



# Race to the Top - District

## Technical Review Form

Application #1284NJ-1 for The Newark Public Schools

### A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	9

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant sets forth a very clear and comprehensive vision complete with a well-thought-out theory of change that is consistent and coherent throughout the application. The application builds on New Jersey's RTT plan and waiver (both mentioned throughout the application) as well as the pending teacher union contract to create a sense of momentum and opportunity to improve student outcomes.

New Jersey's and Newark Public Schools' (NPS) commitment to the Common Core is demonstrated throughout the application as a guiding force in developing new assessments as well as implementing the teacher evaluation system.

An emphasis on data is pervasive in the application. The application outlines a plan to utilize data from Common Core-aligned assessments, link the results to coaching supports for data-driven practices, and incorporate teacher feedback. For example, in later sections, data dashboards are described that would help transition data use in Newark from labor-intensive and paper-based to an online, just-in-time system.

Teacher effectiveness is also woven throughout the application. NPS clearly has invested a great deal in the new teacher union contract and teacher evaluation system, that has developed explicit competencies linked both to the Common Core as well as social-emotional outcomes for students. The application describes specifically how teachers will be rewarded for high levels of performance (section C2) and how the district will explore more innovative ways to build and support teacher capacity by, for example, developing video libraries, get feedback on lessons from third-party reviewers, or even receive real-time feedback via earpiece.

Newark provides context for the dramatic need for improvement, and describes, not just in this section but also B (1), how RTT-D will accelerate and spread its efforts to improve. For example, the district has recently closed 12 schools and opened 8 new "Renew Schools" including reconstituting staff, giving school leaders additional autonomy, and upgrading infrastructure. NPS also provides, not just in A(1) but throughout the application, its vision for utilizing blended learning strategies to deepen and personalize learning, with the goal of rapidly bringing students up to grade level so they can access the college-ready curriculum by the time they reach high school. However, one aspect of this vision is not clearly evidenced: the extent to which students will be supported through common or individual tasks grounded in student academic interests. Students will have individual learning plans, and access to blended learning opportunities; however, it is not explained fully or in detail how these components will provide students with that fully student-centered, interest-based approach that is so critical to engaging students in their own learning.

This section scores in the high range.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	9
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(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

NPS outlines three distinct strands of work, and each strand has a distinct implementation and scale-up approach. These strands do, however, complement each other, and work together to support LEA-wide improvement.

Strand 1 is Investing in Teacher Capacity to Use Data. This strand has an emphasis on grades 2 through 8, and will start with 17 schools in the first year, 30 schools in the second year, and reach all 51 schools by the end of the grant. This strand is considered foundational and no school will be a pilot or initial school for the other strands if it is also not implementing Strand 1. The initial 17 schools are participating in the Achievement Network (an external partnership with a focus on data).

Strand 2 is Integrate Social-Emotional Learning with Academics. This strand is aimed at grades 6-9, and the application makes the case that in those grades social emotional learning becomes even more crucial to success. It is also when, as

described in section C(1), that students are at risk of beginning the process of disengaging, and begin thinking more concretely about their futures and their goals. This strand will begin with approximately 5 schools after a period of research and development, then scale to 15-20 schools by year three and all K-8 schools by year four.

Strand 3 is piloting blended learning. It will be piloted in grades 3-5 and will add one grade per year until it reaches grade 8. The rationale is explained as building on the data strand, and to reach students at the point where achievement gaps begin to become more stark. This strand will be piloted in Renew Schools, which have recently been reconstituted and had technology infrastructure upgraded.

The proposal describes efforts focused on grades 2 through 9; however, there is some confusion in the proposal as the descriptions occasionally refer to K-8 efforts without clarifying if grades K-2 are explicitly to be included in the activities as well. Further, high schools are not a strong focus in this proposal, although section B (1)a describes how while significant progress has been made on high school proficiency levels and graduation rates, achievement in grades 3-8 remains flat. Further, the application emphasizes the need to ensure that students enter high school on grade level and prepared for rigorous work to prepare them for college and work and describes how the theory of change it employs will address other district-wide needs.

A detailed list of participating schools and students is provided, including detail of each school's number of students in poverty (all above 74%) and a chart describing the total number of participating students (grades 2-9) along with the number of students in poverty, the number of students considered high need, and the number of participating teachers.

This section scores in the high range.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	8
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(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The application describes its scale-up efforts in section A(2), describing how each strand will be implemented on its own specific timeline, starting with a small number of schools and eventually spreading to all schools that serve students K through 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The application also includes (in section A(1) and throughout the application) a strategy/logic model/theory of change. In this model, district-wide pillars include developing effective professionals, cultivating leaders, reorienting to a service model, and engaging stakeholders. Upon these pillars is a foundational idea that top-tier (a term defined clearly in section A) schools should be provided to all students. Then the three strands: first data use, then integration of social-emotional, and then the blended learning pilot, all leading up to the goal of ensuring that all students graduate career and college ready. The goals, rational, and activities are thus very clearly spelled out.

Deliverables and timelines are woven throughout each section. Section, E, for example, contains detailed short-term indicators, which identify clearly the necessary steps and conditions to implement all elements of the plan, as well as the staffing, governance, and responsible parties (including resumes and biographies for key staff.)

Some deliverables could be more clearly spelled out. For example, because the district has not yet identified exactly which blended learning provider or system it will be utilizing, the deliverables are not spelled out at a detail level of what kind of devices, what types of applications or software, or what other steps might be necessary, but this does provide the district with necessary flexibility and the proposal indicates that these issues will be addressed in the 100-day planning period referred to in section B and throughout the proposal. However, the proposal describes a great many issues that will need to be resolved in that 100-day planning period:

- assessment of facilities and infrastructure
- detailed school-by-school scheduling and time issues
- evaluation of potential partners for developing individualized learning plans
- soliciting and incorporating feedback on proposed implementation milestones
- engaging stakeholders
- engaging the potential research partner and defining an approach to implementation that supports a rigorous evaluation
- identifying specific schools for participation
- evaluate potential partners for the Competitive Preference Priority.

This may be overly ambitious for that 100-day period. Overall, however, the district has presented a very credible plan that has well-thought-out strands that are explicitly linked to each other and to the district's goals throughout the application. This section scores in the low end of the high range.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	8
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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

NPS describes its rationale for its goals for student performance in detail, building on its previous success, the New Jersey RTT, and the New Jersey waiver. Specifically, Newark sets its targets 5% *higher* than the New Jersey waiver targets, on the belief that its plan would accelerate the pace of growth for its students. It also sets a goal of having all subgroups showing above-average progress relative to their peers across the state. The goals set in the application have achievement increasing by around 30 percentage points during the life of the grant. For example, economically disadvantaged students are targeted to increase from 41% proficient in grades 3-8 English language arts NJ ASK (the state standardized test) in the baseline year to 75% by the end of the grant, and from 53% to 80% in math in the same area. These goals are very ambitious; some subgroups need to increase scores by 6 or 8 percentage points each year, particularly special needs students. Given that the district does not have a track record of improving achievement in grades 3-8, the extent to which these goals are achievable is not demonstrated. Further, the proposal indicates that the targets were set to be 3 to 5 percent higher than the New Jersey targets described in its ESEA waiver. Even with implementing blended learning, it is not clear that these goals can be met.

The goals for graduation rates and college enrollment rates are not quite as ambitious, but this is due to the fact that this grant focuses more on getting students prepared for high school, and the effects on high school will be slower to take shape. However, the graduation rate is targeted to increase from 63% for economically disadvantaged students in the baseline year to 78%, and from 49% college enrollment to 67% for the same group. The application also describes the rationale and goals for reducing the achievement gap, with a similar reference to the statewide gaps and goals, for example, reducing the gap between Newark black students and their counterparts statewide from 42% to 17%.

This section scores in the high range.

### 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

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

This application describes the conditions that it hopes will transform it from one of the most challenged and underperforming school districts in the nation to one of the most ambitious and active in improving. The pending teacher union contract is just one aspect of the conditions that are promising for real change and improvement, along with a strong leadership team, a solid relationship with the State, and a wide range of partnerships.

The district's graduation rate and college-going rates have grown at higher rates than the state. The district's graduation rate increased from 52% to 61% over the last four years, and college matriculation increased from 47% to 50% between 2008 and 2011.

The district has not made significant progress in grades 3-8, which is the reason for the focus on those grades in the proposed activities.

The district has undertaken a wide range of ambitious and significant reforms in its lowest-performing schools, including:

- Embarking on improving its Renew Schools
- Coaching principals in more effective teacher observation and coaching
- Changing staffing practices to facilitate getting the most effective teachers into schools where they are needed most
- Launching new data dashboards
- Increasing stakeholder engagement
- Adding magnet programs
- Embarking on a plan to collaborate more effectively with charter schools

Data has played a key role in the district's efforts. The application describes in detail new data dashboards, including efforts to specifically create a parent-friendly version, as well as how the district seeks to improve the use of its current student information system by expanding the streams of data available to include new interim assessments, individual learning plans, and daily feedback from blended learning efforts.

This section scores in the high range; it is placed in the low end of the high range due to lack of performance increases in

grades 3-8.

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

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(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Section B(2) describes how the district has worked to increase transparency in processes, practices, and investments as follows:

- District budget information available on school website
- A “user friendly” budget
- Budgets broken out by budget category as well as by staffing

Examples of these budgets are included.

The district provides details and examples of how it provides actual personnel salaries at the school level, actual personnel for instructional staff, actual personnel for teachers only, and non-personnel expenditures at the school level. However, there is no evidence of anything going beyond the minimum requirement, and for parents or community members who do not have access to the internet, or the ability to attend the public Budget Hearings, it is not clear that there are other means of making expenditures available to the public. Additionally, more detail could be provided about how the district defines a "user friendly" budget and how it is determined if this budget is actually user friendly.

This section scores in the high range.

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

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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Newark has a unique position as a state-operated school district that now has had a superintendent since 2011. This unique status, the application claims, results in a high level of strategic alignment between the district and the state due to the high priority the state has placed on improvement in Newark. The district also provides additional evidence of the promising nature of the policy conditions including:

- the Digital Learning Now analysis that indicates a highly supportive environment for digital learning
- the statewide process for implementing Common Core
- the state Race to the Top activities described in the appendix
- the autonomy of districts to waive seat time requirements, and
- the ability to waive student-teacher ratios for digital/blended learning environments.

Overall, the conditions are strong. Autonomy is demonstrated through the new superintendent's prior actions described elsewhere in Section B. There is no evidence of the application proposing any activities that might not be able to be implemented in the policy context given the information provided. This section scores in the high range.

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

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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The application describes in detail a thorough and extensive stakeholder engagement process, and provides both evidence and specific artifacts of this process.

