



# Race to the Top - District

## Technical Review Form

Application #0216MS-1 for Clarksdale Municipal School District

### A. Vision (40 total points)

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

**(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to a **great extent** that the Clarksdale Municipal School District (CMSD) set forth a vision that is **clear, comprehensive** and **coherent** for the creation of a personalized learning environment for the students served.

This vision is set forth “to equip all its students, through effective teachers and school leaders, with the knowledge, resources, and skills to empower them to: 1) graduate from high school, 2) be successful in college or professional careers, and 3) to be competitive with their peers around the nation and the globe.” This vision is **reasonable** and **achievable** because of the strategies evidenced in the application for accomplishing this vision. Furthermore, the vision has three primary functions.

Firstly, the vision builds on CMSD’s work in **four core educational assurance areas**. In the *first assurance area*, the adoption of standards and assessment that prepare students to be successful in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy has positioned (not guaranteed) CMSD to succeed. This is evidenced in the proposal in the ways that lead to reform. For example, assessments adopted for the reform include the Academy Choice and Cambridge International Examinations as well as the implementation of a comprehensive diagnostic assessment program in all grades. In addition, the adoption of the Common Core Standards was strategically done to complement the Cambridge International Exam. Therefore, through everyday teaching strategies using the common core standards, students will be prepared for the Cambridge International Examination. *The second assurance* aims at building a data system that measures student growth and success and inform teachers and principals with data and how data can be used successfully to improve instruction. This has been a success area. In that, CMSD has designed an interoperable system for data collection, analysis and utilization that drives the decision-making process for all activities related to instructional strategies and student-level interventions at CMSD. For example, data coaches have been hired so that detailed, accurate, authentic and timely reports can be generated and interpreted. This bodes well for the district because it assures validity and reliability of data obtained on the students. *The third assurance* addresses recruiting, developing, rewarding and retaining effective teachers and principals as leaders. There are strong, supported and consistent professional development activities available for teachers to benefit from. In fact, new teachers meet monthly at the Central Office to discuss topics of their choosing. There is also the Teach for America model that provided an on-going source for teachers to staff hard-to-reach schools as well as hard-to fill subject areas such as math and science. Strong teacher collaboration and partnering with other teachers at different campuses serving CMSD is valuable at CMSD. Recruiting is a deliberate and planned process. Partnership with Teach for America has yielded young and vibrant teachers in hard to place positions. Commitment to the Delta Bridge Mentoring initiative also helps to provide teachers with needed information. *The fourth and final assurance* zeroes in on turning around lowest achieving school. This is heart of the personalized education system proposed by CMSD. For example, a methodical approach to accelerating student achievement is in place at CMSD. The data provided evidence regarding the factors contributing to the schools performing at the lowest level. Because real data was collected and analyzed, there was a **clear** understanding of student achievement levels

and each student's weakness. Thus, CMSD started to develop a plan that was **responsive** with clear goals for accelerating student achievement and deepening student learning. These, measures were put in place to turn around the lowest performing schools.

Secondly, CMDS's vision articulates a **clear** and **credible** approach to the goals for accelerating student achievement, deepening student learning, and increasing equity through personalized student support grounded in common and individual tasks that are based on student academic interests. From the narration provided, it was found that CMSD instituted public school choice at the elementary level through a district-wide magnet school system in order to accelerate student achievement. Therefore, from an early age each student has the opportunity to select the elementary magnet school he/she has an interest in. This strategy is further complemented by the removal of the all attendance zone boundaries ensuring that students can attend any school chosen and they are provided transportation. This strategy is a positive move by the district because when students develop an early focus in their academics, research has shown that they generally have a **deeper understanding** of the content area chosen (deepening student learning), spend less time in college changing majors which lead to having less student loan debt (accelerated student achievement). Having implemented a comprehensive, diagnostic assessment program for all grade level also has led to the acceleration of student achievement and increased equity to a personalized learning system. In fact, because of the diagnostic assessment, students who are struggling or those who are gifted and talented can be identified early so that appropriate interventions are provided. In that way, special needs students are given an **equal opportunity** to excel at the level they are at with the APPROPRIATE interventions. Conversely, students who are gifted and talented can be challenged and their learning supported through an accelerated curriculum that meet the individual needs of the student.

Thirdly, the comprehensive vision articulated provides clear descriptions of what the classroom experience will be like for students and teachers participating in personalized learning environment. Because of the adoption of The Excellence for All Program in 2010 the classroom experiences of each student has been impacted in a positive manner at CMSD. There has been enhancement of the core curriculum, increasing **rigor** in the classes and stronger focus on college and career readiness. For example the rigorous Cambridge International Examination Program has been adopted to enable students to better position themselves to compete in the global marketplace. Core curriculum has been enhanced by the adoption of the Common Core Standards that prepare students to succeed and graduate high school having prerequisite knowledge and skills to attend college or start a career with no remediation. Together, these strategies prepare students by furnishing them with more depth of knowledge and the ability to analyze and problem solve in a smaller number of areas, leading to powerful deep learning versus having a narrow understanding of a broad array of content.

In sum, the **quality** evidence presented by CMSD demonstrates a vision that is **clear, meaningful and operational**. Because of the **research-based** success strategies advanced, the full score in the high range was achieved. CMSD provided a full, comprehensive and coherent reform vision that builds upon the four core educational assurance areas; articulates **clear** and **credible** approaches for accelerating students' achievement while deepening their learning in a personalized learning environment; and a **complete** description of appropriate classroom activities.

<b>(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>
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**(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to a **great** extent that the applicant has laid out a **strong** approach to implementing its reform proposal.

(a) A **clear** description of the process that the applicant used to select schools to participate was evident. Based on the strategic plan that was put in place, the needs assessment carried out showed that all the schools in the district were in deed part of the reform initiative to provide a personalized

learning environment. The description is fair because the evidence showed that it was a collaborative community effort. The collaborators were inclusive of: the Board of Trustees; business and community leaders; early childhood agencies; and institutions of higher education etc. Together, they crafted the high-quality plan having a far-reaching initiative to offer a personalized learning environment. Accompanying the personalized learning system is the ability for school choice that is district-wide. Simultaneously, CMSD began implementing the magnet school concept across the district, as parent of the implementation plan.

(b) A listing of 10 schools that will participate in grant activities is available in the proposal. They are classified as follows: Clarksdale High School; 1 vocational facility; 9<sup>th</sup> grade academy; and 7 magnet schools. It is great that all the schools in the district were part of the overall initiative. No grade band was excluded from the initiative. Thus, there can be continuity and a strong focus from the early grades to high school. This is important, so that students can indeed graduate high school being ready and capable of competing at the international level.

(c) A total of 3,192 participating students with (96%) from low-income families; a total of 93.8% identified as high-need; and over 400 educators throughout the district will serve these students. The applicant has met the requirement for serving low-income families and high needs students. The number of educators seems reasonable for the number of students in terms of pupil-teacher ratio.

In sum, the applicant has demonstrated that the competition's eligibility requirement for serving all 3,192 students in the district with no grade-band excluded was adequately met. These students are from low-income families and also are high-need. A few pieces of data were missing from the table inclusive of: the percent of students from low-income groups for Carl Keen Vocational Facility; number of participating educators for Clarksdale High School and 9th grade academy missing the number of students from low-income groups. As a result, this criterion of the application has earned a high-range score.

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

**10**

**9**

**(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to a **great** extent the application included a high-quality plan outlining reform and change at CMSD. The professional development model employed was explained as having far-reaching impact throughout the state of Mississippi. In fact, the Central Office at CMSD is actively involved in developing the new pilot for the Mississippi Principal Evaluation System (MPES). This activity is translated into meaningful reform to support district-wide changes beyond the participating schools.

Teacher evaluation is an important aspect of the total reform initiative to create the personalized learning environment that would effect positive changes in student learning. Thus, CMSD is poised to help reform the Teacher Evaluation System in Mississippi. This is a positive for the school district as well. With the adoption of the Cambridge International Academy, 9th grade academy and the Magnet school themes students are ensured of having access to quality education. Additionally, these are some of the proven reform issues that are currently underway in the district. Timelines are in place and they are realistic for project implementation. The learning goals laid out are measurable and aligned to the outcomes. Additionally, specific deliverables and who impacts the changes also are in place in this high-quality plan.

Conversely, missing from the narrative was a clear logic of how the applicant would reach its outcome goals. For example, the applicant did not provide a logic model or theory of change of how its plan will improve student-learning outcomes for all students who would be served by the applicant.

In sum, the applicant did provide a **logical** description of LEA-wide reform and change strategies worthy of a high-quality plan. Hence, a high-range score was earned.

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

**10**

**8**

**(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to **large** extent to which the applicant's vision is likely to result in improved student learning and performance. This is because tangible evidence has been provided comprising of clear, measurable, ambitious yet achievable goals. In addition, the vision outlined will provide increased equity as demonstrated by the State's ESEA targets for CMSD and by student subgroups.

**(a) Performance on summative assessment:**

As evidenced in the narrative, the summative assessment test that will be used is the Cambridge International Examination (CIE). The (CIE) will be administered twice per year. In addition, Mississippi Curriculum Test 2 (MCT2) and the Subject Area Test Performance (SATP) also will be used. The narrative showed explicitly how performance on summative assessments would delineate the proficiency status and growth of the students benefiting from the personalized learning environment. Each year a modest 3% incremental increase is anticipated. This is a realistic and achievable goal because it takes time for positive results to be seen after a reform initiative has been introduced.

**(b) Decreasing achievement gaps:**

There are three sub-groups identified in the CMSD (Blacks, Whites, Hispanics). Suffice it to say, there are varying degrees of projected increases based on the goal of the subgroup. For example, economically disadvantaged students are expected to have an increase of up to 4% points each year. For noneconomically disadvantaged students, it is expected that there will be an increase of 2%. For Blacks and Asian students, it is projected that the 10% achievement gap will be narrowed. Noticeably missing from the narrative is any indication of how specific strategies that will be in place to help the Asian students close the 10% gap. In addition, no timeline was provided indicating the closure of this achievement gap.

**(c) Graduation rates:**

The goal is to increase graduation rates by 5% each year for student using the traditional route to graduate. Conversely, the Ombusman Center provides an alternative educational route. At-risk students generally utilize the Ombusman model because they are given the true support needed. Over the years, this program has led to success whereby graduation and skill level of the students are increased, corresponding to a decrease in dropout and truancy rates.

**(d) College enrollment rates:**

With an increase of 3% graduation yearly projected a corresponding 3% increase in college enrollment per year also is expected. Because of the logical progression, the applicant has supported a minimal band width of increases that is aligned with student performance in this category.

**(e) Postsecondary degree attainment:**

Based on current enrollment rate of students in post-secondary institutions, it is safe to project how many students would continue to do so. The table provided shows the enrollment in the post-secondary area was modest. Based on past enrollment the projections are to include a 3% increase over time. For example, in 2012-2013 there were 24 students recorded as entering 4-year institutions in Mississippi. By the year 2017-2018, a predictive outcome would be 80 students expected to enter institutions of higher education. With the plans in place that clearly support student learning, it is likely to happen that they will experience a 30% increase in college enrollment. Having entered these

institutions, the question asked is, how likely will it be for students to remain and attain their post-secondary degree? Based on the high-quality plan presented that is anchored in research findings, it is very likely for such students to be retained because they have been exposed to a culture of success from an early age. Therefore, it is very likely for these students to enter and be retained in college and eventually be awarded their degrees.

In sum, the applicant provided a realistic and achievable plan to improve student learning. This includes: increase performance on standardized tests; increase the graduation rates over time; closing the achievement gaps, and increasing college enrollment and post-secondary degree attainment. The general goals are SMART. That means they are specific and strategic, measurable, action-oriented, rigorous, realistic, research-based and results-focused, as well as time-bound and tracked. The weakness in this area was missing data clearly indicating the strategies that will be in place to work specifically with Asian students in the district. Because of the missing information this criterion earned a high-range score--not the full score.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>

**(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to the **fullest extent** that CMSD had demonstrated evidence of a track record of success in the past four years in advancing student learning and achievement as well as increasing equity in learning and teaching strategies. This has been demonstrated through the evidence provided throughout the proposal illustrating CMSD's ability and capacity to impact the students served. For example, concrete data has been provided to illustrate its ability to improve student learning, reform the lowest achieving schools and make student data available and accessible.

(a) There has been a steady improvement in the district since Mississippi Accountability System was adopted by CMSD. As a result, evidence of steady improvement in student learning outcomes which contributes to the incremental closing of the achievement gaps has been experienced. Furthermore, with a focus on student-centered teaching and learning there is evidence of student achievement rising. These improvements lead inevitably to increases in high school graduation rates leading students on a steady trajectory to enroll in college. Thus, higher enrollment rates. For the high needs students served in this district, this focus on accountability has benefited them greatly.

The Quality Distribution Index (QDI) measure that is used throughout the district has shown steady growth across all schools since this index was utilized starting in 2008-2009 school year. Overall, a 33 points growth has been charted showing growth as measured by the QDI. One of the positive uses of the QDI index is the fact that graduation rates also are factored in. The flagship of the QDI has been the elementary schools some of which have received recognition from the Mississippi Center for Public Policy for being in the top 20 schools in the state for raising student achievement. This recognition is **significant** because students' achievement has been raised while serving a population having 90% or above of the students on free and reduced lunch. This is a big deal that signals a great accomplishment by these elementary schools. In order to be scalable, the other schools in the district now need to model the behaviors of the elementary schools in order to impact students achievement in similar ways.

(b) There has been significant achievement of ambitious and significant reforms in 2 of the 10 chronically low-performing schools. Students' performance was lacking because of teacher quality

issues. These persistently lowest-achieving schools (low-performing schools) did not meet the annual yearly progress target. Hence, these schools were on school improvement watch. With a new stream of revenue funding, and strong visionary leadership, both schools embarked on a rigorous turnaround model of development. Because of this focus non-performing teachers and administrators were replaced, aligning the curriculum with rigorous instructional standards, implementing ongoing academic assessments and having responsive data measures in place. These strategies were coupled with the provision of high-quality job-embedded professional development. This resulted in raising teacher quality which in-turn has impacted student achievement.

Further complementary strategies that contributed to the student success include: school on Saturdays, Cambridge Boot camp as well as after-school extended day programs. Research has shown that it is a combination of targeted activities in schools that lead to improved student and teacher quality. You cannot have one without the other. Therefore, the strategies selected were indeed (SMART) strategic, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound--benefiting all students.

(c) It is of little benefit if schools simply collect data and does not make such accessible to students and educators for helping with decision-making. Hence, CMSD has implemented measures making student performance data available to students, educator and parents in ways that inform and improve participation, instruction, and services. There is and has been an aggressive and continuous campaign to reach parents and the community with data. Specifically open houses are scheduled throughout the year. Student academic performance is presented to the public Board Meetings. Presentations and data are given to the news media for publication. Also implemented is the Superintendent's Round Table activity, which is a district wide Title 1 parent night. Furthermore, students themselves have access to these performance data so they can analyze their own strengths and weaknesses in the bid to "own their results." The evidence has shown that over the years, these strategies have been **effective** in creating a winning mindset in the students and parents leading to improvement of student performance and simultaneously deepening student learning.

In sum, CMSD has successfully **proven** that its clear track record of success poises the district for further successes. Low-performing schools have been turned around by employing ambitious yet achievable goals that can be best described as being (SMART) strategic, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. As a result, there has been a steady increase in student achievement levels, **significant** achievement in low performing schools, and open **access** to data at multiple levels. These proven success strategies that have been documented satisfied this criterion so that it has earned a high-range score.

<b>(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
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**(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to a **great** extent that CMSD has demonstrated a high level of transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments. The actual expenditure for salaries school-level expenditures for regular K-12 instruction, instructional support, pupil support, and school administration all are posted and accessible for all to see.

- (a) Actual personnel salaries at the school level for all school-level instructional and support staff, based on the Census Bureau's classification has been posted.
- (b) Actual personnel salaries at the school level for instructional staff only is readily available on the district's web site.
- (c) Actual personnel salaries at the school level for teachers only are clearly available.
- (d) Actual non-personnel expenditures at the school level also is available to the public for scrutiny.

In sum, there is transparency with regard to the policies and practices to be followed in the CMSD activities. These expenditures are posted on the website under personnel. Having outlined all the salaries on the public website visible to all, constitutes transparency in this LEA. In addition, the Central Office also will provide one with answers to questions they may have regarding financial matters in the district. This high level of transparency argues well for CMSD, showing they are fiscally prudent and accountable with regards to monetary gains. Because of this level of transparency, a **high-range score** was earned.

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

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**(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to the **full extent** that CMSD has demonstrated strong evidence of successful conditions and sufficient autonomy under State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements. The school district has used the autonomy they have to help implement and enhance the personalized learning environments described in the proposal. *First*, CMSD works closely with Mississippi Department of Education on all issues ranging from curriculum matters such as standards adoption to litigations including desegregation matters. *Second*, CMSD and the Department of Education now have a very dynamic partnership. This partnership has led to the elimination of the notion that MDOE is simply a "paper focused agency." To CMSD, the MDOE is a real, living entity that has a heart and soul needed to work with the district in creating and maintaining statutory and autonomous relationships. *Third*, CMSD has had the autonomy to expand many of the research-based practices mandated by the School Improvement Transformation Model regulations, because there was a time when many of the schools in CMSD were on school improvement. These practices have propelled the school district forward because the emphasis was placed on the children's education. In other words, student learning became a top priority. This student-centered focus is what is important in any school district. Students have to be the top priority in order for policies to be in place that are compatible with deepening student learning and increased student achievement. *Fourth*, CMSD abided by the state and federal regulations to restructure the curriculum to create a responsive personalized learning environments. Even with the regulatory oversight, CMSD had autonomy to increase school hours across the district. This is interesting because the school district saw the need to make this adjustment based on the students needs, and they were permitted to do so. Due to the autonomy in the school district other successful conditions created. For example, there was the removal of the required attendance zones--leading to greater school choice. Parents now have the autonomy to send their children anywhere in district leading to greater equity and access for all students. Thus, no longer were some schools labeled at high performing because only a certain set of students could attend such a school. The playing field was leveled with this initiative. The greatest result of this action was a mindset of "oneness" that rippled throughout the school district. The creation of this one mindedness is an important element in defining the success being felt throughout the school district. Hence, this was a positive and worthwhile strategy that broke down barriers and removed stigmas from some schools in the district.

