



# Race to the Top - District

## Technical Review Form

Application #0025IL-1 for Rockford Public School District 205

### A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>
<p><b>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The Rockford School District sets forth a reform vision that includes how the district will build on work in the four core educational assurance areas, the Academy Model approach, along with a description of what classroom experiences will look like for teachers and students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Though the vision includes how the district will use the National Career Readiness Certificate as a measure of career and college readiness and is based on the WORKKEYS tool which is a job skills assessment system, evidence of specific standards that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global community is not addressed.</li> <li>• The district proposes to use the Harvard Graduate School of Education Data Wise protocol that allows educators to examine data with a prescribed method that will measure student growth and inform teachers and students on how to improve performance.</li> <li>• The applicant intends to hire a Director of College and Career Readiness and Academy coaches for each participating high school but failed to address recruiting, rewarding and retaining effective teachers and principals. This is a critical component to consider in redesigning four high schools in the district.</li> <li>• A rationale for housing Academy Coordinators and Academy Coaches at the district office and not on the Academy campus is not provided and could have significant impact on what the classroom experience will be like for students and teachers. High visibility of support staff is important for developing trust among students and teachers.</li> <li>• The vision adequately addresses training and professional development for teachers and principals. The use of Teacher Externships and Student Internships are central components of the classroom experience for both teachers and students and will support the classroom beyond the walls of the academy.</li> <li>• The applicant's Academy Model addresses deepening student learning through career building programs that provide students with opportunities to participate in internships with local businesses and the proposed Innovation Labs. The formation of College and Career Councils for each Academy provides evidence of the likelihood of the internships and Innovation Labs working effectively to accelerate student achievement, increase equity, and focus on student academic and career interests.</li> <li>• Evidence of what the classroom experience will be like is reflected by steps the districts has taken to advance the Academy concept. Some of these steps include alignment of community resources to support public school strategies, adoption of a 7 period day to provide the structure needed to support academies, and adoption of new curriculum for 8th and 9th grade seminar courses to support student development of an individual learning plan.</li> <li>• The approach to accelerating student achievement is centered around the academy approach, designed to personalize student learning, incorporate student interests, and enhance teacher quality. The role of the Academy Coaches will be significant in creating personalized learning environments for students.</li> <li>• The district will offer three academy options to accommodate all students, providing additional evidence of efforts to ensure accelerated student achievement and increased equity through personalized student support and learning environments.</li> <li>• Providing students with an opportunity to attend classes on college campuses through articulation agreements and a Higher Education Bus System to provide access to participating students increases the likelihood of students developing a level of comfort on college campuses and realizing that attending college can be a reality.</li> </ul> <p>The Rockford School District provides a description of the Academy approach it proposes with sufficient description of how student achievement for all students will be deepened. However, there is a limited connection between prior work and the proposed Academy model.</p>		
<b>(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>

**(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant proposes to support high-quality and school-level implementation of their approach evidenced by the following:

- The applicant indicates that four target high schools will participate but no information is provided on the process for selecting the four high schools. For example, the applicant does not indicate if there are other high schools in the district or these four only. A letter of support in the appendices indicates there is a Rockford Alternative School.
- Evidence is provided regarding the process used to ensure that the participating schools collectively meet eligibility requirements and is adequately addressed in the narrative. The process includes reviewing the number of low income and high needs students at each of the four high schools.
- 100% of the students at each high school will participate in the Academy model. The total number of students is 7250.
- Charts provided indicate school-level required demographics for each of the participating schools, including both raw data and percentages. The charts also provide evidence that the four high schools meet the competition eligibility requirements. For example, high needs students range from 30% to 37%, students from low income families range from 70.48% to 82.18% across the four high schools.
- There is one Alternative High School not mentioned in this section. It is unclear if the students assigned to the Alternative School are included in the total number of students participating in the four high schools. Including these students could possibly result in a duplication of the total number of high school students served by the district.

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

**10**

**2**

**(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant does not specifically address how the reform proposal will be scaled up considering only high schools are participating. The applicant clearly addresses how the Academy Model will help reach the goal of improving student learning outcomes for all students in the district's high schools in preceding sections of the proposal.

- All high schools and all students in the high schools are participating with anticipated improvement for student outcomes including all students.
- There is no mention of the Roosevelt Alternative School though there is a letter of support included in the Appendices.
- The applicant does not sufficiently describe how the reform proposal will be scaled up to address district-wide needs. There is no discussion of current reforms in elementary and middle schools. Considering the current performance data for high school students in target schools, a model to support elementary and middle school students is critical and would likely result in change beyond the participating schools.
- The applicant does not provide a plan that includes a timeline or deliverables.

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

**10**

**4**

**(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant's vision includes goals which address improved student learning and performance.

- Performance and summative assessments will be addressed through the PSAE tool and include percentages in meets or exceeds on PSAE, along with the NCLB and ISBE practices to determine growth. Neither assessment instruments are described beyond the use of the acronym making it difficult to determine the sufficiency of the data to adequately determine proficiency status and growth.
- The applicant proposes to decrease achievements gaps by building on to the success of the Secondary Academies, though evidence of success is not provided in this section. Failure to include evidence of success impacts the districts efforts to effectively focus on lessons learning and better determine the outcomes for participating students.
- A major strength of the proposal is the district's alignment of the Academy concept with the Common Core Standards, the Illinois State Standards and College Readiness Standards. Alignment of standards will likely result in improved student learning because standards provide transparency and clear expectations for students, parents, teachers and leaders.
- The district has analyzed truancy rates, high school graduation rates, and high school academic achievement to determine what the outcomes are for participating students. The implementation of the Common Core Standards, along with job-embedded professional development for teachers, and the district's implementation of an evaluation tool based on Charlotte Danielson's Framework for effective teaching will likely impact positive outcomes for

students.

- The district proposes to address high school graduation rates, which fall between 65.8% and 76.5% across the four high schools, through staff development and on the job coaching. A reasonable goal of an increase by 3% per year during and beyond the grant funding cycle is cited as a goal of the district. Research indicates that many features of the Academy Model contribute to improved high school graduation rates. Small class sizes and academic coaching have been major components of the success of the model.
- College enrollment rates are provided and range from 36.7% to 62.3% in 2011-2012 and percentages remained the same for 2012-2013. The goas for the applicant is to increase to percentages of 50% to 75% by 2017-2018 from the lowest to the highest college enrollment rate for each of the four schools.
- The applicant does not address college completion in this section.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>
<p><b>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The district provides limited evidence of a clear record of success as indicated by the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data on the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade indicate gap closing in mathematics. Some of the most dramatic improvements include closing the gap in 3rd grade mathematics from 36% in 1999 to 25% in 2012 and 11th grade achievement gap between Black and White subgroups from 41% in 2001 to 24% in 2011. The applicant does not provide a rationale for the dramatic improvements reported to provide further evidence that demonstrates the applicant's ability to improve student learning outcomes and close achievement gaps.</li> <li>• The ninth grade Academy implementation has seen a 30% decrease in unexcused absence, which has a direct impact on student learning outcomes, closing the achievement gap, high school graduation and college enrollment.</li> <li>• Evidence of a significant drop in grades of F is provided in charts, along with evidence of a drop in absenteeism. Failure to explain these significant improvements impacts the district's ability to further support the current reform efforts that resulted in these changes.</li> <li>• There is no evidence regarding improvements in graduation and college enrollment provided in this section.</li> <li>• Evidence of how performance data is made available to parents, students and educators is not delineated in this section.</li> </ul>		
<b>(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>
<p><b>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>Limited evidence of levels of transparency in LEA Processes, practices and investments are provided for the district:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district describes a website that includes personnel salaries for all school-level instructional and support staff, along with non-personnel expenditures at the school level. There are no specific charts provided with the salaries and expenditures information beyond reference to the website, making it difficult to review the actual evidence required to determine if there is a high level of transparency. The categories of school-level expenditures from State and local funds are not delineated in any other format beyond the website reference.</li> <li>• Non-personnel expenditures at the school level are not provided but reference is made to the website.</li> <li>• The district provides a description of a data management system that parents, students, and educators can readily access for student performance data, which does not address district expenditures. Both a parent portal and a home access center are also described but are not required components of this section and do not strengthen the section.</li> </ul>		
<b>(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>
<p><b>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant provides some evidence that demonstrates successful conditions and sufficient autonomy to implement personalized learning environments as described in the proposal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of sufficient autonomy to create successful conditions for implementation of the proposal includes the ability of the Central Office staff to replace principals and teachers based on performance. However, teachers and principals have an opportunity for professional growth. The applicant does not provide a clear description of the release and replacement process and how this authority is asserted. The district describes a positive relationship with the teacher union that indicates the union's support for dismissal of low performing teachers. A letter of support from the union is not provided as additional evidence of this relationship. A positive relationship with the union will further support successful conditions for teachers to improve their skills and better implement the proposed Academy model.</li> <li>• The district provides additional evidence of sufficient autonomy by granting principals operational flexibility of the budget, staffing and the school calendar. Research indicates that distributed leadership in P-12 schools is one of the more successful approaches to local school leadership. The applicant does not discuss a leadership team approach which could lead to low teacher moral and school climate issues.</li> <li>• Longer school days than state minimum requirements is an example and evidence of the district's level of</li> </ul>		

autonomy. Research on extended school days indicates improved student academic performance and teacher participation when teachers are compensated for additional hours.

- Evidence of successful conditions and sufficient autonomy under State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements to implement the personalized learning environments include the alignment of the academy model with state standards, an extended instructional day that exceeds minimum state requirements for instruction, and fully state accredited high schools. This evidence further indicates that conditions and autonomy are in place for the applicant to successfully implement the proposed reform plan.

<b>(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>
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**(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

The district includes a description of how students, families, teachers and principals were engaged in the development of the proposal and provided feedback through surveys data gathered at a community forum and additional Climate survey data collected by the University of Illinois Rockford and demonstrates some evidence of stakeholder engagement, though examples of the survey questions, along with results from data collected, are not provided.

