



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0953MA-1 for Fall River Public Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The City of Fall River has a vision for its community members to raise educational attainment levels within its diverse community that is facing economic hardships and low educational levels. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has developed a recovery plan for the district and assigned a monitor to the district to assess the city's progress in Leadership and Governance, Teaching and Learning, and Human Resources and Financial Management. Eventhough the four assurance areas are addressed, descriptions of the district's plans to attain success in all four areas could have been strengthened if the plan had been sufficiently cohesive so that the linkages among the assurance areas were clearly apparent.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Fall River is targeting for reform its five middle schools that contain 6th-8th graders. This targeting is especially important in light of the district's dropout rate of almost 25%. The proposed project is focusing on 5 middle schools that serve 2736 students, and each targeted school will have a minimum of 3 vertical content teams. The teams will each have at least one member from the school's Instructional Leadership Team. These targeted initiatives should have a positive impact on school climate and student learning and supoort high-quality implementation plan.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district has put forth a high-quality plan to institute vertically aligned core curricula that embrace college- and career-ready standards to prepare students for higher education and the workforce, while at the same time encourage students to stay in school.The plan is cohesive for the most part and should translate into meaningful reform across the district. .More specific details regarding how the plan will be rolled out to reach its outcome goals would have enhanced the plan.</p>		
(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	6
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Fall River will employ personalized learning as the cornerstone for redesigning its level 4 schools. It is anticipated that with the implementation of the Common Core Standards, students will become better prepared for college and career success. Information provided in this section lays out an ambitious , yet attainable, set of performance targets for each demographic group; however no interpretations of the data or conclusions are presented.</p>		

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	14
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Fall River had been struggling to reduce its dropout rate, which was 12.5% in 2008. The district was awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor in 2007 and used these funds to decrease its dropout rate by 15% in 3 years, The district also</p>		

instituted a "college-going " culture and added staff to counsel students and foster post-secondary education. Additionally, the district made its data systems more transparent and accessible and encouraged its educators to espouse using data to inform instruction. More specific details would have enhanced this section and raised its score.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
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(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:
 Fall River's budgetary procedures are transparent and collaborative. The processes are outlined in Appendix G and include all pertinent data that are made available to the public

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:
 The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has developed a document entitled *Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness* and voted the document into State regulations. This document outlines pathways to and conditions of reform. These initiatives from the State have provided a solid framework for the personalized learning environments described in the proposal.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	7
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:
 Fall River School District involved stakeholders in developing and implementing the initiatives under discussion by its Board. However, more comprehensive information about this process and a full description of the degree of stakeholder participation would have strengthened this proposal. For example, the proposal references a chart included in the proposal to depict the district's vision, however this chart found in section A(1) does not clearly capture the process for implementing the district's Personalized Learning Environment.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	2
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(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:
 More details about the process used for collecting and analyzing pertinent data and for developing implementation strategies would have strengthened this proposal. An outline of a plan was in evidence, but the details about methodologies for identifying the specific data to be gathered, how that information would be used to support personalized learning environments, and how the data would enhance instruction and student learning were not developed effectively. Descriptors used to evaluate various elements were vague terms such as "Consistently Strong," "Strong," or "Needs Improvement", and these terms were neither described nor qualified.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	15

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:
 Fall River's focus in its plan is to build personalized learning environments at its 5 middle schools. Its Learning Time Initiative will add an extra 120 minutes to each school day, which will result in 300 additional hours of learning time per year for all middle school students. If used effectively, this additional learning time should greatly facilitate the implementation of complex science projects and other content-rich projects. More pertinent details about how the additional 120 minutes will be used in an efficient and effective manner were needed. Brief descriptions of possible additional courses and/or course content were articulated; however, an overall systematic high-quality plan that addressed building high-quality personalized learning environments was not sufficiently developed.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	16
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:
 The district is a strong supporter of differentiated instruction based on students' academic needs. The Massachusetts Tiered

System of Support provides a framework for identifying discrepancies in the instructional system and high-quality interventions for students needing academic assistance. This plan strongly supports multiple paths toward academic assistance and excellence. Another significant component of the plan is the institution of Vertical Content Teams in Mathematics, Language and Literacy, and Social Emotional Learning. This initiative in itself should strongly enhance and build on solid academic paths that are logical and not repetitious. However, more details on sections (b) and (c) regarding professional development for staff and high quality mentor and induction programs were needed to support the plan.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	14
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: Fall River's Recovery Plan has a good chance to succeed. The elements that lead to successful school districts focus on the key elements described in this proposal. These are: leadership and governance, teaching and learning, and financial management. In the area of teaching and learning, Fall River's principals will become well-versed in successful learning strategies, provide staff with high-quality professional development and support, and serve as instructional leaders and financial managers to ascertain what is "best" for their teachers, parents, and constituents. More details addressing (e) were needed to enhance the broad focus on personalized learning.		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	7
(D)(2) Reviewer Comments: Some outreach initiatives are being set into place in the school district. Particularly in an area in which students, their parents, and the community as a whole may not have the financial resources to provide what are now considered necessities, the district is suggesting several initiatives to assist the Fall River community. The district partners with Comcast Broadband to provide internet service for students' homes at a reasonable price, as well as computer training. for students and their parents. A practical idea to reach out to the community is a School Messenger service which allows school personnel to contact parents via phone or email. Another initiative is an online nutrition program to educate parents and their children about healthy eating. The proposal does not address whether technical support is provided for these initiatives. Given the demographics of the student and parent population and the relatively high levels of poverty among its residents, technical support for students and parents is critical to help ensure that residents have access to technical support to ensure that the services to be provided will be used effectively by Fall River students and their parents.		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	12
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: Fall River School District has a program called "School Review Visits" whose purpose is to provide differentiated support to schools based on their needs, and to have a viable process for making adjustments and revisions.. Support may be provided in the areas of personalized learning environments, effective use of extended learning time, comprehensive analyses of student data and relevant professional development, all of which should contribute to continuous improvement. Each of the targeted schools has a Redesign Team to monitor long- and short-term goals to foster continuous improvement; however, specific strategies and actions that would occur based on the School Review were not provided nor were visits described sufficiently.		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	3
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: As described in previous sections, Fall River has a high-quality plan for improvement, and, if the initiatives described in the proposal are carried out effectively, the district's academic readiness and program implementation should lead to higher student performance and greater parental and community satisfaction with the school district. The district summarizes school data by grade during every quarter and shares the information in a public forum. More details about the content of the		

quarterly school data reports would have clarified whether this would be a truly effective strategy.

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

5

2

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Fall River had an insufficient number of performance measures to satisfy the requirements of the Request for Proposal; however, the measures listed were pertinent and attainable.

