the districts are currently working to ensure effective teachers and principals as defined by the notice.
- Turning around lowest achieving schools: The applicants relate small gains in the number of students passing the graduation exam, increased achievement rates for students who attend school regularly, and improvements in college-going rates, but little data is provided to support these claims.

However, this work as described is not robust enough to meet the standards of "comprehensive and coherent" set forth in the selection criteria.

Similarly, the applicants do offer some description of how they propose to build work on the four core educational assurance areas by implementing the Project CARE model:

- Standards and assessments: Support and training for standards based instruction; implementation of formative and summative assessments to inform individualized instruction through comprehensive, classroom based interventions; and technology integration tied to standards based instruction.
- Data systems: Support and training to use data to drive instructional strategies, technology integration tied to data use, and a transparent accountability system that monitors implementation progress and progress toward student achievement goals.
- Effective teachers and principals: The applicants describe a model focused on continuous growth for all with job-embedded professional development and coaching for teachers to implement best practice and build capacity, as well as work with principals to understand the dynamics of change and high stakes accountability to support change efforts. The applicants describe a prescriptive remediation and enrichment model, but it is unclear whether this is aimed at students or adults.
- Turning around lowest achieving schools: The applicants do not specify how they will focus on their lowest achieving schools.

However, the work as proposed is again not robust enough to meet the standards of "comprehensive and coherent" as set forth in the selection criteria.

The application begins to address the following goals as required in the selection criteria:

- Accelerating student achievement: The work toward standards and assessments and data systems (described above) are efforts to accelerate student achievement.
- Deepening student learning: The applicants propose to increase access to rigorous and engaging coursework and standards based instruction, but do not address depth of student learning.

- Increasing equity through personalized student support: The proposed 1:1 technology deployment and standards based instruction support increased equity.

However, the proposal as delivered is not sufficient to meet the standards of "comprehensive and coherent" as set forth in the selection criteria, nor does it address the deepening of student learning as required.

The proposed work is not grounded in common and individual tasks that are based on student academic interest as required in the selection criteria..

- The applicants describe a prescriptive remediation and enrichment model, but it is unclear whether this is aimed at students or adults.
- The application does not mention student academic interest as a driver.

Overall, the proposal is in the low range in terms of the selection criteria for articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision.

(A)(2) Applicant’s approach to implementation (10 points)	10	10
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(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The application received an overall high score for the extent to which the applicant’s approach to implementing its reform proposal will support high quality LEA level and school level implementation of that proposal. The applicants:

- described the process they used to select schools to participate. The process ensured that the participating schools collectively meet the competition’s eligibility requirements.
- provided a list of the schools that will participate in grant activities.
- provided the total number of participating students, the number of students participating from low-income families, the number of participating students who are high need students, and the number of participating educators.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	4
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(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The extent to which the applicant includes a **high quality plan** describing how the reform proposal will be scaled up and translated into meaningful reform to support change beyond the participating schools, and will help the applicant reach its outcome goals earned an overall low to medium rating.

A high quality plan includes goals, activities and rationale for those activities, timelines, deliverables, responsible parties. When considered overall, it is credible and likely to lead to the desired outcomes.

There was one strong area in the application. Specifically, the applicants provide clearly stated goals: Academic content, leadership development, technology tools and infrastructure, parental involvement and cultural redesign, along with strategies and activities to support each of them.

However, the other selection criteria were not addressed in a similarly strong manner.

For instance, the rationale for adopting the specified goals and strategies resulted from an analysis of persistently low achieving schools that have improved and are now achieving academic goals for all subgroups. Because the CARE process was used in several of these schools that are similar to the applicant schools, the applicant consortium decided to adopt their processes. The applicant did not provide evidence of a sufficient and detailed enough match of needs and proposed solutions to prove credibility.

Furthermore, there is no clearly stated timeline.

While the deliverables can be ascertained from the details within each goal area (i.e. a technology "bootcamp," weekly technology training sessions, and instructional themes), they are not sufficiently clear, developed, or connected to provide credibility of the plan.

Similarly, while it is not difficult to infer the person or person(s) who would likely be responsible for carrying out the specified goals in this application, a high quality plan should be clear about this. Additionally, while the applicants state that all strategies and steps will be monitored and adjusted as needed, they fail to provide details related to how this will be done or by whom.

When considered holistically, the overall credibility of the plan has more weaknesses than strengths:

- (+) tight systems for training, action and accountability
- (+) sharp focus on data collection and analysis
- (+) alignment of promotion to core learning
- (+) engaging the support of social workers and counselors to positively impact parental involvement

- (-) over-reliance on prescriptive programs rather than developing professional capacity of teachers and coaches
- (-) limited view of the capacity of technology to transform teaching and learning by focusing only on using technology as an engagement tool and e-learning as a prescriptive intervention.
- (-) misguided focus for leadership and program development by narrowly focusing on moving students through a rigid system built on test performance, rather than focusing on development of deep learning and personalizing pathways based on student academic interests.
- (-) adult-centric system that charges principals and teachers with transference of performance standards to students, rather than the facilitation of deep learning from students.

- (-/+) while engaging stakeholders throughout a change process is certainly a worthy goal, it is unrealistic to contact and maintain communication with *all* of stakeholders as specified as a strategy in the work on parental involvement and cultural redesign.
- (-/+) While it is a sound strategy to study other successes in similar conditions, the act of adopting the goals and processes of another school may be less desirable than growing informed goals and action steps out of the local context.