In sum, the applicant provided a robust description of successful conditions that led to autonomy in the school district. Working closely with the regulatory body The Mississippi Department of Education, changes were made that led to improved access, equity, and autonomy. As a result, this criterion has earned a high-range score.

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

15

15

**(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to the **greatest** extent that CMSD has demonstrated full evidence of meaningful stakeholder engagement throughout the development of the proposal and meaningful stakeholder support. A full

and complete description of how students, families, teachers, and principals in participating schools were engaged in the development of the proposal, complete with their continuous engagement and feedback were provided. For example, multiple stakeholder meetings were held at the different levels (school administrators, teachers, parent groups, student groups and community based groups). There also were a series of joint public and private meetings. The media was involved so that meetings could be broadcasted as part of the role to be transparent. The district's website was enhanced to provide information to the public. Principals worked with faculty to develop logic models in order to determine the needs of the schools and practical steps to follow in order to meet those needs. Learning outcomes were charted and specific timelines for deliverables established. Budgets also were developed with stakeholders allowing for a wide range of input as well as **transparency**.

The feedback loop was valued whereby the school administrators listened to the voices of the stakeholders in order to make modification and come up with a personalized learning environment that could be supported and sustained beyond the life time of any grant. This **responsiveness** is very important for school initiatives to stick and be successful. After all, leadership changes are inevitable and if procedures and policies are not in place that were agreed upon collectively, this could lead to negative results when there is change.

CMSD does not have collective bargaining representation. The evidence submitted indicated that 92% of the teachers across the school district shared their enthusiastic support for creating a strategic, measurable, action-oriented, results-focused and time-bound personalized learning environment across the district.

CMSD has a great arsenal of support letters from key stakeholders including parents with limited English proficiency and parent organizations, students from various grade levels, student organizations, early learning programs, the business community, civil rights organizations, advocacy groups, local civic and community-based organizations, national libraries, workforce alliance and institutions of higher education. These support letters were meaningful, relevant and genuine. Stakeholders who provided letters of support were very informed and knowledgeable about the needs in the school district. Therefore, their letters informed the grant proposal. Specifically the letters from students as low as 2nd grade conveyed a strong message that these students knew what was going on at their schools and they wanted to contribute to the provision of a personalized learning environment. These letters also conveyed that the students were aware that the school district had their interest at the forefront.

In sum, the inclusion of parents, community members, business leaders and the wider community in planning, implementing and evaluating the learning environment proposed was proactive, innovative and relevant. This action communicates to the wider community that stake holding groups are valuable in the decision making process. This type of **genuine** support and inclusion bodes well for the CMSD. Having provided full evidence of meaningful stakeholder engagement, this criterion has earned full points in the high-range category.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	19
(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:		

It is to a **great** extent that a high-quality plan for improving student learning was provided from CMSD. Because the plan includes some elements indicative of a rigorous, systematic and relevant approach to implementing instructional strategies it is definitely achievable, a high-range score was earned. From the account, participating students will have the opportunity to pursue a 'rigorous course of study' that is aligned to college and/or career-ready standards leading to the meeting of outlined graduation requirements.

First, the approach to learning has positive elements of engaging and empowering all learners, in ways that are age-appropriate. For example, CMSD has developed a multi-pronged approach through its development of magnet schools. These magnet schools **enable students to pursue a rigorous course of study in a specific content area starting in the elementary schools**. Furthermore, the solid support pledges from parents and educators show that there is a community effort that places value on the views of both internal and external stakeholders. Having input from other stakeholders such as parents also will ensure sustainability of project ideas. With the support of parents and educators, students are better able to understand that what they are learning is key to their success in accomplishing their goals. They have to have a personal investment in their learning. Therefore, they have to complete homework, be engaging in their class activities, be prepared for formative and summative assessments and also seek help when needed. Educators in this proposal have outlined the learning goals for students that are aligned with the Common Core Standards as well as linked to college and/or career-ready standards. The evidence suggest that students will be guided in understanding how to structure their learning to achieve their goals, and measure progress toward those goals using the personalized learning system that will be put in place. Students are expected to and will be immersed into deep learning experiences in areas of academic interest. For example, the magnet school concept is designed to help students learn concepts they are interested in deeper versus having a broad knowledge of many course. There are 5 magnet schools each focusing on specific theme. Therefore, students who attend Booker T. Washington International Baccalaureate Magnet Elementary School will have a very deep understanding of International relations when compared to students to attend the Kirkpatrick Health and Medical Sciences Magnet Elementary School and vice versa. Students have access to and exposure to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives that motivate and deepen individual student learning. Again, the magnet school concept in and of itself is built on diversity of content and concepts. The inquiry-based cross-curricular approach to teaching and learning also facilitate **diversity**. Involving community leaders and higher education faculty from the health field and other related content area provides multiple perspectives. The provision of multiple perspectives also leads to mastery of critical academic content. This mastery also leads to the development of skills and traits inclusive of students being able to; set achievable goals, work in teams, develop perseverance, critical thinking, strong communication, creativity, and problem-solving skills. For students to be college and/or career ready, the skills listed above are deemed important in order for students to succeed. In this aspect of the narrative, the clear focus was on engaging and empowering the learners with age-appropriate training and challenges. The applicant has clearly satisfied this component of the narrative.

Second, based on the strong partnership and support from parents and educators each student will has access to 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/or career-ready. This is evidenced through the magnet school concept as well as the Cambridge International program. For example, the child who loves music or the arts, but also has a great interest in the natural world could attend Heidelberg STEAM Elementary where this combine interest could be pursued with rigorous academics. Students who want a more culturally diverse perspective can enroll at Myrtle Hall 4 Language Immersion School where immersion in Spanish in the content areas begins in Kindergarten. Students interested in the health professions and/or Wellness and Fitness can attend Kirkpatrick Health & Medical Sciences School. These magnet schools will get the students focused at an early age in the content they are interested in. Furthermore, as students' progress through the grades, they can continue at the same school, or elect

at the end of the school year to move to another school, if their name is chosen in the lottery. A variety of high-quality instructional approaches and environments accompany the magnet schools. Students conduct many hands-on learning activities through exploration and thematic learning experiences. These experiences also are facilitated through a variety of persons within the school and the community. Students are learning content that is accessible through digital means. For example, the proposal documented the use of iPads, computers, laptops, educational software and Promethean boards. This communicated the fact that teachers are using technology as an effective means of reaching students who may not be reached otherwise with traditional means of teaching.

The proposal indicates ongoing and regular feedback that ensures the teachers and parents are frequently updated with the most recent student data. Multiple gateways are measured so that student learning is improved continually. Therefore, if a student starts performing at a lower level, with frequent measurement, this can be addressed in the most appropriate manner to get the student back on track. This is because the personalized learning recommendations will be tied directly to the student's current knowledge and skills, stated standards as well as pre-determined deliverables and outcomes. These are all tied to the content to be learned, instructional approaches, and supports in place based on the needs of each student. So, programs such as the Scholastic reading 180, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test, Renaissance Star Reading and Star Math are used to create the personalized learning environment that is interoperable. The response to intervention measure is embedded in the personalized learning environment proposed. Therefore, the proposal provided strong evidence that there are adequate accommodations and high-quality strategies for high-need students in place to contribute to the overall preparation of each student that in the long run, if implemented as planned will help to ensure that students are on track toward meeting college and/or career-ready.

*Third*, there was little evidence that mechanisms were in place to provide training and support to students. Mention was made of providing training from the earliest years. However, no specifics were included in this section of the narrative. However, with any personalized system, it is expected that during classes students would be told how to access information as well as use the technology in place. It is expected that the older kids would definitely have training geared at ensuring they clearly understand how to use the various technology tools and resources provided, so they can help to track and manage their learning.

In sum, it was to a great extent that the applicant provided a high-quality plan earning a high-range score.

<b>(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>
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**(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to a **great** extent that the applicant has provided a high-quality plan for improving learning and teaching by the personalizing learning environment postulated. This plan include an appropriate approach to implement instructional strategies for all students. It is projected in this high-quality plan that students would receive the support needed to pursue a rigorous course of study aligned to college and/or career-ready standards. In order to provide any lucrative support, that positively impacts student learning, the teachers and leaders have to be properly trained.

*First*, mention has been made regarding training for all participating educators in order for them to improve instruction. Mention is made of professional development activities that focus on the magnet themes and how such impacts the personalized learning environment envisioned. A professional development training plan was provided as evidence to indicate training oportunities. This timetable outlined when the training would take place, where, who would be in charge and the outcomes of such training. What was missing was a plan beyond the 2013-2014 school year. Specifically, this criterion asked for a 3 year plan beyond the grant funding years. This evidence was not furnished. Hence, the

full picture of implementation after the grant funding years were not available. This omission, led to reduced score for this criterion.

Support was evident for the effective implementation of personalized learning environments and measurable strategies that meet each student's academic needs. As a result, teaching strategies that encourage interaction between students and teachers as well as students to students were identified as being the standard at each magnet school and Cambridge sites. Furthermore, it was well documented that instruction organized around projects, research inquiries and **collaborative** work would be the hallmark of preparing students so they can graduate on-time as well as college and career ready.

Clear evidence was provided outlining the adaption of content and instruction in order to provide students with genuine opportunities for engagement in common and individual tasks that are responsive to students', academic needs, interests, and optimal learning approaches. For example, students have the opportunity to choose the elementary school experience desired. Schools are boundary free allowing the free flow of students between and among school districts. Furthermore, after leaving elementary school, students have the opportunity to join learning communities having 60 or fewer students to interact with. Instruction is cross-curricular and differentiated—allowing students to work at their own level while they are being challenged to meet the goals and objectives set for them to accomplish. Magnet schools by their very nature engender engaging classrooms that foster a climate of ongoing discussions, collaborative work, project-based learning, as well as the use of technology, and hands-on activities that requires the use of manipulatives.

Reasonable indicators showing student progress toward meeting college- and career-ready standards being measured frequently have been documented. CMSD describes itself as being data driven with a functional "War Room" equipped with the evidences of charts and graphs showing how student learning is measured. The results of summative and formative assessments are clearly outlined providing a synopsis of students' performance across the school district. Teacher and student attendance also are tracked as a means of accountability. CMSD had used this data gathered from students' performance to inform both the acceleration of student progress and the improvement of the individual and collective practice of teachers. After all, teacher quality and presence in the classroom coupled with other variables such as effective instruction impacts students learning. Friendly competitions are fostered among the schools to help students deepening their learning. Student behavior as part of the social and emotional growth is tracked. Schools having the least confrontations and behavioral problems are recognized. This helps to place the responsibility of being good citizens on the shoulders of the students themselves.

Effective ways of improving the practice of teachers and principals in terms of feedback provided a **valid** evaluation system is appropriately documented. CMSD is one of the pilot schools in the early development of the teacher evaluation plan. They have in place plans to integrate a teacher compensation program with the teacher evaluation system. In addition CMSD is also piloting the principal evaluation system in Mississippi using both qualitative and quantitative measures. This was a full picture of teacher and principal performance will be provided so that effective decisions can be made. The district curriculum team observes teachers frequently to offer support, make recommendations and provide interventions where needed. Missing from the narrative was a timetable detailing when teachers would be observed, the school level, why they would be observed, and the overall frequency of observations each year.

Second, the applicant has detailed access educators have to training whereby they become knowledgeable about how to use the tools, data, and resources to accelerate student progress.

As part of the evidence for actionable information that helps educators identify optimal learning approaches that respond to individual student academic needs and interests, CMSD has justified the need for high-quality learning resources especially digital resources. This is substantiated by the fact that each classroom in the CMSD is technology friendly. This includes Promethean boards, iPads, laptops, and regular computers, having Internet access. These resources are appropriate as they

support instruction to get students college and/or career-ready.

A good faith approach has been made to develop a plan that outlines the processes to be followed and the tools to be used that adequately match student needs. In addition, the intent is to provide continuous feedback about the effectiveness of the resources in meeting student needs. As a result, CMSD has plans to utilize the skills of the RTTT-D project director to develop a feedback mechanism that allows free flowing feedback from the principal, teachers and students regarding the effectiveness of the resources. From the feedback anticipated, appropriate decisions will be made regarding areas such as professional development needed.

*Third*, all CMSD leaders and school leadership teams have training, policies, tools, data, and resources that enable them to structure an effective learning environment that meets individual student academic needs. This also accelerates student progress through common and individual tasks. The training, policies, tools, data, and resources identified, shows a rich array of activities. For example, information from the district’s teacher evaluation system when this comes into play will help school leaders and school leadership teams assess and take steps to improve individual and collective educator effectiveness and school culture and climate, for the purpose of continuous school improvement. Currently, “The Boots on the Ground” approach is being used whereby the curriculum team, principals and superintendents are constantly in the schools and classrooms. The “Grow your Own” administrator academy also is in place. This helps with preserving the school’s culture as well. The area of training, systems, and practices to continuously improve school progress toward the goals of increasing student performance and closing achievement gaps also is a strong focus of this application. CMSD is determined to ensure that all teachers receive adequate off-site as well as embedded professional development. However, missing from this narrative is a timetable of professional development activities that goes beyond the 2013-2014 school year.

*Fourth*, the applicant has made a stalwart attempt to provide a high-quality plan for increasing the number of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals. Teachers who are struggling in the classroom are targeted to receive additional coaching and targeted professional development that will help them improve instruction. If after intervention improvement is not observed, then the teacher’s contract may not be renewed. CMSD works closely with Teach for America—hosting their summer training. Because of the partnership with Teach for America, CMSD has positioned itself to benefit from these teachers in order to staff hard-to-staff schools, subjects such as mathematics and science, as well as specialty areas including special education. Work also is done with MAE/CAE in the "Grow your own Educator" initiative through their 3 Point Plan to solve teacher shortage. This includes the provision of Praxis workshops for individuals who are seeking to become teachers.

In sum, it is to a **great** extent that CMSD has provided a high-quality plan addressing the areas of teaching and leading. What was missing was a plan beyond the 2013-2014 school year--leaving a gap in the narrative. Specifically, this criterion asked for a 3 year plan beyond the grant funding years. This evidence was not furnished. Hence, the full picture of implementation and support needed were not seen in the years after the grant. However, even with this gap, a high-range score was still earned. This is because strong evidence was provided that CMSD has the capacity and leadership in and place can furnish the high-needs students in that district with a personalized learning environment that is ambitious, **appropriate** and feasible.

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

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	14
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:		

It is to a **large** extent that the applicant has produced a high-quality plan to support project implementation. The applicant has demonstrated that there is a comprehensive set of policies and infrastructure in place that provide each student and educator with the support and resources needed for creation, maintaining and facilitating a successful personalized learning environment.

First, the evidence point to an organized LEA central office staffed to provide support and services to all participating schools in CMSD. Together, they fully support the school improvement plan already in place and the Central Office being an active stakeholder in the preparation of the proposal stand ready to help with implementation of the personalized learning environment. Each week there is a planned staff meeting so that the policies and procedures are reinforced and specific courses of actions are taken that benefit the school district. The role and function of the Central Office is to support all learning activities carried out in the school district from janitorial services to examinations. What was missing from this narrative was any mention of the number of staff members. Sometimes a Central Office can be top-heavy with duplicative activities, thus reducing funding from instructional activities. No mention was made of the number of staff members in this office and their roles in the office.

Second, CMSD has provided each school leadership team with flexibility and autonomy to make decisions that relate to implementation of policies and guidelines. School schedules and calendars are set at the district level with direct input from each school. School personnel decisions and staffing models general follow a uniform process. Each leader knows his/her roles and responsibilities. Because of the culture of transparency and collaborativeness, decisions regarding staffing, calendars, procedures, budgeting etc., are carried out at the discretion of the school leader, who generally collaborates with other school leaders in the district so that the best decision is made that will impact students in a positive manner. Missing from this narrative was whether or not large purchases were made at the district level or at the individual school level.

Third, the Excellence for All Program and the Cambridge International Examination Program are designed to measure student mastery. As a result, students have the opportunity to progress and earn credit based on demonstrated mastery, not so much on the amount of time spent on a topic. When a student has mastered a benchmark/standard, then the student can move up to the next level. Students can retake an assessment if not mastered the first time. Students who struggle with a benchmark assessment can receive intensive intervention. Conversely, early exit also is available for students who master the content at a faster pace. Because of the flexibility of the assessments systems CMSD students have adopted mastery, rather than seat time. Mastery of content has become a benchmark for goal attainment in the personalized learning environment proposed at CMSD. These measures outlined above are achievable and implementable. Strong support systems are in place to ensure that students needing interventions are identified. After identification, the intervention is tailored to match the specific need of the student because of the responsive system that is in place.

Fourth, at CMSD, the plan is to develop a responsive system that provides for personalized learning whereby students are given the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of standards at multiple times and in multiple comparable ways. Digital Learning Now, Renaissance Star Reading and Star Math are digital platforms that provide formative assessments for students take. Star Assessments are linked with the response to Intervention function. Some assessments are given 3-4 times each year. This will facilitate an accurate portrayal of a student's ability to master the benchmark he/she is tested on. Thus, there is longitudinal data available to map a student's performance in a given year. A shared vision of assessment is developed and fostered through the school district. This leads to the culture of assessment evident in the instructional practices from elementary to high school. Thus, culture of assessment leads to healthy decision making that is data driven.