- A list of stakeholder organizations supporting previous proposals submitted by the district, for example, university personnel, local media organizations and board of education members is included as evidence of stakeholder support and will be continued with the current proposal.
- Councils for each of the four academies have been formed and the number of members for each council is provided as evidence of how students, parents, teachers, and principals were involved. The Councils include membership from each of these categories, in addition to community representatives.
- Though the district indicates a positive relationship with the union, there is no evidence of direct engagement with representatives and support for the proposal from teachers in participating schools. There were also no letters of support from the local teacher's union in the appendices.
- Numerous letters of support are provided from the business community and local civic and community-based organizations. Many of the letters indicate past involvement with the high school redesign. The exceptional support from several businesses that have worked with the school redesign in the past, indicates future support is likely and will have impact on the success of the proposal since it will rely heavily on externships for teachers and internships for students.
- Though an institution of higher education was provided in the list of stakeholders, no letters of support were provided.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(1) Learning (20 points)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>13</b>

**(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant provides a plan that addresses personalizing the learning environment to support all students to graduate college and career ready across participating high schools. Toward this effort, the applicant's goals are to redesign four high schools and create small learning communities that provide personalized learning environments beginning in 8<sup>TH</sup> grade. Small learning communities clearly align with an approach to learning that engages and empowers all learners because of the features that have been proven to be impactful with high-need students. Some of these features include, longer school days, smaller student-teacher ratios, academic coaches and opportunities to personalize the learning environment based on student interests.

- The applicant indicates students will be required to take an interest inventory and develop a high school plan with long term objectives for graduation, potential careers and accessing post-secondary education/training. This approach empowers students to take some responsibility for accomplishing their goals based on their specific interests.
- Students will choose an academy in their 9<sup>TH</sup> grade year based on their interest and all academies have a core curriculum, in addition to specific courses related to the academy theme. A positive feature of this aspect of

the model is the student selection of a mentor in their 9 grade year. Many high needs students are first generation high school students to make it to 9TH grade and may not have mentor support from their home or community. Research indicates that the dropout rate is greater between 8TH and 9TH grade than any other transition point in a student's educational career, which makes the mentor component of the proposal a critical strategy for remaining focused on college and career readiness.

- The early choice of an academy in 9th grade encourages students to identify and pursue learning and development goals early in order to learn how to learn and determine when to ask for assistance and guidance.
- The applicant indicates that students will have access and exposure to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives through real world experiences provided through the academies and their Councils. This is a positive feature of the Academy model approach which moves beyond the walls of the schools and uses the community and all of its diversity as a teaching and learning laboratory.
- Some of the high quality instructional approaches that will enable students to master critical academic content and develop skills and traits including teams work, perseverance and student learning includes, a three year sequence of courses that culminates in college experience and/or career certification; a hand held device to enhance learning for each student; and distance learning and innovation labs.
- The applicant indicates the students will have access to college and career prep curriculum which will place them on track and support them in staying on track. It is unclear how the curriculum will align with the student's interest inventory and allow for flexibility while remaining on track and also allowing for personalizing sequence of instructional content and skill development.
- The applicant provides evidence that the model will be designed for students to meet required graduation standards by completing a core curriculum infused with their selected Academy theme and Global Electives in fine arts, physical education and foreign language.
- Though students will be immersed in technology, it is unclear how digital learning content will be appropriately aligned with college-and career readiness standards or high school graduation.
- Feedback based on student performance data is not clearly addressed beyond frequent meetings with counselors/mentors.
- The applicant indicates that specific interventions will be implemented for high need students but these interventions are not described. It is critical to identify these accommodations to ensure a personalized learning environment is provided for all students and they are on track toward meeting college and career ready graduation requirements.
- A clear delineation of mechanisms to provide training and support to students regarding their understanding of how to use tools and resources is not clearly described. Though the coaches and mentors are a major strength of the model, it is unclear if the applicant has designated the many roles they can play in supporting their mentee, such as providing them with training and support to use tools and resources to track and manage their learning.
- Key goals, activities, rationale for activities, and deliverables are evident in the applicant's plan.
- The timeline and parties responsible for implementing the activities are not provided.

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

**20**

**10**

**(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

Rockford School District sufficiently addresses how they will help educators to improve instruction and support student progress toward meeting college and career ready standards or college graduation requirements.

- Supporting teacher development is central to the district's plan and will include Professional Learning Communities. PLCs are designed to support teachers both individually and collectively and encourages reciprocal mentoring. PLCs provide a platform and a safe place for teachers to bring various classroom dilemmas and seek solutions from their peers.
- Teachers will be trained on data analysis through the PLCs and will also be a participant in data teams. This component is critical to the success of the model and empowers teachers to meet each student's academic needs. Further, training in data analysis will allow teachers to adapt content and instruction. Though the applicant alludes to benchmark and progress monitoring, along with data walls and data binders, the frequency and implementation are not clearly described. Providing specifics on how teachers will use their new knowledge in data analysis would add clarity to this section.
- The district will provide training to support teachers with adapting content and instruction for academically challenged students, along with training in the use of differentiated teaching strategies. This is a critical training component considering the large number of high needs students who are academically challenged and will require adaptations in content and instruction.
- Administrators will receive training through a Leadership Academy, but specific aspects of training are not provided. It is unclear if training will include how to use feedback from the district's teacher evaluation system to support and provide interventions as needed for improvements.
- The applicant will provide frequent measurement of student progress through benchmark and progress monitoring

while incorporating the use of data days, data walls, and data binders.

- Though teacher and leader professional development is adequately addressed, specific assessment tools are not delineated.
- Though administrators will receive training through the Leadership Academy, the content of the training is not provided. For example, training specifically related to information from the district's teacher evaluation system which enables leaders to better support teachers while taking steps toward continuous school improvement.
- The applicant does not clearly address how the principal evaluation system will assist district level administrators to prove the additional supports needed to facilitate school improvements.
- Though access to data is discussed in an earlier section, there is no evidence of access to tools and other resources to accelerate student progress toward meeting college and career ready graduation requirements.
- Training, systems, and practices to continuously improve school progress toward the goals of increasing student performance and closing achievement gaps are a central part of the Academy model and the district has adequately addressed each of these components through PLCs and Academic Coaches for teachers, Leadership Academies for principals and mentors/counselors for students.
- The district proposes to continue to work with teachers in Special Education and Bilingual Education but no specific plan is described for them.
- Though the district has a large number of certified teachers, the plan does not include further increasing the number of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals in the four high schools.
- The applicant provides evidence of key goals, activities of the proposal, rationale for activities and deliverables.
- The applicant does not address a timeline or parties responsible for implementing the activities.

#### D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
<b>(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>The Rockford School District provides evidence of practices, policies and rules that facilitate personalized learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of SUNGARD Public Sector, a system that supports personalized learning plans is a service offered to all participating schools and allows students to progress, move on based on demonstrated mastery of standards and is evidence of a unified system that will further support implementation of the proposed Academy model.</li> <li>• Though principal autonomy regarding teacher contract renewal is described in another section of the proposal, the district does not describe how leadership teams are provided sufficient flexibility and autonomy over factors such as school schedules, calendars and other site based decisions.</li> <li>• The Central Offices offers a web-based, district wide system that tracks and analyzes student performance against state standards, manages curriculum and administers local online benchmark assessment. This system will be a major support to principals and teachers and will provide opportunities for data analysis from multiple data sources.</li> <li>• The e-school suite is evidence of a resource that provides access to instructional practices adaptable for students who are academically challenged but no descriptive information is provided. Additional information regarding the e-school suite would strengthen this section and enable better determination of how this model will support all students, including student with disabilities and English learners.</li> <li>• Key goals, activities, rationale for activities, and deliverables are evident, however, the time and parties responsible for implementation of activities are not provided.</li> </ul>		
<b>(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>The applicant vaguely addresses how the district's infrastructure will support project implementation through comprehensive policies and infrastructure that provide every student, educator, and level of the education system with the support and resources they need when they are needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Student Success Program and Home Access Center are provided as evidence of efforts to ensure parents, students, educators and other stakeholders have access to necessary tools and resources, however, limited information is provided to assess how these options will align with the proposed model and how all parents and</li> </ul>		

students will gain access if computers and internet services are not available in the home. It is not clear how access to necessary content and learning resources will be made available to parents and students both in and out of school to support the implementation of the applicant's proposal.

- The applicant indicates that levels of technical support are provided based of the needs of parents and students, though such support is not described.
- The applicant indicates that parents and students will be able to export data as needed but fail to address the other electronic learning systems that may be used to securely store data or make recommendations for additional learning supports.
- The applicant does not indicate that the data system used by LEAs and schools are interoperable data systems.

## E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>
<p><b>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant does not fully describe the continuous improvement process will sufficiently monitored and provide an approach to continuously improve its plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The applicant plans to partner with the Regional Office of Education to ensure continuous monitoring. The plan does not provide a description of how timely and regular feedback on progress toward project goals and opportunities for ongoing corrections will be determined. The plan does not address how the applicant will monitor and measure information on the quality of it investments, which could best be described in a management plan that specifies benchmarks that will be used as check points during each year of implementation. The applicant indicates a website will be used to share information regarding the plan and will maintain up to date information. Depending totally on a website to publicly share information does not adequately address this requirement for a high-quality plan.</li> <li>• An external evaluator from the University of Illinois Rockford will be hired to evaluate all phases of implementation, however, the applicant does not describe how various components of the plan will be monitored or measured.</li> <li>• An RTTT Oversight committee is described but is not clearly connected to the continuous improvement process.</li> </ul>		
<b>(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>
<p><b>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>A high-quality plan for ongoing communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders is not adequately developed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The applicant describes the RTTT Oversight committee that will include the RTTT Oversight coordinator, a representative from the Alignment Rockford Council, a coach representative from each participating school, external evaluator, current school principals, teachers, community leaders, parents and students will be charged with providing ongoing communication to internal and external stakeholders. The composition of the committee is comprehensive and represents all segments of the school district and community. The formation of this committee and its representation is a strength of this section.</li> <li>• The applicant will also develop an RTTT website to provide feedback and benchmark data distribution. The use of a website to further provide ongoing communication and stakeholder engagement is additional evidence to support this section.</li> </ul>		
<b>(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>
<p><b>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant includes ambitious yet achievable performance measures by sub-groups with the required annual targets, in addition to performance measures across grades 9-12. The performance measure are ambitious because of the number of students falling in the high needs category, but achievable because of the district's efforts to redesign its high schools using a highly successful Academy model.</p>		

- The applicant includes the number and percentage of participating students who complete and submit the FAFSA form and percentages are broken out by all required subgroups. No rationale for selecting each measure is provided.
- A description of how the measure will provide rigorous and timely information regarding implementation success is not addressed
- A plan to review and improve the measure over time to gage implementation progress over time is not addressed.

