



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0204PA-1 for Universal Institute Charter School

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	7

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Universal provides a comprehensive and coherent reform vision.

- A clearly delineated chart includes each core educational assurance area, progress toward core assurance areas to date, and plans and approaches throughout the RTT-D proposal. Evidence of building on to its work in the four core educational assurance areas includes the newly and recently installed Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) and Measures of Academic Performance (MAP) which strongly aligns with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). NWEA-MAP is a newly installed standards aligned, computer-based assessment system that the applicant will administer three times per year. Further evidence of building on to the work in the standards and assessment areas through this reform proposal include revision and alignment of K-8 reading and math curriculum, benchmark assessments every 8 weeks and teacher-generated, standards aligned tests, and quizzes. Focus on reading and math curriculum in elementary and middle school is critical to future success in high school. Benchmark test and quizzes provide teachers with an opportunity to determine if students are learning and when to make adjustments in teaching strategies, lesson plans, and ensuring student supports are in place.

- The applicant will build on the progress made with data systems including the use of the, already developed and currently used Compass Learning Odyssey program, designed to create personalized learning paths for each student based on their NWEA-MAP assessment results. A major strength of this web-based system is its ability to generate assignments based on results from three administrations of the assessment during the school year. Additional evidence of data system progress includes PowerSchool, another web-based student information system that stores other student data and will be merged with Odyssey to provide increased analytical functionality. Student discipline data, achievement data and attendance data considered collectively provide a broader picture of the student and is imperative for educators as they plan instructional modifications to meet the individual educational needs for each student and is central to the success of the applicant reform proposal.

- The applicant will build on its current collaborative partnership with LaSalle University, which provides professional development training to Universal's teachers. By expanding the partnership to include other universities as proposed, the applicant adds more depths to professional development offerings. Partnership with local universities will also help to inform university teacher preparation programs on how to effectively prepare teachers to work with students in high need, low performing urban schools. Additionally, teachers will have available to the individualized learning plans with subject area goals created for each student based on their MAP and benchmark assessment results. In order to develop effective teachers and principals, the applicant proposed to use data to differentiate and personalize instruction, strengthen principal and vice-principal leadership skills, including team building, education leadership, constructive feedback and technology. The applicant's plan to implement this wide range of professional development opportunities is a strength of this section and provides evidence that ensuring students receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers is a priority and central to the success of the reform proposal. The applicant's approach to accelerating student achievement, deepening learning, and increasing equity is significantly impacted by availability of effective and highly effective teachers to lead the charge.

- The applicant has demonstrated some success in turning around low-performing schools as evidenced by removal of a high school from Pennsylvania's list of persistently dangerous schools after one year of Universal management, achieved reductions in percentage of students scoring below basic on state summative data, two schools made AYP after being on a Corrective Action Plan, along with improvements to the learning environments. Though the applicant provides this information in the narrative, no additional charts or tables are provided to support this information.

•Evidence is provided to support the applicant's particularization of a clear and credible approach to the goals of accelerating student achievement, deepening student learning, and increasing equity through personalized student support grounded in common and individual tasks that are based on student academic interests. Evidence includes a comprehensive management plan outlining activities, timelines, deliverables and persons responsible. The applicant's goals include attracting and developing new teachers and leaders, mathematics and literacy education interventions, and building an interoperable data management system. Evidence is clearly delineated in the management plan provided.

•The classroom experience for students and teachers participating in personalized learning environments will include an inviting and clean school, which is critical to setting the stage for learning and providing an environment where students want to come everyday to learn. Many students come from homes and neighborhoods that are in disarray and constant flux, making their time at school the only time for them to experience a clean, organized and distraction-free environment. The applicant also describes how students will be engaged in a personalized learning environment which is described as an environment with availability of multiple assessment tools and technology, along with reading and mathematics specialists to provide small group and/or individualized instruction. Student teachers and beginning teachers will also play a significant role in what the personalized learning environment will look like, providing tutoring opportunities that will likely improve their preparation to better serve students while also improving student performance. High quality teacher preparation programs encourage local schools to use student teachers for tutoring and not taking on full teaching responsibilities until they have moved through the process of skill development and opportunities to demonstrate the appropriate skills with support and guidance of their mentor teachers and university supervisors. Additionally, quality clinical experiences encourage a team approach to delivering instruction, with the student teacher becoming a full member of the team and/or professional learning community, along with their supervising P-12 teacher and their university supervisor.

The applicant provides sufficient evidence to indicate the proposal is building on to work already completed and will add on to this work through the proposed goals of the reform project.

(A)(2) Applicant’s approach to implementation (10 points)	10	6
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(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides an approach to implementing its reform proposal but limited specificity is described for some components.

- Six Universal managed schools will participate in the reform proposal. The process used to select the schools is unclear. In an earlier section of the proposal, the applicant indicates that Universal schools have an enrollment of 4,472 students. However, in this section, the number of students to be included is 3,872, indicating that perhaps some schools were not selected to participate or enrollment has decreased.
- All participating schools that were selected meet the competition's eligibility requirements with 98% of students from low-income families and 98% are high needs students. The applicant adds additional clarity by placing the participating schools in bands based on when the schools were created or taken over for management.
- The applicant provides a detailed chart, including a profile of schools that will participate in grant activities. Adding the student profile information, along with NCLB performance history is a strength of this section and further clarifies what the six participating school look like.
- Including the number of participating students on the chart, along with low-income and high-need percentages in the narrative and on the chart provides significant evidence that the applicant meets this criteria.

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

The applicant provides a Logic Model that includes clearly defined short-term, intermediate and long-term outcomes for each of the proposal initiatives. The expected outcomes are clearly aligned with the three goals of the proposed project including intensive and sustained professional development; building and grade-differentiated mathematics and literacy education interventions; and integrated assessment, along with data management system implementation. This section lacks information on how the reform proposal will be scaled up and translated into meaningful reform to support peer charters and other public schools beyond the participating schools. This is a critical component considering the past growth and potential future growth of Universal Charters in the Philadelphia metropolitan area.

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

The applicant's vision to improve learning and performance and increased equity is evidenced by ambitious yet achievable annual goals that are equal to or exceed State ESEA targets for Universal, overall and by student subgroup.

- Performance on summative assessments is provided for each participating school and by student subgroup in chart format including Grades 3-11.
- Evidence of performance on summative assessments to determine proficiency status and growth include use of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) and Pennsylvania's state summative assessment which are aligned with Common Core State Standards. The applicant will include all students but will have a specific focus on progress at 3rd, 8th, and 11th grades and provides a strong rationale for selection of these grade levels. The rationale suggest that review at 3rd grade will provide an opportunity to determine if young students have overcome early learning deficits. Research indicates that a student's ability to read proficiently at grade 3 determines how they will perform throughout their educational career. Review at 8th grade is significant because grade 8 is a major transition period before high school and where some of the highest drop out rates occur in urban schools. The applicant will be able to determine interventions needed for successful transition to high school. Grade 11 is the third point of assessment review and will provide the applicant data to determine if students are college-and career-ready. Increases proposed each year in mathematics and reading over the term of the grant , are ambitious but achievable for each grade level based on the applicant's previous success rate with participating students.
- The applicant will benchmark narrowing the achievement gap by comparing Universal students' math and reading performance on the PSSA for Grades 3, 8, 11, and reducing those gaps by at least 5% each year. Evidence can be found in Table (A)(4)(b) and is clearly delineated and reasonable. The achievement gap was determined by calculating the difference between 2011-2012, which is the most recent year available, statewide PSSA results on reading and math.
- Graduation rates are not provided because Universal managed only one high school in the 2011-12 school year and there is no baseline to project future graduation rate increases. The participating high school and only high school in the reform proposal is grades 9-12 with a total enrollment of 670 students, but no indication of the number of student enrolled during the take-over year. Test scores for 11th graders are provided further indicating no graduates since the school take over in the 2011-12 school year. The applicant indicates that prior to Universal take-over, the school was in Corrective Action II-2nd year under NCLB performance history. In 2012, they did not make AYP and received a Warning. Making projections based on the number of current students and drop out trends would provide some idea for a possible goal in this area. The applicant does not describe how it will calculate targets to demonstrate how implementation of its reform would likely result in improved student learning and performance.
- College enrollment rates are not provided because Universal managed only one high school in the 2011-12 school year and there is no baseline to project future college enrollment rate increases or postsecondary degree attainment.

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	7

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Universal's record of success in advancing student learning and achievement and increasing equity in learning and teaching over the last four years is unclear as presented and difficult to determine.

- Evidence in the narrative provides 2011-2012 performance data at 57% in math and 56% in reading. There is no indication of prior performance data since the opening of the first school in 1999. Table (B)(1)(a) addresses closing the achievement gaps, but only compares Universal schools with other schools in Philadelphia and State schools. In reading and mathematics across grades 3rd through 8th, Universal schools are outperforming School District of Philadelphia schools but not for the State schools. Beyond a discussion of AYP, the applicant does not address

raising student achievement, high school graduation rates and college enrollment rates.

- The applicant provides evidence of achieving ambitious and significant reforms in its persistently lowest-achieving and in its low-performing schools by providing clearly delineated data on the progress of each of the six schools included in the reform proposal between 2010 and 2013. Table (B)(1)(b) further outlines NCLB performance before and after takeover. Evidence indicates that three of the schools made AYP, three did not and received a warning, and the third school received corrective action II 3rd year. The evidence is clear and compelling that Universal has made tremendous progress in moving these six school forward since their takeover.
- Additional evidence is provided in Table (B)(1)(b-1) and delineates performance on education indicators for two of Universal's schools for 2010-2011 and 2011-2012. These data indicate significant increases in all areas, including IEP mathematics and reading proficiency. Along with performance data, one of the high schools was removed from Pennsylvania's list of persistently dangerous schools. This is significant considering the importance of the school climate to student attendance, teacher morale, and creating an engaging learning environment.
- The applicant provides student performance data through multiple outlets to students, parents and educators. Evidence includes report cards, teacher conferences and of major importance, the principal's open door policy for family members. Additional evidence includes monthly Board Meetings and School Advisory Committee Meetings,

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	3
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(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides evidence of a high level of transparency in Universal processes, practices, and investments including the following:

- School by school board meetings that are open to the public provide some level of transparency. Including members of the community along with parents, students, and school staff is critical for increasing transparency , especially if the presentation format is easy for stakeholders to understand. The method of presentation on budgetary expenditures are not well understand by the public in general, regardless to the socio-economic status. Though families may be poor, many are able to understand budgetary expenditures if clearly presented, and more so based on the LEA Sample budget provided in the proposal.
- A sample budget is provided that includes actual personnel salaries at the school level for all school level instructional and support staff and is based on the state of Pennsylvania Department of Education's school budget categories which meet the US Department of Education standards.
- The budget includes salaries at the school level for instructional staff, personnel salaries at school level for teachers only and non-personnel expenditures at the school level. This evidence is provided for each school and is clearly delineated and comprehensive.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	7
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Evidence of successful conditions and sufficient autonomy under State legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements to implement the personalized learning environments proposed is supported by the following:

- The State of Pennsylvania's Charter School Law gives charter operators broad operating latitude, enabling charters to be more creative and innovative in their approaches to improving conditions for reform and success for high-need, low income students.

- Universal Charter is also governed according to contract terms with the School District of Philadelphia. Though the applicant indicates the terms of the agreement support education management flexibility and autonomy, Universal does not describe the contract nor provide a copy for review making it difficult to determine specific aspects of the contract that supports there is sufficient autonomy to implement the proposed reform proposal.

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

15

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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides limited evidence of stakeholder engagement throughout the development of the proposal.

- Though the applicant indicates there were meetings with teachers, principals, and parent groups, there is no description as to how they were engaged in proposal development. Samples of completed surveys are provided but there is no descriptions of how the survey data was used in the development of the proposal or reflected in the revised proposal based on the feedback.
- Evidence of teacher support is provided by signatures of support forms included in the Appendices. There is no information providing regarding the percentage of teachers who signed the support forms.
- Evidence of parent support is provided in a support letter from the president of the parent organization.
- Support letters from other key community stakeholders are not provided, though the applicant describes a partnership with Comcast as an example of a business partner.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	10

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's 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, includes the following:

- Table (C)(1) is provided as evidence of a plan for improving learning and teaching. A major strength of the table, along with the narrative is the clear delineation of how the support of parents and educators will help students understand that what they are learning is key to their success in accomplishing their goals. One of the deliverables includes 90% of students having multi-year academic/career plans in 6th, 9th, 10th and 12th grades. The plans are likely to help students focus on goals to transition to the next level. The plan for students to develop their own multi-year academic/career plans gives them major responsibility and will enable them to be disciplined and self-driven as indicated by the applicant. Another noted example of a deliverable likely to support student engagement is an increase in the number of students taking the PSAT and SAT for 10th graders and 11th graders, respectively. Supporting students with strategies on how to more effectively use out-of-school time to achieve learning goals, another deliverable, has been used successfully in dual enrollment programs and could prove beneficial to students participant in this reform proposal. Students benefit from managing their time wisely, especially if they are involved in extra-curricular activities and part-time employment, often a reality for middle and high school students in low income families.
- Along with the tasks and deliverables provided in Table (C)(1), the applicant will use CompassLearning Odyssey, which is researched based, nationally normed and standards aligned. This impressive digital platform will help teachers support students in identifying and pursuing learning and development goals linked to college-and career-ready standards or college-and career-ready graduation requirements. This resource will play a significant role in how to direct and pace learning for students and provide focus on skills that may be academically

challenging. Use of the CompassLearning Odyssey along with the RTI model will ensure students, parents and educators are involved in structuring learning to achieve goals and measuring progress toward identified goals.

