



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0030GA-1 for Rockdale County Public Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

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

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

It is to a **great extent** that the RCPS applicant has set forth its vision in clear and understandable terms, building on the four educational assurances.

The **quality** evidence suggests that Rockdale County Public Schools (RCPS) has presented a vision that is clear with meaningful and manageable objectives: 1) ensuring educational equity; 2) accelerating student achievement by supporting each student's unique learning needs and individual interests; and 3) helping each student achieve his/her greatest potential through a wide variety of strategies, supports and resources that are appropriate to their interests, abilities and learning styles. The goals are **manageable** because they are stated in operational terms and the specific activities outlined clearly show how the stated objectives will be accomplished.

First, the proposal indicates building on its work in the four core educational assurance that were specifically asked for in the proposal. The activities proposed for building on the educational assurances are also in keeping with the project's goals and objectives. This is evidenced by **appropriate** documentation showing: a complete transformation of student's path; curriculum and schedules; creating equity for the diverse needs of the students; catering to the high needs of the minority-majority students served by the school system; developing and maintaining credible practices and polices; support systems and technologies in place that are needed to provide a student-centered personalized learning environment district-wide.

Second, RCPS seek to build on earlier strategic plans having a clear community focus and vision for public education that outlines the goals and resource allocations. Furthermore, RCPS is building on earlier successes as a recipient of a state Race to the Top award in 2010. Hence, RCPS was able to build momentum for innovation as well as reforms that are anchored on the four educational assurances.

Third, the proposal indicates an **achievable** plan to create a RIGOROUS system of teaching and learning that empowers students to DEFINE and ACHIEVE educational SUCCESS. This is **substantiated** by the clear achievable goals and outcomes outlined.

Fourth, evidence in the vision was what the varied classrooms experiences for students and teachers in a personalized learning environment would be. Anchoring the vision, were specific plans for: embracing and responding to the diversity of students and stakeholders; providing meaningful training for students to become owners of and leaders of their learning journey; coupled with the training hold students to **higher expectations**; and having a district-wide, student-centered and customized learning system that is designed to: engage, motivate and prepare students to be college and/or career ready.

Finally, based on the research-based success strategies advanced, the full score in the high range was achieved. RCPS provided a full, comprehensive and coherent reform vision based upon: **clear** goals provided for accelerating students' achievement while deepening their learning in a personalized

learning environment; **targeted** and **achievable** objectives, including evidence of how the work builds upon the four core educational assurance areas; and a **complete** description of appropriate classroom activities to be embarked upon were provided in the narrative.

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

10

8

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

It is to a **great extent** that the RCPS applicant has set forth its strong approach to implementation. In keeping with the comprehensive vision outlined in RCPS’s proposal, the applicant’s approach to implementation is a **focused** extension of the vision.

First, a needs assessment was completed that targeted relevant stakeholders (school districts, community and parents). From the needs assessment, the decision was made to implement a system-wide model. Therefore, it was the needs assessment that informed the applicant to include all schools across the district in the initiative. This action was necessary in order to get input at the outset from various stakeholders. Thus, the applicants did not try to “build it and they will come.” Rather, they implemented the “building it together approach.” This is a favorable model for any reform initiative to work—having buy-in from the get-go.

Missing from this description was any mention of how the needs assessment was administered. What were the specific procedures that were followed? For example, what was the response rate from each stake holding group? How were the families for whom English is a second language served? Did they participate in the needs assessment? Clarifying the specific procedures followed for obtaining response to the needs assessment would add validity to the results.

Second, a listing of 23 schools was provided comprising of: 11 elementary; 4 middle level; 3 high schools; 5 specialty schools (Math and Science magnet); 3 academies; and 1 Open campus.

Third, the total number of participating students who will be impacted by this initiative is listed as 15,932. All of these students also were identified as having high-needs. Of this total 10,624 or (66.68%) of these students served are from low-income families. There will be 890 participating educators who will serve students across the school district. This pupil-teacher ratio seems reasonable and workable in this school district.

Evidence provided for the high-needs classification indicates that the RCPS is a K-12 system that is 100% Title I eligible. Seventy percent of the students across the school system receives free and/or reduced lunch. In some schools this figure is as high as 92%. The number of students served with limited language proficiency is approximately 19% of the total population.

Noticeably missing from the narrative was evidence of the total number of students with exceptionalities to be served. Special needs students are an important subgroup needing a personalized learning environment, so they too can succeed to their fullest potential.

In sum, due the a limited response to how the needs assessment was administered/carried out as well as missing data regarding the number of students with exceptionalities to be served, this section of the application did not earn full points. However, the quality of the information provided, merits that it earned a high-range score.

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

10

10

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

It is to a **great extent** that the applicant has documented LEA-wide reform and change. **Convincing** documentation of the demographic shift from minority majority to a high-need school district was **evidenced**. As mentioned in the narrative, students did not meet the standards on the Math 1 End of Course Test and the new coordinate Algebra End-of-Course Test, because of the drastic

demographic shift as well as changing of the math standards three times in three years. The five-year data provided showed that students did not meet the standards for biology or physical science either. Yet, the students performed above the state's average.

It is well documented that RCPS is now "fully immersed in high rigor and strong academic standards and expectations as evidenced by its remarkable accomplishments in student achievement and closing gaps among subgroups." Whereas in 2002-2003 the reading achievement gap between all students and economically disadvantaged students was 5 points in 2011-2012 the gap was only 1 point. In addition, extensive evidence was provided detailing the closing of the achievement gap based on ethnicity in math and reading over a 12-year period.

A deliberate framework is now in place that incorporates a customizable learning path. This learning path posits students' needs at the forefront by: honoring each student as an individual learner and recognizing each student's unique learning style, interests, aspirations and challenges to learning. Together, placing the learner at the center is strongly supported by adult mentors inclusive of trained teachers, counselors and parents at RCPS.

Specifically, how the LEA reform and change will be implemented is outlined in RCPS's plan for a personalized learning environment that is student-centered. There is flexible, learning-anytime and anyplace for students. Student services in the form of tutoring, guidance, health, youth and family services are available to the students at all grade levels. Effective teacher services in the form of professional development, lesson planning and tool sharing also is made available for teachers and other staff members to utilize. Throughout the school year selected school services include implementation support, new school development, and school improvement strategies that extends to all. Furthermore, the behind-the-scenes services focusing on enrollment, finance, personnel, and facilities are embedded in this application system. The applicant demonstrated confidence in the high-quality plan proposed that the strategies and support systems envisioned can be accomplished.

Together, these types of support for students and teachers will help in the implementation of a personalized learning environment system that is robust, feasible and meaningful. With the above services, the district is poised for district-wide services that also are sustainable.

One of the cornerstones of the RCPS is "traditional educational barriers are not allowed to limit the opportunities available to our students."

With this mantra in mind, the applicant has set out to redefine the roles of the teachers. RCPS teachers are now seen as facilitators with the focus shifted to the students at the center of the learning platform. Curriculum changes are now project-based will real-to-life applications helping students to apply their knowledge in given situations. Furthermore, student-designed and student-driven learning paths are evidenced in the Map your Future Model (logic map) provided. Also, greater emphasis is being placed on mastery/competency-based progression and options for demonstrating learning/assessment versus only summative or high-stakes assessments. An analysis of the P-12 continuum of learning through personalized programs of study reveals that it is a catalyst that drives the curriculum and other changes in the district.

Overall, a **high-quality plan** describing how this proposal will effect LEA-wide reform and change was evidenced through: student-centered approaches that promote higher order and critical thinking skills; collaborative work with stakeholders; smart technologies in the hands of each student; implementing of full-service and integrated curriculum management system; providing STEAM programs; awarding high school credits based on demonstrated mastery; having a central data warehouse that provides the core interoperability with other relevant data systems and a detailed timeline for implementation of reform ideas such as school specialty and choice options as well as the Pathway to School Choice and Specialty. RCPS already have many feasible strategies in place. RTTT-D funding will serve to keep these strategies operational while implementing new initiatives that enhance student learning. Together, the **feasible** descriptions provided strong evidence that a high-quality plan is proposed. Having fully satisfied this criterion, a high-range score was earned.

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

10

8

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

It is to a **great extent** that the RCPS applicant has set forth an **achievable** plan outlining LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes earning a high-range score. The evidence provided by the applicant justifies this score. Guided by the applicant's ambitious and feasible vision, plus the ambitious yet achievable annual goals coupled with the outlined strategies for a personalized learning environment, the goals for improved student outcomes will be achieved. This achievement is not tied to any one sub-group but to all students served by RCPS.

First, student learning will be measured based on their performance on the Summative Assessment Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) as well as End-of-Course Test. Goals have been presented to improve the students' academic performance in the areas of reading, mathematics, and ELA. Approved targets and goals have been provided via Georgia's approved ESEA flexibility request.

Improvement in the percent of students meeting state standards on the CRCT by the school year 2017-2018 has been estimated to be: Grade 3 Reading: 6%; Grade 3 Math: 14%; Grade 8 Reading: 1%; Grade 8 Math: 17%; Hispanic students: 3% and students with disabilities: 11%.

These gains outlined for improvement are realistic as steady gains are outlined for each subgroup. The largest increase is in the area of 8th grade math. Therefore, this is where much of the resources need to be utilized in order to help these students meet the expectations of increasing their overall score in math.

Improvement in the percent of students, by sub-group meeting state standards on the Math 1 End-of-Course Test (EoC) CRCT by the school year 2016-2017 has been projected to be: Blacks: 26%; Whites: 18%; Hispanic students: 18% and students with disabilities: 23%.

These gains outlined for improvement are realistic as steady gains are outlined for each subgroup. The largest increase is in the area of students with disabilities. Therefore, this is where much of the resources need to be utilized in order to help these students meet the expectations of increasing their overall score in this subgroup.

Improvement in the percent of students, by sub-group meeting state standards on the Math 2 End-of-Course Test (EoC) CRCT by the school year 2016-2017 are projected to be: Blacks: 26%; Whites: 20%; Hispanic students: 10% and students with disabilities: 30%.

These gains outlined for improvement is realistic as steady gains are outlined for each subgroup. The largest increase is in the area of students with disabilities. Therefore, this is where much of the resources need to be utilized in order to help these students meet the expectations of increasing their overall score in this subgroup. Targeted interventions are needed in order to help students with disabilities make the types of progress needed to improve their scores.

Second, mention was made about decreasing achievement gaps in the proposal. However, the specific ways in which the gap would be reduced over time was NOT articulated. Whereas the point differences were identified based on the subgroups, no evidence was provided regarding specific and targeted strategies that would be used to close the gap. There was a vague mention of "a specific methodology for determining achievement gap, specified for each assessed grade in reading and language and in mathematics." This was **insufficient** to justify how the gap would be closed.

Third, graduation rates have been established at an ambitious yet achievable rate of 2% increase each year for each subgroup. This 2% increase in graduation rate is achievable because the plan shows the incremental steps that will be taken across the school system to effect changes in the graduation rates over time.

Fourth, RCPS has established a reasonable and achievable college enrollment estimate for each subgroup. Overall a 10% increase in college enrollment is projected by 2016-2017 school year. A

further 2% steady increase is projected after the initial grant period has ended. This 2% increase is **reasonable** and **achievable**, because it take time for any new initiative to effect changes in large school districts as RCSP.

Fifth, RCPS's has demonstrated a keen interest in tracking postsecondary attainment for their students. Therefore, plans are in place to invest in the National Student Clearinghouse StudentTracker database. This will allow the school district to receive comprehensive collegiate enrollment and degree data. Based on the high-needs status of RCPS, tracking post secondary attainment is of great importance. Now that the funding is being provided to impact student learning and **retention**, this data would provide valid evidences as to whether or not the personalized learning environment made an impact on students graduating and pursuing postsecondary education.

Overall, RCPS's **sound** vision is likely to result in improved student learning and performances as well as equity based on subgroups. As demonstrated in the narrative, strong evidence was provided for student proficiency on summative assessments, decreasing the achievement gaps, increasing graduation and college enrollment rates as well as post secondary degree attainment. The applicant's target are equal to the State's ESEA targets. In essence, ambitious targets were set that are attainable based on the research-based strategies outlined, the personnel and the program evaluation measures in place. One aspect that was missing was specific evidence regarding the concrete strategies to be used to close the achievement gap. Closing the achievement gap is easily said but more difficult to achieve. It is because of this missing explanation why full points were not earned, even though this criterion scored in the 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	14

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

It was to a great extent that a clear record of success in advancing student learning and achievement as well as increasing equity in learning and teaching over the past 4 years at RCPS. The applicant evidenced that currently, 100% of the 18 traditional schools in the district are title 1 eligible. Therefore, they are 100% low-performing schools bar none. In the evaluation that follows, no specific school will be named as being low performing. This is because 100% of the schools in RCSP were evidenced as low performing. Even though all schools were low performing, over the past 4 years with strong leadership, targeted strategies, consolidations and the development of Virtual High School a well as a Career Academy (Charter School), Rockdale has experienced a streamline of successes. The successes evidenced are in the following areas:

(a) Improved student learning outcomes:

Improved student learning outcomes were clearly communicated and substantiated in the proposal. The evidence from the narrative indicates that prior to 2010, RCPS was on the needs improvement list. Since the reform initiatives that have been implemented in the school district, the status has been changed because students have shown adequate yearly progress (AYP). Having all 100% of the schools identified as low performing, hence Title 1 eligible, successes are charted in grade-bands for clarity.

Specifically, there has been a positive increase in the performance of 8th graders on the CRT content area examinations. ELA proficiency rates have increased above 95% in grades 5-8. For Grades 3-8 math proficiency has increased above 80%--all within the last 4 years. Performance of students from different subgroups has increased narrowing the achievement gap. High school graduation rates continue to improve steadily. For example, In 2012-11 the graduation rate was 86% with the drop-out rate of 2.9%. Furthermore, the development of the Rockdale Career academy that serves 100% of the

high school students has contributed to student success. Students also had access to the Open Campus so they can get on track for graduation. Similarly, the Virtual High School also was a successful innovation providing students the opportunity to take "all high school courses" or utilize the blended pathways model. In this blended model, students can take courses traditionally in a face-to-face classroom as well as online. Together, the multiple strategies outlined have led to a pathway of success for the students in RCPS over the last 4 years. The learning outcomes outlined and strategies were all achievable, realistic and tangible. There were specific measures in place that led to improvement in student learning outcomes in the past. There is no doubt that RCPS district, having 100% low performing schools, will be able to build on the foundation that has been laid and continue to see positive increases in student learning outcomes with the personalized learning environment proposed.

(b) Achieve ambitious and significant reforms:

Since 2010, significant reforms have been achieved at RCPS. This is in keeping with the improved learning outcomes that has been seen at RCPS. There has been a continuous motion and strategic activities designed to "defy the norm of mediocrity" in RCPS. In formative years, 100% of the schools were assessed as being mediocre based on the fact that they were all on school improvement for many years. In essence, they were all low performing schools. With significant reforms, the mediocrity was replaced with growth in student achievement. Specifically the school district: adopted the Common Core State Standards and put in place assessments the help students to be college and/or career ready; installed a data system that measures student growth and success; recruited, rewarded and retained quality teacher and building principals; as well as turned around the 100% low-performing schools. These specific reforms resulted in RCPS's ability to break out of the mediocrity mold that led to great improvement in student learning outcomes.

Furthermore, structured instructional frameworks are in place that emphasizes data-driven instructional decision-making. These decision-making strategies have targeted interventions (aligned with RIT) and progress monitoring of the students progress. There is continuous assessments in place, intervention and safety nets, utilization of connection remediation/acceleration and enrichment interventions. In addition, there are standards-based assessment, grading, and reporting with **strong** emphasis placed on 21st Century work habits and skills. The adoption of the Common Core Standards implementation and reforms in teacher and leader evaluation systems also are strategies in place to help ensure continued student success. The 2 Teacher Evaluation Systems used in the school district are Teacher keys Effectiveness Systems (TKES) and Leader Keyes Effectiveness System (LKES). Both evaluation systems have strong emphasis placed on student achievement. As teacher quality is assessed, the indicators are correlated to student achievement. This leads to a high degree of accountability. These have been significant reform initiatives that have been put in place over the years to help students achieve at a greater level.

(c) Availability of student data:

RCPS has implemented a data warehousing system (Tetra Data and SchoolNet) to make data accessible to educators, parents, and students at anytime. The Cycle for Results approach can be utilized efficiently to respond to student learning needs. The most recent formative and summative student assessment data can be analyzed readily. Having the student data available to students, can serve as a motivating factor for students. In that, they can see how they performed formatively and summatively throughout a given semester rather than having to wait to the end to receive only summative feedback. This was one significant reform activity that has the potential to lead to greater student learning outcomes at RCPS for all schools. The data would be updated synchronously as they are entered into the system. The updates would be carried out by the technical support staff employed on the district. With these specific tasks outlined, it was evidenced that students data is accessible to the relevant stakeholders.

The **detailed** account provided for the record of success has been evidenced over the past 4 years in multiple, **tangible** ways that are **sustainable**. The evidence provided did not name school that were

low-performing because all 100% of the schools fill in that category. The strong evidence provided supported the criterion and justified how all the school had success in improving student achievement through revolutionary reforms adopted by the district. Missing from the narrative were clear charts and tables to show the contrasting data detailing the low-performance next to the improved performance. Because of the missing chart, this criterion did not earn the full score but earned a high-range score.

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

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

It is to a **great extent** that the RCPS applicant has set forth clear evidence indicating that RCPC has a high level of transparency in the LEA process and practices. This is evidenced by the fact that all school level expenditures for the school district inclusive of instructional support, pupil support, school and administration expenditures are made public and accessible to all on the website. Specifically,

(a) Actual personnel salaries for school-level instructional support:

The actual personnel salaries for school -level instruction are available on the RCPS website. Certified personnel salary is available on the TeachGorgia website as well as through the Governor’s office of Student Achievement website under Accountability. There is also access to salary by name on the Open Georgia (Transparency in Government) website. RCPS also participates in the annual Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection program to ensure access and equity for all students.

(b) Personal salary at the school level:

Actual personnel salaries at the school level for instructional staff can be found on the TeachGeorgia website through the Georgia Department of Education, as well as through the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement website under Accountability.

(c) Actual personnel salaries at the school level for teachers:

Actual personnel salaries at the school level for teachers can be found on the TeachGeorgia website through the Georgia Department of Education, as well as through the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement website under Accountability. Anyone interested in this information can find it readily on the Internet.

(d) Actual non-personnel expenditures at the school level:

The Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts maintains the LEA’s audits which contain specific information on personnel expenditures at the school level – linked on the website. Additionally, both school-level and district budgets are available upon request or via link on the RCPS website.

In sum, the full evidence has been provided showing transparency of the processes and practices at RCPS including all salaries for teachers and supporting staff being accessible on various websites. This method is commonly used by many school districts to accomplish this purpose of transparency. Having the community, families and other interested entities all having access to this public data bodes well for RCPS. This information is readily accessible to anyone interested in this information. Due to this **full disclosure**, all points were earned for this criterion.

