



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0035MS-2 for Columbia School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium provided a reasonable description of the ways each district has been successful in establishing the core educational assurances through the adoption of the ACT QualityCore. Through ACT QualityCore, the districts have been able to focus on clearer and higher standards, utilize formative assessment to guide instruction, measure student progress based on mastery of content, provide ongoing professional development, and personalize instruction. The consortium also detailed an approach that would enable students to receive personalized support through the use of technology as well as how student centered classrooms would allow student choice.</p> <p>The weakness in this application was the lack of a clearly described classroom experience. The district also did not fully describe their turn around process for the lowest performing schools. Furthermore, the district provided contradictory information in the application about the ability to recruit and retain high quality educators. In one area of the application, the district claimed the project would attract educators while in another area the district claimed it may lose educators because they will be highly trained as part of the project.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district provided the evidence to demonstrate that all schools had been selected to participate in the project. The district provided comprehensive evidence from the table included in the narrative to support the the demographic breakdowns of all participating students. The data showed approximately 56% of the students were economically disadvantaged and approximately 20% were classified as high need students.</p> <p>The district provided no evidence of the process used to select schools, other than to state this project builds on prior work and to have all students and schools participate in an effort to achieve realistic expectations for change. The lack of information regarding the previous planning sessions during 2012-2013 and the multiple sessions in preparing for this project application was a weakness. The lack of clarifying information regarding these planning sessions did not provide an insight into the implementation approach of this project.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium provided a complete plan to address the reform model presented. The plan included the goal that all teachers would achieve highly effective status and through improved instructional practices, all students would be on track for college and career. Through the use of instructional coaches, teachers would be able to receive valuable feedback during the implementation of individualized instructional practices.</p> <p>The weakness found in this application was the sparse evidence of how this project would be scaled up during the funding period. It may be unrealistic to expect every school and every grade level band to fully implement this project at the beginning without some stages of implementation occurring.</p>		
(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	5
<p>(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p>		

The consortium provided clear annual goals for all 18 schools participating in the project. The tables included in the narrative showed the annual targets for student performance on summative assessments, graduation rates, and college enrollment data.

While the goals were achievable, they may not be ambitious. The application did not fully justify why the selected targets should be considered ambitious. Without this justification, it was difficult to determine whether these targets were ambitious and achievable. It would be reasonable to expect the impact of the project to generate greater gains in academic achievement, graduation rate increases, and college enrollment rates than the schools have projected. Additionally, it would be reasonable to support a 10% increase in the first year of implementation for those student groups who are below 70% proficient. Because each school was setting their own targets, there was not a consistent increase in achievement levels. Finally, there was insufficient evidence to describe how the district was planning to close the achievement gap.

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	11
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium provided strong evidence that the two districts in the LEA are able to improve student performance, graduation rate, and overall academic achievement. Both districts demonstrated a significant increase in QDI scores from 2012 to 2013. Furthermore, graduation rates have increased over the past four years, most notably in the Lamar school district. The Columbia School District, however has not had outstanding success in improving graduation rates. The Columbia School District has also demonstrated an ability to achieve significant reforms in low performing school as evidence from the narrative briefly described the turnaround of Columbia Elementary. Finally, there was specific evidence detailing the use Software Administrator Manager and the ability to log in to the system to see student progress by parents and their students.</p> <p>The weakness in this section was the lack of information about how student performance data would be accessible to parents who do not have internet capabilities. Additionally, the data provided was not disaggregated but only provided in aggregate form. Furthermore, the district did not provide a clear narrative regarding how the data would be used to generate parental involvement or promote participation from students and parents.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium provided appropriate information detailing the high levels of transparency regarding the expenditure of funds. Information is posted to the district website, available during the open school board meetings and available upon request as part of the public record. Additionally, the consortium stated salary information was available at the school level. There were no apparent weaknesses in this selection criteria.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	8
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium stated conditions exist to allow success and there was a sufficient amount of autonomy. The state had previously approved a special graduation path that does not rely on “seat time” but a demonstrated mastery of the standards. Policies were also in place to support multiple paths to graduation which supported personalized instructional practices. The consortium also provided information in the narrative that the State of Mississippi had put policies and practices in place to support Race to the Top grant requirements.</p> <p>The narrative could have been strengthened by the inclusion of specific State statute or educational codes to support the claim of sufficient autonomy to successfully implement the project.</p>		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	9

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium provided adequate evidence of support of key stakeholders, ranging from the local mayor to the State Department of Education. The weakness in the application was due to the consortium not providing clear description of how the stakeholders were engaged during the development of the application. The statement simply stated the relationship began due to the implementation of ACT Quality Core and that all stakeholders have been involved. The narrative gives no evidence of the process. Furthermore, the district does not provide clear evidence of support by 70% or more of the teachers. As a consortium, the need for teacher support is evident but there is little documentation of the teachers' support. There is one signature page of teachers but it contains only 12 names and there is no information to indicate if these are teacher leaders or not. Additionally, there is limited evidence to demonstrate support by local community youth group organizations and there is no evidence of student participation.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	13

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium provided a high quality plan for improving learning and teaching. The plan contained clear goals, multiple activities with sufficient rationales for each activity, a reasonable timeline, specific deliverables, and appropriate parties responsible to ensure high levels of implementation. The application also provided evidence in the narrative that parents, educators, and students will work together to establish personalized learning goals beginning in Kindergarten and continuing through graduation, strengthening 21st Century skills in goal setting, teamwork, critical thinking, communication, and problem solving. Furthermore, the application provided support for students being able to be involved in deep learning of areas of interest through the use of project based learning in classes. The application also provided some evidence of being able to expose students to a variety of diverse cultures and perspectives through the use of the internet and multimedia tools.

However, while the consortium provided all the components of a high quality plan, the details provided in the narrative were insufficiently defined to allow an evaluation of the overall quality of the plan. Furthermore, the move on when ready concept was not fully developed. More operationally defined information regarding move on when ready was needed. There were only two instructional practices clearly identified: the use of ACT QualityCore and project based learning. It was unclear if project based learning would be utilized in combination with ACT QualityCore. Furthermore, the use of high quality digital content was lacking sufficient operationally defined information. The narrative did not address how the project would determine if digital content met the high quality standard. Additionally, the application did not fully develop accommodations for high need students such as Students with Disabilities or Economically Disadvantaged students. The application also provided insufficient evidence detailing how the instructional practices would be differentiated between grade level bands. The application provided limited information explaining how assessment data would be linked to instruction and how this information would be utilized by parents and partners to help support student learning.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	14
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium provided reasonable evidence to demonstrate the use of coaching would improve teaching and leading. Additionally, the utilization of Professional Learning Communities would enable teachers to have the support necessary to implement personalized learning in the classrooms and use instructional practices that would increase student performance as the teachers prepared their students to achieve academic success through differentiated instruction. Additionally, the application provided details to demonstrate frequent progress monitoring. Furthermore, the PLCs will allow teachers to develop action plans to assist students in achieving their goals through the use of personalized resources.

Additionally, the application provided appropriate information that described the access to the necessary tools, data, and resources to accelerate student learning. Through the PLC environment and the instructional coaching team, teachers will be supported in their use of instructional practices to accelerate student learning.

Finally, the application provided evidence of an effective teacher and administrator evaluation system. The consortium provided a strong plan to address the professional learning needs for its teachers, instructional coaches who will be supporting the teachers, and the administrative teams at each school and in both school districts. The plan addressed specific goals of developing instructional leaders through a multi-phase training program as well as providing technology support staff and an addition of two staff members to train parents in support of the project.

