



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0008AL-1 for Huntsville City Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

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

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

STRENGTHS:

- Table A-1 clearly aligns current 1:1 initiatives with the four core educational assurance areas while also demonstrating the linkages and extensions that the RTTD L2 plan builds on in each area. The table provides a column for each core assurance area and specifies the components of their existing initiatives as well as their proposed RTTD initiative that align with each assurance as well as how the L2 RTTD initiative builds on the existing HCS 1:1 work. For example, the 1:1 reform efforts have included aligning all formative ELA and math assessments with CCRS, and the L2 initiative will build on this to align science and social studies assessments with CCRS.

- HCS shows components of the approach in all goal areas that are supportive of those goals by addressing each goal area separately with bullets describing the approach.

- Very thorough description of classroom experience and school day for students and teachers provides a vivid immersion in personalized learning, small group collaboration, individualized instruction integrated with career ambitions, and relevant administrative and student services support. HCS describes a day's instructional experiences for a student as well as the administrators and teachers with whom he interacts, showing anytime, any place instruction and assessment that is highly personalized, experiences that focus on relating instruction to his personal career interests, and involving his family in communication. HCS describes instructional and communication uses of technology in personalizing the instructional experience in ways that make it clear that their vision thoroughly links content, student interests, career goals, and individual readiness with teacher and administrator feedback, group work, and family engagement.

WEAKNESSES:

- The approach to the goal areas are clear and demonstrate personalized support. HCS lists the goal areas itemized is A(1)(b) and then provides lists of their RTTD strategies that will support that goal. For example, in the goal of "accelerating student achievement" is supported with a variety of strategies, including increased training for both teachers and leaders in data analysis and relevant instructional adjustments. The credibility of those approaches is not documented with any reference to best practice or evidence of prior success, which weakens the credibility of the approaches.

- The approach to support turn-around of low-performing schools is not exclusive to those schools and lacks additional unique components specific to school turn-around.

Overall, the vision that HCS articulates is both comprehensive and coherent. It lacks linkages with evidence of best practice or evidence-based programs, thus detracting from its credibility. The fourth core assurance area, school turn-around, is addressed only in the context of initiatives that will be in place at all schools. Overall, this section merits a score in the low end of the high range.

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

STRENGTHS:

- The HCS description of the process used to select all schools and all students in the LEA was supported with an LEA-wide analysis of student poverty, achievement, pre-AP & AP class performance, as well as district-wide school climate and culture analysis. Selection of all 41 schools in the LEA was based on perception of "pockets of need" at all schools and, primarily, the fact that all schools participate in the current 1:1 initiative. Selection of all schools is proposed as an HCS strength in supporting high-quality LEA-level reform. This does not address the vast differences in schools with only 6%

participating low-income students versus schools with 97% participating low-income students.

WEAKNESSES:

- HCS proposes to serve all students (23,715) and all educators (1,710). Of the participating students, 12,906 (54%) are listed as low-income, and 7,952 (33%) are listed as high-need students in reading (5,605 are listed as high-need students in math, with no description of a possible duplicate count). The strength of this approach is diluted by a lack of differentiation in services to all students and all educators in all schools.- HCS proposes to serve all students (23,715) and all educators (1,710). Of the participating students, 12,906 (54%) are listed as low-income, and 7,952 (33%) are listed as high need students in reading (5,605 are listed as high-need students in math, with no description of a possible duplicate count).

- Of the 41 schools in the LEA, HCS's table shows that 12 schools have less that 40% of their students coming from low income families.

While HCS provides all required data on participating students, educators, and schools, it fails to address the significant differences between schools and the rationale for including schools with very few high-need or low-income students. The lack of information about differentiation in selection detracts from the strength of the HCS approach to implementation and the likelihood of high quality implementation of this reform. Overall, this section merits a medium score.

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

10

4

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

STRENGTHS:

- HCS table showing learning components currently in place compared to its proposed RTTD scale-up clearly demonstrates plans for extension of the 1:1 current initiative. This table clearly depicts how the current HCS 1:1 reform initiative will be scaled up with the RTTD proposal in each goal area. For example, HCS currently has two schools with extended day initiatives in place, and their RTTD proposal will take the extended day initiative to every school. HCS proposes to serve all schools with RTTD, so their plan does not address going beyond participating schools.

- HCS includes a table that addresses the components of a high quality plan for preparing the grant proposal and implementing the first six months of the funded program. This table includes a goal, activities, a timeline, deliverables, and responsible parties for July, 2013 through July, 2014.

WEAKNESSES:

- HCS provides a logic model explaining its theory of change, but doesn't address how this plan will differentiate to help all participating students improve learning outcomes.

- While HCS provides a plan addressing most components of a high-quality plan, it does not include a rationale, which detracts from the credibility of the plan. The plan itself is only for one year. Because the goal is for initial implementation of the RTTD initiative, the plan does not clearly show how the reform proposal will improve learning outcomes for all participating students.

Overall, HCS does not address plans for student outcomes in this section, making it difficult to see how the reform initiative will improve student learning. The logic model is more focused on process elements than a connection with student outcomes. This section merits a low medium score.

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

10

2

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

- HCS provides tables for each year of the RTTD grant as well as the post-award year of 2017-18. The tables don't show a rationale for the goals, where listed, to be considered ambitious or achievable.

- HCS shows no overall goals after the 2013-14 school year due to an "unknown new assessment, Spring 2014." Thus, intended increases in performance for grades 3-8 in reading and math are not addressed.

- HCS fails to address baseline or goals on any measure for PK-2 students. 25 of the 41 schools that HCS proposes to serve include PK-2 students, yet applicant makes no mention of any growth or goal for these students, even though they are included in the student count for the grant funds.

- Secondary ACT End of Course goals vary only slightly by content area regardless of the baseline. For example, Geometry is supposed to move from 46% to 93%, while English 9 is supposed to move from 90% to 96%. No student

subgroup data is given at all on these goals, which are listed only by content area.

- HCS shows an overall math growth proficiency of 57.18 in 2011-12 (with 50=one year growth), and aims for 65 for all sub-groups except black students (63.32) and Free/Reduced Lunch students (62.95) by 2017-18. This improvement in growth is achievable, but not ambitious for all sub-groups, and is actually a decrease in one sub-group.
- Increases in graduation rates among sub-groups already at high graduation rates are not ambitious, while increases in graduation rates among sub-groups with low 2012-13 graduation rates are overly ambitious, and unlikely to be achievable.
- Data for college enrollment is not provided for demographic sub-groups, only for total high schools.
- Goals for increased college enrollment are ambitions for some schools and minimal for others, two of which reached the 2017-18 goal in 2012-13, prior to any RTTD funds.

Overall, this section is missing subgroup data as well as any rationale for annual goals, and does not provide a credible explanation of the annual targets that are presented. This section merits a low score.

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	10
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>STRENGTHS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HCS provides information indicating that the LEA overall achievement levels in math and reading for grades 4-8 have been above the State level for the past five years. - HCS 4th – 8th LEP and Special Ed scores in reading and math have improved significantly since 2008-09. - HCS indicates that its AP enrollments have increased for three school years, and its number of AP exams taken and qualifying scores have increased over the last two years. None of this information on AP scores is disaggregated, so sub-group gaps or improvements can't be determined. - Performance at both HCS Persistently Low-Achieving Schools and its schools on the Failing Schools list has improved over the past five years; reforms are not described. - HCS describes a track-record of expanded Pre-K access and goals for Pre-K for all at-risk students. - HCS also describes its home portal for parent and student access to achievement information as well as access to an Instructional Management System that provides further curricular and assessment information. HCS also provides progress reports twice per nine weeks, and makes student services staff available to meet with parents and students. Additionally, educators have access to a data dashboard that aligns student achievement, both formative and summative, with instruction and intervention, as well as with state and local requirements and benchmarks. All stakeholders are invited to participate in online data reviews. <p>WEAKNESSES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HCS provides growth data over prior years for LEP and Special Ed, but no other demographic or economic sub-groups. Information on improvements or closing achievement gaps for those sub-groups is missing. The extent to which achievement gaps have been closed for these sub-groups (all but LEP and Special Ed) is missing. - There is no data for grades other than 4-8. Achievement information in prior years for grades 9-12 is missing, along with any information on achievement gaps being closed for sub-group students in those grade levels. <p>The extent of missing information makes it difficult to determine if HCS has a clear track record over the last four years in advancing achievement or increasing equity. Missing information on subgroups detracts from the quality of this section and leaves the reviewer uniformed as to levels of progress for demographic subgroups. This section does show significant growth in low achieving schools, and clear availability of student performance data, which combine to merit a high medium score.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	3

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

STRENGTHS:

- HCS posts LEA-level financial reports monthly on its website.
- HCS describes the qualifications, structure, and oversight of the Finance Department as well as the publicized information on the availability of and salaries for all personnel vacancies.