Fifth, the provision of learning resources and instructional practices that are adaptable and fully accessible to all students, including students with disabilities and English learners is important in CMSD. A long history has been established that shows a strong commitment to accommodating students with exceptionalities (from disabilities to gifted and talented). Because CMSD students are

properly evaluated, they are matched with the appropriate resources that will ensure they are successful in school in spite of any limitation inclusive of English as a second language.

In sum, this criterion has earned a high-range score because the application has evidenced appropriate measures in place--policies, practices and rules that benefit all students. Therefore, students with exceptionalities are treated equitable as they receive the appropriate services and support needed for them to succeed. Indeed, this plan of a high-quality as CMSD has outlined clear achievable goals, the timelines are realistic, deliverables keep with the goals and the stakeholders who are responsible for implementing the activities identified.

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

**10**

**7**

**(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to **some extent** that the applicant has a high-quality plan to support project implementation through comprehensive policies and infrastructure. This plan seeks to provide each student, educator at each level of the education system with the support and resources needed. Furthermore, CMSD has a strong school infrastructure that supports personalized learning. This is evidenced in the following ways:

First, 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 a personalized learning environment. Several instructional technology projects inclusive of the use of iPads, laptop computers, online digital curriculum resources, mobile technologies have been made available to students. From the account, it is clear that no distinction is made based on income. The tools available are for usage both in and outside of the classroom. For any learning initiative to be most effective, it is imperative that students have consistent access to resources that knows no boundaries and extends beyond the classroom. There is even a checkout system in place for parents to have access to digital devices. In collaboration with the city of Clarksdale, 4-G wireless technology also have been brought in. With the expansion of wireless technology public areas such as libraries, community centers and public housing will have Internet access so that the most all individuals can also have access to the Internet.

Second, students, parents, educators and other stakeholders have little appropriate levels of technical support needed for success which is provided through few strategies. For example there is a homework help system done through e-mail and links to the Khan Academy available to all students. This sparse description is inadequate to clearly explain technology support. Merely stating that "technical support is available...anytime and from anyplace is not enough." More needs to be said with regard to technical support, such as when, where, how and why. This was a weakness in the narrative.

Third, the use of information technology systems that allow parents and students to export their information in an open data format and to use the data in other electronic learning systems was sparsely addressed. A strong plan for such was proposed. Significant upgrades and advances in wireless technology have been made. Technology would be available in the check-out system for parents and students.

Fourth, CMSD uses the Mississippi Student Information Systems (MSIS) as an interoperable data system. This data warehouse has student-level data inclusive of state assessment, demographic and daily indicators of attendance, discipline and other data at the classroom level on each student. In addition, teachers use technology-supported curriculum and instructional programs that has student-level data. What was missing from this narrative was whether or not the two systems mentioned above interacted with each other.

In sum, CMSD has a clear high-quality plan for infrastructure to support the personalized learning environment. There were clear goals, deliverables, realistic timelines and measurable outcomes evidenced throughout the proposal. However, this plan was lacking in some areas. For example, there was little evidence to clearly show how students and families could access to materials and resources as well as receive technical support. Furthermore, the use of two systems to track student data could get confusing, and there was no evidence indicating whether or not both systems were integrated so that full data could be obtained when needed. An interoperable data system is the best way of having a comprehensive system for obtaining data in place for teachers, students, parents and administrators to pull full data on each student. Because of the missing data, a mid-range score was earned.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>

**(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to a **great** extent that the applicant has provided a high-quality plan for implementing a rigorous and continuous improvement process. This high-quality plan further provides timely and regular feedback on progress toward project goals and opportunities for ongoing corrections and improvements both during and after the term of the grant. In addition, this high-quality plan shows how CMSD will monitor, measure, and publicly share information on the quality of its investments including investments in professional development, technology, and staff.

*First*, a clear and **feasible** plan having ambitious yet achievable goals was charted showing CMSD's plan for continuous improvement. This plan is feasible because it aligns the key goals (anchored on the 4 educational assurances areas) with the specific activity to accomplish the stated goal; it provides a rationale for the activity selected, provides a timeline for accomplishments, the concrete deliverables expected and it identifies the person **responsible** for that specific goal attainment. This is what helps to make this plan high-quality. There are very **clear** processes and procedures that are clearly outlined to ensure student success.

*Second*, the plan for monitoring the continuous improvement for the grant initiative builds on the ideals of professional growth and continuous improvement of the already existing teacher evaluation system. This is of high-quality and commendable because the proposed initiative cannot be successful without the strong leadership and mentoring from the teachers in place. A full listing of professional development dates are **evidenced** in the proposal providing proof that professional development will be a major point of focus in this initiative. In essence, all teachers will be held accountable and responsible to provide effective classroom instruction based on clear and measurable performance indicators. In addition, a **detailed** assessment rubric will be furnished in order to collect valid and reliable data regarding student learning.

*Third*, the information will be publicly shared with all internal and external stakeholders. A very **detailed** plan for continuous engagement and communication provided evidence of the proposed continuous engagement with stake holders. This is important because too often stakeholders are left out of the feedback loop after a grant seeking agency was identified to fund the project. Communication will continue with the student advisory body, the Superintendents' Roundtable, PTO meetings at the school level, superintendents' newsletter, local newspaper and the website. These are all important forums that will prove to be essential to stakeholders continuing to be an integral part of the school district.

In sum, a high-quality plan was furnished. From the outset, there were ambitious yet realistic goals

guided by a strong vision in this proposal. This vision and goals do set the stage for implementing a rigorous continuous improvement process. The deliverables and learning outcomes outlined in the proposal were measurable. Timelines were realistic for project implementation and the seeding of student success. In addition, the specific personnel were in place to oversee project implementation. Missing from this section of the narrative was **clear** evidence that pointed to receiving and utilizing timely feedback as the applicant progress towards project goals and opportunities for ongoing corrections and improvements. This was **implied** especially in the area for project evaluation. However, there were no specific (unequivocal) information addressing timely and regular feedback. Even with this missing formation, this high-quality plan merits a score in the high-range.

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

5

5

**(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to a **great** extent that a high-quality plan for ongoing communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders was provided. Communication was documented in the narrative as being ongoing with all stakeholders during and after the grant activities. The information will be publicly shared with all internal and external stakeholders as part of the bigger transparency process. A very **detailed** plan for continuous engagement and communication provided evidence of the proposed continuous engagement with stakeholders. This is important because too often stakeholders are left out of the feedback loop after a grant seeking agency was identified to fund the project. Communication will continue with the student advisory body, the Superintendent's Roundtable, PTO meetings at the school level, superintendents newsletter, local newspaper and the website. These are all important forums that will prove to be essential to stakeholders continuing to be an integral part of the school district.

In sum, the applicant has demonstrated a clear and high-quality approach that will lead to continuously improving its plans. As a result, this criterion of the narrative has earned a high-range score. The key goals are clear and measurable, the rationale for activities are supported, the timeline is realistic and the parties responsible for implementing the outlined activities are all in place.

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

5

5

**(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to a great extent that the applicant provided a **high-quality** response in this section earning a high-range score. This high-range score is **justifiable** because the applicant documented the clear performance measures at each grade band. The goals from the outset of the proposal are ambitious yet achievable goals. The performance measures designed and the annual targets are aligned with the goals, activities, subgroup population and applicable population. Alignment of the goals and activities are key to project success. The applicant has accomplished this needed alignment providing proof that CMSD is capable of helping students deepen their learning and improve their achievement by subgroups through a relevant and meaningful personalized learning environment. The evidence shows 12 specific performance measures that are broken out by grade bands and subpopulations.

(a) Very clear and justifiable rationale for selecting each performance measure is furnished for each grade band.

(b) Each measure is designed to provide rigorous and timely action to measure success. As set forth in the application, CMSD will collect, analyze, and disseminate data to ensure that decisions are made in a timely manner based on the information provided by student data. Modifications will then made throughout the life cycle of the program and beyond the life of the grant. The external evaluator has a crucial job of providing **critical** evaluation results to the project leaders in a timely manner. Constant

communication with internal and external stakeholders is important for systematic monitoring and feedback for project improvement.

Growth is calculated at 3% to take into consideration the difference in growth rates by grade bands as well as the Cambridge International Examination Program expectations. The projected 3% increase is **realistic** because it is a manageable target. Higher targets would be less than achievable and **realistic**, in that lower targets would not set a high enough benchmark for improved performance. The applicant evidenced carrying out sophisticated calculations to arrive at the ambitious yet achievable 3% growth rate.

(c) Reviews of the performance measures are built in through the structured evaluation process so that modifications can be put in place as the project advances. Furthermore, the logic model presented earlier in the application also will help to gauge the process of implementation.

In sum, having clearly outlined 12 ambitious yet achievable performance measures, full score in the high-range was earned by the applicant.

<b>(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>
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**(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to **some** extent that the applicant provided a high-quality plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the grant funded activities, including professional development and activities that employ technology. The applicant successfully charted the key goals of the project alongside the activities to be carried out. These goals are ambitious yet achievable. Furthermore, a succinct rationale was provided for each activity. The timeline for accomplishment, deliverables and personnel responsible also were charted for clarity and efficiency. Professional development activities will be evaluated using data from the Mississippi Teacher Evaluation System a quantitative based norm-referenced evaluation. To supplement such an evaluation, principals will evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development activities qualitatively. This is because a full picture is needed regarding the effectiveness of the professional development activities employed at CMSD. This will also lead to checks and balances within the system. At another level teachers will evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development activities they were engaged in because their voices must be heard regarding the usefulness or the lack thereof of the professional development activity.

The role, use and function of technology also will be evaluated with the professional development activities. Parents and teachers will evaluate their students' performance on the Cambridge International Examination and provide feedback. In doing so a decision can be reached to measure whether or not the instructional strategies teachers use to prepare the students are viable in helping student problem-solve and pass this international test that has been adopted. Further evidence has been provided that an overall matrix will be developed to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the project. This matrix will be distributed to internal and external stakeholders to gain their input. The external evaluator will have access to the results of this data collected to be factored in as part of the bigger evaluation.

In sum, the applicant has provided a plan for evaluating the effectiveness of the personalized learning environment designed for the students in CMSD. Missing from the narrative was clear information regarding how the evaluation will be carried out. Will surveys be sent out to stakeholders? Will the evaluation be administered on-line or paper based? What type of response rates are anticipated? These were questions not answered due to the missing information. Because of the missing information especially as it relates to a rigorous evaluation plan, a mid-range score was earned for this criterion.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>

**(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to a **great extent** that the applicant’s budget, including the budget narrative and tables have provided a detailed account of how funds will be used.

*First*, funds that will support the project were identified as a total of \$9,744,732.54. This figure is in keeping with the amount of funding to be disbursed based on the number of students to be served. CMSD serves over 3,000 students. Matching funds from other sources that will support the project was identified as \$9,771,485. These additional funds would be obtained from Mississippi Department of Education school improvement grant, the local school district and the Magnet School assistant grant, as well as LEA, state, and federal funds. These additional funds will provide salaries for the Central Office staff, use of the facilities, support services, special education services and professional development activities. Using these additional funding in such tangible ways is a welcoming idea. this way, the funds being asked for can be truly used to build a personalized learning environment that is truly learner-centered. Thus, these funds will support classroom instruction, enhance teacher effectiveness and provide much needed resources and equipment that will increase student effectiveness, deepen student learning and prepare students to be college and career ready.

*Second*, based on the description of the personalized learning environment envisioned by CMSD, the amount requested seems reasonable and sufficient to support the development and implementation of the applicant’s proposal.

*Third*, it is to the full extent that the applicant clearly provides a thoughtful rationale for investments and priorities. A clear description of all of the funds (e.g., Race to the Top–District Grant; external foundation support; LEA, State, and other Federal funds) that the applicant will use to support the implementation of the proposal, including total revenue from these sources was provided. The overall budget narrative is detailed taking into account all resources that will be needed. The narrative factors in the big and small resources needed for such a large scale initiative to be successful.

There was no indication regarding the identification of the funds that will be used for one-time investments versus those that will be used for ongoing operational costs. Conversely, exhaustive details were provided focusing on strategies that will ensure the long-term sustainability of the personalized learning environments.

In sum, the budget was detailed in some aspects such as exactly how the money would be used for personnel, training, equipment etc. Every dollar is accounted for, transparency and prudence in how funds would be allocated is provided and **workable** timelines for deliverables are accounted for. A high-range score was received because this was a high quality budget and narrative.

<b>(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>
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**(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

It is to some extent that the applicant has a designed a plan for sustainability of the project’s goals after the term of the grant. In keeping with the full application, a **high-quality** plan is in place. Furthermore, the goals guiding the project are ambitious yet achievable. Timelines are realistic and there are measurable student learning outcomes. The funding to support this high-quality plan is reasonable. There is some financial support already in place from State and local government leaders to match funds being asked for from RTTT-D.

A description of how the applicant will evaluate the effectiveness of past investments and use this data to inform future investments. An external evaluator will be contracted to evaluate the grant activities focusing on improvements in productivity and outcomes based on the project's vision and goals. The evaluation process was not described to show the procedures to be followed. Very little was included indicating budget assumptions, potential sources, and uses of funds. Who would be the

responsible parties leading out in the various activities in the grant after the funding cycle. It is commendable that they have \$9,000,000.00 through local support and from their original school improvement grant etc., for the grant to live on.

In sum, it is to some extent that sustainability of the project is discussed. This is especially in the area of the evaluation plan. Because of the **limited** information provided in the budget and the budget narrative addressing this criterion of sustainability, a mid-range score was earned.

**Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)**

	Available	Score
<b>Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:**

It is to a great extent that CMSD has successfully met the competitive preference priority. This has been **demonstrated by having plans to integrate public or private resources in a** partnership at multiple levels. Having strategic partnerships in place, with support from public and private stakeholders the project has sustainable features. The partnerships forged range from Head Start services to advocacy groups. Together, this mix of diverse organizations and agents will eventually address each child in a holistic manner. In addition to academic need, the social, emotional and behavioral needs of the students to be served will become a reality the personalized learning environment developed. Evidence provided showed how both students and family supports will be maximized.

First, provision was made detailing a **coherent** and **sustainable** partnership between public and private organizations. Because CMSD has established such viable partnerships, the personal learning environments proposed are workable and designed to meet the needs of the whole child. For example, partnering with Head Start to provide pre-kindergarten services; Walton Foundations for economic growth and development; University of Mississippi World class teaching program for effective pre-service teachers; Aaron Henry Health clinic providing health care services to students; local dentists, community outreach centers, the local community colleges and other partners, sets the foundation for true success. These partners were **strategically** selected to support the role and function of the proposed personalized learning system for CMSD student being served.

Second, in this narrative, 10 population-level consortiums were identified as supporting the applicant’s broader Race to the Top–District proposal. Because these results include both educational results (students graduating 3 grade literate and students graduating from high school college and/or career-ready) as well as family and community support, strong predictable results can be predicted from the applicant’s plan.

The proposal has outlined to some extent how selected indicators that measure each result at the aggregate level for all children within the school district will be tracked. Because the plan only suggested that “a robust data collection system that can be maintained digitally” but a clear understanding of exactly what will be done and how were missing from the narrative. More information was needed to elucidate the specific indicators and exactly how the indicators would be measured.

Furthermore, how the data collected will be used to target its resources in order to improve results was provided. Evidence provided include the analysis of both formative and summative assessments with special emphasis placed on tracking of students with special needs as well as students facing the challenge of learning English as a second language. The proposal indicates how the data will be used to effectively monitor student learning, including students with disabilities, English language learners, and the high needs students served by CMSD.

*Third*, developing a strategy to scale the model beyond the participating students was included. How partners would work together to continue building on and extending ideas was detailed. Plans also are in place that would improve students learning over-time. For example, the Mississippi Regional Medical Center sits on the Superintendent's Roundtable committee as a member. Students with special needs are facilitated by the Medical Center to learn job skills. This partnership is mutually beneficial and taps into a population (special needs) that are generally left behind. Therefore, these students are learning practical job skills while in school. This helps to prepare the to be career ready.

*Fourth*, a description of how the partnership would integrate education and other services was provided. Specific mention was not made about services such as social-emotional and behavioral needs, or for acculturation immigrants and refugees. Because specific mention was not made, a gap was identified in CMSD's's plan for a high-quality plan.

*Fifth*, a full description was provided regarding how the partnership and LEA would build the capacity of staff in participating schools. This would be done by providing the tools and support needed. These tools and resources are evidence that the personalized learning environment proposed when implemented would be successful and scalable. An inventory of the needs and assets of the school and community aligned with those goals for improving the education and family and community supports were identified by the applicant. A clear decision-making process and infrastructure to select, implement, and evaluate supports that address the individual needs of CMSD's students also was identified. Furthermore, how parents and families would be engaged in both decision-making about solutions to improve results over-time and in addressing student, family, and school needs was clearly documented. This clear documentation strengthens the evidence supplied for this narrative. A realistic plan is in place to routinely assess the CMSD's progress in implementing the personalized learning environment proposed. Furthermore, this high-quality plan indicated how the district plans to maximize impact and resolve challenges and problems that are inevitable.

*Sixth*, the annual ambitious yet achievable performance measures for CMSD's personalized learning environment provides a workable plan for the desired results for students based on the vision set forth to "to equip all its students, through effective teachers and school leaders, with the knowledge, resources, and skills to empower them to: 1) graduate from high school, 2) be successful in college or professional careers, and 3) be competitive with their peers around the nation and the globe." Because the performance measures are measurable, CMSD is poised to accomplish the outlined goals that are guided by the vision.

