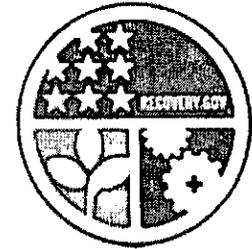




Race to the Top

Technical Review Form - Tier 1

Alabama Application #1000AL3



A. State Success Factors

	Available	Tier 1
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it	65	18
(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda	5	2
(ii) Securing LEA commitment	45	12
(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact	15	4
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(i) First Choice, the reform agenda, is shaped around many initiatives. The education areas are addressed in the body of the application. They are not addressed in a way that showed connections among the parts. The plan lacked coherence. (ii) 113 of 132(98%of LEAs, 89% of schools, 90% of students, 89% poverty) districts signed on. Signatures were obtained from all superintendents and board presidents. 108 union leaders signed on. Though the four education areas are not specifically mentioned in section A(i) all but 102 districts agreed to implement all of the plan. 98% agreed to implement a significant amount of the four education areas. Summary Table for (A)(1)(ii)(c) The scope-of-work requires the participating LEAs to implement significant portions of the plan. The letter from the state teachers union raised questions about the actual intent to implement all parts of the plan. It was not clear that the local union signatures intended full support. It appears that key areas of the plan may be eliminated. (iii) Alabama's NAEP data was mixed. For the most part scores increased. However there are several instances where the scores remained the same or went down. The data was provided in appendices for the A sections. The graduation rate showed a modest increase. Given the letter from the state teachers union, it appears that key items in the reform agenda may be eliminated. The achievement goals were not delineated.</p>		
(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	30	14
(i) Ensuring the capacity to implement	20	10
(ii) Using broad stakeholder support	10	4
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(i)The oversight of RTT has been charged to the Deputy State Superintendent who will oversee teams at the state level and in participating LEAs to implement and evaluate the plan. The colleges and universities will develop regional centers that will provide support to districts. No detail is given about how this shift will happen. No information was provided to know if the colleges and universities have the experience or capacity to do this work. The administration of the grant will rest in the Deputy Sate Superintendent's Office. Very little was said about budget expectations beyond the grant. (ii)The application provided letters of support from higher education, the inservice centers and the state teachers union. There was no letter of support from the principals, parents, the business community, community based organizations, legislative leadership, charter organizations, or the philanthropic community.</p>		

(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps	30	23
(i) Making progress in each reform area	5	5
(ii) Improving student outcomes	25	18
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments: (i)Alabama provided information to show some progress in each of the reform areas. (ii) Information was provided in the Section A Appendices that demonstrates that overall progress has been made in ELA and math on the NAEP and state assessments. The graduation rate has increased. Evidence was provided of continued student growth. However, it should be noted that the 7th grade seems to underperform other grades in math. No mention was made of this. A(3)(ii) The target for improving the graduation rate seems low, given that there are schools with less than a 70% graduation rate.</p>		
Total	125	55

B. Standards and Assessments

	Available	Tier 1
(B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards	40	40
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality standards	20	20
(ii) Adopting standards	20	20
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: (i)Alabama is a member of Achieve's American Diploma Project, which is an initiative of 35 states in using a set of college and career readiness benchmarks. Alabama is a member of the Common Core Standards Initiative, a consortium of 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia. The Initiative is coordinated by the National Governors Association and the Council for Chief State School Officers. The standards that are being developed will be internationally benchmarked. The SBE will need to waive the 3-year adoption process to adopt the common core standards. There is a plan in place to move forward quickly. B(1)(i) The Common Core standards may be supplemented. (ii) The process for reviewing and implementing the standards includes a recommendation to the State Board of Education for adoption by August 12, 2010.</p>		
(B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments	10	10
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: (i)(ii)Alabama is a member of the American Diploma Project that is developing assessments that will be aligned with the Common core Standards. There are 35 states engaged with the American Diploma Project. They are a member of other consortia that are comprised of a majority of states. Information is provided in the B Appendices. Mention was made of the other national assessments that are being used. They are not directly tied to state standards.</p>		
(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	20	17
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: There is a clear plan to assist LEAs & schools in using the new standards once adopted. The model is a train-the-trainer model that will be regional in structure. The new regional centers will be developed in partnership with the colleges & universities. The centers will be charged with providing support to the schools and LEAs. RTT money will be used to train Master Teachers to support teachers in the transition and engage teachers in designing curricula. Principals will be invited to participate in a network to increase their understanding of data and its uses. Teacher leaders will be invited to</p>		

participate as well. Alabama will build on two coaching initiatives already in place to support the transition-- Alabama's Math, Science, and Technology Initiative and the Alabama Reading Initiative. No detail was given about the professional development that will be used. The state will support LEAs & schools through distance learning.