The weakness in the plan was found in the lack of information regarding the process for finding and retaining teachers for high need areas. The application also lacked a clear operationally defined process regarding how the performance data would be utilized by the teachers to inform instructional decisions. Additionally, the plan did not adequately describe how the elements of the learning environment would be adjusted for different grade level bands, high need students based on learning disability or socioeconomic status, or individual students. Furthermore, the application lacked clear operationally defined processes to be used to evaluate the quality of instructional resources, including digital resources found on the internet as well as the processes used to match students to materials.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	10
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The consortium provided clear evidence of the MOU in place to facilitate the governance of the consortium. Additionally, systems are already in place to facilitate support. These systems include district support teams and teacher support teams that were established due to the partnership created by the implementation of ACT Quality Core. The ACT Quality Core has previously established some consistent policies between the districts and allowed school leadership teams to have a greater level of autonomy. Furthermore, the districts have received approval from the State Department of Education that the current policy of "move on when ready" is an acceptable practice which will continue to be used with this project. Finally, the project's and districts' electronics policies allows the student to use their own devices in addition to the 1:1 or 2:1 student to tablet ratio proposed in the project. The use of your own electronics policy supports ELL and Students With Disabilities to have full access to the technology and instructional resources.</p> <p>The weakness of this application was found in the lack of operationally defined aspects of the plan. Two areas that would have benefited from clear operational definitions was found in the district support teams and teacher support teams. While these two teams are in place, there is a lack of information about how the teams will support leadership, teaching and learning. Additionally, the lack of a clear operationally defined aspect can be seen in the Early Exit Diploma. There is a lack of detailed information regarding this aspect of the project. Finally, the consortium did not fully develop how this project would support ELL students.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	8
(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The consortium provided convincing evidence that the project's goals of having a 1:1 or 2:1 ratio of students to technology will have access to instructional resources at all times. Providing additional access to school resources after school hours ensures that families and students with limited internet capabilities have other options. The project proposes to hire four additional IT specialists to support the technology demands. The application briefly mentions the LEA's use Google Docs and Google Drive for students, teachers, and administrators. Finally, the consortium provided specific details offering assurances that the data systems are interoperable and can be used across both districts because they use the same systems.</p> <p>The weakness in this application was found in the lack of operationally defined aspects regarding the online resources and how to gain access outside of school. The plan did not address how the families who had limited or no internet connection would be able to access information or instructional materials anywhere or any time. These families would be restricted to the after school hours. Furthermore, the application does not fully develop the evidence of being able to export the data for use by other electronic systems in an open source format.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	7
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium adequately described a high quality plan to meet the needs of timely and relevant evaluations and feedback to improve the implementation of the project. The feedback would be generated and used by students as they measured their progress on the MAP assessments, the instructional coaches working with teachers and students, the IT specialists who would be working with multiple stakeholders including parents, and the College/Career Readiness counselor who would be working with students, parents, and teachers.</p> <p>The application's weaknesses were found in the lack of information regarding how the consortium would monitor, measure, and report data to the public and its partners. The lack of clear operationally defined processes offering details regarding how the consortium would make adjustments based on evaluation data was another weakness in this section of the application criteria.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	3
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium has a high quality plan to address ongoing communication needs with all stakeholders. The districts have hosted parent training sessions and have utilized all existing forms of communication to relay information to all stakeholders including an automated telephone message program and social media such as Facebook.</p> <p>The consortium lacked evidence that the plan would be able to establish strong levels of engagement. While the use of social media has potential as an innovative approach, there was no information provided regarding how the consortium would ensure engagement with all stakeholders who may not have facebook accounts or access to the internet.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	2
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium provided evidence of performance measures with a rationale for each measure; however, the goals established over the duration of the project may not be ambitious. The data provided in the project is projected because the teacher evaluation and administrator evaluation instruments are being implemented this year and will be determining baseline data. Without the baseline data, projected goals are too speculative to be able to be judged to determine if they are truly ambitious and achievable. Furthermore, the consortium does not clearly address the application of a continuous improvement process to review and improve the measures over time. The lack of ability to determine ambitious and achievable measures combined with the lack of evidence of the continuous improvement process specific to the measures was a weakness in this criteria.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	1
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium did not clearly address the evaluation of the effectiveness of funded activities. There was evidence of a high quality continuous improvement process in previous sections of the application but there was no evidence of the continuous improvement process being applied to the evaluation of the activities to determine the effectiveness of those activities. This section of the application could have been strengthened with a clear operationally defined evaluation process.</p>		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	8
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The district clearly identified the funds that will be used to support the project, ranging from additional personnel to ensure the grant is fully implemented and self sustaining after the grant period to the equipment necessary to ensure the successful implementation of the project. The district also provided a strong rationale for the expenses as they relate to the success of the proposal. Overall, the budget appears to be reasonable and will provide the support necessary for the proposal to be successfully implemented.</p>		

The weakness of the budget was found in the unrealistic claim that technology costs would go down. This is not always the case as new technology replaces older technology and the cost to repair or replace hardware may increase. Additionally, other funding sources were not clearly explained which detracted from the feasibility of this budget.

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

10

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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium anticipates being able to sustain the proposal's goals after the grant through the reallocation of district funds to support the use of the MAP and technology teams already in place will support the new technology from the project. Additionally, the reorganization of some support structures to meet Title I requirements will ensure that Title I funds can be partially used to continue offering the same levels of support to Title I schools. The consortium provided a reasonable plan to sustain this project after the term of the funding.

The consortium may be too optimistic in the ability to reallocate funds or sustain the project with reduced funding. The information presented may contradict the need for the grant in the first place if they were able to simply reallocate funds.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	0

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The consortium did not address the Competitive Preference Priority.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

Overall, the consortium minimally met the requirements found in Absolute Priority 1. There was evidence of improvements in instruction, leadership capacity, and student learning through a variety of methods ranging from the integration of technology to develop individual learning plans throughout the students' academic careers, the partnership 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and the ACT Quality Core. Through the use of project based learning, students will be able to engage deeper in relevant content. Furthermore, the use of instructional coaches combined with the strong professional learning opportunities is expected to increase teacher effectiveness and expand student access to high quality educators. The weaknesses found in the establishment of ambitious and attainable growth as well as the questionable budget, lack of detailed information regarding how student data would be used to inform instruction was a concern. The application would have been strengthened from fully developing these ideas to address personalize learning environments; however, these weaknesses did not significantly detract from the district's ability to meet the Absolute Priority 1.

Total	210	130
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0035MS-3 for Columbia School District



A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	6

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant articulates a clear and credible approach to two of the four core assurance areas. The applicant's vision implements standards and assessments aligned with the ACT program to ensure that students are college and career ready. The applicant also utilizes data systems that track progress through college and career ready standards within the ACT program. This is a clear and comprehensive way to assess and track students' progress.

The applicant is vague about recruiting, rewarding and retaining effective teachers and principals. The applicant plans to provide professional development to make all teachers and leaders more effective; however, the applicant does not address how it will retain those teachers and principals once they are trained (they even acknowledge that losing these highly-trained professionals may be a problem). They also do not have a clear and credible approach to recruiting effective teachers and principals.

The applicant also did not supply a comprehensive approach to turning around the lowest performing schools. The applicant describes using professional development to make all teachers and leaders more effective in order to turn around schools, but they do not describe a comprehensive approach to specifically turning around low performing schools.

The applicant articulates a clear and credible approach to improving student learning through the ACT Quality Core and technology devices: 1:1 grades 6-12 and 1:2 grades k-5. The applicant proves that the ACT Quality Core is a well-established progression that the district has already begun using. However, the ACT Quality Core is a program. The applicant did not address ways that this program would be adapted to fit the unique needs of the students within their schools.

The applicant describes, in detail, a personalized classroom experience. The classroom is student-centered. One of the unique features is narrative feedback is provided by teachers, instead of grades, until the end of a grading period. The applicant presents a plan to personalize students learning by providing support personnel to specifically help with literacy and math instruction. The applicant also plans to utilize personal devices to provide personalized learning opportunities for students. The applicant also has a well-defined approach to student mastery, instead of focusing on a uniform seat time requirement.

