



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0234TX-1 for Monte Alto Independent School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	7
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Monte Alto Independent School District's Consortium (MAISDC) articulates a comprehensive reform model that encompasses the four educational core areas. The consortium's standards closely align with the Texas State Common Core standards and/or College and Career Readiness Standards designed to accelerate student learning. These standards and assessments will guide students for college entrance. Secondly, data systems that measure growth and success and inform teachers will be used. The consortium proposes the Data Management for Assessment and Curriculum Solutions, (DMAC), an integrated system designed to disaggregate data and match student scores, thus creating a multitude of systems to track student progress. Thirdly, recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals will be accomplished through the TAP evaluation system. The consortium will employ a variety of techniques for recruitment, including job fairs, workforce development, and higher education partnerships. Lastly, in an effort to turn around the nations lowest-achieving schools, the consortium plans student centered reform efforts such as highly effective teachers, strong benchmarks, strong leaders, and evaluation measures for tracking progress. The consortium proposes a transformational model designed to impact both the academic and non-academic aspect of the school environment thus producing learner centered school environments and students on grade level by grade 5.</p> <p>Likewise, according to the consortium, the new teacher evaluation system, student data and assessment system, instructional program enhancements, and restructured curriculum are measures employed that should significantly improve student outcomes within the member schools, but it is unclear if these measures will increase equity throughout the consortium.</p> <p>The district's emphasis on personalized learning plans, e-portfolios, state assessments, technology, college partnerships, onsite and online learning opportunities helps to demonstrate the focus on the educational reform areas, however, it is unclear what classroom experiences will look like for students and teachers. Therefore, the applicant has included a reform plan but it is not completely comprehensive, however, if implemented consistently throughout the consortium, the reforms should result in improved students learning thus increasing achievement outcomes for all students.</p> <p>Overall, this places MAISDC in the upper middle range.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium's approach to implementation includes both the LEAs and the member schools as evidenced by the involvement of all schools in the consortium. Although the consortium describes the process of completing a comprehensive needs assessment for all participating schools, the process for selection of the schools is not described in detail. However, a list of all participating schools is included. This list also clearly identifies specific student groups by high needs and low-income populations. Finally, the consortium includes details of support teams including leadership support teams and the total number of participating educators.</p> <p>Overall, this places MAISDC in the lower high range.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	5
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium's reform proposal targets personalized learning for all students in the consortium with the goal of having a significant impact on improving student outcomes including having students on grade level by the end of the fifth grade year. Through the transformational model, all schools will offer flexible learning</p>		

opportunities, redesigned curriculum, refined teacher roles and training, student designed and driven learning paths, e-portfolios, mastery and competency-based assessments, use of technology and college and career preparedness for students including university partnerships, and activities designed to promote a personalized learning environment. By using this model, each student benefits from the new learning process and accountability system in all core subject areas. Thus, MAISDC demonstrates this level of support to all member schools through the participation in this approach. However, it is unclear how this reform proposal will be scaled up and translated into meaningful reform to support district wide change beyond the participating schools. Finally, it appears likely that this plan could result in reform throughout the consortium. However, the proposal does not include a timeline, rational or responsible parties in this section as required, therefore, in the absence of a high quality plan, this places MAISDC in the mid middle range.

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

10

6

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium notes goals that are ambitious by targeting improved student learning through incremental growth on assessments. For example, MAISDC proposes growth on statewide assessments of 23 % and greater by the end of the grant period. Likewise, the consortium expects to narrow student achievement gaps by up to 15 point differences each year by the end of the grant period. Similarly, goals for increasing the graduation rate are from 94.5% to 100% after the grant period ends. Also, the consortium proposes to increase college enrollment rates from 16% to 100%. MAISDC has a track record of increasing achievement in most cases, however, in at least one school an increase in college enrollment rate even after full implementation of the transformation model and student individualized plans, is uncertain if the goal can be achieved. Likewise, the goals include for LEP students appear unreasonable for the end of the grant period.

Although MAISDC has a record of increasing achievement and with the proposed full implementation of the transformation model and individual student plans, it is questionable if these goals are achievable for all students and subgroups and all member schools of the consortium.

Overall, this places MAISDC in the low high range.

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

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

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium reports a proven track record of success over the past years by implementing new programs and initiatives such as Teaching Leadership, Class Instruction, and Curriculum and Assessment designed to improve students learning outcomes. For example, MAISDC districts are currently using or will be using a teacher evaluation system known as TAP. TAP is a comprehensive system of evaluation used to attract, develop, motivate, and retain effective classroom teachers who increase student achievement. Using the TAP system, teachers improve the quality of instruction and professional development through monthly meetings, mentors, master teachers, job-embedded sessions, principal led pre-and post evaluation conferences, and teacher incentives for student growth. Since, conditions at the district are professional and collaborative, this creates an environment for improving the learning process. Additionally, using the TAP system, administrators meet with the TAP Leadership Team to analyze data, monitor progress and provide feedback. The benefit of the TAP system is that teachers can review noted weaknesses in delivery of instruction and make adjustments. However, It not clear in the proposal specifically how teacher reforms will directly improve student achievement.

Also, at least one of the member schools proposes a plan to increase college enrollment rates by offering dual enrollment and pre college admissions test. This practice should result in additional students enrolling in college for this one school, however it is unclear how the other member schools will address this area. Furthermore, potentially ambitious reforms are proposed for low performing schools in the consortium through participation in Academies such as T-STEM, STEM, Extended Learning, and Gateways to Technology all proposed as significant project based academies. However, there is no evidence that these reforms will result in success for students.

Furthermore, it is unclear how the consortium will close achievement gaps, increase equity in learning, or improve the school's graduation rates nor are details provided regarding how student performance data will be made available to students, educators, and parents in ways that inform and improve participation, instruction and services. Therefore, it is apparent that evidence to support the district's claim of a clear record of success is not explicitly described in this section.

Overall, this places MAISDC in the upper low range.

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

5

1

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium describes in narrative detail that it currently practices transparency in processes, practices and investments. For example, it publishes its budgets including per-pupil expenditures, school administration and teaching personnel salaries and benefits, major operational and equipment expenditures, professional development expenditures, federal/state/local grant funding, and private funding. However, there is no evidence of the actual printed information other than the reference to the Texas Educational Agency's website. Likewise, there is no evidence of the following; personnel salaries at the school level for instructional and non-instructional staff, instructional staff only, teachers only, and non-personnel expenditure other than a statement included in the proposal that this information is available to the public through district, state, and governmental websites. Additionally, it is also unclear if this information is available through an annual federal data collection process. Therefore, the consortium did not provide sufficient evidence of a high level of transparency in reporting processes, practices and investments to the public.

Overall, this Places MAISDC in the lower low range.

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

10

2

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium demonstrates evidence of autonomy and leadership of the state of Texas in implementing reform efforts such as the College-and Career Readiness movement. According to the proposal, the district will continue operating procedures already established by the State of Texas. It is entirely appropriate to follow the framework already established in the state, however, the consortium provides no evidence of any autonomy available to member schools with the ability to make adjustments to programs as needed. Therefore, the assumption is that the consortium does not have the autonomy from a state agency or local board to implement the personalized learning environments as described in the proposal.

Overall, this Places MAISDC in the lower low range.

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

15

9

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium reports evidence of stakeholder involvement in the proposed plan. For example, the district developed the reform model based on a comprehensive discernment process. This process included staff, parents, administrators, students and community partners. Also, the specific involvement of students, families, teachers and principals in the process is unclear. However, the consortium established a grant development team composed of three district superintendents and academic program personnel who were responsible for developing the proposal, meeting face to face, conferencing by phone, and providing feedback for revisions to the plan.

Letters of support were included from some external stakeholders such as governmental officials, state agencies business owners, and postsecondary institutions. However, there are no letters of support from all participating principals, teachers, parents, parent organizations, student organizations, tribes, nor is it clear if at least 70% of the staff agreed to participate in the project. Thus, based on the evidence the consortium provided some meaningful stakeholder engagement and support throughout the development of the proposal.

Finally, based on the evidence of stakeholder involvement provided and a lack of support letters, it appears that stakeholder engagement was limited in the development and the support for the proposal.

Overall, this Places MAISDC in the mid middle range.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	6

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium proposes a plan designed to promote personalized learning through a learner centered approach to improve student outcomes and ensure that each student meets the Texas College and Career Ready Standards (CCRS). In a learner centered model, students are in control of their own learning through the development of an academic plan that follows them from elementary schools to graduation from high school. Although this approach to learning should engage students if they are actively involved in the process, however it is not clear if high-need students were given particular consideration in this plan.

According to the application, students will visualize their academic goals and objectives, thus allowing them to understand that what they are learning is key to their success in accomplishing their goals. Likewise, this involvement should help students identify and pursue goals that are linked to the CCRS, and how to measure progress by being active and responsible participants.

The consortium proposes that students enroll in classes specific to their career pathways and participate in internships/externships that expose students to deep learning experiences in areas of academic interest.

It is unknown if students will have access and exposure to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives that motivate and deepen individual student learning, or will develop skills and traits such as goal-setting, teamwork, perseverance, critical thinking, communication, creativity, and problem-solving since the consortium did not specifically address these areas in detail.

MAISDC addresses the development of an individual plan with the assistance of school level personnel including academic progress monitoring with frequently updated ongoing and regular feedback, however, is not clear if parents are included as support for this process other than approval of the students career pathway, if a variety of high-quality instructional approaches and environments other than learning guides and objectives will be offered, or what specific digital learning aligned with college- and career-ready standards or graduation requirement will be used as part of the personalized learning environment.

Although, the district addressed generally some areas in this section of the proposal, it there is little or no evidence of high quality instructional approaches and environments, high quality strategies for high-need students or mechanisms to provide training and support for students.

Finally, based on the evidence above, the applicant did not include a high quality plan complete with goals, rationales, deliverables, responsible parties, or timelines. Therefore, the district scores in the mid middle range for this area.

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

20

7

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium identifies a plan for improving teaching and learning through a personalized learning approach. For example, the district reports that teachers will participate in embedded professional development including coaching and support in areas such as curriculum redesign, instructional methods, learning targets, interventional methods, and evaluation. This includes teachers modeling the student centered approach that will be used in the grant program.

Likewise, school staff will participate in a summer institute designed to focus on the needs of various subgroups covered in the grant. Although this training approach for teachers includes consideration for students, it is not clear if high-need students were given particular consideration in this plan. This training will assist teachers on how to frequently measure college and career standards, and use data to inform both the acceleration of student progress and the improvement of the individual and collective practice of educators.

The district will use the proven teacher evaluator system of effectiveness known as TAP. TAP is a comprehensive approach to school reform that focuses on the quality of teaching and advancement of effective teachers and administrators, through ongoing professional development, use of data training, and incentive compensation, thus assisting them in identifying optimal learning approaches for students. Although teacher training will focus on examining student data, it is unclear how the plan will address the frequent measure of student progress toward meeting college- and career-ready standards, or how data will be used to inform both the acceleration of student progress and the improvement of the individual and collective practice of educators.

The applicant has a plan for increasing the number of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals including in hard-to-staff subjects by implementation of the TAP system. However, there is no plan identified for hard-to-staff schools.

Although, the district addressed generally some areas in this section, it is unclear if educators will have training in areas such as high-quality content, including digital learning content, tools to create and share new resources, processes and tools to match student needs, culture and climate for the purpose of continuous improvement, and closing the achievement

gaps since there is no indication of these areas in the proposal.

