



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0481LA-1 for Ascension Parish School System

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	6
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applicant's reform vision builds on sustained effort/achievement in the four core education assurance areas. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A recent district self-study has led to a vision/plan aimed at 1) ensuring all students learn, 2) creating a culture of collaboration, and 3) focusing on results. 2. The applicant sees personalization as the only way "every child will be successful in an ever-changing world" while recognizing that without exemplary leadership nothing will happen. 3. Standards - Historical progress in curriculum and assessment developed provided, including both district innovation and its steps to adopt CCSS. 4. Data – data warehouse created that is feeding annual and quarterly reports and practice improvement; use of data in shorter instructional or personalized cycles not mentioned. 5. Teacher effectiveness and school turnaround – TAP improvement system employed since 2007. Professional learning communities. Turnaround Zone contains 8 schools. Past and future attention given to teacher development through Master and Mentor Teachers. 6. District has responded and adapted to the challenges of changing demographics due to students displaced from Katrina-affected districts. 2. Applicant provides a "clear and credible approach" to building on these activities including a strategic five-year instructional plan and expanded, more granular use of individual student data; however, the vision does not specifically describe deepening student learning, equity, or, most importantly, "personalized student support grounded in common and individual tasks that are based on student academic interests." 		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	6
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. While the applicant's response to A.2. cites ongoing collaboration with stakeholders, it fails to address "the extent to which the applicant's approach to implementing its reform proposal...will support high-quality LEA-level and school-level implementation of that proposal..." <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Some of the platforms that might support high-quality LEA-level and school-level implementation were mentioned in A.1 and that information has been taken into account; however, the applicant has not specified how their RTTD reform proposal supports high-quality LEA-level and school-level implementation. 2. The process (and logic) behind the selection of participating schools is not provided. (The 8 lowest performing schools and other low performing schools are named.) 3. Donaldson Primary is named but not in the table, perhaps explaining why the number of participating students in the table (9,495) does not match the figure in the Budget Requirement cover sheet (10,127). 		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	4
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The application does not provide a high-quality plan describing how the reform proposal will be scaled <u>to support district-wide change</u>. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Four bullets (taken from the Action Plan provided in Artifact V) describe intended collaborative measures for sharing promising practices. 2. An additional four bullets list the positions and offices that would be instrumental in scale up. 3. The missing elements of a high-quality plan to scale the reform proposal to the rest of the district include the key 		

goals, activities to be taken and their rationale, the timeline, the deliverables, the parties responsibility for each activity/deliverable, and the overall credibility of the plan.

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

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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

1. The applicant's goals for the LEA seem overly ambitious.
 1. Only approximately half of the LEA's students are in participating schools. Without knowing the breakdown between the two halves, and without a rationale provided by the applicant, the goals that are presented do not seem commensurate with the scale and scope of the reform proposal.
 2. For example, graduation rates (LEA-wide) for all subgroups currently range from 33.3% (SPED) to 69.8% (poverty) to 86.9% (non-poverty); the table shows these rates ranging from 97-99% within four years. Graduation rates, even under ideal reform programs, rarely move this rapidly. In addition, this projection implies that non-participating students are advancing at almost the same rate as participating students.

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

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

1. The applicant has demonstrated a clear record of success in implementing school reform and improving student learning outcomes.
 1. Readiness for kindergarten, graduation rates, and youth placed in employment or education have each increased over the past four years.
 2. All LEA schools met or exceeded AYP; positive trends in School Performance Scores are indicated for over 80% of schools.
 3. The district created a Turnaround Zone for its 8 PLA schools with initiatives to increase Capacity through professional development, TAP, and Professional Learning Communities, as well as instituting Conditions and Clustering consistent with school turnaround.
 4. The district has used the Northrup Grumman Horizon Assessment System since 2008 and is using that data with teachers and internal stakeholders; however, the application does not provide evidence that student performance data is being made available to students and parents in ways that inform and improve participation, instruction, and services.

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

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4

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant reports that it is working towards a school-based financial reporting model in anticipation of new state requirements, that concrete steps have been taken to date, and that the conversion is 80% complete.

1. The application describes a current high level of transparency in making public its district-level financial information, including online postings and presentations throughout the year.
2. The district currently shares financial data at the district-wide and department level as its accounting system does not support school site coding.
3. Steps completed in moving to school-level budgeting and reporting include a revamp of the financial system's chart of accounts and the Accounting Department working with all departments to adjust budgeting and accounting practices to accommodate school-level accounting.

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

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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

1. The applicant reports that the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), through its RTTT grant and Education Reform Plan, has undertaken a transformation process over the past two years to reorganize itself "from a compliancy-

monitoring bureaucracy to a performance-based customer service organization dedicated to supporting educators, schools and districts.”

1. LDOE's three strategies are 1) identifying and sharing effective practice, 2) providing regionally based and on-site assistance, and 3) launching Professional Learning Networks.
 2. The LDOE reorganization also targets adopting internationally competitive standards, giving local professionals greater power, and creating a greater range of career pathways.
 3. The application states that Louisiana's new Course Choice process is the nation's first effort to invite industry to partner in career training as part of a state's core K-12 education program.
2. Ascension Parish signed on to LDOE's RTTT application and appears to have worked diligently on its own transformation, profiting “from improved conditions and sufficient autonomies” that have come from the SEA.

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

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9

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

1. The applicant describes a process “throughout the year” to develop its proposal with meaningful input from multiple stakeholders.
 1. In particular, the applicant notes the role of its school board strategic planning committee and engagement with the Ascension Community Coalition for Strong Schools (ACCESS).
 2. Needs assessment review performed by SACS-Advanced Ed.
 3. Teachers were engaged in multiple ways.
 4. Letters of support are provided from a broad range of organizations. While impressive, most writers used a template without revealing their own helpful observations about the applicant or its proposal.
2. The description of the process used covers the district's overall reform initiative, of which the RTTD proposal is an extension or component. While the two should be tightly coordinated, the application does not show the same degree of analysis and planning for personalized learning environments as it does for developing teacher effectiveness, for example.