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

**5**

**1**

**(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

A rigorous evaluation plan is critical to the success of the plan but is not provided. The applicant intends to work with the Regional Office of Education and utilize the service of an external evaluator but does not describe how these entities will evaluate the effectiveness of RTTT district funded activities related to the implementation of the Academy model.

**F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)**

	Available	Score
<b>(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>

**(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant's budget and budget narrative include allocation of funds sufficient to support the proposal. The budget does not include funds from other sources.

- Equipment costs for (16) Smart Rooms are identified as one time costs. All other costs will be ongoing operational costs and appear adequate to support implementation of the proposal.
- It is unclear if the costs for the Smart Rooms include equipment for the Innovation Laboratory and Distance Learning Center.
- The personnel costs include both certified and non certified personnel required and appear adequate to implement the proposal.
- Contract services are a substantial cost for the project and include most of the training for teachers and leaders, along with the external evaluator. The role of the contractor is not clearly defined.
- The training required for teachers, leaders, and others has not been adequately described and no timeline for training activities is provided.
- The same level of training is requested for each year of the proposal and not differentiated as the model moves into different implementation phases.

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

**10**

**0**

**(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant does not provide a sustainability plan for proposed project after grant funding ends.

**Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)**

	Available	Score
<b>Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:**

Though the applicant provides a large number of letters of support from a wide range of community organizations, there is no resource alignment, integrated services or description of how the partnership will be sustained.

The applicant does not provide a specific response to this section in the proposal, such as population level desired results, tracking systems, and use of data to make decisions about resources. This information was not found in other sections of

the proposal.

### Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
<b>Absolute Priority 1</b>		<b>Met</b>
<p><b>Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The Rockford School District has adequately addressed all components of Absolute Priority 1.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district has aligned the Academy concept with the Common Core Standards and the Illinois State Standards and College Readiness Standards.</li> <li>• The district has a data system that measures student growth and success. The Central Offices offers a web-based, district wide system that tracks and analyzes student performance against state standards, manages curriculum and administers local online benchmark assessment.</li> <li>• The district will analyze student data to make decisions and will also include “data days” and “data walls.”</li> <li>• The applicant will assist teachers in getting their full certification in special education and Bilingual Education.</li> <li>• The applicant has a large and diverse teaching pool of high quality teachers and leaders.</li> <li>• Professional Learning Communities will be used to support all teachers and provide authentic and teacher designed professional development.</li> </ul>		
<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>92</b>



## Race to the Top - District Technical Review Form

Application #0025IL-2 for Rockford Public School District 205

### A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>
<p><b>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>This is a mid-range quality response. The primary strength is the portion of the response to (b) where Rockford articulates its approach to accelerating achievement, deepening learning, and increasing equity through personalization. There, Rockford's initiatives for a core curriculum, articulating courses with post secondary curriculum, having students take area college entrance exams, offering concurrent/dual credit courses and professional certificates, linking academy themes to local work opportunities, and providing transportation to area colleges provide a complementary and arguably credible approach to accelerating student learning. Rockford's approach to deepening learning including integrating academic and career classes, articulating with (local?) post secondary institutions, connecting students with the community, providing students work opportunities in fields of student interest, providing working adults as mentors and role models, enabling work site observation via field trips, expecting students to earn the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRE) and</p>		

giving some the chance to earn the Professional Certificate of Employability is credible and substantive. The activities apparently designed to personalize support: mentors, students being able to choose their academy, some choice of courses and electives, "family atmosphere" at the schools, parent involvement, stability in teacher-student grouping, unspecified kinds of counseling, and "intensive intervention curriculum," do indicate more personalized interactions than in a traditional secondary school setting. However, the ways which these will achieve greater equity, i.e. closing of achievement gaps among higher and lower performing student subgroups, is not explained.

Regarding (a), there is no clear, explicit mention of previous work in the four core educational assurance areas. The standard inference to be drawn from this omission is that no such work has been done. There is a description of Rockford's three reform components, but there is no attempt to connect them to previous work in any of the core assurance areas. In the discussion which appears intended to respond to (c) regarding the anticipated classroom experiences of students and teachers, Rockford focuses on the outcomes anticipated from participation in its reforms instead of providing specific, concrete descriptions of what either the students or the teachers will experience in class as a result of realizing its Vision. The response to (B)(4) is also included. It shows some level of support for the application among various district and outside-district individuals, elected officials, groups, and organizations. This reference does not add to the substance of the response as described above.

<b>(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>
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**(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

This is a mid-range response. The primary strengths include:

- specifically identifying the participating schools
- providing most of the data required in the "School Demographics" table
- providing enough data so that the "TOTAL" row in the table could be completed and it could be established that Rockford met the requirement for the percentage of participating low income students

Weaknesses include;

- the failure to explain how the four schools which will participate were chosen.
- the failure to explain why Rockford chose to include all students rather than focusing on one or more subgroups followed by a scaling up
- the failure to fully and correctly complete the School Demographics table.

<b>(A)(3) LEA-wide reform &amp; change (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>
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**(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:**

This is a low, mid range response because Rockford's approach does not include all the elements of a high quality plan. The strengths of the response include that Rockford identifies its initiatives and states who between participating students and participating educators is targeted. When both groups and/or community members will share a facility or participate in an initiative, that is stated. When community members will participate, that is stated. In some cases, the history of an initiative and/or how various initiatives fit into a larger community development effort are described. All of these provide some context for understanding the implementation plan.

The weaknesses of the response include the following: Regarding the facility enhancements at each school, Rockford does not explain why placing the two kinds of labs, the distance learning center, and smart room at each school will help realize its goals. Moreover, the implementation plan does not say who among its students will do what when in these facilities, and the plan does not describe how whatever takes place will enable its students to improve their performances as described in the goals. The plan does not say who will be in charge of the various facilities and activities or what they are expected to produce.

Regarding the added personnel, the plan is not clear about with whom the personnel will interact, what these interactions are to produce in terms of outcomes or deliverables, or how the new personnel and their activities will result in the realization of Rockford's goals.

Regarding the Harvard data protocol, it is not clear who among the educators will engage in the learning and implementing of what aspect of the protocol when. It is not clear who will be in charge or what they are responsible for producing and when.

Regarding the Principal/Leadership training, none of the following is stated in the plan: what the training will consist of, who will cause it to occur, when over the course of the grant it will occur, what principals will know and be able to do as a result of the training, and how that will cause Rockford to realize its goals.

<b>(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>
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**(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

(a) Performance on summative assessments:

- baseline data is provided
  - progress is different for each subgroup
  - accelerating improvement is predicted over the life of the grant and in the following year-- this suggests the planned initiatives will have a positive effect
  - given the demographics and challenges described, modest growth for subgroups is realistic
- Overall: projecting accelerating achievement coupled with realistic growth = achievable goals which are acceptably ambitious

(b) Achievement gaps

- narrative does not address reasons for gaps or the reasons for trends projected,
- narrative is a set of conclusionary statements not directly relevant to achievement gaps
- no specific discussion of how specific gaps will be closed using resources from this grant
- narrative contains numerous typo's, punctuation errors, and grammar errors—this reduces credibility of response
- 11<sup>th</sup> grade ELA:
  - projected closing of Hispanic-white gap never exceeds what occurred between two baseline years
  - projected closing of ED/non-ED grant is modest

Overall: There is no discussion of the projections which would explain or justify the modest projected growth. Without this, the goals are marginally ambitious.
- 11<sup>th</sup> grade Math:
  - very modest improvement projected; little acceleration during grant
  - projections and variations within the projections not explained

Overall: goals are marginally ambitious
- 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Science:
  - modest improvement projected; little acceleration during grant
  - projections and variations within the projections not explained

Overall: goals are marginally ambitious

(c) Graduation rates:

- progress differentiated by subgroup
- modest acceleration of rates during life of grant not discussed
- trends within and among sub-groups not discussed
- no discussion/justification offered regarding achievability or ambition of goals

Overall: absence of discussion/explanation prevents calling goals either achievable or ambitious

(d) College enrollment:

- progress differentiated by subgroup
  - modest acceleration of rates during life of grant not discussed
  - trends within and among sub-groups not discussed
  - no discussion/justification offered regarding achievability or ambition of goal
- Overall: absence of discussion/explanation prevents calling goals either achievable or ambitious

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

	Available	Score
<b>(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</b>

**(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

This response is in the mid range.

(a) The Applicant asserts that its committed to improving student outcomes and closing achievement gaps. It does not, however, systematically provide evidence covering the past four years which presents a clear record of success in the areas specified in the Scoring Tool. More particularly,

- The table showing two years of data re. F's at the Academies does not show a clear pattern of reduction in failing grades. for the past four years in the form required by the Scoring Tool which covers past four years.
- The "on Track" pie charts are not longitudinal and do not indicate what period of time is covered. Because they are not longitudinal "success" cannot be determined.
- The table on "Tardies and Tardy Referrals" generally shows reductions at each Academy comparing SY 2011 to SY 2012, but tardies are not data points requested under this sub-criterion.
- The numbers of "Excessive Absence" show a trend to more not fewer absences at each Academy. Attendance data is not requested under this sub-criterion.
- The data cited in the narrative regarding achievement gaps do not cover all of the gaps Rockford says it monitors. Substantial amounts of data regarding reading and math are omitted. Most of the data for reading subjects are omitted, and results for a majority of the seven grade levels Rockford says it monitors are omitted.
- Rockford does not systematically provide data regarding closing gaps for the four years required by the Scoring Tool.
- Rockford does not systematically provide data for closing gaps for each of the sub-groups which it monitors.
- The gaps closed as described in the narrative are not substantial or significant because of the number of years (more than four) involved.
- Rockford does not provide the data requested regarding graduation rates or college enrollment.