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

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

It is to a **great extent** that the RCPS applicant has set forth its overall high quality response in this section of the narrative. Each school in the district has demonstrated evidence of successful conditions and sufficient autonomy under state, legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements to implement the personalized learning environments clearly outlined and substantiated in the applicant’s proposal. This is evidenced by the autonomy that the school district has in making decisions such as

modifying the school attendance zones. The state of Georgia provided guidelines for schools to follow as it relates to areas such as graduation rate. RCPS has followed these graduation guidelines. However, due to the autonomy of RCPS, they have adopted boundary-free school districts (making it easier for students to move between school districts); proficiency and locally designed courses (that better matches the needs of the clientele); virtual and on-line learning (to accommodate learners who are geographically bound); as well as alternative and extended learning opportunities to provide (greater access to more students).

The strategic creation of a partnership with the state Department of Education to implement RCPS Choices for personalized learning environment has provided the needed access for a wider range of learners in the state. The personalized learning environment customizes programs of study for each student and allows for equitable school choice. It is fitted with a robust system of student advisement, more service learning, internship and capstone opportunities in the communities and allows for greater engagement between the local colleges, universities and RCPS. This partnership allows for core content courses to be offered on high school campuses daily as well as in Early College and AVID programs that support and promote the pursuit of college and/or career readiness. In fact, these strategies outlined in the proposal allow for more of the high-needs students served at RCPS to have a greater chance of succeeding in school. Furthermore, this success will open the way for more of these students to graduate college and/or career ready and eventually pursue post-secondary education.

In essence, the state is onboard with RCPS's initiative. Many of the programs are already on place as provided in the evidence above and successes outlined. Hence, the applicants have demonstrated that partnership already exists with the state to improve student learning. Partnering with the state leads to more autonomy because RCPS and the state has a mutually beneficial relationship. In that, the state department is confident knowing that the decisions made at RCPS will be placing the students needs at the forefront. Hence, they have the autonomy to pursue reforms that the state will approve all because of the strong partnership. It is to a high degree that the applicant has demonstrated successful partnership with the State of Georgia currently and in the past. This sets the stage for future partnerships. Based on the clear evidence provided, that addressed the context for implementation, full points were earned.

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

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

It is to a **great extent** that the RCPS applicant has set forth clear evidence of consistent and meaningful stakeholder engagement from the outset of the development of this proposal. Such documented evidence documentation is as follows:

First, the applicant provided a robust description of how the strategic plan was developed through a process that engaged a variety of internal and external stakeholders. A renewal team served as the steering committee and included school district teachers and administrators, classified staff, parents, students, board members, business partners, faith-based community members, and other community partners. Extensive research was conducted as specific goals and action steps were developed. At various stages of the process the superintendent and his team of cabinet members reviewed all the plans. Specific qualitative feedback was provided to individual action teams and revisions were made so that all voices would be represented. This strategy was the epicenter of collaborative efforts between the community and the school district. Hence, a recipe for student success was developed. As a LEA without collective bargaining representation, letters of support received indicated that a minimum of 70% of the teachers were in favor of the proposed initiatives. After all, teacher signatures also were evidenced and documented in the APPENDIX of the proposal. Rockdale County High school sent in a letter of support with signatures of many teachers. There were signatures of many other school leaders and coordinators--many of whom teach. However, it was not abundantly clear that all the coordinators who signed the letters also were in a teaching role.

Second, letters of support were received from a large number of stakeholders. These letters were meaningful showing the solidarity with wanting to be part of the proposed initiative. Letters were not just written for the sake of adding to the numbers. Rather, the content of the letters of support were meaningful and substantive. Letters were obtained from public and private sector groups including all schools in the district. More than 70% of the teachers supported the initiative as evidenced by the signatures on school letters received. These stakeholders saw the need for improved student learning in the district. Hence, they got on board to support the efforts of providing a high-quality personalized learning environment that would cause an improvement in student learning. They know that improved student learning will lead to an improved work force that eventually will have a positive impact on the society and economy at large.

In sum, this criterion was well support by **strong** evidence indicating that a wide variety of stakeholders participated in and supported this initiative. The major stake holding groups included Rockdale County schools, educators, senators, parents, business community members, advocacy groups, faith-based organizations and institutions of higher education. This cross-section of support across many organizations were crucial in supporting the RCPS initiatives. With this strong support from multiple stakeholders, this criterion earned full points.

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

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

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

It is to a **great extent** that the RCPS applicant has provided robust details indicating this is a high-quality plan for improving learning and teaching by personalizing the learning environment. In this regard, all students will be provided with the support needed to become college and career ready. The approach to learning that is the focus of is application is student-centered. Specifically, the applicant justified this high-quality plan because RCPS has accomplished many successes in the past. Success generally breeds success. Therefore there is no doubt that RCPS has laid out a plan for success. Earlier accomplishments include: building of a system that help students envision their post-secondary futures from the first day of kindergarten; providing appropriate learning goals at all levels; helping students to track and manage their own progress, with input from teachers and parents; having incorporated personalized learning plans and multiple opportunities for students to work at their own pace, seeking extra help or acceleration as needed; providing accommodations and high-quality strategies for high-need students through differentiated and individualized learning activities and opportunities; recognizing the importance of allowing students to build core skills and competencies by pursuing academic topics of high interest; as well as 21st century skills being seen as equally valuable to college/career readiness as academic content mastery; creating a balance between formative and summative assessments so students can demonstrate mastery; and implementing technology investments that allow RCPS to extend learning far beyond the traditional school day.

Together, these specific strategies evidenced are designed to have a personalized learning environment that is responsive to and aligned with the needs of each student served by RCPS. Together, they proved this application is a high-quality. They are measurable, feasible, and complete. With student student learning at the center of the decisions being made, this high-quality plan supports the vision, goals and objectives to develop and implement an effective district-wide personalized learning environment.

There is additional evidence for strengthening learning indicating collaborative partnerships, clear

goal, deliverables and individuals responsible for goal attainment. From the outset, parents as stakeholders were part of the decision making group for The Choices for Personalized Learning Model (CPLM) selected by RCPS. The CPLM includes parents being an active part of the child's learning journey. This action of parents help to build student capacity for learning. With the comprehensive advising system students have the ability to explore career interests much earlier when compared to traditional models.

First, students are trained to understand they are key in their own learning and success in order to accomplish their goals. In fact, "the expectation for college and/or career is set from the first day of kindergarten." In other words, students are made aware of the strategies that will be used in their classrooms upon which they will scaffold their learning as they move through the school system.

Second, the technology systems in place help students identify and pursue learning and developmental goals linked to college and/or career readiness as well as graduation requirements. For example, the evidence points to the middle school level, where students are linked to the comprehensive advising system. At the high school level they advance to the Preparation for Real-Life Experiences and Post Secondary Opportunities through Advisement, Relationships, and Education (PREPARE). These early interventions can serve as motivating students to stay in school.

Advisement creates the conditions for improving student achievement and behavior and enriches the lives of students and teachers through the personalization of the learning experience. In addition, RCPS implements the requirements set forth by the Building Resourceful Individuals to Develop Georgia's Economy (BRIDGE), designed to create an atmosphere that motivates middle and high school students to learn so that they see the relevance of education to their dreams and future plans. Dual enrollment also allows the students to see the link between their current education and higher education.

Third, students have learning opportunities that allow them to be engaged in deep learning experiences in areas of academic interest. Evidence was found providing RCPS students with opportunities for students to understand how to structure their learning to achieve their goals and measure their progress. This is because, when students are an integral part of planning their learning strategies, there is greater buy-in and higher expectations set for them to own their learning. Initiatives that have been in place to support student buy-in are: (1) annual student-led conferences (conferences include the parents, student and staff advisor; (2) having informational meetings providing information during district Parent Academies College, Careers and more Night, and College Goal Sunday during which students and parents can learn about the college application process, financial aid, meet with college admissions officers, and fill out the FAFS; (3) conducting parent university and special college and career night; (4) developing of a college and career readiness website with links to resources for parents and students; (5) providing elementary students with the option of pursuing interests in STEM areas, International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program, and AVID from an early date and (6) giving middle school students the option of pursuing environmental science interests, and high school students have the option to pursue STEM, AVID, and Microsoft Information Technology interests; and (6) offering course work both onsite and offsite, including classes outside of the normal school day via Rockdale Open Campus and Rockdale Virtual Campus.

Together, these programs help students to develop autonomy as well as think critically and divergently at an early age in their educational journey. These strategies are supported by research studies whereby the student is very involved in the educational procedures and practices that impact his/her learning.

Fourth, in a diverse setting the students of RCPS are provided opportunities to actively explore, inquire, discover, and experiment. Furthermore, students are challenged to reason, question, draw connections, communicate, evaluate viewpoints, frame problems, acquire and use evidence, create new knowledge, understandings as well as construct relationships between products individually and in groups. **Cooperative learning and peer teaching situations exist so that diverse students can**

talk together freely as well as question and debate with each other about ideas. These exchanges enrich, extend, and solidify understandings as well as continually expose students to different perspectives. This kind of learning fosters thinking things out deeply and strategically. The school district is made up of 61% blacks, 20% whites, 12% Hispanics and 8% others including American Indian, Asian and Hawaiians. Hence, students are assimilated in a naturally diverse environment.

Fifth, mastery of critical thinking skills come about based on the diverse experiences the students are constantly exposed to. RCPS continues to provide sustainable training for RCPS staff that vertically and horizontally integrates diverse teacher and administrator teams aligned to individual strengths, leadership abilities, and interests. For teaching and learning: students form authentic and caring relationships with each other using curriculum that honors each student's culture and life experiences; teachers shift instructional strategies to meet the diverse learning needs of students; teachers also communicate respect for each student's intelligence; hold consistent and high expectations for all learners; and the school district provides ongoing cultural competency mentoring and support programs for ALL employees. The integration of and the constant melding of these opportunities in the students' education journey demonstrates that RCPS is helping students master critical academic skills in a diverse learning environment.

(b)(i) **Extensive** evidence was provided indicating ACCESS to a personalized sequence of instructional content and skill development designed to enable the student to achieve his or her individual learning goals and ensure students can graduate on time with college and/or career readiness skills. **Access** is key for students to interact with the content and others on their learning journey. Therefore, RCPS students have access to a number of specialty schools. These specialty schools provide the core focus of programs have provided students with a wealth of knowledge of how to effectively operate personalized choice options. In addition, elementary students have the option to pursue interests in the STEM field—students can be oriented from very early in their educational journey. There is smart technology in the hands of every student, along with the thoughtfully planned training and support that surrounds them. Students having access to the technology becomes a tremendous catalyst in the promotion of critical and higher-level thinking skills. In essence, this provides a challenging, project-driven curriculum focus facilitating a technology infused learning environment. All classrooms in RCPS are 21st Century classrooms. RCPS is now a boundary-free school district—allowing students to move between districts more freely.

At the high school access to introductory college courses in grades 9 and 10—positions the students to be equipped to attend college. Work based learning opportunities, for example, internships and service learning opportunities are available as the school district work in tandem with community stakeholders. There are strong partnerships with local colleges and universities help to enhance core content courses offered. This is coupled with multi-dimensional and multi-modal curriculum options—seeking to ensure that learning can be personalized by reading levels. Finally, the RCPS serves over 1,800 students providing several pathways to industry certification. These certification would not have been available if RCPS did not have the foresight, autonomy and ability to update student data focusing on the needs of the students served in the district.

Updated student data:

Credible argument with **strong** supporting evidence was put forth in the RCPS proposal addressing frequently updated student data. The technology infrastructure in place allows for the constant collection of and analyzing of student data. This is in keeping with the state's CCRPI holistic approach to measuring student achievement and growth in every school district. Student progress is charted and flags are generated when students are performing below expectations. For example the "Cycle of results" instructional model referenced in B (1) (b) clearly explains the instructional model that grounds the systematic data-analysis approach that relies on frequent formative assessments that eventually results in targeted interventions and progress monitoring. A proven data warehouse/staff portal also is available to prepare students to be college/career ready. A thorough explanation was provided highlighting the interoperability and completeness of student profile that includes "students

assessment history, grades, learning profile, intervention programs, family information, and teacher notes. The longitudinal capability of the data helps to provide longevity and continuity. One limitation to this system is that the data would be incomplete for students who transfer from a district outside of RCPS.

Coupled with access and constant updatable information is accommodating these high-need students so they can keep on track to be college and/or career ready. This is evidenced by **access** to College and Career Readiness Coordinator. All activities are coordinated with the school counselors and teachers so that developmentally appropriate lessons can be generated. These professionals also receive needed professional development so their teaching strategies and learning activities can remain **relevant** to needs the needs of the students served.

C1(b) (ii)—A variety of high-quality instructional approaches and environments

It is to a **great extent** that **strong** relevant description of high-quality instructional approaches and environments were thoroughly discussed in the application. The description pointed to: collaborative teaching strategies being employed in the school district; a focus on emotional intelligence, taking into consideration the whole child; teaching of attention, memory and process skills so more students can focus on being prepared to becoming critical thinkers; the provision of proficiency based teaching that is aligned with mastery versus seat time; and the development of a more rigorous and unique learning environment facilitated by teachers who were trained in effective research-based strategies that are student-centered, goal-oriented, **measurable** and having reasonable timelines. Students are well aware of what they are supposed to be learning and doing

(C) (1) (b) (iii)—High-quality content including digital learning

There is **convincing** evidence provided that outlined high-quality content inclusive of appropriate digital learning content. In fact, as part of the personalized learning environment, each student is equipped with digital technologies. One of the flagship markers of RCPS is its award winning technologically innovative learning community. This innovation, provides a challenging, project-driven curriculum in a technology infused learning environment. In this environment the curriculum being student-centered intersects with strategies to improve student engagement. There is **strong** evidence of having a Virtual High School in place; providing on-line teaching and learning experiences; expanding the virtual tutoring program; using appropriate technology devices for educational purposes, digital textbook resources; using social media appropriately to motivate and encourage learning; attending and/or conducting relevant webinars; and providing relevant technology resources to students, teachers and parents.

With all the details furnished, addressing each sub group of this criterion, the applicant has fully satisfied this criterion. In fact, RCPS has provided a **strong** justification of how and why students learning would be impacted positively based on the high-quality education plan outlined in this proposal.

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

20

19

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

It is to a **great extent** that the RCPS applicant has set forth its overall high quality response to this criterion. Thus, earning a score in the high range. The response is of a high quality because, quality time and extensive research were carried out to address this criterion. The argument is **convincing** that the applicant has a great command and **thorough** understanding of what it takes to support effective teaching and leading. A **comprehensive** and **detailed** plan has been laid out for improving learning and teaching by personalizing the learning environment in order to provide all students the support needed for them to graduate college and/or career ready.

The multiple approaches that are set forth at RCPS are **doable** because they have selected proven

research-based strategies that work. These strategies are in keeping with the outlined ambitious yet achievable goals guiding this initiative. Additionally, there are realistic timelines for goal accomplishment. The measurable outcomes are aligned with project goals and the responsible parties are identified throughout the proposal. In the section that follows specific description of some of the effective strategies are documented as supporting evidence.

First, engaging educators in training so that each student's needs will be met to ensure college and/or career readiness. Educators are **engage** because there is an abundance of targeted and ongoing professional communities in place for educators to be part of an **active learning community**. Teachers are expected to perform at the highest level and their performance is linked with student-centered learning models. In addition, the teacher evaluation system also links teacher performance to student learning. This helps to hold teachers accountable for student learning. No more can teachers simply divorce themselves for student learning and blame students and their parents for not performing. Built in to the schools' calendar are 5 days dedicated to PD for all teachers and administrator each year. This is complemented by weekly PLC meetings and monthly faculty meetings all having PD embedded in them. Other flexible options include virtual professional development inclusive of self-paced online courses available for anyone who may have to miss a face-to-face session for one reason or another. Teachers continue to be vigilant and improve their effectiveness by utilizing the Teacher Assessment and Performance Standards (TAPS) geared at helping them measure mastery of content. Finally, teachers continue their preparation in becoming Instructional Technology Coaches (ITC) if they so choose, in order to help students and other educators with technical problems that may arise.

Second, adapting content and instruction to facilitate student engagement. In **adapting** content and instruction to facilitate student **engagement** there is job-embedded and **sustainable** professional development and training that utilizes digital learning resources. In this digital age, students respond to anything digital. Therefore, RCPS teachers are seeking to meet students where they are in this digital era. Furthermore, adoption of the curriculum to be reflective of the Common Core State Standards is an effective way of getting students engaged. In fact, when these students leave the school district--if they so choose, then they will not be left behind when they join another school district. In that, Common Core State Standards were designed to bring some degree of uniformity to the curriculum within and across states.

Third, frequently measuring student success leads to further success. This is because early intervention is a hallmark of frequent measurement. Students are able to get formative feedback earlier so that targeted changes can be made for them to improve their learning if needs be. RCPS has employed the proficiency-based model of learning whereby students have to demonstrate **mastery** of content. In support of such mastery, classroom assessments are designed that fully reflects the appropriate level of rigor required by CCSS. As teachers measure student success frequently, they analyze student work on an ongoing basis. Teachers learn how to analyze the data through the professional development activities they are engaged in.

Fourth, improving teacher and principal practice and effectively using positive feedback loop. Student success hinges on many factors. One such factor is effective teacher and principal practice. At RCPS, improving teacher and principal practice is an effective mechanism that has been **targeted** and has led to success. Using the state wide Teacher Key Evaluation System (TKES) is a viable means of accountability at the state level. This evaluation system seeks to provide valid and reliable data regarding teacher effectiveness and performance. Another way of improving this effectiveness is through the recruiting and retaining of highly trained faculty. This is because the quality of the faculty in a school district impacts the quality of the work students produce. Finally, there is **strong** support for new teachers when they join the school district. With the professional development dates in place,

new teachers are **expected** to participate in order to better assist their students. The applicant has furnished a high-quality plan pulling it together in a unique way whereby there are: realistic, ambitious yet achievable goals; measurable student learning outcomes; detailed timeline that are practical and in keeping with project goals for accomplishment; as well as having the trained personnel in place to effect implementation. The detailed cyclical timeline for accomplishment clearly shows the training schedule for teachers that are effective. In other words, they make a lot of sense supporting the bigger scheme of the project.

In sum, **sufficient** evidence was provided in the application addressing teaching and leading. The approach to teaching and leading clearly shows how the strategies in place will help educators improve instruction and increase their capacity to support student progress toward meeting college and/or career standards. Together, the training for educators, access to data and other resources, training for school leaders and school leadership teams presents a comprehensive picture of goal attainment, measurable outcomes, **realistic** timelines and responsible personnel for implementing a personalized learning environment at RCPS. The high caliber of evidence has justified a high-range score for this criterion.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

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

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

It is to a **great** extent that the applicant has **clearly** outlined the policies and practices in place that facilitate personalized learning. Hence, a score in the high range was earned.

