



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0460TX-1 for Stephenville Independent School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant presents an overall narrative that describes a broadly conceived reform vision that revolves around a personalized student learning experience. The vision as presented, to varying degrees of detail, includes attentiveness to college and career preparedness, the creation and use of district-wide data systems, a focus on professional development of both pre-service and in-service teachers and to a more limited degree, turning around lowest-achieving schools.</p> <p>The focus on changing the student and teacher experiences within the classroom to personalized and individualized ones represents a significant change and opportunity for shifting towards improved student outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of a common project based learning model for all grade levels • Moving from a more traditional classroom of instruction to digital ones, that increase student interest but also could allow for differentiation • Aligning content to a National Careers Clusters Framework with detailed career pathways and clusters. <p>There is lack of detail regarding some elements of the controlling vision and how those elements interact with others.</p> <p>As a whole, the applicant does describe a credible and coherent vision that meets the grant criteria.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Problem-Based Learning framework is referenced but not meaningfully explained, nor described in a way that demonstrates how this framework might translate to different grade levels beyond the 5th grade. • The connections between the pre-existing Strategic 5-year plan and the proposed vision are not particularly clear 		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>As a self-described small, rural district, the inclusion of all schools and grade bands is explained clearly.</p> <p>More detail regarding how school-level implementation would inform the larger LEA-level on an ongoing basis, particularly around making necessary shifts, adjustment and differentiated support, would have been helpful to include.</p> <p>The applicant does include the requisite number of participating students, educators, schools and the students who are high-needs or come from low-income families.</p> <p>As a whole, the applicant does present the required information related to implementing its reform proposal.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>As all of the schools in the district will be participating in the reform efforts, no particular 'scale up' is necessary. Moreover, the applicant's stated interest in institutionalizing project-based learning and the distinct pathways to college and career only make sense in the context of having all the district schools participate. As a small district that only has one 'campus' per grade level band, the participation of all schools is essential for the stated reform goals.</p> <p>More information regarding a clear theory of change, one that accompanies and further contextualizes the focus on project based-learning, would have been helpful in terms of grounding the overall reform proposal.</p>		
(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	4
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>While the baseline and target goal information for summative assessment scores, decreasing achievement gaps, college enrollment and postsecondary degree attainment are detailed and progressive, there is some disconnect between the targets and the description of the applicant's controlling vision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the summative assessment scores, it is unclear how all of the assessment scores, barring the areas of the Level II Satisfactory and Level III Advanced, will increase to a level of 100% after the first academic year of the proposed grant. • From the general description of the project-based learning model leading towards more quality student learning and higher cognitive skills, as well as differentiation through instructional technology, it is unclear how those general conditions would lead to a steady decrease of the achievement gaps as described. • There is disconnect between the singular goal of increasing college enrollment rates versus the more general description of more broadly preparing students for college and career readiness through the national career clusters pathway. As described in the general vision, it seems the district should expect a certain percentage of students to transition from their secondary school to general careers or career education as distinct from college. <p>The applicant does include the information requested regarding graduation rate goals.</p> <p>Overall, as a result of inconsistency between the stated benchmarks and the overall reform vision, the applicant has a low to moderate likelihood of increasing student learning and performance as described.</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	6

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant demonstrates some significant improvement between 2006 and 2011 academic years, including much improved graduation rates from 2006 to 2010, the closing of achievement gaps between Hispanic and white students in multiple grade levels and the increase of students qualifying for the RHSP/DAP diplomas.

The inclusion or absence of some other data points, however, detracts from a fuller picture or understanding that links the applicant to any particular reform efforts in 2006 or 2007.

- Selection of the 2011 school data has limited value related to showing growth since this date correlates with the state-wide shift from the TAKS to the new STARR assessments. The broad increase of scores there, particularly as they are not tied to any description of particular ongoing improvement efforts, could reasonably be tied to the adoption of the new assessment measures.
- The categorization of the data with 'passing' as the threshold has narrow value related to revealing trends; having additional categories that demonstrate the range of student performance beyond passing/failing would have provided a fuller picture.

The applicant does not detail any specific efforts to achieve reforms in its lowest performance schools or for particular grade levels.

There is no indication of efforts to make student performance data available to students, educators or parents in a way that informed overall instruction and educational services.

Overall, the applicant has shown some success in achieving reforms over the prior four years but does not provide evidence to show a comprehensive record of success district-wide.

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

The applicant provides ample description of the ways in which the applicant has excelled in being transparent regarding its financial practices, processes and investments.

- The district's recognition of superior achievement by the Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas demonstrates a high level of financial stewardship.
- The annual information that is posted on the Academic Excellence Indicator Report, as required by state regulatory expectations, includes a high level of detail regarding the district's assessment results and other college ready indicators.
- The district also publishes the information related to the salary schedules for teachers and other staff on its district website, though it does not mention if the actual personnel salaries by staff members are made public.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	7
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The description of the applicant engaging in curriculum development and undergoing an independent five year strategic plan indicates a strong level of autonomy in relation to the State guidance, requirements and expectations.

The applicant describes conditions in terms of the state defining rigor and expectations and the district responding to them in an individualized manner. While allowing districts in this state to capitalize on its autonomies, it does not appear as if the state has any particular stated interested in championing personalized learning environments or digital learning environments as its core metrics.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	2
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

While the applicant cites suggested evidence of meaningful stakeholder engagement, such as the composition of the planning committees for the 2009 strategic plan process, public meetings, support from staff and support from various community members, actual evidence is severely lacking.

- There is no description of the process by which members of the strategic planning committee were chosen or represented diversity in representation beyond their particular roles as students, teachers or community members.
- The only evidence of public meetings being held and comments from them is found in legal documents that seem to suggest merely that district level committees related to planning and decision making should occur at least once per year.
- The survey question posed to the teaching staff in the district asked if they would support the district in its efforts to participation in the Race to the Top grant rather than if the grant as proposed would support or improve their particular effectiveness or interest as educators.
- The included letters of support from key stakeholders are extremely disappointing and at minimum, insincere. With the exception of the mayor who added some supplemental text, all of the other fifteen letters are the same copied text.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	2
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(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

While the applicant has recently instituted promising approaches related to personalized learning, such as RTI as a guiding intervention framework in 2009 and the data/diagnostic systems Inova-Plus and Istation, there is a lack of a cohesive plan related to personalized learning environments as a central goal.

- There are insufficient connections made between the stated interest in students designing their own learning, the intended coherence of course offerings based on multiple career pathways and the ability of teachers to guide and create individual and class-wide learning experiences for their students. It is unclear if the applicant is defining personalized learning environments as the ability for teachers to differentiate instructional approaches or for students to select courses that are of highest interest to them.
- It is likely that the quality of a 10 year plan as initiated by a 5th grader, even with academy adults providing guidance, would prove to be a disconnected or abstract exercise.

As a whole, because of the unalignment of some of the key stated metrics from existing assessments to the goals of personalized learning, the needs and gap analysis is not fully coherent.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	8

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant compellingly frames the proposed plan in the context of statewide changes and an interest in integrating the PBL instructional model, career specific education, college readiness standards, social support, trained educators and personalized learning options.

The intended personnel additions to implement the plan address elements of project management but do not match the likely realities of what oversight and training there would be necessary to make the proposed plan successful.

- It is unclear why the director position is in charge of 'school transformation' as opposed to district transformation. While this may be an issue of nomenclature, it is telling that the level of change is identified at the school level as opposed to a district-wide coordinated one.
- The description of the two instructional technology specialists is lacking, particularly as the individuals in charge of the digital learning aspects of the plan seem to be critical for the success of the proposed plan.
- It is not clear in terms of personnel spending what kinds of structures would be created to identify and compensate school-level teams to do the work required to make the whole scale transformation occur. Without creating these structures, it is unlikely that these coordinator positions would be able to lead practical change at the individual school level.

While the identification of the Federal career clusters and the AchieveTexas College and Career Initiative is an exciting idea towards orienting students to college and career, there is no identification of targeted career cluster or program of study focus areas given the capacity of the local community.

