



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0106NC-1 for Cabarrus County Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant describes a well-conceived and coherent reform vision that is designed to address core educational assurance areas including: retaining teachers; turning around low performing schools; building data systems; and implementing standards. The applicant articulates its vision for the district which is based upon the following principles: global competitiveness; lifelong learning; rigorous and relevant instruction; the use of 21st century resources; and healthy learning communities. The applicant articulates a clear and credible approach to: cultivating student ownership of learning; expanding highly effective teachers' reach; and creating a collaborative, personalized environment. The applicant plans to promote student ownership through supports including: career curriculum, data dashboard, and mastery tracking. The applicant provides a sound plan to promote the development of highly effective teachers through: blended learning; data teams and professional development. The applicant plans to create personalized learning through the: integration of technology; data driven decision making; and instructional models. The applicant describes the classroom experience which is designed to transform the learning environment. The applicant has a four-pronged approach to increase equity. The applicant plans to use mastery based progress in grades 6-12. The applicant plans to use: in person subject specialization, in person flexed rotation, enriched flipped and self blend. The applicant plans to incorporate student academic interests through the use of technology.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant describes a somewhat feasible approach to implementing its reform proposal. The applicant plans to target 9 of their 39 schools. The applicant plans to serve 5,681 students; 404 teachers and 9 administrators. The applicant has provided demographic data on each of the target schools. The applicant plans to focus on students who are high need and low income. 63% of the students have been identified as low income, and 55% of the students have been identified as high need. The applicant selected a cluster of Title I schools for the project. The applicant identified elementary schools that feed into one middle and one high school. The applicant describes that the schools selected had high poverty and minority enrollment rates. The applicant also describes the readiness of the administrators and staff in implementing the project. Despite the applicant's feasible approach to implementing reform, further details are necessary to support high-quality implementation. The applicant provides only limited details regarding its rationale for the selection of schools. The applicant does not provide details on items including: the stakeholders involved in the decision making process; the strategic planning efforts implemented in order to reach the decision; the criteria for selection; and whether any other schools met the criteria for selection; and the rationale for excluding the other schools. Within the context of its school selection criteria, the applicant does not adequately document the achievement rates for the schools selected, as compared to the other schools in the county. Nor does the applicant address whether student achievement at the 9 selected schools was a factor in its school selection process.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant demonstrates a sound, high-quality plan for implementing reform that is likely to lead to LEA-wide reform. The plan consists of deliverables, assigned responsibilities, key activities and a timeline. The applicant has identified three project goals that address student use of data, teaching and leading, and creating personalized learning environments. The applicant plans to reach its outcome goals through the implementation of a variety of project tasks. The applicant plans to utilize an advisory council that involves a variety of stakeholders. The applicant has a plan to involve stakeholders through monthly advisory council meetings; quarterly sustainability planning meetings; monthly professional development</p>		

events; and monthly data team meetings. The applicant has selected 9 schools as part of its pilot study. The results of this pilot study is likely to lead to meaningful reform to support district wide change. The lessons learned from this pilot study has the potential to contextualize implementating change and improving outcomes for students in the non-participating schools as well.

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

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8

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has identified a sound plan to achieve targets for the following indicators: improving proficiency levels of summative assessments; decreasing achievement gaps; increasing graduation rates; and increasing college enrollment rates. These thoroughly designed plans include baseline data and annual targets for each subgroup identified. The applicant has developed ambitious and achievable targets for improving student achievement, as evidenced by performance on summative assessments; decreasing achievement gaps; improving graduation rates; and increasing college enrollment. The applicant does not explain its rationale for the selection of growth rates by subgroups. Sufficient comparison to state targets for each subgroup is also not apparent.

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	10

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides a comprehensive description of certain components that reflect notable success. The applicant states that it has closed gaps between student subgroups and increased graduation rates. The applicant has experienced a 12% gain in graduation rates since 2009-2010. The applicant has also experienced a gain in graduation rates among subgroups. The applicant describes its gains in its End of Course Assessments. However, the applicant does not track college enrollment and does not sufficiently describe data on postsecondary enrollment beyond student intentions. The lack of actual college enrollment data does not fully demonstrate a clear record of success. The applicant does not fully describe whether the other schools not targeted for funding met their annual measurable targets. The applicant describes its plan to make student performance data available through the launching of Home Base, an online data system. The applicant does not provide four consecutive years of data with regard to its End of Grade Assessments. The applicant also does not adequately describe its reform efforts in improving its lowest performing schools.

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

5

4

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant details its disclosure of information regarding all school level expenditures including salaries for instructional and non-instructional staff. School level expenditures are available on the website. Stakeholders were involved in the budget process through the participation in public meetings. Teacher feedback is obtained through surveys and participation in the development of departmental and school improvement plans. The applicant clearly describes how community input occurs into the development of district strategic planning. However, there is no evidence of community involvement in school level strategic planning. The applicant does not adequately describe a district level plan or policy that is designed to ensure that transparency is achievement in all processes, practices and investments.

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

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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides compelling evidence of its autonomy to implement the project. The applicant was a 2010 recipient of Race to the Top funds. Since such time it has implemented a Course of Study in Language Arts and Mathematics that incorporates the Common Core Standards. The applicant also implemented a student accountability model that tracks and measures the implementation of student assessments, student growth, and school performance. Efforts in these instructional areas provide the framework for the applicant's ability to scale up its efforts in creating personalized learning environments for students. Statewide initiatives have also supported the attainment of autonomy. For

example, the waiving of caps on class sizes has improved the manner in which instruction can be implemented. The waiving of seat time requirements has also provided additional autonomy in the manner in which the district allows access to online courses to students. The policy initiatives will have a significant impact on the applicant's ability to successfully implement the project.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)

15

12

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides clear and convincing evidence that a variety of stakeholders were involved in the development of the proposal. The applicant states that 70% of its teachers were involved in project planning. The applicant has attached 9 letters of support. There are no letters of support from grassroots stakeholders including parent groups and community based organizations. The applicant describes the contribution of each organization to the project. The applicant has attached resumes of the members of its design team. The applicant attached documentation of teacher signatures indicating their support for the project. The Mayor of the City of Concord provided support for the project. The applicant states that students and parents were solicited for feedback and input in project development through community meetings, advisory groups and PTO meetings. Feedback was used to refine the project. It is unclear as to the specific feedback that parents provided and how their input was used to enhance project design. It is also unclear as to whether any members of the community, parent groups, or students were a part of the design team that had direct responsibility for the development of the project.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	12

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has developed a sound plan for improving learning. The applicant plan to target some of its lowest performing schools. It also describes its vision for learning which includes: recruiting and retaining effective teachers; rigorous, relevant and engaging instruction; data driven decision making; teacher professional learning; teacher collaboration; college and career ready students; and tools and supports for learning. Despite the applicant's sound plan, further details regarding project services is needed to support successful implementation. With regard to student learning plans, the applicant does not provide a comprehensive description regarding the development and use of student learning plans. The applicant does not describe who will develop it and the data that will be contained therein nor does it describe sample interventions, supports or services to be provided in such a plan. The applicant plans to incorporate career development in its curriculum, and it plans to promote a college-going culture. The applicant plans to incorporate project based learning, and utilize learning activities on the higher order of the Revised Blooms Taxonomy. The applicant plans to provide a one to one access to technology. However, the applicant does not describe whether this access will be school only or a home/school option. The applicant also plans to establish collaborative learning spaces in the media centers. Beyond its reference to the Response to Intervention Model, the applicant does not fully describe its accommodations and strategies for high need students. For example, the applicant does not describe how differentiation will be achieved in the elementary classrooms. The applicant does not describe its plan to achieve differentiation. For example, the applicant does not describe whether it plans to differentiate the content, process, products and/or the learning environment. The applicant plans to implement a blended learning model. The applicant plans to teach cultural competence. Although the applicant states that 25% of a student's day will be spent engaged in the use of digital learning, the applicant does not provide sufficient details regarding the logistics of how this will be implemented. The applicant also describes a learning plan that incorporates college and career readiness data. However, the applicant does not fully address whether this plan will include an understanding of a students' performance levels in the content areas along with his/her strengths and weaknesses. The applicant describes its timeline for implementing the student learning component of the project. The applicant plans to provide technical support at the beginning of the school year, but does not address how ongoing support will be provided.

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

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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant describes a high-quality plan to promote teaching and leading. The applicant plan to implement professional learning communities. The applicant plans to focus on five questions as part of its learning community. The applicant plans to implement blended learning models that include: subject specialists; professional tutors and lead teachers. The

applicant plans to utilize a technology specialist to assist teachers and students in the utilization of technology. The applicant plans to establish a demonstration classroom to model teaching approaches and strategies. The applicant describes its approach to integrating Understanding by Design and Professional Learning Communities. The applicant provides a comprehensive description of its plan to use data to drive decision making and instruction. The applicant plans to implement the datapowered dashboard. School leadership teams have access to the necessary resources including technology and training in order to effectively structure the learning environment for students. The applicant plans to implement a value added component to its teacher evaluation system that measures student growth attributable to teacher instruction. This is likely to lead to the increasing the amount of effective and highly effective teachers. The applicant provides a detailed timeline for the implementation of its Teaching and Learning Plan. Despite the applicant's high-quality plan, further details are needed to promote successful project implementation. The applicant does not sufficiently address principal effectiveness as it relates to student growth, data and accountability and/or feedback. The applicant does, however, describe the components of the principal evaluation process as including: strategic, instructional, human resource, managerial, external development and micro political leadership. The applicant does not provide sufficient details regarding its plan to recruit and retain teachers in hard to staff areas.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	13
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The applicant articulates a sound plan for implementation that is supported by appropriate policies and infrastructure. The applicant provides a visual representation of its program structure. Each school will use a data team. The applicant describes the learning resources that are fully accessible to all students. The applicant plans to use assistive technology devices to support students with disabilities. Translators will be used to support English Language Learners. The applicant describes the central office personnel that will support the project. The applicant's central office plans to provide technical assistance and staffing. The school has flexibility and autonomy over the budget, staffing and student schedules. The applicant provides a timeline for its implementation of comprehensive policies and infrastructure. This plan includes activities, deliverables and the persons responsible for implementation. However, further details are needed regarding some project components. The applicant does not provide a detailed description of the instructional practices that will engage students with disabilities and English Language Learners. The applicant merely provides that they will be developed. The applicant describes its plan to allow students to demonstrate mastery in a variety of ways. The applicant plans to use strategies including: student directed research, authentic learning tasks and project based learning to promote the application of students' content knowledge to real world, practical applications..</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	10
(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The applicant provides a comprehensive description of both the LEA and school infrastructure that supports the implementation of the project. The applicant plans to ensure that each student has access to digital devices. Students in grades K-2 will receive tablets and students in grades 3-12 will receive netbooks or laptops. The applicant articulates a sounds plan for ensuring that stakeholders have access to appropriate levels of technical assistance. All teachers will receive laptops to assist them in accessing online resources. The project includes appropriate levels of technical support for stakeholders. The applicant will conduct a technology conference to providing training on the use of digital devices. The applicant lists 12 training topics including: integrating the device into the home; and using the device to achieve educational goals. The applicant plans to hire a Computer Systems Analyst to lead the implementation of the technology plan. The applicant provides a coherent description of its plan to use interoperable data systems. The technology team will ensure that the dashboard is integrated with other data sources. The applicant provides a timeline for the implementation of the technology component of the project. The district will develop an interoperable data system with its student data dashboard that complements the state data system.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

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

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant describes an adequate plan to implement a continuous improvement process. The applicant plans to use a third party evaluator. The applicant has attached the job description for the evaluator it plans to select. The applicant has developed a logic model with inputs, goals, outputs, and outcomes. The applicant has developed its formative assessment component which involves quarterly meetings, actioning planning, and targets around the fidelity index. The purpose of this project component is to ensure ongoing and regular feedback regarding the project is provided. The applicant plans to publicly share the information on its website. The applicant provides a table that demonstrates how it plans to use the fidelity index to monitor and measure project implementation. Further details are needed to support a rigorous continuous improvement process. The applicant's continuous improvement plan is not aligned with measurable project goals. The applicant has not designed a detailed dissemination plan which could include the development of reports and manuals; conference presentations; and the preparation of journal articles and other publications. The fidelity criteria measures listed in the table are not aligned with project goals.