Because of these factors, the application earns a low to medium rating in the category of LEA-wide reform and change.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	1
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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicants describe significant gaps between overall proficiency status and the achievement of the special education subgroup, ranging from -4.25 to -56.00. This gap generally widens as students progress through the system and is alarmingly large (-51.38 for reading and -56.00 for math) in 9-12 data. The included data provide the benchmark year and projected goals for future years. Overall, the application scores low in the likelihood of its vision to result in improved student learning and performance and increased equity as demonstrated by ambitious yet achievable annual goals.

Specifically, the following factors led to the low score for the LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes:

- a) Performance on summative assessments (proficiency status and growth): The data show overall low proficiency rates throughout the consortium. There is insufficient data to consider growth or trends since only the most recent year of data is provided. The applicants do not provide goals for overall proficiency or growth,
- b) Decreasing achievement gaps: The applicants' goal of increasing the performance of all subgroups by 5% annually is generally too broad, considering the range of performance across different schools and subgroups. Specifically, a more aggressive goal is likely warranted in some areas, while less aggressive goals are likely warranted for other subgroup showing a lesser discrepancy.
- c) Graduation rates: There are no specific goals identified for graduation rates.
- d) College enrollment: There are no specific goals identified for college enrollment.
- e) postsecondary degree attainment (optional): N/A

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	5
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Overall, the extent to which each LEA has demonstrated evidence of a clear record of success in the past four years in advancing student learning and achievement and increasing equity in learning and teaching is low to moderate.</p> <p>a). The evidence provided by the applicants to support their record of success in improving student learning outcomes and closing achievement gaps is sparse. The applicants state records of work to raise student achievement, high school graduation rates, and college enrollment rates, but insufficient evidence is provided to support those claims.</p> <p>b). The evidence provided by the applicants to support their record of achieving ambitious and significant reforms in their persistently lowest achieving schools or in their low-performing schools is weak. While there are included rates for meeting AYP goals for grades 3-8 in both LEAs and 9-12 for Fairfield City Schools, the information is missing for the persistently low performing school, Bessemer City High School.</p> <p>c). The evidence provided by the applicant to support its record of making student performance data available to students, educators, and parents in ways that inform and improve participation, instruction and services is promising. School and classroom newsletters, timely progress reports and individualized meetings are an expectation for effective schools.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicants demonstrate strong evidence of a high level of transparency in LEA processes.</p> <p>State code requires standardized financial accounting collection and distribution processes that include those required in the selection criteria:</p> <p>a) Actual personnel salaries at the school level for all school-level instructional and support staff, based on the U.S. Census Bureau's classification used in the F-33 survey of local government finances;</p> <p>b). Actual personnel salaries at the school level for instructional staff only;</p> <p>c). Actual personnel salaries at the school level for teachers only; and</p> <p>d). Actual non-personnel expenditures at the school level (if available)</p> <p>The applicants demonstrate a high level of transparency in processes, practices, and investments by maintaining financial documents as public documents that are available online for public inspection. This includes the required expenditure categories required in the selection criteria.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicants have provided strong evidence of successful conditions and sufficient autonomy under State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements to implement the personalized learning environments described in the applicants' proposal through the included description of <i>Alabama Plan 2020</i>. Specifically, the plan includes such elements as the following that align with the selection criteria's requirement to implement personalized learning plans as described in the proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a unified PK-college and career readiness plan, • adoption of college and career-ready aligned standards in all subject areas K-12, • a balanced and meaningful assessment and accountability system, • a new set of AMOs and state targets aligned with new college and career ready indicators, and 		

- a longitudinal data system.

Additionally, within the *Alabama Plan 2020* there is support for individual district autonomy to create personalized learning environments, calendars, and schedules. Together, these factors demonstrate strong evidence of successful conditions and sufficient autonomy under State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements to implement the proposed plan.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)

10

7

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicants have provided evidence to demonstrate meaningful stakeholder engagement in the development of the proposal. Parents, teachers, principals and school boards were all engaged at several stages of the proposal development process through surveys, meetings, newsletters, and open invitations. Letters and signatures of support provide evidence of direct engagement with collective bargaining representation and teachers. Several letters of support from community stakeholders provide strong support of community engagement and support. However, there was no evidence to demonstrate meaningful engagement from the critically important student stakeholder group in this process.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)

5

1

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

Overall, the applicants demonstrated weak evidence of a **high quality plan** for analysis of current status in implementing personalized learning environments and the logic behind the reform proposal. A high quality plan includes goals, activities and rationale for those activities, timelines, deliverables, responsible parties. When considered overall, it is credible and likely to lead to the desired outcomes.

The application lacked a plan for analysis of current status in implementing personalized learning environments. While some elements of a high quality plan are present in the application -- specifically activities and some deliverables -- these elements are related to implementation of personalized learning plans rather than the process used to identify current status of implementation as required in the selection criteria.

Similarly, the proposal identified personalized learning plans for students, technology integration, and standards based instruction as needs, but there was no description of the needs assessment process used to determine them. Without a description of the logic that led to the identification of these needs, the plan lacks credibility.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	3

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

A high quality plan includes goals, activities and rationale for those activities, timelines, deliverables, responsible parties. When considered overall, it is credible and likely to lead to the desired outcomes. Overall the applicants demonstrated weak evidence of 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.