For A1, the applicant earned a mid-range score of 6. The applicant provides a vision for the district that includes elements of accelerated learning, data tracking, college and career readiness and personalized learning. The applicant is vague about elements of turning around low performing schools and adapting the ACT Quality Core to fit the needs of it's students.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	5
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(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant states that all schools in the consortium will participate in the program; however, it is not clear how the team arrived at that decision. The applicant states, "In an effort to achieve a realistic expectation for change, all students and all schools will participate."

The applicant provides a list of all participating schools that identifies high-need and low income students. All of the schools exceed the 40% low income mark. The applicant provides information regarding the total number of participating students and educators and the number of students in each of the sub-categories.

For A2, the applicant received a mid-range score of 5. The applicant provides adequate information regarding the population that will be served by the grant. The applicant does not present a compelling argument as to the need in the consortium. The applicant also does not explain how this approach, including all schools, will lead to high-quality

implementation.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	6
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(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides a high-quality plan. The timeline for implementation is realistic to phase in change and scale district-wide. The applicant has also included a variety of people who are responsible for implementing, which ensures that implementation will be followed through because there are multiple levels of accountability.

The applicant presents a logic model based on the four core assurance areas.

It was not always clear, from the logic model, how the actions would lead to the outcomes. For example, two outcomes were accelerated student achievement and deepened student learning. The actions include providing equitable technology, instructional coaches, utilizing data, professional development and evaluations. The applicant does not make a research- or experience-based connection of these practices to these outcomes.

For A3, the applicant received a mid-range score of 6. A high-quality plan exists, but the applicant does not prove how its plan will improve student learning outcomes for all students.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	6
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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides ambitious yet achievable annual goals. There are increase of 20-30% in most areas of performance of summative assessments.

The applicant provides ambitious Quality Distribution Index gap goals that exceed those set by state ESEA targets. However, the applicant's vision does not include means to decrease achievement gaps, so this goal does not seem achievable.

The applicant shows high graduation rates now, but plans to increase them by 10% over a four year period, which is ambitious. A couple of the subgroup graduation rates projected post-grant exceed 100%, which does not seem achievable (white--Columbia School District and female--Lamar County School District).

The applicant plans to increase college enrollment by 5% a year from 63% to 80%. This, too, seems ambitious yet achievable.

For A4, the applicant received a mid-range score of 6. The applicant's vision to train teachers, implement technology and instructional coaches and work through the ACT Quality Core is likely to help the district meet these ambitious yet achievable goals. The applicant did not receive full points because some of the goals (i.e. graduation rates) did not seem fully achievable.

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	3

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant presents graphs that show sustained ability to increase the Quality Distribution Index (QDI) over a period of four years: from 159-173 (Columbia) and 185-197 (Lamar County). The applicant states that their state received an ESEA waiver to use QDI gaps for identification of failing schools. The applicant does not explain QDI in-depth, so it is difficult to understand all of the data they present. The applicant did not demonstrate a significant sustained increase in graduation rate.

The applicant does not show a clear upward trend in persistently lowest-achieving schools' scores. The applicant focuses only on one school (Columbia Elementary). Gains were made by the school, but there were not continuous gains over four years.

The applicant makes routine data available through Active Student and Active Parent programs (assignments, attendance and grades). The applicant has purchased a new program, StudentStatus, that will be available by the end of the year, but it is not clear what additional data will be included in the new program. The applicant does not demonstrate that student performance data is available in ways that inform and improve participation, instruction, and service. Some limited data is available, but it is not clear how many stakeholders are accessing the data or how effective it is in transforming education.

For B1, the applicant received a low-range score of 3. The applicant argues that there has been a clear record of success over the past four years, but the limited data presented does not show a significant sustained growth. The applicant only provides a sub-section of data, and it is not a complete picture of how the schools that are part of the plan have been growing over the past four years.

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

The applicant describes typical means (website, salary handbooks, information available upon request) as part of the transparency. The applicant does say that there are open school board meetings with school level information available.

For B2, the applicant received a 3 because the applicant does not demonstrate a high level of transparency. The applicant states that information is available, but patrons would have to work to find the information. The applicant also does not demonstrate evidence of the transparency; the means are just described.

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

The applicant demonstrates a level of successful conditions and sufficient autonomy from the state. One prime example of this is the "move on when ready" allowance from the state in place of a seat time requirement for students. The applicant also mentions a career pathways graduation option from the state, which is not described in-depth, but allows for alternative paths to graduation.

The applicant also says that there is support from the state on faculty evaluation and reading initiatives.

For B3, the applicant received a mid-range score of 7. The applicant describes some successful conditions and autonomy but does not fully demonstrate that they have the full support from the state to implement the personalize learning environments.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	5
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant did not provide evidence of how students, families, teachers, and principals were engaged in the development of the proposal. There is also no evidence of feedback or of revisions based on the feedback gathered from stakeholders.

The applicant only provided 12 teachers' signatures in support of the plan. There was not a letter from a teachers' union, and only 12 teachers signed (which is less than 70%).

The applicant provided 10 letters of support representing parents, teachers, community leaders, etc. The letters were written in response to being provided with information about the plan; they were not form letters.

For B4, the applicant received a low mid-range score of 5. The applicant demonstrates some support for the plan, but the applicant does not demonstrate sufficient support to implement a consortium-wide plan. The applicant is missing engagement with stakeholders (on-going, two-sided dialogue), and the voice of teachers is missing.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	5

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has a plan for improving learning and teaching, but the plan is not fully developed. The plan includes project-based learning to personalize learning and the ACT Quality Core to promote college and career readiness, but it does not fully develop all of the ideas (i.e. diverse cultures, goal-setting, teamwork, perseverance, and accommodations) that are required in this section.

The applicant states that students will understand what they are learning is key to their success through the MAP testing (three times a year) which is aligned to ACT sequence. The applicant also says that the ACT progression will help with college and career ready standards. While it is true that the ACT can provide data regarding specific areas where students need to improve, it is not clear how the teachers, instructional coaches, administrators, students or parents will use this data to develop a personalize learning plan for each student.

The applicant mentions an increase in dual enrollment opportunities for students and project-based learning that requires students to think, but the applicant does not further develop what a rigorous course of study will look like under the plan.

The applicant does not discuss a variety of high-quality instructional approaches and environments, just project-based learning. The project-based learning promotes higher-level thinking, but the applicant does not further develop this idea by discuss specific projects that might be done sat different grade levels or how this might work in different content areas.

Ongoing and regular feedback will be provided through data through ACT sequence, but it is not clear how the data will translated into demonstrated mastery or personal learning recommendations.

The applicant lacks high-quality strategies to support all students, including those who have disabilities or are economically disadvantaged.

For C1, the applicant earned a low mid-range score of 5. The applicant has one high-quality strategy, project-based learning, and the applicant has data as part of the plan. The support of personalized learning is vague.

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

20

14

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant demonstrates a high-quality plan, through professional development strategies, help educators improve instruction and increase their capacity to support student progress. What is lacking is a thorough description of personalized learning for all students, in particular high-need students. One of the high-quality aspects of the applicant's professional development is that is it not just a one time workshop. There is a three-day Project Based Learning workshop followed by two or more annual visits based on needs determined through a survey. There is also virtual support. This approach to professional development helps insure implementation of the strategies.

The applicant states that all participating educators will have access to tools and data to accelerate student progress. The applicant explains the levels of reports available, including individual student need reports, which will help with personalizing learn to specific student needs. The applicant states that PLC assessment teams will discuss utilizing student data, but this is not developed. It is not clear how teachers will match specific students needs (identified in the report) with learning tools that will help the students.