- In any given geographic area, it is unlikely that opportunities exist for students to meaningfully and deeply engage in 16 areas of career interest or 70 particular program areas. The lack of detail regarding the opportunities that do exist in Stephenville or nearby surrounding areas make the prospect of real choices unlikely to actually emerge.
- There is little information or clarity regarding the career interests that might lead to further technical training as opposed to college-level pathways.
- There is little information related to how a student might accumulate the necessary coursework in preparation for any particular career interest or what might comprise the core academic experiences that all students would be required to take.

While the applicant expresses a clear interest in helping students identify academic and career goals, the 10-year graduation plan, one that would seem to require 3rd, 4th and 5th graders to have a clear sense of their future career interests, does not appear likely to be deeply meaningful.

- It is positively noted that there are specific profiling and learning inventory tools available for students to discover career interests and opportunities.
- There is little discussion of opportunities for students to receive ongoing and regular feedback, in particular to revise and shift their college and career interests as the 10-year plan plays out.
- There is little discussion of assessment mechanisms to measure students' individual progress in their chosen coursework pathway of study.

Accommodations or high quality strategies for high-need students are not mentioned.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	6
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's focus on professional learning communities within each school is a promising structure for getting each building's teachers in the room but has limited value towards building a consistent and coherent approach among the different school campuses.

- If PLCs are conducted independently at the six different campus configurations, it is likely that each learning community would come up with its own structures and protocols that would not translate effectively to each successive grade band.
- While good initial 'crucial questions' for the PLCs to consider, the lack of emphasis on the themes of individualization of instruction, orienting teachers/schools towards systems of personalization and general structures to 'hold' this kind of work in each school campus would limit meaningful progress and connection to the overall goals of the proposal.
- Setting up a system of collaboration in and of itself does not automatically equate to higher levels of student achievement. More guidance and direction from project leaders would seem necessary to provide consistency across the PLC's campus-based work and to provide meaningful support for educators to create the broad range of curricular materials, assessments and supports that would be required. Expecting educators in relative isolation to do so on their own as an organic process would likely lead to incoherence and great variety as related to implementation. More attention to building capacity in educators to do this kind of work seems necessary.

The structure of the proposed Professional Learning Academies shows some promise, but the connections to the existing revised curriculum through the district's strategic plan, project-based learning, and the new emphasis on digital classrooms with individualized pathways towards differentiated college/career pathways are undeveloped.

- The initial training schedule as proposed suggests that nearly half of the grade level teachers will not receive the critical PBL training until the second half of the proposed roll-out period.
- There is little information provided as to what exists in the existing curriculum database and the I-station assessment battery of monitoring assessments and other 'individualized instruction' modules.
- There is scarce detail related to the AchieveTexas College and Career Initiative and AchieveTexas models and how they relate to the existing curriculum bundles recently developed by the district.

The intentional focus on organizational health, purportedly at each campus level, shows positive and proactive attentiveness to the importance of leader behavior, behaviors of the staff and the related structures developed within each school campus.

Insufficient discussion of the evaluation system for both teachers, let alone administrators, is provided beyond existing statutory requirements.

- While the current Professional Development and Appraisal System is being revised at the state level, there is no indication of how the applicant district is seeking to inform that practice or to institute its own system towards providing regular feedback to its teachers and administrators for continuous improvement.
- The practice of the five-minute walkthrough seems insufficient as a practice for gathering substantive and meaningful feedback to practicing classroom teachers.
- There is lack of planning, or evidence of, any particular observational tools connected with ongoing professional development that would be utilized towards improving teacher and principal practice.

There is little to no information provided related to high quality learning resources that already exist, particularly those aligned to career and college ready standards, of which teachers would have ready access.

- Even for structures such as moodle online course development, the emphasis is on teachers at each school campus creating its own curricular resources and structures towards individualization.

There is limited attention paid to the proposed Student Academy and SISD Parent/Community Academy even though their respective topics seem critical to the success of the proposal.

- Each academy is only scheduled to meet once, annually, which would seem insufficient to adequately introduce and address all the described topics.
- A number of the topics would seem inappropriate at certain grade levels, for instance early elementary grade students being asked to focus on any of the career related and financial aid topics.

The applicant does reference a promising initiative in place towards recruiting and retaining bilingual teachers, as well as efforts to recruit through area job fairs, mentoring incoming teachers and expanding alternative education certification programs. It is unclear, however, if there is attentiveness, through the evaluation process, of strategically matching more effective teachers with students who might need them most.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	5
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant presents the organizational structure of the district in a general manner but neglects to directly connect how this existing organizational structure would actively support the development of more personalized learning for its students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The levels of administration as described, from the board of trustees to the superintendent, assistant superintendents, departmental directors and campus principals, do not seem to directly connect to site-based decision making as would be called for with the campus-based professional learning communities. While promising to see the institution of a Leadership Academy for all district administrators, it is puzzling to notice the absence of technology integration as a core leadership competency, especially since the effective use of technology is the stated pathway towards the desired 21st century learning goals. <p>In terms of governance and decision-making, there doesn't seem to be a practice of campus-based decision making at each particular campus level. The 'site-based' Decision Making Committee appears to be a district level committee that in fact simply serves as an advisory body to the superintendent on the topics of planning, budgeting, curriculum, staffing patterns and staff development. There seems to be an insufficient ongoing practice of decision making on the part of campus-based school leadership teams.</p> <p>There is insufficient information related to giving students opportunities to demonstrate mastery in differentiated and individualized ways, apart from the existing flexibility of students being able to have flexible attendance if at risk of dropping out, above-age enrollment discretion and credit by exam.</p> <p>Nominal attention is paid towards differentiating for the needs of English language learners or students with disabilities, apart from existing processes for providing general, specialized services.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	7
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant gives meaningful attentiveness to the issue of student access to the digital learning materials through the piloted use of wireless air-cards for student use at home and an existing digital lending program.</p> <p>While the existence of portals such as the Skyward Family Access program and the My Big Campus social learning platforms provides important entry points for parents and students, additional infrastructure such as orientation and training sessions for usage is lacking. In this regard, technical support, whether through peers, online support or local support, is absent.</p> <p>The linkage to the Texas P-16 Public Education Information Resources is a strong way of ensuring an interoperable data system for compliance and regulatory reporting, as well as information related to planning, policy creation and decision-making.</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>Beyond mechanisms described for regulatory and compliance reporting, there is no clearly defined, detailed or cohesive strategy related to providing timely and regular feedback on progress towards project goals at the district or specific campus-levels. No specific strategy is outlined as a major element of responsibility related to monitoring, measuring or publicly sharing information on the progress of its investments through the proposed grant period.</p> <p>The focus of the evaluation and data collection, whether quantitative or qualitative, is more on summative elements of reporting and checking for fidelity of implementation rather than an interest in surfacing formative information to be used for strategic adjustment and improvement at the level of the participating campus schools.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	1
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Communication and engagement, beyond the general description of the participatory evaluation process, appear to be limited to those participants and to the primary audience, the school board through an annual formal report presentation. There is no particular strategy outlined towards communicating ongoing effectiveness of initiatives with community partners in any substantive manner. The goals of continued engagement of stakeholders in this process are absent in the description of the proposed evaluation framework.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	2
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>While the performance measure goals over the proposed grant periods are ambitious, the following elements are missing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of the rationales for choosing these particular measures as ones that best capture the students' transition to the differentiated and individualized college and career pathways. Connection of these particular metrics to the theory of action which focuses on the use of technology, involvement with project-based learning and individualized career differentiation. Plans for possible adjustment if these particular measures are not adequately capturing progress towards intended goals. 		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	1
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Beyond the reporting structure and surveys that will be conducted on an annual basis, there is nominal discussion of plans to evaluate the effectiveness of particular professional development strategies, academy participation and the ways in which each school campus has developed workable and vertically aligned strategies through the professional learning community structure.</p>		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	3
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant provides sufficient documentation to detail anticipated expenditures related to the grant proposal.</p> <p>The request summary, categorized into supporting personnel, Professional Learning Academies, Leadership Academies, Technology Devices and Evaluation, reflects imbalance in terms of overall proposal design.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The nearly 60% expenditure on laptop/ipad purchases for every student in every school does not address building or strengthening the infrastructure for students to access online digital materials and resources. As indicated from some of the student survey responses, wireless access as currently exists seems to be problematic. There is inadequate explanation as to how the quadrupling of the anticipated budget totals for each of the requested areas either deepens or strategically shifts what is already budgeted and planned for in terms of strategic improvement. The high expense of the PBL trainings, at \$4500 a day for eight days per teacher greatly overshadows the time and expenditure planned for teachers to actually do the more central work of integrating the common core standards, national career clusters model and revised assessments in their grade level classrooms. The time budgeted for this latter critical and difficult work is only two days which seems hugely inadequate. There is no apparent budgeting allocated for the work of building and supporting ongoing community partnerships as related to the intended experiential career framework. Funds would seem to be necessary to institutionalize this broad practice. 		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	3
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Some general information is provided related to the sustainability of the project's goals after the term of the grant but no specific anticipated costs are detailed. While the described focus on building lasting capacity by 2017 is the goal, specific information related to expected technology replacement costs, staff attrition and retraining rates and further modification of planned curricular adjustments is absent.</p>		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	3
<p>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant successfully describes the local community context and potential public and private partners that might be interested in partnering related to resource alignment and integrated services with the school district.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The existing relationship with TSU is evidently a strong one, with existing partnerships related to community fitness and health and many of its teachers receiving its training at the university. New opportunities, whether one related to developing a new school/evening homework program at TSU or expanding the Effective Schools Project to address issues geared toward parent issues and concerns, are promising. <p>There is lack of detail, however, related to how the proposed community partnerships represent a jointly considered resource alignment or integration of services that relate to both the school district and the community partner interests.</p> <p>The applicant does not describe a clear process by which collected data would be used to target its resources and direct them to students who need them the most.</p> <p>There is not a specific focus on serving the needs of high-needs students in any particular targeted way nor description of training school staff to identify those students who might most benefit from expanded, integrated services.</p> <p>The proposed metrics for the competitive priority performance measures do not reflect the additional factors of socio-emotional growth, career interest/exploration or other increased civic aptitudes that might result from strategic community partnerships.</p>		

