



# Race to the Top - District

## Technical Review Form

Application #0086FL-1 for School District of Manatee County, FL

### A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The information the applicant presents clearly indicates there is a comprehensive and coherent reform vision in place. The vision is the result of a multi-year program focused on the four educational assurances of the Race to the Top District grant proposal, state core standards and reform initiative. There is clear evidence that the program is designed to transform the curriculum, instruction and practices of elementary schools within the district based upon the use of best practices and proven approaches. The vision is a logical approach to ensuring there will be an increase in student achievement and teacher quality through innovative instructional tools, strategies and professional development opportunities. The vision is clearly tailored toward personalized learning activities to help students achieve academic success and prepare them for postsecondary education and career opportunities. The reform strategy supports what the applicant states as the "District Theory of Action", whereby program activities are centered around building content knowledge of teachers and school leadership and utilizing instructional best practices.</p> <p>The approach the applicant describes is ambitious and achievable, as there is currently a district-wide implementation of early STEM education in technology learning labs at school sites which are aligned with the Race to the Top District grant guidelines. Further details provided by the applicant indicate there are consistent efforts to align instructional standards and individualized student progress with local, state and national standards, and the data is accessible to educators for the purposes of creating personalized instruction. The process supports personalized learning and teacher quality as teachers have the opportunity to use results to plan learning activities at the classroom level and measure effectiveness. The process also helps to identify struggling schools in need of improvement and create an improvement plan through research-based instructional practices centered around parental and stake holder involvement.</p> <p>There is evidence of concerted efforts to provide deep learning opportunities for students. For example, the district's strategic plan resulted in the creation of the College Center at one high school, where students can acquire a high school diploma and associate's degree simultaneously. Projects in science and engineering, in addition to a regional science and engineering fair and one-to-one laptop initiative, have made technology available to students who have no technology accessible to them. Partnerships with local universities have been established to prepare a cohort of teachers to receive master of science degrees. To further provide support and track student achievement, several websites are available for parents, students and stakeholders. The Secondary School Re-Design reform initiative was also established to provide administrator and teacher training to support rigorous core instruction.</p> <p>The classroom experience described by the applicant is a logical approach to provide a comprehensive program of study and personalized learning environment. Currently, there are learning environments in place to improve teaching and learning that include the use of Moodle (a Learning Management System) to increase online learning opportunities for teachers and students. To improve teacher effectiveness, the district implemented multiple incentives that include increased compensation, collaboration and improved career opportunities. Through a pilot program, One Classroom at a Time, the district implemented effective instructional practices and learning experiences using educational technology across grade levels and subject areas to improve teacher effectiveness and increase achievement levels of students living in poverty, students with disabilities, and English language learners. Additionally, the applicant provides examples of new classroom experiences to be implemented, including the Wonder Wall and Wonder Center for first graders to explore various contexts and learning environments. The Wonder Centers will be placed throughout the classroom so that students can gain hands-on experience using various manipulatives.</p>		
<b>(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</b></p>		

The applicant presents a clear need for the project. For example, the majority of the schools chosen are low-performing, high-need schools in dire need of the state's reform initiative and efforts to implement of personalized learning experiences, technology and improved teacher/principal quality. This effort will support high quality LEA-level and school-level instruction as the project is aligned with the state core standards and proven practices designed to increase student achievement. The applicant proposes to provide services for all of the district's PK-5 elementary schools, including 34 traditional elementary schools and 7 charter schools which serves 22,993 students. Among traditional schools, the applicant states that 63.71% of the students are impoverished, and 80% of the students are eligible for free and/or reduced lunch. Among charter schools, 57.4% of the students are impoverished and/or qualify for free and reduced lunch. A list of schools that will participate in the grant activities is presented by the applicant, and they are identified by subgroups that include high-need, low-income students in addition to participating educators.

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

**10**

**10**

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

The applicant presents convincing evidence to show the proposed project is a part of the district's reform plan and the approach will be scaled up to serve all students within the district. The applicant proposes to have a fully implemented STEM FIRST (Fully Integrated Reading, Science and Technology) program by the year 2017. There are specific objectives, activities and goals associated with the implementation of the project that are clearly outlined and appropriate based upon the rationale presented. For example, the applicant states that by the end of school year 2015/2016, the district will have installed STEM FIRST engineer labs within all elementary schools. There are several objectives that include conducting a feasibility study to determine schools to retrofit with the STEM FIRST engineer lab during the first three cohorts. The parties responsible include the project coordinator and key district staff. The rationale is that by providing a separate environment to students' regular classrooms, they will be able to design, prototype, test, build, and create in this lab as they investigate out-of-the-box solutions to real-world challenges. Before the implementation process begins, a feasibility study will be conducted for each school, and they will work with the teachers and the union to gauge the readiness of each site.

Additionally, the applicant proposes to create career and technical student organizations for juniors as a way to get them interested in career development. The organizations will provide peer mentoring, leadership development, academic and career development, professional development, and community service. Additionally, middle schools will mentor elementary schools to ensure their organizations are also successful. There will also be opportunities for training educators online, peer-to-peer collaboration and summer and/or winter institutes hosted by the district to ensure they are well equipped to teach STEM FIRST curriculum activities.

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

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**10**

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

The applicant presents a continuation of the district's reform efforts to improve educational achievement for students while improving teacher quality. The approach clearly indicates that the reform is designed to increase student achievement by aligning activities with the four core educational assurances of the Race to the Top District proposal and its state educational standards. There are a number of high-quality approaches presented by the applicant that will allow the reform to successfully ensure students will succeed and teachers continually gain the skills they need to implement the activities as intended. For example, the applicant proposes to close the achievement gap in reading, math and science by implementing the STEM First project to elementary students within the district through enhanced learning experiences and professional development for teachers.

There is ample information presented to show the goals are ambitious and achievable. The applicant offers several viable approaches to ensure the performance measures for decreasing the achievement gaps and increasing graduation rates and college enrollment will be met, such as utilizing the districts MTSS (Multi-tiered Systems of Support) system to gain insight on student progress and achievement. According to the applicant, the MTSS model ensures students get high-quality instruction based upon personalized needs, academic achievement and learning rate. Implementation of the MTSS model is the overall responsibility of administrators, teachers, and support staff. This is a logical approach to ensuring the program goals will be met, as there will be opportunities to monitor and change program/teaching strategies as needed. There is also concerted efforts to ensure students become interested in postsecondary education and college. Some of the efforts include the use of a district-wide student advisory program for individual counseling to discuss their academic goals

and college enrollment opportunities and to make sure students are on track to graduate. Students will be able to create an electronic personalized education portfolio and learn about opportunities for taking Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate coursework. The applicant also proposes to introduce career and postsecondary foundational skills to younger students so that they will be motivated to learn.

## 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>12</b>
<p><b>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>Student learning and achievement over a three year period is evident. For example, to increase equity in learning and teaching, a career and technical program was implemented to provide training for occupations requiring backgrounds in STEM education. In 2005, the district created a 4-year timeline through the Race to the Top grant program to hire two Bio-Med teachers to be housed at two designated schools, and two Bio-Med classes were implemented in Year 2 of the grant, with two more classes added in Years 3 &amp; 4. The department also increased the number of STEM-related acceleration courses, such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, AICE, dual enrollment, and industry certification. This strategy allowed access to more STEM classes, thereby increasing student enrollment and student achievement.</p> <p>Further, the applicant describes in detail the use of integrated data systems between the district and schools to improve classroom instruction, operations and support research. This was accomplished through the hiring of an online learning specialist and improving the technology system. The applicant indicates the strategies were successful as the process allowed all stakeholders including teachers, students and parents to have access to student assessments, core education curriculum, instructional tools, reading tools and more. Further evidence indicates the process helped lead to an increase in students enrolling in AP and dual enrollment courses, especially amongst Hispanic and African-American students, because educators were able to monitor student progress and implement corrective changes and guidance as needed.</p> <p>Strategies applied to assist low-performing schools indicate there has been success over the last three years. Instructional specialists and instructional coaches provides support to educators to implement school improvement plans. Improvement strategies included extended hours for literacy instruction and tracking student achievement for students attending grades K-5 so teachers could monitor student progress to ensure the end of year benchmarks set by the district were met.</p> <p>The applicant does not provide data regarding the progress over a four year period. Only three years of information has been provided. There are also no specific details to determine if there have been an increase in college enrollment amongst students over the last four years and the applicant does not describe how the strategies have helped student achievement in low-performing schools over the last four years.</p>		
<b>(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>
<p><b>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>There is evidence presented to show transparency regarding the district's processes, practices and investments. Information regarding all programs, practices, procedures, fiscal management and investments is made available to all stakeholders via the district's website. The information presented on the website includes information regarding personnel, principals, teachers and staff. As further support, the applicant states there are additional links to district administrator and school documents that include comprehensive monthly and annual financial reports and budgets, annual program reports, organizational charts, job descriptions, historic budget data, accounting structure, monthly financial reports and monthly check registers. The applicant states that financial data can be requested through the district or community relations department.</p> <p>The applicant does not provide school-by-school salary information. It has only presented the overall base salaries for the district.</p>		
<b>(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>
<p><b>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant shows efforts to ensure autonomy for the project under State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements to effectively implement the STEM FIRST (Fully Integrated Reading Science Technology) program. For example, it is indicated that sites operate in accordance with state legislation, district and school protocol and program guidelines.</p>		

Furthermore, the applicant states that the overall day-to-day operations are managed by the superintendent and leadership team which includes the project coordinator, administrators, educators, teachers and other stakeholders. Program implementation at the school level is supported by a team of educators. The team consists of the project coordinator, coaches, directors and other stakeholders who support the project. The applicant provides an extensive list of qualified administrators who will oversee the project from the superintendent office level to the school level.

While efforts to ensure autonomy are present at the district and school levels, the applicant does not provide specific agreements to indicate flexibility at the school level to make specific changes to curriculum, schedules or other areas related to the proposed project.

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

**15**

**15**

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

The applicant presents evidence to show the proposed project is the result of collective bargaining efforts, input and direct engagement with the district, schools, teachers, principals, and other stakeholders. The process included hosting several meetings with district department members, teacher representatives and principals to design the structure of the STEM FIRST program. The project is rooted on existing programs that are an intricate part of the district education reform initiative, which is well supported by teachers, educators, community leaders, principals and other stakeholders. Throughout the meeting process, several key components of the grant application were discussed, such as professional learning opportunities, curriculum, strategies and concerns related to the project. There are letters of support from a community-based youth serving organization, teachers union, local and state government, businesses and the school district to be served by the project. Parents will participate on a leadership board to help oversee the project, attend special parent driven events, and are privy to site visits. There is evidence to show that teachers and the teachers union were involved with the creation of the proposed project and will support its implementation.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(1) Learning (20 points)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>

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

There is ample information to show the program approach, activities and buy-in from stakeholders will improve learning and teaching through the personalizing learning experience. For example, to ensure parents and students understand what they are learning, the applicant proposes to use various forms of communications both oral and written, homework assignments and one-on-one instructional sessions, in addition to and school and state level academic competitions to provide added clarity and support.

To ensure there will be opportunities to identify and pursue learning development goals linked to college-and-career standards, teachers will be able to use various classroom and one-on-one approaches geared towards each students personalized learning plan. The plan is appropriate to support the goals proposed as teachers and students will have access to student data, advanced technology and professional development opportunities. The plan to utilize a feeder pattern approach to implement the project is innovative, as it allows students and their families to be made aware of various career pathways and academies to promote deep learning experiences in various areas of academic interest. There is sufficient evidence presented to show that students will have the opportunity to pursue learning goals through a variety of activities. For example, students will be able to attend the local technology and business enterprise program whereby students can plan careers and then create a personalized learning plan to match the careers chosen.

To further show the project is committed to personalized instruction and further the deep learning experiences, the applicant presents a comprehensive plan of implementation. The process will begin with early childhood learners who will be able to gain instructional and hands-on experience exploring the various concepts in STEM FIRST Engineer Labs. This encourages students to become actively involved in their educational experience and become motivated to learn. Students will be able to transfer their experience into English language arts, math, and science classes.

There are concerted efforts to provide opportunities for students with diverse backgrounds and with high needs. The plan

includes incorporating problem solving, teamwork communication, and creativity in efforts to motivate students to learn and explore challenges that will help build self-efficacy and increase their academic achievement through diverse topics that increase their confidence.