School administrators will also undergo training to be instructional leaders. The aspects included included in the teacher evaluation system (M-STAR) will help insure that administrators use their instructional leader training.

M-STAR is a high-quality evaluation process that will help effect change because it is frequent and comprehensive. It includes: self-assessment (from teachers), 5 walkthroughs, 2 formal observations, and a student survey. The evaluation will lead to professional development in the areas that the teacher needs to strengthen in order to provide personalized learning environments for student. The applicant includes software (Feedbak and SchoolStatus) to track data on teachers' evaluations, students' progress and teachers progress through professional development, etc. The evaluation system is comprehensive to help teachers structure effective learning environments: they are assessed based on that and provided with support, if they do not meet the criteria.

The applicant's plan to increase the number of students who receive instruction from effective teachers is to improve the capacity of all teachers and leaders through professional development. While this is a strategy to improve the effectiveness of teachers, it does not address staffing hard to fill positions.

For C2, the applicant received a mid-range score of 14. The applicant has a strong teacher evaluation system, they have a on-going professional development model, and they have strategies in place to improve teaching and leading. However, the applicant only has a vague connection to subpoint b--using the tools and data to accelerate student learning.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	7
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant does not include all components of a high-quality plan to support project implementation; however, the applicant does present practices, policies and rules that will help facilitate personalized learning. The applicant describes an Executive Pit Crew that will operate the grant. There is an MOU for the consortium.</p> <p>There are teacher support teams in place at each building, but the TSTs' roles are not clear. The applicant does not describe, in-depth, the flexibility and autonomy that individual buildings have.</p> <p>The applicant describes a strong system in which students can progress based on mastery defined by Carnegie Unit graduation requirements. Students can graduate at the end of the 10th grade, and advanced classes are offered in middle school. The applicant's description of the program is a solid representation of having high standards, but allowing students progress based on mastery, not seat time.</p> <p>The applicant cites technology as the resource that will help with adaptable resources; however, the applicant does not name specific resources that will help students with disabilities and English learners.</p> <p>For D1, the applicant received a mid-range score of 7. The applicant presents some practices, policies and rules (i.e. the consortium working together, demonstrated mastery) that facilitate personalized learning, but other aspects need developed (i.e. school autonomy and adaptable resources).</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	4
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant does not sufficiently prove that all stakeholders, regardless of income, have access to necessary content. The applicant mentions internet access being an issue for some of their families, but the applicant does not fully describe how it will be provided to those who cannot afford it. Technology is a part of the personalized learning plan since students will have devices and be accessing online content.</p> <p>The applicant will hire six (it says four in another place) instructional technologists to help with technical support; however, the applicant did not prove that this number is sufficient to serve the needs of the consortium.</p> <p>The applicant says that data is available, but does not indicate if parents and students and export their data in open data formats. The applicant states that some systems are interoperable in the consortium, and they are working to develop more interoperability.</p> <p>For D2, the applicant receives a mid-range score of 4. Some of the aspects of LEA and school infrastructure are emerging, but there is not a sound foundation evidenced to support personalized learning.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	5
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant provides opportunities for timely and regular feedback through assessments and meetings; however, the applicant does not address how corrections and improvements will be handled.</p> <p>The applicant does not present information about how professional development and technology integration will be assessed. There are plans to hire an external evaluator, but the applicant does not address the major goals of the external evaluator.</p> <p>For E1, the applicant received a low mid-range score of 5. The applicant did not provide a high-quality plan for implementing a rigorous continuous improvement process. Some of the elements of continuous improvement are present,</p>		

but they are not tied together and prioritized.

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

5

2

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant lists ways to communicate: monthly status reports, quarterly newsletters, Facebook, phone messenger, etc. However, they do not describe a high-quality plan for disseminating information to all stakeholders. The applicant does not establish a two-way dialog between all stakeholders. There will be annual town hall meetings, PLC meeting and "Mile Marker" team monthly meetings, but a systematic way to collect feedback and make adjustments based on that feedback is not mentioned.

For E2, the applicant receive a low mid-range score of 2. The applicant does not indicate how the ongoing communication will engage stakeholders and lead to revisions in the plan.

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

5

3

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides 12 performance measures with rationales of why they chose them. The applicant presents some innovative performance measures, such as increasing the # of students successfully completing a 2-year program at the Tech. Center and increasing extra-curricular activities. These performance measures address subgroups of students who are sometimes left out of other rigorous goals, and they speak to career preparedness and emotional/social stability, not just academics.

The applicant describes an external evaluator who will help assess the progress of the plan; however, revision of the plan based on recommendations is not discussed.

For E3, the applicant received a mid-range score of 3. The applicant chose appropriate performance measures and targets and supported these with rationales. The applicant does not describe how the measures will be revised over time to best fit the needs of their plan.

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

5

1

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant does not present a high-quality plan to rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of RTTD funded activities. The applicant provides activities, but they are not specific to evaluating the plan and revising based on recommendations. The applicant plans to hire an external evaluator, and the applicant has some internal process for progress monitoring, but it is not a high-quality plan.

For E4, the applicant received a low-range score of 1. The applicant has activities, but not a well-developed, high-quality plan.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	3

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant only mentioned other funds a couple of times within the budget table. The applicant did not always identify where these other funds were going to come from, but when they were identified, it was reallocating district funds from other areas. The applicant did not show funds from other grants, the state, foundations, etc.

The on-going costs were underestimated. The budget did not label everything one-time or on-going costs, but those that were identified, were often labeled one-time costs when, in reality, there will probably be on-going costs. For example, the applicant states, "After the grant period, the maintenance cost of the technology will be incorporated into the technology budget. As with all technology, the cost should decrease annually." This statement does not adequately address how the funds will be sufficient to support the personalize learning the applicant is describing. Technology breaks, changes, etc., and these issues were not adequately addressed in the budget.

For F1, the applicant received a low mid-range score of 3. The applicant presents a budget, but it is not evidenced that

the budget is reasonable and sufficient to support the applicant's proposal, especially in the areas of having additional funding and budgeting for actual costs.

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

10

1

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant does not prove sustainability of the plan. The applicant underestimates the costs going forward (after the life of the grant). Specifically, the areas of budgeting for technology needs and the coaching positions are not addressed in the sustainability plan.

The applicant raises an issue that trained professionals from their district may be recruited elsewhere because of their new skills. The applicant does not address how to stop this from occurring, nor how to replace those effective professionals who are attracted to other jobs.

The applicant does not specifically identify other funds to support the plan after the life of the grant. The applicant states that the state will help with the ACT Quality Core if the schools perform well, but additional funding sources are vague.

For F2, the applicant received a low-range score of 1. The applicant did not provide a high-quality plan for sustainability of the project's goals after the term of the grant.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	0

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant did not demonstrate evidence of an effective partnership in the application. The applicant did not submit any of the Competitive Preference Priority requirements; therefore, the score for this section is 0.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant meets Absolute Priority 1 for personalized learning environments through:

- college and career readiness progress assessed and monitored through the ACT progression of testing and standards
- technology integration--1:1 in 6-12 grades and 1:2 in k-5th grades; digital resources are used to individualize education
- professional development for teaching in project-based learning
- students have the ability to progress based on mastery, not on seat time; students can even graduate early and enroll in advanced opportunities (i.e. dual college enrollment)
- literacy/math/technology coaches and mentors to support and maintain personalized learning
- teachers will provide narrative feedback on students' progress, rather than grades (early in the learning process)

Total	210	86
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0035MS-1 for Columbia School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	5

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

This consortium of two school districts has a vision that involves student-centered classrooms, improved assessments, an emphasis on 21st Century Learning Skills, collaboration and problem-solving. They are currently implementing college and career readiness efforts at the 9th and 10th grade levels. They expect to expand these efforts to all students K-12 in the consortium. They will focus on literacy and math skills in an equitable personalized learning setting from kindergarten through graduation. They also plan to significantly deepen each student's learning by focusing on professional development for teachers and administrators. They recognize that changing the learning experiences of students will necessitate the changing of instruction from long-held beliefs about pedagogy to new methods.