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met
<p>Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>As a whole, the applicant does present a broad vision that addresses the core assurance areas and indicates how planned personnel hiring, program expenditures, capital expenditures, teacher training and community partners would play a role in moving forward in its school improvement efforts. The supporting explication and planned programming, however, do not adequately match the vision in a way that presents a convincing likelihood of success.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the context of an existing strategic planning framework, there was not an adequate explanation of how the proposed Rtt-D funding and priority areas would interplay with it, whether by deepening or broadening the originally planned school improvement efforts or by shifting its direction given the particular guidelines of the Rtt-D absolute priorities. The documentation included in the application, namely the reports by the different workgroup areas, reflected more progress on character education curricula and school-plant improvement efforts rather than a comprehensive shift in the way that ISID staff and students experience teaching and learning. There is an overall lack of coherence in the theory of action that is intended to fundamentally shift teaching and learning practices to a focus on personalization and preparedness for college and career upon graduation from high school. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is dissonance between the existing decision making structures in ISID and what would seem to be required given the proposed shifts from a traditional learning environment to one in which school-based teachers and staff create experiences for students to pursue individualized and differentiated college/career pathways. Moreover, the evaluation strategy defaults to the limited school-based and limited community input models that singularly inform the school board and superintendent in their decision-making. There is lack of clarity in the interplay between existing digital resources, what would need to be created on the part of school-based teachers and issues of vertical alignment for a K-12 pathway. There is a lack of focus to the significant modification, training and support required to revise the existing curriculum, assessments and instructional practices that would be required to shift teachers, as described in the proposal, from deliverers of information to guides of students as independent learners. The budget does not reflect some critical areas of development, namely the funding of a broad technological improvement plan and thought towards developing and sustaining meaningful community and business partnerships. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The technology purchase is limited to a significant purchase of electronic devices for all students without attention required to have wireless networks that are reliable and robust in school buildings and a detailed way for all students to have continued access to digital resources in their homes. Nominal attention is given to meaningful integration of community partners into the fabric of the students' core educational experiences. 		

Total	210	89
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0460TX-2 for Stephenville 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:

Stephenville Independent School District demonstrated a comprehensive and coherent reform vision for student achievement and has a good basis for future gains that focuses on all community and district resources to integrate the use of new technologies to make a difference for a individualized learning environment. I scored this criterion in the Medium range due to the applicant's ability to build on the four core educational assurance areas. SISD vision is based on ambitious goals addressed evidence by:

- System-wide paradigm shift from traditional classroom to digital classroom
- Standards-based reform aligned with college and career expectations
- Data systems identified to improve instruction through STAAR and end of course assessment
- Evaluation system for administrators and teachers
- Strategic 5-year plan for achievement.

SISD recognizes the need to change to a different paradigm of instruction to narrow achievement gaps by focusing on the needs of individual students. According to the application, the District has not been successful for improving achievement. SISD did not meet AYP results in Reading/ELA and economically disadvantaged students. The achievement of SISD Hispanics and economically disadvantaged students are low. Recognizing the District need to improve achievement, the vision is to provide several measures to support a high quality plan. Even at the high school level demonstrates a gaps in percentage passing between White students and Hispanics and Economically Disadvantaged students. SISD recognizes the need to improve graduation rates, especially for Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students.

SISD does not demonstrate a strong track record of improvement for student achievement. Progress for White students have been maintained; however, significant gaps for Hispanics and economically disadvantaged students. Their reform vision is to use these resources to address their needs.

Overall, SISD is in the Medium range because of its reform vision to identify the areas that need improvement and provide a paradigm shift from the way things have traditionally been done by designing a plan to engage more students. The concept of individualizing the learning environment for students and focusing on College and Career Readiness Standards will assist in SISD reform efforts as expressed in their vision. By deepening learning for all students based on using individualize learning techniques will provide overall improvement. I feel the District recognizes this need to shift from current teaching strategies and provide new technologies and professional development for their staff to make this shift. Significant progress for all subgroups can be obtained with efforts to incorporate their vision in the goals of the four core educational areas.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	7
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(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

SISD score was in the Medium range for the approach selected to implement this proposal. The applicant selected all students and all schools to participant. There was no description of the process used for selection or feedback from schools in the selection process. A documented a list of six campuses K-12 and enrollment to support implementation was given.

The Medium score is supported by the fact the applicant provided a list of schools. Additional information on what each school felt about being selected would help improve this score. The school demographics supported evidence of

- number of participating students
- numbers of high-need students
- number of low-income students.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	7
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(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

SISD scored a Medium plan as evidenced by the goals set forth. Because of the reform vision, the District is changed to focus more on the individualized learning of each student. SISD reported low growth in its assessments and the traditional way of doing things. In order to make this reform, SISD identified goals in Appendix 2 for improving summative assessment, decreasing achievement gaps, increasing graduation rates, increasing college enrollment. SISD demonstrated support for the reform by analyzing what is currently being used and selecting new alternatives for implementation such as computerized programs, iStation, responses to RtI, SISD Strategic Plan to name a few.

SISD explained examples on what procedures would be used to decrease the achievement gaps. Each school reported an achievement goal along with a goal identified for Hispanic students and economically disadvantaged students. SISD explained what processes would be used to accomplish this decrease of narrowing the gap. By changing the paradigm for all schools, the new reform would show evidence for all students when implemented.

Overall, there is a strong need to change based on the data and the reform proposal would provide scaled up procedures for the participating schools to improve student learning outcomes.

SISD completed a Race to the Top Plan with detailed implementation evidenced by:

- Goals - Achievable
- Activities to support the goals
- Long and short term outcomes for implementation
- Quantitative and qualitative measures for achievement
- Performance on summative assessments

The applicant's vision is an ambitious plan to provide change for all students with the individualized learning environment.

