



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0306TX-1 for Mercedes Independent School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	4
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district's response to this criterion does not build on its work in the four core areas. For "adopting standards and assessments" it mentions using \$1.5 million for a scholarship fund. For "building data systems" it mentions several existing systems and plans for a longitudinal data tracking system without explaining how it will relate to the pre-existing systems. The referenced attachment does not help clarify the response. For "effective teachers and principals" the response is limited to mentioning sign-on bonuses and financial aid for pursuing advance degrees. For "turning around low-performing schools" several strategies are mentioned but they do not represent a clear and credible approach to improving student achievement through personalized instruction and support.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	6
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The response is complete in terms of describing the process used to select all schools in the district, listing the schools, and enumerating students and staff. Some confusion is generated by the district's plan to serve all students and schools through Project DISCOVER and then stating it will focus on students in transitional grades (5, 6, and 8), emphasizing STEM and Art in these transitional grades. Overall, there is not a lot of evidence provided that the implementation of the proposed approach will be of high quality.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	5
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district plans to serve all schools and students. The application describes a single district reform plan in one of its attachments. However, it is not possible to read this plan due to the small font size. Some points are awarded since the application overall describes the elements of a plan for reform in the district.</p>		
(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	6
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The response explains clearly that the State is changing assessments in 2012-13 and that a State "bridge study" was used to estimate the percentage of students to pass the new assessments in future years. The new assessments may results in significantly different percentages of students meeting standards or demonstrating proficiency. The response contains no explanation of how the bridge study allows the district to describe future performance goals.</p> <p>Some of the summative performance goals appear reasonable, calling for modest increases in percentage of students proficient or above for the "overall" group and most subgroups. The table describing decreasing achievement gaps is difficult to understand and is presented only for EOC assessments; there are no goals for grades 3-8. The table for graduation rates appears to contain reasonably ambitious and achievable goals. The table for college enrollment appears overly ambitious. While graduation rates are predicted to increase by 2 percent per year, the predicted enrollment rate increases by 4 percent per year.</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> <p>The district presents an incomplete response to this criterion. No evidence of raising student achievement over recent years is provided. Graduation rate improvements for only one of its high schools is provided (Academic Academy). The Early College Academy has had some success with its students earning college credits and associates degrees. Making student performance data available is addressed only through a description of strategies for parent and family engagement.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district's response to this criterion is very complete. Methods for making budgetary information available are described, in addition to the description of how it meets the minimal requirements of the criterion.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	5
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district argues that it has had sufficient autonomy to have been able to provide alternative approaches in its two special high schools. There is also a letter from the State documenting their opportunity for comment and their support for the application.</p>		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	8
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The response to this criterion indicated that district personnel participated in the decision to apply and in the development of the application. There is no mention specifically of teachers, principals, families, or students being involved. The district does not have a collective bargaining agreement. Attached letters of support provide strong evidence that at least 70 percent of teachers support the proposal. A large number of supporting community organizations are listed and there are attached letters of support. A supporting statement from the mayor is also attached.</p>		
(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	3
<p>(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The response describes in great detail various indicators of the needs that are planned to be addressed through this application. However, there is no evidence of a high quality plan to analyze the district's current status in implementing personalized learning environments and the logic behind the reform proposal.</p>		

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	7
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district's response to this criterion is of mixed quality..</p>		

To help students understand that what they are learning is key to their success in accomplishing their goals, the application proposes to hire a Parent/Community Specialist who will work with parents to attend training sessions that will increase parents' knowledge of the district's plan to improve teaching and learning. Nothing is said about how this will help student understanding.

On the other hand, strategies **to help students identify and pursue learning and development goals linked to college - and career-ready standards**, appear promising: the Encore College Cafe, the Personalized Graduation Plan, and the Student Data Workbook.

Project DISCOVER will provide additional staff and resources to a number of current programs designed to help **students be involved in deep learning experiences**. The district also proposes staff and strategies to allow a predominantly Hispanic student population to **have access and exposure to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives**.

The training for teachers and parents to help students **master critical academic content and develop skills and traits such as goal-setting, teamwork, perseverance, critical thinking, communication, creativity, and problem-solving** is not described in a very convincing fashion, only suggesting that it may have something to do with using mobile devices for instruction.

Some evidence is provided that Project DISCOVER will build on existing systems for analyzing state assessment data to inform instruction, e.g., DMAC and iNova, in order to provide a **personalized sequence of instructional content and skill development**. But little is said about how that will be done. The project will add to a **variety of high-quality instructional approaches and environments** by allocating funds for an "electronic notebook" for all ninth grade students and all core teachers in fifth through ninth grade.