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

5

2

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Fall River's plans to evaluate the effectiveness of investments were vague and not well developed. The plan did not appear cohesive. A positive component was the district's focus on "formative feedback," which indicates that they plan to use this early feedback to retool the evaluation and goals on an as-needed basis.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	5
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: The majority of the budget costs are one-time expenditures, and many of the expenditures will be funded only for the life of the grant and may not be sustainable after the grant funding has ended. The district does note, however, that many of the technology upgrades will continue to be funded through its existing technology budget once the grant funding has ceased.		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	5
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: Some evidence is provided that describes how of the components of the plan will continue to be funded through local funds, and maintenance and technology upgrades will be funded through the district's technology budget. For example, "The district will absorb the two technology positions--computer and instructional as the district's needs in technology continue to expand."		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	5
Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments: A major goal of Fall River is the need for a substantial re-investment in readiness-to-learn initiatives that will target students and their families. The goal is to enhance and ensure students' social and emotional wellness throughout the district. The district plans to undertake a plan to focus on students' social and emotional wellbeing so that they are ready to learn and excel academically. The plan includes the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate wrap-around services for students and their families by linking with community social service agencies. Each school will create a Wellness Team. • Develop among students positive peer identity and critical thinking skills. • Provide a positive school and classroom culture, including self-efficiency and hard work. • Make connections between the home and school by involving parents in their children's learning. The proposal lists outside entities that could be engaged to participate in this initiative and that wrap-around zones could be formed to more closely connect home, school, and outside charitable agencies. No specific plans were articulated to provide sufficient evidence of future support from outside agencies.		

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

Fall River has adequately addressed how it will incorporate Personalized Learning Environments into educator training and the roll-out of these protocols to create solid learning environments to meet the needs of each student.

Total	210	154
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Optional Budget Supplement (Scored separately - 15 total points)

	Available	Score
Optional Budget Supplement (Scored separately - 15 total points)	15	0

Optional Budget Supplement Reviewer Comments:

Not included.



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0953MA-2 for Fall River Public Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	4

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant proposes to duplicate the efforts expended in turning around Matthew Kuss Middle School , designated a “failing” school in 2009, and four other Level 4 middle schools, to continue the District's efforts in turning around these schools by improving student outcomes. Proposed reform efforts include an extension of the school days (300 additional hours per year) combined with personalized learning environments for participating middle schools.

At this point, the applicant's vision is confined to successes realized at Kuss Middle School, based primarily on strong recommendations made by the Massachusetts Department of Education for turning around underperforming schools. The applicant superimposes these strategies onto the four core educational assurance areas with only minor success.

The applicant describes Fall River Public Schools as a district of 10,000 diverse learners whose constituents have undergone significant hardships. Very little information is provided about the select schools or their student populations. The applicant does not define “diverse”. Neither the number of District's Schools nor percentages of student populations are identified. Data describing the number of English Language Learners are not reported. The number of students with disabilities is not reported. Data supporting deficiencies in academic proficiency are not reported. “Hardships” are not defined. Socio-economic status of the District and specific school sites are not reported.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	6
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(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The proposed reform targets Fall River's middle school population and five schools that house 6th through 8th grade students, totaling 2,736 students. The application actually identifies 5 Level 4 schools in total , and not 5 schools plus schools that house 6th through 8th grade students.

The decision to focus on middle schools students was based on potential drop out risk factors of those students. Based on the % of participating low-income families reported, the identified schools do meet the competition's eligibility requirements.

The applicant states that "Our data indicates that many of our middle school students enter high school at risk for dropping out." The applicant does not reveal the data used, nor the risk-factors demonstrated by students at-risk of dropping out of school.

There appears to be an error in the applicant's calculations for % of Total LEA income population (column I), Applicant's Approach to Implementation.

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

The applicant reports that several of the core educational assurances are already in place in the District. These include:

- a viable core curriculum that is vertically (pre-K) aligned to college and career frameworks
- a responsive data system that provides timely and detailed data on student learning
- an evaluation framework and tools that provide continual improvement and assessment of performance for the District's educators

If these assurances are already firmly ensconced in the District, they should not be classified as "reform" efforts. The "reform" then centers on the implementation of "personalized learning environments". The scale-up of "personalized learning environments " is not addressed in this narrative.

The applicant proposes to bring the currently engaged "assurances " to scale through oversight by the district's Office of Instruction (OOI) and through heightened communication networks within and across schools and across grade levels. It is difficult to ascertain the applicant's understanding of "to scale" without further discussion from the applicant about his admission of a current viable curriculum, a viable, comprehensive data system and a currently revised evaluation instrument which includes student achievement data as an integral evaluative measure.

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

The applicant submitted sets of charts for assessments, decreasing achievement gaps, graduation rates and college enrollment, as required by the application. Other than fulfilling the requirements for completion of these charts, no explanation as to the relevance of this exercise was included in the narrative. The information , unfortunately, provides no apparent vision and is not likely to result in improved student learning, performance and increased equity.

Charts which identify Goals, Baseline and SY increments, and subjects by current Composite Performance Index (CPI) and another chart for Student Growth Profiles (SGP) containing the same elements were submitted. No grade levels are listed. The charts on their own are difficult to interpret, but no explanation was provided by the applicant as to the annual growth targets posted on the charts.

A second set of charts identified as Decreasing Achievement Gaps also identify Goal Areas by subject, Sub-group, Baseline and subsequent target goals by school year.. These charts are equally difficult to interpret, especially in light of the explanation for the State's calculations for CPI reported by the applicant. There is no break down of subject by grade level.

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	10
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(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant reports a mixture of successes and failures in advancing academic achievement within the last four years. It has realized a decrease in high-school drop-out rates from 12.5% (2008) to 4.7% (2011). Graduation rates have increased significantly for all sub-groups (except Students w/ith disabilities) between 2008 and 2011. The number of students who participated in AP courses increased dramatically between 2009 and 2012. These included low income, African American and Hispanic sub-groups. Grade 10 proficiency in Language Arts and Mathematics, as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, have increased steadily since 2008. Yet, for the successes realized in the high schools, increases in academic achievement in the elementary and middle schools was not reported. Previous narratives described four of the District's middle schools designated as Level 4. This designation is reserved for the lowest performing schools that fall in the lowest 20th percentile of all schools statewide. The District is still attempting to bring these schools to "performing" status, and has selected these as the target schools for this project.

The availability of student performance data to educators is done through several platforms. Certica Solutions TestWiz is used by teachers and administrators to analyze and disaggregate student performance data. AspenX2, the district's student information management system, provides school personnel with data regarding student attendance, conduct, and student performance on state and district assessments. Education Data Warehouse is a resource for public school districts supported by the State. This provides access to both public and private student and educator data.

At this point in time, parents data access is extremely limited, and unfortunately restricted to websites with information like assessment calendars. A "Parent Portal", with ability to track classes, attendance, and online "gradebooks" is being proposed for future implementation, but timelines for this implementation have not been provided.

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

The applicant describes the extent to which the District has demonstrated evidence of a high level of transparency in the District's processes, practices, and investments, including by making public, by school, actual school-level expenditures for regular K-12 instruction, instructional support, pupil support, and school administration. Fall River Schools' budget is unique in that budget workshops are posted and open to the public. Principals work with the School Committee on Finance, who in turn follows the same process with department heads and other operational directors. The draft is discussed in public forum. Finally, the budget must be approved by the City Council and Mayor.