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

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(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has a high quality plan for ongoing communication and community engagement. The applicant has a timeline to promote community engagement. The timeline includes key project activities, deliverables and persons responsible for implementation. The applicant articulated four strategies to promote communication and engagement and they include: establishing an advisory council; district school school meetings; school advisory group meetings and community meetings. The applicant lists the internal and external stakeholders that are involved in the project. The applicant plans to update its website to promote engagement with external stakeholders.

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

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(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has an adequate plan for implementing continuous improvement. The applicant's timeline includes its activities, deliverables, and persons responsible for implementation. The applicant presents its academic indicators consisting of End of Course exams in English II and Grades 4-8 Math. The applicant has developed annual benchmarks/targets as part of its performance measures. The applicant selected absences and disciplinary referrals as its social emotional indicator of successful project implementation. The applicant plans to develop action plans during its quarterly meetings. The applicant plans to use a fidelity index to identify areas of concern. The applicant does not clearly connect all of the performance measures with project goals and objectives. The expectations for student growth are overly ambitious and not likely attainable given the project design. The applicant does not provide a rationale for its incremental targets of 25%, 35% and 40% in years 2 through 4 respectively. The applicant's presentation of its data is not clear. Further clarification is needed in Table 31, with regard to the target setting for performance measures for students in grades 4-8 who score proficient in Reading and Math.

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

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(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has developed a sound plan for evaluating the project. The applicant has identified its evaluation questions. The applicant plans to use a quasi-experimental design. The applicant has identified both qualitative and quantitative data sources. The applicant does not fully assess successful project implementation. The evaluation plan, as designed, will only assess student growth. The applicant identifies some sources of qualitative data including: interviews, focus groups, meeting minutes, and artifacts. The applicant identifies some sources of quantitative data including: attendance rates, graduation rates, suspension rates, and End of Course assessment data. The applicant does not rigorously assess project activities with regard to its activities to promote teacher effectiveness.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides a thorough budget narrative to justify line item expenditures. The applicant identifies all funds

needed to support project implementation. The use of the funds supports implementation of key project components. The budget is reasonable in terms of being able to achieve the project goals. The budget also lists its ongoing operational costs and its one time investments. The applicant describes the in-kind contribution of the Deputy Superintendent who will service as the Advisory Council Leader.

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

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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant describes an inadequate plan for sustainability. Further details regarding the sustainability of the project are needed. The applicant provides a timeline, deliverables and persons responsible for implementing two activities. The two activities are vague and lack specificity. The applicant merely states that it plans to engage in sustainability planning through the building and expanding of community partnerships. The applicant has the support from the Mayor and the state. The applicant describes some sustainable practices including: instructional coaches; digital learning resources; online data system; and the teacher evaluation system. The applicant describes the grants its has been awarded in the past several years. The applicant has developed a post grant estimated budget to sustain the project. The applicant plans to seek sponsorship from businesses in the community in order support its job shadowing and internship component. The applicant does not identify potential sources of funding. The applicant does not identify how it plans to expand existing partnerships and/or develop additional ones. The applicant's evaluation plan, including a fidelity index and quasi experimental design impact studies, will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of its past investments.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

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

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has executed a sustainable partnership with the Howard Lee Institute for Equity and Opportunity in Education. This partnership represents a coherent plan to achieve a more coordinated continuum of support including a seamless delivery of services, which will support the overall goals of the Race To The Top District Project. The applicant provides a sound description of literature to support the design of the partnership. The applicant describes relevant research that associates the provision of social, emotional and behavioral supports with improvements in student achievement. The applicant details its desired results including: decreasing bullying and disciplinary incidents; and improving attendance. The applicant presents a high quality plan for the integration of services. This plan includes performance measures, benchmark data and annual performance targets. The applicant identifies six population level desired results. The applicant plans to scale the model through the use of tracking indicators and data. The applicant links the Response to Intervention Model with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. The applicant plans to scale the model to assist students in the remaining 30 schools.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has designed a plan to promote a personalized learning environment through the provision of blended learning with all students receiving digital devices.

Total	210	172
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0106NC-2 for Cabarrus County Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant included a thorough, detailed and descriptive reform vision. The inclusion of the following elements made the vision very clear and comprehensive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation of how it promotes college and career readiness • Expectations for students, teachers, parents, and district leaders at all levels to support achievement and attainment of goals-ownership of the plan • A graphic that clearly explains outcomes for student ownership; teacher expectations for facilitating learning; and how to create personal learning environments that are collaborative and build on existing structures • Description of the standards PK-12 that students are expected to achieve • Explanation of how current structures will be modified and/or updated to align with the current educational needs of students and integrate technology • Increased collaboration between current community and business partnerships, and the development of new partners • Explanation of its commitment to using data systems to drive the district's instructional and social emotional programs, and monitor student progress; specific data systems are described and connected back to the overall vision for student achievement and personalized learning • Description of enhanced practices for adding value to professional learning for teachers and administrators, and support structures for learning that will be put in place • Each core educational assurance area has its own section with a clear description of processes and procedures that are or will be put in place to meet criteria • A chart outlines the clear and credible approaches that are part of the districts vision, followed by research based information on why the approach is included • Clearly articulated descriptions of the classroom experience for students and teachers that explains each component of instruction that would take place on a daily basis; a visual model enhances the understanding and expectations for student learning and the teacher as a facilitator • Provides a specific explanation of the personalized learning plan for students and presents a description of a tiered approach for personalized learning so that all student performance levels can participate/benefit <p>As a result of thoroughly meeting the criteria in this section, the applicant received the maximum amount of points for this section.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant provided detailed information about how it selected its schools and the focus its participants. The purpose for selecting a target group of schools that are part of a direct feeder pattern from elementary, to middle, to high school was explained (target a cluster of Title I schools that are its lowest performing); is reasonable to allow the district to apply the strategies and activities to other schools after this three year pilot; and the list of schools and demographics was included. The number of low-income and high needs students that will be served is identified. The participating nine schools meet the eligibility requirements of the RTT grant and the inclusion of a chart with specific background information about each school provides further clarity. The explanation also includes the number of participating educators. The district includes a clear, compelling, high-quality approach to addressing the needs of its students. The inclusion of detailed information of the district's approach to implementation awards them with the highest point value for this section.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	10

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant thoroughly incorporates a theory of change that would transform the district's practices beyond its targeted participants. The applicant provides a descriptive explanation of how it will improve performance through meaningful reform and how it will reach its goals. This section includes the following:

- Description of the purpose for amending policies and practices that were barriers to student access and learning for all students; shift in access of coursework for some to access for all based on specific criteria
- Logic model that lists the district's three goals and a description of each goal; the goals are measureable and achievable
- Explanation of key groups and positions that will be put in place to acheive the district's goals; inclusion of Full Time Equivelent (FTE) allocations for each position assists in understanding why the allocation is reasonable; and the detailed descriptions of the positions' roles and responsibilities assists in understanding the alignment to the district's reform and change strategies outlined in the grant
- Chart with a timeline, specific activities, deliverables, and persons responsible enables the reader to understand the district's description of a high-quality plan

It is clear that the district's theory of change will be able to create meaningful reform and improve student performance over time, including after the grant period. The inclusion of the above components earned the applicant the highest score available for this section.

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

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7

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant included reasonable and achievable annual goals that are outlined as performance measures over a five year period; however, the goals don't appear to be ambitious. The expected increase in performance is one or two percentage points for subgroups depending on the category; the increases are not consistent across subgroups and there is not a rationale for inconsistencies. The district did include overall data and student subgroup data for summative assessments, graduation rates, and college enrollment. The names and a brief description of the assessments are included, along with a brief description for the methodology for determining status and growth. The inclusion of data tables provided specific information for all of the district's goals for reading, math, english language arts, and graduation rates for students from K-12.

Areas that provide inadequate information for this section are:

- The column that listed the names of the subgroups lacked a key for knowing what ED & SWD meant, so the reader made assumptions about which group of students these two subgroups represented
- Insufficient information to understand why the difference of the highest subgroup with 40 plus students was reported for determining the achievement gap; unclear if this was set by the district or state and the rationale for using the number 40. Also, the applicant includes a statement that says that the ambitious, yet achievable student learning targets included in its plan are equal to or exceed the state's targets, but the state's targets are not included; thus, the reader could not make comparisons between the state's targets and the proposed targets to determine if they were ambitious
- The lack of information provided of specific (explicit) strategies within the grant that will target the lowest performing students/subgroups as part of the grant application; specific strategies that are part of the grant to decrease the achievement gap
- Three year targets for continuing the success of the Asian subgroup; a rationale was not included to explain why targets for this subgroup, whose performance is currently 97.3 percent, were not set.

Due to some inadequate information and lack of ambitious goals, the district received a score in the middle point range for this section.

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	11

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The district's plan articulates its record of success; however, it only provides an explanation of four year data trends for

graduation rates, end of course success for grades 9-12, college enrollment data, post secondary enrollment data (based on student intent forms), and science achievement for grades five and eight. However, this section provides limited information of four years of consistent progress for improving student outcomes and closing gaps particularly for subgroups at the elementary level; it lacks organization and clarity of trends in improved performance over time for all subgroups in all core academic areas, at each level.

Although the district does not have a current system in place for tracking college enrollment, it explains how it will use resources that are part of the grant (National Student Clearinghouse's Student Tracker) to formalize their college enrollment and graduation tracking system. The plan is reasonable and will provide the necessary information for tracking college enrollment.