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

SISD provided details for the percentages of closing the achievement gap for each subgroup.

SISD provided a 10 year graduation map to personalize individualized instruction and to increase graduation rate.

SISD provided limited information on how college enrollment would be increased.

SISD provided information of summative assessment by the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills that delineated sub-groups achievement gaps.

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:

SISD received a score of Medium quality for demonstrating a clear record of success. SISD has some examples of narrowing the achievement gap, but in many cases the significant progress of subgroup gaps did not decrease. Evidence presented by the applicant revealed the subgroups -- Hispanics, special education students, economically disadvantaged students, students with limited English proficiency, all performed below. Due to these gaps, the applicant stated that this is the strong basis for the reform it would like to take. Because there is not a clear record of success in the last four years for increasing equity in learning, this supports a condition for a need for reform.

SISD provided evidence of some narrowing. Achievement gaps in grades 5, 6, and 9 have pretty much stayed the same or increased. Limited information provided of achievement gaps for other grade levels.

The graduation rate for all student groups have increased from 90.6% to 95.6% for all students. The White students graduation rate increased by approximately 1%. Hispanic students and economically disadvantaged increased significantly from 71.7% to 93.3%, Hispanics from 78.3% to 93.9%.

The applicant did not provide college enrollment rates. Using alternative indicators such as the number of students completing advanced and dual enrollment courses do not reflect a true picture. Overall, the data to show increases in AP/IB examinations does show who enrolled in college. This data is available through College Board on how many students from each high school enrolled in college and received AP credit.

SISD provided limited explanation to address how low performance data will be made available to parents and students to improve participation and instructional services.

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

SISD received a score of Medium range for increasing transparency in the District processes, practices and investment. SISD addressed this indicator by multiple measures. The Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas rated the District 69 out of 70 because it reflected how the District interacts with information for the State and public. The applicant reported that the District makes information available.

The applicant did provide sufficient evidence regarding the actual personnel salaries and expenditures. (See Appendix B2.) The applicant referred you to the website, which is okay for stakeholder; however, what about parents that do not have internet availability.. SISD used multiple measures for processes and practices evidenced by:

- Texas Financial Accounting & Report Guidelines
- Data reported on Districts website @ www.sville.us for administrative salaries
- SISD recognized for superior achievement by the Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas for evaluating the District.

As a whole, evidence demonstrated the information is made available. The actual teacher salaries was reported in the Academic Excellence System (See page 445). The average actual salaries was reported for teachers, professional support staff, campus administration, and central administration. Other actual expenditures were reported for operation (See page 447). Limited information is provided on making investments public.

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

SISD received a Medium score for autonomy under State, legal, statutory and regulatory requirements to implement the proposal. The applicant demonstrated some conditions of autonomy demonstrated by the fact teachers have been empowered to write curriculum documents for writing, mathematics, and science. This evidence supports the improvement of instruction on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. White students increased by 10%, Hispanic students increased by 16%, and economically disadvantaged students increased by 16%.

The applicant did not provide actual legal statutory and regulatory context. The development of SISD Strategic Plan and SISD Leadership Academy, the establishment of the Response to Intervention processes gave the District some autonomy to support the new reform based on the strategies that would be implemented.

Some Legislative initiatives are reported in the plan, however, the report does not reflect the legislative laws. SISD Strategic Plan does support what the reform would undertake by developing strategies for implementation. Some action plans are outlined for implementation.

There is no detailed information on what the State legal, statutory and regulatory context are. I have scored this criterion in the medium range because of some support of autonomy, but there is not enough evidence from the State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements. The strategic plan would personalized the learning environment, but no mention of the State legal requirements.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	8
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

SISD received a score High range based on the support and engagement of stakeholders in the development of the proposal.

SISD developed a system for strategic planning with district personnel to support their vision. Membership of the planning team included parent representatives, teachers, principals, community members, business representative, and SISD school board members. A list of all members were provided in Appendix A5. Multiple measured provided stakeholders engagement and support evidenced by:

- Development of Strategic Plan
- Identification of various committees

- Involvement of stakeholders in the planning process
- Survey completed by teachers for Race to The Top with 80% as the low and 100% from several campuses.
- Application supported by mayor
- Survey completed by teachers
- Meetings held with community and civic leaders

Actual letters of support came from the mayor of Stephenville, Texas for endorsement. A survey was given to students for support. Also letters of support from community and civic leaders are included. SISD have many letters of support from teachers, principals, students, and community leaders to implement Race to the Top. Several meetings were held to discuss the purpose as reflect in the letters and agendas attached. This criterion was rated high because of all the multiple measures used to get approval.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	2
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(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

SISD was scored in the Medium range on this criterion to implement a personalized learning environment. The applicant reported they did not meet AYP based on Reading/LEA for Hispanic students and economically disadvantaged students. Some examples of actual gaps were listed such as Henderson High School 7 & 8 grade in mathematics for both Hispanics and economically disadvantaged students. Based on this type of analysis of their assessment, SISD recognized the need to design a personalized learning plan for each student. Multiple measures were used as evidence such as:

- Review of formative and summative data
- TEKS - common assessment
- STAAR
- End-of- Course assessment,
- Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System

District plans are developed after reviewing plans and establishing ways to assist students with gaps through RtI and Inova-Plus.

Professional development will be available to all school personnel as a data source to inform instruction. Using Istation to identify strengths and weaknesses, teachers can provide a personalized learning plan for each students. A comprehensive system will be in place to address the needs of each students. SISD reported that they will also engage their students as designers of their own learning as producers and responsible for the digital devices that would be used. SISD has focused on the attention of using various data to implement the new reform. The applicant showed some evidence of analyzing the needs and gaps as identified by subgroups. More details are needed on what the plan will address. Additional information is needed on what the gaps are. Limited information on what the gaps are to improve instruction.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	10

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

SISD scored a Medium range for the Learning approach to engage all learners. SISD quality of plan approached achievable goals for assisting students for college and careers. SISD focused on a paradigm shift from traditional ways of teaching by providing a more personalized learning environment to meet all students' expectations for college and career readiness.

By adopting the 16 career cluster of the United States Department of Education Career Cluster System, this will provide an infrastructure for students and parents to know what the careers are and what will be needed to accomplish their goals. The applicant identified the 16 career clusters to help students know what they are and to align their coursework based on the college or careers selected.

SISD students can further their deep learning experiences by developing their own 10-year graduation plan based on their career goals. By identifying this process for career readiness, SISD allows students to develop knowledge and skills necessary for employment or college. The 10-year plan showed evidence that the courses taken by students will deepen their learning because it is based on the student's personal interests.

SISD demonstrated an individualized learning environment starting as early as Pre K-3. This early beginning starts a way of focusing on the personalized instructional program for each students. The 10 year graduation plan starts with 4th grade. SISD adopted a list of multiple measures for each grade level and I like the fact that students will have the opportunity to revise their plan.

Other than using formative assessments, the applicant did not provide sufficient clarification on how students would be exposed to diverse cultures. Limited exposure was presented. The applicant also provided limited information on how it would address team work, critical thinking and communication with feedback of what students want.

The implementation of the District goals provided support for teachers and administrators to develop their project based on their project/product learning model that will also enhance deep learning for students.

SISD provided some evidence for a personalized instructional program and skill development. Some of these instructional approaches included:

1. 10 year graduation plan
2. College and career standards
3. 16 career clusters
4. Strategic plan - including digital learning environment
5. Feedback based on personalized instruction program by Texas Student Data System
6. Inova software for students to make progress
7. SISD student academies - to help students use the tools and resources did not provide sufficient information when the student academies would start and who will be responsible for them.

There is some limitations based on the time it would take to get all the elements in place. SISD did not address the subgroups or if anything would be done other than the mentoring program. These are their students with high needs in order to close the achievement gap. More information is needed on how the resources will be used.