(a) Organization:

A **credible** description was provided regarding the scope and structure of the RCPS. This is because from the narrative, a **strong** focus on teaching and learning was evident. Throughout the narrative, the personalized learning environment was focused on students. Hence, a “lean central office” is maintained so that the resources can truly be placed in the area it is most needed—teaching and learning. Each role of the central office staff is **clearly** outlined and a **concise** explanation of the job done provided. In addition, it was proven that the Central Office, staff members are in keeping with the mission of RCPS. Each section of the Central Office is fully aware of what is important—that of placing students at the center of the teaching and learning environment. Therefore, there is a reduction in the duplication of services and resource allocation. Considering how government resources are and can be misappropriated, it is welcoming to see the fiscal prudence of RCPS as they strive to serve the high-need students in the district.

(b) Provide school leadership teams with resources:

Based on the past opportunities, RCPS has been labeled as a strong school district with visionary principals and school officials. This reputation was earned over the years prior to the initial success of obtaining the 2010 RTTT-D grant. RCPS demonstrates strong leadership support by building a strong leadership team; having school leaders play an active leadership role in the wider community; recruiting new workers through a centralized process; having budget development and resource allocation that are centralized; finally, RCPS celebrates the formation of grass root initiatives such as "grow your own leaders."

As written in the narrative that supports RCPS’s provision of leadership teams with resources one sees there is a **strong** degree of **cohesiveness** across the district with regards to strong leadership. Also, resource is allocated from a centralized point, yet each unit in the school district has a degree of

autonomy that supports success.

(c) Opportunity to progress:

In keeping with the goal of the RCPS to have a Personalized Learning System of Education, a key component of what is proposed is that of mastery or competency-based progressions for each student to work at his/her pace. This is an **authentic** approach to teaching and learning because in this bid all the sub-groups and having variability of learning styles will be facilitated. The Cycle of Results that is implemented is used to facilitate this personalization. Added documentation in Appendix P—suggests that RCPS is “the only school district in Georgia, that utilizes standards-based mastery grading and reporting at all grade levels.” In addition, student portfolios are utilized that demonstrate content mastery that would not be shown by simply giving of a standardized test. In addition, changing from the simple seat-time requirement for graduation requirement in exchange for mastery of the content by students bodes well for RCPS students' learning outcomes.

(d) Opportunity to demonstrate mastery:

The option for re-teaching is not utilized in many school districts across the USA. However, RCSP allows for the re-teaching of content so that student learning can be impacted. Based on the data driven system, caseloads are in constant revision to identify the student who have not mastered the standard. Specifically, to ensure students are mastering the standards, test items are always aligned with standards. This leads to having valid and reliable tests. Staff members develop appropriate interventions that are case specific. "One size does not fit all" in the RCPS district. Hence, the personalized learning environment is interoperable and accessible. Teachers provide students with opportunities for reassessment is available—leads to having accurate data. There is widespread ownership of the level of mastery for each student because the system tracks each student's progress over-time. Each time an assessment is given, the students' progress is updated due to the districts integrated portal monitor. Finally, regular education teachers receive training in Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), in order to meet the needs of English Language learners. After all, these students have to demonstrate mastery of the content like all other students.

(e) Learning resources:

The resources provided are accessible and adaptable to meet the express needs of each student. It was **explicitly** documented that students with disabilities as well as students for whom English is a second language were included. Interesting to note, is the fact that the IEP's are standard based. This complements the standard-based grading and reporting structure that is in place for all students. Hence, no subgroup is being “left behind.” Having an alternative assessment for students who are cognitively challenged also speaks to the high regard the applicants do have for all subgroups. **Appropriate** assistive technology also is provided. Students with disabilities do have access to the regular technology with appropriate adaptability features. They have access to iPads, laptops, voice recognition programs and others that specifically meets the individual needs of the learner.

In sum, evidence was provided in this high-quality plan indicating that together all the teachers work to help every child in the RCPS succeed. By extension, provision is made for students with disabilities to be in the least restricted environment. In physical education adaptive PE is done so all students can participate and benefit from the needed physical activities. Strong **focus** is now being placed on high school students with disabilities for them to be prepared for transition into college and career readiness. To satisfy this criterion of the proposal, the applicant provided valid and reliable evidence that fully supported the high-quality plan proposed for project implementation. Therefore, there are realistic timelines in place for goal attainment; the deliverables are realistic; responsible partners are in place to effect the necessary changes; and the goals guiding the plan are ambitious yet achievable. The documentation shows comprehensive policies and infrastructure in place that provide every student and educator the support and resources needed. This documentation **validated** the perfect score for this criterion.

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

10

10

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

It is to the **fullest extent** that the applicant has provided a **high-quality** plan focusing on LEA and school infrastructure. Hence, this criterion is rated in the high range. The rationale for such high range score is as follows:

First, the evidence shows there is access for all. With the view of reaching all students the RCPS, the applicant showed **documentation** that all is being done to provide students with access to resources in the high-needs district served. For example, evidence has shown: (1) digital resources are in place that are compatible with the personalized learning environment model; (2) 21st century classrooms throughout the school district—equipped with the necessary technologies (digital interface, projector, student response system and interactive White Board); (3) each school had computer labs providing access for student to receive group instruction in the area of technology; (4) classrooms have 4-5 computers with Internet access for class work; (5) capacity building with regards to the network's bandwidth for more students to be connected simultaneously; (6) there is full-service curriculum management software system that automates the lesson planning system in place. This facilitates a process whereby teachers can look at the standards at different grade levels when planning lessons. This also is integrated with: the district's assessment system; response-to intervention features; as well as the parent communication portal.

Therefore, RCPS has a **high-quality plan** in place that matches the resources, training and student learning outcomes in one interoperable system. This seamless integration will in the long provide accountability and reduce duplication of resources.

A **signature** interactive program offered through the Virtual High School is the "Ask the Expert program." This program offers much access to students and parents who have questions about the content. A fascinating aspect of "Ask the Expert" is the fact that the session is recorded as a podcast that is stored in the on-line reference library with searchable features. In this way, other students can search the database and find answer to a similar question they may have. Again, this podcast is downloadable to students MP3 players and /or their smartphone. This goes further to support the notion of reaching the students anytime, anyplace.

Practical and **innovative** ways to expand Internet access to families are being explored through partnering with non-profit organizations to create public computer labs as well as open labs. So far, 35% of the families are still not reached as yet. Working closely with these families, it was found that a large percent do have smart phones. Therefore, the focus now has been on reaching these families through the devices they already have. Free downtime hotspots have been created in one of the communities in an attempt to bridge the gap with regards to access. Students are provided with a map of these hot spots for easy access. Partnering with the One Economy Corporation is yet another practical way for families to have free or reduced Internet access. After all, the RCPS has over 70% students who qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Second, there is an appropriate level of technical support. Throughout the application, **evidence** has been provided that indicates and ensures that students, parents and educators and other stakeholders have appropriate levels of technical support provided through a range of strategies, including.

Peer support: In this section, **sparse** evidence was provided regarding peer support whereby students would help each other. This is implied as "the students work in cooperative learning groups to solve problems." However, with the intense focus on the personalized system, little emphasis was placed on peer support. This is an area that is lacking in the proposal. However, this does not merit losing of points, because it did not detract from the high-quality plan presented.

On-line support: There is a plethora of **evidence** indicating strong, coordinated, and intentional on-line support for students, parents and educators. Students and teachers have access to the Instructional Technology Coach (ITC) who "focuses on the effective use and pedagogical approaches to utilizing technology during instruction. There is a staffed help desk; a signature interactive program offered

through the virtual high school is the “Ask the Expert Program.” This program offers much access to students and parents who have questions about the content. A fascinating aspect of “Ask the Expert” is the fact that the session is recorded as a podcast that is stored in the on-line reference library with searchable features.

Local Support: Stakeholders can access online support and modules for self-guided learning on the system portal. Rockdale Career Academy provided students with the training to offer technical support to those needing such. For example, in partnership with CISCO network support as well as computer services and support, “students from both programs do work as interns throughout the school district and community.” This demonstrates just how much support is provided by the community who are stakeholders in the school district.

Third, the use of information technology systems for open data access was demonstrated. Collecting data and not allowing stakeholders to have access to such does not work well for any system. Hence, the RCPS application demonstrated visioning in providing open access data. This is evidenced based on the documentation of RCPS having a new parent portal (accessible through a password) that is completely integrated into the districts new student information system in place. These systems are further integrated with the curriculum management, response-to-intervention and the grading software program. In terms of accessibility this is not just for parents to be able to look at their students data. There is **evidence** that parents can actually “set alert triggers” that causes the software to notify them by e-mail when a student’s grade falls. This is an important feature that parents will appreciate as they feel like they are part of their child’s educational journey.

Fourth, ensuring interoperable data systems that function at the highest level was evidenced in the application. As part of the earlier successes that RCPS has built on, clearly indicated in the application is the fact that funds from the 2010 RTTT-D allowed them to design and build a state of the art comprehensive and interoperable data system. This system has human resource and student information data as evidenced by the student and teacher data that it houses. Students can be tracked based on grade level, subject matter, standards as well as teacher. Budget data also is part of this comprehensive system, whereby, the amount each school district appropriates for each child is part of the data management system. For instructional improvement, this robust data tracking system allows administrators to conduct longitudinal analysis of any student achievement. The data can be disaggregated by “geographical region, teacher expertise as well as funding.

In sum, the high-quality plan proposed by RCPS is **scalable**, flexible and customizable, providing access needed to student data. The rich **detail** and strong evidence provided to support the school infrastructure, proves that the applicant has provided a high-quality plan that justifies full score in the high range.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	14

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The overall **high quality** of this response to this criterion is rated in the high range. The rationale for such high range score is as follows:

A high-quality plan for implementing a rigorous **continuous** improvement process is provided in this section of the application. In fact, RCPS uses the Longitudinal Data System (LDS) in an effort to raise achievement for all students and eventually close the achievement gap. Hence, student progress is monitored and reported. This is evidenced in the yearly report that each school and school district generates. Their report is shared with the Board Members, Administrators, Parents and the general public. As part of the accountability measures, evidence is provided that supports the building and

maintaining of the technical infrastructure.

Thus, RCPS has demonstrated publicly the investments made in a robust data system that links fiscal, administrative, assessment data and services that are linked to student achievement. Funding of high-quality professional development activities as well as the provision of continuous technical assistance also had been documented. The cycle of continuous improvement and professional growth is a hallmark of the activities conducted. Teacher evaluation using the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) and the Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES) are 2 statewide assessments utilized in RCPS to ensure that teachers remain **relevant** and highly **qualified** in the school district. In fact, the evidence provided indicates that for this current school year, 99.94% of the teaching and 100% of the paraprofessionals at RCPS are highly qualified.

In sum, this criterion was completed appropriately with adequate details and evidences supporting the continuous improvement plan envisioned by RCPS applicant. The provision of timely reports is adequate for initiatives to be properly evaluated. What makes this plan of a high quality are: the goals and **deliverables** are clear and relevant to the project; key personnel are clearly identified for each task in the outlined plan; and timelines are realistic and in keeping with project goals. With the comprehensive and convincing goals, outcomes and deliverables in place, this criterion justly earns a score in the high range.

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

5

5

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

It is to the **fullest extent** that the applicant provided a **high quality** plan in response to this criterion that earned a high- range score. The rationale for such high range score is as follows:

Appropriate and ongoing communications are clearly documented in this application. Good media relations are with the local and news media was reported. There is a good track record of working with the local and national media in the past. The stakeholders supporting this application are numerous. An examination of the letters of support bears testimony that RCPS initiates communication and gets the community engaged in the activities it pursues.

The **robust** and user friendly website for each school provides vital information to the public regarding activities and events taking place at the school. RCPS's presence on social media also is documented as becoming more and more popular. Based on the **detailed** narrative, it is clear that communication is both vertical (from administrators down to the students) as well as horizontal (between and among all stakeholders). Students also are part of the communication procedures at RCPS. Communication is facilitated and encouraged through the student leadership organizations and the student led conferences that are encouraged and fostered at RCPS.

Finally, the letters of support were persuasive and relevant to the initiatives outlined in this high-quality plan. As a whole, the plan supports itself in terms of measurable goals, meaningful and realistic timelines as well as constructive deliverables that will in eed provide a personalized learning environment that impacts student learning in a high-needs district. As a result, a score in the high range was earned.

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

5

5

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The overall **high quality** of this response is rated in the high range. This high range score is **justifiable** because the applicant documented the clear performance measures. The applicant has developed ambitious yet achievable goals from the outset of the application. The performance measures designed as well as the annual targets are aligned and meaningful to the overall proposed

project. The evidence shows 14 specific performance measures that are broken out by grade bands and subpopulations.

(a) RCPS selected **purposeful** and **achievable** performance measures because of the student-centered focus they have in developing personalized learning system. These measures are designed to provide data that monitors students' progress from pre-school to graduation. Measures were selected to provide a clear picture of a student's performance in core subject areas such as mathematics, reading and writing. This is coupled with the assurance that students will be strong in academics as well as social-emotional status.

(b) The measures are set as being aggressive (intentional), realistic, feasible yet achievable increases as evidenced in the tables. RCPS has selected measures that will provide information on the successes of the program at critical times within a student's development at grades 3 and grade 8 as well as summative measures at the high school level (grades 10-12).

(c) As set forth in the application, RCPS will collect, analyze, and disseminate data to ensure that decisions are made in a timely manner based on the information provided by student data. Modifications will then made throughout the life cycle of the program as well as systematic monitoring and feedback for implementation. The 5 year performance target of "100% of the students, teachers and administrators are highly-effective reflects the continuous growth plan for effectiveness." The Cycle of Response Program and the Response-to-Intervention Model are tools that will facilitate continuous feedback. The logic model presented earlier in the application also will help to guide the process of implementation and process evaluation.

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

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

5

5

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

It is to the **fullest extent** that the applicant provided a **high** quality of this response to the evaluation of the effectiveness of investments. This criterion is rated in the high range. The rationale for such high range score is as follows:

First, the applicant has demonstrated a **solid** plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the RTTT-D grant funded activities at varying intervals shown on the logic model. In fact the **detailed** plan states unequivocally "to ensure a rigorous, third-party evaluation of this project, an external evaluator will be selected in accordance with EDGAR standards and local Board policy...to established credibility." Having an external evaluator will add to the validity and reliability of the data that will be produced in an unbiased manner. Fidelity is important and this measure also will ensure that the funds asked for will be used for the intended purposes. That is, providing an effective personalized system for the high needs students served by RCPS. Furthermore, the project evaluation is designed to include a multi-faceted approach to answer evaluation questions and test hypotheses. The applicant has outlined a workable process evaluation plan that demonstrates measures of accountability.

Second, as part of the checks and balances **documented** in this proposal for effective program implementation, the external evaluator will serve as part of the RCPS core team, tracking the development process through meetings, documentation and interviews. This section of the process evaluation will be most prominent in the first year, but will continue throughout the project as the user needs evolve and the inevitable changes occur.

Third, the evaluator will measure staff training using documentation (such as schedules, sign-in sheets and curricula), interviews, surveys and focus groups. A variety of student mentors will be interviewed to gather their views on the progress in the school district regarding the personalized learning environment.

Fourth, teachers and administrators will be surveyed yearly to assess their attitudes toward both the

model itself and the training they receive, to help students succeed. This yearly survey will provide timely and detailed feedback that could be used to formatively to improve delivery of instruction to students.

Fifth, focus groups will provide in-depth qualitative data to supplement the quantitative survey data obtained. The quality of this investment will be **appropriately** evaluated over time by an external body of qualified evaluators who are trained to collect, analyze, evaluate and interpret process and implementation matters of grants of this magnitude. Professional development activities as well as activities that employ technology will be assessed in a timely manner. Reports will be **disseminated** in a timely manner to RCPS as well as the US Department of Education. These timely reports will be at planned intervals based on the timelines provided. Timelines are in keeping with the expectations and guidelines provided by the Department of Education.

In sum, having provided a detailed account regarding the effectiveness of the **high quality** evaluation planned, full score in the high range category was achieved for this criterion. There is transparency in the plan of how, when, why and where the evaluation of each stakeholder will be carried out. In keeping with the completeness of the evidence documented, this criterion earned a high-range score.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

It is to the **fullest extent** that the applicant has provided a high quality response to budget and sustainability of the project. This criterion is rated in the high range because the applicant's budget inclusive of the budget narrative and the tables is practical, feasible, realistic and justifiable. Furthermore, this budget supports the high-quality plan proposed by RCPS. The evidence provided is as follows:

First, the budget identifies all the funds that will support the project. Over the 4 year period a total of \$24,999,015.00 is requested. This is reasonable because RSPC has identified funds from other sources totaling \$32,576,064.00 to match the requested amount. In addition, the proposed budget is heavily weighed on investments in professional development and technology infrastructure the anchors of this proposal on which the personalized learning environment for student achievement will be built. Again the amount requested is **feasible** as it is in keeping with the overall vision and goals of this project to help students graduate college and/or career ready.

Second, the budget demonstrates that it is significantly reasonable when one looks at the overall cost per pupil to be served. Only \$270.75 will be the cost per pupil per year after the initial investment. In light of today's costs, this figure is reasonable per year per child. With all the technology required, this figure could have been much higher. However, because of the fiscal prudence of the school district and RCPS's ability to build on earlier success this cost is kept at a reasonable amount yet providing students with maximum benefits. When this cost is compared with the general cost per child per year of over \$5,000 per child in many school districts, the \$270.75 is indeed a **reasonable** cost in such a high needs school district. Furthermore, the budget priorities indicate and also reflect the recognition that school system will need a sophisticated strategy for coordinating the complexity and significance of the Rockdale County Public Schools Choices for the personalized learning model envisioned. This sophisticated system is realized as being part of the comprehensive and interoperable data system that already is in place.

Third, RCPS clearly provides a succinct and thoughtful rationale for investment and priorities that are evidenced throughout the project and budget narrative. It is succinct because all the relevant aspects

have been considered and explained in a condensed manner that is clearly focused on the project vision and goal. Furthermore, the applicant’s budget plan has line items to hire staff and purchase a variety of supplies needed to carry-out the outlined projects. This includes:

- Staff

Project director, Bookkeeper/secretary, project director, external evaluator, webmaster, director of instructional technology, database specialist, information technology data coach (ITC), computer operations manager, college and career readiness coordinator, STEM teachers, Rockdale virtual campus teachers, fine arts teachers, AVID coordinators, lead teacher, tutors, creativity action and service supervisor and an extended essay supervisor.

- Supplies and technology

Mileage for travel; school choice software; PSAT, SAT/ACT, PLAN/EXPLORE/ReadiStep; Rockdale Virtual Campus Instructional Resources; Elementary and Middle School Lab supplies; Early college textbooks; AVID libraries, Student portfolios etc.

Missing from the narrative was an explicit statement indicating the one-time investments that would be made. Even though this information was missing, the applicant provided substantive evidence to justify the need to employ key staff members and purchase needed technology and supplies

Overall, this narrative earned a high-range score because the budget information clearly outlined where the money would be spent and how it would be spent. The money to be spent also is **justifiable** because it is in keeping with the project's vision and goals. The cyclical timeline provided for purchasing equipment and technology shows transparency with regards to: what will be purchased; reason for purchasing; personnel involved and when the purchase would take place. The money requested is earmarked to be spent on the personalized learning environment system and professional development training for teachers that benefit the students directly in tangible ways, so they can graduate high school college and/or career ready. Because of missing data, few points were lost. However, the criterion still earned a high-range score.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	9
---	-----------	----------

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

It is to the greatest extent that the applicant has provided **in-depth evidence** supporting sustainability of project goals. This high-quality response earns a high range score and is in keeping with the high-quality plan proposed. This is because:

First, RCPS has produced a high-quality plan for sustainability of the project’s goals after the term of the grant. This is clearly **evidenced** in the plan and strengthened by the supporting documents. The time table provided indicates how performance measures will be assessed and the outcomes to be accomplished.

