



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0226PA-2 for Mastery Charter Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

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

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Mastery Charter Schools (MCS) is a consortium of non-profit, non-sectarian charter schools that has been expanding over the last several years, and now encompasses 12 campuses. Over the years the applicant has developed, refined, tested, adjusted and improved a very clear and comprehensive approach to education that has the paramount goal of improving student achievement, especially in with low-income, urban, minority populations. In particular, the applicant proposes to strengthen its work with standards aimed at college and careers; its data systems, which are already have the capability of assessing and predicting student growth; training teachers to use student data to accelerate student achievement.

All parts of the MCS system are directed toward the goal of boosting achievement in a systematic, comprehensive, and coherent way. Every aspect of the MCS system – its emphases on data-driven professional development to increase teacher effectiveness, on deepening student achievement, on improving social and behavioral indices, and preparing students for college or careers – contributes to a uniform vision. The reforms proposed in this application are in harmony with this vision that has guided MCS over the years.

As a result of the project, teachers will continue to receive “aligned expectations and support” so that they will be able to focus more on individuals and small groups (as opposed to whole-class instruction). They will feel well supported by a variety of professional development and coaching opportunities. They will be better able to embed non-cognitive learning in the classroom. Students will be more aware of their direct role in owning their learning and cognizant of where they are on a learning trajectory. Starting in the earliest grades, students will learn age-appropriate skills for working well with others, and all students will feel comfortable with using technological tools, both in monitoring their own progress and in learning new content. Students will know that MCS staff are truly dedicated to helping them achieve.

Additional details about how the program works are spread out throughout the application. In particular, the applicant provides more information about what the classroom and teacher experiences are (and will be) like in several later sections, as well as in the Appendices. For example, information about Mastery Charter Schools (MCS) is a consortium of non-profit, non-sectarian charter schools that has been expanding over the last several years, and now encompasses 12 campuses. Over the years the applicant has developed, refined, tested, adjusted and improved a very clear and comprehensive approach to education that has the paramount goal of improving student achievement, especially in with low-income, urban, minority populations. In particular, the applicant proposes to strengthen its work with standards aimed at college and careers; its data systems, which are already have the capability of assessing and predicting student growth; training teachers to use student data to accelerate student achievement.

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information about what the classroom and teacher experiences are (and will be) like in several later sections, as well as in the Appendices. For example, information about

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

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(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

All the areas of this criterion are addressed, with the one exception noted below. The applicant will involve all 12 of existing campuses in the project, all of which are listed along with the numbers of high-need and low-income students. All of them meet the RTT-D eligibility requirements. The schools cover different grade bands (e.g. K-10, 7-12, K-6); as a group, all grade levels are included. All academic subject areas will be involved.

MCS has plans to expand its purview to include more schools beyond the 12 it has now, but these will not be part of this project. While the applicant has described why the project will not expand beyond its current 12 schools, the applicant has not said why it will include all 12 of its current schools, rather than some smaller subset of them -- for instance, only the eight schools that have a kindergarten.

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

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(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The Mastery Charter schools are a growing enterprise. The current 12 schools are expected to expand to 10 additional schools in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, but those new schools, if they are added, will not directly participate in the activities supported by this grant. Moreover, the applicant intends that the techniques that are being developed (both in the past and under this grant) could be made available to educators nationwide. The applicant does not present an explicit plan for expanding to the 10 new member schools, nor to schools beyond those.

Nonetheless, "District-wide" in this instance evidently means just the 12 participating MCS schools, not the whole of the Philadelphia school district or all the districts in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, so supporting "district-wide" change is what the applicant is proposing.

The 12 schools have differing numbers of grades. Some are essentially elementary school (K-8, for example), while others are secondary (7-12). As a result, some of the reforms proposed are applicable to only a subset of the 12 member schools. Because of this fact, some of the improvements envisioned in the proposal will not be "scaled up" to all the member schools -- for example a change in the early grades reading program will not be relevant in high school. **Even so, no explicit plan is presented for scaling up in cases where that would make sense.** In some cases, perhaps, such a plan may not be needed because the same personnel is involved in two or more schools. (For example there will be one elementary coach for the "mindset" program, and that person will be working in eight of the 12 schools; the secondary coach will be in at least six of the schools.) This is not explicitly discussed, however, so that it is not clear how a change that is made in one school will be "scaled up" to other schools within the MCS group of participating schools.

Much of the student population that attends MCS schools is on the very low-achieving end of the spectrum. Based on the applicant's prior experience, it is likely that MCS will be able to obtain greatly improved student achievement and increased equity, by targeting specific annual goals. These goals for increased performance, closing gaps (by 3% per year), increased graduation rates (90%) and increased college enrollment (70%) are ambitious ones, but the applicant is confident that they can be achieved.

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

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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Much of the student population that attends MCS schools is on the very low-achieving end of the spectrum. Based on the applicant's prior experience, it is highly likely that MCS will be able to realize greatly improved student achievement and increased equity, by targeting specific annual goals. These goals for increased performance, closing gaps (by 3% per year), increased graduation rates (90%) and increased college enrollment (70%) are ambitious ones, and they all meet or exceed ESEA targets.

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	15
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The record of success that MCS has amassed over the last dozen years is truly impressive. After the applicant's work the first year in one high school, the Philadelphia school district asked MCS to take over 10 of its worst-performing and most violent schools. Within the first four years of operation, test scores increased an average of more than 40 percentage points in each grade and subject area.</p> <p>The applicant presents one short case study of one of its high schools that is very instructive. The school was among the 5 lowest-performing schools in the state, with a drop-out rate of 45% and a spot on Pennsylvania's Persistently Dangerous Schools list. Within 7 months of taking over the school, MCS doubled the 11th-grade proficiency level in reading and mathematics, had the school removed from the dangerous school list, and increased the college enrollment rate by 10%. This indeed points to a remarkable track record of success.</p> <p>This section presents an overview of all the ways that MCS makes student data available to parents, teachers, and the students themselves. These include an on-line information system with portals for parents, students and teachers; a web-based tool to help secondary students (and their teachers and parents) plan for college and careers; and a post-secondary tracking tool communicates with graduates about their post-secondary enrollment and persistence. Later sections of the application provide more detail how students, parents, and educators get access to performance data in ways that improve instruction and participation. The applicant also presents more data on improvements on high school graduation rates and enrollment in college.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	2
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant says that it reports all school level financial data to the Pennsylvania Department of Education every year. The applicant further says that screen shots are in Appendix B-3. This information does not appear at the location cited. Instead, in a different section of the Appendices, there is a screen shot of a masterycharter.org web site page (not the PDE site), in which there appears a list of items such as "Preliminary Statement of Revenues and Expenditures Clymer FY13." It is not clear that the items in this list link, in turn, to the information required under this criterion, even though the information appears later in the proposal. In other words, it is not clear that the expenditures are in fact made available to the public.</p> <p>Salaries for the proposed new personnel are given in the budget tables (section F).</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>MCS operates under the Pennsylvania Charter School Law, which gives the organization autonomy to personalize learning and improve achievement at each of the 12 sites. The individual schools within the MCS have control over budget, class size, grading, the calendar, and hiring. While there is some central control over curriculum and finance, individual principals enjoy considerable autonomy and the school building level.</p>		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	15
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>There is good evidence that stakeholders' suggestions and concerns were carefully considered as the application was being prepared. The applicant presents a list of eight specific ideas that helped to shape the proposal -- two each from principals, teachers, parents and students -- and describes exactly how those ideas were incorporated into the final design of the application. For example, student support of the emphasis on college led the applicant to include more dual enrollment, more enrichment opportunities for accelerated learning, and earlier advising and planning in the college enrollment process. Each of these items is cross-referenced to activities that appear in later sections of the proposal.</p> <p>Eighty-four percent of the teachers returned a survey gauging their approval of the proposal, and 100% the ones who returned the survey were supportive. The applicant breaks these data down into the individual schools, and all of the schools meet the minimum threshold for teacher approval.</p>		