Total	70	67
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C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

	Available	Tier 1
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	24	16
(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: The state has the beginning of a longitudinal data system that meets 8 of the 12 elements in America COMPETES. An explanation was provided for how they comply and what they plan to do for the 4 missing elements. They have applied for grant money to complete the system.		
(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	5	5
(C)(2) Reviewer Comments: There is a data system in place that is used by all LEAS. Alabama's current data system has the 10 elements of the Data Quality Campaign Initiative. They have applied for federal money to add the 4 missing elements from America COMPETES. One of the goals in developing the system is to provide data that is accessible and useful to a variety of end users.		
(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	18	9
(C)(3) Reviewer Comments: There is a data system in place that is used by all LEAS. C(3) (i)(ii) The state will use the newly formed Regional service centers to deliver training that will focus on using the data system itself and using the data to make professional development and instructional decisions. The process will be a train-the-trainer model. This process will be overseen by a state-level director and lead trainers in each of the regional service centers. There will be district level trainers who will be certified in one of the two foci. It is not clear why the training pilot will occur until 4th quarter 2011. (9 pts) (iii) The state will build on their university partnerships to engage researchers in using the data to evaluate effectiveness of materials, strategies, etc. The state is developing ASCEND, a data system to tie together data from various state agencies. It is not ready yet. Further, the state did not talk about researchers using the data system to evaluate effectiveness of materials, strategies, etc. (0 pts)		
Total	47	30

D. Great Teachers and Leaders

	Available	Tier 1
(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals	21	12
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: (i)The state has the legal authority to allow alternative routes that do not have to be connected to IHEs. It is not clear that there is an alternative program for principals. (4pts) (ii)There are several pathways that meet the 5 elements required by the grant. The alternative routes seem to be limited to temporary certification. STEM subjects are mentioned specifically among the areas of need for which there are alternative routes. (4pts) (iii)The application notes the current areas of shortage, but does not mention how shortages are determined. The state has several methods for filling areas of need such as ATRIP,		

a scholarship program that supports students entering education programs in areas of need. No mention was made of filling leadership shortages. (4pt)

(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	58	48
(i) Measuring student growth	5	5
(ii) Developing evaluation systems	15	15
(iii) Conducting annual evaluations	10	0
(iv) Using evaluations to inform key decisions	28	28

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

(i)The state plans to work with their university partners and outside contractors to develop a student growth measure. There will be professional development to assist teachers and principals in using student growth data in decision-making. (ii) A new principal evaluation instrument will be introduced in the 2010 school year. The evaluation system is a component in the broad overhaul of principal preparation and support that came from the Governor's 2004 Congress on School Leadership. The state is in a process of completing a new teacher evaluation system that is an outcome of the Governor's 2006 Commission on Quality Teaching. Both will include student growth data that will be available from the longitudinal data system. Teachers and principals were involved in these committees. The use of student growth and details were found in D (2)(iii) (iii) It was not specified that evaluations were annual. (iv) The evaluation will be used to inform decisions about the development, compensation, promotion, and retention of employees.

(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals	25	9
(i) Ensuring equitable distribution in high-poverty or high-minority schools	15	7
(ii) Ensuring equitable distribution in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas	10	2

(D)(3) Reviewer Comments:

(i)The state has an incentive program(ATRIP) to encourage teachers to gain the skills & knowledge to teach in shortage areas. The leadership shortage will be handled by scaling the Educational Leadership Network. This item along with redesigning teacher preparation programs was found in the timeline and activities chart. Neither was included in the narrative. The state did not provide its definition of high-poverty and/or high-minority schools. (ii)The state will use distance learning (ACCESS)to provide access to subjects where there is a shortage. They will scale ATRIP and develop alternative pathways for teachers in hard to staff subjects. Additional approaches are not mentioned. No evidence is provided that distance learning will meet the needs of all students. Other than ATRIP, the incentive to enter a shortage area was not apparent.

(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	14	11
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(D)(4) Reviewer Comments:

(i)In 2004 the Governor convened the Congress on School Leadership, which recommended expectations for leaders' performance and their development. In response the SBE required all principal preparation programs to go through a redesign process to focus on instructional leadership. The university programs were not automatically approved. Those that did not meet the recommendations had to make the adjustments or be closed. A similar process happened for teachers. The longitudinal data system will begin to track student growth and teacher/principal preparation programs. RTT money will be used to revamp the longitudinal data system. (ii)The best practices of successful programs will be shared with others in the state. The state will create a best practices repository. Discussion will be held with participants of those programs and information learned will be shared with weak programs to assist them in improving. Programs that do not improve will be shut down. No mention was made about public reporting. A principal residency program will begin in fall of 2010. It will serve as a place for mentorship. The program is based on the NAESP