One of the innovations that have been implemented is the ACT Quality Core course standards in English/Language Arts and Math. These standards are fully aligned with the Common Core Standards which have been adopted by the state and will be implemented state-wide in 2014-15. There are also corresponding end of course assessments with the Quality Core program and professional development in understanding and teaching to these standards. They have begun with 9 courses.

Funds will be used to improve their data collection and analysis systems which measure student progress and inform teachers and principals with data about how to improve instruction. They will also purchase a new assessment system, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) which correlates with the ACT standards and the Common Core Standards. This will help them to develop curriculum and meet student needs.

The state currently has an evaluation system in place which the consortium uses to develop effective teachers and principals. They plan to create environments of "continuous professional growth" which will include professional development of various types including on-site coaches to help teachers learn ELA and math strategies and data analysis coaches. These coaches will be part of the assessment and teacher evaluation teams. The coaches are meant to be part of the change process in helping teachers change their instructional process. If they are also involved in evaluating teachers they may not be effective change agents since teachers are unlikely to take risks in trying new strategies in front of an evaluator.

The consortium plans to improve education for all its students, but especially those in the lowest 25% with achievement gaps. They feel that most of the gaps are directly related to "poor reading skills." The demographics, participating schools and numbers of students in each school are given in the next section.

In the classroom, students will spend time interacting with teachers and other students. Learning activities that had been done in the classroom: watching a video, reading, research via the internet, etc. will be done as homework. Technology will provide audio and visual instruction and learning. Teachers will demonstrate and model steps in a project and students will work together in groups. They also state "It will be common to see students teaching someone else what they have learned." It is not clear whether students are actually teaching one another, or if they discussing what they have learned thereby deepening their understanding of a concept. The first does little for the student who is teaching, the second may help students gain a better understanding if they fully grasp the concepts. Teachers will give narrative feedback and allow students to improve their work rather than giving an immediate grade to a piece of work. This allows students to continually improve their work.

The consortium has developed some achievable goals in defining highly effective teachers as their first focus and targeting their lowest performing schools and students. The goals are ambitious in that they plan to address all of the 11,165 students in the two school districts as well as all the teaching staff and principals of all the schools. They are utilizing existing systems for evaluation, common core standards, and some data management. They are building on the innovations currently being implemented at two grade levels and they have a clear and credible approach. The personalized classroom will be described further in later sections. Some of the instructional practices are not as deep or

effective as others. Their vision is broad and addresses the core assurance areas. Their approach seems superficial and some of the instructional practices are not effective in promoting a personalized learning environment. For all these reasons, the score for this section is in the mid-range.

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

10

4

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The two consortium superintendents are leading a reform effort that includes teachers, parents, school board members, ACT Quality Core representatives, state department of education leaders, and leaders from the National Council on Education and the Economy (NCEE). They decided to include all schools and all students in the district: four schools with 1,818 students in one district and 14 schools with 9,347 in the second district. The schools and demographics are listed in a chart in this section including the numbers of high needs students at each school, although "high-needs" is not defined. The smaller district has a poverty rate of 76% and the larger has one of 52%. The two schools together have a free/reduced lunch population of 56% which is higher than the minimum required by the grant.

Throughout the grant application narrative, the consortium refers to a leadership team, but they do not elaborate on the make-up of this team. The consortium decided to include all its students. They do not explain why. In section (A)(1) they mention that they have worked at meeting their measurable objectives and increased the achievement in the lowest 25% achievement gaps. It is also mentioned in their logic plan: "Turn around lowest-achieving schools." They do not, then include this as a priority or focus in this area. The data included in the parts of section A do not show achievement gaps by group within the districts.

Criteria b and c for this section has been met by the consortium, however section a has not been met since they do not describe the process by which they chose schools and student groups. They also leave questions regarding any possible achievement gaps in the two districts. Therefore this section is scored in the low-medium range.

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

10

5

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium builds their reform plan around four major initiatives:

1. Adopt the standards and assessment that prepare students to be college and career ready.
2. Build data systems that track student progress and inform teachers & principals with the data to improve instruction.
3. Recruit, develop and retain effective teachers and principals.
4. Turn around lowest-achieving schools.

Their inputs include teams that will work with lesson development and assessment. They list two specific assessment systems that they plan to use. Their initiatives will be supported with technology devices for students and teachers, coaches to assist teachers, on-going professional development and the state evaluation system. The outcomes and measures they list are compatible and reasonable expectations given the inputs and actions.

They plan to hire a grant director and administrative assistant to ensure the funds are used for the stated purposes. They will hire instructional coaches and technologists, plan professional development, and send 60 consortium leaders to School Leadership workshop for 27 days. These days are spread over three years of the grant during the summers. Forty consortium administrators will have 20 half days, over two years, of personalized coaching to become instructional leaders. Other actions follow the stated goals and include reasonable timelines of implementation.

The plan is likely to result in meaningful reform with all the professional development that is included. The coaching and technology is likely to improve instruction and having teams that support good lesson development, and understanding and using assessment data, will also translate into better instruction. Since all teachers and principals will be involved in the professional development, it is very likely that the reforms will be LEA-wide. The focus on college and career ready standards will help in reaching the stated goals for all students. Personalized learning environments have not been mentioned in this section, but differentiation is discussed in section (C). Overall, it is a good plan, but the lack of discussion concerning achievement gaps or any other barriers to learning, other than the mention of poverty, and how these might be overcome casues the plan to look good, but not high quality. Therefore the score for this section is in the medium range.

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

10

3

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium's state has the worst ACT scores in the nation. They show a chart from part of an online website to

support this assertion. While the consortium scores are not the lowest in the state, they say there is a disconnect between the state test scores and readiness for college and career. They use, as a case in point, student readiness for college algebra. In an included chart, only 10% of their students show readiness for college algebra as compared to 20% in the state and 45% in the nation. Their English scores have been close to the state average for four of the past 5 years, even exceeding the state average by .1 during one year. They plan to use the ACT Quality Core program to address both the Algebra and English problem.

The consortium includes an ACT profile report that shows the consortium is below state and national averages by a wide margin in English, Math, Reading and Science. Only 5% of students tested met all 4 ACT benchmark scores. The consortium feels that including an assessment system, MAP, that is correlated to ACT and college and career readiness will help them to align instruction and keep track of progress toward college and career readiness. They include a transitional timeline for this effort.

The consortium has included a chart for each school showing the proficiency level for each identified grade level group. It is clear from these charts that there is an achievement gap between African American students and white students, economically disadvantaged and white students, and between males and females. Even with the efforts included in the grant application, the disparity continues in the projections for the grant years. The district acknowledges the gaps and explains how the gaps will be measured with the new assessments. They do not address them beyond this. There has been an increase for 9th and 10th graders in Algebra 1 based on the innovations already introduced of between 10 and 20 percentage points. This track record, shows that the district has made significant changes in these areas that have positively impacted student achievement.

In addition to student proficiencies, the consortium also shows a chart with their graduation rates which is overall between 84 and 86%. It is less for those groups showing an achievement gap and lowest for those students living in poverty and those students with an IEP. The projection over the timeline in the grant shows an increase in the graduation rate for all students, but the gaps between groups have not changed very much. The consortium also shows college enrollment rates overall for both districts at 64% currently and by the end of the grant 80%.