The response indicates that the district is currently using a variety of **digital learning content** in STEM instruction and teachers' accessing materials on instructional websites, and the project will add training for parents in the use of digital devices so that they will be more comfortable helping their children.

Very little is said about how the project will support **ongoing and regular feedback** through data utilization and personalized learning recommendations based on current student's knowledge and skills.

Reference to **accommodations and high-quality strategies for high-need students** are limited to the district's currently employing IEPs, independent learning modules, differentiated instruction, progress monitoring, and afterschool support.

The only description of **mechanisms to train and support students in their use of tools and resources designed to help them track and manage their learning** is training to be provided by parents and teachers to students on the use of the Student Workbooks and the Collge- and Career-Ready On-Track Plan.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	9
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Very little evidence is provided that the district has a high quality **plan for all participating educators to engage in training and professional teams or communities** that will help them (a) support the effective implementation of personalized learning environments and strategies, (b) adapt content and instruction, (c) measure student progress, and (d) use feedback provided by the LEA's teacher and principal evaluation systems. The project will fund Instructional Technologists to provide training on instructional technology designed to personalize instruction and increase learning time. It will fund a Staff Development Coordinator to carry out training to improve teachers' and principals' development of instructional content that engages learners in common and individual tasks. There will be staff development on formative and summative assessment, and the use of Student Data Workbooks and other tracking methods. There is also a statement suggesting that teachers may not be getting valid feedback from the current teacher assessment instrument.

The district provides little evidence of a high quality plan to provide participating educators with **access to, and how to use, tools, data, and resources to accelerate student progress**, including actionable information, learning resources, and tools/processes to match students needs. The response describes a current paucity of information, tools, and processes, both for educators and students due to financial restraints. Presumably the proposed project would alleviate these restraints.

Very little is said about how the district plans for all participating school leaders and school leadership teams to **have training, policies, tools, data, and resources that enable them to structure an effective learning environment**, including information from teacher evaluation systems and training in continuous improvement systems and practices. Given the district's concern about the validity of the current teacher evaluation system, it is not surprising that nothing is said about how that information will be used to inform leadership. The only leadership training mentioned is on Critical Success Factors.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	11
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district has provided some evidence that it has a plan to support project implementation through comprehensive policies and infrastructure. The application describes the role and responsibility of the project director, but does not describe how that person will fit into the organizational structure of the central office. The response describes the ability of the principals and school leadership teams to make staffing decisions and create schedules and calendars. There is a statement of intent to move away from credit for seat time toward a competency-based model, but there are no details on how that would be accomplished. Similarly, there is a statement of commitment to support 24/7 anytime, anywhere learning and providing multiple times and ways for students to demonstrate mastery, with reference to several current strategies that demonstrate this commitment (after school and Saturday tutorials, computer-based instruction, and various assessment methods for measuring competency). The response demonstrates a very strong support for adapting instructional resources and practices to accomodate the needs of all students..</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	8
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The application provides strong evidence of current and proposed elements that ensure that students, parents, educators, and other stakeholders have access to content, tools, and resources which support the implementation of Project DISCOVER. There is also good evidence of technical supports being provided, e.g., use of the Texas STaR Chart to analyze the integration of technology into the teaching and learning process, and a commitment to processes and accountability measures that will evaluate how well Project DISCOVER activities integrate technology into curricula and instruction.</p> <p>The district has indicated a commitment to the exportability of data maintained in its technology systems to other electronic systems. It also shows evidence of a commitment to the use of interoperable data systems. Currently, its infrastructure integrates computer hardware, data, networks, information resources, and software. It plans to upgrade its local and wide area networks to receive distance learning capability to provide more than online courses to students.</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 provides insufficient evidence of a strategy for implementing a continuous improvement process. Other than mentioning surveys of teachers, parents, students, and staff, there is no discription of how it will monitor,</p>		

measure, and publicly share information on the quality of Project DISCOVER activities and investments. The description of the Critical Success Factors and professional development do not appear relevant to this criterion.

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

5

3

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The district shows some evidence of being committed to ongoing communication and engagement with stakeholders, but there are few details on how this would be accomplished--especially for external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders will meet regularly to discuss implementation and plans for improvement. Communications with parents and the community are perceived to be low, with no means to track communications between parents and the schools.

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

5

2

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The district provides incomplete information regarding the performance measures it will use to determine if its proposed plan will require adjustments or revisions over time. The following issues were identified:

- The data for numbers of participating students with effective and highly effective teachers and principals are the same. Does this mean that all effective teachers and principals were also highly effective?
- The age-appropriate academic growth measures for PreK-3 are the state assessments which exist only for grade 3.
- Results for subgroups are not always reported and the subgroups reported change across measures.
- The non-cognitive, health, or social-emotional measure is always the Fitnessgram, which is never explained.
- None of the other applicant-proposed measures are explained.

