



# Race to the Top - District

## Technical Review Form

Application #1207MS-1 for Corinth School District

### A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	8

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The Corinth and South Panola School Districts have developed a plan that effectively addresses most of the core educational assurance areas and provides a reform vision that can have long lasting positive effects on the students and families in their districts.

- In depth needs assessments completed in order to determine causes of persistent achievement gaps
- The consortium have adopted and begun implementation of the Common Core State standards
- Cornith High School has implemented the University of Cambridge International System - NCEE Excellence for All program; provides a framework for offering a globally accepted and rigorous course of study
- Will implement personalized learning opportunities for students through STEM Academies and offering varying courses of study.
- Over past couple of years have restructured personnel assignments to ensure most effective educators are in schools where their skills are needed most. In addition, plans are under way to offer increased compensation and career advancement for educators based on the teacher evaluation system.
- Incorporates and embeds supports to holistically support students and families around student achievement, health, nutrition, and life skills.

There is no specific discussion about how the district will measure student growth and use that information to inform future practice. Although they mention that they will collect data and even use data teams as a strategy to guide school improvement, it is unclear how this data will be gathered and ultimately how it will be used to effect student growth. This is an important piece in truly effecting change with the most at risk students. As a result, this places the districts on the low end of the high range.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	7
---	----	---

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The Cornith and South Panola School Districts have provided criteria for selecting the schools that will participate in the reform proposal.

- All of the schools in the Cornith School District will participate (3)
- Four schools in the South Panola School District will participate and serve students in grades 4 - 12
- The schools were selected based on the identified needs in the schools and also based on work and participation in the High Performance Leadership Institute. Involving stakeholders in decisions around providing additional supports to schools is essential in ensuring fairness and equity.
- The number of students and their free and reduced lunch status meet the requirements set forth in the grant application.

The districts have presented a somewhat thoughtful approach as to why they have selected the schools to participate in the this reform program. The Corinth School District has three schools with two of them rated as High Performing under the state's rating system. The inclusion of these schools as well as their school that is not rated as high performing will allow them to continue and exceed their current succes and perhaps scale up some of their current reforms and add additional reforms to the High School so it can become High Performing as well.

The South Panola District has decided to serve four schools but only in grades 4 - 12. Two of their schools, Pope Elementary

and Batesville Middle are rated as Academic Watch based on the state's rating system. One school is rated Successful and another as High Performing. Although the districts mention the selection of these schools was based on stakeholder input from the High Performance Leadership Institute, it is unclear why the lower grades were excluded from participation in the reform efforts; especially since the elementary school - Pope Elementary is on Academic Watch. Students have a much better chance of performing well in higher grades when they are provided a solid learning foundation in earlier grades. As a result of this missing component, the district scores high on the middle range.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)

10

6

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The Corinth and South Panola School Districts began their plan for reform in 2010 through their participation in the High Performing Leadership Institute (HPLI). Through their participation in this institute, the consortium developed goals and plans of action that were vetted by stakeholder groups as to the effectiveness of the plans. As a result of this early work, several reform initiatives were put into place that would effect change throughout the district:

- Replacement or reassignment of 10-25% of teaching staff
- Increased focus on rigor and personalization
- Implementing national and international instructional standards in schools
- Employing curriculum specialists to provide professional development, assist in teacher professional growth, and provide resources to teachers
- Creation of school data teams to identify individual student gaps and provide individualized supports
- Administering bench mark assessments every six weeks

Although the efforts presented are achievable and will probably lead to some success, the overall plan lacks ambition. Many of the ideas presented are best practices and do not represent ambitious reform efforts. The implementation of the international curriculums is probably the most ambitious part of the reform proposal that once fully implemented will greatly affect student outcomes. As a result, this places the district in the middle range.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)

10

8

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The Corinth and South Panola School Districts have set ambitious yet attainable goals for each of the subgroup performance measures. The districts have based their projection for growth on the implementation of rigorous instructional frameworks through the National Common Core standards and the University Cambridge International System.

Through efforts to personalize instruction for students such as analyzing student data through the data teams and employing curriculum specialists to assist teachers with differentiating instruction, the districts are poised to effect significant growth in overall student achievement.

The major focus of the districts in terms of increasing post secondary degree attainment is the implementation of the University Cambridge International System. Although this system has been effectively implemented around the world, it's effectiveness in American schools is currently being studied and researched. In addition, according to the model, students, are "sorted" based on academic performance and preference, thereby allowing some students to pursue an academic path focused on obtaining a job immediately after high school. Although the model claims that every student who successfully completes the lower track of instruction will be prepared to at least enter a community college and succeed, it does provide a trajectory for students to bypass post secondary education. Taking this into consideration, high school graduation rates should increase but this may cause college enrollment rates to decrease.

## 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	7

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Although the Cornith School District has demonstrated a track record of success, the South Panola School District has not been as successful in obtaining consistent academic gains.

The South Panola School District has reported significant decreases in achievement in several areas from the baseline year of 2010-2011 to 2011-2012. Significant decreases in achievement levels can be seen at Batesville High School where every subgroup saw close to double digit decreases in Algebra 1 proficiency levels except the economically disadvantaged subgroup who saw double digit gains. The South Panola Pope Elementary School saw significant decreases in math achievement in grades 4-8 during the 2011-2102 school year as compared to the 2010-2011 school year.

The districts use a variety of means to communicate student performance data such as local newspapers, the publication of annual "dashboard" reports which detail financial, demographic, and personnel data. In addition, annual parent meetings are held to inform parents of district student achievement data. Although these are effective means of communicating information to various stakeholders, they are not robust enough to increase and improve parent participation around instruction.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
--	---	---

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The Cornith and South Panola School Districts make personnel salaries and school expenditures available to the public in accordance with Mississippi state laws. Salaries are discussed in open school board meetings and annual public budget hearings. In addition principals provide financial information to parents during school wide meetings.

The steps taken by the districts are in-line with acceptable practices of making budgetary expenses transparent to all stakeholders.

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

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The State of Mississippi has demonstrated its commitment to encouraging districts to create innovative reform efforts aimed at increasing student achievement through personalization of instruction and other reform efforts. The state has enacted legislation to allow districts to offer modified grading practices for students with disabilities and English Language learners in addition to allowing districts the flexibility to establish alternative education programs. In addition, the state has allowed flexibility in terms of curriculum offerings and assessments.

The Consortium will employ the use of Credit Recovery to further individualize instruction for students. Students will be able to receive credit for classes based on skills mastered and not necessarily the amount of time spent in a class. Credit recovery options will be available through the Mississippi Virtual Schools.

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

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The Corinth and South Panola School Districts have taken a thoughtful and detailed approach to involving a wide array of stakeholders in the development of their reform efforts. The districts employed the following protocols to solicit input and recommendations for the application:

- Established concept advisory team to develop conceptual framework for the Forward First consortium
- Internet surveys used to allow teachers, parents, and students to provide input
- Convened student focus groups
- Representatives from partnering organizations provided opportunity to review and offer suggestions
- Provided draft of application for review at individual schools, in Parent Teacher meetings, and on the district websites

The districts have provided overwhelming evidence of the support it has received for the reform efforts proposed on the application through letters of support.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	4
--	---	---

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

The Corinth and South Panola School Districts have determined their greatest needs through a comprehensive need assessment process.

- Significant achievement gaps found between White and African American students in reading and math as well as non-economically disadvantaged students and economically disadvantaged students
- Only 30% of graduates accepted into 4-year universities and 55% accepted to 2-year college

Students score on the low end of the minimal required ACT score to be eligible for admission into Mississippi State or the University of Mississippi (South Panola missing ACT scores)

- Graduation rates, though showing some progress in improving, are still an area of much needed focus and support - only 59% of Economically disadvantaged students graduate in four years

The districts do an adequate job of identifying the areas of focus within their districts. They have identified several areas where immediate reform measures are warranted and needed. The plan the districts have set forth will begin to address some of these needs.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	10

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The Corinth and South Panola School Districts have developed a learning plan that describes supports they will utilize to ensure their students are prepared for college and careers. However, the goals they describe to accomplish this are limited in scope and lack ambition to truly bring about the needed changes.

The districts do not explicitly speak to the goals of providing processes and mechanisms for students to be more involved in creating plans and goals in order to increase academic achievement. Employing the use of the Socratic Method as an instructional technique is mentioned as a way to promote the students awareness of his or her learning. The development of soft skills and increasing diversity efforts are absent from the plan.

The districts focus on implementing a Systematic Literacy Model for School Reform is feasible. The idea is to strengthen students literacy skills thereby increasing comprehension in all subjects. This is a formidable goal, but the limited amount of training the teachers will participate in may not allow the districts to reach their goals. The application states teachers will participate in two days of training in systemic curriculum alignment and one day of job-embedded training to strengthen alignment. In addition a literacy consultant will assist all the teachers in both districts. In order for this model of school reform to truly impact the entire educational environment, more intense and purposeful training should take place.

The districts present a model of Tiered interventions that will move them towards providing a more personalized learning experience for students. Students will be evaluated and placed on a Tier of service and then services can and will be adjusted based on continuous monitoring.

There are plans in place to provide students in grades 4-12 with an electronic tablet to be used in and out of school. It is the consortium's goal to create 21st Century learners that will be able to connect not only with their classmates but with people from around the world. Based on the information presented, it is unclear what the plan is to teach students how to effectively use these tools.

A large effort to ensure all students graduate and are college and career ready revolve around the work of the Districts' "Life Plan Strategists." The Life Plan Strategists will work to identify and assist those students that are most at-risk of not graduating and/or dropping out of school. The Strategists will use an array of data sources to determine the students that would most benefit from their assistance. In addition, the Districts will develop a STEM+ Academy that will further personalize learning for students and create a pathway to serve the diverse interests of students.

The Districts will offer free trainings to parents through their Parent Academy model in 60 IT and Business certifications. However, it is unclear how the district will support students and families in tracking and managing the students academic progress.

