



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0457TN-1 for McMinn County Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	9
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>McMinn County Schools has presented a comprehensive and cohesive vision of how it intends to transition from a traditional to personalized learning environment. The district's proposal builds on a strong foundation of reform stimulated by the State's Race to the Top program. The district has made significant progress in implementing college- and career-ready standards including the American Diploma standards. The implementation of the College and Career Ready Standards (CCRS) has moved from a high-level policy framework to instructional engagement of educators and students in the classroom. The district has strengthened the rigor of its Career and Technical Education (CTE) program and has expanded career paths for students. The district, which has used value-added data to to inform instruction for two decades, is in its second year of evaluating educators with more robust systems that include frequent observations of practice and student growth measures by core domain areas. McMinn has intervened in low-performing schools through instructional interventions and innovations in human capital management including replacing principals in low performing schools and providing alternative compensation to teachers who will work in high-need schools or take on additional roles or responsibilities.</p> <p>The district worked collaboratively with a range of stakeholders to develop its PLE vision. Rather than the RTT-D grant driving the district's vision, the planning committee developed its long-term vision then identified specific areas the RTT-D grant could fund to help build district capacity. The district has thoughtfully leveraged it current reform efforts and its Teacher Incentive Fund grant to support its long-term goal of personalized and blended learning for all students in the district. The district appears to be keenly aware that with the advent of technology, students learn differently than they did in the past and the traditional models of learning and instruction no longer meet their needs. The committee developed expectations for both students and teachers to create successful learning environments. The district is embracing a student-centered model with a strong and engaging partnership between students and adults. While the district would use grant funds to support a major investment in technology, it is clear that it views technology as one tool for personalized learning and encourages multiple pathways for student to achieve their learning goals.</p> <p>As a rural community, PLEs could be a powerful reform for McMinn. The use of technology could open doors for students who may live in relative isolation. Secondary students, for example, would have access to postsecondary programming though on-line courses that they would not have access to without virtual means.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>As district with a large population of low-income students, McMinn is proposing to serve all schools and students. The applicant provided a list of those schools and data demonstrating they are high-need based on free and reduced price lunch eligibility. The district would serve over 6,000 students. While all students would be participating in the reform, the district provides a reasonable phased in approach to implementation. The district is realistic that it will not be able to make such a dramatic change in the learning culture overnight, which is why it has decided to phase in both the technology and professional supports.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>As discussed in (A)(1) and (A)(2) the district has developed a clear and cohesive vision of transitioning to personalized and blended learning for all students in the district.</p>		

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district submitted data that demonstrates that it is committed to setting both ambitious and achievable goals. In terms of achievement, the district has set reasonable growth and status targets. While the district is committed to reducing achievement gaps between subgroups, it appears that it has calculated the gaps off the achievement rates of all students rather than the highest performing subgroup. The district did not provide data for all race/ethnicity groups. There is concern that the students in the reported subgroups will continue to have lower achievement expectations than White students. However, students in the subgroups will need to make greater gains more quickly to even reach the projected targets.</p> <p>The district has already made progress on realizing high graduation rates overall and by subgroup. By 2016-17 the district has set a reasonable target that 58.4% of students--overall and by subgroup--will enroll in college. This will greatly increase the college enrollment rate for Black and Hispanic students.</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	5
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant did not provide 4-year trend data for most of the required measures. Therefore, it cannot be determined if the district has a comprehensive record of past performance. The TVAAS data suggest that the district's trend has been positive student growth over the past three years, although in 2012 only 4th graders obtained an NCE gain above the growth standard by at least one standard error. Students actually regressed at grade 6 and the other grades were less than one standard error in either a positive or negative direction. • The district detailed its success in turning around a low performing school. The applicant documented its strategies for success which largely mirror reforms in the four assurance areas that govern this competition. The district replaced the principal and assigned instructional coaches to provide school-embedded professional development for teachers. The district reported that the school went from being identified as low performing to a Reward School after one year of intervention. • The district did not address how it makes performance data available to students, educators, or partners to inform and improve participation, instruction or services other than mentioning four week progress reports to parents. 		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	0
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant did not provide expenditure data or explicitly ensure that the specific data required by the notice were made available to the public. The district notes that salary information is physically available at the finance office. However, members of the public need to request the data through a formal process which is a significant barrier to transparency.</p> <p>While school board meetings are open to the public, there does not appear to be a routine release of school-level expenditure data even at aggregate levels.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	7
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district notes that one of its major barriers to implementing PLEs is to change from a seat-time to a competency-based credit system. The district is proactively working with the state to move in this direction. Correspondence from the state suggest that if awarded this grant, the district will be able to move forward with implementing a competency-based credit system.</p>		