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

5

1

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The response to this criterion describes little of how the district will evaluate the different aspects of its proposed plan and describes in great detail the challenges to conducting an evaluation of such activities as professional development and the instructional use of technology. Information about evaluating community partnerships and teachers is also provided, but appears irrelevant to this criterion.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	7
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The proposal identifies all funds that will support the project. There are no sources of funds other than the Race to the Top - District grant. However, the district has provided a list of "leveraged funds" from a variety of sources. No explanation is provided of how these funds will be leveraged to maximize the Race to the Top - District grant.</p> <p>It is difficult to determine whether the funds requested appear to be reasonable and sufficient to support the applicant's proposal due to the lack of specificity and detail in the applicant's plan. Some of this detail can be inferred from the budget narrative, but that would not be the appropriate place to find it. This difficulty is reflected in the score assigned.</p> <p>The budget appears to identify the funds that will be used for one-time investment and those that will be used for ongoing operational costs,</p>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	3

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The application does not present a high-quality plan for sustaining the project's goal after the term of the grant. There is a narrative discussion that includes a statement that sustainability will be ensured by building the capacity of district personnel. Examples of how this capacity might be built are provided. The district also argues that it has the ability to implement school improvement initiatives. That argument and the rest of this section appears to be non-responsive to the requirements of this criterion.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	0

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The district did not provide a response to this criterion.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Not Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The district does not build on its work in the four core educational assurance areas, and there is not a lot of evidence provided that the implementation of the proposed approach will be of high quality. For example, some evidence is provided that Project DISCOVER will build on existing systems for analyzing state assessment data to inform instruction, e.g., DMAC and iNova, in order to provide a personalized sequence of instructional content and skill development. But little is said about how that will be done.

Very little evidence is provided that the district has a high quality plan for all participating educators to engage in training and professional teams or communities or to provide them with access to, and how to use, tools, data, and resources to accelerate student progress.

The district has provided some evidence that it has a plan to support project implementation through comprehensive policies and infrastructure. And its application provides evidence of current and proposed elements that ensure that students, parents, educators, and other stakeholders have access to content, tools, and resources which support the implementation of Project DISCOVER.

The district provides insufficient evidence of a strategy for implementing a continuous improvement process. The district shows some evidence of being committed to ongoing communication and engagement with stakeholders, but provides few details on how this would be accomplished--especially for external stakeholders.

Total	210	101
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

A. Vision (40 total points)

Application #0306TX-2 for Mercedes Independent School District

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	3
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The application does not provide a coherent and comprehensive reform vision.</p> <p>The applicant makes mention monies from the grant will be utilized for college scholarships for econometrically disadvantaged students.....students are well prepared for college. This statement is inconsistent with schools in need of reform.</p> <p>The applicant address building data systems to measure student growth by utilizing pre-existing systems to generate data reports but does not address how this will improve instruction.</p> <p>The applicant does not address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adopting standards and assessment other than the current TEKS assessment already in implementation by the state • how learning will be personalized for students. • recruiting, developing and rewarding effective principals <p>The applicant makes mention of DISCOVER however no further details are provided to determine the vision.</p> <p>The applicant does not provide evidence or support to demonstrate how students at low achieving school will be inspired to learn in a creative and stimulating environment.</p> <p>Absolute Priority 1 is not addressed.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	4
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant mentions STEAM in this section which is inconsistent or unaligned with the mention of STEM in the vision. These terms are used interchangeable however STEAM and STEM have varying differences. It is unclear which if the two was intended.</p> <p>The applicant provides total numbers for students however does not provide a number of educators. It is unclear if educators are included in the number of identified professionals.</p> <p>It is unclear if Management staff benefiting from this grant is educators as defined in the notice.</p> <p>Absolute Priority 1 is not addressed in this section.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	2
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant states the plan that is aligned to the state guidelines however the applicant fails to include details to support a high-quality plan for reform. It is unclear how the plan if aligned to the state is consistent with school reform.</p>		

The applicant mentions implementing a program with rigorous academic, personalized learning, academic and social support, relevant teaching and learning but fails to provide any support to evidence that this as a high-quality plan.

The application does not include any details on its single district reform plan and its replicable model; it is unclear how this will support district-wide change.

Absolute priority 1 is not addressed.