A good variety of letters of support is appended, including ones from local and national organizations, the MCS parent advisory council, various charitable foundations (e.g. Bill & Melinda Gates), civic associations, and the U.S. Congressman who represents the Philadelphia area.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	18
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>This section is strong. The applicant has provided a wealth of information about how the MCS approach to learning is effective, particularly with the high-need students who make up the bulk of the population. Through the use of web-based "dashboards" at every point along the way, students, teachers, and principals are constantly aware of where everyone is in the instructional process, thereby allowing for changes and adjustments to meet each individual's needs. With regard to criterion (C)(1)(c), part of the responsibilities of the Deputy Chief Data Officer and the Data Analytics Developer will be to ensure that students are able to use the data-tracking systems efficiently so that they will know where they are in relation to their academic goals and what they need to do next.</p> <p>Content is presented in digital format, as appropriate, and feedback and support are always available. Students will have age-appropriate electronic "snapshot" boards on which they can get real-time information on their academic progress; teachers will always be available for assistance as needed. Keeping everyone on track toward career and college readiness is accomplished by maintaining a comprehensive system of assessments.</p> <p>More advanced high school students have opportunities to pursue areas of academic interest on a deep level, through dual enrollment with local IHEs, or in a summer "writer's workshop," or in a three-week robotics lab experience.</p> <p>The plan is set forth in sufficient detail. For each of the main activities the applicant has supplied a chart that includes (a) key milestones, (b) who is the party responsible for carrying out that milestone, and (c) exactly when work on the milestone will start and stop. Some activities, like "provide PD to teachers and leaders" or "administer the student survey" might recur several times over the course of the grant period, and their frequency of occurrence is readily apparent from the chart.</p> <p>One weakness: There are two charts for Activity 6, which is "Tech and Data Access & Dashboards." The charts are similar, but not identical, and it is unclear which one, if either, is the chart that the applicant proposes to follow. For example, one has a task called "RFP for servers, infrastructure supports, wireless upgrades," and the other does not. One has a task for "upgrade parent portal"; the other does not. These are important activities -- indeed the applicant says that parents have complained that the parent portal is confusing and difficult to use. Since so much of the whole project is dependent on technology, data access and dashboards, these charts should be clarified.</p>		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	17
<p>(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant will undertake two tasks: The full implementation of K-12 Common Core curriculum and assessment in ELA, mathematics, science and social studies; and the development of a "community of literacy practice" in the schools. Both tasks are presented in detail, with sub-tasks specified along with the people responsible and the timeline to be used.</p> <p>The Common Core curriculum is clearly directed toward readiness for college or career, and the MCS system personalizes the individual student's learning by constantly monitoring student progress and making adjustments as needed. The applicant will devote considerable resources to provide professional development that is closely aligned with the Common Core curriculum.</p> <p>For the culture of literacy project, designed to infuse literacy practice into areas of the curriculum in grades 3-8, the applicant will hire a team of six literacy specialists to work with specialists in professional development and in data analysis. (It is not clear, however, why as many as 6 literacy specialists are needed. No rationale is offered for that large a number, especially since several of the schools have grade bands that overlap only partially with 3-8.)</p> <p>Professional development is a paramount concern to the applicant. Improved teaching begins with selection of the most qualified teachers and leaders; providing systematic orientation for new teachers and administrators; ongoing staff development; a program of classroom observation, evaluation, and feedback; performance-based pay; and career ladders. The goal throughout is to increase teacher and principal effectiveness, and thereby increase the number of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers.</p>		

The overall plan for professional development appears to be very sound. It is clear who is responsible for what tasks and on what schedule. For instance, in the program of classroom observation referred to above, the kinds of observation are specified (quick visit, targeted visit or formal observation), as are the people involved (e.g. assistant principals for instruction are expected to spend 75% of each day in classrooms giving support and feedback to teachers). The documented forms of observation feedback occur at least eight times a year.

One weakness in the proposal is the section on the plan to add the evaluation of content expertise to the observations of teachers. Teachers are going to be trained in content, and the applicant states that as a result, "principals will need more intensive training in content areas outside their own area of expertise." It is not clear, however, that a principal who majored in English, say, will be qualified to evaluate the content expertise of someone who is teaching a calculus course. No plan is presented for ensuring that the principals do, in fact, have the necessary background to evaluate the performance of a teacher in a different subject area.

Further, it is not clear why the applicant chose to include the implementation of Common Core in this section, rather than in (C)(1), but in any case the applicant presents no rationale for why the curriculum development must be done in-house, as opposed to obtaining the necessary materials from some other source. Materials that are congruent with the requirements of the Common Core are widely available from large commercial publishing houses, as well as from smaller groups such as teacher organizations all over the country. To create new curriculum materials will be a major and expensive undertaking, one that could be accomplished more cost effectively through another avenue.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	15
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>Project implementation will be supported by an organizational structure with clear roles and responsibilities in the areas of the academic program (including special education, curriculum development , teacher support, professional development and coaching), operations (data and technology), finance and innovation (which includes work with parents and other external groups, and the extracurricular and postsecondary programs). The central office is oversees the provision of support and services to all 12 of the participating schools.</p> <p>A significant feature of the MCS structure is the high level of autonomy that is granted to principals in the indiivudal schools, allowing them wide latitude to make decisions about school calendars, hiring of teachers, budgets (subject to approval by the Board and assigning roles to professional and non-professional staff.</p> <p>The Mastery model is built on the idea that students should be able to progress by showing mastery, not by the amount of time spent on a topic. For example, the use of blended mathematics formats in 6th grade allows students to work on material at any level from 2nd to 8th grade. Although the applicant has a pilot program that lets seniors test out of typical high school courses and enroll in higher level courses of interest, the applicant does not specifically state that those students can earn full college credit.</p> <p>Students can show their mastery in a variety of ways – standardized testing, portfolio projects, teacher-made tests, and so forth. Data from all formative and summative evaluations are summarized every nine weeks in the Master Value Added System.</p> <p>The MCS schools enroll a larger percentage of students with special needs than the surrounding district (Philadelphia) does. The resources and instructional practices that are used with mainstream students are used with IEP students as well, and the applicant says that its experience with differentiating instruction for IEP students has influenced its ability to personalize instruction for all students.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	7
(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The applicant describes a range of policies and infrastructure components that give students and teachers the resources they need. Some of these policies raise questions about the extent to which all students have access whenever they need it, however. While MCS has provided laptops to all staff members, the ratio of students to laptops is only 2.5 to 1. The applicant says that "This means every day students will engage with technology, some students and programs will be able to require home technology use , and educators will be able to personalize learning with available technology." It is not clear why only "some" students will have home technology use. Nor is it clear if there are some instances in which technology use is optional. This becomes an important consideration in view of the substantial proportion of students from low-income families.</p>		