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	10
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>As discussed above, the district involved a diverse group of stakeholders to inform not just the writing of the RTT-D, but to create its long-term vision of personalized learning.</p> <p>The president of the McMinn County Education Association signed off on the application and provided a letter of support indicating the MCEA representatives unanimously voted in support of the application.</p> <p>The district received letters of support from the mayor, businesses, community organizations, and parent organizations.</p>		
(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	1
<p>(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>While the district noted how it has begun to implement PLEs, it does not provide a coherent or high-quality plan to identify challenges or gaps in reaching its goal of implementing PLEs in all schools. For example, while the district indicates that technology will be critical for PLEs, the application skirts around the magnitude of the investment in technology it will need to fully transition to PLEs. The district does not address how it might need additional tools, professional development, and access to alternative instruction to support those students most at-risk of failing. In short, the applicant did not adequately address this criterion to allow for a determination of its implementation gaps and how it would address them.</p>		

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	13
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district has set clear expectations for how students will take more responsibility for their learning in an PLE. While the district's approach is student-centered, adults have active roles in engaging students in the learning process and facilitating content delivery. The district is making a significant investment in tablets, netbooks, and laptops so that students have access to mobile technologies that they can use beyond the school day. Although technology is an important learning tool, it is but one pathway for students to access and master content. Students will work in large and small groups as well as peer to peer. The district notes that it will take an active role in identifying internships and other community-based experiential opportunities to allow students to develop and complete project-based assignments. The district's plan includes ongoing feedback on student progress through electronic portfolios that will follow students from grade to grade. Technology facilitators, teachers, and counselors will provide support and training to student on how to develop their electronic portfolios. These instructors will work with students to develop a personalized learning plan.</p> <p>Within this vision, the applicant provided a broad overview of its approach to developing and implementing PLEs. However, the plan falls short on specifics particularly on how it will identify strategies for students who are most at risk of not being on track for college and career readiness such as students with disabilities or EL students. The applicant also did not address how it would expose students to diverse cultures.</p>		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	12
<p>(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant provided a broad overview of its vision of teaching in a PLE and how it will support teachers. Some of the strengths of the district's plan include the use of coaches to support teachers at the building level on implementing personalized instruction as well as delivering content, the use of electronic portfolios to continuously monitor student progress, and intensive training on how to use data to inform instruction. The district also will leverage existing professional learning communities to provide supports to teachers on PLEs including how to use various tools and resources to provide effective blended instruction. The district intends to secure the services of several respected vendors to offer professional development and give educators access to high-quality online content and pedagogy. While the district provides a high-level overview of its major efforts to support teachers, the plan lacks specificity. It does not, for example, provide a timeline for training across the various elements of its proposal. Its also not clear which entity (or entities) will be responsible for developing a comprehensive human capital initiative to support the PLEs.</p> <p>The district's plan does not provide adequate detail on the role of principals and other leaders in transforming schools from traditional to personalized learning environments. Clearly, this instructional cultural shift will require buy-in from and supports</p>		

to leaders.