For teachers, this process was inextricably linked with the efforts to produce a new teacher contract. The application describes newsletters, meetings, surveys and survey results, and forums. The application cites survey data that 74% of teachers indicated they would be very or somewhat excited to participate in a plan that included blended learning (n=146) and includes a detailed and supportive letter from the teachers union.

The application also describes its efforts to reach out to principals, including newsletters, leadership institutes, focus groups, and conversations with the principals most likely to be pilot schools in the proposed activities.

Family and community outreach included outreach to community leaders, parent liaisons, website, city-wide committees, clergy, elected officials, and other community organizations.

The application includes a detailed chart with descriptions of the type and nature of feedback received during this process and

how the plan addresses that feedback.

Outreach to students is not specifically mentioned in this section.

The appendix includes 23 letters of support for the district’s application, but there are no letters from parents to indicate the kind of grassroots support this effort may need to be successful. Overall, however, the district has described extensive efforts and showed evidence of engagement. This section scores in the high range.

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

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(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

Newark Public Schools provides an analysis of needs and gaps through the frame of the levers in its theory of change and a plan for further investigating the needs and how to close the gaps. The analysis includes data and qualitative assessment of each area and provides a description of how the application responds. For example, while the district has improved the quality of its leaders and given them additional autonomy, few have developed robust school-wide practices around data. The plan includes, as a result, robust coaching support for those principals, to embed practices of data-driven instruction.

The district also describes a 100-day planning period. This planning period is referred to throughout the application. The goals, activities, and objectives for this planning period are described in detail in terms of the gaps and needs that will be examined, including assessing facilities and technology infrastructure and school-by-school engagement efforts. Section E includes details about the role and composition of a Steering Committee that will be responsible for overseeing this 100-day planning process.

The application also includes the Digital Learning Now report that describes in detail the conditions for digital and blended learning statewide, which contributes to the overall picture of the district’s current status in implementing personalized learning environments.

This section scores in the high range.

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

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

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Newark provides a detailed list of key changes to learning that are woven throughout its RTT-D plan that includes:

1. Students track progress in demonstrating mastery
2. Students develop individual learning plans
3. Students spend more classroom time focused on social emotional competencies
4. Students will have access to a social-emotional curriculum that takes into account life experiences
5. Students with greatest need will get additional support form external providers
6. Students will use a blended learning model focused on accelerating adolescent literacy (9<sup>th</sup> grade)
7. Students will use a blended learning model as part of core instruction
8. Students will receive daily feedback as part of the blended learning experience.

The application also provides a detailed chart of the requirements in C(1) a-c that links those requirements to specific parts of this learning plan. For example, a (i) is linked to Items 1 and 2: the district intended to align interim assessment to connect students day to day learning and college readiness outcomes, and individual learning plans will include inventories of goals and interests and link them to a process of goal-setting.

a (ii) is linked to items 2, 6 and 7: individual learning plans, link to college-ready standards to present a complete pathway; blended learning models include a personalized path to progress through a range of content and learning modalities.

a (iii) is linked to items 4, 6 and 7. Unit plans link social-emotional competencies to clear learning objectives with the goal of making learning relevant and engaging through the frame of student life experiences; blended learning also provides mixed modalities, although details about the blended learning program are lacking.

a (iv) is linked to item 4: the district will go through a rigorous research and development (R&D) process to create a social-emotional curriculum from a wide range of existing organizations, that includes a diverse range of student backgrounds and

culturally relevant experiences.

a (v) is linked to items 1 and 3: interim assessments linked to Common Core will focus on core academic skills; the district will also invest in resources that help develop social emotional skills including goal-setting, teamwork, perseverance, etc.

b (i) is linked to items 2, 6, and 7: individual learning plans will embody a personalized pathway; blended learning will further that personalization. However, it is not clearly described why grades 2-6 do not participate in individual learning plans, or how the unique goals of younger students will be addressed beyond the blended learning system.

b (ii) is linked to 3, 4, 6, and 7. The process of developing the social-emotional criteria will bring together resources from a wide range of sources to ensure diversity of content and approach; the blended learning model will allow students to experience more small-group, individual, project-based, group-based, and independent work.

b (iii) is linked to items 6, 7, and 1: the district intends to rigorously evaluate all content to ensure quality alignment to the common core; (this process relies in part on an external partner relationship that will be developed through an RFP process) and by utilizing the interim Common Core assessments administered every 6-8 weeks to directly evaluate the efficacy and alignment of selected content.

b (iv) (A) is linked to items 1, 2, 6 and 7: common core aligned assessments will be administered every 6-8 weeks; individual learning plans will incorporate measures of non-academic progress related to college readiness.

b (iv) (B) is linked to items 1, 2, 6 and 7: results from those common core assessments will serve as the baseline for the individual learning plan; non-academic indicators will also be included, and the blended learning model will provide a variety of instructional approaches; in fact the application specifically notes that the district's strategy for blended learning will include multiple providers, as it has ascertained that using just a single provider can result in sub-optimal results for students.

(c) is linked to item 8: teachers will be considered the first level of support for students in using tools and resources; the budget also includes training in technology use for students and families, and for additional technical support staff.

This section is well-thought out and very complete. Many of the aspects of the high quality plan, particularly timeline and responsible parties, are spelled out in more detail in section E and elsewhere. Those sections describe both short-term implementation milestones as well as the leadership team that will oversee the implementation of the grant activities. However, there is some lack of clarity around how the district will ensure deepened learning experiences. This section scores in the high range.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	17
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Newark's application is built on the fundamental understanding that personalized learning is nothing new: it is what all teachers strive for, but difficult to achieve. Thus it provides an explicit and clear link between the goals of improving teacher effectiveness and increasing student access to personalized learning. The district's efforts around improving teaching and learning are the following 12 items:

1. teacher evaluation framework
2. frequent teacher observations
3. access to effectiveness data
4. compensation system
5. access to student data
6. coaching supports to translate data into changed instruction
7. innovative, high-tech rapid formative feedback for teachers
8. access to data on students' social-emotional learning
9. standards and curriculum linked to social-emotional learning
10. blended learning models offer more time for small group and individual instruction
11. blended learning increases access to daily data on student learning
12. professional development, upfront training, and technical support.

These items are then linked to the selection criteria as follows:

a (i): all items, specifically 2, 6. Observations and feedback include a significant emphasis on personalized learning as outlined in the district's Framework for Effective Teaching; Common Core assessments and on-site coaching linked to data.

a (ii): Items 6 and 10: Coaching supports include development of action plans to adapt content based on interim assessments; blended learning partner will conduct professional development regarding adaptive digital content. However, detail is lacking here about how student interests will be sufficiently incorporated, especially interests other than academic goals.

a (iii): Items 6 and 10: both items focus on ability of teachers to frequently measure student progress and translate data into action; robust plan for training and support for these skills.

a (iv) Items 2 and 7: teacher evaluation system includes support for feedback, including goal-setting conferences, ongoing observations, mid-year and annual reviews, informal and formal feedback, and details about how many formal/full-period observations will be conducted; additionally the district will explore more innovative and rapid methods of teacher feedback such as videos, third-party reviews, and live feedback by audio from observers.

b (i): 5, 6, 11, 8, 9: interim assessments and blended learning result in actionable data; individual learning plans include both academic progress and social-emotional competencies.

b (ii): 5, 10, 12, 9: external partner will be contracted to provide interim common core assessments as well as support teachers/leaders in facilitating content meetings that include reports, data, and tools and allow teachers to share resources; blended learning partner will be required to have expertise in digital content to ensure that rigorous resources are selected, and that partner will support professional development. Partnerships with national experts on social-emotional learning will develop standards, curriculum, and data systems to support use of social emotional learning in classrooms. R&D process will test and evaluate these resources before they are piloted.

b (iii): 5, 6, 12, 11 (also section E): partners will provide professional development; blended learning will provide professional development around strengths and weaknesses of content providers and build routines around selecting specific content to meet student needs; learning management system will allow leaders to example data to assess quality and results of selected resources.

c (i): 1, 2, 3, 11, section E: new teacher evaluation system includes clear vision for effective teaching and a portal to help teachers track and improve effectiveness; principals will have similar portal; learning management system will also contain information to help improve teacher effectiveness, and section E describes stakeholder surveys.

c (ii): 12: professional development provided by both the partner that will provide the interim assessments as well as the blended learning partner. There is also an explicit goal of embedded training opportunities into the school culture.

d: 2, 7, 4, 9, 12: the new teacher evaluation system includes specific bonuses for teachers who are both highly effective and teach in high need schools, and who are in high-need subjects. This creates added incentives for teachers. The district's plan for scaling its efforts will also increase the number of highly effective teachers over time.

This section is thorough and comprehensive in its approach. The short-term implementation indicators are spelled out in detail for each of the three strands. Section D includes a detailed description of the roles of key leaders who will oversee the implementation of each strand, as well as the role of a Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer who will oversee the whole project along with a project manager. Much of the applicant's proposal rests on the not-yet-identified partners that will be conducting a great deal of the work, including teacher professional development and assessment work; as a result, it is not clear that there is sufficient evidence of the *capacity* to carry out this work.

Overall, however, other elements of a high quality plan are present here or embedded in other sections. This section scores in the high range.

#### D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

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

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Newark's application describes a rationale for LEA implementation that is cross-functional in its design. Responsibilities and structures for supporting the grant activities are described in detail, principals are described as having more than sufficient autonomy, the state regulations support student mastery efforts, and learning resources are adaptable and accessible.

Newark's strategy for organizing the central office revolves around the strong oversight and leadership of the Superintendent along with a Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer, who, with a full time project manager, will oversee achieving the performance measures described in the grant. Additionally, each strand of work has a specific subject matter owner. These individuals make up a Steering Committee. That committee is also responsible for continuous improvement as outlined in section E, and timelines and milestones for that committee's work are included in that section, including meeting frequency, collecting data and feedback, holding public meetings, and publishing progress reports. However, it is not clear if there will be a more diverse, community-based committee structure that might be able to help guide the work.

The application also describes how principal autonomy has been increased in the past 18 months. The district has also implemented weighted student funding and giving principals more authority to hire staff, reduced burdensome compliance activities for principals, and given principals more control over teachers, students, and their own use of time.

Efforts to give students the opportunity to progress based on mastery are supported at both the state and district level. The state grants districts the authority to grant credit based on completion of assessments. The state is also moving towards competency-based Common Core assessments. And the state is exploring ways to give students more opportunities to take assessments to demonstrate that mastery. However, demonstration of mastery should go beyond multiple opportunities to take the same assessments over again; the Notice to Applicants mentions use of student data and the fact that there should be multiple comparable ways for students to demonstrate that mastery. Grades and tests do not fully address this issue.

Overall, however, this section scores in the high range.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	9
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(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Newark’s application describes its rationale and strategy for ensuring all stakeholders have access to the tools and information they need. This strategy is well thought out and aligned with the other areas of the application.