MCS already has a robust interoperable data system that includes a Student Information System, the Mastery Value Added system, Naviance (which is a tool for career and college planning aimed at parents and secondary students), a post-secondary tracking tool (to be replaced with a better one with support from the RTT-D grant), and various adaptive software platforms for K-8 students. But there is no specific indication that students or parents will be able to export their own information in an open data format and use the data in other electronic learning systems.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	13
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has presented a high-quality plan for implementing a continuous improvement process. Eight specific components are identified: (a) a Chiefs team (i.e. Chief of Schools, Chief Academic Officer, Chief Operations Officer, Chief financial Officer and Chief Innovation Officer) that will meet three times a week; (b) a network advisory committee involving school leaders, teachers, parents and students; (c) regular input from the formal parent advisory committee; (d) survey and feedback loops, including focus groups and regular lunches with parents, principals, etc.; (e) data reviews at the chief team meetings; (f) one key full-time staff member to manage the implementation process; (g) feedback through the data portals for teachers, leaders, students, and parents; and (h) "activity dashboards" for internal evaluation of effectiveness of program implementation (beyond the student performance measures).</p> <p>The applicant provides no specific information, however, about what information will be presented to the <i>general</i> public (i.e., people beyond the parents who happen to be on a MCS committee, and even beyond the full set of MCS parents), or how often, or in what format.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	5
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant's high quality plan for ongoing communication and engagement is related directly to the applicant's high-quality plan for continuous improvement, described in the section immediately preceding this one. The eight components that are listed there all include descriptions of (a) schedules (if appropriate) and (b) the people who will be responsible. For example, the Network Advisory Committee will conduct formal meetings three times a year to review data and get input from the leaders of each project. That committee will consist of the five "chiefs" plus school leaders, parents, teachers and students to be chosen by the chiefs.</p> <p>Each of the eight components of the applicant's plan for continuous improvement includes an element of communication. For example, the NAC cited above is designed to promote and assure adequate internal communications among all the stakeholders. As another example, the data portals component is aimed precisely at facilitating communication among teachers, leaders, students and parents.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	2
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has proposed a set of performance measures, but it is not clear what the annual targets are. For example, the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment will be used to measure reading abilities (e.g. decoding, fluency, vocabulary) in grades K-3. On average, students should exhibit at least one year of growth for each year in school. But there is no statement about what the annual target <i>for MCS students</i> is – what numbers or percentages of K-3 students are in fact on grade level in reading.</p> <p>As another example, a proposed measure in K-3 is the "ratio of merits to demerits." Although merits and demerits are discussed in one of the appendices, there is no explanation of how and by whom they are measured, nor what the target for the ratio is. As a third example, at the secondary level, is FAFSA completion. The applicant states that "all Mastery seniors are expected to complete the FAFSA," but the applicant provides no information to indicate that this is a realistic goal.</p> <p>The applicant did not list proposed annual targets for any of the subgroups.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	1

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant proposes an internal evaluation with three components: (a) the impact of teachers on student growth and achievement; (b) the connection between program elements and student outcomes; and (c) documenting and assessing efficiency of investment. There is, however, no detailed plan presented for accomplishing any of these aims. It is not clear who will be responsible for conducting this internal evaluation. Further, no timelines or schedules are specified, nor is there any description of what final or interim reports will be produced.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	7

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The budget identifies the total amount of funds that will be coming from sources other than the grant, but does not generally break these down into what the sources or individual amounts are. Of the 11 sub-projects in the budget, eight include funds other than grant funds. In all but two of those, MCS alone is listed as the source of non-grant support. In one other, the sources are listed at MCS and the Dell Foundation, but no separate amounts are given. In the remaining sub-project, the sources are MCS and the Cohn Foundation, but again there is no indication of how much is actually coming from a non-MCS source.

The costs for each item seem reasonable (e.g. personnel salaries, laptops). But no rationale is provided for the levels of effort. For example, it is not clear why 6 FTEs are needed as "11th grade and senior transition coaches," or why one "mindset manager" is needed to manage two "mindset coaches." These are significant costs, and they should be further justified.

\$300,000 for a "back up power generator" is a major expenditure. Earlier in the proposal a rationale was offered for having a back-up generator, but nothing in the budget explains why it costs so much.

With regard to criterion (F)(1)(c)(ii), one must refer to the next section, (F)(2), for a list of one-time acquisitions. The funds for those items are specified in the budget tables in this section. (For example, the \$300,000 for the generator appears as a line item under "equipment" for the Data Access and Dashboards project.) There is no clear presentation of strategies for covering ongoing operational costs beyond the grant period, however.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	1
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The section on "Sustainability" lists all the items in the budget that are one-time acquisitions -- for example, laptops, charging stations, headphones, network infrastructure and the back-up power generator. There is virtually no information how the project will be sustained after the grant is over. No indication of support from state and local government is given, and there is no explicit plan for sustaining the effort. No estimated 3-year post-grant budget is provided.

In an earlier section of the proposal the applicant says that it will increase its revenue in the future by virtue having more schools join MCS. The increased student enrollment will increase the contribution from the state, but expenses will mount proportionally. In fact, if MCS needs additional funding, beyond what Pennsylvania provides as its per-pupil contribution, then expanding the number of schools and students in MCS will increase the burden, making sustainability more difficult, not less.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

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

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant proposes to build parent and community engagement through a "community schools" approach at each Mastery school. At each school a "Community Engagement Manager" will work with school staff to determine what specific set of services is needed to strengthen supports for students and families. One major focus will be on family engagement, specifically family literacy (the low literacy rate in the adult population perpetuates a culture of poverty and diminishes

opportunities for families to foster literacy in their homes. To this end, MCS will join the Center for Literacy, a local non-profit, to ensure that parents have support to help their children develop literacy skills and also to increase the literacy abilities of the parents themselves.

The second component is a pair of "Community Catalysts" -- one for areas of local need (e.g. access to healthy food, child care) and the other for mental and behavioral health. The third is increased parent empowerment and leadership, through staff that will be employed part-time to increase positive parent participation.

The applicant describes six population-level desired goals. Three of these are educational and have been set forth earlier. The ones involving increased parent engagement are going to be tracked mainly by questionnaires, surveys, and the level of parental participation in parent logs. It is not clear if these instruments will necessarily give an accurate picture of parental involvement because parents who do not want to be involved are unlikely to complete questionnaires or surveys. For example, the SY 2016-17 goal for parents reporting on an annual survey that they are welcome in the school is 85%; but parents who do not feel welcome, or who never got the survey form, or who cannot read the form, are unlikely to respond at all. Thus the results will be skewed more positively than is warranted.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The entire MCS application is devoted to describing how it will create learning environments to improve learning and teaching through personalized tools and strategies. The applicant will align all its work with Common Core standards aimed at promoting readiness for careers or college. Through the various data-gathering instruments that the applicant describes, student achievement will be accelerated and deepened. Professional development programs will increase the number of effective and highly effective teachers, and thus the number of students who will be exposed to such teachers. As a result, achievement gaps will be decreased and high school graduation rates will be raised.

Total	210	171
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0226PA-3 for Mastery Charter Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

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

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has an exceptional record of working in the four core educational assurance areas, which they plan to build on as they increase the number of students and schools with whom they work. Their successes with turnaround schools have been recognized nationally. The applicant is also recognized as a leader in aligning Common Core standards in Math, English Language Arts, Science and Social Studies with teaching and learning. Additionally, they are seeking innovative ways to align assessments to college readiness exit standards for graduation. Their data system is viewed as one deserving replication nationally. The applicant has developed a model for recruiting, training and retaining teachers and leaders that have led to highly effective educators to serve their schools.

The applicant presents a clear and credible approach to accelerating student achievement, deepening student learning, and increasing equity through personalized learning environments that are based on four components. Detailed descriptions are provided for a focus on aligning Common Core standards, instruction, assessment, and professional development; attending to students' mindsets for success by focusing on non-cognitive skill development; differentiating learning for a common level of mastery through personalized learning; and being key institutions in the communities they serve. The combination of the four components that serve as a foundation for the applicant's reform plan are forward-thinking and appropriate given their goals for personalized learning environments.

