



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0959TN-1 for Tennessee Achievement School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	9
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>This application provides a high-quality vision for the core educational assurance areas.</p> <p>(1) adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy: The applicant mentions a 'College for Certain' curriculum and a custom-built assessment system to track progress in student achievement. The application lacks detail relative to standards, but describes curriculum.</p> <p>(2) building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals with data about how they can improve instruction: The applicant describes their "Godzilla" internal data reporting system and the external "Schoolzilla" summative data reporting tool as being aptly suited for measuring student growth and performance, and providing indicators relative to instructional growth areas.</p> <p>(3) recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most: The applicant notes that this is a high priority, providing innovative compensation models that "...in some cases, allow teachers to out earn their principals."</p> <p>(4) turning around lowest-achieving schools: The entire application is built around improving the lowest performing schools.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(a) The applicant adequately described the method by which participating schools were chosen. They cited factors such as "percent of students eligible for free and reduced lunch, quality of existing facilities and infrastructure, average class size, principal and teacher interest capacity, grade level configuration, student academic achievement, and e-rate eligibility..."</p> <p>(b and c) The list of schools and school and student level data were clearly presented in this section's table.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant focuses on using technology to bridge the distance between consortium members, and providing a mechanism for uniformity and consensus regarding teaching and learning in a blended learning environment. This section of the application is strong in providing evidence of frequent communication, but lacks detail on the strategy for scaling other than to say that it can scale quickly.</p>		
(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(a) The applicant's vision is likely to result in increased performance on summative assessments. While the applicant provides clear support for selecting the cohort approach to tracking student performance growth, the details supporting the end-state growth goals are lacking. The summative assessment goals are ambitious and exceed State ESEA targets.</p>		

(b) The achievement gap reductions are ambitious but achievable, particularly when considering personalized approach to instruction detailed in section A1.

(c) The ASD must expand to the high school level before it can present its own graduation data; however, it has adopted state-wide goals for graduation minimums, and commits to increasing goals relative to state-wide goals in the future.

(d) Similar to graduation rates, since ASD does not yet operate high schools, state-wide minimums are adopted for college enrollment.

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	12
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant first began operating schools in August, 2012, and therefore presents limited historical data; however, it makes a compelling case based on its initial performance, and therefore the response justifies awarding partial points. Evidence to support this high-range score is as follows:</p> <p>(a) The data ASD displays a positive trajectory for consortium-wide improvement.</p> <p>(b) The consortium schools are among the lowest performing in participating states.</p> <p>(c) The student, teacher, and parent accessible data systems are described as making formative and summative data easily accessible.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	2
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The level of transparency is in the middle range as ASD does not yet provide, and “expects to make some of these [school level] expenditures public”. Also, Aspire does not seem to provide actual salary data for school-level personnel.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	9
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant is an entity of the state; however, it cites the “First to the Top Act of 2010” as providing sufficient autonomy to accomplish its goals.</p> <p>ASD highlights autonomy in several key areas including human capital, finance and procurement, etc. which are key to the success of their vision. Aspire Public Schools cite the autonomy afforded to charter schools in the state of California.</p>		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	10
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(a) The applicant provided a high-level of detail regarding the process for soliciting feedback from key stakeholders. Of particular note was the effort that the applicant put into reaching out to student families through apartment complex visits and social media updates among other means of communication.</p> <p>(b) The applicant garnered a large number of student, parent, and letters from high-ranking officials in support of the consortium’s application and their innovative approach to the use of technology-aided instruction.</p>		
(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	5
<p>(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant performed a high-level of due diligence on identifying potential gaps and addressing them prior to launching the blended learning initiative via this consortium. The detailed investigations led to the hiring of key positions to mitigate gaps in</p>		