Specifically, the application provides little evidence to support an approach to learning that engages and empowers all learners – particularly high need students – in an age appropriate manner. While attention is paid to helping students understand that what they are learning is key to their success, there is no detail to support how this will be accomplished besides the educator helping students understand so during conferences. Further, it does not specify strategies or accommodations for high need students.

Additionally, work to identify and pursue development goals linked to college and career ready standards and graduation requirements is largely described as teacher-centric. While the application states that students will be encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and develop goals linked to future plans, there are no clear strategies for transferring ownership of learning to students.

The application does describe a system for frequently updated individual student data that can be used to determine ongoing progress toward college and career ready standards and personalized supports, but does not address mechanisms by which students will be trained and supported in its use.

The plan does not address plans for engaging students in deep learning in areas of their own academic interest, nor does it address the access and exposure to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives that motivate and deepen learning as required by the selection criteria.

Though the plan discusses work to understand and implement the Common Core State Standards, it lacks sufficient detail to support the claim of transformational change in teaching and learning for mastery of essential content, skills, and dispositions.

The notice calls for a variety of high quality instructional approaches and environments and digital learning content, but the application provides limited personalization options other than those related to remediation, acceleration, and learning style.

The many missing or underdeveloped elements of the selection criteria result in a low score for evidence of 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.

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

A high quality plan includes goals, activities and rationale for those activities, timelines, deliverables, responsible parties. When considered overall, it is credible and likely to lead to the desired outcomes. Overall the applicants demonstrated low to moderate evidence of a **high quality plan** for improving teaching and learning by personalizing the learning environment in order to provide all students the support to graduate college and career ready.

The applicants describe a goal of every student having an effective teacher and every school being led by an effective principal. While this is a worthy goal, the plan to support it not sufficiently detailed.

For instance, there are several actions detailed, including:

- a system of training and support for teachers that includes formative evaluations;
- varied professional learning opportunities;
- collaboration, mentoring, and coaching related to standards based instruction and technology integration;
- training in data analysis;
- partnerships with statewide resources to build leadership capacity;
- hiring of an instructional technology specialist;
- organization of professional learning communities; and
- implementation of engaging presentations and digital learning resources for students.

However, in many instances it is unclear who will be responsible for carrying out the specified actions.

In addition, the overall credibility of the plan is difficult to establish because of the many different actions identified are not effectively tied together with a cohesive or unified plan for transforming teaching and learning because there is no timeline and no clarity around responsible parties. Because of this, the evidence of a high quality plan for improving teaching and learning by personalizing the learning environment in order to provide all students the support to graduate college and career ready is determined to be low to moderate.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	10

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicants have demonstrated sufficient evidence of practices, policies, and rules that facilitate personalized learning through organization of the central office and consortium governance structures, school and leadership team autonomy and flexibility, and evidence of ensuring accessible learning resources for all students. Specifically, the applicants describe:

- collaboration among central office staff, superintendents, and a school improvement specialist to define and plan for needed support within schools;
- a school improvement who will serve as a liaison to work collaboratively with contracted personnel;
- autonomy and flexibility for each school to implement contextually appropriate staffing models and schedules; and
- effective leadership teams in place in each school.

However, the evidence presented in support of practices to support granting credit based upon mastery rather than seat time and practices for providing students multiple and comparable opportunities to demonstrate mastery is weak. The proposal states that students will use online technologies and instructional practices to demonstrate mastery of standards in multiple ways and at their own pace; however, none of the elements of a high quality plan are described to support this work.

The application fails to address selection criteria (D)(1)(e).

Overall, the application provides moderate evidence of practices, policies, and rules that facilitate personalized learning because not all elements of the selection criteria are addressed.

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

10

3

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

A high quality plan includes goals, activities and rationale for those activities, timelines, deliverables, responsible parties. When considered overall, it is credible and likely to lead to the desired outcomes. The plan submitted by the applicants does not appear credible, as timelines, deliverables, and responsibilities are unclear.

The applicants have provided evidence of their readiness to ensure all students, parents, educators and other stakeholders, regardless of income, have access to necessary content, tools, and other learning resources both in and out of school to support the implementation of the proposal. Specifically, the applicants propose to ensure this through:

- 1:1 device deployment with training for parents and students,
- web-based content that is available at all times,
- surveys to provide data to target and meet parent and student technology access needs, and
- collaboration with libraries and community centers.

The applicants have also provided moderate evidence of readiness to ensure appropriate levels of technical support, and use of information technology systems to allow open data and electronic learning systems. Specifically, the applications proposes technical support through additional staff and peer support for students.

Finally, the applicants state that an interoperable data system as described in the notice is currently in place.

Overall, parts of the selection criteria are discussed, but without clear details regarding timelines, responsible parties, and deliverables, the information provided is inadequate evidence for the selection criteria. Because of this, the application is deemed to contain low to moderate evidence of a high quality plan for LEA and school infrastructure to support personalized learning.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	10

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Overall, the applicants have provided moderate evidence of a strategy for implementing a rigorous continuous improvement process that provides timely and regular feedback on progress toward project goals and provides opportunities for ongoing corrections and improvements during and after the term of the grant.

The application details a monitoring schedule that reflects ongoing continuous improvement. The schedule details monitoring events that will happen on a weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly basis.