The applicant attached a proposed 2013 school/ district budgets including all categories of expenditures. Graphs depicting percent of total budget expenditures by position (principals, assistants, teachers, psychologists etc.) were attached.

Composites of personnel salaries by position were presented in graph form. Actual salaries of personnel in those positions are listed by code.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	8
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant cites three specific State regulations which lend themselves to the proposed implementation of personalized learning environments:

1. Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness (2010)
2. Massachusetts' Framework for District Accountability and The Essential Conditions and School Self-Assessment tool
3. Massachusetts Education Reform Law (1993) revised : Act Relative to the Achievement Gap of 2010

The goal of the Act is to close gaps in achievement, to help all students reach proficiency, to provide innovative choices for students and families by aggressively turning around underperforming schools, and to lift the cap on charter schools in low-performing districts. The Act provides local superintendents with the tools to intervene decisively to turn around schools and districts designated as underperforming or chronically underperforming, while providing the support necessary for change and success.

Whereas the applicant provides examples of State regulations that provide autonomy to Districts in areas of school improvement, the application does not specifically address the manner in which these directly impact the District's decision to implement personalized learning environments, specifically in the middle school settings.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	2
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant claims that the District “entered into conversation with both internal and external stakeholders” as the district began its development process for the RTT-D proposal. No meeting announcements, Emails, presentations, flyers, agendas, nor sign-in sheets were included as evidence that students, families, teachers, and principals were engaged in the development of this proposal or that revisions were made to this proposal based on participant’s feedback.</p> <p>The applicant stated that an implementation plan was presented to union representatives from all participating schools, but, again, no evidence was included to support this claim. The president of the local teacher’s union did sign the application.</p> <p>Support of this proposal from teachers of participating schools was not evident.</p> <p>Only nine letters of support were included in the application. Of those, four were from principals of the following participating schools: Doran, Kuss, Morton and Lord. No letter was evident from the principal of Talbot Middle School.</p> <p>Without artifacts proving the representation of internal and external stakeholders from the participating schools in the development of this proposal, claims of participation are simply limited to "conversations" and not active "engagement" in the process.</p>		
(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	1
<p>(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant failed to adequately respond to the question: “The extend to which each LEA has demonstrated evidence of a high –quality plan for an analysis of the applicant’s current status in implementing personalized learning environments and the logic behind the reform proposal contained within the applicant’s proposal...”</p> <p>Throughout this application, the applicant makes reference to “personalized learning environments”, yet this proposal fails to define what the District means by that term. The applicant claims that they will implement personalized learning environments as a reform initiative, yet it fails to provide a clear, cohesive picture of what that will look like... especially at the middle school level, which the applicant has selected as their areas of focus.</p>		

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	14
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>In order to personalize learning environments, the district proposes to institute an extended learning environment at all middle schools that maximizes and increase personalized instruction each day. Schedules will focus on flexible scheduling and grouping that support student needs. Students will be engaged in literacy rich, rigorous, relevant, effective enrichment and intervention strategies.</p> <p>Learning Time Initiative, which will add 120 extra minutes a day to the learning, will provide more focus on core academics, personalized instruction and individualized support. Based on marginal performance results on the state Science exam, Science based enrichment activities will be offered. Students will be ability grouped based on levels of proficiency and then grouped again as stronger proficiency is demonstrated. More challenging enrichment courses will be offered for those who qualify. Advisory periods will be added to the schedules where students can create college and career minded goals.</p> <p>Eighth grade students are enrolled in Algebra classes as a part of the career-readiness standards. Other career readiness classes, taken from the Common Core State Standards will be offered which are meant to engage students in their learning. Seventh grade students complete “career inventories”, and based on their interests, develop short and long-term career plans with their Advisors.</p> <p>Block academic courses and enrichment courses are aimed at invigorating the students’ desire to learn. Enrichment is designed to target gaps in the standard curriculum and awaken learning through teacher-created curriculum. If successful, the</p>		

District plans to extend the Learning Time Initiative to all middle schools , so that the District can strengthen core instruction and provide the time to effectively identify, plan for, and deliver individualized instruction and tiered support to all students

.The District's middle schools have instituted a Student Support Team made up of administrators, school nurses, counselors, and classroom teachers to lead initiatives and activities aimed at improving the culture and climate of each school, with a focus on activities that introduce new perspectives and lifestyle choices to bring cultural awareness to the student body. Team activities, community celebrations of diversity, parent groups, and ESL classes for parents have contributed to building school culture.

It appears to this reviewer that the District's emphasis for advancing personalized learning environments is focused on remediation, intervention, homogeneous groupings, and IEPs (very much the Special Education model), rather than exploration, enrichment, and fulfillment of intellectual curiosity. The District's energies are being expended on the middle schools that required state intervention, and it is apparent that because of low academic performance demonstrated by the students on these campuses, the District's "vision" is colored to "remediate", rather than to "accelerate", much to the peril of the students involved.

The applicant describes the District's heavy investments in technology (computer lab, Doran, Tuss, Talbot have mobile lap top carts, overhead projectors with white boards, limited intervention software), yet this technology merely scratches the surface in available student on-line resources and desperately needs to be updated.

Benefits realized by adding two hours to the learning day, implementing block scheduling, and supplementing the course offerings with enrichment classes will only succeed if teachers are provided with extensive professional development that is geared to preparing them for these innovative changes. Instructional delivery must be administered differently when a class is twice as long. Students' enrichment interests may vary from staff interests, so ensuring student engagement in enrichment activities will require staff to select and present offerings judiciously.

It is mentioned that one school is compensating staff for their additional contractual hours. Unless staff are voluntarily on board or generously compensated for their time, adding 2 hours to the school day will not benefit students unless teachers and staff are excited about being there.

Parental involvement in the learning process and the acculturation of effective and highly effective teachers are not addressed by the application in this Selection Criteria.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	8
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant proposes, that in addition to grade level and content common planning, each district school will be expected to form three Vertical Content Teams in Mathematics, Language and Literacy and Social Emotional Learning. At least one member of the Team is expected to serve on the school's Instructional Leadership Team to monitor student progress. These teams will be facilitated by instructional coaches for Literacy and Math, and a Student Counselor. These facilitators will participate in district networks which meet bi-weekly and will be facilitated by a member of the District Office of Instruction. It is anticipated that individual schools and central administration will utilize these communication structures within schools, across schools and across grade levels.

All participating schools are not expected to implement the extended learning schedules until the 2013-14 school year. It is anticipated that the teachers' planning time will be used to analyze assessment data and examine student work to identify individual student needs and implement common and individualized instructional strategies.

Unless these teams are extremely well structured, expectations clearly defined, and accountability measures well understood, the likelihood of this arrangement resulting in personalization of learning environments for individual or collective students is low. The applicant frequently points to Kuss Middle School and the success of its implementation efforts. Clearly, the professional culture of Kuss must be unique in that they were designated a "failing" school as were several of the middle schools identified in this proposal and it is successful.. All "failing" schools were seemingly presented with the same opportunities to improve by the State, yet, Kuss is now looked upon as a model of improvement and the other schools are still struggling.