The consortium shows good data that indicates growth in those populations who have already benefitted from some innovations. The data also shows distinct achievement gaps among various groups as noted here. Yet they are not mentioned in the goals or vision for the whole consortium. They do not show the achievement gaps decreasing, a major criteria of this grant. The goals and actions stated are likely to increase student achievement in all groups, but without addressing it directly, the achievement gaps are likely to continue. These goals then are achievable, but not ambitious. Therefore, the score for this section was in the lower range.

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	7

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The data presented in this section includes state performance scores for the districts, graduation rates and 4th and 5th grade Language Arts and math scores. The state performance scores in both districts has shown improvement from 2010 to 2013, by approximately 12-14 points. The graduation rates for the two districts have also improved over those same years so that both districts graduate around 80% of their students. The fourth grade data in Language Arts and math shows slight, but inconsistent improvements. The fifth grade students showed greater improvements in Language Arts and math, but again, not consistently over this period of time.

If one includes the data from the previous section, the picture is one of mild increases for most grade levels with greater increases in student achievement for those grades who piloted some of the innovations. None of the scores show any closing of achievement gaps. The reforms initiated so far have shown some improvements although they could not be called significant and it is not clear if those students are from their lowest achieving schools. Since the consortium targeted grade levels, the improvements, it is assumed, would be for all students in the consortium at that grade level.

The consortium mentions that there are policies and procedures in place for making student data available to parents, students and educators through an identified database. This data would inform instruction and be used by classroom teachers, coaches and the assessment teams mentioned in other sections. A program called Active Parent allows parents to log in and monitor their student's academic progress and attendance. They are working with a consultant to change over to another software product called SchoolStatus. They do not indicate why they are making this change.

In this section, the consortium addresses the criteria in part (c) and some of (a). They do not address part (b), their lowest performing schools. They also do not address the achievement gaps evident in their data in section (A). They have made some improvements and most of their students show a slight increase in achievement, so they have a proven track record. However, these would not be considered significant or ambitious reforms. Therefore the score for this section is in the low average range.

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

The superintendents of both districts include a report on their website that addresses district budgets, expenditures and salaries. Per pupil expenditures are posted on the state department of education website. The business manager will supply information on salaries since it is public record. District salary scales for certified and classified staff are available upon request. Each district holds an open school board meeting where all financial information is shared with the public and available for public comment and review. This information includes school level salaries for all personnel and all non-personnel expenditures at the school level.

This amount of information shared fits the concept of transparency, but is not a high level since information must be requested, or one must attend a meeting of the school board to attain it. The consortium lists general information that they say is on the website, but one must dig deeper to find salary information at the school level. Therefore this section is scored in the mid range.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	9
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

In the application narrative, the consortium states that the State has "put in place all policies and procedures as required to support Race to the Top Grant requirements." In addition, the legislature has supported the consortium efforts and created a special graduation path that supports their personalized learning efforts. In this special path to graduation, a 10th grade student who demonstrates college readiness on the Act Quality Core end-of-course assessments may be granted a high school diploma. They also mention that they have the "Career Pathways" graduation option, but do not describe it either in this or further sections.

The consortium describes their technology support for learning; one to one laptops or tablets for grades 6-12 and two students per laptop or tablet in grades K-5. These devices are in compliance with the LEA's technology plans which in turn have been approved by the state.

All participating schools are using the state approved evaluation system which in turn helps to support the effectiveness of the teachers and principals. It will also help in continuing those improvements.

Finally, the state has mandated that all third grade students must be reading on or above grade level. They have required a gateway assessment to show that students are performing as expected. The consortium feels this will support their literacy efforts including the coaches, and professional development to increase student achievement. They include a chart that shows that this state's third graders are performing significantly below the national average on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and have been since 1998.

Based on this evidence, the district seems to have the necessary supports and conditions in place to implement the personalized learning environments they describe. They have met the criteria for this section, although it is not clear what the career pathways are. Therefore this section is scored in the high range.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	3
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The two districts in this consortium are the only two in the state to use the ACT Quality Core with 9th and 10th graders. This brought them together. They state that they have included all stakeholders including the state department of education leaders, building principals, the National Center on Education and the Economy leaders, parents, students and community members. They list the sources of the letters in the appendix. There are 9 letters of support from leaders of the community, including the PTA president and state education agencies. There is one page of 12 signatures of teachers.

This section does not describe how these various leaders and stakeholders worked together to develop the grant application. There is no indication that input was gained or that the proposal was revised. Staff members are

conspicuously absent in any kind of declared support. There are no teacher unions. Other than the list of 12 signatures, there is no documentation from any staff member in any part of the grant application that supports the project.

Part (a) of this section has not been met since there is no evidence of 70% of the consortium's teachers supporting this proposal. There is also no description of how the various stakeholders developed and revised the proposal. Part (b) has been met by having the nine letters from various community and state leaders expressing support and from the PTA president. However, there are no letters from students groups, advocacy groups or other agencies outside of the school. Therefore the score for this section is in the low range.

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

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

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium states its goal of turning every classroom into a student centered classroom that ends with each student graduating college and career ready. In order to provide this, each district sets goals, each school sets goals and each student sets goals with the assistance of teachers, administrators, and parents. They plan to have all students, K-12, set goals. They will hire a college and career counselor in each district to help with this goal-setting.

In order to measure progress on goals, the district is administering MAP testing three times during the year to all students. The assessment fits well with ACT assessments and they hope to see a greater correlation between doing well on their curriculum and doing well on ACT tests. Implementing ACT Quality Core for 9th and 10th grade students with end-of-course assessments in the nine courses, will keep students, parents and teachers informed of progress toward college readiness. After 10th grade, AP courses will be offered.

Each district has a Career and Technical Center. They also have Career Academies in some of the high schools. These will be expanded under the grant so that students can obtain technical certifications based on interests. If students at the end of 10th grade are determined to be college ready, there are reduced tuition rates provided to students from the consortium at a local community college. The grant will provide training for teachers to teach college level classes for dual enrollment.

The increased technology; laptops or tablets for students, will provide increased online opportunities for students through Skype, digital interaction with students from diverse cultures, and unlimited access through free resources like "Kahn Academy" and other open learning sites. There was no description of what this particular resource was. The grant will provide digital subscriptions, textbooks and constant access to student status and progress to college and career ready goals. The 1 to 1 tablet will allow students to track and manage their learning, thereby taking responsibility for their own learning. Classes are already in place at each grade level to provide technology training to students. Additional technicians will be hired to support students so that they understand the uses of the technology.

To personalize each classroom, teachers will differentiate instruction and provide a variety of projects and performance based activities for students. Additional accommodations for high-needs students will be provided by highly skilled interventionists. They have built in several "safety nets" through their Excellence for All program to ensure that all students will graduate college and career ready. They feel strongly about project-based learning as a means to learn 21st Century skills since it allows for inquiry based learning, problem-solving, and still allows students to make choices. They describe the project-based learning quite thoroughly with a visual and explanation of each part. Project-based learning appears to be the only instructional strategy to be employed in the classrooms. The other new instructional practices mentioned are the 9 classes of ACT Quality Core at the 9th and 10th grade level, online materials and courses, and AP classes..

In addressing the first set of criteria for this section, the consortium has addressed goal-setting at all levels. There is an assumption that the goal-setting will help students understand the importance of their goals and what they are learning in order to be college and career ready. They have access to their own assessment information as well as other progress toward their goals through their technology devices. The technology will help them to be exposed to greater cultural diversity and perspectives, and to learn using online resources. Interventions will be provided to high-need students by "highly skilled" interventionists. This was the only mention made of high-need students and the interventions were not described in any way, nor is it clear how they define highly skilled. This may have been their attempt to address section (b) part (v).

In section (b), the personalized sequence of instructional content and skill development was addressed by differentiation in the classroom and project-based instruction. Ongoing feedback was not addressed at all. There were some references to

teachers using data and making data-driven decisions, but it was not linked to instruction or the differentiation. The learning environment was briefly described as was the content.