There is also evidence of various high-quality instructional approaches and environments. For example, the applicant proposes to equip each elementary classroom multi-media STEM libraries with non-fiction texts on science, mathematics, the arts, and social studies, in addition to other tools to build reading skills, vocabulary, content knowledge and comprehension that will foster core foundational skills to support self-sufficiency. The process of using student data on an ongoing basis will help to gauge whether students are mastering classroom content and core instruction courses.

Ongoing feedback regarding student progress is presented. Flyers and school documents are translated for families, and schools work to have translators onsite at events. Additionally, all communications that are released from the schools/district through the ConnectEd system is translated into Spanish and many of the elementary schools currently have global themes and units to teach young children about the world and build empathy among students from diverse backgrounds. Access to student assessments, and district and program information will be made available on the district's website in addition to one-on-one communication.

The plan to integrate high-quality digital learning content is both comprehensive and innovative. The use of Labs feature high-quality content, including digital learning content and equipment such as iPads, Mimio Boards, Laser Engravers, 3-D Printers, and wind tunnels, and other curriculum activities are aligned with college and career-ready standards as well as the Standards for Technological Literacy and virtual college. The plan to include blended learning options digitally through the STEMulators online libraries is unique as it will allow students to continue their personalized experience and allow teachers to be able to track their progress. Students will be required to journal and reflect on each project and add these reflections to the content of the library creating a personal link to learning. All project activities are adaptable for diverse and high-needs populations of students to be served by the project. The activities will allow students to engage in deeper learning experiences through problem-solving, teamwork challenges and various learning concepts. Through the hands-on experiences, students will be actively engaged in their learning experience.

Through STEM FIRST, students will learn to apply their lessons to "real world" applications beginning at an early age. The personal learning and deeper learning experiences to be offered by the project will motivate students to learn and become interested in post secondary education. Program activities are linked to college- and career-ready standards, and the strategies are well documented by the applicant. To promote college and career awareness students will be able to tour "The Virtual College," allows students to explore college through virtual field trips where they can gain knowledge from various subjects. The tour would be pre-recorded with a pilot class of students and linked to a lesson plan created by the STEMulators and instructional Innovators for further classroom instruction. To further deepen the learning experience, students will have the opportunity to plan their careers through innovative activities from the technology and business enterprise at the Manatee Technical Institute. Additionally, students will also be able to tour colleges, conduct interviews with college students, staff and faculty. The overall approach is designed to work with students holistically. Therefore, the process will allow them to gain knowledge through peer mentoring, leadership development, professional development and community service projects.

The plan to ensure students are on track towards meeting college and career ready standards is clearly outlined. Some of the strategies include hosting parent/student meetings and informational gatherings that provide hands-on activities, such as completing financial aid forms, researching colleges and completing college applications.

To ensure that parents and students will be informed, the plan includes using teachers, Instructional Innovators, the project coordinator and other stakeholders associated with the implementation of the project as instructors to provide the training. For example, the instructional innovators will train teachers on the various tools and will then monitor and observe teachers to make sure they train students and parents on the proper use. The Instructional Innovator will be able to provide immediate feedback and assistance if needed.

The applicant does not provide detailed information regarding the training process for all of the project activities to be provided. For example, there is no information provided or how early learners will be trained to use the hands on equipment in the STEM First Engineering labs as presented by the applicant.

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

**20**

**17**

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

Overall, the applicant presents a high quality plan to improve teaching and learning through personalized learning environments. The STEM FIRST program is the result of a district-wide effort to reform instructional activities to increase teacher quality and support student achievement. To show the efforts are viable, the applicant has presented information indicating that the curriculum is aligned with the district's college and career ready standards and is inclusive of a structural framework to support the personalization of teaching and learning. Further information indicate the methods are logical, as the structure was developed to support grade-level teaching and learning progressions.

The applicant presents several effective strategies designed to meet each student's academic needs to ensure all students can graduate on time and college- and career-ready. One of the strategies includes, a student-oriented feedback mechanism whereby achievement can be tracked by students regarding their progress toward their learning goals. This is an innovative way to actively engage and motivate students to become involved in their own education. The personal learning environment will be designed so that student progress towards unit activity goals will be collected and linked to instructional data to assist students progressing toward proficiency. Parents and students will have access to all student progress and assessments and will have the opportunity to provide input in the instructional process.

Evidence of teacher preparedness is present as teachers will be prepared to implement all program strategies through professional development training at the district and school levels. Based on the information provided, it is clear students will be able to receive specific instruction based on their needs while teachers will gain the knowledge and skills needed to support the students. There are several approaches which will support efforts to provide teachers with the feedback they need to continue to improve. For example, the Professional Teaching and Learning Cycle will be used to gauge teacher effectiveness. The concept consists of six steps—study, select, plan, implement, analyze, and adjust. The process can be used as a guide to help teachers focus on improving classroom instruction through data-driven activities. Teachers will learn how to interpret and use student data to drive individual instruction through the use of assessment tools such as Moodle (learning management system) and units of instructional process that are tied directly to the curriculum to be used. Other methods of teacher development are clearly defined and include the use of expert teachers who will be able to mentor other teachers so that they will be able to move students' progress toward meeting individualized identified learning goals. The use of professional learning communities (PLCs), a web-based interactive program, which is connected to Teaching-Learning Critical Pathways further provides support for students in personal learning environments. The website hosts program activities, and curricula are available for students to learn at their own pace.

Training, systems, and practices to continuously improve school progress is present and feasible for project use. Teachers will learn how to interpret student and program collected data and then use the data to drive individualized instruction. Opportunities for teachers to have access to assessment tools is described and included an item bank in Moodle (Learning Management System, LMS) that is tied directly to the curriculum with defined learning targets for each unit of instruction. The process by which teachers will have immediate access to accurate and comprehensive information on the progress of each student is logical to further track achievement. All stakeholders, specifically parents, teachers and district administration will be able to use the data gathered to direct instruction. Students will be able to set and refine academic and college-career goals.

The plan to increase the number of students who receive instruction from highly effective teachers and the strategies to be used is appropriate. The applicant proposes to increase the number of instructional tools, skills and knowledge of elementary teachers through ongoing professional development delivered at both the district and school level. For example, summer institutes will be hosted for elementary teachers at each school to provide instruction on the implementation of personalized learning environments. Teachers designated for training during the first year of the project will become Mentor Teachers to teachers who will implement the project in the second-year and so forth until all schools have implemented the project. The Project Coordinator and STEMulators and Instructional Innovators will work with the district's curriculum and professional learning tools to implement all activities. Professional training will also be delivered online, peer-to-peer, and lesson study, and other activities.

The evaluation system for teachers is a high quality plan that will support student and teacher achievement. For example, the Manatee School Leader Assessment (MSLA) is designed to recruit, develop, reward, and retain effective and highly effective principals and assistant principals. The assessment is a self-reflection tool whereby feedback is provided to promote professional growth. Emphasized are the leader's appropriate use of evaluation criteria and procedures, as well as the recruitment, professional growth, and retention of effective and highly effective classroom teachers.

The applicant does not provide any specific information to provide high-quality training for principals. Furthermore, there is no discussion regarding the plan to increase the number of students who receive instruction from highly effective teachers and principals in hard to staff schools and specialty areas of education.

**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>15</b>

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

The applicant presents a high-quality plan to support project implementation through comprehensive policies and infrastructure. The governance structure is clearly outlined and appropriate for project implementation and monitoring. The STEM FIRST project presented by the applicant is the result of a district-wide effort reform initiative. The district will oversee the overall project and each school or site will operate under their standards. There is evidence to show there will be sufficient oversight by the project coordinator, principals and teachers at the school level. They will be trained to implement and monitor the program so that all activities are aligned with program goal and outcomes. To show sufficient flexibility and autonomy at the school level, the applicant provides additional information clearly defining specific activities that include the use of schedules and calendars of professional learning, school personnel decisions and staffing models, roles and responsibilities for educators and non-educators, and school-level budgets to address STEM FIRST objectives and activities with fidelity and program intent.

There is sufficient evidence to show leadership teams are in place at the school level and will provide ample support for the project. The team includes the principal, school staff, teachers and other stakeholders. The teachers' union is also a partner, and their role is to help to guide the program components. Partnering with the union is a logical approach to gain support for teachers as they implement the project. For example, the union will be responsible for working with each school to ensure installation of the engineer lab and help to develop the professional development model to best meet the needs of the teachers and their schools.

The applicant offers a comprehensive plan by which students will have the opportunity to progress and earn credit based on demonstrated mastery. Competency-based learning strategies will be incorporated, and students will direct their own learning experience. For example, students will direct their own learning through Wonder Centers, a hands-on learning experience strategically placed throughout the classroom. The use of technology is another viable tool to help students master subject matter. Students will be able to sign onto a computer at the start of class, gain access to their "to do" list and their homework will reflect their individual class studies. The use of tracking tools and/or consistent monitoring will ensure mastery skills are gained.

Additional opportunities to gain mastery of standards at multiple times and in various comparable ways is demonstrated. For example, the STEM FIRST project offers flexibility and options for students to achieve at their own pace, share their ideas and learn various skills and concepts. The incorporation of digital and virtual learning is innovative, as it is interactive and is inclusive of a blended learning process whereby students can benefit from self study or through the classroom process.

Ample provisions will be made to support students with disabilities and English learners so that all learning resources and practices are adaptable and fully accessible. To ensure these students gain the benefit of the STEM FIRST program, qualified and trained teachers and instructors will ensure the classroom experience is a successful learning environment. The approach to provide personalized learning experiences for this group of students is outlined and will prove to be a viable approach to support their needs. The plans include the use of differentiated instruction, matching students' needs to the requirements for achievement, one on one instruction and classroom group sessions.

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

There is sufficient information presented by the applicant to show there is a high quality plan in place to support personalized learning environments by providing and provide the resources needed to support students, parents and educators at the school and district levels. The process begins at the district level providing a technology infrastructure with state-of -the art technology tools and district-wide Internet access. The district has partnered with the state and local government to ensure accessibility to their communication systems at all times. The "open systems" policy allows access to all data pertinent to student achievement at the district level. Public community and stakeholder access includes personalized models and tools with documentation, videos, classes, and online courses.

Provisions to provide technical support are clearly outlined. For example, the district will provide support services, computer repair and application support through their help desk. School-level support includes the use of Knowledge Centers, which offer the use of technology to students before and after school. The use of Certified Media Specialists will ensure teachers promote the integration of technology with curriculum. A plan to ensure families have learning opportunities to gain technical support is present and includes providing access to the personalized learning portal, workshops and other

learning tools to support their child's education.

There is detailed information clearly describing the methods by which parents and students will be able to export information in an open data format. The access is made available to all stakeholders by an easy sign-on process through the district's website. The district has hired an Online Learning Specialist and is in the process of employing Moodle Learning Management System as the online learning platform. Additional resources are also defined and will logically support the project to ensure the line of communications are open between school and home to further support the personalized learning experience.

Quality inter-operable systems are in place. The district is committed to providing quality services as it recently implemented FOCUS/SIS as a part of its Local Instructional Improvement System (LIIS) which will be in place for use within the STEM FIRST program. This system is not required until the year 2014. However the district has forged ahead with the implementation process. The applicant presents further information to show the system is a viable to provide support. For example, the system provides statewide communication and reporting procedures in all district offices and in all areas of education, training and resources which are accessible to all stakeholders. Additionally, support will be made available through the district's local area network.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>The applicant presents a high quality plan that includes timelines, milestones, activities and persons responsible. To test program effectiveness and provide program feedback, the applicant proposes to use both a formative and summative approach. The plan includes the use of a qualified evaluation data team who will collect data and report findings. The evaluator will communicate progress data quarterly to district and school planning teams and provide detailed reports annually. The use of both a summative and formative methods of evaluation is appropriate for the project, as the summative evaluation will address the overall impacts and outcomes while the formative evaluation will focus on levels and quality of implementation and progress indicators. Data and feedback will be gathered from students, teachers, parents, administrators, businesses and community partners. The use of an independent evaluator will ensure the integrity of the evaluation process.</p> <p>Surveys, interviews and observation instruments will be used to gain feedback from students, parents, and teachers. This is an appropriate and viable way to gain ongoing feedback and gauge the success of the project and/or address concerns during and after the grant. Also resources and additional educational and professional development tools and statewide data reporting systems will be made available via the state website. The website includes reporting requirements and some evaluation instruments, such as surveys of graduating seniors and school climate surveys employed in the continuous improvement plan. The District Data Management System will also be utilized to collect important outcomes data relating to academic performance, attendance, discipline, course credits and enrollment. The evaluator will be responsible for ensuring stakeholders are provided continuous feedback. All the tools and resources are accessible through public and district systems.</p>		
<b>(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>There is a reasonable plan to ensure ongoing communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders that includes activities, timelines, roles and responsibilities. The persons responsible are identified and include an external evaluator and internal project coordinator who will provide consistent feedback to all stakeholders in a timely manner. For example, the timeline to make program progress will be available on a quarterly basis and will include results of project assessments, student achievement records and other project outcomes. Additional methods include the use of the district's website, electronic bulletin board communications, teleconferences among schools and use of GoToMeeting and Skype software. A FIRST Note publication will be disseminated within the first month of the project and will include school and district information to better keep stakeholders informed. The use of ConnectEd calls will ensure parents and any other stakeholders receive information through their personal phone system. Parent night events will be hosted twice per year. All of the information will be translated so that stakeholders whose first language is not English will be able understand the information presented.</p>		

<b>(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>
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**(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant clearly identifies 14 performance measures for student groups, including all students, pre-K-3, 4-8 and 8-12 grade levels. The applicant proposes a 1.5-2% increase in student achievement each year throughout the duration of the grant. The proposed increase is reasonable based on the baseline data presented pertaining to each subgroup. For example, the applicant proposes to increase overall math scores by 1.5-2.0% annually for all students. The rationale is that math scores will be improved through curriculum alignment with the state core comprehensive test and standardized assessments as required by the state Department of Education. Previous year test scores will be used as the baseline data for assessment to gauge whether all subgroups are progressing as proposed. The plan is to reduce the percentage of non-proficient students by more than half by the end of the grant year 2017-2018.