The applicant provides a thorough description of teacher and student classroom experiences in personalized learning environments. They propose that they will support development of student-centered classrooms where teachers are facilitators of learning with less a focus on whole group instruction, and more of a focus on individualized and small group instruction. The applicant describes classrooms where teachers will use more data and technology to guide and support their instruction.

Students in the proposed vision will experience classrooms where grade appropriate non-cognitive learning is taking place. The applicant describes a classroom environment where students will be more responsible for understanding their role in their learning, and active in impacting their future learning. Like teachers, students will use more technology in personalized learning environments to monitor their own learning, and for planning and learning. Students will be exposed to challenging learning environments as means for preparing them for the rigor they will experience in college or careers. Overall, the applicant describes a learning environment with substantive changes from the ones currently experienced by teachers and students in their schools. The classroom environments for both teachers and students clearly align with purposes described for each of the four components that shape the applicant's reform vision.

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

Mastery Charter School consists of 12 independent LEAs, and all agreed to be participate in the reform plan. The applicant presents a detailed list of the 12 schools that will participate in the proposed project, along with the total number of teachers and students involved, and demographic information as required by the criterion. Given the applicant's goal to increase the number of schools and students who are a part of the network, they state that schools new to the network will be required to engage in reforms proposed for RTT-D.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	5
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(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Since all schools in their network will participate in the proposed project, the applicant's scale up activities will focus on the movement of innovations from one grade band to another, and from one subject area to another. Their ultimate goal is 85 % of students be on grade level by grade six, college ready by graduation, and able to persist toward a degree within six years.

The applicant does not however present a well-defined high quality plan for scale up efforts. In addition to the ultimate goal mentioned above, they present a list of activities that reflect their theory of action and anticipated deliverables as a result of the activities listed. They do not however identify explicit grade bands or subject areas that will focus their scale up efforts, suggesting that the spread of some innovative ideas happen serendipitously. The applicant does not present clear timelines for implementation of the activities listed. Additionally, it is unclear who would be responsible for implementing the activities listed, and who would decide which innovative ideas should be scaled to a different grade band or subject area. The lack of these important elements of a high quality makes it difficult to discern how and when the applicant's scale up activities will move forward

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

The applicant proposes ambitious yet achievable goals for improvement of student learning on an annual basis. They propose that 80% of students in grades 3-8 will be proficient or advanced on summative assessments or experience 1.25 years of growth in one year; 80% of K-2 students will be at grade level or achieve 1 year of growth over a year's period; and that 50% of students will meet or exceed college ready performance targets over the period of grant funding. Using white students in various subgroups and overall at the state level as a comparison, the applicant projects that the

achievement gap will be reduced by 3%. The applicant projects that graduation rates over the period of the grant will increase from 86% to 90%, even though their current rate exceeds the state average. The applicant proposes that 70% of project graduates will enroll in college within 16 months of graduation, by the end of the grant period. The applicant presents projections that appear to be feasible, given their past successes with the population of students participating in the project.

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>The applicant has outstanding success turning around low performing schools over a twelve-year period. The test scores at the schools on average improved 40 percentage points per grade and subject. Student learning at each of the applicant's schools consistently improved over a four-year period, with a range in increases in math between 12 percent and 46 percent, and in reading between 9 and 46 percent. These data document a clear record of advancing student learning and achievement.</p> <p>The applicant presents data that show a declining achievement gap for the middle grades when performance by network students is compared to performance of students statewide. However it is unclear how many years are included in the data chart. While the applicant discusses a graduation rate that exceeds that of the state, there is no documentation of this level of graduation completion over a four-year period, and there is no documentation that there is increasing college enrollment over the same period, as required by B (1) criteria.</p> <p>While the applicant looks to improve their data and information technology systems, they currently have acceptable means for parents, teachers, and students to access performance data.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	4
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant reports that expenditure data are reported annually to the state, and is then made public on applicant's website. Personnel salaries at the school level for instructional staff, teachers only, and non-personnel expenditures at the each school's level are available to the public electronically. The applicant presents adequate documentation of the level of transparency described in the application.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant demonstrates considerable autonomy to implement the personalized learning environments they propose. They operate under the state charter school law, which allows autonomy beyond that experienced by traditional public schools. Additionally, a local school district rule allows the applicant flexibility in selecting an educational model to structure the personalized learning environments they propose.</p> <p>The applicant is located in a state where conditions are very positive for innovative educational change and the applicant has incorporated state goals for improved education into their reform vision. In fact, the applicant currently disseminates best practices to traditional school setting. The applicant presents convincing evidence that conditions and autonomy exists for them to implement their reform vision.</p>		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	14
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p>		

The applicant describes a process of meaningful engagement among stakeholders, which included focus groups on all school campuses; parent surveys; staff and leadership training on the four components that structure the reform proposal; and a web link where community stakeholders, families, and educators were able to obtain updates during development of the proposal and provide feedback.

Teacher support for the application was demonstrated through a survey, which had an 84% response rate. Among those responding, 100% supported the reform effort.

The applicant presents 37 letters of support, to include letters from the business community, community agencies and organizations, foundations, members of congress, post-secondary education institutions, religious organizations, and educational organizations. While there is a letter of support from the Mastery Parent Advisory Council, there are no letters of support from individual parents of children attending Mastery schools, nor are there letters of support from students. Even with this, the applicant demonstrates an outstanding process for ensuring that stakeholders were involved in the grant development process, and were able to provide input.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	18
(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The applicant presents a high quality plan for learning that is organized around two areas they identify as crucial to improved learning and teaching in personalized learning environments: college ready mindsets and differentiated learning.</p> <p>A thorough explanation is provided which articulates the importance of each area, followed by a clear description of the activities the applicant will implement to support that area. The applicant presents a detailed list of expected outcomes as a result of implementing the activities, which are aligned with specific criteria listed in C (1) Learning. For example, the applicant anticipates that developing a non-cognitive skills curriculum will support students development of goal-setting, teamwork, perseverance, critical thinking communication, and problem solving, and will ensure that they understand how to use the tools and resources provided to them in order to track and manage their learning.</p> <p>The connection between some C (1) indicators and activities are not clearly explained. For example, it is not patently clear how the inclusion of Dialectical Behavior Therapy relates to all students having access and exposure to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives that motivate and deepen individual learning.</p> <p>The applicant provides a detailed timeline for implementation of areas they identify as Critical Paths. The timeline includes the points at which the areas will be implemented and evaluated for specific grade levels, and the persons responsible for the implementation are identified as well.</p> <p>The applicant's approach to learning is credible and well organized.</p>		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	15
(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The applicant's plan for teaching and leading, as presented, focuses on developing instructional tools and training to support their efforts in increasing the number of highly qualified teachers and leaders. The plan is structured around the component of the applicant's reform project that focuses on aligning Common Core instruction, assessment, and professional development. Three key activities are presented to accomplish their Common Core goals: implementing Common Core aligned English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social studies at all grade levels, K-12; sequencing common core aligned content into professional development and training for teachers; and developing communities of literacy practice.</p> <p>Most of the applicant's high quality plan concentrates on tool development activities, rather than implementation of instructional strategies. In the process of describing the current status of teacher and leader development, the applicant</p>		

states that it was not their intention to focus on improvement to their current “human capital development,” as they believe they are already successful at developing talented educators. While they have an outstanding process and model for the development of teachers and leaders in place, they do not address or account for the possibility of changes that may be required as they move forward with newly developed tools and practices as described in their plan.

Since there are no years included in the development of the common core aligned curriculum and the community of literacy, it is unclear when the applicant foresees these activities taking place over the life of the reform project. Also, given the focus of the plan on strategy and tool development, the applicant does not explicitly address all indicators under criterion C (2) as part of a high quality plan.