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

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3

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

1. The applicant has provided ample evidence and logic for its overall reform plan but not for its proposed implementation of personalized learning environments.
 1. The logic model for the applicant's RTTD proposal emphasizes that “the inputs are directed to facilitate the personalization of education for students by investing in human capital capacity.” While capacity is certainly crucial, Absolute Priority 1 lists many other aspects that the applicant has not addressed.
 2. The implementation timeline provided as Artifact HH shows hiring of instructional technology coordinators, technology purchases, and ongoing professional development, but no plan for designing personalized learning environments including online learning platforms, blending, redesign of learning time, tailoring to the needs and goals of each student that “dramatically transforms the learning environment.” (NIA)

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	13

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

1. The applicant's strategy is to encourage new personalized learning environments to emerge through a process of continuous improvement catalyzed by a focus on new standards, teacher/leader development and collaboration, and a focus on data/results. While these catalyzers are crucial to both innovation and scaling, details on how learning and teaching would actually change, and by when, are limited at best. No effort is made to tie the applicant's plans to the goals it has presented in section E.
2. Compounding these shortcomings, the applicant provides very little information on its experience and successes with personalizing learning to date, and how that experience has informed its proposed approach. There are exceptions; for example, the district took the initiative to pilot Fast ForWord this year based on its success in a neighboring district and, based on those experiences, has made Fast ForWord an element of its future plans. The district appears to be very

capable in implementing change; however, its proposal lacks details on what it has learned to date about personalized learning (and Fast ForWord) and how it is basing its plans on that experience.

3. The applicant has thought deeply about the use of data and assessment; it has laid out details on how it plans to inform students and teachers on student progress. It has also begun designing a new standards-based report card for kindergarten students which it hopes will communicate more meaningful information to students and parents. A goal is to extend this work to other grades.
4. Culling through the 61 pages submitted in Part C, there appear to be five main elements to its Part C proposal (in addition to its underlying reform strategy of standards, data, teachers, turnaround): 1) providing an electronic device to each participating student (expanding their existing 1:1 program), 2) expanding a partnership with Apple, 3) partnering with Solution Tree on professional development and Professional Learning Communities, 4) adopting Fast ForWord as an adaptive learning program (both academic/cognitive), and 5) creating 8 Instructional Technology Coordinators. The applicant does not present a vision or a high-quality plan for how these elements will be integrated into the creation of new personalized learning environments. There is virtually no discussion of how the average day/week for an elementary, MS, or HS student would change; how class structure and learning time will be modified; or how the roles of students, teachers, parents, specialists, or community members will change. For example, the applicant states that “for those who reach mastery of grade level standards prior to the end of a school year, goals will be set for these individuals that enrich their understanding of content or application of a skill at a level higher or more rigorous than the grade level standard.” This statement seems to encapsulate much of the intended goal of Part C, yet the applicant has not answered how its proposed personalized learning environment would enable a student would reach “early” mastery or how the district’s accommodations in instruction, scheduling, grouping, and resources would be arranged to offer extended, personalized learning options. The applicant’s statement and Part C present a systemic challenge that, while solvable, is not adequately addressed in the applicant’s proposal.
5. A good example and a weak one: To deepen learning and develop 21st century skills, the applicant has proposed a creative strategy using iTeach, Apple productivity tools, and other elements to advance Wagner’s Seven Survival Skills for the 21st Century. In this instance, the applicant has formulated a strategy, organized a prototype, and broadly noted its plans to scale it – the components of a high-quality plan are described if not in detail. The same cannot be said for the critical case of accommodations for high-need students. Here the response is largely aspirational (“Individualized learning paths for each student will be designed for each child to progress him/her from entry point to grade level mastery”) with no concrete strategy or plan.

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

20

13

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

1. It is hard to overstate how often the applicant returns to professional development and professional learning communities as the central activity driving its personalized learning approach. Without questioning this priority or the foundational necessity for effective teachers, collaboration, and culture in a successful personalized learning initiative, the applicant’s response to this section is a 20-page proposal from Solution Tree that never mentions personalized learning. While this proposal may represent a significant resource, as currently written, it is not a high-quality plan ensuring that all participating educators have the capacity for implementing instructional strategies specific to the RTTD program.
2. In describing how the applicant will identify optimal learning approaches, high-quality learning resources, and processes and tools, the applicant describes how it will expand its partnership with and technical assistance from Apple, create a vanguard of approximately 20 teachers, develop professional development programs for all teachers, and install instructional technology coordinators to pioneer or assist in pioneering digital content. There is no mention of district support/involvement in the vetting or development of digital content. Considering the rate at which the online learning field is mushrooming, a strategy and plan for vetting and developing content, including its selection, installation, and evaluation seems imperative.
3. With respect to adapting content and instruction, and providing opportunities for students to engage in common and individual tasks in response to their academic needs, interests, and optimal learning approaches, the application first describes the Horizon assessment tool and training that will be used to support adaptive instruction, then describes the proposed utilization of Fast ForWord and ENGAGE. The application does not answer how instruction will be adapted across 10,000 students in 16 schools; no plan is provided for elementary strategies versus middle school or high school initiatives, or how these relate or integrate with one another. The response does not provide a credible plan for how each student will receive instruction adapted to their needs, interests, and optimal learning approaches.
4. In describing how an increasing number of students will receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers, the applicant relies exclusively on its district-wide teacher quality program without a high-quality, detailed plan tailored to how and when the applicant’s 10,000 participating students will have access to teachers effective in personalized learning within a timeframe consistent with the dramatic (and therefore rapid) transformation envisioned by the RTTD program.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	14