The monitoring schedule explains how student achievement goals and professional development efforts will be monitored and measured:

- data meetings,
- leadership team meetings,
- using data to plan individualized instruction,
- reports to boards and superintendents,
- consortia meetings, and
- reviews of action plans.

However, the plan does not specifically address how technology and staff will be monitored and measured as required in the selection criteria.

It is also problematic that the application leaves the communication with stakeholders of the information regarding monitoring up to each school, rather than having a consortia-wide system for communication.

The combination of the quality information in the monitoring schedule, the missing components of the selection criteria, and the overly loose plans for stakeholder communication result in the middle to high range score.

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

5

5

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicants have demonstrated strong evidence of strategies for ongoing communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders through a variety of means, including: e-mail, newsletters, activities and meetings, surveys, web-based communications, committees, and open houses.

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

5

1

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

For each measure proposed by the applicants, there is a provided rationale. For example, the applicants chose to identify level four performance for reading and math on the ARMT and provided the rationale that the measure will be used by their state department of education next year. While this is a rationale, it is weak because it determined based on outside factors not clearly grown out of local factors. The application relies on blanket statements related to the measures being research based or required by the state.

In addition, the applicants propose to track:

- percentage of grade 10 students who are on track to graduate,
- percentage of students who pass all grade level/course requirements,
- percentage of students in grade 9 with no more than one semester F in a core course,
- percentage of students who pass all parts of the AHSGE, and
- percentage of discipline referrals.

These appear to be logical performance measures to choose for the proposal; however, the application does not clearly address how each measure will provide rigorous, timely, and formative leading information tailored to its proposed plan. The application is also missing a theory of action regarding the applicant's implementation success or areas of concern as required in the selection criteria.

To address how the consortium will review and improve each measures over time if it is insufficient to gauge implementation progress, the application provides an overly simplistic statement about using formative assessments to make changes as needed. The insufficient depth of explanation and lack of detail in the application offer weak evidence of ambitious, yet achievable performance measures.

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

5

5

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The application provides strong evidence of plans to evaluate effectiveness of Race to the Top – District funded activities. The application specifies multiple, ongoing methods of gathering effectiveness data for professional development, use of technology, parental involvement, community involvement, scheduling, and infrastructure. These methods include:

- continuous feedback on professional development through examination of short and long term goals;
- examination of long term changes in teacher knowledge, beliefs, and level of satisfaction;
- tracking changes in instructional impact, student behavior and engagement, and learning outcomes;
- monitoring student, parent, and classroom use of technology through observations and surveys;
- assessment of parents and community involvement; and
- evaluation of infrastructure through connectivity reports and surveys.

Together, these methods represent the scope of the varied goals of the proposal and offer a valid way of evaluating effectiveness of the proposed activities.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	9

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The application provides a strong budget summary that details all funds that will support the project. The applicants propose to fund the project solely with Race to the Top - District grant funds. The applications includes the required break-down by budget categories.

The budget summary narrative describes an effort of massive technology infusion with implementation of a standards based instructional model. The application details a four-year implementation that makes the largest investments in years one and two while purchasing technology and investing in intensive training for educators, parents, and students. The narrative describes a budget that is reasonable and sufficient to support the proposal within the context of a rural, majority minority, and economically disadvantaged community where technology can level the playing field for students and their families. The budget narrative provides a thoughtful rationale for investments and priorities while buiding local capacity.

Generally, one-time and ongoing operational expenses are described with a focus on strategies that will ensure the long-term sustainability of the personalized learning environments. Specifiially, the investments in professional development and coaching of district staff support sustainability so that local staff can take over for outside trainers at the end of the grant period. The application does not address sustainability to technology resources, which is problematic. Overall, though, the budget and sustainability proposal is strong.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	3
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

A high quality plan includes goals, activities and rationale for those activities, timelines, deliverables, responsible parties. When considered overall, it is credible and likely to lead to the desired outcomes. Though it can be inferred that the partnership with Project CARE will end at the end of the grant period with the intent of carrying forward the work in the consortia schools without additional support, the applicants submitted little evidence of a high quality plan for sustainability of the personalized learning environments. However, it is clear throughout the proposal that the applicants intend to develop processes and build capacity within the consortium to carry this work forward after the end of the grant period. Based on this, the application scores in the low to moderate range for these selection criteria.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	2
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Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

While the application describes a high poverty community with high crime rates and low employment rates that would likely benefit from community based supports for its schools, what is presented in the application is not a coherent and sustainable partnership. The application does not identify any specific, desired results that align with the broader proposal. Furthermore, there is no plan to track indicators, use data, or scale an existing or proposed model and improve results over time.

What is described in the application is a history of commendable effort to rally individual community based organizations to support the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of a high needs population. These historical partnerships include:

- unstructured, open invitations to churches, civic organizations and businesses that "have always had a good response;"
- positive relationships with city employess;
- collaboration with groups from local colleges and universities;
- partnerships with local social service and health agencies; and
- a school foundation with community representation.

While a reader can imagine how these partnerships might be formalized or enhanced, in the absence of goals, plans, or desired results there is no evidence that any of the selection criteria have been met.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Not Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicants did not meet Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments. While efforts to build on the four core educational assurance areas are present in the application, it does not meet all the requirements.