A plan to show timely and formative information regarding the project's successful implementation or areas of concern is clearly defined. The independent evaluator and project coordinator will provide quarterly reports based on assessments, student engagement, professional development and student achievement findings, to all stakeholders. Performance feedback provided quarterly will allow for timely adjustments and adaptation of project strategies. Further ongoing methods are introduced by the the applicant to show continuous feedback and include electronic communication, monthly publications and postings on the district and school websites. Additionally, annual summative reports will be used to document target progress, and end-of-grant reports will provide evaluation of the overall project.

The feedback process will also be the catalyst for regular review of performance measures. The persons responsible for the monitoring include the evaluator and program coordinator and staff who will help to collect data. The progress will also be measured based on the state core standards and the reform initiative to gauge implementation progress. Overall, the approaches proposed by the applicant will ensure performance measures are tracked and met.

The applicant does not provide any subgroup information to show teachers and principals are highly effective as the applicant states this information is not provided by the state education department. Furthermore, there is no specific information provided regarding the health and social-emotional leading indicators within the performance measures presented.

<b>(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
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**(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:**

In order to ensure program effectiveness, the applicant presents an action plan to ensure the project is rigorously evaluated. The overarching goal presented is to create and maintain coordinated and ongoing activities such as professional development, employing technology, and other resources in order to improve results, that are critical to the successes and sustainability measures of STEM FIRST. The rationale is to evaluate the effectiveness of the grant-funded activities and make good use of other resources associated with the project, such as time, staff and money to improve results. The applicant presents a reasonable approach through the use of a researched-based evaluation system. The system was created based on proven practices designed to increase student achievement. The evaluation system is also based upon the state core education standards and the Race to the Top District four core educational assurances.

Additionally, there is ample information presented to show there is an evaluation plan in place for principals and teachers. For example, the Mantee School Leader Assessment (MSLA) is designed to recruit, develop, reward, and retain effective and highly effective principals, assistant principals and teachers. To further ensure student achievement, the use of school leadership teams to observe, motivate and provide feedback to teachers is logical as the process will ensure effective classroom instruction and allow for close monitoring of the project implementation process. Timelines and activities are at the forefront of all project and are logical based upon the activities presented. The use of several stakeholder committees and district representatives to monitor program activities, data assessments, and core standards supports the continuous improvement process.

The plan to monitor, measure and publicly share information on the investments in technology is clearly outlined. The process includes tracking the installation of the elementary tech labs and continuous professional development for teachers based upon rigorous academic and career related standards, assessments and personalized programs of study. The holistic approach is viable, as the process will require frequent school visits, surveys, interviews and observation instruments for students, parents and educators.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant's budget will sufficiently support the proposed project. The budget is comprised of all revenue and expenditures associated with the project, including the designation of ongoing funds to support the project at the district level. All one time investments for the project are identified versus those that would be ongoing expenditures, including purchasing program supplies, salaries, contractors and other cost associated with project services. There is evidence presented in the budget and budget narrative to show that funds will be used for ongoing operational costs during and after the grant period has ended to ensure long-term sustainability of the personalized learning environments.</p>		
<b>(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant provides a high quality plan that includes timelines, milestones and persons responsibly to ensure the sustainability plan is effective. The project presented is a continued effort by the district, school, community and other stakeholders who are vested in improving teacher quality and student achievement for all of the schools located in the district. The applicant presents a sustainability plan the will extend the program for three years after the term of the grant. The applicant states that the activities outlined will not require substantial investment for further support following the initial four year funding period, as expenses associated with the activities will be part of the budgeting process at all elementary schools participating throughout the District. The district proposes to provide \$750,000 to support the project each year.</p> <p>The use of a school-guided plan is a logical approach to program sustainability, as the STEM FIRST program is a replicable model. For example, as teachers commit and participate in ongoing training, they will be able to mentor other teachers which will allow the project to expand. Further replication will include the use of Instructional Innovators and Stimulators for added classroom support. and an online library of model lessons will be disseminated throughout the district, state and nationally. Additionally, the district has committed 15% (\$4,733,000.00) of the funding request from other state and local sources over the course of the 4-year implementation grant. Participation from the district will be ongoing.</p> <p>The applicant will evaluate the effectiveness of past investments by collecting program data, reviewing the evaluation plan and financials related to the project. The information will be used to inform future investments.</p>		

## Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
<b>Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant provides evidence to show current partnerships and their levels of commitment through letters of support. Partners include youth serving agencies, local businesses, and other community agencies, all of which have committed time and services to the project. For example, the local Boys &amp; Girls Club will offer mentoring services and help to implement the technology activities. This will help the applicant ensure they will meet the social-emotional needs of their students as indicated in their continuous improvement plan. The applicant successfully identifies 10 population-level desired results for students that support the Race to the Top-District proposal. The outcomes include educational results and outcomes related to the project, in addition to family and community results. The applicant proposes to connect high-need families with local agencies who can provide them support beyond the classroom. This will allow the child to be served holistically through various opportunities that include mentoring/tutoring, leadership development and socially and emotionally.</p> <p>The applicant presents information to show there will be methods to track selected indicators at the aggregate level for all children within the LEA. While it is evident that tracking will be done at the school and program level through the STEM FIRST program, there will be mechanisms at the partner level for those providing direct services to students. For example, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Manatee County will be able to track students through their own systems. The district will be able to use the data collected to compare and further track students while providing support to partner agencies. Data from the STEM FIRST program and partners will be used to improve results for all participating students, including those who</p>		

are high-need or are facing other challenges. This will be accomplished by linking with agencies that have experience working with students with various backgrounds. There is reasonable evidence to show there will be efforts to scale the model far beyond the participating students. The STEM FIRST is a district-wide endeavor. All of the elementary students will have access to the project. However, the plan to build a network through community partnerships proposed by the applicant is a viable approach to move the project model forward to achieve project goals. The process will allow them to increase their services to offer a broader mix of collaborative teaching experiences and opportunities for students and teachers.

Reasonable efforts will be made to support students needing additional resources. For example, the applicant has indicated that STEM FIRST staff will receive additional training at the district level to help students needing additional assistance and to identify resources for support. It is further noted that many district departments are geared toward helping special-needs populations and will also be integrated into the STEM FIRST program planning. Personalized learning will be used as a vehicle to serve special-needs populations so that children can learn at their own pace.

The applicant provides a logical approach to ensure the needs and assets of participating students that are aligned with the partnership's goals. For example, the applicant has created a STEM FIRST Community Council, a separate entity from the other leadership associated with the project, consist of partners and other representatives from PK-12. The council is charged with making sure that partnerships are aligned with the educational component and overarching goal of increasing STEM education to be delivered in a Personalized Learning Environment Pre-Kindergarten through 5th grade. This will hold partners accountable to the commitment of the project, ensure they are able to reach goals set, and ensure students need will be met. The applicant successfully presents appropriate methods by which they will be able to identify and inventory the needs and assets of the school and community that are aligned with those goals for improving the education and family and community supports. The approach includes the use of surveys, and a needs assessment will be conducted. The teachers' union will be responsible for the creation, dissemination and analysis of the data collected and the tools will be made available in hard copy, electronically and translated versions will be made available to ensure access to all partners. The applicant provides information to show there will be reasonable efforts to have a decision-making process and infrastructure in place. The process will be the responsibility of the STEM FIRST Community Council, who will create a decision-making process and infrastructure to address the individual concerns of participating students and support improved results based on the needs assessment and feedback from all partners. The applicant offers many opportunities that include a parent showcase hosted twice per year, and information booths will be held at other school-wide events. Multimedia marketing items will be made available all year round to promote program awareness in addition to newsletters, phone calls to the school and the district website. The inclusion of parent input through surveys at events is a reasonable approach as it will allow opportunities for direct input and allow face-to-face engagement and interaction. The applicant identifies the performance measures by which they will use to measure results. The process will include the use of an independent evaluator and the community council who will routinely assess the districts progress relating to program implementation and its impact and how they meet challenges and resolve problems in order to stay on track in meeting program outcome measurements. The performance measures presented, activities and targeted results proposed by the applicant are reasonable given the identity of each subgroup and their current baseline data. The use of the baseline data, monitoring and data assessments will help the applicant gauge success and adjust or create new performance measures based on the results of the data collected.

### Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

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

**Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:**

The STEM FIRST project presented by the applicant meets the Absolute Priority 1. The project is rooted in opportunities for students to succeed, as they will be able to successfully engage in personalized learning environments in the areas of math, science, reading and technology. The project is the result of a district-wide continued effort to improve student achievement and teacher quality. The vision of the project is the result of a multi-year program to transform the curriculum, instruction and practices of elementary schools within the district through the use of best practices and proven approaches.

Further evidence presented indicates the overall project is aligned with the Race to the Top District grant guidelines and instructional standards and individualized student progress with local, state and national standards. For example, stakeholders will have access to data for the purposes of creating personalized instruction throughout the district. There is a concerted effort for teachers to have the opportunity to gain knowledge through professional development opportunities and through the use of student assessment data as they will be able to use the results to create activities to be used at the

classroom level to support student needs.

There is ample information presented to show that the project will be far reaching to low performing schools, diverse populations and high needs students. The applicant proposes to assess the needs and resources of all schools to ensure they are prepared for the STEM FIRST project implementation. If there are schools that are not prepared, there are provisions in place to prepare them that includes teacher training, STEM FIRST curriculum training and more concerted efforts to provide deep learning opportunities for students. For example, the district's strategic plan resulted in the creation of the College Center at one high school where students can acquire a high school diploma and Associate's Degree simultaneously. Projects in science and engineering, in addition to a regional science and engineering fair and one-to-one laptop initiatives, are made available to students who have no access to technology. Partnership are evidenced in the project narrative and include local universities who will prepare a cohort of teachers to receive master of science degrees to further support the project. To further support the needs of students, websites have been launched to show student achievement, and the Secondary School Re-Design reform initiative was also established for middle and high school students to provide administrator and teacher training to support rigorous core instruction. The efforts will help students to become career and college ready.

<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>198</b>
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## Race to the Top - District

### Technical Review Form

Application #0086FL-2 for School District of Manatee County, FL

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

	Available	Score
<b>(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

**(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

a) The applicant describes a comprehensive and coherent reform vision that builds on its work in the four core assurance areas:

- The vision includes an instructional alignment to the Common Core State Standards in all subject areas with appropriate assessment systems which meets the criteria.
- With the implementation of the data system planned through this project, teachers and administrators will be able to track individual student progress in real-time, and consolidate data at the classroom and school level to identify effective instructional practices. This is an important enhancement over the current system and an essential part of the improvement process.
- The district envisions developing and retaining effective teachers and administrators through a robust professional development process designed for the STEM FIRST project. New STEM teachers will be recruited for the elementary schools in the project where STEM expertise is needed. This plan meets the criteria for this assurance area.
- The vision calls for a concerted effort to effectively impact negative school ratings through implementation of research-based instructional practices that foster parental involvement and generate community involvement through business alliances and expansion of agency support. These are important components of the STEM FIRST project. The focus on the lowest achieving schools and students is supported by the plan for the project and meets the criteria for this assurance area.

b) The district vision of transforming the curriculum, instruction and practices of the elementary schools in the district through the implementation of an early STEM education project articulates a clear credible approach. The project's inquiry-based approach to learning and the hands-on constructivist nature of the learning paths are well designed, engaging and robust. Coupled with the

personalized learning environments with supports for students who need them, the plan meets the requirements for this criteria.

c) "Wonder" classrooms for inquiry-based learning are described in detail. Students log into a personal learning environment. There are hands-on Technology learning labs at each school. Students spend time at a T.E.C.H. Zone space at Manatee Technical Institute (MTI), which will be built and visited often. All of these components of STEM FIRST are described in depth in the narrative and graphically depicted through pictures included in the appendix to meet the requirements for this section.