Second, there was an excellent listing of previous success that positions this district to continue on the trajectory of success. Most noticeable is having been a recipient of a state Race to the Top award. These former successes form the bedrock on which the current initiatives will be clearly anchored, stabilized and sustained. Many of these successes will be maintained with the RTTT-D funding that will be provided.

Third, there is energy, momentum and capacity to move the program forward by transforming the educational system and its learning environment to assure that RCPS students graduate with career and/or college readiness skills. The stakeholders enlisted are fully on-board to support the various initiatives. When the stakeholders are motivated and happy to work with a school district, initiatives are better sustained over long periods of time.

Fourth, there is a strong high-quality plan put forward to ensure long-term sustainability beyond RTT-

D funding. This is shown in the documentation anchored in “significant investments in professional development for school-based leaders and teachers.” Therefore, the applicant sees the need to ensure that teacher quality is paramount in the bigger scheme of providing the personalized learning environment proposed. In fact, sustainability of this initiative would be hampered if strategic professional development activities were not in place.

Fifth, the plan also includes strengthening the collaborations with stake holding groups. Many stake holding groups were referenced in the proposal including (civic groups, institutions of higher education, early learning groups, advocacy, student, business partners and faith-based organizations etc.). These stakeholders are essential to the process of sustainability. In that, their continued support for school activities will propel the school on the path of success in the future. Having these stakeholders on-board from the outset of the grant writing process was one way of ensuring they will continue to support current and future initiatives at RCPS.

Sixth, RCPS has pledged to use funds received prudently as a catalyst for long-term internal capacity building. This, in the long-run, will help to create and institutionalize a cultural-shift toward PK-12 having a fully personalized learning environment across the system. With such a system in place, this will lead to increased graduation rates and post-secondary success. Above all, this will lead to improved student achievement. It is the goal of the school district to maintain high student achievement. Therefore, the strategies planned are more likely to be prolonged (sustained) over time.

Seventh, ultimately, part of RCPS's bigger plan is to establish a world-class program that can be sustained by internal resources indefinitely. In addition RCPS hopes tat this world-class model will be replicated by other school districts across America. Replication of a model is a sure way of sustaining such.

In sum, it is to a great extent that the applicant provided a high-quality plan for sustainability of the project’s goals after the term of the grant. This solid plan includes real support from state and local government leaders and financial support as detailed in the matching funds of over \$32 million dollars. A clear description of how the applicant will evaluate the effectiveness of past investments and use this data to inform future investments is laid out in the process evaluation plan included in the application. Project director and the school leadership will be able to use this data effectively for future decision-making and planning. This plan clearly and coherently addresses how the applicant will evaluate improvements in productivity and outcomes to inform a post-grant budget. This was clearly evidenced in the estimated budget for the three years after the term of the grant, including reasonable budget assumptions, potential sources, and uses of funds; realistic timelines and qualified personnel to make the plan happen. Having satisfied all parts of the criterion for the budget, a high score in the high range was earned.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

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

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The overall quality of this response to the Competitive Preference Priority is **strong, detailed** and **robust** earning a high range score. The personalized learning environment proposed in this application, met this overall criterion for competitive preferences in the following ways:

First, a **coherent** description of sustainable partnerships between public and private sector organizations was provided. These entities include; government, business and industry, law enforcement, social services agencies, faith-based groups, civic organizations, and families in

Rockdale County. Together, these stake holding groups are recognized for providing a safe and supportive environment, which is key, to a successful, high-quality education that enables students to become contributing members of a community and society as a whole.

Second, the desired results for 7 population-level of students in the LEA were identified and the desired results charted. These results were inclusive of: (a) educational results, for example, “children will exit 3 grade reading at or above grade level; At-risk students are identified early and provided with early interventions that address their academic and emotional/social/ behavioral; (b) family and community supports, for example, “students participate in community service and leadership opportunities related to their personalized learning plan.” These tangible examples demonstrate that the intended personalized learning system is indeed designed to benefit the students. Participating in internship activities in the community strengthens the partnership that has been established with the community based groups

Third, a thorough description delineating how the partnership worked to benefit the RCPS students was documented, showing in **tangible** terms how student learning was impacted. The following activities took place:

- a. Tracking the selected indicators that measure each result at the aggregate level for all children within the school district. This will be done by external evaluators using 3 discrete evaluation components (1) process evaluation; (2) outcome evaluation, and (3) informal feedback.
- b. Using the Cycle or Results data to target its resource in order to improve results for participating students over time so that the individual needs of the learner is adequately met.
- c. Developing a strategy to scale the model beyond participating students was documented. This is demonstrated by the use of STARS and RELI that address social/emotional learning for all RCPS students at all schools. This would immediately increase access to children at the early education stages as well as high school aged students by 25%.
- d. The bottom line is to improve results of student engagement over time. The extensive documentation clearly delineates that as part of the plan for continuous improvement, STARS and RELI will build on experiences and evaluation findings to further enhance personal behavior management among RCPS. This also will facilitate collaborative resource sharing among the partners. Overtime, there have been strong partnership strategies indicated in the narrative. This has resulted in “improved outcomes for students.” However, there are risk factors present in the community that continue to increase. RCPS continues to monitor these risk factors and address them with appropriate strategies. Using the Cycle for Results adapted for the STARS Project, RCPS will improve outcomes and results for students.

Fourth, a **thorough** description of how the partnership would integrate with educational and counseling services (e.g., services that address socio-emotional and behavioral needs) in and outside the school was articulated. GAIN-SS would be administered with parental consent.

Fifth, an **extensive** description of how the partnership would build on capacity of the staff already in place was detailed. Training of these staff members was cited as a top priority in order to be successful. Furthermore, assessing the needs and assets of participating students using the appropriate assessment measure such as the Kindergarten Readiness Screener was identified. Through collaborative efforts, RCPS leaders can identify and take inventory of the needs and assets of the school and community. This will help to ensure there is goal alignment for improving the education, family and community relations. A workable and collaborative decision-making process as well as infrastructure to select implement and evaluate success by utilizing the expertise of stake holding groups would be a phenomenal asset to RCPS's innovative strategies. Specifically, “through

continued collaboration, RCPS has seen improvement in the areas of bullying, mental health services, early childhood education, and substance abuse prevention.” This is part of the full service envisioned to impact the "whole child" socially, emotionally and academically.

Known as the “birthplace of system-of-care” RCPS seeks to engage parents and families of all participating students in decision-making process about solutions to improve results over time and in addressing student, family, and school needs simultaneously. Through local school councils, individual schools also supports a forum for parent and community input into decision-making and providing solutions with regard to academic performance, school discipline, and school activities. These collaborative efforts have been established from the get-go when the views and input from stakeholders were sought at the front end of the grant application process. Routinely assessing the applicant’s progress has been documented and will be carried out constantly using both formative and summative assessment measures. The Cycle for Results frameworks and STARS community models will be used to maximize impact and resolve any challenge and/or problems that will arise. These processes and procedures are workable in this high-quality plan.

Sixth, an **extensive** justification was made identifying the annual ambitious yet achievable performance measures for the personalized learning environment with strong emphasis on decreasing the number of students who report being bullied and/or was reported having used marijuana. In addition, increasing the number of kindergartens who are ready to read as well as increasing the number of 3rd graders reading at or above grade level is a desired performance measure for RCPS.

In sum, the applicant has provided a **convincing, comprehensive** and a **coherent** argument outlining how the Competitive Preference Priority: Results, Resource Alignment, and Integrated Services are met in the proposal. It is to a large extent that RCPS has demonstrated unequivocally the capacity to integrate public or private resources in a partnership designed to augment the schools’ resources. This was demonstrated in how RCPS has outlined the provision for students’ and their family supports while addressing the social, emotional, or behavioral needs of the high needs students in the district. It is because of the convincing high-quality plan that this criterion earned the full score.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has successfully **satisfied** Absolute Priority 1 throughout the application. A **coherent** and **comprehensive** description of how the personalized learning environment would be implemented, measured and evaluated over time also was provided. The applicant completely addressed how RCPS would build on the four core educational assurance areas to create a personalized and enriching and **student-centered** learning environment designed to significantly improve learning and teaching. The applicant furnished information demonstrating how students are expected to take ownership of their learning journey as they utilize personalized strategies, tools, and support systems. These support systems were **clearly** shown to be **aligned** with college and/or career readiness standards for the high needs students served in the school district. Furthermore, the entire application supported **tangible** ways in which student achievement would be **accelerated** at the various grade levels. How student learning would be **deepened** as the individual needs of each student is met also was clearly articulated. The expansion of student access to the most effective

educators and resources rippled throughout the application. Tangible **research-based** strategies for decreasing the achievement gaps across student groups--inclusive of students with special needs were highlighted.

Finally, proven strategies of how the rates at which students graduate from high school prepared for college and/or careers would be increased over time was charted in a **realistic** fashion. Having provided all the documentation and evidence regarding the capability of RCPS to implement a personalized learning system that meets the needs of the high needs students served throughout the district, demonstrates that Absolute Priority 1 was fully met by the applicant.

Total	210	200
--------------	------------	------------



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0030GA-2 for Rockdale County Public Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

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

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

In A(1)(a) the applicant provides an overview of its plan because it lays out its overall vision to provide personalized learning environments and touches on how its vision incorporates the four core educational assurance areas, specifically in relation to three of its overarching goals (which relate to utilizing technology to personalize students, developing teachers' abilities to support students, and creating systems, such as data management and evaluation systems to carry out its vision. The first part of this subsection concludes with tangential assertions as well because it makes general statements about increasing achievement and improving graduation and post-secondary enrollment rates.

In A(1)(b) the application articulates each aspect of the goals of accelerating achievement (by monitoring students' personalized learning plans and increasing student-directed learning and engagement), deepening learning (by creating specialty magnet schools), and increasing equity (by assuring school choice). The applicant also includes additional goals stemming from its *Choices for Personalized Learning* program. These goals further explain the applicant's approach to accelerating achievement, deepening learning, and increasing equity because they include measurable objectives (such as developing a personalized learning plan for each student and creating an anytime-anywhere, boundary-free learning environment) and expected outcomes (such as increased student engagement and increased mastery of college and career readiness standards). These ambitious goals are strengthened by Sections B(1) and E(1) of the application because the applicant has included an Appendix item mentioned in those sections that backs up its ability to achieve the goals in A(2)(b). The appendix item is the district's "Cycle for Results," and the cycle should particularly accelerate achievement and deepen learning because it outlines the process of delivering instruction (Step 2 of the cycle), conducting and utilizing formative assessments (Steps 3 and 4), adjusting for individual student needs (Step 5) and assessing mastery (Step 6).

In describing what the classroom experience will be like for students and teachers, the application provides some reasonable aspects of personalized learning environments because the list of classroom conditions includes those conditions under which students utilize digital media and technology, engage in collaboration, and "build strong content knowledge." Nevertheless, the applicant heads its list of classroom descriptors with this statement: "When asked about the personalized learning experience, students, teachers and parents responded with what they would expect to see, hear and feel." This somewhat weakens the applicant's response to A(1)(c) because it does not describe the environment in terms of what the experience will be like for those in the classrooms or specifically how the stakeholders' responses will be incorporated into the vision. Furthermore, some of the expectations are idealistic and difficult to measure. For example,

there is an expectation that students and teachers will be proud of what they produce. More concrete, however, are the descriptions throughout the application of the integration of technology into the district's classrooms.

The application scores in the high range for this selection criteria because it establishes a comprehensive and coherent reform vision that will build on its work in the four core educational assurance areas. However, the applicant did not explain what the classroom experience will be like for students and teachers as clearly as it could have.

Score: 9

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	9
--	-----------	----------

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The application clearly articulates which schools will be included in the implementation of its proposal because it includes a chart that contains each school's name and level (elementary, middle school, or high school) or its designation (magnet school, academy, or open campus).

The application also includes a brief description of how it determined which schools would participate. The overall determination process is sensible because it involved stakeholders on the Strategic Plan Committee who conducted a needs assessment. However, the application fails to provide important details about the process because it does not explain who was included in the Strategic Plan Committee or how the needs assessment was designed and conducted. Nevertheless, all schools within the LEA will participate because this is "a system-wide model," and the competing schools collectively meet the competitor's requirements.

All relevant data is included and a second detailed chart lists each of the 22 schools and includes their respective total number of students, participating students from low-income families, participating students who are high-need students, and participating educators. All schools exceed the requirement that at least 40% of participating students be from low-income families. Additionally, the applicant documents later in the application in B(1) that 100% of its students qualify as high-need because of the district's minority-majority status.

This portion of the application scores in the high range because it explains the criteria it used to determine which schools would participate, and it provides all relevant data for the students in its participating schools.

Score: 9

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	9
--	-----------	----------

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The application provides appropriate reasons for why all students and schools in the LEA will be included in the plan because implementation of the plan will benefit students at all levels by using achievable district-wide strategies. In particular, the application presents a convincing theory about the plan's "strategic, comprehensive continuum of opportunities" for students because the application demonstrates the connection between providing college- and career-related opportunities and improving student learning outcomes. For example, the applicant theorizes that "college and career awareness, exploration, and preparation" will provide students with access to rigorous, practical coursework; will increase students' test scores; and will improve students' abilities to pursue postsecondary study and careers.

The application also supports its theory that the plan will increasingly improve student learning outcomes for a greater number of students because the application offers a reasonable explanation of how this approach will better prepare students in "high need and traditionally underrepresented groups." Furthermore, the application justifies the rationale behind its *Choices for Personalized Learning (CPL)* platform because it convincingly articulates the importance of highly individualized and "customizable" learning paths in order to deliver a "student-centered education." This thorough explanation is especially important because the CPL accounts for such a significant portion of the applicant's overall vision.

The application does include a number of innovative but feasible goals and activities (such as the establishment of a "boundary-free school system" that provides "flexible learning, anytime and anyplace" and "student-designed and -driven learning paths"). In this section and elsewhere in the application, the applicant has demonstrated how its "boundary-free school system" supports its students' individual learning styles and interests because the district is willing to coach students through making important educational decisions as early as 6th grade. Such an approach is innovative because, as the applicant writes, "this level of flexibility and personal choice in one's educational plan is not typically available until one's college experience." Nevertheless, such goals are feasible for the applicant because the district already has in place such tools as its "Map Your Future" guide for students in grades 6-12 that outlines the choices for individualization that all students can take into consideration. Though many of these programs and relevant goals target older students, the application also demonstrates its current ability to set ambitious goals for younger students, too, because its elementary programs (including the first elementary AVID program in the state and an elementary school STEM program) encourage students to take an active interest in their education from a young age. When these younger students move on to middle school and high school, their own experiences and successes will increase the likelihood of continued district-wide change because they will be even more prepared to construct their own "student-designed and -driven learning paths." Therefore, the applicant has demonstrated that it will be able to scale up its plan across the district and at all levels because such comprehensive vertical alignment will support students' personalized learning experiences.

Referenced appendix items provide further evidence of a high-quality plan because the appendix items list activities (such as conducting research to build on areas of interests, strengths, [and] needs) as well as deliverables (such as an implementation plan to establish pathways to school and specialty choice). Details about timelines and responsible parties are also evident in the relevant appendix items because each item lists dates, activities, and responsible parties, some of which are specific even to the day of implementation (i.e. June 14, 2013 when out-of-zone students will be notified about transportation options by the district's transportation department).

Some aspects of a high-quality plan are more ambiguous because the applicant alludes to additional ways that it will scale-up to district-wide implementation without explaining as clearly how it will do so. For example, the narrative points out that existing specialty schools "provide the core focus of our initial implementation" and have "provided [the district] with a wealth of knowledge as to how to effectively operate personalized choice options for students," but the applicant fails to present "the core focus" or the "wealth of knowledge." As a result, these particular conclusions demonstrate to a lesser extent that the applicant will be able to implement LEA-wide reform and change because these conclusions do not explain how the district will achieve meaningful reform and improve learning outcomes.

Overall, this section of the application scores in the high range because the applicant demonstrates achievable goals, activities, and timelines that will lead to meaningful reform and has already implemented some pertinent changes including the implementation of its Choices for Personalized Learning platform.

Score: 9

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	5
--	-----------	----------

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

In the first part of its response to A(4)(a), the applicant demonstrates ambitious and achievable goals that are appropriate because they "include existing, approved targets and goals via the State's approved ESEA flexibility request." The details of this flexibility request are included in the applicant's appendix. To demonstrate its goals for performance on summative assessments, the applicant first includes charts of Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) data for the overall group and for six subgroups in grades 3-8. The CRCT test scores are for reading, math, and English Language Arts. The applicant effectively demonstrates its measurement of growth because its status is determined by the "percent proficient and above" while growth is determined by the change in the percentage of students who demonstrate proficiency.

For the second part of its response to A(4)(a), the applicant presents a detailed chart with summative assessment data based on End-of-Course-Tests (EOCT) in Coordinate Algebra, Math I, and Math II. Again, the applicant convincingly demonstrates appropriate, ambitious, and achievable goals because they are based on "existing, approved targets and goals via the State's approved ESEA flexibility request." Complete data includes overall percentages as well as percentages for students in the same six subgroups as the CRCT. The methods for determining status and growth were also the same as with the CRCT. The applicant appropriately addresses one inconsistency in the Math I data because it explains that the state of Georgia has changed the high school math curriculum "three times over the past four years." As a result, Math I scores actually decreased drastically from 2011-12 to 2012-13 from an overall percent proficiency rate of 65% to 31%. The effect of the changes in the math curriculum cannot be determined for Coordinate Algebra because the applicant does not present Coordinate Algebra data for the 2011-12 school year. As a result, the Coordinate Algebra baseline consists of only the 2012-13 rates.

To respond to A(4)(b), the applicant includes a limited number of performance goals because it only provides data sets for high school EOCT math data and middle school CRCT language arts data. However, it is also unclear how the applicant calculated the baseline gaps because the gaps, where applicable, are inconsistent with the data the applicant has included elsewhere in A(4)(b) and in the rest of the application, and the application does not explain that alternative data was used for the calculations. For example, the baseline gap between English Language Learners and whites for the 2012-13 EOCT math test is 24 percentage points. However, this difference does not exist between these two groups for any of the EOCT math tests included in A(4)(a), nor does it exist between them for any combination of EOCT math test results in A(4)(a).

Whether or not the annual goals in A(4)(b) are appropriately ambitious yet achievable is also unclear because the applicant does not provide evidence to indicate whether they equal or exceed State ESEA targets. Instead, the annual goals appear to be limited to basic mathematical calculations because they have been attained by taking the difference between 2012-13 percentages and the end goal percentages and dividing by the three years in between. For example, the gap on the CRCT language arts assessment between middle school students with disabilities and white students was a 50% point difference in 2012-13. The applicant's goal for the 2016-17 year is to achieve a difference of only 10%. As a result, students are expected to make up 10% of the difference each of the years in between to account for the 40% expected change from 2012-13 to 2016-17 because the baseline is 50%, Year 1 is 40%, Year 2 is 30%, Year 3 is 20%, and Year 4 is 10%.