Proposed support and training for standards based instruction, formative and summative assessment to inform individualized instruction through comprehensive, classroom-based interventions are present in the application, but fall short of the requirement to create learning environments that are designed to significantly improve learning and teaching through the personalization of strategies, tools, and supports for students and educators that are aligned with college- and career-ready standards. Efforts toward personalization described in the application are built around prescriptive academic core support and high stakes test preparation, rather than student interest and the goal of deepening student learning as required in the Notice.

The application identifies a vision for integration of technology but with an extremely limited view of the capacity of technology to transform teaching and learning by focusing only on using technology as an engagement tool and e-learning as a prescriptive intervention.

While the application proposes training and professional development for teachers and leaders, there is insufficient information to comprise a credible plan for increasing the effectiveness of educators and expanding student access to the most effective educators. The presumption that all teachers will improve with professional development is missing comprehensive plans that would provide essential monitoring and accountability.

Though the plan does offer strategies for decreasing achievement gaps and increasing the rates at which students graduate, the application is also missing high quality plans to provide appropriate implementation and monitoring of the proposal.

Total	210	102
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0325AL-3 for Bessemer City Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has investigated and selected the Project CARE model to transform its schools at all levels, from district administration to individual classrooms and students . Project CARE appears to be a rigorous, research-based and proven system that meets students at their individual level of need. Its holistic approach, with an emphasis on data-driven individualized strategies and frequent assessments, professional development, technology, constant communication, and a culture of achievement appear well-suited to the needs of the applicant's students.</p> <p>Especially impressive is the level of planned formative and summative assessments, and the collaborative model of assessment, with students and parents having a voice in their individualized learning plans and goals. This helps enormously to increase buy-in and investment in student outcomes by all stakeholders.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant's approach to implementing the reform proposal by selecting participating schools is sound and demonstrates that the appropriate population is being targeted. All 6,226 students in the districts are participating in this program, and approximately 88% of the students come from low-income / high-need families. As all districts' students are participating, the implementation's effects can be reinforced throughout the district.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Because all schools in the district will be included, the sustainability of the project becomes more critical to the district's long-term success. In this regard, the applicant has submitted a high-quality plan that ensures sustainability through the inclusion of the following elements of the implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership training will reinforce a no-excuses, teacher-led culture. Administrators will be trained to implement supportive teaching and learning environments, and teachers will have significant, ongoing input into and ownership of the program design. • A detailed, comprehensive approach that utilizes data and instructional coaching will inform instructional design and teacher support of its implementation. • Data will link individual student needs to prescriptive academic support. Teachers will have a clear understanding of a student's strengths and which specific types of lessons work best with individual students on particular skills. • 45 Day Action Plans focus attention of all senior staff on subgroup achievement and accountability. This frequent assessment increases accountability and the likelihood that all children's needs are attended to. 		

- Clear Roles and responsibilities are laid out for the academic coaches, technology support coaches. The coaches have specific deliverables on which their work may be evaluated to ensure it adds value to teacher knowledge and, ultimately, student performance.
- Technology and training will support all areas of teaching, from assessing performance to providing lesson content.
- Parents will be engaged in the process to change the culture through frequent communication and input into student progress and goals. They will receive additional information through multiple events, electronic communications, and conversations with teachers, counselors, and social workers.

With so many data-informed efforts focused on student outcomes, the chances for success are strong.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	8
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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has strongly demonstrated how its vision will likely result in improved student learning and performance and increased equity among various student subgroups. The applicant has identified specific achievement gaps, most of whose remedies and associated goals, such as a 5% annual proficiency increase by subgroups in reading and math, appear ambitious and yet reasonable.

The applicant illustrates a strong, detailed analysis of student achievement data at the district and school levels that showed a distinctive gap between special ed students and other students. Specifically, the analysis identified gaps by reading and math scores for different ages for subgroups by special ed, black race, and poverty status. Nonetheless, the applicant's vision is for near-parity achieved among all groups by the first year of the post-grant period. While laudable, some of the goals may be somewhat out of reach over the four year period, such as the 100% graduation rates for special education students. While the application would be strengthened by information regarding projections of college enrollment rates, the applicant does not currently calculate college enrollment rates, but will begin to do so. Even without this baseline data, the application would benefit from projections of college enrollment rates to get a sense of the district's ambitions.

The focus on individualized progress reporting at frequent intervals, along with individualized coaching toward high school graduation and college/career preparation from the 8th grade, holds principals, faculty members, students, and parents accountable for student achievement. The level of focus and required buy-in from all stakeholders increases the likelihood of closing these stubborn gaps.

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	5

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has demonstrated weak evidence that the past four years have offered a clear record of student success. There's no doubt that the applicants' schools are performing well on state standardized measures; in 2011-12, Bessemer City Schools met 20 of 21 Grade 3-5 goals for 95.24%, met 18 of 19 goals for grades 6-8 (94.4%); and Fairfield City met 100% of 17 goals for grades 3-5; 14 of 15 goals for grades 6-8 for 93.3%, and 12 of 15 high school goals for 80%. The missing data for the Bessemer Schools 9-12 makes it difficult to gauge the district's success with high school student achievement.

However, additional data would strengthen the understanding of the districts' performance historically and how the schools have performed over the last four years. The applicant shows some successful results for the 2011-12 and 2012-13 years, and mentions a four year track record, but does not provide four years of data, nor does it provide detailed data regarding graduation rates.