- The applicant will use group projects to deepen student engagement. Group projects have been successfully used with P-12 students and college students, demonstrating that all students can become engaged at various levels, providing benefits to all students. Participating students will be grouped according to interest which contributes to learning experiences in areas of academic focus of choice. A major strength of the group project approach to be used is that students will conduct research, relate previous knowledge to new knowledge and apply that knowledge to everyday experiences. Though students will be encouraged to use a wide range of tools in researching and presenting their work, examples of these tools are not provided and would strengthen this section.

- Evidence that students will have exposure to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives that motivate and deepen their learning is limited beyond grade level units of study that focus on various aspects of a different country or culture. Since Universal schools lack a diverse student population, it is critical that students have greater exposure to other cultures, contexts, and perspectives.

- The applicant indicates that each school's student handbook addresses honor and penitance. It is unclear if traits such as goal setting, teamwork, critical thinking, communication, creativity, and problem solving are included. Universal's student handbook is described as addressing honor and perseverance. Additional evidence includes character lessons woven into critical academic content. The specific areas of goal setting, teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving are not clearly addressed.

- It is unclear how students will access a personalized sequence of instructional content and skill development designed to enable them to achieve their individual learning goals and ensure they can graduate on time and college-and career-ready through the use of the RTI model. Though Response to Intervention will be used to support students who are experiencing academic challenges, the application does not adequately describe how access to instructional content will be addressed. There is evidence that RTI has proven to be a successful model in whole school reform when implemented with fidelity, however, the applicant does not sufficiently describe the instructional content in this section of the application.

- Utilizing student teachers to pull students out in small groups for differentiated instruction does provide some evidence of ensuring student have access to a personalized sequence of instructional content and skill development designed to enable them to achieve their individual learning goals. Using student teachers in a different way is innovative and not often considered in typical P-12 schools. The small group instruction opportunity benefits both the student teachers and the K-12 students learning instructional content derived from adopted standards previously described. High quality teacher preparation programs encourage schools to use student teachers for tutoring and small group work that extends instruction beyond the regular school curriculum, yet still under the supervision of the mentor teacher and university supervisors.

- A variety of high-quality instructional approaches and environments are evidenced by math and literacy education interventions. The applicant provides a creative and innovative list of interventions that include professional development for teachers, math and literacy specialist teams, a Promethean board in every classroom, evidence-based, standards-aligned learning technology. One of the most impactful interventions is the assistance to help every household to obtain free or reduced priced broadband access and a computer in the home. Considering the digital divide continues to exist for low income families, this is a critical and much needed intervention to address.

- The applicant will maintain high quality content through redesigning curricula and adopting assessments to align to CCSS in every classroom. Universal describes how technology will be used to deliver instruction and share best practices among teachers, but does not clearly describe the inclusion of digital learning content as defined in the notice.

- The applicant addresses ongoing and regular feedback through the CompassLearning Odyssey, a standards aligned digital assessment tool designed to help teacher identify appropriate RTI strategies and make recommendations for struggling students. Actionable plans for instruction and grouping is evidence of supporting personalized learning recommendations based on student needs and a major component of the RTI model. Other evidence of frequently updated individual student data includes data from the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measure of Academic Progress (MAPS) and DataDirector. These tools combined will ensure frequent data is available to make data-based decisions and keep students on track toward mastery of college-and career-ready standards or college- and career-ready graduation requirements.
- Accommodations are not addressed separately beyond all students are high-need and at risk for failure, however, the applicant has described the use of RTI, small group support, and frequent monitoring, which sufficiently addresses this component of the reform proposal. Response to Intervention (RTI) will be used to support students who are experiencing academic challenges and consist of developing individual learning plans for students and requires assessment, diagnosis and interventions, including accommodations and modifications, to address identified needs and deficits. The strength of the RTI model is the whole school and team effort approach to supporting each student based on their individual needs and not placing this responsibility on one teacher in isolation.
- The applicant will provide adequate professional development for teachers which will prepare them to support students and ensure they understand how to use tools and resources provided to them in order to track and manage their learning. Specific elements of the training are not provided and would add additional clarity to this component of the reform proposal.
- The application provides a high-quality plan that includes key goals, activities to be undertaken and the rationale for the activities, the timeline, the deliverables, and the parties responsible for implementing the activities. The plan for personalizing the learning environment is included in Table (C)(1).

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

20

15

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant describes an approach to teaching and leading that will help educators to improve instruction and increase their capacity to support student progress.

- Table (C))(2) clearly and comprehensively outlines goals, deliverable, timelines and responsible parties to accelerate teacher leader capacity to implement personalized learning outcomes for students.
- Evidence of support for effective implementation of personalized learning environments and strategies that meet each student's academic needs includes the Universal Professional Development Collaborative which targets three areas including implementation of the personalized learning framework to include personal mastery; use of frequent formative assessments to shape instruction; and building leader capacity, collaborative and support. The applicant clearly delineates specific detailed components for each target area with sufficient evidence that ensures participating educators will be engaged in training and professional teams designed to support their individual and collective capacity to meet the goals of the reform proposal.
- Teachers and Leaders will be equipped to adapt content and instruction, providing opportunities for students to engage in common and individual tasks evidenced by professional development that will help teachers engage students as active learners through technology and allows students to move at their own pace, using differential modalities. The focus on differential modalities further support a personalized learning environment for students designed to meet their individual needs.

- The applicant will frequently measure student progress and use data to inform both the acceleration of student progress and individual and collective educators' practice by using DataDirector to support measurement of student progress. The use of a standardized measure of student progress removes the responsibility of teachers developing their own quizzes which sometimes encourages teaching to the test or designing questions that are inappropriate and do not encourage deep learning. The rapid time availability of data is a major strength of this element and will be of significant support to teachers and students in meeting their individual goals.
- Though Pennsylvania is a RTT state, it has been verified that there is no teacher evaluation, State or local system, referenced by the applicant in the application. Universal describes how they will collaboratively work with participating teachers and leaders to create evaluation systems that help to improve teachers' and principals' practice and effectiveness. Inclusion of teachers voices is critical for the development of the instrument. Many states are also including parents and stakeholders in the development of educator evaluations. It appears that pending the development of an evaluation system, school leaders will conduct regular observations of each teacher in their building and meet with them one-on-one to discuss the observations and recommendations for areas of improvement. There is no information provided regarding any type of observation tool to be used for observations pending the development of a system.
- Additionally, coaching and evaluation cycles will be conducted, along with bi-weekly, mini-observations, and one-on-one meetings to discuss the observation and make recommendations for improvements if required. These frequent meetings and observations provide opportunities for teachers to get immediate feedback and professional development to address areas of improvement.
- Focus on teacher evaluation and feedback is sufficiently addressed in this section, but there is limited information regarding principal evaluation, who will conduct the evaluation and how feedback will be used to support interventions that may be needed for improvement.
- Three primary tools are provided as evidence of actionable information that helps educators identify optimal learning approaches that respond to individual student academic needs and interests. These include the CompassLearning Odyssey, Northwest Evaluation (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and DataDirector. The three tools combined will provide a wide-range of actionable data to support each student's specific academic needs.
- Evidence of high quality learning resources includes Promethean boards for each classroom, tablets for each student, evidence-based, standards-aligned open educational resources, and online curricula. Providing tablets for each student will make available to them an unlimited amount of useful resources to support their individualized learning plans.
- The applicant sufficiently addresses the processes and tools to match student needs, along with feedback frequency regarding effectiveness of resources in meeting student needs. The Director of Technology will also have the responsibility of determining effectiveness of technology resources as evidenced by classroom observations and teacher/leaders surveys on their opinions regarding effectiveness of technology resources.
- Evidence of information that helps school leaders and school leadership teams assess, and take steps to improve individual and collective educator effectiveness, school culture, and climate for the purpose of continuous school improvement includes working collaboratively with teachers and leaders to create evaluation systems, evaluation cycles that will afford teachers and leaders opportunities to build their capacity to ensure all students are meeting their goals, and tracking of school improvements through PowerSchools, which includes data on truancy, tardiness, absenteeism, school incidents and other indicators of the health and climate of the school.

- Training systems and practices to continuously improve school progress toward closing the achievement gaps are adequately addressed and evidenced by the Universal Professional Development Collaborative and Teacher Mentor Program, quarterly trainings for principals, regular classroom observations designed to provide support and feedback.
- Evidence was provided in a previous section regarding increasing the number of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals and involves partnerships with local universities, teacher to leader pipelines, and support through the Universal Professional Development Collaborative, along with professional learning communities. Professional learning communities have a major impact on teacher effectiveness and teacher retention depending on the design the applicant will use. Professional learning communities offer excellent venues for supporting new teachers and retooling veteran teachers through reciprocal mentoring.
- The applicant provides a high quality plan that includes key goals, activities to be undertaken and the rationale for the activities, the timeline, the deliverables, and the parties responsible for implementing the activities/tasks for increasing the number of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals (as defined in this notice), including in hard-to-staff schools, subjects (such as mathematics and science), and specialty areas (such as special education).

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	10

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides significant evidence of practices, policies, and rules that facilitate personalized learning.

- All schools included in the proposal are managed by Universal and the centralized office includes staff who lead common functions across all schools. Support is evidenced by all staff focusing exclusively on optimizing results in the classroom for all participating schools. The focus on students is critical and brings all parties together for a common goal of school improvement and student achievement.
- The applicant's school leaders have a highly effective degree of autonomy and sufficient flexibility as evidenced by being able to make hiring decision, controlling staffing models, and managing budgets at local school level.
- Evidence of the applicant's ability to give students the opportunity to progress and earn credit based on demonstrated mastery and move on when ready includes provision of their technology-enhanced, blended learning classrooms, standards-aligned technology that allows students differential practice time, embedded assessments, and target instruction. This evidence clearly addresses how high school students will have an opportunity to move on by offering dual enrollment and distance learning options. In most school districts and university partnerships, dual enrollment courses will also be accepted in college, putting students far ahead of traditional college freshmen.
- The applicant will give students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of standards at multiple times and in multiple comparable ways. Evidence includes, oral or written presentations, performance tasks, and assessments previously described. Embedded assessment will be conducted and is an excellent method for determining student progress in this area of continuous high-stakes testing. District wide testing will occur every eight weeks, along with other major district and state tests administered once a year.
- Adaptable and fully accessible learning resources and instructional practices are evidenced by use of blended learning and differentiated teaching/learning environments that support a variety of accommodations. The

applicant provides a comprehensive list of accommodations that will be offered. Examples likely to be effective include distraction free testing environments, extended time to finish a task, enlarged print, project based learning and guided digital learning time.

- The applicant does not have a high-quality plan that includes key goals, activities to be undertaken and the rationale for the activities, the timeline, the deliverables, and the parties responsible for implementing the activities in this section, but this component was addressed in other areas of the application proposal.

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

10

2

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's central office and school infrastructure support personalized learning as evidenced by the following:

- All students will have access to internet accessible technology in and out of school. In an earlier section, the applicant also indicated they will assist families to get free or reduced priced internet service. This is a much needed effort for the applicant to undertake and will contribute to student accessibility to appropriate learning resources. The use of the Comcast Internet Essentials Program and efforts to raise scholarship dollars to ensure online access will be impactful.
- Training is appropriately address and will be provided to parents at each school at least four time during the year. Sessions are set up to meet the scheduling needs of parents and will be offered morning and afternoon. The applicant does not clearly delineated how students, educators and other stakeholders will receive the technical support they need through a range of strategies.
- The applicant indicates they will build a system that allows parents and students to export their information in an open data format and to use data in other electronic learning systems, however, they do not provide a description of what the system will look like and what learning systems will be included. Some descriptions was found in (E)(1).
- The applicant has provided evidence of ensuring Universal schools will use interoperable data systems and components of the systems are clearly and comprehensively described. These components include human resources data, student information data, budget data and instructional improvement system data. The applicant does not include a high quality plan with a timeline making it difficult to determine if the comprehensive system will be developed and successfully implemented within the grant period.
- The applicant does not have a high-quality plan that includes key goals, activities to be undertaken and the rationale for the activities, the timeline, the deliverables, and the parties responsible for implementing the activities.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	2

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant describes a limited plan for providing a continuous improvement process that includes the following evidence:

- The applicant's plan does not clearly indicate how timely and regular feedback on progress toward project goals will be gathered. Though a diagram is provided which indicates a continuous cycle among and including focus, evaluation, planning and implementation, clear indication of how ongoing corrections and improvements will be made during this cycle are not provided.

- A continuous improvement team will include Universal's Chief Academic Officer, Director of Technology, and Technology Team members. The responsibilities of this team are not clearly defined. The applicant will contract with an external evaluator who will design a survey instrument to gain ongoing feedback from stakeholders, including parents and students. It is unclear how often the surveys will be completed and how the information collected will be used for program improvements.
- The applicant indicates the Technology Director will gather data monthly by site and quarterly by subject area. It is unclear how data collected will be used for ongoing corrections and improvements during and after the term of the grant or to publicly share with key stakeholders.
- The applicant does not provide a high-quality plan that includes key goals, activities to be undertaken and the rationale for the activities, the timeline, the deliverables, and the parties responsible for implementing the activities.