Although the districts plan to equip their students with a wide array of 21st century tools, there is little discussion concerning how students will learn how to use these tools and resources, specifically to track and manage their learning.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	9
---	----	---

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The Corinth and South Panola Districts have provided a framework that details how their educators will receive training to implement their reform model. However, the manner in which this training is deployed may not lead to the shift in practice they would like. Much of the training will be given to administrators and instructional leads. Although it is important to build the capacity of instructional leaders in districts in order to carry out training and provide support in the future, the initial training

for all teachers seems limited. The districts plan to employ a coaching and professional learning community model to assist teachers as they implement the reform model. There should be more specific recommendations for ensuring the reforms are implemented with fidelity throughout the districts.

The information presented is vague in respects to how the district will seek to obtain actionable information on an on-going basis to adapt instruction for students.

The districts will provide educators with different means of accessing professional development and support. They will work with an external consultant to develop an online professional development and teacher forum. Although this type of delivery system is important to meet the needs of a diverse population of educators, there are currently many free sources of online professional development delivery systems that could possibly be utilized.

With the help and support of the State of Mississippi, the Districts are well on their way to creating systems and ensuring all children are taught by highly effective educators. The districts are continuing work on creating evaluation systems that include student performance data and even expectations of acquiring additional certifications and degrees. A unique piece of the evaluation system is the inclusion of parent, student, and peer feedback options. In addition to reframing the evaluation system, the districts are implementing differentiated compensation models and opportunities for advancement and additional monetary compensation based on performance.

The districts have partnered with Universities to provide input in the preparation of new teachers so they will be successful in their districts. In addition, the districts will implement a two-week training program for new teachers and offer retention bonuses in order to keep the most successful teachers in the districts. This is an essential element in making sure highly effective teachers remain in the districts.

The districts have a plan to implement some key reforms that should positively affect student achievement. However, the training at the beginning of the reform efforts should be more robust for all educators if the plans are to be implemented with fidelity.

#### D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	6
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: The districts take advantage of the autonomy giving to them by the State of Mississippi to offer flexible school calendars, bell schedules, staffing models, and instructional programs. These efforts are supported by central office personnel and other organizations that work closely with the schools and districts. The schools use School Leadership Teams and Professional Learning Communities to provide building level leadership in regards to curriculum, instruction, and federal and state issues. The districts are able to offer students alternate means of gaining course credit through mastering skills as opposed to seat time. The Excellence for All Program provides alternate routes for students to enter college. The districts see the implementation of a 1:1 technology environment as further enabling them to provide a personalized learning environment for their students through the use of various software and online programs to facilitate differentiation. The districts use several portals to allow students and parents access to student demographic and achievement information. Te districts plan to use several online programs to work with students with disabilities and English learners. This is a limited approach and fails to differentiate between the vast needs across and within these groups. Although the districts presented some evidence of how they will accomplish the goals in this section, a high quality plan was not presented.		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	6

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:  
 The Corinth and South Panola Districts have set forth a plan to provide necessary resources to students and parents and also provide training to use those resources in an effective manner. The cornerstone of their efforts to impact not only students, but their parents and community as well is the creation of the "ICAN" center that is accessible to members of the community that would benefit most from its services. The ICAN center will serve as a training center that will strive to offer a holistic array of services to help the entire community. The ICAN center will offer Trainings to assist parents in understanding the

curriculum and how they can better assist their children. In addition, the ICAN center will also offer GED classes, certification programs, employment assistance, soft skill development, and even nutrition classes. This approach will ensure fundamental needs are met in families thereby increasing the likelihood of increased student achievement. The ICAN center will be a vital resource in effecting change with students, their families, and the community. Although rationale was provided for the location of the center, it is unclear how other parents and families who live in other communities will have access to tools and training.

The districts also plan to hire additional technology personnel to assist with training educators, students, and parents. Computer labs in the community will be open in the evenings and on the weekends to provide flexible use of resources. Providing technology support in the form of personnel trained to meet the needs of the community will have a tremendous effect on students achievement in that parents will become more equipped to help students outside of school. Also, providing flexible hours of operation will make the center's resources accessible to those that may need them the most.

The districts currently use a district student management system - SAM7. This platform allows educators to view real-time data on students. The state of Mississippi uses an interoperable data system that allows for the sharing of a wide array of student information. It is unclear whether or not the student/parent data system described allows the users to export information and use in other electronic data learning systems.

### E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	7
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The Corinth and South Panola Districts have developed an approach to evaluating their project goals. The districts will develop an Internal Advisory Committee (IAC) and External Advisory Council (EAC). The IAC will meet once a month in order to evaluate and make program improvement recommendations. This internal committee is important because they will have an up-close look of what is taking place in the district and will be able to make needed changes quickly if needed.</p> <p>The EAC will provide more of a summative evaluation of the program efforts. The EAC will meet quarterly and analyze information from the IAC meetings and findings. Both the IAC and EAC will be made up of a wide array of stakeholders which will add to the credibility of the evaluation reports.</p> <p>The districts will also employ an outside evaluator to further assess the effectiveness of the reform efforts and make suggestions for improvement.</p> <p>It is stated that the IAC will "inform communication and PR" efforts and produce monthly progress reports, but it is unclear as to how these reports will be disseminated to the public.</p> <p>Overall, the districts have provided a clear and succinct method of evaluating the reform efforts that are both ambitious and achievable. However, how the districts will communicate its findings to all stakeholders is lacking.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	4
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The Corinth and South Panola Districts have described a process by which they have and will continue to communicate and engage all stakeholders around their reform efforts. Some of the following methods have already been employed while others are scheduled to begin after the acquisition of the grant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly presentations to Board of Trustees regarding expenditures, program participation, and progress toward achieving goals</li> <li>• Project Advisory committee meeting monthly during first year of grant and quarterly thereafter</li> <li>• Community forums</li> <li>• Website dedicated to the initiative</li> <li>• Speaker's bureau</li> <li>• Coordination of local newspapers, television, and radio to discuss project efforts</li> <li>• Social media campaigns</li> <li>• Dissemination of information at local, state, regional, and national conferences</li> </ul>		

Although the district has provided a myriad of communication avenues by which to keep stakeholders engaged around the efforts of the grant, it is unclear how these efforts will work together in order to create a cohesive system of communication.

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

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The Corinth and South Panola Districts provide 13 performance measures but it is unclear the rationale for the selection of these performance measures.

The performance measures related to effective and highly effective teachers and administrators are both ambitious and achievable for all students. The consortium have presented a plan where if realized, close to 100% of all students will be taught by an effective or highly effective teacher and administrator.

The application presents goals for students PreK-3, 4-8, and 9-12 that are both academic and social in nature. The goal of reducing the percentage of mental health referrals for all groups is both achievable and ambitious. The goals for each of the measures are ambitious and achievable.

The goals presented in regards to increasing the percentages of students who complete the FAFSA paperwork and are on track to being college and career ready are ambitious and achievable.

Overall the districts have provided both ambitious and achievable goals to address the performance measures presented in their plan, although the rationale for their selection is unclear. As a result, the district ranks in the middle range of this performance measure.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	3
---	---	---

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The Corinth and South Panola School District will employ the expertise of an external evaluator to assess the effectiveness of the programs set forth in their reform model. The districts' internal and external evaluation teams will work with The Program of Research and Evaluation for Public Schools (PREPS), Inc. to determine the extent to which the districts are meeting their goals.

The PREPS organization will utilize a Continuous Improvement Cycle model to evaluate all of the programs in the reform model and will utilize a data management system to electronically track, manage, and analyze project data. However it is unclear how this data management system will be created and who will have access to it.

The fact that the PREPS organization will work with the districts from the beginning of the reform implementation and throughout will allow them to clearly assess the and evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed reform measures. The plan states that the evaluators will use both qualitative and quantitative data to analyze and provide feedback to the districts which is vital to obtaining a clear and precise evaluation. The questions the districts will seek to answer through their evaluation process will provide them with the necessary feedback to determine if their efforts have been successful.

Lastly, the cost of the evaluation team is questionable in regards to the return for such a large investment - \$1,080,000.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	8

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The Corinth and South Panola School Districts have provided a thorough description of how they plan to fund their reform efforts. The districts planned to use their funds to build the capacity of their educators through professional development, improve and enhance infrastructure, and upgrade systems of support to personalize learning for students.

Although study visits have been found to have some impact on the professional development of educators, the amount of funds budgeted for study visits may not be a prudent investment towards the reform model. A little over \$160,000 will be spent to send approximately 100 educators to various study visits during the course of the grant. This may not be the best way to effect change in that the scalability of this practice may not possible in years to come.

The districts have provided clear explanations of how the Race to the Top District grant funds will be used over the course of

the grant funding. The districts plan to make full use of their local, state, and federal funds to support the work set forth in the grant application and have detailed the amounts of these funds they plan to use. However, there is mention of the use of private foundation funds as a source of funding for items in the budget. It is not clear what foundations will provide these funds and if they have been secured.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	7
--	----	---

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The Corinth and South Panola Districts provide a detailed plan of how they will pool additional funds to support the reform initiatives during the course of the grant period. Although, many of the initial funding needs are one-time in nature, little discussion was given towards how the efforts would be maintained after the grant period has ended. The information presented mentioned the use of state and federal funds to achieve the goals during the grant period, but it is unclear if those funds will be used after the grant period has ended and to what extent to continue the reform efforts.

Overall, there are vague plans presented as to how the reform efforts will be sustained after the grant period has ended.

### Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

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

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The Consortium Districts have partnered with various outside organizations, parents, and stakeholders to create a plan towards achieving their reform efforts. Some of these partnerships have been previously established and have already begun to show success. The efforts detailed in their plan not only support academic achievement of their students, but provide a continuum of services to serve the whole child.

The district has identified but social and academic goals for the not only students but their families as well. However, students in grades K - 3 are missing from the plan for the South Panola school district. Since the reform efforts are not targeted to them and little discussion was provided concerning their needs, to what extent the overall reform efforts will be successful are questionable.