The score for this section is at the highest point due to the comprehensiveness of the plan.

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

**10**

**10**

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

a) The applicant chose all elementary schools in the district and 7 of 8 charter schools chose to be included in the project. These schools meet the competition's eligibility requirements. The decision to include the youngest children for this project is based on the idea that these are the most enthusiastic students who are unencumbered and know no boundaries. That is a reasonable assumption based on experiences in the district with pilot schools.

b & c) The applicant included a list of schools that will participate, the total number of participating students, those from low-income families, those who are high-need students and participating educators which meets the criteria for this section.

The score for this criteria is at the highest level due to the fact that the choice of elementary students will support high quality implementation and all criteria are met.

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

**10**

**9**

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

The application provides the following rationale for the lack of a plan for scale-up from this project beyond to all PK-5 schools. The narrative does include descriptive information on the STEM focus already in place at secondary schools. "STEM FIRST involves LEA-wide change and reform. *The goal is for EVERY district elementary school to be a STEM FIRST School.* As all elementary schools are involved, and this program is designed specifically for that level, there is not a scale-up plan in place other than the aspiration to create a national model." The applicant does not include a high-quality plan to address all schools in the LEA, only all PK-5 schools, however, secondary schools already have a STEM focus and should not need a scale-up plan from a PK-5 initiative.

A high quality plan for describing how the proposal will help the applicant reach outcome goals for all students served is included. The goal for the project is, "By 2017, the School District of Manatee County will establish and implement a personalized learning environment for every elementary student participating in the STEM FIRST program." A series of well described and detailed activities/deliverables are linked to this main goal and other implementation goals with timelines. Rationale and persons responsible are included for each objective/activity. These objectives encompass all elements of a high quality plan needed to meet goals. Examples of objectives under the main project goal include each participating elementary school implementing STEM lessons based on non-fiction works that include writing in year one, the district establishing an online management system in year two, schools adopting a blended learning approach to learning in year 3, etc. The goals and associated objectives/activities/deliverables, timelines, rationale and persons responsible meets this portion of the criteria for this section.

The score for this section is in the middle of the high range due to the quality of the plan for reaching outcome goals but a lack of explanation to link the missing scale-up plan to STEM initiatives at secondary schools in the district.

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

**10**

**10**

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

a) Annual targets for proficient performance on the FCAT 2.0 and the FAA summative assessments are provided and are ambitious yet achievable through the personalized learning and support focus of the application.

b) Annual targets for decreasing achievement gaps and reducing the percentage of non-proficient students by comparing other subgroups to the White, Non-Hispanic subgroup are provided, and are ambitious yet achievable based on a coherent plan for addressing high-needs students and their families and providing an engaging curriculum through effective teaching and coaching. Since the district targets are lower than those for the state, the comparison group target used in the table provided is the state subgroup's average performance. This meets the criteria for this section.

c) Graduation rates reflect the Federal method of calculation. Annual targets for increasing the graduation rate are provided and are reasonable yet achievable based on the goals of the project and the Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) model for increasing equity and support for all students. Graduation rates in the future for students involved in STEM FIRST should be improved due to the fact that the initiative targets students at an early point where barriers to achievement can be most easily addressed.

d) College enrollment targets are provided and are calculated from a baseline of actual enrollment data provided by the state. They are ambitious yet achievable. An important aspect of the district plan is the partnership with institutions of higher learning which should help with the targeted improvements.

The score for this section is at the highest level due to the high quality response to meeting the criteria.

## 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>12</b>

### (B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

1.

a)The district has been a participant in the original Race to the Top grant and has worked for the past four years to meet those goals. A number of improvement initiatives and strategies have been implemented in the district, however, no evidence is provided of a clear record of success in the past four years in closing achievement gaps and raising student achievement, high school graduation rates and college enrollment.

b) The applicant discusses plans and interventions in place to assist their low-performing schools, however, no evidence is provided to demonstrate a clear record of success in achieving ambitious and significant reforms in these schools over the past four years. Data are provided to document a trend of increasing numbers of AP exams taken which is a worthy goal for gaining college credit and preparing for the rigor of college coursework. Data are provided for a comparison of two STEM elementary schools and the rest of the district elementary schools which show significantly higher math, science and reading scores on last year's FCAT exam at the STEM schools, a positive sign of improvement.

c) The applicant cites the requirement in the original Race to the Top grant for a single sign-on system to make student performance data available to students, educators and parents. The district plans to make that a reality by the deadline of 2014. Currently they are using reports from The Data Project they designed that are user-friendly and include bi-weekly status reports, benchmark and summative reports, and other pertinent data. It is not clear whether these reports are provided to students and parents and whether these reports have been available for the last four years, however the new system is designed to meet all these requirements and the plan indicates that the district has the ability to complete the data system project with the required functionality.

The score for this criteria is in the lowest point of the high range due to missing information clearly showing a record of success in the last four years.

<b>(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>
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### (B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's narrative provides information on transparency of information regarding processes, practices and investments. A hyperlink titled "Transparency" leads to district budgets and offsite links required by transparency of records laws for Florida school districts. Salary information searchable by name is maintained by the Tampa Tribune, and financial information is provided on each school plan. Board meetings are televised and minutes are available online. A statement is provided regarding the ability to obtain financial information by requesting it through the district's Finance Department or Community Relations Department, however that does not meet the requirement for making the information highly transparent to the public. Salary schedules are included in the appendix. However, the information provided is not responsive to the selection criteria for a high level of transparency regarding minimum information by category and classification. Information on how school plans are accessed and how the information is organized is not provided.

The score on this response is in the middle range based on information provided except for missing highly transparent information for making public salary and non-personnel expenditures at the school level by required category and classification.

<b>(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>The applicant describes in detail the conditions in the district that would contribute to the success of the implementation of personalized learning environments, including a cadre of district leaders with a wealth of experience and a plan to employ or contract with outside experts as needed. Description in a previous section of the application details the district initiative as part of the state Race to the Top grant, which focuses in part on increased opportunities for STEM courses at elementary schools. Autonomy provided through the STEM FIRST continuation of the state Race to the Top initiative and the inclusion of project practices that do not require additional legal, statutory or regulatory changes at the state level seems sufficient to meet project goals. The information provided meets the criteria for this section.</p> <p>The score for this section is at the highest point due to evidence provided on successful conditions and autonomy.</p>		
<b>(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>
<p><b>(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>a)</p> <p>i) The applicant describes a broad-based, collaborative process in preparing the grant application including district staff, educators from participating schools, the teachers' union and community partners. Letters of support from all of the district elementary schools and seven of eight charter schools, as well as from the president of the Manatee Education Association and from the director of the Manatee Technical Institute, are included in the appendix. Drafts of the proposal were reviewed and shaped with edits and comments, a process that meets the requirements of this criteria.</p> <p>b) Letters of support from key stakeholders such as businesses, civil rights organizations, advocacy groups, local civic and community-based organizations, and institutions of higher education are included in the appendix. In addition to letters, many stakeholders have offered services in support of the application such as technical assistance, input and guidance on project design, mentorships for students, provision of field trips for students, virtual field trips for students, college scholarships, assistance with on-site speaking forums to engage the community and disseminate information, assistance in engaging community organizations, before and after school programs and summer camps. This is comprehensive evidence of support for STEM FIRST (Fully Integrated Reading Science Technology).</p> <p>The score for this criteria is at the highest level due to the information provided to describe meaningful stakeholder support and engagement.</p>		

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

	Available	Score
<b>(C)(1) Learning (20 points)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>
<p><b>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>A credible, high-quality plan for improving learning and teaching by personalizing the learning environment in order to provide all students the support to graduate college- and career-ready is provided in the narrative and tables with goals, rationales, objectives/activities/deliverables, persons responsible and timelines.</p> <p>a) The applicant confirms that the full range of accommodations for exceptional or high-needs students are available through the Engineer Labs in full compliance with IDEA guidelines. An important step in engaging high-need learners is for STEM FIRST activities to be modified as needed. Exceptional Student Education teachers have already been trained in project based learning and multi-modal instruction and are committed to working seamlessly with other teachers in the elementary schools in implementing STEM FIRST.</p> <p>i) The applicant describes the environment of inquiry-based instruction incorporating the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for PK-5 students and suggests that because learning experiences in this environment are closely related to real world situations, students will understand that what they are learning is essential to their success in accomplishing goals. The students are expected to be active participants in setting their personal goals, a strategy that meets the criteria of this section. A strong component of the plan is to encourage career and business partners to visit the STEM labs to help demonstrate to</p>		

students the link between classroom concepts and skills and the job or career path in their future.

ii) The applicant asserts that STEM FIRST students will identify and pursue learning and development goals linked to college and career-ready standards. Even at the early age of these students, they will learn to structure their knowledge in a way that will help them achieve their goals and measure their progress through support from educators and parents. Exposure for parents and students to meetings where research and trends are reported and discussed will educate them about the world of tomorrow. One appropriate research-based strategy is to use word walls in the academic discipline being studied to strengthen and build vocabulary and content knowledge. The plan is based on a great deal of STEM research and seems feasible to meet the criteria.

iii) The STEM FIRST project and inquiry-based learning environment based on the common core adequately provides deep learning experiences for elementary students. Interests are developed through the real world problem solving instructional process. Students are appropriately provided with multiple learning opportunities from technology and digital learning strategies to thematic lessons explored in the engineering lab which are connected to English/language arts, math or science. The instructional content is engaging and fun but is solidly designed to promote learning.

iv) The district student population is diverse and multi-cultural to a large degree. Many schools already have global themes/units in place. The Engineer labs are designed to be culturally neutral so that students of various backgrounds are able to showcase their abilities. The information included by the applicant indicates that the STEM FIRST labs and curriculum will build on the work administrators and teachers are already doing to promote exposure to multicultural contexts and perspectives, a reasonable assumption due to the nature of the activities described.

v) According to the applicant, mastering critical academic content, based on the CCSSs, will be accomplished through the multiple modalities of STEM FIRST. The example of the Engineer labs' unique environment, which is designed to inspire creativity in students as they design, prototype, build, and collaborate but maintain connections to writing and reading instruction, presents a clear picture of a unique learning approach that meets the criteria for this section.

b)

i & ii) The plan incorporates the implementation of a learning management system to provide students with a personal learning environment and a repository of online resources aligned with the Common Core Curriculum and STEM instruction, a feasible solution for accessing curriculum and tracking progress toward learning goals. The College and Career STEM Experience at MTI's T.E.C.H. Zone (Technology & Enterprise Career Hub) will give students opportunities to learn about STEM careers in action. A similar approach is the virtual college experience through virtual field trips at the local state college to allow students to explore a career area. These are important steps toward setting long term goals for college and career readiness.

iii) The applicant provides the digital content available through the learning management system and that accessed through blended learning on the portable Wonder Wizard stations with rich, multi-media content and special input devices such as thermometers, sensors and probes which allow for real-world research and data collection aligned to the common core standards. The STEM libraries provided in classrooms provide high-quality non-digital content through a variety of leveled texts with high interest choices for students and approximately half literature or fiction and half informational text in science, mathematics, the arts, and social studies. The plan provides a wealth of resources to meet the criteria for this section.

iv)

A & B) These criteria are met through the description of a student oriented feedback mechanism. The learning goals for each unit will be identified in each student's learning environment and students will have access to the proficiency scales at any point in their learning of the unit of instruction. Learning data in the personal learning environment's *data collection system*, creates a topical learning profile. The personal learning environment will be designed so that as data about a student's progress toward unit goals is collected, instructional resources are linked in the system to assist the student in progressing toward proficiency and beyond. This personalized sequence of instructional content and skill development is well designed to enable the student to achieve his or her individual learning goals and also to be on the pathway to graduating on time and being college- and career-ready. This is a feasible approach to meeting the criteria.

v) The applicant provides for design teams to create learning resources and instructional practices that are adaptable and fully accessible to all students, including students with disabilities and English learners. The plan ensures that all students participating in STEM FIRST will show growth in achievement and earn proficiency on standards. This meets the criteria for this section.

c) The applicant states that training will be provided to support students and ensure they understand how to use the tools and resources provided to them. However, information is missing to provide a thorough description of the plan for this type of training.