personnel training such as the blended learning teaching assistant, and key deficiencies in technology as evidenced by the gap analysis in schools' available bandwidth.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	16
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(a) The combination of the class rotation model for blended learning with individualized learning plans (ILP) will serve to ensure students get a more personalized learning experience.</p> <p>(b) The ILPs are aligned to college-and career-ready standards. Students are encouraged to pursue personal learning interests and record progress on the ILPs. Longer schools days and a longer year will provide students with greater opportunity to pursue topics that pique their interests.</p> <p>(c) While the applicant details strategies to improve data-driven instruction, the applicant attributes much of the needed teacher training to the role of the blended learning teaching assistants. This is a critical position, but this sections lacks detail to support the mechanisms of training students and teaches on the use of these advanced data and adaptive learning systems.</p>		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	18
<p>(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(a) The applicant provides evidence to support a high-quality plan for teacher development. From clearly assisting in the creation of and evaluating the effectiveness of the learning environment for personalized learning to instruction on how best to "blend" instruction through the use of innovative blended learning models, teachers will gain the skills necessary to implement this program. Of particular note is the evaluation tool, "Purple Planet," which provides the opportunity for staff to create personalized learning plans in the same fashion as students, targeting individual growth goals.</p> <p>(b) The applicant provides evidence that all teachers will have access to the necessary formative and summative data tools to evaluate student performance and adjust teaching accordingly. The applicant will also use a "Data Driver" program to coach teachers in interpreting student data, much of which is the result of the deep integration of adaptive learning software with embedded assessments.</p> <p>(c) The applicant addresses the training needs of educators through the effective combination of professional development tracking tools that provide just-in-time instructional supports based upon targeted student needs. The applicant also describes how blended learning coaches and data managers will be an omnipresent part of instructional support rather than a periodic intervention.</p> <p>(d) Aspire provides an Educator Effectiveness Framework provides professional opportunities for growth for those educators who wish to advance their careers into administration. ASD provides the New Teacher Project to "reward effective educators" as well. These retention strategies combined with the robust training that ingrained into daily instruction should serve to further the applicant's ability to realize their vision.</p>		

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	12
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(a) The applicant organizes the consortium governance via an MOU that provides adequate support to participating LEAs. In</p>		

addition to financial oversight and procurement assistance, the consortium provides personnel support in strategic positions which are designed to strengthen the ability of schools to accomplish their goals without impacting the level of autonomy afforded to each school.

(b) Both the Tennessee laws and the California laws provide ample autonomy for ASD and Aspire programs to offer flexibility in structural matters such as school scheduling, calendars, staffing, etc. Furthermore, ASD provides 100% of its funds to schools. ASD also provides a menu of services for procurement and other services that traditionally reside at the district-level.

(c,d) In this section and throughout the application, there are many examples of student mastery as the primary means of student advancement. This is facilitated, in part, with the use of adaptive learning software and the rotation model of blended learning in the classrooms.

(e) The applicant provides sufficient examples of adaptive learning software. What is not addressed as clearly is how the applicant makes this information fully accessible to students with disabilities and English learners in sufficient detail.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	7
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(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

(a) The applicant provides evidence that students will be well supported in school using advanced technology systems; however, the applicant does not adequately address student access to technology outside of school other than to say it would work with families to identify ways to afford access and/or devices. The applicant also notes that it will provide traditional (non-digital) resources such as textbooks; however, the bulk of this application centers on the innovative use of technology, adaptive learning software, online data dashboards, and the like.

(b) Students will have technical support available on site during the school day, and will have access to consortium-based tech support with service level agreements.

(c) The applicant relies heavily upon existing technology at each school for parent access to data, while it proposes a more robust solution for students involving single-sign-on.

(d) The applicant notes that it has facilitated a migration to open data formats, sometimes manually and hopes to increase the level of automation with this award; however, it was unclear as to the extent of the participating school systems that currently use—or will use interoperable data systems in the future.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	11

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides sufficient data to support a high-quality continuous improvement process. The public sharing of data section is not as well developed, lacking specificity on what specific data will be available to the public.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	4
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(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant describes innovative outreach programs designed to engage parents, but lacks information on how the program will engage local businesses and other valuable community members. Through the frequent use of technology for communications, and “technology-focused committees,” internal stakeholders will engage in an almost constant flow of information.

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

The applicant notes that since it is in its third month of existence, that establishing baseline data is difficult. It provides rationale for using the first 100 days of the grant award to develop more robust measures, and establishes ‘quick win’ milestones to “ensure that students and families are receptive to the implementation such as 30, 90, and 180 day attendance

goals.” While it is understandable that the new organization has few performance measures to report baselines, the organization lacks sufficient number and explanation of performance measures.