According to the narrative, the District does not yet have a comprehensive professional development system in place. According to the applicant, by 2013, differentiated support will be provided to educators at all stages of development. Currently, professional development is sporadic, occurring in context "two full day professional development sessions annually". Currently, professional development centers on Common Core, a new reading series, writing, assessment, and

discipline. This limited schedule, and limited offerings are sorely inadequate to forge the intents of this proposal, especially in the areas of personalized learning environments.

The availability of district individual student benchmark data is extremely limited. The availability of data every six weeks does not lend itself to continuous monitoring of student achievement, as discussed earlier in this discourse.

It does not appear that the District's evaluation system has been revised to include the recent federal requirement to include elements of student achievement in the teacher and principal evaluation system. The district's lack of a revised evaluation instrument limits the District's leverage on instructional staff.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	3
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant describes a restrictive agreement between the Fall River Educator's Association (FREA) and the District regarding transformative work in the Level 4 schools, which strictly limits the autonomy afforded the District administration. The principals have the authority to establish master schedules (not school committees or Leadership Teams), which include the work day and year for faculty. In regard to Personnel decisions, principals have the right to involuntarily transfer permanent faculty who receive a rating of "inadequate progress". Workdays were extended 65 minutes (which appears to be in conflict with the Extended Day discussions earlier in the narratives). Professional development schedule requirements are strictly prescribed.</p> <p>The applicant did not provide responses to D(c), D(d), nor D(e).</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	4
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Through an arrangement with Comcast Broadband, students who qualify for free and reduced lunch can receive quality home Internet service (\$9.95 per month), and an internet –ready computer (\$149.00) and computer training. This service allows parents access to online tools and resources, but because the District does not have a data base which can be accessed by parents, the on-line access is limited to platforms such as School Messenger system which allows school personnel to contact parents via phone or email, NUTRI-KIDS which offers parents the opportunity to view menus, and deposit money into student accounts and FRED-TV which produces and broadcasts education related content and includes meetings, sporting and entertainment events, and target instructional materials</p> <p>Data access platforms are very limited, but current FRPS high school students do have access to online courses which are not offered on school campuses A Parent Portal, which will allow parents access to student assessments, gradebooks, conduct reports and attendance records is in the planning stages. The Human Resources department uses software which accesses certification, transcripts, work history, references and open job positions. A budget tracking system allows grant managers and payroll to keep accurate records.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	3
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The District's continuous improvement process is its School Review Visits, which is meant to provide support to Level 4 schools based on their needs. Visits occur every 2-3 months or are scheduled more frequently if a crisis arises. Staff are apprised of progress toward short and long-term goals by the school's Redesign Team , made up of administration, teachers, and support staff. An additional team, with representatives from each of the participating schools will track project goals and report results at monthly meetings. Results will be posted on schools' websites for parent and community review.</p>		

The applicant appears to be content with the continuation of its School Review Visits as a current District practice in monitoring Level 4 Schools. The application requests a strategy for a “rigorous” and “continuous” process by which the applicant will monitor, measure and publicly share Race to the Top-District proposal implementation. The applicant's process fails to provide a plan that is either rigorous or continuous.

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

5

1

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant reports that the district summarizes school data by grade, quarterly, and shares this information with school committees and with principals at principal meetings. It is proposed that this information will be posted on websites for public knowledge. School Review Visits are shared through monthly reports. Student information is shared with parents during Parent Nights conferences or mail.

The applicant, again, describes current practice and misses the opportunity to envision 21st century opportunities for information dissemination and communication between and among stakeholders.

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

5

1

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provided tables identifying performance areas by all students, students by grade span, highly performing and performing teachers and principals. Ideally, the sum of the percentages of effective teachers and highly effective teachers and effective principals and highly effective principals should equal 100% for each year listed. Sums do not equal 100%. No narratives explaining the information submitted on the tables, rationales for selection of the performance measures, nor explanations for review and adjustment of performance information were submitted in the narratives.

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

5

1

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

An annual evaluation will be conducted through interviews and focus groups comprised of teachers, students, parents of participating students, administration and staff; questionnaires to be administered to all students and parents; observations; and document analysis including the professional development plan and syllabi.

Since evaluations will be conducted annually, program modifications are unlikely. “Effectiveness” of funded activities such as professional development (Ex. What impact did professional development regarding block scheduling have on the implementation of personalized learning activities?), employment of enhanced technology, community partners, compensation reform, modification of school schedules etc. was not addressed.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	4

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant submitted a budget, narratives and explanations of one-time vs. ongoing funding. the applicant did not provide a calculation of per pupil cost of the project over the course of the grant.

The following budget allocations are problematic and therefore, this reviewer finds this budget unreasonable.

The applicant identifies the project name on this Budget narrative as "Personalized Learning Environments", but in reality it should be named "Extended Learning Time", because the entire thrust of this proposal is extending the learning time for the middle schools target in this proposal and ultimately extending time for most schools within the District.

The Director of Instructional Services: By the very nature of his current role, is responsible for overseeing the implementation of this grant. By simply changing 30% of his title to "Project Manager", his capacity as "Director" neither diminishes, nor increases his responsibility as "manager", it simply provides an additional salary of \$30,000 of grant funding which could be

better served for technology upgrades.

Wraparound Zone Coordinator: Additionally, the role of Wraparound Zone Coordinator is currently funded through RTTT funds and should continue from that funding source. The coordinator's position under the Wellness Initiative was for the Fall River Public Schools... not only for servicing Doran and Kuss. The \$45,000 annual cost could be better used elsewhere.

Teacher Stipends: Funding 90 hours of professional development per teacher per 4 years is unrealistic. There is no evidence of staff buy-in of this project and the expectation that EACH teacher will devote 90 additional hours per year (in addition to the daily/yearly extended learning time) is optimistic, at best. The applicant should enumerate the professional development topics that will require that amount of training annually.

Contractual Services: The applicant lists on-site professional development for Blended Learning and SEL, Math, Science and Project Lead the Way. If these trainings are in addition to those listed under Teacher Stipends (for which teachers will be paid after contractual hours), the professional development expectations being imposed on staff is unrealistic.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	6
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant does not propose a high-quality plan for sustainability of the project's goals after the term of the grant. The applicant proposes to bring the currently engaged "assurances" to scale through oversight by the district's Office of Instruction (OOI) and through heightened communication networks within and across schools and across grade levels. The two technology positions - a computer and instructional position will continue post grant, as well as regular maintenance and upgrades to technology and software subscriptions will be funded through additional grants and through the existing technology and textbook budgets. State and local government support, is confined to federal and state grants such as Title I, IIA, III, and School Improvement.