The student achievement goals the districts hope to achieve are both ambitious and achievable. The district plans to use teacher leaders and support personnel to further the work and change efforts throughout their districts. However, in order to continue the growth they anticipate from the reform efforts, more thought should be put into how the initiatives will be continued and replicated in years to come.

The districts have worked to assess the needs of their students and communities and have set forth a detailed plan to continue collecting and analyzing data in an effort to continuously monitor and adjust for the benefit of all students. The district have several robust protocols in place to gather, analyze, and disseminate information about their ongoing reform efforts.

The annual academic performance measures identified are ambitious, but to what extent achievable is questionable based on the cautions mentioned above.

### Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The Corinth and South Panola School Districts have met the Absolute Priority 1 set forth in the grant requirements.

The districts plan to implement several learning environments that foster personalization and focus on preparing students and communities for the 21st Century. These environments include the Interdependent Community Advancement Network, the International Teaching and Learning Center, and the STEM+ Academy. In addition, through the use of technology devices, students will be able to access information and communicate on an ongoing basis.

The districts will seek to integrate curriculums and teaching methods that increase rigor across their districts and prepare students for college and careers. Students will also be provided opportunities to have instructional delivery models tailored to their unique and varying needs.

The plans described to place a highly effective teacher in every classroom and administrator in every building are very detailed and thoughtful.

The district has identified some huge achievement gaps within their districts and have proposed some somewhat ambitious and achievable goals to close those gaps. Some of the approaches provided to close these gaps include: creating more personalized learning opportunities for students including offering diverse ways in which students show mastery of concepts, different pathways of study and a STEM Academy.

Lastly, the districts have developed a holistic approach to equipping and preparing their students and communities with the tools needed for success through to development of the ICAN center which will provide an integrated approach to assist not only students but the community.

Total	210	135
-------	-----	-----



# Race to the Top - District

## Technical Review Form

Application #1207MS-2 for Corinth School District

### A. Vision (40 total points)

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

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The Corinth and South Panola School Districts (hereafter referred to as the LEA Consortium/ LEAC) provides some evidence of a clear plan to build on core educational assurance areas toward the RTT-D goals.

They articulate a solid approach to accelerate student achievement:

- They show significant resolve to close significant achievement gaps (from 20-50% between lowest- and highest-achieving groups);
- They locate the source of the achievement gap in issues of equity: access to high quality standards and assessments, increased engagement through use of technology, outreach to parents to support students' social, emotional and academic growth;
- They identify four objectives: recruitment of highly effective teachers and leaders, providing curricular/instructional/technology resources, concentrating on social/emotional/behavior/academic needs of students, and increasing the number of college- and career-ready students.

The LEAC shows intent to deepen student learning through high standards for teachers, students, school leaders and community agencies, particularly through curricular reforms:

Regarding high standards for teachers, the LEAC aims to align high expectations with an "internationally benchmarked curriculum," provide differentiated instruction, enhance teachers' abilities to use data to drive their instruction, and transform teacher compensation systems;

- Regarding high standards for school leaders, in addition to the implementation of the curriculum reforms and use of data, to increase the cultural diversity of staff, and to commit to a continuous improvement process;
- Regarding high standards for students, the LEAC emphasizes content learning as conveyed by the new curriculum and assessed by internationally benchmarked exams, so that they will graduate college- and career-ready;
- No explicit mention is made of high standards for community agencies;
- The emphasis on the particular curriculum as the source of reform is significant and could present drawbacks, should its implementation prove more difficult than anticipated by the LEAC.

The LEAC has inexplicitly aligned their efforts to personalize student learning to clear, significant, and achievable equity goals.

- The LEAC sets forth four conditions for reform: continuous improvement of curriculum/ instruction/ student achievement, district and school leadership focuses on using key practices as a guide to school improvement, stakeholder support for replacing curriculum and standard statewide graduation track, and district leaders supporting school leaders and teachers to carry out key practice;
- The description provided of these key conditions to reform does not make explicit their relationships to each other (e.g. by referring solely to "School Data Teams" there is little sense of what in particular such teams would do to advance the corresponding key condition of "using key practices as a guide to school improvement");
- The heavy lifting set forth is that of one particular curriculum, "Excellence for All," with little discussion of how the proposed curriculum aligns with the stated goal of addressing LEAC inequities;
- For a district with 70% poverty levels, there was insufficient discussion of the appropriateness of the EfA curriculum to provide the "world class educational system" promised in the proposal.

Overall, this section of their application shows a positive and ambitious but inexplicit reform vision, relying significantly on the promise of an external curriculum, and provides evidence for a score in the low end of the middle range.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	8
---	----	---

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal clearly and effectively describes the process of school selection, and the targeted schools meet the RTT-D eligibility requirements.

- The LEAC includes all three schools in the Corinth School District and schools serving students in grades 4-12 in the South Panola School District;
- The participating schools have student populations with over 40% students from low-income families (ranging from 47.9% to 85.8%);
- They do not explicitly state the poverty percentages by school;
- They do not specify why K-3 schools from South Panola are not included

The proposal includes a detailed list of the schools that will participate in the grant activities.

- The participating schools include Corinth Elementary, Middle, and High Schools, South Panola High School, Batesville Junior High School, Batesville Middle School, and Pope Elementary School;

The proposal accurately describes the number of participating students affected by the grant proposal.

- In all, 5,479 students and 367 teachers will participate across the 7 schools, representing 100% of the population within the target schools.

Overall, this section provides concrete evidence of the LEAC's clarity of intent to involve and affect student learning, and thus qualifies for a score in the middle of the high range.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	2
---	----	---

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAC proposal provides minimal evidence of a high-quality plan to effect change in the district as a whole as well as a plan to learn from their efforts so that they may be implemented elsewhere.

The proposal describes past positive change initiatives, but does not concretely elaborate a vision for future positive change in the district as a whole.

- The district has undergone recent positive change, subsequent to the LEA school leaders' participation in a "High Performing Leadership Institute" in 2010, followed by the LEAC leadership's cultivation of buy-in for the reform vision from teachers, parents, community leaders, and business leaders.
- After the consolidation of elementary and middle schools, implementation teams consisting of teachers, administrators, parents and community members emphasized work on personalized students learning and increased student achievement through instructional rigor;
- The Corinth High School began participating in a pilot of the *Excellence for All* curriculum in Fall 2011 and a subsequent implementation effort has begun in SY 2012-13 in Corinth Middle and Elementary Schools;
- The LEAC has identified data-driven instruction and analyses of student data as critical needs;
- The RTT-D proposal aims to accelerate the process already underway of (a) introducing personalized technology, (b) emphasizing international curriculum, (c) ongoing professional development for administrators and teachers, and (d) provide access through STEM opportunities and neighborhood technology access;
- The proposal does not make explicit in this section the introduction of new initiatives or approaches to increase equity, close the achievement gap, or prepare underperforming subgroups for college and career.

The logic model provides some evidence of the relationships between the various sub-initiatives of the proposal and their individual contributions toward common long-term outcomes.

- It was unclear how the elements of the acceleration process relate to and advance each other -- more description was given to work already begun rather than work the LEAC proposes to do;
- The reform framework included in A(4) listed approaches without making clear their relationships to each other or their connection to long-term specific and measurable outcomes;

The vision for improving student learning outcomes is unspecified in this section, mentioned in general terms about improvement without concrete and measurable outcomes.

Overall, this section of the proposal provides good evidence for work already begun, but limited evidence of a high-quality plan, and is scored in the high end of the low range.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	2
---	----	---

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAC's proposal shows that based on realistic interventions and prior achievement, their plan is likely to result in improved student learning and performance and address performance on summative assessments, orientation to reduce achievement gaps between White students and other groups, and increase graduation and college enrollment rates. They do not address post-secondary degree attainment in the proposal.

Regarding improved students learning outcomes, they show a modest track record of improvement and an inexplicit plan to change this trend.

- the LEAC has not established a strong track record of improved student learning outcomes-- though Corinth Elementary, Corinth Middle and Corinth High Schools showed some improvement across most groups (<10% for two years of data, the South Panola Schools showed less significant gains and in some cases a decline from SY 2010-11 to SY 2011-12;
- The goals for improvement are ambitious, but do not follow sequentially from the baseline data;
- Particularly concerning were the trends at South Panola Batesville High school, where across the board students experienced steep declines in Algebra I proficiency over the baseline years.

Regarding closing achievement gaps and increasing graduation rates, the LEAC has shown a limited track record of improvement.

- Over the two years of baseline data, the underperforming groups did appear to narrow the achievement gap, however the percentage of White students attaining proficiency level dropped from Y1 to Y2 in the majority of the participating schools, so the decreased gap could be attributed in part to decreased achievement in MCT2 Math;
- Similarly, the graduation rate in the two high schools dropped in the highest-achieving group from 2010-11 to 2011-12, so although the achievement gap dropped it is difficult to identify a positive trend;

The gains forecast to close the achievement gap are not plausible based on the baseline data and the lack of concrete plans to address subpopulations specified thus far in the proposal;

Regarding increased college enrollment, the proposal sets forth a vague plan to expand college-preparation initiatives and improve college enrollment.

- The baseline data show some improvement in the college enrollment rate from Y1-Y2 (around 2%);
- The forecast improvements in the graduation rate are reasonable, though not as ambitious as they could be, and the proposed results of the grant have the same 20% differential between graduation rates of White and Black students as in Y1 of the baseline data.

Overall, this section of the proposal provides minimal evidence for components required by RTT-D, and as such scores at the low end of the low range.

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	2

### (B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAC has demonstrated a variable record of success, with an emphasis on new facility construction in both districts, over the past several years.

Regarding improved student learning outcomes and closing achievement gaps, the district has shown more investment in facilities and less explicit attention to approaches to improving student learning outcomes.