Therefore, the consortium's lack of evidence and exclusion of components of a high quality plan such as rationales, goals, timelines, responsible parties, and deliverables results in a score in the low middle range.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	5
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium 's infrastructure and policy are aligned to support continuous implementation of this project. For instance, implementation teams will be organized at the consortium, district, and school level to ensure that the project meets its intended goal. The Consortium Leadership Team will act as a supervisory team and coordinate all efforts of the grant. In addition, each central office will have people overseeing the grant as well as school support teams providing critical operational and instructional support.</p> <p>Since member districts operate as a distinct entity, it is assumed that each has the autonomy to plan for improved student achievement. However, there is no specific evidence of each having flexibility to develop calendars and schedules, hire personnel, prepare budgets, and organize instruction.</p> <p>However, it is unclear how the consortium's practices, policies, and rules impact the opportunity for students to progress and earn credit based on demonstrated mastery, demonstrate mastery of standards at multiple times and in multiple comparable ways, and receive learning resources and instructional practices that are adaptable and fully accessible to all, including students with disabilities and English learners.</p> <p>Therefore, although the district includes components of a high quality plan such as timelines, rationales, goals, responsible parties and deliverables, it is highly unlikely that these measures will be effective since MAISDC provided limited details in this proposal.</p> <p>Overall, this Places MAISDC in the lower middle range.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	5
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium demonstrates its commitment to a personalized learning environment through the use of technology. For example, all parents, students, educators, and the community have access to technology because of the established community partnerships throughout the consortium. In addition, parents will also have access to the learning management system, websites, local television programming, and parent notification system. However, for some parents, without internet access at home, it is unclear how they will receive the necessary content, tools, and other learning resources. Likewise, students also have limited access to instructional strategies and technology equipment.</p> <p>MAISDC proposes to offer technical assistance to students, educators, parents, and community partners with its blending learning model if funded by the grant. Through the blending learning opportunities, technology systems will be merged with the DMAC, thus creating a system such that data is readily available through an online data portal. For example, parents may refer to this open format for attendance, behavior, grades, health records, registration, assignments and enrollment information.</p> <p>Additionally, MAISDC proposes if funded to implement an interoperable data system that integrates multiple data sources for district. However, it is unclear what specific system will be used and what kind of data the system will support.</p> <p>Therefore, since the consortium provides some evidence of an infrastructure to support a personalized learning environment but no evidence of all components of a high quality plan such as timelines, goals, and rationales as required, this places MAISDC score in the mid middle range.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
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(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	4
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium states that it will monitor, measure, and publicly share information on the quality of its practices under the grant. In addition, the Project Director will ensure that progress updates specific to student achievement, instructional methods and grant performance are included on the initiative's website thus providing limited opportunities for public sharing of information on the quality of investments under the grant. Likewise, the district proposes to monitor performance measures only yearly and quarterly.</p> <p>Furthermore, it is unclear if information will be shared regarding professional development and technology. Likewise, little or no evidence is included to demonstrate the components of the high quality plan other than the parties responsible for implementing some of the activities. For example, the consortium will create a comprehensive implementation plan if the grant is awarded. In this plan, the Project Director will be responsible for leading this effort to ensure that targeted milestones and benchmarks are met. Also, the Leadership Team will be expected to review grant performance measures yearly and quarterly. The fact that the improvement process is not clearly described and plans are pending for creating an implementation plan can be modified as necessary suggests that the consortium does not have a quality plan.</p> <p>Overall, this Places MAISDC in the low middle range.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	5
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium offers an ongoing communication plan to provide meaningful engagement with its stakeholders through focus groups and forums. For example, the district will have a RTTD Community Advisory Group and Parent Advisory Council who will be responsible for informing stakeholders and receiving stakeholder feedback by engaging with school staff and community members. Likewise, forums through the use of focus groups will provide an avenue to obtain input on consortium initiatives and serve as a means to further facilitate communication with stakeholders and the community. For example, focus groups MAISDC also provides stakeholder engagement through ongoing communication including updating the district's website and specifically sharing information on student outcomes in multiple ways such as summary reports, meetings, parent portals, newsletters and open houses. Finally, parents are engaged through the DMAC online data system, a data system that will centralize performance management information for the RTTD project. All of these methods of communication suggest that MAISDC thoroughly and effectively engages internal and external stakeholders with multiple strategies and modes of communication provided for all stakeholders.</p> <p>Overall, this Places MAISDC in the upper high range.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	2
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium shows a commitment to implementing a personalized learning environment with a range of 6-18 ambitious performance measures rather than 12-18, organized by varied subgroups with annual targets for each performance measure. Although the consortium states that based on past experience, the targets are achievable, it is questionable if the LEP subgroup can attain the targets as stated in English Language Arts. For example, the percent of students in grades 9-11 who meet ELA standards on the ELA Assessment is expected to increase from 48 to 85 percent by the end of the grant period is evidence of such questionable expectation. Additionally, the percent of LEP students in grades 9-11 who meet ELA standards on the ELA Assessment is expected to increase from 15 to 75 percent by the end of the grant period is also evidence of such questionable expectation.</p> <p>MAISDC does not provide a clear rationale for selecting each of its performance measures, specifics on how the measure will provide information on implementation success and/or concern nor is there a description of how it will review and improve the measures over time.</p> <p>Although some of the performance measures when implemented properly could result in some success, information in this section does not clearly describe the success in narrative form.</p> <p>Overall, MAISDC scores in the lower middle range.</p>		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	2

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium plans to use a Quasi-experiential design to assess the effectiveness of the grant program. For example, the district will work with an evaluation firm who will subscribe to a multi-method, multi-source evaluation protocol, thus using both qualitative and quantitative data collection measures and provide an annual formative evaluation report. Additionally, the evaluation firm, Project Director, and School Support Team will all share the responsibility of data collection, specifically in areas such as teacher professional development, student outcomes, academic plans, and project outcomes. However, it is unclear how the effectiveness of activities that employ technology will be determined since it is not mentioned in the proposal. Likewise, the proposed plan does not include a rationale, timeline, or responsible parties as required components of a high quality plan. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that the consortium's included evaluation plan is rigorous and of high quality.

Overall, MAISDC scores in the low high range.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	4

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium articulates in a narrative format, all funds that are available to support the grant project such as RTTD, local, state, federal funds, and private funds. However, it is unknown which federal funds will be available or who will provide the private funding. Also, the total revenue from each of these additional sources is unclear. In fact, this column is not completed on the budget grid nor is it described in the narrative.

Additionally, the per pupil expenditure per year makes the budget appears reasonable based on the amount of funds requested and the number of students expected to be served by the grant.

Likewise, since the district focuses on professional development, if completed by educators and implemented appropriately, these practices and strategies should be sustainable long term but other long-run strategies are not identified in the proposal. Finally, funds that may be needed for ongoing operational cost versus funds for one time investments after the grant period ends are not clearly identified in the proposal. Therefore, based on the evidence above, this places MAISDC's score in the mid middle range.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	3
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium shares a commitment for sustainability beyond the grant period in the form of institutional and organizational support and potential grants from private and public entities. For example, personnel will be gradually transitioned to the operational budgets of each member school that will allow services offered under the grant to continue.

The district currently receives other local, state, and federal entitlement and competitive grant funds that will be used as financial support for the project and will continue the support beyond the grant period. However, it is unclear of the total revenue from each of these additional sources or of the amount of remaining time of each grant. Likewise, the column indicating additional fund sources is not completed on the budget grid.

Although the district identified several collaborative partners, there is no evidence of a specific dollar value support per individual or entity beyond the grant period. Therefore, in the absence of a description of how the consortium will evaluate the effectiveness of its investments and use data in decision making, a three year post-grant budget, and a high quality plan, it is questionable that the MAISDC's plan for sustainability is high quality. For example, the district only includes deliverables and not goals, timelines, rationales, and responsible parties as part of the required components of a high quality plan.

Overall, this Places MAISDC in the low middle range.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
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Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	4
Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:		
<p>Monte Alto Independent School District Consortium is committed to providing a comprehensive schoolwide experiences for its students in the area of academics, social, emotional, and behavioral. This is evident in the partnership that it has formed with several organizations to provide educational, social and behavioral services for its students. For example, <i>Texas A & M Colonias Project</i> offers health and human services, <i>United Way of South Texas</i> offers school resources, <i>Hidalgo County Head Start</i> offers 3-5 age group educational services, <i>University of Texas</i> offers mentors and tutors, <i>South Texas College</i> offers mentors and tutors, and <i>Rio Grande Valley Council</i> offers referral partners for health needs.</p> <p>MAISDC 's focus on establishing partnerships with the goal of targeted student outcomes and family and community support outcomes such as 90% of K-5 students end year on/above grade level, eliminate achievement gaps, 70% of 11th grade students score 21+ on the ACT, 100% of graduates enter college, 85% of graduates graduate from college in six years, 95% of students have highly effective principal, improve student attitudes about school and future, improve daily school attendance, improve graduation rate and decrease drop-out rate, increase student success on state assessments, increase the number of students who say they feel safe at school and traveling to and from school, increase the number of students who say they have good home environment, improve student health and fitness, community supports, decrease teen pregnancy, decrease drug use, and increase parental involvement.</p> <p>MAISDC describes its continuous improvement process as a mechanism to improve results. However, details are limited to the evaluation services listed in the enclosed chart as a means to track the selected indicators that measure each result. Likewise, it is unclear how the partnership will use the data to target its resources in order to improve results for participating students, with special emphasis on students facing significant challenges, such as students with disabilities, English learners, and students affected by poverty, family instability, or other child welfare issues.</p> <p>Additionally, it is not known how the partnership will develop a strategy to scale the model beyond the participating students, to at least other high-need students, and communities. Furthermore, the proposal does not address how this model can be replicated for use in other districts over time.</p> <p>The district vaguely addresses all of the components in this section. Likewise, it does not state how the partnership would, within participating schools integrate education and other services such as social-emotional, and behavioral needs for participating students nor address particular student needs and services. In fact, there is no response included in some sections in this part of the application.</p> <p>Finally, it is unclear how the partnerships will build capacity in district staff, identify and inventory the needs and assets of the school and community, create a decision-making process and infrastructure to select, implement, and evaluate supports, engage parents and families of participating students in decision-making about solutions, and routinely assess the applicant's progress in implementing its plan. However, the district does clearly identify its performance measures and desired outcomes for students as a result of stated partnerships.</p> <p>Overall, this Places MAISDC in the lower middle range.</p>		

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Not Met
Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:		
<p>Monte Alto Independent School District's Consortium (MAISDC) articulates a comprehensive reform model that encompasses the four educational core areas. The consortium's standards closely align with the Texas State Common Core standards and/or College and Career Readiness Standards designed to accelerate student learning. These standards and assessments will guide students for college entrance. Secondly, data systems that measure growth and success and inform teachers will be used. The consortium proposes the Data Management for Assessment and Curriculum Solutions, (DMAC), an integrated system designed to disaggregate data and match student scores, thus creating a multitude of systems to track student progress. Thirdly, recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals will be accomplished through the TAP evaluation system. The consortium will employ a variety of techniques for recruitment, including job fairs, workforce development, and higher education partnerships. Lastly, in an effort to turn around the nations lowest-achieving schools, the consortium plans student centered reform efforts such as highly effective teachers, strong benchmarks, strong leaders, and evaluation measures for tracking progress. The consortium proposes a transformational model designed to impact both the academic and non-academic aspect of the school environment thus</p>		

producing learner centered school environments and students on grade level by grade 5.