In A(4)(c) the applicant presents overall graduation rates as well as those for students in five of the six subgroups previously mentioned. (The applicant did not provide baseline data or goals for students with disabilities because it states that the data is not available from the state.) The applicant can only use 2010-11 data for the included subgroups as its baseline because the state has not released subgroup data for 2011-12 or 2012-13. Additionally, the applicant has only the overall four-year cohort rate data from 2010-11 and 2011-12 to establish its recent trends because, as it explains, the state of Georgia "calculated graduation rates based on the percentage of students who graduated with [sic] seven years." The current goals for all subgroups are achievable but are not as ambitious as they should be because even though the overall change from 2010-11 to 2011-12 was 5.8 percentage points, future goals show only a 2 percentage point increase per year for each subgroup. For example, white students are expected to go from a graduation rate of 53% in 2013-14 to a post-grant rate of 63% in 2017-18. This increase of 10% over five years is not ambitious because the students were able to achieve an increase of 5.8% overall in just one year.

A(4)(d) includes overall college enrollment data and college enrollment data for all six subgroups. Whether the applicant's goals are ambitious yet achievable in relation to State ESEA targets cannot be determined because unlike with other data sets in A(4), the applicant does not indicate whether there are State ESEA targets for college enrollment or, if not, whether it used an alternative method to determine its targets. The baseline data for this section also contains a discrepancy that is important to note because while no subgroup has more than a 28% college enrollment rate, the applicant reports that its overall college enrollment rate is 48%. For example, the college enrollment rates for males and females are 28% and 19% respectively, which are not consistent with an overall enrollment rate of 48%. (The average should be close to an average of the male and female percentage, not the sum of them.) This discrepancy is important because the accuracy of the overall college enrollment determines how ambitious and achievable the overall targets are.

The applicant does address A(4)(e) (the optional postsecondary degree attainment section). District administrators are planning to start tracking this data through the National Student Clearinghouse StudentTracker database. However, the applicant does not include baseline data and goals because it currently does not have a way to track postsecondary degree attainment.

The overall score for this section falls in the medium range because it demonstrates ambitious yet achievable goals for A(4)(a) and achievable goals for A(4)(c). However, the extent to which the applicant demonstrates ambitious goals for A(4)(c) and ambitious yet achievable goals for A(4)(b) and A(4)(d) is more difficult to determine because the applicant does not include the methodologies for determining growth. Additionally, the application does not address all subgroups in A(4)(c) because it fails to include data for students with disabilities. Finally, the applicant's data in A(4)(d) brings into question its college enrollment rate targets because the applicant does not indicate how it determined what its targets would be and does not present accurate baseline data, both of which are relevant to the ambitiousness and achievability of the targets.

Score: 5

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

Available	Score
-----------	-------

(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)**15****11****(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

In this section the applicant convincingly demonstrates its ability to increase student achievement on assessments because it presents descriptions and charts as evidence to support the claim that "student achievement continues to increase." The narrative for this section specifies that overall student performance on summative assessments has particularly increased in grades K-8 over the last four years, which is supported by 8 graphs in the application narrative. Furthermore, the graphs also demonstrate strong evidence that the applicant has convincingly closed the achievement gaps between students despite economic disadvantages and despite student ethnicity. For example, the overall level of student proficiency in elementary and middle school math and reading has increased between 2008-09 and 2011-12 across the board at an average of 2 percentage points per year. While this increase may at first seem insignificant, the accomplishment is even more remarkable when one considers the students' previous level of high achievement because four years ago the students were already scoring above 90 percent proficient in reading and above 80 percent proficient in math.

While the evidence that the applicant has closed achievement gaps over the last four years is a bit more limited, graphs also indicate that lower achieving subgroups have nevertheless been catching up to those who have traditionally outscored them. Again, compelling graphs demonstrate this narrowing of the achievement gap because they illustrate how black and Hispanic students have improved their test scores over the last four years in three of the four data sets (at both the elementary and middle school levels) and in the subjects of reading and math. The only exception has been at the elementary level in math because while the students' scores improved for the three years in a row, they dropped the fourth year.

An appendix item with information about the district's graduation trends demonstrates the applicant's increasing graduation rates over the last four years. The graph also supports the district's explanation about the state's recent change in how it determines graduation rates because the state of Georgia recently went from calculating a 7-year cohort to a 4-year cohort to determine graduation rates. This reasonable explanation clarifies why rates dropped between 2010-2011 because the sudden change would otherwise be confusing.

The applicant does not provide any evidence to support college enrollment data for subsection B(1)(a). Though the applicant implies in its response to A(4) that a National Student Clearinghouse StudentTracker database will allow it to "receive comprehensive collegiate enrollment and degree data as we move forward," the applicant did provide at least some college enrollment data for A(4)(d). Therefore, the applicant's omission of such data in B(1)(a) weakens its response in this section.

In section B(1)(b), the applicant describes activities and systems that may lead to ambitious and significant reforms in its lowest-achieving and low-performing schools, but the evidence is lacking because the applicant fails to demonstrate that these activities and systems have achieved the desired outcomes. For example, the applicant does not include information in the form of descriptions, charts, data, etc. specific to its lowest-achieving or low-performing schools in this section or elsewhere in the application, yet an appendix item clearly indicates that this district is one of twenty-six districts that has "68 percent of the state's lowest-achieving schools." Without documented evidence that shows reasonable gains in student achievement at any of these struggling schools, the applicant cannot demonstrate that its reforms have led to increases in achievement and a clear record of success.

B(1)(c) supports the applicants' ability to make performance data available to students, educators, and parents because this section explains how the district uses a data warehousing system that all of these interested parties can access. The applicant provides appropriate descriptions of the information available to educators including summative and formative assessment data and performance indicators for specific skills and concepts. The narrative demonstrates the process educators can use to transform this information into improved instruction and services because it references its Cycle for Results approach, which outlines the steps educators can take to conduct formative assessments, analyze data, and adjust instructions based on the information educators have access to through the data warehousing system.

A convincing appendix item also demonstrates the quality of data teachers have to work with because it shows a screenshot of the way the district's program displays class and student performance information. This evidence is particularly strong because it proves that educators have immediate access to a wealth of relevant data. For example, the graphic shows section, school, and district performance levels for specific tests or even specific benchmarks right alongside individual students' performance levels. The applicant also explains that administrators utilize this data to take action because "principals can generate intervention caseloads by subgroups in a matter of minutes."

The applicant supports its assertion that parents and students have access to student performance data because they are able to log in to a "Parent Portal" for "more specific information" or can opt to automatically receive the information. Additionally, the applicant specifies that parents and students can see not only assignment completion and performance, but they can also see the curriculum standards and topics addressed by the assignments. The availability of this information will improve participation because parents and students are better prepared to play an active role. The

applicant justifies the likelihood of these outcomes because it explains that parents can “engage in dialogue” and students can “set informed goals.” These are reasonable conclusions because the information provided to parents and students gives them real-time data throughout a grading period instead of just at the end and because the information demonstrates the students’ strengths and weaknesses in multidimensional ways including standards-based grading.

This district provides evidence elsewhere in its application that it has made extensive efforts to provide student performance data to its parents because it makes efforts to provide wireless internet access to parents and to make its systems smartphone compatible, etc. One concern that the applicant does not address in this section or elsewhere is how it makes student performance data available to parents who do not have internet access. Therefore, it is unrealistic to assume that all parents will be able to utilize the “Parent Portal” in a district where 100% of its schools are eligible for Title I funding and where 100% of its students qualify as high-need. Furthermore, the district does not address whether it provides student performance data other than through an online portal.

The overall score for this section falls in the medium range. The applicant clearly demonstrates that it can improve student learning, close achievement gaps, and make data available to students, educators, and parents. However, it has not demonstrated to the fullest extent possible that it has implemented activities and systems that will lead to ambitious and significant reforms in its persistently lowest-achieving schools, and it does not demonstrate evidence that it has improved college enrollment rates.

Score: 11

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

5

5

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides thorough and convincing narrative evidence that the district maintains a high level of transparency by making information about school-level expenditures public. General instructional staff salary information is available on the district website and salary information by name is made available on the transparency website managed by the state of Georgia and linked to by the district.

Even more specific information about the actual personnel salaries for instructional staff only and for teachers only is available to the public through the websites maintained by both the Georgia Department of Education and the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, and the district makes this information easily accessible because it has provided links to these sources on its website as well.

Finally, the district convincingly explains how it demonstrates transparency when it comes to non-personnel expenditures at the school level because it also provides links to the Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts because this department audits these expenditures. However, this district also openly shares budget information because it provides both school-level and district budgets upon request as well as through its website.

The overall score for this section falls in the high range. The applicant provides thorough narrative evidence that the district promotes transparency because it makes relevant information available in a number of ways. Additional supporting evidence showing the types of information available to the public would demonstrate transparency to an even great extent.

Score: 5

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

10

10

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

In section (B)(3), the applicant provides clear evidence that it will be able to implement the personalized learning environments that it is proposing because the application outlines how state requirements allow for the independence needed by the district for its plan to be successful. For example, the district is implementing innovative approaches such as a boundary-free school district and a competency-based credit system. To demonstrate that it will have the necessary support from the state and autonomy to implement its plan, the applicant documents that the Georgia Legislature allows LEAs to establish attendance zones. This distinction is critical because it assures that the local board of education has the right to allow public school choice and a boundary-free school district.

Similarly, the applicant explains how its innovative plans will be feasible by asserting that the State Superintendent of Education “encourages districts to seek flexibility for innovation.” This evidence is critical because it demonstrates that the

innovation behind the district's Choice for Personalized Learning model has been approved by the Georgia Department of Education as appropriately ambitious while also being achievable in terms of regulatory requirements.

The applicant further strengthens its proposal by including state-approved programs that it has already successfully implemented. For example, it has recently expanded a local charter school and is in the process of establishing an academy of environmental sciences (in partnership with Georgia Tech and others). This evidence is powerful because it demonstrates that not only has the district already worked with the state of Georgia, but it has also already begun carrying out its plan.

The overall score for this section falls in the high range because the applicant has demonstrated that it can both establish ambitious and innovative goals while creating successful conditions and appropriately utilizing (and ensuring) its autonomy under state requirements.

Score: 10

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

15

13

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

In section (B)(4), the applicant provides clear evidence it has involved stakeholders in the development of its Choices for Personalized Learning Model. Members of the community were involved at various points through the process because they have served on a team that renewed the district's strategic plan, and they have been engaged in developing personalized learning experiences for students. The applicant demonstrates the on-going role community involvement has played because it explains how the superintendent reviews input from stakeholders and utilizes feedback when he communicates with staff, parents, students, and community members.

The applicant presents a chart that strongly demonstrates the ways in which it has engaged stakeholders because the chart lists the wide variety of forums through which parents, local organizations and businesses, teacher, administrators, and students have been able to get involved. For example, the parents have been able to attend Personalized Learning parent information meetings at both the district and school levels. Teachers have engaged in "think tanks" at each level and have been involved in focused task forces. Community members and local organizations have worked with the district through the superintendent's advisory council, and the Chamber of Commerce.

Section B(4)(a)(ii), however, provides an unconvincing indication of teacher support because the appendix includes form letters from every school principal, and each form letter states that "at least 70% of the faculty at this school has offered their support of the proposed grant as evidenced by the attached signature sheet." The evidence is also unconvincing because unlike some of the form letters and accompanying signature sheets from district-level departments (such as the ones from the director of technology and the director of curriculum), none of the attached signature sheets are included with the principals' letters to demonstrate teacher support. Instead, the appendix item indicates that "signature sheets are available upon request." As a result, the applicant does not demonstrate to a sufficient extent that it has evidence of meaningful teacher support.

Appendix item I.I. includes an extensive collection of letters that convincingly demonstrate the support of stakeholders because there are letters of support from parents, U.S. and State Senators, local institutions of higher learning, city officials, local business owners, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and many others.

The overall score for this section falls in the high range because the applicant has demonstrated that the district has well-documented support from stakeholders.

Score: 13

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	19

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant demonstrates in this section that the district has created a comprehensive and ambitious, yet feasible, plan to prepare students to be college- and career-ready. This plan is particularly strong because of the ways in which it exposes students to personalized learning opportunities and coaches them through the educational process. For example, students can attend any high school in the district (or even any combination of schools) to earn credit and demonstrate content mastery. Students also benefit from the school advisement program PREPARE because it focuses on the importance of establishing relationships to help students make quality choices about their educational and vocational futures.

In C(1)(a), the applicant effectively outlines the ways in which the district provides support to students because the narrative explains how the district has adopted such initiatives as the BRIDGE Act, which is a set of state House Bills. The implementation of this Act directly addresses C(1)(a)(i) and (ii) because it “motivates middle-and high-school students to learn so that they can see the relevance of education to their dreams and future plans” and because it really encourages student empowerment. As a result, the combination of the BRIDGE Act and the applicant's overall plan will experience increased motivation and will have a greater understanding of how their educational goals and choices impact the learning process.

The applicant articulates how it prepares students for real world environments through its approach to C(1)(a)(iv) and (v) because the district presents students with authentic learning experiences; however, details about these experiences are somewhat vague. Similarly, though the applicant describes an effective way that the district both exposes students to diversity and helps them master critical academic content because it utilizes “cooperative learning and peer teaching situations,” it does not explain the process it uses to group students. Nevertheless, the applicant does address C(1)(b)(i) because the district works to personalize the students' educational experiences by measuring students' learning styles and utilizing students' previously successful experiences and personal interests to inform instruction.

Later in this section, the applicant effectively demonstrates its dedication to college- and career-readiness by justifying its need for a College and Career Readiness Coordinator. For example, someone in this position would, according to the district's plan, oversee a program through which college students mentor high school juniors and seniors. Such an approach would be effective because the high school students will respond well to advice and encouragement provided by someone closer to their age – hence, the name of the program: Near Peer Service Learning. Furthermore, this program will expose students to diversity across ages, which complements the students' current exposure to diversity across ethnic groups within their school, and will provide unique support to high-need students.

Finally, the applicant effectively explains how its approach to learning will engage and empower high-need students in particular because the district has developed a Cycle for Results (to guide instruction, formative assessment, data analysis, etc.) that will especially support these students. As part of the Cycle, teachers will be able to more easily identify and serve those students who will benefit from interventions because real-time data will be available and will be immediately actionable.

In terms the timelines required of a high-quality plan, the applicant's cyclical approach to implementing its plan and to effecting change means that its timelines are not necessarily linear with clear beginning, middle, and end dates. Instead, the applicant presents an on-going cycle of implementation, evaluation, and adjustment. Depending on the goal, the cycle may occur on a daily, weekly, monthly, or even yearly basis, and the applicant has indicated this frequency when appropriate throughout the application.

The overall score for this section falls in the high range. This section demonstrates many of the strongest attributes of the applicant's plan because the district has made bold moves to re-design its schools and its programs completely around its Choices for Personalized Learning framework, which is a program that directly meets the requirements of this section in particular. Additionally, the application presents a high-quality plan because the applicant articulates goals and activities for its educators (such as implementing an advisement program through which staff meet with students bi-monthly to erase student anonymity and provide students with opportunities to increase graduation and postsecondary enrollment rates) and students (such as completing yearly student-led conferences to empower the students to structure their learning, measure their progress, and achieve their goals).

Score: 19

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

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

In C(2) the application convincingly presents its goals to improve its teachers and leaders because it demonstrates its willingness to invest in training and professional development. Educators will continually benefit from professional development opportunities because the district offers relevant and diverse PD selections. For example, teachers are

exposed to the Classroom Instruction that Works program which includes 9 categories of professional learning in 3 component areas. Components 1 and 2 especially address C(2)(a)(i) because they focus on developing effective learning environments and on improving student understanding. Similarly, teachers participate in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (CIA) training through which they will gain a deepened understanding of the State Standards because the training includes time for teachers to work together to unpack and process State Standards.

Teachers in the district will also benefit from various support systems because they are provided with technological tools, collaborative planning time, and Professional Learning Communities. Furthermore, the administration makes an effort to understand how teachers and students are finding success because they conduct "focus walks" to "gauge student engagement and learning." This involvement of school leaders is important because it gives administrators a frame of reference that is authentic.

The applicant also convincingly explains how the district will improve learning and teaching through its assessment of students. Teachers will be empowered to use assessment data because they will have opportunities to further their understanding of assessments (by, for example, developing their own Standards-based assessments) and to utilize assessment data to differentiate instruction. An important outcome of assessment and data analysis for this district will also be how its educators guide students to be college- and career-ready because the district begins using data as early as when students are in middle school to help students transition into career pathways. Then, trained educators continue to guide students through individualized learning opportunities and along career pathways throughout high school.

In C(2), the applicant also demonstrates the districts' willingness to be flexible in order to meet the individual needs of students because it uses assessment data and the students' interests not only to guide instruction generally but also to hold "electives fairs" and determine course offerings. Such information is helpful because it is actionable and can be used effectively to offer both remediation and enrichment. The district provides additional evidence of its willingness to be flexible because it will adjust student-teacher ratios to meet diverse of student needs.

In its efforts to meet C(2)(c), the applicant details the opportunities educators will have to improve their effectiveness as a result of informal and formal evaluations. The opportunities will increase the likelihood that teachers will be able to improve their instruction and to support student progress toward meeting college- and career-readiness because of the diversity of feedback they will receive. For example, in addition to the formal Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) evaluations that teachers undergo, they will also benefit from mentors and coaches. Similarly, administrators not only benefit from the Leader Keys Effectiveness System, but they also participate in self-evaluations using the Leader Assessment on Performance Standards (LAPS). These varying methods of evaluation are especially effective because none of them generates evidence of effectiveness that is then forgotten about or ignored. Instead, the district continually refers back to the evaluations both to improve educators' effectiveness and to identify strong teachers and leaders. For example, the district will develop a Professional Learning Advisory Council consisting of accomplished teachers because the members will be teachers who have demonstrated their knowledge and effectiveness through achievements such as National Board Certification and high TKES scores. This continual cycling back to evaluation results also leads to the ongoing development of emerging leaders and potential principals because it identifies those who are most promising.

The application scores in the high range for this selection criteria because it has envisioned an effective professional structure that recognizes and responds to the demands that the shift to individualized learning will place on teachers and principals. As a result, it has created professional development opportunities that will improve educators' instructional strategies, that will increase their ability to utilize data, and that will ultimately provide students with the support to graduate college- and career-ready. Evaluation tools will be used not only to improve instructor effectiveness but also to develop and retain effective and highly effective teachers who work collaboratively on shared resources and strategies. This high-quality plan outlines goals and activities for the district and its teachers to personalize students' learning environment by training and supporting both the educators and the students, and the applicant has embedded timelines and responsible parties throughout its narrative.