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

SISD scored in the Medium range for Teaching and Leading based on SISD support to provide an infrastructure to train their stakeholders to teach the new content areas that focus on individualized student learning. A lot of focus for this plan is based on professional development. First, SISD will focus on developing a Professional Learning Communities to engage in training for improving teachers and to support progress for college and career standards. This criterion will assist the teachers be prepared as they change over. Limited information is provided of what those professional development opportunities would look like.

SISD reported that professional Learning teams will enable their District to meet each student's academic needs. In my opinion this will definitely help each teacher by working in teams to find out what is needed for each student. Identification of each student current level and moving forward will individualize their learning environment. Significant progress would occur for this strategy. Evidence from SISD survey showed that 94.3% (267) teachers indicated they are willing to support this initiative for the District to participate in Race to the Top. Only 16 teachers said no. This definitely shows a willingness to make it happen.

SISD Strategic Plan slogan is "Every Student, Every Day." By adopting such a slogan, teachers are focused on individual content and instruction. Training will still be provided in the core content areas, but there is some evidence presented that work has started to provide collaboration. The applicant addressed almost all elements on what they will do for example, "Teachers will attend Project-Based Learning. The training is limited to 12 teams of 12 each. This will take time for the entire staff to be trained to do total support and implementation. Limited information was provided for individualized learning to enable full implementation.

SISD documented multiple training measures such as:

1. Professional Learning Academies
2. Project-Based Learning Training
3. LEAD 4 Ward Trainings
4. Technology training for teachers
5. Career training for teachers

A limited amount of information on how technology would be individualized for instructional purpose or how it would be used. Achieve Texas College and Career Initiative meets the criterion for measuring progress toward college and career ready standards. Limited information how this would relate.

SISD will use the INOVA Process as a data disaggregate tool. This will enable teachers to provide feedback on their students progress. Again, how long will it take SISD to start implementation based on the various training programs that need to be implemented.

SISD plan provided several resources for teaching and leading evidenced by:

- Effective implementation of personalized learning environment and strategies to improve learning.
- Professional Learning communities for full implementation of personalized learning and teaching.
- Data used to measure results from TEKS.
- Implementation of Professional Learning Academies.
- Project-Based Learning.
- Technology training for teacher.
- STAAR - professional development session.
- Career training for teachers.
- Leadership Academy.

SISD reported evidence of teachers' principals' and superintendents' evaluations. Texas Education Code provided statutory requirements for each District to conduct an annual appraisal of the administration. This evaluation does include recommendation and intervention when needed for improvement. SISD provided limited information on examples of interventions as needed for support. Need to detail what type of interventions.

SISD academies will be conducted once a year; additional time may be needed to personalize this plan.

SISD supports many measures for school leaders to be trained and to enable them to concentrate on an effective learning environment. Limited information provided for feedback.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	9

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

SISD scored in the Medium range based on their policies and infrastructure to implement this proposal. SISD organized infrastructure supports the school operations and implementation of their instructional programs. The Board policy provided structure to utilize their professional staff and other resources the District may need to implement a new learning environment.

SISD provided several examples of documentation for school leadership teams by forming a Leadership Academy, which is composed of all administrators in the District. SISD meets this criteria for flexibility and autonomy for calendars, school personnel decisions through their Site-Based Decision Making Process. SISD Site-Decision Making Committee provided evidence of autonomy by being involved in the following activities:

- Planning
- Budgeting decisions
- Curriculum decision
- Staff development
- School organization such as the school calendar
- Evaluation

The SISD Site-Based Decision Making process provided the leadership team with the flexibility to focus on improving student achievement and adapting a student learning environment.

Based on the evidence provided, all students have an opportunity to demonstrate academic mastery through Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for each course a student enroll in. Instructional procedures for Limited English Proficiency students and special education students were identified. One part of the plan that is notable is the fact that SISD students at any grade level may accelerate through courses by exams to receive credit. This policy allows for instruction not to be based on just time spent in the classroom. Other examples for opportunities of mastery is their dual college credit program.

SISD provided several ways to facilitate personalized learning by their organized infrastructure, providing school leadership teams, giving students the opportunity to demonstrated mastery and also the various learning resources for all students. One area of concern was what type of additional opportunities are available for their subgroups to individualize their learning program. Additional details is needed on how the personalized learning would be accomplished.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	6
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(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

SISD school infrastructure supports personalized learning evidenced by SISD WAN - wide area net work for the District. Technology is available from various sources for teachers, students, and parents based on the wireless infrastructure and MBC social learning. Administrative staff has the available of Skyward System. Skyward System is administrative software for K-12 schools. More details is needed on what the system offers and how it will be used.

SISD provided information on how the technology system would be effective to response to student needs. The applicant provided an example of My Big Campus social network for delivery of instruction such as on line searches, exams, and share information. SISD does not provide sufficient information on what teachers would provide through technology for the individualized learning environment. The applicant states equipment is available, but no mention of what this instruction would look like.

SISD scored in the Medium range because more clarification is needed on the individual learning environment to assist students. There is a lot of emphasis on the use of their partnerships. More information is needed on how effective this Big Brother and Big Sister offers. Limited information on what support by parents. Limited information provided from outside groups. Details are needed on what those groups would be responsible for to support students.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	8
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>SISD scored in the Medium range for implementing a rigorous continuous improvement process. More information is needed on how this process would be rigorous. SISD presented evidence that a contract will be made with an external evaluator to provide regular feedback on the progress toward meeting project goals. There is no evidence of who the evaluator would be other than someone who has extensive experience in Texas education and how the evaluator will be selected for this critical role to provide a continuous improvement plan.</p> <p>SISD evaluation plan will include both quantitative and qualitative assessment based on the work provided by the evaluator. SISD documented what the qualitative component of the evaluation would look like. Many other evaluation procedures were identified such as surveys, observations, document review, reporting procedures and bi-weekly status updates. Information regarding setting performance goals for students was documented to show support for this proposal. Each grade level will receive some form of assessment. One goal established by SISD is to design an effective and efficient plan that has minimum impact on participant time and results in actionable findings for the District to use in future decision making. I agree this strategy is critical for the success of the program based on the various evaluation system that would be implemented. Limited information on what will be done once the assessment is received to provide feedback. More details are needed to show continuous improvement and regular feedback. How will the feedback be implemented?</p> <p>SISD scored in the Medium range for the continuous improvement process. The evaluation system would monitor the program and then make changes. SISD provided limited information on how this investment would be publicly shared.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	1
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>SISD scored in the Low range for ongoing communication and engagement. SISD provided several measures for ongoing communication such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys - to understand how reforms are being perceived by the population as a whole • Annual reports - integrated analysis of the impact of the program • Executive summary posted on the District website • PowerPoint presentation • Project kick-off meeting and bi-weekly status updates <p>SISD provided limited communication and engagement information. SISD stated that the evaluation teams will establish effective communication procedures between all stakeholders. It is unclear what will be established by the team and what the communication would like. Other than the bi-weekly status updates and the kick-off meeting, it is clear what other strategies would be in place. Additional information is needed for engagement.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	3
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>SISD scored in the Medium range for this criterion. SISD provided evidence of all the performance measures. SISD showed evidence of goals for the performance measures such as reading/ELA. Reading/ELA students will score 94% in the year 2012 and 100% 2013-2014. Performance goals were identified for all levels starting with pre-K. Formative assessment is provided at this early age and intervention for pre-K students. Another assessment provided for pre-K students is Fitness Grams. Performance goals for students in grades 4-8 is based on STAAR and the results on statewide assessments.</p> <p>Several performance indicators are documented for students in grades 9-12. A low percentage of students graduate (64%) and attend colleges and universities. SISD is starting to use the college and career readiness for this component.</p> <p>SISD provided evidence of performance measures for all students and subgroups who have highly effective teachers or principal, AYP proficiency rates, number of students who are on track to college and career readiness, attendance, healthy fitness, number of students who complete and submit free application for Free Application for Federal Student Aid, high school graduation rate, average score on PSAT.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	2
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>SISD provided some information for evaluation. There is a lot of professional development and time is needed for complete implementation. SISD provided limited information regarding the effectiveness of the investment.</p> <p>Information was provided regarding professional development and technology that would be used. Two individuals were identified, district project manager and external evaluator, who would be responsible to ensure that the plan is being implemented. More information is needed on feedback from professional development and the activities that would be utilized.</p> <p>The end product is improvement student achievement based on the individualized learning plan. The applicant did not clearly address student outcomes.</p>		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	6
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>SISD scored in the Medium range for the budget. The items in the budget list several personnel to implement the program such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of School Transformation 		

- College and Career Coordinator
- External Evaluator

Most of the items in the budget seemed reasonable for improvement, especially the Leadership Academy and Professional Learning Academy. The technology devices will provide support for implementation for the independent learner and the personalized learning environment that will be needed. SISD provided information for the budget that was evidenced by a detailed narrative for the use of funds based on the 5 project areas:

1. Personnel
2. Academies
3. Leadership Academy
4. Professional Learning Academy
5. Technology/Evaluation

The applicant described how the expenditures would be used to support the development and implementation. Funds for 1 time use were also identified.