Likewise, according to the consortium, the new teacher evaluation system, student data and assessment system, instructional program enhancements, and restructured curriculum are measures employed that should significantly improve student outcomes within the member schools, but it is unclear if these measures will increase equity and support for all students throughout the consortium.

The district's emphasis on personalized learning plans, e-portfolios, state assessments, technology, college partnerships, onsite and online learning opportunities helps to demonstrate the focus on the educational reform areas, however, it is unclear what classroom experiences will look like for students and teachers or if the academic needs of all students can be met with through this personalized environment.

It is unknown if students will have access and exposure to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives that motivate and deepen individual student learning, or will have an opportunity to develop skills and traits such as goal-setting, teamwork, perseverance, critical thinking, communication, creativity, and problem-solving which also deepen learning, since the consortium did not specifically address these areas in detail.

The applicant has a plan for increasing the number of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals including in hard-to-staff subjects by implementation of the TAP system. However, there is no plan identified for hard-to-staff schools.

Although, the consortium addressed generally some areas in this section, it is unclear if educators will have training in areas such as high-quality content, tools to create and share new resources, processes and tools to match student needs, culture and climate for the purpose of continuous improvement, and closing the achievement gaps since there is no indication of these areas in the proposal.

Although MAISDC has a record of increasing achievement and with the proposed full implementation of the transformation model and individual student plans, it is questionable if these goals are achievable for all students and subgroups and all member schools of the consortium.

Finally, the consortium proposes to increase college enrollment rates from 16% to 100%. MAISDC has a track record of increasing achievement in most cases, however, in at least one school an increase in college enrollment rate even after full implementation of the transformation model and student individualized plans, is uncertain if the goal can be achieved. Likewise, the goals include for LEP students appear unreasonable for the end of the grant period.

Therefore, based on the lack of a comprehensive and coherent plan to create learning environments that significantly improve learning for all students, the consortium scores in the upper low range.

Therefore, this places MAISDC in the upper low range.

Total	210	88
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0234TX-2 for Monte Alto Independent School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

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

In section (A)(1) the applicant describes their vision for reform.

(a) Building on the work in the four core assurance areas:

Standards: The consortium schools have district curriculum and assessment that is aligned with Texas State Common Core Standards and/or Texas College and Career Readiness Standards. They plan to establish a Curriculum Team within each district and map the curriculum from 12th grade to 5th grade and work with post secondary partners to gather information specific to college entrance. A definite strength of this section is a philosophical shift from teacher-oriented delivery to student-centered instruction. The Colonias Project, which maintains sites on two of the three consortia campuses, was a strength of this section, however, there was no mention of scale-up to include the third consortium district or how the current services provided might be scaled up.

Weaknesses: It is unclear who would make up the Curriculum Team and what their qualifications would be. There lacks justification as to why 12th-5th grade was chosen over mapping the curriculum K-12, in order to provide consistent scope and sequence for all learners.

The applicant determines that the Curriculum Team will ensure all classes are aligned to specific personalized learning targets as established in collaboration within each subject area. What remains unclear is how specific, personalized learning targets are determined overall or how each student's personalized learning opportunities are determined, curriculum is adapted, and deeper student learning will be increased.

Professional development (PD) is highlighted as a mechanism for enhanced personalized instruction, but it is unclear what the PD goals, subject, or strategies will be.

The applicant indicates, "...parents will have electronic access to their child's academic performance throughout their educational year." However, earlier in the narrative, the applicant indicates, "Many of the individuals and families within the region have no electricity or running water in their homes..." which would make parental involvement through electronic access nearly impossible. Parent-teacher conferences, home visits, phone calls, and progress reports provide opportunities for communication, but the section would have been strengthened by indicating how the RTT vision might include opportunities for families to use technology available at the school or community buildings such as public libraries or community centers. It remains unclear if the applicant will communicate with students and their families in Spanish.

Data Systems: The applicant plans to use Data Management for Assessment and Curriculum Solutions (DMAC) through their regional service center. This system is integrated with the state assessment results and the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment, which allows local school districts to match individual scores with student achievement (it remains unclear if student data is matched to individual teachers). The DMAC also offers an RTI module, which teachers will use to adjust to each student's academic plan, provided by the DMAC student portfolio module.

Weaknesses: What remains unclear is the process for using the data provided by DMAC for data-driven decision making. It is unclear if the Curriculum Team will respond to data trends across the consortium, if PD for teachers will be informed by the data, and what mechanisms might be needed to assess if instructional shifts from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction are occurring or successful.

Educator Effectiveness: The consortium plans to use the TAP system to evaluate educator effectiveness and the Teacher Incentive Fund (federal program) to reward and retain teachers for delivery of high quality instruction and improved student performance indicators.

Weaknesses: The applicant indicates that the consortium will create a learner-centered rather than a teacher-centered instructional model to determine effectiveness of instruction. What remains unclear is how the applicant will determine efficacy of the model, what the learner-centered approach will be, and what the catalyst for instructional change will be. (Is there a research-based framework, model, or other protocol for teaching practices across districts, grade levels and content areas?)

The applicant describes a Summer Institute for all teachers, administrators, and counselors for new learning practices, but what remains unclear is what the specific catalyst for change will be. For example, if 40% of the student population are English Language Learners, it seems that some type of ESL strategies should be addressed in the PD, Summer Institute, or as a component of the personalized learning model efforts. However, it remains unclear if the applicant has any plans, other than hiring candidates whom are required to determine their own plan for addressing the needs of "LEP" learners.

School Improvement: Turning around lowest-achieving schools.

The applicant indicates plans to use reform efforts focused on creating learner-centered environment, highly effective teachers, and strong leadership, coupled with strong benchmark and evaluation measures to track progress and create a system for change for other low-performing districts.

Weaknesses: It was difficult to determine if the lowest-achieving schools were identified. In each of the tables that describe the three consortium districts, there seemed to be discrepancy in each student achievement segment. For example, "...only 71% of the students in grades 3-8 met the standard on the Math section...these scores [sic] significantly lower than the state averages of 61%..." This example was indicative of all three district schools. The data presented did not align with the narrative presented.

TAP was indicated as a data system to identify teacher and principal performance, but It is unclear what indicators of "strong leadership" will be, and what mechanism will be in place to determine what will take place if a low performing teacher, principal, or school is identified. The applicant does not make a compelling argument that once the TAP system is in place, and if deficiencies in teachers or administrators are discovered, the types of interventions or policies will ensure instructional or leadership improvement. It also remains unclear if there are specific, and standards-based content areas for improvement consortium-wide. For example, will the thrust of school improvement be ELA or Math? It is unclear if each district will target their own, data-driven content interventions or if the goals for school improvement will be the same across the consortium.

(b) A clear and credible approach to accelerating student achievement and deepening student learning remains unclear. While the applicant does mention a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning, the approaches remain unclear. For example, there is unconvincing evidence that student learning will change. As described in the narrative, teachers will get achievement data, teachers will go to a summer institute, and make students their focus. However, what remains unclear is evidence of individual tasks based on student academic interest. Also unclear is a credible approach for increasing equity, particularly for the 40% of English Learners. Overall, there is unconvincing evidence that equity and access will be improved through the project (internally or externally).

(c) A description of the classroom experience remains vague. Evidence of technology access remains unclear. The TAP program offers RTI modules, but it remains unclear if the modules are meant for teachers--in order to learn how to address a tiered approach in their classroom--or if students participate in a learner-based RTI module.

This section scores in the medium range due to a lack of compelling evidence for a clear and credible approach to reaching goals addressed in the narrative, and a lack of evidence towards increasing equity through personalized student support.

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

In section (A)(2) the applicant describes their approach to implementation.

(a) The applicant lists the selected schools for RTT participation, however, it is unclear how the individual schools were selected to participate. For example, not all schools have underperforming students in all content areas and it remains unclear if higher performing schools, grade bands or content areas in all schools will receive the same interventions. The issue of K-4 grade bands remains problematic if the target group for improvement across the consortium is 5-12, and the elementary school is a K-5 school. It remains unclear if a K-5 school will participate in the same way a 6-12 school would participate.

(b) The applicant provides a list of the schools that will participate in grant activities.

(c) The demographics are available for total number of students, (although since grades K-5 are not targeted in the proposal, it is difficult to determine how many students will be served once those students are taken out of the equation). It is also unclear if the total high-needs students as well as students who come from low-income families. The section lacks clear evidence of how many educators are participating.

This section scores in the medium range, due to a blanket approach of the same interventions across the district, when not all grade bands are being targeted, and not all subgroups are underperforming, according to performance data presented in section (A)(1).

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

The applicant describes how the reform proposal will be scaled up in section (A)(3).

For this section, the reviewer has provided a list of the plan components (in bold), and analysis/response to each component.

- **The applicant indicates an effective plan to address transformation through instructional strategies,**

advanced teacher professional development, and implementation of a new teacher evaluation system. The applicant does not indicate the specific strategies to be implemented or what the targeted professional development content areas will be. Furthermore, a timeline and deliverables for the TAP system remain undefined.

- **Sub-groups of limited English, low-income, at-risk, and SPED students will be the primary focus for each school in reading and math.** It remains unclear what approach or strategies will be used with each group, the timeline for intervention or strategies, how efficacy will be measured, and if the interventions include additional staff, materials, or other resources.
- **Classroom libraries will be incorporated.** The applicant does not make it clear if the classroom libraries are print or e-books, how classroom libraries will be tied to academic outcomes or utilized in instructional practices.
- **Dual enrollment opportunities will be sought with university partners.** This is fairly straightforward, although it is unclear how low-income students will be able to afford concurrent enrollment fees.
- **Career development counselors will provide support to students identifying a career path and aligning courses, community resources, and experiences to match their pathway.** It remains unclear if individual counselors will hold the power to make determinations of career pathways or if career pathways will be determined by career-interest exposure, formal career-interest assessments, or other means.
- **Progress will be measured by publication of achievement and success, post-secondary readiness success rate, all students being on grade level, and all K-2 students being fluent readers.** The applicant does not offer a convincing argument for evaluation of "post-secondary readiness" assessment, formally or informally. While "all students being on grade level," is an ambitious goal, timelines and benchmarks as well as touchstone checks for progress would make the likelihood of goal achievement more persuasive. Also notable is the effort to map curriculum 5-12, yet K-2 reading fluency is a target. It seems important to map the curriculum K-12 if all students are a part of improvement plans.
- **Each district will create customized learning plans per student and e-portfolios to measure academic progress from elementary to high school graduation.** This section does not offer enough detail to be compelling evidence. For example, it is unclear how technology will be incorporated to provide access to e-portfolios, what benchmarks for progress will be, or why e-portfolios are a catalyst to achievement.
- **Curriculum will be redesigned to include learning targets and interventions to address comprehension of each target area.** It remains unclear what the applicant means by "redesigned curriculum" in the context of CCSS, individual learning plans, and e-portfolios. It is not possible to determine if all district curricular content is being redesigned, just ELA, or all content and curriculum will be redesigned.
- **Learning facilitators and teachers will closely monitor student progress and make appropriate adjustments to instruction, content delivery, and measurement tools.** The applicant does not provide compelling evidence of what learning facilitators will do, how often student progress will be monitored, how teachers and facilitators will collaborate and how often, what measurement tools will be used to inform instructional practices, etc. This section was too vague to provide a compelling argument for implementation, especially without timelines.
- **Teachers will offer expanded learning periods for students not meeting targets.** This goal is problematic due to a lack of specific information on how the applicant defines "expanded learning periods" in the context of underperforming students. It is unclear if this means extended time within a class period, a seminar or tutoring time, shift of school-day structure, or other means.
- **DMAC system will allow school districts to create a comprehensive model to measure longitudinal academic progress.** It is not clear how often the DMAC system will be used to make district level decisions, who will create the model, what "comprehensive" might mean in district decision-making, and a timeline for model creation.