Score: 20

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

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

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

This district has a lean central office consisting of the superintendent, a cabinet of officers, and those under the supervision

of the cabinet members. The organizational structure of the district will complement the implementation of the plan because each cabinet member and his/her respective divisions has an appropriate responsibility in the fulfillment of the plan. For example, the Chief Academic Officer will supervise all elementary school principals while the elementary schools go through plan-inspired changes, and the Professional Development Department will provide job-embedded professional learning support as reforms are implemented. Such support will be necessary because of the ambitious shifts the district will continue to undertake (including, for example, those related to calendar and schedule changes, assessment systems, and individualized instructional practices).

The applicant demonstrates that independent building leadership teams are provided with the required flexibility and autonomy to implement the plan. The leadership teams take advantage of these opportunities because their efforts lead to additional ad hoc committees and task forces with “wide-ranging influence within the school.” Examples of a school’s localized control demonstrate the independence schools have because they are able to establish individual school calendars, produce unique schedules and experiences according to their students’ needs, and to determine their own staffing models. Furthermore, the applicant convincingly demonstrates the district’s history of support for innovative reforms because it highlights such grassroots achievements as two NASA Explorer Schools and the first STEM certified high school in the state.

In D(1)(c), the applicant demonstrates its strong belief in giving students opportunities to progress and earn credit based on demonstrated mastery rather than based on seat time because the district has been pushing for this reform at the high school level for a number of years. Furthermore, it had already established this model in its elementary and middle schools and was only kept from doing so in its high school by the state Department of Education. However, when the Department recently amended the state graduation rules, the district became the only one in Georgia to utilize standards-based master grading and reporting at all levels. The applicant demonstrates its committed approach to demonstrated mastery by including an 8th grade standards-based report card sample.

The district has maximized data systems to give students opportunities to demonstrate mastery of standards at multiple times and in multiple comparable ways, and administrators and teachers are willing to make on-going adjustments. The applicant demonstrates this appropriate flexibility because it explains how its Cycle for Results program supports individual student needs when it comes to mastery. For example, an individual student has multiple options for reassessment because the student can demonstrate mastery through anything from a more formal mastery test to a less formal class activity.

In the last portion of this section, the applicant describes how it provides equal access to all students, including those with disabilities and those who are English language learners. The district effectively demonstrates its belief that learning resources and instructional practices should be “fully accessible to all students” because it provides the majority of services to students with disabilities and to English language learners within the general education “in a co-teaching, collaborative, or push-in model.” Additionally, the applicant provides support for the ways in which it supports students with disabilities and English language learners because it explains that students have access to a variety of assistive technology devices and that regular education teachers are supported by other staff members including, but not limited to, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and interpreters.

Throughout this section the applicant presents a number of goals, activities, and general timelines, such as increasing the bandwidth of its network by 2015 and implementing a full 1:1 technology program within the next four years. The applicant also mentions some of the staff who are involved with technology integration and support, such as a network technician and support specialist. The budget includes additional details that provide evidence of a high-quality plan because budget narratives detail who the responsible parties will be as well as their job descriptions (including activities). Some additional timeline specifics would improve the quality of the plan because technology will play such a critical role in the district’s vision.

The overall score for this section falls in the high range. The applicant not only already has practices, policies and rules in place that facilitate personalized learning, but it has already been working towards full implementation of its proposed high-quality plan because it continues to refine these elements of its infrastructure.

Score: 14

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	8
---	-----------	----------

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides relevant narrative about its efforts to convert to digital learning environments in the district’s schools. For example, it explains that “digital textbook resources will become the norm.” The district also acknowledges the importance of full implementation of digital devices because the success of its personalized learning initiative relies

heavily on this kind of comprehensive implementation. To this end, the district demonstrates that it has experimented with innovative ways to ensure that all participating students, parents, educators, and other stakeholders have access to information and resources. For example, it has already created public computer labs and made computers and internet access available to parents. However, it readily acknowledges that “none of those solutions has adequately addressed the access concerns for approximately 35% of [its] families.”

To meet the needs of those without private internet access, the district has also ambitiously explored additional innovative options. For example, it has even approached local business to ask if they will open their wireless networks to the public, and it has created a downtown wireless hotspot for families. This approach is quite innovative because the district has taken its realization that many of its parents have smart phone technology even if they do not have home computers.

The applicant has gone above and beyond to provide its parents with digital access to content, tools, and other learning resources; however, these efforts also demonstrate how difficult it is to accomplish this challenging feat. The district will need to continue its efforts because one of the hurdles to full support of personalized learning is ensuring the participation of families. Nevertheless, the district already provides appropriate support to students, parents, educators, and other stakeholders, and it provides information, when appropriate, in an open data format. As it moves forward, the district will improve in its ability to provide this information in various ways to parents because it plans to continue to work with its technology vendors to make student achievement data and messages available to parents through Apple and Android applications. However, as long as parents need access to digital and/or online services in order to support their students fully, the applicant cannot guarantee that all students will benefit from the applicant's existing and proposed infrastructure.

In this section the applicant demonstrates some aspects of a high-quality plan because it discusses appropriate goals, activities, and deliverables as well as general timelines. However, the applicant does not include specific timelines because it only includes general deadlines (such as "by 2015" and "within four years") and references to its "phases" of implementation. Similar to elsewhere in the application, the district's approach to implementing its plan and to effecting change is a cyclical one with timelines that do not necessarily have clear beginning, middle, and end dates. Instead, the applicant presents an on-going cycle of implementation, evaluation, and adjustment. Nevertheless, this is one section that would have been stronger with the inclusion of specific timelines because technology plays such a critical role in the district's efforts to communicate with parents.

The overall score for this section falls in the high range. The applicant effectively demonstrates its efforts to provide all participants in the educational process with important resources; however, it has not yet been able to ensure access to everyone through the development of a comprehensive high-quality plan.

Score: 8

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	14

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant demonstrates that the district embraces continuous improvement because it recognizes that even its comprehensive strategic plan is a living document. Consequently, the district has established a schedule by which principals will meet with central office administrators and departments to determine where support or enrichment are needed. Furthermore, the district has invested in data systems, developed its technical infrastructure, focused on connecting students to assessment results that are accurate and relevant, and trained staff to utilize data efficiently and effectively because it clearly recognizes that it must utilize data to guide on-going refinement. These efforts demonstrate the district's dedication to professional development, technology, and staff because without these entities continuous improvement would not be possible.

Furthermore, the applicant has demonstrated elsewhere in the application that it is willing to make adjustments and revisions as necessary and/or when possible. For example it was fully prepared to move its high schools to a mastery-of-standards model as soon as the state gave it the permission to do so.

The applicant does have in place a system through which it will gather and share feedback because part of its reporting process includes the development of an academic report with information about students achievement at all grade levels. This report, along with student trend data, will be available for all stakeholders to review because it is shared with board members and educators and is made available online for the public.

Teachers will also monitor and measure student achievement and the success of the district's plan through the use of the district's Cycle for Results system because the system includes appropriate processes that generate on-going feedback such as data analysis and formative assessments. Principals then meet twice a year with central office administrators to review the data generated by the Cycle for Results system. Additionally, the curriculum generates an annual report that is published electronically and viewable by administrators, educators, and the public.

As part of this section, the applicant presents effective ways in which it will utilize grant funding to improve students as well as to foster continuous improvement because it will invest in data systems that provide more comprehensive tools to "link fiscal, administrative and assessment" data in order "to make important strategic decisions about project goals and opportunities for ongoing corrections and improvements.

This section inconsistently demonstrates the attributes of a high-quality plan because it does not include clear evidence of an appropriate timeline for the overall continuous improvement process. As a result, the application has not provided clear documentation of how efficiently it will implement continuous improvement.

The overall score for this section falls in the high range. The applicant effectively demonstrates that it welcomes continuous improvements and that it has achievable, appropriate plans for to ensure continuous improvement. Furthermore, it recognizes that it must invest in the monitoring and reporting process because only with appropriate systems will its continuous improvement be carried out with fidelity.

Score: 14

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

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

This section of the application demonstrates that the district effectively utilizes communication opportunities. For example, the district encourages objective coverage of its plans because it supports the local newspaper's efforts to report on both the district's success and its struggles. Additionally, the district welcomes (and even hopes for) an increased television presence in coming years.

The district also works to establish relationships with those outside of the immediate community because it convenes a Superintendent's Advisory Council that provides opportunities for involvement to local, state, and federal members of the government; community business leaders; and faith-based leaders. The district's support of the transparency created by this two-way conversation is important because it expects the stakeholders to help "carry information to the community at large."

Though the district demonstrates its efforts to maintain information-rich websites to support ongoing communication and engagement, it also recognizes that its abilities are currently limited because its technology infrastructure does not allow it to share the kinds of media-rich communication that it would like to, such as podcasts and interactive systems. Elsewhere in the plan, however, the applicant has provided evidence of its on-going to commitment to improve its technology infrastructure.

The district actively works to increase the involvement of those immediately affected by its plans and goals because it enlists a Parent Advisory Council and student-led conferences and student-centered opportunities (such as the Rockdale Youth Leadership and the Teen Leadership Summit). The applicant particularly demonstrates how it provides individual schools with equal representation because the Parent Advisory Council is made up of two parents from each school, and the parents are expected to share information about and take information back to their home schools.

The applicant addresses a general schedule in this section. For example, the districts meets with state representatives and senators prior to each legislative session, employees receive an electronic newsletter on a monthly basis, and the superintendent meets with internal stakeholders according to consistent weekly, monthly, and bi-annual schedules.

The overall score for this section falls in the high range. The applicant effectively demonstrates the ways in which it will maintain ongoing communication and engagement because it includes goals, activities, deliverables, and responsible parties as well as general timelines.

Score: 5

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

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Performance Measures for All

In section E(3), the applicant has added an additional performance measure for all students to track the percentage of students who meet grade band checkpoints. In particular, this measure demonstrates whether students complete the program of study documented in their Personalized Student Portfolios, which is important because this measure will be used to determine district professional learning initiatives. The applicant appropriately explains how the measure will provide relevant information because assessing whether students are meeting grade band checkpoints provides timely and formative learning feedback. As a result, teachers can more thoroughly support students because the information generated by this performance measure will also determine which students are in need of "rigorous and timely safety-net services." However, the applicant does not provide clear evidence of how it will revise this measure if necessary because it does not explain how it will review and improve the measure if it is insufficient in gauging the implementation progress.

Performance Measures for PreK-3

The applicant includes the two required performance measures for students at the PreK-3 level, and it places importance on the first of the two because of the connection between students' reading level being on or above grade-level and their potential for success. In its narrative for the second measure, the applicant proposes a performance measure that will examine the number of students who receive social-emotional and/or behavioral interventions because the district recognizes the importance of students having equal opportunities "to learn without social-emotional and/or behavior distractions." Though assessing this measure will be achievable, it will be challenging for the applicant to make changes based on the data because social-emotional and/or behavior distractions can only be locally controlled. For example, the district should be able to minimize such distractions that occur for students when they are at school; however, it will be much more challenged to limit them once students leave school at the end of the day. Therefore, meeting annual targets will also be less achievable.

Performance Measures for 4-8

The district explains its rationale for both of the academic leading indicators in this section (both of which relate to meeting academic benchmarks and/or demonstrate proficiency) because it articulates how the measure will help teachers respond to individual student needs with "safety-net interventions."

For its social-emotional leading indicator, the applicant does not address its rationale for including the measure of students "who report they know an adult at school that they can talk to if they need help." Instead, the applicant includes its rationale for a performance measure for students in grades 9-12. Additionally, the evidence required by E(3)(b) and (c) is also lacking, and as a result, it is difficult to determine the appropriateness of this performance measure.

Performance Measures for 9-12

For the first performance measure in this part of the section (FAFSA completion), the applicant effectively demonstrates how it will use the information that it gains from this measure because it will institute advisement programs with lessons on the financial responsibility of attending/completing college. However, the chart it has included contains no data for participating subgroups, and this data (and the related goals) would have made the performance measure more effective because the district would be able to track better how well it was supporting all students as they transitioned on to college or to careers.

For its performance measure that demonstrates career-readiness, the applicant plans to determine the percentage of students who meet or exceed standards on career certification exams. However, the goals the district has established for this measure are not appropriate because they have established the same goals for both genders and, as a result, the obvious differences in baseline percentages are not taken into consideration. For example, males and females are both to gain 10 percentage points in the first year (males from 29% to 39% and females from 39% to 49%), but because the genders start ten percentage points off from each (29% and 39% respectively), the females only have to improve by 1% the next year to reach that year's gender-neutral goal of 50% while males are expected to achieve by 11% to meet the same goal as females. Having goals that are the same for both genders is not appropriate or ambitious enough given baseline data.

For its grades 9-12 social-emotional leading indicator, the district will measure the percentage of students who report "personalized learning satisfaction" based on a district exit survey. The survey has been designed locally and while the rationale seems reasonable given the focus of the plan, the evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of the survey is lacking. Furthermore, the district does not provide evidence of how it will improve the measure if necessary. As a result, it is difficult to tell how appropriate the performance measure will be.

The applicant does not include baseline data for a number of the performance measures, and though the district may not have been able to assess these measures previously (or retroactively), the lack of baseline data makes it less clear how ambitious and achievable the annual targets are. This will also restrict the ability of the district to measure the effectiveness of its plan in early years because the applicant does not have baselines against which to evaluate the impact of its reforms.

The overall score for this section falls in the medium range. Though the application does include ambitious yet achievable performance measures in many instances, it does not thoroughly explain how the applicant-proposed measures will be improved, if necessary, and some of the targets are not ambitious enough.

Score: 3

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

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

In E(4) the applicant provides convincing evidence that it will be able to evaluate the effectiveness of its investments because it describes extensive plans with thorough and diverse internal and external evaluation systems. For example, an external evaluator will conduct a systematic review and will help the district develop appropriate tools that gather data effectively. Similarly, internal reviews will measure the active involvement of staff because it will track such indicators as meeting attendance. However, the applicant does not provide specifics about who will conduct the internal reviews or how internal reviewers/evaluators will be chosen. Elsewhere in the plan the applicant also references an internal review process because the applicant mentions that internal reviews are part of the district's strategic plan and that "stakeholder groups that represent a microcosm of the school and district communities" conduct internal reviews. However, it is unclear whether there is a connection between the different internal reviews because the applicant does not clarify whether they are one and the same. These details would have demonstrated increased evidence of a high-quality plan. Even so, the internal and external evaluation results will be communicated to the public on at least an annual basis in a variety of ways through websites, community partners, and a public forum.

The applicant includes a convincing research objective to determine if its model results in improved student achievement, decreased learning gaps, and increased college and career preparation programs. The focus of the research objective takes into account the comprehensive focus of E(4) because the applicant will examine whether its plan leads to students "increasingly access[ing] more rigorous and applied personalized coursework," and it will help determine if implementing the proposal's personalized learning system has been worth the expense.

The district also proposes an innovative evaluation tool because it will conduct a comparison study between itself and a comparable "control" district.

The overall score for this section falls in the high range. The applicant effectively demonstrates that it has a high-quality plan in place to rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of its Race to the Top - District-funded activities. An internal evaluation process will gauge whether the district has fully implemented its plan and is using its Choice for Personalized Learning model appropriately. External evaluation will be conducted by an independent evaluator who will provide ongoing reports. Overall, the district incorporates a technically sound evaluation system because it includes numerous effectiveness checks.

Score: 4

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's budget appears to be feasible and appropriate. It identifies all project funds including those grant funds being requested as well as those funds from other sources. For each of its projects the district demonstrates that it has extensive financial support in addition to the grant funds because the funds it is receiving from sources other than the grant are greater for two of the four projects and are still quite substantial for the other two. The overall budget narrative convincingly demonstrates the efficiency of the budget because it explains that its plan has only "a \$270.75 cost per student per year after initial one-time investment."

The budget summary project list provides an effective snapshot of the reasonable and sufficient scope of the budget because the proposed projects are appropriately categorized to cover all aspects of the proposal including administration,

technology, personalized learning, the Competitive Preference Priority, and professional learning. The detailed but succinct chart in which the district summarizes its projects and overall budget summary also demonstrates evidence of the relevancy of the funding requests because each project is tied to specific sections in the application. For example, the administration project is cross-referenced as being relevant to E(4).

Throughout the budget, the applicant indicates which expenses are one-time investments, and the cost per student per year following initial expenditures further supports the effectiveness of the one-time investments.

The overall score for this section falls in the high range. The applicant identifies all of its funding sources and provides extensive and detailed rationale for its investments and priorities including everything from screening tools to youth conferences to Kindergarten Readiness Camp. Finally, the applicant's proposal is reasonable and sufficient because the district has demonstrated a high-quality plan to utilize grant funds and has supported the feasibility of its budget further by demonstrating that it has additional financial support from outside sources.

Score: 10

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

10

9

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

For this section, the applicant demonstrates the sustainability of its project goals because it demonstrates how future investments are aligned with the personalized learning projects that the district has already begun implementing. Additionally, the district has set an ambitious sustainability goal that extends beyond its own implementation because it has made an effort to design "a model that can [be] sustained and replicated nationwide."

Over a number of years, the district board and other stakeholders have implemented, assessed, and revised a comprehensive strategic plan. Therefore, the district's project goals for the Race to the Top-District funds are more likely to be sustainable and successful because they are also aligned with this strategic plan.

Additional support for the project will come from the local board's adoption of a resolution supporting an "Educational Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (ESPLOST)" because this sales tax "will fund capital outlay projects associated with the strategic plan and this grant proposal." In other words, the district is fully committing itself to the plan because it has opted to meet diverse requirements proposed by external stakeholders.

The sustainability of the applicant's plan is more likely because it will utilize collaborative partnerships to help sustain the project. These partnerships include organizations that have a successful history of working directly with youth" or working in youth-related capacities, such as the Boys & Girls Club and United Way.

Next, the applicant explains that not all aspects of the grant will have to be sustained post-grant because a "great portion of expenditures are for time-limited activities during the grant's duration." Furthermore, it makes a convincing case for this because its focus is on using grant funds to transform its whole educational system rather than to fund the establishment of ongoing needs. However, the applicant does not provide examples of specific "time-limited activities," which would have been helpful because the these time-limited expenses speak directly to the sustainability of the program. Along the same lines, the applicant fails to include clear timelines in this section, which limits the extent to which this is a high-quality plan.

As part of its own efforts to ensure sustainability, the district will manage "significant in-kind contributions" to the program for accounting resources, software, etc. These funds will further shore up the feasibility and sustainability of the plan because they demonstrate the district's intent to take on added the responsibility for maximizing opportunities provided by the grant.

The applicant does document other ways that the district demonstrates a high-quality plan because it includes the district's intentions to create school-based experts and to then move "away from the support of contracted experts," to account for a growth in numbers of students in coming years (which increases the availability of funding), and to budget for ongoing expenses beyond the life of the grant of over \$5,000,000 each year.

Elsewhere in the application, the applicant has convincingly detailed how it will evaluate the effectiveness of the grant and the district's investments.

The application scores in the high range for this section because the district appropriately demonstrates that it "views [the] grant as a catalyst for long-term internal capacity building." In this section the applicant has effectively demonstrated that its plan includes ambitious yet achievable goals and activities in particular. Also, the applicant includes information throughout its budget to demonstrate that this is a high-quality plan because the budget's detailed narratives indicate activities and deliverables broken down by position as well as grant-related timelines.