In sum, a high-range score was achieved for this criterion. The **quality** of evidence presented by CMSD demonstrates meeting of the competitive preference priority. Although there were few gaps, overall, the majority of the elements in this criterion were met adequately. The partnership in place with private and public agencies shows strong and sustainable support for the project. These partners do have the meaningful and operational vision postulated at the forefront of what they do. With a strong vision, ambitious and achievable goals supported throughout the proposal, realistic timelines, measurable student learning outcomes, coupled with an accountability system CMSD has met the Competitive Preference Priority even with a few missing pieces of data.

### Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

#### Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has demonstrated in a **coherent** and **comprehensive** manner how it will build on the four core educational assurance areas to create a personal learning environment designed to significantly **improve** learning and teaching at CMSD. Specifically, the applicant has documented how the personalization of strategies, tools, and supports for students and educators are aligned with

college and/or career readiness. Evidence indicating how student achievement would deepen student learning was provided through: a variety of diverse experiences; meeting the academic needs of each student by tailoring assessments that were **age-appropriate**; increasing the effectiveness of educators--through targeted professional development activities; expanding student access to the most effective educators--using the magnet school thematic approaches; decreasing achievement gaps across student groups--with quality teachers in place; and increasing the rates at which students graduate from high school prepared for college and/or careers--giving them the support needed. These strategies were all supported throughout the proposal. Because of the high-quality plan **detailing** ambitious and achievable goals; realistic timelines for project implementation; measurable student learning outcomes and outlining the individuals to complete specific tasks, the applicant has successfully met Absolute Priority 1.

<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>191</b>
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## Race to the Top - District

### Technical Review Form

Application #0216MS-2 for Clarksdale Municipal School District

#### A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

#### (A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

In A(1) the applicant sets forth a comprehensive and coherent reform vision because its vision convincingly builds on the four core educational assurance areas, soundly articulates a clear and credible approach to the appropriate goals, and describes what the classroom experience will be like for students and teachers.

Throughout A(1) the applicant provides extensive evidence that its plan will build on the four core educational assurance areas because it demonstrates that the district has adopted and continues to adopt comprehensive standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace. The district has implemented the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in grades K-2 and will implement them at all grade levels in May of 2014. Until May 2014, students will still be responsible for meeting the Mississippi Curriculum Standards. The applicant also explains that some of its schools follow additional and/or alternative standards because the district and individual schools have chosen to participate in two different programs: the Excellence for All Program (under the National Center for Educational Excellence) and the Cambridge International Program (from Cambridge University, England). One of the district's high schools became a participant in the Excellence for All Program in 2010, and the applicant explains that the high school's involvement with the program led to positive changes because the school redesigned its graduation requirements, enhanced its curriculum, and increased rigor for students. The district's decision to become involved with the Cambridge International Program should also improve educational outcomes because the Program has its own standards and assessments that are aligned with the CCSS and that are designed to prepare students to compete in the global economy.

The district effectively uses appropriate data systems that measure student growth and inform educators about how they can improve instruction because it utilizes multiple assessments that provide comprehensive data that it also communicates with educators, students, and parents. The applicant includes four examples of the types of assessment it uses in its appendix including a sample report from the Northwest Evaluation Association's Measure of Academic Progress. Once data is obtained, the district utilizes it extensively, especially as a communication tool to inform and improve instruction because, for example, the district employs "school-based data coaches" who train teachers in group settings as well as one-on-one to analyze and interpret data in order to differentiate and personalize instruction. District administrators,

principals, and teachers also analyze the data exhaustively because they hold weekly, monthly, bi-monthly, and quarterly meetings together and separately to discuss the reports and "formulate plans for instruction." For example, principals participate in bi-monthly meetings with the central office administration to discuss data, and teachers meet quarterly with parents to help the parents understand data reports. Furthermore, the district uses effective data systems because it can keep detailed assessment records on all students, which are then appropriately available to teachers, parents, and students, and because the district, like others in the state, uses an integrated reporting system (the Mississippi Student Information System or MSIS) that offers individual student tracking.

The applicant also convincingly demonstrates that the district recruits, develops, rewards, and retains effective teachers and principals because the applicant provides multiple examples of the district's efforts. For example, in its efforts to recruit effective educators, the district partners with local politicians and community leaders to "improve the quality of life in Clarksdale" and recognizes that "it takes a commitment from everyone to make our schools and city an attractive place to live and work." Similarly, the district also works with a local university and businesses to financially support new teachers as well as upcoming teachers who are single parents. For those educators it employs, the district supports them in various ways because it provides extensive professional development opportunities for all educators and rewards educators' efforts. For example, teachers and principals receive training to personalize the assistance they provide to students and parents, such as helping students "choose a theme with their interest level at a magnet school or academy." Similarly, the district encourages new teachers because it has created a support system for new teachers based on the model used by Teach for America. In addition to providing professional development, the district also utilizes effective superintendent, principal, and teacher evaluations based on the Mississippi Statewide Teacher Appraisal Rubric (or MSTAR). Finally, the applicant demonstrates that it is making efforts to reward and retain effective teachers because it is working with the state of Mississippi to refine a compensation structure that takes into account teacher evaluations.

The applicant also provides sound evidence that it has and will continue to turn around its lowest-achieving schools because the students are demonstrating improvement according to various measures. For example, the applicant presents yearly assessment results in the form of graphs demonstrating that since the 2008-09 school year students have shown steady improvement in language arts and math in grades 3-8. The only exception is the performance of 6th grade math students because their performance declined. Similarly the rate at which students are passing Algebra I and English has increased nearly 19.8 percentage points for Algebra in five years and 40.8 percentage points for English in five years according to graphs in the appendix. Finally, all of the schools in the district have increased their Quality Distribution Index (QDI) scores over the last five years, which indicates that each school has increased student proficiency levels. To convincingly demonstrate that the district can turn around its lowest-achieving schools, the applicant documents its QDI success using two different charts in separate parts of the application. For example, one middle school received a score in 2008-09 of 88, which is 12 points below a failing score of 100 on the QDI, but it received a "successful" score of 135 in 2012-13).

The applicant also effectively demonstrates that the district will accelerate student achievement, deepen student learning, and increase equity through personalized student support because the district has implemented programs to improve educator effectiveness and to personalize students' learning experiences. For example, the district's participation in the Excellence for All Program will help educators redesign graduation requirements and enhance the core curriculum, and teachers receive training to help them interpret data and differentiate instruction accordingly. Furthermore, the district provides students with personalized instruction at elementary magnet schools because it has implemented school choice at the elementary level. Consequently, it provides students with opportunities to personalize coursework according to their interests and achievement levels. Finally, the district implemented Pre-K-level education at all of its schools to accelerate student achievement because, as the applicant effectively explains in its Competitive Preference Priority section, a Pre-K program greatly increases the likelihood that students will enter Kindergarten socially and emotionally prepared to succeed.

In its response to A(1)(c), the applicant provides a reasonable account of the innovative types of classroom experiences students and teachers will have at the elementary level because the applicant explains that the experiences will vary widely according to themes at each of the elementary schools. Two of the schools will operate under STEM-related themes that will provide students with diverse options because one will incorporate visual and performing arts to create a STEAM environment, and the other will have a health and medical science theme. The remaining schools will provide additional options for personalization because one will have an international studies focus, one will offer language immersion opportunities, and one will offer a visual and performing arts focus.

Personalization will continue at the middle school level because following elementary school, students will enter either an intermediate school that preserves the themes of the elementary schools by creating academies or a middle school that offers "a comprehensive Visual & Performing Arts Program and [that] will begin the transition to the Cambridge Program."

Students will continue to experience a more personalized learning environment in ninth grade because a 9th grade academy will follow the Cambridge International curriculum and will operate independently from the high school. Similarly, students in grades 9-12 should continue to experience personalized learning because both the 9th grade academy and high school will offer "a greater emphasis on group work and cooperative learning rather than lecture."

Overall, the score for this section falls in the high range because the applicant presents a detailed articulation of its reform vision. In particular the applicant demonstrates how it will focus on the four core educational assurance areas and how it will improve student achievement and personalized instruction.

Score: 10

<b>(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>
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**(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

For A(2) the applicant provides sound reasoning for why it has included all of its schools in the plan because in its explanation it emphasizes the importance of providing a quality education and full choice to all children. The application clearly articulates which schools the district will include in the implementation of its proposal because it includes a chart that contains each school's name, grade level, and theme (where applicable).

The applicant includes most of the required data for each of the ten schools because it includes the number of participating students from low-income families, the number who are high-need, and the number of participating educators. However, the applicant does not include the number of educators from its participating high school, and does not provide data about low-income students for its 9th grade academy. All of the schools in the district collectively meet eligibility requirements related to low-income status because all but one of the schools for which it provides data have greater than 95% of students who qualify as low-income.

Overall, this section of the application earns a score in the high range because the applicant explains why it is including all of the district's schools and, with the exception of two small omissions, provides pertinent data for those schools.

Score: 9

<b>(A)(3) LEA-wide reform &amp; change (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
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**(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant will include all of its schools in its plan, but it will nevertheless also work to scale up parts of its proposal because it plans to repeat those successful reforms at individual schools in the district's other schools. For example, the district has two schools in which a teacher incentive plan has been implemented to tie compensation to teacher evaluations, and the district hopes to expand this program to all of its schools in the 2013-14 school year.

The application includes a thorough approach to achieving meaningful reform because it presents the M-STAR evaluation process as a central component of its plan. The process includes such activities as formal classroom observations, pre- and post-observation conferences, teacher self-assessments, and student surveys. The district plans to focus on increasing teacher effectiveness through the use of evaluations because it is planning to use the M-STAR district-wide as well as principal and superintendent evaluations to achieve this goal "to increase individual and collective educator effectiveness."

The applicant has additional appropriate goals because it would also like to create a larger pool of effective teachers and would like to incorporate its compensation system into a new teacher appraisal system. The applicant has activities in place to achieve its goals because it has included numerous professional development opportunities related to increasing teacher effectiveness and improving students learning outcomes. For example the applicant includes an appendix item that details the 2013-14 professional development options according to date, time, audience, presenter, and description. The opportunities include data analysis and management, student engagement, and mastering instructional strategies. Similarly, district educators received training during the spring and summer of 2013 to understand M-STAR (the state evaluation system) better.

The district is planning particularly extensive reforms in curriculum development changes to turn around its low-achieving schools and to accelerate student learning because it has developed an extensive process to analyze instructional and student performance weaknesses and to study how the CCSS and the district's magnet school themes will complement each other. An important part of this high-quality plan has been to offer teachers and principals relevant training because they need to understand better how to personalize instruction and encourage and support students and parents. Additionally, teachers have had opportunities to participate in curriculum development so that they have hands-on experience with connecting the CCSS to the magnet-themed schools and Cambridge International Examination program.

The applicant includes a high-quality plan for implementation because it provides numerous goals, activities, timelines,

deliverables, and responsible parties throughout Section A. Overall, this section scores in the high range because the applicant explains how it will incorporate aspects of its reform proposal throughout the district in order to reach its goals.

Score: 10

<b>(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>
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**(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

To address section A(4), the district thoroughly demonstrates how it will improve student learning through personalization and increased equity because it has implemented school choice at the elementary level, it has involved itself in innovative programs such as the Excellence for All program, and it has organized its elementary schools according to themes that are then also incorporated into the district's middle school structure.

The district has also demonstrated that it plans for ambitious goals because it has set targets that are higher than those for the state in order to "increase [its] students' achievement rate at a faster rate than the state's." These goals are achievable because the district has already demonstrated its capacity to improve student learning. For example, its students demonstrated impressive growth in grades 3-8 from 2011-12 to 2012-13 in both English language arts and math.

To demonstrate recent performance and future goals for summative assessments, the district includes detailed charts for Mississippi Subject Area Tests or Mississippi Curriculum Tests in English language arts and math for each school in grades 3-8 and for the district as a whole. The district's goals are ambitious and achievable because students at every school but one scored higher in 2012-13 than in 2011-12, and the district's projected targets are always 1 percentage point higher than those set by the state. However, the district does not indicate which students took which tests. The charts are also confusing at times because they reference the Achievement Index, which is a point-based system, but the narrative also mentions growth in the form of increased percentage rates without indicating whether these rates are connected to the point-based system.

To demonstrate the district's efforts to decrease achievement gaps, the applicant presents data for the Cambridge International Examinations, which students complete twice each year. The district proposes ambitious goals because it plans for its students to increase their achievement rates by 3% each year, whereas the National Center for Education Excellence has established a goal of a 2% increase each year.

Finally, the applicant presents tables that demonstrate its graduation and college enrollment rates. The graduation rates are ambitious but achievable because they increase at a slightly higher rate each year. For example the rate of improvement between 2012-13 (the baseline) and 2013-14 (year 1) is 1.85 percentage points; whereas, the rate of improvement between 2016-17 (year 4) and 2017-18 (post-grant) is 2.08 percentage points. In a larger district, this rate of growth might not be as ambitious, but in a district with only 3,192 students total and only 574 students in its traditional high school, a 2 percentage point increase is substantial.

The applicant's targets for college enrollment are similarly ambitious and may or may not be attainable because the district's college enrollment targets for 2017-18 are based on a high enough total number of graduates that the school's number of attending seniors will also need to increase dramatically.

The applicant earns a high score for this section because it demonstrates convincing evidence that its vision is likely to result in improved student learning and performance and increased equity.

Score: 9

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

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>

**(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant demonstrates the district's record of success in the past four years because the schools have all improved their Quality Distribution Index (QDI) between 2008-09 and 2012-13, and the QDI measurement includes achievement, growth, and graduation/dropout components. While all schools have improved, some schools have demonstrated even more remarkable success. For example, while 31 points separate schools that are considered failing (QDI<101) and schools that are successful (QDI>132), four of nine schools increased their QDI scores by more than 31 points, and the other five increased their scores by a remarkable average of over 19 points.

For B(1) the applicant effectively communicates its success because it includes two charts in particular: The first demonstrates each school's QDI growth, and the second chart demonstrates that six of the nine are now on-target or have even achieved a high progress reward. Now, only three schools are considered "Approaching Target." The third chart details whether each school has met Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs), and more schools have met the AMOs for ELA and Math (11 AMOs total) than have not met them (9 AMOs total). Nevertheless, the applicant's narrative and its presentation of this third chart are confusing because the narrative references "Appendix Item 7, page 145 for Federal Differentiated Accountability Quality of Distribution Index (QDI) Results." However, Appendix Item 7 is actually a sample website page from the Mississippi Identification System. Nevertheless, the chart with data for all students does indicate that all students as a group did reach AMO targets.

The applicant further demonstrates improvement in language arts and math in all grades 3-8 since the 2008-09 school year because it includes a PowerPoint presentation in its Appendix as evidence of these improvements. The only exception are the results for 6th grade math students because their performance declined. Similarly, the rate at which students are passing Algebra I and English have increased nearly 19.8 percentage points for Algebra in five years and 40.8 percentage points for English in five years according to graphs in the appendix.

The district acknowledges that it has not raised its high school graduation rates enough to meet Annual Measurable Objectives. The district's inability to demonstrate success in this area also shows up in its QDI rating because the rating slipped in 2013 once graduation rates were taken into account. Additionally, the district fails to demonstrate a track record of success as measured by college enrollment rates because the applicant does not address college enrollment rates directly in this section or elsewhere in the application.

However, the applicant does effectively demonstrate an improvement in student learning outcomes and closing the achievement gaps because it includes charts that indicate that its lowest performing schools in 2008-09 (Higgins, Heidelberg, George H. Oliver, and Booker T. Washington) finish the four years with an average QDI of 153 in 2012-13 whereas its previously 4 highest performing schools (Myrtle, Kirkpatrick, Oakhurst, and J.W. Stampley) finish the four years with an average QDI of only 138.

Finally, the applicant explains how the district makes student performance data available to students, educators, and parents because it includes data-sharing opportunities for parents such as Open Houses and one-on-one meetings with teachers. Performance results are also shared at board meetings (which are open to and recorded for the public). As part of the board presentation, student results and a relevant interview are also provided to the local newspaper. The superintendent continues to share assessment results with the public because the superintendent hosts a Roundtable that is open to the public and is attended by local business, churches, and community leaders as well as students and parents.

The applicant effectively communicates information because the results of each formative assessment are posted at central administrative offices and in each school, and principals and teachers then work together to analyze and discuss data in order to improve instruction. Students also have opportunities to understand their assessment results because they meet at least quarterly with teachers or data coaches to review their data reports and assessment results.

Appendix items demonstrate the learning opportunities that educators have to utilize data to inform and improve instruction because specific opportunities include sectionals in data management, data analysis, and data coaching. Similarly, an annual Title I Community Forum provides information because it is open to the public and to parents and includes a presentation of test results.

Overall, the application scores in the high range for this section because the applicant effectively demonstrates its plans to continue to improve student learning outcomes, to achieve ambitious reforms, and to make student performance data available to stakeholders. The applicant also makes the district's record of success evident with the exception of graduation rates and college enrollment rates.

Score: 13

<b>(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
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**(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

For section B(2), the applicant provides a narrative and appendix items that indicate a high level of transparency in processes, practices, and investments because this section includes sample budget pages of the kind that are shared with the public at district meetings and when board members vote on fiscal records. Similarly, the applicant explains that members of the public receive "budgetary notifications" at monthly Superintendent Roundtables. The district also provides budget-related information to the public at large because it posts PowerPoint presentations from board meetings on its district website. Non-personnel expenditures are also communicated to the public through school board meetings because hard copies are provided to meeting attendees.