National Mentoring Program. The state is considering a residency program for teachers, no start date was mentioned.		
(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals	20	15
<p>(D)(5) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(i)The state is developing a dashboard of info to support teachers and principals in decision-making. Professional development will be provided to assist principals in using current technological tools for decision-making. Teachers will be given training in using the dashboard and in using technology to support student's learning. (10 pts) (ii)The state will develop a system with benchmarks to evaluate the effectiveness of the support. The state will report the findings of these evaluations to the public. It is not clear what will happen once reported to help improve effectiveness. (5pts)</p>		
Total	138	95

E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

	Available	Tier 1
(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs	10	10
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: The SBE has the right to intervene in LEAs & schools.</p>		
(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	40	15
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	0
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	15
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(i)The application made the following statement. "Alabama's persistently low-performing schools will be defined in conjunction with those identified through the 1003g School Improvement grant." The appendix that was referenced in the application provides data on schools that do not make AYP. It does not provide information on identifying the lowest performing schools. (ii)The state is aware of the 4 models, but has found that the transformation model works best in its schools. It appears that this is the only model it will use in its schools. They have an achievable plan to support schools in the transformation process. They do not have a contingency plan if there is an LEA with 9 lowest-performing schools. The activities in the timeline are not addressed in the narrative.</p>		
Total	50	25

F. General

	Available	Tier 1
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	0
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>(i)Education funding is tied directly to the sales tax, which has decreased. LEAs do benefit from the property tax. The budget presented in Appendix F shows a reduction in actual dollars and a reduction in the percentage of the state budget going to education. (ii) No mention was made about equitable funding.</p>		
(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	2

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:		
(i)The state does not have a charter school law. They are working with the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools to design a law. Legislation will be introduced in 2010. Items in (ii)(iii)(iv) are not applicable. (v)The state has supported the development of magnet schools that are STEM or arts focused. They appear to be theme schools, not schools that have been given autonomy in the same sense of a charter school. It was mentioned that there are two schools that have their own governance structures and boards. The application does not provide information on the powers of the Boards.		
(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	5
(F)(3) Reviewer Comments:		
The state has put resources into a focus on STEM and college readiness. There wasn't much said in this section beyond comments on the move away from Carnegie units in the high school. Other reforms that were mentioned in the introduction were not commented in this section.		
Total	55	7

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	15	15
Competitive Reviewer Comments:		
A commitment to STEM education is mentioned throughout the proposal. The Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) is a multi-participant partnership including colleges of education and colleges of math and science and supported by an array of business partners who provide application expertise and content and practice expertise. It is in 50% of the state's schools. Detail about AMSTI is provided in the appendices. There is a focus on assisting teachers and leaders in using technology for instructional and management decisions.		
Total	15	15

Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

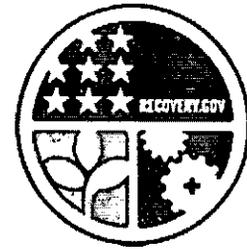
	Available	Tier 1
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		No
Absolute Reviewer Comments:		
The state is committed to using the Common Core Standards as the base for their own state standards. There is a clear pathway to developing principals and teachers to transition to a more rigorous set of standards The state has laid out a regional strategy to support principals and teachers in the reform process. It is ready to hold preparation programs accountable and it is ready to build a solid longitudinal data system. The most troubling aspects of the application are: 1. The letter from the leadership of the state union that implies that key initiatives of RTT may be eliminated; 2. the lack of clear achievement goals for students; and no charter law. Other troubling aspects are: 1. the focus on the transformation strategy for turnaround, 2. lack of evidence of broad stakeholder support, 3. glossing over the places where achievement has not improved, and 4. little attention to the achievement gaps.		
Total		0
Grand Total	500	294



Race to the Top

Technical Review Form - Tier 1

Alabama Application #1000a1-3



A. State Success Factors

	Available	Tier 1
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it	65	44
(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda	5	2
(ii) Securing LEA commitment	45	32
(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact	15	10
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments: Alabama provided a summary of the initiatives that have been implemented and evidence of their commitment to statewide educational reform. Information that specifically articulates its goals for implementing reforms in the four areas targeted to improve student outcomes statewide is needed. Also needed is a more complete description of a clear path to achieving these goals. Eighty-five percent (113) of their 132 LEAs agreed to participate in the reform effort, ninety percent of the state's students. There is strong representation of students in poverty (89%). Strong LEA participation positions Alabama to achieve statewide impact. There is strong leadership support; superintendents, board presidents, and union leaders (where applicable) from each of the 113 participating LEAs signed a Memorandum of Understanding aligned with elements in the Race to the Top notice. Most LEAs (99%) committed to each element of reform defined in the Race to the Top notice and 95 percent of the union leaders signed the MOU. This provides a strong base for statewide impact. Alabama proposes use of a regional service model and a multi-dimensional, customized, delivery system of support to further promote statewide impact. More specific explanation as to how this regional model will be developed and will interface with the various initiatives is needed.</p>		
(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	30	14
(i) Ensuring the capacity to implement	20	9
(ii) Using broad stakeholder support	10	5
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments: Alabama proposes investment of Race to the Top funds to build capacity at the local level and sustain the effort. It proposes shifting the focus at the state level from oversight and implementation to policy making and development of resources. It also proposes increased involvement of colleges and universities; that they become centers of research, development, and evaluation, and hosts of Regional Centers of support and coordination. Evidence of the colleges' and universities' capacity for or commitment to becoming centers is needed. More is also needed to clarify how the state will build local capacity. Alabama's Deputy State Superintendent of Education will lead senior leadership teams and LEAs in implementing statewide reform. The Alabama Learning Exchange portal will be utilized to share successful practices. It is unclear how the deputy and leadership teams interface with college and university centers and with regional centers. Letters of support included in the appendix indicate that there is potential for stakeholder support but more detail about how broad-based support will be achieved is needed.</p>		