For example, there is no discussion in the plan regarding the use of feedback on individual and collective effectiveness as these relate to the planned implementation of new tools and strategies. While the applicant plans for the creation of dashboard data points, there is no discussion of when and how educators will have access to, and know how to use these data to accelerate student learning. The applicant describes the current evaluation system however their plan does not account for how information from the evaluation system will be used to help school leaders and school leadership teams assess, and take steps to improve, individual and collective educator effectiveness, in light of the curricular changes anticipated in their high quality plan.

The applicant does not present a high quality plan for increasing the number of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	13
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The applicant presents an acceptable high quality plan for practices, policies, and rules to facilitate personalized learning that names the Mastery Charter High School as the lead LEA for member Mastery schools. This office is organized around five leadership teams that are, for the most part aligned with the focus areas of the grant proposal, and led by an individuals responsible for ensuring that resources and services related to their area are available to member schools.</p> <p>The applicant plans to create a network-level advisory committee that will have the responsibility of reviewing progress toward RTT-D goals, however it is unclear when this committee will be structured and if they will have a role in ensuring that resources and services are available to schools.</p> <p>School leadership teams currently have sufficient flexibility and autonomy to make decisions about personnel, budgets, school calendars, and schedules. Students currently are able to receive credit once they demonstrate mastery. While the applicant plans to expand mastery-based proficiency, there is no timeline for doing so, nor is there a person identified who would be in charge of this effort. Students are also currently able to demonstrate mastery in multiple ways. The applicant uses technology and differentiation to ensure that resources and learning opportunities are adaptable and accessible to all students.</p> <p>The applicant describes a number of practices, policies, and rules already in place, but does not incorporate these into a high quality plan that ensures that students and educators will have the support and resources they need when they need them. Activities that are included as part of a high quality plan lack timelines as to when they will be created or implemented.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	6
(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The applicant presents a number of activities they plan to develop, in order to ensure that an infrastructure exists so that students, parents and stakeholders have access to content, tools, and resources needed to support implementation of the applicant’s proposal. For example, the applicant plans to ensure around-the-clock access to student information; increase the number of laptops available to students; provide higher levels of technical support to all stakeholders; and develop a cadre of peer technology leaders to assist on site tech managers.</p> <p>None of the applicant’s improvements are structured as a high quality plan with key goals, rationale for activities, timelines, deliverables or parties responsible. Without delineation of these elements of a high-quality plan, it is difficult to determine how the applicants envisions the activities discussed as contributing to their overall reform plan, when they will be</p>		

implemented, and who will be responsible for doing so.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	15
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>A number of individuals and committees are identified with specific responsibility for reviewing and/or collecting and analyzing data related to different aspects of the applicant's proposed plan. Some committees are charged with face-to-face meetings and presentations both to inform and receive feedback regarding grant related activities. A grant director will be the person responsible for managing and ensuring implementation of various continuous improvement activities. The applicant plans to use technology such as data portals, in order to create feedback loops among schools, students, and families in support of their continuous improvement efforts. Internal evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness of RTT-D investments will be conducted by network Chiefs and RTT-D managers in charge of particular activities, along with a Data Analytics manager. The applicant presents an adequate high quality plan for a continuous improvement process.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	5
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant proposes to use the communication and engagement processes that are inherent in their continuous improvement processes to ensure ongoing communication and engagement, and this appears to appropriately address this criterion. A variety and numerous processes are planned for (e.g., data portals for feedback loops, focus groups, presentations, and teacher surveys) which should prove to be beneficial to the applicant's communication and engagement goals with various stakeholders--both internal and external.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	5
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant presents the required number of ambitious yet achievable performance measures with annual targets and rationales. The performance measures are appropriate for the associated grade levels and are pertinent to the applicant's proposed plan and theory of action. The applicant describes how the measures will be reviewed, and improved over time if necessary.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	2
<p>(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant identifies three major and appropriate areas that will focus evaluation of the their effectiveness of RTT-D funded activities: teacher and student growth and achievement; the connection between program elements and student outcomes; and assessing the efficiency of investments.</p> <p>While the applicant discusses what they hope to learn from each of these evaluation areas, they do not structure their evaluation into a high quality plan with all required elements. Missing are the goals for each activity; detailed activities that describe how the evaluation will be conducted; timelines for the evaluations; and parties responsible for conducting the evaluation. These missing elements leaves the applicant with an incomplete plan for evaluation, which makes it difficult to discern how they will move forward with the evaluation process.</p>		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score

(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	9
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant presents a reasonable and sufficient budget to implement their proposed plans. The budget includes funding sources in addition to RTT-D, which includes funding from foundations, private donors, and funds from the School District of Philadelphia on a per pupil basis. The applicant identifies one-time investments, which represent 11% of the applicant's budget, and includes technology such as laptops for teachers and students; network infrastructure; supplies; and Common Core assessments. Ongoing investments are not consistently indicated clearly. For example, the applicant states that mindset coaches will move from full-time to half-time positions—which suggests an ongoing cost beyond receipt of RTT-D funds. The Data Analytics Developer will be hired in the middle of year one, and will become fulltime thereafter. It is not clear if “thereafter” will continue beyond the grant. The applicant presents a thoughtful rationale for investments and priorities.</p>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	2
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant anticipates that they will continue to receive funds on a per pupil basis, and that this amount will increase, given the popularity of their program and plans for expansion. They provide no other clear description of how project goals will be sustained, nor do they provide an estimated budget for the three years after the RTT-D grant.</p>		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	10
<p>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant presents a coherent description of a partnership with local agencies that would have three primary goals: family engagement through training; Community Catalyst Partnerships; and parent empowerment and leadership. They intend to partner with the Center for Literacy, a local non-profit that works on adult literacy and is a GED provider; Resources for Human Development; and community agencies that would be identified by each school to address specific community needs.</p> <p>The applicant identifies six population level results for students and families that could be addressed by the partnership, and which are in keeping with goals outlined in the applicant's grant proposal. They also selected appropriate indicators to measure results, and identified achievable performance measures to track progress in growth toward desired results. Parents are integral to the applicant's proposed partnership, as they will play primary roles in assessing community needs and selecting community agencies to support them. The applicant has presented a partnership that is sustainable given their desire to integrate services provided into the “fabric of the school(s),” through strategies such as using services as interventions under Response to Instruction and Intervention, and by providing training and resources to help educators understand how to build useful community partnerships that serve the needs of children and their families.</p>		

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met
<p>Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant presents a coherent and comprehensive description of how they will build on the core educational assurance areas. They have demonstrated outstanding success working with low achieving schools; serve as a leader in aligning Common Core standards with teaching and learning; and have received recognition for their work with training teachers and leaders and the development of their data system. They clearly articulate how they will rely on past experiences and successes to create learning environments that will significantly improve teaching and learning through use of</p>		

personalization strategies, and to develop tools and supports for students and educators that are aligned with college- and career-ready standards. Their vision for learning is detailed and focused, and holds promise to accelerate student achievement, deepen student learning, and increase the number of students able to graduate from high school prepared for college and careers.

Total	210	173
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0226PA-4 for Mastery Charter Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

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

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The proposal lists numerous examples meeting each of the 4 core educational assurances including since 2011 their work with 18 other charter school networks and districts on their alignment to the common core in teaching and learning, to their 2012 project to align to the ACT exam and the Common Core standards as the college readiness exit standard for graduation.

The applicant includes a high quality data system where it collects data from basic student demographics and performance levels to linking student level performance to teacher pay.

The applicant has an impressive record of working with and turning around 10 schools since 2005. Most of the schools have been considered in "Corrective Action II" category in Pennsylvania. Additionally, the applicant has been recognized nationally as an example of a "restart" turnaround school model.