- The Corinth district underwent a significant reorganization in 2010, reconfiguring four schools into one elementary and one middle school, the former described as "state of the art elementary school facility;"
- The South Panola School district has also invested in improvements to physical facilities;
- The two districts serve different student populations with different challenges -- Corinth is a high-performing district while South Panola is plagued with persistent low achievement;
- The LEAC have invested Title I funds into addressing achievement gaps for African American, Hispanic, special needs, and economically disadvantaged subgroups-- though beyond stating that it has done do, the proposal does not describe the results of these efforts;
- School leadership have received development in using data analyses to inform school decision making;
- The proposal describes variable results regarding the use of "equitable teaching strategies to ensure rigor for all students;"
- The LEAC is aligning curriculum with the Common Core State Standards;
- The participating districts have very different percentages of student proficiency on various assessments of elementary, middle, and high school learning;
- The narrative describes "improved performance during the 2011-12 school year" on the statewide accountability model, though the performance gains represented in the appendices were more variable among school sites;

Regarding the significance of their reforms in turning around lowest-achieving or lowest-performing schools, the LEAC is inexplicit.

- There is limited explanation given for the rationale for closing, consolidating and reopening two schools of four in Corinth;
- There is no explicit attention given to turning around persistently low-achieving schools in either district-- all reforms proposed are for the entire student population in the seven target schools;

Regarding the transparency and access of their student performance data, the district has a regular practice of sharing data with teachers, parents and students throughout the school year, less clear was how available the data are on an ad hoc basis.

- The LEAC districts hold annual parent meetings in which the school leadership reviews school and district performance results;
- Individualized learner's data are provided to parents;
- Data are made available to teachers in data books;
- It was unclear to what extent data are made available to constituencies on-demand.

Overall, the LEA's performance in this section is minimal. This component scores in the low end of the low range.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
--	---	---

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAC has demonstrated comprehensive efforts toward a high level of transparency in processes, practices, investments, and access to data as required in the RTT-D proposal.

- The LEAC has a high degree of transparency regarding K-12 expenditures, promoted and encouraged by the state of Mississippi;
- Expenditures are tracked for regular L-12 instruction, instructional support, pupil support and school administration by school;
- Annual public hearings are held for the public to comment on the proposed budget;
- Districts are required to adopt an amended budget showing actual expenditures, including salaries and program expenses;
- All individual salaries by location are made public and available for review;
- School leaders share financial information with Parent Teacher Organization meeting;
- Financial reports are regularly presented to Board of Trustees

Because the LEAC has demonstrated a high level of transparency in all levels required by the grant proposal, this element scores at the high end of the range.

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

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAC has demonstrated sufficient evidence that they have access to the right conditions with the appropriate level of autonomy to implement their proposed interventions in their state context.

- The LEAC has a track record of effective work with the state of Mississippi, as evidenced by their participation in the Coordinated School Health Programs initiative;
- The Mississippi Education Reform act of 2006 supports educators' work to achieve "more personalized learning environments," and numerous examples of such initiatives are given;
- The LEAC states that they have "sufficient autonomy ... to implement personalized learning environments" and the state accountability frameworks provide "latitude and support to facilitate these personal learning environments;"
- Districts in the state may make modifications to meet the needs of students, including modified grading policies for students with disabilities and English Language Learners, and the two participating districts have different grading policies;
- The districts have received support to implement innovative programs (such as the proposed expansion of the internationally-benchmarked curriculum);
- Districts may also have flexibility in configuring their school day (including extending same) and "virtual public schools" are approved by the state.

In sum, the proposal shows a high degree of the appropriate conditions for their interventions to be successful, and as such, rates at the high end of the high range.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	5
---	----	---

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAC has demonstrated moderate evidence of stakeholder engagement in the proposal, with a reasonable degree of involvement by students, parents, school leaders, elected officials, and community agencies. The LEA does not have collective bargaining representation.

The LEA describes work to involve stakeholders in the development of the project, largely through information dissemination throughout the process. It was unclear how significantly such groups' feedback was incorporated into the proposal.

- The LEAC Superintendents created a concept advisory team (administrators, teachers, parents, students, business and community leaders) to develop the proposal conceptual framework. Specific numbers of these representative groups on the concept advisory team are not specified;
- The manner in which the conceptual framework was shared with "various constituencies" is inexplicit and vague-- the

proposal describes "comments and feedback received" without a description of how specific data were incorporated into the grant;

- The summary of data gathering instrument in Appendix B(4) indicates consensus around the quality of the educational program (the majority of respondents indicating "great extent") while the items around students' learning/ accomplishments and parental and community involvement were more varied;
- No mention is made about the number or nature of survey respondents, it is difficult to discern who completed the survey;
- After the grant proposal was written, the proposal describes "additional meetings" held to give various constituencies "opportunities to provide comment," but the only constituencies mentioned explicitly are higher education organizations and building principals;
- The overall impression left by the description of the development was that it was centrally driven with nonsubstantial impact from external groups;
- It is unclear the extent to which community partners and involved stakeholders view their work as integral to the grant.

The district provides numerous letters of support from key stakeholders in support of the proposal.

- The description of the process of soliciting letters of support involved an informational meeting after which organizational representatives were asked to solicit local support;
- 95% of teachers have indicated support for the grant proposal through signed letters of support;
- Letters of support represent school district leadership, school faculty, elected officials, community business partners, community agencies, education foundations, parent teacher organizations, institutions of higher education, state education officials, education research agencies, and early childhood agencies;
- Few letters provided concrete examples of expectations around how the agencies planned to be involved, or how the proposal was building on existing partnerships;

The extent to which the LEAC leadership has cultivated active and engaged partners of their proposal is solid, and as such, scores in the middle range.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	1
--	---	---

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAC has demonstrated minimal evidence for a high quality plan to implement personalized learning environments as proposed.

Regarding the quality of their plan,

- Key goals (or "Priority Needs") are listed, but not related to each other
- Activities to be undertaken are general ("All students with a realistic opportunity to earn a standard diploma") and rationale for the activities are stated in general terms of underperformance across student groups;
- The timeline is unstated.
- Deliverables are unstated.
- The parties responsible for the deliverables are unstated.
- The overall credibility of the plan is low.

The logic of the reform proposal is inexplicit.

- There are minimal specifics provided regarding the logic of the proposal.

The LEA has identified needs and gaps to inform their proposal.

- Extensive discussion is made of the needs and gaps, but no plan is presented to address these gaps with key goals, activities, timeline, deliverables, or parties responsible.

Overall, the district has not demonstrated evidence of a high quality plan, despite their discussion of identified needs and gaps. It warrants a score in the low range.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	5
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The LEAC has not articulated a quality plan to improve teaching and learning through personalizing the learning environment. Though key goals are described with related activities, there is no timeline, specific deliverables, or parties responsible specified in the proposal or its appendices.</p> <p>Regarding their proposed approach to learning to empower all learners in age-appropriate manners, the LEA focuses on the use of a target curriculum, the Systemic Literacy Model for School Reform.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The LEAC's Excel by 5 committee aims at enhancing literacy development in pre-school aged learners, and screened to target children with the most severe language deficits;</li> <li>• The LEAC plans to hire a consultant to implement a "Systemic Literacy Model for School Reform." The consultants will lead curriculum alignment work and develop school leaders' and teachers' capacities to effectively use the curriculum;</li> <li>• Specific days devoted to training are mentioned, but not laid out along an implementation timeline;</li> <li>• Mention is made of the contents of the SLMfSR but not of target learning outcomes for students that the LEAC hopes will result from implementation of the curriculum;</li> <li>• The proposed curriculum allows data to be disaggregated for English learners and other "special populations;"</li> </ul> <p>The LEA has set forth an unclear strategy to ensure student access to personalized learning, high quality instructional approaches and content, regular feedback, and appropriate accommodations for high need students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposal describes tiered approach to student intervention, with specific attention to individuals and subgroups, and led by "onsite literacy facilitators;"</li> <li>• The proposed curriculum intervention is research-based;</li> <li>• Little evidence of nature or purpose of feedback;</li> <li>• cursory discussion of interventions for high need students (apart from 90-120 minute blocks of intervention minutes and accompanying teacher training);</li> </ul> <p>The LEA has set forth some mechanisms to provide training and support to students, teachers, school leaders and parents to ensure that all understand how to use tools to track and manage their learning, but these are not linked to a timeline or benchmarks aligned with student outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposal mentions tools (ActivTables, etablets, e.g.) without explaining how these will support students' capacities to track and manage their learning;</li> <li>• Proposed International Teaching and Learning Center is framed to provide students access to technology, distance learning, and teacher resource center, including resources to support teacher training;</li> <li>• ITLC proposes to offer continuing education credits and national board certification for teachers;</li> <li>• Overall emphasis on tools without description of how these may be expected to have specific results in student learning outcomes or increased access to college and career;</li> <li>• At-risk identification process not clearly aligned with technology and personalized learning initiatives.</li> </ul> <p>Overall, although there are many strategies mentioned in this section of the proposal, there is little sense of coherence around the focus of the RTT-D grant; the LEA has set forth an unclear proposal for a plan for improving learning and teaching by personalizing the learning environment, and qualifies for a score in the low range.</p>		

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	5
---	----	---

<p>(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The LEAC includes a description for addressing teacher and educator development, but has not laid out a high quality plan as specified in the RTT-D grant. While key goals are identified, no deliverables are specified, no timeline is included, and no parties responsible are identified.</p> <p>Regarding educators' engagement in training and participation in professional learning communities, the LEA sets forth some goals around increasing personalized learning in their schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional learning communities focus on strategies and techniques;</li> <li>• The proposal aims to hire external professional development consultants to provide leadership academy experiences, on the job coaching and ongoing professional development for instructional leaders;</li> <li>• The LEAC uses the M-STAR teacher evaluation rubric and the Mississippi Principal Evaluation System;</li> </ul>		
---	--	--

- Descriptions focus on improved teaching quality, but emphasis on capacity to increase personalized learning in schools is vague;
- Evidence of reformed compensation plan but little connection to participation in professional learning communities

The LEA proposes professional development for teachers and principals to increase these educators' access to and knowledge of tools and resources to accelerate student progress toward college and career readiness.