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

5

2

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant describes the effectiveness evaluation process by presenting intermediate outcomes that address key research questions. The rubric that the applicant intends to use for evaluation is not yet created, and will be modeled after the “Aspire’s previously developed logic model.” Overall, this section lack specific evaluation models and methods to support a rigorous approach to program evaluation.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	9
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>(a) The applicant clearly identifies the funds required to support the consortium’s blended learning initiative.</p> <p>(b) The applicant’s funding proposal is reasonable and sufficient to support their initiatives. While the applicant clearly states its plan for sustainability, and assigns specific post grant costs to the LEAs, Aspire incorporates a philanthropic funding approach that, in essence, will fill gaps in state funding to support the initiative. While this is a valid approach to funding, it is not guaranteed and difficult to scale.</p> <p>(c) The applicant provides thoughtful rationale for investments and priorities. Each fund is clearly listed with supporting documentation to both justify the expense and describe how it contributes to the overall plan. Furthermore, the applicant clearly differentiates one-time funding from recurring costs such as the \$100/student licensing fees for software.</p>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	10
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>In each section of the budget, and throughout the applicant, the applicant provides evidence of a strong commitment to sustainability. By investing in comprehensive content delivery systems that can house almost any type of adaptive learning software, to teacher, parent, and student accessible data dashboards, the applicant proposes to use the grant funds to “buy in” to the systems. System maintenance and upgrades become the responsibility of the participating schools/LEAs at the conclusion of the grant. The applicant further commits to funding key positions with school funding to ensure that much of the technical support and professional development will come from within schools, and will be the result of the comprehensive trainings and practical experience gained on the systems during the implementation of the grant. Finally, with a commitment to development efforts headed by the Vice President of Advancement to its Senior Leadership Team, the Aspire schools aim to take advantage of the many philanthropists who provide written endorsements of the applicant’s goals for this application.</p>		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	5
Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:		
<p>While this section was not specifically addressed by the applicant, I find sufficient evidence to award points. There is a large amount of evidence to demonstrate strong community buy-in, including community groups, philanthropic organizations, and elected officials. There is a definite plan in place to scale the program as schools transition into the 5% lowest achieving schools range, and it is evident that the applicant supports the students who display the highest need.</p>		

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant coherently and comprehensively addressed how it will build upon the core educational assurance areas to create technology-rich personalized learning environments. The applicant provided sufficient evidence that the programs detailed in this application will improve student achievement and reduce gaps in subgroup performance. While the applicant is unable to provide historical data to support its claims due to its relatively recent entry into school management, the applicant presents blended learning, a research-based and ground-proven method of instruction, as a way to connect students with their a combination of their goals and the goals that the schools have for their achievement together in a self-paced and self-guided multi-media rich learning environment.

Total	210	168
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0959TN-2 for Tennessee Achievement School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	10
(A)(1) Reviewer Comments: This proposal is an ambitious collaborative effort to transform the unique district and enable personalized learning for all learners. Outstanding articulation of vision and model. The district is very cognizant of the complex issues facing children from poverty and embeds a community-based approach.		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	10
(A)(2) Reviewer Comments: The blended-learning model described ensures fidelity to the implementation of personalized learning. The workshops will enable a consistent and common set of expectations for the project. 100% of school leaders are involved.		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	10
(A)(3) Reviewer Comments: The model is tested in other locations and has an infrastructure to allow student success. The personalized learning approach is presented from the real-time to the long-term data opportunities.		
(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	8
(A)(4) Reviewer Comments: Growth in student learning and achievement are ambitiously presented through the grant years and formulated to raise the		

floor and ceiling of student performance.

All the presented data sets are included.

In the areas of students with disabilities, African American, socio-economic disadvantaged, and English language learners the targets could be even higher to enable true transformation.

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	15
(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: Each of the categories in this section are fully met with specific data and goals that stretch achievement for all learners. Graduation rates are also stretch goals and transformational.		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	3
(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: Because ASD is a new innovation, four years of data are not available. The short-term results are impressive. The data, data systems and reporting mechanisms align well with this effort.		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10
(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: ASD and the state of Tennessee have developed strong systems of transparency, equity, autonomy and accountability. They fully prepare to meet state legal, statutory and regulatory requirements.		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	10
(B)(4) Reviewer Comments: All constituents were involved in the development of this proposal and there was great engagement and shared development of the proposal.		
(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	5
(B)(5) Reviewer Comments: Strong connections to the research and practice in the field. This proposal is well informed by the best practices in the field.		