Overall, Rockford does not present a clear record of success in advancing learning or closing achievement gaps.

(b) Rockford does not explicitly state whether its primary reform, the Academy model, has been placed at its lowest or low performing performing schools. That is left to be inferred. The data presented by Rockford regarding its Academy reform does not demonstrate a clear record of success in advancing learning or increasing equity for the reasons detailed in the first four bullets immediately above.

(c) Rockford does not present a response to the requirements described for (c) in the Scoring Tool under (B) (1). Under (B) (2), it describes several systems which in combination enables it to make student performance data available to students, parents, and educators in ways which inform and improve participation, instruction, and services. The Parent Portal in its Home Access Center give parents the ability to monitor their students' attendance, class work, grades, and standardized test information in real time. Educators can personalize education, assesse and monitor student performance and analyze data using "Discovery Education" and "PerformancePLUS."

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

5

5

**(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

This is a high range response. Under the Scoring Tool, the Applicant is required to make publicly available (a) actual salaries at the school level for all school level instructional and support staff based on the the U.S. Census Bureau's F-33 classification system, (b) actual personnel salaries at the school level for instructional staff; (c) actual personnel salaries at the school level for teachers only; and, (d) actual non personnel expenditures at the school level if any.

In its response, Rockford states that it places on its website and thereby makes public "all collective bargaining agreements which contain the actual personnel salaries at the school level for all school level instructional and support staff based on the U.S... Census Bureau's classification used in the F-33 survey ... ." This response appears to provide evidence that Rockford meets requirement (a).

Rockford further responds, "The website shows actual personnel salaries at the school level for instructional staff, teachers, and non-personnel expenditures at the school level." This response appears to provide evidence that Rockford meets requirements (b), (c), and (d), respectively.

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

10

10

**(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:**

Rockford's primary reform initiative is the installation of "wall to wall" academies at four high schools. It says that it can assign staff based on system needs, it can replace teachers and principals based on performance, it gives principals flexibility regarding their budgets, staffing and calendars. It says "Our district's relationship with the union will ... ensure the placement of highly effective teachers and dismissal of low performing teachers. There is an open flow of communication between our union and the district."

The conditions described appear to be such that would enable Rockford to implement this and the complementary initiatives described in this proposal.

The credibility of these statements, particularly regarding the relationship of the district with the union and the district's ability to assign and evaluate teachers as described comes from the following. Under "IV. Application Assurances" in Rockford's Application there are the following statements:

- "To the best of my knowledge and belief, all of the information and data in this application are true and correct.
- "I further certify that I have read the application, am fully committed to it, and will support its implementation.
- "I am aware that any false, fictitious, or fraudulent statements or claims may subject me to criminal, civil, or administrative penalties. \*\*\* "

Under these statements, the President of Teachers' Union, [Name omitted as prescribed by the Scoring Tool] has placed his/her signature. The signature shows the date of "9-30-13" and the telephone number of the President is given, apparently so that these statements could be verified if needed.

In addition, both the Rockford Superintendent and its School Board President have signed the same document thereby affirming that the statements made by the district in this response are "true and correct."

These statements are evidence that Rockford's description of these conditions are accurate. For these reasons, this is scored as a high range response.

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

**15**

**10**

**(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

The response shows that students were not engaged in the development of this proposal. Parents and families were apparently engaged as "community members" with their involvement limited to responding to surveys. No individual parents, students, or organizations representing either submitted letters of support.

The requirement of teacher involvement under (a) (i) was met by the attachment of the form, "IV. Application Assurances", which includes the signature of president of the local teachers' union. The union did not submit a letter of support.

The four principals of the four participating high schools and one alternative school signed form letters indicating that they and their "school teams" were "deeply involved" in the development of the academy initiative. No specifics were given, and no mention was made of the balance of the proposal. It is asserted in the response to subpart (a), that unspecified "principals, assistant principals, and staff" were involved in developing either this plan or one of three antecedents applications to SIG or Race to the Top. Members of a Principals' Leadership Team also acted as liaisons with "staff" to "ensure staff is aware and supportive" of the initiatives in the plan. No specifics supported either assertion. There is no indication that those preparing the plan received or responded to any feedback from students, parents, teachers, or principals or from any group representing any of them.

Four elected officials submitted support letters. The two U.S. Senators from Illinois signed identical letters. The Mayors of Rockford and Loves Park and the chair of the county legislature each provided separate support letters with the Rockford Mayor's support included in an acknowledgment of receipt of the plan for comment. No other elected officials including notably, state-level legislators whose influence over funding, public opinion, laws, and regulations could benefit Rockford and/or lead to post grant funding wrote support letters. Neither the State Board of Education nor the Governor offered comments on the plan.

Fifteen letters of support were written on behalf of local businesses and another came from the local parks department. About half were the same or similar form letters, but all included evidence that the authors had substantial understanding and willingness to give significant support to this proposal.

No letters of support or comment came from civil rights or advocacy groups representing the interests of any of the student sub-groups described in the plan. There were no letters of support from institutions of higher education including any of the area colleges mentioned in (A) with whom Rockford is coordinating its curricula, its dual credit programs, and/or the administration of local entrance exams.

Overall, the evidence presented shows at best a moderate level of engagement in the proposal's development by the stakeholders specified in (a). Because of the local business support, the level of support for the proposal from the types of stakeholders described in (b) must be seen as stronger. Overall, the response earns a score in the medium range.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(1) Learning (20 points)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>

**(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

This is a mid range response.

(a) The Applicant describes an approach which contains significant elements of a high quality plan for improving learning by personalizing the learning environment in its response to (a).

- The heart of Applicant's proposal is the creation of five Career Academies at each of its four comprehensive high schools. Each will be a small learning community. Applicant understands that in structuring its high schools this way and presumably reducing the number of students and staff each student will interact with, it has personalized the

learning environment of all of its students.

- (i) The Applicant will required require all student to construct two plans, one in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and a second in 9<sup>th</sup>. The plans will cover the balance of a student's high school career and the seven years which follow. Applicant intends that this will help students see that learning is the key to his/her success. This resonse is insufficient to meet the requirements under (i).
- (ii) The Applicant will ensure that the core curriculum in each academy meets college and career ready standards. Thus, when each student creates his plan for his/her high school career, he/she will be identifying and then pursuing learning and development goals linked to college and career readiness. In the process of constructing these plans, students will learn how to structure their learning to achieve these goals. The Applicant indicates that students will periodically review these plans with a "mentor/coach" to measure their progress. These activities meet the requirements under (ii) in the scoring tool.
- (iii) The Applicant will ensure that core curriculum and electives complement the themes of the respective academies. By enabling each student to choose among the theme based academies, the Applicant intends that each student will be able to pursue his/her areas of academic interest and that, because of his/her interest in academy theme, students learning will be intensified and deepened. This approach meets the requirements under (iii).
- (iv) The Applicant indicates that its electives will provide students with exposure to diverse cultures. In addition, all students are to engage in work experiences consistent with their interests and the themes of their academies. Although the exposure to the work world will expose students to a different culture than that of the school, the balance of Applicant's approach to exposing students to diverse cultures is not sufficiently described to lead to the conclusion that the requirements under (iv) are fully met.
- (v) Applicant anticipates that all student will master a college/career ready curriculum sufficiently to enable them to graduate. To master this curriculum, they will have to demonstrate critical thinking, communication skills, problem solving, and creativity. By engaging in the planning and monitoring described in (ii), each student will have to demonstrate goals-setting. To graduate, students will have to have demonstrated perseverance This response is sufficient to satisfy the requirements under (v).
- Because all students are to complete the activities outlined above, it can be presumed that they will be engaged in by all of Applicant's high needs students.
- Each of the activities outlined above contain information sufficient to identify the activities, understand Applicant's goal and the reason for it, and to understand the expected outcomes. In some instances the applicable time line is sufficiently clear and in others they are not. Other than the "mentor/counselor" and students, the parties responsible are not identified or must be implied.

(b)

- (i) Although it is implicit in the requirement that each student produce two plans for his school and post graduation lives, the Applicant there is insufficient detail about the contents of the plans, who will support its construction, the time lines for its monitoring and revision to be able to say students will have a personalized sequence of content and skill development sufficient to ensure his on time graduation college/career ready.
  - (ii) The Applicant's does not directly discuss the existence or development of high quality instructional approaches and environments beyond what is noted above. That is not sufficient to meet the requirements under (ii).
  - (iii) The Applicant's assertion that its curricula meet college and career ready standards and that core and elective courses will complement the themes of its academies is insufficient detail to enable a judgment to be made that the content will be high quality. That the Applicant will install two of digital technology labs, a distance learning center, a smart room in each school and give students tablets does not ensure that students' experiences with them will be high quality or aligned with college/career ready standards This response does not meet the requirements under (iii).
  - (iv) (A) The Applicant has said that it has a state of the are data system with which parents, students, and educators can gain access to a wide variety of student performance, behavior, and academic progress data. The Applicant also indicates that student/parent access is real time—accessible as soon as the teacher enters it. This meets the requirements under (iv) (A).
  - (iv) (B) What is not described with any sufficient particularity is the nature of the counseling system by which each student receives personalized recommendations consistent with each individual student's skills, knowledge, and progress toward graduation and college enrollment. This response does not meet the requirements under (iv) (B).
- [2]

(c) It appears that there is training and support for students so that they understand and can use the tools available to them for tracking their progress on their plans and for managing their learning.

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

**20**

**18**

**(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

This a high range response.

Rockford reports that all of its educators at the four theme based aca train and work in professional learning communities (PLC's) as required by the Scoring Tool. A goal of the PLC's is to support the work of the educators to implement personalized learning environments (PLE's). Rockford intends, apparently with support from this grant, that teachers and their PLC's will adapt content and instruction so that the participating students will engage in school tasks responsive to their interests, needs, and learning styles including collaborative and project-based learning. If this kind of personalization work requires training, Rockford does not indicate when the training will be done or by whom.