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

The applicant states that there are no established passing standards in Texas therefore it is unclear if the plan is ambitious yet achievable. The data provided by the applicant to evidence student targets is provided by a study. It is unclear if the study aligns or tracks data trends throughout the state, school district, schools and also student populations.

The applicant states that Texas is in a transitional year in 2012. The state has replaced an existing assessment with a new assessment. The applicant does not include how these assessments compare in terms of what is measured.

The applicant intends to use 2010 and 2011 assessment results for baseline data and provides no support of how this data from the previous assessment aligns with the new assessment in determining student performance.

The applicant states that appropriate assessment instruments will be used however the assessments are not detailed. It is unclear if the assessments will change over the course of the grant award and how student improvement is measured using varying assessment instruments.

The applicant proposes to use grant monies for scholarships however does not provide any evidence how this allocation of funds will result in improved student learning in terms of graduation rates.

The applicant does not provide any goals in the narrative for college enrollment. The applicant intends to allocate funds towards scholarships however does not include student performance criteria to support.

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	1

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant does not provide a clear record of success in the past four years. A description, raw student data or other evidence is not included.

The applicant refers to a portal that provides attendance, grades and discipline but does not mention if this portal provides assessed benchmarks, growth or student performance.

The applicant refers to a website of current and upcoming events as well as items of interest however does not mention if these items pertain to student performance data.

There is no evidence in the application of how student performance data is made available to students and parents.

The application does not provide a clear record of low-achieving schools over 4 years. Table 3 provides only information from 2010 to 2012 for one school however it is unclear if this school is low-achieving. In this section of the application the applicant refers to a replication model which has not been described in this application.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	3
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(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant does not provide a URL to demonstrate evidence although mentioned of budget posting on district website, AEIS public hearing, school board budget meeting and Educational Service Center One.

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

10

2

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides information on other grants awarded and the successes of each however it is unclear how this information address B(3).

The application makes mention of implementation of personalized learning environment but insufficient details of this is provided in the narrative; students design their learning is confusing and vague. It is unclear what design of learning will be applied. Technology to be utilized is mentioned in general terms and it is unclear how this technology will impact the student learning on a personalized level.

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

10

6

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The application does not provide a description of how students, families, teachers and principals were engaged in the development of the proposal.

The applicant does provide evidence of support from various stakeholders however there is no support evidence from parents and parent organizations.

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

5

1

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant does not demonstrate evidence of a high quality plan in implementing a personalized learning environment.

The applicant provides some current data but there is no evidence of how this data will be utilized to implement reform.

The application states that the plan will close the gaps and narrow the gaps without any supporting evidence.

The applicant mentions that the proposal will attain target rates set by the state in *Closing the Gaps* however in previous sections of this application the application stated that the state had no established passing standards.

Absolute Priority 1 is not addressed.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	4

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant does not provide a high-quality plan.

- No mention of rigorous coursework is made throughout this section of the application.
- It is not clear how the Encore College Café will provide rigor, meet goals and improve learning; the café as present appears to be an information booth
- The garden mentioned in the application does not provide any further support on its purpose or function in rigorous coursework and meeting learning goals

- The applicant refers to Blooms Taxonomy for higher order levels of thinking; an outdated, not current research practice

Parent/Community Specialist:

- It is unclear how the Parent/Community Specialist role and services provided impact the student learning
- There is no topic of focus of the activities, training, local and state conferences; as there is no focus, this provides no support to the role parents will have in the plan in the students learning

Student Data Workbooks:

- It is unclear if the workbooks are computerized or paper/pencil
- There is no specific evidence to detail what information is available in the workbook and how this will personalize student learning or provide rigorous coursework

Technology/Digital Learning:

- The applicant will provide electronic notebooks to 9th grade students; the other participating students in other grades are not addressed
- The applicant currently utilizes electronic textbooks however the applicant states that it is unrealistic to expect parents to purchase digital devices
- The applicant plans and plans for virtual museum trips however the applicant states that it is unrealistic to expect parents to purchase digital devices
- The applicant refers to new approaches that involve use of technology but does not offer examples of these uses

Ongoing and regular feedback:

- The applicant states formative and summative assessments are utilized but provides no evidence of these assessments, what the assessments measure, how the data impacts the learning and rigor of coursework

High-need students

- The applicant will develop an IEP for high-need students; this is a current practice required by law and therefore does not meet the vision or need for this competition
- The applicant will provide resources, differentiated instruction, immediate assessment and afterschool support; these appear to be services that should already be in place at schools

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

20

13

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant does not provide a high-quality plan for increasing the number of students who receive instruction from effective/highly effective teachers; the applicant will hire a consultant; lacking description of service provided by consultant.