Acknowledging that there is a significant digital divide in Newark, the district affirms its commitment to providing students the digital resources they need during the school hours. They will also partner with libraries and other partners to help students and families have access after school hours, and will explore options for letting students check out devices or other methods to allow students to bring devices home. However, it is not clear that this approach will truly support the goals of the proposal. For students to see the significant benefits that the proposal outlines in section A, their learning needs must be met both in and out of school.

The district will also work to provide opportunities for parent training on how to use the digital resources that are available, and make efforts to make the individual learning plans and related information completely accessible to parents through both online and paper methods.

The district’s plan for teachers includes providing all participating teachers with a laptop as well as intensive training to make effective use of those digital resources. The district will also expand its existing family hotline, and add full-time technical support employees.

The district’s data systems currently support cut-and-paste operations and will be upgraded to explicitly support more open data formats over the course of the grant. The district also plans to leverage the state’s interoperable Instructional Improvement System for instruction, and currently has interoperable systems for human resources, finance, and other data. This section scores in the high range.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	13

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Newark’s plans include not only student performance indicators, but a wide-ranging, comprehensive list of short-term implementation indicators as well as a 100-day planning period during which feedback on the implementation indicators will be sought. Once those indicators are finalized, the application describes how the steering committee will collect data and feedback at least twice a year, as well as hold public meetings and publish public performance reports. However, this section does not specifically indicate other ways stakeholders will be able to weigh in on the progress of the grant other than in surveys and other feedback mechanisms. The implementation of the proposal throughout the grant is heavily biased towards top-down, rather than collaborative or grass-roots, management. The capacity of the district leadership to carry out reforms of this level and intensity without including teachers, principals, parents, and community members as full partners is questionable, especially given the nature and depth of the cultural and behavioral changes that will be required.

Section E3 describes, as well, the performance measures in detail including leading indicators such as attendance in 8th and 9th grade and student engagement survey results. Section E3 also describes how the district intends to improve its performance measures. Overall, this section scores in the high range.

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

In this section, the district describes how it will include stakeholders in the 100-day planning process as well as provide formal updates to the public at least once per year. It will create an additional set of opportunities to collect feedback from stakeholder groups, and hold public Steering Committee meetings at least once a year. Parent workshops will be held quarterly. There is a strong emphasis on sharing of lessons learned.

However, this seems to be less than sufficient given the wide-ranging and intensive support the district had to solicit from the public to gain support. Once a year for public meetings and formal public updates once a year seems a bit infrequent, especially given the extent and pace of the district's planned scale-up efforts. This section scores in the middle range.

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

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4

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Newark's application describes 13 measures, including: number and percentage of students with an effective/highly effective teacher or principal; percentage of students with a teacher that is highly effective according to Domain 2 of the Teacher Evaluation Framework; percentage of students with disabilities being served in the least restrictive environment; average percent of common core standards mastered by students as per interim assessments; percent of students absent for 10% or fewer school days; students meeting benchmarks on ACT assessments in English and math; growth percentiles on state assessments; motivation and engagement on student surveys; year-over-year attendance rate changes for first time 9<sup>th</sup> graders; growth between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade EXPLORE results.

The rationale for each of these measures is described in detail as is the linkage between the measure and the proposed plan. This section also describes how the measures will be reviewed: for example, after the launch of the PARCC consortia assessments in 2014-15, the district will review whether any academic indicators would be better measured with those new assessments. Additionally, the district indicates that there is a lack of established instruments for measuring non-cognitive and social-emotional areas, but that it intends to work to identify and refine instruments for that purpose.

The goals set for the identified measures are quite ambitious, although some are still in development. For some areas, such as surveys to measure student engagement, the district does not yet have a baseline. Further, the teacher evaluation system is being revised, so baseline data for that measure will not be representative of results after the new evaluation system is fully implemented. Most targets are based on closing the gap to 100% by half. However, some measures are overly ambitious. For example, the expectations of growth in Performance Measure 5 indicate jumps of 14, 17, even 19 percentage points for some subgroups.

This section scores in the high range.

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

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(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Newark's application describes how it will contract an independent evaluator. While the district acknowledges that a randomized controlled trial is likely not feasible, it will work to ensure that the evaluation approximates this design as closely as possible. The research questions are outlined: for example, the district will seek to identify changes in teaching behavior and enabling conditions for personalized learning as well as ascertain if there are statistically significant results for students. The district will seek an evaluation that includes both qualitative and quantitative data obtained through student performance outcomes, student and teacher surveys, observations, and interviews with stakeholders. The research partner will be engaged in the 100 day planning process to ensure good implementation planning and evaluation design, and the Steering Committee, particularly the Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer, will be responsible for overseeing this process. However, this is some question as to the capacity of the district to make those critical decisions in the short 100 day planning time given all the other decisions that are also dependent on that process, and given that the research partner has not yet been identified and thus would not be identified until partway through that process.

Overall, however, in addition to the external evaluation, there are a wide range of other evaluation points described in the application, including the role of the Chief Strategy and Innovation officer and the project manager. This section scores in the high range.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score

(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	9
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>This application includes a detailed and thoughtful budget and budget narrative. Budget tables are provided for each project strand and a fourth project of management, evaluation, and continuous improvement. Assumptions are clearly defined: for example, teacher compensation for supplemental training time is built on an assumption of 8 hours per teacher in the first year of participation, 4 hours in the second year, and no additional time in the third or fourth year. Spending with partners via contract for providing school-based student support services also ramps down to zero during the four-year grant period to ensure the building of sustainable capacity.</p> <p>All funds are identified and explained, and one-time versus operational costs are identified.</p> <p>There is one area for which a full rationale is not fully explicit – the hiring of an events coordinator to support city-wide symposia with charter schools. This component is mentioned in the application, but is not described with the same level of detail as the three strands, and it is not clear why this work needs to garner such significant resources. This component also mentions that this work will be done with charter partners, but it is not clear what those partners will contribute, or the extent of proposed philanthropic match funds for this effort. Overall, this section scores in the high range.</p>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	10
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Newark Public School is a large district with a significant budget, and the application describes that the estimated cost of ongoing annual budgetary impact is less than 0.4% of the district's yearly budget. The district also identifies areas of cost savings and additional revenue supports that are projected to be available, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• decreases in textbook spending due to implementation of digital content</li> <li>• e-rate</li> <li>• transition from paper to online survey administration</li> <li>• reallocation of professional development dollars</li> <li>• philanthropic support</li> </ul> <p>The proposed spending plan indicates how many components of the proposed activities would be ramped up initially and then ramped down to ensure a sustainable effort, and the details of goals and activities are evidenced throughout the application. Responsible parties and deliverables are clearly delineated in other sections of the application with the descriptions of the Steering Committee and the implementation milestones. This section scores in the high range.</p>		

### Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	6
<p>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Newark's application describes an understanding that meeting the social-emotional needs of students will require action beyond data and classroom practices, and thus expresses intent to partner to help build a common set of school-based practices and coordinate the integration of other required supports such as mental health or social services. The partner organization is not explicitly identified, although the district has partners in mind; the district intends to use the 100 day planning period to evaluate all potential partners. However, the evidence of capacity to implement this section of the application is lacking due to the lack of identified partner. The notice to applicants clearly states that the applicant should describe a partnership that has already been formed.</p> <p>The key components of the work of this partnership would include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a student support team</li> <li>• linking with mental health providers</li> <li>• collaborating with other agencies that interact with students on social needs such as juvenile justice or child protective services</li> </ul> <p>The district has identified 6 performance measures that include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• percent of students absent less than 10% of days</li> </ul>		

- student performance on statewide tests
- mastery on common core aligned assessments
- students showing strong motivation and persistence
- percent of students showing social efficacy
- students showing self-regulated learning

Those last three would be based on a student engagement and school climate survey that has yet to be developed. These indicators align well with the rest of the application.

The application indicates that the district would launch this partnership in the school identified in the R&D efforts of project strand 2 described throughout the application. The Student Support Team is designed to meet weekly and develop and monitor intervention plans. The district does describe how it intends to scale the efforts beyond participating students by including both measures of success for a subgroup of students and all students participating in the grant activities.

NPS's goals for the partnership to integrate education and other service and build capacity of staff are clear, although the role of parents and families in this process is not exactly clear.

The goals set for the performance measures for which there are baselines are highly ambitious, especially given that there is no established benchmark for several of them. The performance measures for student motivation, persistence, social efficacy, and self-regulated learning are not fully developed, and in fact may need to be developed and validated before they can be used, which would shorten the time span for improvement. Further, expecting 15 percentage points of growth per year on a Common Core interim assessment that is not yet developed is overly ambitious. However, the plan indicates that those goals and benchmarks will be revised if needed.

This section scores in the middle range.

### Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

#### Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

Newark Public Schools' application consistently and comprehensively describes how it will address Absolute Priority 1. It keeps a laserlike focus on its three project strands of Teacher Capacity to Use Data, Integrating Social-Emotional Learning with Academics, and Blended Learning. These three strands address how teacher effectiveness will be increased (building on the pending teacher union contract) and better align college and career ready standards (building on statewide efforts through Race to the Top and the state's ESEA waiver). The district also describes a thoughtful and innovative approach to blended learning that will use technology and digital content to better meet the needs of all students in terms of student performance and decreasing achievement gaps. While this application focuses on grades 2-9, it does provide a rationale for the focus on those grades and indicates how its efforts under RTT-D will fit into other districtwide initiatives to ensure results are truly systemic.

Total	210	181
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# Race to the Top - District

## Technical Review Form

Application #1284NJ-2 for The Newark Public Schools

### A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	9
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The Newark Public School System has provided a comprehensive reform vision and a clear and concise approach to achieve the reforms presented.</p> <p>The vision includes four pillars from which to build their reform initiative. These pillars are the leads to providing top tier school options for all district students. These pillars are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- developing effective professionals in every classroom</li> <li>- cultivating transformational school leaders</li> <li>- re-imagining NPS as a service orientated team</li> <li>- engaging and involving stakeholders to contribute to college readiness</li> </ul> <p>Three keys building blocks comprise the work that NPS will pursue in order to create more personalized learning for students. These strands are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Investing in teacher capacity to use data. This sets the foundation for the other two building blocks.</li> <li>- Integrating social-emotional teaching and learning with academics.</li> <li>- Piloting blended learning models to accelerate student achievement.</li> </ul> <p>NPS proposes that these three building blocks will lead to the achievement of the ultimate goal to ensure all students graduate college ready. NPS has identified the strands of work that will drive their initiatives. Key activities for each strand have been isolated. NPS has also answered the questions of how each strand accelerates and deepens students learning and how each strand supports teachers in personalized learning. NPS has presented a focused and strong plan for district wide reform.</p> <p>The key concern with this reform vision is that kids do not appear to have a voice and/or choice in their learning and does not address student interest. Overall this a rigorous plan has been outlined and has received a high score as a result.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	9
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Newark Public Schools has presented a compelling platform for systemic change: building school by school, grade by grade to ultimately transform student learning across the entire district. Throughout the narrative NPS presented a clear, concise and systemic process for selecting participants. The three strands presented in (A) (1) provides the framework for the implementation rollout. Each strand addressed the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What grade levels do we target with this strand of work?</li> <li>- What level of scale do we aim to achieve with this work?</li> <li>- What is the timeline for achieving this level of scale?</li> <li>- What is the process for selecting participating scale?</li> </ul> <p>NPS provided evidence in regards to the number of low income and high needs student served as well as the number of participating educators. A list of schools was not presented but through the process of addressing the above questions school selection was evident. There is confusion in regard to what grades will be a part of the implementation. Grades K-8 and 2-9 are both mentioned as target groups.</p> <p>This is a very ambitious plan with a systematic plan of implementation and has resulted in a high score.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	9

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Newark Public Schools provided a very thoughtful logic model that leads the reader from their overall theory of change through accelerated progress towards the ultimate goal of all students graduating college ready. Each of the four pillars were present in the logic model. These pillars were referenced in (A)(1).