Although the district indicates that it is increasing the number of highly effective educators, it does not adequately address how it will ensure that students in hard-to-staff schools, subjects, and specialty areas will have access to highly effective educators. For example, the district notes that it is rewarding teachers who excel through its TIF grant, but does not offer specifics on how it will place highly effective teachers and leaders in the highest need areas. The plan does not address student access to highly effective principals.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	8
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The district indicates that it will not restructure the central office to support PLEs other than employing a project director. It cannot be determined from the information contained in the application if the current structure will allow for formal and informal communication and collaboration across offices to facilitate the implementation of a comprehensive PLE plan. The district does not describe its human capital management system or the current structure of the central office and if any barriers exist because of its governance structure. The applicant notes that leadership teams are in place and will be granted autonomy to implement the RTT-D grant. However, the district does not describe any areas that may require additional autonomy nor could evidence be located to suggest that the Board of Education and the Director of Schools will waive autonomy. As mentioned earlier, the district is working closely with the state to allow credit for mastery of content rather than seat time. Correspondence between the state and district suggests that this may be feasible in the near future. The district is already moving forward in allowing students to master standards at multiple times and in multiple ways; it is likely a policy change is not warranted. The application does not discuss any changes in its policy framework required to provide learning resources and instructional practices that are adaptable and fully accessible to all students, including students with disabilities and English learners. 		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	2
(D)(2) Reviewer Comments: <p>The applicant provided limited information to adequately address this criterion. The application does not provide a clear picture on how stakeholders will access and receive support on using various tools and resources. For example, the district mentions that existing Family Resource Centers have technology that parents can access to review their children's lesson plans and progress. However the plan does not discuss how parents will be supported to use technology. It also is not clear if parents will have access to their children's electronic portfolios, and if so, if they will be given support on how to interpret them.</p> <p>The applicant does not address if it uses a technology system that allows parents and students to export their information in an open data format.</p> <p>The applicant indicates that it will use the RTT-D grant to expand its interoperable data system to include human resources, budget, and instructional improvement data but provides no detail on how it will accomplish this task which could be quite complex.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	6
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: <p>The district is planning on obtaining ongoing feedback from internal and external stakeholders through multiple channels including surveys to parents, educators and community members and through an assessment to determine professional development needs. The application does not describe the types of performance management measures or indicators that</p>		

might be important to monitoring overall project progress or what specific data project managers would need to ensure they are on track in meeting the grant requirements. For example, the district intends to use the grant to make a significant investment in technology. The district would want to develop a set of measures to monitor the acquisition, deployment, and expenditures on its technology initiative. The application does not indicate how the district will share information on the quality of its investment funded by RTT-D with the public.

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

5

2

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The application indicates that the district will develop a communications program targeted to stakeholders that uses a range of traditional communications channels (PTA meetings, newsletters, letters to parents, email updates, school/district webpages, etc.). It is not clear if the district will create a webpage dedicate to RTT-D efforts. While the district plans to communicate with stakeholders, it does not provide specificity of who will be responsible for creating, implementing, or monitoring the plan. Many of the provisions of the grant will likely change the way teachers will work, yet there is no discussion on how the district plans to communicate with the MCEA or other educator associations.

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

5

4

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The district provided the required performance measures and developed its own that align with the district's vision of PLEs at each grade level. The district has set ambitious and achievable targets for each set of indicators. [Note: it is not clear the educator effectiveness data are calculated correctly; FAQ E-18f indicates that the effective data should include the highly effective data. It appears the district has separated the two. If this is the case, there will be very little differentiation in educator performance.]

The district did not address how it will review and improve the measures over time if it is insufficient to gauge implementation progress.

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

5

1

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

While the district provides clear goals on what it wants to accomplish with PLEs, it does not provide a plan for evaluating critical elements of the project. The overall goal of the plan is that 75% percent of teachers move to a PLE as shown by classroom teaching strategies and student activities. The applicant does not offer a plan to evaluate major investments in such areas of professional development and technology. Although the district will monitor outcomes through the performance measures identified in (E)(3), it does not plan to evaluate either program implementation or to outcomes linked directly to the reform efforts supported with by the grant including increasing student achievement.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	6
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>McMinn has presented a clear and cohesive plan to implementing PLEs. As the district noted earlier in its application, it engaged in long-term planning to support its vision. It did not look to the RTT-D grant to drive its plan, but rather identified how the grant could fund key investments to help it reach its ultimate goals. The district has determined that it would use the RTT-D grant to fund an initial one-time investment in technology and related professional development and training. The district is requesting about \$20 million of which one half will be expended on technology. The district has requested decreasing amounts of support in each of the out years suggesting that it has plans for long-term sustainability. The district plans to spend slightly less than a quarter of its budget on staffing; staffing and compensation levels appear to be reasonable for a grant of this size.</p> <p>The district has identified only \$30,000 over the four years of the project period from other sources to support the project. This raises concern about the district's commitment to this effort and its ability to access community and other resources to support a PLE that could greatly benefit a comprehensive student-centered learning environment.</p>		