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

1. LEA practices, policies, and rules have been revamped in accordance with its overall reform plan and its district-level support for the 8 schools in its Turnaround Zone. The District Turnaround Office provides an Internal Support Partner to each school; champions autonomy and flexibility at the school-level; and encourages collaboration and continuous improvement among many partnering schools. The applicant does not appear to clarify if participating schools that are not currently part of the Zone will be supported by the Turnaround Office and have the same support and flexibility.
2. The applicant asserts that the leadership teams at each participating schools currently have sufficient flexibility and autonomy over school schedules, hiring, and budgets. Concrete examples of school-level autonomy are provided for each type.
3. The applicant describes an ongoing shift in the district towards mastery, citing several examples. It seems clear that the district is committed to furthering this shift and states that it sees RTTD funding as helping them “move forward systematically to ensure that every student is provided this opportunity every time they encounter difficulty.”
4. As with learning resources and instructional practices in general, the applicant’s approach to ensure that methods are adaptable and fully accessible to all students is to support decision making at the school level. The district embraces an inclusion model with the special education teacher in the classroom and an active participant in the PLCs.
5. While strong support of school-level decision making seems crucial, the applicant has not proposed capacity building at the district level that may also be necessary to provide expertise and technical assistance to the schools with respect to new learning technologies or new personalized learning solutions from within the district or from outside.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	10
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(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

1. Through its existing 1:1 program providing an iPad or computer to 4,000 students, the district already provides a considerable level of access. It was cited by the SEA as one of two parishes poised to meet the technology needs of the 21st century. The applicant will expand access to 10,000 students through its RTTD proposal, expanding tech support/training to students, parents, and teachers, and expanding information access to student data through enhanced dashboards tied to its data warehouse.
2. These measures suggest the applicant is well positioned to meet the requirements of this section.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

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

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

1. The applicant emphasizes an extensive system of performance measures, supported by district competency, to monitor “continuous increase in student academic, career and social-emotional improvement toward set goals.” For student performance, the plan is divided into 1) setting district goals and school goals, 2) Setting short-term wins to meet school goals, and 3) setting individual student goals. Corrective action, it is presumed, is associated with this monitoring. Teacher performance will encompass formal classroom observations 2-4 times per year, feedback, and professional development. Leader performance, like teacher performance, will be divided between student growth measures and professional practice measures. Established rubrics support these evaluations.
2. What the applicant has not addressed is the efficacy of its personalized learning initiatives and how it will move resources from methods with low “return on investment” to those with more promising results. There is no rigorous, high-quality plan for designing, piloting, evaluating, and revising/replacing individual methods. For example, there is no process noted for how the Fast ForWord or the Apple investments will be evaluated and adjusted, or determining if teacher-created digital content is performing better or worse than vendor-provided content, or who will pull the plug on popular approaches that are not measuring up.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	4
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>1. The applicant lists four forums for sharing information on the quality of its investments: data fairs, best practices sharing, open forums and board meetings, and an RTTD report to stakeholders. The engagement of students and parents, and engendering their support through the failures as well as the successes, is not discussed.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	5
(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>1. The applicant has provided a thoughtful array of 16 performance measures spanning the age spectrum, with a rationale and description of each. The applicant has not addressed directly in this section how it will review and improve the measure over time if it is insufficient to gauge implementation progress; however, the response to E.4 addresses the question adequately if indirectly.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	3
(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>1. The applicant places overall responsibility for the RTTD program evaluation system with the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction and School Turnaround. Under that system, the applicant discusses three components: the Leadership Academy, Professional Learning Communities, and Personalization of Learning. Evaluation of each component is described. Personalization is weak; beginning with the statement that student scores in the 1:1 environment will be compared to how those students scored the previous year. Digital content will be field-tested and its use extended if proven effective. Lab managers will monitor the effectiveness of Fast ForWord.</p> <p>2. The response does not provide information on how the district would evaluate funded activities and, as appropriate, use time, staff, money, or other resources more productively.</p>		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	9
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>1. The applicant's budget and budget narrative is detailed and the most clear picture provided of the scope of the applicant's proposal. The \$51.7 million total four-year budget (RTTD and other funds) is divided into the applicant's three initiatives and proportioned thus: 33% for the Leadership Academy, 23% for the Professional Learning Communities, and 44% for Personalization of Learning. Personalization covers the most direct costs of instruction including tech staff, equipment and supplies, content development and licenses. The Leadership Academy and PLCs might be thought of as providing Capacity including coordination, knowledge transfer, evaluation, and continuous improvement.</p> <p>2. There is no project-level budget detail (Subpart 4) for the Leadership Academy; apparently, a second copy of the Personalization detail was inserted in error.</p> <p>3. The Leadership Academy and PLC costs support the district's overall reform strategy and, indirectly, the creation of personalized learning environments. The applicant's Personalization budget is limited to new technology hires, creation of digital content (only \$400k over 4 years), purchase of iPads and computers, professional development, Fast ForWord, technical services, and assessment tools. While the application allocates 56% of its budget to capacity building, it provides no budgeting or contingency for new learning technologies or solutions that will most certainly emerge in the next four years.</p>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	6
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:		

1. The applicant envisioned these investments as either one-time investments or ongoing costs that can be sustained from Title dollars, general funds, or new grants. The applicant does not appear to contemplate the reallocation of time, staff, money, or other resources from existing instructional models; rather, the proposal suggests an additive approach rather than a reinvention philosophy. Regardless of how the applicant chooses to define sustainability, it has not provided a high-quality plan (goals, activities, timeline, deliverables, parties responsible) or an (optional) three-year budget beyond the grant years.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	8
Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The applicant proposes to establish a broad early childhood initiative focused on readiness for kindergarten – a persistent problem in the district. The initiative would encompass partnerships with three organizations: Head Start, The Capital City Health, and the Gonzales Chamber of Commerce – along with the district's existing Family Literacy Program and other district resources. 2. While the concept is admirable and the need crucial, the proposal does not provide details on how the initiative would be sustained, how the partnership would build capacity, or create a decision-making process and infrastructure. Because the applicant has already demonstrated accomplishments in the early learning space, there is little doubt it has the capability to do so; however, the details for these aspects of the plan are not discussed. 		