- focus on improved curriculum;
- little detail on specific goals for increased readiness for college and career;

The LEAC is oriented toward continuous improvement, though few specific milestones are articulated.

- copious evidence of initiatives to improve teachers' use of and understanding of curricula;
- little sense of linkage to specific goals around reduced achievement gap, increased college attendance, or increased social-emotional indicators.

The LEA is committed to increasing numbers of students taught by effective and highly effective teachers and principals.

- observations and evaluations oriented around teacher and principal improvement;
- online professional development;

The LEA has not set forth a high quality plan to personalize the learning environment through expanding teacher and leader capacity.

- Elements of high quality plan are general and combined with all other activities for the proposal;
- No specific deliverables are mentioned

Overall, the LEA is unclear about their intent to support teachers' and principals' development in the core areas specified by the RTT-D grant, despite numerous initiatives to provide teachers and principals with evaluation measures and professional development. As a result, this merits a score in the middle-low range.

#### D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	4

##### (D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAC is ill-positioned to effect positive gains for its teachers and students, evidenced by its organization and prior record of collaborative work.

The LEA central offices are somewhat organized to provide support and services to all participating schools.

- The two school districts have a prior track record of collaborative work, though they do not have shared central offices. The Corinth School district is the lead in the consortium;

The school leadership teams are provided with adequate flexibility and autonomy to facilitate personalized learning initiatives.

- Both districts describe high autonomy and flexibility in organizing support and services to participating schools;

Students are given some opportunity to progress and earn credit based on mastery.

- The proposed *Excellence for All*, provides two "pathways to college admission": one measured by performance in international exams and one earned through standard graduation requirements, career pathways, or "opt out procedure."
- Opt out procedure is not elaborated.

Students have multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery of standards.

- Various pathways to graduation; unclear how or if students may move between pathways;

All students may receive adapted and accessible learning resources and instructional practices, loosely reinforced in the central curricular reforms proposed.

- Opportunities described are numerous: Lindamood Bell, Rosetta Stone, SPIRE, Language Based Multi-Sensory Models; little sense of coherence or themes among these interventions are described.
- Regarding students with disabilities, few accommodations are specified;
- Regarding English learners, no explicit description of supports are provided.

The LEAC has not set forth a quality plan to support project implementation.

- The key goals are not aligned around the intervention themes;
- The activities to be undertaken and rationale for the activities are global more than specific;
- The timeline is somewhat specified (i.e. within 30 days of notice of award, careful review of policies and procedures; approval by Board of Trustees thereafter);
- The description of deliverables is not included;
- The parties responsible are only loosely described (i.e. Corinth Board of Trustees approving policies and procedures);
- The overall credibility of this plan is low

Overall, this section of the proposal is weak, and warrants a score in the high end of the low range.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	3
--	----	---

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAC describes their commitment to expand and ensure all students' access to content, tools, and resources in and out of school, though a "high quality plan" as specified in RTT-D is not provided.

- Targeted focus on downtown "pocket of poverty" area;
- Location of intervention site (ICAN) near this area with focus on training, GED attainment for adults;

The proposal provides minimal evidence of technology supports for students, teachers, school leaders, families, and other stakeholders.

- ICAN center offers family mentorship, literacy classes, certification programs;
- Family Resource facilitator focuses on wellness, home visits, coordination;
- Teachers provide training in target curriculum to support parents;
- Some focus on technology (e.g. "exploring educational websites for children");
- Emphasis on cultivating practitioner capacity (i.e. Colorado-based professional development) rather than technology supports for parents and others;

The proposal is vague regarding the capacity of parents and students to export information and use data in other systems.

- SAM7 system allows schools to enter and maintain data, accessible at all times by teachers and administrators. No mention is made of similar on-demand access for students and parents;
- Statewide Longitudinal Data System oriented around increasing graduation rates and college readiness;
- Data system meets America COMPETES standard;
- No mention made of ability for parents and students to export information and use data in other systems.

The proposal addresses elements of this section weakly. For that reason, this section scores in the low range.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	4

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAC sets forth a general approach to continuously improve its plan.

Their plan to provide timely and regular feedback on progress toward project goals shows commitment without explicit timelines being set.

- Participation in High Performing Learning Community/ PLE is oriented around identification and implementation of effective turnaround strategies;
- Proposal is explicit that stakeholders will engage in continuous improvement according to the USDE's model;
- Internal Advisory Committee will carry out process evaluation, meeting monthly and creating progress reports;
- External Advisory Council will conduct outcome evaluation, meeting quarterly

The plan is general about phases of continuous improvement during the grant.

- The continuous evaluation timeline provides no sense of concrete and achievable goals.

Overall, the proposal shows a vague orientation to study and learn from the implementation process during the grant, and merits a score in the high end of the low range.

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

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The LEA has structures in place to ensure ongoing communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders, but little sense of how they would be engaged and the purposes of their engagement are provided.

- Monthly presentations to Board of Trustees regarding expenditures, program participation, progress toward goals;
- Project advisory committee meets monthly during first year of grant and quarterly thereafter, though their purpose is inexplicit;
- Community forums review grant objectives and activities without specification of the criteria they would use or the timeline of their meeting;
- Forward first website makes public project activities - no content for website is specified;
- Other structures are listed, but no sense is provided of their alignment with the various priorities of the grant (e.g. pathways to graduation, implementation of internationally benchmarked curriculum, ICAN center use, teacher training);
- Consortium has website updated on a weekly basis.

Because of the inexplicit level of community engagement, the LEA has scored at the low scale.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	1
--	---	---

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAC has set forth performance measures, but their ambition and achievability varies. They have not provided appropriate and logical rationales for the performance measures and have not explicitly described how they will review and improve as needed during the grant implementation process.

- Performance measures are included (Appendix E3) broken out by ethnic group, access to highly effective teacher and principal.
- Performance measures for all students address increased performance on the MCT2 and other tests, reduction in number of mental health referrals.
- Performance measures for K-3 students focus on closing achievement gaps, reduction of mental health referrals, increased reading fluency.
- Performance measures for college- and career-readiness are listed as specified in the RTT-D grant;
- Performance measures for 4-8 students focus on increasing full year academic growth by 15% in first two years of grant and additional 20% in second two years of grant;
- A description of various initiatives to provide professional development to classroom teachers is provided, but the LEAC has not described how they will review and improve as needed during the grant implementation process.
- Reducing the number of mental health referrals does not necessarily address how the needs for mental health services are being met.

In the tables describing concrete targets for performance measure improvement, the goals are insufficiently ambitious and achievable

- Goals focus on increasing K-3 content learning annually by one grade level, while more significant gains would be required to address gaps.
- Performance measures for 4-8 students focus on increasing full year academic growth by 15% in first two years of grant and additional 20% in second two years of grant;

The LEAC has not included a high-quality plan for addressing all criteria specified in this section, and thus merits a low score.

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

5

1

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAC has articulated broad and general plans to evaluate the effectiveness of Race to the Top – District funded activities.

- The proposal plans to contract with the Program of Research and Evaluation for Public Schools (PREPS) to accomplish external evaluation;
- Curriculum will be evaluated according to Cambridge International Curriculum and Common Core Standards, ISTE technology standards, and student performance according to NAEP and TIMES (sic) -- how this evaluation is distinguished from an alignment process is unclear;
- The proposal describes the dissemination of data through presentations, bulletin boards, newsletters, and a website;
- A summative evaluation plan proposes to "determine variety and scale of outcomes of the project... fidelity of project implementation.. provide evidence to funders and stakeholders... and to inform decisions on replication";
- Questions to guide this evaluation are listed, but are general and large-scope; no sense of alignment with particular learning outcomes for students is given.

The plan for evaluation does not adequately address review of documents, budgets, service utilization records, and feedback from stakeholders.

- The plan describes this review only in very general terms.

The proposal aims to evaluate the impact of grant investments on students' academic success through a broad questioning approach.

- No sense of alignment is given between general questions and specific performance data.

A high-quality plan for evaluating effectiveness of investments is not provided.

- The key goals are only generally described.
- The activities to be undertaken and rationale for the activities are not provided
- The timeline is not stated
- The deliverables are unspecified
- The parties responsible for the deliverables are not made clear
- The overall credibility of this plan for evaluating effectiveness of investments is low.

Overall, the LEAC has demonstrated little evidence for the appropriateness and scope of a concrete plan to evaluate effectiveness, and thus merit a low score on this measure.

## F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	8

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAC has identified all funds to support the project, the funds are reasonable and sufficient to support the proposal, and appropriate rationales are given for investments and priorities.

- Unclear how the two districts' budgets contribute to the proposal;
- Rationales for expenditures are included in the project-level budget narratives and are addressed throughout other areas of the proposal;
- The budget has a high degree of investment in travel and contractual expenditures, resulting from their priority on professional development from outside groups;
- New personnel expenditures address hiring of coordinator and specialist personnel;
- Resources drawn from other funding sources (e.. Children's Progress of Academic Achievement) are made explicit;
- The narratives and budget documents align with the proposed reform initiatives, though the titles of the sections do not

mirror language used elsewhere in the proposal.

The LEAC has provided sufficient evidence for the description of the use of their proposed funds, and therefore merits a score in the low end of the high range in this criterion.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	4
--	----	---

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAC has set forth a plan for sustainability of the project after the term of the grant.

- The LEAC has a track record of sustainability with prior grants received;
- Several components of the grant are described as "start up positions" that can be "eliminated or folded into other district positions" after the grant period, though the proposal does not describe how any possible negative impact of this elimination would be ameliorated;
- Evidence for sustainability is addressed throughout the budget narratives, though not with regard to the specifics of the RTT-D high quality plan.

The LEAC has anticipated issues of sustainability after the proposed project ends, though has not addressed several elements of a high quality plan.