The score on this criteria is near the top of the high range due to the quality of the plan with just one missing component, a description of the training for students on using tools and resources.

**(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)****20****18****(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant has provided a comprehensive view of the high-quality plan for improving learning and teaching. Included are key goals, activities with a rationale for each one, the timelines, the deliverables and the parties responsible for implementation. The use of scenarios to provide a more complete view of the plan is sound.

a)

i) The plan design for professional development with extensive training for all participating teachers and work in professional learning communities (PLCs) to collaborate and prepare meets the criteria for this section. All teachers attending initial summer institutes will be polled and allowed to select the method and time for their additional training. Teachers in the first cohort will be mentors to teachers new to the STEM FIRST learning process. These are effective practices for assuring that all teachers are willing and able to support the STEM FIRST implementation and to meet each students' academic needs.

ii) The plan calls for the use of Michael Fullan's focused teaching model to adapt content and instruction to enhance personalization, a research-based approach. The teachers will use formative assessment to identify strengths and weaknesses, respond with appropriate instruction and know when and how to use strategies and resources, then have the classroom structures, routines and tools to deliver differentiated instruction and focused teaching on a daily basis. This model matches well with the resources provided through the STEM FIRST initiative, which employ a variety of learning approaches.

iii) The plan provides for teachers to learn how to interpret and use data to individualize instruction. Support for that includes a set of assessment tools such as an item bank in the Moodle LMS tied directly to the curriculum with defined learning targets for each unit. Importantly, each teacher will be able to access information on each student's progress immediately. Assessments can be created quickly and administered frequently, enhancing the formative assessment process for measuring student progress and the effectiveness of teaching. This is an effective approach for meeting the criteria for this section.

iv) The applicant provides information to meet the criteria on a plan to improve on the current annual teacher and principal evaluation system by adding a new level of data concerning elementary student performance and implementing the new data system allowing administrators to track individual student progress in real-time, consolidating data at the classroom and school level to identify effective instructional practices. This reporting will be linked to available STEM methods training for instructional staff. Providing online access to appropriate professional development and STEM training components is a positive step toward improvement. Through the administrative assessment system school leaders are rated on their ability to improve the percentage of effective and highly effective teachers on the faculty. This is an important accountability measure to ensure administrators focus on teacher's effective practice.

b)

i) The plan provides for teacher training on the use of the real-time data system and the use of information retrieved to identify optimal learning approaches in response to student academic needs and interests. STEM FIRST provides teacher learning plans to assure teachers are able to take effective action through multiple training opportunities and supports, a feasible approach.

li & iii) The plan provides for comprehensive personalized learning/STEM training for teachers that includes training on instructional content and assessments that are new to the district. The district already has access to learning resources aligned to standards. With the addition of new resources available in the LMS and the planned process of linking resources to appropriate interventions provided to students, the applicant meets the criteria of this section.

c)

i) The plan cites the STEM FIRST overall goal for teaching and leading which is for all educators to improve instruction and increase their capacity to support student progress toward meeting college- and career-ready standards by implementing a personalized learning approach for teachers as well as their students. The administrative assessment system includes a climate survey given to school stakeholders and used as a metric for the administrator's deliberate practice goals for improvement. This is in addition to the school leaders rating on their ability to improve the percentage of effective and highly effective teachers on the faculty, part of the calculation for their overall rating. With access to the real-time data system these strategies are well designed to meet the criteria for this section.

ii) STEM FIRST includes a comprehensive professional learning plan where teachers learn to implement personalized learning environments, adapt content and instruction, frequently measure student progress and improve their effectiveness through feedback. The plan cites activities which will be ongoing throughout the grant period

facilitated by the teacher mentors and district trainers. It is evident that district leaders understand the importance of professional development and have designed a feasible plan that will meet the criteria for this section.

d) The applicant describes principal accountability for increasing numbers of effective and highly effective teachers, however, there is no mention of a plan to increase effective teachers and principals in hard-to-staff schools and in specialty areas. With this missing information it is not possible to judge the overall credibility of the plan for this criteria.

The score for this section is at the midpoint of the high range due to a missing high quality plan for increasing effective teachers and principals in hard-to-staff schools and specialty areas.

**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>15</b>

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

The applicant has a high quality plan to support project implementation including key goals, activities and rationales for the activities, the timeline, the deliverables and parties responsible for implementing the activities. The overall credibility of the plan as judged by the supporting evidence is convincing.

a) District leadership has increased staffing at the district and school levels to support the STEM FIRST project. The project will fall under the Curriculum/Professional Learning area. A dedicated STEM FIRST project coordinator and accountant will be hired to manage the project. Each school will hire one STEM FIRST teacher. Four STEM content experts will be hired to develop the Engineer labs and embed core STEM principals into overall learning. Four Instruction Innovators will develop and implement the STEM FIRST Wonder Classrooms. These two teams will work together to develop lesson plans. The curriculum will be rolled out district wide soon after the grant award. The STEM FIRST labs will be implemented in a phased approach managed by the teachers' union and the schools themselves with district support. The process seems reasonable to ensure personalized learning environments are functional and supported to meet the goals of the project.

b) The district has school-based management principles already in place and the plan describes a culture of flexibility and autonomy for instructional and support staff with STEM FIRST. The school leadership has discretion over staffing decisions. The Teacher's Union will be part of the leadership team and will work with each school on implementation of the STEM FIRST Engineer lab as well as working to develop the best professional development plan to meet the needs of teachers and schools. The plan provides a sufficient level of autonomy at the school level to meet the criteria of this section.

c) According to the applicant because the learning progressions described in the plan are standards-based, they are not driven by age, amount of time it takes to accomplish them, or a particular grade level. All students are honored as they progress at their own pace in attaining proficiency. Each personalized learning environment will be differentiated according to the specific needs of each child. While attendance is still required, competency-based learning strategies will be incorporated rather than having students progress after a pre-defined amount of "seat time" in the classroom. The plan meets the criteria for this section due to the design of the STEM FIRST learning pathways.

d) Appropriately, students have a range of opportunities for demonstrating mastery in the STEM FIRST classroom. Because of the inquiry based model of STEM FIRST there will be more than one way to solve problems or meet a challenge. Students will work together to solve complex problems and complete rigorous tasks. Digital learning and blended learning options as well as students learning at their own pace will yield multiple avenues to mastery. This personalized environment meets the criteria for this section.

e) The applicant has developed a series of strategies to assist English learners in the STEM FIRST classrooms. Examples are the assignment of basic literature related to an upcoming unit to offer ELL students the opportunity to become familiar with the basics of the subject before the unit begins and using basic projects such as labeling diagrams to introduce the vocabulary. The district is engaging ESOL staff and others to provide ongoing professional learning opportunities for teachers during the school year. Strategies such as these as well as scaffolding and differentiating instruction for students with disabilities will meet the criteria for this section.

The score for this criteria is at the highest level due to the high quality plan provided.

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

The infrastructure necessary to meet this criteria and successfully manage the personalized learning environment described in the plan appears to already be in place. A high-quality plan for STEM FIRST resources is provided in another section of the application.

a)The LEA and school infrastructure appears to be robust according to the applicant. In addition to Internet access district-wide for all stakeholders in the educational process, a 3:1 student to computer ratio, assessment centers in every school and on-site technical support provide an optimal environment for teaching and learning. Knowledge Centers in every school provide extended access to technology for students before and after the school day. Parents will be given access to the student's personalized learning portal. Parent nights for accessing resources will be held. Summer programs will be available for high-needs students. The applicant notes that access to necessary content, tools, and other learning resources is a priority for STEM FIRST and accommodations will be made for any learning time outside of school in which technology is needed. The infrastructure needed for supporting personalized learning appears to be in place.

b) The plan describes an appropriate number of technical support options to stakeholders including peer support, online support and local support as needed within the school and during afterschool programs. In addition, the District's Technology and Information Services Department provides network services support, computer repair and application support through its Help Desk, response teams and systems analysts. The district technical support resources meet the criteria for this section.

c)The district provides information accessible to users in open data formats which would allow students and parents to export their information for use in other systems. The instructional improvement program now being developed as a part of the original Race to the Top grant is easy to use and includes a single sign-on access to state-level applications and access to appropriate data by all users. The district hired an Online Learning Specialist, and is in the process of employing Moodle Learning Management System as the online learning platform. The system described meets the criteria for this section.

d) The applicant has been using interoperable data systems for a number of years due to the fact that the district has been a participant in the Florida Information Resource Network (FIRN), established by the Florida legislature and the Department of Education for use by schools and educators. Interoperable data systems are in use in the district for statewide communication and reporting procedures in all district office areas of responsibility including school and district plans, teacher preparation and certification, human resources data, student information data, budget data, and instructional improvement system data. This capability meets the criteria for this section and supports personalized learning.

The score for this section is at the highest level due to the high quality of the infrastructure in place to support the project.

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

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

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

The applicant has provided a high quality plan with all required components in place and a program evaluation logic model to provide an overall picture of the process included. All four levels of the logic model are addressed in the plan provided. A qualified independent evaluation team will manage the evaluation process. Formative and summative evaluation plans are provided, a strength of the process for ongoing progress checks. Formative data will be provided to the project team quarterly to allow adjustments to be made. More extensive reporting and summative data will be supplied annually. All facets of the project including student academic performance, personalization, attendance, professional development, technology, staff and more are part of the evaluation plan. The evaluation team will communicate regularly with the project personnel. Project personnel will manage the sharing of project processes with the public through multiple channels. This criteria has been met and exceeded.

The score for this section is at the highest level due to the quality of the evaluation plan.

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

5

5

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

A high quality plan is in place with a goal of total transparency to ensure buy in for achieving desired results. An objective of maintaining ongoing communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders regarding the successes of STEM FIRST and associated activities, timeline and parties responsible is provided. The independent evaluator and the project coordinator will provide reports on formative finds quarterly. Annual summative reports will document project status with targets and benchmarks. The widely disseminated end-of-grant report will address all goals of the project. The project coordinator will be responsible for establishing and maintaining communication efforts as well as for activities involving The FIRST Coordinating Council. The council, consisting of partners and other representatives from PK-12, is the key to building parent and community involvement. The plan is sound, and due to the multiple methods of communication such as web pages, newsletters, events and networking as well as the involvement of stakeholders in the council, the plan meets the criteria for this section.

The score for this section is at the highest point due to the quality of the communication plan.

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

5

4

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

The applicant has included ambitious yet achievable performance measures for PK-5 STEM FIRST students considering the level of personalization built into the overall plan. Activities designed for monitoring student academic progress and applying interventions when needed will be effective measures toward staying on track toward improvement. Built into the STEM FIRST initiative is an engaging, active, inquiry-based learning environment. The plan for using a decrease of In School Suspension (ISS) and Out of School Suspension (OSS) numbers as a performance measure counts on the STEM FIRST initiative to increase student engagement and positive attitudes. If these AMO numbers do not improve the plan provides for using behavior and social-emotional support strategies with students as needed. However, more meaningful, age-appropriate non-cognitive growth indicators could be used to measure the physical well-being and motor development, or social-emotional development of K-5 students.

Missing from the performance objectives provided are subgroup numbers and targets for effective and highly effective teachers and principals. The explanation provided on the tables is that the Florida Department of Education does not provide subgroup information. There is no explanation of why this information is not provided. The data in these tables are completed from baseline data provided from the Value-Added Model (VAM) Report/Survey 3 by the Florida Department of Education. However, the missing subgroup data are not responsive to the criteria for these tables.

The number of performance measures included meets the criteria.

The score for this criteria is at the low point of the high range due to missing subgroup data.