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

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3

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's plan for ongoing communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders are evidenced by the following:

- Solicitation input and feedback from the general community and solicitation of financial support to ensure viability of other funding streams will be facilitated through convening current and potential external stakeholders.
- Establishing an RTT-D Advisory Committee is proposed and the membership will contribute to the engagement of internal and external stakeholders. The Committee will include representatives from community organizations, government, foundation, and college university representatives. The applicant indicates the Committee will meet quarterly over the course of the grant.
- A website to be developed is also an appropriate mechanism to share progress and engage with internal and external stakeholders. The website will be designed to share project progress, and develop a robust social media campaign.
- The applicant does not provide a high-quality plan that includes key goals, activities to be undertaken and the rationale for the activities, the timeline, the deliverables, and the parties responsible for implementing the activities.

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

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5

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides ambitious yet achievable performance measures, overall and by subgroup.

- Evidence that demonstrates the rationale for selecting the measures that the applicant believes will provide timely, formative, and leading information includes measures that balance academic progress as well as identification and remediation of environmental conditions that may interfere with academic progress. The applicant includes a chart that clearly delineates the rationale for measures for each sub-group and overall. Along with clear rationale statements, is a section on how each measure will provide rigorous, timely, and formative information. Examples include assessing teacher and principal effectiveness with evaluation tool to be developed; use of PSSA summative assessment to benchmark student academic mastery and NWEA-MAP to measure student formative growth; and attendance data from the Student and Family Resource Center. The rationale for selecting the performance measures are on target and further indicates the laser focus the applicant has on student learning.
- Evidence of how measures will provide rigorous, timely and formative leading information is provided in chart format and includes a review plan for each performance measure. Examples include reviewing reports from Student and Family Resource Center at least quarterly; and reviewing student progress on standardized assessments annually. It is clear throughout the proposal that Universal is aware of the realities of the population they serve and have high expectations regardless of what students bring to the classroom. They are focused on the whole child which is evident by the use of the Student and Family Resource Center data on student attendance and attention to problems in the home that may interfere with the student's ability to learn and succeed. Further evidence in other

sections of the application include the healthy food initiative, welcoming and safe school environment, and support for families who lack access to services such as the internet.

- Performance on selected measures will be benchmarked and disaggregated by school only which provides strong evidence of reviewing measures over time to determine and gage implementation progress. Evidence of how the applicant will review and improve the benchmarks includes quarterly reviews of data reports from the Student and Family Resource Center, with follow-up that provides families with resources and how to access resources to address problems. Additional evidence of how the applicant will improve the benchmarks includes annual reviews of standardized assessments and adjustments as needed with input from external evaluators, students and other stakeholders.
- The applicant includes in the chart provided the process if the performance measures are insufficient to gage the implementation process and includes making adjustments to measurement practices as needed with input from external evaluators and other key stakeholders. The process outlined appears reasonable for gaging the process and making changes if needed.

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

5

1

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant plans to use an external evaluator, as was mentioned in a previous section. A response to (E)(4), specifically, was not found.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides evidence of the following:

- Universal provides a description of all funds that will be used to support the proposed project. The funds in addition to RTT will also include the Internet Partnership support.
- The funds appear reasonable and sufficient to support the development and implementation of the applicants' goals and objectives including Teacher and Principal Development Program/Universal Professional Development Collaborative; Mathematics and Literacy Education Interventions; and Interoperable Data Management System.
- A thoughtful rationale for investments and priorities is clearly delineated and includes a description of all funds the applicant will use to support the implementation of the proposal.
- The applicant also includes a comprehensive project-level budget narrative for each reform proposal. The project level budget narratives include cost descriptions cost assumptions total costs and whether the costs is one-time or ongoing.
- The applicant will use a train-the-trainer model to continue professional development which supports long-term sustainability beyond the life of the grant. It is unclear how the Comprehensive Data Management System component will be sustained.

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

10

1

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant does not provide a comprehensive sustainability plan goals after the term of the grant. Lack of a fully developed plan limits the ability to determine support from State and local government leaders, financial support, and a description of how the applicant will evaluation the effectiveness of past investments and use these data to inform future investments.

The applicant does not provide an estimated budget for the three years after the term of the grant.

The applicant indicates they will use a train-the-trainer model to support sustainability of the professional development component of the reform proposal. Train the trainer models have traditionally demonstrated continuation of the initiative once grant funds end.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	2

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant does not address the competitive preference section separately and provides limited information throughout the application proposal that addresses some components of the application.

- The applicant indicates that they seek to establish the school as the focal point for neighborhood transformation, while fostering strong partnerships between its employees, students, families, businesses and other constituents. The applicant does not list specific community partners nor is there a coherent and sustainable partnership described.
- The establishment of the Student and Family Resource Center in each school that coordinates the delivery of non-academic resources within the school and in the community that responds to student and family health, along with social/emotional needs. SFRC also provides a wide range of more complex needs such as housing, food, and helping adults in the household to connect to employment and job training resources. Appendix B further describes the SFRC as an Integrated Service Model that engages community stakeholders at all levels. All school external partnerships are handled by the SFRC, in addition to a school hotline, social networks and school marketing. It is unclear how the SFRC is funded, whether with private funds or public funds.
- The applicant incorporates the SFRC as a source to provide data for gathering attendance data, determining the nature of family challenges and assisting them in accessing resources and providing resources to address problems that may be impeding success.
- Though the applicant does not provide letters of support from key stakeholders, there is mention of a partnership with Comcast to seek to provide free or reduced priced internet access for families who cannot afford the cost associated with this service.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant meets the Absolute Priority 1 based on the following evidence:

Table (A)(1)(a) is provided and comprehensively addresses each core educational assurance area, progress toward core assurance areas to date, along with the proposed approach through RTT-D. Evidence of building on to its work in the four core educational assurance areas includes installation of the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) and Measures of Academic Performance (MAP) which strongly align with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). NWEA-MAP is a standards aligned, computer-based assessment system that the applicant will administer three times per year.

Additional evidence of building on the work in the standards and assessment areas includes revision and alignment of K-8 reading and math curriculum, benchmark assessments every 8 weeks and teacher-generated, standards aligned tests, and quizzes. The applicant's plan to focus on reading and math curriculum in elementary and middle schools is critical to future success in high schools. Use of benchmark tests and quizzes provide critical data to teachers, enabling them to better determine if students are learning and when to make adjustments in teaching strategies, lesson plans and ensuring student supports are in place. These efforts should also accelerate student achievement and deepen student learning by meeting the academic needs of each student.

The applicant will build on the progress made with data systems including the use of the Compass Learning Odyssey program, designed to create personalized learning paths for each student based on their NWEA-MAP assessment results. A major strength of this web-based system is its ability to generate assignments based on results from three administrations of the assessment during the school year. Additional evidence of data system progress includes

PowerSchool, another web-based student information system that stores other student data and will be merged with Odyssey to provide increased analytical functionality. Student discipline data, achievement data and attendance data considered collectively provide a broader picture of the student and is imperative for educators as they plan instructional modifications to meet the individual educational needs for each student.

The applicant has demonstrated some success in turning around low-performing schools as evidenced by removal of a high school from the Pennsylvania's list of persistently dangerous schools after one year of Universal management, achieved reductions in percentage of students scoring below basic on state summative data, two schools made AYP after being on a Corrective Action Plan, along with improvements to the learning environments. These successes significantly support the ability of Universal to decrease the achievement gaps.

In addition to Universal Professional Development Collaborative, the applicant will build on its current partnership with LaSalle University, which provides professional development training to Universal teachers. By expanding the partnership to include other universities, the applicant adds more depths to professional development offerings. Partnership with local universities will also help to inform university teacher preparation programs on how to prepare teachers to effectively work with students in high need, low performing urban schools in addition to expanding student access to the most effective educators.

Evidence is provided to support the applicant's description of a clear and credible approach to the goals of accelerating student achievement and deepening student learning. Evidence includes a comprehensive management plan outlining activities, timelines, deliverables and person responsible. The applicant's goals include attracting and developing new teachers and leaders which will expand student access to the most effective teachers, particularly in mathematics and literacy education.

The applicant also describes how students will be engaged in their classes, availability of multiple assessment tools and technology, along with reading and mathematics specialists to provide small group and/or individualized instruction. These effort will contribute to increasing the rates at which students graduate from high school and are prepared for college and careers, along with closing the achievement gap.

Total	210	104
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Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0204PA-2 for Universal Institute Charter School

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	5

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

This is a mid range response.

The Applicant (Universal) has operated one of its participating schools since 1993 and became responsible for the five other of its participating schools in the years between 2010 and 2013. All are low performing as measured by student performance on State of Pennsylvania summative assessments. Universal's Vision is one of comprehensive community development for urban, predominantly African-American, impoverished communities with its schools as the cornerstone and hub of community revitalization. It seeks this grant to strengthen its schools so that each can better serve its purpose within

this Vision.

Universal has identified key needs which characterize its schools as community cornerstones and as educational institutions. Universal believes, it can be inferred, that addressing these needs are precursors to reforming its schools as it intends under this grant. Thus Universal begins by engaging the community regarding the needs of children to be safe, nourished, and ultimately well-educated and for the adult community to commit strongly to responsibility for its school's academic success. The initial steps also include seeking staff's commitment to Universal's Vision, making tangible improvements to the physical environment of the school including filling the interior with supportive messages and providing healthy foods, and establishing a Student and Family Resource Center (SFRC) which provides resources directed to the social, emotional, health, economic, and housing needs of each school's students and families. It is noteworthy that the communities which Universal serves have responded very positively. Since its takeover of the participating schools, overall enrollment increased from 625 students to 4472.

The educational reforms which Universal intends for each of its participating schools take three forms: Teacher/Principal Development through a to-be-formed "Universal Professional Development Collaborative," Initiating Math and Literacy Interventions, and Building an Interoperability Data Management System.

(a) Building on previous work in the four core educational areas: As noted, Universal's history with five of its six participating schools is short encompassing the years of 2010 through 2013. Possibly as a consequence, the amount of work which Universal has done is less than substantial.

- Regarding standards and assessments work has consisted of aligning K-8 reading and math curricula with the Common Core, "recently installing" the "NWEA MAP" software which will—but apparently is not now--enable three times per year formative assessments, and having its teachers administer "standards-aligned" assessments.
- Similarly, its existing data system could, when it is integrated with "MAP," create assessment-driven "learning paths" for students. "School Net for Power School" "is being implemented" to create more data analysis capability and "will" make assessment and intervention data available
- Universal's efforts to provide its students more effective educators appears to be in the incipient stage: Its teachers are to create individualized learning plans for students but the plans appear to depend on the not-yet implemented MAP formative assessment regimen. Universal is planning a professional development program with several local universities, but the plans for what it will consist of is dependent on needs surveys to be undertaken only if this grant is awarded. What is currently in place regarding effective educators is Universal teachers working with La Salle University "to use writing ... to develop higher literacy skills and meta cognitive thinking."
- Universal's record in turning around schools is similarly slender. The high school it took over came off the most persistently dangerous list in its first year as a Universal school. Two other schools previously in NCLB Corrective Action made "AYP" in their second years under Universal. Performance at some schools on State assessments is improving although the improvement is registering below the "proficient" level. The students in the school which Universal has operated since 1993 are still scoring substantially below the State wide averages on summative assessments. As noted, the communities in the newly taken over schools have signaled a vote of hope and confidence in Universal by dramatically increasing the numbers of students they are sending to its schools.

(b) Clear/Credible approach to accelerating achievement, deepening learning, increasing equity through personalized supports: Universal presents its response in the form of a table which is designed to present information addressing the elements of a High Quality Plan (HQP) as defined in the Scoring Tool. That makes Universal's approach clear. Just three of the 18 activities presented will directly affect students. They are technology training for educators and families, math and literacy teaching strategies and interventions, and placing technology in the schools. The key activities related to math and literacy are not described in any significant detail here or elsewhere in its responses. This apparent focus on the activities which will enable teachers to be more effective rather than on activities which will actually result in personalization leading to improved performance weakens the response.

(c) Describe the classroom experience: Universal's first focuses its response on conditions that will precede the implementation of the grant. This weakens the response. The balance of the description is general but does give a picture of what a generic classroom could be like when all of the grant funded initiatives have been implemented

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

10

6

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

This is a mid range response . Universal chose six of the seven schools it operates to be participating schools. It did not describe the process it used to select the schools which are to participate in its reform proposal. This weakens the response substantially. Each of the six school whic will participate are apparently low performing as defined in the Scoring Tool. Universal has designated 3872 students to participate and provides documentation to show that collectively they meet the requirements for the prescribed ratios of high needs and low income students as defined. Universal intends that all educators at the six sites will participate and estimates their number as "200."

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

10

7

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

This is a high, middle range response. As noted Universal provided a “High Quality Plan to Implement for Meaningful Reform” in a table which met the requirements for a HQP in its response to (A) (1) (b). As such it lists 18 activities designed to meet the goals of its reform plan, identifies responsible parties, indicates in which Grant Years each activity will take place, and describes the anticipated results. Because the activities are linked clearly to specific timeliness and because these activities are to be implemented for each of the schools in the LEA, this table also serves as a HQP describing how Universal will “scale up” to cause its reform activities to reach each participating school. The activities themselves, particularly those which pertain to the instructional strategies, interventions, and support are not well described. This weakens the response.

The table under (A) (3) labeled “Logic Model Delineating Short-Term, Intermediate, and Long-Term Goals,” includes information which supplements and extends the information in the HQP table under (A) (1) (b). The supplement comes in the form of Universal's adding detail under each of the implementation activities a more extended description of the outcomes or results anticipated from the activity. There are three separate descriptions for each outcome—result to be realized “short term,” results to be realized in the “intermediate” future, and those to be realized “long-term.”

Universal is also required to explain “how” the proposed activities will result in its goals or the outcomes/results it describes. There is no narrative addressing that matter under (A) (3). That weakens the response.