- The timeline is woven throughout, so specific means of addressing sustainability were unclear;
- The deliverables are implicit and not tied to specific post-grant benchmarks;
- The parties responsible are identified (specifically with regard to the "start up positions")
- The overall credibility of the plan is variable.

The clarity of the plan for post-grant sustainability is modest. This component merits a score in the low-middle range.

### Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	5

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The competitive preference priority is set forth solidly, though not extensively nor with a high level of detail, in this proposal.

The proposal enumerates and describes critical partnerships, which include public and private organizations.

- The Easom Outreach Foundation has a vision to help educate the community;
- Excel by 5 partnership supports early childhood intervention and programming;
- Corinth-Alcorn Reaching for Excellence (CARE) addresses needs sharing terrain with the proposed grant initiative;

The LEAC has set forth clear population-level desired results that align with and support the RTT-D proposal.

- The desired results address educational, health/wellness, community, family, and social/emotional outcomes;
- Desired results make clear which build from connections with community partners (e.g. increased school readiness is supported by Excel by 5);
- Performance measures are not disaggregated to make clear how they would aim at reducing achievement gaps between higher-performing and lower-performing subgroups.

The LEAC has identified how they propose to track indicators to measure each result at the aggregate and individual level, use the data to improve results for participating (especially high-need) students, and to bring the initiative strategically to scale.

- MetaMetrics partnership's personalized learning platforms, Lexile Framework for Writing and Learning Oasis support students' reading and writing development;
- Learning Oasis offers students on-demand access to developmentally appropriate reading and writing activities. The LEAC has a plan to use this data to monitor student learning outcomes in language arts.
- Partnerships with NCEE support the LEAC's use of *Excellence for All* and generate data to be analyzed.

The LEAC describes some integration of education and other services for participating students.

- Partnerships share expertise in integration of education and other services (i.e. Excel by 5, CARE)

The LEAC shows a disposition to build staff capacity to assess student needs, identify and inventory school and community needs and assets, create a decision-making process to build and evaluate supports to address needs, and assess the progress of implementing the plan.

- The High Performance Leadership Institute supports school leaders' capacity in this area;
- It is less clear how the grant proposes to sustain teacher capacity in these areas; descriptions of increased teacher capacity are general.

The LEAC has not set forth a high quality plan to support their proposed competitive preference work.

- The key goals of the competitive preference work are not broken out from the grant as a whole.
- The activities are indistinct from the broader grant goals;
- The timeline is unstated;
- The benchmarks of student achievement in the performance measures are stated;
- The parties responsible for activities are somewhat specified (e.g. descriptions of connections to community partners) without making clear who within that group holds responsibility for leadership;
- The overall credibility of the plan is moderate.

Regarding identified performance measures for population level, the representation of data does set forth ambitious and achievable goals.

- Performance measures show improvement goals that are ambitious and achievable (e.g. PK school readiness increases by 10% annually);

The nature and description of partnerships in the community moderately supports the LEAC's efforts to increase student academic performance, and as such, merits a score in the middle range.

### Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Not Met

#### Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

There was a high level of variability among criteria for this proposal.

- Under "Vision", one section provided high evidence while three were low;
- Under "Record of Success and Conditions for Reform" two criteria were low, two middle and one high;
- Under "Preparing Students for College and Careers" both criteria had low evidence for a coherent plan;
- Under "LEA Policy and Infrastructure" there was minimal evidence of high transferability between the two participating districts and both criteria received low scores;
- Under "Continuous Improvement," there was little evidence across all criteria that the LEAC had articulated specific and concrete measures to evaluate their process during implementation;
- Under "Budget and Sustainability" the budget was detailed and specific, but the sustainability of project goals were broad and general with few specifics;
- Under "Competitive Preference Priority" there was moderate evidence, meriting a middle score;
- Across the entire proposal, the collapsing of all high quality plans into one document made it unclear how each component would demonstrate accountability.

The evidence and variability thereof does not support the absolute priority of a clear and comprehensive plan to address how the LEAC plans to build on the core educational assurance areas to create personalized learning environments.

Total	210	82
-------	-----	----



# Race to the Top - District

## Technical Review Form

Application #1207MS-3 for Corinth School District

### A. Vision (40 total points)

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

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

- The applicant frames an ambitious vision of comprehensive reform. It's theory of change is summarized in the Appendix and envisions a model that integrates new academic strategies, technology, electronic networks, and connections with both the Common Core State Standards and an international baccalaureate managed by the National Center for Education and the Economy.
- There is a strong stated commitment to closing the achievement gap among differentially achieving schools across two school districts, with a strong mission statement that commits to "provide an equitable environment so that all students have the same opportunity to succeed academically and to be globally competitive."
- Teacher and principal development is proposed as an increasingly rigorous course of study.

The proposal is weakened by a vision that is not as clear, consistent, and integrated as it could be:

- The vision statement overstates goals (e.g., the Forward First program "will redefine education in these two districts") with inadequate specifics.
- It is not systematic in outlining out a practical plan for coordinating the initiatives across two very different districts.
- The statements do not explicitly connect the many disparate elements of its proposed vision in its Theory of Change.
- The idea of an "internationally benchmarked curriculum" is introduced without demonstrating the connections between the proposed Cambridge curriculum with the Mississippi State Curriculum and the Common Core.
- "Personalized learning" is not defined or clearly spelled out.
- It is not clear how an integrated data system and advanced technology promotes the vision.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	5
---	----	---

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant indicates that it will serve all schools within the two districts that have formed a consortium for the purposes of implementing the RTTT program. Although the list of schools includes pre-K to high schools in both districts, the text suggests that the focus of the program will be the schools that serve 4th through 12th graders. Later in the application, pre-kindergarten programs as well as programs for grades 4 - 12 are described.

- It is not absolutely clear whether the proposed program is a pre-K through 12th grade program or if it is targeted to certain grades and to certain curriculum (e.g., those addressed by the Cambridge Examinations);
- Schools that will be supported range from high performing schools to schools that are on academic watch. The rationale for including the high performing schools is not clearly presented;
- A listing of the schools that will be involved is presented. However, percentages of students in risk categories within each school are not included as specified by the competition's eligibility requirements; and
- There is no indication about where Panola's pre-K through third grade students are attending school, and there is no explanation of why no schools are listed for this cohort of students in Panola.

The data on the schools provides neither overall totals nor percentages, making it difficult to assess the extent of need among the schools. It is also not clear from the statement how the applicant will differentiate its reform within and across schools, grades, or subject areas that where the needs vary so widely. Lack of focus or rationale for differentiating services weakens

the case within this criterion.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	5
---	----	---

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The districts have been engaged in various activities to promote renewal and change over the past several years. They have been working in partnership with the state university's School of Business and school of education. Leadership teams from schools in both districts have participated in planning consortia. Up to a quarter of the district's teaching staffs have been replaced in recent years. One of the two districts has become partners in the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) national pilot using a "global curriculum."

- The text is confusing in that it states a vision of the future and some actions of the past, but it is not clear how the actual plan for the future unfolds to serve all schools.
- The Cambridge Secondary I International Curriculum is to be piloted in the future, but it is not clear how this secondary curriculum coordinates with the programs in the prekindergarten and elementary grades and if these programs are planned for both Corinth and Panola districts.
- School Data Teams have been created but it is not clear what conclusions they drew from their analyses and how these analyses link to the proposed action plan.

The result is that the proposed plan is rough and insufficiently systematic for it to be a clear and "high-quality" plan. It is also not clear how the plan will be scaled up and made meaningful in two very different school districts. Its vision is ambitious but its action planning does not demonstrate how the connections between vision and change processes are to be made.

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

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

In this section, the applicant bullets nearly 40 different components of various dimensions of its proposed plan. This listing, however, is more of a "laundry list" organized under broadly thematic headings than a plan with clear performance goals. A concern is raised as to whether such large number of initiatives or actions can be effectively undertaken and implemented and achieve the student improvement goals defined. Thus, while the goals are ambitious, it is not clear how they are achievable.

The performance charts are provided in the four performance areas requested in the grant's NIA, but the charts are not entirely clean, clear, and systematically presented. Certain information is indicated as "not available," and there are figures with negative percentages included, but it is not clear what those negative figures mean. Some school-level data are provided but it does not appear that all school-level data for all schools are included. Because the charts are not presented in a systematic way, it is difficult for the reader to make a judgment about whether the goals are achievable.

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:

Information is provided that summarizes some gains in varied content areas and grades. The applicant states that both districts "saw improved performance during the 2011-12 school year" measured on the Mississippi Accountability Model's "Quality Distribution Index" (QDI).

The evidence of prior success appears to be uneven across schools and districts and unsystematic. The case is not made as to why achievement improved in some areas but not others or why the measured improvements vary so widely in magnitude. Schools that will be included in this reform are a mix of high performing "successful" schools and students on academic "watch." The evidence presented does not explain why the progress in the highest performing schools in one of the consortium districts was not matched in schools in the lower perform district within the consortium.

This section of the application states that the two participating districts have communicated assessment results to parents, have implemented federal, State, and foundation grants, and have implemented two five-year 21st Century Community Learning Center grants. These factors may be true, but they are not relevant assessing intent or future plans within this evaluation criterion.

A more convincing case needs to be made to demonstrate that the applicant has systematically planned its project on the basis of evidence-based and previously systematic and successful initiatives.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	2
--	---	---

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has summarized current established state and local policies regarding data transparency. State and local policies provide procedural rules pertaining to personnel actions associated with salaries, accounting procedures, budgeting, etc. At the school level, the applicant indicates that principals "provide financial information at Parent Teacher Organization meetings."

Although the procedures are summarized, the applicant has failed to provide:

- Actual personnel salaries at the school level;
- Actual personnel salaries for instructional staff;
- Actual school-level personnel salaries for teachers; and
- Actual school-level non-personnel expenditures.