WEAKNESSES:

- Financial reports posted on the HCS website are at the LEA level. Two public hearings of the annual budget prior to each school year are the only times that school-level expenditures are available, and these appear to divide personnel expenses only by certified vs non-certified categories.
- HCS does not address shared information about non-personnel expenses at the school level.

This section demoinstates partial transparency by making LEA-level expenses publicly available, but less clearly providing information on expenses at the school-level, especially by requested categories. This merits a medium score.

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

STRENGTHS:

- HCS provides a thorough description of AL SEA goals, support, and flexibility that support the HCS proposal. AL SEA has a College and Career Ready Strategic Plan that aligns with HCS proposed outcomes and has already provided LEAs with latitude in fund-raising and implementation of digital learning.
- AL allows LEAs flexibility in choosing mastery versus seat-time for credits.
- AL SEA delegates teacher evaluation and incentives to its LEAs
- HCS proposed RTTD L2 reform initiatives are already approved at the SEA level.

WEAKNESSES: None

This section clearly addresses each of the conditions and autonomy required for a fully supportive State context for reform implementation, and exceeds those by having already obtained SEA approval for the reforms proposed in the RTTD initiative. This merits a high score.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	7
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

STRENGTHS:

- HCS states that they conferred with multiple key stakeholders who approved of the RTTD proposal.
- HCS describes revision of proposed mandatory extended learning to voluntary participation based on objections from key stakeholders.
- There are multiple letters of support from some key stakeholders.

WEAKNESSES:

- HCS does not describe how students and families other key stakeholders in participating schools were involved in developing the proposal.
- HCS appears to be a non-collective bargaining district. While HCS states that it conferred with the Huntsville Education Association, it does not indicate that 70% of the teachers from participating schools support the RTTD proposal, nor does it indicate direct participation from teachers in the development of the proposal.
- There are no letters of support from student organizations, early learning programs, or, most notably, the Huntsville Education Association or any teachers.
- Many of the letters of support are not signed.

While HCS provides many indicators of support and some proposal revisions based on teacher input, it does not describe

the input of other stake-holders in the proposal development or revision process. Notably, students were not participants in this process. These missing elements combine to merit a medium score in this section.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	12
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>STRENGTHS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HCS addresses most components of a high-quality plan (goals, activities, timeline deliverables, and persons responsible), accompanied by narrative that provides the HCS rationale for activities to support the goals of the proposed plan. - Extending use of GPS plans from middle to high school students provides an engaging & personalized strategy for secondary students to measure their progress and refine their goals according to their own interests. - Mechanisms for training and supporting students and families are thoroughly outlined. <p>WEAKNESSES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HCS provides a plan that has the labeled components of a high-quality plan with a supporting narrative that provides some rationale for the activities. The rationales described in the supporting narrative do not include evidence-based or best practice references for the proposed activities, detracting from the overall credibility of the plan. - HCS does not describe a systematic approach to engaging and empowering all students, especially high-need students and elementary students. - Many of the HCS plan's deliverables have to do with staff increases and logs of contact rather than tools that engage learners, such as "increase in highly effective student support staff." - HCS does not indicate any explanation showing that low income families, when provided with internet access, will have the other equipment or resources to effectively use the grant-funded access to support their children's learning. - Many of the planned activities do not address specific outreach or services for high-needs students. Example: adding a certified teacher to each school's existing after-school program does not address participation of high-need students in those programs. Details about the accommodations and high quality strategies for high-need students are missing. - The described instructional approaches described rely on digital content; there is no clarity around varied instructional approaches or environments. It's unclear how this will immerse students in diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives. - HCS describes a heavy reliance on digital content and universal online access, but does not address how that content will be of high quality. <p>This section on learning omits detailed discussion of how students, especially high-need students, will improve through a more personalized learning environment. In particular, there is very little detail on how outreach and instruction will differentiate for high-need students, low-income students, or culturally diverse students. Overall, this section merits a medium score.</p>		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	14
<p>(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>STRENGTHS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extensive narrative on a wide variety of strategies to improve capacity of both teachers and instructional leaders in digital instructional strategies - Narrative supports the high quality plan components with a discussion of rationale that improves the plan's credibility. <p>WEAKNESSES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Goals in the high quality plan are the criteria from the scoring tool as opposed to actual outcomes for HCS teachers and 		

leaders. One of the deliverables listed is the grant proposal's high-quality plan, rather than an implementation deliverable.

- The plan and narrative focus more on technology activities with teachers and leaders than on teacher capacity to support student progress.
- This section is missing a discussion of particular strategies to help educators personalize learning for high-needs students.
- While middle and high school students will have GPS plans for continuous feedback, the plan for feedback for elementary students is unclear.
- There is no high quality plan for increasing numbers of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals, although the intent to do so is discussed in a narrative without the components of a high quality plan. There is no discussion or plan for increasing numbers of students with effective or highly effective teachers in hard-to-staff schools, subjects, or specialty areas.

While this section provides a lengthy and detailed discussion and plan for staff development for both teachers and administrators in the use of digital instructional techniques, there is much less information about how students will improve in their engagement and mastery, especially high-need, low-income, and diverse students. There is a very limited discussion of differentiation. This section merits a medium score in the higher range.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	12

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

STRENGTHS:

- HCS describes an "L2 Project Leadership Team" that will directly support school leadership teams in implementing the RTTD grant. They show that the team will have input from and provide support to multiple levels at the central office as well as at each school.
- HCS has already developed school leadership teams in their professional learning communities process. They propose to add RTTD personnel to each team and that each team at each school will meet weekly for both implementation review and instructional data analysis and planning. HCS states that they provide school teams with flexibility and autonomy in school-based decision-making, and they list the items described in the scoring tool as areas of autonomy.
- HCS plans to roll site-based monthly leadership reviews into quarterly LEA data reviews which link the school based leadership teams with the central office leadership team in terms of data analysis and strategies.
- HCS already has policies in place, supported by SEA policies, for granting credit based on mastery rather than seat-time.
- HCS proposes that students be able to demonstrate mastery in multiple ways through both classroom and online instruction, online credit recovery customized to each student's missing mastery, individual and group projects, and teacher assessments.
- HCS describes two digital programs that are adaptable and accessible, and provide assessment driven instruction and remediation, particularly suitable for ELL and disabled students.
- The HCS plan addresses all components of a high-quality plan while it is also well-supported with rationale from the narrative, which increases the plan's credibility.

WEAKNESSES:

- While HCS lists the areas in which they provide school-based autonomy, they give no examples of such policies.
- HCS does not describe learning resources and instructional practices that are adaptable and fully accessible for high-need students, low-income, homeless, or culturally diverse students.