The final section, (c) was addressed with the devices, technicians and technology classes. These supports will ensure that students understand how to use the devices to access online resources and information. It could be assumed that the classes would teach students to monitor their progress and keep themselves on track toward goals although that connection was not clearly made.

This proposal has potential for making a difference in the educational lives of students in the consortium. However, there are many missing pieces of information, there are few instructional strategies mentioned, high needs students are barely acknowledged, achievement gaps are again not addressed, the descriptions are very brief and it seems there is very little parent involvement. In the latter, there was a one line mention made in regards to goal setting. Therefore, this section is scored in the low mid range.

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

20

10

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium states that professional development is "vital" to the success of their project. In doing so they are developing student-centered classrooms and providing students with individualized learning environments. The grant will provide training for all K-12 educators through the Project Based Learning Institute for Education. There will be an on-site 3 day workshop to lay the foundations. This will be followed by two more small group workshops annually. There will be an online survey before each workshop to tailor the workshop to the needs of the participants. There is also continued online support from this organization.

School leaders will attend a workshop that will teach them various practices to support the project based instruction. The grant will also pay for the various coaches to attend an Instructional Coaching Institute which will teach coaches to help teachers to embed standards based instruction within the systems and processes of the school. The coaching institute was described in considerable detail and will likely equip the coaches with the necessary skills to help teachers become more effective.

The district has implemented the state teacher evaluation system. It includes on-going communication between teachers and administrators, self-evaluations and peer evaluations. The system employs walk-through observations and at least one formal observation. There are conferences held between teacher and administrator before and after each formal observation, and artifacts are submitted by the teacher that are relevant to the domains and standards of the evaluation system. They also mention a student survey, but it is not clear how that is used in conjunction with the teacher evaluation. With the grant, the consortium hopes to expand the online feedback part of the system to include a Master Teacher Prescription which can be used by the principal to deliver instant individualized and prescriptive professional development to each teacher based on the observation information. It seems to provide a series of courses since teachers and principals can see which courses have been completed.

All school leaders will attend a National training program for leaders to become instructional leaders. This professional development emphasizes the role of the principal as strategic thinker, instructional leader and creator of a fair and caring school culture in which all students meet high standards. A listing of the content of the program was included and it is delivered in 13 two day units over 12-18 months.

The scope of all of the professional development addresses everyone involved in K-12 education employed by the consortium.

Listed at the end of this section are the various actions, rationales, deliverables and responsible parties for the professional development described. Instructional technologists are mentioned to "provide training and support to all stakeholders." Weekly training for PLCs (teacher learning groups although not mentioned previously) students, parents, and administrators is included. A Parent Curriculum Trainer is also listed although this was never described in any previous section. The Trainer would teach parents "what is required of students, how to help students at home, and how to access resources to help." The training will take place monthly, in each school's parent resource center.

The consortium addressed the professional development needs for all teachers and principals in this section. They defined the type of professional development that would be provided and it seems the coaches especially will be effective since they receive the broadest scope of skills and knowledge. They will also help teachers work with various skills and standards. The majority of the teacher professional development outside of the coaching is project-based instruction. While this is certainly a good strategy, there is no evidence of other strategies to be used.

The districts plan to assess students three times per year, and state that this will help to keep students on track for college and career readiness. There is no mention of progress monitoring for those who receive interventions and there is no

mention of how teachers will use the assessment data to improve instructional practice and to provide personalized learning. Instruction on technology is listed as an action item, but there is no description for how this will happen.

High quality learning resources are limited to ACT Quality Core for 9th and 10th grade, AP courses, project based learning and online resources. There is no mention of matching these to student needs and goals. There seems to be an assumption that project-based learning will do so.

The teacher and principal evaluation system and the professional development is likely to improve educational opportunities and processes for students. However no mention is made in any part of section (C) of how the LEA will address achievement gaps. There is one mention in section (B) that this state seems to have an achievement gap with the rest of the country. It is possible that the consortium sees raising the achievement of all students a closing of this type of gap. If so, it was not clearly stated.

Overall, the consortium has good professional development opportunities, especially with the coaching, addresses some personalized learning, has few high-quality learning resources, and does not address achievement gaps in the districts. Therefore the score for this section is in the average range.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	10
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The Columbia School District will be the fiscal agent for this grant project. The consortium's two superintendents already have formed their "executive pit crew" consisting of "key personnel" with skills to implement the grant. Those key people are not identified. Presumably they are district leaders. They also have in place Teacher Support Teams (TSTs) at each school building composed of the teachers representing different grade spans and subjects. The focus of the TSTs is to improve teaching and learning at each school site although how that is done is not explained. Within 30 days of the grant award, the executive pit crew will hire a grant director and administrative assistant who will ensure the project is implemented as approved. They will also follow existing policy and procedures to hire for other positions listed in the grant.</p> <p>Updated policies, rules and procedures are already in place since the consortium has worked with the state to be ready for implementation. Since ACT Quality Core includes provisions to move students ahead when they show readiness, rather than just keeping seat time, the state has approved an early exit diploma for those students who show early college and career readiness. This is in addition to the regular diploma, the opt out diploma, and the Career Pathways diploma. The opt out and the Career Pathways diplomas have not been explained in the grant narrative.</p> <p>Each LEA has technology plans approved by the state including "bring your own devices" policies and practices that are currently being piloted in some high school classrooms. The plans also support the use of devices as mentioned previously in the narrative. The plan includes agreements with services providers to provide low-income families with equitable internet services, however they are still developing ways to overcome the lack of internet services available in rural areas.</p> <p>The existing school leadership teams have been granted sufficient flexibility and autonomy over school factors such as schedules, calendars, personnel decisions, staffing, budgets and roles and responsibilities for staff members. Each building also has the flexibility to to align or adjust the program to meet the needs of each school based on their data.</p> <p>The LEAs have existing support structures in place for all participating schools. School leadership teams have sufficient autonomy to provide the services described in the proposal. Students have the opportunity to graduate from high school early or on time with one of four types of diplomas. Two have not been explained. There are three types of assessments explained that will show student progress toward individual goals as well as toward school and district goals. Learning resources and instructional practices are accessible by most students. It is difficult to discern whether or not they are adaptable. It is also unclear how they might be made available to English Language Learners and students with disabilities. Therefore the score for this section is in the high average range.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	6

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The LEAs claim that all stakeholders have access to necessary content, tools and other learning resources both in and out of school regardless of income to support the implementation of the project. They also say all stakeholders will receive ongoing instruction and training on the use of technology and related services. In addition, they say that funds will be used to provide learning resources and practices that are adaptable and fully accessible to all students including those with disabilities and ELL. Other than mentioning technology and the differentiated learning, there is no real description of how this will happen. There are vague references to parent resource centers and using technology to overcome disabilities, but nothing solidly descriptive of how these services will look.

The districts have made arrangements with local internet service providers so that low-income families will have equitable access to the online information and services. They are still working on a plan to overcome the the lack of internet services available in rural areas. These services for personalized learning will provide digital tools such as internet based software subscriptions to use at home, (4 product names are included) digital textbooks, and e-books. For technical support there will be 4 instructional technologists. They will not only provide technical support, but training at a variety of times to meet the needs of all stakeholders. They will also be part of the PLCs and collect data to determine the effectiveness of the technology.

The consortium school districts already use data systems that include human resources, student information, budget, and instructional improvement. Some grant funds will be used to upgrade these data systems for increased interoperability. Specific data systems were named as being in use by the LEAs. They say they will follow all guidelines to protect students and student information as required by FERPA.

The consortium claims they have some interoperability now and that grant funds will be used to increase this. They use the SAM student information data system. Instructional system data is interoperable since both districts use the same software. Exporting data in open data format was not mentioned.