Student progress data will be available in a variety of formats, including Progress Reports every 3 weeks; and Report Cards at 9 weeks, which will clearly strengthen participation by all key stakeholders in student achievement. Additionally, parents will sign a compact to underscore their commitment to their student's academic goals, another good tool for strengthening parent investment in student outcomes.

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

The applicant shows strong evidence of a high level of transparency in the availability of detailed budget information for general public review. In following the dictates of the Alabama requirements regarding transparency and reporting, the applicant shows transparency in currently providing the public with actual salaries for teachers and administrators at a school level, along with non-personnel expenses. This information is available online and is discussed at public budget meetings, allowing for transparency as well as opportunities for public discussion and feedback.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)

10

10

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides strong evidence that the district has sufficient autonomy under State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements to implement the personalized learning environments described in this proposal. Additionally, other statewide initiatives provide evidence that Alabama has offered flexibility to districts in implementing sizable new initiatives. The Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators, and Students Statewide (ACCESS) program, for example, offers high school students web-based instruction, including interactive video conferencing, to allow any student in the state, especially less-well served rural students, to have access to rigorous content at any time.

With a focus on preparing students for college and career through appropriate curriculum and instructional support, the Alabama 2020 initiative provides support for local school districts to redistribute and allocate resources according to local needs. Local districts are given the autonomy to alter calendars, schedules, and programs to support individualized student needs. Other Alabama statewide initiatives offer a culture of support for local districts, including:

- AP Testing Support
- The Alabama Reading Initiative
- Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative (AMSTI)
- Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators, and Students Statewide (ACCESS)

The various initiatives showcase the state's support of a variety of approaches to personalized learning environments, including the Reading Initiatives school-based coaches, to the AMSTI professional development around project-based learning and the ACCESS program's reliance on digitalized content. As each are elements of the proposed initiative, their current support suggests similar strong State and local support and flexibility for this initiative.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)

10

8

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant demonstrates strong evidence of meaningful stakeholder engagement in the development of this proposal.

A multi-faceted approach to gathering stakeholder engagement and support through invitations to join planning groups, surveys of parents and educators, and presentations to school boards resulted in the inclusion of stakeholder ideas in the development of the proposal. After discussions with leaders, seventy percent of teachers expressed their support of the proposal. Letters of support identify many business partners, along with a smaller number of nonprofit and religious leaders who support the initiative.

The application lacks information regarding the specific number of parents, teachers, and community members who participated in the planning process. Such data would be helpful to understanding the actual extent of community participation in the development of the proposal, which is key to buy-in and support of the project's outcomes.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)

5

3

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant presents moderate evidence of a high-quality plan to analyze the applicant's current status in implementing personalized learning environments. To date, it appears that most LEA research has been based on teacher evaluations. The results of those evaluations suggest to the applicant team that little personalized learning is currently conducted due to a lack of technology. The applicant also states that opportunities exist to strengthen communication with students and parents about the importance of mastering content to college success.

The applicant does not provide details regarding how the analysis of needs and gaps will be conducted nor what other tools, besides teacher evaluations, support the identification of stated needs and gaps. However, implicit in the applicant's discussion of proposed solutions are what are assumed to be the preliminary results of the gap analysis. Those solutions include:

- Professional Development for teachers to develop personal learning plans
- Ongoing coaching
- Increased communication and buy-in with parents and students
- Frequent assessments of progress, at daily, weekly, 3-week, 9-week intervals, and at parent conferences

More detail regarding the analysis that will be done to test the efficacy of the implementation is presented in later sections, which suggests that the applicant will continue to test for gaps in implementation and results.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	17
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant proposal shows a high-quality plan for addressing individualized learners at whatever level of preparation or need they are.</p> <p>As a results, students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand why what they are learning is so critical to their goals, through building on the the Alabama 2020's 8th grade and high school college prep emphasis through aptitude testing; college-bound coursework and/or personalized instruction to be ready for college bound courses. The applicant proposes to begin this process earlier in middle school. • Understand and pursue college-ready goals, through the expansion of Alabama 2020; personalized lessons through Global Scholar; and expansion of AP funding to more students. Parents will also have the opportunity to attend Parent College Readiness events and Graduation coaches will link families to programs like Upward Bound. • Be involved in deep learning experiences, through project-based cooperative, small group, or individual virtual experiences tailored to their interests and abilities based on Group Scholar's monitoring and testing; • Have access to diverse points of view through their cooperative teamwork, although the proposal does not address including culturally-diverse materials among its offerings; • Master critical content and develop 21st century learning skills through the problem solving, critical thinking, and teamwork opportunities embedded in the proposed lesson plans. <p>Students will benefit from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A personalized sequence of content and instruction through the individual learning plans developed in conjunction with the student, parents, and teachers, and adjusted through pre- and post-testing through the Global Scholar program; • High quality content based on the Common Core. The proposal would benefit from more discussion of the content to be utilized. • Ongoing and regular feedback, through a rigorous monitoring and evaluation system within Global Scholar that provides performance at the individual, subgroup, and total population levels. <p>As the applicant has defined over 88% of its students as high-needs, these strategies are also applicable to high-needs students.</p> <p>Together, the various components will ensure that each student moves successfully toward college or career-readiness along his or her individual path.</p>		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	15

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has shown moderate evidence of helping educators to improve instruction and improve their practice in developing personalized, college-ready instruction for learners.