Overall, this section thoroughly addresses the required elements to demonstrate that their RTTD program will have the practices, policies, and rules to support personalized learning at all levels. The lack of any specific policy examples as well as minimal details about adaptable and accessible learning resources and instructional practices detract from a full explanation of their supports for personalized learning. This section merits a high score.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	9
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>STRENGTHS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The HCS existing 1:1 reform provided significant equity in digital access by providing all students with devices.even K-2 students have tablets. - Digital curriculum tools are available online to all students and parents. HCS proposes to provide Wi-Fi connectivity access to 8,000 homes (based on Free and Reduced Lunch status) through their RTTD program, thus increasing access for low-income students. - The HCS plan addresses all components of a high-quality plan, with a supporting narrative that adds the rationale for activities and strengthens the credibility of the plan. - HCS will provide face-to-face and online technical support to faculty, students, and parents that is also available to all stakeholders. They also plan to provide embedded staff development to support faculty with mentoring and modeling in the schools. - HCS presented a plan to get continuous feedback on technical support, and to modify the provided support based on that feedback from all sources. - While HCS can't use the state-required information management system's data in a completely interoperable way due to state requirements, they have developed a local work-around with an instructional management system that they plan to convert to a dashboard system available to all stakeholders. <p>WEAKNESSES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technical support for internet access at homes of low-income students is not addressed as a separate element of the proposal. Providing a connection may not be sufficient to enable appropriate use of access. - Technical support for parents is available, but not structured through a differentiated outreach strategy. HCS doesn't address cultural or economic differences in parent groups taking advantage of the technical support. <p>This section is thorough in its explanation of plans for bot LEA and school infrastructure that supports equitable access at all levels. Some details concerning effective differentiation would strengthen the plan. Overall, this section merits a high score.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	6
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>STRENGTHS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narrative addresses a conceptual framework that includes the intent for all schools to complete their own comprehensive needs assessment with which each school will then create aligned instructional improvement targets. - The narrative describes seven reviews of instructional targets at each school each year that involve both the school and central office leadership teams, plus quarterly reviews with all schools.. <p>WEAKNESSES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HCS presents a plan at the end of their (e)(4) narrative that includes the components of a high quality plan (except for the rationale for activities). The plan is very global. For example, one of the activities is "Conduct yearly needs assessment" with the deliverable being "Needs Assessment for setting targets for district ands local schools." The plan lacks details about specific and timely feedback for continuous improvement. It doesn't address publicly sharing information on the quality of HCS investments funded by RTTD. - The idea of seven instructional target reviews per year per school, plus quarterly reviews that also involve the school and district leadership teams, seems unmanageable. That would be over 400 reviews. 		

Overall, the continuous improvement process is not clearly planned. It's rigor is not clearly explained. The rationale for selecting activities is not provided in a way that links to the plan, with the result that the plan appears not to be achievable. This merits a score in the low end of the medium range.

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

5

1

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

- The narrative in this section mentions a "comprehensive communication strategy and plan" that involves internal and external stakeholders, but the plan is not provided or described.
- The narrative in this section does state that each school's website will display the school's "Instructional Target" and evidence of each strategy from the monthly reviews. The narrative further states that this website display will provide evidence to internal and external stakeholders. No information is provided on the timeline or parties responsible for these website displays, or how these displays at each school's website would be presented in terms of district-wide communication and engagement.
- The only plan presented in at the end of the (e)(4) discussion. While it is laid out with column headers labeled with the components of a high-quality plan (except for rationale), it is so general that it lacks credibility. Most notably, while the activities of "plan monthly data reviews at each school" and "plan district quarterly reviews" could address internal stakeholder communication (although that is not mentioned), there is no mention of communication with external stakeholders in the plan.

This section fails to address the elements of a high-quality plan for communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders, and merits a low score.

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

5

1

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

- The 2012-13 baseline for all students and each subgroup with highly effective teachers and principals is exactly the same (30%) and the 2017-18 goal for all students and each subgroup with highly effective teachers and principals is exactly the same (36%). A six per cent increase over five years is not ambitious, and there is no differentiation for any subgroup.
- The 2012-13 baseline for all students and each subgroup with effective teachers and principals is exactly the same (41%) and the 2017-18 goal for all students and each subgroup with effective teachers and principals is exactly the same (63%). There is no differentiation for any subgroup.
- The K-3 academic and non-cognitive measures have no description of rigorous, timely, or formative leading information' the data is only annual. The academic measure applies to 3rd graders only, so no academic measure is provided for K-2 students. The non-cognitive measure, in and out of school suspensions, has a rationale for potential improvement, but not a selection rationale. The gaps by sub-group are not addressed, and are projected to persist after the grant (In-school suspensions in 2017-18: 8% for white students, 33% for black students, and 47% for Free & Reduced Lunch students).
- The 4-8 performance measure selected for career-college readiness is successful completion of Algebra I at the end of 8th grade. No rationale is provided for selecting this measure. No formative information is provided - only annual measures for 8th graders. HCS doesn't address the vast differences by sub-group, or the minimal improvement in sub-groups by 2017-18 (from a baseline of 84.5% to 100% for white students, a baseline of 30.9% to 50% for black students, and a baseline of 35.8% to 58% for Free/Reduced Lunch students)
- There is no baseline, growth, subgroup, or formative information for the 4-8 academic measure, since the state assessments are changing in 2014.
- The 4-8 social-emotional performance measure is again in and out of school suspensions. HCS provides a rationale for intended improvement, but not a rationale for selection. HCS does state an intent to review these rates at least three times yearly for formative information, but does not address large subgroup differences, especially for black and Free/Reduced Lunch students.
- HCS did not collect the number of 12th graders completing the FAFSA in 2012-13, so it provides no baseline or annual targets and no subgroup data. HCS does not describe any formative information for this measure.
- The 9-12 measure of on track college/career students is the number/percentage of 11th graders whose composite ACT score is at or above the national average. Because the "ACT PLUS Writing" will be administered for the first time in 2014, HCS provides no baseline or projected annual targets for the total population or any subgroups. HCS does not describe

their rationale for selecting this measure, nor any plans for formative information on this measure.

- The 9-12 career readiness measure selected is the 12th grade WorkKeys which will be administered for the first time in the 2014-15 school year. Thus, there is no baseline or annual target information of any kind. HCS provides no rationale for selecting this measure, and no indication of formative information.

- HCS selected successful student completion of four core courses, enabling progression to the next grade, as their 9-12 academic performance measure. Their rationale for selection made sense in terms of this measure as an indicator of on-time graduation. They did not have any baseline subgroup data for this measure as it was not disaggregated. HCS does not posit any formative information for this measure.

- The 9-12 social-emotional measure is in and out of school suspensions. HCS does plan a review three times yearly for formative information. HCS does not address the large gaps by black and Free/Reduced Lunch subgroups in the 2017-18 targets; these gaps persist in their targets,

- HCS does not address how they will review and improve any of these measures over time if they are insufficient to gauge implementation progress.

Overall, HCS failed to fully address the required description elements in this section. They provided very limited rationales for selecting measures, incomplete annual targets, very little formative performance information, and did not address large gaps in sub-group targets. This section merits a low score.

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

5

1

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

- HCS does not address the components of a high-quality plan for rigorous evaluation of RTTD. For example, an activity in their evaluation plan is "Develop yearly PD plan and schedule events." This is not an activity that contributes to evaluating the effectiveness of RTTD investments, but is, at best, an activity that could be an element of an implementation plan.

- HCS does include a narrative in which they list a variety of quantitative and qualitative measures. They provide no goals or timeline for the administration or analysis of these measures.

The lack of a clear high-quality plan for rigorous evaluation of effectiveness and the brief narrative discussion of evaluation earn a low score in this section.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

- HCS requests \$30 Million to serve all 23,715 students in its LEA. They specify over \$52 Million in funds from other sources, which turns out to be entirely from the existing HCS 1:1 initiative. No other external foundations, LEA, State, or other Federal funds are identified in support of this initiative.

- HCS does not provide a per project budget break-down, but repeats the entire grant budget in the project worksheet (Budget Subpart 3). Thus, Budget Subpart 4 is the total grant proposal as opposed to a project-level narrative.

- Because HCS does not describe project level budgets, the projects do not have the associated criterion identified, making it difficult to determine their linkage with personalized learning initiatives. Some examples: The budget is the first time that HCS describes digital signage, which is not linked to any personalized learning environment criterion and would cost \$400,000. The \$980,000 for an additional seven social workers is not linked to improving a personalized learning environment.

- While the proposed budget seems reasonable and sufficient to support the HCS proposal, it's unclear that the budget is actually supportive of the RTTD program. It seems to provide significant support of the existing 1:1 initiative, and some budget items, as mentioned above, do not seem linked to a personalized learning environment.

- HCS does not clarify which funds are one-time investments versus on-going operational costs.

- HCS does not provide a clear focus on strategies that will ensure the long-term sustainability of the personalized learning

environment.

The budget's failure to address project-level budgets, linkages with proposal criteria, and clear strategies for sustainability cause this section to merit a low score in the medium range.