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

10

3

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

This is a low range response.

(a) Summative Assessments: Universal's benchmarks—reading and math summative test results at Grades 3, 8, and 11—are consistent with tracking growth and achievement in what Applicant labels the foundation skills for student success. The choice of the grade levels is appropriate because each marks a crucial transition in every student's academic career.

Universal does not provide student sub-group data because virtually all of its students are African-American. Universal targets flat rates of growth for all students at each participating school of 5 percent per year each year for each benchmark assessment. An inference which can be drawn from such targets is that improvement will not increase even as reform implementation and, presumably its positive effects intensify. Further, the inference can be drawn that Universal does anticipate that its reforms will have little actual effect on the learning of its students. This weakens the response. In light of the negative conditions which Universal says exist at five of the six of its schools and the low student achievement data at all of the schools, the predicted growth targets are acceptably achievable and ambitious.

(b) Decreasing Achievement Gaps: Universal chose the same benchmark grade levels and assessments as in (a). For the reasons stated above, these are appropriate selections. Universal chose to target a 5 percent reduction in the gaps between its students' performances school by school and the state-wide average for each assessment for each benchmark year. As noted above, this approach weakens its response because it calls to question the positive, cumulative effects of Universal's reforms. For the same reasons as stated in (a), the goals appear achievable and ambitious.

(c) Graduation Rates: There is only one high school in the LEA, and Universal has operated this participating school, "Audentird High School," since 2011. Universal provides no data in this response regarding Graduation Rates instead asserting that it “does not have reportable data as defined in this notice.” In a subsequent response to (B) (1) (1) (b), however, it provides data regarding number of diplomas awarded at this school in Universal's first year of management and says that the data is evidence of its ability to improve student performance. In addition, this school has apparently been under the operation of the Philadelphia School District before Universal took over. This strongly suggests there is graduation rate data for the years before Universal took over. In short, it appears that Universal is in possession of data regarding graduation rates for this school but has chosen not to present it. This substantially weakens the response.

(d) College Enrollment: There is only one high school in the LEA, and Universal has operated this participating school, "Audentird High School," since 2011. Universal provides no data in this response regarding College Enrollment instead asserting that it “does not have reportable data as defined in this notice.” In a subsequent response to (B) (1) (1) (b), however, it provides data regarding number of diplomas awarded at this school in Universal's first year of management and says that the data is evidence of its ability to improve student performance. In addition, this school has apparently been under the operation of the Philadelphia School District before Universal took over. This strongly suggests there is college enrollment data for the years before Universal took over. In short, it appears that Universal is in possession of data regarding graduation rates for this school but has chosen not to present it. This substantially weakens the response.

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	5

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Overall this is a low mid range response.

(a) Improving student outcomes: Universal does not provide a full, systematic, or adequate response. It was required to describe its four year record regarding outcomes. It has operated one of its school for nine years, but it provides a table of data for just one year and that regarding achievement gaps only. Given its nine year operation of the school, there is sufficient data available for review under the requirements of the Scoring Tool. Not providing that data weakens the response.

Regarding improving other Universal schools, Universal cites its work with Stanton Elementary—a school which is not participating in its reform—for awards given the school since 2003 for improving and “turning around.” It also cites improvements made by one of its participating schools, Vare Middle, in raising reading and math student performance “as compared to 2002.” The relevance of this information is not clear, either, because Universal did not begin operating the school until 2011. (See “Table (B) (1) (b).”)

Universal also cites two other participating schools “making AYP” since becoming Universal schools in 2010, Bluford and Daroff, and provides a table detailing improved performance at each in 2011 math and reading apparently for all students, and improved performance by IEP students in the same realms. This data is of some relevance.

(b) Ambitious and unique reforms: Although Universal does not directly state this, it appears that all six of Universal's participating schools meet the definition of low performing in the Scoring Tool. Universal's incomplete response to (a) prevents reaching a conclusion that it has engaged in four years of applying successful, systemic educational reforms to any schools. Given the context in which its schools operate however—service to impoverished, urban, African-American students and communities where “basics” such as nutritious food, jobs, housing, safety, stability, money, clean/well-maintained school facilities, adult commitment to academic achievement, and hope are in short supply—the steps Universal has taken to address these preconditions to achievement must be systematically applied. Moreover, they are astutely designed to respond to conditions unique to the communities they serve. They are unique as well—few if any school reforms begin with community engagement and development--and because they create preconditions to reform success, must be regarded as highly significant. What Universal does for its schools and communities, overall, creates a strong response under (b).

(c) Making student data available: The ways and frequency with which Universal currently makes student data available—quarterly report cards, aggregated data at periodic meetings for off-campus personnel, the open doors of principals--do not lead to the level or quality of engagement and data-driven responsiveness that leads to or supports reform. This is a weak response for (c).

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

5

1

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

This response is in the low range.

In describing how it provides information regarding salaries and non-personnel expenditures, Universal cites discussions at “school by school board meetings” of “budget versus actual expenditures,” and cites its compliance with State law regarding “expenditures by category.” According to the illustrations Universal provides regarding the latter, such reporting is in the form of aggregated data instead of the individual, “actual” salary data required in the Scoring Tool. School budgets are presented once a year to the respective school site governing boards. The sample budget provided by Universal provides information by category rather than “actual” salaries attributable to specific staff members as required by the Scoring Tool. By using the a budget conforming to the sample annual budget, one could aggregate non-personnel line items to determine the total of non-personnel expenditures as budgeted. One could determine how much was actually spend by attending the previously mentioned school by school meetings “where actual expenditures” versus budgeted expenditures were discussed to differentiate between actual and budgeted non-personnel expenditures. This is a low level of transparency.

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

10

10

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

This is a high range response. Universal asserts that the State's charter school law and its contracts with its schools give sufficient autonomy and flexibility to implement its reform activities. Given the straight-forward and conventional nature of what Universal intends to do in the form of school reform activities, this conclusion seems credible.

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

15

3

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

This is a low range response.

(a) Stakeholder involvement in proposal development: Universal's response is highly abbreviated—three sentences—and offers no details regarding how, how often, or how many teachers, parent representatives, or principals were involved in

developing this proposal and/or in giving feedback. Students are not mentioned at all.

There is no union representation for any of the school's teachers. The Scoring Tool requires evidence that 70 percent of the participating teachers support the proposal. Universal appended petitions under section "C" of its Appendix. There are approximately signatures of persons who are teachers or who do not designated themselves as a principal, vice principal/AP, or parent. If there are 200 participating educators less 13 principals/vice-principals as indicated by Universal, those signing the support petitions constitute 64+ percent of the teachers. This is in substantial but not full compliance with the requirement under (a) (ii).

(b) Letters of Support: There are four letters of support. Three elected officials, the Mayor of Philadelphia, a City Councilman, and a State Representative, provided letters. The fourth letter is from the President of "SAC," a parent group, on Universal Companies stationery. Three of the four letters are form letters. The Mayor's is not. There are no letters from student organizations, none from representatives of support or advocacy groups for special education students/families, LLE students/families, African-American or other civil rights groups, legal aid, other NGO's serving the communities in which the schools are located. Notably, there is no letter from La Salle University with whom Universal now partners or any of the universities with which Universal intends to partner for its professional development program (UPDC). Although this lack of support could be argued to be attributable to the impoverished nature and circumstances of the communities which Universal has chosen to serve—and there is merit to that argument—the lack of such letters mitigates against a conclusion that there is wide spread support from relevant communities for this reform.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	13

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

This is a mid range response.

(a) (i) Students understand learning is a key to their success: As soon as Universal takes responsibility for a school it transmits the message that learning is the key to students' success. It does so in its initial meetings with communities to introduce the Universal Vision for schools and communities, reinforces it by calling on community members to take responsibility for the academic success of the school, and literally places the message on the wall of each of its schools. When Universal takes leadership of a school staff, its leaders share its Vision including this message with the staff and seek commitment to it. The same message is to be conveyed during its recurring of new teaches and leaders, and is highly likely to permeate the professional development (UPDC) to be implemented in this reform and to be a message conveyed among teaching colleagues as part of what is to be transmitted to students when these colleagues work with the math/literacy teams, the two-year new teacher mentors, and which are to form as part of Universal's approach. Overall including Universal's responses under other criterion in addition to (C) (1), Universal can be said to have proposed a HQP to make this happen.

(a) (ii) Students identify and pursue goals linked to college/career standards, structure their learning, measure their progress: Universal's response is weakened by its apparently not being able to state that all of its curricula are linked to college/career readiness standards. It expressly indicates that it has aligned its K-8 math and literacy standards with the Common Core, is requiring teacher-made assessments to be aligned with "standards," and starting in the first year of the grant the "MAP" system will be coupled with "Compass Learning Odyssey, " a "nationally normed, standards-aligned digital platform," to enable teachers to generate student learning plans based on three-times a year formative assessments. More generally, it asserts in the table responding to (ii) that its teachers and Chief Academic Officer will "vet" its curricula for adherence to college/career standards during each year of its grant. Given the comment elsewhere in its responses that high quality curricula was "almost non-existent" in its schools, this mention including the activities described above cannot be said to be a plan meeting all the requisite elements of a HQP to ensure all its students in all its schools will follow curricula linked as required.

Universal is more clear and explicit regarding its ensuring that students structure their learning In this response, Universal states that students will set academic/career plans in 6th, 6th, 10th, and 12th grades and that annual goals will be set for each student each year. Responsible parties are designated and this initiative is to begin in the first Grant Year.

(a) (iii) Students are involved in deep learning experiences in areas of academic interest: Universal asserts that its professional development program (UPDC) to be implemented starting the summer of Grant Year 1 (and continuing the following three years) will enable teachers to "focus on deepening ... learning experiences" and that twice a year students will be grouped by areas of academic interest to produce a project integrating information and "applying that knowledge to everyday experience." Universal asserts that lesson conducted each year regarding other countries also deepens learning There is no mention of this particular goal in any of the tables which delineate time lines, and it is not otherwise clear when teachers will be trained or evaluated for this. Accordingly, the response cannot be said to constitute a HQP to meet this requirement.

(a) (iv) Students have access to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives that motivate and deepen learning: Universal responds as described under the Comments to (iii) and adds that they are continually urged to see themselves as citizens of the world who are and will be prepared to participate in a “world economy.” The former is the way schools universally address this goal, and the latter is consistent with the philosophy which underpins Universal's philosophy of education. Given these, it does not appear that a more formalized plan is required.

(a) (v) Master critical content, master and develop crucial skill and characteristics: Overall, Universal's various plans as they appear in the various tables mentioned in these Comments supplemented by what is said in the narrative pertinent to Universal's core initiatives-- Teacher/Principal Development, Initiating Math and Literacy Interventions, and Building an Interoperable Data Management System constitute a HQP to enable students to master critical content. That Universal plans that students will learn perseverance, cooperation, critical thinking, teamwork, communication, creativity, and problem solving are implicit in its expectations that all students will complete their education and graduate. Goal-setting will be explicitly taught as part of the formulation of the plans for which there is a specific HQP. Universal notes that it also teaches or requires the display of some of the same skill and characteristics through its approaches to teaching positive behaviors. All of this suffices to meet this requirement.

(b) (i) Each student gains access to personalized sequence of instructional content/skill development ... to ensure he/she graduates on time and college career ready: On its face, this response is weak because Universal cites only its implementation of Rtl, which is for “struggling students” not all, as its means to realize this goal and couples it with the availability of “practice teachers,” a project the outcome of which appears somewhat uncertain. Beyond this direct response, however, one can find a number of plans whihc in combination should enable teachers over the life of the grant to become much more skilled in personalizing students learning of content and skill. These latter plans typically contain the elements required of HQP's. These include the plans under Table (A) (1) (b) the Universal Professional Development Collaborative and for math and literacy interventions, plans under Table (C) (1) regarding individual learning goals, personalized interventions, use of technology, college and career standards, and assessments, and plans under Table (C) (2) regarding student goal setting and teachers implementing of personalized learning environments. Considering all of the above, Universal meets the requirements to a substantial degree.

(b) (ii) Student access to a variety of high quality instructional approaches: Universal cites its “Math and Literacy Education Interventions” and five of its implementation strategies as a response. For four of the five, one can find a HQP for developing them in one or more places in Universal's narrative and tables. Regarding a plan for literacy and math deep learning strategies, there is not one plan to accomplish this and much depends on the UPDC (professional development) and accomplishing this will require considerable amount of time and the successful implementation of a number of interlocking strategies Because who will learn what when is not clear under the UPDC plan, it is also not clear when students will begin to receive the benefits of the high quality learning approaches to be taught through the UDPC. This latter factor weakens this response to a minor degree.

(b) (iii) Student access to high quality content including digital learning content: As noted Universal does not have a HQP for its efforts to align all of its curricula with appropriate standards including those for college and career readiness. It does describe under Table (A) (1) (b) and its budget (F) what amounts to a HQP to install digital instructional devices during Grant Year 1 and to provide its students access to digital learning devices during the same year.

(b) (iv) Student access to ongoing regular feedback including (i) student data re. progress toward college/ career readiness and (ii) personalized learning recommendations:

(i) Universal cites the current and planned availability of data through the following platforms: PowerSchools, CompassLearning Odyssey, NWEA-MAP, DataDirector. Universal does not say, however, that students can use any of these platforms. It appears, therefore, that student access to data remains that which is received from quarterly report cards. Universal does not offer a plan to change this. It does mention students learning to use tablets under Table (C) (1) but does not say nor imply that these are to be the vehicles for accessing the data described under (b) (iv) (i). This response does not meet the requirements of the Scoring Tool.