The applicant clearly explains its existing structures and strategies for learning to assist in meeting its goals for its lowest-achieving schools and students. The structures and learning include: professional development on student engagement; culturally responsive pedagogy; Positive Behavior Intervention; Response to Intervention; Understanding by Design; and Professional Learning Communities which are all research based. These structures align to the district's goal of redesigning teaching so that teachers are facilitators of student learning instead of dictators of learning. The clear explanation of the strategies provides sufficient evidence to demonstrate that they will enhance the learning of the lowest performing students and continue to close gaps.

The applicant describes comprehensive strategies and tools for ensuring that student performance data is available to multiple stakeholders. They have launched a state-wide online data system that provides student and instructional improvement information. The on-line data system (HomeBase) has portals with data and other information that students, parents, teachers, and administrators can access from any location. The purpose of the system is clearly explained and a detailed chart outlines specific information that is available for the various stakeholder groups. The district is looking to use RTT funds to add another student dashboard system (DataPowered) that has the ability to aggregate different data sources, and create and monitor student planning tools that allows students to set individual goals.

Finally, the applicant describes the use of a continuous improvement model that is used at the district, department and school level to support data analysis and on-going progress monitoring. The Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle provides real-time information about progress that can be incorporated into the DataPowered dashboard system.

Due to the limited information of district's record of success particularly at the elementary level, but inclusion of other components for addressing its lowest performing students and availability of performance data, the district received a score in the middle point range for this section.

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

The applicant has clear mechanisms that demonstrate transparency of its processes, practices and investments. Information is made public for expenditures for salaries (administrative, support, and teacher), instructional resources, and any other expenditures. The district's website (graphics included in the Appendix) provides specific information on personnel salaries for instructional staff, teachers, and non-personnel expenditures. This information is also available at the school level. As a result, the applicant earned the maximum points allowed for this section.

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

The applicant clearly describes the state context for implementation and presents a clear alignment to the state's goals for student achievement. The state of North Carolina adopted standards in 2010 (Common Core) that identify specifically what students are expected to know and be able to do by the time they graduate from high school. These standards have been implemented in the district and will be used to support student goal setting for personalized learning. Last year North Carolina instituted a new student accountability model that provides real-time information about student progress; the model includes measures for standardized and formative assessments, along with student growth measures from K-12. This accountability and progress monitoring system is aligned with measuring student success embedded in the goals of the district's RTT grant. The North Carolina RTT state grant provides resources and additional supports for professional development and technology based systems to enhance student learning. The state grant also brought about the institution of a revised teacher evaluation system that incorporates student growth as a measure of teachers' success. This evaluation system is described as an integral component of the applicant's RTT grant.

The applicant provides a clear description of its autonomy and flexibility to implement personalized learning in its targeted schools. The district has the flexibility to do flexible grouping or grouping by subjects without a cap on class size; and can determine its own criteria for subject and grade advancement for students in grades 8-12 with state approval while no

longer worrying about adhering to seat requirements-mastery of content becomes the criteria for advancement as opposed to having to spend a prescribed amount of time per year/semester in a class.

Finally, the applicant received written notice from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction that it feels their grant aligns with the State's goals/activities, and recommended that the United States Department of Education fund their application.

As a result of the clear description and examples, the applicant earned the maximum amount of points for this section.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	15
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides clear evidence that it engaged a variety of stakeholders in developing its proposal and gained the appropriate level of support. A district data team was convened to develop an initial design for the RTT program to target personalized learning. The initial planning was followed by the preliminary plan was presented to district staff and parents to gain input and get consensus around the initiatives and components. District administrators then shared information about the preliminary plan to principals at the target schools that included question and answer sessions, and then the principals presented the plan to their staff and parents through regularly scheduled meetings; parents and staff provided recommendations and had time to ask questions to clarify information. Information was presented at public meetings and feedback was obtained. There is documentation via signatures that over 70% of staff support the plan; a letter of support from the Mayor; and other letters of support from program partners. There is even a chart that outlines the type of support that each community partner will provide. As a result, the applicant has earned the maximum amount of points for this section.

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

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

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides a plethora of information in this section that outlines its high-quality plan for improving learning and teaching by personalizing the learning environment. The plan is very comprehensive and includes clear explanations that provide evidence that the strategies can be implemented successfully. The following components are included:

- The district's approach to learning and why it selected its 9 targeted elementary, middle, and high schools that are part of a cluster of schools within the same feeder pattern; an explanation of the application of 21st century skills and professional learning opportunities, including the incorporation of technology; consolidation of resources and practices through innovative teaching and learning projects (a graphic clearly explains the connections between these ideas for students K-12)
- Vision for student learning through the development of a learner centered environment; explains the pathway that will be put in place to ensure students are college and career ready; explanation of how technology will be used to enhance student learning is included
- How the concept of creating a culture of ownership for learning will be used to drive student choice of their learning process without compromising the achievement of the district's standards;
- DataDashboard will be used to identify student strengths and needs, and monitor student progress across the targeted schools; it is clear that this tool will have the ability to provide ongoing feedback about student progress and the information can be updated frequently to reflect current performance
- Implementation of the Plan, Do, Check, Act process that is implemented at the district level to be implemented at the student level for them to create personalized learning plans and have a process for evaluating their success or the need to make modifications; this is another way to obtain feedback
- An explanation of the Common Core State Standards that have been adopted by the district and its alignment to personalized learning
- College and Career Assessments and how students can monitor how well they are prepared for college; again, another means for providing feedback and the ability to make adjustments
- An explanation of Work Maps that students will create in collaboration with their parents and counselors to identify specific coursework that aligns with their interest, and actions students will take to be prepared for post secondary education

- Incorporating work based experiences K-12 to engage students and provide them with opportunities to experience some of their interests
- Creation of a culture of the benefits of going to college starting as early as kindergarten; and concept of a K-16 education
- Aligning daily teaching and curriculum activities with the revised Blooms' Taxonomy; project based learning; technology initiative where students have 1 to 1 access to technology; digital learning resources; collaborative learning environments; inclusion of culturally responsive practices that allow students to collaborate within a diverse society; culturally responsive teaching practices; integration of critical academic skills-critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity
- Provision of access to personalized learning through blended learning models (subject personalization, flexible rotation model, flipped learning models, and choice of online courses to supplement traditional course offering; students work at their own pace and provide evidence of progress through documentation in their learning action plans; Global immersion through work-based summer programs and professional learning for teachers and students
- Re-writing the district's curriculum to align with the State curriculum and using specific databases to document and monitor student progress
- Use college readiness assessment to identify students' strengths and interests that will inform their post-secondary education and career pathway; this is a great tool for customizing the personalized learning plans and ensuring student readiness
- Incorporation of the Response to Intervention model that has a tiered approach for address student performance at a variety of levels from basic instruction to more intensive small group or one-on-one instruction; this structure will enforce accommodations for the lowest performing students and enable teachers to identify and apply targeted interventions for individual students; the structure can be applied to any subgroup of students and includes ongoing data collection on how students are responding to their intervention
- Training and support for students with clear roles for teachers, counselors, and a Career Development Coordinator; a summit at the beginning of each school year with a focus on how to use the provided technology appropriately; and meeting with students at least twice per year to discuss and update their personalized learning plans

Finally, the applicant includes an implementation plan that includes a timeline, activities, deliverables, and persons responsible during and beyond the grant period. Due to the high level of specificity and well developed plan that supports student learning, the applicant earned the maximum amount of points that can be awarded for this section.

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

20

18

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides a wealth of clear information in this section that outlines its high-quality plan for improving teaching and leading. The following components are included:

- The creation of revised teacher pathways to ensure the most effective teachers are part of the blended learning model such as: subject specialists; lead teachers; and professional tutors. An explanation of the positions' roles and responsibilities is included; the pathways are reasonable and would build teacher capacity
- Professional learning models to ensure high-quality teaching that include professional learning communities (PLCs)- research to support this model is included along with an outline of how the PLCs currently function and will continue to operate; experienced instructional coaches for each school to lead the work and support the development of personalized learning environments; instructional technology specialists; demonstration classrooms; and a home base instructional improvement system where teachers can access a variety of resources
- Curriculum planning that is combined with the work of the PLCs to develop lessons that deepen student understanding; backward planning using the Understanding by Design (Wiggins and McTighe 2011) model will be used; Marzano's high yield strategies to support high need students and strong instructional strategies; and project based learning. Collaboratively developing lessons will be a great structure for teachers to share practices, problem solve, analyze student data to better align their instruction, and study the curriculum.
- How specific assessments will be used to assess student progress K-12 toward college readiness; field testing of a new state assessment that will measure students attainment of the Common Core Standards; use of benchmark assessments; longitudinal tracking of college and career readiness; use of the data to accelerate student progress; components of a Data Dashboard for documenting and tracking student progress (assessable by students and parents too); the variety of tools described will provide appropriate information for teachers to adjust their instruction immediately and leaders to adjust their programs on a larger scale
- Explanation of how the new teacher evaluation system will be used to measure teachers' progress and incorporate accountability for student growth and progress based on specific performance measures; the evaluation plan also incorporates the teacher evaluation standards. The use of specific criteria for evaluating teachers will allow feedback to be tied to specific observable behaviors

An outline of its accountability model; how the information will be used to implement personalized learning environments; and a description of its integrated instructional improvement system; it is clear that school leadership teams, teachers, and administrators will have access to a variety of information that can be used to make adjustments to programs and strategies that are customized for students

- Clear plan for matching resources to students needs; structures that would allow teachers to create personalized learning environments matched to students' needs; and a clear, reasonable plan with a timeline, activities and deliverables for ensuring students receive instruction from effective teachers and principals

The majority of the criteria is addressed to support teaching and leading, and provides good evidence that the strategies will increase the educators' ability to provide quality instruction toward college and career readiness. Overall the plan is well developed; however, the one area that the district did not discuss at all is how it plans to address hard to staff areas. Also, a general statement about evaluating principals through formal and informal observations is provided, but further information on a specific plan for increasing the number of highly effective principals is not included. As a result, the applicant earned a score in the high point range.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	15
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The applicant thoroughly describes its infrastructure and policies for supporting the attainment of its outcomes. It explains the roles and responsibilities of key central office leaders, and how they currently support and will continue to support the targeted schools. What is compelling is the process that the district implemented to identify a draft of improvements and develop the framework for personalized learning. The process involved input from the Board of Education; meetings with staff in targeted schools held by the district team and its principals; and input from parents at the schools. Leadership teams will be called Data Teams who will have autonomy and flexibility to implement continuous improvement practices that are data driven; schools will be allowed to implement flexible schedules and personnel decisions; schools will identify roles and responsibilities of personnel based on student needs; and have flexibility with their school budgets. Students will be allowed to use a variety of digital learning formats and progress through their own learning trajectory through the creation of personalized plans instead of having to rely on seat time (the Deputy Superintendent has applied for seat time waivers in its target schools); and project based learning will allow students to learn and apply 21st century skills, along with the inclusion of a variety of technology programs that are web or software based. Finally, a clear explanation is provided for how the resources and instructional practices will be accessible to all students no matter their disability or performance level. The processes and procedures that are included are reasonable and meaningful, and will provide the appropriate support to students, teachers and the district. As a result of its thorough explanation, the district recieved the maximum number of points for this section.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	10

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides a clear description of its infrastructure, how it supports personalized learning, and how its infrastructure will continue to be enhanced through the use of resources described in the RTT grant. A clear explanation of the following is included:

- Access to content, learning tools, and other resources through digital devices, HomeBased dashboard and a student data dashboard; wireless air cards provided for students without internet access
- Transformation of existing media center into collaborative environments that are open spaces for learning; quiet reading areas and nooks for accessing the internet
- Laptops for teachers to access databases and other resources; facilitate on-going communication between students and families beyond the school day
- Annual technology summit to provide training to parents and technical support; technology specialist assigned to each school to provide on-going training and support for staff, students, and parents
- Coaches assigned to each schoool to provide ongoing support for establishing personalized learning environments and job embedded professional development
- Interoperable data systems where information can flow from each system; a computer systems analystist will be hired will be in charge of the technology roll-out and support.