NPS provided a focused overview for each pillar and summarized the progress made to-date, highlights of further work that is required and a description of how RTTD funds can accelerate the work outlined. Through very specific guiding and thoughtful questions NPS presented a reflective and thorough plan. Each of the pillars focused on three guiding questions:

- What have we already achieved (building on past successes)?
- Where is further focus and work required?
- How will RTTD accelerate this work?

NPS is very systemic and logical in their approach to school reform. They ask the hard questions and formulate a success strategy in response. Based on the strategy presented for rolling out and scaling up the strands of work in their proposal it is clear that NPS is at the point of initiating district wide change. NPS has a plan in place that layers reforms on to each other, targets outcomes within the entire 2nd through 9th grade continuum that over time scales up to reach all of the schools in that grade span. The plan presented by NPS stands to serve every student that passes through their schools over time. A further defining element of the NPS plan is that this district recognizes that for optimum outcomes to be evidenced, their RTTD work must actively reinforce and be supported by the broader reforms that are underway in this district. More description surrounding the timeline would have provided essential clarity to the overall vision of reform and change and would have resulted in a higher score.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	9
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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

In this section the applicant provided a detailed rationale for their calculated achievable performance targets on summative assessments. They also included detailed supporting tables to further delineate this plan. The methodology used for determining status was percentage scores of tested students in relevant grades that were proficient or above. Their methodology for determining growth is the average growth potential of all students in relevant grades and subjects district wide based on a comparison to peers statewide. The methodology that NPS used to determine achievement gap was percentage point difference in proficiency between the relevant NPS subgroup and its relevant state-wide counterpart. A plan for incremental gains in graduation rates and college enrollment was also presented. When considering the lack of successful school improvement achieved within the district over the past several years, some of the projected gains (from seven to twelve percent in some areas) appear somewhat unrealistic and unattainable. Overall a clear data picture for student outcomes is evident and has received a high score. Again, based on the strategy presented for rolling out and scaling up the strands of work in their proposal it is clear that NPS is at the point of initiating district wide change and has received a high score.

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:

As outlined in the narrative, the New Jersey State Department of Education took control of this district in 1995 and over a 15 year span student outcomes remained unacceptably low. Today, under the dynamic leadership of their superintendent this district has adopted a clear, aggressive theory of change. This plan includes a vision to improve teaching and leadership district-wide and a commitment to deliver top-tier school options for all students. Two of the successes detailed was the launch of Renew Schools in the cities most troubled school communities and the creation of a new teacher and principal evaluation system. Finally, a compelling sign of the momentum is a breakthrough negotiated, but not ratified labor contract that does the following:

- strengthens the role that teachers have as professionals in developing their peers
- aligns teacher pay to performance on the new evaluation system
- creates flexibility or the lowest performing schools

While key performance measures are showing substantial progress, the NPS plan to improve student learning outcomes and close the achievement gaps is evident. NPS plans to target the elementary and middle grades where historically their performance has been low. This has the potential to unleash a cycle of improvement that spans up through the high school grades over time.

Section B focuses on reform to the lowest performing schools, NPS ascertains that they must balance this against the urgent need to improve all schools in their district. Nearly half of the schools have been identified as Focus or Priority Schools. Given this, NPS has initiated ambitious and significant reforms district wide. Each section of their theory of change has seen dramatic reforms in the past 18 months and with the help of RTTD is primed to further improve.

NPS has a remarkable plan to make student data available and useful. The dashboards provide user-friendly and comprehensive views of each schools end of year results in four areas: student performance, student progress, equity and school climate. With the dashboard, principals also receive the underlying student data that is used to calculate each reportable metric to help identify which students are achieving appropriate growth and those that need additional support.

While NPS has demonstrated a record of success it has only provided data for two previous years rather than the requisite four years. A track record of success has been evidenced given a historically troubled past. Therefore this section has received a high-medium score.

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

Newark Public Schools has demonstrated a commitment to a high degree of transparency by implementing the following

- making district budget information available through budget hearings that are open the public
- user friendly school level and district budgets are posted on the district website
- teaching staff and instructional staff are reported separately so that readers can distinguish between them
- non personnel expenditures are included in budget report

NPS has provided sample budget reports for review. A high level of transparency is evidenced through the narrative and sample budget report.

This applicant has provided evidence as detailed above, that demonstrates an increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices and investments and merits a high score.

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

The applicant has shown that is has met the expectations for successful conditions and sufficient autonomy under State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements to implement the personalized learning environments described in their proposal. This is evidenced by:

- the level of strategic alignment with the New Jersey Department of Education and the New Jersey governor, the state education commissioner and the NPS Superintendent
- evidence of policy, regulatory and financial conditions that New Jersey has in place to support a personal learning strategy

Important to the successful implementation of this grant NPS has provided evidence that traditional classroom student-teacher ratios do not apply to blended learning environments. New Jersey has a statewide approval process for digital content providers to ensure alignment with the Common Core Curriculum. In addition, the district has full authority to grant credit for the successful completion of assessments that meet or exceed the state standards, allowing students to progress to the next relevant course upon successful completion of a mastery assessment. All of these conditions provide the structure to support the successful implementation of the grant proposal as the district has state support where needed. Again, this applicant has shown that is has met the expectations for successful conditions and sufficient autonomy under State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements to implement the personalized learning environments described in their proposal and has received a high score.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	9
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>NPS has evidence a large scale stakeholder engagement process. The narrative outlined in detail the process and the outcomes. The stakeholders include: teachers and their union representation, principals, families and communities, and the school advisory board. In addition to the above mentioned data, NPS went so far as to include a chart that reveals the most common feedback and a description of where in the plan the issues will be addressed. Twenty three letters of support were included in this application detailing a wide range of support for the implementation of this plan. Of the twenty three letters of support five were from elected officials, three were current or potential partners, ten were from the community and faith based organizations, and five were from local philanthropic organizations. The district provided engagement with the teachers in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- solicited early input on the proposal from teachers through the bi-weekly Teacher Talk Newsletter (sample provided)</li> <li>- updates shared with teachers and additional feedback was requested from teachers</li> <li>- academic leader within the teachers union were involved in discussions about content in the initial proposal</li> <li>- superintendent hosted two interactive teacher forums to provide a face to face summary of the proposal and to survey teachers and gather input - of the teachers surveyed 74% said that they would be excited to participate the plan to create more personalized learning environments for students</li> </ul> <p>What was not apparent in regards to stakeholder engagement and support is evidence that parents and students were included in the buy-in/support of the proposal. The inclusion of parents and students in the process would have ramped up this proposal. Overall this district demonstrated through narrative and examples a good level of stakeholder engagement and support for the proposal; both being elemental to the success of the outlined proposal. Most impressive was the chart detailing relevant feedback and a description of where the feedback is addressed in the proposal which demonstrates clear and convincing evidence that this district is serious about stakeholder involvement. As a result a high score is evidenced.</p>		
(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	5
<p>(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>As detailed in an earlier section of this review, Newark Public Schools provided in their logic model four pillars that will be the bedrock of their proposed plan. These four pillars again are: developing effective professionals in every classroom, cultivating transformational leaders, engaging and involving stakeholders to contribute to college readiness and providing top-tier school options for all students. NPS has provided a chart that clearly outlines the needs and gaps found within each pillar and how they plan to address them.</p> <p>Closing these gaps appears to be the top priority for NPS during the 100 day planning period afforded by this grant. Some of the issues that NPS is most focused on include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- detailed assessment of facilities and technology infrastructure</li> <li>- detailed school by school implications for use of time</li> <li>- detailed school by school engagement efforts to build familiarity and understanding among teachers and school leaders - particularly for blended learning environments</li> </ul> <p>This district has clearly evidenced a well thought out plan to analyze the needs and gaps and a plan to bridge the gaps and has received a high score.</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>Through the narrative and statistics provided, it is evident that the applicant recognizes the challenges ahead and has a clear and concise learning plan. The plan recognizes eight key changes that will transform the learning experience for their students:</p>		

1. Grades 2 - 8 will have the ability to track their progress towards mastery every six weeks
2. To start, students in grades 6-9 will develop individualized learning plans that have both academic and social-emotional goals
3. Students will spend more focused time on social-emotional competencies along with academic ones
4. students will benefit from social-emotional curriculum
5. students with the most significant social-emotional or mental health needs will have additional support from outside providers
6. students that enter 9th grade with a below grade reading level will work with a blended learning model focused on accelerating literacy
7. students in grades 3 - 8 will work with a blended learning model as a part of their core instruction
8. students working in a blended learning model will receive daily feedback

The applicant recognizes that students need focus on academic progress, social emotional skills and competencies, talents and interests and college knowledge. Newark Public Schools has demonstrated an approach to learning that engages all learners in a variety of ways in an age appropriate manner.

In order to meet the selection criteria of providing ongoing and regular feedback this applicant proposes to:

- administer Common Core aligned interim assessments every six to eight weeks in both English and Math, with the data from the assessments available within 48 hours
- ILP's will add to this academic data by incorporating measurement of non-academic indicators that research suggests are required to achieve college readiness (socio-emotional indicators)
- performance information from students participating in blended learning will be available daily, almost in real time, and stored in an integrated learning management system that tracks student trajectory towards college-ready standards

Personalized learning recommendations based on the student's current knowledge and skills, college and career ready standards will be addressed in the following ways:

- results from the Common Core aligned interim assessments will serve as the baseline for assessing a student's overarching trajectory toward standards, and will both inform the ILP and be included within the learning management system for blended learning students
- The ILP plans that NPS will develop for all students in grades 6-9 embody their personalized pathway toward college-readiness by mapping their trajectory on both academic and non-academic indicators
- students participating in a blended learning model will experience a personalized learning path that is driven by real time feedback on their performance with teacher led small group instruction and other project based or group work

Accommodations and strategies for high need students are in place to help ensure that they are on track toward meeting college and career ready standards. These goals will be met in the following ways:

- through a partnership without outside organizations to help integrate public and private resources, NPS will ensure that the highest need students receive the services they require to stay on track academically (e.g. support from local social worker, mental health and social services agencies).
- NPS plans to use upgrade technology for students with disabilities and other high need students so they can access content through multiple points of engagement (e.g. purchase iPads for students with autism)

This applicant has met the selection criteria for this section and as a result has received a high score.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	18
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The elements that define Newark Public Schools plan to transform teaching and leadership can be described in twelve basic steps. The first four set the foundation for the plan and exist outside of the RTTD plan. The other eight stem directly from investments proposed within the application.