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met
Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:		
<p>Strength of this proposal: grounded in an overall reform strategy built on the core assurance areas with a very heavy emphasis on building teacher and leader capacity (although not exclusively in personalization). Weakness of this proposal: largely sidesteps the design of new personalized learning environments that dramatically transform traditional school structures and processes including class structure, learning time, or the role of the teacher.</p>		

Total	210	156
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0481LA-3 for Ascension Parish School System

A. Vision (40 total points)

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

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal demonstrates that the school district has developed a comprehensive and coherent vision of reform to a great extent. This is evident for several reasons. For example, the district has created a five-year instructional plan that is closely aligned with the core educational assurances. This instructional plan identifies goals and related action steps to achieve the goals. These goals seek to address the achievement gap and data is provided to acknowledge and characterize the achievement gap. These goals are standards-based, which aligns with one of the core assurance areas.

In addition, the current comprehensive reform vision includes the establishment of a Turnaround Zone aimed at cohesively organizing best practices for a group of eight schools in need of such practices. Seeing teachers as being key to Ascension's vision of reform, the district also implements the TAP system as a way of supporting and rewarding successful teachers.

It is important to note that the strategies and vision are grounded in previous work, such as the work of Wiggins and McTighe for curriculum and the Milken Family Foundation for TAP. These models provide a framework and common practices around the school's reform vision, such as a focus on teaching as a lever of improvement.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	8
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(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The project proposal demonstrates that the district's approach to implementing its reform proposal will support a high level of implementation by the targeted schools. This is evidenced by an understanding that the proposal shows of the current conditions of student performance. For example, the proposal states in table form the total number of participating students and categorizes those students by the necessary sub-categories as defined in the notice, such as the percent qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Moreover, the proposal demonstrates understanding of the schools that this project will target by identifying them by name. These district schools were identified for the project based on their need for assistance. Yet, while this is mentioned, it is not specific in the proposal why these schools were chosen and not other low performing schools that were noted in the proposal. This decision making process was not made explicit.

Also the proposal describes that a wide array of constituency members have been involved in shaping the vision of the district's educational reform efforts, and a coalition has been formed to bring together board members, educators, business leaders, community members, etc. in order to address the instructional goals of the project.

However, while there were data presented about the participating schools, it is worth mentioning that the number of participating students from schools is not consistent between the schools listed and the data presented about the schools. For example, Donaldson Primary school is listed as a targeted school, but is not presented in the table of student data.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	6
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(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal describes how the proposal will be scaled and translated to other schools in the district. Specifically, the spread of best practices is fundamental to this project. For example, the general model of instructional improvement that the proposal describes states that the best practices cultivated, provided or refined within the turnaround zone will be shared with the additional schools identified in this proposal. The proposal also draws attention to an action plan for disseminating promising practices from the turnaround zone to the district at large. This plan includes providing collaborative opportunities for people at various levels of leadership to share their work. In addition to sharing work, these school leaders will have opportunities to be exposed to new ideas not currently being implemented in their district.

Considering the aforementioned points, the proposal does not present many of the components of a high quality plan that are necessary for this criterion. For example, this plan does not make clear a timeline, specific goals and the activities that will support the achievement of these goals. Moreover, this plan does not make clear who the people responsible for carrying out the activities of the plan are or the deliverables that will come from the plan.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	6
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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

There are several elements of this project proposal that suggest that this project will result in improved student academic performance and increased equity in the target schools. For instance, the proposal states that the LEA-wide goals were developed by a varied group representing different constituent groups. This suggests that the goals for the target schools represent the needs and priorities of a broad constituency. Furthermore, these goals and targets will be reflected on, refined and assessed as part of the reform process. The proposal specifically charts the goals of improving on summative

assessments (LEAP), decreasing the achievement gap, improving graduation rates as well as college enrollment. This trajectory of improvement suggests ultimately that all students can be successful in the target schools.

The proposal also notes that they have begun to subscribe to the National Student Clearinghouse, which will enable them to track students' post-secondary work. This will enable the school district to track their impact on students beyond graduation.

Despite the strengths of the proposal, it is important to note that there is a difference between the success of the students in the target schools and the success of the students in the whole district. Based on the trajectory of student success presented in the charts of the proposal, it does not seem plausible that the success of the target schools will result in the anticipated success for the district.