(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps	30	25
(i) Making progress in each reform area	5	5
(ii) Improving student outcomes	25	20
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments: Alabama has undertaken numerous reform initiatives in the four areas identified by Race to the Top as crucial to improving student achievement. These were specifically addressed in the application. They developed sets of standards and are one of 14 states meeting NCLB assessment standards in reading, math and science for both regular and alternate assessments. Progress has also been made in development of a longitudinal data system; six of 12 America COMPETES elements are in place. Data to inform instruction is part of its statewide reading initiative. Principal preparation programs have been revised and are now tied to standards for principal certification and to quality teaching standards. Scholarships have been provided for strengthening teacher effectiveness and a low achieving school turnaround model has been developed. The number of schools in need of improvement has been significantly reduced. Alabama's NAEP scores have risen in mathematics and fourth grade reading. It was noted that Alabama experienced the greatest gain in the nation in 4th grade reading from 2003 to 2009. Eighth grade reading scores, however, are flat over that same period. The scale scores of fourth and eighth grade students have risen steadily in mathematics over that four-year period. The rise is greatest in the 8th grade. There had been a persistent gap between the scores of white and black students of approximately thirty percentile points in mathematics, but Alabama narrowed that gap by about ten scale points in 2009, a noteworthy accomplishment. No 2009 NAEP reading scores were provided but the gap between the scores of white and black students from 2003 to 2007 hovers around 30 scale points. NAEP scores were included in the appendix. Needed is a chart with the data and a narrative analysis. The percent of students scoring at or above on Alabama Reading and Mathematics Achievement tests have steadily increased. Eight of ten students are proficient in Mathematics and eighty-five percent in reading as measured by the state assessment. The state's graduation rate rose four percent from 2005 to 2008 demonstrating progress in an important area. In sum, while achievement gaps exist, Alabama has made progress in improving student outcomes in a number of areas.</p>		
Total	125	83

B. Standards and Assessments

	Available	Tier 1
(B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards	40	40
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality standards	20	20
(ii) Adopting standards	20	20
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: The state is a participant in the national consortium of states committed to developing and adopting a common core of rigorous, internationally benchmarked standards in English Language Arts and mathematics aligned to college and work force readiness. Alabama asserts that there is a statute that mandates standards. Alabama provides a very specific process for developing and adopting courses of study and provides an attachment in the appendix as evidence of existing standards. By statute, courses of study must define what a student must know and be able to do by the end of the course. The three-year process for adopting standards was provided. Because the state has a three-year process for adopting standards Alabama asserts it will waive the traditional mechanism and adopt a common set of standards by August 2010. Alabama has demonstrated they are a member of a consortium and that they will adopt standards in a timely manner.</p>		

(B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments	10	10
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: The criterion for (B)(2) is participation in a K-12 consortium as defined by the notice. Alabama is one of 34 states participating in the American Diploma Project, committed to developing high-quality assessments in high schools. Evidence of Alabama's participation in consortia that address high quality assessments is in the appendix but not mentioned in the narrative.</p>		
(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	20	16
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: Alabama's plan to support the transition to enhanced standards and high quality assessments targets a number of activities that support the transition to enhanced standards and high quality assessments: establishment of national benchmarks, measurement of student growth, differentiated instruction, driving instruction, strong assessments, feedback loop, build expectations of student performance, retrofit existing systems, and develop and implement new programs consistent with Common Standards. The process for implementing these objectives described in detail in 11 discrete elements that support and facilitate a transition to enhanced standards and high quality assessments. A chart provides the flow of activities to facilitate the transition by year and identifies responsible parties. More is needed to better understand the proposed activities and how they will be carried out.</p>		
Total	70	66