This section scores in the medium range. The applicant did not provide a high-quality plan according to RTT standards. It remains unclear what the timeline for key goals will be, detailed activities to be undertaken for each goal, and the rationale for the activities. Also unclear were the deliverables, and details of the parties responsible for implementing each of the activities. It remains unknown what the logic model or theory of change is, and how current infrastructure might be scaled up. It remains unclear if the applicant has a high-quality plan for scale-up that extends beyond participating schools, a criteria of the application.

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

10

4

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Section (A)(4) provides information on LEA-wide goals for student outcomes.

The outlined goals for performance on (a) summative assessments, (b) decreasing achievement gaps, (c) graduation rates, and (d) and college enrollment are provided in a numbered list: (Charts were available for different targets than were on the list and it was unclear how the charts and list aligned)

1. 90% of students meet standard in Math and ELA assessments. (This was unclear as to whether or not this was across all subgroups as not all tables indicated a 90% target for Math and ELA assessments, some were lower and some were higher)
2. 70 % of 11-12 grade students score 21 on ACT. (Current ACT scores, mean scores or other information to indicate goal rationale were unclear)
3. 90% of K-5 student end of year are reading on or above grade level. (It is unclear why some subgroups were given higher targets, particularly English Language Learners)
4. 100% of seniors apply to enter a 4-year college. (It was unclear what the applicant's rationale is for all students attending college--what about those who wish to enter technical college or other type of certification--and the rationale behind a 16% to 90% jump in four years.)
5. 85% of students graduate from college within 5 years. (This rate would go against current national trends. It is unclear what the rationale or evidence would be for this kind of success rate.)
6. 100% of students take AP or Pre-AP course at the high school. (It is unclear if each district offers these courses or how the districts would staff additional, Pre-AP courses.)
7. 25% of students receive an associate's when graduating from high school. (It was unclear what the rationale or measurement for this goal would be)
8. 40% of middle school students receive high school credit prior to 9th grade. (There seemed to be no clear rationale or timeline for this goal.)
9. 100% of teachers will use redesigned curriculum for college entrance down to fifth grade level to ensure students are meeting their educational plan. (It remains unclear why curricular reform stops at fifth grade and is not a K-12 initiative.)

Several of the goals did not appear achievable. For example, grades 3-8 SPED students are being asked to reach targets at a higher level of increase in math assessment scores than any of the other subgroups in the cohort. In grades 9-11, SPED students are being asked to reach targets at higher levels of increase in math assessment scores than any of the other subgroups in the cohort.

The section scores in the medium range. The reviewer was unable to determine the extent to which the aforementioned goals addressed equity. Each of the goals was ambitious, however, the applicant lacks compelling evidence whether the goals are achievable or if they meet or exceed State 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	4

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

In section (B)(1) the applicant describes their efforts toward success. (This section would have been stronger had the applicant followed the application template. It was difficult to determine how the evidence presented fit each required category.)

(1) Monte Alto district was highlighted as a district that is advancing student learning and achievement by a "proven track record of success" in teaching leadership, shared leadership, class instruction, curriculum & assessment, leadership reform, and data-driven reform, however, not all of the district's information was presented, and the applicant lacked a compelling argument in this section without descriptions of all district efforts, charts or graphs, raw student data, or other evidence to clearly show if Monte Alto is advancing student learning and achievement.

It was unclear how any of the districts are increasing equity in learning and teaching.

(a) It remains unclear how all districts are improving district learning outcomes and closing the achievement gaps, raising student achievement, graduation rates, and college enrollment. Monte Alto is primarily highlighted in the narrative, however, it remains unclear if the other schools have the capacities to do so across similar categories.

(b) It remains unclear which of the consortium schools is designated as the persistently lowest-achieving school. Lasara has implemented a T-STEM academy to focus on stem through project-based learning, however, it is unclear if this program is targeted to be scaled up across and throughout all consortium schools as an ambitious and significant reform.

Since the T-STEM academy is a 7-12 grade approach, it remains unclear if expansion to K-6 schools or individual grade bands or content areas is planned. Santa Maria met standard on all indexes, yet it is unclear if what they are doing to create successful student results will be replicated as reform measures in other schools. Santa Maria has implemented morning, after school, and Saturday programs, but again, no scale-up of these reforms seems to be targeted for replication consortium-wide.

(c) It is unclear how the applicant currently makes student performance data available to students, educators, and parents in ways that inform and improve instruction and services.

The section scores in the medium range. While different efforts from different LEAs was made available, what remains unclear are consortium plans to transfer what is currently happening separately in districts into a successful plan for reform for all. The applicant does not make a compelling argument for turning around low-achieving schools, particularly in the area of equity.

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

5

3

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Section (B)(2) indicates the extent to which each LEA has demonstrated evidence of increasing transparency in processes, practices, and investments.

The narrative describes that

(a) actual personnel salaries all school-level instructional and support staff, administrator expenditures, K-12 instructional budgets and expenditures, pupil support expenditures, professional development expenditures, and all district and school level budgets are available for public view on the Texas Education Agency website. The applicant does not make the information available in the section but guides the reviewer to the website for the data.

(b) actual instructional staff salaries are published on the TEA website.

(c) actual salaries for teachers are published on the TEA website.

(d) actual non-personnel expenditures are published on the TEA website.

Additionally, the consortium districts make budget information available on request, make it available via the Parent Advisory Councils at each school, and at school board meetings. The section includes a the extent to which the applicant already makes available school-level expenditures from State and local funds and describes a high level of transparency through the TEA Website.

This section scores in the medium range as it remains unclear if a high level of transparency is possible without Spanish language information. While the salary/expenditure information was described, actual figures would have made a more compelling argument in this section.

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

10

2

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Although the state declined to comment on the application or support it with a letter affirming such, the applicant indicates that as part of the state's evolving efforts to align the state and federal accounting systems, TEA established the Texas Center for District and School Support (TCDSS), a state-level entity that functions to coordinate, in conjunction with TEA, system-level leadership for school improvement efforts. In collaboration with TCDSS, TEA developed a research-based framework for continuous improvement.

The applicant indicates that "...the consortium will work closely with TCDSS to [sic] its framework for transforming the participating school districts," however, it is unclear exactly how that framework aligns with the application under review. It is unclear if there is a fee for using the services of TCDSS, if they work collaboratively with district and school leadership, how they will facilitate district and campus supports, and how the state level supports will fit with a high-quality plan.

The applicant does not make clear if the consortium has autonomy to move forward with the proposal, if awarded, or if the consortium is bound by state requirements to utilize TCDSS to implement personalized learning environments.

The section scores in the low range due to a lack of assurance that the consortium has sufficient autonomy for implementation.

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

15

10

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Section (B)(4) addresses stakeholder engagement and support.

(a) Strengths:

The applicant describes that the consortium gathered a RTT development team consisting of three district superintendents and academic programs personnel to develop the proposal. The development team built the proposal through face to face meetings and conference calls.

Weaknesses:

The applicant indicates that educators, parents, students, and community members were involved in formulating the vision for the plan, however, it is unclear how the proposal was revised based on their engagement and feedback.

(i) The applicant indicates that at least 70% of the teachers support the proposal but there was not clear evidence of direct engagement or support.

(b) A list of supporters that the consortium sought support from was listed, however, the letters did not represent all the names provided. However, a variety of stakeholders including a judicial representative, county commissioner, institutions of higher education, community-based organizations, an educational service center, a civic organization, and a "decline to comment" letter from the Texas Education Agency were presented in the appendix.

This section scores in the medium range due to the evidence of stakeholder support. There are deductions do to a lack of evidence that 70% of teachers supported the project and that teachers, students, and families were a part of the revision process.

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

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

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

In section (C)(1), the application's focus is on learning.

In this section, the applicant does not make a compelling argument for learning that corresponds to the application structure, therefore, the narrative section was searched for evidence that might align with section requirements. This section narrative did not contain a high-quality plan according to RTT guidelines, with a timeline, benchmarks, roles and responsibilities, activities, and deliverables.

(a) With the support of parents and educators, each students

(i) Understand that what they are learning is key to their success in accomplishing their goals;

The district plans a learner-centered model. The narrative includes, "When mastery of a core subject area is not achieved, teachers and learning facilitators will provide appropriate interventions and expanded learning activities." What remains unclear is a well-defined description of "learning facilitators" and what their role is. It is not clear if they are in classrooms like a paraprofessional or what their qualifications or duties are. Also unclear is the way that expanded learning opportunities will be provided. For example, one of the consortium LEAs has had success with before school and after school programs, but plans for expanded learning opportunities and the personnel to staff them across the consortium have not been made clear.

(ii) Identify and pursue learning and development goals linked to college- and career-ready standards or college- and career-ready graduation requirements, understand how to structure their learning to achieve their goals, and measure progress toward those goals;

The applicant describes that students who are in learner-centered classrooms "take ownership for their own success" and "students choose what they will learn, how they will learn, and how they will assess their own learning," however, it remains unclear how this will be facilitated, or how the students will gain proficiencies for that type of self- directed learning management.

(iii) Are able to be involved in deep learning experiences in areas of academic interest;

While there is evidence of teacher-as-facilitator of students who are on a tracked path of individual learning, there is also

the presence of CSCOPE, which has a constrained lesson timetable. It remains unclear how each aspect will be meshed to provide deep learning experiences. One focus seems to be on self-monitoring by students and one seems to be monitored by teachers and learning facilitators. Student interest seems to be the responsibility of guidance counselors. The applicant does not provide a compelling argument that there is a systematic and targeted effort towards deep learning experiences in areas of academic interest and if deep learning experiences are occurring, how that would be measured.

(iv) Have access and exposure to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives that motivate and deepen individual student learning; and

It remains unclear how the consortium will provide access and exposure to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives that will motivate and deepen learning.

(v) Master critical academic content and develop skills and traits such as goal-setting, teamwork, perseverance, critical thinking, communication, creativity, and problem-solving;

This aspect of the application is difficult to judge because on the one hand, there is a tracking system through the STAAR program that determine if a student is on a track that is, tradition, advanced, or developmental track, then there is a CSCOPE support system that involved a curriculum/teacher pacing guide, and then a description of a personalized learning environment that "students are in charge of what they learn and when they learn it." It is difficult to appreciate these three philosophically different student learning approaches without further description of how they can operate simultaneously.

(b) With the support of parents and educators, each student has access to—

(i) A personalized sequence of instructional content and skill development designed to enable the student to achieve his or her individual learning goals and ensure he or she can graduate on time and college- and career-ready.

The applicant describes an electronic student portfolio that will serve as an academic plan and students will "self-select" their pathway. What remains unclear are the touchstones or benchmarks, and the specific details of progress monitoring. The applicant does describes formative progress monitoring every three to six weeks, however, it remains unclear in what content areas, and what teachers (and learning facilitators) will do with the information. Guidance counselors are relied upon for support, but it remains unclear what will be in place to train them for an expanded role, how they fit with new technologies, and how they fit in the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction. The emphasis seems to be on a one stop shop where all information is stored in an e-portfolio so that teachers, counselors, and parents will be able to have access, yet in the opening narrative, the applicant stated that many parents do not have electricity in their homes. It remains unclear how the parents and families will in fact have access to electronic information they need for decision-making.