The applicant refers to Blooms Taxonomy for higher order levels of thinking; an outdated practice.

The applicant lists several trainings, programs and activities but does not address how these will improve the instruction and increase capacity. The applicant provides a definition of each but no rationale.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	8
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant states that applicants for personnel will be interviewed and hired however the capacity of these applicants is not addressed.</p> <p>The applicant does not fully address all the functions of the consortium governance structure as defined in the notice. The following were not addressed: method and process for decision making, operation protocols, procedure for managing funds, procurement process.</p> <p>The applicant does not provide supporting evidence to demonstrate the leadership teams flexibility and autonomy.</p> <p>The applicant does not provide additional support to define flexible scheduling model.</p> <p>The applicant states that students will have opportunity to demonstrate mastery by the following: varying ways, multiple opportunities and multiple items; multiple items is unclear as details or example were not provided.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	6
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant does not address the levels of support provided to stakeholders.</p> <p>There is no supporting evidence to support how parents and students export information and use in other electronic learning systems.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	7
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant does not address how it will public share the information on the quality of its investments.</p> <p>The applicant does not provide any timeframe or guidelines that would support timely and regular feedback on progress.</p> <p>The applicant does not provide support to determine how the quality of the investments are measured.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	0
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant does not address the method of ongoing communication nor the frequency of communication.</p> <p>The applicant states that there is no current method to track parent communication; strategies to improve this are not addressed.</p> <p>External stakeholders other than parents are not mentioned.</p> <p>Students and teachers are not mentioned as internal stakeholders.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	1

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The narrative does not include descriptions of E(3), (a), (b), (c).

The methodology for calculating the performance measures is omitted on several charts included in the application.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	2
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(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides domains for evaluation however there is no evidence to support its plan in regards to the frequency of the evaluations and strategies for improvement.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	3

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant refers to section X1 for budget narrative; X1 is not included.

Thoughtful rationale is not included.

There are several items listed on the budget charts which have not previously been mentioned in the application on any other section.

These include:

- scanners
- printers
- 2000 Lumen Project
- speakers system
- Document cameras
- Challenge Days
- Teacher Leadership Academy
- Principal Leadership Academy

Totals for indirect costs are included on the charts however the indirect cost rate is not identified.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	1
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

High quality plan is scored low:

- No evidence of state and local governments leader support is provided.
- Insufficient details to determine long term impact of the grant after the term.
- Lacking explanation of BOY, MOY, EOY.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	0

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

Section X: Competitive Preference Priority not included in application

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Not Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant does not address Absolute Priority 1 throughout the application.

The application is inconsistent in providing evidence of personalized learning environments.

Total	210	68
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0306TX-3 for Mercedes Independent School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	7

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

While the vision is well articulated, it is vague in the following areas: (a) adopting standards and assessments to prepare students for college and career does not address how standards that are challenging for the students will become a focus of instruction. The grant states the district would commit funds to scholarships but mentions it would commit \$1.5 million in this section but \$1.4 million in other sections; (b) building a data system does not indicate how the multiple data systems currently in use would be streamlined or consolidated for a user-friendly approach and the district omits key stakeholders in making the data available - the parents and students; and, (c) turning around low performing schools is minimally addressed by stating the schools would get on-going support with only a limited description of areas of emphasis.

The district was successful in defining a comprehensive vision that addressed the four core areas and including the implementation of a longitudinal tracking system. The district also clearly defined its critical success factors including the use of data to drive instructional decision making, improving leadership, increasing learning time, and increasing family/community engagement as well as school climate and teacher quality.

A higher score would have provided more details of the on-going support, the need for simplicity in data-management instead of multiple systems that may or may not be user friendly or communicate effectively with each other to avoid the need for multiple data systems for teachers to manipulate in their quest for student data, and addressed the inconsistency with the scholarship amount.

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

The description of the selection process was focused on a wide review of various data sources beyond proficiency scores on the State assessment. The district was able to identify highly specific areas of concern by grade level and subject areas. The list of schools participating provided specific details and seems appropriate based on the information provided as the district attempts to correct areas of weakness across the K-12 curriculum. The district's proposal addresses all core content area teachers at multiple levels ranging from elementary to secondary school. The concept of infusing arts education into the traditional Science, Technology, and Mathematics based curriculum is a concept that will assist in reaching the most struggling students.

