



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0454TN-1 for Sevier County Board of Education

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>Sevier County is in the process of retrofitting the district 's configuration of schools to establish junior and senior high academies that will focus on STEM. The first academy will open in fall 2013. The district plans to expand the academy concept throughout the district from 2013 to 2017. This refitting plan aligns efficiently and effectively with the district's long-range building program. The district plans to utilize a series of appropriate formative and summative assessments and an array of research-based instructional practices to inform its teachers' instructional practices and to focus closely on students' needs. Thus, this retrofitting is a clear and credible approach for accelerating student achievement. It is clear that the application builds on the 4 assurances areas and each section supports the assurances.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	9
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The catalyst for learning will be the new Common Core State Standards, and blended learning approaches will be used to facilitate classroom instruction. This practical and pedagogically sound approach should enhance the implementation of rigorous STEM-based curriculum throughout the school district. Approximately seventy percent of students from participating schools meet the eligibility criteria and are from low-income families whose students will likely benefit most from personalized learning to close the achievement gap. Demographic data are provided to describe the participating schools.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The State of Tennessee partnered with Achieve's American Diploma Project to develop the Tennessee Diploma Project to raise standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science and to set more rigorous graduation standards to ensure that more students will graduate at college and career levels. This is a bold step is evidenced in a high-quality plan that has resulted in significant positive changes in raising standards and student performance in other states. The state collaborated with K-12 entities, higher education, business and philanthropic entities, the Governor's staff, and Achieve to involve numerous vested entities. In support of these initiatives, the State Board of Education adopted new and more rigorous standards and graduation requirements. Sevier County is implementing a staggered plan for instituting the Common Core Standards and is providing information and training to teachers and administrators through a long-range professional development plan to support the initiatives of the state. Implementing the Common Core Standards in a staggered manner will provide both teachers and students with a practical approach to ensure that the content of the standards is attained by students through careful planning by the district's teachers who will need to develop strategies for student mastery of the standards in a realistic and supported manner.</p>		
(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Even though educational expenditures per student in the Sevier County School System are usually lower than both the state and national levels, student performance has typically exceeded that of the state. The district has a history of establishing laudable, yet attainable, goals and expectations for its students. The school district has been recognized by the Tennessee Department of Education by having two "Reward Schools", i.e. schools which are in the top 5% showing academic growth. Sevier County School District recognizes high student achievement for all students, and the district emphasizes academic success by setting high, yet attainable goals for increasing academic performance. The district's vision of high achievement should continue to result in ever-increasing gains in student performance. Other notable academic performance gains in</p>		

reading/language arts, Algebra I, and English II were highlighted. From 2010-2012 Sevier County Schools evidenced significant gains in performance for students who are economically disadvantaged, racial minority, disabled, or English language learners. Methodology for calculating graduation rates was changed by the U.S. Department of Education in 2010. The graduation rate data for Sevier County in 2012 using the new methodology was 80.3 per cent. Data show that 88.2 per cent of Sevier's 2011 graduates enrolled in an institution of higher learning within 16 months of graduation. No data were presented regarding postsecondary degree attainment. Thus, the district's focus on high achievement remains with former as well as current students.

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	13
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Sevier County schools experienced increased student performance and a notable gap closure in 2011-2012 in all tested subject areas. Two high schools were named "Reward Schools," which designates them as being in the top 5% in academic performance. The percentage of students in grades 3-8 scoring at the proficient/advanced levels in mathematics on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program has increased 10.8% since 2010. Additionally, data disaggregated by subgroup for mathematics showed notable gains in performance for all subgroups. Performance data are readily accessible. These data support a district-wide priority of raising the bar for academic performance.</p> <p>Sevier County stakeholders meet annually to prioritize the districts's strategic plan, which is a commendable means for eliciting and retaining "buy-in" from the county's residents.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Sevier County School District has demonstrated a high level of transparency in making the public aware of its expenditures. The district submits its budget data to the Tennessee Department of Education and the State Comptroller's Office. The data are disaggregated by district according to the state's accounting structure. The district's Annual Statistical Report is available on the Tennessee state website and includes annual reports from 2005-2011 that contain and expand upon the data listed in the required criteria. Per pupil expenditure information and salary schedules are also reported. Audit reports include financial information from individual schools.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	3
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Tennessee permits 24 school systems or any part of a system to operate innovative programs that emphasize school-based decision-making and the creation of small learning communities. This proposal describes the state's permission for personalized learning plans, but the proposal does not mention specifically what procedures are used in Sevier County.</p>		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	9
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Sevier County School System has a planning team that represents a broad range of school district stakeholders who review and revise the district's strategic plan, indicating long-range planning goals and targeting the Board of Education's superintendent's action plan to support and enrich curriculum and program planning. The vision and beliefs to meet the needs of each Sevier County student support the personalization of learning for each of Sevier County's students. The team was formed in 2011 to clarify the district's strategic plan in the area of personalized learning. Project Access was created to ensure that all students had the skills needed for success in the 21st century. In 2012-13 a team of Sevier County residents was formed to clarify the strategic plan in the area of personalized learning and to facilitate the personalization of learning for all students, thus supporting one of the district's primary goals. Parents have provided district students with mobile devices to facilitate learning and communication. It is obvious throughout this section that local stakeholders had considerable input into the development of Sevier County's Race to the Top proposal.</p>		
(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	5

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

Annually each school develops in-depth analyzes of student performance from multiple sources as a key component of its high-quality plan, rather than relying on only one source for information., and includes both state and local data from which strengths and needs are identified. The greatest subgroup gap occurred in the 2012 achievement data. As a result, a strategy for growth was created for each school as well as for the district. When gaps were analyzed, the district's instructional coaches met with teachers to develop an Individual Academic Plan that was tailored for each student. Using a dynamic roster that contains data for all students in Grades 4-9 in the subject areas tested on the state assessment program in 2012, with Individual Academic Plans and dynamic rosters, the district improved the percent of students performing at the proficient/advanced levels for all subgroups.

Each school has an instructional coach., which allows this individual to become familiar with the schools' administrators, students, and faculty so that he/she can target more easily the school's strengths and needs.The State Board of Education has adopted Tennessee's First to the Top Team (Teacher Evaluation Assessment Model). Evaluation is comprised of multiple measures, such as classroom observation and student assessment scores. Forty-three percent of the district's teachers are highly effective or effective.