The district regularly provides salary information at the school level for all employees because it shares annual salary reports on instructional and support staff, administration, and district office personnel and provides updated adjustments as needed based on transfers, new hires, etc.

The applicant also explains that it provides salary information for all personnel positions on its website and will share additional salary data with the public as needed because the central office "is happy to oblige and requests for information."

Overall, this section of the application earns a score in the high range because it demonstrates how it makes expenditures in the four required categories available to the public.

Score: 5

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

**10**

**10**

**(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:**

In B(3) the applicant provides reasonable evidence that it has the autonomy necessary to implement its plans because it has been working with the state Department of Education particularly over the last few years to implement innovative reforms that have required Department of Education approval. For example, the Department has already played a role in the implementation of the Excellence for All and Cambridge International Examination programs in the district. Similarly, the applicant explains that the district has already been working with the Department "to restructure policies and procedures to create personalized learning environments."

The strongest evidence of the district's autonomy to create personalized learning environments is the elimination of attendance zones previously required by a federal desegregation order. The applicant includes an appendix item that verifies this departure from the norm because it is an update from the United States District Court affirming the school district's ability to implement magnet schools. The district has also been allowed to modify the school day to accommodate its reform vision because it has been allowed to increase school hours.

Elsewhere in the application, the applicant explains that teachers also have relevant autonomy because they make decisions based on their preferences for the delivery of content and the utilization of diverse instructional models such as those provided by the Cambridge International Examination (CIE) program's instructional model. For example, even though the applicant does not address graduation requirements in B(3), elsewhere in the application the district demonstrates that it has been allowed to modify graduation requirements to take into account the CIE's exit examination which means that accomplished students can potentially graduate following their sophomore year of high school based on their ability to meet bench marks and not based on seat time requirements.

Though not mentioned in this section, a letter from the Mississippi Department of Education is another appendix item that suggests that the district will have the benefit of successful conditions and sufficient autonomy to implement its plan because the letter acknowledges that the state Department of Education recognizes that "the planned activities hold great potential to improve educational outcomes for all students."

Overall, this sections earns a score in the high range because it demonstrates that the district has been given the autonomy to make ambitious, innovative reforms to implement its plan. The district has already begun to implement the major components of its plan, namely the elimination of required attendance zones as well as the district's involvement in the CIE program and its unique exit requirements.

Score: 10

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

**15**

**12**

**(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

For B(4) the applicant explains that it began involving teachers, principals, and parents early on because it held meetings at the school level starting in 2009 to share the district's strategic plan. On-going dialogue continued via PTO meetings and at local civic group meetings, and the superintendent held roundtable meetings to share the district's plans with community members, leaders, and parents. The district also developed a student advisory council to include students in the process. The applicant also demonstrates that it sought input from teachers because it utilized a web-based survey to determine that 92% of teachers supported the plan. The applicant does not, however, share any of the survey items, and these items would have been helpful because they would have demonstrated to a greater extent how the district engaged teachers.

The applicant offered parents a unique opportunity to provide feedback regarding the plan because parents could log-in to an online portal and share their perspectives. However, the applicant references MS SOARS as the tool it used to gather

feedback without explaining what MS SOARS is. Nevertheless, the applicant engaged parents in the process because a "Magnet School Advisory Council" was formed as a result.

To develop its grant proposal, the district utilized a reasonable logic model with faculty members to understand their goals for the next four years because the logic model includes effective steps for evaluation and feedback. For example, the logic model includes activity outputs such as "on-going training for sustainability" with an outcome of data usage to drive instruction. Similarly, other outputs include professional development to support high-level science, math, and language courses and differentiated instruction with outcomes such as more on-site advanced classes. The use of this logic model would be more well-supported if the applicant had demonstrated that it connected the feedback model to direct additions to or revisions of the plan because such information would provide evidence of how the district took teachers' feedback into account as it finalized its plan.

The district sought additional input from teachers and parents because it conducted separate needs assessments with both groups. For example, a majority of teachers indicated that they needed additional training in research-based strategies to close the gap in achievement between students and that they desired help in "developing and adjusting lessons to meet the needs of diverse learners" and analyzing and interpreting student test data. Such feedback would have been very helpful as the district planned ways to increase the effectiveness of its educators. The district describes additional ways that it sought input from educators because it explains that administrators met with the principals from each school "to develop a working logic model for that school and to determine the direction each principal and his/her staff wanted their school to go." Similarly, teachers, staff, and principals at each school developed their own budgets to prepare for the implementation of individual school's plans.

The district did revise its plan based on feedback because it restructured its middle schools and 9th grade Academy as a result of stakeholder feedback, and it used parent and teacher input to determine that 5th and 6th grade students and 7th and 8th grade students should have their own educational environments. Similarly, feedback led the district to create a "focused, personalized" learning environment for 9th graders in the form of a 9th grade academy. Finally, the district expanded its pre-school program based on feedback provided by teachers, parents, and administrators.

The district continues to seek input from parents because it engages them through Superintendent Roundtable discussions, shares educational materials with them, and provides translators for students and parents whose first language is not English. The applicant also explains that it supports the equality of educational opportunities because it provides mentoring programs and enrichment activities, such as math and science camps.

The applicant demonstrates the support of the LEA's collective bargaining unit because it has included a letter from the Clarksdale Association of Educators in which the Association's president expresses his support for the district's plan by vowing "continued collaboration."

To meet the requirements of B(4)(b), the applicant has included a thorough collection of letters of support because it presents those from parent organizations (such as a parent advisory committee); students; business, community, and civil rights organizations including an advertising company and a health center; local civic and community-based organizations such as 4-H, Teach for America, and area churches; and institutions of higher learning including Delta State University and Mississippi University.

Overall, the applicant earns a score in the high range for this section because it engaged teachers, principals, parents, and students in the planning process; it revised existing and/or developed new plans based on feedback; and it demonstrated support in the form of numerous letters from community members.

Score: 12

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

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(1) Learning (20 points)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>18</b>

**(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

For section C(1) the applicant demonstrates a student-based high-quality learning plan because the application includes a spreadsheet with student goals, activities, rationale, grade level timelines, deliverables, and responsible parties. For example, a reading goal has students learning to read (the activity) because "reading is the key to all other subjects" (the rationale) with separate grade-level timelines and deliverables including proficient reading scores on state assessments. For this goal, the responsible parties include parents and educators.

The plan implements instructional strategies for all students because the district's pre-K - 4th grade elementary schools have theme-based approaches and because neighborhood zoning requirements have given way to school choice based on students' interests. Personalized learning continues beyond 4th grade because students go on to attend "Personalized Learning Academies" in grades 5-8 before transitioning into a 9th grade academy based on the Excellence for All program and its college-and career-ready mission.

Students' needs will be supported because educators will use technology to identify students' strengths and weaknesses, and educators will receive professional development in the techniques of differentiating instruction.

The applicant partially addresses how students will come to understand the connection between what they are learning and the successes students will have in accomplishing their goals because in its response to C(1)(a)(i) the applicant writes about the importance of engaging and empowering learners but does not explain fully how students will be supported. Additionally, the applicant references The Foxtire Core Practices (related to magnet schools) without explicitly explaining how its educational philosophies will help students understand the connection between what they are learning and their goals. However, the applicant meets C(1)(a)(i) because it does address this connection elsewhere in its plan.

To address C(1)(a)(ii) the applicant demonstrates that the district's students have opportunities to link their learning goals directly to college- and career-ready standards because they get to choose learning pathways and schools according to their interests. For example, the Vocational and Technology Center provides students with opportunities to earn full cosmetology licenses or CNA certificates as well as hands-on experience in automotive technology, culinary, and business fields. Similarly, students begin structuring their learning according to their individual goals as early as elementary school because elementary school students have the opportunity each year to reevaluate their interests and goals and can switch from one magnet school to another based on a lottery system. Students receive support in identifying and pursuing their goals because they take interest surveys and learning style surveys; however, the applicant provides neither specific information about the surveys, nor does it articulate how it supports the students' interpretation of them.

Students become involved in deep learning experiences at every level because the magnet school and academy concepts expose them to more in-depth cross-curricular lessons and hands-on activities than they would otherwise have. For example, the district partners with local universities, NASA, and a local extension service and museum to augment STEM-based lessons.

The applicant explains that it offers students access to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives in a somewhat reasonable way because students are heterogeneously grouped according to their interests, which the applicant explains "provide[s] the diversity, contexts and perspectives that are otherwise lacking" in a relatively homogenous student population. Though this philosophy cannot guarantee exposure to diversity, students who attend Myrtle Hall, the language immersion elementary school, have better access to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives because teachers at Myrtle Hall have either lived in or are from other countries.

The applicant includes as one of its goals that students will develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, but it fails to demonstrate thoroughly how it will approach teaching these difficult-to-master skills. Nevertheless, the students should be pushed by the Cambridge International Program because of its cross-curricular and hands on activities.

The applicant demonstrates that it provides students access to personalized instructional content and skill development opportunities because students and their parents begin making choices at the pre-K level about their areas of interest and continue to do so throughout middle school and high school. For example, students can move on to a higher level or can even graduate early if they master required benchmarks.

To address C(1)(b)(ii), the applicant references the "Adaptive Dimension" that "bonds with and integrates curriculum (what is taught) and instruction (how it is taught)." This evidence is rooted more in philosophical assertions than pragmatic steps, but the district allows for a variety of instructional environments (because of the magnet schools and academies), and it also provides teachers with the training and autonomy to differentiate and vary instructional approaches.

In recent years the district has made an effort to secure high-quality content because it has received School Improvement Grants (SIG) to purchase technology and provide professional development. Similarly, the district has utilized Title I resources to create 1:1 learning environments in two of its schools. To support these technological advances, the district has also focused on infrastructure support and is working with the wider community to upgrade networks and develop the necessary infrastructure.

Teachers will benefit from ongoing and related feedback because students will be tested using reading and math screenings, Measures of Academic Progress, and formative curriculum-based tests, each of which will be administered three times per year. Students receive individual instruction because they are then grouped according to their skill levels so that they can receive appropriately individualized support because those who do not demonstrate proficiency benefit from intense remediation and those who are proficient or advanced benefit from enrichment activities. Administrators, principals, and teachers analyze data to address challenges. Students and parents are also appropriately informed of the

students' scores.

The district has methods in place to personalize learning recommendations because it utilizes the Response to Intervention tier model along with self-paced computer programs such as Read 180. As a result, students "are able to master educational content and remain with their peers," and they are further supported because a Teacher Support Team, which includes parents, provides extra assistance to those students who need it.

The applicant convincingly demonstrates how it utilizes accommodations and high-quality strategies to support high-needs students because it thoroughly explains how it will use research-based intervention materials (such as "online, video-based remediation") in combination with the three tiers of the Response to Intervention model. For example, the district will implement such accommodations and strategies as a reading program that uses adaptive technology "to provide individualized practice with corrective feedback" and a learning program that will present "curriculum content using sports as a learning tool" to address gender-based gaps in learning. The district will also provide social and emotional support to its high-need students and their families by connecting them to "parenting resource services, mental health services, or any other community-based services."

Overall, the applicant earns a score in the high range for this section because it demonstrates evidence of an overall student-based high-quality plan to support and prepare students for college and careers.

Score: 18

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

**20**

**20**

**(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

For C(2) the applicant indicates that it has a high-quality plan because it includes a thorough chart that outlines goals, rationale, timelines, deliverables, and responsible parties. For example, the district has set the goal that educators will understand what personalized learning environments are with the rationale that they must first understand a goal in order to implement it. By June 2014, educators will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of personalized learning environments as a result of the efforts of responsible parties including the superintendent and instructional and literacy coaches.

The applicant provides evidence that it will use personalized learning environments and strategies to meet students' needs as they graduate on time and college- and career-ready because the district presents instruction using student-chosen focus strands. Teachers appropriately support students throughout the education process because they develop relationships with students; encourage interaction between students; and design interactive, collaborative, and dynamic learning projects.

To adapt content and instruction, educators teach and plan in "pods" as a way to engage students in common and individual tasks. The applicant effectively justifies this approach because the teacher pods facilitate cross-curricular and differentiated instruction which allows "students to work at their own rhythm and level, while challenging students to meet more rigorous content and goals and objectives." Furthermore, working in pods helps teachers adapt material appropriately because they are serving a common group of students.

Throughout its plan, the applicant has demonstrated that it has numerous assessment tools because it uses the Renaissance Star Reading and Star Math assessments, the NWEA MAP tests, the Mississippi Curriculum Test 2 (MCT2), and the Subject Area Testing Program 2(SATP2). Furthermore, the district takes into account unique measures of student progress because it tracks student attendance (and even teacher attendance) as well as "days of peace" without conflict.

Students understand their own progress because they are "taught how to read their data." School Improvement Grants benefit students in particular because data coaches at two schools work with teachers to improve instructional practices and with students to help them understand the relevance of their achievements in relation to the students' goals. Furthermore, the applicant explains that it would use RTTD funds to provide data coaches at each school because of the benefits of having on-site data coaches.

The applicant demonstrates its willingness to use teacher systems effectively because it has been part of a pilot program to merge a new Teacher Appraisal System with a Teacher Incentive Plan and because it will implement the program in all schools in 2013-14. As a result, the new system will take into account students' performance but it will also consider factors beyond teachers' control such as attendance and "socio-economic home factors." The district extends its evaluation system to all educator levels because it also using a principal and a superintendent evaluation program.

Educators receive a variety of feedback in addition to evaluation results because the district curriculum team identifies opportunities to support teachers, and a professional development provider works directly in the classroom with teachers. Ultimately, the district assesses student progress to improve teaching and to increase the overall effectiveness of educators because it effectively uses qualitative and quantitative data.

The applicant gathers actionable information on a regular basis and uses it effectively because the district starts each year by conducting a needs assessment survey with teachers, parents, and students. The results of the survey then drive professional development. The district offers diverse and extensive professional development opportunities because it supports new and experienced educators with such offerings as a Teacher Academy (to address areas noted in the professional development needs assessment), a Sustaining New Teachers Through Training (to assist new teachers with classroom management), and a Mastering Instructional Strategies session (to provide all teachers with advanced support to increase student achievement).

To address C(2)(b)(ii), the applicant demonstrates that it provides teachers with high-quality learning resources because it offers professional development geared towards technology integration and computer-based assessments that produce detail-rich reports and track interventions. The applicant does not explicitly articulate how teachers are supported in their efforts to share resources in this section; however, the applicant has articulated elsewhere in the plan that teachers have opportunities to work together and to engage in professional learning teams.

The applicant explains in C(2)(b)(iii) that it has a plan in place to determine the effectiveness of the resources it acquires because it will employ a project director who solicits feedback from principals, teachers, and students in the form of resource ratings. The narrative reasonably explains how the director will then use the ratings because he/she will be able to determine whether additional professional development or resources need to be provided. The results will also be used to continuously improve feedback because it will be adjusted between school years as needed.

In C(2)(c) the applicant demonstrates that there are reasonable measures in place to empower school leaders and leadership teams to structure effective learning environments because the school board has already approved policies that allow for additional training and resources as needed. For example the superintendent and curriculum team members effectively utilize time as a resource that allows them to improve educational effectiveness because they are able to spend time in schools and classrooms on a regular basis. The applicant justifies this method because it explains how such observations provide timely support and allow the district to be proactive.

New teachers benefit from a unique approach to professional support for developing educators because they participate in a New Teacher Academy that they structure according to their own needs. Similarly, the district works to retain effective educators while also developing their leadership skills because it has established an Aspiring Administrator's Academy that meets on monthly basis so that the district can develop administrative leadership from within.

This evidence from C(2)(c)(i) also demonstrates the district's efforts to improve school progress as outlined in C(2)(c)(ii) because the evidence speaks to training, systems, and practices that increase student performance and close achievement gaps. Additionally, the applicant presents reasonable evidence in C(2)(c)(ii) that it provides relevant training, systems, and practices because teachers have numerous opportunities for professional development in general but also opportunities specific to their roles in individual magnet schools and academies. For example, teachers who work in Excellence for All schools receive training in the Cambridge International Examination Program. The district also supports teachers across schools and content areas because it facilitates professional learning communities.

The applicant demonstrates a high-quality plan in this section because it has provided extensive evidence that teachers and principals have access to coaching and professional development. Teachers who need improvement are provided with additional support because the district has a key goal: for these teachers to improve. The applicant presents early on in this section an effective and comprehensive chart to support its plan to increase the number of effective and highly effective teachers and principals in the district. The applicant identifies additional effective methods to increase the number of effective educators in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas because the district is working on financial incentives, differentiated pay scales, and an employment outreach plan. The timeline for these strategic goals is between January and March 2014, and the superintendent, district administrative team, and school board will be responsible for implementing the strategies.

Overall, the applicant earns a high score for this section because it has presented a high-quality plan for developing teachers and leaders who personalize learning environments and prepare students to be college- and career-ready.

Score: 20

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

	Available	Score
<b>(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b>		

To address D(1)(a), the applicant explains appropriately how its governance structure supports participating schools because a curriculum team from the central office meets weekly to "discuss and plan issues around curriculum, supporting principals and teachers, [and] professional development." Curriculum team members then communicate directly with principals and visit schools as needed based on the outcomes of the meeting. The applicant also explains that the curriculum team meets with parents and provides schools with materials and resources.

In D(1)(b), the applicant succinctly describes the level of autonomy that school leadership teams have because it states directly that each school's administration will have the autonomy and authority to make key decisions about everything from the general implementation of the plan to specific staffing needs, timelines, and school-level budgets.

Particularly at the upper levels, students in this district can progress and earn credit based on demonstrated mastery because they learn under the Excellence for All, Cambridge International Examination Program which "is a qualification system, based on mastering benchmarks." As students demonstrate mastery, they move forward and can even graduate early. Those who need additional time or support are also allowed to progress according to their own speed of mastery because they may take courses and/or exams over as needed. Similarly, students can learn through online courses, which also eliminates the "amount of time spent" requirement because the students have access to courses and materials at their convenience.