SISD provided limited information on what funds would be used to update technology equipment at the end of the program.

The budget is reasonable for what the applicant proposed to do.

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

SISD scored in the Low Medium range for sustainability of the project goals. SISD may need additional time for training in core content areas at the end of the grant period to continue support. SISD identified funds from other sources such as:

- Title I - \$30K per year
- State Comp Ed - \$30K
- TEA Lending Grant \$100K
- Local Funds \$461,294
- Principal training and Support - \$20K

The amount requested supports the implementation in the core educational areas. SISD provided limited information on the budget for the 3 years after the term of the grant even though funding would also come from other sources. A big concern is how the program will be continued to support the change that is needed. Limited information provided on continuing cost. Limited information on budget to continue.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

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

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

SISD scored in the Medium range. SISD identified partnerships are Tarleton State University, Ranger College, and SISD Education Foundation. The applicant stated that the partners will work with the SISD's Director of School Transformation to form a Community Advisory Committee. The applicant comments are not detailed on what these partners would be responsible for if the Community Advisory Committee is formed. SISD provided some of the services that would be provided such as health, counseling, childcare, education and human service. The applicant does not go into detail of these services and there is no plan when or where the services will be completed.

The partnership for a fitness evaluation program for SISD students in grades 2-6 does support a continuous instructional program and integrated student service program. Another partnership that the applicant proposes is to work with Tarleton State University College of Education to develop an after school/evening homework program. SISD provided limited information of what this program would be and which students would the program address such as the subgroups, Hispanics or disadvantaged students. Additional detail should be added for the structure of the program.

Ranger College currently has a partnership to offer dual credit courses. This partnership will continue for students to receive credit for their college and career standards. More details are needed on what this partnership would be responsible for.

SISD identified the required number of population level desired results to support the Race to the Top proposal.

SISD provided information on the performance measures to track the selected indicators such as the number of students in tested grades meeting the Healthy Fitness Zone. The population was identified, sub groups, baseline goal and target areas for the term of the proposal. Another performance measures target was the number of students who are college and career ready. SISD did not provide explanation on outcomes from the partners. Lack of evidence on how the partners will track the students. Lack of details on how the results would be improved over time.

Overall, SISD provided limited information regarding partners and the impact the partners have on student outcomes. Additional details on the services of the partner are needed on how they will work with Race to the Top reform proposal. SISD identified 3 lead partners, - Ranger College, Tarleton State University, SISD Education Foundation. The applicant showed some evidence on how the partners would participate with the schools. I am not sure what schools the partners are participating in and how many students they service.

Areas that need to be addressed for the partnerships are assessing the needs of students and identifying the needs and goals. SISD proposed to work with TSU to expand the Effective Schools Project to provide training for staff regarding issues affecting families. One of the themes used is "Overcoming Poverty." This is one way that TSU has addressed family needs. More details are needed on other services that would be provided. Ranger College has been used for annual college/career fair. This partnership is an excellent focus for the college and career readiness. The partners would offer more services; however, there must be a plan or structure for SISD to implement their services if asked. There is limited use of the partners as described in the plan.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

SISD met this priority because it showed evidence of a comprehensive plan that was build around the core education assurance described in this application. The applicant proposed to used those core education assurance areas to provide a change from the traditional ways of teaching to provide instruction based on an individualized learning system to improve student achievement. SISD recognized the need to improve student achievement based on data reflected in the various assessments for the District. Having established various committees at the District and school levels, there is overwhelming support to support their instructional program for students that are aligned with college- and career-ready standards and to improve their graduation rates. The proposal addresses all these areas starting with early intervention for Pre K students to high schools. SISD has

put in several procedures to identify the effectiveness of educators by providing the necessary professional development to build upon the success of the reform.

Overall, the components meet the requirements for a personalized learning environment for student achievement. The components described in the proposal is designed to address the need for change for better student outcomes for their District.

Total	210	115
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0460TX-3 for Stephenville Independent School District