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
(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: <i>The proposal states that the school has demonstrated a prior record of success by being the 9th ranked school district in the state of Louisiana. Further evidence of this capacity is the fact that all of the schools met or exceeded AYP. With charts and a table, the proposal displays the positive trend in student performance. For example, all but 4 of the target schools have shown improvement in student achievement in the past five years.</i> <i>While the proposal describes the use of the Horizon Assessment System as a means of sharing data among teachers, it is not clear that these data are shared with students and parents.</i>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: <i>The proposal shows how the district is increasing the transparency of their processes. For example, the district budget and yearly audit are posted on the district web site. These documents include both the district revenue as well as expenses with personnel salaries. Furthermore, the budget is annually presented at a public meeting to a specific committee. The monthly finance committee meetings are also open to the public.</i>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10
(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: <i>The proposal does completely describe how the district will have sufficient autonomy to implement the personalized learning environments. The proposal notes two key aspects of the state policy context. First, the department of education has adopted a system of empowerment rather than a system of compliance to ensure educational reform is taking place. Second, the state is adopting a new program whereby private contractors can provide sequences of courses. Finally, the district has already exercised their ability to act autonomously by implementing such programs as TAP as well as virtual learning opportunities—both of which can support personalized instruction.</i>		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	8
(B)(4) Reviewer Comments: The proposal demonstrates that the proposal sought to gain widespread support in the development of this proposal. For example, many of the goals and initiatives being undergone through the district are subject to review and revision through district leadership teams. Therefore, most of the ideas with respect to improving student achievement have undergone discussion through these teams. Moreover, an outline of the proposal was presented to the principals and teacher leaders and their feedback was solicited. In addition, the proposal was detailed at a school board meeting and a period of feedback was allowed. However, while these are substantial strategies for involving the schools' staff, this does not address the need for student and parent input.		
(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	5

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal contains a logic model with descriptions of inputs, outputs and outcomes. These suggest that the project possesses a high quality plan. Also, the implementation timeline also indicates that the districts has an active status of implementing personalized learning. Finally, the needs are identified, with gaps important to address.

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

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

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal describes a high quality plan for ensuring that students' learning experiences are personalized and prepare them for post-secondary educational experiences and / or a career. This is evident for a number of reasons. First, teachers and coaches will be guided by Measured Progress's Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning. This is notable since the underlying goal of these strategies is to build self-awareness in students of what they are learning and how it leads to mastery. In addition, the proposal shows how R2T funds will be used to build the capacity of the district's educators to support student learning.

The proposal shows how students will pursue learning goals that will prepare them for college and career as evidenced by the curriculum tying its scope and sequence to the Common Core State Standards. And the proposal demonstrates that the students' progress toward being college and career ready will be monitored through a locally designed benchmark exam.

The proposal does not adequately demonstrate that the students will be involved in deep learning experiences in areas of academic interest. Although they will expand their magnet classes as well as the availability of digital content, it is not clear the extent to which these two programs will relate to academic interest or be deep learning experiences. Moreover, it is not clear the extent to which students will be exposed to cultures and / or contexts, outside of their own, that may motivate students' learning.

The proposal identifies Wagner's skills for the 21st century, which will ensure that students are exposed to rigorous and relevant content. Through the Fast Forward program as well as the partnership with Apple, students are also exposed to high quality digital content and skill building activities.

The use of data, augmented by the fact that each teacher will have access to a common data platform, suggests that high quality strategies will be supported for all students. With these as well as the Assessment for Learning strategies, high-need students will be exposed to a variety of activities and strategies to buffet their progress. In general, these activities may be supported by the Learn Portal as well.

It is not clear how the Learn Portal, the Horizon platform and the data warehouses will work together and not present coordination difficulties or redundancies. Moreover, the role of parents supporting all of the learning activities described in this section is underspecified.

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

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20

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal presents a high quality plan for improving learning and teaching. This is shown through several ways. First, there is a general framework of guiding questions that shapes the larger reform and those questions are grounded in what they want students to learn. The district is partnering with Solution Tree Professional Development Services to develop a professional learning community. These activities will overlap with the addition of a leadership academy, a coaching academy and a rti academy. Additional staff will be hired to support both the use of technology, instructional coaching as well as a project manager to coordinate the professional development plans in the district. This shows that the plan understands the importance of coherence in supporting the trajectory of learning for the educators in the school district. The proposal breaks up many of these professional learning opportunities into phases which shows that they understand the developmental nature of their educators' learning. Moreover, the proposal provides a model of the learning cycle embedded in the professional learning community, which integrates elements such as students' self-assessment and formative assessment strategies to guide the personalization of instructional decisions.

As mentioned above, the proposal includes a plan for a leadership academy, which is their approach to building the capacity of administrators to support both the effective functioning of the professional learning communities and the implementation of personalized learning strategies. The proposal elaborates that the academy will not only develop leadership

strategies of the administrators, but also make them aware of the resources they can leverage to support their teachers.

The proposal cites how the district will frequently measure student progress. This is worth noting as it will be used as a way to understand the progress of teachers' instructional practice development. The proposal is also drawing from protocols for measuring instruction and leadership as a way of understanding accomplishments in practice as well as areas for improvement.

It is also worth pointing out that the observational tool to support evidence of effective teaching, the NIET 5 scale instructional rubric, is parallel to the same tool in the TAP schools. This suggests that there will not be a formalized competing model of what constitutes effective instruction.