(ii) A variety of high-quality instructional approaches and environments;

This aspect of the narrative is problematic due to the reliance on an academic support system that remains unconvincing. For example, as students progress by grade level, the individual attention and focus on the academic plan increases and more personnel become involved in the student's development, would indicate that a student-centered approach is gradually being shifted to a support system of teachers and support staff.

Further evidence of increasing staff involvement occurs in the same section, wherein the applicant indicates, at the middle school level the plan will be relatively simple, and at the high school level the plan will be focused on a specific career pathway in which teachers will incorporate common core requirements into the curriculum for each career pathway. What remains unclear is how the teachers are supposed to "incorporate" the Common Core into the pathways listed, Agriculture, Business, Technology, Healthcare, Human Services, and Trade and Industry. It is unclear if this incorporation is through a formal instructional approach. It is unclear how the teachers will handle the task of incorporating the Common Core into those curriculums or if somehow the curriculum will be prepared and then loaded onto the technology for students or in other ways. Also problematic is the information that, each student will self-select his or her own career pathway with parent approval, yet, there is little evidence of career exposure or a plan for increased career information K-12. Emphasis is on the "model" but it remains unclear if this is a research-based model, a timeline of deliverables, what key goals and activities will be infused in what grade level, who will be responsible at each point in time, and how efficacy of the model will be measured.

(iii) High-quality content, including digital learning content aligned with college- and career-ready standards or college and career-ready graduation requirements.

The applicant does not make clear what high quality content will be sought or utilized. It remains problematic that, teachers will incorporate graduation and common core requirements into the curriculum for courses within each pathway, without any concrete framework for that important work. It is unclear if cohorts of teachers will start with one career band (for example, Agriculture) and have meetings to align content with college- and career-ready standards or how that important

work will be structured.

(iv) Ongoing and regular feedback, including, at a minimum--

(A) Frequently updated individual student data that can be used to determine progress toward mastery of college- and career-ready standards or college- and career-ready graduation requirements; and

The applicant indicates the consortium has developed an effective model to measure academic achievement comprised of assessment, data, student performance data, college and career readiness standards, common core requirements, and graduation requirements into one comprehensive system, however, no in-depth information is clear as to how the information will be frequently updated, and how mastery will be measured. Also unclear is how adjustments will be made during progress monitoring. For example, it remains unclear at what point a struggling student will be targeted for extended learning time and how that aligns with the personal learning environment. If a student is in charge of "what they learn and when they learn it" as described, it remains unclear how progress monitoring fits in. The emphasis on the model would require that the description of the model be more robust (diagram, chart, timeline, etc.).

(B) Personalized learning recommendations based on the student's current knowledge and skills, college- and career-ready standards or college- and career-ready graduation requirements, and available content, instructional approaches, and supports; and

The interventions and expanded learning opportunities remain vague. For example, "...the school will implement various modes of intervention such as grouping students by proficiency levels, special intervention classes, mentoring, tutoring, and additional expanded learning opportunities...formative assessment data every three to six weeks..." are all listed, but no specifics are offered on any of the modes of intervention. If the students are all working individually, and in charge of "what they learn and when they learn it" it remains unclear how the aforementioned interventions happen in a concrete and consistent way across content areas and grade bands.

(v) Accommodations and high-quality strategies for high-need students to help ensure that they are on track toward meeting college- and career-ready standards or college- and career-ready standards or college- and career-ready graduation requirements and

The applicant did not make clear what accommodations and high quality strategies would be used specifically for high need students. For example, the applicant indicates, "The LEP subgroup population will be monitored by the teacher, ESL teacher, and reading interventionist on an ongoing basis to ensure they meet learning targets. The intervention approach for these special populations will require an more in-depth and hands-on experience..." yet the applicant does not make clear what differentiates a hands-on experience from a personalized learning environment. It also remains unclear what type of high-quality strategies will be used. The application indicates that 90%-100% of LEP students will be enrolled in college upon graduation, yet the high quality strategies for helping to ensure they are on track remain unclear.

(c) Mechanisms are in place to provide training and support to 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.

An academic support system involves the School Support Team, learning facilitators, teachers, guidance counselors, social workers, and community liaisons. All members will provided will support the academic plan of each student, however, details of each role and responsibility remains unclear.

This section scores in the low level due to a lack of clarity of a high-quality plan according to RTT guidelines. The applicant does not make a compelling argument that a timeline with key goals, activities, and deliverables is guiding the process of learning across the consortium which is required for a high-quality project according to RTT guidelines. The basic ideas are listed, but the "how" pieces remain unclear.

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

20

5

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

In section (C)(2) the applicant describes the features of TAP to improve teaching and leading. The applicant does not offer a high-quality plan according to RTT standards, which requires a timeline, key goals, activities, and deliverables.

(a) (i) The applicant indicates that all teachers will participate in TAP to redesign curriculum and instructional methods to achieve improved student outcomes by attending high quality workshops as well as embedded workshops however, no timeline or information of how they will be embedded is clear.

(ii) The narrative offers that, "Moving to a PLE is a complete culture shift... and ...Moving an entire district to a system with PLE takes time and a process..." yet it remains unclear what the timeline will be for the consortium to implement TAP and

embed professional development.

(iii) The applicant indicates that through TAP, master and mentor teachers form a leadership team, along with administrators, to deliver school-based professional support as well as a professional summer institute, however, it remains unclear if professional consultants will offer a "train the trainer" model for the master and mentor teachers. The applicant mentions summer "courses" on teaching special group populations such as LEP, SPED, Economically Disadvantaged, and At-Risk, but with no accompanying timeline it is difficult to determine if these are university courses or other format. Also unclear is how the embedded training will align with application requirements such as PD on how teachers will use data to frequently measure student progress toward meeting college- and career-ready standards, and other aspects of the application requirements.

(iv) The narrative includes the TAP "elements of success" but the applicant does not align the elements to the requirements of this section of the application. The applicant does not make a convincing argument of how TAP will effectively improve teachers' and principals' practice and effectiveness in the context of this particular consortium.

(b) (i-iii) The focus of this section of the application asks for information on teacher access to optimal learning approaches, high-quality learning resources, and instructional tools and processes to meet student needs. While the applicant focuses the majority of this section on the benefits of TAP, it remains unclear how the consortium will evaluate efficacy of instructional resources and practices provided by TAP.

(C)(2) (c) (i-ii) The applicant described using TAP to determine teacher effectiveness. What remains unconvincing is how TAP information will be used in an actionable way and how TAP will be used for continuous improvement. Without a timeline, key goals, activities, and deliverables, it is unclear how the consortium will utilize the information from TAP to take steps to improve.

(C)(2)(d) The applicant includes TAP as their high-quality plan, however, no timeline, key goals, or deliverables are listed. The narrative did not provide convincing evidence that addressed increasing the number of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals hard-to-staff schools, subjects, and specialty areas.

This section scores in the middle range due because does not offer compelling evidence of a high quality plan. While the TAP system is described, what remains unclear is a high-quality plan according to RTT standards with a timeline, key goals, and outcomes. The applicant will use TAP, but it remains unclear how the TAP will be utilized to fulfill each required element of the application aligned with the applicant's vision for reform.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	5

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Section (D)(1) describes LEA practices, policies, and rules.

(a) This section was one of the stronger sections, in that tables of information were included to provide clarification. District level, school level, and professional level roles were provided and described, however, key goals, activities to be undertaken and the rationale for the activities, the timeline, the deliverables, and the parties responsible for implementing the activities remains unclear. It remains unclear why the Learning Facilitators are on a 12-month contract.

(b) The applicant provides information that addresses sufficient flexibility and autonomy by stating, "Each district will have central office people oversee the grant requirements and personnel that are hired by the grant." However, it remains unclear if each district meets the requirement of autonomy over factors such as school schedules and calendars, school personnel decisions, staffing models, roles and responsibilities for educators, and noneducators, and school level budgets.

(c) The applicant does not make a compelling argument with evidence to support that students will be given the opportunity to progress and earn credit based on demonstrated mastery and not the amount of time spent on a topic.

(d) It remains unclear of the consortium will give students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of standards at multiple times and in multiple comparable ways.

(e) The application does address an ESL teacher and support for other subgroups, however, this section does not address district autonomy in practices and policies for providing learning resources and instructional practices that are adaptable and fully accessible to all students, including students with disabilities and English learners.

While the section provides a strong description of LEA practices, it is weak on the policies and rules. This section scores in the medium range due to a lack of a high quality plan according to RTT standards that would require a timeline, key goals/outcomes, activities, and deliverables.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	4
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(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

In section (D)(2) the applicant describes infrastructure of the project, though it lacks a high-quality plan according to RTT standards as it remains unclear what the proposed timeline and deliverables will be.

(a) The narrative describes efforts to increase parental and community engagement through technology. The DMAC is described as an operating system that is interoperable. However, the threshold of "regardless of income have access ..." is not clearly addressed, especially for those who lack electricity in their homes. The applicant does include allowing faith-based and community-based centers to become Wi-Fi hotspots, but it does not describe how the grant will provide those facility upgrades. There also seems to be a lack of clarity of the technology initiative which will be 1:4 or 1:1.

(b) The applicant indicates various plan components, such as a blended learning model, will be put in place, however, there is no clear timeline for this or other benchmarks. The applicant then states that "all teachers, counselors, principals, and district leadership...will become turnkey trainers to provide training and technical assistance to students, parents, and community partners." This is difficult to comprehend without some sort of high-quality plan. It is unclear how a principal would take time to provide technical assistance and training for a community partner on an electronic device without a definitive action plan in place.

(c) This section describes that information technology systems will be merged, however, it was previously stated that the technology system is already interoperable. What also remains unclear is how the parents and students will be able to export their information in an open data format.

(d) The applicant makes the assurance that interoperable data systems will be used, however it remains unclear if this is a current function of the system or it will be made interoperable.

This section scores in the medium range due to a lack of a high-quality plan according to RTT standards. While ideas are put forth, there lacks a distinct timeline, key goals and activities, and distinct deliverables to address time-sensitive benchmarks through the life of the project. A logic model, which was not referenced in the narrative, was located later in the application, however, it did not include a timeline or the parties responsible for implementing the activities.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

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

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

In section (E)(1) the applicant indicates the consortium's efforts for a continuous improvement process.

The narrative describes that the consortium will monitor, measure, and publicly share information on the quality of practices implemented using grant funds. However, the paragraph fails to provide a high-quality plan according to the RTT standards. The applicant does not make clear the following:

Strength: "Each school district will involve its stakeholders and ensure efficient decision-making"

Weakness: It remains unclear what the mechanism for that involvement will be. (e.g... weekly monitoring meetings)

Strength: "A highly efficient and streamlined decision-making strategy that is consistent and responsive to change."

Weakness: The streamlined strategy remains unclear

Strength: "...continuous monitoring process should help personalized learning through early stages."

Weakness: There is not a clear timeline for monitoring.

Strength: "...if selected, the district will dedicate substantial time to create a comprehensive implementation plan."

Weakness: It remains unclear what "substantial time" means without the context of a timeline.

Strength: "Yearly and quarterly goals and performance measures will be monitored."

Weakness: It remains unclear what yearly and quarterly goals and performance measures will be.