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

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant summarizes the state context for implementing RTTT, citing education reform commitments that began in 1982 with the Educational Reform Act. The most recent upgrade is the 2006 Education Upgrade. The evidence presented suggests that the districts have the autonomy they need to carry out the RTTT grant. Examples of how these districts have used this autonomy include: (1) Corinth's implementation of the Cambridge International Exams, which began last year; (2) offering Credit Recovery options to students as alternate ways of receiving high school credits; (3) use of the Mississippi Virtual Public Schools computer-assisted instruction network.

The applicant lists the initiatives that have been created by the state and lists several (above) examples of how these policies create local flexibility. This section would have been strengthened if the applicant included implications of these policies, specific initiatives undertaken as a result of these flexible policies, and evidence of the impact local reform have had on individual or institutional improvements.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	5
---	----	---

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

This section describes how the community, including parents, teachers, students, business and community leaders, and school district staff were involved in the effort to design Forward First. The advisory board and development team sought responsive feedback and surveyed constituents. A wide ranging constituency of staff, leaders, community representatives, and teachers had the opportunities to review and comment on the grant proposal at Board meetings. Both the mayor's office and the Mississippi Department of Education staff also received review copies of the application with the 10-day review period and they wrote letters of support. The MDEA also offered suggestions for improvements.

Appendix B includes numerous support letters that demonstrate commitment and interest in supporting the project's implementation. The final grant was "reviewed by principals and all teachers involved in the project." The Appendix includes signatures on letters of support for the application.

While a general level of stakeholder support for the project is included in the Appendix, it is not clear how representative the endorsements are. There is no information about how the application development committee reached out to underrepresented constituencies (ethnic minorities and poor families) or to families with students who have special education of language learning needs. The applicant's case would have been stronger if they had cited meeting dates, purposes, and names/positions of attendees, and if they had verifiable statistics that demonstrated how representative the groups are whose signatures appear on the application.

It is not clear whether there are teacher or principal bargaining units in either of the applicant districts, so it is not clear what percentage of the professionals who will be involved in the project are represented in the project's endorsement, if there are professional organizations in the districts and how they were involved in the planning and whether they endorsed the application.

The applicant states that "over 95 percent of teachers" in the districts "indicated their support by their signatures" but the way in which the data are presented makes it difficult to verify how representative these signatures are across schools, grade levels, teaching areas, and among principals.

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

5

2

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

The analysis of student needs and achievement gaps is a weak component of this application. The applicant's commitment to serving its student well is evident but the evidence for its current plan and status implementing personalized learning environments does not logically support the reform proposal. Missing elements include:

- A systematic grade-by-grade academic needs analysis indicating how various subgroups are currently performing;
- Data on the 2011 ACT Scores chart are missing;
- AYP information is not presented at the school level or for all NCLB demographic subgroups;
- The descriptive text does not consistently relate to the data that are included in the charts reference;
- Verifying the case made with data is made more difficult because no table or chart is given a source number, so it is hard to determine which text refers to which evidence; and
- It is also not always clear that the numbers in each column refer to.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	10

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant describes a variety of avenues for addressing students' literacy learning needs in Kindergarten through grade 12 and for engaging communitywide support systems and data management systems to implement the design. However, the great many components of this plan are very hard to follow, making it difficult to see how they integrate with one another and across the schools within the Consortium.

A data management system is proposed to report student-level and aggregated results. The meanings of the terms used in the proposal are not clear (e.g., results are to be based on "specific language and processing measures;" different systems will serve different "Tiers").

Charts are provided to summarize the intent of the innovation and to show how the pieces fit together, but charts and tables are not numbered or referenced, so the reader cannot be certain about what charts are related to which texts, reducing the effectiveness of the explanations in the narrative.

Many technological support systems are listed as training and support mechanisms, e.g., Promethean Planet, Learning Oasis, PD360, STEM+ academy but it is not clear whether these are past or future programs that will be used and it is also not clear how they relate to the SLMR program proposed.

The intent is indicated to "improve our technology," but here again a lengthy list of new technologies are listed (electronic tablets, video conferencing, global collaborative projects, use of ActivTablts, etc.) without adequate explanation of how these components integrate with each other, how they are used differently across grades and content areas, and how their use will help students meet the ambitious targeted goals.

An example of the confusion is the following statement: "by implementing the 1:1 etablet initiative...our students and teachers can break through the boundaries of the classroom and become global explorers." Another example of this vision is that the project will purchase a host of "e-systems," including "3M Library Cloud, 3M Discovery Terminals, and eReaders

This is an ambitious vision, but the proposed implementation plan does not make clear how the elements align with one another and how students will e-system and electronic tablet to knowledge. It is not clear how the Cambridge curriculum and assessment systems work with the individual student-assigned tablets or how teachers and support educators will differentiate teaching so that students' learning is personalized within these complex systems. There is a real danger that big investments in technology will be poorly used because it is so unclear how the elements fit together.

Also worrisome in this plan is the very poorly articulated plan to train educators, prepare students and families, and fully benefit from the well-established Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE), an internationally benchmarked assessment system which uses a European designed curriculum and assessment system (Cambridge International Examinations). These systems have been successful in many countries in the world, but their evolution has been long in coming and they exist as the core curriculum, not in competition with several other curriculums which apparently are to be used in Mississippi, e.g., the Mississippi State curriculum and the Common Core State Standards.

Many other systems are described by the applicant as pieces of their implementation puzzle, including support from a Life Plan Strategist to students most at risk, tutoring to support "credit recovery," "Virtual Schools," which substitute for in-school experiences for students who drop out of school, Saturday School programs, and mentoring, among many others.

In short, the intent to introduce these many strategies is worthy; however the implementation plan falls short in key ways. In particular

- There is component and program overload, without clarity of how the many systems related to one another;
- The applicant fails to define a tight management strategy that ensures each participant in the learning process will be taught at an appropriate learning level and understand how to use the numerous exciting opportunities created by all these many proposed resources, teaching innovations, and technological tools; and
- A great deal of focused training is necessary to implement successfully so many technological advancements, but the applicant has not provided a systematic plan demonstrating how the program leaders will introduce these systems and develop and sustain a continual focused training program that will enable educators, families, and children in the districts to use the new systems so they optimally serve students most at risk and least served.

The strategies, management procedures, feedback loops, and processes to help these ideas work effectively are simply not defined systematically

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	10
---	----	----

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has not put in place a high-quality plan that will systematically address the teaching and leading strategies for creating personalized learning environments that will provide all students the support to graduate college- and career-ready. The approach suggested anticipates future statewide and local mechanisms that will upgrade instruction for participating students but it is greatly limited by the same overload of ideas and lack of management systems for implementing these many ideas

In particular: the following additional clarifications are needed:

- Proposed training comes from outside consultants, and it is not clear how these training resources are coordinated;
- It is not clear how professional learning communities will work together to implement the systems proposed in the previous criteria.
- Critical evaluation and management systems for monitoring student achievement and progress are not yet in place so there is no evidence about how the many proposed evaluation and assessment systems will work together;
- Many avenues are proposed for adapting content and instruction and for giving students access to personalized learning opportunities tasks but it is not evident that the systems are in place for designing, offering, or tracking these innovations or to monitor student progress;
- Examples are needed of the proposed systems which will give educators access to and know-how to use, tools, data, and resources to accelerate student progress toward meeting college- and career-ready graduation requirements;
- Systems are proposed for which there is no clear evidence-based research demonstrating their successor potential for success in at-risk settings; and
- No information demonstrates how these many proposed components will provide actionable information respond to individual student academic needs and interests.

The training, policies, tools, data, and resources that will be needed to implement the proposed innovations are in very early development stages so that they are unlikely to be available to provide the quality of professional evaluation needed to help school leaders, leadership teams, and front-line educators to make the many changes that are proposed.

In short, the applicant's many ideas do not constitute a systematic and high quality plan that ensures programmatic success. The extensive information provided is too chaotically explained to make the coherent case that is needed for a stronger score on this criterion.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	5
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Policies, practices and rules proposed by the Consortium are in their earliest stages of development and implementation. Since two LEAs are involved in this program, implementation of this grant will require considerable cross-community, cross-district coordination. The applicant does not demonstrate its mechanisms for ensuring that regulations, procedures, and policies are in place to ensure smooth and coordinated implementation. Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The organizing consortium governance structure does not clearly have the capacity to support and fully serve participating schools</li> <li>• Specific strategies for integrating and coordinating the District- and School- leadership teams is not sufficiently defined beyond the promise of flexibility and autonomy;</li> <li>• Credit mastery and credit flexibility systems are presented, but the strategy the Consortium will use to implement these systems across schools is not evident;</li> <li>• As indicated in the previous criteria, a great many new learning resources and instructional practices are proposed without the benefit of coherent systems and management strategies that will make them adaptable and fully accessible to all students, especially to high-risk groups.</li> </ul> <p>In brief, this section is weakened by the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key goals are not aligned around intervention plans and themes;</li> <li>• No deliverables are cited</li> <li>• The responsible parties for each component are only loosely described.</li> </ul>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	3
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The governance mechanisms, infrastructure, and organizing approaches described by Consortium to implement this proposed program are too vague to ensure that the system will achieve the defined ambitious goals. Introducing the ICAN Program and to make technological resources available to the community are strong points of this application, but they are not strong enough to make the case for an expertly functioning cross-LEAS infrastructure.</p> <p>Each of the required components of the RTTT is addressed by the applicant in broad generalities, none of which provides specific evidence of processes to be used by contributing Consortium members that will ensure an infrastructure that accomplishes the goals of this ambitious agenda.</p> <p>There is insufficient detail about technology support for families, school leaders, and students. The proposed concepts about how families and community members will be able to use technology skills and use of technology resources to upgrade instruction.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	5
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant demonstrates its past and continuing collaboration within the Consortium to define a common mission and vision to refocus decision making fully on students, going beyond simple assessment indicators. The Consortium commits to a more relevant and rich assessment system using a "continuous improvement cycle" which it depicts as an example of the process it will use quarterly and annually. Both internal and external advisory committees will be formed to monitor progress over the life of the grant. It is expected that the External Advisory Council will conduct an outcome evaluation and a communication process for keeping all partners and participants informed of the progress of the project.</p> <p>Although claims are made for existing systems that track continuous improvement in a timely manner, no examples were provided of these systems at work. More evidence is called for that demonstrates what evidence about program</p>		

implementaiton will be collected, how that evidence will be used, what the data dashboard will look like and how it will function (including information about reporting frequency, substance, modified reports for specific constituencies, etc.).