The District is participating in a multi-state consortium entitled, the TIME Collaborative which is a multi-year investment in the development of high-quality and cost-effective expanded learning time schools in five states. It is anticipated that these schools will serve as a national model for effectively expanding the traditional school day and/or year to improve achievement.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

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

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides the application it submitted for funding of the Wraparound Zone Initiative Grant (funded) and the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) Coalition as evidence for the Competitive Preference Priority requirement of Race to the Top -District competition. The originally submitted application provides services which support social, emotional, and health wellness for District students in six schools in two feeder patterns, including three elementary schools, two middle schools, and the district's one comprehensive high school. The original application includes all elements of the Competitive Preference's requirements. Tables have been updated to reflect Baseline data for Performance Measures and Population-Level Desire Results.

Since the Race to the Top - District proposal supposedly focuses on 5 middle schools, the applicant did not focus the response to the Competitive Preference Priority on the population and needs of these participating students. The applicant did not adequately identify population-level desired results for students in the District's selected middle schools that align with and support the applicant's broader Race to the Top - District proposal. It is also uncertain if the partnerships forged in 2010-2011, when the original grant was submitted are still sustained.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not	Met

	Met	
<p>Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant proposes to duplicate the efforts expended in turning around Matthew Kuss Middle School , designated a “failing” school in 2009, and four other Level 4 middle schools, to continue the District's efforts in turning around these schools by improving student outcomes. Proposed reform efforts include an extension of the school days (300 additional hours per year) combined with personalized learning environments for participating middle schools.</p> <p>“Personalization” will occur through:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. pathway programming that builds on students' strengths and dreams 2. an efficient model of tiered academic support that targets students' needs and fills existing individual gaps 3. a comprehensive model of social emotional supports for students and families provided through connections with community partners 		

Total	210	93
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0953MA-3 for Fall River Public Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	9

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The narrative describes the district's reform vision that builds on its work in rapidly accelerating student achievement, deepening student learning, and increasing equity through personalized student support in its lowest performing schools over the past several years.

The reform proposal is clearly described and focuses on extending the learning day while personalizing the learning environment through three strategies: 1) career pathway programming that builds on students' strengths and aspirations, 2) building a model of tiered academic support that targets individual needs and works to close the achievement gap, and 3) social emotional supports for students and families in partnership with community service providers.

The narrative is certainly adequate to describe a high-level view of the district's reform vision. However, there are several aspects of the vision that merit additional explanation for the sake of clarity. These include the source or focus of the career pathway programming the nature or focus of the tiered academic supports,

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

The narrative convincingly describes the district's rationale for selecting to focus on the middle school population and provides data to support that decision. Based on the data provided for improvement at both the high-school level in graduation and drop-out rates as well as data provided on the success of these very reforms used at a particular low-performing middle school, the extent to which the applicant's approach to implementing its reform proposal will support high-quality district-level

and school-level implementation of that proposal is high.

The description of the process used to select schools is sound, and the narrative provides information to illustrate that the schools collectively meet the competition's eligibility requirements.

Also meeting the criteria, a list of the schools and total number of participating students, including low income and high-needs students, is embedded in the narrative as is the requested information on the number of participating educators.

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

10

8

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The narrative successfully describes its plan briefly discussing the administrative support, training, and communication models it will use to scale-up the reform proposal district-wide and benefit all students in the district. These systems involve differentiated central office support for schools based on identified need, a dense and multi-layered communications network that includes common planning time for teachers, and professional development and supports based on identified need. These systems appear to be appropriately designed to support the district's theory of action around the three core assurances of a viable core curriculum, a responsive data system, and a robust evaluation system focused on continuous improvement, but the narrative only begins to make a connection between these systems and core assurances as they relate to personalizing the learning environment.

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

10

6

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The application narrative describes the logic behind the setting of performance goals for both status and growth in an effort to increase achievement for all while simultaneously moving to close the achievement gap. The goals for status and decreasing achievement gaps are understandable, ambitious, and achievable. The explanation for the goals for growth is more complex, but the growth model essentially appears to measure individual student growth against the growth of similarly academically performing students across the state. While the targets for growth set by the district are robust given the system in place at the state level, they do not appear to put the focus on individual student growth, and, as described, the system would allow for attainment of the growth goals while 50% of the students languished below the target.

The graduation rate goals are decidedly ambitious and lofty, clearly showing a belief in and high expectations for all students. However, when comparing these goals to the still ambitious yet more reasonable proficiency targets, it seems unreasonable to expect 90% graduation rates across all groups of students in five short years given the starting point for several of them. The same is true for college enrollment goals. This chart appears to be missing school year 2011-12 in its calculations as well.

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	12

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The application narrative illustrates a rather astounding improvement in both drop out and graduation rates in the aggregate for the district over the past four years. Subgroup numbers are not provided on the drop out rate. For graduation rate, all subgroups except the students with disabilities group have made significant gains over the past four years. Numbers for the ELL group are erratic but overall improved from four years ago. Additionally, the narrative describes significant increases in the numbers of students enrolling in AP classes and subsequently scoring 3 or above on the national exam. The narrative also provides data illustrating increases in college enrollment over the past two, rather than four, years. The narrative does not provide historical student achievement data on state assessments for the district to determine if the various reforms on which this proposal is building had an effect in that area as well, except for the very impressive results of Kuss Middle School. This is not a specifically stated requirement of the criterion, however, and does not lower the score.

A very impressive strength of the proposal is the description of the turnaround at Kuss Middle School where the district was able to achieve ambitious and significant reforms in this persistently lowest-achieving school. The school has been featured in state and national publications highlighting and honoring its successes and now has a waiting list when several years ago

parents and teachers were fleeing its doors.

The narrative describes the level to which student performance data is available to students, educators, and parents. From the description, it is clear that educators and administrators have ready-access to frequently updated data and that the superintendent provides quarterly reports to the community. The district has plans to improve access to data for parents that will enable them to track student progress on assessments as well as ongoing classroom work, attendance, and behavior. The narrative explains that students also have access to their data as early as elementary school, and that educators work with students collaboratively in the development of personalized goals. The narrative does not mention the involvement of parents in that process to further improve participation and student performance.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	4
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(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The narrative's description of the overall budget process illustrates it has adequate transparency and public involvement throughout the process.

The narrative states that specific school expenditures broken down by category to include administration, teachers, support staff, and non-instructional expenditures are available on the district's Web site, and a link is provided, which provides a high-level of transparency. A sample of the information taken from the district level is provided in the application. Specific school-level information is not provided other than through a Web link.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	9
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The application narrative successfully describes conditions that exist in the state and district to support the implementation of personalized learning environments as described in the applicant's proposal.

The application describes state regulations called collectively the *Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness* that outline a set of practices to guide school improvement planning, accountability, and technical assistance across the state. These practices align nicely with the district's reform proposal. Two of these call for principal authority in staffing and adequate budget authority, which speak to the issue of autonomy.

Of particular interest is the description of a positive historical relationship with the teacher's union that recognizes principal authority over areas key to the proposal such as staffing, staggered start times, and flexibility on early dismissal days for professional development. Further, the bargaining agreement allows for performance-based pay. The narrative also describes contractual provisions in place to allow for Extended Learning Time for three schools; the narrative does not indicate that this option is available for all the participating schools.