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

- HCS fails to provide the components of a high-quality plan for sustainability. They provide a narrative discussion with some possible activities, but do not provide goals, a timeline, or responsible personnel, decreasing the credibility of potential sustainability in the narrative.
 - The elements required in this section's description are not addressed, especially in terms of support from state and government leaders or how HCS will use data to inform future investments.
 - There is no estimated budget for three years after the term of the grant.
- The degree of missing information in this section merits a low score.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	2

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

- HCS describes its Career Coach program for this priority. However, the seven high school Career Coaches would be paid for solely with RTTD funds, and there is no indicated alignment of resources for this element of the initiative. External partnerships are not described as an element of the high school career coach program.
 - HCS does describe the involvement of the Governor's Office of Workforce Development and the Chamber in workforce and state program assessment.
 - HCS uses its college and career ready measures from Section E as its population-level desired results for this priority. While these results do include educational outcomes, they do not address measures for results for family and community supports
 - HCS does not describe a coherent and sustainable partnership to sustain Absolute Priority 1 or as a resource-aligned element of the Career Coach Program. This means that there is no description of how the partnership would track indicators integrate services in participating schools, or build staff capacity.
- Because HCS did not address a partnership in this section, many of the required elements are missing, which results in a low score.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

- Digital instructional strategies are described throughout the HCS application which are intended to personalize learning and teaching in ways that improve achievement.
- Core assurance areas are threaded throughout the proposal, particularly in adopting standards and assessments, using data systems, and developing effective teachers and principals. The proposal provides significant emphasis on professional development for all educators.
- HCS consistently posits throughout the application that the capacity to individualize instructional strategies through digital tools will significantly personalize the learning environment and thus increase the engagement of all students, resulting in increased achievement, graduation rates, and college and career readiness.

Total	210	112
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0008AL-2 for Huntsville City Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has set forth a reform vision that is quite coherent and nearly comprehensive. By showing how the proposed work builds on existing work, there is a sense of continuity within the vision. The applicant describes a vision of data-rich, personalized learning environments built on an existing digital learning initiative to ensure all students graduate college and career ready. The vision addresses a broad range of factors -- curriculum, instruction, assessment, culture, climate, and professional development -- that paint a coherent and comprehensive picture of change.</p> <p>Each of the four core educational assurances is addressed in terms of both existing work (the 1:1 Learning Initiative) and proposed work (L-Squared). The proposal includes extensions from the work that is currently in progress to the work that would develop if funded for RTTT-D. The applicant describes efforts related to alignment, assessment, real-time data use, coaching and training, evaluation, collaboration for learning, extended learning time, career coaches, social workers, and more that all seem to lay a solid foundation of vision.</p> <p>Because the applicant tied academic and social efforts together, the approach is credible. While there is a clear pathway for students to accelerate through the system if they are motivated, there remains some question about how the applicant will specifically motivate the unmotivated or chronically failing students. Some ideas can be easily inferred, but the application lacks specific details on this. Similarly, the illustration at the end of the section provides a nod to student interest, but the application pays little attention to how student academic interest will drive teaching and learning.</p> <p>The application clearly describes what personalized learning environments will look like for some teachers and one student. The description is clear and compelling, but requires the reader to generalize beyond a single, clearly motivated student.</p> <p>Overall, the applicant provides a strong vision for reform that is coherent and nearly comprehensive.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant described an approach to implementing its reform proposal that appears likely to support high-quality LEA-level and school-level implementation of the proposal. Selection for all schools in the district to participate was determined by an RTTT-D leadership team that examined academic and cultural data, poverty rates, student achievement data, Advanced Placement courses, attendance data, suspension data, and perception data. The applicant describes an approach that meets the eligibility requirements of the competition.</p> <p>The applicant provides a list of all schools that will participate in grant activities and the total number of students participating from low-income families, who are high-need students, and participating educators. However, the application is missing the total number of high need students, which is required by the selection criteria. Based on the selection criteria, the applicant has provided a fairly strong approach to implementation.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	5

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Overall, the applicant fails to provide a credible plan. Some credibility begins to grow from the clear connections between what is currently in places and what is proposed for RTTT-D purposes. The plan is grounded in the ideas that capacity building and ongoing monitoring to support real-time adjustments are critical, which lend credibility to the plan as well. The applicant's plan clearly describes reasonable activities, such as needs assessments, budgets, hiring and training, and communication. However, the activities listed end at the beginning of implementation and leave the reader to make assumptions about what happens from July 2014 to get to the one stated goal of personalized learning environments for all students.

While the applicant details theories of action that demonstrate understanding of the complexities of the stated goal, the reader is left to make a huge leap from program inception to goal attainment that ultimately shows that the applicant fails to provide a truly credible plan. Similarly, while the applicant has provided the components of a high quality plan -- timeline, deliverables, and responsible parties -- the plan does not take the reader all the way to the goal as stated. For this reasons, the applicant's plan earns medium score.

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

10

4

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant is at a transitional point in summative assessment as the state of Alabama is switching from one assessment to another. The application includes annual goals for state assessments based on reasonable predictions over this transitional period, but it is difficult to assess whether these are both reasonable and ambitious given the transition.

The applicant has provided ambitious yet achievable annual goals for decreasing achievement gaps in math based on an 11-12 baseline and progress already made in the 12-13 school year. The stated goals demonstrate a strong trajectory for improvement, which seem reasonable based on progress made in the 12-13 year. However, it is unclear why the applicant did not specify annual improvement goals for overall math performance.

The applicant failed to provide any goals for decreasing achievement gaps in reading, as well as goals for preschool through 2nd grade. Similarly, the applicant failed to list college enrollment goals by subgroup, which is required in the selection criteria.

The applicant provides ambitious yet achievable annual goals for increased graduation rates. Like the math goals, these goals are based on an 11-12 baseline and progress already made in the 12-13 school year. The stated goals demonstrate a strong trajectory for improvement, which seem reasonable based on progress made in the 12-13 year. Overall, the application scores in the low range for LEA wide goals for improved student outcomes.

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	11

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has provided evidence that it has a track record of success. The applicant provides sets of data that show steady improvement in subgroups and strong performance in overall achievement across the district. The applicant includes charts that detail overall consistent growth from 08-09 through 12-13 in the special education subgroup and the Limited English Proficiency subgroup in both reading and math in all grades 3rd through 8th. However, application did not provide specific data related to achievement of low-income students.

The application provided a detailed description of efforts to increase participation and success in Advanced Placement courses. While the data related to this effort shows significant progress toward initiative goals, there is little data presented to demonstrate improvements in college enrollment rates -- only data from the 11-12 and 12-13 school years. However, these data points do show growth in the area of college enrollment from one year to the next. There is a related question about the validity of participation in Advanced Placement courses as an indicator for college and career readiness. The applicant did not make a clear connection between the two.

The applicant has provided compelling data related to strong improvement in three of its persistently low-achieving schools over the past four years. It is unclear how many persistently low achieving schools the applicant district has, but data showing improvement in ten of them are provided. Along with the improvement data, the applicant outlines an effort to expand pre-kindergarten programs for students determined to be at-risk. However, the fact that the application is missing

outcome measures for Pk-2 further erodes the credibility of the plan's ability to impact low-achieving students.

By describing a student information system, an instructional management system, the Renaissance Learning website, a data dashboard, and live-streamed site data review meetings, the applicant provided evidence that it makes student performance data available to students, educators, and parents in ways that inform and improve participation, instruction, and services.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	3
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(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:
 The applicant has provided evidence of transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments through a description of available financial reports, public hearings on operating budgets that provide actual personnel salaries, and Board meetings that are public and reported by the media. However, there is no evidence that actions have been taken to increase transparency. Additionally, all evidence of transparency represents passive means of sharing information.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	8
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:
 The applicant has provided evidence of conditions and sufficient autonomy under State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements to implement the personalized learning environment described. The applicant notes that the State of Alabama has adopted college and career ready standards, defined college and career readiness, and defined state goals and strategies related to college and career readiness. However, there is no evidence provided to illustrate how these state goals and definitions will contribute to conditions that support project implementation.
 The applicant also notes that the state legislature has authorized mechanisms for funding, credit-earning, and evaluation that are included in the proposal. Overall, there is clear evidence of permission and autonomy to allow the applicant to do what is proposed; however, the application lacks a clear description of how the state context creates successful conditions.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	12
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:
 The applicant has provided evidence of stakeholder engagement. In addition to providing 25 letters of support, the applicant described a process of conferring with the Alabama State Department of Education, city officials, the district's Education Association, many levels of school and district leadership, and the district's Parent Teacher Association. As evidence that this process was more than perfunctory, the applicant described one area of opposition and a change that was made as a result of the concern. However, many of the letters included are not signed, which raises some questions about the strength of their support. Most problematic, however, is that fact that the proposal lacks any description of meaningful family engagement.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	4

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:
 The applicant has provided the required components of a high quality plan -- goals, activities and rationale for them, timeline, deliverables, and parties responsible for implementing the activities. Considered together, the stated goals provide an illustration of the proposed work. However, there are some serious disconnects between the goals and the activities aligned to achieve them. Specifically, there is a disconnect between the goals related to deep learning and variety of instructional approach and the heavy reliance on a purchased digital curriculum through which students navigate while teachers monitor. While there is undeniable value in "outsourcing" some learning to technology -- especially when the learning goal is rote application or knowledge -- the applicant stops short of painting a compelling picture of the value that will be added by teacher-student interaction. For example, the application mentions project based learning -- on more than one occasion -- but neglects to connect that outcome back to PD and support for systemic change. The application has stated goals that would realistically lead to college and career readiness -- such as core content knowledge, career awareness, creativity, and problem-solving skills -- but not all can be clearly tracked to quality implementation through the activities and deliverables outlined.