Specifically, teachers will be given training to support their capacity to:

- Support the effective implementation of personalized learning environments through the development of support communities to help teachers share best practices and celebrate successes together. As a result, teachers will develop into the highly-effective educators most integral to student success.
- Adapt content and instruction to individual learning needs. Teachers will receive professional development training and instructional and technology coaching support, and will work within grade and subject matter professional learning communities to develop strategies for individual students.
- Frequently measure student progress and use the results to accelerate progress and improve individual and collective practices by reviewing daily reports, 3 week Progress Reports, and 9 week Report cards.
- Improve teacher and principal practices through evaluation feedback. The applicant's teachers and administrators receive frequent and comprehensive feedback through state-developed systems. Teachers are given feedback through observations, discussions, and self-assessments, and principals are evaluated through an online system, discussions, 360 feedback, and the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education.
- Of some concern is the sheer amount of work to be completed within the project framework, which may be unrealistic in its reach.

All participating teachers will have access to, and know how to use tools, data, and resources to further student achievement toward college and career ready goals through:

- Actionable information to optimize educational approaches. Teachers will receive continual feedback on student performance through Global Scholars' electronic testing, daily, 3 week, and 9 week reports, as well as ongoing student and parental feedback. They will have the opportunity to discuss this information and optimize approaches with peers through professional learning communities and with instructional and technology coaches.
- High quality learning resources which students will utilize through the E2020 lab, as well as ACCESS blended courses.
- Processes and tools to match student needs with specific resources and approaches through the development of the personalized learning plans, the E2020 lab's content in diverse subject areas, and small group and project work to match individual learning styles;

All participating leaders will have the tools, training, policies, and data to structure effective personalized learning environments by:

- Information from the district's evaluation, including the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education will assist principals in recognizing areas of opportunity for them in building effective personalized learning environments for teachers and students.
- Training, systems, and practices to continually improve school progress toward meeting student performance and closing achievement gaps. Principals receive ongoing training from local colleges, and, where necessary, receive additional personalized instruction based on their performance evaluations.

The applicant has a high-quality plan for increasing the number of students who receive instruction from highly-effective and effective teachers and leaders, including significant teacher professional development; access to instructional and technology coaching; scholarships to aspiring teachers in math, science, or special education; access to online courses for students in difficult-to-staff schools; and the elimination of tenure protections for less-effective teachers.

The applicant demonstrates that teachers and leaders will have numerous and varied supports and tools through training, coaching, frequent evaluation of student progress, and feedback on their own practices to become highly-effective instructors of personalized learning plans.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

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	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	12
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has shown strong evidence of supportive LEA practices, policies, and rules to facilitate personalized learning, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making the LEA central office a key partner in developing and supporting individual schools through the Superintendent's support, as well as that of the District's School Improvement Specialist, in providing a strong liaison between the schools and the central office; • Providing school leadership teams with the flexibility to set schedules, personnel, and budgeting through Alabama and the district's providing the individual schools with the flexibility needed for implementation; • Allowing students to receive multiple opportunities through the Global Scholar technological system, as well as the e-lab, to receive individualized, high-quality content and demonstrate mastery of a topic; • Allowing schools to set standards for students' "mastering" a course beyond traditional seat time measures; • Supporting the establishment of the E2020 lab to provide individualized lessons for learners at all levels, including special education students and English learners. <p>These practices, policies, and rules suggest that the LEA clearly understands the degree of flexibility necessitated by this initiative and is very supportive of the applicant's efforts to develop personalized learning environments.</p>		

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	9
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<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has presented strong evidence of its plan to support personalized learning through school and LEA infrastructure by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that students, parents, educators, and other stakeholders have access to content, tools, and other resources through electronic content access of Global Scholar via take-home devices or access through a community resource, such as a library. The flexible nature of the Global Scholar platform ensures that students will be learning and achieving according to their strengths and needs. • Ensuring stakeholders have appropriate levels of technical support, through professional development training, and instructional and technology support coaches. Prior to the application process, the applicant contracted with a technology consultant to survey the existing technological infrastructure to ensure data security, and the applicant has made budgetary provisions to ensure all sites are up to this standard of security. It also has sufficient funding for training of faculty, students, and parents. • Using information technology systems that allow parents and students to export their information in an open data format. While the district is investigating an online portal for parents to access data, it's not clear yet how the data might be exported to other systems. • Ensuring that LEAs and schools use interoperable data systems through the use of the district's current interoperable data system, into which human resources data and student information data will be added. 		
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E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	12

<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has shown strong evidence of a strategy for continuous improvement that includes timely feedback through the assessment of student progress, professional development, and technological effectiveness.</p>		
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- Student progress will be assessed at daily, 3-week, and 9-week intervals, and within 45 day plans. This constant review ensures that all students' progress is tracked closely.
- Weekly professional development meetings and bi-weekly grade and content-level meetings will ensure that student achievement data can be acted upon by teachers and administrators.
- A technology consultant has already reviewed the school's existing infrastructure for potential weaknesses. The technology team will conduct continual assessments of technology use, down-time, and other measures of the implementation of the new data tools. The application would benefit from more information about how this data will be used to adjust technology and infrastructure.
- Teachers and administrators receive 360 degree feedback through a variety of assessment tools, allowing them to make updates and adjustments as needed to their practices.