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	20
(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: The leaders of this effort spent considerable time investigating multiple models of personalized learning. There is a strong college-readiness component. The ILP is a strong mechanism to enable students to focus on specific short-term and long-term goals. Specific focus on culturally sensitive methods and approaches are included. Multiple teaching approaches are included. Project-based and inquiry learning are emphasized. Adaptive learning is a strong component. The blended learning approach is well described.		

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	20
<p>(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The proposal includes the tangible and intangible components of real reform. From the types of furniture, to the specific PD provided this is a high-quality plan. The Purple Planet platform will allow a common home-base for data, formative assessment and reflective practice. Key in the proposal is leadership development and principal strategic leadership. The evaluation methods are strong.</p>		

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	15
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The staffing model is strong. There is strong decentralization of school responsibility to provide results and empowering of school leaders. The school calendar and timeframes are designed around student mastery.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	10
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>There are multiple assessment opportunities during the year for students to demonstrate mastery and for educators to adjust instruction to personalize learning. The model is very sound. There are many specific examples of information technology and stakeholder input. The technical components are well grounded.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	13
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>There are specific continuous improvement strategies for each of the five components of this effort. There are real-time immediate opportunities to tweak and/or revise this effort at the classroom, school and macro levels. The professional development evaluation component included could be stronger and include evidence of personalized learning across subjects and grade levels.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	5
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Various and varied creative approaches are included to ensure this effort is on track. Major communication components are included. Outstanding data systems and strategies to engage all stakeholders make this a strong proposal.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	4
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Specific data are included in the proposal that show competence and confidence in this effort being successful. In addition, systems are in place to make needed adjustments as results come in. The student persistence metric will be a very transferrable component of this effort to the rest of the country, There are multiple (23) performance measures included but only 7 are in place at this time.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	4
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The key to this section is verification that professional development of teaches leads to implementation of personalized learning with fidelity. That is not necessarily what the record of reform has indicated in the past in American schools. Very</p>		

strong structures are included for this section 5.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	8
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: ASD has a clear vision for sustaining this effort with an Advancement Director and clear understanding of one-time and permanent expenditures. The PD component is strong. There is no mention of the rate of turnover of teachers and the training of new colleagues along the way. There are likely going to be major transitions of adults in schools as a result of this project and a one and done PD will not lead to sustainable change.		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	10
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: Very well articulated budget that shows a plan for sustainability. The support from the state and local government shows financial support.		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	0
Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments: This section is not evident.		

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met
Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments: This initiative is a clear and exemplary example of the Secretary's goal to move change forward to personalized learning for all students.		

Total	210	190
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Optional Budget Supplement (Scored separately - 15 total points)

	Available	Score
Optional Budget Supplement (Scored separately - 15 total points)	15	0



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0959TN-3 for Tennessee Achievement School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium described in this application is a strong partnership of a new portfolio district in Tennessee (ASD) that will oversee the restructuring of the lowest performing schools, in partnership with a successful charter school organization (Aspire), primarily based in California. This partnership provides many advantages, as Aspire can provide expertise in teacher, supervisor, and building-level strategies, while ASD can be responsive to state and community needs. However, this partnership also appears unwieldy in the application, and it is not always clear exactly what activities will be done and who will be responsible for what deliverables. Thus, the overall plan seems strong, particularly as the consortium proposes to emphasize technology-based, adaptive blended learning in a rotation model (rotating from teacher-led group work to computer-led adaptive individual work) that would be based on students' individual learning plans. The consortium also proposes creative staffing ideas to support teachers in this transition, as well as progressive and differentiated funding proposals. These are strong ideas, but sometimes sufficient details are not provided to fully understand their implementation.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium has a clear understanding with all of the stakeholders about which schools will qualify for the project, as they are tasked with selecting schools that are in the lowest 5% of the area, and have the goals of raising these schools to the top 25% in the state. Among those lowest-performing schools, candidates were selected based on students' socioeconomic status, student achievement, capacity of the building and personnel, and the desires of the principal and teachers. In fact, candidate schools were briefed through a series of workshops and given the chance to opt-in or opt-out, resulting in 100% commitment to the program.</p> <p>In succeeding years, the consortium plans to continue adding additional schools through the same selection process. Based on this process, the consortium has selected schools that are in dire need, with high (up to 90%) levels of students from difficult SES, language, or minority backgrounds.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium has clear plans and mandates for scaling up the project to include additional schools each year. To manage this growth, the consortium plans to use technologies (such as a consortium wiki and data sharing tools) and meetings/conferences to share best practices and instructional efforts across the consortium. In addition, the consortium wisely plans to hire Blended Learning Teaching Assistants and instructional coaches who will be directly charged with interfacing with teachers as they adopt the new personalized and blended learning model. These plans are strong, however, details are lacking about how exactly various aspects of the training and mentoring will occur to facilitate the reform.</p>		
(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium has set specific goals to close achievement gaps and have higher student achievement. However, there remain many questions about the goals that are not adequately explained in the narrative. For example:</p>		