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

The reform plan is vague, even with the attachment detailing the plan. The details are lacking sufficient and specific evidence of how the plan will achieve the stated goals. A highly detailed plan would include the specific steps and milestones to indicate if the plan is on the right path to be successful. While the district has indicated what its partners would be offering, there are no details in the narrative to explain how this would translate into greater opportunities for student success. The plan is not specific enough for another district to implement as it was described. The operational definitions of what constitutes a rigorous curriculum, personalized learning, academic support, relevant teaching, and effective educators or leaders were not included in the narrative. Furthermore, the district provides irrelevant information about how the plan will be measured by increasing the number of effective educators and leaders but does not effectively address how the plan will improve student learning outcomes.

The strengths of the plan provided by the district were the stated alignment to state standards and the systemic approach to implementation. The concept that the plan can be scaled up district-wide or to be applied by other districts is also feasible if the operational details were provided.

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

Proficiency growth on summative assessments is achievable however it is inadequate to be considered ambitious. Decreasing the achievement gap is feasible but not supported with the limited growth as measured by the summative assessment. Increasing graduation rates also seems feasible yet may not be overly ambitious. College enrollment data is inadequate for an ambitious plan. Finally, postsecondary degree attainment is not addressed in the narrative and the data charts addressing (A)(4)(e) inappropriately details teacher and student attendance data and goals.

A more ambitious plan would demonstrate greater than 1 to 3% increases across all grade levels and subgroups. In the early elementary grades, the percentage increase in an ambitious plan would be expected to be 10% at minimum.

The only areas that were significantly ambitious were found in the 3rd Grade Reading for ESE students which described increases over 5% by Year 2 as well as on the Grade 9 EOC assessments in English, Algebra, Biology, and World Geography. While the secondary levels are ambitious, the goals may prove to be unrealistic which leads to an inconsistent analysis by the district. Based on the data provided, the district is not convincing that student learning or performance will improve significantly. The focus on elementary reading in grade three and on EOC assessments at grade

nine will have a slight effect simply from being an area of focus. Unfortunately, the plan does not provide convincing details that the effect will continue over the next four years.

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
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district provided a confusing narrative regarding the improvement of student learning and closing the achievement gap. The information related to student enrollment in a state college and the degrees that have been earned. The data chart provided in the narrative had an apparent discrepancy between the 59 students who have earned college credit and the 24 students who have completed an Associate's Degree. The information did not include any historical data to indicate how successful the district had been in utilizing the programs developed at the Early College Academy. Furthermore, the data to indicate success in closing the achievement gaps between subgroups as measured by standardized assessments was not provided.</p> <p>The district provided a succinct narrative about being successful in improving graduation rates at one of the identified low performing schools, however the historical data regarding graduation rates was missing from the included data table. There was data regarding the percentage of students who met proficiency standards in the core academic areas, but there was no indication of how this data related to the graduation rate. Furthermore, the data regarding proficiency standards failed to provide information about why there was a decline in ELA results from 2010 to 2011. The results from 2011 to 2012 was promising as it showed a significant increase. This section could have been strengthened with more information provided in the narrative about the changes in the ELA data over time.</p> <p>The district also provided some information about making the student performance data available to students, educators, and parents but did not include sufficient detail about how the district would encourage the use of the parent portal and other technology based tools. In a district with so many students and families living in poverty, it seems contradictory to provide parents with a web-based system. This section would have been improved with a detailed explanation of how the district will overcome this apparent limitation. There was a brief mention of the families being instructed on the use and care of school issued technology but it did not provide enough information for the reader to know if this technology was issued to every student for parent use in accessing the parent portal.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district provided evidence that supported its claim they have a high level of transparency by offering details of how the district's expenditures are shared publicly. The personnel salaries and school by school expenditures being provided on the district website were strong indicators of the transparency displayed by the district. The annual public hearing is another strong indicator of transparency which convinced the reader the district met the expectation of transparency.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	9
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district earned high marks in this category due to the evidence provided that indicated the conditions and autonomy would support the proposal. The evidence of conditions of autonomy were found in the district's ability to implement a Title I grant which allowed for a flexible schedule. Furthermore, evidence of success in other grant awarded programs provided further proof the district could be successful in implementing this proposal. The evidence of success in implementing the Title I grant was found in the grant being featured as a showcase by the State. The district's statement</p>		

to use assessments as learning through the implementation of this proposal which convinced the reader that conditions were present for success. Finally, the district's ability to provide a flexible calendar which extended the school day and the school year was also strong evidence that conditions for success are in place.

The area of weakness with this section was the duplication of information regarding the Mercedes Independent School District in implementing a personalized learning plan district wide. The repetition was unnecessary and detracted from the strengths presented in the section.