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	0
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: The district's response to this criterion could not be located in the application.		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	5
Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments: McMinn appears to have the support of community foundations (such as the McMinn County Education Foundation) and other social support organizations (such as Hiwassee Mental Health). While the applicant does not provide a cohesive argument on how these partnerships will support the district's vision in achieving its goals to meet Absolute Priority 1, the district understands the importance of community engagement to support children and youth throughout their education. McMinn serves a high-need population and its partners will work closely with the district to ensure that students have the at least basic physical/mental health and nutritional services to support its most needy students. These supports will help ensure that children and youth come to school ready to learn. In addition, the McMinn County Education Foundation's resources could easily be adapted to support PLEs even before children enter school. This said, the district does not provide a cohesive plan on how it would retool community services to address its needs as it transitions to PLEs. The applicant does not provide an assessment of community or student needs. The district appears to be relying on existing community supports rather than rethinking how those resources could be refined to better connect with individual students and families. As written, there appears to be little connection between social services and the schools to fully integrate supports to children and youth. It is not clear if teachers have channels to communicate with social and community services and visa versa. The applicant more or less repeated its performance measures for the larger RTT-D application. It did not provide specific measure for the competitive priority or address how social and health supports would lead to improved achievement.		

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Not Met
Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments: McMinn County Schools began its application with a bold, comprehensive, and cohesive vision of how it intends to transition from traditional to a personalized learning environment. The district's proposal builds on a strong foundation of reform and current efforts to increase rigor across the curriculum. The district embraces a student-centered model with a strong and engaging partnership between students and adults. While the district would use grant funds to support a major investment in technology, it is clear that it views technology as one tool for personalized learning and encourages multiple pathways for student to achieve their learning goals. The district worked collaboratively with a range of stakeholders to develop its vision of PLEs. Rather than the RTT-D grant driving the district's vision, the planning committee developed its long-term vision then identified specific areas the RTT-D grant could fund to help build district capacity. The district has thoughtfully leveraged its current reform efforts and its Teacher Incentive Fund grant to support its long-term goal of personalized and blended learning for all students in the district. While the district clearly has a vision for and commitment to PLEs, the remainder of its RTT-D application falls short on the quality of its implementation plan. Throughout the application, the district did not clearly address specific roles and responsibilities for implementing key provisions or how it would manage the grant in terms of monitoring project budgets, milestones, and outcomes. McMinn does not offer strategies to help parents and other community members to help student reach their learning goals. The district does not compellingly address how educators will assess the needs of and provide strategies to help high-need students such as those with disabilities or who are EL achieve and become college- and career-ready		

Total	210	116
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0457TN-2 for McMinn County Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	8
(A)(1) Reviewer Comments: The applicant provides detailed information of existing resources and initiatives that supports increasing student achievement. Currently, there is a plan in place where teachers review data during professional learning communities. The district also shows a strength with a history of state and district level access to data. There are clear goals for continuing this progress over the next five years. The district's plan include all students from preK through post secondary. College and career ready skills start as early as preK. The applicant will need to streamline their approach to include low socioeconomic and English language learning students.		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	10
(A)(2) Reviewer Comments: the applicant will include all all district prek through grade twelve schools and serve all students. The district has a high poverty rate and feels every student, teacher, and staff member can benefit from participating in the grant initiative.		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	2
(A)(3) Reviewer Comments: The applicant provides details that all schools will be involved from the early stages. However, the applicant does not provide specific details delineating a high quality plan, or how they plan to reach their outcome goals. A logic model will help detail this information.		
(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	2
(A)(4) Reviewer Comments: The applicant provides details regarding the need for grant funds and who will participate. Data is also provided to display state assessment scores and district expected projected test scores in reading and math over the duration of the grant. the applicant also provides details on background information for their students. However, the applicant does not provide clear goals or a plan for decreasing achievement gaps, increasing graduation rates and college enrollment, or increasing student achievement.		