The applicant has a overarching goal to have 85% or more of its students on grade level by grade six, graduating college ready and able to persist to a degree. To do this they have pledged to align all their curriculum to the Common Core and more importantly to use an instructional and co-curricular focus on non-cognitive teaching and learning including the understanding and assessment of mindset (non-cognitive) curriculum through the mindset concept. T

The applicant's proposal includes significant examples of how it differentiates instruction for all students in its schools using more blended learning programming, RTII (Response to Instruction and intervention) among other program expansions and additions that it will include as part of the proposed programs.

The applicant has also proposed a re-training program for teacher buy-in and the mindset objectives that will be built into the new program development.

In summary the applicant has set out a very comprehensive and coherent reform vision that builds on the 4 core educational assurances and their approach is clear and credible.

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

The process for selecting the participating schools was made by the lead school, which is also the managing school of the network. The process will support a high-quality LEA-level and school-level implementation of the proposed grant activities. The applicant's schools all belong to a network where the schools (12 in total in the application) share a

common Board of Directors and Charter Management Organization (CMO), and all campuses have agreed to participate collectively in the RTT Initiative with one school as the lead LEA. And according to the applicant and from reviewing the chart serving students in grades K-12 meet the Race to the Top- District competition's eligibility requirements. The participating schools identified by the applicant have chosen to work with the applicant to implement the plan under Absolute Priority 1, in all aspects of the proposal throughout each entire school and affecting a significant number of its students. Additionally, each school has a management agreement with the lead school to follow the accepted key goals, activities to be undertaken and the rationale for the activities, as set forth in the application.

The applicant has listed all 12 schools and there are letters of support to confirm that all will participate if the grant is awarded.

The applicant has identified all students, educators and schools to be included and each group meets the RTT definitions and requirements. For example, the combined schools (elementary through high school) will serve over 900 educators and 9,629 students in the first year with 89% of the student population qualifying as high-need students under the RTT definition. Additionally, 85% of the student population meets the low-income definition. They will also serve a large number of children with special needs who have mild to severe disabilities and are educated in the schools.

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

As part of the proposed plan the applicant indicates that blended learning will occur in grades K-2 literacy, 3-6 math, and 9-12 in pilots for math/science flipped classrooms. The applicant is also committed to expanding the initial grant activities to new schools coming into the network.

The applicant's logic model describes how the applicant's plan will be scaled up and translated into meaningful reform to support network-wide change beyond the participating schools. As an example it focuses on how the applicant will implement a high-quality educational approach that meets the needs of each child in its care by aiming for an 85% mastery level for each child by grade 6, is college-ready by graduation and able to persist toward a degree within 6 years. The plan includes a continuous improvement feedback cycle, and a plan to scale and adapt grant initiatives across all current and future schools, and shows how it will implement the educational interventions that meet the needs of all children but especially those at risk of failure in its schools.

Finally, there is no clear timeline to show when the proposed activities will occur, no schedule for scaling up any of the proposed programs or discussion to show how the Mindset model coach, for example, will be able to work with all elementary schools.

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

The applicant's comparison group is the State's white students. The applicant's students are 90% African American. The applicant has demonstrated that it has goals in reading and math for its student population (including the 18% who have mild to severe disabilities). It has also demonstrated that student learning and performance through its performance goals are ambitious yet achievable and that they exceed State ESEA targets, by student subgroup that the applicant serves.

The applicant has consistently shown that its students meet or exceed the state's highest-achieving subgroup on standardized assessments.

The goals that the applicant developed for improved student achievement appear both ambitious and achievable based on the current interventions and past achievements for students in their network. The specific performance of each school in the network is reported as part of the proposal.

The applicant's current graduation rate for its students (across all relevant participating schools) is a good start (except the most recent addition that does not have a track record of the network's intervention strategy) and its projected rate is both ambitious and achievable based on the programming that it provides and its past track record.

The applicant does not however have consistent data to support a model for ensuring college enrollment since not all of its schools have been part of the network. However, based on the results the applicant reports for schools in its network for 4 years or longer it would suggest that it will improve college enrollment across its schools.

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	15
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Seven of the applicant's 12 schools, considered the lowest performing, and/or most violent schools in Philadelphia, and opened more than 4 years, have shown growth in test scores improving an average of more than 40 percentage points per grade and subject within four years of operation. And for schools opened less than 4 years there is evidence that their scores are moving up as well. Additionally, 4 of the applicant's schools have been rated in the top 10 highest performing schools in the state. One applicant high school, rated as one of the lowest and persistently underachieving high schools with only 10% of its students meeting state standards in reading and math changed in seven months increasing the number of college enrolled students by 10 %.</p> <p>It is evident from the evidence presented that the applicant has had impressive results in raising achievement levels of the students in its schools. For example, evidence provided shows that failing public schools in their network and in the bottom 10% for performance have made remarkable gains.</p> <p>The applicant has many systems in place to allow for parent, student and educator access to records and a child's continuous performance. The applicant has data portals available for all stakeholders, web based college and career planning tools, and various software and instructional programs where students and teachers can track academic performance. They also have in place special education data and tracking systems for their students receiving special educational services.</p> <p>In summary the applicant has presented a clear record of success in the past four years in advancing student learning and achievement and increasing equity in learning and teaching and has demonstrated its ability to continue to improve student learning and make student data available to its stakeholders.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	4
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant makes available data regarding school level expenditures and has reported actual school level data in the proposal and the data is also included on its website. Financial statements are available on their website as a screen shot of the site (included in the application) evidences.</p> <p>The applicant has indicated that its investments at the network office level are not publically available. Not showing this information detracts from the transparency required by this grant review criterion specially in light of the definition of a high quality plan. Therefore not including investments does not meet the test for a high level of transparency.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has indicated that it is both free from state and local control (both in PA and also when it is awarded a charter in New Jersey). It also states that its individual schools within the network are relied on for their unique and individual approach (within the over arching philosophy of the applicant).</p> <p>The applicant has clearly demonstrated that it has the autonomy under state and local laws as independently operated public charter schools that have been established under the Pennsylvania Charter School Law Act 22 of 1997. Additioanly each charter within the network allows autonomy in the academic model that the applicnat is using to personalize learning and increase student achievement at each site.</p>		
(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	15
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has demonstrated that it has consulted with and received feedback from its main stakeholders - teachers, students and families and government agencies. And it has implemented network-wide advisory committees on mindset and parent and community engagement to develop a 4 year plan as part of its preliminary grant development work.</p> <p>Additionally the applicant used webinars, surveys and face-to-face meetings to inform and receive feedback about its plan and to get input on how to further its mission. Over 75% of teachers in the all schools indicated their support for the applicant's proposal as well as an overwhelming number of principals.</p>		