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 provides a vision that recognizes the need for collaboration between educators, businesses and the community to support learning. Digital devices are the cornerstone of this vision and have the potential to enhance learning. There is a need to discuss the current state of district technology, how this enhancement will make a difference and how equity will be increased. It is clear from the narrative and Appendix A that members of the community participated in the development of the vision and there is a common and agreed direction for school activities.</p> <p>A clear and credible approach to the goal of increasing student achievement is evident in the vision based on standards-based instruction and the use of problem based instruction to deepen students' understanding.</p> <p>The applicant addresses the issue of school reform. The activities and areas suggested align more with the idea of renewal than reform. The school district is successful in many areas and the applicant seeks to improve by increasing digital and other modalities to improve learning through a problem-based learning approach. Technology can support this approach. A reform effort would be the change and alteration of existing governance, policies, plans and procedures to adapt to new circumstances and requirements.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	6
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant describes the six schools involved in the project and lists the achievement scores, the number of students, and the number of students from low income families. In chart form the applicant lists all schools in the district and all will participate from Pre-K to high school. The charts do not describe strategies and processes of implementation in the closing of achievement gaps for economically disadvantaged students and Hispanic students.</p> <p>Particular concerns at grades 6 through 8 will be addressed. Currently, 90% of economically disadvantaged students meet the state standards in math and about 75% in reading. The process for selection of certain groups and implementation strategies for reform are not clearly presented in this section. The effort to improve these scores and reach the 100% may require adjustments to the program, but not necessarily reform efforts. On the other hand, the bold goals to increase performance to the advanced level would require a major paradigm shift since the economically disadvantaged are reaching these levels in small percentages. The applicant needs to describe in detail how the reform approach will target various underachieving groups and what techniques will target second language learners and students with disabilities.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	4
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>This section is not specifically addressed in the proposal. However, since all schools are involved in the project, activities should be scaled up to include all students. The proposal does address how the career program will develop a series of career education courses in partnership with a local colleges and businesses in order to improve college readiness and attendance. The strategic plan offers the possibility of cooperation and describes efforts at instructional and institutional improvements. However, there is no coherent theory of change and how the changes will link to student improvements, especially in the disadvantaged and special education categories.</p>		
(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	6
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>In chart form specific attention is given to gaps between white students, economically disadvantaged students and Hispanic students. The applicant provides comprehensive achievement data and projections for all grades with emphasis on closing the achievement gaps and increasing college attendance. In areas of high performance and areas of moderate performance on standardized tests, there are ambitious goals of 100% proficient on standardized tests. Graduation rates are high at over 90% for economically disadvantaged; however, there is no projection or discussion in this area.</p> <p>The proposal seeks to use other measures besides standardized tests to assess performance especially in the use of Problem-based learning. However, there is no discussion of what these measures might be and how they will influence achievement. The proposal states that one of the goals would be to reduce barriers to achievement. There is no discussion of the barriers their relationship to increased equity, and what some of the steps might be to eliminate and reduce inequities in the school system. Using Problem based-learning and increasing teacher production are used as possible way to increase achievement. The applicant does not provide evidence of the success of these efforts in previous years nor does the applicant provide a description of the types of training necessary to ensure quality and increased performance.</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	9
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant uses charts and raw data demonstrating consistent improvement in closing achievement gaps with economically disadvantaged students and Hispanic students. There have been significant increases in the numbers of all students enrolled in AP courses including Hispanic and economically disadvantaged. Of special note is that there have been increases of the percentage of Hispanic and disadvantaged students exempted on the Texas Success Initiative.</p> <p>The district has managed to achieve modest gains in achievement from 2007 to 2011 in most areas. The gaps between white and Hispanic students have narrowed during this period. There are no historical comparisons presented for the Special Education groups for the four year period.</p> <p>This section of the application does not contain a description of how reform efforts have impacted lower achieving schools or grade levels. There needs to be some connection between district efforts and increased achievements. Strategic Planning efforts and activities date from 2010 and 2011. The narrative does not link outcomes with district initiatives or special efforts from the years 2007 until 2011.</p> <p>Student performance data as defined in the notice means that information about a student including test scores, engagement, time on tasks and instructor information needs to be available to educators and parents to inform and improve participation, instruction and services. There is no information in this section that discusses how the information is shared with parents and how results are used to improve performance.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	3
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant follows Texas accounting procedures and has been recognized for "Superior Achievement" by the financial integrity rating system of Texas. The applicant does not state the year that this award was received.</p> <p>The Board of Education releases all materials in conjunction with state rules and regulations at a public hearing and on the district web site. Appendix B provides information about teacher-pupil ratios and administrative expenditures. The district reports include staffing patterns, student-teacher ratios and fund balances. Although salary schedules are posted, there is no information in Appendix B or in the narrative about the actual personnel salaries for instructional staff and teachers at the school level. Although these may be listed in the district budget, there is no evidence in the application that the district uses these specific categories to disseminate information for the public.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	4
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>In the last two years the district has developed a strategic plan designed to improve all parts of the school system. Updates and plans are included in an appendix with some bold and ambitious goals for leadership, achievement and RTI.</p> <p>The narrative provides limited information about a fifth grade pilot at one school using problem based learning as model for district replication. Problem based learning is not a new concept and there is considerable research and information about this teaching paradigm. The applicant does not offer evidence of success or how this model will be replicated in diverse settings or how it will connect with the goal of personalized learning environments.</p> <p>The narrative provides limited information about the successful conditions that exist in the school district to implement personalized learning environments such as teacher interest, parent involvement, state support or regulatory requirements.</p>		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	6
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant used an outside consulting service to assist in the strategic planning process. This process involved various segments of the community as well as school personnel. The process has been linked with a visioning institute supported by the Texas Association of School Administrators. The applicant asserts that this proposal was an outgrowth of the strategic plan and the process. New committee members including parents and others have developed recommendations and modifications of the strategic plan that appear to be incorporated in the grant proposal. However, the applicant sought input and comment from many sources after the proposal was developed. It does not appear that teachers and parents were part of the actual grant planning process, but were asked for support and validation after the proposal was completed. The same can be said for other groups. It is not stated in the proposal that parents or groups representing Hispanics and low income students were asked to review the proposal or be a part of the development process.</p> <p>Several letters of support accompany the application and the application has been reviewed by local business, college and government officials with high praise.</p>		
(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	4
<p>(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has identified the area of need in terms of AYP, and has developed strategies and a system for data collection that will enable staff to use information to meet student needs. Training for an individual graduation plan, partnership with Tarleton State, using a computerized diagnostic tool, and enhancing RTI assistance are means of addressing needs and implementing a personalized learning environment. There is no mention in this section about how digital tools will be employed in the implementation of problem-based learning, and this is one key component in the attempt to personalize learning. The proposal does not connect this component to the needs of students and the logic of the reform agenda.</p>		

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	14
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>A major component of this program is the development of course menus for 16 career clusters. An ambitious partnership involving schools, colleges, a foundation and the business community will develop the curriculum. The development of a 10 year graduation plan for fourth graders appears to be a method designed to personalize the process and provide students with an understanding of the need to connect learning with long term academic goals. Although the applicant discusses the development of the graduation plan, there is no discussion of how this plan will be monitored from year to year. There is a lack of information about the staff responsible for communication with students and parents on a regular basis, about plan progress and about the need for modifications.</p> <p>The applicant has linked the 16 career clusters to college and career readiness and has formed a partnership to develop and implement the program in conjunction with a college and the business community. There is a need to develop a system to monitor progress during the program and not after the program has been completed.</p>		

Problem based learning is an accepted method that can provide a deep learning experience. However, the applicant does not specify how PBL will be used in academic areas and how the learnings will be evaluated and monitored. A linkage to state standards is not addressed.

The applicant does not address the idea of diversity in the curriculum.

The proposal offers a variety of instructional possibilities in the career cluster approach, the use of digital medium and using problem based learning. Some of these approaches are in current use and there is the need for some evidence as to their specific applications and effectiveness. The applicant provides details about problem based learning and how this and other strategies will help students master critical academic content and develop skills and traits such as goal-setting, teamwork, perseverance, critical thinking, communication, and creativity. This plan needs to have a special component for students from special populations and a management system for those who need special help and guidance. This is a high quality approach, but there needs to be follow up and follow through to see if staff are implementing the program and meeting student needs. Problem-based learning may be difficult for students with special needs or students without some English skills.

There is the question of whether the state assessments and standardized tests are appropriate for measuring progress in a problem based curriculum. The proposal refers to tests such as EXPLORE and ACT and student data to assist in the development of personalized plans. Although these tools are useful, there needs to be a more detailed approach to address a personalized sequence of content and skill development that is aligned with state standards. Parents and staff require training and a detailed time line of events and activities designed to meet student needs.

The Tata system is also an ambitious and potentially worthwhile for the applicant. The applicant states that teacher will be able to look at student profiles and make adjustments. The need to train teachers and others in using data and connecting information with learning strategies needs more development in the proposal. This would allow for continuous feedback loops and adjustments to curriculum and teaching strategies based on the students performance and needs.

The idea of providing students with training in an academy setting is promising. Students will be aided in preparation of financial aid forms and graduation plans. There is a need for more information about the development and operation of these academies. Details are sketchy.

There needs to be specific information about how accommodations will be developed and used for students with special language or learning needs. The same can be said for parents of these students.

There are some mechanisms in place to provide training and support to student. Current systems are not presented in detail; however, the My Big Campus offers the possibility to track and manage learning.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	12
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Within four years all staff members will receive training to become an active member of a professional learning community. The purpose of this training will be to coordinate the commitment to learning with strategies to respond to students who have difficulty in learning. The goals of the training will support personalized learning environments by quickly identifying and directing students to the sources of help. This ambitious program has the potential to transform the culture and the school. The evaluation of teacher implementation of this plan is not included in the narrative. The proposal is also silent as to how content and curriculum will be revised to accommodate new ideas in the elementary grades as well as middle school. The modus operandi of the PLC needs more clarification.

The proposal provides teacher, administrator, student and community training sessions in technology, differentiation of instruction, teacher support, teaching in the content areas, problem based learning, professional learning academies, and content specific training. RTI support is listed in another section of the application. The proposal does not indicate how the training sessions will be evaluated and how staff will be held accountable for implementation. The proposal states that it will review results, however, formative assessments about the effectiveness of the training, application of skills and the utility of the training are not presented. Thus, results may or may not be connected with reform efforts. Accountability of staff for implementation needs further attention in this proposal, especially for those staff who work with special education students and minority students. Thus, the need to train teachers and others in using data and connecting information with learning strategies needs more development in the proposal. This would allow for continuous feedback loops and adjustments to curriculum and teaching strategies based on the students performance and needs.