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

5

5

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

The applicant has provided a high quality plan with a goal of evaluating the effectiveness of STEM FIRST, providing ongoing teacher evaluation and improvement as well as ongoing student assessment and accountability to ultimately improve student achievement and educator effectiveness. An objective is provided to create and maintain a coordinated, ongoing plan that includes activities such as professional development, using technology, and other resources to improve results with a rationale of evaluating grant-funded activities and more productively using resources to improve results. Parties responsible for this objective are district leaders and project staff. A timeline is included. The plan is based on measures of effectiveness and associated professional development for administrators and teachers. A thorough discussion of the research-based evaluation systems designed to improve the quality of instruction for the purpose of increased student learning growth is included. The evaluations described are of high quality and have been carefully created with input based on research by respected experts in the field including Robert Marzano and Charlotte Danielson, an important plan for an effective evaluation system. Combined with the rigorous program evaluation planned for STEM FIRST the applicant meets the criteria for this section due to the overall comprehensiveness of the plan.

The score on this section is at the highest point due to the quality of the plan for evaluating effectiveness of investments.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>a) The budget narrative and tables identify all funds that will support the project. The tables provide a high level of detail to make the purpose of each expenditure clear and provides an explanation of how each one is aligned to project activities.</p> <p>b) The budget seems reasonable and sufficient to support the development and implementation of the proposal. The narrative explains that the district financial tracking system allowed expenses to be determined based on previous district expenditures and is expected to be close to actual expenses incurred. The applicant provides detail needed to determine that the funding outlined in the application is appropriate for achieving the goals of the project.</p> <p>c)</p> <p>i) A description is provided of all funds to be used to support the implementation of the proposal and includes total revenue from each funding source delineated by budget item. The rationale for investments and priorities is clearly explained and appropriate based on the goals and sustainability of the project after the grant ends when local funds will be reallocated or such items as staff will be downsized due to transfer of knowledge and expertise to district staff during the term of the grant.</p> <p>ii) Budget items that are one-time costs are clearly labeled. Some purchasing decisions will be made based on durability so that the items will last beyond the term of the grant. Others such as the MTI T.E.C.H. Zone space to be built will last for many years.</p> <p>The score for this section is at the highest level due to the reasonable budget and clearly defined rationale for expenditures.</p>		
<b>(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<p><b>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:</b></p> <p>A high quality plan with required rationale for sustainability of STEM FIRST after the term of the grant is provided in the application. A clear explanation of the sustainability efforts designed to continue the elementary STEM initiative and associated student academic gains is included in the narrative. The applicant is convinced that the initiative will achieve the expected successes and will become ingrained in the district culture. To that end the plan provides for repurposing funds to continue the effort. From local school bus budgets for field trips to schools using local funds to keep STEM teachers on staff the plan is well designed to sustain the initiative beyond the term of the grant. Another strength of the plan is the establishment of the FIRST Coordinating Council of local stakeholders to monitor and assist with the implementation process and ensure that all aspects of community support are brought to the table during the project and after for sustainability. Importantly, the district has committed to a minimum of \$750,000 of direct district funds per year over a three year period after the grant ends to sustain professional development, supplies, curriculum, instructional materials, support, STEM experiences, and other fundamental components of STEM FIRST.</p> <p>The score for this section is at the highest level due to the clear, feasible plan for sustainability of STEM FIRST after the term of the grant.</p>		

## Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
<b>Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:</b>		

1)The district has formed partnerships with public and private community organizations and has included a list of organizations in the Competitive Preference Priority (CPP) narrative and their letters of support in the appendix of the application. Support in these letters goes beyond approval of the STEM FIRST initiative and commits resources to assist with addressing needs of high-risk families and children. The level of support is strong.

2)

a & b)The applicant has provided four population-level desired results. Three are educational results related to STEM and positive behavior /working collaboratively and one is family/community, increasing awareness of services to high-need families. These align with and support the STEM FIRST application well and are clearly explained.

3)

a)Demographic data will be tracked for all students in the STEM FIRST program. In addition to partner tracking systems, the district will use its data system to collect, analyze and present data to stakeholders.

b & c) Data from STEM FIRST and the community outreach partners will be used to improve results for all students including those who are high-needs or are facing other challenges. Of value will be the insight gained on the real challenges students face daily. Additionally tutors, mentors, leadership programs and other wellness activities will be made available and additional partners recruited, positive steps toward making a difference in student lives and increasing the impact of the partnerships. STEM FIRST is a district-wide initiative available in all elementary schools, the model would be scaled up to all elementary schools as STEM FIRST is implemented.

d)The expectation is that results will improve over time as younger students are involved with the career and technical student organizations where leadership training is a large component. Students of all backgrounds will have access to training, workshops, peer mentoring, competitions, etc. developing foundational skills. These supports should lead to improved results.

4) The applicant's plan to integrate education and other services may be included in professional learning for STEM FIRST staff to identify students needing special resources. Some departments in the district are already geared toward helping special needs students and can be integrated into the STEM FIRST program planning. The idea that personalized learning will allow these children to learn on their own terms using a modality that suits them best is sound. This strategy should improve the identification process.

5)

a)The partnership would be enhanced with the addition of a separate STEM FIRST Community Council consisting of partners and PK-12 district representatives tasked with governing the program. This should aid in the alignment of the partnership with the education component. Having leadership and accountability over the process of making sure STEM education is delivered in a personalized learning environment PreK-5 in this way is an appropriate step toward ensuring student progress and building family supports.

b) The partnership will identify and inventory the needs and assets of the school and community , aligned with the goals for improving education and family/community supports through needs assessments and surveys conducted online and with paper and pencil. Translated versions will be available. The teacher's union will be tasked with designing the tools to be used and analyzing the results. This seems to be a feasible approach to acquiring needed information to determine next steps in the process.

c)The partnership STEM FIRST Community Council will create a decision-making process and infrastructure to select, implement and evaluate supports that address student needs based on the needs assessment and feedback from all partners. This is a feasible approach for moving the process forward.

d)The partnership will engage student families in decision-making solutions and addressing needs through multimedia marketing, parent showcases involving community partners and information booths at school-wide events. Using surveys at events to assess increases in awareness is a positive step to evaluate progress toward family awareness and allow any needed intervention to occur to ensure engagement.

e)Assessment of progress in implementing the plan to maximize impact and resolve problems will be managed by the STEM FIRST Community Council and the program evaluator. This is a logical solution to ensure success. Involving the independent program evaluator is a strength of this assessment plan. Having an independent professional look at the partnership outcomes will add credibility to the evaluation.

6)The annual performance measures included are the ISS/OSS behavioral measures from Selection Criteria (E)(3) . These results will be shared with the partners and service providers. Missed classroom instruction while in ISS/OSS affects academic performance and can create hostile attitudes. The rationale for using these data for intervention is to increase

classroom engagement and positive attitudes. Turning a negative solution for behavior problems into a positive intervention process with the use of these data is a sound approach.

The score for the CPP is at the highest level due to the quality of the partnership and the likelihood of creating an environment for an increase in successful outcomes for students and their families.

### Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

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

**Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant meets Absolute Priority 1 with a strong plan for increasing student academic success through the STEM FIRST initiative in PreK-5 for personalizing learning through an inquiry based instructional process. The engaging, project-based curriculum aligned with college- and career-ready standards or college and career ready graduation requirements and the formative and summative assessment plan implemented at the earliest ages has an excellent chance of accelerating student achievement.

The strong professional development/learning component and supports for improving educator effectiveness is key to the success of the STEM FIRST plan and to increasing the numbers of students with effective or highly effective educators. Adding STEM experts to assist in the creation of resources aligned to the STEM FIRST curriculum for access by teachers will ensure unit/lesson quality.

The plan for project evaluation through an independent evaluator and project leadership is a strength throughout the proposal, especially the formative and summative nature of the proposed process. Frequent checks to identify problems and find solutions is an effective way to ensure successful outcomes in all areas of the project.

The partnerships that permeate the proposal are innovative. Having strong support and commitments from numerous community and higher education partners in the state with the STEM FIRST curriculum and with social/emotional interventions strengthen the plan and contribute to sustainability for continued progress toward student academic success.

Underpinning the proposal is a strong technology component with computers, digital resources and a data system already in place with a strong plan to increase capability and robustness of these tools.

This application meets Absolute Priority 1.

<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>200</b>
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## Race to the Top - District Technical Review Form

Application #0086FL-3 for School District of Manatee County, FL

### A. Vision (40 total points)

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

**(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant does present a comprehensive and coherent vision in that the proposal appears to be consistent with the LEA's ongoing commitment to a long-established strategic plan that is aligned with statewide efforts for reform. The applicant's approach to accelerating student achievement and deepening student learning and increasing equity through personalized learning is plainly driven by its commitment to the STEM First approach. Applicant expects that its vision of providing all elementary school students with STEM based learning will deepen their understanding of all subjects and enable all students to learn and create a more equalized playing field by giving students a variety of ways to learn. The applicant presents sufficient evidence that its research-based approach and focus on content knowledge and an early introduction to STEM subject matter is credible and the description of the applicant's reform vision provides a clear description of what the classroom experience will be like for participating students. The extent to which the proposal builds on each of the four core assurance areas is less evident however. The applicant references that it is committed to implementing strategies that will address the assurances. However, the applicant does not merit a score of all ten (10) points because: (1) the narrative does not appear to address directly its plans for turning around its lowest performing schools; and (2) while it is clear that the primary focus of the applicant's proposal will be expansion of its STEM First programming, the proposal needs to include a more articulate discussion of how the focus on STEM First will bring about improved student achievement for participating students in all subject areas. The applicant makes some general statements about the increased preparedness and improved academic achievement it expects to see from participating students, but does not sufficiently articulate why it is reasonable to expect that the emphasis on STEM lessons, lab-based instructional activities and other elements of the STEM First project will lead to those outcomes.

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

**10**

**10**

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

The applicant presents a sound and reasoned approach to its plan which will reach all elementary schools within the LEA, including all but one of the charter schools. The proposal focuses on establishing personalized learning for students in pre-K to grade 5 and will have a tiered and consensus-driven roll out of STEM FIRST engineering labs. This approach will likely support high-quality implementation of the proposal at the district and school level. The applicant invited all elementary schools, regardless of whether they are traditional or charter, to ensure that all students within the LEA would receive the opportunity to benefit from the grant resources. The proposal includes a list of the participating schools and educators as well as letters of support from those schools, which demonstrates their commitment to the project. In addition, the applicant details the number and demographics of participating students, including those from low-income families and those who are defined as high-need students. The proposal makes clear that while a significant number of students who will be served are socio-economically disadvantaged or can be considered "high need", all students in the district, grades pre-k to 5 will be able to participate.

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

**10**

**9**

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

The applicant provides a visual presentation that demonstrates how its high quality plan to personalize learning for all students in pre-primary and primary grades fits into the LEA's overall plans for district-wide change. The applicant intends to transform every district elementary school into a STEM First school, which will necessarily include personalized learning for students. The overarching goals are supported by specific, objectives that build over time and are consistent with the goals. As an example, the goal to create personalized learning environments in all elementary schools by the end of the contract term starts in the first year with integrated STEM lessons, moves to an online learning management system in year two with supplemental assignments and coursework, to a blending learning approach in year three and composite classroom re-designs in year four. Each step of the plan is supported by a rationale that is aligned to the outcomes and overall goals.

In addition to phasing in the various curricular components of the STEM First program over time, the applicant intends to scale up its use of redesigned classrooms and Engineer Labs so that every elementary school is retrofitted with a STEM First Engineer Lab where students will be able to engage in a lot of the lab-based activities contemplated under the proposal. Each contract year, one-third of the schools will have the Engineer Labs installed and lab-based activities integrated into the curriculum until all elementary students have an Engineer Lab in their building. The process for scaling up the Engineer Labs will be inclusive in that the STEM First team, which will include union representatives and charter schools, will conduct a feasibility study to determine in which year or phase each school will have its lab installed. The establishment of STEM focused curriculum and the Engineer Labs in the elementary grades will enable students throughout the whole district to receive applied, constructivist lab-based instruction, not only in middle and high school, but throughout their entire Pre-K to 12 educational experience.

The plan for ensuring that all students are served and that the labs are constructed in schools throughout the district includes key goals, concrete descriptions of the activities that will be undertaken, a reasonable timeline and specific

identification of the persons who will ultimately be held accountable to achieve the goal. However, because the applicant did not include specific deliverables for each activity, the response did not justify a score of the full ten points. Having readily identifiable deliverables that are concrete and distinct from the overall objectives is important for a project that has so many different components and that will be implemented in every elementary school within the district.