It is also important to mention that the measurement of instruction is not only an accountability tool, but also a tool to develop struggling teachers. For example, feedback from the system will be used to support teachers in the improvement of their instructional practice. The proposal asserts that teachers not showing growth will be provided with coaches or master teachers through an Intensive Assistance Plan to address areas in need of improvement.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	15
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: Overall, the project proposal describes a high quality plan to support project implementation. For example, the plan describes a variety of mechanisms for teachers and administrators to discuss, reflect on and ultimately shape the policies that guide this work. This is evidenced by a variety of meetings that are intended to link administrators vertically and horizontally in the district. This is also evidenced by allocating certain expenditures to be available at the school level and providing a level of autonomy to the schools to make decisions, such as those related to personnel. Through the magnet program, the technology supports and Fast Forward program, students are given a chance to demonstrate mastery of standards that are not dependent on time as well as enhancing the resource base for students that need additional or different resources.		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	10
(D)(2) Reviewer Comments: <i>The proposal describes how the technological infrastructure is providing resources and tools to all students and parents. This is evident through the growth of parent education related to technology and the ability for parents to download their students data with a data dashboard. The proposal acknowledges that the data do not speak for themselves and so they are ensuring that the teachers have a knowledge base in the strategies of assessment for learning that will ensure they can make appropriate data-based decisions to further students on the path to a successful outcome. Finally, the district is supporting personalized learning by ensuring that there is a level of inter-operability of data to include data about students, teaching and governance within one system.</i>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	15
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: The district's proposal presents a high-quality plan that incorporates processes and practices of continuous improvement. This is evident in several ways. First, there is a focus on student and instructional data to track the progress of the work. Second, the district has established the practice of goal setting that allows the data to monitor success on the goals. These goals are set at different levels for the school district and for different time frames. Furthermore, the PLC framework for professional learning provides a social mechanism for the teachers and administration to set and discuss goals that are based on their two broad categories of data. In the service of sharing what is learned from this continuous improvement process, the proposal also notes specific and regular opportunities for presenting and discussing the program's work. This includes internal opportunities like data fairs as well as external opportunities like open forums and reports to the community.		

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	4
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p><i>The proposal presents several strategies for maintaining communication and engagement within and outside of the school district. First, there will be R2T data fairs quarterly that will communicate progress among teachers based on student data. This internal sharing will also be catalyzed through the professional learning activities. In order to engage outside stakeholders, the district will hold open forum board and committee meetings and report out to stakeholders. While these serve as significant mechanisms for communication, they do not appear to be significant mechanisms for engagement.</i></p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	5
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The grant proposal states that the project will have ambitious and achievable goals for monitoring performance. This is evident in several ways. First, for each performance measure, the proposal provides baseline data that gives the reader an indicator of what constitutes ambitious and achievable. Moreover, these measures are tied to both student academic achievement measures as well as measures that are important mediators for academic success, such as the ENGAGE assessment. Finally, it is worth pointing out that the proposal describes a mechanism by which the district will monitor, reflect on and potentially refine the measures to ensure that the measures are valid indicators of success.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	4
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The proposal provides a description of the district's evaluation plan for the Race to the Top project. The plan segments the evaluation by sub projects such as professional learning community and Personalization of Learning. Moreover, the evaluation plan identifies a person or persons who will be responsible for the evaluation and what the measures will be to monitor success. However, the proposal's evaluation plan does not state why the people responsible for the evaluations are strategically positioned to evaluate the work to both assess the effects as well as provide an opportunity for improvement</p>		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	10
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p><i>The proposal's budget identifies all of the funds that will support the project and they divide these funds by project name, such as professional learning communities and personalization of learning. Through the tables and the budget narrative, the project proposal provides a rationale that demonstrates the funds requested are reasonable yet significant enough to help the project realize its goals.</i></p>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	8
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p><i>In order to demonstrate a plan for sustainability of the project's goals, the proposal describes several important facets. First, the project is contracting with a grants management software system to track the money for the project. Second, the district has demonstrated success in raising funds for projects in the past. The proposal uses the TAP project as one example. Finally, and significantly, the proposal states that each budget item has a source of funding that can continue the efforts once they are off the ground.</i></p> <p><i>However, this proposal does not include many of the components of a high quality plan. While the points above are strengths, the plan does not make clear the people responsible, the timeline, the goals and activities or deliverables related to their plan for sustainability for after the term of the grant.</i></p>		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	9

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

For this competitive preference priority, the proposal identifies early childhood learning opportunities and school readiness as the target area for improvement. This description represents a systematic and comprehensive approach to prepare children for success in early elementary school. The project seeks to improve early childhood learning opportunities in several ways. For example, the project description describes a partnership with Capital City Health who provide health support to primary school students. This is to ensure that the medical, psychological and dental needs of the district's most vulnerable population are met.

Also, an instructional coach will work with pre-K classes to support instruction. This would be augmented by utilizing interns from high school and college. Moreover, the program would seek to build parents' capacity to support student learning through instruction on productive ways to interact with their children. Plus, to additionally support the early childhood educators in the district, the program will reach out to daycare providers to make the teachers aware of the common core state standards and what specific academic skills students will need in order to be successful in the early elementary grades. Finally, the district will share access to their blackboard online tool with early childhood teachers so that they have access to information that the instructional coaches share and use.

It is worth mentioning that in order to make sure that all pre-K students are being reached, the proposal states that the district would work with the Chamber of Commerce to seek out families in need and provide resources to those families.

While this is a significant plan for this competitive preference priority, the partnership does not make clear how their indicators will measure success. The proposal does refer to the developing skills checklist as a means of measuring success of the instructional coaches. However, it is not clear how this measure may be actually mediated by other significant factors like the classroom teacher (instead of the coach) and it is also not entirely clear how this checklist aligns with the priority of oral language development for the students.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The district's project proposal emphasizes a focus on personalized learning as evidenced by the project's focus on professional development, technology and measurement-based activities that focus on student learning. This proposal demonstrates a significant amount of investment that this district has put forth in time, effort and money in order to improve the outcomes of their students. This work will surely contribute to continued success in the district. While the proposal seeks to draw from several promising practices in teaching and reform, it is not clear the extent to which this proposal will provide innovative practices and structures for others to learn from.