The narrative also states that the *2010 Act Relevant to the Achievement Gap* provides sufficient autonomy to implement personalized learning environments, and it provides sufficient information about how and in what areas it achieves that. These areas align to the reform proposal project activities and goals.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	7
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The narrative describes the manner in which the district solicited input from various stakeholders, including parents, the business community, social service agencies, higher education, teachers, and union representatives in the development of the plan. Though it is clear that there was an adequate level of engagement, it is not clear from the narrative the degree to which teachers support the proposal.

Specifically regarding the participating schools, the narrative details the involvement of three union representatives from each school (for a total of 15 teachers). It is not clear the degree of involvement of the rest of the teaching staff.

Letters of support are present from an institution of higher learning, a member of the business community, each participating school, one school's PTO Board, and youth-serving agencies. The number and breadth of representation of letters of support are not particularly strong.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	2
<p>(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The application’s discussion of the extent to which the district has demonstrated a high-quality plan for an analysis of the their current status in implementing personalized learning environments and the logic behind the reform proposal contained within the district’s proposal, including identified needs and gaps, is insufficient. The narrative describes a strong process of data collection but fails to effectively discuss how that data is used as part of a high-quality plan in the process of gap analysis to identify and subsequently act on needs. Further, the narrative describes a state process in which four of the five focused schools participated to analyze five key areas in terms of strengths and weaknesses. The process as described provides high level rather than specific information, so it is not possible to determine from the narrative the quality of this process or how it contributed to the logic of the reform proposal in terms of readiness to implement personalized learning environments. No information is provided about an analysis of the current status in implementing personalized learning environments for the fifth participating school.</p>		

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	14

<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district-wide reform plan calls for creating new or enhancing current personalized learning environments in all schools, and this proposal focuses on the district’s middle schools. Using lessons learned through its work in turning around low-performing middle schools, the district appropriately plans to extend learning time to provide more focus on core academics, personalized instruction, and individualized support.</p> <p>The plan also calls for opportunities for deepening and personalizing learning through applied science courses, some of which are in partnership with Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. As described in the narrative, this decision was data-driven based on student performance on state science assessments. In language arts and math, students will participate in ramp-up classes that provide either intervention or enrichment to meet individual student needs.</p> <p>The narrative states that Henry Lord has adopted Advisories and Intervention periods, but it is not clear from the narrative whether the other four participating schools plan to adopt this particular model as part of their reform proposal as well. Though later in the narrative the applicant discusses that there are two advisory periods weekly as part of the Extended Learning Time model. It is through this advisory time that students and educators collaborate on developing a year-long plan to achieve college and career focused goals. The narrative does not discuss parents’ involvement in this planning and goal-setting. The narrative also notes that selected students work with community mentors through the SMILES program. There is no discussion of how these students are selected, so it is not clear if this is intended as a support for high-needs students.</p> <p>The narrative states that administrators and staff have developed an enrichment program at each school to provide choice, increase engagement, and deepen learning. Examples are provided from two of the five schools, though the overall discussion in this area is not thorough enough to provide a full picture of what these enrichment offerings look like across the schools or how students would access them.</p> <p>Through its Wellness Teams, the district plans to build upon successes in the SEL realm gained through Wraparound Zones funded by the state’s Race to the Top grant. The district has seen gains in student engagement and attendance through use of these zones, so that is a wise decision. Students must be present and engaged in order to increase their level of academic achievement.</p> <p>The application provides a plethora of avenues through which the district plans to build on student access and exposure to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives in an attempt to motivate students and deepen individual student learning. The activities are varied and sound appealing to the age level. From the narrative, there does not appear to be a cohesive or focused plan in these many offerings, however.</p> <p>The narrative describes a very strong system for how schools will use flexible and fluid scheduling to allow students to master critical academic content both in the traditional classroom and, if necessary, in intervention classes that allow for open entry and exit as needed to meet individual student needs. The advisory courses are designed, in part, to develop skills and traits such as goal-setting, teamwork, perseverance, critical thinking, communication, creativity, and problem-solving.</p>		
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The narrative describes how one middle school used data to create and continuously modify personalized schedules for all students designed to meet their individual needs. What the narrative does not make clear is whether all middle schools will be adopting these methods or if they will be enabled to craft their own models within their extended learning time schedules. What is clear is that the district has set the expectation for all participating schools to offer intervention and enrichment periods within the school day to help students meet their individual goals. The narrative does not describe how parents might be involved in this process.

The narrative's discussion around having a variety of high quality instructional approaches and environments is insufficient and, in one aspect, contradictory. Much of the proposal has been built around the importance of extended learning time for students that adds 300 hours a year to their instructional time. However, this section of the application states that after extensive analysis, educators determined that the problem with student 's educational attainment was not a lack of time in core academics, but how that time was being used. Beyond a discussion of moving to more project-based learning and statements that the schools have made heavy investments in technology and have intervention software, there is insufficient discussion in the narrative about ensuring high-quality content, including digital content as appropriate, that is aligned to college and career ready standards or graduation requirements.

The narrative describes frequent ongoing and regular feedback, including both formative and summative assessments, to help educators work in collaboration with students to determine progress toward mastery of standards. Also described are frequent assessments to determine the effectiveness of interventions. The narrative appears to be describing a loose Response to Intervention model, presumably the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support referred to elsewhere in the application, but without additional specificity in the narrative, that is not clear.

In terms of personalized learning recommendations based on the student's current knowledge and skills, the narrative refers to the year-long plan each student puts together with the assistance of teachers at Kuss middle school. Other areas of the narrative discuss how all participating schools will use these year-long plans, so it is assumed that is the intent here, since the narrative does mention professional development support in this area.

The narrative describes a thorough plan for accommodations to help ensure all students are on track toward meeting standards using the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support. The plan appropriately allows for student movement among tiers as necessary to meet their individual needs. Collaboration and co-teaching between the special education and the classroom teacher as well as more targeted subject-area Resource Room support will also assist in meeting the support needs of special needs students while ensuring that they still have access to a strong curriculum based on college and career ready standards. There is insufficient discussion of the supports for ELL students.

The only mechanisms discussed in the narrative for students to track their progress are the plans and goals they create and monitor in their advisory class – a low-tech but perhaps not ineffective solution. The narrative also explains that students will have gmail accounts and access to Google tools such as Google docs and indicates that students will receive training on how to use these tools.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	14
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The narrative describes the district's plans to personalize the learning environment for students through a combination of RTI (Massachusetts Tiered System of Supports) and the focused use of a variety of common planning blocks for educators based on content, team, and cluster. Additionally, the plan calls for a multi-layered yet cohesive network of communication strands across the district to monitor progress and maximize outcomes for all students in alignment with the state standards. As described, the networks include teachers from each school or team in a manner that ensures each school is represented at each level and that all participating teachers participate at least at the school level.