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	4
(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:		

The applicant provides some narrative describing records of success. The applicant also includes specific initiatives to advance student learning and achievement. There is insufficient evidence detailing a clear record of success over the past four years. This could be detailed utilizing charts or graphs that include student data.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
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(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:
 The applicant has a current system in place for public access to personnel salaries. Salary information can be accessed through the district website. In addition the district provides detailed financial information at district board meetings and in the central school board office.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	2
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:
 The applicant discusses conversations that have taken place with the Department of Education pertaining to flexibility in the state mandated seat time requirement. The applicant has also discussed the possibility of offering online courses to elementary students for credit. However, the applicant does not demonstrate evidence of sufficient autonomy under state legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements to implement personalized learning environments.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	3
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:
 The applicant provides letters of support from key stakeholders. There is also a description describing a committee made up of teachers, principals, instructional coaches, and system level administration that assisted with the grant proposal. The applicant indicates that students and families were sought out for input, but does not provide specific details as to how this was accomplished. There is no evidence describing how the proposal was revised based on stakeholder engagement and feedback.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	2
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(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:
 The applicant provides thorough details describing their current status in implementing personalized learning environments. Instructional staff analyze data to make instructional decisions and the district has integrated professional learning committees. The district also has instructional coaches to provide job embedded professional development. The applicant does not provide details pertaining to identified needs and gaps that the plan will address.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	5
(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: The applicant describes staffing and instructional resources that will be utilized to transform the learning environment to student centered. This includes high-speed internet, computer programs, the hiring of guidance counselors, and the use of electronic portfolios that will follow students throughout their schooling. The applicant does not provide a detailed plan as to how they will support the implementation of high-quality strategies for high-need students, English language learners, and poverty students. The application lacks detail of the districts plan to ensure these students are college and career ready upon graduation. The applicant indicates students will be proficient in the technologies that are provided, however the applicant does not provide a plan detailing how this will be accomplished. There is no evidence detailing how students will master critical academic content and skills such as teamwork, critical thinking skills, creativity, or problem solving.		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	15

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Professional learning communities are established in elementary and secondary schools. Currently teachers are completing portfolios on career and technical education students. The district will implement electronic portfolios for prek-12 students. Instructional coaches are in place to provide job embedded professional development. The applicant does not provide information detailing a plan for improving teacher and principal effectiveness through an evaluation system. The applicant does not detail their plan to adapt content and instruction, providing opportunities for students to engage in common and individual tasks, in response to their academic needs, academic interests, and optimal learning approaches.

The district describes their current data system and how teachers can receive professional development through training videos available to them. The applicant details the type of professional development the district will provide instructional staff. This includes technology integration, the district data system, and how to create personalized learning environments. However, the applicant does not provide details on how they plan to evaluate tools and processes to make adjustments and improvements in meeting student needs.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	4
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district will hire a project director to manage the grant, but does not specify any other types of central office reorganization. The applicant indicates the the district leadership will allow the leadership teams flexibility for full grant implementation, but does not describe these in detail. The applicant can provide detail of the districts plan to allow for flexibility in scheduling, seat time, staffing, budget, personnel decisions, and calendars.</p> <p>The district will implement credit based mastery in place of the state mandated seat time requirement. This will also entail an integration of long distance learning opportunities. These distant learning opportunities will include English Language Learners.</p> <p>The applicant's schools have family resource centers which will assist students and parents with grant implementation. However, the applicant does not detail a plan for these efforts.</p> <p>The districts overall plan for LEA practices, policies, and rules is weak and lacks specific details pertaining to implementation policies and procedures.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	1
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant will utilize existing family resource centers to assist students and parents in grant implementation. However, the applicant does not include a plan on how school infrastructure will support personalized learning. The applicant provides details as to what practices are in place to support students, but does not provide a high-quality plan as to how these requirements will be met.</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 will administer surveys to students, parents, teachers, principals, and community members soliciting feedback regarding grant implementation and its effect on increasing student achievement. An established grant team will analyze survey results and make recommendations for program improvement. The applicant does not provide detail at to which constituents will make up the grant team. This team can include stakeholders such as parents, teachers, community members, students, leadership, and government officials.</p> <p>The applicant states their intention to conduct professional development needs assessment, but there is no plan as to who will</p>		

be assessed and how the professional development will be provided. The applicant does indicate the possibility of seeking external professional development providers. The applicant can build capacity by training curriculum coaches, master teachers, and district leadership to provide essential professional development. This will promote sustainability post grant.