Total	210	186
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0481LA-4 for Ascension Parish School System

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Ascension Parish School System has comprehensively addressed their past work and success in relation to the four educational assurances and has clearly presented their vision for building upon these assurances. They created and field tested comprehensive exams with the anticipation of the adoption of the CCSS. Because of the successful results of these exams in their lowest performing elementary school, their new initiative reform is to urgently pace new assessment adoption prior to the state level implementation timeline. This evidence stated in their vision articulates their goal of accelerating student achievement.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Although the schools they selected were the lowest performing schools and other Title I schools that were high poverty, there was not a description as to how they arrived at this decision to serve only these schools. The number of participating students is not consistent between the columns on the chart and the Budget Requirement Assurance form. Donaldson Primary was listed in the set of schools to be served, but not in the chart of data.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	4
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The plan was lacking timelines, specific goals and activities. Artifact V: Ascension Parish District Turnaround Office--Action Plan for Sharing Promising Practices Chart only included who would be responsible. The description did not include how it would improve student learning outcomes for all students who will be served by Ascension Parish.</p>		
(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	5
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>These goals are ambitious but not likely achievable given the breadth and depth of the vision articulated in section A 1. Noteworthy is the closing of the achievement gap and the graduation rate gap among subgroups, yet the ambitious graduation rates do not seem to be realistic given the large growth that some schools will need to achieve. It does not seem realistic that participating schools and non-participating schools would achieve growth at the same rates.</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	12
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>A record of success in the past four years is evidenced by the fact that all schools met AYP last year. Graduation rate has increased from 72.1 to 81%. School Performance Scores have seen positive trends in 80% of the district's schools. The Turnaround Zone Office was created in the district to help support their lowest performing schools. While progress has been made to make student data more accessible and usable for staff, there is a lack of evidence that individual student performance data has been made increasingly available and transparent to students and parents. For this particular criteria, there is moderate evidence of a record of success.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	4
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>There is a demonstrated effort of transparency on a district level to report information to the public. Even though there is not a system in place 100% yet, Ascension Parish is building a school specific reporting system in anticipation of new Louisiana</p>		

regulations and also for reporting purposes of this grant and they report that it is 80% complete in implementation.

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

10

10

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Because of innovative reform initiatives at the state level from a compliance system to a customer service based system, Ascension Parish has been able to design successful programs and solicit personalized support from the state offices. All of their successful practices have enhanced a personalized learning environment for students.

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

10

10

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

There was clear and strong evidence regarding input and feedback from the AdvanceEd appraisal that included students and parents. Minutes from principal and teacher meetings were provided that show details that were incorporated into the grant. Letter of support from state and city were given along with their suggestions. Evidence is given from all groups that their input was indeed integrated into this grant.

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

5

3

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

Even though there is a well defined logic model for the reform proposal based on the needs and gaps, this criterion was asking for a plan for analyzing the current status of implementing a personalized learning environment and that analysis was insufficient. The gaps were referred to in section E3 but again the process for determining these was not evident.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	16
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Ascension Parish has outlined an appropriate plan that demonstrates learning of the students in a personalized environment that is feasible and actionable. Even though there is reasonable and appropriate selection of goals and activities to meet this criterion, the components of a high quality plan required to be part of the evidence of this criterion are inconsistent throughout the subsections.</p> <p>In all of the subsections, there are strong and specific goals and activities supported by convincing rationale which brings credibility to their plan. The inadequacy of the evidence presented is the lack of timelines and persons responsible. All of the components of the high quality plan are inconsistent throughout.</p> <p>An example of missing components is C (1) (a) where Dufour's Four Guiding Questions and Measured Progress's Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning are the deliverables for helping students understand what they are learning as a key to their success in accomplishing their goals. In this subsection, there is no timeline or persons responsible for implementing the activities.</p> <p>However, as an opposing piece of evidence, in C (1)(a)(v), there seems to be more extensive evidence of all the components of a high quality plan .</p> <p>In summary, Ascension's plan for personalizing learning for students is justified, feasible, and reasonable regarding goals, activities, and credibility of research-based strategies. They did not remain consistent throughout the section in clearly delineating a high quality plan with all the components as required and defined in the notice for application.</p>		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	20
<p>(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Whereas, Ascension Parish had strong and sound goals and activities for learning in C (1), but lacked all the components of a high quality plan, this was not the case for this criterion, C (2).</p> <p>The criterion for Teaching and Leading appears to be Ascension's unique and exhaustive piece for carrying out their</p>		

application by helping build highly effective teachers and leaders. The same guiding Four Questions appear to also frame this section's chosen goals and activities. Their plan for supporting their teachers and leaders is coherent and comprehensive relative to the programs that have been named previously in the application, namely Fast ForWard, digital content, Carnegie Units, and Wagoner's survival skills.

Most convincing perhaps is the focused detail on implementation stages or phases to each of the mentioned activities/strategies in their proposal. There has been great care in making sure that all of the programs are integrated and support each other.

What appeared so convincingly in contrast to criterion C (1) is that in every subsection there was evidence of all of the components of a high quality plan which suggests that this is the focal point of their application in supporting their teachers and leaders to deliver with fidelity all of the other components of this application. They are placing all of their accountability for the success of their district upon superior professional learning and fidelity of the implementation, which is where it should be.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	15
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Ascension Parish has given clearly documented evidence that their LEA practices, policies, and rules are extending and supporting all schools participating in this grant by organizing a new District Turnaround Office and establishing a Turnaround Zone within the district.</p> <p>Each school in the Zone has been assigned an Internal Support Partner, too. School board members and central office review and discuss goals and objectives that can be executed to support each site. The district has established leadership teams throughout the district at each school. In Ascension, school teams have complete autonomy over schedules and calendars. Hiring practices also vary from school to school, but ultimately the principal and team have the authority to recommend for hire. Each school has discretion regarding funds to meet the needs of the school. District authority is available to bypass decision-making and approval protocols of the district in order to expedite any and all reform efforts of the Turnaround Zone schools. Seat time waivers have personalized learning by allowing students to progress through a course at a quicker pace instead of requiring students to spend an allotted amount of time in a course to demonstrate proficiency. Carnegie units are capable of being earned by middle school students. A <i>Second Chance</i> program gives students who do not master standards additional opportunities to master the content. Virtual learning is available to students who do not master standards in high school. As stated earlier in the grant, Fast ForWord and the Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning both lead to instructional practices based on the needs of students rather than the teacher.</p> <p>Given all of the above evidences, there is clear demonstration that Ascension Parish has met all of the requirements for this criterion.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	10
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Currently parent education is offered on internet safety, Blackboard Learning, and literacy sessions. All parents and educators have access to a district help desk for immediate technical support.</p> <p>This grant would put personal devices either iPads or a personal computer into the hands of participating students regardless of situation or income. This would allow parents and students to access Blackboard for communication and accessing digital information.</p> <p>Existing structures to provide info to students and parents will be enhanced by informational dashboards and student alerts to teachers and administrators. Existing student and parent logins for assessment, grade, attendance, and discipline information will also be available. Parents will be able to export the data associated with their students for import into other systems and tools.</p>		