The applicant has provided evidence that the proposal will result in students understanding that what they are learning is key to their success. The wrap-around support of social workers and career counselors, along with tech-rich and standards-based tracking systems support this. Similarly, the support services focused on college and career readiness demonstrate a likelihood that students will be able to identify and pursue goals linked to college and career ready standards, structuring their own learning and measuring their own progress toward those goals.

While the applicant articulates goals that students will be involved in deep learning in areas of academic interest and have access and exposure to diverse cultures, contexts and perspectives that motivate and deepen individual learning, these are both areas where the activities to support the goal leave too much room for question to be considered a clear and credible path.

The application does provide goals supported by clear actions that are likely to provide students with personalized sequences of instructional content and skill development that lead to on-time graduation and college and career readiness. Scaling up the GPS program, relying on personalized learning plans in a standards-based learning environment, and clear focus on alignment are all actions that support these goals.

The application often refers to digital content that is aligned with college and career ready standards, but does not provide enough depth related to variety of high quality content and instructional approaches.

The applicant provides evidence of a high quality plan for ongoing, regular feedback and personalized learning recommendations based on a student's current knowledge and skills. Similarly, the application provides evidence of readiness to provide accommodations to keep high need students on track through PBIS, wi-fi access at home, and supports such as career counselors and social workers. However, the plan for preparing students to college and careers scores in the low range because it is disconnect in some areas and vague in others.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	5
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

While the applicant provides all the necessary components of a high quality plan, the link between the goals, activities, and deliverables to the stated outcome of project based learning (PBL) and implied outcome of transformational technology use is missing in the plan. The professional developed described focuses mainly on specific tech tools, data use, and alignment, so it is unclear how these things will result in PBL and transformational technology use. This negatively impacts the overall credibility of the plan, as it is not clear to the reader how the articulated outcomes will lead to qualitatively different learning environments. While it is possible that the stated activities related to curriculum alignment and differentiated professional development could lead to project based learning and tech-rich learning environments that embody the NETS standards, it is not a given.

The applicant has provided plenty of evidence that high need students will be served through the proposal, that teaching and learning will be aligned to college and career ready content, and that there will be frequent measures of student progress that increase the likelihood that students will graduate on time and ready for college and career.

The proposed plan for differentiated teacher professional development instills confidence in the reader that teachers will have access to, and know how to use tools, data, and resources to accelerate student progress toward college and career ready standards and on-time graduation. The additional layer of data-rich professional learning communities increases the likelihood that teachers will be able to meet individual student needs in a continuously-improving system.

Finally, the applicant describes a recruitment and evaluation system that seems likely to draw in and grow highly effective educators. The proposal uses RTTT-D funds to pay for performance, but it is unclear if there is a plan for sustaining this after the end of the grant period.

Overall, the applicant provides a reasonable plan which is negatively impacted by the gap between intention and planning related to PBL and transformational technology use. For this reason, the proposal receives a low-medium score.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	12

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has provided evidence of LEA practices, policies, and rules to support project implementation. There is a clear focus on building leadership capacity at the school level, which generates confidence that the proposal will have a

lasting impact. However, the disconnects that exist between goals and implementation continue to negatively affect the proposal. Existing school leadership teams appear to be empowered and site-based decision making is an expectation. School leadership teams are already in place and meet weekly. It seems likely that they will be able to incorporate the goals of the proposal into their function. The applicant provides support for data-driven decision making that will serve a continuous improvement model well.

The applicant has described a responsive system that is able to meet individual students where they are and provide multiple pathways into and out of college and career ready learning. Existing waivers and permissions support this system.

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

10

8

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides evidence of an existing and planned infrastructure that supports personalized learning. The applicant already has a data system that stores educational data for each students and can be accessed by teachers, administrators, parents and students. The applicant's digital curriculum offers access to videos, online tutors, practice problems, and a variety of assessments that ensure all stakeholders have access to necessary content and tools. The proposal to support internet connections at homes currently without them increases the likelihood that students and parents will have access both in and out of school. There is a plan to provide access to technical support for all stakeholders.

The applicant currently has data and management systems that house assessment data, curriculum, software, HR and budget information, and student data. Existing state reporting procedures interfere with the ability of the system to be fully interoperable. It is unclear whether parents and students are able to export their information in an open data format as required within the selection criteria.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	13
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>Data use and monitoring and evaluation are a clear strength of this application. The proposal describes how current continuous improvement processes will be scaled up to meet the needs of the grant. The application describes a rigorous continuous improvement process that will use school and district level leadership teams and a shared process built on a conceptual framework already in place to inform and guide data-driven, job-embedded, and ongoing professional development to support project goals. However, the disconnect between stated outcomes and professional development continues to raise questions about the effectiveness of the process.</p> <p>Supported by a comprehensive needs assessment structure, each school will identify improvement targets related to culture, curriculum, and strategies for academic success and regularly interact to in collaborative groups to monitor progress through a series on seven monthly reviews each year. Support for instructional improvement will be provided through an embedded coaching model. The applicant describes a comprehensive communication strategy that ensures public sharing of information on the quality of grant-funded investments.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	2
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The applicant has provided the necessary categories required in a high quality plan; however, the descriptions provided are too general to paint a clear and compelling picture of the plan for communication and engagement. The application describes a systemic approach to informing and engaging all stakeholders in a continuous improvement process that to ensure implementation and fidelity of the proposal. District and school level instructional targets monitored by monthly walk-throughs are positioned to inform a responsive professional development process; however, there is not enough information to fully understand what this will look like in action. It is also unclear whether this is plan for meaningfully including external stakeholders in the process.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	1
(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The application includes most of the required performance measures with both overall and subgroup goals. The goals</p>		

articulated appear to be achievable; however, there is some question about whether some of the goals are truly ambitious. It is further problematic that subgroups are not disaggregated and identified in terms of performance measures. While there are existing gaps, the proposal lacks targeted interventions to address these gaps. Finally, annual goals for reading and math are missing and there is no FAFSA data included.

The applicant does select additional performance measures and provides a rationale for choosing them as required within the selection criteria. For example, a PK-3 performance measure is a decrease in disciplinary referrals tracked as in and out of school suspension with the rationale that increased relevance for students and more access to data and information for adults will decrease behavior issues. Baseline data from the 12-13 school year is provided with incremental improvement goals set through the 17-18 school year.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	1
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(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

There is a place for all components required in a high quality plan for evaluating the effectiveness of grant investments, but the descriptions included in those categories do not address program evaluation. Rather, they further describe implementation. The applicant provides goals, activities, timelines, deliverables, and persons responsible, but the plan does not represent a credible way to evaluate the effectiveness of grant funds.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	2

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Through the supporting budget narrative and tables, the applicant identifies the funds that will support the project. The budget appears reasonable and sufficient to support the development and implementation of the proposal. Unfortunately, the proposal is missing project-level narratives. Similarly, each project does not include a subpart budget as required in the selection criteria.

Additionally, the plans for sustainability of the work after the grant period are too vague to promote confidence. While it makes sense that some professional development and technology investments will wane over time, the number of other pieces of the work these savings are proposed to offset doesn't quite match up. The applicant describes a "hope to maintain" investments often, which raise questions about realistic sustainability.