1. Teachers are evaluated within a framework that was built on defining the competencies that elevate student mastery.
2. Teachers and leaders will have more frequent observations and conversations about classroom practice aligned to the framework.
3. Teachers and leaders will have access to effective data based goal setting, observation results and student growth.
4. Teachers that demonstrate a "highly effective" performance will receive additional compensation.
5. Teachers and leaders will have timely access to student data from common core aligned interim assessments.
6. Teachers and leaders will receive coaching to help translate data.

7. Teachers and leaders will pilot innovative new ways to use technology to get more rapid formative feedback.
8. Teachers and leaders will have access to data on students social-emotional learning to provide a fuller picture of students assets and needs.
9. Teachers and leaders will benefit from standards and curriculum developed to increase rigor and improve instruction on social-emotional learning.
10. Teachers and leaders will be supported in blending learning models that reduce class size by offering more time for small group and individual instruction.
11. Teachers and leaders will be supported in adopting blended learning models.
12. Teachers and leaders will receive professional development, upfront training, and ongoing technical support.

To support the effective implementation of personalized learning environments and strategies that meet each student's academic needs and help ensure all students can graduate on time as well as college and career-ready, all of the strands of work within the NPS application include time and resources for teacher training, especially working with teachers in collaborative settings. Observations and feedback that are a part of the NPS teacher evaluation system include a emphasis on personalizing student learning toward college-readiness, given the focus that these concepts have within the overall Framework for Effective Teaching. Also, NPS will contract with a partner to provide both interim assessments aligned to the Common Core and on-site coaching supports that facilitate teachers' ability to work with this data in routines that emphasize collaborative planning.

This proposal also adapts content and instruction, providing opportunities for students to engage in common and individual tasks, in response to their academic needs, academic interests, and optimal learning approaches. As part of the coaching supports and collaboration process, teachers will work in content and grade level teams, with facilitation from outside partners, to develop action plans that adapt content and instruction to meet students' needs based on the results of students' interim assessments. This data-driven instructional planning routine will initially be facilitated by an external partner every 6-8 weeks, but one of the explicit goals of such a partnership is to embed ongoing systems and processes within each school so that teachers continue to plan collaboratively and adapt content and instruction to students' needs over time.

NPS will engage with an implementation support partner as it launches the blended learning pilots, with this partner scheduled to work with school leadership teams and teachers from six months before launch through at least the first two years of implementation. One of the roles of this partner will be to conduct professional development with teams from participating schools that focuses on how to use adaptive digital content and classroom rotations to make instructional time personalized to student needs.

This applicant frequently measures student progress toward meeting college- and career ready standards and uses data to inform both the acceleration of student progress and the improvement of the individual and collective practice of educators. Both the interim assessment strand of work and the blended learning strand of work focus on the ability of teachers to frequently measure student progress toward college ready standards and understand how to translate this data into concrete actions they can take in the classroom to improve outcomes.

A plan is in place to improve teachers' and principals' practice and effectiveness by using feedback provided by the LEA's teacher and principal evaluation systems. This plan will include frequent feedback on individual and collective effectiveness. Recommendations for supports and interventions, as needed, for improvement will be provided. For example, principals and administrators will be provided guidance on how to give specific and actionable feedback tailored to teachers' individual growth areas. All educators are encouraged to have regular conversations to discuss strengths and growth areas, set professional goals, and create individualized professional development plans to meet those goals.

This plan also provides for a small number of schools to pilot innovative forms of rapid, formative feedback for teachers. Pilot schools will help identify the most promising tools and approaches that offer specific, actionable feedback to help teachers improve their practice.

The applicant provides actionable information that helps educators identify optimal learning approaches that respond to individual student academic needs and interests. Both the interim assessment strand of work and the blended learning strand of work focus on providing teachers with actionable data and information on students' progress toward college-ready standards so that they respond to individual students' academic needs by grouping students strategically, selecting appropriate content, and reviewing concepts as required based on student needs.

Also a part of the plan is to create Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs) for each student, beginning in grades 6-9. These ILPs will contain information and data not only on students' academic progress, but also on their social-emotional skills and competencies; talents and interests; and "college knowledge."

The partner and interim assessment provider will also provide intensive professional development to support teachers in using interim assessment data to select appropriate resources and tailor instructional strategies to meet students' individual needs.

The implementation partner for blended learning will also provide significant training to help teachers understand the strengths

and weaknesses of different content providers and build routines around selecting specific content to meet specific student needs.

The new teacher and leader evaluation system at NPS includes policies and tools that provide school leaders with (a) a clear and common vision for effective teaching, and (b) makes the resulting information available to teachers and leaders through a user-friendly portal that helps educators track and improve their effectiveness. As they launch new systems, they will also be developing portals that allow teachers to access their individual evaluation information (including observation scores, comments, and specific recommended interventions). Principal portals will provide access to the same information for all teachers within a school. The applicant has a plan to provide for intensive professional development and training to increase teachers' and school leaders' effectiveness with the ultimate goal of improving student outcomes and closing achievement gaps. Much of this professional development will be provided initially by their partners, but each partnership will include an explicit goal of embedding training systems and practices into the school culture and increasing the capacity of school leaders to sustain these systems and practices on an ongoing basis.

The applicant's new leader evaluation system focuses on developing and assessing leaders' capacity to continuously improve school progress by supporting high quality instruction, increase teacher effectiveness, establishing a positive school culture, and demonstrating transformational leadership qualities. These elements work together to improve student performance on an ongoing basis.

The applicant has identified one big gap in the district capacity to improve involving a lack of focus on social-emotional teaching and learning. By providing training and instructional resources on social-emotional learning for teachers and leaders, the district hopes to help schools address some of the underlying, persistent barriers to improved student outcomes.

The new teacher and leader evaluation and support systems are explicitly designed to increase the effectiveness of all teachers and leaders, thereby increasing the number of students who are served by effective educators. The plan to pilot innovative forms of rapid, formative feedback for teachers is also intended to boost the effectiveness of our educators overall.

The applicant has a groundbreaking new agreement (not yet ratified) with the NTU including bonuses for teachers who earn a rating of Highly Effective, who teach hard-to-staff subjects, and who work in their lowest-performing schools. These provisions will help ensure that students who are most in need of effective instruction have access to our most effective teachers. Additionally, this system will create an added incentive for teachers to take advantage of the many supports we offer to help increase instructional effectiveness over time.

NPS will also boost educators' effectiveness through work intended to increase the role of social- emotional skill-building in the classroom. The applicant states that creating rigorous standards, assessment, and curriculum for social-emotional learning and providing intensive supports to educators to help them integrate these resources into their classrooms, will equip educators with the tools they need to address some of the systemic causes of student under performance.

Above is an overview of the guiding steps for the continued success of the district as they implement the RTTD plan. Each of the elements of this section were addressed and demonstrate a model that supports teaching and leading in effective ways. While the overall quality of the of this plan is good there was a lack of student involvement in regards to recognizing and addressing their interests and needs. In addition, there was not a clearly identified plan for creating and sharing resources. This section received a high score based on evidence presented.

#### D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

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

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Newark Public Schools has established two imperatives in regards policy and infrastructure. NPS will have in place a single senior leader (not the superintendent) who is accountable for the overall delivery of the plan, and who has the authority to coordinate related activities between strands of work. In addition, it is recognized that there must be clear ownership of each strand of work, with those owners understanding the grant plan to be embedded within their existing day to day priorities. Providing school leaders autonomy is a priority at NPS. Principals are given control over school budgets, personnel, and use of time. Students in NPS are afforded the opportunity to earn credit and progress based on demonstrated mastery, rather than seat time. In addition, the state is moving towards more competency based end of course assessments that will further empower students to move forward in their education based on their skill and mastery.

What was not evidenced through this narrative were defined roles for a collaborative team approach. In addition, learning resources were limited in access and not available to all learners. While there are LEA practices, policies and rules evidenced

they are not extremely innovative in their approach, a mid-range score is evidenced.

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

10

10

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Newark Public Schools has demonstrated a commitment to serving and supporting its students by ensuring that learning resources are accessible regardless of disability, English proficiency, behavioral needs, or other individual circumstances, including income. Specific resources that are deemed most relevant to the RTTD plan are made available to students, families, and educators with a particular emphasis on low-income populations.

- For students - hardware, software, digital learning content and progress to support students' learning
- For parents - student progress data so that parents can support students' learning
- For teachers' - hardware, software, student progress data, and data tools to inform instruction

To address providing appropriate technical support NPS proposes to:

- Add 6 full time employees to the central team that provides technical support to schools
- Contracting specific staff to assist with the temporary increase in demand
- Expansion of the family hotline to answer questions

Currently at NPS parents can access student data but cannot actually export it. They are able to cut and paste it in to another document. With the implementation of this plan software will be in place that will allow a smoother, easier way to export data. In addition, NPS has full interoperability with the state's student information system and will take steps to achieve interoperability in data domains outside of student information. What is not evidenced is a plan of action to include providing families and students access to technology to begin to close the digital divide. Further, NPS has delineated an infrastructure for data management and use in place with plans to further tweak and expand their interoperability. Overall this applicant demonstrates a quality school infrastructure and has received a high score.

### E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	13

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

This applicant has outlined a plan to ensure continuous improvement. The monitoring of the process will be done in layers, starting with the Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer and his RTTD project manager to a grant specific steering committee. The committee will be responsible for the effective communication, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement of the plan during and beyond the term of the grant. The narrative provided demonstrated a comprehensive plan to meet short and long term goals for continuous improvement as well. This plan describes several measures to keep the public informed of the quality of its investments. These measures include public meetings and publishing an annual progress report annually.

One area of concern was evidenced. There is a definite top-down rather than a bottom up, grassroots approach which demonstrates a weak involvement and input of the stakeholders - students and teachers in particular. Both student and teacher buy-in and support of the program is essential to its continued improvement and overall success. As a result, a mid-high score is evidenced.