By collecting data from multiple sources to inform instruction and instructional coaches to facilitate learning, the Sevier schools are providing its educators with pertinent and timely data to improve instruction.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	18

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Recently Sevier County became one of Tennessee's highest achieving school systems, rating in the top 21 of 137. Of note is the fact that the gains in performance occurred wholly among the state's subgroup population., thus targeting students with the most need, which is an important element of a high quality plan. The state has implemented Project ACCESS, which is an innovative and personalized program for the improvement of teaching and learning to individualize the learning environment for all students in grades K-9. Project ACCESS uses project-based and traditional learning, with individualization in K-9. Sevier County adheres to the Tennessee First to the Top reforms. Gains in performance by subgroups have occurred for mathematics and English language arts. More rigorous state standards and a new teacher evaluation process have been put in place. Savier's early learning program focuses on skilled teachers, individual instruction, and strong parental involvement.

Savier's First to the Top Program will focus on the Common Core Standards and will use STEM and project-based learning. Additionally, starting in 2009 Tennessee adopted the Tennessee Diploma Project. These initiatives are clear components of a high-quality plan.

The aforementioned approach toward raising student performance targets for students in need of academic improvement and providing an individual path for each student to succeed is a critical component of a high-quality plan. It is clear that the district has developed a cohesive plan for improving academic achievement and is providing its teachers and instructional leaders with the tools and training to improve student performance.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	15
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Tennessee has adopted college- and career-readiness standards, the Common Core Curriculum Standards, and the American Diploma Project standards as critical components of their high-quality plan. Sevier County Schools are implementing the standards currently with full implementation of new content standards being completed by 2013-14. These standards will be linked to Tennessee's current standards. The district is providing local training in the new standards using a trainer-of-trainers model. This type of training is critical to the success of their new standards-based system. An important component to this ambitious training roll-out is training on the use of assessment data to inform instruction, involving parents in decision-making, and committing sufficient resources to the retooling of curriculum resources.The aforementioned are critical components to Savier's plan to ensure success among educators, parents, and students.More details on how the district will shift from teacher-directed school work to student-initiated learning models would have strengthened this section.

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>In addition to Central Office superintendents, assistant superintendents, and supervisors, Savier assigns district supervisors to the core areas to provide clinical supervision and program monitoring to ensure that staff development training is accurate and of the highest quality. These individuals provide staff development in areas requested by school administrators based on school development plans. These sessions frequently focus on data interpretation and intervention strategies. Additionally, consultants work throughout the school year to assist teachers, school data teams and teachers in analyzing data to inform instruction.</p> <p>The district utilizes a formative benchmark assessment process for students K-8 in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science. The district also implements other programs, such as advanced mathematics programs, and hands-on cultural art classes.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	9
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Savier District offers an array of opportunities to provide support in areas, such as guidance in curricular practices, school-specific needs assessments, technical support for the district's technology infrastructure, and district-wide training on using mobile devices in the classroom. The district is forward-looking in its plans to ensure that its educators have sufficient opportunities to participate in staff development of the highest quality.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	11
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Savier's data will be collected in a manner such that longitudinal information and snap shots of performance indicators for a given period of time for different entities can be used in analyses with varying components. Instructional coaches in conjunction with district consultants will work regularly with teachers to ensure that student data are being used to inform and guide instruction, e.g. Individualized Academic Plans that are developed on an annual basis. However, the proposal did not state explicitly that these procedures will continue after the term of the grant.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	4
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Sevier County has described its approach to maintain ongoing communications and engagement with stakeholders regarding the plan through the use of multiple avenues of communication, such as monthly newsletters, the district's website, social networking applications, the school system's television channel, and through stakeholder meetings. More details about how each of these venues would be used, as well as the responsible parties, would have enhanced the proposal.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	2
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Sevier County School District has proposed a set of performance measures that are forward-looking, attainable, and reflect demographics and environment of the school district. These measures reflect a "high-quality" plan; however there is no discussion regarding their rationale for the specific measures chosen.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	0
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Not included</p>		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	9
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: Sevier County's budget was reasonable, clearly justified, and appropriate based on the scope of need. Especially in the area of technology, the budget supports the need of the district to become more technology driven and technology scaffolded. Including specific budget narrative in this section would have enhanced the reader's understanding of the budget.		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	4
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: The budget is well documented, likely sustainable after the term of the grant, and realistic to achieve Sevier County's goals; however the plan warrants more detail about sustainability after the grant period has ended. The proposal did not include a specific plan for sustainability after the grant. It merely stated that "After the term of the grant, a plan for establishing a budget line item through other sources that includes equipment replacement, additional training, technical assistance, and software upgrades will be necessary.		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	10
Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments: All four competitive preference priorities are pertinent for the locale of Sevier County and the non-education-related factors which could impede the full impact of the grant and the health and well-being of the student population. The school population consists of a growing number of students who are economically disadvantaged and many of whom do not have adequate health care. The school district and the Cherokee Health Systems have formed a partnership to provide site-based health clinics. Beginning in 2012-2013, all coordinated school health goals will be integrated into individual school-level plans. This partnership is vital to the health and well-being of Sevier County students and their families		

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met
Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments: Personalized learning environments and their need to enhance student performance were addressed throughout the proposal. Project ACCESS will be a cornerstone toward creating environments designed to significantly improve both learning and teaching through personalizing strategies, tools, and support for students and educators that are aligned with college- and career-ready standards and meet the academic needs of each student to ensure 21st century readiness.		

Total	210	168
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Technical Review Form

Application #0454TN-2 for Sevier County Board of Education

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	3
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant fails to adequately provide a clear and comprehensive vision for reform. In this Selection Criteria, the applicant identifies a retrofit of the district's organizational structure to establish junior and senior high academies with a significant focus on STEM as a significant portion of the district's strategic planning process. Yet, the applicant fails to adequately provide a narrative in support of this structural change and its alignment with the four core educational assurance areas (as defined in this notice).</p> <p>The applicant lists the four educational assurance areas and identifies a focus of "21st century readiness" in an attempt to provide the reviewer with a reform vision; however, 21st century readiness is not defined. The plan is neither comprehensive nor particularly coherent in addressing the educational assurance areas. The applicant minimally addresses personalization of student learning, but fails to adequately address an increase in educator effectiveness, fails to provide an expansion of student access to the most effective educators, fails to address a decrease in achievement gaps across student sub-groups and fails to describe the manner by which an increase in graduation rates or college readiness would be implemented.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	5
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant provides a menu of strategies e.g. STEM based academies, and block scheduling, that will be implemented in grades 7- 9 in order to fulfill the requirements of this proposal. Other than a mention of problem-solving and project-based learning, little is offered for grades 4 -6 and correlated resources is the strategy identified for grades 1-3. No true "reform" efforts are identified.</p> <p>The applicant mentions several of Tennessee's "First to the Top" initiatives, but fails to address the unique manner in which the Sevier County School District will implement these initiatives in order to fulfill the requirements of this proposal.</p> <p>The applicant has included a list of participating schools and for each identified school has included the number of participating students, the number of low income students, the number of high-need students and the number of participating educators, as required by the application.</p> <p>The applicant failed to describe the process by which 22 of the district's 27 schools were selected to participate in this proposal. Without this process it is difficult to ascertain if the selection was based solely on percentage of low income students being served.</p> <p>The applicant identifies the number of participating educators per school, but does not include the percentage of those educators who are highly effective or highly qualified.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	2
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant failed to include a high quality, specific plan describing the means by which this reform proposal will be scaled up and translated into meaningful reform to support district-wide change beyond participating schools. The applicant proposes that sustainability of project goals would occur due to embedded training which will not only establish new learning for teachers, but also expand and refine implementation and delivery of content to an extent that the culture will shift to support 21st Century learners. Ultimately, the cultural shift will create new learning environments that result in continued development, growth, and facilitation of personalized learning that extends well beyond the duration of the grant.</p>		