The narrative describes the district's efforts to align curriculum to the new state standards and to ensure that all teaching is consistent and of high quality, leading to the deepening of learning for students. In terms of opportunities for students to have content and instruction adapted to their individual needs, the narrative describes how under-performing students will have opportunities using blended learning environments to meet their needs. Enrichment opportunities will be available for students using project-based learning, giving student the opportunity for hands-on exploration and collaborative work. It is not clear from the narrative if students working below proficiency level will have access to these opportunities for interest-based, collaborative, deep-learning experiences.

The narrative states that the district is making great strides in the analysis and use of the voluminous amounts of data it collects. It describes the hope that a RTT-D grant would allow the district to provide professional development and collaboration time for participating teachers to grow in this critical area. Insufficient detail is given about the various forms of data the district collects and the frequency with which it does so. Similarly, the professional development plans for training

are unclear based on the narrative, other than that training would be modeled after Kuss Middle School's summer institute. What is clear is that the purpose of the training and additional time for data analysis would be to enhance teacher skills, design classroom and personalized learning activities based on data, and compare the findings with state level standards for the purpose of increasing student outcomes.

The narrative provides an excellent connection between the use of the educator evaluation system and the improvement of instruction and increasing of student performance outcomes. A key component of that system will be the design and implementation of differentiated professional development based on evaluation results to include student performance data.

The narrative describes professional development opportunities that will be offered to staff in the area of personalizing learning environments and providing knowledge and tools to identify optimal learning approaches based on individual student needs. The narrative does not indicate that any of this training will be mandatory as part of a planned system to ensure educator effectiveness, which is a weakness.

The narrative's description of high-quality learning resources is insufficient and incomplete. Though it notes meaningful partnerships with various foundations and institutions of higher learning that help the district stay on the cutting-edge of tools and resources, the discussion of those tools is inadequate to demonstrate their use or effectiveness. The two specific digital resources noted are used only with students needing extra support and intervention. There is no discussion of tools to deepen learning and increase personalization. The narrative states that a RTT-D grant would enable the district to expand its current digital resources and bring them into alignment with college and career ready standards, but it provides no information on what the plans are for which resources to acquire or how and for whom they would be used.

In terms of matching processes and tools to match student needs with specific resources, the narrative notes that currently student formative assessment data is available every six weeks. The district plans to improve its data collection and systems to enable teachers to have updated data on students daily in order to respond more efficiently to individual student needs. The limited details of the plan provided do not make it possible to determine the potential effectiveness of such a robust data collection plan. It is not clear if data will be collected daily or just available daily. Certainly if the data collected is formative assessment data, best practice would indicate that daily collection is excessive and not necessary or meaningful in progress-monitoring, though the current six week window is certainly too long.

The narrative describes differentiated support that will be offered to schools beginning with school review visits that will be collaborative in nature and through which schools will set goals based on data. Using a continuous improvement model, these goals will appropriately be revisited on a set schedule to determine progress and make mid-course corrections as warranted. The narrative also states that through its collaboration with the local teacher union, the district is creating a tool for "assessing teaching and leadership practice and for providing transformative and actionable feedback resulting in improved teacher practice, school/district leadership, and ultimately, student outcomes." That does, indeed, appear to be the case, and the apparent history of collaboration with the union is a positive.

A strength of the narrative is the district's plan to build the capacity of its instructional leaders through monthly Principal Leadership Institute meetings and Principal Critical Friends groups to provide the training, networking, and peer assistance necessary to enact the desired reforms. The narrative further describes a redesign of the central office structure to provide targeted support to schools and their leaders based on individual need and using the continuous improvement process described above.

The applicant insufficiently describes its plan for increasing the number of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals, including in hard-to-staff schools, subjects, and specialty areas. It notes the hiring of an Executive Director of Human Resources to work on this issue several years ago, but does not speak to the effect of this effort. The narrative also states the findings of research in terms of the factors that effect teacher retention, but it does not provide a high-quality plan for working to improve in these four areas. The narrative does note that Level 4 school principals have been given autonomy over their staffs, but not all participating schools are in Level 4 status. It is not at all clear from the narrative what the district's plan is to increase the number of participating students taught by effective and highly effective educators and principals, though elements of that effort (such as increased professional development and opportunities for professional growth and leadership) can be gleaned from elsewhere in the narrative.

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 district's narrative is incomplete in its description of a high-quality plan to support project implementation through comprehensive policies and infrastructure that provide every student, educator, and level of the education system with the support and resources they need, when and where they are needed.

There is no furthering of the cursory discussion in other sections regarding organizing the central office to provide support and services to all participating schools.

The narrative does provide information as to the degree that school leadership has flexibility and autonomy over factors such as school schedules and calendars, school personnel decisions and staffing models, roles and responsibilities for educators and non-educators, and school-level budgets. This flexibility and autonomy is determined by a combination of state regulation, local policies, and local collective bargaining agreement. It is noted that this agreement is currently being renegotiated as part of the normal cycle of review. From the narrative, school leadership appears to have a small level of autonomy over the flexible use of building resources, professional development topics based on identified building needs, and site-based fiscal management. It is not clear from the narrative the degree to which the principal has staffing autonomy related to the use of the teacher evaluation tool, except that they are afforded the very critical right to transfer a teacher deemed to be making inadequate progress in the rating system. Principals do have the authority to establish the master schedule, including the work day and work year and its potential for five additional professional development days at the beginning of the school year.

The narrative appears to skip sections D(1)(c), D(1)(d), and D(1)(e). No information on (c) and (d) is provided elsewhere in the narrative, so the response to those sections cannot be evaluated at all. D(1)(e), however, on learning resources and instructional practices that are adaptable and fully accessible to all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners, has been addressed, albeit inadequately, in other sections of the narrative. The narrative has described adaptable instructional practices (such as blended-learning and project-based learning), but has provided little information on adaptable resources and on meeting the unique needs of English Language Learners.

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

10

2

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The narrative describes an excellent partnership with Comcast Broadband that provides computers, internet access, and training to families that qualify for free or reduced lunch. This enables families to have 24/7 access to available online resources. The district's plan does not make the use of such resources a key component of the plan, but it is a helpful support to families nonetheless. This also gives parents ready access to the district's Web site and the information there available for their use. The district's television station also provides instructional and information programming for families. How these resources are aligned to and support the district's reform plan is not made clear in the narrative.

The narrative does not provide information about technical support provided to students, parents, educators, and other stakeholders on the use of technology tools. Nor is information provided about how the district uses information technology systems that allow parents and students to export their information in an open data format and to use the data in other electronic learning systems. The district is developing a parent portal that will allow parents to access their student's information on assessments, grades, attendance, and behavior, but that is only planned for pilot at the high school level, not in participating schools.

Information is provided on the various HR and budget data systems the district uses, but no information is provided on ensuring that districts and schools use interoperable data systems.