(ii) Each of these platforms is accessible to educators. It can be presumed that given the training and emphasis that Universal is putting on individual learning opportunities that educators will provide personalized recommendations based on the data they obtain from these platforms. Universal's plans to train educators to make better and more frequent use of these tools. This meets the requirements of the Scoring Tool.

(b) (v) Student access to accommodations and high quality strategies for high need students: All Universal's students are high need. Therefore, the Comments above under (C) cover this matter. To a substantial extent, Universal meets these requirements.

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

20

13

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

This is a mid range response.

(a) (i) All educators engage in training and professional teams which support the effective implementation of personalized learning environments (PLE's) that meet students' needs: Universal plans to partner with local universities to deliver a

comprehensive professional development program (UDPC) starting in the summer of Grant Year 1 and continuing throughout the three subsequent Grant Years. The primary focus is the development of the capacity of the teachers to deliver personalized learning environments meeting (a) (i) requirements. The weakness of the plan is that it does not include details regarding when teachers will master which instructional strategies for the delivery any specific approach to personalized classroom learning. Therefore, it is not clear when any particular group of participating students will begin to receive the benefits of any specific learning strategy. Similarly, although Universal indicates there will be training and the creation of professional learning communities as required under (a), there is no time line for either training or implementation.

There is more clarity and definiteness regarding other aspects of implementation: teachers are to be able to do quarterly assessments using MAP in Year 1, this indicates that teachers can or will use Odyssey in Year 1 to create Rtl support strategies, regular classroom observations and evaluations will begin in Year 1 and will be based for an evaluation system supporting PLE's in School Year 2014, Math and Literacy Teams will be working in schools Year 1, two-year Mentors will be supporting new teachers in Grant Year 1, "teacher simulation" to produce better trained and acclimated new teachers also begins Year 1.

(a) (ii) which enable the adaption of content and instruction so students engage in tasks in response to their academic needs, interests, etc.: Universal cites the availability to teachers of MAP (and elsewhere in its responses) to Odyssey both of which will be available in Year 1 as tools by which teachers can respond to students' academic needs. By stating when these platforms are accessible, it is presumed this means that teachers will also be trained to use them in Year 1. It also says in Table (C) (1) that students will be using digital learning devices in Year 1. This implies that the devices will be used by students to pursue learning meeting their interests. Given the lack of instructional capacity of its teachers possess and the weaknesses of its curricula as described by Universal in its responses to (C) (2), it is difficult to fully credit Universal's time line for accomplishing the goal under (a) (ii). This weakens this response.

(a) (iii) which enable frequent measurement of student progress toward college/career readiness: Universal intends to purchase licenses for DataDirector with grant funds. Universal says that in combination with the data it already can generate from other systems, DataDirector will provide immediate feedback, longitudinal tracking, and reporting of student assessment. It notes, however, that not all of its curricula are aligned with the Common Core and that many of its teachers current instructional practices are not of appropriate quality. It intends, over the life of the grant, to create teacher teams to develop assessments which are aligned with college/career readiness and to place them on DataDirector for universal use. Universal also indicates that its UPDC will provide coaching and teaching methods which will upgrade its teachers practices. DataDirector is scheduled to be available during Grant Year 1. Universal does not specify a time line for its implementation of its aligned assessments or the completion of teacher training to use them. These latter factors weakens the response.

(a) (iv) which improve educator effectiveness by using feedback from evaluations: Universal has a two step process to accomplish this. It will develop evaluation systems for its teachers which are more aligned with those described in the Scoring Tool and begin their use in the 2014 school year. In the meantime, there will be "mini-observations" and feedback conferences on an every two-week basis. Although Universal says that the new evaluation systems will "guarantee all teachers are meeting the requirement of their jobs" and that both teachers and leaders will build their capacities through use of the new systems, it does not specify that the systems will enable the identification of "effective/highly effective" teachers and principals as those terms are defined in the Scoring Tool. It does not mention applying measures of student achievement or growth through either the two-week observation process or the process to begin in 2014. These factors weaken the response.

(b) (i) Educators will use actionable information to identify optimal learning approaches to address students' interests and needs: Universal's educators will use Odyssey to develop Rtl strategies to meet struggling students' needs for support. They will use MAP to create learning plans in response to students quarterly performances on formative assessments They will use DataDirector and the to-be-developed Common Core, college/career readiness-aligned common internal assessments to "identify needed interventions." The MAP system is to be in place during Grant Year 1. Universal is not clear when the DataDirector assessments will be in place and teachers equipped to use them. It makes only a passing, non-specific reference to responding to student's interests. The latter factors weaken the response.

(b) (ii) Educators will use instructional content and assessments aligned with college/career readiness and graduation requirements. These will include digital resources: Universal will be giving students access to digital learning devices in Grant Year 1 and will be placing digital teaching devices in all classrooms in Grant Year 1. In this response Universal notes that most of its schools currently lack the resources described here and under (C) (2) (a) (iii) says most of its teachers lack sound instructional practices. Although Universal makes clear its intention to address these conditions through this grant, its plans are not time specific. This weakens the response

(b) (iii) The evaluation systems and enhanced data systems can provide educators with feedback about the degree to which educators are meeting student needs and the effectiveness with which they are using the resources provided them to meet student needs. Universal intends to do such monitoring and adds that its technology team will be monitoring both teacher and student use of digital technology. The weakness in this approach is, as noted, the lack of time specificity regarding when the curricular and assessment tools, other than MAP, will be available and when the poor instructional practices will be addressed in the UPDC.

(c) (i) School leaders will have training, tools, and policies to enable them to structure effective learning environments including information from evaluation systems which enable them to improve educator effectiveness, school culture, and climate: As noted under (a) (iv) above, Universal says that its new evaluation systems and approaches will “guarantee all teachers are meeting the requirement of their jobs” and that both teachers and leaders will build their capacities through use of the new systems. It does not specify that the systems will enable the identification of “effective/highly effective” teachers and principals as those terms are defined in the Scoring Tool and does not mention applying measures of student achievement or growth using either of its evaluation approaches.

As described in its responses to (A), Universal begins addressing issues regarding climate and culture in a thorough and systematic way immediately on taking responsibility for a school. It trains its staff regarding expectations for safety, stability, and provides physically inspiring learning environment routinely. It requires positive expectations for student behavior be taught all students. Its data systems enable its leaders to monitor indicators relating to climate and culture on an on-going basis and expects problems to be addressed promptly. Universal's approach to schooling calls for immediate and continual engagement and dialog with the communities it serves. Universal's approach to issues of climate and culture is particularly strong.

(c)(ii) Training, systems, and practices to continuously improve student performance and closing achievement gaps: Universal intends that it's grant-funded approaches to professional development (UPDC), its installation and enhancement of its data systems, and the practices to be taught and or developed will meet this requirement. There are some weaknesses which have been noted above. The weaknesses do not outweigh the strengths, and it is likely that Universal's plan will result in improved student performance and the closing of achievement gaps.

(d) Applicant has a HQP for increasing the number of students being instructed by “effective”/“highly effective” educators as those terms are defined in the Scoring Tool: Universal partially meets this goal. It has a time specific plan for enhancing and systematizing its approach to evaluations. It has designated responsible parties, and the deliverables are the evaluation systems. The activities are encompassed in Universal's approach to professional development, the UPDC. Its approach, however, does not appear to include evaluating its educators using the definitions of “effective” and “highly effective” as defined in the Scoring Tool. This substantially weakens Universal's response.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	11
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>This response is in the high mid range.</p> <p>(a) <u>Central office organization:</u> Universal's Education Department is organized to provide support and services to each of its participating schools. There is no information suggesting otherwise.</p> <p>(b) <u>Flexibility for School Leadership Teams (as defined in the Scoring Tool):</u> Universal does not state explicitly whether its schools have leadership teams as defined. Each school is governed to some degree by a school board composed of school-level stakeholders which might meet the leadership team definition. Universal gives its “school leaders” (term not defined by Universal) control of hiring and staffing models. Budgets are built starting at the school level and are based on needs identified and articulated by the principal in collaboration with the LEA's Chief Academic Officer. Universal does not indicate whether school leaders have control of either school calendars or schedules. This is substantial but not the complete level of flexibility and autonomy contemplated by these requirements.</p> <p>(c) <u>Students have the opportunity to progress and earn credit without regard to the time spent on a topic:</u> Universal indicates that, as this grant is implemented, students will be able to progress at their own pace and demonstrate mastery accordingly. Universal does not discuss whether this means that students can advance in its grade levels by this means. Universal notes that its students can take advance placement courses, long distance learning courses, and dual enrollment courses. It does not directly state that these courses are without time on topic requirements, and often, the latter two types of courses do. This response partially meets the requirements of (c).</p> <p>(d) <u>Students have the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of standards at multiple times and in multiple, comparable ways:</u> Universal indicates that its grant funded approaches to personalization will increase the opportunities for its students to demonstrate mastery as described in (d). Its reference to quarterly formative and annual summative assessments do not appear to be activities which meet these criteria. The response substantially meets the requirements.</p> <p>(e) <u>Providing learning resources and instructional practices which are adaptable and accessible to all students including special education and English Language Learner students:</u> Universal asserts that its learning resources will be fully accessible and adaptable and gives examples of both. There is no information which indicates otherwise. This response meets the requirements.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	6

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

This is a mid range response.

(a) All students have access to content, tools, and learning resources to support implementation of the Applicant's proposal: Universal intends that all of its students will participate in the activities and use the resources created or made available under this grant and Universal's approach to reform. There is no information to indicate otherwise. This includes the placing of several high quality digital teaching devices in every class room during Grant Year 1. Universal plans to make available individual digital learning devices to each of its students during Year 1 with students in Grades 1-3 having access on a two student to one device ratio. Training for student use is not described in detail but appears to be expected to occur in Year 1.

Universal describes an ingenious and thoughtful approach to encouraging its families to obtain Internet access in their homes. It indicates that it will attempt to raise "scholarship" funds to cover the costs for families who cannot afford the private subscription service described. This substantially meets requirements and is strengthened by the novel approach to Internet access.

(b) Students, parents, educators and other stakeholders will have appropriate levels of technical support: Universal shows in various tables as has been discussed elsewhere in these Comments that teachers and students will be given access to the various digital learning and teaching tools in Grant Year 1. The inference is that training will accompany the distribution. Universal adds one sentence here referring to four-times per year training for parents. In the context of the inquiry for information which (b) connotes, this is not a sufficiently detailed response to be regarded as fully meeting the applicable requirements.

(c) The LEA will use technology systems which enable students and parents to export their data to an open data format: Universal provides a one sentence response indicating its intent to accomplish this using grant-funded resources. This response is not in sufficient detail to determine whether Universal's plan is likely to accomplish this goal.

(d) The LEA and participating schools will use interoperable data systems as defined in the Scoring Tool: Universal indicates that the data system to be created with grant resources will be interoperable as described under (d). There is no information indicating otherwise.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

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

(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:

This is a low range response.

Under "(A) Vision," Universal presents its "High Quality Plan to Implement for Meaningful Reform." Universal's three primary reform goals are "Attract and Develop New Teachers and Leaders," "Mathematics and Literacy Education Interventions," and "Build an Interoperable Management System."

Continuous Improvement of "Attract and Develop New Teachers and Leader" Program: Universal's approach is to gather opinions and perceptions of its educators on the quality of its four-year professional development program (UPDC) and its support programs for new and student teachers each of which are key components under this reform goal. Universal will also seek educator opinions on whether the instructional strategies taught in UPDC are showing positive effects on student learning as measured by the MAP assessment program. An "external evaluator" (Evaluator) will gather this information, analyze it, report it according to pertinent time lines, so that the programs can be adjusted according to the feedback.

The weaknesses of this approach are:

- There are 11 activities and 10 deliverables described by Universal under this goal. Time lines for the activities and the associated deliverables vary from one quarter of a year to the duration of the grant—four years. Universal does not provide for any monitoring of progress in implementing the activities or producing the deliverables. Universal does not describe how corrections are to be made or who is responsible for making them.
- The approach to assessing the effect of the development program on educators, the classroom, and student performance is not systematic or comprehensive. The validity of the kinds of opinions and perceptions to be sought are always subject to question, and Universal does not describe a process for bringing quantitative data to bear as a counter weight or buttress to the subjectivity of what is to be collected. In addition Universal does not attempt to describe how what is taught to the educators in UPDC will be linked in a legitimate cause and effect way to what occurs in the classroom or in student performance on the MAP assessments.

Continuous Improvement of "Mathematics and Literacy Education Interventions" Program: Under "(A) Vision," Universal describe five activities and four deliverables under goal. Pertinent time lines vary from two consecutive quarters in the first grant year to all four grant years. Universal does not describe a plan to monitor the implementation of these activities or

the production of associated deliverables.

Continuous Improvement of "Development of Critical Skills and Reducing Achievement Gaps." This rubric appears in Universal's response under (E) (1) and appears to be a relabeling of the goal regarding math and literacy interventions immediately above. Universal summarizes this approach as ensuring students acquire critical literacy and math skills by building personalized math and literacy interventions.

Universal's approach to continuous improvement under this goal is to say that educators will analyze data from the MAP assessments comparing it "school by school, class by class, and year by year," and that educators will compare State summative assessment data to State averages. Educators are also to collect stakeholder opinions on the "process impact and satisfaction with outcomes throughout the reform process and annually to both alert us to necessary mid-course corrections and give us information about year-to-year progress."

On its face this is not a HQP for making ongoing corrections and improvements. Universal does not describe how the information it intends to gather will be linked in a meaningful way to its math and literacy interventions.