Also, the applicant has secured letters of support from an impressive array of state and local agencies, local and national partners, including parents from 11 of the 12 participating schools.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	17
(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The applicant has started to shift toward enabling students to develop resilience and leadership skills earlier in their academic careers and to begin to take a much larger role in shaping their own academic experience. The applicant has provided evidence of this through research results, pilot testing, a new survey instrument and the implementation of an advisory committee (comprising parents and educators) to shepherd the new plan into fruition network-wide. The focus is on non-cognitive skills curriculum to be taught and evaluated in each school. They have already started to develop a system to track child and school progress in mindset skills. Additionally, they have developed ambitious goals for this transition that are comprehensive and innovative – using a behavior therapy approach to ensuring all students thrive. The process of allowing students to control and drive their education is noteworthy.</p> <p>The applicant has identified several goals and objectives to ensure that students from k-12 are aware of their performance and social emotional skill level. The applicant proposes that students will have real-time access to technology both in school and in the community including the use of blended learning modules, on-line interventions for RTII, as they shift to more integrated instruction aligned to the Common Core. As a result of these activities in consort with others the applicant has demonstrated that it understands how to structure their learning to achieve their goals, and measure progress toward those goals.</p> <p>The applicant has identified a specific goals and objectives for students: to identify and pursue learning and development goals linked to college- and career-ready standards, college- and career ready graduation requirements, understand how to structure their learning to achieve their goals, and measure progress toward those goals. This includes areas of academic interest for each student and is also included in a goal for blended learning. The applicant has pilot tested a blended learning program as well as a dashboard so that students can frequently check their status in meeting their goals and revise them. All of these approaches according to the applicant are geared toward fulfillment of the core standards and are linked to college- and career-ready standards and college- and career ready graduation requirements and are personalized for each student in its network.</p> <p>The applicant clearly has developed numerous systems to ensure each child K-12 has the supports and the assistance to ensure that he personally and continuously has feedback on his individual learning goals. For example they have defined two goals which state that with support of parents and educators, all students identify and pursue learning and development goals linked to college- and career-ready standards and college- and career ready graduation requirements, understand how to structure their learning to achieve their goals, and measure progress toward those goals; and each student has access to frequently updated individual student data that can be used to determine progress toward mastery of college- and career-ready standards and college- and career-ready graduation requirements.</p> <p>Students will have an RTII strategy that is personalized for their particular situation (according to the applicant RTII is a K-12 approach to support students based on their need regardless of special education status) and students with special educational needs will also have an IEP, and all students will have access to their dashboard and a variety of teaching methods (from blended learning to college courses and the use of technology enhancements). It appears the applicant will have a variety of accommodations available for the students they serve.</p> <p>There was no reference to training students that will ensure that they understand how to use the tools and resources provided to them in order to track and manage their learning. Additionally, there is not enough information to suggest that the parent portal will be an effective way for the network to communicate with parents and vice versa.</p>		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	17
(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The applicant clearly has the ability to train school leaders and school teams in the policies, tools, data, and resources that</p>		

are needed to structure an effective learning environment that meets individual student academic needs.

The applicant was selected as having an effective teacher coaching model by a major foundation and as a result they train other schools on how to build teacher support systems. The function of the applicant's coaching and staff development model is to support their teaching learning model and will evolve to include the addition of RTII model they want to build.

Professional development occurs through Wednesday trainings at schools, teacher orientation sessions in the summer, teacher learning communities that exist at schools and network-wide, voluntary seminars, and self-paced learning via their online portal. The applicant also proposes to develop a learning community for teachers and frequent (3 times per year) teacher evaluations. They also use an incentive pay system to ensure teachers are focused on student achievement among other strategies to ensure student success.

The applicant has made clear its intention of providing frequent and ongoing access to students, parents and others regarding student progress toward meeting college- and career-ready, or college- and career-ready graduation requirements through the use of the dashboards, RTII and other methods ensuring students are supported in their education. Additionally, they intend to hire specialists in literacy and curriculum, among other areas (e.g., common core assessments, literacy teaching, IT) to help them ensure that the teaching staff become "experts" on how to help students access literacy in new ways and to meet each student's personalized learning goals so they can graduate on time and be college- and career-ready.

A further example of the applicant's efforts to help its educators to identify optimal learning approaches that respond to individual student academic needs and interests, the applicant will hire staff to ensure all teachers have training on-site that supports school leaders and teachers on developing best practices in literacy for grades 3-8, develop toolbox of literacy best practice; Align and train staff on Instructional Standards for common core integration as well as how to adapt content. The applicant has also proposed that it will adapt content and instruction, providing opportunities for students to engage in common and individual tasks, in response to their academic needs, academic interests, and optimal learning approaches (e.g., discussion and collaborative work, project-based learning, videos, audio, manipulatives).

As for high quality learning resources, the applicant has already in place a dashboard to allow students and others to see their progress and their needs. Additionally, the applicant proposes to expand its blended learning and other technology rich programming as well as high school enrichment programs all geared toward the common core and college- and career-ready standards. The tools to create and share resources are defined well in their statements about teacher development and the infusion of experts in literacy and curriculum alignment with the common core as well as the development of assessments to mirror the teaching.

The applicant also states that its schools adapt content and instruction, providing opportunities for students to engage in common and individual tasks, in response to their academic needs, academic interests, and optimal learning approaches (e.g., discussion and collaborative work, project-based learning, videos, audio, manipulatives). The applicant does not, however, describe specific individual approaches but rather speaks in broad brush language of supporting and implementing a personalized learning environment and strategies that meet each student's needs. It is lacking clarity on what exactly the personalized system will look like.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

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

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has proposed a high quality plan to create a network-level advisory committee made up parents, teachers, leaders, students, community partners among others to meet on a quarterly basis to review progress toward goals. The applicant already has in place 5 offices that will supervise the proposed project and it has a history of managing federal and other large grants. Therefore it appears that the governance structure is a continuation of what is already in place for the 12 LEAs in the network.

Each of the 12 LEAs in the network pay a management fee to the lead LEA. The lead LEA is responsible for principal supervision and evaluation and a focus on school-level results. They are also responsible for human resources, financial operations, and grants management among other areas.

According to the applicant, each school is responsible for implementing the Mastery model and that while major decisions

about programming are made by consensus across the network, individual principals/schools can independently make decisions about things such as changing/modifying school schedules, school personnel decisions and staffing models, roles and responsibilities for educators and non educators, and school-level budgets.

According to the applicant mastery of a subject and not grades is what drives each LEA. An example is the use of blended math formats in grade six math where students can work on content ranging from 2nd to 8th grade level based on their skill level.

The applicant proposes to use technology to self-pace and differentiate learning, improve age appropriate data dashboards and student self-reflection, and intervening with students at all levels of mastery to help remediate and accelerate learning in real-time to allow each child the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of standards at multiple times and in multiple ways. Students will be able to expand their use of multiple modalities to achieve mastery in various subjects over time. Additionally the applicant already has in place summative and formative assessments and measureable goals for each student and data are collected every nine weeks.

Regarding learning resources that are adaptable and child centered for **all** students attending the applicant's schools – including students with special educational needs and English language learners, the applicant states that it will provide students with differentiated entry points and multiple metrics to achieve learning mastery using technology and to support self-paced and differentiated learning. It will also improve the age appropriate data dashboards and include student self-reflection. Also included are building a menu of supports for students and providing intensive training to teachers and school leaders on how to implement these supports effectively at a school level. Finally, included in the appendices the applicant discusses its policy on how to adapt learning tasks for students needing modifications. With all these supports in place- especially one that focuses on competencies rather than a static grade showing mastery of a subject matter - the applicant will be evidencing that no child is left behind.

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

10

9

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant is proposing that through the use of data systems, including dashboards, and student-level technology, students, parents, and teachers will have 24 hour access to student information so they can use data to set goals, monitor progress, and seek appropriate resources to support student learning. Additionally, it is proposing that through the use of blended learning, an after hours lab, its community initiatives it will serve not only the child and his/her parents but the community as well.

Furthermore the applicant proposes to continue to provide support to stakeholders by maintaining and supporting user access 24/7 and to provide sufficient data including among other technology systems in place or planned, college and career planning information, grades, and to track general academic progress. It will also ensure that families will have access to technology through extended learning lab hours under our community catalyst initiatives that they proposed.

The applicant has also indicated that its data systems are interoperable and will continue to be as they modify and expand the systems as a part of the grant proposal. The applicant has indicated that data can flow from one of their systems to another and is produced in a nonproprietary and open format.