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

**10**

**10**

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

The applicant includes ambitious goals for performance on summative assessments (proficiency status and growth in reading and math), decreasing achievement gaps, increasing graduation rates, and increasing college enrollment. The assessments reflect the application of college and career ready standards. The methodology for determining student growth and proficiency appears to be reasonable as well. The applicant focuses its efforts on the reduction of the percentage of non-proficient students by more than half by the end of the contract period. It sets a separate target each year to ensure that progress is being made toward that goal. The expected growth on summative assessments is incremental, but varies by subgroup depending on the baseline and is greater for those subgroups that have had lower academic achievement to date. The efforts to close the achievement gap are very ambitious but achievable, as the applicant will seek to bridge the proficiency gap by 90% between students of color and white students. The applicant also provides performance goals designed to support its theory that expansion of personalized learning and the focus on STEM First can bring about the improved academic achievement it is expecting (i.e. increase in reading and math achievement) for students in elementary school and that it will also impact learning long term, for students in other grades who are not participating in the STEM First programming (as evidenced by inclusion of high school graduation rate and college enrollment rate).

**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>12</b>
<b>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>The applicant demonstrates that it has already made progress in achieving a number of the goals that are the centerpiece of its proposal. As examples, the learning management system is already in place, which has facilitated the sharing of student level data with students, educators and parents. Additionally, the applicant has already hired a data specialist, an online learning specialist and an instructional assessment specialist. Each of these individuals will play a critical role in the establishment of personalized learning in the elementary schools. A district technology council has already been formed and has already begun the work necessary to ensure that schools have the technological infrastructure to support personalized learning.</p> <p>The applicant also presents evidence from its work in the LEA's secondary schools that demonstrates the applicant has a strong track record of implementing reforms that can affect change. The applicant set a goal for establishing career academies in all secondary schools and has accomplished it. The applicant's work has been recognized nationally. Additionally, there is some evidence to support the conclusion that the applicant's Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) and other efforts at the secondary schools have resulted in increased numbers of students taking AP and Dual Enrollment classes; higher levels of positive postsecondary placements; increasing scholarships and college acceptance rates; and, in some cases, higher school grades.</p> <p>Moreover, the applicant showed that in schools where the STEM First initiative has been implemented, students performed better on the statewide assessment in math, reading and science. However, the data is from a single year and there is insufficient information available to draw conclusions about the long-term effectiveness of the programming. There is also no long term data available to support a conclusion that the district has had prior success closing achievement gaps in a sustained way.</p> <p>The applicant does not present any multi-year achievement data to demonstrate whether its current efforts have brought about improved performance at its lowest achieving schools. However, the applicant has already taken steps to improve achievement at its lowest performing schools and has made numerous investments designed to address school level issues (i.e., hiring Instructional Specialists and Coaches to support teachers and leaders in these schools).</p>		
<b>(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>

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

The applicant has presented evidence demonstrating a commitment to transparency of its use of public dollars. The applicant publishes on its website actual school-level expenditures for regular K-12 instruction, instructional support, pupil support, and school administration. In addition to basic budget information, the applicant publishes its Annual Financial Reports, Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports as well as the Annual Reports, organizational chart, job descriptions, public salaries, the Accounting Structure/Red Book, monthly financial reports, monthly check registers and monthly financial reports. The actual personnel salaries at the school level for instructional staff and teachers are available via a local newspaper and as part of financial information that is included in school plans. Non-personnel expenditures at the school level are also available as part of published school plans. Moreover, decisions of the LEA board are included on the applicant's website, as are meeting agendas and minutes. However, the applicant cannot be awarded the full points available given that it is unclear from the proposal whether the salaries are based on the US Census classification. In addition, although some of the financial data that is not published online is reportedly available upon request, the district has made clear that it has the capacity to make information more readily accessible to the public via its website. By requiring the public to specifically request this financial information either in person or via the phone, the district is demonstrating a lack of transparency around some of its data.

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

**10**

**8**

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

In response to information regarding the state context for implementation, the applicant instead appears to rely on the existing authority vested with the LEA and does not provide a detailed discussion to support its statement that it has sufficient autonomy to implement its plans. The applicant does not provide specific evidence of the flexibility it indicates it will have and that its schools will have available to implement the proposal. The proposal also does not include references to statutory or regulatory authority in support of its assertion that the district retains sufficient authority to implement its plans. However, even without those specific references to the law and regulations, the proposal as a whole confirms that the state's overall efforts to embrace reform have created a regulatory and policy environment that will foster the implementation of many elements of the applicant's proposals, including the application of new standards, assessments based on those standards. More specifically, the state has established as statewide goals: (1) increasing the graduation rate, (2) cutting the achievement gap in half, and (3) increasing the percentage of students at or above proficiency on the NAEP. The applicant has effectively integrated these goals as part of its proposal. The district has adopted a strategic plan that incorporates these goals. In addition, as a district within a state that has already embraced reform, the applicant must prepare students to meet college and career-ready standards, must use student data to inform teacher and principal evaluations in compliance with the Florida Educator Accomplished Practices and had already begun taking steps to personalize learning and make investments in technology that would provide more frequent individual student level data and make it accessible to educators.

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

**15**

**15**

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

The applicant details a comprehensive process of stakeholder engagement around its reform efforts generally and those efforts that led to the current strategic plan, as well as the decision to move forward with the RTT-D application. The applicant's commitment to meaningfully engaging stakeholders is evidenced in a variety of ways in the proposal. The applicant has established that the teachers' union and charter schools will be intimately involved in implementation of the proposal. The union has signaled its support of the initiative. Union and teacher representatives participated in the meetings to design the structure of the STEM First plan and the Manatee Education Association submitted a separate letter of support. Charter schools have indicated their support as well, given that the overwhelming majority of charter school students in the district will be participating. Teachers will play a critical role in the implementation of professional development and development of the training process. Stakeholders will also be involved in monitoring the progress of implementation. The applicant has indicated it will create a Coordinating Council to be comprised of selected district level administrators, elementary principals, Manatee Education Association teacher representatives, parents, student representatives, business leaders, post-secondary educators and community agency representatives. The group will be charged with meeting regularly and reviewing the progress of the STEM FIRST program and offering guidance for future activities. Finally, the proposal has received support from a number of community partners and other stakeholders, as evidenced by various letters of support. The letters include those from participating school principals which demonstrates a high level of buy-in from those who will be required to implement the plan at the school level.

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

	Available	Score
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<b>(C)(1) Learning (20 points)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>
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**(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant presents an compelling discussion of the learning environment it expects to create for all students in grades pre-K to 5 in the district and details a program of instruction that focuses on STEM as a way to deepen students' understanding of all subjects and improve academic achievement. It is clear that the approach is designed to empower all students to accomplish individualized learning goals that will lead them to graduate college and career ready. By 2017, all elementary schools will be re-designed to ensure students and parents have access to the technology supports that will make personalized learning possible. The applicant will use a variety of high quality instructional approaches, but ones that work cohesively together to support student learning. The plan to applicant sets out to reach this goal meets the requirements for a high quality plan in that the proposal includes explicit goals with clear timelines, specific objectives that are aligned with the goals and clear lines of accountability for the individuals responsible to implement the plan. The decision to phase in the building of STEM First engineer labs and the integration of lab based activities at each school over time reflects a thoughtful plan that incorporates a feasibility study for each site. The applicant also includes specific evidence to support its position that the proposal's focus on STEM and personalized learning will result in deep learning experiences, improved proficiency in all subjects and for all students and also mastery of critical STEM subjects. That belief is reinforced by the goals the applicant set for increased academic achievement that it expects will result from implementation of the STEM First strategy.

Under the applicant's approach, all students will receive regular updates on their progress in order to drive learning. By 2014, the applicant will be able to demonstrate that it makes student performance data available to students, educators and parents in ways that inform and improve participation and student learning and support. The district is in the process of implementing a single sign on system on its website that will enable teachers to obtain immediate access to data, parents to check student progress and students to take individual responsibility for assignments and homework outside of the school day. In addition, the plan includes implementation of a student oriented feedback mechanism which will allow students to see the learning goals for the units they work on and access the proficiency scales so they can monitor their own progress toward achievement of standards. The applicant also offers a credible description of how the proposed curricular changes will accommodate the needs of students with special needs and ELL students. In addition, the connection to college and career that students will be able to make under the plan is evidenced by the early exposure students will gain through the Virtual College Experience and other features of the STEM First program.

The proposal falls slightly short of what is needed to receive the full 20 point score because it lacks a discussion of the training students will receive to ensure they are capable of using the new tools and resources that will be provided to them to enhance their learning and enable them to take more initiative over their academic performance. This is especially important given the applicant's focus on the provision of lab-based instruction and technology centered programming to students in grades pre-K to 5. Although older students may have the skills needed to use technology, data and lab resources to deepen their learning, younger students will need more direct training on how to use those tools.

<b>(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>18</b>
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**(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant presents a very inclusive and comprehensive approach to ensuring that the LEA's educators are prepared to implement the STEM First curriculum and deliver personalized learning to all students. Teachers will be given the training and resources to adapt content and instructional strategies to meet student needs. They will utilize a student oriented feedback mechanism and other tools to engage students in understanding their own learning. Teachers will have the necessary systems in place to enable the generation of student level data they will need to access in order to personalize learning. The plan for professional development is thorough and thoughtful in the way that teachers are consulted with regard to decision-making and continuously trained throughout the contract period. The commitment to apply the principles of the Professional Teaching and Learning Cycle reflects a strong understanding of change and how to secure faithful implementation of such a large initiative. Moreover, the applicant intends to utilize its teacher and administrator evaluation system and the data it collects on performance as part of that system to improve instruction.

The applicant will deploy the necessary resources to ensure that all participating educators have the tools and training to implement the standards based curriculum that is designed to accelerate student progress and help them meet college and career-ready graduation requirements. The plan, however, is also extraordinarily ambitious. The applicant intends to: author its new Common Core aligned curriculum, develop within-grade level teaching and learning progressions and to re-design the system teachers will actually use to implement the new curriculum. Teachers will be expected to plan and then implement newly-designed lessons that are aligned local, state, and national standards. While all aspects of the plan are consistent and appear to stem logically from curricular changes and reforms the State and district have already begun to make, the applicant proposes to make substantial advances in the process of teaching and learning as well as the content. This raises a relatively minor concern about the applicant's ability to implement all aspects of the plan effectively

throughout the contract period and the feasibility of executing a plan with so many different components. However, this concern is essentially alleviated by the applicant's thoughtful and comprehensive continuous improvement plan and its intention to include teacher representatives in the ongoing implementation of the project. The applicant has a strong continuous improvement plan that is designed to address implementation issues as they arise and enable the applicant to make adjustments as needed. This should ensure that the applicant can prioritize and narrow the scope of some of its plans if necessary to ensure effective implementation.

Also, although the applicant expects to enhance the evaluation of teachers and principals to improve overall educator effectiveness, the proposal does not discuss in detail how all school leaders and leadership teams will be provided with the necessary professional development to assist teachers and students throughout implementation of the plan. The applicant notes that school leaders and leadership teams will be given data on the effectiveness of the educators they lead and provided with tools to increase the number of effective leaders available, but the plan needs to discuss in more explicit detail the type of training and resources the school leaders will receive. Also, although it contains the basic elements of a high quality plan, in that there are goals, objectives and responsible parties, the plan does not sufficiently address how applicant will ensure the programming will meet goals for closing the achievement gap and for increasing the overall number of effective teachers who will be fully prepared to deliver the STEM First programming in hard to staff schools and for special needs students.