Also, a table is included that further clarifies the district's high-quality plan for developing and enhancing its infrastructure that includes a timeline, activities, deliverables, and persons responsible. As a result, this section recieved the maximum amount of pointsl.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	15
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant provides a clear, high-quality approach for continuous improvement. The plan includes a rigourous improvement process that incorporates the ability to recieve on-going feedback from all of its stakeholders over a period of time. The plan clearly addresses how it will monitor, measure, and share information publicly over the course of the grant period using existing and new structures. The following strategies will be used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract with a third party evaluator to provide on-going feedback on progress, ideas for adjusting programs, accountability info and upgrades, provide ideas for disseminating information • An Advisory Council for the grant that meets quarterly and focuses on key items in the grant • Logic model to help stakeholders understand the critical components of the grant and a quarterly review of this model to assess theory and action • Data placed on public website to show on-going progress and revisions; benchmarks and performance targets will be included • Fidelity Index that measures fidelity of program implementation • All quarterly meetings will have written action plans detailing next steps for improvement, include person(s) responsible and by when <p>A table is also included that describes the district's continous improvement process; along with a timeline, activities, deliverables, and persons responsible. It is clear that the structures, processes, and procedures will allow the district to gather ongoing feedback and make adjustments over time; all stakeholders are included throughout the entire process. As a result, the applicant recieved the maximum points allowed for this section.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	5
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant presents and describes a clear plan for ongoing communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders. A graphic is included that clearly describes its communication plan along with a table that articulates its high-quality plan for communication; the table includes a timeline, list of specific activities and frequency, deliverables, and persons responsible. The strategies for communication include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly communication meetings via an advisory council composed of all stakeholders • Sharing of evaluation reports with all stakeholders • A website solely dedicated to providing updates about the grant and its progress • Community and local school meetings; grant kickoff meetings too • The districts annual report that articulates progress on specific measurable goals • Local news and social media <p>As a result of a clear and thoughtful plan for ongoing communication, the applicant earned the highest points available for this section.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	5
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant includes and thoroughly describes its performance measures for all populations. A clear rationale; information that will result from each measure; and how the measures will be reviewed and improved over time based on student performance is provided. (The information for making improvements is embedded in a chart that includes a column that explains how progress will be reviewed and improved over time.) The measures are reasonable and align to the state's expectations for assessing and monitoring student progress. The goals are also ambitious and achievable, especially through the use of the strategies and supports that are articulated throughout the grant to improve student learning. A</p>		

clear explanation of what and how baseline information was used to select the measures is included, along with a rationale for incremental increases. The targets make sense and align with the district's vision. Charts with goals, baseline, target, and post grant performance measures for each goal and subgroup are provided that further clarify the district's vision for improvement. As a result, the district has earned the maximum amount of points that can be awarded for this section.

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

5

5

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant includes a detailed explanation of a high-quality plan that rigorously evaluates the effectiveness of the goals and activities described in its RTT application. It includes quantitative and qualitative strategies that will be used throughout the grant period, and the strategies can also be maintained and continued after the grant ends. An outside evaluator will have the major responsibility for supporting the district to measure its effectiveness. The following strategies are thoroughly described as a way to evaluate the programs effectiveness:

- An annual review conducted by an advisory council made up of a variety of stakeholders
- Longitudinal Impact Evaluation that uses three research questions to drive the evaluation
- The research questions will be answered through the use of three impact studies that use a quasi-experimental design to assess impact at the end of grade five (Study 1), grade eight (Study 2), and grade eleven (Study 3)

A table is included that summarizes the parameters of the quasi-experimental design for each of the studies; and a chart with a timeline, activities, and deliverables for the outside evaluator is also included. Interviews, focus groups, open-ended surveys, meeting notes, teacher logs and lesson plans are the qualitative measures that will be used as part of the evaluation.

As a result, the district articulated a clear evaluation plan that warrants the full amount of points available for this section.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant includes a very detailed budget that is clearly aligned to its outcomes, goals and strategies. All funding sources are listed and explained (local, state, and federal) through a clear budget narrative and costs for all expenditures are identified in the format of a table. The budget is reasonable and areas where one-time funding is only needed are included. Priorities for the funding are explained and align with strategies described throughout the grant. Long-term sustainability is clear and is supported through existing structures that will continue during and after the grant period. An explanation of each line item with a breakdown of costs provides further clarity for how the district will effectively use its funds. As a result, the applicant earned the maximum amount of points for this section.

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

10

9

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant clearly articulates a high-quality plan for sustaining the goals of the grant after the grant expires. It provides a description of existing grant funds and their amounts that provided technology, instructional materials, and professional development resources to support achievement of its goals. A clear description of state and local government support; instructional and staffing model revisions; job embedded professional development; digital learning resources; and community and business support is included. The plan also explains how the district will evaluate improvements in its productivity and outcomes to inform its post-grant budget, and provides a table of an estimated budget for the three years after the term of the grant. The table further clarifies the use of funds. The only explanation that is missing is a description of how the district will evaluate the effectiveness of its past investments and use this information to inform its future investments. As a result, this section of the grant received a score close to the highest allowable points.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
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Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	10
<p>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant's competitive preference priority plan is very well developed and explained. It is reasonable and adds value to the academic components of the district's plan through a focus on social emotional learning through a partnership with a community organization. This section includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear demonstration of how it will integrate public and private funding to augment existing resources in its lowest performing schools • Thorough description of a well-planned and sustainable partnership • Educational outcomes, and family and community outcomes with a clear way of tracking progress; how data will be used to monitor progress and target its resources; apply the model to other student groups; and a clear plan for improving results over time • Description of the integration of education and other services that address behavior and social emotional learning through a tiered approach • Explanation of how staff capacity will be enhanced through the partnership beyond what is currently in place that assesses needs; identifies specific needs; incorporates a decision making process; has strategies for on-going engagement of families; and will regularly assess projects • Annual ambitious and achievable performance measures with desired outcomes • Tables that identify the targeted populations and specific targets for each population; the targets are clearly defined, reasonable, and achievable <p>As one reads the plan, he or she can get a sense of what it would look like in action. A table with a timeline, activities, deliverables, and responsibilities is also included that provides further clarity on the roll-out of the plan. As a result of a well developed, fully explained and articulated competitive preference priority plan, the district received the maximum amount of points for this section.</p>		

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met
<p>Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant comprehensively addresses how it will build on the core educational assurances to improve student learning. The applicant thoroughly articulates its plan for improving student learning above and beyond what is currently in place. There is evidence of quality strategies and activities that promote personalized learning and clear structures for assessing the progress of students, teachers, and the different learning environments. Evidence for how community partnerships will enhance learning and prepare students for college and career is thoroughly explained; and the connection/alignment to State standards and assessments makes the plan coherent and achievable. Accountability for teaching and learning at all levels is clearly described too. As a result, the applicant has met absolute priority 1.</p>		

Total	210	200
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0106NC-3 for Cabarrus County Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Cabarrus County Schools (CCS) has articulated a comprehensive and coherent reform vision in EMPOWER that personalizes the learning experience for impacted students. The approach set forth by the district will increase equity by creating an educational atmosphere that will have the capacity to identify and meet the needs of individual students.</p> <p>The district has adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in ELA and mathematics, North Carolina Essential Standards which are geared at aligning other subject areas with the CCSS, and as part of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), will be implementing new online assessments geared at preparing students to succeed in college and in the workforce.</p> <p>The State of North Carolina has developed a data system to measure student growth and progress geared at informing stakeholders of student standard attainment and means of supporting student success. CCS plans to build upon this by creating a dashboard that will aggregate student data from multiple sources, providing a comprehensive view of each student, accessible by students, parents, educators, and administrators.</p> <p>The plan targets the lowest 9 of 39 elementary schools performing as feeder schools into the middle and high school grades, which are each impacted by grant goals. The approach involves bold, innovative approaches to motivate and engage students, with the end goal of helping students succeed and value learning intrinsically.</p> <p>The vision removes seat time, allowing students to move at their own paces as they master curriculum standards. Innovative approaches to using technology and scheduling educators will provide a means for student learning experiences to be enhanced. Thoughtful planning for the use of technology resources and instruction by highly effective subject area teachers will support an improved, focused use of instructional time. In the high school grades, students will have increased freedom to choose their own paths, pursuing advanced coursework, including college courses to support academic and career goals. Students in need of intensive support will have enhanced opportunities for direct instruction to support learning needs. Teachers may serve in multiple ways, including as subject area experts, tutors, and lead teachers. The classroom experiences of students will be varied and flexible. Students will engage in learning experiences via a variety means, including the use of online learning, professional tutoring, and lessons taught by highly effective subject area teachers. The approaches applied by CCS in creating personalized learning will be guided by evaluation of student performance and student interest.</p> <p>The CCS vision sets forth a clear, comprehensive plan for student success going so far as to begin changing student expectations of success and goals as early as kindergarten. The vision was limited however in its approach to recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers as required per the four core assurance areas. While these goals were stated, no process was described to clarify how this would be achieved through EMPOWER. As a result, the application scores in the upper middle range for (A)(1).</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>CCS has provided a detailed description relating to implementation of their proposal. Seven Title I elementary schools as well as the district high school and district middle school into which the elementary schools feed are clearly identified as targets. In addition to demographics and need, involved schools showed evidence of teachers' and administrators' readiness and willingness to implement grant goals. Evidence of teacher support was provided in Appendix B with signatures of over 70% of the teachers in target schools demonstrating their full commitment to support grant implementation. The support of involved teachers is a key ingredient in producing effective change in schools.</p> <p>It is noted that the grant will serve 5,681 students, with 63% coming from low-income families and 55% identified as high need. It is further noted that 404 educators, including both teachers and administrators, will be impacted by EMPOWER. The numbers of participating students and educators are further broken down by building to further demonstrate the demographics of each involved school. Each of the 9 impacted schools has over 50% of participating students coming from low income families. Students in grades K-12 will be impacted by grant activities</p> <p>The district applied a sound rationale supporting a focus on both need and readiness for change in their selection of participating schools. Given the applicant's well thought-out plan for selecting schools and student participation, section (A)(2) scores high for approach to implementation.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	9

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

One exceptional goal of EMPOWER is to cultivate a culture of student ownership of learning. Beginning in kindergarten, students will be participants in a culture that expects success and helps students plan for the future. The EMPOWER change process helps students establish goals for their own success. Students will regularly reflect upon these goals, setting the stage for college and career readiness from an early age.