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

The application is missing a high quality plan for sustainability of project goals as defined by the notice. A high quality plan includes key goals, activities to be undertaken and the rationale for them, timeline, deliverables, and parties responsible for implementing the activities. Taken together, these pieces come together to lend credibility to the plan. While some of these elements may be inferred for the narrative included, there is just not enough detail or cohesiveness to meet the criteria.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

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

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's proposal for the Competitive Preference Priority describes a partnership among workforce development, post-secondary institutions, the chamber of commerce, and the school district that seeks to introduce and support career pathways for students early enough to allow them to make wise career choices as early as middle school. The proposal emphasizes high need students who are identified by the school and supported by Career Coaches who 'think with' students about future career plans, teach sound decision-making skills, assist with action planning, providing students with an introduction to the workforce, and connect students to outside resources. While these processes and outcomes are quite worthy, there is not a clear picture of how resources are aligned create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

By building on an already existing program that has support from public and private organizations, the proposal to add a Career Coach to each of seven high schools is coherent, though sustainability of the proposal carries the same real questions as the sustainability for the overall RTTT-D proposal. The proposed combination of group and individual services lend coherence, but again clear alignment is missing.

The applicant provides, population-specific desired results, including readiness for high school success, readiness for college and careers, family involvement, and understanding of workplace expectations. These goals align with and expand the applicant's broader RTTT-D proposal. There is a description of how the indicators would be tracked and data used to target resources and improve results over time, but the results are difficult to connect to the data collected. For example, it is questionable that the data indicator identified actually shows parent involvement. Additionally, the goals as stated do not appear ambitious.

The proposal includes a credible description of how the partnership could build capacity of school staff, such as guidance counselors and teachers, but overall the proposal is more about adding complementary resources than representing a real partnership.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met
Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The proposal does provide a coherent and comprehensive plan to build on the core educational assurance areas. By addressing tech equipment and support, policies and procedures, knowledge, incentives, data collection and use, and school structures to provide a personalized students learning environment that is supported by a system of continuous improvement, the applicant meets Absolute Priority 1.</p> <p>The proposal seeks to increase the number of high need students performing at or above grade level and graduating ready for college and careers. The applicant proposes varied, yet connected efforts that deepen student learning, personalize individual student learning, increase educator effectiveness and ensure high need students have highly effective educators, and decrease gaps.</p>		

Total	210	113
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0008AL-3 for Huntsville City Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	7
(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:		

HCS has provided a coherent vision of reform building on its past success.

The applicant presents a convincing vision that it will continue work in the four core areas. The proposal has a large component of professional development directed at increasing educator effectiveness. The district's successful 1:1 digital initiative will be enhanced to increase student engagement, achievement, and close gaps. Individualized plans and career coaches will help students prepare for college and careers.

Tables in section E3 enumerate appropriate targets related to accelerating student achievement and increased equity. The use of devices by all students that will enable them to have personalized learning plans will deepen learning and increase equity as well.

The applicant has provided an effective narrative example of how a student sees the new learning environment with personalized learning and how teachers interact within that environment.

However, the LEA does not give sufficient detail on how it will turn around low-achieving schools. It mentions the use of funds for home Internet access and the use of Title I funds. General interventions are given, such as after school programs, and increased Internet access. Nevertheless, specific, targeted interventions in these schools are not addressed.

Although the LEA presents a coherent vision of reform, it is not comprehensive enough as it relates to its lowest achieving schools. Therefore this criterion was marked in the medium range with 7 points.

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

The LEA uses an approach that will impact all students at all schools.

The applicant has clearly described in section A2 how it determined the need for the grant--by considering eligible students in free lunch programs, looking at state assessment data, monitoring attendance data, examining course enrollment information, and conducting district surveys. The high need students were differentiated between math and reading students, which helps to underscore the detail to which the applicant has considered which schools should be included in the project. Because the need was seen across the board, all schools (listed) and all students will participate (23,715). The totals of low income students and high need students were also provided in this section.

However, it is unclear why two schools were included in the proposal, as they have less than ten percent of the population as low income students, and have few high need students. In addition, although the applicant distinguishes between high need students by content area, it is unclear if these are duplicate counts or unique students.

Because the applicant has described its process of selecting participating schools, meets the eligibility requirements of serving 40% or more low income students, and provided a list of all schools, this criterion was scored in the high range with 9 points.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	7
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(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The LEA includes all of its schools in the proposal. It has described effectively how the plan will impact meaningful reform over the life of the grant.

In addition to the preliminary project guide in Section A3, the applicant has included parts of a high quality plan in tables C1 and C2 for the overall project. These tables show goals, activities, timelines, deliverables, and parties responsible. Rationale for the activities is given in the narrative. In addition, section A3 has a table with a preliminary project guide that also has the goal of personalized environments, activities, timelines, deliverables, and persons responsible.

The LEA's theory of change has as its foundation personalized learning environments. The theory of action model in Graphic 3 demonstrates how this foundation will impact student learning and achievement. However, this theory of action does not include annotations that it is supported by research. Furthermore, it focuses on processes rather than student-centered outcomes.

The applicant has produced a credible high-quality plan with a feasible and comprehensive theory of action, but lacks specific student outcomes. Based on this, the score for this criterion was in the medium range, at 7 points.

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

The LEA presented ambitious and achievable goals in three of the four areas.

Each component in this criterion had a corresponding chart with targets. The applicant has provided a rationale for determining its targets on summative assessment in grades 8-12. The goals in this area were reasonable and attainable. However, the applicant has not provided targets for new state assessments for grades 3-8.

The applicant had very small gaps in achievement in A4b across subgroups, but showed low rates of proficiency that were not addressed. The target of increasing 10% in five years is not ambitious. There was no rationale provided for these low targets. In contrast, the LEA's targets for graduation and college enrollment were reasonable, and while ambitious, achievable. However, the college enrollment targets are not delineated by subgroups to demonstrate increased equity, as required in this section.

The applicant did not address postsecondary degree attainment. No points were deducted for this omission.

This criterion was scored in the medium range with a score of 4 because of the lack of ambitious targets for decreasing achievement gaps and a lack of goals related to increasing rates of proficiency.

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	10
(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>HCS has demonstrated some success in the last few years in the areas of increasing equity and learning, closing achievement gaps, improved performance at low-achieving schools and increased access to student data.</p> <p>The applicant has provided evidence using bar charts and tables that students in special education in grades three to six have increased achievement on state tests in reading and mathematics over the last five years. For the same time period, students classified as LEP in grades three to eight have made improved scores in both reading and math. These rising scores have served to close the achievement gap with the general population scores in grades four to seven.</p> <p>HCS has improved student learning outcomes by providing more Advanced Placement classes to students, and the number of students who score well on the AP tests has risen. The district has enjoyed a grant from A+ College Ready to increase AP course enrollment and proficiency by providing professional development to teachers and academic support to students. There has been an increase in the overall high school graduation rate from 66% in 2012 to 77% in 2013. Similarly, HCS has achieved a higher percent of students who enroll in college in 2013 compared to 2012.</p> <p>The applicant has been able to increase levels of proficiency on the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Tests at three of its low-achieving schools. Dawson will have extended learning time to aid in the improvement of the campus.</p> <p>The district has products such as INOW and SchoolNet that allow students, parents, and teachers to use data to inform instruction and participation. HCS has also established the practice of site data reviews to provide all stakeholders a voice in data meetings. Specific student performance data (state and local assessments) will be made available to students, parents, and educators in the site data reviews, which will be conducted to drive instruction and intervention services.</p> <p>However, seventh and eighth grade math scores of special education students have not made progress on the ARMT over the last five years. The applicant did not address this situation in the proposal. Dawson, Lakewood, and MLK have made progress on the ARMT, but there was no elaboration of details of ambitious or significant reforms on those campuses. Graduation and college enrollment data, although promising, was only provided for two years.</p> <p>Overall, the applicant has provided moderate evidence for a track record of success in advancing student learning and achievement, and thus the score of 10, which is in the medium range.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	3

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

HCS has made some strides in providing transparency in its financial transactions, but some detailed data has not yet been made readily accessible.

The applicant has provided evidence of transparency in its financial reports by posting monthly reports on its website (as

indicated in the application), as well as by holding two public hearings per year on its operating budget. Salary schedules by job description are posted in multiple places.