C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

	Available	Tier 1
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	24	10
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: Alabama has made modest progress in implementing a statewide data system. The application described completion of five (1, 7, 8, 9, and 10.) of the twelve elements in the America COMPETES Act. Review of the narrative revealed that seven elements are not complete: (#2) separate uncoordinated data collection sites, (#3) K-12 data, not Prek-16, (#4) ASCEND is being developed, (#5) integrated system is being built, (#6) more integration is needed, (#11) some necessary components in progress, and (#12) "does not exist".</p>		
(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	5	2
<p>(C)(2) Reviewer Comments: The plan to access and use state data has three appropriate goals. They focus on the use of data, products and dashboards, and compliance with FERPA. While a timeline and activities are provided the plan to ensure accessible longitudinal data lacks sufficient information to understand what is being proposed and how it will be implemented. "Automated workflow," for example, is insufficient to understand what is proposed or what it entails. A narrative describing key activities and how they will be employed is needed to ensure that the plan is achievable and of high quality.</p>		
(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	18	10
<p>(C)(3) Reviewer Comments: Alabama has a plan to use data to improve instruction. It builds on progress made and on structures and tools in place. It also adds additional components to strengthen the effort. Two overarching important goals directly address how Alabama will impact instruction and evaluation and improvement of programs and staff. Alabama proposes a "train the trainer" approach to provide training that supports participating LEAs. The approach is appropriate as are the activities, timeline and responsible parties identified. Developing and implementing its data warehouse (ASCEND) to create a more</p>		

complete set of data is the second goal. It is designed to increase flexibility and access. The application did not clarify how progress in the use of data to improve instruction will be measured. Alabama plans to use money from a competitive grant (not yet decided) to support its development but has built it into the Race to the Top budget in case they are not awarded the grant. This is appropriate. The work plan includes activities, timelines, and responsible parties. The timeline indicates that data use will be ready to implement in 2013. This will create problems for any part of the Alabama plan that necessitates use of data.

Total	47	22
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D. Great Teachers and Leaders

	Available	Tier 1
(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals	21	7
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: Alabama's laws and regulations provide the state broad power does have provisions that allow aspiring K-8 teachers and principals alternative routes as defined by the notice. These pathways are tied to higher education institutions. Statutes provide aspiring secondary teachers an alternative route to teacher certification although they are ultimately required to pass praxis. The same flexibility does not provide alternative routes for aspiring PreK-8 teachers. There is no alternative certification for principals. In sum, Alabama does not provide pathways or alternative routes for teachers that meet the criteria in the Race to the Top notice. The Governor's Commission of High Quality teachers and Leaders identified shortages in availability of science, mathematics, and special education teachers in 2007. In an effort to address these shortages Alabama designed and implemented ATRIP, The Alabama Teacher Recruitment Incentive Program. ATRIP offers scholarships to aspiring teachers in the amount of \$20,000. These scholarships are offered to students enrolled in approved teacher education programs in the critical needs areas of math, special education, general science, and English language arts. In the first year of the program, over 500 students applied for the 100 ATRIP scholarships. ATRIP also awards scholarships to those seeking alternate certification and who have been unconditionally admitted to an Alternative Class A teacher education program. Needed is a description of the process for monitoring, evaluating, and identifying areas of teacher and principal shortage.</p>		
(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	58	24
(i) Measuring student growth	5	5
(ii) Developing evaluation systems	15	6
(iii) Conducting annual evaluations	10	6
(iv) Using evaluations to inform key decisions	28	7
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments: The plan for improving teacher effectiveness is anchored by a strategy designed to link student growth and teacher performance. It has five goals: (1) define a metric, (2) track student achievement annually, (3) build in teacher accountability linked to student performance, (4) use measures of growth to recognize effective teachers, and (5) improve ineffective teachers. Timelines and responsible parties for developing and utilizing the longitudinal data system and tracking new assessments are provided. The plan identifies activities to develop clear approaches to measuring student growth. Alabama has completed the development of formative teacher and principal evaluation instruments. The proposal provides four activities to strengthen the performance of teachers and principals. A description of how the summative evaluation aspect will be developed and aligned with the elements included in the Race to the Top notice is needed. Also needed are additional strategies and explanation to clarify how principals and teachers will be involved in development of the system and what will be done to develop</p>		

an evaluation system that informs decisions relevant to development of teachers and principals, compensation, granting of tenure, and removal of ineffective tenured teachers and the removal of principals.