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	5
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Individual Achievement Plans (IAPs) are developed for students to adjust instructional strategies to meet the needs of students. This strategy complements the personalized student support element of the first educational assurance requirement.</p> <p>The applicant provides current achievement gap data for student subgroups which indicate that the Sevier County School District is adhering to Tennessee's accountability system for aggregate and sub-group achievement. The District has set achievement targets for proficiency on state assessments by approximately 3-5 % each year and 20% over a 5 year trajectory. Charts identifying a goal area, subgroup, baseline and projected growth or decline were included. These achievement goals appear to be reasonable and achievable.</p> <p>Rather than developing an Action Plan that specifically and uniquely addresses the goals for this project, the applicant included an Action Plan Development template (Appendix A.4.3) which appears to be the District's response to the State's Five Year Plan.</p> <p>The applicant identifies the following (Project ACCESS) as the vision for this proposal. "It is our contention that the shift to a more comprehensive, student-centered approach that uses a combination of technological resources with more customized instruction will put our vision of preparing students for lifelong learning in a position that will yield more students being prepared for college and a demanding workforce." The author references Appendix A.4.4 for specific goals, activities, timelines, deliverables and responsible parties to implement Project ACCESS. The applicant selected Goals 1-2-3-9-10-11 from the State's Five Year Plan for this proposal.</p> <p>For each goal identified, the same menu of supporting grant activities, timelines, deliverables and responsible parties are listed, with no variation as to the specific needs of the district or schools involved.</p> <p>Additionally, the academic goals state that "All subgroups of students will meet the annual measurable objectives (AMO) targets for grades 3-12 as measured by TCAP and EOC in..." The AMOs for each grade level in these academic areas have not been identified.</p> <p>The Project ACCESS goals do not address decreasing achieving gaps between student populations, graduation rates or college enrollment.</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	13
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has included extensive evidence (Appendix B.1.1) that the LEA has demonstrated a clear record of success for especially grades 4-8 in advancing the student learning and achievement and closing achievement gaps. The Sevier County School District has been designated as an Exemplary System for significantly improving student achievement and narrowing achievement gaps. The Exemplary status included academic improvements for minorities, students with disabilities, ELLs, and the economically disadvantaged. Math scores depicting proficiency improved by 10.8% for students in grades 3-8. Reading showed increases in grades 4-8, and students in grades 4-8 increased in Science proficiency. At the high school level, Algebra I, and English II demonstrated positive growth.</p> <p>Although 4 targeted district schools are identified as high schools, the narratives do not include data demonstrating increases in high school graduation rates or college enrollment rates. Without this data, it is difficult to state that the level of success in advancing student achievement being demonstrated in the elementary grades impacts the high school graduation and college enrollment.</p> <p>The applicant states that the District makes student performance data available to students, educators, and parents to help inform and improve participation and instruction. Communication with parents primarily relies on newsletters, progress reports and report card. Technological advances in data reporting systems would provide instant access to relevant data, for parents, students, and educators.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5	5	3

points)		
(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: The District submits required budget data to the Tennessee Department of Education and the State Comptroller's Office which is then available to the public via the tn.gov website. Annual Report Cards, available on the District's website entails per pupil expenditures per ADA, the percentage of local, state and federal funding, as well as the number of teachers and administrators. Annual audits are supplied to the State Comptroller's Office regarding individual schools. But, the applicant fails to demonstrate a high level of transparency in that specific district and school budgets and expenditures, and actual personnel salaries are not readily published or made available for public review.		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	5
(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: The applicant successfully outlines the State's Board of Education Master Plan, Tennessee State Board of Education's Technology Plan, and State Board Policy 3.208 which establishes requirements for distance learning. The applicant fails to address specific district board policy regarding personalized learning environments; for example those governing equal access, non-discrimination, FERPA etc.		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	4
(B)(4) Reviewer Comments: According to the applicant, a team consisting of the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction the Director of Elementary Education, the Title I Supervisor, the Instructional Supervisor for Materials and Supplies, the system Technology Educator and an outside consultant for data analysis created Project ACCESS. The team developed a draft proposal and the tentative draft was extended to include additional stakeholders which included parents, teachers, principals, administrators and community members. Unfortunately, no evidence was included within the narratives nor the appendices which supports the direct engagement of this additional group in the draft's revisions. The only conclave of stakeholders occurred during a 2 ½ hour meeting which was held on September 27, 2012 to present the proposal. A sign-in sheet with 29 signatures was included as proof of attendance. There was no further evidence presented which validates that these or other individuals were engaged in the development or revision of this proposal. Twenty-three letters of support dated Sept. 24, 2012 through Oct. 25, 2012 were included. These letters were from a variety of individuals including city managers, 2 teachers, an assistant principal, a college dean and Board member, 2 PTO presidents 2 principals, and 5 individuals acknowledging the 10 day window regarding the review of the grant proposal .The applicant provided no rationale for solicitation of letters of support from the identified individuals. Letters of support from participating principals were not evident. Since some letters are dated before the proposal presentation, it is unclear what information was made available to the letter writers. The majority of the letters of support referenced that the District was applying for a 30 million grant to be used primarily for technology and/or infrastructure. This "misunderstanding" provides further evidence of the lack of engagement of non-district personnel in the development of this proposal. A survey garnering the support of school personnel was also administered. According the the applicant, 70% of teachers from participating schools supported the proposal. No evidence was included which would allow a cross check of participating schools' staff names to those responding to the survey.		
(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	3
(B)(5) Reviewer Comments: The applicant has included detailed documents (Appendices B.1.1 - B.1.14) demonstrating an analysis of district-wide academic achievement data; identified areas of strengths and weaknesses, examples of IAPs and detailed school diagnostic reports meant to assist individual schools in interpreting data and developing aggressive plans to overcome deficiencies in achievement results. Unfortunately, the applicant does not link this extensive analysis to the implementation of personalized learning environments and their relationship to the district's successes or failures in achievement.		