Rockford indicates that its educators already have access to software which enables them to align their instruction with pertinent assessments This includes formative ("benchmark") assessments which enable teachers to track ("monitor") student progress. Rockford says that its central office provides ongoing oversight of its curriculum to ensure that it and the teachers' instructional practices are "research-based" and addresses students' needs.

Rockford also indicates that PLC's currently engage in regular data analysis. It says that the PLC's are supported in this by coaches and "data teams" and that this work supports instruction and "the delivery of curriculum." Rockford says that its teachers use "data walls" and binders as tools for revising and recording data. Training for these tasks is already being provided on an ongoing basis.

Training is also ongoing for academy teachers in differentiating instruction. The PLC's are a vehicle for ensuring that the training is individualized for the teachers. The district provides coaches who support teachers' work on instructional practices, methods, and in tailoring what is taught to students' needs.

As a result of the training and support which is currently provided, Rockford says that students who are struggling and those who need enrichment are both able to participate in learning opportunities targeted to their needs. Rockford notes that its current data system enables educators to identify and analyze gaps in a student's "learning profile" and to address them. Rockford says that the external community also responds to address students' non-academic needs through the Align Rockford initiative

With the one exception noted where it is not clear to what degree future training is required and a HQP does not appear to be in place, it appears from Rockford's summation that its teachers are already engaged in training and PLC's enabling them to meet the requirements under (C) (2) (a) and that they are engaged in using tools, data and resources to identify optimal learning approaches, deliver a district curriculum aligned with college/career readiness, and match students needs for support and focused instruction as required under (C) (2) (b).

It can be inferred from what Rockford describes under (B) (3) regarding its abilities to place staff according to district need, replace teacher and principals based on performance, and work with the teachers union to "place highly effective teachers," that it can and does use its evaluations systems as a resource for helping its site leaders to improve educator effectiveness and address school culture and climate. The training which the district describes in its response under (a) and (b) above appears to be designed to improve school progress toward increasing student performance and closing achievement gaps. This substantially meets the requirements unde (C) (2) (c).

Rockford does not describe a HQP to increase the number of students served by effective/highly effective educators as those terms are defined in the Scoring Tool. The response does not speak directly to those terms in describing what it hopes to accomplish in terms of improving the quality of its teachers and principals. Instead the district responds in terms of graduate degree attainment, years of experience, pupil-teacher ratios, and "qualified" (as that term is used under the No Child Left Behind law). Rockford provides a brief description of its leadership training and how it is tailored for its administrators in its response under (d). Rockford does not describe specific activities it has designed to assist its educators to become effective/highly effective as those terms are defined, set specific time lines, or targets (i.e. "deliverables") for increasing the number of its educators who meet the Scoring Tool's definition. This weakens an otherwise strong response to all the (C) (2) requirements.

**D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)**

	Available	Score
<b>(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>

**(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

This is a mid range response for the following reasons:

(a) Rockford says that its central office is organized and it has polices and practices which enable it to provide support and services to its participating schools including curricula, software, assessments, and the means by which teachers can personalize them to meet the needs of his/her students. Schools are expected to administer benchmark exams which enable school personnel and central office staff to monitor students' academic progress in core curricular areas. Schools are provided with information and tools with which to monitor and intervene when an array of indicators suggest a students

is struggling, i.e. is “at risk.” Students so identified and their parents can be notified and engaged in personalized interventions and supports. School staff are provided with various tools for these purposes. Individual background information about each student's school career is also available to provide context. School staff members receive “appropriate technical support” for these primarily computer-based resources. This response does not fully meet the criteria for a HQP because the specific parties responsible for the central office activities are not identified and the timing of the activities or services is not specified.

(b) Rockford does not respond under this criterion. It can be inferred from this that Rockford does not provide autonomy or flexibility to schools in the areas specified. Elsewhere in the narrative, it was noted that the central office required the each participating school to operate on a 7-period schedule. This weakens the response.

(c) Rockford indicates that its Sungard system enables students to earn credit based on mastery. There is no response to whether there are rules or policies to support what appears to be a practice. The absence of an affirmation regarding rules and policies weakens the overall response to a slight degree.

(d) The information provided in the entire response affirms that teachers have the opportunity to personalize curriculum, instruction, and assessments. This leads to the inference that students are able to demonstrate mastery in a variety of ways and at different times.

(e) The information provided under (D) (1) supports the conclusion that Rockford supplies schools with resources which are adaptable and accessible to all students including the special needs students described in this part of the Application.

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

**10**

**3**

**(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

This is a low range response.

(a) The strengths are:

- Rockford's grant proposal promises all participating students access to course content, skill development, work-world exposure in and out of school which readies them for college and/or career.
- Rockford asserts that the “e-school suite” gives students access to “learning resources” and instructional practices which it can be inferred track or complement what is offered them through this proposal.
- Rockford's response to (C) (1) includes the promise that “every student” is to have a “tablet to enhance learning”

The weaknesses are:

- The Applicant does not present a HQP as the term is defined to make good on the promises listed above.
- Other than the promised experiences in the work-world which are “out of school” by definition, the response does not make clear how, when, or where participating students, parents, and relevant stakeholders will have out of school access to the “content, tools, instructional practices, and other learning resources” required under (D) (2) (a)-the reference to the “e-school suite” without further elaboration is not sufficient.
- There is no further mention of students receiving “tablets” in the narrative. There is no mention of tablets for students in the proposed budget.

(b) The strength is: Rockford asserts that students and other relevant groups will have “appropriate” access to technical support. The weakness is: There is insufficient detail or evidence to confirm the assertion, and there is no HQP presented to ensure access will be provided.

(c) The strength is: Rockford asserts it uses systems which allow students and parent to export data “as needed.” The weaknesses are: There is insufficient detail or evidence to confirm that what is asserted meets the requirements of (D) (2) (c), and there is no HQP presented to address this deficiency.

(d) The weakness is: Rockford does not directly or explicitly discuss the “interoperability” of its systems. Therefore, the Applicant has failed to respond to this sub-criterion.

**E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)**

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>3</b>

**(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

The Applicant's response is low range.

The Regional Office of Education (ROE) is identified as the responsible party for ensuring “fidelity of implementation” and ensuring goals and objectives are met. Applicant does not describe the activities ROE will undertake to realize these goals

and sets no time lines for their accomplishment.

The Applicant says that an "RTTT Oversight Committee" will be formed and also charged with ensuring fidelity of oversight and implementation. The Applicant describes the membership of the Committee and describes its responsibilities further as "evaluating program data, monitoring grant progress, and facilitating changes as necessary." Applicant sets no time lines for accomplishing these tasks.

The Applicant identifies ROE as the party responsible for its pertinent professional development, and describes the implementing activities to include curricular coaching, training and monitoring coaches, and staff training regarding personalized learning environments The Applicant sets no time lines for any of the activities, and it does not describe what staff will know and/or be able to do as a result of the activities (i.e. deliverables).

The Applicant states that it will hire a qualified educational administrator to assist with oversight. It does not describe what activities he/she will engage in, what the results or deliverables will be, or when (i.e. time lines) any oversight activities will be undertaken.

The Applicant states that "coaching clusters" "will provide focus structure and assurance of forward progress on selected topics." It is not clear whether this is a goal or an activity. It is not clear who will be part of the "coaching clusters." This description of what the clusters are to do is vague. The Applicant does not provide any more information about what the "clusters" will do, set any time lines, or describe the deliverables.

The Applicant says that "one time coaching" will be provided. It does not identify a responsible party, describe what the results/deliverables will be, and sets no time lines.

Dr. Penny Billman is identified by the Applicant as the evaluator of all phases of the implementation of its proposal. Other than her reporting to the Superintendent, the Applicant does not specify what activities Dr. Billman will undertake. The Applicant says that Dr. Billman will produce a "report" that will be shared with all stakeholder. The Applicant does not say what the content will be and sets no time lines for its production and sharing.

The RTTT Oversight Committee is charged with ensuring "ongoing communication and engagement" with stakeholders. The Applicant does not describe what activities will be undertaken to accomplish this goal, sets no time lines, and describes no deliverables. The Committee is also to provide feedback from the stakeholders to the Applicant. The Applicant does not describe any activities in this regard, sets no time lines, and describes no deliverables.

The Applicant says that the RTTT Coordinator and coaches will be in "constant contact with site level staff and teachers." It does not indicate how this relates to continuous improvement, does not describe any activities to accomplish the "constant contact," does not set any time lines, and describes no deliverables.

This approach does not constitute a high quality plan because of the high number of HQP elements which are missing from the descriptions of what the responsible parties are to do. This approach does not provide a credible approach to providing regular feedback on progress toward project goals. It does not provide opportunities for ongoing corrections or improvements during and after the term of the grant. It is not a competent or credible process for Applicant's monitoring, measuring, and publicly sharing information on the quality of its investments using Race to the Top grant funds. For these reasons, it is a low range response.

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

**5**

**1**

**(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

This is a low range response. The RTTT Oversight Committee is charged with ensuring "ongoing communication and engagement" with stakeholders. The Applicant does not describe what activities will be undertaken to accomplish this goal, sets no time lines, and describes no deliverables. The Committee is also to provide feedback from the stakeholders to the Applicant. The Applicant does not describe any activities in this regard, sets no time lines, and describes no deliverables. The Applicant says that the RTTT Coordinator and coaches will be in "constant contact with site level staff and teachers." It does not indicate how this relates to continuous improvement, does not describe any activities to accomplish the "constant contact," does not set any time lines, and describes no deliverables.

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

**5**

**1**

**(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:**

This response is in the low range.

(a) Performance Measure for All Applicants: Increasing highly effective teachers and principals: Given the high standards which pertain, increasing by one (of four) the number of principals and increasing by 20% the number of teachers over five years is both achievable and ambitious.