Highly effective teachers will be identified as a result of grant goals. The reach of these highly effective teachers will be maximized through creative, blended learning models. Teachers will also have opportunities to learn about the content they teach in business and industry, enabling them to bring back real world examples to their classrooms, helping to bring life to the content they teach and to help students better understand career opportunities. The traditional role of the teacher will be redefined as a result of the grant to that of a facilitator of learning.

The elimination of seat time requirements will enable schools to focus on individual student needs. The application of effective technologies and creative teaching solutions will make it possible for CCS to advance students based on mastery. This mastery approach further supports student ownership of learning through a process of setting and achieving learning goals. CCS has a well-developed plan for staffing to support the implementation of this change, ensuring that students meet with educators on a regular basis to review their educational goals.

It is clear that the activities of EMPOWER will result in system-wide change even though only 9 of the 39 schools are targets of this application. The district has reviewed and changed policies to ensure that policy-based barriers to student achievement are eliminated. A variety of supportive reforms have been established, including the Schlechty Student Engagement Model, Positive Behavior Intervention Support, Team-Initiated Problem-Solving, Understanding by Design, and Professional Learning Communities that will work in conjunction with grant goals to support student growth. Upon evaluation of the EMPOWER activities, key effective program components will be scaled up to be deployed in the other 30 schools in the district. An advisory council will be created that will bear responsibility in the reform process, along with a plan for the sustainability, and scaling up of the key effective grant components.

The plan set forth by CCS is of high quality as it clearly identifies goals, specifies related activities, and indicates the individuals responsible. As indicated in (A)(1), a limitation of the plan is that it does not clearly express a means of recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers. While professional development opportunities and changed roles of teachers may assist in retaining teachers, specific evidence is not provided to suggest such efforts. The professional development and changed roles is addressed as a means of improving instructional quality for the impacted students. As a result of what is overall a well-developed plan for reform and change, the applicant scores in the high range for (A)(3).

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

10

8

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

CCS has indicated commitment to improving student college and career readiness as evidenced by ambitious, yet achievable learning targets that equal or exceed state targets. Summative assessments to evaluate student growth and proficiency are clearly identified. Performances are listed for the 2011-2012 school year and projections are made for the 5 coming school years. These performances are broken down by gender, ethnicity, economically disadvantaged (ED), English language learners (ELL), and students with disabilities (SWD). The projections reflect efforts to narrow achievement gaps in all areas. A question comes to mind when evaluating the projections as a method of setting the anticipated proficiency levels is not explained. Certain subgroups have seemingly high projected growth, whereas others have more modest growth projections. For several of the elementary proficiency examinations, the greatest growth is projected for Hispanic students, and yet they currently may not necessarily be the lowest performing subgroup. Percentages of growth anticipated vary throughout the listing of proficiency examinations by subgroup. On the grade 4 mathematics proficiency examination, growth of nearly 4% per year is expected of students with disabilities, where only around 1-2 % growth is expected of other groups per year. It seems that the SWD are targeted for higher growth, especially in mathematics, than are other students with no explanation provided to explain this discrepancy. In narrowing achievement gaps, ambitious efforts are likewise shared. ELL students are expected to narrow the achievement gap by 15.4% over 4 years, but no specific grant activities are indicated that target this subgroup that might provide a basis for the generous expectation for growth.

High school graduation rates along with projections are broken down by subgroup, with modest growth expectations. Similarly, college enrollment rates by subgroup show very modest growth projections. The projections do reflect a graduated increase which might be anticipated as a result of the change in school culture expected from grant implementation.

Postsecondary degree attainment statistics are not provided for the district, but 2012 data for North Carolina college completion is provided along with statistics regarding national degree attainment and need for remediation. This information supports the college and career readiness goals of CCS.

CCS has shared strong LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes. These goals lack explanation to clarify discrepancies in growth projections. As a result, the applicant scores at the lower end of the high range for (A)(4).

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	13
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The CCS performance record is impressive. Five of the 39 district schools were designated as Honor Schools of Excellence, with over 90% of students achieving proficiency on state required exams. Expected or High Growth was achieved by 27 of the schools and another 25% met 90% or more of their Annual Measurable Objectives.</p> <p>The district has incorporated the use of Graduation Coaches to help keep students on track for graduation. A non-traditional high school has been implemented so that students may learn at their own pace and still obtain a high school diploma. As a result of its efforts, gains in graduation rates of 6.8% to 22.2% have been noted across subgroups since 2009, resulting in a 12.3% gain in graduation rate overall. Achievement gaps have been narrowing for CCS schools. A gain of over 45% since the 2007-2008 school year is noted in English I end-of-course assessment results by American Indian students. This same subgroup over the same time period experienced a 33.4% gain in reading assessment scores at the elementary level. These impressive gains by the lowest performing subgroup in 2007-2008 for these assessments shows that the district has the capacity to identify areas of need and implement plans to improve student success rates.</p> <p>The reported student performance on assessments shows that CCS students have consistently exceeded state averages since the 2008-2009 school year. AP enrollment rates have risen substantially and both AP enrollment and exam passing rates exceed state averages. The successes of CCS are especially notable given that the district ranks 112 out of 115 in the state for per-pupil expenditure. The evidence provided supports the district's ability to achieve ambitious and significant reform in its lowest-achieving or low-performing schools with limited resources.</p> <p>CCS already has implemented a means of making student performance data available to stakeholders and has plans to improve its means of sharing information with stakeholders by providing a dashboard that will aggregate student data, extending the district's capacity to improve student outcomes and improve instruction.</p> <p>The district has made great strides to overcome barriers to student learning and has focused on professional development activities to improve instructional practices. Removing restrictions that limited the number of AP courses students could take resulted in increased AP course enrollment. Middle and High school educators have received extensive training in the Schlechty Student Engagement Model to build the capacity within the instructional staff to transform CCS schools to better prepare students for societal interactions and work in the 21st century. Culturally responsive pedagogy is practiced to ensure that the lives and experiences of all students are taken into account, promoting equity and fostering student participation in their learning. Positive Behavior Intervention Support has been implemented in about half of the district's elementary and middle schools, significantly reducing the number of days students spend in out-of-school suspension. The district cites several additional examples of targeted efforts to improve practices that have improved student success rates. As a result of its efforts, CCS has been cited by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction as one of five districts in the state with the largest three-year decrease in dropout rates. The dropout rate has decreased 44% overall in the past 5 years, with decreases of 20% among African-American and 29% among Hispanic students.</p> <p>The district has demonstrated a track record of setting and achieving goals relating to the performance and success of students. Further evidence of successes annually since the 2007-2008 school year along with evidence of successes below grade 5 would have strengthened the application. As a result of the reasonably strong evidence of prior success provided by the applicant, (B)(1) scores in the lower end of the high range.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	4
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>CCS has made school-level expenditure information available to its community via its website. The information provided includes personnel salaries (including those based on U.S. Census Bureau classification) for all school level instructional and support staff, as well as non-personnel expenditures. The district strives to maintain a transparent budget process. Its Budget Committee is comprised of members of the Board of Education, district administrators, teachers, teacher assistants, and community members who work together to guide budgetary planning. This committee receives input from 20 subcommittees and 37 advisory committees. Public meetings are held to gather community stakeholder input to support</p>		

the budgetary process. The district provides its community press releases, webinars, and an annual report. Appendix F provides multiple examples of means of communication with the public in which district data (including comparisons with state data) is shown in the form of charts, graphs, and tables. Based on evidence provided, the district effectively communicates its needs to stakeholders. Explanations and descriptions of needs, including physical items and improvements to facilities, include photographs which are an effective means of maximizing the district's communication efforts to help stakeholders understand district needs.

Additional meetings that are used to disseminate information are regular school board meetings, parent meetings, community meetings, school-level teacher and administrator meetings, and school improvement team meetings. A variety of tools, including Google Docs, Instant Messenger, webinars, and email, are utilized by the district to share information, and assist in the process of developing school or district wide consensus. An online data system (Home Base) will be introduced during the current school year, allowing parents and students access to real-time performance and attendance data, assignment descriptions, and school bulletins. The district website is used to share improvement plans, curriculum unit plans, and other information at the district and school levels with stakeholders.

Home Base, the state-wide student information system is being introduced in the current school year, with plans under EMPOWER to add a dashboard that will aggregate data from multiple sources. It is not evident that the district has previously or is currently making real-time information available to students and parents via a secure online system, or portal.

Based on the information provided, it is evident that CCS has a well-developed process for sharing information with and gathering feedback from its community. A limiting factor in the transparency of district activities however is the absence of a current means of sharing real-time student performance data with students, parents, and educators. As a result of a well-established means of communicating a great deal of important information with stakeholders, the applicant scores high in section (B)(2).

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

10

10

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

As a 2010 Race to the Top (RttT) grant recipient, North Carolina set a course for closing student achievement gaps and increasing the number of students graduating college and career ready. The state (and district) has adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Essential Standards (additional standards established by NC that align with CCSS, designed to support skill development in collaboration, critical-thinking, research, problem solving, and technology). New evaluation systems have been developed for teachers and principals geared at raising effectiveness, with the support of additional professional development of educators to improve practices. New technology-based learning supports, including the student information system known as Home Base, will also be implemented to assist in data-informed decision making.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) has provided the autonomy and flexibility to allow CCS to implement EMPOWER. This flexibility will allow CCS to implement creative portfolios of personalized learning options that include blended and online instruction in the targeted schools. To support creative approaches to maximize the reach of highly effective teachers, NCDPI has waived caps on class size. With state approval, districts are now able to determine their own criteria for subject and grade advancement. By waiving seat time requirements, the state has allowed for a flexible environment that will permit students to progress based on mastery. Students who exhibit mastery can progress to advanced coursework, including college-level credit-bearing courses and courses available through NC Virtual Public School.

The NC Race to the Top Program Director has applauded the creativity and ambition of the EMPOWER plan, noting that the goals and activities of the plan align strongly with the efforts of the State.