The applicant provides detail regarding not only the level of detailed data to be provided to teachers, administrators, parents, and students at frequent intervals, but also the means by which actions may be taken on that data (training, professional learning communities, instructional or technology coaches, etc.)

The process amounts to a 360 degree look (and accountability loop) for student achievement. Having meetings at the grade and subject level ensures a comprehensive look at the student's achievement from a variety of perspectives. Such close attention to all aspects of implementation, but most importantly on student outcomes, suggests the applicant will rigorously review implementation progress from many perspectives to quickly identify needed process improvements and act quickly to remedy them.

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

5

5

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

A multi-faceted communications approach ensures two-way communication among a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders. The plan ensures multiple opportunities for input, either at well-publicized school or district-level meetings, through surveys, or other personal contact. Such involvement increases the likelihood of buy-in and personal investment among the citizens and organizations of the districts.

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

5

5

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has shown strong evidence of ambitious yet achievable performance measures for the K-12 populations.

- The proposed data measure are well-chosen and useful for tracking progress across all schools, and against other Alabama school districts, as most are required by Alabama's statewide standards. Though summative in original use, the data will be used on both formative and summative assessments. Data measurements toward college-readiness are based in research, although the research is not identified.
- The applicant has included the required indicators and the applicant's proposed indicator of health or social-emotional leading indicator, discipline referrals, is a sound indicator that knits together academic and social/emotional measures.
- The numerous measures of Professional Development and Technological effectiveness will be employed on a short - and long-term basis. Measurements for parental involvement and community involvement appear sound also.
- While very ambitious, the 100% goals for highly-effective teachers by 2016-17 may not be achievable, given the 10% baseline. Nonetheless, as 80% of teachers are currently deemed effective, and with the proposed culture of achievement, this may be possible.

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

5

4

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant shows strong evidence of a plan to evaluate the program's District funded activities through:

- Constant monitoring of student achievement at daily, 3 week, 9 week, and 45-day intervals ensures a detailed focus on progress for individual students and subgroups.

- The proposal's frequent opportunities for updated teacher instruction and up-training, either in Common Core curriculum, instructional methods, or the use of technology, will allow instruction to adapt to changing student needs.
- The state's commitment to flexibility at the local level in allocating resources, or changing calendars, scheduling or requirements according to student needs creates a supportive environment for adjustments or revisions as needed.
- With an in-house technology integration specialist, it's clear close attention will be paid to technological efficacy; nonetheless, more detail on the measurement of the effectiveness of technological platforms and approaches would be helpful.
- Parents and community partners will also be surveyed regarding the connectivity and usefulness of the technology.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	8
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has shown strong evidence of a sound budget that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies all sources of funding, which includes \$20,000 in internal funding from one partner over the four-year period. While this is not a significant investment given the proposed overall budget, it reflects the commitment of the applicant team, despite the applicant's stated difficulty in attracting local funding to an impoverished area. • Seems reasonable and sufficient to support the acquisition of appropriate technology and training to • The overall budget appears reasonable, and the proposed personnel will guide implementation of Project CARE and also ensure sustainability over the long-term. • The one-time equipment costs seem appropriate for the preparation of the schools' infrastructure to take full advantage of the technology piece at the heart of this initiative. 		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	5
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has moderate evidence of a high-quality plan for sustainability of the project's goals after the term of the grant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant states that developing processes is more integral to the sustained success of the project than just purchasing products. Therefore, the applicants will partner with a state approved Educational Management Organization to work with coaches, administrators, and teachers on school improvement and transformation strategies that complement the proposal's goals of personalized learning environments. This is certainly a sound strategy that will enable new initiatives or products to be utilized more productively within a supportive framework. • It is unclear what financial resources will be available to ensure the sustainability of the initiative, other than one district's contribution to the funding of \$20,000. 		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	5
<p>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has shown moderate evidence of coherent and sustainable partnerships that will further the goals of the program. While many elements and partners are presented below, the proposal doesn't present an overarching vision of how the various components fit together.</p>		

- The applicant's counselors and social workers screen students for needs such as school supplies, clothing, or food, and work with local religious institutions to supply those needs.
- The applicant has identified academic partners, including Head Start and mentoring programs, as well as institutions of higher education, to supplement school-based instruction for students.
- The applicant does not discuss a decision-making process and infrastructure to select, implement, and evaluate supports.
- Parents and families of participating students are engaged in decisionmaking by being made more aware of educational opportunities and supplemental service providers outside of the school, such as medical providers, which they may choose to enroll their student in.
- The applicant will work with community partners, such as the library, to assess the applicant's progress in implementing its plan, especially in terms of technology usage.
- While it is clear that many partners work with the applicants' LEAs to provide support and services to the schools, an overall coordinated evaluation, with ambitious yet achievable performance measures, is not in place.
- The appendix lists numerous letters of support from mayors, chambers of commerce, colleges, and nonprofit and religious leaders. More specifics around what those partners will offer the schools would be helpful.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's commitment to individual learning plans is apparent, from the focus on developing student goals to the constant monitoring of student progress to the individualized professional development and support for teachers to the proposed technological solutions. The relentless focus on meeting students where they are and where they would like to go as individuals is apparent and admirable. Teachers, administrators, students, staff, parents, and community members have a clear focus and strategy for building 21st century skills for their students to excel in college or career.

Total	210	164
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