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

The district provided thorough evidence of support by addressing how major stakeholders provided input. The district sought input from teachers, parents, community members and local elected officials. Furthermore, the district provided detailed documentation of support from the teachers and support staff at the schools that would be impacted by the proposal.

The district offered a convincing narrative about the support it has for the implementation of this proposal. The wide variety of stakeholders who have pledged support convinced the reader that there was strong community support which would be needed for successful implementation of this proposal.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	1
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(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

The district did not provide a high quality plan detailing the analysis of the current status. What the district provided was an analysis of its needs and a brief statement of its goals and critical success factors. The district provided no information regarding the activities to be undertaken, the rationale for those activities, details of the timeline in the narrative, the deliverables, and the parties responsible for implementing the activities. As such, the reader could not effectively determine the overall credibility of the plan. Furthermore, the narrative that referred to an included table was repeated, leading to a confusing narrative.

The one strength found in the narrative was the stated goal of reducing the overall achievement gap between the district and the state. This statement indicated district leadership was ambitious in identifying this goal. Unfortunately, this single statement was not supported by further details of a high-quality plan.

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

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

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The district minimally addressed the criteria for preparing students for college and careers. The narrative focused tremendously on parental involvement and parental education or training. While this is a critical aspect of education, it is irrelevant information as it relates to the criteria of this section. The criteria was to describe a high quality plan that would address student learning. There was insufficient details about the key goals, activities, rationale, details of the timeline in the narrative, deliverables, and parties responsible for the implementation of the activities. This lack of clearly stated information did not allow the reader to determine the overall credibility of the plan to prepare students for college and careers.

Furthermore, the district minimally addressed the criteria for developing a plan to ensure students have access to a personalized sequence of content. Some of the criteria for meeting the conditions of a high-quality plan were missing. There was insufficient details about the timeline, deliverables, and parties responsible for the implementation of the activities. This lack of clearly stated information did not allow the reader to determine the overall credibility of the plan to provide personalized instructional content and skill development. The district also did not provide details regarding how the highly successful instructional practices would be implemented for all students. The proposal simply listed a limited number of instructional practices without providing supporting evidence of how these strategies would be implemented.

The district did describe how students would utilize technology in the classroom in the form of electronic textbooks, STEM/STEAM related curriculum based on technology and other instructional websites, but it neglected to describe how this would be accomplished.

However, the district provided vague details of how formative and summative assessment would be used. The statement included a vague reference to "a point where timely adjustments can be made immediately" yet failed to operationally define that point. The statement went further to vaguely state the adjustments would help students meet goals "within a set time frame" without operationally defining the time frame.

The district addressed how high-need students would be helped through the use of an Individual Educational Plan but failed to provide the details necessary of a high quality plan to address this need. There was insufficient details about the activities, rationale, timeline, deliverables, and parties responsible for the implementation of the activities. This lack of clearly stated information did not allow the reader to determine the overall credibility of the plan to prepare high- need students for college and careers.

Finally, the district provided limited evidence of how mechanisms are in place for students to be successful in utilizing the tools and resources available for tracking their own progress. The district mentions parents and educators have access to the same tools and resources and will train students in their use but does not provide specific information of how this would be accomplished.

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

20

15

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The district provided details of a high quality plan to address the improvement of instructional practices that would impact student learning. The district described goals, activities to be undertaken, reasonable rationale for the activities, and the parties responsible for the implementation. The weakness of the described plan was a lack of details regarding the timeline in the narrative, clearly described deliverables to indicate successful implementation, and older research to support the professional development process. The cited research was from 1998. Additionally, the reference to utilizing Blooms Taxonomy on higher order thinking is dated. There is more current research on using Webb's Depth of Knowledge which has become influential information for the creation of standardized tests. Finally, the district improvement plan needed to clearly address how it would measure success in improving instruction beyond the annual teacher evaluation.