(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals	25	9
(i) Ensuring equitable distribution in high-poverty or high-minority schools	15	5
(ii) Ensuring equitable distribution in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas	10	4
<p>(D)(3) Reviewer Comments: Alabama did not define high poverty or high-minority schools. It proposes to achieve an equitable distribution of teachers through distance learning, redesigning teacher preparation programs, and scaling the educational leadership network. Plans, activities, and timeline need to be provided to clarify how these activities will be accomplished. It also proposes to increase the number of teachers for hard-to-staff subjects. Activities identified are (1) scaling ATRIP to incentivize teachers, (2) using distance learning, (3) designing shortage tracking and talent capabilities, and (4) developing alternative methods of certification. Needed is additional information about how the activities will be carried out to promote the equitable distribution of teachers and principals to high-poverty and high-minority schools.</p>		
(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	14	5
<p>(D)(4) Reviewer Comments: Alabama proposes to include student growth measures and a set of program standards as criteria for assessing teacher effectiveness. Goals are identified: (1) create centers of practice to identify best practices, (2) employ best practices to either redesign or shut down ineffective preparation programs, and (3) develop a principal mentoring program. The use of a clinical hands-on approach is proposed. Plans for achieving the goals need to be provided as well as a plan for how to change policies governing teacher preparation and certification to allow redesign or shut-down of teacher preparation programs. Also needed are goals and plans for improving the effectiveness of principal preparation programs.</p>		
(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals	20	8
<p>(D)(5) Reviewer Comments: Alabama proposes six goals to improve support provided to teachers and principals. Building data into day-to-day activities, using available resources, integrating transparency into school life, using data as benchmarks, analyzing trends, and monitoring data and targeting improvements are identified. Activities, timelines and responsible parties are provided. An evaluation to determine the effectiveness of professional development will be conducted. The process and activities for achieving the six goals were sufficiently described in a narrative that included four activities. How the six goals would be reached through these activities needs additional explanation. The application must also specifically address how to provide effective data-informed professional development to teachers and principals.</p>		
Total	138	53

E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

	Available	Tier 1
(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs	10	10
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: Alabama code provides the State Board of Education with authority and broad powers to intervene directly in low performing schools. Any school with more than half the students scoring below one grade level can be provided an assistance program developed by the State Board of Education. If, after two years, student achievement has not improved, the state superintendent shall develop a</p>		

system-wide school improvement plan. If improvement is not made the State Board of Education shall require the State Superintendent of Education to intervene and assume the direct management and day-to-day operation of the local board of education for such period of time as may be necessary for student achievement to improve. This provides the state legal authority to intervene in the lowest achieving schools and LEAs. Per Alabama's legal code (see Section E Appendix 1), any school that has a majority of its students scoring one or more grade levels below the prescribed norm on the state adopted student assessments will have an assistance program developed by the State Board of Education. In considering whether to take steps of intervention, the State Board of Education shall consider factors which may have affected the prescribed norm test score. Factors shall include drop-out rates, attendance rates, special education enrollment, and any other data necessary to properly interpret student achievement in each school. The Alabama State Department of Education's Rewards and Intervention Plan (see Section E Appendix 2) thoroughly articulates the state's intervention policy for low-performing schools, which also applies to the state's persistently lowest-performing schools, as defined in this application. This policy includes support through a statewide system of support that is guided by a continuous improvement plan (CIP). LEAs and schools not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) must conduct an analysis of needs. Alabama currently implements intervention in a manner that aligns with the transformational model defined in the Race to the Top notice.

(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	40	28
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	4
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	24
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: Alabama in its statute has identified low achieving schools that meet the criteria defined in the Race to the Top notice for elementary schools but not high schools. It plans to implement a multi-pronged approach to turn around persistently lowest-achieving schools using the transformation model. It proposes (1) strengthening the capacity of the Statewide System of Support, (2) providing training to strengthen LEA knowledge, skills, and ability to increase graduation rates, (3) strengthening collaboration with LEAs in developing multiple models of innovative pathways to high school graduation, (4) providing greater incentives to low-performing and turnaround schools that show potential for success, and (5) integrating technology as an interactive learning tool in low-performing schools. It proposes a number of activities that have merit. There is no explanation of how these activities will be carried out. The activities do not comprise a comprehensive or coherent plan for turning around low performing schools. More explanation and clarity are needed. From 2006-2007 to 2010 Alabama's "Schools in Improvement" decreased from 452 to 121. Ninety-one (91) LEAs are currently working with State Department of Education (SDE) Regional School Improvement Coaches. Alabama has demonstrated significant progress in this area. Alabama has focused primarily on the Transformational Model because of the large number of rural schools where significant numbers of new principals and teachers are not readily available. It asserts that LEAs have embraced this model because it mirrors "models that have been successful". It is not clear that the current intervention model replaces the principal and that replacement of the principal is part of the proposed strategy.</p>		
Total	50	38

F. General

	Available	Tier 1
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	3
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: Alabama's total revenue expenditure has decreased. The downturn in the economy in a state where education funding is directly tied to sales and income tax has exacted a toll on the state's financial capacity. It was noted that Alabama has a unique funding formula where 10 mills of property tax or the</p>		

equivalent rests with the local district as their participation in the Foundation Program. Further clarification as to the effect of that provision is needed. It is not clear that the state's funding formula takes into account wealth, student need, and towns with low wealth.