It is expected that retraining will improve the feedback loops and provide teachers with the means and methods to provide useful information to parents and students. The proposal does not address how this will be accomplished in any detail. If completion and application of new skills were part of the teacher evaluation system or accountability systems, this would be helpful in determining if any of these efforts had a significant impact on attitudes and achievement. The applicant needs to be more detailed about the current teacher and principal evaluation systems and how they will provide support and assistance to the new instructional program.

The training is directed at all teachers and staff. However, there are no special considerations or trainings for students with language issues or students with special needs. There is no specific measure for accountability for staff members who work with special needs students or students at risk.

The applicant asserts that the teachers are highly qualified under the proposals guidelines.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	10

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The organizational chart is clearly presented in the appendix. Since this is a rural district with a population of about 3700 students, the leadership academy and the size of the district are enabling factors in providing support to all levels of administration and staff. Each school, in accordance with board policy has a site based decision making team. The community also has a role in this committee. All facets of the organization are impacted by these committees including budget, curriculum and planning. The committee meets quarterly and an evaluation process exists. There is no specific evidence presented as to the prior success of these committees.

Students are allowed to progress as per local policy connected with the TEKS test for each course enrolled. Explanation of the use of this policy and its success is not addressed. There is no discussion of how often and in what ways students can earn credit and demonstrate mastery.

The district provides support for students with LEP through a process and a committee structure. The flexibility of this structure is not addressed in the narrative. There are also specialized services for special education. There is a general statement that teachers monitor progress and may reteach or provide special services in accordance with guidelines. Staff flexibility to meet the needs of students who may have special circumstances is not addressed.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	4
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(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant uses its website and public participation at meetings to provide legal notification to the community. The district has a viable structure for technology and data supports and uses a robust Skyward system for information management including a data base on attendance, achievement scores and administrative management. Parents and students are afforded access to this system. The applicant does not present strong evidence that the Skyward system has the capabilities to allow students to access content, tools and special learning resources that might be needed to help

underserved students achieve learning goals. The applicant does not present information on how families without computer access or those with limited English abilities receive information. There are questions about how students, regardless of income levels and language abilities have access to the necessary tools and other learning resources outside of the school setting. Within the school setting there is no discussion of how these tools are used by students to access information and support learning activities.

A range of strategies have been proposed such as student academies and parent community academies. These efforts, however, will be conducted annually and are not ongoing and continuous. The attendance and participation of reluctant parents, non English speaking parents or working parents is not addressed. The impact on students, most in need is not addressed in this section of the narrative. Finally, there is no discussion of peer support or other avenues of providing technical support to those who may need it most.

It appears that the district uses systems that are interoperable. There is no data to confirm the effectiveness of the system.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	9
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Evaluation of the plan will be conducted by an outside evaluator who has not yet been identified. The evaluation plan is well conceived and provides a variety of questions and methods to assess the success of the project. Surveys, interviews, data review and focus groups will be useful in making determinations about project success. The timeline for these activities is presented in the Appendix E. Since there are so many activities and data collection points in April, most of the evaluation is concentrated in one month. It would be helpful to gather some of the information and organize activities so teachers and others are reviewing information in an orderly manner more frequently.</p> <p>A comprehensive visit is scheduled in the spring of every year to review all data and report to the Board of Trustees. The applicant sees this is a method to generate support and provide transparency. There is no discussion on how these reports would be used to make program adjustments. The proposal does not detail a process for change if activities are not achieving desired results.</p> <p>There is a plan to establish communication with stakeholders including bi-weekly status updates. The use of the website for reports and updates will be helpful, but other means of communication need to be used to contact those without access or those who do not usually use the district website. This is not covered in the proposal.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	3
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>There is a plan to establish communication with stakeholders including bi-weekly status updates. The use of the website for reports and updates will be helpful, but other means of communication need to be used to contact those without access or those who do not usually use the district website. This is not covered in the proposal. It may be assumed that the evaluator and the district administrative team would make needed adjustments during the project if the data suggested that changes were needed. There is, however, no provision for this in the proposal.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	2
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has provided appropriate performance measures and targets in all required areas.</p> <p>The applicant does not describe in detail its rationale for selecting some of the measures of performance. As per the guidelines the applicant needs to describe how the measure will provide rigorous, timely, and formative leading information tailored to its proposed plan. The applicant also needs to describe a theory of action regarding the applicant's implementation success or areas of concern. Finally, the applicant needs to describe how it will review and improve the measure over time if it is insufficient to assess implementation progress.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	1
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant does not specifically address this in a separate section of the narrative. The section on evaluation discusses the project evaluation in detail. District funded activities such as professional development and current compensation rates and school schedules are not addressed in the narrative.</p>		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	7
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant provides information about the total amount of state support for the district. There needs to be more detail about what portion of district salaries will be supported by state funds and what portion of grant funds will support district personnel. There is a general figure included for the amount of state support for the district, but a breakdown would be helpful to understand the relationship between state support and proposed federal support. In this way the district could estimate how it will support the continuation of certain activities.</p> <p>Revenue sources are provided from the perspective of the total budget. The financial contributions of the foundation and the other partners are not specifically addressed. The applicant has not adequately described how current and future funding will support reform efforts in the future in areas such, as RTI support, parent and student academies, new hardware and software, continued teacher and administrator training, evaluation, and compensation for personnel dealing with college readiness. The costs of evaluation and role</p>		

of the project coordinator and other personnel will be absorbed by the district after the funding period. This is not addressed in the district proposal.

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

There are several letters of support from cooperating agencies, the mayor and some community groups in section B-14. There are a few statements in the narrative suggesting that the district will be able to fund some of the leadership academies and that Title Two funds and some state and local funds will be used to continue initiatives from the grant and strategic planning initiatives. There are no letters of financial support from any cooperating agency. There is no budget plan for sustainability for the period beyond the grant period.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

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

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The evaluation scheme tracks students at all grade levels at all schools using a variety of data to track students from Hispanic backgrounds and lower economic levels. The proposal does not differentiate between English language learners and Hispanic students in many cases. Special education students are included in most areas of evaluation.

The performance measures of the various subgroups include achievement measures and other measures such as healthy fitness as students who are on to college and career readiness. Some of the baseline percentages of the subgroups are close to maximum. Others indicate the need for modest to substantial growth. Improvement is expected in all areas.

The partnerships with the colleges have been historically strong and there is every reason to believe that they will be enhanced through grant activities. Strategic planning through the school includes members of the community in planning and discussion; however, parent teacher groups, state and county agencies, service clubs, religious organizations and businesses are not specifically included in this proposal and limit formal community connections. Community health and fitness partnerships offer promise with family events planned. Ranger College and Tarleton State partnerships offer some specific programs for career education and college readiness. More information is needed about how the partners and the school will track records of participation and success. For example, there is the need to describe how mentoring will be used and tracked to ensure student success.

The activities described in the proposal have the potential to improve learning and achievement in all groups over time. All students in the district will benefit from project success. The question of sustainability due to funding is an issue.

Parents are included in proposal activities and will be involved through strategic planning, academies and participation through Skyward. Plans to involve parents of special needs students, parents with limited English and parents without access to technology are not fully developed. Parents of students in need may need special activities to ensure active involvement and meaningful participation. The applicant used strategic planning to assist in the development of programs and initiatives. A more detailed analysis of community assets and resources could produce additional connections to parents and other stakeholders.

The ability of the staff to improve instruction will be enhanced by the training proposed by the applicant as well as the participation of stakeholders in strategic planning and on site teams. The on site teams have the ability to make decisions about instruction and resources. Parent organizations and individual parents need more of a voice in the decision making process. Innovative methods of involvement and participation need to be developed.

The district administrative team and the governance structure of the district are primed to meet challenges that may arise from grant activities.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has met Absolute Priority 1 in an effort to personalize learning environments by creating a PLC, instituting a system of problem based learning and providing students with greater access to technology. Workshops and training sessions for staff and administration demonstrate a commitment to improvement of the context and content of learning. The use of data will provide a guide for future direction. The strategic planning process has identified areas of need and the district has documented test results and areas for improvement with activities designed to meet the needs such as higher achievement, more high school graduates and improved college attendance.

Total	210	119
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