The applicant does not provide details as to how they will publicly share information on the quality of its investments funded by Race to the Top. District strategy for implementing a rigorous improvement process after the term of the grant is unclear.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	5
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(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:
The applicant will provide ongoing communication and engagement through multiple modalities. This plan is clear and includes all stakeholders.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	4
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(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:
The applicant will utilize their state assessment and graduation rates as performance measures. The applicant provided details on their state required performance measures and their rationale. The applicant will need to detail specific measures to ensure students are mastering grade level content and monitoring progress.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	0
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(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:
The applicant details grant initiatives and outcome goals, but does not provide a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of grant funded activities. Evaluating the effectiveness of grant funded activities is essential to making programmatic changes that will increase student achievement.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	7

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:
The applicant provides a clear and detailed budget that describes reasonable activities which will promote personalized learning environments. However, the budget lacks details describing grant fund use for building capacity for sustainability once the grant funds subside.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	3
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:
The applicant's budget details how the Race to the Top funds will be allocated to support the integration of personalized learning environments throughout the district. However, it is unclear how the applicant will sustain these initiatives once the grant funding is over. The plan also lacks detail as to how they will receive support from state and local government leaders after the term of the grant. A budget detailing this information is not provided.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

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

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:
The applicant has sustainable partnerships with stakeholders and community members. These partnerships include medical centers that assist with student health concerns. The applicant is number one in the state at a 92% effect rate in providing resources starting from birth. The applicant under state and district requirements routinely monitors assessment data to make

instructional decisions. It is unclear as to how data is utilized to make program improvement to current initiatives.

It is unclear how the applicant will utilize data to target individual student needs to increase student achievement including English language learners and high need students.

The applicant provides limited details as to how partnerships with essential stakeholders will be evaluated to make program enhancements. There is also limited detail as to how the applicant will engage parent feedback to aid in decision making about solutions which will improve initiative results.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant details achievable initiatives that will have a positive effect on the integration of personalized learning environments. The applicant describes their plan for building on current initiatives and infrastructure to support student learning, professional development, and graduation rates. There is a high emphasis on the integration and updating up technology for sustainability.

Total	210	92
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0457TN-3 for McMinn County Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

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

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The application cites values closely aligned with problem-based, student-centered learning as well as providing professional development to teachers to facilitate in classrooms that are student-centered. Awarding credit for proficiency rather than seat time is included in the description. While aligned values are expressed, little coherent structure is provided regarding how desired reforms could be achieved.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	5
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(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant indicates that all schools in the district will participate, and that all schools in the district are eligible as defined by the grant prospectus with a percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch at 68.7%.

Schools that would participate are listed including multiple elementary schools and two high schools.

Numbers of participating students are estimated as approximately 6000.

Method of determining numbers of high need students does not appear to be based on hard numbers, but rather an arbitrary estimate. A rationale is provided, but cites the estimate as "pretty accurate".

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

The applicant indicates that all schools in the district would be participating; consequently it appears that this would represent an LEA-wide reform. The applicant provides a schedule for implementing grant strategies at various grade levels over the first three years of the grant period, at which point all grade levels would be fully involved. Teacher and staff development would begin in the first year, and all teachers would be encouraged to attain certification in a tier system that the district has identified and used in the past.

The logic model for how the plan would improve student outcomes is unclear. The applicant cites beliefs, but additional detail regarding a theoretical base for those beliefs is not clearly described.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	5
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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Baseline data is provided by the applicant regarding student performance on summative assessments, such as state tests and end-of-course tests. Goals for improvement on each of these measures are provided for the current academic year, through the grant period and for the first year following the grant. Baseline data and goals are provided by student group, including economically disadvantaged, Limited English Proficient, and students with disabilities.

Tabular data groups together both baseline data and goals for Black, Hispanic and Native American students. Such a wide grouping may not support the ability to disaggregate these data for appropriate analysis in the future.