The district's current Data Warehouse contains or is connected live to all systems within the district. Many other external data sources can also be imported. The district portal is also designed to accommodate the accessibility needs of all stakeholders.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	15
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Ascension Parish has a sound process that provides continuous improvement opportunities through a feedback loop of monitoring and measuring growth through multiple performance measures. The sharing is done through Principals' Professional learning Communities and is facilitated by district leadership. This information is then replicated within each school through the school's leadership team. Student performance begins by setting district and school goals, the short term wins to meet the school goals, and finally setting individual student goals. All of these goals are shared publically, internally, and externally.</p> <p>The second area that is monitored and measured is teacher and leader performance. Individual growth plans are designed for each individual teacher and leader. The CODE data system is used to track growth.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	5
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Stakeholder sharing occurs in regard to the quality of the investments funded by Race to the Top by using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · R2T Data Fairs · Sharing best Practices Structures · Open Forum committee and Board Meetings <p>R2T Report for Stakeholders</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	5
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Ascension's performance measures are definitely ambitious, achievable, most also very appropriate, justified, and equitable for all students. There is clear and specific evidence stated about each measure's rationale, how it will provide information to their plan and theory of action and how the district will review and improve the measure over time if it is insufficient to gauge implementation.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	4
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Persons responsible for each section or goal area of the grant are responsible for designing a strategic plan for program evaluation aligned to the standards established JCSEE. Evidence provided in the grant demonstrated appropriate strategies for evaluation of each part as they relate to the personalization of learning and performance measure improvement for increased student achievement. However, the plan lacks specificity on how to more productively use time, staff, money, or other resources in order to improve their results.</p>		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	10
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The budget for this project is reasonable and demonstrates that Ascension Parish is also investing their funds and re-directing funds from other revenue sources in order to meet the demands of the needs for the project's initiatives.</p> <p>Building the capacity of the teacher and principal leadership as well as developing a culture of professional learning communities will ensure the long-term sustainability of the personalized learning environments especially when student achievement is increased.</p>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	10
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Ascension has a history of public support through bond proposals and tax renewals with voters overwhelmingly supporting district initiatives. It is reasonable to believe that with gains and overall program accomplishments made during the four years of this grant, that there will continue to be support. They have contracted with an online grants management software system to secure funding for continued improvement initiatives. Past records of success in other initiatives have proven successful in winning competitions for more money. Title dollars and general fund dollars are already written substantially into this grant and will continue to be used in the future. As additional support in human capacity is needed to implement the grant, it is expected that as the grant ends and success is achieved, that some positions may be phased out.</p>		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	7
<p>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The partnership between Ascension and Head Start, Capital City Health, and local university students, as well as the Gonzales Chamber of Commerce describes details of various ways that health, speech and language, parent interventions, and supplies can be used to support high need students and family supports. Evidence includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donations of books, refrigerator magnets with language strategies, DVDs showing models of oral language strategies for young children for parents; • University students in speech and language earning experience hours volunteering in prek classes; • Providing medical, dental, and psychological support at Donaldsonville Primary, the most vulnerable population; • Vertical alignment of skill development from Head Start into kindergarten by sharing best practices between staff in professional development opportunities. <p>Educational outcomes, family outcomes, and community outcomes were clearly outlined. A set of measurable indicators was identified by using the Developmental Skills Checklist. Special attention was given to minorities and special education populations, and low income.</p> <p>There was also evidence of scaling the model to all pre K teachers from non-target schools as they were invited to participate in all professional development experiences.</p> <p>Evidence is lacking regarding how the partnership and LEA would identify and inventory the needs and assets of the school and community that are aligned with the family, educational, and community supports.</p>		

There is also insufficient evidence regarding a decision-making process and infrastructure to select, implement, and evaluate supports that address the individual needs of participating students and support improved results.

No evidence cited regarding how to routinely assess the applicant's progress in implementing its plan to maximize impact and resolve challenges and problems.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

Ascension Parish has met the absolute priority of personalized learning environments by describing a coherent and comprehensive plan. Their plan addresses all four core assurance areas by enhancing a successful record of past achievement. Each part of their plan was aligned and demonstrated thoughtfulness about professional development, evaluation, and monitoring results. Although there were many strengths to Ascension's plan, the plan seemed to be lacking in rigor as to true reform, but rather approached district reform from a perspective of what "good" practice should be in any district in the United States. Their plan set forth a formula for solid foundational pieces that any school or district should have in place and created an accountability system for ensuring fidelity of practice and instruction. Even though Ascension had an admirable plan for professional development and for coaching educators, there was less evidence with specificity in regard to high quality plans for how they would expand student access to the most effective educators on the ground in each classroom for every child. It was also noted in section A (4) that there was an expectation for increasing graduation rates at an unrealistic rate between participating schools and non-participating schools.

Total	210	182
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