Score: 9

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	9

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

To demonstrate the extent to which the district has met the Competitive Preference Priority, the district provides a description of coherent and sustainable partnerships that it has with outside entities. These partnerships are significant because they thoroughly demonstrates the support the district receives from the Support Team for All Rockdale Students (STARS) and the Rockdale Early Learning Initiative (RELI). STARS demonstrates the district's collaboration with various organizations (such as the local police and sheriff departments as well as the Boys & Girls Club to name a few). RELI integrates student services because it allows for the integration of reading assistance, for example, with health and developmental treatments. This approach supports personalized learning environments because it acknowledges the importance of providing students and families with individualized social and emotional support as early as possible.

In section 2 of the Competitive Preference Priority the applicant effectively identifies 7 population-level desired results because it presents a chart that labels each result according to its population group and type. For example, the district expects students to exit third grade reading at or above level, and this PK to 3 goal demonstrates educational and social/emotional results. Similarly, it details that programs and processes will be implemented to reduce student risk and exposure to alcohol and marijuana for all students (PK-12), and this goal demonstrates educational, social/emotional, and family and community results.

The district will be able to effectively track the selected indicators because it will conduct formal and informal evaluations, such as an outcome evaluation and informal feedback sessions. These evaluation procedures will then be used by the district to improve results because both STARS and RELI have adopted the district's Cycle for Results system. The district thoroughly demonstrates how the Cycle for Results system will work for STARS and RELI because it presents the six steps of Cycle for Results in a table according to the activities STARS and RELI will undertake to analyze data, conduct assessments, adjust instruction, and then assess for Mastery.

The model demonstrates a strategy to scale the model to all participating students because the district has included all students in its plan.

The plan will integrate education with other services in ways that will meaningfully support participating students because STARS and RELI will afford the district opportunities to provide individualized emotional and behavioral support. For example, all participating students will have access to mental health services "regardless of insurance state/ability to pay" because STARS helps the district provide therapeutic services in the schools during the school day by licensed clinicians.

The applicant will build the capacity of its staff because it places an emphasis on staff training and works within its community partnerships to provide trainings on everything from managing staff burnout and compassion fatigue to assisting students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

The district will be able to establish the needs and assets of the school and community as these needs and assets align with 5(b) because the applicant references its population-level desired results in great detail. For example, the district knows the needs and assets of its community in relation how safe and supportive its school climate is because it recognizes that 18 of the 22 schools that will be served by the project are heavily impacted by a concentration of gang activity.

For 5(c) the applicant does not provide sufficient evidence that it has as extensive decision-making process and infrastructure in place to evaluate these supports because it only references them generally. For example, it explains the district utilizes partnerships to make decisions, but it does not get any more specific than to imply that those partnerships come from the district's involvement with STARS and RELI.

The district makes an effort to engage parents and families because it includes parent participation on its Advisory Council, and it offers opportunities such as its Parent Academy program and Parent Leadership Institute (which is sponsored by RELI).

Finally, the district has plans in place to routinely assess its progress in implementing the plan because it will utilize the Cycle for Result Framework along with oversight, evaluation, and reporting.

The applicant effectively identifies ambitious yet achievable performance measures because it includes a very detailed chart of 13 performance measures complete with applicable populations and targets. Examples include that the percentage of students who report being bullied in the last 30 days will decrease 5% each year of the grant and that the number of middle/high school students who use marijuana will decrease by 5% each year. The applicant also proposes two additional measures related to disruptive behaviors but it was unable to present baseline data at the time of the application.

The overall score for this section falls in the high range. The applicant convincingly demonstrates how it will work with community partnerships to integrate services and align resources in order to support the students and families the district serves.

Score: 9

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met
Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The applicant demonstrates that it has an extensive plan to improve learning and teaching through personalization in its Choices for Personalized Learning system because of the applicants' use of strategies, tools, and supports that will improve college- and career-readiness. Additionally, the applicant has demonstrated its ability to meet AYP for the last six years after having previously been identified as a "Needs Improvement" district especially because of the significant changes in its student population that have led to a minority-majority status.</p> <p>The applicant has also demonstrated that it can and will expand student access to the most effective educators and that it will increase the effectiveness of its educators because of the district's exceptionally high rate of highly qualified teachers (99.92%) and paraprofessionals (100%) and its on-going dedication to professional development.</p> <p>Similarly, the applicant has proven that it can decrease achievement gaps because it has been able to decrease achievement gaps in a number of its subgroups and across a variety of subject areas.</p> <p>The applicant has demonstrated its ability to accelerate student achievement and to deepen student learning because the district has evaluated students' academic needs and interests, involved students in the educational experience, and created and utilized two-way communication with parents and families, all of which will effectively address and meet student needs. The applicant will also increase the rates at which students graduate from high school prepared for college and careers because of the district's plan to individualize instruction and to keep students engaged in the educational process.</p> <p>Educators will also use the assessment of students to evaluate and modify their efforts in order to help students succeed. The applicant will improve the educators' ability to use assessment and data because it has a plan to heavily invest in training and technology to improve and individualize instruction based on assessment and data.</p> <p>Finally, the applicant has demonstrated throughout its plan that it will recruit, develop, reward, and retain effective teachers and principals because it has a comprehensive plan to develop professional development and evaluation systems. These systems will not only offer constructive criticism to educators, but they will also identify teacher leaders and effective principals and place them in roles that allow them to support their colleagues.</p>		
Total	210	186



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0030GA-3 for Rockdale County Public Schools

A. Vision (40 total points)

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

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The Rockdale County Public Schools has set forth a comprehensive and coherent reform vision for the district. The vision is comprehensive because the applicant has meticulously embedded and aligned all project initiatives to address the four core educational assurance areas throughout the vision and the district's Strategic Plan. All activities and initiatives are aligned with the four assurances areas and include, timelines, key goals, and key activities with rationales. For example, the following activities will be implemented:

- (1) The adoption of new State and the Common Core standards and revising all student assessments to align with the new standards;
- (2) The development of a new data system that is aligned with the new assessments and standards. The new system will allow district educators to better monitor student achievement;
- (3) Implementing a new teacher evaluation and merit system that is aligned with student achievement, thus allowing for monitoring of teacher and student successes;
- (4) The implementation of initiatives to turn around the lowest performing schools, such as personalized learning environments, and magnet schools.

The vision as articulated serves as the foundation for several innovative approaches to accelerating student learning through the proposed RCPS Choices for Personalized Learning Plan, such as (a) creating magnet and specialty schools, (2) system-wide equitable school choice, (3) increasing college and career awareness choices, and (4) expanding online learning opportunities. The innovative approaches will provide enhanced opportunities for increasing student performance and student learning experiences. The applicant describes the classroom experiences with proven strategies for success with personalized learning environments, such as, (1) flexible scheduling, (2) student-designed and student driven learning paths, and (3) mastery and competency-based progression.

The applicant has clearly demonstrated a clear focus for the district's STEAM programs of study with expanded K-12 opportunities for college and career readiness. The vision is clearly outlined in the district's Strategic Plan, which will provide a template for the applicant to implement and achieve their goals. A review of the Strategic Plan provided documented evidence that the district has developed a framework for increasing equity and closing achievement gaps among various student groups. The applicant provides evidence of the development of innovative goals with reasonable and achievable goals and objectives.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	9
--	-----------	----------

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The Rockdale County Public Schools describes a credible approach to implementing an all inclusive system-wide reform model in which all schools in the district will participate in the project and the development of a personalized learning environment at each school. The system-wide approach would be effective because utilizing the whole district model ensures collectively the applicant through the RTT-D grant will address the gaps that exist in the current educational system. The applicant provided data and evidence of involvement from various stakeholders in the community, schools and educators with the decision to embark on a district wide program model. For example, based on the demographic data presented, all schools (22 schools and 16,000 students) in the district collectively meet the competition requirements. Additionally, the 22 schools represent high concentrations of high-need students and high poverty.

In addition to these factors, the school district and multiple stakeholders, including parents, students and educators conducted a needs assessment for the district to assess district gaps and weaknesses. The survey results

indicated an overwhelming positive response that some changes needed to be made in the current model of educating students. The applicant concluded that system-wide participation in the RTT-D initiatives would ensure all students would effectively benefit from a student-centered and customized learning model.

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

10

10

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The Rockdale County Public Schools provided a high-quality reform plan for scale-up and replication. The plan is high-quality because the plan includes key goals, timelines, activities to be implemented and a rationale for each activity. For example, the RCPS Choices for Personalized Learning is a multi-faceted blend of strategies and approaches that create a longitudinal approach to personalized student learning through: (1) the exploration of student interests, (2) increased rigor, (3) exposure to student-selected pathways of study, and (4) post-secondary preparation. The applicant provides evidence of an increasing high-need student population struggling with various out-of school variables that negatively impact student achievement. The strategies are good because they provide students who are struggling with achievement and other home variables options for successfully completing their educational pursuits.

The proposed plan is responsive to the changes that are occurring in the student population by providing students with personalized learning opportunities. The proposed program will provide students with support to assist students in meeting state academic standards. The applicant describes a theory of action and plan based on incorporating customized learning paths that puts the needs of students first. The framework for the plan involves students setting learning goals based on personal, academic and career interest with support from teachers, parents, and counselors. The plan is an innovative approach because it includes elements that are commonly associated with best practices, such as: (1) flexible scheduling; (2) project-based learning; and (3) student driven learning.

The applicant convincingly demonstrates the critical need to redefine the role of the teacher in order to effectively achieve an authentic student-centered approach required for personalized learning. Redefining the role of the teacher will be critical to the success of personalized learning environments. The applicant included a comprehensive timeline, deliverables and indicated who would be responsible for implementing each phase of the project.

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

10

9

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's vision is likely to result in improved student learning and performance as demonstrated by ambitious yet achievable annual targets greater than the State ESEA targeted measures. The RCPS provides clear and coherent data in the form of tables which indicate that student achievement is projected to increase and the achievement gap will decrease among sub-groups. For example, the method for determining growth will be demonstrated by how many students meet proficiency as compared to approved targets and the State's approved ESEA flexibility requests. The applicant has set forth ambitious yet achievable annual goals that will be targeted through two assessments, the CRCT test and the State EOCT academic exam. The CRCT measures how well students acquire the skills and knowledge described in the state mandated content standards in reading, English/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. The assessments will yield information on academic achievement at the student, class, school, system, and state levels. This information is used to diagnose individual student strengths and weaknesses as related to the instruction of the state standards, and to gauge the quality of education throughout Georgia. The EOCT aligns with Georgia's state mandated content standards and include assessment of specific content knowledge and skills. The assessments provide diagnostic information to help students identify strengths and areas of need in learning, therefore improving performance in all high school courses.

The applicant provides comprehensive charts and tables on the students' summative assessments for proficiency status and growth for student's achievement which includes baselines and goals. The chart describes projected goals of improvement for all students' learning performance from Grades 3-12 with a proficiency rate target that increases 4 or 5 percent each year, which is ambitious and achievable. The applicant proposes a goal of reducing the overall achievement gap among student subgroups by 80% over five years. The goals are ambitious and achievable given their proposed comprehensive student supports initiatives to assist student's in the process.

The annual cohort graduation rate goal and the annual college rate goal are ambitious and achievable. Implementing their comprehensive plan will result in improvement of students' growth, which leads to success in academic achievement, success in college enrollment and graduation, and future careers. The applicant's vision is comprehensive was articulated very well in the proposal. It is very likely the applicant will be able to improve student learning and performance by implementing the proposed initiatives.

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	15
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has clearly demonstrated evidence of a clear record of success in the past four years in advancing student learning and achievement, while overcoming major demographic shifts in the student population and high need status. The applicant indicated the district is 100% Title I and was a Need Improvement district. Over the past five years the district was removed from being a Need Improvement district to making AYP. The significant change was accomplished by revisiting their vision and developing a Strategic Plan. The applicant indicated increased achievement among high-need and minority students have occurred over the past four years. Overall, the applicant has demonstrated a clear record of success in advancing student learning at many levels.</p> <p>The projections for continued improvement is credible because the following successes have occurred in the district: (1) K–8 performance on the state’s CRCT has increased across all core academic areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. For example, in the area of English Language Arts, student performance is above 90% proficient in all grades 3 – 8 and exceeds state performance in every grade level; (2) high school graduation rate has improved over the past decade reaching a high rate of 86%, with a drop-out rate of 2.9% . These improvements are due to the expansion of innovative, non-traditional, personalized learning approaches at the high school level.</p> <p>The district has implemented a data warehousing system for the purpose of making student performance data more accessible to educators, parents, and students. This system enables teachers to readily access summative and formative student performance data. Using this technology, educators at all levels are able to analyze real-time assessment data in order to adjust instruction for individual and groups of students.</p> <p>All of the prior successes are a clear indication the applicant is on the right track and the proposed RTT-D grant initiatives would support their continued efforts.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has demonstrated credible evidence of a high level of transparency in LEA processes, practices and investments. The applicant provided convincing evidence that school-level expenditure data is available to the public through administrative policies. Additionally, local and state legislation and mandates have been put in place to approve reform efforts. These policies are evident in the fact that changes have occurred in legislative mandates to redefine the definition of "seat time" for students who are engaged in personalized learning environments. This legislation is key to the district because many of the purposed programs will change the traditional nature of what happens in the classroom. A review of the legislative policies and mandates indicate that provisions have been made to make actual personnel salaries for school-level instructional and support staff available through salary schedules posted locally on the RCPS website. Certified personnel salary information are available at the state level on the Teach Georgia website, as well as through the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement website.</p> <p>The Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts maintains the LEA’s audits which contain specific information on non-personnel expenditures at the school level. All information is linked on the Georgia Department of Education website. Additionally, both school-level and district budgets are available upon request or via link on the RCPS website. Since the community and various stakeholders have invested greatly in supporting the school system with the RTT-D project, providing the appropriate transparency offers stakeholders opportunities to keep abreast of their investments and progress made on project implementation in the school district. All of the provisions for transparency described in the narrative are acceptable and common practices used by school districts in the State of Georgia.</p>		

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has demonstrated evidence of successful conditions and sufficient autonomy under State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements to implement the personalized learning environments. The evidence indicates that there are appropriate state legal, statutory and regulatory systems in place to support the district autonomy to implement programs such as student personalized learning. The proposal includes elements of public school choice in the district and this initiative is within the authority of the local board of education. In addition, the Georgia Legislature grants authority to establish charter schools or charter systems which stipulates that an LEA has the authority to establish and approve charter petitions. Moreover, this grant project proposal is aligned with the vision of the Georgia Department of Education which allows school districts to create "boundary free school districts." These legislative actions provide a clear path for the RCPS to develop a district-wide program which will include developing personalized learning environments in all schools.</p> <p>The State of Georgia additionally revised the rules for calculating graduation rates in all of Georgia's school districts. The new graduation rule eliminates the language of "seat time" and clock hours required for credit instruction, emphasizing instead competency-based course credit. These revisions are directly aligned to the vision described in this proposal to move towards a proficiency-based approach to earning high school course credit within structured pathways, instead of the traditional school schedule. In addition, the state's new graduation rule requires all students to complete either a work-based learning project, a capstone project or an on-line learning project. Based on these requirements, the district will have some method of assessing student learning at all levels. All of these key components are within the district's strategic plan and the RCPS Choices for Personalized Learning vision and will provide the district to autonomy to meet the needs of the students through customized graduation choice programs.</p>		

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)	15	15
<p>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant clearly demonstrates through a variety of evidence and sources that meaningful engagement and support with various stakeholders occurred during the development of the proposal. The applicant has shown evidence that many collaborative initiatives and strategies were utilized in the development of the proposal. These collaborations provides some assurance that stakeholders support the vision of the school district and support to assist them with the transition. The applicant effectively provided evidence of the following stakeholder collaborations and support in the development of the RTT-D proposal:</p> <p>(1) The applicant provided evidence through letters of support and documented meetings that various stakeholders included teachers, parents, administrators and external community members collaborated and provided input, as well as, support to ensure the long-term sustainability of the plan. Agendas and minutes of meeting were available for evidence.</p> <p>(2) RCPS solicited the active involvement and support of both internal and external stakeholders throughout the planning process, beginning with the District's Strategic Plan renewal and transition to its personalized learning foundation. The Superintendent was active in presenting the proposed RTT-D proposal to various constituents.</p> <p>(3) The applicant provides evidence that at least 70 percent of teachers from participating schools. Evidence of teacher support is demonstrated through letters of declaration of each school principal. In addition, letters of support from other community partners demonstrate support from a wide variety of external stakeholders in the Appendix. The State of Georgia does not participate in a collective bargaining process for teachers, thus, 70% support is adequate representation of support.</p>		

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	19
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has developed a good high-quality plan for improving the learning and teaching process for all students. The plan is high quality because it includes timelines, key goals, and rationales for key activities that will support the various initiatives to engage and empower students to pursue individualized paths to accelerate and support their learning needs. The applicant has outlined an excellent range and variety of high quality instructional approaches and environments. The district's learning approach has been framed around the goals set forth in the Strategic Plan and that is to ensure all students are prepared for graduation and ready for college and/or careers. This goal has been presented and</p>		

embedded throughout the proposal. One of the key decisions to ensure this takes place is the decision to implement the program system-wide (K-12). By implementing the personalized learning model as a K-12 initiative, the district is building a system that will help students; (1) envision their post-secondary futures, (2) set appropriate learning goals, and (3) track and manage their own progress. Additionally, the district-wide model demonstrates that the expectation for college and or career is set from the first day of Kindergarten. The district's plan includes innovative approaches, all of which are research-based and are proven strategies to address a high quality student learning environment such as:

- (1) personalized learning plans provide multiple opportunities for students to work at their own pace, seeking extra help or acceleration as needed;
- (2) accommodations and high-quality strategies are in place for high-need students through differentiated and individualized learning activities and opportunities;
- (3) formative and summative assessments balance standardized testing with multiple ways to demonstrate mastery with extending learning days;
- (4) RCPS has put in place a comprehensive advisement system called PREPARE to help students understand what they are learning is key to their success in accomplishing their goals, and linked to future college- and career plans, at both the high school and middle school levels;
- (5) the state's BRIDGE Act, signed into law in May 2010 as well as the 8th graders' Individual Graduation Plans, and the key mandates within the BRIDGE Bill are that students choose a career focus, create an Individual Graduation Plan, and graduate high school prepared to go to college or to enter the workforce also supports this career awareness work;
- (6) opportunities for learning are provided through their Dual Enrollment/Dual Credit courses that provide opportunities for 11th and 12th graders to take college-level courses in partnership with a number of Georgia's colleges and through the AVID;

The RCPS Strategic Plan calls for increased parent and student exposure to post-secondary and career opportunities. RCPS has a career center established at each high school. Parental involvement will be encouraged to utilize the career centers with students and participate in annual student-led conferences with teachers and staff to discuss a student's individualized plan of study. Additionally, students and parent will be able to access utilize data points such as assessment performance and interest inventories in order to make collaborative decisions. The parental support and participation will provide increased opportunities for student success. However, the applicant did not provide any discussion as to how they will put in place mechanisms to provide training and support to students, parents and teachers to ensure they will be able to utilize all of the tools and resources provided to them.