(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	2
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: Alabama does not have legislation authorizing the establishment of charter schools. It was asserted that the State Board of Education has recently passed a resolution in support of legislation authorizing charter schools. No points are awarded states with no charter school law. The state does allow innovative and autonomous schools. In addition to a number of magnet and innovative schools described, two schools that function under the direction of their own governance structure and their own board of directors were identified.		
(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	2
(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: FIRST CHOICE has provided an environment for innovation and reform in serving students at the secondary level. Needed are identification and description of additional initiatives or programs created through law, regulation, or policy that promote statewide reform or have potential for significant impact in increasing graduation rates and narrowing the achievement gap.		
Total	55	7

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	15	0
Competitive Reviewer Comments: Alabama has described plans to impact STEM components: (1) rigorous course of study, (2) STEM capable community partners to prepare and assist teachers, and (3) preparing more students for advance study and careers in the sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics by addressing the needs of underrepresented groups, and of women and girls. Strategies chosen to place emphasis on STEM were not strong or sufficiently integrated throughout the application.		
Total	15	0

Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		No
Absolute Reviewer Comments: Alabama's did not demonstrate it has a high quality plan to implement a systematic approach to state reform. It did not comprehensively and coherently address each to Race to the Top element defined in the notice. While the application demonstrated strength in specific areas there were a number of key areas where the strategies did not align with the component. For example, Alabama's plan to provide effective support to teachers and principals does not provide an overarching approach for providing support. It focuses on data access and provides few explicit strategies to provide support for teachers and principals. Its plan for designing and implementing evaluation systems has two strategies, both related to the development of formative evaluation instruments. But there are no strategies to identify how transparent, rigorous, and fair evaluation systems with rating categories that tie student growth to		

teacher and principal effectiveness will be developed. Other such examples are identified in the comments in the sections above. In addition, in a number of areas (identified in the comments in sections) there was insufficient explanation about an activity to determine the quality of the initiative or judge the likelihood of statewide implementation and use.

Total		0
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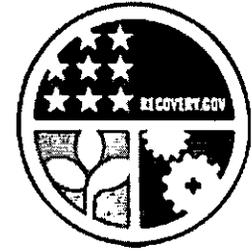
Grand Total	500	269
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Race to the Top

Technical Review Form - Tier 1

Alabama Application #1000AL-4



A. State Success Factors

	Available	Tier 1
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it	65	47
(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda	5	2
(ii) Securing LEA commitment	45	35
(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact	15	10

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

i. The state describes reform strategies that appear promising from early trials. The strategies/goals are organized around 3 facets which include: 1) implementation of "organic" Alabama initiatives; 2) scaling up what has been proved effective on a smaller scale; and 3) equity across geography and student populations. The state's goals include a high school reform initiative where time is variable and "mastery" of a rigorous program is the goal; a college readiness program promoting participation in Advanced Placement courses that has already increased minority participation in AP by 300% in the past 5 years and has raised AP scores; a state reading initiative that has produced a significant gain in fourth grade NAEP scores; a STEM initiative featuring project-based learning that is already in 50% of the state's schools; and a technology-based initiative aimed at improving access (particularly in rural areas) to high quality instruction and coursework through web-based and interactive videoconferencing. While the goals of the plan might be good, the plan is not a very coherent and comprehensive plan organized around a theory of action that is reflected throughout the plan and supports the plan's goals and targets.

ii. The scope of work reflected in the state's MOU for participating LEA's is substantial, addressing all four ARRA areas with between 89% and 90% of the LEA's signing on for each reform element. In addition, the state demonstrates strong commitment from its LEA's by the following: 1) 85% of the LEA's signed on; and 2) the LEA's represent 90% of the total state student population, 89% of the schools, and 89% of students in poverty. Despite these strengths, however, the state does not receive full points in this section due to the letter of support from the Alabama Education Association (AEA) that raises questions about teacher commitment to key aspects of reform. The AEA letter was sent to its local area presidents and others, recommending that they sign the MOU for the RTTT plan now that the AEA had been assured that certain proposals would not be included in the RTTT plan. Among these were the following: 1) The elimination of criterion-reference tests that were to be administered four times a year; 2) Deletion of linkages between student achievement, tenure, and compensation; 3) Deletion of a proposal to tie performance to career decisions; 4) Elimination of a proposal for a new teacher evaluation system; and 5) Deletion of a proposal for differentiated pay for STEM teachers. The elimination of these proposed possible reform strategies raises serious questions about the commitment of the state teachers' organization to implementing real change.

iii. The state indicates that the RTTT plan would affect 89% of the state's students in poverty. The accompanying chart that shows participation by LEA in each of the criteria, but provides little narrative to explain how the goals will help improve achievement by subgroup and provides no commentary on how the goals would look if the state was not awarded RTTT funding. To receive full points these should have been addressed.