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 applicant fails to present compelling narratives which demonstrate active participation of parents, buy in by students, goal-setting by students, administration of interest surveys which ensure in-depth learning experiences in areas of academic interest, exposure to diverse cultures, contexts and perspectives, or mechanisms which will ensure that students understand how to use the tools and resources provided to them in order to track and manage their own learning..</p> <p>The narratives in this section reiterate an “innovative” personalized program, Tennessee’s Common Core Standards requirements, and a more rigorous teacher evaluation process, yet, once again these concepts are not elaborated upon and do not include specific means by which these concepts will be tailored to meet the requirements of articulating comprehensive and coherent reform efforts.</p>		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	14
<p>(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant identifies Professional Learning Communities as the primary vehicle for in-school professional development. Additionally, online professional development resources such as the State’s Effective Practice Network, and PD 360, instructional coaches, and data consultants improve teachers’ practice and effectiveness.</p> <p>The plight of transitioning teachers from effectively implementing State academic standards to effectively implementing Common Core State Standards is not unique to the Sevier County District. Teachers nationwide are grappling with the transition, and participating in a plethora of state and locally sponsored staff development offerings. These professional development requirements, while essential to the successful implementation of the Common Core Standards in instructional delivery, are not essential to the applicant’s vision of students’ “personalized learning environments” proposed in this application.</p> <p>Significant progress has been made in the area of recruiting, developing, rewarding and retaining effective teachers and principals. A new teacher evaluation system comprised of 50% observation data, 35% student growth and 15% student achievement data will ensure the delivery of effective instruction. The concept of constructive on-going feedback as a result of these observations and evaluations has not been explored by this applicant. Nor has the applicant made mention of the obvious impact of leadership effectiveness upon academic achievement and its relationship to principal evaluations.</p> <p>The applicant comments that a major portion of instruction will shift from teacher-directed, teacher assigned work to student-initiated, goal-driven, independent and intentional learning models. Although the applicant does not support this statement by enumerating professional development requirements supporting this paradigm shift in this Selection Criterion, proposed professional development offerings are listed in the Budget narrative. These include: cross-curricular instruction, integrating technology in the classroom, differentiated instruction, using formative and summative assessment data, standards based instruction, professional learning communities, common core state standards, higher-order thinking, and STEM education.</p>		

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 applicant identified a variety of support personnel to provide assistance with organizational practices to the District’s schools. These include, Assistant Superintendents, Directors, K-8 math, language, science, social studies , band, LEP specialists, counselors, psychologists, Media Specialist, Special Education Supervisor, and numerous other staff in supervisory capacities. This volume of additional personnel is undoubtedly beneficial to the oversight of the academic progress evident with the district.</p>		

Leadership teams are afforded autonomy and flexibility over factors such as school schedules, calendars, personnel decisions, staffing models, roles, responsibilities and school-level budgets.

Alternative placements within the District ensure successful service delivery to at-risk students. Freshman Academies transition students from middle to high school. Grades 7-9 will be reconstituted to support students' social, emotional and physical development.

No mention was made of policies which ensure non-discrimination and equal access to students (and staff) in all instructional practices.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	3
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(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant failed to address equitability of resources for students and families regardless of income.

The District is in the process of soliciting academic content providers who offer secure access to academic records and student performance; however, additional electronic learning supports were not addressed. Written guidelines regarding utilization of equipment, specifically mobile devices, will be developed and distributed through mandatory informational meetings. Interoperable data systems, which include human resources data, student information data, budget data, and instructional improvement systems data, were not addressed.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	5

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has provided an adequate narrative outlining the current process by which the District collects, analyzes, disaggregates and disseminates formative and summative data.

The applicant fails to address the manner by which the District will monitor, measure and publicly share information regarding the quality of its investments funded by Race to the Top-District funds.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	3
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(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant states that "groups performing at the lowest levels currently (students in racial/ethnic subgroups that perform below the state average, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities and English learners) grow proficiency levels faster than other students." Whereas this statement fulfills the minimum requirement of this selection criterion, additional current data comparing these populations to the general population in specific academic areas would be beneficial. This narrative does not elaborate on which band of grade levels these performance measures target.

For Performance Measures "A" and "B", current percentages of "highly effective" and "effective" teachers and principals appear to be relatively low; yet, given the required evaluation system, the District still does not project that 100% of its teachers and principals will be designated as "highly effective" or "effective" by SY 2016-17.

The total number of participating students at baseline is 10,898. This number should vary by SY 2016-17, but the applicant does not project a change in the number of participating students.

The narrative is insufficient in its scope of describing how this measure will provide "rigorous, timely, and formative leading information". The applicant states that the District will implement "blended learning techniques, embedded assessment elements, such as syllabi, curricula, instructional materials and methods, assignments, exams and quizzes": yet, provides no evidence of "rigorous", "timely", or "formative".

A review of assessments and practices will be done through Professional Learning Communities, surveys, criterion based rating scales, and focus groups which satisfy the requirements of "C".

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

The applicant states that “groups performing at the lowest levels currently (students in racial/ethnic subgroups that perform below the state average, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities and English learners) grow proficiency levels faster than other students.” Whereas this statement fulfills the minimum requirement of this selection criterion, additional current data comparing these populations to the general population in specific academic areas would be beneficial. For the sake of this application, this narrative does not elaborate on which band of grade levels the performance measures target.

For Performance Measures “A” and “B”, current percentages of “highly effective” and “effective” teachers and principals appear to be relatively low; yet, given the required evaluation system, the District still does not project that 100% of its teachers and principals will be designated as “highly effective” or “effective” by SY 2016-17.

The total number of participating students at baseline is 10,898. This number should vary by SY 2016-17, but the applicant does not project a change in the number of participating students as the years progress.

The narrative is insufficient in its scope of describing how this measure will provide “rigorous, timely, and formative leading information”, The applicant states that the District will implement “ blended learning techniques, embedded assessment elements, such as syllabi, curricula, instructional materials and methods, assignments, exams and quizzes.” There was no evidence provided by the applicant that these techniques are "rigorous", "timely", or "formative".