Continuous Improvement of Universal's Program for "Building an Interoperable Data System." Universal says that its Director of Technology will gather monthly and quarterly data on educators', students', and parents' use of the components of its various systems. Universal does not how this data will be used to modify or improve the systems and does not set a time line for this purpose. The approach is not a HQP for continuous improvement

Universal does not describe how analyses it makes of the effectiveness of its investments will be made public.

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

5

1

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Universal briefly describes several approaches to communication and engagement—a "RTT-D Advisory Committee" including representatives of potential, external partners, supporters, and other stakeholders, sharing of challenges and outcomes with the "general community," and soliciting "various forms of support." None of the approaches, however, are accompanied by a set of activities, time lines, or deliverables to implement them. That causes the response to be in the low range.

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

5

2

(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

This is a low, mid range response.

Universal presents 12 measures as required. Universal explains that, because virtually all of its students are African-American, high needs, and low income as latter terms are defined, its disaggregation will be by school not student sub-group This is a sensible adaption. Almost every measure presents a significant weakness.

1 & 2. All Students: Highly Effective & Effective Educators:

- Should explain why not using the definitions for effective/highly effective in the Scoring Tool and how Universal's approach is similar or better
- Rational that effective educators enable better student performance is well-established and measure could provide useful formative information.
- Explanation of how measure will be improved is not clear
- Universal projects that less students than comprise the entire enrollment of certain of its schools will be served by an effective/highly effective principal. (See e.g. in SY 2014, there are projected to be 725 students enrolled at UICS and presumably there will be one school principal, but just 15 are projected to be served by a highly effective principal. Presuming only one principal, this projection cannot be correct.) The same mistaken projection appears on multiple occasions in the pertinent tables. This reduces the credibility of the projections regarding principals as well as the credibility of the response.
- The projections for increases of effective/highly effective teachers are achievable but not ambitious.

3. a. PreK-3: Proficient on Grade 3 Reading PSSA:

- Reading as a measure is consistent with reform goals and will provide helpful formative data.
- Explanation of how measure will be improved is not clear.
- Same rate of growth each year calls to question the cumulative, positive effects of the grant.
- Annual targets are achievable and ambitious.

4. b. PreK-3: Age appropriate social emotional skills on Universal Instrument:

- Using a measure of maturity is consistent with reform goals and could provide useful formative information.
- Because all schools have a baseline of 90% and annual projections are for no change, the choice of this instrument to measure the effect of the grant needs additional explanation.
- Annual targets are not ambitious

5. Grades 4-8: 4th Grade Attendance:

- Using attendance as an indicator for intervention is consistent with reform goals and can provide useful formative information.
- Explanation of how measure will be improved is not clear.
- Annual improvement targets are achievable until they rise to 100% attendance by all students in a school and “overall.” Achieving that level of attendance among 378 students over the course of an entire school is not realistic.

6. Grades 4-8: Proficient on Grade 8 PSSA Reading:

- Using reading as a measure is consistent with reform goals and will provide useful formative information.
- Explanation of how measure will be improved is not clear.
- Same rate of growth each year calls to question the cumulative, positive effects of the grant.
- Annual targets are achievable and ambitious.

7. Grades 4-8: Proficient on Grade 8 PSSA Math:

- Using reading as a measure is consistent with reform goals and will provide useful formative information.
- Explanation of how measure will be improved is not clear.
- Same rate of growth each year calls to question the cumulative, positive effects of the grant.
- Annual targets are achievable and ambitious.

8. Grades 9-12: Free Application for Federal Assistance Form Completion:

- Because Applicant's school already achieves 100% and annual projections are for no change, the choice of this measure will not assist in determine the effect of the grant.

9. Grades 9-12: Attendance:

- Using attendance as an indicator for intervention is consistent with reform goals and can provide useful formative information.
- Explanation of how measure will be improved is not clear.
- Annual improvement targets are achievable until they rise to 100% attendance by all students in a school and “overall.” Achieving that level of attendance among 800+ high school students over the course of an entire school year is not realistic.

10. Grades 9-12: Grades 10-12 Students Earning Career Tech Credit:

- Using career tech credit as a measure is consistent with reform goals and could provide useful formative information.
- Explanation of how measure will be improved is not clear.
- Same rate of growth each year calls to question the cumulative, positive effects of the grant.
- Annual targets are achievable and ambitious.

11. Grades 9-12: Proficient on Grade 11 PSSA Reading:

- Using reading as a measure is consistent with reform goals.
- Measuring reading to determine in aggregate what reading level students have attained can provide helpful information to the school. It is not likely, however, to be useful for individual students because there will be little time to proved support, and not clear that student will be motivate to address issue this late in career.
- Explanation of how measure will be improved is not clear.
- Same rate of growth each year calls to question the cumulative, positive effects of the grant.
- Increasing performance by 4 percent in four years is not ambitious.

12. Grades 9-12: Proficient on Grade 11 PSSA Math:

- Using math as a measure is consistent with reform goals.
- Measuring math to determine in aggregate what reading level students have attained can provide helpful information to the school. It is not likely, however, to be useful for individual students because there will be little time to proved support, and not clear that student will be motivate to address issue this late in career.
- Explanation of how measure will be improved is not clear.
- Same rate of growth each year calls to question the cumulative, positive effects of the grant.
- Increasing performance by 3 percent in four years is not ambitious.

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

5

0

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

This is a low range response. It does not appear that Universal chose to respond under (E) (4) because no response was found in its Application.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

This is a medium range response. There are concerns about two large, proposed expenditures because both the rationale and the basis for the calculations are not well explained. There is some concern about the completeness and the practicability of Universal's strategy for sustainability.

(a) Budget for Project: Universal seeks \$10,000,000 in RTTT-D grant funds on a budget of \$1,394,280. In its narrative it says that it will raise the additional \$1,394,280 from "other sources."

(b) Budget is reasonable and sufficient to support the reform proposal: Universal divides its proposal into three goals or projects.

Teacher and Principal Development Project:

- Personnel: The \$90,000 salary plus fringe benefits for the Project Director is consistent with the duty of overseeing the expenditure of \$10 million dollars over four years on a variety of complex activities.
- Travel: \$5000 per trip is proposed for six LEA officials to attend Harvard Turnaround or Principals Institute Six trips are proposed. The costs appear adequately estimated and conference topics are consistent with the goals of Universal's reform proposal.
- Training Stipends:
 - \$1.542 million is proposed to be spent on training stipends for teachers working on non-duty days. The number of teachers, the number of days, the daily stipend are each reasonable The stipends are expected to be the same for each of the four years and to involved the same number of teachers each year. This too is reasonable in light of the nature and content of the anticipated training Materials are calculated at \$ 15 per day for a total of \$100,000 over four years. The entire item appears reasonable and sufficient. The training is aligned with Universal's reform.
 - One-day of mentor training is proposed for three mentors per school for each of the six schools each of the four grant years. The stipends of \$140 per mentor is reasonable and sufficient. Having mentors in the schools is consistent with Universal's reform proposal.
- "Universal Companies Program Management": Universal proposes being paid a fee of \$581,000 at \$145,305 per year for each of the four years of the grant. The fee is for "program leadership, accounting, communications, website design and maintenance, partnership development, inter-agency coordination and support." There is no explanation or discussion of this fee in the narrative. Without this it cannot be determined if this fee is reasonable or sufficient. Proposing to "pay itself" this amount without substantial explanation and justification substantially weakens the proposal.

Math and Literacy Interventions Project:

- Personnel: Universal proposes paying \$75,000 plus fringe benefits per year to one math and one literacy specialist acting as a team at each school. They will coach teachers, co and team-teach, and deliver model lessons. There will be one team per school during each of the four grant years. The salaries for experienced, expert teachers is reasonable. Providing such

coaches is regarded as a sound practice, and it is consistent with Universal's goals for reform.

- Technology:

- Universal proposes to place Promethian Boards, digital white boards with necessary peripherals, and provide training to teachers for their use in every classroom in the LEA. The per classroom cost is estimated to be \$1500. Installation is to be completed during the first Grant Year. This timing and the initiative are both consistent with Universal's goals and implementation plan. The costs appear reasonable.
- Universal proposes to give each student access to a digital tablet. The tablets will be provided during Grant Year 1. The proposal and the timing are both consistent with Universal's reform goals and its implementation plan. The estimate of \$175 per table is reasonable and the total number to be purchased are consistent with providing access to each student and having approximately 100 for replacements/increased enrollment per school is also reasonable.

Funds from Other Sources: Universal proposes to raise additional funds to enable students without Internet access and/or home computers to obtain one or both. It will partner with cable company, Comcast, for both. Comcast will provide one or both at reasonable and/or discounted prices. Universal estimates that about one-third or approximately 1000 of its participating students will be involved. This is a unique and forward-looking solution to the "digital divide" which very frequently handicaps low income students. The projected per pupil costs are reasonable. The monies to be raised could be sufficient, and the proposal is consistent with Universal's reform goals.

Interoperable Data System:

- Personnel: Universal proposes paying \$75,000 plus fringe benefits per year to three 12-month employees to form a "Technology Team." They will provide school-site training, monitor teacher/students use of the data systems, and provide other related support services. They will support all participating schools. The salaries for competent persons performing these duties is reasonable. Providing persons with the requisite expertise to perform these function is regarded as a sound practice, and it is consistent with Universal's goals for reform.
- Contractual: Universal proposes spending about \$38,270 per year or \$193,600 over the course of the grant for a software license for assessment software. It recommends DataDirector. There is nothing in the information provided which leads to questions about the reasonableness or sufficiency of this expenditure. It is consistent with Universal's plan and goals.

Other Contractual: "RTT-D External Evaluator:

- Universal's proposes an allocation of \$250,000 per year for an "external evaluator" This position is provided for in Universal's plan for continuous improvement under (E) of the Application. Universal indicates that the sum was arrived at using a formula which stipulated the cost of the position be 10 percent "of the total Federal investment." Universal does not explain what that formula is appropriate or reasonable. The plan for continuous improvement is weak under the requirements of the Scoring Tool for a high quality plan. The qualifications, duties, level of responsibility, time involved, the tasks to be performed, and other challenges to be met by this person are vaguely described by Universal or not at all. Given the weakness of the plan and the uncertainty regarding these other matters, this expenditure cannot be said to be reasonable. The lack of detail noted and the lack of justification for the formula and the amount proposed substantially weaken the response.

(c) Thoughtful rationale and (i) description of the funds; (ii) identification of funds as one-time or ongoing costs:

The Comments under (b) address the issue of the rationales for expenditures and their sufficiency or

thoughtfulness.

(i) The total expenditure totals \$11,394,280. \$10 million is from RTTT-D funds and the balance of \$1,394,280, from a partnership between Universal and Comcast.

(ii) Expenses related to the Comcast partnership, approximately \$348,600 per year, are on-going. Universal intends that they be raised separately and is not devoting any grant money to these expenses. Expenses for the Technology Team, approximately \$292,500 per year, are on-going. Software license fees for DataDirector or its equivalent, \$38,270 per year, are on-going. The annual on-going expenditures total \$ 409,370.

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

10

1

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

This is a low range response. It appears that Universal's primary strategy for sustaining its project goals is for its staff to become capable of training one another—the “train the trainer” model. Given the concerns Universal expressed about its current staff or educators in its narrative, this is an ambitious goal. It appears likely that beyond the grant years.

Although three elected officials wrote letters of support for Universal's proposal, two of the letters were form letters containing identical wording. The only other letter of support came from the head of a support group. None of the letters suggested future financial support. Other than the intimation that the partnership with Comcast can be sustained, Universal does not suggest in any specific way that there are sources to continue meeting any of the other ongoing expenses it has identified.

Universal does not describe how it will evaluate the effectiveness of past investments or how it will use data to inform future investments. Other than labeling certain expenses as “on-going” as described elsewhere in these Comments, Universal's response does not contain evidence of an estimated budget for the three years after the term of this grant.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	6

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

(1) Coherent and Sustainable Partnership:

This is a mid range response.

Universal presented no discussion of any kind under this rubric. In its Application, however, it appears that Universal engages in one or more partnerships as the term is defined in the Scoring Tool by implementing its Student and Family Resource Center model (SFRC) at every participating school. Because Universal chose not to respond, it does not get full credit for what appears to be a strong approach to meeting the criteria under this "Partnership" criterion.

According to Universal in its response to (A) including its attachment of a SFRC brochure, it implements an SFRC at every school it manages—presumably including each of its participating schools under this Application. Each SFRC is to provide resources directed to the social, emotional, health, economic, and housing needs of each school's students and families.

More particularly, these services include:

- Case management for students at risk and families in need. These include student and family intake assessments, school-based social services, academic interventions and support, counseling at home and/or school, and referrals including that for behavior, health, etc.
- Students at risk of failure are assigned a case manager who assesses the student, identifies issues affecting academic progress, and pursues solutions which can include additional supports for the student's family
- Crisis Intervention: FSRC staff regard lateness, absences, no school uniforms as indicators of the need for support. FSRC staff conduct interviews to determine what the causes of the crisis behaviors are and attempts to address them.
- Support for Positive School Climate and Culture; FSRC staff seek to extend Universal's positive approach to these matters by community outreach, programs, and events.
- FSRC personnel are responsible for external partnerships; “structured communications” with the School, School Advisory Councils, and site based Boards of Trustees; Parent Teacher Associations, etc.; School Hotline and Suggestion Box; Social Network Efforts; school marketing including quarterly newsletters; and positive messaging in the schools.

2. Not more than 10 population level desired results: Universal did not identify population level desired outcomes, although they

can be inferred in general terms from the activities Universal expects its SFRC staff to engage in.