-- ASD's goals seem very ambitious, but may not be achievable, as their goals are often to take cohorts where 15% of students are proficient and in five years have up to 70% of the cohort proficient. This type of improvement may not be possible.

-- On the other hand, Aspire's goals are always 10% higher after five years. These goals may not be ambitious enough, and they might indicate a lack of thoughtfulness in setting standard goals instead of differentiating goals based on the needs of various subgroups.

-- It is not clear why different cohorts are expected to begin at different places. For example, with the TNASD math scores, Cohort 1 in 2012 begins at a baseline of 14.9%, and is hoped to finish 2013 at 22.9% proficient. Cohort 2, which would begin that second year, is estimated to start at a baseline of 18.7%, which is higher than Cohort 1's baseline, but less than its expected level in year 2. There is no explanation for how these baselines are estimated for each cohort, or at least it is not clearly explained.

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	13
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>It is difficult for ASD to provide any evidence for a record of success because it was just formed in 2012. Thus, they are in their first year, and have no record to speak of. So while the ideas in the application have some merit, it is difficult to know if ASD will be able to achieve its goals. ASD claims remarkable success in achieving "ambitious and significant reforms," but without data, you cannot really call this a success. However, they do have good plans in place that are likely to yield success in the future, if managed effectively, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- teacher/supervisor evaluation systems -- performance-based pay -- portfolio management model of charter and public schools -- technology-based personalized learning -- community outreach and collaboration. <p>Because Aspire has more of a record, it is easier to make a judgment about their evidence of success, and it is strong. These are a few pieces of evidence of Aspire's success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Aspire public schools have outperformed every comparable district in California -- Despite growing from 243 students in 1999 12,000 in 2012, Aspire has consistently raised its Academic Performance Score every year. -- Math and ELA proficiency rates have doubled overall and tripled for African American students (similar increases for other subgroups), showing a remarkable ability to have success with minority populations. -- 95% of Aspire students graduate, and 100% of those who do are accepted to college. <p>Overall, ASD has no track record --- yet---of success, and while Aspire does in California, it does not have a track record in Tennessee, making it likely, but not certain, that the consortium should have success with their proposal.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	2
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>In this section, the merging of ASD and Aspire is again problematic, as each provides transparency in some of the four categories, but not all, and it is not clear if their merged consortium will provide transparency in every area. In addition, some of the ways in which they have provided transparency are not easy for the public to find (e.g. sending a list of expenses to the department of education that it then publishes on its website, instead of Aspire's own.).</p>		