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

5

4

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

This applicant has presented a set of strategies for ongoing communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders. To ensure ongoing stakeholder engagement NPS plans to:

- engage a broad range of stakeholders in goal setting and overall progress monitoring
- solicit ongoing feedback from participants
- shared lessons learned and celebration of successes

The applicant did not demonstrate multiple means for sharing information. More and frequent feedback would have added strength to this section. Overall the applicant met the criteria for this section and as a result a high score is evident.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	3
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Newark Public Schools is committed to and has provided ambitious performance measures that reflect their ultimate achievement gains and also valuable feedback to inform the continuous improvement. The narrative contains 13 performance measures for the RTTD plan. NPS chose to put together a mix of required performance measures and applicant proposed measures that will involve three distinct groups: all students, students in K-3, and students in grades 4-8. NPS provided a comprehensive chart that details each measure, its source and rationale. What is not evidenced in the proposal is baseline data and no data instrument for the socio-emotional piece. While the applicant has provided ambitious performance measures the ability to achieve some of the goals does not appear to be realistic.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	4
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>This applicant proposes to work with an independent evaluator to refine the plan with the following guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did students participating in the RTTD plan show statistically significant improvements in academic outcomes compared to their non-participating peers?</li> <li>• What, if any, significant changes in teacher behavior have occurred over the period of the grant?</li> <li>• What enabling conditions are required for personalized learning interventions to impact student learning and teacher practice?</li> <li>• What individual characteristics are most important in determining student success?</li> </ul> <p>NPS plans to utilize student performance outcomes, student and teacher surveys, deep dive observations and interviews with stakeholders to ensure evaluation of effectiveness of investments. This in turn will inform the district's long term allocation of resources to support student growth.</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>Newark Public Schools has constructed a high quality budget that aligns with the three strands of work that was detailed in (A)(1). Each of the three projects has a detailed budget and a fourth project details the cost of managing and supporting the overall plan. There is a very concise and comprehensive budget analysis that looks at each strand of the project in detail and breaks costs out accordingly in table form.</p> <p>The applicant has provided a budget that identifies all funds that will support its RTTD project, is reasonable and sufficient to support the development and implementation of the proposal and also clearly provides a thoughtful rationale for investments and priorities. As a result a high score is evidenced.</p>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	10
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>In order to ensure the sustainability of key strands of work, NPS has structured its plan to build district capacity, leverage existing resources, and minimize the incremental outgoing costs after the grant period. Where there are post-grant outgoing costs, NPS feels that they will be manageable within the general budget after the four year period. In addition, the applicant enjoys the benefits of local philanthropic support as evidenced by letters of support that demonstrate that if a need were to occur they have the capacity to garner local support.</p> <p>This applicant has noted two possible sources of support from the state. First is dedicated funding streams(textbook money) can be used to purchase digital content and e-rate and capital funding to help maintain technology purchases. In addition, this applicant has provided letters of support from the mayor, a state senator and a city council member pledging their support for the initiatives in this proposal.</p>		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

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

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

This applicant has demonstrated a plan to build capacity within the schools to address students' social-emotional needs with the same level of rigor and and focus as they do the academic needs. This work comprises two primary components: developing individualized learning plans that measure and highlight key social, emotional and academic indicators; and building aligned standards, curriculum and assessments that complement the individualized plans by empowering teachers to place social-emotional learning at the core of classroom practice. Together these components will support student development as learners as well as their success in college and in life. NPS has identified a potential partner to facilitate this part of the plan and will use the 100 day planning period to further evaluate the potential partner as well as many others to find a good fit for their program and the objectives they have identified.

An area of concern is that many key elements of the proposal have been relegated to the 100 day planning period. Therefore, the progress plan is vague at best. In addition the role of parents and families in planning and decision making is not clear and is it not clear how parents are integrated into the process as a result a medium score is evidenced.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

Newark Public Schools has envisioned a plan that fosters personalized learning to build conditions for success at a school level. The proposed ultimate vision of the personalized learning environment is one in which academic and socio-emotional learning are deeply integrated and taught with the same level of rigor. It is also evidenced in the proposal that implementation through the RTTD grant will allow for important first steps towards this model through targeted investments in basic tools and data. Another tenet that is evidenced throughout this proposal is that technology can further the student and teacher experience when it is used in service of a coherent instructional strategy. This proposal documents a plan that is rigorous and relevant and meets the criteria.

Total	210	184
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# Race to the Top - District

## Technical Review Form

Application #1284NJ-3 for The Newark Public Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	8

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Newark Public Schools (NPS) articulates a vision for comprehensive and coherent reform across grades 2 through 9. Through investing in teacher capacity to use data paired with Common Core-aligned interim assessments, teachers will use data to inform instruction, ultimately improving student performance. This plan for improved performance is to impact all students in grades 2-9, with special emphasis on narrowing achievement gaps across subgroups. Graduation rate and college enrollment increases are also a part of the vision, but given that the vision targets grades 2-9, clear measures of the impact of the implementation of supported measures on graduation rate and college enrollment for impacted students will not be available until the grant period ends.

Support for personalized student support is evident, but the vision lacks evidence of focusing personalization on student academic interest. The implementation of individualized learning focuses on independent study, online learning, work-based programs, study abroad programs, student exchange programs, service learning, and structured learning experiences that are to be based on student interest and career goals. The proposal does not provide a means however, of identifying student career goals. Furthermore, a means of linking career goals to student academic interests is not evident.

While for the most part, the the NPS vision is clear and supportive of RttT-D ideals, the proposal lacks clear evidence of personalization of student learning based on academic interest, resulting in a lower high range score for articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision.

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

10

8

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Descriptions of the target areas for improvement for NPS are identified and explained in the proposal. Target areas involve improved assessment performances, improved graduation rates, increased college matriculation rates, and narrowed achievement gaps. A listing of participating schools with numbers of participating students at each school, including those from low-income families, is provided. The listing only includes total numbers of high needs students and numbers of educators, without breakdown according to participating schools or grade levels.

Some confusion exists in the proposal resulting from the description of a process that will target grades 2-9, followed by a description of a focus on support to K-8, since K-8 schools will participate. When referring to graduation rate and college matriculation rate metrics, K-8 is discussed as follows, "Due to its focus on grades K-8, this proposal will not directly affect the [sic] either of these measures over the life of the grant." Shortly thereafter, the proposal states that a "fundamentally changed student experience across the grade 2-9 continuum" will result from the NPS approach to implementation.

While overall, NPS has shared a strong approach to implementation of the proposal, clarification of aspects of the plan, such as grade level involvement, are needed. As a result, the proposal scores in the lower high range for its approach to implementation.

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

10

10

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Newark Public Schools plans to scale up each strand of its improvement efforts to "gradually build the conditions for success across the city." The plan calls for a 100-day planning period followed by initial implementation efforts at schools with high levels of buy-in and school level leadership capacity likely to produce effective change. From these core schools, efforts will be scaled up, with the intent of producing sustainable reform system-wide, eventually serving all students in the system.

In order to support the plan, effectiveness of educators will be developed, building upon efforts that have already begun through existing reform efforts. A "breakthrough" teacher's contract is mentioned, but given that its ratification is pending, its ability to produce opportunities for coaching and real-time, evidence-based feedback on instruction is uncertain. The proposal calls for the development of transformational leaders, to be equipped with tools to create a culture of high expectations. Given that 50% of the system's principals have been replaced in the past 18 months, the need for leadership development, as described, is evident. Efforts to get relevant information and "data into the hands of families," engaging them in improvement efforts will further support system-wide change.

Low performing schools will receive additional focus and effort to ensure that the essential ingredients for success are present in all schools. Collaboration efforts between district schools, charter schools, and other schools in the form of symposiums, teacher and leader trainings, and parent workshops will further promote the vision developed in this proposal to achieve city-wide excellence.

As a result of a well-developed plan that promotes implementation on a relatively small level at the onset, followed by implementation system-wide to involve all stakeholders, this proposal rates high in LEA-wide reform and change.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)

10

8

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has clearly developed an ambitious plan for annual improvements that exceed state ESEA targets. Plans to improve summative assessment results, close achievement gaps, improve graduation rates, and increase college enrollment are evident. The proposal as written is to impact grades 2-9, making impacting graduation rates and college enrollment rates in the four year grant period questionable.

Some of the goals are so ambitious however, that attainability is questionable. A goal for 7-8% improvement each year for certain subgroups may be unrealistic. Metric 18, involving Math Grade 11 Average Proficiency, indicates goals for 7-8 % growth per year for Special Education Students. Metric 1, involving Grades 3-8 Average Proficiency on the New Jersey Language Arts examination, projects 8% growth per year.

While this school system has shown recent improvement, a long-standing history of failed improvement efforts make such ambitious goals seem unrealistic. While reform efforts suggest the development of leadership teams in schools, a high degree of focus on an individual as district leader may negatively impact proposal implementation. The strong emphasis on the individual district leader effectively reduces the impact of system-wide team leadership practices in achieving success.

While ambitious goals for improved outcomes are evident, concern exists regarding attainability of established goals and in the effectiveness of leadership practices in implementing these goals, resulting in a lower high range score for LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes.

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>Data relating to student performance is somewhat lacking in the NPS proposal. Several graphs are provided in appendix B(1) that provide a snapshot of student performance statistics since 2008. The snapshot indicates performance that might be described as declining and/or flat overall until 2010, at which point the graphs demonstrate an upward trend. Data is provided in table form for the past two years (as opposed to four) for 22 metrics relating to achievement test performance, achievement gap narrowing, graduation rates, and college readiness. Improvements are demonstrated across all metrics from the 2010-2011 school year to the 2011-2012 school year.</p> <p>Reform efforts in the last 18 months have involved replacing approximately half of principals district-wide, paired with closure of twelve of the district's persistently lowest performing schools. Eight schools were reopened and four new high schools were opened. These schools received infusion of technology, leadership, and a fundamental change approach to improve student achievement.</p> <p>Student performance data is made readily available to parents through a parent portal to the school information system. A data "dashboard" has been available for two years, providing important district performance data to stakeholders. Principals also receive student data to assist in the focus on efforts to improve instruction and student services.</p> <p>A track record of success over a four year period is not evident in Newark Public Schools. However, highly focused reform efforts over the past two years support a low high-range score for demonstration of a clear track record of success.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The NPS provides budget information to the public through budget hearings and website postings. Actual school-level expenditures for instruction, instructional support, pupil support, and school administration are provided. A comprehensive budget in a "user-friendly" format is provided on the website, providing enrollment data, operating costs, expenses related to instruction, capital expenditures, grants and entitlements, and employee salaries and benefits for certain district employees.</p> <p>Given the high degree of transparency of the Newark Public Schools, this section rates high in transparency of processes, practices, and investments.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	9

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Given that Newark Public Schools are state-operated, and therefore are under state control, the district has somewhat restricted autonomy. On the other hand, New Jersey has implemented strategies that support the development of personalized learning environments. Since 2002, New Jersey has operated a successful virtual school that has served over 450 school districts. A publication of the Foundation for Excellence in Education, *Digital Learning Now!*, identified New Jersey as a national leader in transforming education for the digital age. Under state law, public schools are eligible for publicly-funded digital learning curricula aligned to Common Core Standards. Furthermore, New Jersey lacks traditional seat time requirements, paving the way for student progression based on mastery. Districts in New Jersey have the authority to grant credit based on successful course completion whenever a student demonstrates mastery. The State has also invested in an innovation department to support implementation of personalized approaches to learning for all students.