However, it is not clear from the proposal that HCS provides specific data on actual personnel salaries at the school level for teachers, instructional, or support staff. No documentation was provided in the application related to the LEA's financial transparency.

This criterion was ranked in the medium range with a score of 3 because although many financial reports were posted, it was not clear that data was provided broken down by the three levels of personnel salary categories.

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

10

10

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

HCS enjoys optimal state conditions for the implementation of its proposal. The applicant has provided strong and compelling detailed evidence of successful conditions and autonomy for the project.

The applicant has provided evidence that there are successful conditions in its state to implement the learning environments in its project. HCS included a letter from the State Department of Education as well as the mayor in its proposal. The state has embraced the Common Core Standards, and it has adopted goals in its Plan 2020 related to closing gaps, improving student achievement, as well as increasing high school graduation and college enrollment rates. Furthermore, the state has adopted a law in 2012 to grant autonomy from regulatory requirements related to seat time, teacher evaluation, and teacher incentives. Alabama has provided a funding mechanism for technology by authorizing up to \$100 million in bonds for this purpose.

Because the applicant has fully addressed the question of sufficient autonomy and successful conditions for the proposal, this criterion was scored in the high range with full points (10).

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

15

8

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has garnered support for its proposal from many groups, including community members and parents, but lacks evidence of approval from key stakeholders, particularly teachers and students.

The LEA has indicated stakeholder engagement in the development of the proposal, as evidenced by its Race to the Top proposal meetings in July and October. Feedback from that meeting modified the plan concerning use of extended day. However, it is not clear that teachers and students had input in the initial process of the plan.

Due in part to its success with its 1:1 initiative, more than fifteen letters of support from a variety of community members and parents show that it has broad-based support for the plan.

The applicant has provided letters of support from a variety of constituents including: the Alabama Department of Education, the mayor, business organizations, the education foundation, principals, parents, and the PTA.

The president of the local teacher association has approved the proposal as indicated by signing the proposal. However, HCS has not provided evidence that many teachers or students approve of the proposal. There are no letters of support from teacher organizations, institutions of higher education, early learning programs, or student organizations. The applicant has not provided evidence of support for the plan by a majority of teachers.

Because of these omissions, this criterion was ranked in the middle of the range with a score of 8.

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

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

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The LEA has produced a sound high quality proposal that will improve instruction and student progress through a personalized digital learning environment.

Table C1 includes all of the elements of a high quality plan with key goals, activities, rationale for activities, timelines, deliverables, and parties responsible. Sections A1 and E3 address the improvement of teaching utilizing professional

development, and the personalization of learning for students so that they can graduate career and college ready. The applicant's approach of using 1:1 devices engage and empowers all students in the district. Building on a successful program in 2012, the use of career coaches will ensure that students create goals and understand how to structure and monitor their learning in order to achieve their goals. In addition, the LEA will employ social workers to support individual's social, emotional and behavioral needs as a safety net for the district's neediest students.

Parents and educators will be able prepared to support student use of technology via professional development and workshops. Table C1 attests to the applicant's thoughtful approach to meeting the goals of all students understanding their learning is key, that students are involved in areas of their own academic interest, and that students are exposed to a variety of contexts and perspectives in order to deepen their learning. The budget narrative indicates that the project contains a wide variety of high quality instructional approaches that are aligned with the Common Core. These approaches and programs will give ongoing feedback on short-term progress, while the INoW system will provide daily updates to student attendance and assessment data, and indicate mastery towards career readiness and high school graduation.

Additional supports will be provided after school and in the summer for high need students in order to ensure progress toward personalized goals of college and career readiness. Internet access will be extended to low income students so that all students can access high quality content around the clock. Training will be continued for students who already have received instruction in the use of electronic devices through the district's current 1:1 initiative.

The proposal includes a continuous improvement plan whereby there will be frequent evaluation of the project so that students (along with parents and educators) will be supported to learn, achieving the goals of college and career readiness.

However, the plan fails to specifically address the high suspension rates documented in Section E3. The proposal lacks a linkage between discipline rates and the personalization of learning, particularly for high need students.

As the applicant has provided a feasible high quality plan with focus on student learning in a personalized learning environment, this criterion was scored in the high range with 18 points.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	15
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The LEA has produced an elaborate yet feasible proposal that will improve instruction in order to support student progress.

Table C2 and the sample table of professional development in section C2 enumerate some of the elements of a high quality plan with activities, rationale for activities, timelines, and deliverables. Key goals in the narrative include creating professional learning communities (PLC) for educators, and provide additional training as follow-up from the 1:1 digital initiative. The staff development director is the responsible party for this section of the proposal.

The professional development will focus on the personalization of learning for students so that they can graduate career and college ready. As part of the PLC, educators will work on instructional strategies that reach and motivate all students. Teacher knowledge and practice will be measured and monitored so that individually and as a whole they will be able to adapt content and instruction and put into practice professional development in the area of digital curriculum. Not only will teachers create personalized learning environments for students so they will progress towards college and career readiness, but their own professional development will be in a parallel personalized learning environment. Teachers will be exposed to a wide variety of learning approaches to provide students with multiple paths to achieving academic goals. Data review teams will meet frequently so that data will be used to inform teams of student progress and teacher practice. The Innovation Instructional Leader Evaluation Plan details how feedback is given to teachers and principals, with focus on student performance targets. Common planning and PLC meetings will give teachers constant feedback concerning collective and individual effectiveness.

Professional development was delivered during the district's 1:1 technology initiative, so that all participating educators have access to the tools and resources necessary to use the digital curriculum and monitor student progress using INow. The attendance and assessment results in the INow system will enable teachers to identify best approaches in the creation of personalized learning plans. The LEA has planned for continuing professional development of educators geared specifically to ensuring that teacher tools and processes will match and meet student needs. This includes training in the digital environment, onsite training in the classroom, as well as coaching and modeling. Staff development will also include data analysis, the integration of technology in the classroom, as well as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). The professional development will focus on improving student performance and closing gaps in achievement.

As evidenced by the extensive professional development plan, the LEA will train all educators in order for them to create effective learning environments to meet individual student needs. Data from professional development and educator evaluations will improve educator performance at the individual and team level.

However, the plan does not provides all students access to effective and highly effective teachers in a reasonable time frame, as evidenced in charts in section E3. It does not have a high-quality plan to increase the number of effective staff, as the proposal lacks timelines and personnel responsible for achieving this task. The school will use various resources such as the regional service center to look for additional candidates, but it appears that improvement in teacher quality will take place slowly through teacher attrition.

Despite the thoroughness of the professional development plan, because the lack of some of the elements of a high quality plan for increasing the number of effective staff, this criterion was marked 15, in the medium range.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	12

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

HCS has provided compelling evidence that it has practices, policies and rules that will help personalize learning.

The applicant has organized sufficient support for the project by including key district personnel such as the superintendent, director of assessment, and coordinator of professional development on the project leadership team. Schools plan to hold weekly meetings to evaluate the process by considering student data, observation of classrooms, and teacher input. These are of appropriate frequency to monitor and adjust the process.

Practices and policies of the LEA related to autonomy, mastery, and individualization lay a sound foundation for the successful completion of the project. The district states that it provides autonomy to schools in the areas of schedules, calendars, staffing models, and budgets. Local and state policy allow students to progress based on mastery rather than seat time. The applicant will include individualized plans for special education students and English learners, in addition to the Personalized Learning Environments and digital learning programs. Table C2 provided clear evidence of a high quality plan, including goals, activities, deliverables, timelines and responsible parties.

Although activities in the plan are listed (such as needs assessment), they are not linked to rationales related to project implementation.

Although HCS will employ a variety of assessments to demonstrate mastery of topics, it is unclear which of these assessments will earn students credit so that students can progress to the next level of instruction.

The criterion was ranked in the high range, with a score of 12 as a sound high quality plan to support project implementation was evident.

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

The applicant has provided ample evidence that it supports personalized learning through the LEA's technology infrastructure.

Table C2 demonstrates components of a high quality plan, including key goals, activities, timelines, deliverables, and parties responsible. Rationale and support for these activities are given in the narrative of D2a. These supports are appropriate and make the overall project feasible.