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium has a clear mandate from the state for its proposals, as ASD was created specifically to do the work it is proposing to do. The consortium has autonomy over policies and human capital, including alternative license plans and other ways of finding good teaching talent. In addition, teachers for the consortium relinquish previous contractual rights and enter into a new contract, allowing the consortium greater latitude to negotiate for reforms such as differentiated compensation and longer school days/ years (some schools have added 20 days to their calendar, as an example). In addition, funds will follow the students in the consortium, allowing for competition and flexibility. In addition, Tennessee has already lifted the cap on charter schools, allowing a charter portfolio district like ASD to emerge.</p> <p>With these affordances granted by the state, the conditions should be fertile for the consortium to implement its proposals.</p>		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	8
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium engaged with key stakeholder groups to describe the proposal and ask for feedback, including having meetings in apartment complexes of parents so they could more easily attend; but it does not appear that these stakeholder groups were engaged in a collaborative effort in developing the proposal. Still, all but 8 of 196 surveyed teachers indicated their support. However, the consortium only claimed to have "dozens" of parents across Tennessee and California sign onto the proposal, which is not indicative of the "overwhelmingly positive" response that the consortium claims. Still, the level of support is strong, as the consortium boasts support from many mayors, the state, and a diverse array of community organizations.</p>		
(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	5
<p>(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium has invested time and resources in analyzing the current readiness for the proposed reforms and what gaps need to be addressed. This was done with an Aspire pilot study, which indicated the need for additional mentoring of teachers, which will be addressed through instructional coaches and blended learning TAs. In addition, they conducted a technology audit to see what technology infrastructures are in place and what updates are needed, and met with individual schools to assess their readiness.</p>		

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	18
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Overall, the consortium has put forward a strong proposal of reforms that should lead to deepened learning and increased achievement. Specifically, they have proposed that in their district, students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Will all have individual learning plans created in collaboration with students, teachers, and students. -- Use a classroom rotation/blended learning model that will integrate individual learning through adaptive technology, with teacher-led group activities -- learn from a variety of media, including but not limited to text. -- Have "intercession" periods of about a week where students study one topic more in depth through project-based approaches. These types of experiences provide the opportunity to learn many of the critical career and college skills sometimes missing in education, and is a strong proposal. -- read literature from a wide range of cultures and perspectives. -- will be involved in schools that collaborate with community cultural partners. -- will receive monthly data reports on their progress and quarterly reviews with teachers and parents. <p>However, the proposal sometimes lacks critical details on how exactly these ideas will be implemented, including how the</p>		

technological system will be adaptive (although the consortium has guidelines it will use in screening content providers), how exactly the lessons on student metacognition will be taught, what exactly the content will be like (some examples would help), what kinds of projects are examples of project-based learning approaches they will use, and what a typical individual learning plan may look like.

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

20

17

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium again has many good ideas proposed, but not always with sufficient detail to know exactly how they will work. However, the overall plan is strong, as are the proposed processes for monitoring and feeding evaluative data back into the system. A few key points:

- Teachers will use assessment data to group students by specific need, allowing for common tasks to be more personalized.
- Software will be used to provide adaptive, personalized content. However, we do not yet know how this software will work, nor what kind of content will be provided and how to be assured that the content is of high quality.
- The consortium is collaborating with BloomBoard to provide a technological service for managing teacher and principal evaluation data, so the educators can know where they are strong and weak, and then receive adaptive resources to help them improve in the areas needed most. Thus, the educators will also engage in personalized learning. However, again we do not really know what kinds of resources or their level of quality that will be provided as professional development.
- Each teacher has an annual learning plan, like the students, for the teacher's professional development.
- It mentions that Aspire evaluates principals on various criteria, but it doesn't discuss how this evaluation occurs (what data/evidence?)
- It mentions that because ASD is in its inaugural year, it will work hands-on with principals in implementing the reforms. What about new schools that come into the program later on, when it is no longer "ASD's inaugural year"? Will they get hands-on support?
- Project managers and instructional coaches will work regularly with teachers and principals to help them interpret data and implement the personalized instructional practices and systems.
- The teacher evaluation system has a good balance of required data from student achievement, observations, and parent/student surveys.
- The consortium has a resource-sharing system that allows teachers to share instructional resources with each other. To scale this, the system will be made available to schools outside of the specific project outlined in this application. This is a strong idea, but would be stronger if there was a way to evaluate and rate the resources in the system so that the best ideas "bubble up" to the top of the pile instead of requiring educators to sift through all of the ideas.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	13

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The LEA is organized specifically to support the reforms in this proposal, by mandate from the state. In this organization, the consortium has been given a substantial amount of autonomy over staffing, calendaring, budgeting, and personnel decisions. The application states that "many" of these autonomies are passed along to the school, including which services from the consortium's menu of choices will be used in the school, or whether other options might be better. The proposed system will give students frequent opportunities to demonstrate mastery in the adaptive system and progress at different rates and with different materials. It is not made clear how these resources will be made adaptive to ELL or disability students, other than stating that using multimedia could be more effective of a medium than text for these students.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)