A review of assessments and practices will be done through Professional Learning Communities, surveys, criterion based rating scales, and focus groups which appear to satisfy the requirements of “C”.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	1
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(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant describes a system of monitoring and evaluating the implementaton of Project ACCESS primarily through the existence of physical evidence, such as, syllabi, curricula, instructional materials and methods, assignments, and quizzes. In addition, surveys and focus groups will gauge imlementation progress through audience perception,

The applicant failed to address both the evaluation component of Race to the Top District fund activities and necessary modifications to the plan pending evaluation measures.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Acceptable rationales were presented for the majority of the funding. However, staff travel costs appear to be excessive. Since professional development costs are listed among the Personnel expenditures, it is difficult to ascertain the need for monthly travel (lodging, ground transportation, food, miscellaneous expenses for 17 educators over the 4 years of this grant. More specific information as to topic, location, consultant(s) involved in these travel expenditures is requested.

Funds are being requested for parent training. Whereas, this may be an essential component to the successful implementation of this grant, a parent training component is not listed within the narratives of this proposal.

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

The applicant describes limited replacement of technology (due to staggering technology purchases over the latter years of funding). Sustainability of project goals would occur due to embedded training which will not only establish new learning for teachers, but also expand and refine implementation and delivery of content to an extent that the culture will shift to support 21st Century learners. Ultimately, the cultural shiift will create new learning environments that result in continued development, growth, and facilitation of personalized learning that extends well beyond the duration of the grant.

The applicant neither addresses the anticipated support from State and local government to sustain this project, nor provides a budget projection geared at sustaining the project's goals.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

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

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant states that 65% of the District's students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The applicant further explains that of these, "many parents are unable to provide health insurance coverage for their children." While this statement may be true, the applicant provides no data in support of this finding.

Sevier County District has selected to reduce childhood obesity rates by 1% annually as measured against the County's baseline body mass index data for 2009-2010. The applicant provides no data in support of this initiative.

The applicant's description of the Competitive Preference Priority's services describe current federal mandates requiring increases in physical activity and lower fat content in school-served menus. For purposes of this application, the District will continue to monitor physical activity and fat intake, as already required. A comprehensive health education class and School Healthy Teams will be established to reinforce good and healthy habits.

Additionally, the District does identify and create a decision-making process and infrastructure to implement and evaluate supports that address individual needs through the Sevier County School System Health Council, and Cherokee Health Systems. Support of in-kind funds appear to be unsuccessful.

Desired results for this initiative were briefly charted; however, little if any supporting narratives were provided for their selection.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant stumbles to provide a clear and comprehensive vision for reform. The applicant first identifies a retrofit of the district's organizational structure to establish junior and senior high academies with a significant focus on STEM as a significant portion of the district's strategic planning process. But, the applicant fails to provide substantive narrative support of this structural change and its alignment with the four core educational assurance areas

The applicant lists the four educational assurance areas and identifies a focus of "21st century readiness" in an attempt to provide the reviewer with a reform vision; however, 21st century readiness is not defined. The applicant minimally addresses personalization of student learning, the impact of educator effectiveness on student achievement, or graduation rates and college readiness.

The applicant provides a menu of strategies e.g. STEM based academies, and block scheduling, that will be implemented in grades 7- 9 in order to fulfill the requirements of this proposal. Few strategies are offered for grades 1 -6.

This reviewer has assigned a "Met" score to Absolute Priority 1, by virtue of the fact that the proposal's strengths minimally outweigh the proposal's deficiencies, which are considerable.

Total	210	104
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0454TN-3 for Sevier County Board of Education

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	6
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant successfully provides information about the reform work done to date in this Race to the Top winning state and begins to describe how the concepts in the application build upon those efforts. Neither the narrative nor the appendix identified, however, provides a descriptive plan for the Academy concept. Rather, the appendix merely illustrates the movement of enrollment numbers as the conversion occurs. No real substance of the content or purpose of the conversion is provided in the narrative. There is no substantive discussion of how the new schools will be different from existing schools beyond a new name, a focus on STEM, and the vehicle of blended learning. The narrative does not explain why an Academy concept is advantageous to complete this reform. Additionally, the narrative does not provide a definition of "21st Century readiness" to help outline the vision for the proposal though the narrative lists this as the focus of the plan. The focus on meeting individual student needs and interests is apparent, so long as that interest is in the STEM areas. The narrative would benefit from a more thorough explanation of Project ACCESS, as this appears to be the key to providing the individualized experience the district seeks to implement. The narrative does not explain how students in poverty will access the digital tools and resources that will be available 24/7. Without an explanation of how the district will resolve this common problem, it is difficult to determine how the technology effort will, in fact, increase equity and make headway in closing the achievement gap. The reform vision is not comprehensive or entirely coherent, though many essential pieces are here (such as the state's increased standards and the district's shift in curriculum and delivery method). Fortunately, sections (A)(2) and (A)(4) of the application narrative provide some of the description and explanation missing in (A)(1) surrounding the vision for Project ACCESS which elevates the score to the mid range.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>From the application narrative, it is clear that the participating schools meet the competition's eligibility requirements. A list of the schools participating is provided as are the numbers of participating students. All elements of this criterion are met in the application narrative, though without more information about why the applicant's approach of the Academy structure is the most suitable for this reform it is difficult to determine the district's rationale. The only mention of the benefit of and philosophy behind the selection of the Academy structure is a very brief and insufficient mention in Appendix A.4.3 of the narrative.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	5
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>In terms of a plan to scale-up the reform proposal and support district-wide change, the application narrative states that the district's graduation requirements are significantly higher than the increased requirements of the state in terms of number of credits, but it does not explain how a higher number of required credits, as opposed to a higher rigor in the same number of graduation requirements, will result in district-wide change.</p> <p>The broad involvement of teachers in creation of the new standards-aligned curriculum as well as the thoughtful transition planning and support development bodes well for full-district implementation of the common core, but the narrative does not make a connection between that condition and the ability to scale-up the district's reform proposal.</p> <p>The work with university teacher preparation programs being undertaken by the state department of education is positive. The layering of the district's Leadership Development Teams on this pre-service training alongside the district's teacher induction and mentoring programs should assist with teacher and administrator knowledge and retention. The direct connection between this important process and the scaling up of the district's reform proposal is not made.</p> <p>Section (A)(3) does not include any discussion of the district's scale-up plan. Rather, it discusses the excellent work being done in the state and the district in terms of strengthening standards, increasing student expectations, and ensuring high</p>		

quality teachers and leaders in the schools. All of those conditions are absolutely necessary for LEA-wide reform and change, but the narrative does not attempt to make any connection between the existence of those conditions and the applicant's scale-up plan, logic model, or theory of change.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	7
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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant demonstrates that the district has a track-record of increasing student achievement and decreasing the achievement gap in the areas of reading and writing and is doing so at a pace faster than the state as a whole, and its schools have been rewarded under the accountability system for their efforts. With past performance being a strong predictor of future performance, the narrative demonstrates that this is a district with the demonstrated ability to make positive change in the academic outcomes for youth.