While the context of being a state-operated school district results in a lack of autonomy under the State, the state has paved the way to support the development of personalized learning environments. As a result, this section scores in the middle of the high range for State context for implementation.

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

Teacher input was solicited by Newark Public Schools through its bi-weekly district newsletter. An update on the initial plan and request for additional feedback were shared at the October meetings of the Teacher Leadership Institute and Child Study Team meetings. Two interactive Teacher Forums were held at which the Superintendent shared her summary of the plan. Teachers were surveyed, and input was gathered at that time. Data was collected on teacher interest. Support for creating more personalized learning environments for students was indicated by a 74% response in favor of such change. Input was solicited early on from principals, with additional focus on meeting with the 12 principals of the earliest participating schools.

Input from community leaders was solicited. These leaders, with the input of constituents, gathered feedback. A summary of the initial plan was posted on the district website with an invitation to the community to respond with questions or feedback via email. Several additional examples of means used to inform and involve stakeholders are included in the proposal. A table is provided in the proposal that lists the most common feedback from stakeholders with a detailed description of how the plan addresses common stakeholder feedback.

Letters of Support include letters from 5 elected officials, 3 current and potential partners, 10 community- and faith-based organizations, and 5 local philanthropic organizations. Attached to the proposal are letters from the following individuals;

- President and CEO, Newark Trust for Education
- CEO Newark Charter School Fund
- Vice President, Corporate Social Responsibility, Prudential
- Executive Officer, Victoria Foundation
- CEO Foundation for Newark's Future
- Vice President of Arts Education, New Jersey Performing Arts Center
- Pastor, Clear View Baptist Church
- Executive Director, La Cass de Don Pedro
- Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, YMCA of Newark
- President and CEO, Newark Now
- Executive Director, The Center for Collaborative Change,
- President and CEO, United Way of Essex and West Hudson
- Executive Director, Ironbound Community Corporation
- Executive Director, iReform
- President & CEO, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Essex, Hudson & Union Counties
- President & CEO Turnaround for Children
- CEO, The Achievement Network
- Executive Director, Citizen Schools New Jersey
- New Jersey State Senator
- Associate Professor of Law, Seton Hall University School of Law
- President, Newark Teachers Union
- Council Member- Central Ward, Newark
- Newark Mayor

While NPS has demonstrated a high level of stakeholder input in its proposal, the display of support as evidenced by the attached letters is lacking evidence of support from students, parents, and teachers. A lack of supportive evidence from the very most basic levels of the instructional process result in a low high range score for stakeholder engagement and support

for the proposal.

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

5

5

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

The Newark Public Schools proposal identifies several needs and gaps, with plans for addressing these areas to support reform efforts.

Needs and gaps identified include;

- Lack of data availability to teachers
- Lack of teacher resources to support social-emotional skill-building
- Leaders lacking school-wide practices and routines that facilitate collaborative data-focused planning
- Lack of partnerships to provide leaders with opportunities for effective interventions for highest-need students
- A clear data-based trajectory of student progress for college and career readiness
- Assessments in line with Common Core Standards
- Ability to accelerate learning and engage all students using technology

The proposal includes a 100-day planning period to further develop goals and implementation plans. Analysis during this 100-day period will focus on school level factors for successful implementation of the proposal. During this period, some areas of focus will include the following;

- Facilities assessment , including assessment of technology infrastructure
- Analysis school-by-school flexibility in use of time
- Detailed school-by-school engagement efforts (a special area of focus for the blended learning pilots)

Given the identification of several gaps, plans to further gap evaluation, and evident planning for gap elimination, the NPS proposal rates high in its analysis of needs and gaps.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	17

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The Newark Public Schools proposal states, “the ultimate goal...is to help all students master the skills to succeed in college and life.” In order to support a plan for improved student learning, eight key changes are identified as follows;

- Students and families in grades 2-8 will be able to track student progress in demonstration of mastery of college-ready standards every 6 weeks
- Students, initially in grades 6-9, will establish individualized learning plans (ILPs) focused on both academic and social-emotional goals
- Students will spend more classroom time focused on learning social-emotional competencies alongside academic ones
- Students will benefit from social-emotional curriculum
- Students with the most significant behavioral, social-emotional, and mental health needs will receive additional support
- Students entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade significantly below grade level will engage in a blended learning model to accelerate literacy development
- Students in grades 3-8 will engage in blended learning in small groups and individually with adaptive digital content
- Students working in blended learning will receive daily feedback and will have access to a wide range of content providers

A self- assessment instrument will be administered to students to identify career and life goals, providing information about the academic path students need to achieve their goals. The decision to implement ILPs in grades 6-9 was made because this is a period when students are increasingly thoughtful about their futures. Funds have been designated in the budget to provide for a data portal that will integrate with existing data and provide teachers, students, and families with access to student ILPs.

The provisions for supporting student social-emotional needs will help students achieve their goals, in support of college and career readiness. Technology will also be an asset in providing for the needs of all students, including those with significant challenges in learning.

All aspects of the ILPs are to be aligned with college-ready standards, including Common Core Standards. Strategies exist to incorporate a variety of technology providers to ensure the delivery of quality content from a variety of sources.

This plan has many great aspects, particularly in providing social-emotional training alongside academic training. Weaknesses are evident in the following areas;

- Exposure to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives- While this is briefly addressed in relation to the social-emotional education of students, compelling evidence is not present of this sort of exposure in the plan as presented.
- While ILPs and quality resources to support learning are described, the plan lacks emphasis on critical thinking, communication, creativity, and problem-solving.
- Ensuring that each student has an individualized learning plan- Limiting the ILP development to grades 6-9 does not reach out to all students involved in the proposal. One might argue however, that over time, all students will be involved in the development of an ILP.

While overall, a quality plan to prepare students for colleges and careers is evident, some limitations, as indicated above, exist. As a result, the NPS proposal ranks in the middle of the high range for learning.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	17
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Newark Public Schools has a well-developed plan for improving instruction to support student progress toward meeting college and career ready standards. Plans are evident for regular training embedded into the school schedule to provide all educators training and collaboration opportunities;

- in support of individual and collective implementation of personalized learning environments.
- to frequently measure student progress.
- to apply student data in decision making.
- to improve practices through a plan for regular formative and evaluative feedback.

Plans clearly indicate a need and expectations to use data to diagnose student needs. Evidence does not fully support responding to student academic interests and optimal learning approaches, though these are mentioned briefly in the proposal. Access to high quality digital resources is indicated, but tools for creating and sharing new resources are not identified, nor is there evidence of linking resources and approaches to individual student needs. Clear evidence exists of a plan to regularly analyze student performance data to inform instructional practices and decisions, and to engage in professional development opportunities to support implementation of the plan as outlined in the proposal.

A plan exists, though not yet approved by district teachers, to provide significant financial incentives to teachers rating “highly effective” in the new evaluation system. This is an apparent focus for providing more highly effective teachers to district students. The district has already replaced approximately 50% of the district's principals as a component of its strategy to improve the effectiveness of building level leadership in support of improvement efforts. Efforts of educators are expected to become more effective through the development of social-emotional education skills of all involved teachers and principals.

Overall, a quality plan has been developed for teaching and leading , but the evidence provided lacks appeal to individual student interests and needs. Furthermore, tools for creating and sharing resources have not been clearly identified. As a result, the NPS proposal ranks in the middle of the high range for teaching and leading.

#### D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

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

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Leadership positions and related responsibilities have been clearly identified, providing an evident structure of support to participating schools. Flexibility and autonomy is provided to principals in budgeting, scheduling, and personnel decisions. Reference is not made specifically to the authority of building leadership teams, though references to such leadership teams are evident in the proposal. Principals also have autonomy in focusing teacher professional development on content deemed to be most helpful in meeting individual school level needs.

Students will be permitted to progress in their studies, earning credit based on mastery as opposed to seat time. The proposal indicates opportunities to demonstrate mastery through assessments more than once per year. Grades will be determined

through summative assessments, formative assessments, and homework, with the final grade representing a measure of mastery of grade level standards over the course of an academic quarter. Summative assessments are heavily emphasized, which are to make up 65% of quarter grades.

Some learning resources are provided for all students. Teachers and principals are currently being trained in Universal Design for Learning, which provides guidance to educators in developing flexible goals, materials, and assessments that are customizable to meet individual students' needs. SOLO, a speech to text, text to speech, and co-writing resource is available to all students. Students with print disabilities receive all text in audio format. Under a pilot in the district's 8 Renew schools, iPads are provided to autistic students to support communication needs. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports are also provided to students to support varied behavioral needs. Coaching and technical assistance is provided to teachers to meet the needs of English Language Learners.

Defined roles for collaborative teams at the individual school level were not evident in this proposal. Multiple times and multiple ways of demonstrating mastery, while not connected to seat time in New Jersey, was presented in a restrictive, traditional test and course based approach. Emphasis on summative testing and evaluation, as described in the proposal, is very high. Furthermore, while some learning resources were presented, the resources indicated were limited and not consistently focused on meeting the needs of all learners. As a result, the NPS proposal ranks in the middle range for LEA practices, policies, and rules.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	8
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(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Newark Public Schools plans to support students with access to necessary content, tools, and learning resources. Technology to support these needs will be made available to students during the school day. Collaboration with local libraries and community based organizations will result in a list of locations at which parents and students can access computers outside of the school day. During the grant period, strategies for loaning devices to students will be explored, pending operational and financial considerations. The schools will provide weekly parent training sessions to support parent access to student data and resources, including ILPs. At parent request, printed copies of student data and ILPs will be sent out.

All participating teachers will be provided with a laptop for use during and outside of school. Teachers will also receive intensive training to support the development of technical and instructional skills. Technical support will be expanded to support increased demand resulting from proposal implementation, including extended call center hours providing support to district employees and parents.

The current student information system used by the district provides access to student data, including ILPs. The State of New Jersey also has a data system which has been invested in heavily to make into an interoperable Instructional Improvement System. As a result, the district has not invested its resources in a separate interoperable data system. The district also uses other data sources for human resources, financial, and workforce management data. A system that will integrate these data feeds into a single, unified data source is currently under development.

While the Newark Public Schools clearly has an infrastructure in place with plans developed to adjust in support of the proposal, it seems that greater effort could be made in narrowing the "digital divide" through creating more opportunities for students to access technology outside of the school day to support learning activities. As a result, this proposal scores at the low end of the high range in LEA and school infrastructure.