Achievement gap data provides baseline data and goals in similar fashion with multiple student groups considered together. Such a comprehensive grouping may interfere with the ability to disaggregate these data for within-groups analysis and between-groups analysis in the future.

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	7

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

- Applicant reports gains in student achievement that exceed expectations over the past four years. These gains are quantified by scores on the Tennessee Value-Added Comprehensive Assessment Program.
- Applicant reports the turnaround of a low performing school using the strategy of replacing the principal and adding an academic coach. This particular school was cited as a Reward School by the Tennessee Department of Education.
- A program entitled Engrade has been used to post assignments and grades as well as four week progress reports to make such information readily available to families.
- Applicant reports use of multiple strategies to improve family involvement.
- Applicant reports improvement in equity of teaching and learning, with 96% of teachers and 100% of principals listed as effective or highly effective.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5	5	3
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points)		
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Applicant cites information available on their website, including both professional salary schedules and nonprofessional salary schedules. However, salaries for specific individuals and all other school expenditures are only available through their finance office.</p> <p>The process for acquiring access to these records is not specified, but is cited as being "available on request". Greater clarity regarding how stakeholders can gain access to these records would be helpful in guiding inquiries, as well as in supporting a sense of transparency.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	3
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(My responses were complete sentences in their original form.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant notes that some changes would need to be made in their state in order to implement competency-based credit where this is currently not the approved protocol. • No assurance is provided by the applicant that these changes would, in fact, be made by their state board of Education. • Applicant notes that in a preliminary contact with the state department of Education, they have "some confirmation" that they could pursue this if awarded the grant. • No clear definition is provided by the applicant regarding what "pursue" would mean in this context. It is unclear if such pursuit would result in the applicant's ability to award competency-based credit, or if it would simply mean that they would continue to ask for this permission from the state. 		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	5
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Applicant indicates that families, teachers, administrators, and students worked as a committee in creating the grant proposal with input from all stated stakeholders. The percentage of teachers supporting the proposal, however, is not cited.</p> <p>Local business and civic leaders have been informed and their input sought.</p> <p>Letters of support are included in the appendix from multiple constituencies in the educational and community arenas, including the local mayor and president of the county educational association.</p>		

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	2
(B)(5) Reviewer Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant notes several steps which have been taken to improve student outcomes, including curriculum mapping with evidence regarding what is happening and/or what is being planned to happen. • Some programs are cited to assist with this identifying gaps and shortfalls, including development of school data teams using the Tennessee School Improvement Planning Process. • The applicant asserts that the district has had a technology infusion which they see as a way of making students more active learners who are not just passive receptors of information. • The applicant cites use of SuccessMaker software for students at risk of academic failure. • The applicant asserts that district teachers are moving from a role as dispensers of information toward being facilitators in their classrooms. • While the applicant expresses these aspirations, limited information is provided regarding actual data gleaned and analysis methodologies used in assessing current status. 		

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	8
(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant indicates a range of changes desired for the learning environment, primarily focused on problem based learning and the ability of students to receive instruction based on ability rather than grade of age. • Applicant cites the importance of technology as well as interface with local business for internships. • Learning is intended to be personal, self-directed, and documented in portfolios. • Limited detail is provided regarding college and career-ready standards, diverse cultures, and critical academic content. • Applicant cites multiple school personnel as being involved with student electronic portfolios to document project based learning. • Limited information regarding parental roles is provided. • Multiple strategies, including digital learning content are cited with limited reference to college and career ready standards. • Student portfolios will be maintained; data approaches are not clearly defined. • Limited information regarding appropriate accommodations is offered. • Technology coaches and a Microsoft Academy will be offered to support tech-learning both for students and faculty. 		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	8
(C)(2) Reviewer Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant cites a variety of methodologies to improve instruction, including state website with training videos, in person workshops on developing personalized learning environments, and training in using data available regarding student achievement. • Learning communities have been established at each school. • Electronic portfolios will contain measurements of progress toward being college and career-ready. • These measurements are not identified, but cited as common formative assessments. • Instructional coaches will provide feedback for teacher evaluation. • Teachers will receive training in using data; limited information about identifying optimal learning approaches for individuals is provided. • Hardware needs are mentioned in general terms. 		