CCS has demonstrated substantial evidence of conditions and autonomy under State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements to successfully implement the personalized learning environments described in EMPOWER. As a result, section (B)(3) receives a high score.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)

15

13

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The process of involving stakeholders is clearly described by CCS. The grant process was led by the District Design Team, which was composed of the Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Executive Director for Organizational Planning and Development, Director of Elementary Schools and Title I, Director of High Schools, Director of Middle Schools, Director of Career and Technical Education, and the district Data Analyst. Elementary, Middle, and High School Directors presented preliminary plans to members of the district staff and parents to gather input and develop consensus. The Design Team then solicited input from principals who then presented the program to their school staff members at

regularly scheduled professional learning meetings. Throughout the process, feedback was used to inform program refinements.

CCS has a well-established system for communications via a variety of forums. The public is invited to participate in regular meetings of the school board. Additional meetings used to disseminate information and gather community feedback include regular school board meetings, parent meetings, community meetings, school-level teacher and administrator meetings, and school improvement team meetings. Student, parent, teacher, and teacher assistant advisory groups, which include a representative from each of the 39 district schools, meet 3 times per year to provide feedback on district initiatives. The district holds frequent subject-specific meetings to gather input from community members, an example of which involved meetings relating to the development of the district's strategic plan. Annual satisfaction surveys are completed annually by parents, principals, and teachers, providing data which is disaggregated and used to identify opportunities for improvement. Parents are enlisted to serve on the improvement teams for each individual district school. The Teacher Advisory Council provides feedback on district initiatives. Principals meet monthly with the superintendent.

Support for the EMPOWER initiative was provided and evidenced by the signatures of over 70% of the 404 educators in the target schools, with 1/3 of the schools demonstrating 100% teacher support. Family and student input was provided via school-level PTO and district wide community meetings held regularly throughout the school year. Additionally, the district has student, parent, teacher, and teacher assistant advisory groups that meet at least three times per year. These groups from the target schools were asked to provide input on EMPOWER strategies.

Letters of support are included in Appendix E from Cabarrus County EMS, Cabarrus Regional Chamber of Commerce, Concord Department of Fire and Life Safety, Howard N. Lee Institute for Equity and Opportunity in Education, NCDPI, Public Impact, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, UNC Charlotte Center for STEM Education, VIF International Education, and World View of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The roles of each of the organizations providing letters of support are provided and range from career shadowing and internship opportunities, to more formal educational opportunities, including professional development and dual enrollment options. The Concord City Mayor, a public school teacher and educator of over 30 years, enthusiastically endorsed the proposal set forth in EMPOWER.

While the district provides clear and compelling evidence of stakeholder engagement and support, letters of support from some key stakeholders are not included. Letters of support from parents and parent organizations, student organizations, and early learning programs were not included. It is also evident that these stakeholders may not have been involved in the earliest planning efforts for the EMPOWER plan. As a result, CCS scores at the lower end of the high range for stakeholder engagement and support.

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

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

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

In the EMPOWER application, CCS has set the stage for a cultural change to empower students beginning in the earliest grades to make the connection between learning and goal attainment. Beginning in kindergarten in its highest needs schools, students will learn the importance of being a good student. Teachers will use forward-thinking language, encouraging students to think about what they want to be when they grow up, helping them to develop positive attitudes about school and life-long learning. Professional development of teachers will involve changing the culture to establish higher learning as an expectation and to ensure that CCS students develop a disposition of being lifelong learners. The district began implementation of CCSS in the last school year, with the goal of promoting college and career readiness through both learning standards and graduation requirement changes. While the CCSS are geared at ensuring that critical academic content is mastered, NC Essential Standards promote development of other important traits, including collaboration, critical-thinking, research, problem-solving, and technology skills. The Revised Bloom's Taxonomy, which focuses on higher-order thinking will be applied to learning activities in conjunction with the aforementioned standards to ensure deep, meaningful learning experiences for CCS students.

CCS plans to apply a student level Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cyclical process, encouraging students to take ownership of their own learning as they engage in a continuous process of goal setting, reflection, and revision as student progress toward subject mastery. This process helps build responsibility and self-motivation that will likely lead to increased student engagement, persistence, and achievement. Throughout the process, students will be involved in important decision making regarding the design of the personalized learning experiences. Twice per year, the PDCA process will be employed as student *Empowered to Succeed* plans will be updated. This process will help students realize the connection between shorter term learning goals and longer range career planning goals.

Work mapping will be applied to help students, working with parents and educational professionals, understand how their interests and abilities inform postsecondary education and career planning. In the summer of the first year of EMPOWER, counselors, the Career Development Coordinator, and industry representatives will plan a sequence of career development activities, including the development of local standards to support career awareness and planning. Work-based experiences will be included in the planning, which are to include field trips, job shadowing, mock interviews with potential employers, internships, and pre-apprenticeships. Similarly, teachers will have professional development experiences through GLOBALmersion to go out into community businesses and bring back ideas and opportunities for student engagement through real-world examples relating to subject area content. A variety of college and career access and success activities will be designed to increase postsecondary preparation. These activities include university tours, college entrance exam prep, college admissions and financial aid workshops, assistance in completing college entrance and financial aid forms, exposure to on-campus events, and summer Career Camps.

Students will develop skill sets for communicating with and understanding diverse cultures and through culturally responsive teaching methods, the diverse backgrounds of students will be valued and supported, resulting in student development of respect for cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences.

With the support of parents and educators each impacted student will be able to establish a personalized sequence of instructional content and skill development designed to enable the student to achieve his or her individual learning goals and ensure he or she can graduate on time and college- and career-ready. Seat time waivers and innovative approaches to instruction that will capitalize upon digital learning resources while maximizing the reach of highly effective instructors will enable students to master course content that is aligned with college and career readiness standards, enabling students to progress as they are ready. Ongoing assessment and feedback via the district's student information system and related data dashboard will assist in evaluating student progression toward academic and career goals. For those students in need of assistance in progressing toward graduation, the district has provided graduation coaches and an alternative environment at the high school level to meet the unique needs of students. To ensure that students understand how to manage their learning using the tools provided (including the data dashboard), students will meet twice per year with educators to evaluate and revise goals as appropriate applying the PDCA cycle.

Cabarrus County Schools, with the support of parents and educators, will provide each student has access to personalized sequences of instructional content and skill development to help each student to achieve his or her individual learning goals, graduating on time and college- and career-ready. To accomplish this, the proposal includes innovative high-quality instructional approaches and environments that include including digital learning that is aligned with Common Core Learning Standards and other learning standards adopted by the district. The proposal establishes a fluid means of blending the use of digital content with small group and one-on-one accommodations to meet the unique learning needs of all students, including high-need students with the overarching goal of ensuring that students are on track toward meeting college- and career-ready standards and graduation requirements. The district plans to use access to high-quality online learning resources 25% of the time. The remaining instructional time will involve the use of highly effective subject area teachers, and teacher tutoring to meet individual learning needs via small group or one-on-one instruction depending upon the level of student need.

The district plans to establish a 1:1 digital learning initiative, with tablets being used for K-2 students, and netbooks for grades 3-12. Students will be trained, alongside parents, in the use of the tools and digital resources available to them. At the start of the school year, training will be held to support the use and maintenance of equipment as well as the use of digital resources, including the student information system and data dashboard which will enable students, parents, teachers, and administrators to track and manage student learning.

The plan developed by CCS is a high quality plan with ambitious, yet realistic research-based goals to promote student achievement. A timeline is provided which delineates responsibilities for related activities. As a result, the plan scores high in Learning (C)(1).

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	16
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

CCS has developed a high-quality plan for improving learning and teaching by personalizing the learning environment to ensure that its students graduate career and college ready. The approach of CCS includes a creative means of blending learning strategies, capitalizing on effective digital learning resources paired with maximizing the reach of its most effective instructors. The removal of the seat time requirement in favor of a mastery approach further ensures that students will be challenged at an appropriate level according to the goals set forth in their personalized educational plans. The net effect of the approach is to provide intensive instructional supports when needed, while providing the flexibility to allow students to achieve at individualized rates, with learning taking place anywhere, anytime. Interactions with students in the earliest grades set the stage for planning for college and career readiness and establish a school environment focused on the importance and value of life-long learning.

Blended learning models will maximize student contact with highly effective teachers as they serve in subject specialist roles. Lead teachers that both teach and lead teacher teams in practices and strategies will help to focus instructional efforts and improve practices. Professional tutors will be devoted to small group instruction. The use of high-quality digital curricular tools will supplement 25% of instructional time. Intensive professional learning is planned to determine which blended learning models and teacher roles work best for each individual target school. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) organized by subject and grade will allow for teacher collaboration focused on student learning and results. In these communities, teachers will apply a continuous improvement cycle to establish goals, identify and implement strategies, and evaluate progress to ensure that students master curricular content. The CCS PLC process is described with key strategies at various stages of the process. Experienced instructional coaches will work one-on-one with teachers and with PLCs to coach educators on data informed decision making and planning instruction to meet the needs of individual students based on abilities, areas of need, interest, and college and career goals. An Instructional Technology Specialist will assist teachers with the implementation of the 1:1 technology environment and the incorporation of technology in instruction. Each school will set up a demonstration classroom in which blended learning demonstration and professional coaching will take place. The Home Base Instructional Improvement System will provide online professional development modules for staff to target professional learning in a variety of areas, including personalized learning environments, culturally responsible pedagogy, effective use of technology, and blended learning models.

Educators will have training to support maximizing student engagement and learning. In the previous school year, the district implemented Wiggins and McTighe's Understanding by Design to improve the quality of student educational experiences. As a result of this implementation, instructors apply a continuous improvement approach in their PLCs in which student data informs curricular adjustments. Teachers in the district have been provided with professional learning opportunities in Marzano's High-Yield Instructional Strategies to meet student needs and learning styles. GLOBALmersion as a result of EMPOWER implementation will provide opportunities for teachers to better understand the business organizations within their local communities, enabling them to bring a hands-on view and real-world examples of applications of curricular content to their classrooms.

Student progress is already measured via a variety of formative, benchmark, and end-of-course assessments. In the 2014-2015 school year, Smarter Balanced Assessments will be provided as a means of online summative assessments throughout North Carolina. Per NCDPI requirements, the district began using ACT College Readiness Assessments in the 2011-2012 school year to monitor the college and career readiness of students from grades 8-12. The resulting reports will be used by EMPOWER Data Teams and their coaches to identify students for possible AP and college credit-bearing courses through local colleges and universities. This testing will also assist in identifying students in need of intervention, remediation, and acceleration. A variety of tools are being implemented by the district to analyze data for the purpose of instructional improvement. These resources include PowerSchool (learner profiles), Schoolnet (instructional design, practice, & resources), OpenClass (assessment), TestNav (data analysis), and TrueNorthLogic (educator effectiveness).