(b) Performance Measure for All Applicants: Increasing the total of highly effective and effective educators: Adding two principals (of four) and achieving a 50 percent increase in effective/highly effective teachers are ambitious goals. Adding one effective principal is achievable. Achieving 100 percent effective/highly effective teachers is not likely to be achieved because of turnover. The latter weakens the response.

(a) Performance Measure for All Applicants: FAFSA: A 24 percent increase in completions overall during the four grant years is realistic and achievable given the demographics of the participating students. Attaining an 85 percent completion

rate overall and among all subgroups is also achievable because having students complete the application is dependent on the persistence and effort of staff and less on the performance and skill levels of the students.

(b) Performance Measure for Grades 9-12: On track indicators for 11<sup>th</sup> grade students: It is not stated but it is presumed that this indicator is linked to student performance on a standardized test. Not specifying to what assessments it refers weakens the response. Because the assessments are not specified, it cannot be determined to what degree the targets are ambitious or achievable.

(c) Performance Measure for Grades 9-12: National Career Readiness Certificate: The weaknesses of this response are:

- no rationale is given for choosing a measure where, as here, the Applicant is not able to predict that its grant-funded activities will cause any substantial growth or progress
- the targets for growth/progress are “0” or negligible
- the pace of growth during the grant years is also “0” or negligible
- such targets are not ambitious

(d) Performance Measure for Grades 9-12: Power Promotion Index: The weakness is that the “PPI” denominator is not defined. If the denominator were to be students starting 12<sup>th</sup> grade in a given year, these targets would likely be achieved but not ambitious. If they represent the performance of an NCLB cohort, given the demographics of the participating students and their baseline performance, they would be.

(e) Performance Measure for Grades 9-12: Discipline Referrals: The weakness are that “Referrals” are a notoriously subjective measure. Definitions are not universal; their application is highly subjective; recording and reporting are subject to frequent and significant error. In short, they are a measure of suspect validity. Using flat percentage rates of reductions as annual targets, rates which are subject to the same errors described immediately above, compounds further compromises this approach to measuring improvement.

The Applicant provides seven performance measures instead of the 14 required by the Scoring Tool. Overall, the Applicant has chosen problematic indicators of its performance, and in most instances has not chosen ambitious targets.

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

**5**

**1**

**(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

Rockford has identified an evaluator for all phases of the implementation of its proposal. Other than her reporting to the Superintendent, the Applicant does not specify what activities the evaluator will undertake. In particular, Rockford does indicated that the evaluator will determine the effectiveness of the Applicant's investments in professional development or technology. The Applicant says that the evaluator will produce a “report” that will be shared with all stakeholders. The Applicant does not say what the content will be and sets no time lines for its production and sharing.

**F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)**

	Available	Score
<b>(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>

**(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

This is a low range response.

(a) Rockford identifies all the funds which will support the project from this grant including those from “other sources”. There are none of the latter.

(b) The Applicant requests ample funds in its budget to support the development and implementation of its proposal. The proposed expenditures are not reasonable, however, because the Applicant does not satisfactorily explain or provide satisfactory plans for using the grant funds. This conclusion is explained more fully in the Comments to (c), below.

(c) Overall, Rockford does not provide a thoughtful rationale for the investments and priorities. More particularly:

- There is not a clear plan for how the four Instructional Coaches (\$800,000+) will interact with the 475 teachers they are to “support.”
- There is no clear explanation how these coaches (and/or other staff) will cause the 50 percent of the 475 teachers who are not effective/highly effective to become so during the four years of the grant.
- There is not a clear plan for how the four Innovation Supervisors (\$ (680,000+) and/or additional staff will each engage and interact with between 1712 and 1829 students each year at their respective Academies to bring the benefits of the grant funded technology to them in a way that personalizes their learning environments or otherwise causes the Vision and its goals to be realized.
- The statement above is also applicable to the request for \$580,000+ for the Smart Rooms and related equipment.

- That same statement applies to the request for \$1.3 million for the “Innovative Labs”.
- There no description of how the several counselors at each Academy will use the time purchased by the budgeted stipends (\$200,000+) to further the Vision and meet its goals.
- It is not clear how the four Academy Curriculum Coordinators' coordination of the “elective curriculum” “to meet Common Core Learning Standards” (\$1.1 million) will enable Rockford to achieve its Vision and meet its goals. There is no specific explanation beyond what is quoted for what the Coordinators will do, when, and/or what the “deliverables” are to be.
- There is no plan for or description of the training and its sequencing which explains the \$89,000+ to be spent for Substitute Teachers for “teachers at training or academy related meetings.”
- There is not a sufficient description of the visits to “Best Practice sites”, the anticipated effects, or other “deliverables” sufficient to explain the request for \$348,000+.
- The explanation that \$1.04 million needs to be spent for “focus specific curriculum that will meet the individual needs of each student” does not sufficiently explain how the expenditure will cause the district to realize its Vision and goals.
- There is no description of Dr. Billman's “deliverables” (\$105,000), and there is no time line for what she is to do.
- There is no description of what the “Trainers for Instructional Leadership” (\$400,000) will do, with whom, when, or what the anticipated outcomes are.
- There is no sufficient description of the services of the Community Professional Development entity (\$160,000), the anticipated effects, the timing of the activities and/or “deliverables”. The link between these services and providing personalized learning environments for students is not clear.
- The description of the teachers' externships is not sufficient to support the request for \$140,000.
- No plan is described for the Summer Curriculum Development expenditure (\$280,000). Neither results or “deliverables” are described.
- The same statement applies to the “Summer Senior Internships” (\$400,000).

Regarding the specific requirements in the Scoring Tool under romanettes i, ii, and iii:

- (i) The Applicant does not propose to use any funds to implement its proposal other than Race to the Top-District funds. Its request for this grant represents the total revenue from all sources.
- (ii) It can be reasonably inferred from the narrative, the tables, and common practices regarding budgets which or the expenditures are one-time investments and which are for operational costs. The Applicant does not describe or discuss ongoing operational costs that will be incurred after the grant period.

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

**10**

**1**

**(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

The Applicant does not discuss strategies that will ensure the long term sustainability of the personalized learning environments and/or its other reform goals. It can be noted that the letters of support included in the response to (B) from the local business community manifested enthusiastic support and some referred to the raising of \$175,000 before this proposal was submitted. None contained mention of on-going or future efforts to fund the proposal. In addition, two local Mayor's voiced support for the proposed reform but did not mention financial support. The same is true of the two U.S. Senators. No other elected officials including notably, state-level legislators whose influence over funding, public opinion, laws, and regulations any or all of which could help Rockford with post-grant sustainability wrote support letters. The Applicant does discuss how it will evaluate improvements in productivity and outcomes to inform a post-grant budget. It does not include an estimated budget for the three years after the term of the grant.

**Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)**

	Available	Score
<b>Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:**

In its Vision, Rockford describes a series of hoped for "partnerships" and what each could mean to the district. They include: parental involvement, academy themes reflecting workforce opportunities, post-secondary institution articulation and dual credit opportunities, "academy support teams," business people as role models, teacher externships, field trips, "career-related big brothers and sisters," paid and unpaid student work experiences. It did not provide, however, any explicit response to any of the requirements under numbers (1) through (6) of "Competitive Preference Priority" as they appear in the Scoring Tool. Therefore, it is concluded that Rockford did not intend to seek the points available from an explicit response to this Priority, and the score awarded is "0."

### Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
<b>Absolute Priority 1</b>		<b>Met</b>
<b>Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>Rockford's proposal barely meets the requirements of this priority. The proposal does not explain how it is built on the district's previous implementation of the core educational assurance areas. An inference can be made, however, that the district has aligned or is in the process of aligning its curriculum and assessments with college and career success. The same inference can be made regarding the district's data system from references made in the proposal to the capabilities of its system in the areas of measuring student performance and providing data which can be used to improve instruction. The proposal does not cite significant work in the recruiting, developing, rewarding, or retaining of effective educators, and it does not describe previous success in turning around its lowest achieving schools. The district did not provide convincing evidence of advancing learning or increasing equity within the recent past.</p> <p>Presuming that the district's "wall to wall academies" are its personalized learning environments, it can be said that the academies are designed to improve learning and teaching by creating more personalized learning environments and by educators' employing the capabilities of the district's data system to monitor student progress, identify struggling students, and engage with the families of those students. Similarly, the district indicates that the software available to teachers enables them to provide individualized lesson plans and supports for all students. The curricula and assessments are or will be aligned with college/career readiness standards and are/will be aligned with local college entrance requirements including examinations.</p> <p>The facts that students may choose among theme-based academies whose themes are based on the students' interests and the local labor market, are required to produce plans at the beginning of their secondary school careers for their futures in school and beyond, and will be given work-world experiences before leaving school all have promise to accelerate and deepen students' learning. The district did not articulate a credible plan plan to increase the effectiveness of its educators, and it did not articulate an effective plan to increase student access to effective teachers.</p> <p>The district did not offer either credible targets or an effective plan to reduce achievement gaps. Although the academies hold promise for the reasons noted above, the district did not complement this promise with credible targets or sufficiently specific plans for increasing graduation rates or college entrance.</p>		

<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>105</b>
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## Race to the Top - District

### Technical Review Form

Application #0025IL-3 for Rockford Public School District 205

#### A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>The applicant seems to have created quite a compelling and effective reform vision that builds on the core educational assurance areas and should accelerate student achievement and learning. However, as written, it was sometimes difficult to understand the specifics of this vision. For example, there were many typos, and several places where the applicant mentions things that sound interesting, but are not fully explained. For example, on p. 14, they talk about strategic rocks such as College and Career Readiness, but without discussion on this. They also mention the Academy Program,</p>		

WORKKEYS, and Teacher Externships without explaining these well.

Still, there are many things that the applicant does discuss that are good ideas, and well thought out reform proposals. For example:

(a)

The applicant's proposal meets the core educational assurance areas. First, the applicant has adopted career and college-focused standards and assessments, such as the number of students who graduate, enroll in college within 16 months, complete FAFSA applications, National Career Readiness Certificates, and performance on a state summative assessment (PSAE). In addition, the LEA has created a position of Director for College and Career Readiness, which shows commitment in this area by having a person responsible for progress towards college and career readiness. In addition, the LEA has established very strong partnerships with business stakeholders to create pathways to employment for their students, opportunities for students to receive internships and for teachers to learn about how they can teach their students to be career ready for specific career types. The idea of creating different academies around specific types of careers is an excellent approach to customizing curriculum to the unique interests and needs of various students, while creating pathways to careers for them.