3. (a) Tracking aggregated data: It is likely that the staff keeps records of their contacts and their results which might be turned into aggregate data of the type described under (3) (a).

(b) Use data to target resources: It is highly likely that the FSRC staff do this as expected under (c) to target and improve the services they deliver to the Universal school students and families.

(c) Scale the model: Because there is an FSRC at each Universal school, it can be said that the model has already been scaled.

(d) Improve over time: For the reasons noted under (a) through (c), it is likely that SFRC services have become better for their target families over time.

2. Integrate education and other services: As noted in the descriptions of what FSRC staff do, the activities they orchestrate, and how they are triggered by and linked to the schools, it can be said that the SFRC services already integrated with those of the schools.

3. (a) Assess student's needs and assets: Given the integration of the Centers and the schools and the duties and responsibilities of Center staff, it can be inferred that students assessments are done continually and that supports are provided both to students and their families as a result.

(b) Assess community needs and strengths: Because Universal's primary goal is community development, it can be understood that these assessments are occurring and being improved supports as required under (5) (b).

(c) Engage parents/families in decision making: It can be inferred from all of the above that parents and families are currently engaged in machine decisions about how to improve results over time.

(d) Assess implementation progress: It can be inferred that there is a process whereby clients of FSRC have input on Universal's approach. Based on representations regarding increased enrollment at the participating schools, it appears students and their families are satisfied and/or hopeful and are choosing Universal's schools when the alternative is a Philadelphia School District school.

2. Projected Performance on Selected Measures: Universal did not present such measures. The comment under (d) regarding enrollment might be apropos.

Overall the FSRC partnership with the Universal schools is highly promising. It earns less than full points in the high range because it appears that Universal did not choose to assemble the response projected on them in these Comments but instead provided no formal response and because there are no formal Performance Measures and performance targets.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Not Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

Universal's Vision is one of comprehensive community development for urban, predominantly African-American, impoverished communities with its schools as the cornerstone. The most clear and cohesive component of Universal's Vision is one of comprehensive community development with the precursors to major in-school reform addressed before matters of curriculum, instruction, personalization, and data infrastructure are addressed. Thus Universal begins by engaging the community regarding the needs of children to be safe, nourished, and ultimately well-educated and for the adult community to commit strongly to responsibility for its school's academic success. The initial steps also include seeking staff's commitment to the Universal Vision, making tangible improvements to the physical environment of the school, and establishing a Student and Family Resource Center (SFRC) which provides resources directed to the social, emotional, health, economic, and housing needs of each school's students and families.

Universal has operated one of its schools since 1993 and the other five for just one to two years. Possibly as a consequence, the amount of work which Universal has done in the four core assurance areas is less than substantial. Universal's schools are just beginning to align their curricula with college and career ready standards, and work on aligning assessments is also in the beginning stages. Universal characterizes the learning resources many of its teachers have been using as inadequate and the teaching methods as consisting too much in "teaching to the test." Teacher generated assessments are not typically aligned with college and

career readiness standards, and it is if and when this grant is awarded that Universal will be able to enhance a new data platform to produce formative assessments aligned with these standards. Current professional development involves the basic work of introducing instructing to rigorous standards in math and literacy.

Universal's record in turning around schools is slender. All Universal's schools are low performing. Progress at the high school Universal has taken over has taken the form of its coming off the State's most persistently dangerous list. Two other schools previously in NCLB Corrective Action made "AYP" in their second years under Universal. Performance at other of Universal's schools on State assessments is improving but the improvements thus far remain below the "proficient" level. The students in the school which Universal has operated since 1993 are still scoring substantially below the State wide averages on summative assessments.

Universal's plan for personalization is presented in a table describing 18 activities. Just three of them will directly affect students. There is nothing in Universal's plan beyond the distribution of digital tools (which could but do not necessarily require personalization strategies to be useful) to indicate that Universal has a model for personalization as it will be practiced in its schools. Substantiating this is Universal's description of how classrooms will look as a result of grant implementation. The description emphasizes the ameliorated conditions precedent to successful teaching with most of the detail presented describing the roles played by support personnel.

Universal's plan puts more emphasis on recruiting new teachers, supporting their introduction to and inducing them to continue to work in high needs schools through the employment of multi-year mentors, coaching teams, and data technicians. Given the state of its schools and the capacities of its teachers as described by Universal, it is consistent with the portrait Universal paints of its schools and staff to focus first on invigorating them with new faculty before using the professional development funded by this grant to provide new teachers and those willing to commit to Universal's vision with the knowledge and skills to pursue personalization.

Universal's approach to professional development for the implementation of personalized learning environments is general and lacks detail. Essentially, Universal proposes to wait until this grant is funded before conducting needs assessments among its educators and, then, formulating the substance of its professional development plan. As noted Universal is yet in the process rather than having completed the work of aligning its curricula with core standards and college/career readiness. Regarding plan implementation, it must be noted that Universal's approach to monitoring progress and making continuous improvement is weak.

Given these factors, what is most likely to occur as a result of funding Universal's proposal is not that personalization will occur in large measure and student performance increase substantially but that Universal's teachers will become equipped to with stand the realities of urban, high needs education and feel better able to cope. Such an outcome is supported by the levels of student achievement and performance Universal has targeted or predicted its students will be capable of during and at the end of the grant. The anticipated rates of growth are modest, flat in the sense that they do not accelerate as they might were the grant to have a substantial and intensifying impact, and the final, post-grant results are often predicted to leave intact substantial gaps between Universal's students and those against whom they must be compared under the requirements of the Scoring Tool. Regarding graduation and college enrollment rates for its one high school, Universal says that it has been in charge too short a time and there is insufficient data for it to set any targets for improvement or predict any measureable outcomes.

The conclusion that is most comfortably reached regarding this application is that Universal's work with its educators and schools is not at a stage where the proposed grant will result in the achievement the goals it is designed to attain. More work in the four core assurance areas must be done. More teachers able and committed to working in Universal's school must be found, and more detailed planning focused on actual personalization strategies be presented before it can be concluded as required that an investment in Universal's proposal will indeed accelerate and deepen student learning in areas aligned with college and career readiness because Universal's educators developed and employed an array of well-designed and effective personalized learning environments. The Absolute Priority 1 is not met by this proposal.



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0204PA-3 for Universal Institute Charter School

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	4
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant describes a vision that sounds promising, but lacks specific details in order to understand exactly how teaching and learning will be different within these schools. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The figure at the beginning of the application is a good metaphor for much of the application. All of the key stakeholders and processes are represented here, such as families and communities, school leaders, students, etc., with arrows showing that they are supposed to be interacting and showing the obvious that high achieving schools result from an interaction with leaders, teachers, and community persons. However, there is no explanation of what actually will happen in these interactions. In effect, the figure tells us nothing about the proposed vision and what will actually happen. - On p. 19, the applicant discusses establishing student and family resource centers, and claim these will respond to families' health, social, and emotional needs. This is a big claim, but the applicant gives no information about how this will be accomplished, or what the specific needs are that would be addressed. The applicant then mentions issues related to housing, food, job training, etc. and again gives no specifics except a brief advertising brochure in the appendix. - On p. 20, the applicant discusses creating a professional development collaborative with university partners, which sounds like a very useful project and a smart way to recruit and also develop effective teachers and principals, but again there are few specific details about how this collaborative would function or how the "internal leadership pipeline" would be developed and what this would mean for actual teachers. - The applicant mentions developing an interoperable data management system, but with no specifics as to how this will be done. In fact, in the budget, only the money for hiring technical staff to train and support educators in using the system is mentioned, and nothing on how to actually build the system. - Another example is that the applicant proposes purchasing tablets and promethean boards for every classroom, but without any discussion about how they would be used, showing a lack of thought as to actual implementation of the vision, which was characteristic of this application. For instance, both tablets and promethean boards are tactile technologies and largely accomplish the same goals, so a rationale for needing both would be necessary. <p>There were several strengths of the proposed vision, mostly in the goals proposed, although not in the specifics about implementation. For example, a strength is the emphasis on building communities and attending to students' extracurricular needs, which the applicant identifies as being essential to enabling students to be able to focus and be successful in schools. To this end, the applicant proposes comprehensive community development as part of its vision, which is a solid goal. In addition, the partnership with local universities is a solid one, and the proposed teaching simulation program could be very beneficial for developing new teacher candidates into effective teachers. Another strength of this collaborative is their strong focus on turning around and assisting the lowest-achieving schools, which has been their history and mission as a charter organization already, and one that there is some evidence they are accomplishing. The collaborative has also adopted standards and assessments linked to college success and linked to the common core and managed through an online data system.</p> <p>In short, the applicant proposed a vision that seemed like it could be viable and spoke to the core assurance areas, but lacked the specifics to fully understand how things would be implemented and what personalized learning and teaching would look like every day.</p>		

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

The applicant made easy choices for which schools and students would participate by including all of the schools and students under Universal's management, which is appropriate because these schools have very challenging student demographics, and Universal reports nearly 100% of the students are at-risk. Because of this, Universal does not differentiate between the students, but treats them homogeneously. The LEA provides information on the schools participating and the total number of participating students, including students from high need, low income, and minority groups, which is nearly all of the students.

A weakness of the applicant's approach to implementation is the lack of detail on specifically how implementation will occur, as discussed in my previous comment. Here are a few more examples of this lack of specificity:

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	4
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(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

As defined by the Race to the Top application, a high quality plan includes goals, activities, timelines, deliverables, and parties responsible. In this application, there are some elements of a high quality plan. For example, there are many goals that are worthy and important, such as improvement in math and literacy as a foundation to educational success, community-building as a way to create safe learning environments, etc. Rationale is discussed broadly for these goals, and broad timelines are provided for which key administrator is responsible each year for accomplishing the tasks. However, specifics were not given for actual implementation, creating doubt that the applicant's plan can create real reform. Here are a few examples:

-- On p. 26, the applicant says it will strengthen principal leadership skills, which is important, but no detail is given to how this will be done.

-- On p. 32, it is explained that teachers will be given access to powerful assessment and teaching technologies. Access is important, but nearly always insufficient without training on the pedagogy for using the tools. The specifics on whether this pedagogical training would occur, and what it would be, is absent from the application.

-- Illuminating, perhaps, is the table beginning on p. 36 where the applicant is supposed to articulate their logic model for action. Instead of providing actionable goals that are specific and measurable, broad desirables such as "literacy integrated into every discipline" and "students will improve their ability to read and comprehend technical material."

In short, there are timelines, parties, and goals, but the plan lacks specific details in these areas.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	3
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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has a track record of previous success, and this generates confidence that they would continue to have success moving forward. In general, the applicant has good goals in important areas to continue this upward trajectory, such as goals for improved literacy and math performance, as well as in behavioral and social/emotional areas, which are important for this school district's vision. The applicant did provide goals for performance on most summative assessments, and for decreasing gaps. However, there are several missing links and flawed logic in some of the goals leading them to not be as ambitious as might be expected. For example, while the LEA explains that they have just recently assumed ownership of schools servicing grades 9-12, and thus have no baseline graduation data, this is not entirely accurate, as the school was in existence and they could use the baseline data from before, when under previous leadership. Regardless, the lack of previous graduation rate data should not preclude the LEA from setting ambitious yet achievable graduation and college enrollment goals going forward. In fact, it was curious that in section A4 of the application the LEA lists no goals in the area of graduation and college readiness/attendance, and then in the performance measures section, they did! In that section they listed the goals that students would earn credit in a career technical course (93% by the end of the granting period), be on track for college (100%), and complete FAFSA forms as a proxy for desired college attendance (100%).

So the problem then becomes: 1) the LEA doesn't seem to know whether it does or doesn't have goals in these areas, as the information is contradictory and 2) the goals the LEA does list in the performance measures seem too ambitious, and thus not likely to be achievable. For example, an LEA where only 10% of students in 2011-2012 were proficient in math in 11th grade would not normally be expected to have 100% success in having all students attend college.

The problem is the reverse for many of the goals listed in section A4. What I mean is that the goals are not ambitious enough. The LEA explains that they will seek to raise scores by 5% each year, but when the scores are already so low,

this means annual improvement of sometimes just 1 or 2% on a particular assessment. It seems like a different way of creating goals would be more appropriate in this situation.

The score reflects that the applicant provided some goals, with some being more ambitious yet achievable than others, and conflicting statements about goals for graduation rates and college enrollment.