Strength: "The Project Director will also ensure that a RTT-D initiative web page is on all school districts' web sites..."

Weakness: It is unclear if the website will be used to publicly share information on investments. The lack of technology in many of the students' households precludes them from getting the information. Though the district has 40% LEP students, there seems to be a lack of information on how public information will be shared in Spanish, which would render the plan ineffective for 40% of students and families.

These are examples of the section, that scores in the low range due to a lack of a high-quality plan according to RTT standards and a lack of clarity on how the applicant will monitor and measure the quality of its investments, such as investments in professional development, technology, and staff.

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

5

1

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Section (E)(2) describes ongoing communication and engagement.

This section does not provide evidence of a high-quality plan according to RTT standards, in that it does not provide key goals, a timeline, actions, and deliverables. The applicant provides a list of communication strategies, such as summary reports, meetings, a parent portal, updates, and a monthly newsletter. Other than the "monthly basis" indicator of time, the applicant does not make clear how feedback will be made available to inform continuous improvement. How will data be collected from forums, focus groups, faculty meetings, parent surveys, conferences, town hall meetings, back to school nights, open houses and parent meetings, and where will the feedback loop be strategically situated, remains unclear. It is problematic that 40% of the district students are LEP and it remains unclear if communication and engagement will include Spanish language modalities for communication.

This section scores in the low range due to the lack of evidence that a high-quality plan as defined by RTT standards is represented.

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

5

2

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Section (E)(3) describes performance measures.

Targets are presented in table format. The applicant indicates (in only 3 sentences) that ambitious and bold targets were set that are realistic and achievable, however the only rationale offered was "...a history of taking student achievement at its lowest level and accomplishing more than was expected or even imagined." What remains unclear are section requirements that for **each** measure selected:

- (a) Its rationale for selecting that measure;
- (b) How the measure will provide rigorous, timely, and formative leading information tailored to its proposed plan and theory of action regarding the applicant's implementation success or areas of concern; and
- (c) How it will review and improve the measure over time if it is insufficient to appraise implementation progress.

The applicant does provide the required 12-14 performance measures, however, some of the targets seem unclear without an accompanying rationale. For example, why LEP students would be less likely to achieve 50% mastery on a physical fitness test than other groups, and why SPED students would be expected to make higher incremental jumps on STAAR assessments than any other group. However, because the applicant does not provide a compelling argument with evidence to address a, b, and c., the section scores in the medium range.

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

5

2

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

In Section (E)(4), the applicant describes evaluating effectiveness of investments.

The applicant indicates that the consortium will evaluate the success of the project and effectiveness of investments through a comprehensive approach that includes:

- Staff: monitor and evaluate evaluation measures specific to teacher professional development, student outcomes, academic plans and project outcomes.
- Consortium: analyze evaluation data results individually (by district) and collectively.

The applicant describes that an evaluation firm will subscribe to a multi-method, multi-source evaluation protocol but it remains unclear how the plan will be undertaken as a whole, with high-quality components according to RTT standards. The narrative indicates that a performance measures table can be referenced for evaluating effectiveness, however, the performance measures table is vague according to RTT standards of a high-quality plan. For example, the table is unclear concerning the parties responsible for implementing the activities. The table offers, "We will track this data annually..." or "This enables us to make ambitious yet achievable goals..." but in order for the plan to be high-quality, clarity of who is responsible for gathering the data, who is responsible for reporting the data, and how the data will be used in a clear and high-quality approach, is necessary for a high score. Therefore, this section scores in the medium range.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	5

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

In section (F)(1) the applicant identifies the project budget.

(a) The applicant indicates that each district has local, state, federal, and private funding that will help support the project, but the identification of all these funds is unclear.

(b) The applicant indicates that the budget narrative and tables are reasonable and sufficient to support the development and implementation of the proposal, however, there are some aspects of the budget that do not correlate to sections of the application and lack a rationale for inclusion. For example, in Table six, the applicant indicates that teachers will be paid for job-embedded professional development, however, this is unclear in the budget.

(c) Alignment between the budget and other sections of the application seems to be unclear. For example,

- It is difficult to determine adequacy of a \$1,125 annual teacher stipend for a summer institute is difficult to determine (high or low) without knowing how long the summer institutes will last.
- The application does not make it clear that 50 junior/senior students will be taken on a post secondary visit. It is not clear in the application how the students would be selected or how the visit would be tied to project goals.
- The roles of social workers, additionally hired Pre-K teachers (for some schools), and classroom assistants (for some schools), in the project is unclear throughout the narrative.
- Technology includes multi-platform formats (iPads, E-readers, and laptops) but it is unclear what the plan is to make the various systems interoperable.

(i) The applicant does not make a compelling argument with evidence of all of the funds that the applicant will use to support the implementation of the proposal including total revenue from these sources.

(ii) The applicant does not provide clear identification of the funds that will be used for one-time investments versus those that will be used for ongoing operational costs that will be incurred during and after the grant period, with a focus on strategies that will ensure the long-term sustainability of the personalized learning environments.

The table of budget correlation to project strategies would have been more compelling with evidence of dollar amounts or justification/rationale that was more robust. For example, \$1,125 is allotted for teacher professional development stipends for summer institutes. It remains unclear if weekly TAP group professional development would be imbedded in the school day or after/before school. If the professional development is embedded, it remains unclear how that factors into offering extended learning time for students.

This section scores in the middle range, as there seems to be a lack of rationale for some of the expenditures lacking in the narrative, (e.g... classroom assistants, social workers) and a lack of evidence of all fund strands and use.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	2
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Section (F)(2) describes the consortium's plans for sustainability of the project's goals after the term of the grant.</p> <p>The applicant does not present a high-quality plan for sustainability after the term of the grant according to RTT standards. The consortium does not make clear key goals, activities to be undertaken and the rationale for the activities, the timeline, the deliverables, and the parties responsible for implementing the activities for a post-grant budget. The applicant does not make a compelling argument with evidence of an estimated budget for the three years after the term of the grant or evidence of State and local government support.</p> <p>The applicant describes that key personnel will be transitioned to operational funds, but it remains unclear how levels of new technology will be maintained. Potential sources include additional funding, however, potential uses of funds remains unclear. Also unconvincing is how the applicant will evaluate effectiveness of past investments and improvements in productivity.</p> <p>This section scores in the low range due to the lack of a high-quality plan according to RTT standards including key goals, activities to be undertaken and the rationale for the activities, the timeline, the deliverables, and the parties responsible for implementing the activities, and a post-grant estimated budget.</p>		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

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

<p>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>In this section, the applicant highlights efforts toward the competitive preference priority.</p> <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consortium plans to develop relationships with community organizations to address the needs of students and families in the Rio Grand Valley area. • Two groups (Texas A&M Colonias Project and United Way) provide school supplies for students and socioeconomic support for parents. Hidalgo County Head Start will work with the school districts, although it is unclear how its position on Monte Alto ISD will enable its utilization to be beneficial to other consortium schools. • Two universities, UT at Brownsville, and South Texas College will provide students to serve as mentors and tutors, and offer dual credit programs. <p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It remains unclear if highest priority will be given to participating schools with high-need students. • The applicant does not indicate a link between desired population-level results, and the proposal. For example, it is unclear how the plan addresses decreased drug use and pregnancy. <p>Table 14 provides information that includes planned activities that the Project Director and principals will be responsible for that will produce results that impact social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes.</p> <p>A different table labeled "Table 14" details current, funded school programs that support students in the area, however, some programs serve one or more consortium schools, and it is unclear how the listed programs and partners might be expanded beyond current capacities.</p> <p>In section (2)(2) (a) educational results or other education outcomes and (b) family and community population-level desired results are listed. However, the structure of the section falls apart here as the section ends with the Population-Level Desired Results table and no accompanying rationale. The reviewer is directed to "Section E for specific Performance Measures by School District", however, the applicant does not make a compelling argument with evidence for sections (3) (a-d), (4), (5)(a-e), or (6).</p> <p>Because the applicant does not address so many sections of the Competitive Preference Priority, the section scores in the medium range for meeting the Competitive Preference Priority.</p>		
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Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Not Met
Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The consortium does not comprehensively address how it will build on the core educational assurance areas do to various gaps available evidence in the application sections. Furthermore, most sections requiring a high-quality plan lack evidence of such according to RTT standards. While some sections had outcomes or measures, they would lack timelines, or deliverables, and the parties responsible for implementing the activities.</p> <p>There was a lack of coherence in how the teachers would be able to take each of the career pathways of Agriculture, Business, Technology, Healthcare, Human Services, and Trade and Industry, and incorporate common core requirements into the curriculum for courses within each career pathway.</p> <p>Some of the ambitious goals seemed not only unachievable, but unrealistic. 100% enrollment in a 4 year college is ambitious, but some students might choose a trade certification or technical degree if that is better suited to their personal goals and interests.</p> <p>The population-level goals were problematic without rationale, timeline, deliverables, or responsible parties.</p> <p>A technology support framework was incoherent, and described principals ready to provide technical support to community stakeholders among their various and important duties. Interoperability between technology device platforms in and among districts remains unclear along with students and parents being able to export their information within an open data format.</p> <p>A post-grant budget of three years was not made clear.</p> <p>The reviewer can appreciate the obstacles to achieving technology communication in an area with such high poverty, however, solutions such as WiFi Hotspots in faith-based buildings and community centers would have been more convincing with letters of support or implementation costs written into the budget. For the aforementioned issues and other discrepancies, the Absolute Priority 1 is not met.</p>		

Total	210	74
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Race to the Top - District Technical Review Form

Application #0234TX-3 for Monte Alto Independent School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	6
(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>This application represents a consortium of three rural school districts in a tri-county area of southern Texas. In the overview, the applicants provide a helpful description of each of the three districts, which, in total, serve 2, 266 students in grades K-12. The description paints a picture of three very poor economic regions, lacking jobs, many basic services, and</p>		

local governmental structures/services. The application does not state if the three districts are served by the same Regional Educational Services Center. Each district has one elementary school, and either one middle school and high school, or one 7-12 secondary campus. The populations of all three LEAs are predominantly Latino, with high rates of poverty, low median family incomes, and a combined percentage of 40% ELL students (ranging from 14.4% to 44.7%).

The vision statement for the consortium indicates that it wants to put in place a transformational model that will personalize learning, so that all elementary students perform at or above grade level by the end of grade five, and to promote a culture of high expectations at the secondary level. While the application does not directly address each of the (a) and (b) components of this question, it does describe its current and proposed work in each of the four core educational assurance areas, as defined in the RTTT notice.

Regarding standards, the LEAs are aligned with the TX state standards and state assessments. TX is not an RTTT state, and has not applied for an NCLB waiver, so it is still operating under current NCLB legislation. The LEAs will rely heavily on district-level curriculum teams to map curriculum design pathways, and oversee the development of personalized learning environments for students. Some descriptions of the proposed learning environment are found in this segment of the response, including learning targets for each student, student-centered curriculum, units of study, etc. Given that nearly one in two students are identified as ELL, the segment highlights the intent to build ELL strategies into all aspects of the professional development (and hiring) within this proposal. This segment also describes parent involvement, community engagement, student support, and counseling services as part of the larger plan.

Regarding data systems, the consortium will use Data Management for Assessment and Curriculum Solutions (DMAC) which was developed at the Region 7 Education Service Center (does not say if any of them are served by this ESC). The DMAC appears to provide many of the required standards for data services, including student performance and success data, and the provision of data for decision-making purposes. According to the application, the DMAC is integrated with state assessment results, allowing districts to track student progress, create academic interventions, and post assignments. The LEAs say they will use DMAC to measure depth of student performance based on learning targets, which will be an important benefit for them. In addition, the consortium will develop an individual student plan/student portfolio based on DMAC that follows the students.