Finally, the applicant demonstrates that it provides alternate opportunities to students who are not completing coursework at the same rate as their peers because they can progress at their own pace through an accredited Ombudsman program that offers "individualized, computerized instruction."

Students have various ways that they can demonstrate mastery of standards at multiple times and in multiple ways because they can complete standardized testing, such as NWEA's MAP assessments as well as project-based projects, daily assignments, and hands-on activities. The applicant provides some evidence that it is working towards reformed assessment practices because the narrative explains that data coaches are working with teachers to develop a variety of classroom assessment and to implement "individualized, adaptive assessments." Additional details about these efforts would have provided even stronger evidence that the district has practices in place that will fully support project implementation.

In the final part of D(1), the applicant presents some evidence of how it will adapt resources and practices because it describes general elements of differentiated instruction such as "every school receives training in the importance of proper identification of students who are eligible for services." However, the applicant provides additional details about training methods it will employ and the services it will provide elsewhere in the application (such as in C(1)).

Overall, this section earns a high score because it outlines reasonable practices, policies, and rules to a minimal extent, but the applicant fails to demonstrate to a full extent how it will personalize student learning through the utilization of its policies and infrastructure.

Score: 14

<b>(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>
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**(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

For D(2)(a) the applicant demonstrates convincingly that it is making an effort to improve the wireless internet structures in the community because it is partnering with the city of Clarksdale to provide free access to community members in public areas such as library and in private homes with log-in information. However, the applicant provides somewhat vague evidence of its efforts to ensure that students and their parents will have access to content, tools and resources because while it states that it will devise a check-out system, the applicant does not explain what it is that students and parents will be able to check out. Elsewhere in the plan the applicant has referenced a 1:1 iPad program, but it does not provide such specifics here.

Similarly, the applicant inadequately demonstrates that stakeholders will have access to technical support because the application merely states that "technical support is also available [. . .] anytime and from any place; however, there is no indication as to the type of technical support or the method of delivery that will be utilized. Students will have some support as they are completing homework and online coursework because peer and professional tutoring and links will be available online.

The applicant fails to describe how parents and students will access data because the plan does not mention open data formats. Also, while the applicant does make brief mention in D(2)(d) of the data system it will use (the Mississippi Student Information System), it fails to indicate whether this data includes anything other than student level information, such as human resources and budget data.

Overall, the application scores in the medium range for this section because it provides partial evidence that it will support

personalized learning by developing an appropriate infrastructure. The applicant does demonstrate limited elements of a high-quality plan because it includes an assessment-based accounting of action steps, timelines, and responsible parties; however, these details are not clearly related to infrastructure or personalized learning.

Score: 5

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

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>

**(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

For E(1) the applicant presents aspects of a high-quality plan for continuous improvement because it articulates goals related to the 9th grade academy, Ombudsman program, and utilization of an outside evaluator. The applicant shares appropriate rationale for the 9th grade academy and Ombudsman program because both will indicate the district's ability to meet the individualized needs of 9th grade students and struggling students. However, the applicant provides no clear evidence of how these goals relate directly to the overall improvement process. Both goals would be more effective in E(3) because they measure performance better than they measure the general success of the plan.

Utilizing an outside evaluator is an appropriate and effective way to monitor and measure the quality of the applicant's investments because an outside evaluator can assess the plan objectively and with fidelity. The timeline for outside evaluations will follow a reasonable schedule because they will be conducted quarterly.

The narrative for E(1) provides additional details about the continuous improvement process because it explains that a Race to the Top Leadership Team will meet on a monthly basis with the superintendent and will share the progress the district is making towards meeting its goals. However, the plan for this section does not address goals, rationale, or clear evidence to the extent that it could. Instead, the application includes general statements. For example, the applicant states that the team "will share current status toward stated reform goals, using data measures collected in a variety of areas." The applicant does articulate some of those areas, but they are still quite general because they include "student academic performance," "parent/community engagement factors," and "additional school level needs." Nevertheless, the Leadership Team will be able to consistently report its findings in the superintendent's monthly newsletter.

Overall, the applicant earns a score in the high range for this section because even though some of its plans are more general than specific in nature, the applicant does have plans in place for continuous improvement, such as its use of an outside evaluator and a Race to the Top Leadership Team.

Score: 13

<b>(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
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**(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

For E(2) the applicant provides a thorough and convincing high-quality plan because the district has designed a comprehensive communication and engagement plan. The communication will be ongoing because internal and external stakeholders will benefit from regular monthly updates. Students in the district will gather valuable communication on a weekly basis when student representatives meet with their classmates to understand the concerns of the general student population.

The superintendent will play a critical role in the ongoing communication efforts by participating in monthly events such as Student Advisory meetings with student representatives; Superintendent Roundtable meetings with educators, parents, and community members; and monthly school board meetings.

Parents and members of the public will have additional opportunities to receive and share information because the district holds Title I Community Parent meetings and produces informational videos for a local cable channel.

This applicant earns a high score for this section because it has included a detailed table that outlines how it will achieve its goal of continuous communication and engagement. The superintendent and district staff will engage educators, parents, and community members on a regular basis, and students will stay engaged and informed through a Student Advisory and student representatives.

Score: 5

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

For E(3) the applicant presents the required performance measures for all students with appropriate targets because the targets for highly effective teacher/principal percentages are equal to those for state-level proficiency and the district's gap-reduction goals. The applicant includes only black students and economically disadvantaged students because these groups constitute 97% and 96% of students respectively.

For the first performance measure for all students, the narrative proposes ambitious yet ambitious goals of 3% growth in the percent of students who have highly effective teachers and a 5% growth who have highly effective principals. The applicant's table, however, provides inconsistent targets because the percent improvement for highly effective teachers only increases from 25% pre-grant to 30% post-grant for teachers and from 25% pre-grant to 32% post-grant for principals, which does not demonstrate a growth rate of 3% or 5% per year.

The applicant presents similar targets for performance measure b) because the narrative indicates that growth will be calculated by the same rates of 3% for teachers and 5% for principals, yet the statistical table demonstrates targets that are inconsistent with the narrative.

The applicant includes both required performance measures for PreK-3 students because its measure of academic growth is based on universal assessments of math, language, and literacy. The applicant demonstrates ambitious targets because it proposes a ten percentage point increase each year. Additionally, the applicant presents convincing rationale for its decision to measure Pre-K competencies because students who participate in the district's pre-kindergarten program outperform those who do not participate. Therefore, these performance measures provide powerful support for the district's investments in a pre-kindergarten education.

For its second Pre-K-3 performance measure, the applicant indicates that it assessed social-emotional competence; however, it fails to provide convincing evidence of the appropriateness of this measure because it does not indicate what the competence measure consists of.

The applicant includes three appropriate performance measures for grades 4-8 because it examines MCT2 scores in English language arts and math. The targets are achievable, and they are most likely ambitious because they anticipate a four to six percentage point increase each year.

The district will assess students' performance on state-level proficiency indexes (AMOs) for its grade-appropriate academic leading indicator. The targets are ambitious yet achievable because if students meet the targets they will have improved between fifteen and twenty-five percentage points or more.

The applicant selects an effective health/social-emotional leading indicator because it will track the percentage of days its 6th grade students have without any altercations. The targets are ambitious yet achievable because if the students meet the target, they will have nearly 20 percent more days without physical altercations by the post-grant period.

For grades 9-12 the applicant includes targets for students who complete the FAFSA; however, the applicant only considers those students who apply to colleges and universities as "participating students." Therefore, the baseline and target measures may not allow for ambitious yet achievable growth because a high percentage of students applying for college will most likely already be completing the FAFSA.

To assess students who are on-track to graduate college- and career-ready, the applicant will monitor the number of students who score a 16 or better on the ACT. The targets are ambitious yet achievable, and this is an effective performance measure because the applicant explains in its narrative that the average ACT score for its high school is 16.1, and the district achieves these targets, its students will be much more competitive on the state and national levels given their respective averages of 18.9 and 20.9.

To assess career-readiness, the applicant proposes a measure based on Cambridge International Examination (CIE) results. The table presented by the applicant is a bit confusing, however, because the applicant includes CIE results for its baseline as well as for 2012-13, but it fails to include targets for 2013-14 through 2016-17. As a result, one is left to assume that the numbers listed under the CIE results would be the same as those listed for the other subgroups since they are the same across the chart. (For example, the total number of participating students in each cell of a column is the same for each subgroup.) Nevertheless, the applicant presents ambitious yet achievable targets for the percent of students who are career-ready based on the the Cambridge International Examination Program.

The final performance measures presented by the applicant measure the level of proficiency of students who complete the Mississippi Career Planning and Assessment measure. The achievability of the applicant's targets is difficult to assess because the applicant does not indicate whether the "proficient" values are percentages or raw numbers. If they are percentages, the targets are more appropriate than if they are raw numbers.

The applicant only includes eleven performance measures because even though its final table implies that it covers two combined performance measures (academic and health or social-emotional), the eleventh performance measure does not indicate health or social-emotional achievements.

Overall the applicant scores in the medium range for this section because of inconsistencies in its data and because it does not include all twelve of the required performance measures.

Score: 3

<b>(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>
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**(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

To address E(4) the applicant includes elements of a high-quality plan because it provides a table with a goal, activities, rationale, timelines, deliverables, and responsible parties. However, the applicant includes only one goal ("investments of time and money and budget are used effectively"), which does not provide opportunities for rigorous evaluation because the goal is so general. The applicant does include appropriate evaluative activities, however, because the RTTD project director, principals, teachers, parents and students will all be involved in assessing the effectiveness of the plan.

The applicant has designed a reasonable evaluation tool because principals, teachers, parents, and students will all complete an appropriate matrix that will be designed by the RTTD Project Director. However, the effectiveness of the matrices is difficult to assess because they have not been designed, and the applicant describes each deliverable as essentially the same activity. For example, each responsible party "will evaluate the effectiveness of" similar components such as professional development and the use of technology and building materials (principals and teachers) as well as the "effectiveness of magnet and Cambridge International programs" (educators, parents, and students).

The applicant earns a score in the high range for this section. Though the applicant includes elements of a high-quality plan, the district's ability to "rigorously evaluate" the effectiveness of RTTD-funded activities may be a bit limited because its narrative in E(4) does not articulate a clear approach to the fullest extent possible. Other sections, such as E(1), include goals that may be appropriate as part of this evaluation process, however.

Score: 4

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

	Available	Score
<b>(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

**(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

In response to F(1) the applicant provides comprehensive and convincing evidence of an effective budget because it provides narratives and tables that cover each of the F(1) subsections. For F(1)(a) the applicant identifies appropriate district, federal and "other grant" funding and clearly demonstrates all funding sources because the table breaks down each type of funding according to the year of the grant for which it will be available and for each project. For example, the applicant indicates that it will use district funding to support personalized learning, college- and career-ready initiatives, educator evaluation, data systems, and general administration throughout and after the grant.

The table breaks down costs for each cell of the table and indicates the total revenue from all additional funding sources, and supportive narratives convincingly demonstrate how the budget will reasonably and sufficiently support the development and implementation of the applicant's proposal because the applicant explains how its previous experience with grants has prepared the district to implement its plan effectively. For example the district understands the financial and personnel resources it will need because it has already implemented comparable resources to carry out its existing School Improvement Grants.

For F(1)(c)(i), the applicant also provides extensive descriptions of how it will use funds to implement its plan because the applicant breaks down its expenditures in narratives according to personnel, fringe benefits, travel, supplies, contractual, training, and other expenses. For example, one personnel narrative explains that the plan will contract with an outside evaluator for \$43,200 each year.

In a second table, the applicant justifies its reasonable budget because it breaks down all purchases by grant year and according to whether they are one-time expenditures or on-going operational costs. It also demonstrates the sustainability of its project's goals because the applicant explains its strategies for sustainability. For example, the applicant expects to use grant funding to train teachers in ways that help teachers "internalize training and continue to utilize the strategies they

learn [to] train new teachers."

The applicant earns a high score for this section because it provides a clear delineation of the funds that will support its project including sources and rationale.

Score: 10

<b>(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>
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**(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant demonstrates the sustainability of its project goals because it weaves elements of a high-quality plan throughout a general narrative for all of section F. The district reiterates general goals, such as making "a lasting improvement in the lives of our students," as well as more specific goals, such as "working with partners in the region to develop a plan for external support of our schools."

The applicant provides comprehensive strategies for sustainability that form the activities and deliverables of its high-quality plan because they include activities such as "trainers train teachers to sustain strategies and methods" as well as deliverables such as "build[ing] teacher capacity."

The applicant provides two tables with budgetary timelines: one includes just the four years of the grant, and the other also includes a post-grant timeline. The timelines are somewhat vague because they do not include specific months or dates, however.

Deliverables such as new instructional materials and the acquisition of accountability software increase the feasibility of the applicant's plans for sustainability.

The applicant does not demonstrate adequately who the responsible parties for implementation will be, however, because it references responsible parties vaguely. For example, in one such reference the applicant explains that "personnel brought into this grant understand that it is part of their job is [sic] to train teachers so that after they have gone, teachers can carry what they have learned on into the second, third, and subsequent years after grant funding has ceased." However, the applicant does not make clear what roles/positions these personnel members will fill.

The applicant has demonstrated that it successfully works with and gains the support of local government agencies and community members because it has previously benefited from sizeable grants, and it continues to seek additional funding. These partnerships provide evidence of the sustainability of the applicant's project goals.

The overall score for this section falls in the high range because the applicant clearly demonstrates elements of a high-quality plan in some areas, but it does not adequately demonstrate comparable qualities in other areas.

Score: 9

**Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)**

	Available	Score
<b>Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant establishes convincing evidence of appropriate, diverse partnerships within the community because it works with such organizations as Head Start, which provides pre-kindergarten services; Delta Bridge (an association funded by the Walton Foundation) which works to improve the community overall; and local churches, which provide tutoring services, to name a few. The district also works with local businesses to provide outreach to parents who are reluctant to take an active role in the education system.

The applicant identifies comprehensive population-desired results because it has designed a plan that will academically support students from PreK through graduation and will emotionally and socially support students, their families, and the wider community. For example, goals 1-5 target students' academic preparation, goal 6 establishes a priority for conflict-free learning environments, goals 7 and 8 support literacy programs, and goals 9 and 10 support the local and wider communities.

The applicant supplies reasonable evidence that it will track the selected indicators to measure results because it recognizes the benefits of using a robust data collection system. However, the applicant does not provide extensive details about how it will measure some of the more subjective goals including the tenth goal related to partnerships in the wider

community that will increase students' access to a "world-class education." Even so, the applicant recognizes a powerful distinction because it writes that "teachers and administrators must learn a paradigm shift from using data to assess teachers to using data to assess the needs and assets of students."

Nevertheless, the applicant will be able to measure the rates of achievement for nearly all of its goals because it will utilize regular assessments, screenings, and exams to measure the district's progress towards meeting all students' needs, and especially those needs of students with disabilities and English language learners.

The applicant's plan will serve all of the schools in its district, but the district still has appropriate plans to scale its reforms beyond its own schools because the applicant has developed partnerships with other districts in the area and around the state.

While the applicant has demonstrated elsewhere in its plan that it has a proven record of success, it does not adequately address in this section how it will improve future results over time because it merely states that it has done so in the past. By not establishing evidence that the applicant can adjust its goals and activities as needed by the current plan, it is difficult to determine whether the applicant will be able to improve results in the future.

The applicant provides reasonable evidence of how it will partner with organizations and businesses in the community to meet its goals because it describes relevant educational supports (such as working with local farmers so that students learn about planting and harvesting crops). The applicant also asserts its appreciation for relevancy because it stresses the importance of providing students with experiences and supports that are applicable to their lives outside of school.

The applicant will gather information from various members of the community in order to design its support systems because it will use needs assessments to gain feedback from those who attend meetings and from those who are willing to submit online surveys. However, the applicant does not address how it will integrate these results with its own goals because the applicant does not demonstrate a clear connection between the plan's design and the results of the needs assessments it administers and the support systems that the district has decided to establish.

Nevertheless, the necessary infrastructure and decision-making processes will appropriately be rooted in weekly superintendent and curriculum meetings because these meetings provide opportunities for open discussion and reporting.

The applicant also does not provide convincing evidence that it has established a system to assess its implementation progress because it does not address specific methods for identifying and resolving challenges. However the applicant does describe the "war room" created by the central office to "display and examine data." Presumably data related to performance measures will also be displayed in the war room, and those in attendance at meetings will determine the success of the district's efforts.

Finally, the applicant identifies performance measures but they are not consistent with its population-level desired results from the first part of the Competitive Preference Priority because the tables at the end of this section are the same as those that the applicant included in E(3) and are not specific to how the applicant will integrate resources as part of partnerships.

Overall, the applicant earns a score in the high range for this section because it provided reasonable evidence that it will align the resources and services provided by community partnerships with the the needs and assets of its students.

Score: 8

## Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
<b>Absolute Priority 1</b>		<b>Met</b>

### Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

Throughout its plan the applicant has addressed Absolute Priority 1 because it has consistently demonstrated how it will build on the four core educational assurance areas. The district uses state and Common Core standards as well those of the Cambridge International Program to prepare students for college and career. While current data systems measure growth and provide data, the applicant also continues to develop its infrastructure in order to streamline and collect data more efficiently. Similarly, the district works to "grow its own" when it comes to recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective educators by providing support and maintaining two-way communication systems. Finally, the applicant has demonstrated its reform effectiveness because it has successfully turned around its lowest achieving schools.