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

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	10
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The applicant has had some success in taking ownership over some of the most challenging schools and turning them around. This is to be commended. With a challenging demographic in their first school (85% of students qualifying for reduced school lunch), the LEA reformed the school and for the last 9 years this school has met or exceeded AYP standards for student performance on assessments (because the LEA has only recently taken over most of the schools in the collaborative, the LEA does not provide data on improving graduate and college rates, nor would this be expected as yet). However achievement gaps still remain for this school, indicating that more improvement is needed.</p> <p>Since the LEA has assumed control of other schools, they have had some similar success in making some initial improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- EM Stanton was recognized as one of the state's top turnaround schools in 2007 and a top 10 school in PA for improved 6th grade performance (2008). However, we are not told what the criteria is for giving these awards, and Stanton appears not to have been included as one of the schools for this RTT reform initiative, and this is not explained. -- Edwin Vare Middle School has drastically decreased failing performances in math and reading -- Two schools that the LEA took control of in 2010 had needed corrective action for two years because of failures to meet AYP, but in 2011-2012 both did make AYP. -- The LEA has impressive success in improving attendance and decreasing behavioral issues, which will also likely lead to improved academic performance. <p>Despite these successes, there were a few areas of concern. First, Vare, Audenried, and Creighton are still not making AYP. It is acknowledged that the LEA assumed control of these schools only in the last couple of years, so improvement may be forthcoming. But as yet, there has not been noticeable improvement towards AYP. Second, the LEA makes student performance data available four times a year on report cards and also in monthly board meetings, and it is mentioned that teachers will have "rapid" access to data for "immediately" adjusting their lesson plans, but it is not explicitly clear whether the data is as immediately available to parents and students.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	3
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The LEA has been transparent in their budgets by having school board meetings for each school where the budget is shared, including expenditures for actual personnel salaries at the school level, as well as non-personel expenditures. These meetings are open to the public. However, it is unclear how often these meetings are held, how well they are advertised and attended, and whether and in what ways the budgetary data is made public after the meeting (for example, via a website). Thus, while the budget information may be public via these meetings, it is unclear how well the public knows and can really access the information.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	5
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The LEA appears to have this autonomy, but does not really demonstrate <i>evidence</i> of this autonomy in sufficient detail to provide assurance. Three sentences are all that is provided. So while the LEA operates under PA charter school laws, we are not sure what these laws really are and what freedoms PA gives to Universal in its charter school management. We see some evidence of autonomy throughout the application through mention of school uniforms, hiring policies, etc., but</p>		

there is simply not enough detail provided to know how much autonomy and in what areas Universal has. In addition, there are not many letters of support from the state and community level, and the letters provided (for example, the mayor's letter) are not explicit either. Letters of support are often that way, so that's not surprising, but without explicit detail in these letters about the nature of the autonomy granted, this would need to be more explicit in the application itself.

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

15

4

(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

It is unclear how much support the LEA has. Positively, the LEA held meetings to discuss and develop buy-in with the teachers, parents, and principals. On the one hand, the LEA has signatures from dozens of teachers pledging support, but it is not clear what they are pledging support about specifically. Similarly, there is a letter of support from the president of the parents' organization, but it seems generic and again, not clear what they are specifically supporting other than carte blanche supporting the Universal group. This is similarly true for other stakeholders such as the mayor. Noticeably absent is data about the support from the university partners, community (especially important if the LEA is planning to rebuild neighborhoods, as they will need partners to accomplish this, and other civic groups). The applicant does not discuss how they used information from the meeting to develop the proposal specifically, although it is mentioned that these meetings were held. The applicant does not discuss meeting with students to engage them in the process.

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

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	7

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

As mentioned previously, the applicant makes mention of many of these criteria, but without specifics, leaving us unsure what exactly the plan is that they are proposing to implement. In this way, the applicant does not demonstrate evidence of a "high quality plan." Here are some examples:

--- The LEA explains they will have an annual goal-setting conference with students and parents, which is a good idea. However, we do not know what will happen in that conference, what types of goals will be set, and how those goals will actually inform the teaching and learning.

--- On p. 73, the applicant states they will allow teachers flexibility in the timing and type of assignments. This is very important, but without specifics can be hollow, as educational systems for years have said they will give teachers flexibility, but often without real reform in actual pedagogical and leadership practices.

--- On p. 73 it is also mentioned that they will use a blended learning approach, but there are many kinds of blended learning, and there are no details on what the actual strategies and activities will be like.

--- On p. 74, it is mentioned that teachers will map instructional intervention strategies using Compass Learning Odyssey, but it is still not known what kinds of intervention strategies these are, how they will be mapped, and how this will change practice.

--- On p. 75 a description of a typical activity for students to promote deep learning is explained as one where students will "produce a project that organizes and integrates information from a variety of sources, relates previous knowledge to new knowledge, and applies that knowledge to an everyday experience. Students will be encouraged to employ a wide range of tools ..." This is pretty vague, and does not tell us what kind of new learning the students will do as this description can describe most assignments. This leaves us wondering what the real reforms and improvements to the learning process are.

--- On p. 76, the applicant says, "soft skills, character lessons are seamlessly woven into academic lessons constantly." This again could represent almost any educational system, and it does not provide the specific details to understand the LEA's vision.

--- The plan to have multiple data points and the use of Powerschools is a good one (p. 78), but it is unclear how Compass Learning Odyssey will "translate the raw data into actionable plans" for student learning.

Also, absent are details on what mechanisms would be in place to train and support students in using the tools and resources provided to them, although there is a part of the budget set aside for hiring this support personnel.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	6
(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>As mentioned previously, there were elements of the criteria mentioned in the application and several good ideas, but many questions remaining because of the lack of specific details.</p> <p>(a) The applicant has good ideas for developing teachers and leaders through an internal leadership pipeline, where they will place excellent candidates in positions for gradual leadership accompanied by mentoring to develop their skills. In addition, the LEA will implement a two-year teacher/mentor program where trained mentors will provide support to teachers, and a teaching simulation program where teacher candidates can develop their skills prior to being hired.</p> <p>They will also convene teachers by subject matter and grade level throughout the year to collaborate on standardized assessments and the data from these assessments in the DataDirector program. School leaders will also conduct biweekly observations of every teacher in their building to provide feedback on how they may improve, which is an ambitious goal.</p> <p>(b) The applicant did a good job of discussing frequent data points and opportunities for parents, students, and teachers to make decisions based on data; and mention was made of school-level professional learning communities for assisting teachers in developing teaching strategies. DataDirector and CompassLearning Odyssey seem like strong tools for taking raw student data and developing this into student growth plans, although the specifics about how this would happen and what these growth plans would look like is not shared.</p> <p>(c) Similarly, what was really missing were specifics on how the teacher and learning would be adapted, based on the data, to each student's needs.</p> <p>(d) Also, no mention was made of processes, systems, and strategies for evaluating teacher and principal effectiveness, and feeding this data back to the educational professionals. There are some goals presented for increasing the number of students who receive instruction from effective and highly effective teachers and principals, but no information is given about what the processes would be for attaining these goals.</p> <p>What is also lacking are explicit details about the timeline, deliverables, and parties responsible for implementing various activities, which would be needed to constitute a high quality plan.</p>		

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, and rules (15 points)	15	4
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The applicant outlines some answers to these criteria, although more detail is necessary to understand the full plan.</p> <p>(a and b) The LEA is organized well with a central office, since it is a Charter network, and individual school leadership teams who have autonomy over staffing and decisions regarding budgets. The LEA central office maintains some staff (although not explained in specific detail) that provide some services to the participating schools. However, little information is provided about the LEA central office governance structure other than to say they exist and that there is a board composed of parents and community stakeholders, with no information about what this board does.</p> <p>(c) It is mentioned that students can pursue AP class credits and dual enrollment at local university partners, which will allow students some autonomy to earn college credit based on demonstrated mastery (passing of AP tests), but not high school credit.</p> <p>(d) There is little information provided about how students would be able to progress based on mastery and have learning materials that are adapted to their needs and interests, other than stating that they will give oral and written presentations, and complete projects and assessments.</p> <p>(e) Some strategies are explained for providing adaptable learning opportunities for students with specific needs, such as adjusting the environment/setting with preferential seating and assessments in other locations without distractions, extended time to finish to finish tasks, and opportunities for "individualized instruction," which is not discussed further.</p> <p>Overall, the applicant does not provide a high quality plan, however, with explicit timelines, deliverables, and parties responsible for accomplishing these activities and progressing towards achieving goals.</p>		

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	5
(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The applicant recognizes that for technology to play a part in the reform process, that students need broadband access at home, and they have partnered with Comcast to deliver broadband to students that need it. This is an excellent idea, but it was unclear how the LEA would determine who needed this help, and how exactly they would fund and support this initiative (they mention fundraising to fund scholarships, but details are scarce). The budget does mention hiring staff to support training of technological infrastructure, but it is unsure how they will do this. Mention is made of four training sessions throughout the year for parents, but not what will be taught specifically at those sessions. The only thing the applicant says for criteria c is "With RTT-D support, we will be able to build this capacity." In other words, they do not seem to have a plan as yet, and the plan is certainly not as yet of high quality as there is no mention of specific timelines, deliverables, or parties responsible for carrying out these activities and only limited rationale for the activities themselves, leaving us to assume the part they play in the LEA's vision. Neither do they appear to have a plan for interoperability, as it is mentioned, but not discussed at any length.</p>		

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	4
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>It seemed that instead of proposing a plan for the LEA to continuously improve the LEA's strategies and processes, the LEA reiterated their plan, without many specifics, for improvement within the schools themselves---in other words, restating their plan already mentioned in the proposal. This plan itself is not described in sufficient detail to be high quality. Some aspects of a high quality plan are there, as they will develop the Universal Professional Development Collaborative to be responsible for teacher development, and various officials at the LEA level are assigned responsibility for continuous improvement. However, most of the ideas are presented broadly without specific timelines, deliverables, and parties responsible for the activities, nor a fine-grained discussion of the specific activities themselves.</p> <p>Still some ideas were presented such as teacher/leader feedback on training (without specific details) and stakeholder interviews (without specifics). Sufficient money is set aside for hiring an external evaluator, but there is no plan for what this evaluator will do or how it will interact with the LEA. The LEA proposes creating an RTT advisory board to meet quarterly over the course of the grant, which is a good idea, although it is not sure what this board will do.</p> <p>The LEA also mentions curious ideas in this section, such as a social media campaign, which I could not tell how that would be related to continuous improvement.</p>		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	3
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The LEA proposes forming an advisory board of community, government, foundation, and higher education representatives to share insights and receive input and feedback four times a year. This seems like a good idea, although we're not told what specifically this board will do beyond this. Mention is also made of creating a website that will share project progress, which is an excellent idea, but again without details about what would be on the website. In short, the applicant has done well to identify the party who will be responsible for carrying out this part of their plan, along with a timeline (they will meet quarterly), and a few of the activities they will engage in, although more information and specific details on how they will engage with the external stakeholders is important, and especially the internal stakeholders.</p>		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	3
(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:		
<p>The LEA proposes mostly adequate measures, although some measures the LEA will develop themselves (such as a socio/emotional indicator and teacher/leader performance evaluation metric). There are no details provided on these assessment measures that will be developed or on the process for developing and validating them, leaving little confidence that these measures will be of high quality without understand the validation measures that will be used. The same is true of the measure for students to report high levels of meaningful participation in school, which is an ambiguous goal.</p>		

Other than these measures that will be developed by the LEA itself, the LEA has selected other measures that are strong indicators towards successfully accomplishing the LEA's goals, including state standardized assessments, attendance rates, FAFSA form completion, and credit earned in Career Technical Education Courses. For each measure, the LEA articulates the rationale for the measure and how they will review the effectiveness of the measure.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	2
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(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

E4 is not discussed in the application directly, although in other sections the applicant mentions hiring an external evaluator, and sufficient funds are set aside to do so. Some mention is made in other sections about plans for surveying teachers and leaders about the professional development provided, and interviewing stakeholders about the RTT project's success, but there are few details provided. In other words, the plan for evaluating the effectiveness of the investments is not a high quality one, as we lack details on who the specific responsible persons will be, and what activities this person will do to conduct the evaluation.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

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

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant does a good job of delineating the budget, identifying what funds would be provided by RTT grant money, and what other money will be contributed by the LEA through other methods. The funds seem appropriate in most cases for what is described in the narrative for the most part, although there are some items in the budget (such as staff to train and support implementation of technologies) that are not discussed in the narrative, but would be good ideas. Many items in the budget reflect thoughtful uses of funds, including a partnership with Comcast to increase access for students to internet technologies at home, and math/literacy specialists to provide differentiated instruction.

One aspect of the budget that is worrisome is the amount dedicated to external evaluation, which seems excessive (\$1 million). In addition, the need to purchase Smartboards is not clearly articulated, including how this technology will accomplish the LEA's goals. Also, it is worrisome that money is expended or otherwise accounted for in year one to purchase tablets, but no money is set aside for replacing those tablets over the course of the grant as needed.

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

The applicant mentions using a train-the-trainer model to improve sustainability after the grant ends. However, no other details are given, and no budget is presented for maintaining the project post-RTT. This is especially concerning in the case of the technologies, in particular the tablets, which will age and need to be replaced.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	3

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant did not address the competitive preference directly, making it difficult to ascertain the full response to this criteria. The applicant does have a strong system for providing supports to students and families in developing their social, emotional, and familial needs through the Student Family Resource Centers (SFRCs). These centers are created anywhere this charter organization takes over a new school, and involves a partnership between service providers, the community, and the school system. The centers provide information on job training, housing, and other social services while also directly providing training related to social and family issues, and the centers represent the LEA's belief that in order for students to succeed, they must have their social, emotional, and physical needs taken care of at home.

While these centers sound like a good idea, there is not a lot of information provided about how they actually work. For example, population-level results are not identified, nor how the centers track their performance over time, nor directly how

the centers build capacity of staff in participating schools. The score reflects that the LEA has a good idea, and good community and social partnerships, but that these ideas are not fully described in the application.

Absolute Priority 1: Personalized Learning Environments

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1		Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant discusses the core areas and ideas for creating personalized learning environments, and also has a track record of some success in turning around challenging schools. The applicant's ideas in this proposal will likely contribute to improved learning and some personalization of strategies for students through frequent conversations between teachers and students about progress data and an enhanced emphasis on college readiness and enrollment. The applicant has a good emphasis on teacher professional development, and on recruiting and developing effective teachers through teacher simulation, the teacher leadership pipeline, and collaborations with local higher education institutions.

The main problem with this application was the lack of specific details. It is difficult to judge whether these lack of details constitute the applicant not having a coherent and comprehensive proposal. In the end, the applicant appears to have met absolute priority because their vision---though short on specifics---does address the absolute priority.

Total	210	88
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