A high-quality plan has been developed to improve student achievement by increasing the numbers of students impacted by the practices of highly effective teachers and principals. The plan includes a timeline with responsible parties and deliverables. The practices of teachers and principals will be improved through professional development activities and targeted responses to feedback provided by the new evaluation system. Teacher evaluations are based on leadership, establishing a respectful environment, content knowledge, facilitating learning, reflecting upon practice, and contributing to student academic success. Administrators are evaluated on strategic, instructional, cultural, human resource, managerial, external development, and micro-political leadership. North Carolina applies a green, yellow, or red code for indicating educator effectiveness. These are entered in the Home Base platform, helping administrators quickly identify areas in which educators need professional learning to improve practices. The Home Base system also provides each teacher suggested professional learning activities.

Cabarrus County School District supports personalized learning by ensuring that all participating students, parents, educators, and other stakeholders, regardless of income, have access to necessary content, tools, and other learning resources both in and out of school to support the implementation of the applicant's proposal. The district plans to establish a 1:1 digital learning initiative, with tablets being used for K-2 students, and netbooks for grades 3-12. Students will be trained, alongside parents, in the use of the tools and digital resources available to them. At the start of the school year, training will be held to support the use and maintenance of equipment as well as the use of digital resources, including the student information system and data dashboard which will enable students, parents, teachers, and administrators to track and manage student learning. The district will have wireless internet cards available for checkout to families that lack internet access. The district also plans to negotiate discounted internet service rates for residences within the district, further supporting the goal of access to technology resources anywhere, anytime in support of student learning goals. Teachers will be provided with laptops to support instructional goals and data-driven decision making. Four day summer institutes will be held for teachers in years 2-4 of the grant to support the use of technology. The district will also provide support on site and will continue professional development activities regarding the use of technology and related resources throughout the school year.

Overall, CCS has developed a high-quality plan for Teaching and Leading that includes a timeline for deliverables that delineates the responsible parties for activities relating to Teaching and Learning and maximizing the reach of effective educators. A limitation exists in that the specific resources and tools to be matched with student needs in (C)(2)(b)(iii) would benefit from further development. Examples of specific strategies to be applied would strengthen the application. A means to maximize student contact with highly effective principals is not identified, nor is a plan to use the existing evaluation system data to improve principal effectiveness. Similarly, a plan is not evident to support the staffing of educator positions in hard to fill areas such as mathematics, science, foreign languages, and special education. As a result, the application scores in the upper middle range for Teaching and Leading.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

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

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

CCS has involved a wide range of stakeholders from the earliest stages of the EMPOWER process. Given that North Carolina is not a collective-bargaining state, over 70% of the teachers in the impacted schools were required to sign in support of the EMPOWER application. Three of the 9 impacted schools had 100% of their teachers sign in support of EMPOWER. This indicates a high degree of support from those most closely involved with the district's students. The policies and infrastructure established in the proposal indicate an educational system ready to provide substantial resources and support to teachers and students.

The Cabarrus County Board of Education (CCBoE) governs the CCS district. This governing body is dedicated to the goals of the grant as they are committed to providing a foundation for lifelong learning that enables students to participate responsibly in a rapidly changing global community. The CCBoE is committed to innovation at the school level and supports the vision of teachers serving as facilitators of knowledge, empowering students to take ownership of their own learning. The CCBoE furthermore supports the role of families in empowering their children as they support their academic journeys.

The grant process was led by the District Design Team, which was composed of the Deputy Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Executive Director for Organizational Planning and Development, Director of Elementary Schools and Title I, Director of High Schools, Director of Middle Schools, Director of Career and Technical Education, and the district Data Analyst. These individuals will make up the EMPOWER Advisory Council which will oversee the project Evaluator, Project Director, and Expert Consultants. In turn, the Project Director will oversee the Grant Coordinator, EMPOWER Coaches, and the Computer Systems Analyst. EMPOWER Coaches will meet with School Data Teams and the Computer Systems Analyst will direct Educational Technology Specialists. Data Teams will be comprised of the EMPOWER Coach, Instructional Technology Specialist, Principal, and Teacher Leaders.

Throughout the project, the district plans to support target schools through:

- EMPOWER Advisory Council meetings (monthly)
- presentations to the Cabarrus County Board of Education (monthly)
- EMPOWER Data Team meetings (monthly)
- evaluation team visits (quarterly)
- professional development (monthly)
- sustainability planning (quarterly)

Each target school will also have two new staff members:

- EMPOWER Coach
- Instructional Technology Specialist

These individuals will support program activities and provide ongoing assistance. Additional technical support will also be provided to ensure successful implementation of technology. A timeline including activities, responsibilities, and deliverables is included.

Each school will have flexibility in school schedules and calendars, school personnel decisions, staffing models, roles and responsibilities of educators and non-educators, and school level budgets. A seat time waiver provides the schools great flexibility in charting a new course where they might choose from a variety of blended learning models to best meet the needs of the school and its students. The seat time waiver also creates opportunities for students to demonstrate content

mastery multiple times in multiple ways through means determined at the school level and approved by the state. The strategies and tools being implemented through EMPOWER support the learning of all students. The Project Director will work with the Executive Director for Exceptional Children to identify students with disabilities and to provide appropriate learning resources and practices. Translators will be identified as needed for ELL students and those with speech and hearing difficulties to support their learning needs. EMPOWER events and activities will be fully accessible to students with disabilities and/or language barriers. School informational brochures will be designed so that persons of varying educational levels, cultures, and races can understand provided information.

The district's efforts in removal of seat time in favor of a mastery approach to learning and in providing flexibility of individual schools as a result of EMPOWER to determine the strategies most effective for each school and its students is commendable. While the plan set forth regarding LEA practices, policies and rules is generally of high quality, further development of the timeline, including responsibilities and deliverables, would strengthen the application. A timeline is provided for limited aspects of the plan for practices, policy, and rule implementation. As a result, the application scores in the low end of the high 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:

The 1:1 technology implementation efforts of the district paired with the DataPowered data dashboard will provide students, parents, and educators with essential tools to guide students success. The access to technology will assist students in viewing the learning process as an anywhere, anytime process and will support the changed focus on mastery of learning as opposed to seat time being a dominant factor in student course progression.

The district plans to hold an annual technology summit to provide digital device training. Parents will have the opportunity to access the parent webinar library which was developed to meet the needs of parents in accessing parenting materials to support 21st century academic success, safe and responsible students, and special student populations. Special topics for webinars include transitioning to middle school, education planning, successful parent-teacher conferences, and more. Through EMPOWER, the district plans to rollout technical support for parents via webinars, meetings, and information sessions. The district will also create a technology storage reimaging center to store and maintain devices to ensure optimal performance. In school, educators and students will have access to an Instructional Technology Specialist and support staff.

The district launched a new statewide online data system known as Home Base. This student information system includes an instructional management improvement system. Building upon the state system, EMPOWER will develop a K-12 Student Data Dashboard to aggregate data from several existing sources to provide a comprehensive view of each student as an individual. It will include biographical information, schedule, attendance, assessment scores, grades, PDCA process, Empowered to Succeed College and Career Plan, and credits. This dashboard will also allow students and parents to track student progress in real time and will include age appropriate interfaces that will allow different user groups to quickly identify academic and behavioral strengths and weaknesses to assist in identifying students in need of supports and/or intervention.

The district will hire a Computer Systems Analyst to provide implementation and support for the new data dashboard. Instructional Technology Specialists at the school level will lead device rollout, maintenance and support for the new dashboard at the school level.

The plan developed generally meets the expectations of a high-quality plan in that a timeline, activities, deliverables, and responsible parties are identified for LEA and School Infrastructure. It is not clear if the systems to be used to manage school data will involve the use of non-proprietary, machine readable open data formats. The proposal could be strengthened by providing further evidence to ensure that students and parents have appropriate levels of technical support. Support for teachers is well-established in the plans. Parents would benefit from training strategies to support their use of technology which in turn might be applied to support student learning. Webinars, meetings, and information sessions are helpful, but further information regarding the content of these sessions to support the capacity of parents to access and apply data to support student success is needed. As a result, CCS scores in the lower end of the high range for LEA and school infrastructure.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	14

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The focus of CCS on implementation of the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) Cycle to continuous improvement at all levels of district practice is impressive. From the individualized learning plans developed to guide student goal setting and achievement through building and district level practices, the PDCA process is evident. The CCS plan includes a timeline with activities, deliverables, and responsible parties for the implementation process. Progress will be monitored regularly with reporting and review activities taking place quarterly to ensure that areas in need of improvement are identified and appropriate corrective actions are taken. Information regarding EMPOWER will be shared with stakeholders through several different forums, including a variety of meetings, the EMPOWER website, and a variety of deliverables prepared to communicate district progress on EMPOWER activities.

Structured formative evaluation will provide useful, timely feedback to monitor progress. A clearly articulated logic model will provide an organized strategy and basis from which to articulate desired outcomes and monitor progress. The model will be revisited quarterly to assess its effectiveness. A fidelity index will be applied to assess the extent to which the program achieves its desired outcomes. Evaluation data will be provided to the public via a dedicated website in an easy-to-read, visually appealing manner, so that lay readers can accurately and easily judge EMPOWER performance.

Further development of efforts to evaluate progress relating to the proposal goals of increasing student ownership of learning, expanding the reach of highly effective educators, and personalizing learning environments would have strengthened this application. Overall however, the applicant developed a high-quality plan for continuous improvement on all levels, resulting in a high range score for the Continuous Improvement Process.

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

5

5

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

CCS has developed a clear approach in its proposal for high quality ongoing communication and engagement. A timeline, which includes activities, deliverables, and responsible parties is included. The EMPOWER Advisory Council will meet monthly, led by the Deputy Superintendent, who in turn will inform the Board of Education. Kick-off meetings, led by the Planning Team, will be held at schools at the start of the grant period to inform stakeholders. Annual community meetings for the purpose of discussing EMPOWER will be led by the project director each spring. By July, a project website will be created by the Computer Systems Analyst to share information, surveys, and message boards. Information regarding EMPOWER will be shared via social media, local news, and school meetings as part of an ongoing process to inform the public. Other processes described include quarterly meetings of stakeholders to review gathered information and revise strategies as appropriate to maximize grant activity effectiveness in enhancing student achievement.

The district has well-established means of communicating with and engaging its public. The public is invited to participate in regular meetings of the school board. Additional meetings used to disseminate information and gather community feedback are regular school board meetings, parent meetings, community meetings, school-level teacher and administrator meetings, and school improvement team meetings. Student, parent, teacher, and teacher assistant advisory groups which include a representative from each of the 39 district schools meet 3 times per year to provide feedback on district initiatives. The district holds frequent subject-specific meetings to gather input from community members, an example of which involved meetings relating to the development of the district's strategic plan. Annual satisfaction surveys are completed annually by parents, principals, and teachers, providing data which is disaggregated and used to identify opportunities for improvement. Parents are enlisted to serve on the improvement teams for each individual district school. The Teacher Advisory Council provides feedback on district initiatives. Principals meet monthly with the superintendent.