Regarding effective educators, the consortium intends to use the TAP system developed by the Millken Foundation. One district is already a TAP participant, and the other two have agreed to join TAP as their performance-based teacher evaluation system. The districts will also make use of TAP standards as the basis for recruitment and hiring of new teaching staff, and TAP strategies as the basis for a consortium-level Professional Development Summer Institute. The application indicates that the TEA will be adopting a new state-level teacher evaluation system in 2014-15 and is now piloting TAP in several districts around the state. If TAP is incorporated into the TX system, these districts will benefit through their early adoption. The application cites TIF as incentive for retaining quality teaches. Although the application makes reference to the professional development that site administrators will receive through TAP, it does not describe an administrator evaluation system.

The application does not identify any specific schools as turn-arounds, but briefly describes how the proposal will benefit poor-performing schools. In a later section, the application does talk about the status of each of its schools within the TX accountability system, and all are poor-performing.

This section scores in the middle range, because the consortium does identify a common vision for its work together, but does not adequately describe components (b) and (c) in this section.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	8
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(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

All students and all schools in the three LEAs will be participants in the grant. The application does say that the consortium conducted a review of its practices before deciding to complete the application, but does not say why/ how these three districts banded together in the first place. All three districts say that they are fairly new (since 2008), and serve similar populations in similarly depressed communities, but it is difficult to determine if they had any prior partnerships with each other, with other service providers, or how far apart they are from each other in three separate counties.

The tables in A2 provide appropriate information about each of the districts, and the aggregate student population clearly meet the requirements of RTTT. The tables includes the number of participating students, students from low-income families, high-needs students, and participating educators.

This section scores in the high range, lacking only the information about how these LEAs chose each other in the first place to be a consortium.

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

This section requires the applicant to include a high-quality plan for how reform will be scaled-up, according to the definition in the notice. The components of a high-quality plan include key goals, activities, deliverables, responsible parties, and a timeline for implementation. The consortium does not provide such a plan in its brief response to the questions here.

The application does describe what some of the reform changes will be, such as transformation of instructional strategies, teacher professional development, and implementation of a new teacher evaluation system, but does not provide the other details required in a high-quality plan. For example, a thoughtful description is provided of the proposed individual learning plans/student portfolios, but gives no indication of what the deliverables will be along the way or what the timeline is for development and other steps.

This section scores in the low range, because it is incomplete in its response, and does not include a high-quality plan. No logic model is provided to explain why these changes will lead to the desired results.

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

10

5

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium has identified appropriate performance goals in each of the requested areas (a) through (d). Yet, it is surprising that none of the goals specifically target the movement of ELLs from entry into and through the reclassification process, or monitor their progress on the state's ELD test. As 40% of the students are ELL students, information about their performance as a result of ELD services is critical to knowing about/monitoring their performance in other content areas.

The performance goals in the academic areas measure proficiency on state tests in Reading and mathematics. For the most part, the targets appear to be ambitious and achievable. One exception is the desired increase of ELL students in K-2 Reading on the TPRI in Monte Alto. In the first year, ELL students are expected to jump from 22% proficient in the baseline year to 45% proficient in the first year of implementation. Similarly, in Lasara District, Special Education students are to jump from 10% in the baseline year to 50% in the first year of implementation on the same test. In Santa Maria ISD, overall students are expected to jump from 30% proficient in the baseline year to 70% proficient in the first year of implementation on the same test.

In the tables on decreasing the achievement gap, the LEAs have identified the state's highest performing sub-group (not clear if it is always non-LEP) as the comparison for its ELL, Special Education, economically-disadvantaged subgroups. It would also be appropriate to compare the district's Latino subgroup to the state's Latino subgroup, in order to gather information about its overall performance. It is difficult to determine if the reduction in the achievement gap will be due to increases in the LEA subgroups or because of a stagnation on the part of the comparison group. Santa Maria ISD used average scaled score differences instead of percent proficient, which will make comparisons among the three LEAs more difficult to interpret. There is no indication of what the scaled score differences are at this time, so it cannot be determined if the improvement in scaled scores is achievable.

The tables on graduation rates show that the rates are already high, but do not provide what the state graduation rate is, or what the state target is in this area. Tables on college-going rates appear to be ambitious, because of the goal stated in the narrative about 100% of students applying to a four-year college seems narrow in scope. The college enrollment rate also presumes a big jump in Monte Alto, moving from 16% in the baseline year to 40% in the first year of implementation, and 90% in the post-grant year. The goal may be eventually achievable, but not realistically so in the first year.

This section scores in the middle range, because the tables do not pay enough attention to the unique population characteristics of the student populations in these LEAs.

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	4

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

All three districts in the consortium have indicated that they are fairly new districts (since 2008), so all of their work has been conducted in the last five years. (Monte Alto later says it was established in 1927). Monte Alto cites its one year of implementation of TAP as the beginning of a successful reform effort. All three LEAs have class sizes of 20 students or fewer, although there are no data to confirm any direct benefits. The application cites a number of reform activities that are currently in place, such as use of the DMAC system, teacher incentives and bonuses, and use of extended time, but none of the activities show a clear record of success linked to student achievement in the last four years.

Each of the participant LEAs has identified some change in status of individual schools, such as Monte Alto HS moving from an Unacceptable campus to Met Standard. The application describes individual efforts in reform at low-performing schools, such as the initiation of a T-STEM Academy in Lasara ISD. Although promising, the application does not say when the Academy was initiated or what student results have been in the new system. Similarly, Santa Maria cites the use of Read 180, but without student results.

The application does not address the (c) component, but did describe earlier the opportunities for communicating with students, teachers, and parents about data through DMAC, but did not provide examples of how it has been used.

This section scores in the low range, due to lack of concrete examples and evidence showing a clear record of success in advancing learning in the three areas requested.

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

5

2

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The application states that every TX district publishes its school budget on the TEA website, containing the required components in this question. Annual audit results are also available on request, and other financial data are posted on the TEA website. The TEA assigns a financial accountability rating to each district, which is also publicly shared. Within the districts, individual and school budgets are shared with parents and others using district websites, parent advisory councils, and school board meetings

This section scores in the middle range. Although it appears that the requested data are shared publicly by the LEAs themselves and by the state, the description of specific information was very general. It could not be determined how public expenditures are subdivided. No examples were given, and no information was shared about providing the data in languages other than English.

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

10

3

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The application indicates that the TEA has provided a supportive educational environment for initiating reform, and cites state-level work in standards, assessments, and accountability systems. TEA has established a special office intended to coordinate leadership for school improvement efforts under both federal and state educational systems. In Diagram 1, the application provides a graphic representation of the TX Framework for Continuous District and School Improvement, and, in Tables 5 and 6, provides a useful correlation between the major outcomes and success factors of the TEA reform initiative and those of the RTTT-D initiative. Establishing personalized learning environments is not specifically called out by the TEA as a desired outcome.

However, the LEAs do not cite any examples or evidence of how they have used such support or demonstrated autonomy to make their own changes.

This section scores in the middle range. Although it states clearly what the state's support conditions are, it does not cite any evidence of how the LEAs have taken advantage of such conditions and shown autonomy.

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

15

4

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The application states that the three LEAs, parents, students, school administrators, and community partners worked together to formulate the vision for the application. Each district was represented on the grant development team, although the composition was not noted. Each LEA gave its teachers an opportunity to provide feedback and vote for their support.

It was not stated how any of their feedback was used to inform or revise the proposal. The application states that over 70% of teachers in all three LEAs voted for approval. TX is not a collective bargaining state.

No public forums or town meetings were identified as having occurred, and the application makes no mention of how the

proposal information was shared with parents and others who do not speak English. Given the difficulties in communication and technology cited by the application in the A section, approaches to parent communication and feedback would have needed special attention. The list of partners includes the parent advisory councils in all three LEAs, but no letters are included from them in the appendix.

Several letters of support are provided -- from county officials, area colleges and universities, and some community organizations. A letter was included from Region One ESC, but it does not say that it is the regional service center for the three LEAs, nor does it mention any specific support it will give. In fact, the application is silent on any partnership or support with ESCs, which is somewhat surprising.

The three LEAs are located in three separate towns in TX, but there was no evidence of communication/input from the mayors of any of those towns.

This section scores in the low range, due to lack of information about use of feedback by any groups and lack of information about communication efforts in Spanish.

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

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

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

This section requires the applicant to include a high-quality plan for improving learning and teaching by establishing personalized learning environments, according to the definition in the notice. The components of a high-quality plan include key goals, activities, deliverables, responsible parties, and a timeline for implementation. The consortium does not provide such a plan in its response to the questions here.

The narrative in this section describes a number of efforts that will be made in the area of teaching and learning, but does not address each of the (a) through (c) components directly.

The consortium intends to use the work of the TX College and Career Readiness Standards as the basis for the development of its personalized learning environments in a learner-centered model. Each student will have an academic plan/student portfolio which follows the student throughout schooling, and culminates in a career pathway at high school. Students will have a responsible role in determining the plan's goals and monitoring their own progress. Of some concern is the consortium's plan to track students into an advanced track or developmental track based on state test scores. This seems antithetical to providing opportunities for all students to engage in high-quality learning and receive appropriate supports. No mention is made of ELL status in determining placement in or exit from these tracks. Also of concern is the consortium's use of CSCAPE, a TEA curriculum support system, which is described as a set timetable for lessons -- which also appears to go against the grain of personalized learning and learning at different paces and in different modalities.

According to the application, academic progress will be monitored beginning in third grade. At sixth grade, students will develop their individual learning plans, with the help of guidance counselors. This segment states that ELL students will be monitored by the classroom teacher, ESL teacher, and reading interventionist. More information would have been helpful to be able to determine if the learning goals for ELLs include reclassification and equivalent content mastery.

A great deal of emphasis is placed on the role of the student academic plan/student portfolio as a monitoring device, data-sharing mechanism, and trigger for increased levels of student support. It appears to be a tool that teachers, parents, and students will use together to determine interests and goals, and progress being made toward those goals. The application does not state if any of the three LEAs currently use this tool, or have used it in the past with some success.

This section scores in the low range, since it does not provide a high-quality plan as required, and it appears to have some components (such as tracking and pacing) which are not in line with desired personalization. With 40% of the student population identified as ELLs, not enough was said about the major instructional initiatives necessary for this group to succeed.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	4
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

This section requires the applicant to include a high-quality plan for increasing the number of students who receive instruction from effective educators, according to the definition in the notice. The components of a high-quality plan include key goals, activities, deliverables, responsible parties, and a timeline for implementation. The consortium does not provide

such a plan in its brief response to the questions here.

The narrative in this section describes a number of efforts that will be made in the area of teaching and leading, but does not address each of the (a) through (d) components directly. The consortium is relying heavily on its TAP involvement to increase teacher engagement in the learning process, change instruction from teacher-centered to student-centered, and to provide the basis for professional development and teacher evaluation. An extensive description of the benefits of TAP is provided in the response to this section. Teachers of ELL students will be offered specialized training in the TEA English Language Learner Instructional Tool as a way address the needs of those students. But the application does not say what percent of teachers instructing ELL students have proper ELD credentials and does not outline a goal to ensure such proper training.

Teachers will be offered incentives and rewards through the Teacher Incentive Fund, a current federal grant program. The application appears to train teachers through TAP and keep them through TIF.