The district effectively personalizes instruction starting with very young students because it has redesigned its elementary

schools into theme-based learning centers and continues this personalization throughout middle school and high school to prepare students for college or career depending on the students' plans of study.

The district's implementation of the Cambridge International Program, IB curriculum, and Advanced Placement courses appropriately accelerates student achievement and deepens student learning.

The applicant thoroughly demonstrates that it has measures in place to increase the effectiveness of its teachers and to expand student access to effective teachers because the district offers a broad range of professional development courses and supports improvement efforts.

Finally, the district has demonstrated that it can decrease achievement gaps across student groups and that it can increase the rates at which its students will graduate prepared for college and careers because nearly all of its schools have shown continual improvement across grade levels and subjects over the last four years.

<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>187</b>
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## Race to the Top - District

### Technical Review Form

#### Application #0216MS-3 for Clarksdale Municipal School District

#### A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

#### (A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The Clarksdale Municipal School District (CMSD) has set forth a comprehensive and coherent vision for school reform. The vision is comprehensive because the applicant includes ambitious goals and objectives that are aligned with the four core educational assurance areas. The applicant clearly articulates credible approaches to providing all students with schools staffed by effective teachers and school leaders with the knowledge, resources, and skills to accelerate student achievement.

The vision includes comprehensive and ambitious initiatives with timelines, aligned rationales and appropriate deliverables to support the inclusion of the four core educational assurances. For example the applicant will: (1) develop personalized learning for all students; (2) institute public school choice at the elementary level through a district-wide magnet school system; (3) implement Academy Choice and Cambridge International Examinations programs at the intermediate and secondary level; (4) implement a comprehensive, diagnostic assessment program in all grades; (5) utilize an accessible data management system with school-based data coaches; (6) uphold school-level and student accountability decisions in all areas; including Superintendent, principal, and teacher evaluations through MSTAR and the new Principal Evaluation System; and (7) turn around struggling schools with proven professional development and hiring quality teachers/administrative staff. All of the proposed initiatives are innovative approaches serve as a foundation for accelerating student learning and deepening student learning.

The school district provided a detailed description as to how they will utilize the development of magnet schools to further individualize the learning environment for students. The approach specifies how they measure student progress, personalize learning goals that encompass academics and college and careers. The plan is ambitious and demonstrates that the district's vision is grounded in tasks and activities to increase student achievement, deepen student learning, and increase equity through personalized learning. The applicant appropriately describes that the classroom experiences of students will be based on student academic and career interests and teachers will be trained to engage learners and facilitate the learning process.

<b>(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>
<p><b>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant provided a comprehensive approach for implementing the reform proposal. The approach was developed as a collaborative effort by the district leadership team with input from the community and school based stakeholders. The decision to include all schools in the program was expressed initially in the District Strategic Plan. In the plan, the applicant specifically expressed that the inclusion of all schools would provide district-wide consistency and equitable programming at all schools. Due to the long term desegregation agreement in place within the State, the applicant needed to find some means of ensuring equitable participation for all schools and all students. The goal is to ensure all students have an opportunity to participate in implementing personalized learning initiatives at all school levels. The approach is comprehensive because the applicant provided documentation of the following criteria:</p> <p>(a) The applicant will implement a district-wide program. All schools will participate. Data was provided for each school participating and evidenced the need for improvement at the schools.</p> <p>(b) The applicant provided a list of the schools that will participate in grant activities. Overall, 3153 students will participate and 96% are certified as Poverty Level Income by the MDE, and the Free and Reduced Lunch district-wide total is 96%. The demographic data clearly identifies the district as high need. 400 educators will be included in the project.</p> <p>(c) The applicant will use this reform opportunity to transition over a three year period to a district-wide magnet school model.</p> <p>(d) The applicant did not provide data or information on the participants in 9th grade Academy. This information would have been helpful in determining how many students would participate and a projection of the demographic make-up of this group of students.</p>		

<b>(A)(3) LEA-wide reform &amp; change (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>
<p><b>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant provides a high-quality plan to describe how the reform proposal will be scaled up and translated into meaningful reform to support district-wide changes to reach their outcome goal of improving student learning. The plan is credible because the district has previously been involved in several initiatives to align student learning outcomes with the proposed district reform efforts. The following initiatives provide evidence the district has begun the work to reform schools in the district with programs that support increased student learning and RTT-D funds will allow the applicant to scale up and expand. The applicant's plan includes timelines, rationales and key goals for the following initiatives, all of which are aligned with the applicant's logic model. The implementation of these projects will help the applicant reach their outcome goals.</p> <p>(1) Teacher and leader evaluation plan M-STAR will support teacher effectiveness through rigorous support and competency based compensation. The use of an effective teacher evaluation will provide data to identify teacher performance and to target support for struggling teachers. In the pilot program, teachers who participated in the teacher incentive plan for student performance and growth saw significant changes in student test scores.</p> <p>(2) The applicant will develop K-12 theme-based magnet schools throughout the district and develop customized personal learning experiences appropriately tailored to each school. This initiative supports the district's school turnaround efforts to change the curriculum and focus for low-performing schools.</p> <p>(3) The applicant has begun the process of curriculum development for the new magnet schools with the support of the Cambridge program. The new curriculum will infuse the Common Core Standards with magnet themes, which provides content in a focused ways for struggling students.</p> <p>(4) The applicant will develop a 9th grade academy at the high school to support personalized and project-based learning for 9th grade students. This model allows 9th graders to make a smooth transition to 10th-12th grades, thus supporting the district's goal of increasing 9th grade and high school retention.</p>		

<b>(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>
<p><b>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant provides a clear and coherent vision and plan that is likely to result in improved student learning and performance and increased equity. The plan is demonstrated by ambitious yet achievable annual goals that are equal to or exceed the State's overall targets for the district by grade level and by student subgroup. The district's strategic plan</p>		

provided insight into the fact that there has been some progress towards reaching the goals of increasing student achievement. The plan includes the following documentation with appropriate timelines, activities and associated rationales as evidence:

- CMSD is using a 3% growth goal rather than using the NCEE percentage growth guidelines of 2% per year calculated for state growth. Four out of nine schools were at the lowest (Level 1) four years ago. Two were at risk of failing, and two were on academic watch. Clarksdale High School was classified as Level 1 and failing. Annual Measurable goals are established through 2016 which are above the required state minimum.
- The core teachers who were highly qualified ranged from 100% at some schools to as low as 73% at others. Districtwide, 87% of core teachers were highly qualified and 17% had emergency/provisional certification.
- Achievement gaps with each subgroup are identified, which include economically disadvantaged students showed a large gap between the school district and that sub-group. The applicant is proposing to decrease achievement gaps overall by 5% annually. Based on prior annual success, this goal while not so ambitious is achievable.
- The applicant is proposing to increase graduation rates and to increase college enrollment. The goal and plan include bringing a Graduation Coach on board to promote college and career readiness. The hiring of a Graduation Coach and establishing strong and diverse partnerships with postsecondary to impact college enrollment rates is likely to increase graduation rates.
- Clarksdale High School will implement Cambridge school-wide by grade level over the next three year. By 2016-17, Clarksdale High School will have Cambridge International completely school-wide. Cambridge has been in place for a cohort of students in 9th and 10th grade since the 2011-12 school-year. Schools with innovative programs such as Cambridge are exempted from participating in the State Curriculum Tests, because they are studying a different curriculum.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>The applicant has effectively demonstrated evidence of a prior record of success over the past four years in advancing student learning and achievement. For example, the district has embarked on many new and innovative initiatives to increase equity in learning and teaching that have been effective in increasing teacher performance and student learning. The applicant provides evidence of a record of increased achievement for most subgroups across the last four years, but for some subgroups, the gains were relatively small. For example, in the high need subgroup the percent proficient on the reading assessment increased from 46% to 53% in 2011; and in math from 56% to 59%. The data presented suggests that the gap has not significantly closed across those years for some high-need subgroups. On the Reading assessments, the gap between ELL students and the total population increased from 18% to 19%, and for several other subgroups, the closure was insignificant. For example, on the reading assessment for students with disabilities and the total population the gap changed from 25% to 24%, and for math, the gap between the total population and the economically disadvantaged subgroup increased from 12% to 13%.</p> <p>The applicant provides additional evidence to indicate while ambitious goals have been set for the persistently lowest-achieving schools, there have been some successful prior successes with students at those schools. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district has demonstrated a record of success according to the QDI for the State of Mississippi. Two elementary schools in the district soared to the rank of High Progress, however, improvements are needed in math, language arts and English/Language across all sub-groups.</li> <li>• The district has improved the performance of chronically low-performing schools in the district into thriving and schools.</li> <li>• The district has reached out to parents events planned at school, one-on-one meetings with teachers are conducted to discussion individual student's test results, thus improving parental involvement.</li> </ul>		
<b>(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>The applicant provided comprehensive evidence to demonstrate that school-level expenditure data is available to the public</p>		

through administrative policies that emphasize transparency. Overall, the evidence indicates that the district's processes and practices are efficient and transparent. The district processes, practices, and investments are made public, by school, actual school-level expenditures for regular K-12 instruction, instructional support, pupil support, and school administration. This information will provide assurance to the public that RTT-D funds are properly administered. The Superintendent has provided measures for various school groups to meet and discuss issues surrounding the school district. The State requires all school districts to report certain financial information in the form of a school financial report to parents/guardians. This report shows how revenues were spent to operate each school during the prior year. Copies of the report are distributed through various public forums. Other demonstrations of high levels of transparency include:

- The CMSD website posts Budget Workshop PowerPoint's as presented to the Board and the Combined Budget. There are direct links to the Business Office personnel who may answer questions.
- At the local Board of Trustees meetings each month, fiscal records are presented for a vote and made public. Mississippi Code requires that public school districts in Mississippi provide salaries at the school level for all employees— instructional and support staff, administration, and district office personnel. This information is shared at least annually, and each month whenever adjustments to the personnel records (transfers, terminations, new hires, etc.) are made.
- In addition, all non-personnel expenditures at the school and district level are reported to the Board of Trustees, voted on for approval, and made public. Hard copies of all items on the Board Agenda are available at each School Board meeting for the public to review and take home.

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

**10**

**10**

**(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant demonstrated comprehensive evidence of developing and building successful conditions and sufficient autonomy under State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements to implement the personalized learning environments described in the proposal. The Clarksdale Municipal School District works closely and collaboratively with the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) aimed at improving the educational offerings of schools and the outcomes for the district. Documenting evidence to demonstrate this working relationship include:

- Successful mandated integration of Common Core State Standards into the curriculum.
- The approval and successful development of Themed Magnet Schools and Excellence for All, and the Cambridge International Examination Programs. In particular, the themed magnet schools and Cambridge Curriculum were specifically designed to implement the personalized learning environments which creates a pathway to college-and career-readiness.
- The applicant has worked with the Mississippi Department of Education to restructure policies and procedures to create personalized learning environments within the existing structures of federal and state regulations, Mississippi Code, and Mississippi State Board of Education policies. One such example is that the District has had the autonomy to increase school hours across the district.
- The district sought and secured permission to remove required attendance zones that forced students to attend certain schools based on the location of their residence. This move provides increased access to more personalized learning environments through school choice. This shift to school choice allowed CMSD to eliminate targeted busing zones initiated by a federal desegregation order. Parents now have autonomy to send their elementary students to whatever school in the District they so desire, thus providing equity and access for all students.
- A restructuring of the District for the school-year 2013/14, created one Intermediate School (grades 5 & 6), one Middle School (grades 7 & 8), a 9th Grade Academy, and Clarksdale High School is able to serve 10th – 12th grade students.

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

**15**

**15**

**(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant has demonstrated comprehensive evidence that the district is and has been engaging in meaningful stakeholder collaborations and continued to acquire support throughout the development of the proposal. The collaborative support is evidenced by the following:

- The applicant does an excellent job of describing their strategies for ensuring significant stakeholder engagement as evidenced by the letters of support from a variety of stakeholders and the comments in the Letters of Support clearly indicate all are supportive of the proposed grant initiatives.
- Teachers provided feedback on how to improve the strategic plan and there is clear support by teachers as evidenced by the signed letter of support documenting a large percentage of teachers from each of the schools. There is no union and over 70% of teachers indicated support of the reform vision.

- The applicant provides information indicating that community forums with parents and staff members and student were conducted that collected input and informed all of the strategic plan. The comments indicate a strong commitment by community stakeholders in the design of the proposed project.
- A series of newspapers have kept the public informed about the improvement plans and Cable One television ran informational videos about all programs in the district. In addition, the Superintendent's Newsletter gives continuous updates of all activities in schools, including the RTT-D proposal.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(1) Learning (20 points)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>The applicant provides a high-quality plan for improving learning and teaching through personalized learning environments. The plan is high-quality because the plan consists of a strategic framework for preparing students to achieve at their highest potential. For example, teachers and students will work together to develop a post-secondary plan, and make the connection to what is needed to graduate with the academic and personal skills to succeed in the workforce or higher education. This proposed approach will allow students to be able to manage their own learning in a personalized learning environment. Content will be derived from the Common Core State Standards, Mississippi State Standards, and the District assessments. The plan is additionally high-quality because the applicant meticulously documents and aligns key goals with timelines, deliverables, and rationales for each activity.</p> <p>For example, in reference to instruction--instruction will be presented in thematic focus strands. Allowing students strands options, students will be able to choose and build on their level of knowledge and application within the framework of a particular theme. Each magnet school will employ a multi-faceted approach to the learning environment and use a variety of instructional methods which bridge together the theory with practice which is a great instructional strategy to engage students and establish the connections from school to college and careers.</p> <p>For example, in reference to ongoing and regular feedback--for students who struggle academically and/or socially the district is committed to the Three Tier Model of Intervention. The district has developed school strategies which will support the intervention process such as; curriculum and behavioral programs, assessments, daily schedules, new personnel, increased technology and the needed infrastructure. These strategies will provide the needed support system for struggling students.</p> <p>For example, in reference to high quality instruction--the Cambridge model is aligned to Common Core State Standards, ensuring high-quality instruction. Students will be able to be involved in deep learning experiences by working on high-interest projects independently and collaboratively, reflecting and discussing in small group settings, and drawing on real-life experiences that relate to the concepts of each lesson. Teachers, students and parents will be able to monitor students' learning progress by tracking their concept master through a checklist of student learning goals included in the online system. The Cambridge project will empower educators, leaders, and the community to support students' creativity and successful use of the personalized learning environment.</p> <p>For example, in references to accommodations for high-need students--school master schedules will be designed for individual students that will allow them to progress at their own pace. This mechanism will allow students to move on to higher-level course work or provides remediation strategies if necessary.</p> <p>For example, in reference to personalized learning environments--the personalized learning environments will allow students to take charge of their own learning path and to work on high interest projects individually and collaboratively in online learning communities. Because the initiatives emphasize 21st century learning skills, it allows students to learn to think critically, learn and adapt to new learning techniques.</p> <p>For example, in reference to assessments--students will take a pre-assessment to determine strengths, weaknesses and learning targets that will be incorporated into their individual learning plan and students will take part in a series of assessments.</p>		
<b>(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>

**(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant demonstrated a high-quality and well-developed plan for ensuring all teachers and school leaders are prepared for improving teaching and learning and increasing their capacity to support students all all levels of implementing personalized learning programs. Additionally, the plan will provide teachers with the appropriate training and professional development to learn how to adapt content and measure student progress. Teachers and leaders will participate in a new evaluation system. The evaluation system has been piloted at several schools and will be implemented fully during the 2014 school year. The evaluation system is multi-faceted with several key components and steps to ensure each educator receives a fair assessment, and opportunities for continuous improvement. Teacher effectiveness in closing gaps and increasing student performance are the key goals of the evaluation system, which is appropriately aligned with the district's vision. Effective teachers will be rewarded through a merit pay plan based on student performance/growth and observations. A similar evaluation system will be implemented for school administrators.

The plan is high-quality because the applicant included documentation of the following examples of initiatives that demonstrate professional educators will have the appropriate training, policies, tools and resources they need to teach and lead in an effective teaching and learning environment. Each initiative is aligned with a timeline, appropriate rationales and aligned deliverables. All of the initiatives are aligned with goals and objectives and inclusive in the applicant's vision for reform as it relates to developing effective teachers and leaders.

For example, with regard to engaging educators in training and professional development- Professional Learning Communities and the POD approach, will be used to assist teachers with learning how to adapt content and instruction both to the theme requirements and to the student's individual learning style. With effective professional development in theme integration teachers will learn the best techniques for giving students the opportunities to engage in common and individual tasks, collaborative work, project-based learning. Teachers will have input into developing their own Professional Development Plan (PDP). This approach allows teachers to have more buy-in and control of their training options.

For example in regards to teacher training--teachers will receive increased training on effective Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies. Data Coaches will be utilized at each school site to work closely with teachers to discuss data and plans to accelerate student achievement based on what the data results. The district will ensure that high-quality digital resources are available in every classroom throughout the district. Training will be provided to ensure all teachers understand how to integrate digital tools into instruction. Several schools in the district are piloting iPads in the classrooms. The district has a goal to expand to a one-to-one iPads initiative through the RTT-D. All teachers and administrators will be trained in teaching the thematic focus of their magnet schools. All teachers in the International Baccalaureate schools will receive at least Level I Training of the IB teaching strategies, Excellence for All teachers will receive intensive training in the Cambridge Model. Learning communities will be established throughout the district and within schools for vertical alignment within disciplines and theme implementation.

The applicant will utilize programs such as Teach for America to staff hard to staff schools and subject areas. Additionally, the applicant currently has a close working relationship with the local university School of Education programs to recruit teachers. Although, these are resources for recruitment, since the applicant's proposal includes a STEAM and STEM focus, more emphasis or a plan should be in place to recruit STEAM and STEM trained teachers. The applicant did not include a plan to increase the number of principals in hard-to-staff schools.