Overall, the response for this section is very weak.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

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

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The district narrative has described throughout its built-in continuous improvement process through its School Review Visits that provides differentiated support to districts. In addition, each school has a Redesign Team that analyzes and reports regularly back to the whole school on its progress in meeting reform plan goals. The site level team planning time is also used for the purposes of continuous improvement at a more granular level. All levels of this process are data-informed. The highly interrelated communications networks detailed elsewhere in the plan narrative are also a critical component of the district's

continuous improvement process. As explained in the narrative, information is shared with community stakeholders on the results of these continuous improvement efforts passively by posting them on the district's Web site, but parents do not appear to be an integrated part of the review process. No information is provided as to what "qualitative and quantitative" project results will be shared. The narrative provides no information as to how the district will analyze and publicly share information on the quality of its investments funded by RTT-D, such as investments in professional development, technology, and staff, which weakens the response.

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

5

3

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The narrative describes its current and proposed strategies for ongoing communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders. These include the basics of report card information as well as the monthly report cards of progress proposed to be created as part of the School Review Visits structure. These reports will be made available to parents and other community stakeholders as well as internal stakeholders. It is not entirely clear from the narrative, but there appear to be monthly stakeholder meetings as part of this monthly release of progress reports during which stakeholders can provide their insights and perspectives to broaden the understanding of student needs. In addition, the narrative refers to monthly stakeholder meetings, comprised of community partners and parents. It is not at all clear from the narrative whether these are the same or different meetings.

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

5

2

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The performance measures for effective vs. highly effective teachers and principals are not clear. It appears from the targets provided that the district has collapsed highly effective into effective, meaning that if an educator is determined to be highly effective, they are also included in the effective category. With that assumption in mind, the targets for this measure appear to be very ambitious. 100% of any measure is certainly aspirational, but perhaps not realistic. Thus, the performance target for 100% of principals being highly effective, is an admirable goal, but it is not realistic in a truly meaningful evaluation system, particularly given the 20% baseline.

The performance measure for the on-track measure is similarly unrealistic. Though it is noble to aspire to completely erase the significant achievement gap that exists in the provided baseline data, it is not realistic given the district's reform plan. The same is true for the disparity in the attendance data.

No explanation is provided for how the academic performance measure targets for ELA and mathematics are determined, so it is not possible to evaluate these targets as the chart provided is not intuitive.

No rationale for selecting the measures is provided in the narrative, nor is there any discussion of how the measure will provide rigorous, timely, and formative leading information tailored to its proposed plan and theory of action regarding the applicant's implementation success or areas of concern

The applicant provides no discussion of how it will review and improve the measures over time if they are insufficient to gauge implementation progress.

There appear to be fewer than 12-14 performance measures. There is no social-emotional measure.

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

5

4

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The project narrative describes the three major parts of its evaluation plan: 1) documentation of the implementation of key innovative elements of the project's approach, 2) performance feedback about the effectiveness of those key elements, and 3) frequent measurement of the project's critical outcomes. The results of the evaluation will be used to replicate effective practices and strategies and in future program development, make mid-course corrections, and for accountability. The narrative concisely details the plans for gathering and tracking the necessary data. The evaluation plan appears thorough from the narrative, yet there is also discussion of a selected evaluator who will collaborate closely with project leaders during the "planning year" to develop a full evaluation plan. This appears to be the first mention of a planning year in the narrative and is confusing in light of the rather detailed plan presented throughout the project application.

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's budget and narrative identifies all funds that will support the project. It is very concerning that the budget narrative and accompanying numbers are very general. Salaries and fringe benefits appear to be rounded estimates. Dollars earmarked for technology are generalized as, in many cases, are the technologies themselves. The budget as presented does not reflect a high-level of planning and preparation, and with these generalities, it is not possible to fully determine whether or not the budget is reasonable and sufficient to support the development and implementation of the proposal.</p> <p>The budget narrative for contractual services discusses relationships with vendors that are not discussed in the application narrative.</p> <p>The fringe benefits provided to new positions of varying salary amounts are listed as the same. No detail is provided for what these fringe benefits entail. Given the sparse information provided, this does not appear logical.</p> <p>The narrative for the travel budget provides no guidance or detail on how that money will be used.</p> <p>The budget narrative explanation for funds from other sources used to support the project appears to be supplanting, but without additional information, that cannot be determined for certain.</p> <p>In most instances, the budget narrative does not provide a thoughtful rationale for investments and priorities, though some discussion of sustainability considerations is present in the budget, particularly surrounding additional personnel.</p>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	3
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The narrative states that the majority of the costs of the project are one-time expenses that either currently exist in the district's budget or will be phased out with the completion of the grant as they are designed to build capacity. Some costs, particularly related to technology support, will be absorbed by the district as their technology needs expand, according to the narrative. The narrative even states that technology upgrades will be handled as part of the district's existing refurbishment schedule. This level of absorption does not seem reasonable or probable. If so, the district would really have no need for this grant. This approach to the sustainability of the budget is also in direct contrast to the opening paragraph of the grant narrative that speaks to the economic challenges of the area.</p>		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	6
<p>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The narrative describes two initiatives in the district to strengthen the supports to students and families: The Wraparound Zone (WAZ) Initiative and the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Coalition (CFCE).</p> <p>Regarding the WAZ initiative, the narrative describes the district's research-supported belief that building youth assets and social-emotional well-being through strengths-based approaches is essential to supporting their academic progress. The narrative also details requirements for schools in the district around building Wellness Teams, the adoption of positive discipline approaches and curricula, and the development of parent engagement activities. The narrative also lists various community partners some schools have in their wellness and wraparound efforts and some district-level partners. The narrative states there are plans in the future for a more coordinated effort, but these plans are not detailed.</p> <p>The CFCE Coalition is focused on the younger child and the early learning community rather than on the participating schools'</p>		

population. The narrative states that CFCE is a community-based resource hub for families. CFCE partners share a belief in and use of the Strengthening Families Framework. The connection between this group and the district's proposed reform initiative for middle school students is not made clear in the narrative.

The narrative notes selected performance measures and sets reasonable and ambitious annual targets. The annual targets, however, being set at a 5 percentage point improvement each year for every subgroup will not close the achievement gap and are not in alignment with the targets set in the district's overall reform project application.

No information is provided on how the district and its partners will track the selected indicators or use data to target resources to improve results for participating students. There is no discussion of a scale-up strategy, plans to use results to improve performance over time, or how community partner efforts will be integrated with education services, though there is some information provided about common assessments used between community providers in the early learning sector which allows public schools to have a better understanding of entering kindergartners.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Not Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The application does make a strong case for how it is building on knowledge gained through its successful efforts to turn around low-performing schools. The plan is aligned to the core assurance areas and makes some effort to create personalized learning environments for students. The strategies for doing so are adequately described as are the supports for educators. The discussions of the tools to be employed and the supports for students are not as strong or clear. The budget for achieving the plan is not well-conceived. Many of the performance targets are not reasonable. The plan to expand student access to the most effective educators is not at all clear. Overall, the applicant has the beginnings of a fine plan, but they have not thoroughly addressed all necessary aspects.

Total	210	132
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