The narrative in this section clarifies the district's vision and describes how that vision will improve student outcomes.

However, the issue of how low-income students who may not have computer access at home will access Project ACCESS tools outside school time is not addressed, so it is unclear how the increased access to technology tools and independent learning opportunities will succeed in closing the achievement gap for low-income students who may not have access at home.

The applicant has provided information on annual proficiency goals that are equal to the state ESEA targets overall and by student subgroup. Proficiency status goals are provided, but growth goals do not appear to be included. Additionally, the percent proficient goals do not appear to match the goal of full proficiency in all sub-groups outlined in the attached Action Plan in the appendix.

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	9

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The application narrative explains that due to the increase in standards and expectations that came with being a Race to the Top State, student performance data from four years ago is not an accurate reflection of student performance and growth. The state's new accountability rules and structures have only been in place for the past three years. Thus, the application does not provide the requested four years of data.

As evidence of its track-record to improve student achievement, the application notes that the district has been designated by the state as an Exemplary system for significantly improving student performance and narrowing achievement gaps.

The application provides evidence of a clear record of success over the past three years in improving student learning outcomes and closing achievement gaps; however, specific areas of need are noted in the district's data analysis in Appendix B.1.1. The proposed reform appropriately targets the grades identified by the district as most in need of improvement.

The application narrative provides only two years of data on graduation rates. There was an improvement over these two years; however, lack of four years of data showing progress weakens the response in the area of graduation rate improvement as a full review is not possible without the data.

The application narrative provides only one year of data related to college enrollment rather than four; thus, it is not possible to review progress in this area. The application notes that increasing the ability of the district to track this data is a focus of the new system.

The application narrative provides data on the positive impacts of its efforts to reform targeted schools. The development of Individual Academic Plans for students in each of these targeted schools is a strength and is cited as making a considerable difference in the academic achievement of the district's young people. Early recognition by the district of the need to individualize academic programming for students is a strong indicator of its ability to build increased individualization into its reform efforts.

From the narrative, it appears that the district makes student performance data available to students and parents in fairly basic ways (such as annual mailings and report cards) and in infrequent intervals throughout the school year rather than in dynamic and robust ways like online data systems accessible by parents and students that would enable them to be more informed and

participate more fully in the education of the student. The discussion of school-based data teams earlier in the narrative is strong evidence that educators, however, are using data in meaningful ways to improve instruction.

Overall, the district provides some evidence of a track-record of academic success in the form of assessment scores and recognition for recent efforts, though one year of requested data is missing. Two years of graduation rate data is missing as is three years of college enrollment data. Missing data results in a score falling in the mid range.

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

5

1

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The narrative explains the manner in which the district makes expenditure data public in accordance with state regulations, procedures, and processes, which does not provide access to actual school-level data on actual personnel salaries for instructional and administrative staff as well as non-personnel expenditures. The applicant does not provide any information about efforts the district might make above and beyond these basic requirements to ensure transparency and ease of public access to financial information beyond the publication of a generic salary schedule for the district. The description of how an individual would access financial information reveals a cumbersome process.

Neither the narrative nor the referenced attachment describe how the district makes available either the actual personnel salaries for instructional or support staff or the actual non-personnel expenditures at the school level; thus the response receives a score in the low range.

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

10

10

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The narrative states that there are no restrictions placed on districts in carrying out personalized learning plans. Further, the narrative details ways in which state laws and regulations provide support to districts in personalizing learning environments. Chief among these is Tennessee Code Annotated 49-1-207 that specifically authorizes the commissioner of education to authorize a certain number of school systems to operate innovative educational programs and engage in a higher level of site-based decision-making. The state's Technology Long Range Plan further supports the use of technology tools and distance learning to increase student engagement and equity. The narrative is fully responsive to this criterion.

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

10

6

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

For the development of this proposal, the applicant describes how the district built on the existing strategic plan, which was built with the involvement of an undefined broad range of stakeholders. It appears from the narrative and attachments that only one fairly short meeting was held with stakeholders during the development of the grant application. It is not possible from the sign-in sheet to determine affiliation of many of the individual participants, but the narrative indicates that students, parents, teachers, and principals were engaged, not to mention business leaders as well. One short meeting does not, even for the purposes of further refining an earlier public and inclusive process, demonstrate meaningful engagement and stakeholder support.

Surveys were collected showing strong support from participating teachers, meeting the 70% threshold for support in non-bargaining unit districts.

Numerous letters of support are provided illustrating support from various stakeholders to include business and city leaders, parents, principals, teachers, and institutes of higher learning.

The evidence presented in the narrative and related attachments demonstrates a sufficient level of support for the proposal, but not meaningful stakeholder engagement in the development of the proposal.

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

5

2

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

The narrative describes the method by which each school in the district analyzes its own data and uses that data to craft individualized academic plans for students. The narrative does not describe a high quality plan for an analysis of the district's current status in implementing personalized learning environments, including identified needs and gaps in that process that the plan will address. Through the narrative the applicant does provide, however, discussion of how the district is already

implementing the Individualized Academic Plan portion of the reform proposal. The response, therefore, is incomplete.