#### 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>15</b>
<b>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>The applicant has presented substantial evidence that the practices, policies and rules of the LEA will facilitate effective implementation of the proposal. Its response demonstrates that it has a high-quality plan to support project implementation. The goals and rationale for those goals are clear and consistent with the rest of the proposal. The applicant has assigned responsible parties and identified objectives and activities that will lead to achievement of those goals and a timeline to accomplish each goal.</p> <p>First, the applicant structure of the team that will be accountable to implement the plan is sound. The team will include instructional leaders with both content and process expertise. The decision to prioritize placement of the project coordinator and an accountant suggests that the applicant fully understands the need to monitor closely the many components of the plan and the significant resources that must be wisely and responsibly utilized to carry out the plan.</p> <p>Second, school leadership has been given discretion over personnel decisions and flexibility and autonomy over factors such as schedules and calendars of professional learning. The placement of project personnel at each school reflects the applicant's understanding of how important it will be to allow individual school autonomy and flexibility to make necessary changes during implementation. Having project personnel at the local school level will ensure that administrators can adjust plans as needed and that they will have the flexibility to and support to implement the programs in a tailored way.</p> <p>Third, with the Wonder Centers that the applicant will put in place in all classrooms and the STEM First engineer labs, the applicant also ensures that students will have the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of contents in a variety of ways, and they will not be limited to traditional notions of seat time. Therefore, students will be allowed to earn credit based upon mastery of the materials rather than the number of days they attend class.</p> <p>Fourth, the proposal suggests that students who have special needs and who are English learners will have additional supports needed to ensure their full participation in the STEM First curriculum and programming. Moreover, the flexibility that the lab approach and technology based learning allows will also help educators come up with the necessary accommodations for students with special needs.</p>		
<b>(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

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

The applicant's proposal indicates that all students will have access to the technological tools and supports that will be necessary for active participation in the STEM First initiative. Due to ongoing reform efforts, the applicant has already made significant progress in building the necessary infrastructure to support its district wide STEM First initiative. The applicant has already secured the technology that will enable interoperability of communication systems that will be important for keeping individual student level data and making it accessible to educators. The applicant has initiated plans

to make student performance data available to students, educators and parents via a single sign-on system on the district website that will give everyone open access to data. This system should be available by 2014. The applicant has established a 3:1 students to computers ratio, has placed assessment centers in every school and each school has on-site tech support available. In addition, applicant has a sound, high quality plan for providing educators, administrators and other stakeholders with the training that will be needed to use the technology to facilitate personalized learning. The applicant has identified key goals, activities and deliverables that will lead to achievement of those goals and a timeline to accomplish each activity. In addition, the applicant has identified the parties who will be held accountable for reaching the goal. Moreover, the expansion of Knowledge Centers at every site will extend learning beyond the school day for students and their families. This will give parents and students access to learning resources and technology tools they need to support learning. The establishment of the College and Career STEM Experience will help students connect their everyday learning to valuable information about STEM careers.

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

	Available	Score
<b>(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>The applicant's proposal exhibits all of the elements of a high-quality plan for the implementation of a sound continuous improvement process. It is comprehensive in that it includes a formative and summative component and includes key goals, activities and deliverables that will lead to achievement of those goals and a timeline to accomplish each activity. The applicant has identified the parties who will be held accountable for reaching the goal. The applicant has built into its continuous improvement process retention of a third party, independent evaluator who will ensure that an objective assessment of the applicant's progress is made and that proactive steps can be taken to modify the plan as needed to ensure success. In addition to the independent evaluator, the applicant will establish a Coordinating Council comprised of stakeholders that provide important contributions to the continuous improvement process. The Coordinating Council will also play an important role in keeping stakeholders informed about the progress of the plan and about assessments of the investments that have been made. The plan builds in regular reporting on progress of the plan during public meetings and through publication of progress reports and evaluations in various district communications to parents and stakeholders, on the district's website, in newsletters and other publicly available reports.</p> <p>The plan is enhanced by the fact that the applicant already has systems in place to enable the review of comprehensive data sets and to evaluate performance at the student, school and district level on a number of different measures. To build upon those systems, evaluators will implement a plan that is comprehensive in scope and includes gathering information and data from a number of sources (such as climate and alumni surveys), not just standardized assessments. The level of detail the applicant provides about the continuous improvement process indicates that the applicant takes the process seriously and has already taken concrete steps to ensure the process is completed. Critical questions have already been identified and the district data management system is already set up to begin collecting pertinent information. Those questions range from questions regarding the increase in students performing at proficient levels and enrollment patterns in math and science courses, to whether students are engaged in meaningful learning experiences to whether there have been a sufficient number of community partnerships created.</p>		
<b>(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>The applicant sets forth a detailed plan for both oral and written communication to stakeholders with regard to implementation of the initiative. The plan is of high-quality in that it has goals that are clear, plainly identified activities that will lead to achievement of those goals and a timeline to accomplish each activity. The commitment to provide formative findings on a quarterly basis to stakeholders suggests that applicant takes seriously the need to keep stakeholders informed and engage them in the process. In addition, the plan to provide and widely disseminate annual written summative reports as well as an end of grant report includes specific goals, reflects a sound rationale and a reasonable timeline with concrete deliverables. Moreover, the parties who will be held accountable for ensuring that the plan is implemented are clearly identified.</p>		
<b>(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:</b>		
<p>The proposal includes the requisite number of performance measures and the measures implicate a range of performance standards, including those that address academic achievement and proficiency in reading, math and science, academic</p>		

growth and on-track rates. The applicant also explains its rationale for selecting each of these measures and its explanation is generally sound in each case. The applicant seeks to reduce the percentage of students who are not proficient by more than half by the end of the contract period. Thus, the performance targets are sufficiently ambitious and appear to be achievable given the scope and breadth of the curricular changes the applicant intends to make. In addition, the measures will offer the applicant information that will be helpful in measuring the extent to which its STEM First approach is having the desired impact on student academic achievement in reading, as well as math and science proficiency. The applicant does not provide subgroup information with regard to the number of students who will be taught by highly effective and effective educators. However, the applicant contends that the information is not available from the state. Given the comprehensive nature of the applicant's continuous improvement process, it appears that applicant will be able to adjust these measures as necessary to obtain relevant and beneficial information on student progress.

The applicant's response does not justify a score of all available points because of its reliance solely on in school and out of school suspension as indicators of social and emotional health for students in grades Pre-Kindergarten to 5. There are likely more meaningful indicators available to demonstrate how the applicant's reforms impact student social and emotional health. Although suspension rates provide useful information with regard to school climate, there are more direct indicators available regarding individual student behavior. Suspension rates can be influenced by a number of other factors, including school policies on discipline and zero tolerance and classroom management strategies.

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

**5**

**5**

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

The applicant's plan to evaluate the effectiveness of its investments is fully incorporated into its continuous improvement process and is a high quality plan. The goals are clear and consistent with the rest of the proposal. The applicant has identified activities and deliverables that will lead to achievement of those goals and a timeline to accomplish each activity. The appointment of an accountant as part of the leadership reflects the importance that the applicant places on being able to assess the return on its investments. The accountant has specialized expertise in assessing the value of various assets and monitoring the use of grant dollars. Thus, the accountant will be able to help the team evaluate whether adjustments in the budget should be made. In addition, the applicant has already committed substantial resources to the development of a value added teacher and principal evaluation system that is rigorous and based upon research as to what makes an effective educator. At least 50% of the performance evaluation that will be used will be based upon indicators of student learning and growth. In addition to principals and teachers, the superintendent will be evaluated as well.

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

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

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

The applicant's budget is comprehensive and transparent as to the funds that will be necessary to implement the overall plan, both those requested under the grant and those that the applicant expects to contribute from the LEA and other sources. The budget appears to be sufficient and includes all of the funds that will be necessary to support the different components of the STEM First program. The budget narrative is provided by project and the applicant has included a detailed breakdown of the costs. Based on the expansive scope of the project, the complexity of the overall plan and ambitious goals, the budget is reasonable. The budget limits administrative costs at 2 percent. Thus, the majority of funds are expenditures that will impact student learning directly. Although the sums requested are substantial, the applicant provides a sound explanation for each expenditure. Many of the costs are phased in over a period of years which will give the applicant time to adjust the budget as necessary. Further, while a substantial majority of the funds will be used for ongoing operation costs and personnel, the applicant has developed a sound plan to sustain the initiative beyond the contract period.

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

**10**

**9**

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

The applicant has already invested a substantial amount of funds to ensure that the STEM First initiative can be successful and positively impact all participating students in the district. The budget plan demonstrates that the applicant intends to continue its investment and embed many of the ongoing costs of implementing the STEM First programming into its overall

budget. Specifically, the applicant has pledged to contribute close to \$5 million or 15 percent of the funding request amount. These dollars will come from other state and local resources during the contract period. The LEA itself will commit another \$750,000 annually for three years after the contract period ends. The commitment of dollars from the LEA evidences widespread support for the goals of the project. In addition, the applicant conducted an internal feasibility study that has informed its budget plan and decision making with regard to the project. Moreover, the establishment of the Coordinating Council should help the applicant establish a more concrete program to find additional funds to continue implementation. The applicant's continuous improvement process is comprehensive and will enable the applicant to evaluate its investments and make adjustments as necessary. The applicant also intends to continue to explore ways to ensure the sustainability of the project beyond the contract period by creating a working group of local stakeholders to assure that all aspects of community support are utilized for the project. Each of these components combine to make up a high quality plan that includes clear goals, with objectives and activities that are consistent with the goals and likely to lead to achievement of the goals. The applicant has identified the responsible parties and a general timeline to meet the goals as well.

Despite the applicant's clear intention to sustain the project, however, as evidenced by the district's commitment of dollars beyond the contract period, the applicant does not provide sufficient information about the anticipated budget beyond the contract years or whether the \$750,000 annual allocation will be enough to sustain the STEM First program. Nor does the applicant identify any other sources of funding it could utilize to support programming beyond the contract years. Accordingly, it cannot be awarded the total available points.

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

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

**Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant's plan to implement its STEM First initiative at all elementary schools includes a commitment to provide personalized learning for all students and the applicant has developed an infrastructure that will enable the applicant to implement the plan. The applicant has set forth a reasonable plan to leverage existing relationships with outside service providers and to engage new partners in order to help the applicant meet the various needs of at-risk and underserved students. The applicant identifies a number of organizations it plans to contact as well as specific partnerships such as the State College of Florida. The types of partnerships the applicant proposes to form range from those with corporate partners such as Apple, to those with community organizations and agencies such as the Boys and Girls Club of Manatee County, the Easter Seals of Southwest Florida, the NAACP and Suncoast Workforce Board, to those with other colleges and universities like Manatee Technical Institute and the University of South Florida. In addition to its plan to utilize resources from community partners, the applicant intends to train its STEM First teachers to better identify services that will benefit participating students and to refer families to the various organizations that can provide those services. The overall plan for building the infrastructure to extend community based supports to participating students is a high quality plan. The goals are clear and consistent with the rest of the proposal. The applicant has identified activities and deliverables that will lead to achievement of those goals and a timeline to accomplish each activity.

In addition, the applicant has identified a set of four population-level desired results for students in the district that are consistent with the proposal's goals and priorities. It has family and community results that focus on high need families and a set of education results that reinforce the focus on STEM education and teaching students to work collaboratively (a skill for college and career readiness). Partners will be helping the applicant measure the results and use the data to inform their work and student performance and the applicant indicates that the existing partners already have capacity to track demographic data as needed.

By establishing the Community Coordinating Council, the applicant will ensure that the most appropriate partners are utilized and that the program suits the needs of participating students and their families. Educators will have the necessary tools as part of the STEM First program to identify particular student needs, as they will have individualized data about student progress against learning goals. Those educators will work with other school leaders and instructional staff responsible for serving the special needs of students (ELL, special education students) to ensure that students are matched up with the right partners. The applicant notes that it will connect with specific agencies that serve students from low income families and use the data it has from the STEM First program in combination with information available from the agencies to gain better insight into how to best serve those students. The applicant includes a plan to engage parents in the process of identifying and evaluating the effectiveness of the various supports as well. Parents will be engaged through a variety of efforts by both partners and individual schools. The applicant intends to make parents ongoing

partners in providing information about what their students need and what services will support student learning.

To improve results over time, the applicant will work with partners to track data over time and monitor for improved student results on formative and summative assessments. To scale the model beyond a limited number of students, the applicant intends to work to increase the number and breadth of community partnerships over time. Although all students in elementary school will participate in the STEM First program, the applicant will work with partners over time to enable all of those students to access the network for opportunities to engage in tutoring, mentoring, leadership programs and other activities.

### Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

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

**Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:**

The applicant has developed a cohesive and very ambitious plan that is focused on leveraging the potential of its STEM First curriculum to provide personalized learning environments for all of its elementary school students. Each component of the proposal is aligned with the applicant's overall mission and set of specific goals. The proposal builds on each core educational assurance areas as evidenced by the following: (1) the applicant district is committed to expanding the STEM First program to improve the academic achievement of all students in math, reading and science and to do so in ways that ensure students can meet standards for college and career readiness; (2) the applicant has already developed the necessary technological infrastructure to support the use of data and data systems to inform and drive improvements to student learning and teaching and to facilitate student growth and increased proficiency; (3) the plan dedicates real resources to building knowledge of what it means to be an effective educator and to increase participating students' access to those educators and (4) by implementing STEM First for all elementary school students, the applicant commits to reaching students who are high-need, students with special needs and English learners and has a plan to provide the supports that will be necessary to achieve this goal; In addition, the application contains extensive details about how the applicant will use grant funds to accelerate and expand personalized learning for all participating students and how the STEM First approach will lead to improved academic outcomes. Furthermore, the applicant has committed significant resources of its own and from other sources to ensure faithful implementation and sustainability of its plans.

<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>195</b>
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