10

9

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium has put in place many strong efforts for ensuring all students and parents can participate. During initial stages of proposal development, for example, they held meetings in apartment complexes so parents would not have to travel to the

district offices. They also have many half-day sessions on Saturdays when parents can attend school with their kids and participate with them, as well as parent centers at many schools for parents to access the technological resources. The ASD technical team has a strong proposal for being responsive to technological concerns, by answering ticketed questions within 3 days, and having call-in help desk support. Mention is also made of a Parent Portal to provide a "comprehensive understanding of their child's academic standing" but not much detail is provided. Mention is also made that parents can export grades and schedules to an open format, but this is not defined, nor is it clear whether parents can export other non-grade data about their students, such as the data collected and used by the adaptive systems.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	12
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The Project Manager will oversee continuous improvement by meeting frequently with school leaders to establish annual goals for the schools, as well as to review the project manager's performance based upon pre-determined (determined through collaboration) performance goals. The consortium will evaluate the effectiveness of professional development, as well as the effectiveness of the adaptive software in increasing student performance. One concern is the over-reliance on "time on task", such as attendance at professional development, amount of time a student spends in the adaptive system, etc. This is not often a very good evaluative measure.</p> <p>Lacking was a more coherent evaluation framework, with specific evaluation questions and methods for data collection, analysis, and reporting.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	5
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium has several innovative ideas for engaging with stakeholders, including holding a Blended Learning Week, where they have the goal of engaging 50% of their parents, at least, in having a simulated experience similar to the personalized learning their students receive. In addition, they will use the blended learning TAs to interact with teachers, and these TAs will share with each other via an internal wiki.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	2
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium only proposed seven measures, and indicated they would propose more within 100 days of receiving the grant. No socio-emotional measures were proposed except a survey of what the students felt the school climate was. The consortium seems to emphasize attendance and time in the system disproportionately.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	3
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Again, the district proposes to formalize this more within the first 100 days of receiving the grant, but has proposed questions the Project Manager can use in continuous improvement, although they are more surface-level questions about infrastructure, awareness of systems and supports, and attendance to PD. These are important, but not the only kinds of questions that should guide evaluation. The consortium does propose a variety of data to address issues.</p>		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	10
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The budget is well delineated and the request for funds is appropriate. The consortium has a good plan in place for absorbing ongoing costs after the grant funding ends by scaling up incrementally so that costs can be better absorbed by future budgets.</p>		

The LEA also benefits from philanthropic support which can match federal funds and help sustain the program after the grant ends. Over 50% of the budget will be used for converting to the blended learning model and for startup costs, which will be understandably significant. By overcoming this initial barrier, the LEA can more effectively sustain costs later. Monies for the blended learning TAs will be for the first two years, after which they will be provided for by the individual schools.

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

10

9

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium has a good proposal in place for absorbing ongoing personnel and management costs after initial startup, by using grant monies for infrastructure and initial training costs, and then expecting individual schools to gradually absorb maintenance costs until by the end of the grant they are more self-sufficient. In addition, the LEA has good support from philanthropic stakeholders, who have committed money to help support the Aspire program. They have also hired a director specifically to seek additional philanthropic money. A secondary method for increasing financial sustainability will be by increasing enrollment by 20 students per school, which the LEA estimates will offset future, more gradual, computer replacement after this initial computer purchasing expense supported by the grant. There is no budget provided for after the term of the grant, but the LEA does appear to have the support of the state for future sustainability of ASD, although it is not clear to what degree (i.e. whether the state will help absorb extra maintenance costs initiated by this grant).

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

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

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The application did not include a section of how they were addressing the competitive preference priority. It is evident from other portions of the proposal that the consortium has strong relationships with community groups, including many philanthropic groups that have funded Aspire schools previously. The proposal also makes some reference to scaling the model by adding additional failing schools each year, as well as sharing resources and ideas across the area to other schools. The consortium is also targeting some of the most needy students, with high rates of ELL, minorities, and students from low SES families. However, the application did not clearly articulate how these resources and networks would come together to improve the social-emotional needs of the students, nor how they would measure growth in this area or evaluate effectiveness.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The proposal will use an adaptive, blended approach to learning that should provide a high degree of personalized learning and deep learning supports.

Total	210	173
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