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 application narrative states that Project Access is designed to personalize learning, support individual student needs, present and study diverse cultures and perspectives, and support student interests. The primary vehicle for this personalization is the development of personalized learning plans. Particular strengths of the individualized learning plan process are that it will be developed in collaboration with the student, parents, classroom teacher, and the academic facilitator for the school; that it will be guided by the student's individual abilities and interests; and that it will be firmly organized around each of the Common Core Standards to ensure college/career readiness.</p> <p>The application narrative states that student progress will be monitored by students, parents, and educators, but it does not provide a mechanism by which this will occur or describe the robustness of that system. Further, the narrative states that student assessment will be based on perseverance, critical thinking, creativity, the Common Core standards, and the extent to which students can demonstrate higher-order thinking, but it provides no description or detail about what these assessments will look like or how they will be administered.</p> <p>The narrative clearly describes how, with support of parents and educators, all students will understand their personal goals and that what they are learning matters. Further, the narrative successfully demonstrates that through the individualized learning plans and the four-year plans, students will be able to identify personal goals and understand how to structure their learning to achieve those goals. The narrative makes a brief mention of a system of formative and summative assessments that will be used to determine learning and guide necessary re-teaching. The narrative also states that parents and students will be involved in conferencing around student progress, but it does not describe thoroughly how much access beyond these undetermined number of conferences parents and students will have access to their achievement data to monitor individual student learning and progress toward meeting goals.</p> <p>The narrative successfully describes how students will be involved in deep learning experiences in the areas of their academic interest through their project-based learning model wherein students will participate in every level of the design of the project. Through this process of design, students will also be gaining 21st century skills such as collaboration, teamwork, and incorporation of technology.</p> <p>The narrative does not discuss how Project Access will engage and empower all learners, particularly high-needs students, beyond a general statement that the level of teacher facilitation and direct involvement in student learning will be determined by individual student need. There is no discussion of the plan for accommodations and high-quality strategies for high-need students to ensure they are on track to meeting standards.</p> <p>Neither does the narrative describe how students will have access and exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives to deepen their learning, and master critical academic content and develop skills. It states that it will occur, but does not provide any depth or breadth of description about how the district plans to achieve this goal.</p> <p>The narrative states that school-based media resource personnel will be a valuable resource in assisting students in their project-based learning, but the narrative does not describe the district's plan to ensure that mechanisms are in place to provide training and support to students that ensure they know how to use the tools and resources provided to them in order to track and manage their own learning.</p> <p>Overall, the narrative is strong in describing a plan that will successfully and dynamically ensure students and parents will be involved in the planning for student's individualized, high-quality learning based on their interest and abilities. The narrative is insufficient in describing the plan to assess that learning in a manner that provides students and parents ready-access to results for the purposes of monitoring and adjustment. Practically absent from the narrative is a description of the plan to meet the requirements of high needs students and the plan to ensure diversity of cultures and perspectives. Thus, the response scores in the middle of the range.</p>		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	16
<p>(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p>		

The narrative specifies that all mathematics and language arts educators will engage in training and in professional teams or learning communities that will support their individual and collective capacity to implement the Common Core standards. The district has already successfully engaged in these processes and practices in the area of mathematics and plans to repeat the work in the area of language arts as the Common Core standards are phased in to practice in the district. The narrative details the myriad training opportunities that will be afforded to teachers by both the state and the district and the varied forms of that training to include digital content, face-to-face training, and job-embedded training opportunities. In-school training opportunities will also occur through an already-established system of professional learning communities. One focus of the training described will be to assist teachers in the design and implementation of individualized project-based learning opportunities for students.

The narrative provides the district's plan to ensure frequent measurement of student progress toward meeting standards and use of data to inform the acceleration of student progress and educator improvement of practice through the use of instructional coaches assigned to each school. These instructional coaches will collaborate with teachers on site regarding ongoing evaluation of student progress and the planning of instruction to meet individual student needs using data.

The narrative states that additional training will need to take place on effective research-based strategies that work best for various settings and subgroups in order for the district to continue to close the achievement gap, but the narrative is lacking any detail about how or when these trainings will occur.

The application narrative convincingly describes the state's robust data collection system that enables the examination of student growth data tied to specific teachers. The narrative further explains the system by which teachers are evaluated 35% of which is comprised by student growth score and 15% by student achievement data mutually selected by the educator and his supervisor. Thus, fully 50% of a teacher's evaluation is informed by student academic performance and growth.

The narrative does not sufficiently explain, however, how the district will ensure that supervisors will develop knowledge around how to use the teacher evaluation system to help leaders assess and take steps to improve individual and collective educator effectiveness and school culture and climate for continuous school improvement for the purposes of increasing academic achievement and closing the achievement gap.

Overall, the narrative does an excellent job of presenting the district's approach to teaching and leading that helps educators improve instruction and increase their capacity to support student progress toward meeting high-quality standards and full implementation of personalized learning and teaching for all students. Less convincing is the description of necessary training for meeting the unique needs of special populations. Another area of weakness surrounds the training on the effective use of the evaluation system and its results; however, the applicant cites the effective implementation of this system as one of its strengths. Completely absent from the narrative is a high-quality plan for increasing the number of students receiving instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals, including in hard-to-staff schools, subjects, and specialty areas.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	5

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The narrative lists the various administrative positions at the central office level. It is not clear from the application narrative how the district employs its supervisors in assisting schools. Instructional supervisors are assigned to core areas, but how that translates to school support and the implementation of personalized learning is unclear beyond the narrative merely stating that this occurs. In addition to instructional supervisors, the narrative states that a consultant is hired specifically to assist school data teams, administrators, teachers, and instructional coaches on the analysis of data to inform instruction.

The narrative states that school leadership teams are provided with flexibility and autonomy around such things as calendars, school schedules, school personnel decisions, and school level budgets. However, an important caveat in the narrative is that school administrators make scheduling decisions in accordance with time-on-task guidelines of the district and state. The narrative further clarifies that instructional days are determined by a district-wide calendar. It appears from the narrative that support personnel scheduling decisions are made at the central office level. Thus, when taken in sum, it appears that the site-based administrator actually has little autonomy over scheduling. The same appears to be true for hiring, which is processed centrally from the point of initial screening interview to recommendation by the principal to the superintendent who actually approves the hire.

The application narrative lists six components of mastery, stating that these are designed to ensure that students are afforded

the opportunity to demonstrate mastery without moving through an assembly line of pre-determined topics. However, the description provided is inadequate in demonstrating how this system would work in an actual school setting. This, combined with the statement in the narrative about state and local guidelines for time-on-task, are not convincing that the district has successfully grappled with the issue of independent student progress unlimited by seat-time constraints. The one exception to this, highlighted in the narrative, is the Gary Hardin Academy that appears to operate as an alternative school for students struggling to meet credit requirements.

The narrative describes multiple ways that students can demonstrate mastery of standards, such as through science fairs, a young author's conference, and National History Day. It is not clear from the narrative how such activities ensure that students are not slowed in their academic growth by having to participate in classroom instruction on topics for which they've already demonstrated mastery in various comparable ways.

The narrative is lacking a discussion of how its learning resources and instructional practices are adaptable and fully accessible to all students, including English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities.

Overall, the application narrative does not effectively demonstrate that the applicant has practices, policies, and rules that facilitate personalized in the areas prescribed.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	3
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(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The narrative details how the district is committed to ensuring that all participating students and educators have access to necessary content, tools, and other learning resources as well as technology support in school. It is not at all clear how the district plans to ensure that families of all types have out-of-school access and support to technology tools. No mention is made of the plans for families who do not have internet access at home.