### E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	12

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The focus of this plan involves a top-down approach, with responsibilities laid out at the top for assessing the data and questioning building level implementation. Plans are in place to monitor, measure, and share results of proposal implementation. While the proposed plans have been clearly thought out and well-developed, questions remain. To produce the sort of change needed in the Newark Public Schools, significant cultural change must occur. This change must be deeply embedded in the practices of individual teachers and students in classrooms. Through effective collaboration efforts and team leadership in individual schools, great growth collectively as a district might be achieved. The information provided regarding the continuous improvement process lacks focus on changing the culture of teachers and building leaders. A process of engagement in regular data analysis and feedback to inform school practices, resulting in continuous evaluation and

improvement efforts is anticipated as a result of proposal implementation. This process could be further developed however, to promote a greater degree of stakeholders involvement in the change process.

While the continuous improvement process has been well-developed, with thoughtful development of managerial layering of oversight, the proposal does not provide sufficient evidence of supporting the development of a culture of continuous improvement that effectively reaches to the level of students and parents. The NPS proposal therefore ranks in the lower high range for the continuous improvement process.

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

5

4

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

A thorough plan exists for sharing information with and soliciting feedback from stakeholders. The 100-day planning process will involve a wide variety of stakeholders to finalize specific project goals and activities. Formal updates will be provided to the public at least once per year. A calendar of public opportunities to provide feedback will be established. Surveys will be conducted twice a year to evaluate the progress of the plan, the effectiveness of specific investments, and the quality of plan implementation. A public steering committee meeting will be held at least once per year to solicit additional feedback and to share updates with a broad range of stakeholders.

Internally, regular meetings will provide teachers feedback in their schools to celebrate achievements and spread best practices. Educator trainings and parent workshops will provide training and share relevant information. Data regarding school and student performance is made available to stakeholders through the district student information system and the state data system.

Multiple means will be employed by NPS to share information with and gather feedback from stakeholders, however, the frequency of meeting opportunities with the public is not clearly defined, leaving the option for only one public steering committee meeting per year. Newark Public Schools therefore rates in the lower high range for ongoing communication and engagement.

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

5

3

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Thirteen performance measures are addressed overall and by subgroup in the NPS proposal. A rationale for each measure is included, such as an explanation of the value of student attendance information paired with survey data to assess student engagement. The rationale includes the value of each tool used in providing information to evaluate implementation efforts, enabling the district to identify successes and concerns.

Newark Public Schools plans to review and improve performance measures over time. A challenge exists in that current New Jersey summative assessments do not align with the Common Core Standards. The district must wait until the 2014-2015 school year for new assessment implementation. As a result, a collection of measures is used to assess college-readiness. Following the implementation of the new assessments, academic indicators identified in this proposal will be reviewed to consider replacement. Over the course of the grant period, the district intends to also identify and refine instruments use to best measure cognitive and social-emotional development, which is at present a great challenge.

NPS has selected ambitious performance measures with annual targets identified. Each of the district selected measures includes a rationale. Evidence is provided of plans to review and improve the measures used over time. Questions exist however regarding the ability to achieve some of the goals indicated. Most are reasonable, but for some of the summative assessments, annual growth for both subgroups and students overall of 10% and higher seems optimistic, but not realistic. As a result, the NPS proposal scores in the upper middle range for performance measures.

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

5

5

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

An outside evaluator will be hired, though not required, to determine the overall relationship of the plan to learning outcomes of students and the instructional practices of teachers. The contributions of individual investments will be assessed as they relate to student outcomes and instructional practices. These investments include such items as digital learning content, professional development on data-driven instruction, and community partnerships.

Several key research questions will focus the evaluation efforts in obtaining multiple diverse measures of student progress. Both quantitative and qualitative data will be analyzed to provide a measure of the effectiveness of the proposal implementation in a complex school environment. Key research questions to be studied focus on changes in student performance, changes in teacher behaviors, conditions that determine student success, and conditions required to enable

successful personalized learning interventions.

Given the establishment of a thoughtful evaluation plan, which includes key questions to be assessed by an outside evaluator, the NPS proposal scores high in evaluating the effectiveness of its investments.

## F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

### (F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Newark Public Schools has included a detailed budget and narrative to identify all funds supporting the project, including expenditures assumed by the district in support of program goals. Fund use is clearly described in a detailed manner, linked to program goals, and each expenditure is identified as a one-time investment or an ongoing operational cost. The budget is divided into three projects, each of which has its own budget developed, plus a category for overall implementation. The projects and itemized expenses for each of the 4 budget components (3 projects plus overall implementation) are;

- Investing in Teacher Capacity of Use Data
  - full-time project manager
  - Common Core-aligned interim assessments and related coaching supports
  - piloting innovative forms of teacher feedback
- Integrating Social-Emotional Teaching and Learning with Academics
  - full-time project manager
  - working team for development of social-emotional standards, curriculum, and assessments
  - teacher compensation for supplemental training time
  - advisor on social-emotional learning
  - integrated platform developer
  - partnership to provide and coordinate school-based student support services
  - student engagement and school climate survey
- Piloting Blended Learning Models to Accelerate Student Achievement
  - network administrators
  - field technicians
  - teacher compensation for supplemental training time ("boot camp")
  - open training sessions for parents
  - server upgrades
  - storage upgrades
  - firewall and security upgrade
  - general technology infrastructure
  - SMART boards
  - laptops for students
  - HDMI cables
  - wireless printers
  - faculty laptops
  - implementation and data integration support
  - digital learning content
  - teacher and principal technology "boot camp"
  - tech infrastructure implementation services
  - laptop implementation services
- Overall implementation
  - Race to the Top project manager
  - special events coordinator (charter/NPS)
  - special events (charter/NPS)
  - continuous improvement
  - outside evaluation

Nearly all listed budget items are explained in detail, with cost assumptions linked to implementation plans for the four year project. For example, in the table including the network administrators expense, the purpose of hiring additional network administrators is justified. The need in providing timely service in typical network-related responsibilities (installations, monitoring, and maintenance of computer networks) while supporting a large influx of new hardware is explained. The table

provides additional details regarding annual salaries for two new network administrators, with projected raises, source of funding to be applied through 2016-2017 (RttT-D grant funds), and finally plans to assume the ongoing expense in the district's operating budget in the post-grant period.

The thorough nature of the budget development for the NPS proposal results in a high score for budget and sustainability.

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

Newark Public Schools has established a plan to develop district capacity, leverage existing resources, and minimize the incremental ongoing costs after the grant period. The estimated ongoing cost of implementing the project following the grant period is less than 0.5% of the annual budget for the district. Categorical data is provided relating to associated costs to support this claim. Five key strategies have further been identified for managing costs. Textbook spending is expected to decrease as the use of digital content for blended learning models increases. E-Rate and capital funding support technology acquisition costs. Online surveys can be used instead of printed surveys, resulting in an 80-90% cost savings per survey. Professional development spending will decline as principals focus professional development opportunities on items such as coaching support, which will result in higher impact use of funds through internal professional development practices. Philanthropic support through an active funding community also provides a great source of funding to sustain and support work beyond the grant period. The district plans to build upon the work from the grant period to support more ambitious efforts in post-grant years.

Given the limited impact on the district budget of extending the proposal beyond the four years, paired with the 5 key strategies for managing costs, the sustainability of this project is highly supported. As a result, the NPS proposal scores high for its high quality plan to sustain its goals 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:

Newark Public Schools has been influenced by an organization named Turnaround for Children, which is “a nationally recognized organization that promotes school transformation through a research-based, youth development-oriented approach targeting barriers to student growth that arise from circumstances of poverty.” While this organization has expressed interest in partnering with the Newark Public Schools, the 100-day planning period will be used to evaluate a wide range of potential partners to support program goals. The partnership will focus on the following;

- Increasing the capacity and efficiency of the school in identifying students in need of targeted and intensive intervention
- Building interdisciplinary Student Support Teams to develop, monitor, and implement student interventions
- Establishing a permanent school-based social worker
- Establishing a linkage with nearby mental health provider(s)
- Creating structures for ongoing collaboration with juvenile justice, child protective services and/or other available social services
- Training teachers on classroom rules and procedures as well as defusing and managing disruptive behavior

Six performance measures and related goals have been identified to evaluate the educational outcomes relating to engagement, community, and academic standards;

- Percent of students absent less than 10% of days
- Average student growth percentile on the NJASK
- Average percent of standards mastered on Common Core-aligned interim assessments
- Percent of students showing strong motivation and persistence levels
- Percent of students showing strong social efficacy
- Percent of students showing strong self-regulated learning

While some implementation plans and ideas are developed, others are lacking. A strategy to scale the model and improve results over time is not evident. Tables indicate improved results over time, but the strategy for this growth is absent.

It seems that the need to establish a partner has made completion of this section of the proposal a challenge in that elements

of this section of the proposal are missing, including;

- ideas relating to identification of needs and assets of the school and community
- a decision making process and infrastructure, engagement of parents and families in decision making
- a plan for routine assessment of progress is vague at best

Ambitious performance measures are indicated, but for some measures, the projected growth is questionable. Growth rates of 10% per year are established for qualitative data, including students reporting high levels of motivation and engagement on student surveys, percentages of students reporting high levels of social efficacy, and percentages of students reporting high levels of self-regulated learning. Other performance measures in this section share more modest goals for growth over time.

Though a likely partner has been identified, the lack of partner establishment and resulting limitations in planning relating to the competitive preference priority, the NPS proposal scores in the upper middle range.

## Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

### Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The Newark Public Schools proposal addresses the four core educational assurance areas;

- Common Core Standards adoption promotes college and career readiness.
- Routine and methodical progress monitoring will inform educational practice and provide timely interventions to meet student needs.
- A commitment is evident to provide the best teachers and school leaders and to promote their effectiveness through training, an extensive rewards-based performance evaluation system, and collaborative meetings.
- A focus on evaluation of student achievement and continual improvement will result in improvement of all schools.

A clear plan exists to develop personalized learning environments, with a unique focus on the social-behavioral aspect of the learning environment. Evidence exists for support to be provided to students, educators, and parents in use of student data and technologies to support learning. College and career ready standards and graduation requirements are already being implemented as a result of Common Core Standards adoption. Training in the use of data to inform instructional practices will support deepened student learning, accelerated student achievement, and increased effectiveness of educators. Newly developed evaluation methods paired with a proposed new teacher contract may support linking highly effective teaching to teacher pay, which is anticipated to significantly increase the percentages of highly performing teachers in district schools. All efforts combined are anticipated to narrow achievement gaps and eventually increase graduation rates for NPS schools.

As a result of coherent and comprehensive plans that address creating personalized learning environments built on the core educational assurance areas, the NPS proposal has met absolute priority 1.

Total	210	175
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