HCS has implemented a 1:1 initiative so that all students in grades K-12 have a digital device. Older students have access to this devices at all times, both in and out of school. Internet service will be provided as part of the grant to parents and students of low income. Appropriate stakeholders, such as students, teachers, and parents have access to content and tools: students will have personalized plans, teachers will be given professional development, and parents will have online training tools.

The district has a data system that allows students, teachers, and parents access to student information. The data system is interoperable including budget, student assessment, and curriculum data. However, no details about exporting data in an open format is provided.

HCS has made provision for online training, but it has not provided evidence for technical support for parents and students delivered either online or via telephone.

The applicant has included the elements of a high quality plan so that its infrastructure will support personalized learning,

and thus this criterion receives 8 points, in the high range.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	12
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has provided a solid framework for its continuous improvement process, with focus on curriculum, assessment for learning, and strategies for academic success.</p> <p>HCS has created a rigorous process that uses a culture of community and of professional development as the foundation to improve learning and instruction. There will be periodic monitoring of the plan at the district level so that improvements can be made in a timely fashion. Elements of a high quality plan are present, including meeting frequency, deliverables, and responsible parties.</p> <p>Although the applicant lists how it will monitor and measure the on-going quality of the project by school personnel, it does not elicit response to these findings from the public.</p> <p>As HCS has demonstrated a thoughtful plan of continuous improvement, this criterion was scored in the high range, with 12 points.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	2
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The LEA will utilize its continuous improvement plan to share news of the project with stakeholders.</p> <p>The leadership team will produce thirty day reports with input from district personnel. These will serve to engage internal stakeholders. The applicant will post news of the project to its website in an effort to communicate the effectiveness of strategies with external stakeholders. Letters of support from community members attest to ongoing communication during the planning period of the proposal.</p> <p>However, it is not clear how the district will actively engage external stakeholders or elicit comments from parents during the improvement process. Timelines and deliverables are mentioned as part of a high quality plan, but it is not explicit which leadership members are the responsible parties for communication with the public.</p> <p>Because of the lack of clarity of how the LEA will receive comments from external stakeholders and uncertainty concerning who is responsible for communicating project updates, this criterion was scored a 2, in the medium range.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	1
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has partially met the basic requirements of this criterion, using suspension rates as a non-academic indicator across all grade levels. Low academic performance and high suspension rates were concerns identified in the school survey. They also relate to HCS' theory of action as given in Graphic 3. The continuous improvement plan ensures that the applicant will revisit these indicators.</p> <p>A total of fifteen measures are addressed in charts in this section. The number of students served by effective and highly effective staff are listed in tables E3a and E3b. It contains measures for PreK-3, including a non-academic plan to reduce suspensions for PreK-3rd grade. Algebra I enrollment in 8th grade was used to determine college and career readiness. Retention rates are used to measure success in high school. However, there was no differentiation across high schools or by subgroup in order to monitor these rates.</p> <p>The highly effective teacher and principal chart in section E3a does not support ambitious goals, as the percent served by effective staff moves from 30% to 33% in a period of five years. The performance measures for subgroups in math and reading do not have targets for each year. Although suspension rates for some subgroups are alarmingly high, no targeted interventions address this area. Data was missing for the measures relating to high school (FAFSA, ACT scores, and WorkKeys).</p>		

Because some of the targets and baseline data are missing, as well as the lack of ambitious goals in the area of highly effective staff, this criterion was marked 1, in the low range.

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

5

3

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has elaborated elements of a high quality plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the project using quantitative and qualitative measures.

The major components of the project are evaluated in a timely fashion, including student scores, discipline reports, and professional development activities. The continuous improvement process is an integral part of the project's effectiveness evaluation.

The evaluation plan includes goals, activities, deliverables, timelines and parties responsible. Some of these elements are vague, such as the activity of conducting a yearly needs assessment. More details are required for the plan to be credible and feasible.

Because of the presence of elements of a high quality evaluation plan, the proposal earned 3 on this criterion, in the middle range.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	8

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

HCS provides strong evidence that its budget is closely linked to the project's goals, with thoughtful rationale for use of funds.

It has clearly distinguished between Race to the Top funds and local district monies. However, the LEA did not provide a breakdown of the budget by subproject.

The budget is reasonable, and is sufficient in light of the district's prior commitment to the 1:1 initiative. The application allots money to personnel, hardware and software that will be used during the life of the grant. The personnel budget contemplates sufficient compensation and fringe benefits for key personnel, including the grant director, social workers, and career coaches. The positions listed in the personnel section are logical, and fit well into the overall plan. Each of the software and hardware items mentioned includes a description of how it will be used to support student learning or teacher development.

Although professional development funds are a large portion of the budget, they reflect the emphasis on staff development as outlined in the plan.

However, the district included an expense of \$400,000 for signage without compelling narrative or documentation for this expenditure.

As the applicant has provided a detailed budget that is reasonable overall and will support the project during the life of the grant, this criterion was in the high range with a score of 8.

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

10

3

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant was only partially successful in making a compelling case for the sustainability of the project.

The district plans to reallocate future textbook funds towards the on-going cost of the curriculum project. Personnel costs may be met by grant funding.

The application includes letters of support from the mayor, local community leaders, as well as the Alabama Department of Education. However, none of the letters of support hold any promise for additional funding, nor are there letters from philanthropic organizations that support the project. No outside funding for the proposal is contemplated other than district funds. Some of the parts of a high quality plan for sustainability are included in the proposal; the applicant understands the need for continued funding for key personnel and interconnectivity and provides rationale for this need. However,

elements of a high quality plan for sustainability such as timelines and parties responsible are missing.

Because of the uncertainty of the sustainability of the project beyond the life of the grant, this was scored in the medium range with 3 points.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	6

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has proposed expanding the current successful partnership it has with community colleges related to career coaches. In so doing, it has met several of the requirements of the competitive preference priority.

HCS will hire seven more career coaches, with the goal of helping all 8th graders be successful in high school, as well as making all families active in the career planning process. A tracking mechanism is envisioned that includes 9th grade failure rates, as well as parent participation in conferences and workshops. The applicant has provided evidence that special populations will be included, as all students in the designated grade levels will benefit from the services. The proposal makes a strong case that this priority is an integral part of its plan, as it is included in the budget and continuous improvement plan. The coaches will provide input to the personalized plans and coursework that make up the overall project. The applicant gave evidence of supports for this priority in the chart in this section, with goals, activities, and responsible parties enumerated. The goals for Algebra I completion by 8th graders is an appropriate proxy for high school readiness. However, other measures, aimed at career readiness are missing.

Furthermore, the applicant has only set goals and measures for high school completion related to the all student category, rather than by sub-group. As noted in the discussion of E3, the ACT table contains no data. No additional points were deducted for this omission. The goals for the free and reduced lunch subgroup are not ambitious, as only an additional 20 students are projected to complete Algebra I by the end of the project.

The applicant has not provided evidence how external stakeholders and partners will be involved with this preference priority. It is unclear how parents and families will be supported by this facet of the project. In addition, there is no provision for sustainability of this priority beyond the life of the grant.

Because of the lack of ambitious goals for students across a wide spectrum of needs and lack of evidence for involvement of community partners, this criterion was scored in the medium range, with a mark of 6.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has addressed absolute priority one in a comprehensive way.

The applicant has demonstrated that it is committed to the four core educational assurance areas. Based on the proposal, it has adopting standards and assessments that prepare students for college and the workplace as demonstrated in section E. It is using INow, a data system to measure student growth and inform educators. The proposal includes ways to develop and retain effective educators, including professional development and a financial incentive program. Its three lowest achieving schools have been targeted for interventions. The LEA has a teacher and principal evaluation system, as attested by the Innovation Instructional Leader Evaluation Plan included in the application. The LEA is in a Common Core state, with a data system that includes teacher identifiers, receives student level preschool-high education data, and provides timely data to educators on student growth. Key elements of the proposal address college and career readiness, such as the electronic Personalized Learning Plans and the employment of Career Coaches. The LEA's targets include acceleration of student achievement of all students at all grade levels and increased graduation rates. Extensive professional development contained in the project will increase the effectiveness of educators and decrease achievement gaps.

However, the plan slowly provides all students access to effective and highly effective teachers as evidenced by charts in section E3. The application is missing the assurance page signed by the superintendent that the LEA is committed to the four core educational areas.

Total	210	146
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