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	4
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant cites hiring a project manager to oversee implementation of the grant. • Applicant asserts that leadership teams are in place at all schools with sufficient autonomy to implement the grant. • The district intent is to grant credit based on mastery rather than seat time. • Earlier discourse regarding this issue was inconclusive with respect to state approval of the practice. • Demonstration of mastery at multiple times and in multiple comparable ways is not clearly described. • An alternative way of accommodating English learners is cited. 		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	7
(D)(2) Reviewer Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant cites current Family Resource Centers are in place at all schools. • Family engagement coordinators currently reside at all sites. • Stakeholders have access to technology tools and content, including lesson plans and data on growth of students. • Little information is provided regarding export of information to open data formats; this is important so that families and other stakeholders will have the ability to access and display essential information in systems they typically use for data examination. • Applicant affirms current use of an interoperable system which supports sharing data from one database to others for analysis. 		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	4
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Original comments were all in complete sentences.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant cites surveys as a principal method of collecting data. • In addition to surveys, greater clarity regarding the need for adjustments could be provided using actual quantitative data reflecting student performance and actual classroom practice. • The applicant notes that a grant team will develop a high quality plan to phase in steps for improvement, however, the proposal would be strengthened if such a high quality plan were already in place and available to the reviewers. • Limited information is provided regarding monitoring or sharing information. 		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	2
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant indicates that a plan will be developed to establish an ongoing and comprehensive communication system. • Multiple methods of communication, including meetings, newsletters, and press releases are suggested. 		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	4
(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:		

- Multiple sources to measure performance are cited, including a value-added system that is currently in place and that provides statistical analysis of achievement data that reveals academic growth over time for students and groups of students. State achievement tests will also be used as well as end of grade tests.
- Definitions of “effective” and “highly effective” teachers and principals are offered.
- Little information is offered regarding how to improve these measures if they are insufficient gauges.

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

5

3

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Applicant cites teacher training through tiers on a timeline, as well as observations of classroom delivery as evaluation techniques.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	6

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

A budget summary in tabular form identifies funds that would support the project from the grant as well as other sources.

Other sources are listed as a single entity.

An accompanying narrative provides explanation of amounts delegated to certain categories, such as personnel, however, they are not broken down further into specific positions and their recompense.

Information is provided regarding one-time investments vs. ongoing costs.

Additional tabular information describes potential expenditures in categories over a four-year period.

Additional tabular information is provided regarding costs for teachers, devices, stipends, travel, infrastructure, and virtual outreach.

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

10

1

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

This section was not located. Sustainability information was addressed in the section marked: COMPETITIVE PREFERENCE PRIORITY

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	4

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

- Applicant cites partnerships already developed and in the process of development with multiple organizations, including “adopt-a-school” protocols with businesses, three IHEs and the county education foundations.
- Information is provided regarding assessment systems, but is not clearly related to these partnerships.
- A committee will be established to conduct and analyze a needs assessment.
- Memoranda of Understanding have been signed with agencies offering services such as mental health and family resources.
- The applicant intends to do a needs assessment that will be evaluated by a committee in order to make plans for improvement where needed.

In addition, interviews and surveys will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of services and programs.

- Little information regarding the decision making process to support improved results is included.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has met the priority in terms of addressing the core educational assurance areas.

However, additional detail regarding a high-quality plan to address some of the core educational assurances, such as decreasing achievement gaps, would be helpful. In this example, goals are cited by the applicant, but additional information linking planned strategies to those targeted goals would provide greater clarity. Similarly, while the applicant has a plan for engaging students in active, student-centered learning, more detail would be welcome regarding exactly how that learning will be personalized for each student in addition to those in cooperative groups. Some information is given regarding this issue in the description provided about a teacher "tiers" system that the district is supports. Teachers who reach tier three of this four-tier system will be developing assignments and curriculum in concert with individual students. However, more detail would be welcome about how this personalization will take place among teachers at lower tiers. In addition, while project- and problem- and place-based learning are cited as central strategies of reform, more explanation linking these strategies to actual personalization of the learning environment would be welcome.

Total	210	87
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