Overall, the applicant provided a credible approach to teaching and leading that will help educators improve instruction and increase their capacity to support student progress toward meeting college- and career-ready standards and graduation requirements. All of the proposed activities will enable teachers and leaders the support needed to fully implement a personalized learning and teaching for all students, in particular high-need students.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>

**(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant has demonstrated that a high-quality plan is in place to support the implementation of project initiatives. The plan is high-quality because the applicant provides evidence that comprehensive policies, rules, practices and a sufficient infrastructure are in place or will be acquired to provide every student and educator with the support and resources needed to be successful. The applicant provided the appropriate evidence with timelines, rationales and deliverables to support the project in the narrative.

- The applicant has assembled a team of appropriate educators and curriculum experts to assist with the development

and implementation of all reform initiatives outlined in the proposal.

- The applicant amended polices for creating a school choice magnet schools program district wide. The plan approval was needed because the district is under a Desegregation Court Order and developing a school choice district needed prior approval.
- The Central Office consists of a leadership team headed by the superintendent, a curriculum team headed by the assistant superintendent, support services, technology services, special services, and the business office. The leadership team has been designated with appropriate responsibilities to implement project initiatives and meet all project goals. Each initiative is aligned with timelines, deliverables and persons responsible for each activity. The timeline/management plan will be effective for ensuring all project goals are met.
- At the school level, the appropriate personnel will ensure all school-based activities are implemented. At the school level to assist the principals will also be a curriculum coordinator, and professional development/magnet school coordinator. The school based leadership teams will address issues around curriculum and instruction, and accessing resources. Each school's administration will have the autonomy and authority to make key decisions that relate to the implementation of the RTT-D grant. The applicant provided clear and comprehensive descriptions of all proposed initiatives that will provide students opportunities to progress and earn credit based on demonstrated mastery. The district will implement the following programs: (a) The Excellence for All, and (b) Cambridge International Examination Program. Both programs are considered research based qualification systems based on mastering benchmarks. Both programs offer students opportunities to demonstrate mastery of a benchmark, which is evidenced by passing an exit exam, then the student moves to the next level. Students may retake coursework and/or exit exams until they demonstrate mastery. Intensive intervention is available for students who struggle. Both programs are considered effective because: (1) early exit is available for students who demonstrate mastery in a shorter amount of time, (2) mastery, rather than seat-time, is the benchmark of achievement of goals.

The plan is a student-centered approach to improving student academic performance and to deepen student understanding of curriculum material. School personnel will learn to apply powerful strategies for assessment to guide instructional practice. Teachers will tailor learning objectives, content, method, pace, and environment to each student's unique learning needs, learning style, personal interests, and preferred expression styles.

- Assessments will be created to evaluate students' strengths and needs, and a personalized learning path, using research-based, rigorous, engaging curriculum, will be prescribed to allow students to reach mastery at multiple times and in various ways. Internal and external assessments will be administered to measure and report student progress, which includes formative, interim, and summative assessment. These assessments will allow teachers to provide immediate analysis, feedback and targeted instruction in areas of greatest academic need or enrichment.
- Data Coaches school based data teams will plan and organize meaningful lessons, monitor and adjust instruction based on student performance, and provide corrective feedback to maximize student learning. Team meetings will be held to analyze formative, interim, and summative assessments and the resulting performance data for the purpose of creating flexible instructional groups, providing immediate corrective feedback to students, and targeting instruction to maximize student learning.
- The applicant provides evidence that all learning resources and instructional practices will be adaptable and fully accessible to all students, including students with disabilities and English learners. Each school will receive training to ensure proper identification of students who are eligible for services (struggling learners, migratory, limited English, neglected students, and etc.).

<b>(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>
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**(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant has demonstrated a high-quality plan because the district has in place several strong instructional technology projects for use by teachers and students in their classrooms. For example, teachers and students are using iPads, laptop computers, online digital curriculum resources and mobile devices along with media-rich content and multimedia digital texts to enrich and integrate teaching and learning into the classroom. The applicant detailed the plan and all proposed initiatives in a detailed management plan. The plan included reasonable timelines, deliverables, and persons who will be responsible for implementation. Other documented evidence include the following:

- All students and parent regardless of income will have access through a check-out system to the necessary tools, resources, and materials needed to implement the strategies and initiatives proposed in the RTT-D proposal.
- All infrastructure issues (wireless technology, public housing access and community hot-spots) are currently being put into place through a grant from the Delta Bridge Foundation and support from the City of Clarksdale to ensure local access for all of the districts students and parents.
- All students will be able to participate in high-quality instruction, delivered online, through the Mississippi Virtual Public School (MVPS), an online course delivery system available to all Mississippi school districts at no cost. The

program allows all district students through this program access to a wider range of courses, flexible scheduling, which is additionally building independence and personalized learning environments.

- Additionally, students and teachers have access to a variety of online instructional resources, which provide web-based or technology-based instruction, remediation, and enrichment. Online peer tutoring and tutoring provided by professionals is available to every student. Students also have access to link to the Khan Academy, which is an excellent online learning tool for students who need extra credits and support.
- Parents, teachers and district personnel will have access to the newly devised inoperable data system. The inoperable data system will provide access to student grades and learning plans in open data formats. Parents will be able to monitor a student's progress within the system. There are no plans to provide human resources data and budget data for public consumption in the new inoperable data system.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>The applicant provides a clear and credible approach to continuously improve on the reform plan and all of the project initiatives. The plan is high-quality because the applicant included in the reform proposal a timeline/management plan for each individual initiative proposed in the plan. The various timelines included timely and regular feedback on progress toward project goals and opportunities for ongoing corrections and improvements during and after the term of the grant. Each plan effectively addressed how the applicant will monitor, measure, and publicly share information on the RTT-D initiatives and programs. The following approaches demonstrate opportunities for regular feedback and progress reporting that could lead to major improvements during the grant's implementation phase:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The applicant developed an evaluation and communication system to share information on how instructional staff and leadership are utilizing new digital resources, how instruction is provided and how well students perform.</li> <li>• The system will provide a progress monitoring system for teacher effectiveness and student academic growth. Important milestones and expectations will be established collectively by teachers, students, administrators and parents.</li> <li>• The district will create a Race to the Top Leadership Team to meet with the Superintendent on a monthly basis. This Leadership Team will share the current status towards meeting the district's reform goals, using data measures collected in a variety of areas – student academic performance, teacher quality indicators, utilization of new curriculum and digital resources, parent/community engagement factors, and additional school level needs.</li> <li>• The Superintendent's Newsletter is published monthly online and will be used to report on the Race to the Top grant progress towards meeting all reform goals and initiatives, as well as how funds are being spent.</li> </ul>		
<b>(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>The applicant demonstrates a clear and high-quality approach to continuously improve on the reform plans. The plan is high-quality because it demonstrates and documents evidence that processes and procedures are in place to ensure ongoing communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders. The applicant detailed in the collaborative development of the Strategic Plan a commitment to the vision of the district as "belonging to the stakeholders." The plan is comprehensive and strong enough to meet the selection criteria. Evidence documenting the plan have been evaluated and samples of the strong points have been provided below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district will want to ensure continuous and two-way communication with all stakeholders. To ensure this happens the district will create various Advisory Committees representing various stakeholders, such as the Student Advisory Committee, and the Superintendent's Roundtable.</li> <li>• PTO meetings will be held at the school level on a monthly basis and representatives from the school level PTOs will meet at the central office to bring their ideas and concerns together district-wide.</li> <li>• The Superintendent's Newsletter will be sent home monthly with every student in the system and made available on the website, and distributed to businesses and offices to ensure that stakeholders who do not currently have students in the system still have access to the information contained therein. CMSD will work closely with the local newspaper and cable channel to ensure that informational pieces are written and videos aired on the cable network.</li> <li>• The district will continue to implement and support the Active Parent service which is available to parents via the newly developed data monitoring website. Parents can check student grades, attendance, and find notes from the</li> </ul>		

teacher. Additionally, school level parent nights and open houses will be held and phone calls will be made to home, as well as, notes and information will be sent home with students. All provide effective and ongoing communication and engagement.

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

5

5

**(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant does an excellent job of identifying performance measures that are both ambitious and obtainable. The rationale for each of the measures are clearly described and includes information as to how the stated performance measures are rigorous and aligned to measures that will provide rigorous, timely, and formative leading information tailored to their proposed plan for implementation and areas of concern. For example, when deciding on the percentage of students overall and by subgroup whose teacher of record is considered effective or highly effective, the applicant reflected on historically how teachers were rated, and wanted a measure that would allow them to differentiate teacher performance and human capital decisions based on performance. Each of the stated objectives has a formative and summative aspect that will allow for a high-quality and comprehensive project evaluation with results reported quarterly and annually. The applicant identified 18 performance measures. Appropriate and high-quality rationales were included for the measures. The targets are appropriate, and are ambitious yet achievable and each performance measure will provide rigorous, timely, and formative information. The assessments are tailored to its plan and theory of action in all respects. A strength is that the measures include both performance and participation measures disaggregated by subgroup.

Documenting evidence with timelines for implementation and aligned rationales include the following:

- Involving and collaborating with the teachers, students, parents and administrators in the development of the plan which is good for teacher buy-in.
- The implementation of a "Race to the Top Leadership Team" which will meet with the Superintendent on a monthly basis to share current status that is being made towards reform goals and increasing student academic achievement. The team will examine student and teacher performance, the utilization of new curriculum, digital resources and parent engagement progress all of which focus upon the goals. Great for monitoring.
- The State of Mississippi releases a state report card measuring the school districts across the state based upon measures of effective schools. The state also takes the data from each school district across the state and develops individual report cards for that state. The district plans to compare the District Report Card to the State Report Card. After comparison the results will yield achievement gaps. The gaps will be addressed within the school improvement process. The processes outlined clearly demonstrate a comprehensive plan for improvement.

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

5

4

**(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant has a clear and coherent high-quality plan in place to make adjustments and revisions during implementation of the project. The applicant's plan is high-quality because the approach includes re-occurring and continuous evaluations on the effectiveness of the project's initiatives and program purchases. The plan ensures all internal and external stakeholders are inclusive in the evaluative processes. The plan is high-quality because the applicant comprehensively spelled out in a matrix that was collaboratively developed by various stakeholders from the district level and the school level rigorous initiatives for evaluating effectiveness. Additional evaluation components will be added by an outside evaluator. The outside evaluator will add the non-bias component needed to validate the consistency of the evaluation. Written reports will be developed and distributed and available for public view. Below are a couple of proposed evaluation activities. These evaluation components will provide some evaluative insights of effectiveness of school based programs:

- To ensure fiscal responsibility Principals will evaluate the effectiveness of professional development, use of technology and inventory within their buildings and effectiveness of magnet and Cambridge Internal programs.
- Teachers will evaluate the effectiveness of professional development, use of technology and inventory within their buildings and effectiveness of magnet and Cambridge Internal programs.
- Sophomores, Juniors and Seniors in high school will rate the effectiveness of the magnet and Cambridge programs on their educational outcomes and report to the graduation coach at the high school.
- RTTT Project Director will create a matrix detailing inventory, effectiveness of professional development, and employment of technology and magnet and Cambridge Internal programs.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant's budget included a comprehensive budget narrative and tables that clearly identifies all internal and external funds that will support the project. The over 9 million requested RTT-D budget is reasonable and sufficient to support the development and implementation of the applicant's proposal. Additionally, the applicant clearly provides well thought-out rationales for investments and priorities which are appropriately aligned with the reform vision. The applicant has amassed an additional 9 million in funding to support grant initiatives. The applicant's budget explains that funding will be provided by the Mississippi Department of Education School Improvement Grants, local district support for the project through LEA and state funds. Collaboration between RTTT federal funds, LEA, Mississippi Adequate Education Program state funding, and external funding through the School Improvement Grant presents a strong feasible approach. Other evidence of a strong budget include the following evidence with timelines and deliverables appropriately aligned with all activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school district has been successful with previous grants awarded.</li> <li>• The application includes a thorough description which demonstrates ambitious plans to fund high quality teachers - 25 additional, digital equipment for access any time and any place, and travel for professional learning.</li> <li>• One time investments are clearly explained with a plan to maintain equipment and a cycle to refresh technology.</li> </ul>		
<b>(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant has a high-quality plan for sustainability of the project's goals after the term of the grant. The plan is high-quality because it includes evidence of financial support from State and local stakeholders. For example, the applicant has amassed over 9 million in supplemental funds from other sources to support grant initiatives. The proposal will be supported through funding provided by the Mississippi Department of Education School Improvement Grants for Clarksdale High School and the Magnet Schools Assistance Grant. Additionally, the local school district support for the project through LEA, state funds and federal funds, which provide salaries for central office administrators, use of facilities and utilities, support services, special education services, and professional development opportunities. The plan includes a timeline, an alignment of key goals with shared funding, and the alignment of funding with projected needs (deliverables).</p> <p>While personnel costs account for a sizeable part of the budget, the additional positions proposed in the budget demonstrates the plan's ability to impact student achievement. Current teachers along with the new teachers brought on board with the funds from this grant will develop the skills and abilities to effectively provide personalized learning experiences for all students. After the grant the district plans to continue the program through implementation of a professional development community. Teachers will continue to gain new competencies through on-site, job-embedded modeling and professional development. As a result, student achievement will continue to increase substantially.</p> <p>The applicant additionally describes in detail how the project will evaluate the effectiveness of past investments and use this data to inform future investments. For example, the applicant describes how they have and will use previous School Improvement Grant at Higgins Middle School and the existing School Improving Grant at Clarksdale High School, to contract with instructional coaches, data coaches, and a graduation coach. This collaboration will provide more needed support for the high school initiatives.</p>		

**Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)**

	Available	Score
<b>Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant provides a comprehensive Competitive Preference Priority narrative that effectively meets all of the criteria of demonstrating current and proposed partnerships to integrate public or private resources to augment the schools' resources by providing additional student and family supports to schools that address the social, emotional, or behavioral needs of high need students. The Clarksdale Municipal School District has formed many partnerships with both public and private organizations. CMSD actively seeks these partnerships and encourages outside entities to seek partnerships with CMSD. The types of partnerships formed</p>		

include partnerships to support the ability of professionals in high poverty areas to respond to the specific needs of the students. Other partnerships that work directly with students to improve their academic success and opportunities for success in life and the third type are partnerships that are aimed directly towards parents and community stakeholders. The partnerships are reflected in the annual ambitious and achievable ten population-level indicators selected by the district.

The applicant is currently partnering with Head Start to provide pre-kindergarten services in three elementary schools to students who may not qualify for Head Start services and who may not currently receive any pre-kindergarten services. With funds from the RTT-D grant the applicant will be able to provide additional classrooms in the other elementary schools, expanding the reach of pre-kindergarten to children who do not have placement options.

CMSD partnered with the University of Mississippi World Class Teaching Program and Southern Bancorp to enable teachers to pursue National Board Certification. Title II funds enabled teachers to receive mentoring through the World Class Teaching Program and Southern Bancorp provided below market interest loans which are not required to be paid until after the candidates receive their refund checks from the Mississippi Department of Education. Many churches in the area offer after-school tutoring to complement the after-school tutoring available within the school system. CMSD interacts on an on-going basis to provide relevant information to churches and community organizations and to ensure that they have current textbooks, pacing guides, and assignments.

The applicant's partnership with the Delta Music Institute will provide much needed resources to the arts themed magnet school. The University will provide students with instruction into the business side of the music industry, integrating math and social studies. Students in STEAM schools will learn robotics through a partnership with The Extension Service. Local farmers plow up portions of the school grounds and teach students how to plant and harvest crops. Local doctors work with students at the Health & Medical elementary magnet school.

The applicant effectively described how the district's partnerships will contribute to building the capacity of staff in participating schools by providing them with tools and supports. For example, among those supports is the Mississippi State Department of Education. The MDE has effectively supported the decision-making process and infrastructure to allow the applicant to develop a district-wide system personalized learning environment in all schools. This supportive decision was critical because of the applicant's desegregation consent decree enforcement which allows little change in how schools operate and the selection of staff.

### Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
<b>Absolute Priority 1</b>		<b>Met</b>

**Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:**

The Clarksdale Municipal School District (CMSD) meets the Absolute Priority I by providing a comprehensive plan for the development of personalized learning environments district-wide. The plan is comprehensively addressed because the plan includes ambitious goals to equip all its students for academic success through effective teachers and school leaders, with the knowledge, resources, and skills. The goals are to empower them to: 1) graduate from high school, 2) be successful in college or professional careers, and 3) to be competitive with their peers around the nation and the globe. The plan included comprehensive and ambitious initiatives to support the inclusion of the four core educational assurances. For example the applicant will: (1) develop personalizing learning for all students; (2) institute public school choice at the elementary level through a district-wide magnet school system; (3) implement Academy Choice and Cambridge International Examinations programs at the intermediate and secondary level; (4) implement a comprehensive, diagnostic assessment program in all grades; (5) utilize a robust and accessible data management system with school-based data coaches; (6) uphold school-level and student accountability decisions in all areas; including Superintendent, principal, and teacher evaluations through MSTAR and the new Principal Evaluation System; and (7) turn around struggling schools with proven professional development and hiring quality teachers/administrative staff. All of the initiatives are reasonable approaches to ensure effective school reform.

The school district provided a detailed description as to how they will implement the development of magnet schools. The approach specifies how they will measure student progress, personalize learning goals that encompasses academics and college and careers. The plan is ambitious and demonstrates that there is a plan in place to accelerate progress toward reaching the goals of increased student achievement, deepened student learning, and increased equity through personalized learning.

<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>198</b>
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