The LEA has built data systems for measuring student growth and informing students, parents, and stakeholders, including the SUNGARD system that can track student performance across years and identify areas of need. By being web-based, it should be accessible to most parents, regardless of computer operating system. In addition, SUNGARD allows teachers to design personalized lesson plans. This effectively combines assessment with pedagogical planning. Finally, the PLUS student success system automatically flags students at risk according to test scores, alerting teachers and leaders about students who need greater attention.

The LEA does not have a strong plan for recruiting and retaining effective teachers and principals other than to state their belief that their faculty are already strong, as evidenced by years of experience and attainment of master's degrees, which are means to the end of teacher quality, but are not the actual evidence of teacher quality in and of themselves.

The LEA's vision should be a strong support in continuing to turn around low-achieving schools by increasing student choice and pathways to various careers through the Academy approach, and the enhanced partnerships with industry stakeholders, allowing students multiple pathways to success and different learning opportunities within school.

(b) The applicant's plan focuses on activities that are based on student academic interest, as they revolve predominantly around the use of Career Academies, chosen by students, and student-generated learning plans. In addition, they have added options for high school classes that also satisfy college and technical school requirements, which are excellent options for helping students develop career readiness. Common planning time for teachers to develop integrated curriculum and scheduled flexibility for special teaching opportunities will allow for continued teaching innovation. The Academy Expo and other efforts to inform youth of career options should help students envision themselves in a career, and allow them, their teachers, and parents to customize the school experience for that career. The higher education bus system is a simple but creative solution from the LEA that shows great dedication to enabling students to receive concurrent college enrollment by providing transportation for them.

In particular, the Innovation Labs and Smart Rooms have the potential to provide deepened student learning by engaging students in project-based learning not often possible in traditional classrooms, but these activities were not discussed in enough details to be fully evaluated in this proposal. Similarly, the Invention Convention will enable students to see themselves in the engineering and creation industries, which is admirable, and develop deep learning through engaging in authentic problem solving.

(c) In this area, the applicant was weak, as the applicant described several powerful and innovative reforms, as discussed above, but without sufficient details to describe the actual classroom experience.

Overall, the score reflects generally strong ideas for criteria a and b, but without enough detail to evaluate criteria c.

<b>(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>
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**(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

(a) The applicant does not explain the process for selecting the schools to participate. It seems that this is a consortium of all of the high schools in this community, and thus it would make sense to include all of these schools. However, this is not really clear. In addition, it is not discussed why the reforms are geared only towards the high school students. This could be because high school students can most benefit from the career academies that are the focus of this plan, but this is not explained.

(b). The applicant lists the schools that will participate and (c) the total number of participating students, and the

percentage from low-income families and that are high-need. Within these four schools, the reforms are designed for 100% of the students, and should benefit both high and low achieving kids, which is a strength of the proposal. However, we do lack some specifics about how this implementation will occur on the ground level, within each school, for example how the academies and business/community partnerships are created and managed and then implemented, and how the innovation lab/convention will work, and what types of pedagogies will take advantage of the SmartRoom technologies.

<b>(A)(3) LEA-wide reform &amp; change (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>
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**(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:**

It appears that these four high schools constitute all of Rockford's school district, thus if the applicant can meet their goals with these four schools they will have addressed reform for the whole district. That being said, there was no discussion of how these reform ideas could be scaled to the middle schools and elementary schools, creating greater pathways and foundations for students (there is some discussion about beginning career assessments in middle school, but nothing more is discussed for these other grade levels). The type of reforms discussed in this proposal are most appropriate for high school students, and thus it would not be expected that as much would be done for lower grade levels, but discussion of how a few ideas scaled down to those levels would have been appropriate.

Despite not articulating the logic behind every activity sufficiently, the plan, overall, is well thought-out at the activity level, with high quality partnerships, processes, and activities, which should enable the applicant to be successful. The applicant has identified career and college goals and strong and well-thought activities that are rooted in their vision for reform. These activities include the Academies, which represent a dramatic reforming of school culture and organization, SmartRooms, Innovation Labs, community stakeholder advisory boards, teacher externships, and improved teacher/student planning, collaboration, and grouping. These activities will be implemented by councils (e.g. College and Career Readiness Council and Alignment Rockford Board) involving strong partnerships with industry leaders and educational staff, allowing for close collaboration.

<b>(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>
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**(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

Overall, the applicant identifies good goals and strikes a good balance between ambitious and yet achievable goals, and also setting goals for decreasing gaps so that the most needy students make the greatest improvement. There are goals related to graduation, college enrollment, and performance on summative assessments, such as the PSAE, which is a state assessment. Some questions remain when things are not explained well. For example, the applicant mentions various evaluation frameworks, but does not explain them within the body of the application (e.g. the Barbara Bray stages of personalized learning and others). Also, the percentage goals for the 11th grade PSAE in English, Science, and Math are very confusing, as the numbers go down, and this is not explained. It could be that this represents the gap, or the percentage of students NOT meeting standards on the PSAE, but it is not clear what this data represents and why it goes down. Also, in explaining the process for decreasing achievement gaps, they explain their practice of creating small learning communities of 150 students, but without details about how this works and the evidence that this is successful. Thus, it appears the LEA's vision will result in improved learning and performance, and the goals are ambitious and achievable, but some confusion remained about how a few of these goals would be attained.

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

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

**(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant did a poor job of explaining their prior record of success, because it seems like they probably had more success than how it was explained in the application. For example, the applicant describes impressively decreasing gaps between high and low achieving subgroups in both reading and math, but does not explain which test provided this data, or give us the raw scores so we can verify their analysis of their performance. In fact, the LEA did not provide the full data for the past four years as requested, making it difficult to fully understand the past track record.

The real problem is in the graphs presented. For example, there is a graph of students who received F grades. First of all, it's not clear why this data would be important. As it is, the data undermines the applicant's case and it looks like no significant improvement has been made at all. East goes up in students with Fs and Auburn too. Only Jefferson really goes down in terms of total students who received an F, but now with their chronic failing students, which remained about the

same. Also the data fluctuates quite a bit, spiking up and then going down, but ending at about the similar level for most schools as they were at the beginning of 2012.

There are also some pie charts that show the percentage of freshmen on track for graduation, but this is a snapshot in time and doesn't show growth, or tell us what point of time this data is from.

There is also a bar chart on tardies and tardy referrals, but it seems that the numbers have gone up in all schools. There is also a bar chart on the number of illness days, which seems irrelevant. Finally, another bar chart shows excessive absences going up in all schools, which is not a positive finding.

The LEA reports on its track record typically in the aggregate, not mentioning efforts for its lowest-achieving schools. However, it appears that the four schools in the consortium have fairly similar outcomes. The LEA does have an adequate track record in making student performance data available to teachers through the SUNGARD system, in which students can access data and develop personalized learning plans, and through a Home Access Center where parents can access data in real time as it is inputted. However, it is not clear how accessible this data is to parents outside of the Home Access Center.

In summary, the applicant reports ambiguously that they have made impressive gains in closing a gap in some kind of performance, but much of the actual data shared is contradictory or casts doubt on the applicants' prior success.

<b>(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
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**(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant provides information on a public website on actual personnel salaries for instructional and non-instructional staff for each school, along with all collective bargaining agreements, as well as the schools' line item budget.

<b>(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>
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**(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant describes an open environment with sufficient opportunity to enact change, but without specific details or evidence. For example, the applicant says it has a relationship with the union that supports negotiating contract terms and dismissing ineffective teachers, but no details are provided on this or the "open flow of communication between our union and the district." Likewise the applicant claims connection and communication between the district and the building level teams, but without details. The relationships with the community, and the established advisory boards for the school Academies are impressive, and represent strong community stakeholder support. In addition, a key part of the applicant's plan is the installation of the career academies, and in this they appear to have good autonomy as they can assign staff across the system according to staff needs. They can replace teachers and principals according to performance, and the principals have control over budgets.

<b>(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>
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**(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant states that students, families, teachers, and principals were engaged in the development of the proposal, and this is confirmed by the letters in the appendix indicating that the principals and teachers union were, in fact, engaged in the process. There is still some uncertainty, however, about how they were engaged, and to what degree, in the development of the plan.

The engagement with the community stakeholders is outstanding, with key business leaders providing support and action in helping teachers understand better how to teach their students, and in helping students better understand potential career pathways. The applicant has reformed their schools to represent career academies, which are managed by advisory boards with participating stakeholders. This shows strong community stakeholder engagement. In addition, they sought community feedback and support via surveys and university partnership. Their four College and Career Readiness Councils meet every month, and these represent the academies and are chaired by a member of the community. The school district participates in Alignment Rockford, the community action advisory group.

The score reflects strong external engagement and good internal engagement albeit with less detail about how this occurred.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(1) Learning (20 points)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>

**(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant describes several interesting and potentially powerful initiatives, but without sufficient details to constitute a high quality plan.

(a) The applicant's plan to create academies/learning communities within each high school is a powerful one because of the potential to create pathways into careers and college by personalizing the students' curriculum towards career interests. This personalization begins in 8th grade when students complete interest inventories, develop presentations about their goals, examine choices, and develop a 10 year plan. This is important, as it helps the students see themselves beyond graduation into their college and career choices.

(b) However, it is not clear what exactly this will mean for the kinds of learning the students will do each year and how students will be provided high-quality content and approaches in a structured, personalized way. Mention is made about developing a growth plan related to scores on Explore Plan ACT and WorkKeys, but without explaining these tools. Similarly, the innovation lab and distance learning center are important components, but it is not discussed how they will be used exactly, nor what pedagogies will be used to take advantage of the tablets and the technology rich Smart Rooms. Finally, it is mentioned that they will identify a mentor, which is an important addition, but it does not discuss who these mentors would be or what role they would play. Also, the applicant does not mention specifically how the instructional sequences will be personalized, what kind of digital content will be provided, and how students will be trained to use data to personalize their learning, except to indicate that they will be working with mentors who will assist them, which is a good practice.