This section scores in the low range, as it does not directly address the components of Teaching and Leading, and does not include a high-quality plan, as required.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	3
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>This section requires the applicant to include a high-quality plan to support project implementation through policies and infrastructure, according to the definition in the notice. The components of a high-quality plan include key goals, activities, deliverables, responsible parties, and a timeline for implementation. The consortium does not provide such a plan in its brief response to the questions here.</p> <p>Although the application does provide helpful tables on the composition and functions of district-level teams, school level teams, and professional development, it does not directly address components (b), c), (d) and (e) of this section. The richness of the formula for personnel leads to a conclusion that the governance will be adequate, and possibly overlapping. The number of grant-funded positions noted here seems high, including a site coordinator for each LEA and 6 Learning Facilitators, 3 guidance counselors, 3 social workers, and 3 community liaisons. This concern arises again in the budget section. Without knowing the distance between the three LEAs, it is difficult to determine that such replication of staffing is necessary.</p> <p>This section scores in the low range, because four of the required components are not addressed in this section, and there is no high-quality plan provided.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	3
(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>This section requires the applicant to include a high-quality plan for supporting implementation through policies and infrastructure to provide technology support to educators, according to the definition in the notice. The components of a high-quality plan include key goals, activities, deliverables, responsible parties, and a timeline for implementation. The consortium does not provide such a plan in its brief response to the questions here.</p> <p>The response to this question does provide information about how access and technical support is provided to educators and parents through DMAC and PEIMS systems. The support for educators appears to be sufficient, but questions arise about sufficiency for parents. It cites special parent meetings for families of ELL and special education during the school year, so that parents can have access to information about their student's progress. It does not state if the information provided in the data systems is available in Spanish. In a setting of little technology and unreliable Internet access, the consortium does propose several supports to provide more access, although these technology supports are not found in the budget section narratives. Some of these, such as open labs and online AP/electives could be helpful in out-of-school access for students. It is not clear to what degree parents can make use of technology to export information about their student in an open data format and if that information is in Spanish.</p> <p>A general statement is made about interoperable data systems, but the statement does not indicate that human resources data, student data, budget data, and instructional improvement system data will all be available through this system.</p>		

This section scores in the low range, because the responses do not carry adequate information about the technology providing information in Spanish, and because there is no high-quality plan provided.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	2
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>This section requires the applicant to include a high-quality plan for implementing a continuous improvement process, according to the definition in the notice. The components of a high-quality plan include key goals, activities, deliverables, responsible parties, and a timeline for implementation. The consortium does not provide such a plan in its brief response to the questions here.</p> <p>The application does describe the importance of monitoring and continuous improvement, and recognizes that it will be a large effort, led by the grant-funded Project Director. However, the response is insufficient to suggest that the applicant has a clear and high-quality approach to continuous improvement. It does not address mid-course and post-grant corrections concerning the grant investments in professional development, technology, and staff. The application suggests that the main form of public communication will be through webpages, but does not state if the information will be in Spanish. It has already been noted in the application that few parents have access to the Internet in their homes or communities.</p> <p>This section scores in the low range, as it does not directly address the questions in this section and does not a high-quality plan, as required.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	1
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>This section requires the applicant to include a high-quality plan for ongoing communication and engagement with stakeholders, according to the definition in the notice. The components of a high-quality plan include key goals, activities, deliverables, responsible parties, and a timeline for implementation. The consortium does not provide such a plan in its brief response to the questions here.</p> <p>The application states that each LEA will have a webpage dedicated to the grant project, not saying if the webpage will also be available in Spanish. The response outlines two very general approaches to communication -- informing stakeholders through the DMAC system and engaging stakeholder feedback. Other vehicles include face-to-face sessions with the RTTT Community Advisory Group and parent advisory councils. None of the activities listed indicate that communication will be provided in Spanish. Given the brevity of information provided here and lack of information about Spanish access, the communication and engagement efforts proposed do not appear to be effective.</p> <p>This section scores in the low range due to the general nature of the response and the lack of a high-quality plan, as required.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	2
<p>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The tables on effective teacher and administrator indicate that in Monte Alto, all teachers and principals are already effective or highly effective. Monte Alto includes reading, mathematics, and physical fitness performance measures. The expectations for grades K through 8 appear to be ambitious yet achievable. Monte Alto identifies one of its performance measure for grades 9-12 students for college- and career-readiness as yearly attendance, which is not a strong academic indicator, per se. Other performance measures for this same outcome include ELA, math, and physical fitness results. The ELA and math targets appear to be appropriate, but one wonders about the use of the Healthy Fitness Zone Tests results for college readiness.</p> <p>In Lasara ISD, reading and mathematics form the basis of the academic performance measure, and targets appear to ambitious yet achievable. No measure is identified for college and career -readiness for students in grades 4-8, or for grades 9-12. The table lists what improvement will be year by year, but not on what measure.</p>		

In Santa Maria ISD, literacy skills (in fluency) and physical fitness are identified as the performance indicators in grades K-3. Although fluency is a desired outcome, it is not an ambitious target in its own right. Santa Maria identifies reading and math as measures for grades 4-8 students on track for college and career, and the targets seem to be both ambitious and achievable. For grades 9-12, no measure is identified for being on-track for college. The table lists what what improvement will be year by year, but not on what measure. For career readiness, performance measures include ELA, math, and physical fitness results. The ELA and math targets appear to be appropriate, but one wonders about the use of the Healthy Fitness Zone Tests results for college readiness.

At the end of the tables, the consortium provides a nice summary of its logic model, with regard to the performance measures in this section, approaching but not quite reaching full responses for (a) through (c). For example, the table identifies inputs, outputs, desired outcomes, and desired outcome indicators, but does not indicate how measures were selected or how the measures will be reviewed and possibly modified. It is surprising that no data are indicated from the state ELD test, nor for rates of redesignation, even in the row on specific subgroup interventions.

This section scores in the middle range, as not all of the LEAs have responded fully to the requirements.

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

5

1

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

This section requires the applicant to include a high-quality plan for the evaluation of the effectiveness of grant-funded activities, according to the definition in the notice. The components of a high-quality plan include key goals, activities, deliverables, responsible parties, and a timeline for implementation. The consortium does not provide such a plan in its brief response to the questions here.

The consortium will hire an evaluation firm for the evaluation and enumerates its responsibilities in this brief section. However, no high-quality plan is provided here.

This section scores in the low range.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The consortium is requesting \$9,999,031 in funds over the four-year period. The yearly amounts are unequal, ranging from \$2,352,118 in the second year to \$2,769,027 in the first year. No funds from other sources are identified in the budget, although earlier narratives made reference to nearly \$8 million in outside funds operating in Monte Alto.

The budget is excessive in hiring staff, naming three joint positions, and up to 17 district-level positions per LEA. Altogether, there are a total of 38 full-time positions being requested, to serve a student population of 2,266 students. The fringe benefit rate of 10% is consistently used and appears to be low for benefits including Social Security and retirement contributions, and health and life insurance.

Three budget summary projects are listed, one for each district. Grant funds requested range from \$2,528,503 for Lasara ISD to \$4,246,569 for Monte Also ISD. Each LEA has asked for 3 Learning facilitators, even though there are only 8 schools. Monte Alto is the only district asking for two full-time ELL positions (bilingual strategist and LEP strategist). It appears to be asking for two classroom teacher positions, which seems inappropriate out of grant funds instead of general district funds. In Lasara ISD, 8 full-time positions are requested, including 3 Learning facilitators (only two schools in district) and a Special Education teacher. No fees are listed in the contractual section for the LEA's partnership with TAP, although the fee structure is clearly identified in the MOU from NIES in the appendix. In Santa Maria, 11 full-time positions are requested, in addition to the shared positions. Both a career counselor and two college readiness facilitators are requested, which seems high. Again, no fees for a TAP partnership are included in the contractual portion. Overall, the budget does not seem to be reasonable since it so heavily weighted toward individual personnel for each LEA.

This section scores in the low range, due to excessive requests for full-time grant-funded personnel. There is no differentiation between one-time and recurring expenses during and after the grant period, and the narrative does not speak to sustainability without the large personnel inputs.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	2
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>This section requires the applicant to include a high-quality plan for sustainability of the project's goals after the term of the grant, according to the definition in the notice. The components of a high-quality plan include key goals, activities, deliverables, responsible parties, and a timeline for implementation. The consortium does not provide such a plan in its very brief response to the questions here. It is a minimal response.</p> <p>The narrative talks about current partnerships and a commitment to transitioning key personnel to operational funds, or by additional fundraising. There is no indication of support from state and local government leaders. No evaluation is provided of the effectiveness of past investments. No estimated budget for the three years following the grant is provided. There are no specifics on public or private sources of future funding.</p> <p>This section scores in the low range due to lack of information requested about support from others, evaluation of past investments, how the LEAs will evaluate improvements in productivity, and lack of high-quality plan for sustainability as required.</p>		

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	6
<p>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>In Table 13, the consortium identifies a number of current and proposed partnerships with universities, United Way, Head Start, and the Rio Grande Valley Council. The intent of the Competitive Priority section is listed as impacting social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes through directed partnerships with area institutions/organizations. Although not required in this section, a modified work plan is provided that describes how the grant project director will develop and administer a needs assessment survey to identify the most important aspects of partnerships. Table 14 provides an overview of current academic partnerships in the individual districts, such as AVID and GEAR UP.</p> <p>The application lists its performance measures for the Competitive Preference Priority, which include educational and family and community supports. Table 15 provides a clear summary of the performance measures selected, rationale for its selection, how the measure will provide useful information, and how the measure will be reviewed over time. For the most part, measures appear to be appropriate, although not the one using attendance as a measure for percentage of grades 9-12 students on track for college and career. The reviewer could not find the measures to be used for the family and community supports, such as a decrease in teen pregnancy, decrease in drug use, and increase in parental involvement.</p> <p>Not all components of the question were addressed. For example, there was no information given on building the capacity of staff (5) or scaling the initiatives over time(3), nor specific opportunities listed for families for whom English is not the first language (3).</p> <p>This scores in the middle range, because it does address components (1), (2), (4) and (6),</p>		

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Not Met
<p>Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Although this proposal represents a well-intentioned effort to build on the four core educational assurance areas in order to create some aspects of personalized learning environments, many section responses were general in nature and did not include required high-quality plans. It was difficult to determine what would really be a consortium-level set of services, except for the Summer Professional Development Institutes. For the most part, it appears that the three LEAs would work individually on the initiatives and then get together in the summer.</p> <p>It is difficult to describe the consortium's possible success in accelerating student achievement, increasing the effectiveness of educators, expanding access to effective educators, decreasing achievement gaps, etc due to the lack of high-quality plans throughout the application, and because of the weaknesses in the critical C section.</p>		

Three limitations of the proposal really stand out. (1) Even with a student population of 40% ELLs, the proposal seems to regard their academic and linguistic needs, and the communication needs of their parents, as more of a sidebar than a main feature. (2) The proposal is extremely top-heavy in hiring personnel for a student population of 2, 266. (3) The proposal does not appear to make use of available resources from the TEA Education Service Centers, whose function is to provide resources, especially to rural districts. The ESCs could also have served as a bridging function for the three LEAs involved.

These are clearly districts in great need, and they are to be commended for their candor in describing the economic and academic environments, and the extent of their needs. They should also be advised to be careful in instituting (or maintaining) separate academic tracks for high school students.

Total	210	66
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