Needed to more strengthen this application are specific examples of measures, reports, means that advisory groups will be using. In particular, it is not clear what data the various leadership teams will be entering and pulling data from the system for use in adjusting classroom practices according to identified needs. Since a core component of this program, the Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) is long-developed and long-used throughout the world, example models, tools, and feedback mechanisms should be available as examples to show the promise of this program as proposed.

Absent such clear examples, it is challenging to imagine how these systems look, what ensures that they are efficient and not cumbersome, and how teaching teams will coordinate the data to be collected during the life of the program.

A strategy for implementing the proposed rigorous continuous improvement process is needed to demonstrate how ongoing corrections and improvements will be made during and after the term of the grant. The strategy should provide examples of how the applicant will monitor, measure, and publicly share information on the quality of its investments.

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

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Community forums and a Forward First website, publishing electronic newsletters, will be key means for communicating with participants and community members. Email and listserv groups will be created as regular resources for information.

To strengthen this component of the plan, the applicant could have included specific topic areas, target groups, and outreach strategies it plans to customize for each subgroup group.

Two school districts with widely varied constituencies are proposed to be served by this project, but the communications plan does not propose specific strategies that reach out to any of those individual constituencies. The complexity of serving such varying communities with such different histories and school achievements is also not considered. A stronger plan would have specified how each participant group - from students through families, teachers, administrators, and across the community - will be served. Much that the applicant proposes in its future "revised" plans would have been supportive at the front end of the project's development.

Many ideas and possible communications strategies are suggested but the lack of specifics make it hard to assess how these strategies will be implemented on the ground and on what time line.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	2
--	---	---

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

This section contains a broad outline of how the applicant proposes to assess the program impact, and makes the case that past - far smaller grants - have been successfully evaluated.

The plan outline is lacking key specifics that are required by this criteria such as:

- The rationale for selecting measures is not persuasive;
- The proposed measures are rooted in current and traditional measurement systems, and no evidence is presented that they will provide rigorous, timely, or formative information tailored to the proposed plan and theory of action ; and
- There are inadequate assurances indicating how measures will be continuously reviewed and improved to ensure that they are sufficient to gage implementation progress.

The required performance measures proposed are broad, unsystematic, and not sufficiently nuanced to be able to assess implementation or impact. Specific measures proposed are those used in current assessment systems and are not likely to provide quality evidence about the effects of innovations on varied populations and needs groups.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	2
---	---	---

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

An external evaluator is identified. It is anticipated that the evaluator will develop a project management system to electronically "track, manage, and analyze project data and produce project reports." The applicant states that the evaluation will "emphasize continuous assessment, improvement, and accountability" but a specific set of plans for accomplishing this type of application is missing. The applicant states that the evaluation will consider key components of the program, including Cambridge International Curriculum and the Common Core State Standards, as well as assessments conducted by

international and national organizations. An electronic data management system is expected to be built to manage the data integration and evaluation.

This overarching concept of an evaluation does not comprise an evaluation implementation plan. Seven broad questions are proposed that the evaluation will address, but these questions are so broad that considerable additional work will be needed to define expected outcomes and impacts, measures that will be used to assess these impacts, and procedure for collecting and analyzing data. In a project of this magnitude, this depth of planning information must be laid out before the project startup if the evaluation procedures are to be implemented in a timely manner. In addition, this plan does not specify reporting strategies and schedules or procedures, all of which will be essential for an evaluation to be ready to move forward immediately, once the project is funded.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	3
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant identifies reasonable and sufficient funds and supportive resources that will be projected to implement this project. The budget summary and accompanying narratives provide a broad rationale for the investments and priorities, including--</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A description of all of the funds requested and allocated; and</li> <li>• Identification of the funds that will be used for one-time investments versus those that will be used for ongoing operational costs.</li> </ul> <p>However, the budget narrative is difficult to follow because it is not aligned with a systematic implementation plan or theory of change, making it very difficult to assess if the budget is appropriate, reasonable, and complete. Component titles used in the budget (e.g., "Transformational Improvement" or "Project Management") are not the same titles of the program components described in earlier application sections, except in the case of the ICAN program, which is consistent with the component described earlier. To be understandable, the budget subparts should carry the same component titles as those used in the application's vision and implementation sections.</p> <p>This lack of informative section names makes it difficult to determine actual costs and plan coherence, or to assess if how funds will be used in particular proposed program components.</p> <p>Also missing from the budget also evidence of how the two school district's budgets are differentiated and accounted for. It is simply not clear how resources will be distributed across the two participating districts. This is particularly problematic, since it appears that one school district is significantly more affluent than the other. More information is needed to ensure that there will be a compensatory distribution of new resources across districts and schools which serve students and communities with varying degrees of need and risk.</p> <p>Finally, the budget shows a very high investment in outside consultants, especially to implement the AICE. This component would be strengthened by demonstrating why it is necessary for much money to leave the system and additional evidence of what new resources will be available to build a sustainable infrastructure for the internationally benchmarked program.</p>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	2
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant states a commitment to develop a sustainability plan as the project moves forward. Some limited information is provided within the budget narrative regarding sustainability.</p> <p>However, specifics that are presented are inadequate for assessing the quality of the sustainability plan. Support from State and local government leaders is promised but it is not clear how program partners plan to sustain their commitments and contribution to the project of what specific continuing resources they will contribute after the grant concludes. The result is that the sustainability of the project components and its capacity to meet its goals after the life of the grant is insufficient defined or planned.</p>		

### Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	5

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant describes plans to work with six partners, including

- Metametrics - to create standards-based personalized learning resources, measures, and tools that are the foundation of personalized learning platforms to facilitate growth in reading instruction and writing ability;
- The National Center on Education and the Economy will implement a high-school assessment based curriculum used in some international schools across the world; one of the district's high schools is part of a consortium which has implemented Board Examinations at three grade spans, grades 5-8; grades 9-10 and grades 11-12. This assessment based curriculum will also work with teachers and with district leaders to extend the initiative throughout the Corinth system;
- EASOM Outreach Foundation is a community based organization that has a long history in the community and will partner to provide supplemental educational services in the summer and after school. In time, the program will provide athletic, recreational, and social service components, focusing its efforts in South Corinth neighborhoods with additional technology, internet access, and, in time, a STEM program.
- EXCEL by 5 - is offering Early Childhood Education and family support services in the target communities.
- Corinth-Acorn CARE program will supplement community initiatives in early childhood education, community college attendance, and reducing the dropout rate
- High Performance Leadership Institute, supported by the Mississippi Department of Education and the Appalachian Regional Commission will be a two-year program designed to strengthen local leadership capacity to support school turn around and to offer real-time support to principals and professionals that are participating in the programs transformation process.

Population-level desired results have been defined for students in the consortium that aligns with and supports the applicant's broader grant proposal.

Weaknesses of these potentially valuable inputs are:

- The integration of these key programs is not clearly spelled out;
- Actions and activities that each group is responsible for providing is not clear;
- How the selected indicators will be measured and tracked is not well defined;
- It is not clear from the plans presented how the model will be applied on the ground or scaled to other high-need students and communities;
- Descriptions of each partner and their roles are broad and so overlapping that it is difficult to assess how results will improve over time;
- It is not clear where partners will work (which schools or communities) and how the services will be integrated with one another and/or with existing services;
- Training is proposed but strategies for long-range capacity building are insufficient to demonstrate what tools and supports will be provided
- The Performance measures are listed but do not include systematic measures and indicator outcomes are not consistently presented for each category of potential participating group

### Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Not Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has only partially met this Absolute priority. The ambitious and valued goals are designed to improve academic achievement, close achievement gaps, and to create new educational and personalized learning opportunities that are aligned with college- and career-ready standards and college- and career-ready graduation requirements.

Although many ambitious and potentially valued opportunities are proposed, the overall vision is not coherently conceptualized and planned. Many innovative components are suggested, but the plans for implementation are insufficient to accomplish the applicant's vision. More significantly, it is not at all clear how the elements fit together with existing programs, in existing schools or how they will work together across two different school systems.

A serious challenge to the success of the project which is not addressed is how two different school systems, directed by two different boards of education and serving two very different communities, will coordinate and work together with their dramatically different student populations and widely varying academic, developmental, and social support system needs.

Another challenge that is inadequately addressed is how two complementary but quite different curriculum content structures will be woven together. The Common Core Standards and the Cambridge curriculum and assessment systems may both be ambitious but they are different curriculums, different assessments, and attempting to implement both systems threatens to confuse and dilute each system.

The applicant has listed core educational assurance areas as defined in the notice, but does not offer high-quality plans with carefully laid out targets, goals, responsible individuals, or specific timelines. The sense is that many systems will be imposed on various existing systems by well-intentioned and partially trained personnel whose responsibility is to provide leadership and support. The proposed professional evaluation systems are lengthy and cumbersome, and no evidence is presented as to how the systems have been developed and why they promise to be successful. Finally, the integrated data system that would be needed to weave these many components together is in its earliest and untested stages. Insufficient evidence is presented that the MIS system elements are mature enough or integrated enough into emerging data management systems to be useful to the project's components, all of which need these systems to function efficiently.

Based on the plans presented in this application, however, the unsystematic measures of outcomes and impacts and the vague strategies for developing systematic tracking and measuring systems weaken the good intent making it hard to see how this absolute priority will be met as planned.

Total	210	84
-------	-----	----