The narrative describes a decidedly incomplete plan for sharing information about available technology and its uses with parents. One roll out night is described, but it is not clear if this is a district-wide event or if one roll-out night per school will be hosted to manage numbers. The narrative further states that this informational night for parents will be mandatory, but there is no explanation for how the district will achieve such a plan. There is no explanation for how the district will ensure 100% participation through such things as providing transportation and childcare, translators, or make-up nights for parents who may work nights.

The narrative states that the district is committed to improving data access for families and that they will do this by soliciting help from academic content providers who do this type of work and can assist families in managing a pathway of personalized learning for every child. There is not sufficient explanation or description for how the district plans to honor its commitment.

The application narrative does not discuss how it will ensure that the district and schools will use interoperable data systems that include human resources data, student information data, budget data, and instructional improvement system data.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	9

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The application successfully describes a strategy for implementing a rigorous continuous improvement process that provides timely and regular feedback on progress toward project goals and opportunities for ongoing improvement. District instructional supervisors analyze and report on data at designated monthly staff meetings. More formally, data is analyzed and embedded in the annual Tennessee Comprehensive System-wide Planning Process.

The application narrative insufficiently addresses how the applicant will monitor, measure, and publicly share information on the quality of its investments funded by this grant as required in this criterion (such as investments in professional development, technology, and staff). The narrative makes the statement that this will occur, but no high-quality plan detailing process, method, timeline, or responsible party is discussed beyond annual publication of performance data to the local school board.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	3
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The narrative describes ongoing communication with stakeholders via a variety of means to include newsletters, a dedicated Web site, social media, and the district's television station. An annual stakeholder meeting will also be held annually. The stated purpose of the meeting is to "inform" interested stakeholders as to the district's progress in transforming teaching and learning. No discussion of true two-way, ongoing engagement is present in the narrative.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	2
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The narrative describes a district with a clear understanding of the challenges of closing the achievement gap while maintaining high expectations for increasing achievement for all and states its commitment to doing so. The application notes that overall levels of proficiency are different from the state's Race to the Top application due to the increased rigor of the state's standards and assessment – presumably this means the proficiency levels are less than in the original Race to the Top application, but that is not clarified. The district's plan to increase proficiency in the various groups 3-6% (rather than percentage points) in the actual performance measures given does not set a high enough bar for improvement for subgroups that are dramatically behind where they need to be for success in school and in life. The expectations for students who are economically disadvantaged, experience disabilities, or are English Language Learners are not ambitious enough to set an expectation for serious change for these populations. For example, moving from 6.7% of students with disabilities in math who are on-track to college/career readiness in that subject to only 9.2% five years later does not indicate an ambitious goal and leaves far too many students without the education they need for success. On other measures, however, such as the percentage of ELL students reading proficiency on the TCAP and EOC, the applicant appears to set much more ambitious targets.</p> <p>The application narrative provides neither a general rationale for the measures it has selected nor a rationale for each specific measure selected as required by the RFP. Neither does the narrative describe how the particular measures will provide rigorous, timely, and formative information tied to its proposed plan and theory of action regarding the district's implementation success or areas of concern.</p> <p>The applicant's health indicators measure access to health curriculum rather than actual student health or SEL status. Since the narrative does not discuss why it has chosen its various measures, it is not clear if the district expects to see an increase in students' healthy behaviors and outcomes due to this increase in health-related curriculum.</p> <p>The narrative does not discuss how the district will review and improve the measures over time if they are insufficient to gauge implementation progress.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	0
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The application narrative does not address section (E)(4) – Evaluating effectiveness of investments.</p>		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	8
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>It most every way, the budget is reasonable and sufficient to support the development and implementation of the applicant's proposal. The narrative presents a thoughtful rationale for investments and priorities and includes a description of all funds, identifying one-time vs. ongoing expenses.</p> <p>The budget narrative identifies a small amount of funds that will support the project beyond grant funds, but there is no discussion of how the district might also incorporate other federally available funds, such as ESEA or IDEA funds, to make sure the project is aligned with other district efforts.</p>		

Two concerns are in the areas of technology support and access for all students. Given the vast amount of technology that will be introduced into the district in a short period of time, increasing by only 2.5 FTE the Computer Technician position for 21 schools does not seem adequate. One sure way this innovative reform proposal will fail is if the technology support is inadequate. The second concern in terms of adequacy is that the budget does not account for dollars to subsidize or provide at-home access for low-income families. The narrative repeatedly indicates that one of the strengths of this reform model is that students and parents will have 24/7 access to content, tools, and resources. Low-income families may be at a disadvantage in acquiring this access.

In terms of clarity, it is unclear from the budget narrative which 17 staff positions will be involved with travel for professional development activities.

In terms of sustainability, tablets that only have a two to three year life, based on the applicant's budget and narrative, will be an expensive ongoing cost, even with the district's described replacement schedule.

It is particularly strong that the budget and narrative demonstrate a commitment by the district to involve parents in training as well.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	3
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The narrative describes the current reality of decreasing revenues from the state and federal level limiting the proposed reform prior to the contemplation of this grant. That does not bode well for long-term sustainability.

The budget itself does identify a slight amount of increasing funds from other sources throughout the life of the grant that will be dedicated to the key area of technology support.

The narrative indicates that some expenses will be one-time (such as the purchase of digital content), but even that purchase requires an ongoing maintenance cost. Other expenses, such as training, will build capacity from which the district can draw in increasingly less expensive ways.

Overall, there is very little in the narrative to suggest that the applicant has a plan for sustainability of this technology-rich reform proposal.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	1

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The Powerpoint provided in the application on the SMART program indicates what appears to be a partnership with the local non-profit health provider. There is no narrative to provide context or detail on this program and partnership. The project appears to focus on student physical health rather than on social, emotional, or behavioral needs of students, but since there is no narrative, this is not entirely clear. The information provided does not indicate whether or not the program has measurable goals or would integrate educational services. There is no discussion of building staff capacity. The application has insufficiently addressed the competitive preference.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has successfully demonstrated how it will build on the core educational assurance areas to create personalized

learning environments, using tools, strategies, and supports for students and educators that are aligned with college and career ready standards. It is clear from the application how the district plans to accelerate student achievement and deepen student learning; increase the effectiveness of educators through training and coaching, thus expanding student access to effective teachers; decrease achievement gaps; and increase graduation rates.

Total	210	117
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