Overall, the plan described by the district is reasonable based on the explanation of how the district would improve instruction with student learning at the forefront of the effort. Based on the details provided in the implementation of professional development, the plan would have been strengthened by having more information about how professional development would be measured and the indicators of success for teacher growth.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	13
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district provided succinct details of a high quality plan to provide support for the implementation of the proposed project. The district described clear goals, activities to be undertaken, reasonable rationale for the activities, the deliverables to indicate successful implementation, and the parties responsible for the implementation. The weakness of the described plan was a lack details about the timeline in the narrative. Overall, the plan described by the district is feasible baaed on the commitment to hire a project director, ensure site based administration would have the necessary flexibility to hire additional staff to implement the proposal, and the stated desire to achieve mastery by teachers and students alike. The process described by the district would be expected to have support from district and site based administrative staff as needed to support high levels of implementation.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	8
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district provided relevant details of a high quality plan to support the proposed project at the district level. The district described clear goals, activities to be undertaken, reasonable rationale for the activities, the deliverables to indicate successful implementation, and the parties responsible for the implementation. The weakness of the described plan was a lack of details in the narrative about the timeline. Overall, the plan described by the district is convincing based on an ability to provide access to high quality instruction and technological tools to all students; the strong relationships between the schools, parents, and community members; and, the flexibility provided by the district to offer extended learning time when needed. This information led the reader to conclude the proposal would be achievable and supported by the district to ensure success.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	10
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district provided relevant details of a high quality plan to address the continuous improvement process. The district described clear goals, activities to be undertaken, reasonable rationale for the activities, the deliverables to indicate successful implementation, and the parties responsible for the implementation. The weakness of the described plan was a lack of details about the timeline in the narrative. Another weakness of the plan was the lack of information that addressed how the district would publicly share the quality of implementation and investments funded by the grant. Overall, the plan described by the district is sound based on the seven critical success factors, the fact that professional development is conducted in a collaborative environment and followed up through the use of instructional coaches. The district's plan would be expected to continuously improve instruction and learning.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	3
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>While the district provided adequate information detailing the high quality plan for ongoing communication with stakeholders, the narrative was vague in the details of the frequency of meetings between the Superintendent, Principals, Project Director, Technologists, and Staff. The frequency of these meetings was not operationally defined, so the reader was unable to determine the district's definition of "regularly" discussions. Furthermore, there was a lack of a specific and detailed timeline of how to ensure ongoing communication and any improvements to the communication procedures. The</p>		

lack of an operationally defined meaning of regularly and the lack of a detailed timeline to ensure communication occurs with all stakeholders was the cause of the loss of points.

Overall, the plan adequately demonstrated how the district would ensure ongoing communication with stakeholders.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	2
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(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The district provided a limited rationale for selecting the performance measures to use in evaluating student performance. The rationale was a generic statement that attempted to cover all 12 performance measures. The district would have strengthened this section had a specific rationale been provided for each of the measures. Furthermore, the district did not provide any information about how the measure would provide formative information. The reader expected the district to provide information regarding the type of information the measure would provide teachers and specific information about how the district operationally defined success for each measure. Finally, the district did not clearly explain the critical success factors for the evaluations of the assessment measures.

Additionally, the district's strength in this area was the clearly identified assessments provided in the table. The achievement goals for each academic year however were a conservative blend of achievable goals with a minimal increase of less than 5% per year to more ambitious goals with an increase of 10-13% per academic year. The reader expected to find more evidence of highly ambitious goals with an increase of 10% or greater per academic year in the lower elementary grades where large gains are more feasible and in areas that were low performing where there were large areas of improvement to be gained. In higher grades or where student performance was already high, low goals of improving 5% per year would be considered ambitious.

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

The district provided a focused approach to evaluate the effectiveness of the project. The district provided key goals, activities, rationale, indicators of success, and the parties responsible for determining the level of implementation. The plan did not address how frequently the project would be evaluated. Overall, however, the plan is achievable in measuring the project's effectiveness due to the thoroughness of the identified critical success factors.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The district's budget included in the proposal was comprehensive in identifying the expenses the district would incur in each academic year of the project. Furthermore, the budget seemed reasonable and supported the hiring of additional staff whose main responsibility would be the implementation of the proposal. Additionally, the district was clear in identifying one time expenses as well as recurring costs; however, the lack of highly specific details of the funds was a weakness in this budget. An example is the budgeted amount of \$1,116,935 for the grant to purchase a reading program without any specific information about the reading program being provided.

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

The district provided some details of a high quality plan to address the sustainability of the project's goals, however many aspects of a high quality plan were missing. The district did not adequately address the timeline regarding how long the district could continue to meeting the project's goals after the conclusion of the grant funding. The strengths of the sustainability plan were found in the details regarding the development of leadership capacity, ongoing professional development through coaching, and utilizing data analysis processes to determine student success and to inform instruction.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	0
Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments: The district's application did not address this section.		

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Not Met
Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments: Overall, the district did not meet the requirements. There was limited evidence of improvements in instruction, leadership capacity, and student learning. The positive aspects of this proposal were found in the variety of instructional methods that would be attempted to improve student learning, ranging from the integration of technology to developing individual learning pathways, the partnership with the local State College to provide students an opportunity to earn college credits, the scholarship plan, and the focus on college and career ready standards. The strengths in the plan however did not significantly overcome the weaknesses when determining the district's ability to meet the Absolute Priority 1.		

Total	210	125
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