The applicant has not, however, provided timelines to suggest a high quality plan is in place to support the project's implementation through comprehensive policies and infrastructure.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

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

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's core values include the commitment to student achievement and the continuous improvement of the organization and its delivery of educational services. The applicant has identified its senior leadership teams as the source for implementation and oversight of the proposed grant activities. They have defined an impressive array of teams in place as part of the general function of the network and provided the descriptions of the regular feedback to parents, students and professionals as well as other stakeholders.

Also they have included implementation plans and timelines to gauge their progress toward goals for the proposed grant activities. And they assigned departmental chiefs responsible for the work to be accountable.

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

The applicant has an ongoing routine for communicating with all stakeholders and has provided a list of the teams and their duties to continually communicate among, and with stakeholders.

The applicant uses focus groups, trainings, feedback loops, and publicly available information about the network, and data systems to ensure that information is shared throughout the network on a frequent basis. It also has in place a system to ensure that individuals from across the network (including, teachers, leaders, students, parents and community members) are able to continuously get information on programs, assess needs, share best practices, provide constructive feedback, participate in decision making, and make the adjustments to learning environments for students. The applicant has also provided a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process that is part of its long range planning and the implementation of same.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	4
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(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has provided 12 performance measures – many of which it currently uses within the network and each is aligned with data points that the applicant collects. The measures include academic, behavioral (attendance, resilience – social emotional indicators), college readiness, among others. Each measure is achievable and is accompanied by a metric to ensure its efficacy. The applicant’s measures appear to be directly related to its plan and can be modified if the need arises.

Each measure is part of a systemic plan to collect and analyze data and use the data to inform decisions and are in-line with the grant requirements. The applicant has produced scores of data and performance sheets. For example, at the elementary level grades 4-8 it has identified the number and percentage of participating students by subgroup who are working toward college- and career-readiness based on the applicant’s on-track indicator - the PSSA and other indices.

The applicant has also proposed a grade-appropriate health or social-emotional leading indicator of successful implementation of its plan (merits to demerits ratio - but there appears to be no operational definition for merits or demerits in the proposal) as a non-cognitive indicator of growth. Since there are no annual targets for individual student growth, the idea of evaluating ambitious yet achievable performance for each performance measure is not possible.

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

The applicant’s plan is rich in the use of technology to drive instruction, monitor students behavior and evaluate its workforce, among other uses. It has presented numerous accounts of its teacher evaluation system and professional development strategies and schedules as well as the instruments used to evaluate teaching and leadership staff. Additionally, its use of technology is pervasive throughout the delivery of its services to students to its ability to evaluate the efficacy of each proposed project.

The applicant has demonstrated a well thought out plan, for example, indicating that all proposed staff focused on the proposed initiatives will report to directors on the Academic team to ensure integration of new programs with the applicant's academic systems, supports, training, and evaluation of effectiveness.

The applicant has also indicated that its data analytics manager will develop a set of outcomes for implementation to measure efficiency of resources toward impact and results will be shared at all levels of the organization to inform implementation, make modifications where needed, and measure the impact of the investments on student achievement. Additionally, the director of technology will design and support all data systems, manage the implementation plan for technology in classrooms, evaluate and support online and software-based solutions for blended instruction, and serve as an internal evaluation arm to measure effectiveness of the proposed programs. The only component missing is a timeline for such evaluative strategies that support a high-quality plan.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	7
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has stated that its overall budget for the proposed projects is \$24,894,326, of which \$19,987,309 is requested from RTT and the remaining \$4,907,017 will come from foundations, private donors and public support. The non-government sources of funding are not specifically identified in the budget section yet they are alluded to in other sections but the amount each foundation might contribute is not specified.</p> <p>The applicant's budget shows 11 proposed projects to be funded and appears reasonable. The bulk of the requested funding is for personnel and technology is the second highest budget second. The applicant's budget is loaded so that the middle 2 years (year 2 and 3), which are the most cost intensive, reflect the bulk of the grant activity and less in the last year when they will start the internalization/sustainability component. An example of this is the staff positions supported by the grant request that will either phase out within the grant period or move to a campus creating sustainable positions into the future.</p> <p>Additionally, the applicant has identified the funds proposed in the projects that will be used for one-time investments versus those that will be used for ongoing operational. Examples of one-time investments include laptops, charging stations, a generator to secure the data systems in the event of an electrical outage, and other infrastructure and manipulatives. However, the applicant has not identified from whom the non-federal funds will come except to indicate that it expects to continue to receive funds from the city and a group of foundations and private donors. It does not indicate how much of the matching funds contributed will be coming from the state or city or other sources.</p>		
(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	4
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has shown that it has the support from government and foundation leaders via their many letters of support for their proposed grant funded projects. It has presented several program evaluation methods from surveys, trainings and examples of agenda.</p> <p>The applicant has proposed that staff positions supported by the grant request would either phase out within the grant period or move to a campus creating sustainable positions. For example, many of the RTT staff functions will serve as supports during early implementation and the roles will be absorbed by staff on the Academic team after the grant period.</p> <p>The applicant has also provided a list of one-time investments that will sustain the project after the proposed grant funds have been expired. The funds for the one-time investments account for 11% of the total proposed grant request.</p> <p>The applicant has identified sustainability plans but not a stand alone section addressing the complete plan for all proposed programs. For example, there is a plan to ensure family and community continuation after the proposed grant period as well as family engagement through training (training, professional development, literacy), and the continuation of Community Catalyst Partnerships and parent empowerment and leadership but not one for blended learning or how the continuation of RTI might look after the grant period.</p> <p>Finally, the financial support they will need to continue the project is not delineated and it is unclear who will fund the continuation of the proposed project. And there is no overall proposed evaluation of the effectiveness of past investments to inform a post-grant budget. As a result of these deficiencies, this is not a high quality plan.</p>		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	9
<p>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant proposes a three-pronged sustainable approach to partnerships with local community organizations at the school level and city-wide to identify social and economic barriers to student success and seek local solutions to these problems. One such partnership proposed is with the Center for Literacy - to build sustainable family literacy programming within the network schools as community hubs for services. Another is with Philabundance which will provide food for needy families, and a third is Resources for Human Development which will provide on-site mental and behavioral supports to students.</p>		

Additionally, the applicant proposes that it will employ part-time community engagement managers at each school to increase positive parent participation in school programming, student learning as well as school leadership. These managers will also be charged with leading school teams to select, implement and evaluate supports provided by partners to address student and family needs.

The applicant has also proposed an evaluative process to ensure that the supports provided are beneficial to each student and will be included as possible students and family interventions under the RTI programs that each student will have.

The applicant has clearly defined its goals for its partnerships and appears capable to measures success. It has also delineated a plan to allow each child to have his own RTI and has shown that it has the capacity to continuously evaluate its ability to deliver services to the child and to its stakeholders. The applicant has demonstrated its intent and ability to integrate public and private resources in a partnership to augment each schools' resources by providing additional student and family supports in each schools where possible that address the social, emotional, or behavioral needs of the participating students and their families.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

Throughout the application, the applicant has clearly stated how it will enable each child to have an individualized learning plan. It has also indicated that it will use blended learning, allow students access to school material 24/7, provide college enrollment while in high school, enable students to work on topics of interest to them while ensuring that they meet state standards – all through the increased use of technology to monitor and assess each student’s work and development.

Also the applicant has a percentage of students with special educational needs and it intends to continue to serve these students in the regular schools within the network and continue to provide material that is adapted and appropriate to meet their needs as well.

Finally, the applicant has demonstrated through past performance that it has the ability to train teachers, school leaders and make an impact on the education of children from disadvantaged areas.

Total	210	187
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