As a result of a transparent plan that involves a broad array of stakeholders with a systemic approach to continuous improvement, this application scores high in ongoing communication and engagement.

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

5

4

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

In Table 30, the CCS plan includes seven categories of performance measures to be evaluated, including the district's rationale for selecting that measure; an explanation of how the measure will provide rigorous, timely, and formative leading information tailored to its proposed plan and theory of action regarding the applicant's implementation success or areas of concern; and a means of reviewing and improving the measure over time if found insufficient to gauge implementation progress. Several of the categories include multiple performance measures to be evaluated. For example, "The number and percentage of participating students scoring proficient or above on math and reading EOG tests, by subgroup, in grades 4-8 " is listed as a single performance measure, where it might be considered to involve at least two different performance measures to be evaluated. Thirteen separate performance measures are identified in Table 31, which include baseline data and targets through the post-grant year.

The applicant has met performance measure expectations by grade-level through applying a variety of indicators across the K-12 grade levels to assess student performance, socio-emotional and behavioral data, attendance, career and college readiness, and FAFSA application rates. Along with these rates, targets have been established that are for the most part ambitious and achievable. For example, the reach of highly effective principals and teachers is provided by subgroup, with targets to increase the numbers and reach of these highly effective educators. An area that may not be reasonable however is the expectations provided for increases in proficiency by year for students in grades 4-8 who score proficient or above in reading and math on the NC EOG tests. Expected increases of 25%, 35%, and 40% in years 2-4 seem unreasonable. This aspect of grant-related expectations needs clarification. Furthermore, according to Table 31, it might be interpreted that the district actually expects an increase of 4% in students earning below 50% in SY 2017-2018, which is contradictory to grant goals. Table 32, which lists the targets for the performance measures indicates more reasonable expectations per subgroup for growth on 4-8 NC EOG reading assessments.

While overall the expectations set forth by CCS under Performance Measures are of high quality, the lack of clarity surrounding the expected increases in both 4-8 NC EOG math and reading assessments results in a score at the lower end of the high range.

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

The applicant has set forth a high-quality plan for continuous improvement through evaluation of the effectiveness of its investments. Incorporating the PDCA cycle as a key component of the school culture is commendable. The PDCA cycle has power to help all stakeholders focus on goal setting, reflect upon progress toward attaining established goals, and revise goals as appropriate to ensure success.

The evaluation plan includes a timeline, activities, and deliverables with responsibilities delineated. While deliverables identified in Table 33 are largely the responsibility of the grant evaluator, the process being employed by CCS to evaluate its effectiveness includes gathering both quantitative and qualitative data and feedback from stakeholders through a variety of means. The district has established a leadership structure for the project with responsibilities of individual leaders to carry out a variety of monthly, quarterly, and annual meetings for the purposes of disseminating information, gathering feedback, and planning for improvements. The Advisory Council will establish core activities for implementation each year and follow up by evaluating outcomes and reporting on associated changes at the end of the school year. A longitudinal study will be carried out after 3 program years to evaluate 5th and 8th grade math, science, and reading achievement as well as 11th grade ACT composite scores and subtests to assess the impact of EMPOWER. A second longitudinal impact study will evaluate the impact of three years of EMPOWER on 8th grade math, science, and reading achievement. The results of EMPOWER serviced students will be compared to outcomes of other students in the district, with 5th grade end of course assessment data serving as a baseline for comparison. A third impact study will similarly evaluate the impact of EMPOWER on ACT Composite scores.

The evaluation of student growth as a result of EMPOWER has been well-developed. The plan lacks development strategies for evaluating both the effectiveness of the professional learning activities of educators and the effectiveness of the innovative instructional means (including in-person subject specialization, in-person flex rotation, enriched flipped, and self-blended/"a la carte") to be employed through EMPOWER implementation. As a result, the application scored in the lower end of the high range for Evaluating Effectiveness of Investments.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has prior experience implementing large district-wide initiatives. The bold reforms proposed by the district result in an estimated cost of less than \$880 per student per year. The plan provides a thoughtful means of building upon existing investments, which have been considerable in the areas of professional learning and technology. Funding support for the district initiatives to implement EMPOWER will come from a variety of sources, including Title I funding, State Race to the Top funds, State CTAE (Career and Technical Education), community support in the form of in-kind contributions

and volunteer hours, and the funds requested through this grant competition. The budget tables provided clearly identify expenditures, with brief explanation of the associated costs and identification as either one-time or ongoing costs. Table 40 specifies budget categories, funding sources, and related costs per year for a three year post grant period, indicating plans for the sustainability of the project. This table is broken down to include key personnel, fringe benefits, travel, supplies, and contractual, each with descriptions to describe their associated costs.

The proposed use of funds clearly supports the implementation of the proposal, including targeted items, such as support for professional development activities, 1:1 devices, and wireless network cards to support the anytime, anywhere, personalized blended learning approach for all students set forth by the district. Total costs, funds requested, and funds from other sources to support the project are clearly laid out and seem both reasonable and accurate. The budget has been well-developed and appears reasonable and sufficient to support the development and implementation of the applicant's proposal. As a result, CCS scores high in the Budget for the Project category.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	7
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has prior experience implementing large district-wide initiatives. Table 40 specifies budget categories, funding sources, and related costs per year for the post grant period, indicating plans for the sustainability of the project. This table is broken down to include key personnel, fringe benefits, travel, supplies, and contractual expenses, each with descriptions to describe their associated costs. The proposed budget includes funds targeted for sustainability planning and program assistance. These funds will be applied in part to help the district achieve capacity to scale up the plan and achieve sustainability. Some of the earliest planning efforts during the first year of the grant will focus on sustainability planning with a formal sustainability plan to be written in year 3 to ensure that EMPOWER personalized learning initiatives will continue beyond the grant period. The Project Director, Advisory Council, sustainability planning team, and Project Director will all be involved in developing and implementing the sustainability plan. Appendix D includes a timeline, activities, deliverables, and responsible parties relating to sustainability planning efforts.

The district already has implemented application of the PDCA cycle in applying data to inform goal setting. This process is a central theme in grant activities and given the efforts of CCS to embed this process into its culture, one can expect that it will continue to inform decision making well into the post-grant period.

Overall, the sustainability plan is reasonably well-developed. It is lacking in quality however, as the timeline and deliverables lack development that would clearly delineate actions and responsibilities into the post-grant period. As a result, CCS scores in the upper middle range for the Sustainability of Project Goals category.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	9

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

Cabarrus County Schools will partner with the Howard Lee Institute for Equity and Opportunity in Education to support students and families, providing collaborative personalized learning environments anytime, anywhere. The Institute is a 501(c)(3) organization aimed at helping at-risk students overcome challenges and graduate ready to enter college and compete in the global workforce. The partnership will help CCS identify and address the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students that are barriers to academic achievement and college and career readiness. Population-level desired results for students include reductions in bullying, victimization, disciplinary referrals, and absences of students. Additional results that impact students and their families include services to address social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. All students in EMPOWER schools will benefit from efforts to reduce bullying through the implementation of a research-based bullying prevention program. Community forums will be held to share data profiles with stakeholders, parents will be instructed in career and blended learning, a supplemental program of academic support and personal growth will be established for boys beginning in grade 3, and young minority males will benefit from mentoring. Community members will be engaged to provide mentoring and socio-emotional support. The Institute will collaborate and partner with the district by serving on the EMPOWER Advisory Council, reaching out to the community, working with minority youth, identifying barriers that impede access to the best education for students.

The district's data dashboard will use aggregated student data, including socio-emotional indicators to show a comprehensive view of each student to be used for implementing targetted academic and behavioral interventions and supports. The district has had success using a Team-Initiated Problem-Solving (TIPS) method to provide a three-tiered

continuum of support to prevent problem behavior while developing positive school climates that support student achievement. Given that TIPS is applied district-wide, the enhanced interventions resulting from the partnership with Howard Lee Institute might be scaled up with relative ease to support the entire district.

The Howard Lee Institute will continually assess progress and use data to inform decisions regarding supports to students and families. The organization will work with educators and other professionals in the school regarding TIPS implementation. The EMPOWER Advisory Council will meet monthly to informally assess the program. A logic model will be employed to provide stakeholders with an organized strategy to outline, analyze, and communicate assumptions about how activities will lead to positive outcomes and to provide a logical base from which to conduct monitoring, articulate desired outcomes, and dissect the crucial pieces of the plan, including inputs, strategies and activities, outputs, and outcomes. A built-in feedback loop will ensure that regular, timely feedback is provided to stakeholders for informed decision making.

Annual performance measures relating to socio-behavioral issues and related targets are provided. The plan also includes a timeline with activities, deliverables, and responsible parties to support implementation.

CCS has developed a collaborative plan to further the development of personalized learning experiences of its EMPOWER students. The plan builds upon and supports the core educational assurance areas by assisting students in socio-behavioral areas that are often barriers to student success. The supports provided to the district via the partnership have strong emphasis on minority students- and especially minority male students. While this may be necessary and appropriate, a more substantial plan of support via the partnership to more broadly serve the school community would strengthen the application. A rationale for the selection of the target intervention group would also be beneficial. As a result of the indicated supports, tools, and services provided to the school community through the partnership with Howard Lee Institute, the CCS application scores in the high range for the Competitive Preference Priority.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met
Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:		
<p>Cabarrus County School District has met Absolute Priority 1. The applicant has coherently and comprehensively built upon the core educational assurance areas to create learning environments designed to significantly improve learning and teaching through personalization of strategies, tools, and supports for students and educators. CCSS, NC Essential Standards, and graduation requirements will support accelerated student achievement and deepened student learning. The effectiveness of educators will be increased through a variety of means of professional learning, including learning via PLCs. Creative blended learning approaches will maximize the reach of the district's most effective instructors through having them serve as subject area teachers, while providing opportunities to enhance instruction through online learning activities that can occur anywhere, anytime. Students in need of academic support will have opportunities for direct, personalized supports through professional tutoring in one-on-one and small group settings. Achievement gaps have been narrowed in recent years, with plans for additional narrowing under the EMPOWER proposal. Graduation rates have also been steadily rising as a result of district efforts, with expectations for the personalized approach to student learning further improving graduation rates for all district students. The personalized learning approach, which includes individualized learning plans that are revisited at least twice per year to reflect upon both short and long-term goal attainment paired with a new approach to learning that favors mastery over seat time will support increased readiness of district students for colleges and careers. The classroom cultural changes beginning in kindergarten will help students value life-long learning and begin thinking about careers. As students mature, they will have classroom experiences rooted in real-world examples and will begin to establish educational and career goals matched with their interests and abilities. Through personalization of the learning experience, students will likely value their learning more, achieve more, and be more prepared for the plans they develop for their lives after high school graduation. As a result, the applicant has met Absolute Priority 1.</p>		
Total	210	184