As previously noted, the district is experiencing major cultural demographic changes in the school district. The district has seen a major increase in the number of minority students. In an effort to address the shift and cultural differences the RTT-D grant will provide staff with ongoing cultural diversity training to ensure that teachers, administrators, and all other personnel have the knowledge and skills to work with and proactively engage students from all cultural backgrounds and family structures. This is a great strategy to ensure all staff are prepared and ready to address and understand challenges inherent to cultural differences. While this strategy is useful, there was no mention as to how they plan to make changes to the curriculum to ensure there is no curriculum bias.

Overall, the applicant has provided strong evidence to indicate the extent to which the applicant has a high-quality plan for improving learning and teaching by personalizing the learning environment in order to provide all students the support to graduate college- and career-ready. The district has already started to work on implementing many proposed instructional strategies for students as it relates to personalized the learning environment and strategies to allow students to accelerate his or her learning.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	18
--	-----------	-----------

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant describes a high-quality plan for improving leading and teaching through personalizing learning environments for the proposed project. The plan is high-quality because the applicant recognizes that the traditional role of the teacher and the leader will change as they begin to implement the new vision for personalized learning environments district-wide. The high-quality plan includes reasonable timelines, key goals and rationales for all activities. For example, as the district begin the new reform efforts, teachers will need training in new methods of teaching such as; (1) co-teaching, (2) e-learning facilitation, (3) project-based learning, (4) personalized learning, (5) using multiple data sources to differentiate instruction, formative assessments, and (6) the use of technology resources and platforms. These training efforts, along with a learning community in every school are sound strategies that will support effective implementation of personalized learning environments and will help teachers adapt content and instruction appropriately. Therefore, in order to meet the needs of teachers the applicant proposes a rigorous professional development agenda complete with

timelines, deliverables, and responsible parties. The district has set aside time and funding to allow teacher planning in addition to regularly embedded common planning time within the school day and week. All training and professional development are aligned with the reform agenda. RCPS will provide ongoing professional learning on nine categories of research-based strategies from the research based program Classroom Instruction that Works (CITW). Additionally, current leaders and aspiring leaders will have access to training programs to prepare school leaders to lead in schools offering varied personalized learning options.

Included in the RTT-D proposal is a plan to expand the current data system to allow all educators to access and interact with student data in real-time for the purpose of informing instructional practice and accelerating student achievement. A series of professional development opportunities for all participating educators to access and gain experience with the new system is planned. There appeared to be no specific discussion in this section concerning how educator capacity would be addressed to frequently measure student progress towards meeting standards, or using data to inform acceleration of student progress and improve practice of educators.

The district has adopted a teacher, principal, and superintendent evaluation system that will measure progress based on student achievement and provide frequent feedback on effectiveness. The applicant presented a solid description of the Teacher Keys Effectiveness Systems (TKES) and Leader Keys Effectiveness Systems (LKES) developed through Georgia's Race to the Top grant, and how it was piloted last year and expected to be fully implemented by 2014. The system appropriately takes into account observations and other measures of teacher performance standards, student growth and academic achievement, and student perceptions. Much of the system is described as being on-line, which should significantly help with the ease and consistent implementation of the system. Training will be provided to all staff.

All educators will have access to students' personal learning plans, career action plans, and cross-curricular data in the expanded data dashboard system. Professional development would be provided to develop effective strategies for using the data to personalize learning. Teachers would develop new curricular units and evaluate their use with the student centered teaching model. All of the strategies provided in association with the new teacher and leader evaluation program are effective strategies to gain educator support for the new system.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

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

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has provided a high-quality plan regarding the LEA practices, policies and rules. The plan is high-quality because it includes, key goals, timelines and rationales to support the implementation. The plan is high-quality because, the applicant maintains a highly de-centralized district office, a result of a major initiative to shift authority and resources to the school-level. The majority of the work to implement district initiatives is primarily on-site with educators at their schools. District personnel will provide support to each school and this is beneficial to the success of the proposed program because the district school support networks have a close relationship with the schools and know the needs of the school which will assist in providing the schools with greater support. The district's organizational cabinet will conduct weekly cabinet meeting of the progress and status of implementation. Data will be compared to track progress against established benchmarks for implementation and student achievement. This is an important strategy because the time will be used also to discuss challenges and solutions and resources to be reallocated.

Schools will have the authority to make school-level personnel decisions and create unique staffing models, except for certain positions that are required by the district. The applicant provides schools with flexibility and autonomy in their organizational, budgetary and scheduling decision-making processes. The district has a small central office, with a superintendent and 6 cabinet members each heading up a clearly differentiated set of areas, tasks and personnel. New tasks and initiatives that would result from the proposed grant would be assigned to the appropriate cabinet member and department as logical extensions of their current work. The practices, polices and rules to support implementation are

evident in the plan. The ability for schools to have decision making authority will allow school leaders to determine how to adapt the learning resources and instructional practices to their schools based on the needs of the make-up of their school population. The RCPS is well-positioned to give students the opportunity to progress and earn credits based on mastery, as the only district in Georgia that currently uses standards-based mastery grading and reporting at all levels, including high school. RCPS describes a sound approach for providing resources and instructional practices that are adaptable and fully accessible to all students, including students with disabilities and English learners.

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

10

9

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provided evidence to determine a high-quality plan is in place to ensure the LEA has an effective infrastrue. The plan is high-quality because the applicant clearly outlines the practices, polices and rules that will facilitate personalized learning at all schools. The applicant describes the LEA and the school infrastructure to demonstrate it has a plan to support project implementation through comprehensive policies and planning that will provide every student the support and resources needed. Resources and instructional practices in the districts are cited to be adaptable and fully accessible to all stakeholders. The applicant presents a well-developed and comprehensive high-quality plan that supports the overall vision of reform as required by the Race to the Top District core educational reform efforts. To ensure that all students, parents, educators, and stakeholders have the necessary tools to implement the proposed project design, the applicant will utilize the division of Information Technology to support and promote student achievement through the integration of technology resources into the instruction and administrative processes. There is significant support from the State and local resources as evidenced by the letters of support outlining commitments to the project by the various stakeholders. The following evidence with timelines, goals and rationales to support the school infrastructure to implement personalized learning:

- The applicant has been outfitting its schools with upgraded technology to ensure that all students and educators have access to technology and the resources needed to use technology effectively in the classroom. All schools have some internet access and more technology upgrades are being planned. The district has already made a significant investment in technology, as evidenced by all classrooms in every school being 21st Century classrooms that are digitally equipped.
- The district also has a full service curriculum management system integrated with their assessment system, response to intervention system, and a parent portal. They will be building on several successful efforts already in place, including the Rockdale Virtual campus; the Ask the Expert program, and a 1:1 computer to student approach with digital pads, and establishing after-hour centers with computers and free hot spots for wireless connections in downtown.
- The RCPS has in place an important parent portal that gives parents access to student data and information in open source language that is exportable. The work has been appropriately organized into three phases, each of which expands the type and nature of information that will be available to parents.

The applicant has a small number of designated staff in each school and in the district office to offer technical support to teachers, staff, students and parents. The staffing numbers look sufficient for supporting teachers, but may not be able to fully serve parents and students as well. With so much of the proposal's initiatives depending on technology, thus requiring the need for the applicant to consider increasing technology support.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

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

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The RCPS presented evidence that a strong continuous improvement process is in place which will be guided by their pre-existing and recently renewed 5-year Strategic Plan. In addition, the applicant has develop a 6-step RCPS cycle of results framework and based on the existence of these documents, the applicant has proven there are clear plans for implementation and revisions throughout the reform process. The applicant has consistently expressed that they will operate using the Strategic Plan as its blueprint and guidance for continuous improvement and to achieve its mission, vision and goals. The original Strategic Plan was developed more than five years ago and the system achieved

international accreditation from AdvancED (SACS) with ten commendations related to implementation of the district's strategic plan. Each school has a site based plan which was developed using the same method and aligns with the district plan for common focus and direction.

The applicant provides a detailed plan that includes all elements of a high-quality plan (i.e., goals, timelines, key personnel, and activities) to ensure that the project is meeting its stated objectives. The importance of this project is well-documented as each of the strategic initiatives is aligned with provisions for regular staff reviews on implementation status, quarterly reporting to the Board of Education and other publics, and an annual update which maintains its relevance and responsiveness to current conditions. RCPS has created a framework (RCPS Cycle for Results) for teaching and learning to ensure continuous improvement, data driven instruction, customization, and on demand support systems. The Cycle for Results was developed to have a systemic approach to increasing student achievement, closing the achievement gap, and creating a model for enabling the district experience high performance levels.

The applicant has embodied throughout the proposal several impressive high-quality continuous improvement methods that will happen at all levels-(classroom, school and district level) and recurring regularly. All project initiatives will undergo regular and rigorous evaluation and provide regular and feedback that will allow responsible persons to ascertain if goals and objectives are being met.

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

5

5

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has provided in the narrative a credible plan for ongoing communication and engagement during the reform process. The plan is high quality because the RCPS has strong communications strategies in place to support needed communication with external and internal stakeholders. The plan includes timelines, deliverables and rationales for each proposed activity. For external stakeholders information will be dispersed through various media outlets. Information from the Superintendent's Action Council, will be directed through the district website and e-BOARD, Parent Advisory Group and Parent Academy. For internal stakeholders, information will be distributed through the district e-newsletter, and multiple meetings held on a regular basis with teachers, principals and others. They also cite several different ways in which students are engaged in communication, including student-led conferences, student leadership opportunities, and ability to choose their program of study according to their interests and needs. The applicant provides a comprehensive and detailed plan for ensuring ongoing communication and engagement with stakeholders, parents, students, teachers, principals, and community leaders that includes monthly, quarterly, and semi-annual Council meetings led by the superintendent. The applicant describes a strong system of communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders. The applicant has added various safeguards to ensure that communication remains in the forefront.

The plan for this project includes constant communication between stakeholders and project managers. The project management team, school improvement teams, and expert consultants have many meetings and forums scheduled to discuss progress and listen to feedback for improvement. Each quarter evaluation reports, management team meetings, and sustainability planning will take place. Both internal and external stakeholders are invited to attend scheduled meetings to offer feedback, and the district's approach to inviting feedback to potentially improve its performance will add to the effectiveness of this proposal.

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

5

5

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provided a credible and comprehensive approach for continuously supporting and revisit their plan for increasing performance. This statement is based on the fact that in the narrative the applicant does an excellent job of identifying performance measures that are both ambitious and obtainable. Measures are well conceptualized, and organized into age-appropriate grade bands of K-3; 6-8, and 9-12. They have proposed an appropriate set of required and applicant-proposed measures for each grade band. Grade level targets are appropriately set, and impressively is equitable across all sub-groups of students.

The rationale for each of the measures is clearly described and includes information as to how the stated performance measure provides rigorous and formative information aligned to the four core educational assurances. For example, when deciding on the percentage of students overall and by subgroup whose teacher of record is considered effective or highly effective, the applicant reflected on historically how teachers were rated, and wanted a measure that would allow them to differentiate teacher performance and human capital decisions based on performance. Each of the stated objectives has a formative and summative aspect that will allow for a high-quality and comprehensive project evaluation with results reported quarterly and annually. The applicant did not include

data on the number of high need students wh completed the FAFSA, however, they have begun to complile data and track the number of students who are applying to post-secondary schools. Additionally, the applicant has begun to track elementary school students health issues through a partnership with the local health department. There is a special focus on juvenile diabetes.

The plan included reasonable timelines for meeting activity deadlines, rationales for each proposed initiative and deliverables, that will provide documentation of continuous improvements. The applicant provided a very detailed chart to indicate how they will measure and provide rigorous, timely implementation progress monitoring. The applicant describes in detail the Cycle of Results 6-step plan in which the district developed to have a systematic approach to monitor and report continuous improvements at the district and school levels. The six-step plan is very detailed and the data produced over time will be valuable in helping the district determine the necessary support and/or enrichment needed at the school levels.

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

5

5

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant does an excellent job of describing their plan to evaluate effectiveness as it relates to reaching project objectives that includes hiring an external evaluator who will work with an internal evaluation analyst to track and report on progress towards meeting the stated objectives. The use of an internal and external evaluation model will provide an external view in which the project can be assessed. The applicant will utilize a quasi-experimental research design will enable a summative assessment of the program's impact on educational outcomes. An important element of the evaluation is an inclusion of a process evaluation component that will allow closer scrutiny of the actual program intervention, and the degree to which it was implemented as envisioned within and across district schools. Additionally, the applicant will collect quantitative data that will be used to track retention rates of participants, growth and achievement of students, and to determine if students are college and career ready. There is a comprehensive plan for evaluating with clearly delineated reporting timelines, rigourous data collection, and assignment of tasks to be performed.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has provided a comprehensive, sufficiently detailed project budget for its total 4-year budget grant funds of \$24,999,015.00. The applicant provides a comprehensive budget that fully describes the commitment by the district and other stakeholders. Based on review of the budget and the justification narratives, the budget will be used primarily to support the design and development of the personalized learning system that will be anchored in college and career readiness; measure rigorous content throughout the school year; leverage technology for innovation, cost efficiency and speed; and provide educators with timely reports of student performance and practical tools to improve instruction based on achievement results.

The budget request is for the most part direct spending on the design, development and technology associated with the proposed Rockdale County Public Schools Choices for Personalized Learning model, and reflects a \$270.75 cost per student per year after initial one-time investments. In addition, the proposed budget invests heavily in professional development and technology whose involvement will be critical for ensuring the success of all program initiatives. The applicant ensures all procurement transactions associated with the grant will be consistent with federal regulations and state and local Boards of Education guidelines.

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

10

10

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has developed a high-quality plan for sustaining the project, which includes leveraging existing federal funding through the various Title I, II-A, III, and VI-B. The local Board of Education supports the RCPS Strategic Plan and

its initiatives toward personalized learning. Based on the narrative, the plan is high-quality because, the entire grant proposal is aligned to the Board approved 2012-2017 RCPS Strategic Plan. Following this Strategic Plan will provide the district some guidance and a blueprint for operation. Additionally, the plan is high-quality because the district has fully aligned the plan with timelines for implementation, ke goals and rationales and lines of responsibility. The applicant has included a very thorough post grant 3-year budget and the budget provides evidence there will be continued support from partners and stakeholders to maintain and continue the success that may occur as a result of RTT-D funding.

Furthermore, the local Board has unanimously adopted a resolution supporting an Educational Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (ESPLOST) which will fund capital outlay projects associated with the strategic plan and this grant proposal. The plan includes timelines, rationales and deliverables for the utilization of all budget expenditures. There are a number of community and corporate stakeholders who fully support the project that can be leveraged as an additional resource to sustainability. The design of the project will inherently build in opportunities for embedding a number of the strategies into the overall school culture, which will allow the applicant to leverage existing district funds. The district has formed collaborative partnerships that can effectively implement a successful education program and will use them to help provide necessary resources and services such as evaluating, training, tutoring and/or implementing the project. Based on a review of the proposal, the budget and other relevant documents in the Appendix, the applicant has proven to have the capacity to administer funds and manage contracts, while delivering the proposed project.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

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

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has set forth a credible and sustainable approach for the competitive preference priority to support their efforts to integrate public and private resources in a partnership designed to augment the schools' resources. The plan is comprehensive because the applicant does an excellent job of summarizing their commitment to partnering with government agencies and local organizations to provide support to high-need students and their families. The overall program design is geared towards building and developing partnerships that will prepare all students to graduate college and be career ready. The applicant identified seven population-level desired results for students in the district that align with and support the applicant's RTT-D proposal. Additionally, the applicant demonstrates annual ambitious yet achievable performance measures for the seven proposed population-level and described the desired results for students.

The following evidence are examples of initiatives, effective resource alignments and integrated services documenting the high-quality plan:

- A.) The applicant describes a number of solid partnerships with local organizations and stakeholders. The applicant presents a strong case for how they would work with multiple stakeholders to provide a well-integrated set of educational and other services for students, teachers and parents.
- B) The applicant has set forth a good case for how they would build the capacity of staff in participating schools to assess the needs and assets of participating students; inventory the needs and assets of the schools, create a decision-making process that supports individual students, engages parents and families, and routinely assesses the applicant's progress in implementing its plan.
- C) The applicant describes an appropriate initiative that builds upon two coherent and sustainable partnerships that have emerged from past work in the district, the STARS (the Support Team for All Rockdale Students) Community Partnership, a comprehensive program to address the social, emotional and behavioral needs of students (part of the federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant) and the Rockdale Early Learning Initiative (RELI)/Parents as Teachers (PAT).
- D) The applicant has developed a high quality evaluation plan to track the selected indicators concerning student achievement. The applicant outlined plans to conduct three different evaluation components consisting of process evaluation, outcome evaluation and informal feedback. The applicant refers to the RCPS Cycle for Results framework as the method by which they would use data to target its resources, but does not elaborate more specifically.
- E) The Early Learning Initiative implements an extensive outreach and education effort throughout the Rockdale County community which impacts families, teachers, and local businesses. Teacher training and technical assistance, resource referral, and community workshops focusing on early literacy education, child abuse/neglect prevention, and development-centered parenting, are all part of the comprehensive offerings available through the Early Learning Resource Center.

F) Collaboration and support through the STARS Project places Rockdale Early Learning Initiative in a unique position to provide longitudinal data on the impact of early intervention. Data collection is used to take direct action, modify plans and ultimately improve outcomes and results for families and children. Building capacity of the RELI team enables RCPS to disaggregate data so that individualized family and child support plans can be developed through primary intervention, early intervention and intensive early intervention. Coordination of RELI efforts with the STARS project provides a level of comprehensive support unlike any other in our state. This approach provides the ultimate personalized education plan because in Rockdale County, personalized learning plans begin at birth.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides a comprehensive and detailed description of the vision of change and new direction for students and staff that has been built over the last two years. This vision of change includes the implementation of integrated and differentiated instruction, more interactivity and problem-based teaching, and increased flexibility in pacing. The implementation of a system-wide program that will allow for greater flexibility and innovation and most of all growth. The plan was greatly supported by community stakeholders, parents, teachers, and school administration (as evidenced by the letters of support from a wide range of stakeholders) and supports the vision and new direction. The applicant realizes the student demographic population has changed over the past few years and the collaborative efforts to address the shift is a strength of the proposed project as it is clear that a change was needed based on significant achievement between various sub-groups.

Moreover, the vision articulates the four core educational reform areas mandated by the Race To The Top proposal requirements (e.g. the adoption of the Common Core Standards and Assessments), and details how they will reform low performing schools through the implementation of a performance-based teacher and school leader program, through the movement of decision-making to the local school level. School based leaders will have the authority to determine waivers and manage resource allocations specific to their schools. The applicant effectively demonstrates that increasing student achievement, increasing graduation rates and teacher effectiveness is the foundation of their plan. The district has reached out to community partners, private and faith based schools to help provide placement for every student to receive the rich and meaningful learning experiences necessary for success in school, career and college.

Total	210	204
--------------	------------	------------