In short, it appears that there are ideas for high-quality content and approaches, but it isn't clear how they will be directly tied to students' personalized learning plans.

The LEA does propose strong data management tools for providing frequently updated individual student data.

(c) The students will be provided mentors, who could assumedly provide training and support to students on using the tools, but it is not made explicit.

The score indicates a strong proposal in terms of criteria (a), as the ideas in this plan should lead to deep learning experiences connected to career readiness due to the outstanding partnerships and design of the career academies. However, the proposal is weak in regards to criteria b and c where these items are mentioned, but without great detail.

<b>(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7</b>
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**(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant has many excellent ideas for personalizing learning and improving teaching and leading, and the budget identifies several wise uses of funds in hiring training and coaching personnel to support the instructional staff. The applicant also discusses the use of data from technological systems and within teacher planning communities for personalizing instruction. However, these ideas are typically mentioned broadly without concrete examples of the actual teaching and leading strategies that would be implemented. For example, the applicant mentions the following:

- Data days, although it is not clear what they do as part of this training.
- Coaches are provided, which is an excellent approach to just in time training, but details are not given on what they do.
- It is mentioned that the data systems allow for the analysis of gaps in a student's profile, but it is not clear how this is done.
- Data walls/binders, which sounds interesting, but no details are given.
- At one point the applicant states that "Our district office ensures that research-based instructional strategies and curriculum are implemented" but no details are given about what these curriculum and these strategies are.
- It is mentioned that their trainer/coach model has been identified as a best practice ---but it is not said who made this judgment.
- The applicant appears to be addressing the improvement of teaching through professional development only, and it is not clear how they may use hiring, recruitment, and retaining of teachers as a potential strategy.

Positive features of the applicant's plan include how the applicant involves the community in addressing gaps in the students' learning needs, and how their teacher force shows a commitment to deep content knowledge and teaching experience, with averages of 14 years of experiences and 70% of the teachers holding master's degrees.

Overall, the applicant's plan includes a discussion of many innovative activities based on solid rationale for developing teachers through coaching, collaboration, and the use of student performance data, but the proposal lacks details on specific interim goals for teacher/leader evaluation and development and the timeline, deliverables, and parties responsible for implementing all of the activities at a level of specificity needed for a high quality plan.

#### D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
<b>(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>

**(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant has several good ideas in place for implementing and supporting the plan in this proposal. For example:

- The Sungard Performance Plus system shows much promise by identifying students that are at-risk based on certain criteria (which aren't explained), and allowing for student success plans to be developed and accessed by multiple appropriate parties. The applicant claims this will support the preparation of curriculum that is personalized to the needs of the students, but this isn't explained well with specific examples.
- The applicant discusses various ways that students can earn credit and progress, including concurrent enrollment.
- The Home Access Center is an excellent way to involve parents by providing real-time data.
- The data can be exported, and is not locked in the system.
- The applicant claims the student can progress by showing mastery, but it is not clear how this is done other than the concurrent enrollment and similar options.
- It is also not clear how school leadership teams will be able to exercise autonomy over schedules, calendars, staffing, and other decisions, and it is not discussed clearly how the LEA central office will be structured to support the reforms.

Overall, the applicant's plan has identified end goals related to college enrollment and attainment of career certificates, but not mid-range goals, and a strong set of activities to achieve these goals along with a solid rationale linked to a collaboration with industry to provide authentic experiences for students. However, the timeline, deliverables, and parties responsible for implementing the activities is not clearly discussed with enough details to warrant confidence that this is a high quality plan.

<b>(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>
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**(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant has determined wise uses of grant money to hire support staff that should be adequate for ensuring participants have access and knowledge to use the tools and systems in the plan. This includes an innovation supervisor, instructional coaches, and an expansion of their counseling services in order to provide enhanced counseling to students to personalize their learning plans. These staff members will assist in ensuring that students, parents, and teachers can utilize the tools sufficiently. The applicant will also use grant money to purchase computers and industry-specific tools such as health equipment; drills, presses, and riveting machines; pottery and sculpture equipment; and simulation equipment so that all students will be able to access and use the tools. In addition, money will be set aside to provide for students to travel to visit local institutions of higher learning and businesses in order to have "real life" experiences with their chosen careers. The money will provide for all students, regardless of income to have at least two of these community-based experiences.

The participants can export their data from the system, but it is not clear if they can then import their data into another system to make it fully interoperable.

Thus, the score indicates the beginnings of a good plan for (a) and (b) in that persons will be hired and made responsible for ensuring participants can access the tools and understand how to use them, and plans have been made to ensure that all students have access to career-specific and academic-specific technology in order to participate fully in the LEA's

reform vision. The plan is incomplete, however, in identifying timelines and specific deliverables related to these criteria, in particular true interoperability and open data formats for criteria (c) and (d).

## E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</b>
<p><b>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant has set aside money and a plan for hiring an external evaluator from a local university. In addition, the LEA will create an oversight committee involving major stakeholders (external evaluator, RTT coordinator, school coaches and leaders, parents, and community stakeholders) in continuously monitoring their performance on this initiative. Specifically,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-- the Regional Office of Education (ROE) will ensure continuous monitoring and see that goals and objectives in the proposal are met.</li> <li>-- The ROE will also work with Rockford Public Schools on ensuring the quality of professional development and fidelity in implementing the reforms of the proposal.</li> <li>-- An educational administrator will be hired to assist with oversight.</li> </ul> <p>The applicant will share data and findings regarding the effectiveness of their use of RTT investments with the website and through the oversight committee with internal and external stakeholders, but specifics are not given on how this will be done, nor exactly how the evaluator will conduct her work. It is also not mentioned how regularly this oversight and information will be discussed and shared.</p> <p>Thus, the applicant has identified key parties to assist with oversight, and general activities to be accomplished, but the timeline and deliverables related to this oversight are not discussed.</p>		
<b>(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>
<p><b>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant will create an oversight committee with major stakeholders, including parents, instructional leaders and coaches, oversight and evaluation specialists, and impressively, community stakeholders to communicate findings related to the RTT project. However it is not clear how regularly these people will discuss and share information related to the initiative. Thus, there are not specific details about the timeline, activities to be undertaken, and deliverables to be developed related to ongoing communication and engagement, although the key partners are all represented and will be engaged on the oversight committee.</p>		
<b>(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>
<p><b>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant has selected measures, but does not discuss its rationale for the measures and how they will review and improve the measure over time. Most of the goals seem to be ambitious and yet achievable, but there are some confusing goals as well. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-- For many of the measures, it does not appear that the applicant expects to improve post-grant, as the goals do not go up for the first year after the grant ends.</li> <li>-- For measure B, the applicant expects to have 100% of its teachers effective in six years. This does not seem to be achievable, as perfection in this regard is rare.</li> <li>-- The goals for measure C do not seem ambitious enough, as they only expect to improve by 1% over the course of the grant overall, with no improvement at all for some subgroups (i.e. Hispanics and Whites).</li> <li>-- Performance measure D was not readable in the current document.</li> <li>-- Performance measure E was confusing as it seemed to indicate that referrals for behavior issues would go up instead of down.</li> </ul>		
<b>(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>

**(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

A plan is made for hiring an external evaluator who appears to be well qualified, but a plan for using this evaluator is not discussed, beyond indicating that they will have regular contact.

**F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)**

	Available	Score
<b>(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>

**(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant identified all funding to support the project, which will come only from the RTT grant monies. The budget seems appropriate and outlines sufficient money for support and implementation, along with rationale for the staff to be hired (including their assignments) and the expenses to be incurred for various projects. For example, the LEA has set aside money to hire an Instruction Coach to support teachers in enhancing their strategies and aligning their delivery models to match the student-focused learning of the reform. They will also hire an Innovation Supervisor to support technology components in the proposal. Wisely, the LEA will use some money to expand counseling services in order to provide greater assistance to students in personalizing their learning plans. Technology purchases are essential for the LEA's outlined goals in the Career Academies, in particular the Smart Rooms.

However, the LEA has not specified what are one-time investments and which would be ongoing costs, which reflects in the lower score.

<b>(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>
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**(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant does not discuss sustainability, although it seems that much of their efforts would create sustainable reforms, particularly their connection and development of strong relationships with the business and community leaders of their city.

**Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)**

	Available	Score
<b>Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant did not directly address the competitive priority in its narrative. In reviewing the whole proposal, the applicant has proposed a strong collaboration with community stakeholders to augment and support the educational reforms, which will include addressing students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs through authentic, hands-on, and student-chosen career training and project-based instruction. However, the LEA does not address additional student and family supports, goals of the partnership beyond the student performance outcomes and performance measures already addressed, and how specifically the partnership would integrate education and other services and build staff capacity.

**Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments**

	Available	Score
<b>Absolute Priority 1</b>		<b>Met</b>

**Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant has proposed a plan that would significantly improve learning and the personalization of learning in this LEA, with a strong focus on college and career-ready graduation. The applicant has adopted career and college-focused standards and assessments, such as the number of students who graduate, enroll in college within 16 months, complete FAFSA applications, National Career Readiness Certificates, and performance on a state summative assessment (PSAE). In addition, the LEA has established very strong partnerships with business stakeholders to create pathways to employment

for their students, opportunities for students to receive internships and for teachers to learn about how they can teach their students to be career ready for specific career types.

These partnerships will be further employed in the career academies, where students will choose to participate and engage in deep learning opportunities that are authentic to a particular discipline such as health services, engineering, etc. Through these academies, the students will progress towards graduation and college enrollment, while also earning certification in their chosen career fields.

The LEA has built data systems for measuring student growth and informing students, parents, and stakeholders, including the SUNGARD PLUS system that can track student performance across years and identify areas of need. The LEA has a strong record of student achievement, and the reforms outlined in this proposal should accelerate their efforts.

Total	210	97
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