Almost all of the criteria for this section has been addressed although there is no clear plan to provide access to internet service to those whose circumstances or location prevents it, therefore access is not available to everyone and the open data format was not addressed. Therefore the score for this section is in the average range.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	3

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

In order to provide timely and regular feedback on progress toward project goals, corrections and improvements, the consortium will do the following:

- monitor, measure and publicly share information on the investments in professional development, technology and staff listed in this narrative.
- assess students three times per year with the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) which predicts ACT performance, and provides cohort data, tracks growth, tracks teacher data and current student status.
- use a variety of data sources to gauge the effectiveness of each professional development training: follow-up survey data, implementation data, and reports on the effective use of technology.

The Consortium says, "All stakeholders will use this data to determine next steps," but does not indicate in what format this is done. They do not explain if this is accomplished in project leadership teams or at the school level and who those stakeholders included might be.

The consortium then lists again the actions, rationales, timelines and deliverables with responsible parties listed in previous sections of the grant. They do not explain how they will monitor, measure or make the information and data available to all stakeholders. They also do not describe what the specific feedback may look like, nor do they include procedures for corrective actions, except to say that the data will be used to determine next steps. Therefore this is not a high quality plan and the score is in the low range.

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

The consortium says that they have developed communication plans with stakeholders during their previous reform measures that include ongoing parent training sessions on what is going to be different and why. They say that developing this grant project involved numerous meetings with students, parents, business leaders, educators and school board members. However, there are no specific details about those meetings or how future meetings may be facilitated.

The LEAs mention a progress monitoring team that will meet monthly to discuss and determine progress toward the stated goals. Instructional technologists will create quarterly newsletters for each school system to promote communication and awareness. This newsletter will be posted to the school website. The monthly meeting information of the progress monitoring team will also be presented in quarterly newsletters posted on the school websites. In addition, they plan to use Facebook for further digital communication and communication software which leaves telephone messages with the option to reply and text messages.

The consortium then, lists meetings, parent training sessions, website newsletters, Facebook and telephone messages or texts as their communication plan. Most of this is one-way communication that does not allow for dialogue with community members, students, educators and parents in each of the communities. The internal and external stakeholders are told about the project and its progress, but only through the meetings for some stakeholders will there be conversation and input. This does not seem to be a high quality plan for ongoing communication with internal and external stakeholders. Therefore the score for this section is in the low range.

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

5

3

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium is using the teacher/principal evaluation model used by the state to determine baseline levels for their teachers and principals. They have used this for one year. Including professional development and the evaluation tool, they name their teachers and principals as highly effective for the first performance measures.

Performance measures to be used for student evaluation of achievement include:

1. students who are being taught by highly effective teachers and have highly effective principals
2. the state ELA and math tests for 3rd and 8th grades
3. the MAP assessment
4. ACT scores
5. attendance data
6. discipline referral data
7. the number of students who appear on track for college and career readiness as identified by ACT Quality Core end of course assessments
8. graduation rates
9. the number of students who complete FAFSA forms
10. number of students involved in extracurricular activities
11. the number of students who participate in Career Technology Centers

The data will be gathered on all participating students, all teachers and all principals in the LEAs. The listed data just barely covers the criteria for this section. They are using attendance data, discipline referrals and number of students in extra curricular activities as their health or socio-emotional indicators. The measures are achievable since most schools have most of this data available on their students. It is not ambitious since those groups who have achievement gaps with others are not represented in the measures. The score for this section is in the mid range.

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

5

3

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium plans to evaluate the project's effectiveness by an external evaluator, by the monthly reports of the progress monitoring group named the "Mile Markers", and quarterly evaluation reports to the leadership team and school board. Their most important evaluation will take place in the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) who will evaluate, adjust, plan on a daily basis. The PLC structure has been referred to but never explained. It seems the instructional coaches and technology support people are involved with the teachers who are on the teams.

The external evaluator will examine all areas of implementation to determine the level of effectiveness for each investment. The evaluation will be both programmatic and financial; involving the collection of multiple sources of data and surveys to determine stakeholder satisfaction. The information will be reported to all stakeholders and will be part of the monthly and quarterly reports mentioned earlier. Each report will have a summary of program implementation, monthly outcomes, and recommendations for improvement.

The student assessment data will also be part of the evaluation. All districts and schools will be tracked for 4 years and continue to track after the grant years. At the end of the grant, the consortium will determine what is essential to continue to fund.

The plan to evaluate covers all areas of the project, but the questions to be used by the external evaluator, how effectiveness is defined, and how the surveys are developed will determine how rigorous the evaluation is. That information was not included in the plan. It could be a high quality plan, but more description by the consortium is necessary to determine the level of rigor and therefore the score is in the mid-range.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	5
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium narrative combines one-time costs with sustainability and rigorous evaluation of the project into one section. [(E)(4), (F)(1), (F)(2)]</p> <p>The one-time costs include the purchase of a large number of laptops and tablets, software and subscriptions, initial professional development and several positions, including that of director of the grant and the administrative assistant. They assert that once devices have been bought, the cost for technology will decrease and can be covered by their existing technology budgets. The consortium seems to be underestimating what the costs will actually be, particularly in bringing internet services to all stakeholders in the consortium and continuing that service.</p> <p>The budget pages include categories for personnel, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contracts, stipends and other for each activity from their chart. They indicate how much will come from grant funds, which again seems low and how much will come from "other" funds, but do not define what those others might be. They also include a timeline that delineates the costs for each year of the grant and the totals. The amounts seem lower than reasonable and sufficient to support the activities described in the narrative, although they are explained by a rationale for each. The lack of information on the other funding sources, the underestimation of costs cause the score to be in the average range.</p>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	4
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The consortium has several letters of support from state and local government leaders for this project in the appendix. The state allocates funds for the ACT Quality Core tests for as long as the high schools are deemed "Innovative High Schools" by the state. The data analysis coaches will lead the drive to next steps and publish monthly reports and quarterly findings for the consortium. These coaches will train teacher support teams, PLCs and school leaders until analyzing data becomes a natural next step in each decision making process.</p> <p>The student data will be examined over time and all improvements will be examined in terms of productivity and outcomes to inform the post-grant budget. An estimated budget is included for the three years after the grant. The same categories as the grant budget are given as in (F)(1) except that instead of a rationale, a cost description and assumption are included. The funding source is listed as Innovate funds for some of the high school needs associated with ACT Quality Core. Another funding source is the districts' technology budgets. Other funding sources are not identified, but simply called "Total funds to sustain." It may be that the district hopes to absorb these costs into their coverall budget.</p> <p>The districts listed the types of costs expected after the term of the grant. They stated that they will evaluate past effectiveness to determine future investments, but other than saying the data coaches would lead the way, they did not have specific processes to determine this. The estimated budget lists budget assumptions and uses of funds, but very little about the sources of those funds. Since there is again a lack of information in some areas, this section is scored in the low-mid range.</p>		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	0
Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:		
There was nothing in the grant narrative for this section of the proposal.		

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Not Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The consortium has not fully addressed how they will create learning centers that are designed to significantly improve learning. They mention state and MAP assessments, project-based learning and instruction, ACT Quality Core materials and assessments, and online resources. These are not enough to be considered a high quality plan to accelerate student achievement and deepen student learning. The professional development will likely increase the effectiveness of the teachers and principals, but there is little to suggest that teachers are on board with the project since there are only 12 signatures. There is also a lack of information to suggest they might address achievement gaps that appear in their data as presented in sections (A) and (B), especially among students with disabilities, impoverished students, and African American students. Even their projected data does not begin to close those gaps. The ACT Quality Core and Career Academies may help to prepare more students for college and career, but with all the other evidence in this proposal, it does not appear that Absolute Priority 1 has been met.

Total	210	93
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