(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	30	20
(i) Ensuring the capacity to implement	20	15
(ii) Using broad stakeholder support	10	5
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>i. The state's strategy for successful implementation of the RTTT plan is to build capacity at the local level. The state would assign the leadership role to the State Deputy Superintendent of Education who would lead senior leadership teams and LEA's in implementing, evaluating, and taking forward the RTTT reform plans. Assigning the leadership to a State Deputy Superintendent sends a strong message of state support for the RTTT initiative to districts. Building the RTTT plan around "best practices" with supporting evidence of success is also a strength. The state plans to use an existing web portal (Alabama Learning Exchange) to communicate practices being implemented, evaluate them, and provide the information as open source documents open to all to view (transparency). The state presents a detailed budget but a more detailed narrative budget narrative related to how the expenditures will be directly related to specific targets is not clear. Also, a direct response as to how the state will coordinate, reallocate, and/or repurpose state, federal and local education funds so expenditures align with the RTTT plan would have made for a stronger response. ii. The response to this criterion is mediocre. While there are a number of letters of support from the state's universities, there are not many letters of support from other organizations or groups that might assist and support the state in implementing the RTTT reform agenda, such as community-based organizations, state parent/teacher organizations, business and industry, cultural institutions, nonprofits and local education foundations, etc.</p>		
(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps	30	19
(i) Making progress in each reform area	5	4
(ii) Improving student outcomes	25	15
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>i. The state provides evidence of having made progress in all of the four ARRA education reform areas. The weakest area appears to be in data systems to support instruction. While Alabama has built and implemented a Longitudinal Data System, it does not yet address all 12 America Competes elements (8 are presently in place). The state is strong in its response, however, to making progress in the area of standards and assessments. The state is a member of ACHIEVE's American Diploma Project, has joined a consortium of 35 states working on college and career ready benchmarks, and is a member of the Common Core Standards consortium led by CCSSO and NGA. In the area of great teachers and leaders, the state has also shown progress with a program to strengthen principal leadership instituted by the Governor. The state has taken strong action in the area of turning around the lowest achieving schools and the result is a reduction of schools in improvement from 452 to 121 over four years. ii. To its credit, the state was identified as having the greatest percentage gain in the nation in 4th grade reading on the 2007 NAEP and has witnessed an increase in mathematics scores that the state credits to the investment it has made in the Alabama Mathematics, Science, and Technology Initiative and other STEM efforts. It appears from the NAEP material included in the appendices that the state has reduced the gap for some subgroups but, overall, the gap has remained close to the same over the past four years in both reading and math. The state did show progress, as reported in an earlier commentary, in grade 4 mathematics. The score for this second suffers some from the state not discussing the achievement gaps as reported on NAEP in the narrative. Points were not awarded because the state did not discuss or analyze in the narrative the data on graduate rates (for all students and subgroups) included in the appendices. In addition, the state's response would have been stronger on this criterion, had it provided more "analysis" of the data (particularly related to any achievement for subgroups) and connected the data to actions the state has taken.</p>		

Total	125	86
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B. Standards and Assessments

	Available	Tier 1
(B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards	40	40
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality standards	20	20
(ii) Adopting standards	20	20
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>i. The state is a member of the Common Core Standards effort being coordinated by CCSSO and NGA and consisting of 48 states. A signed MOU and copy of the standards are provided in the appendices. These standards are being internationally benchmarked and build toward college readiness. ii. The application indicates that the state plans to recommend adoption of the Common Core Standards by Aug. 2, 2010.</p>		
(B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments	10	10
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The state participates in several assessment consortia. It has been actively involved in the ACHIEVE American Diploma Project and is a member of the Balanced Assessment Consortium coordinated by CCSSO and NGA which consists of over half of the states in the country. A copy of the MOU is include in the appendices but it is not a signed copy However, along with the MOU is a list of the states in the Balance Assessment Consortium and Alabama is listed as a member.</p>		
(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	20	20
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The state's plan to support transition to enhanced standards and high quality assessments appears to be comprehensive so receives full points for this criterion. Included in the application is a roll-out plan that includes the following strengths: 1)adopting the Common Core Standards and creating new aligned assessments – both state level summative assessments and formative assessments for classroom use; 2) maintaining a consortium approach to assessment development to provide an avenue for comparing scores across states; 3) scaffolding professional development from the state down to LEA's and making use of regional centers, and 4)using the state Longitudinal Data System to track student growth, provide instructional resources to teachers and principals, and to connect the standards and assessment work to other RTTT programs.</p>		
Total	70	70

C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

	Available	Tier 1
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	24	16
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The state has a Longitudinal Data System in place but it addresses only 8 of the 12 America Competes elements which is reflected in its score. All elements need to be in place to implement successfully the RTTT plan.</p>		
(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	5	5

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:
 The state application contains a plan for implementing a high quality longitudinal data system, the Alabama Consolidated Education System (ACES). A description of what is already in place reported in Criterion C1, plus plans discussed in Criterion C2, reflect a plan that will accommodate all of the important uses of data and provide accessibility to all of the state's public constituencies. The plan demonstrates that the state realizes the importance of access to the America Competes Elements for decision-makers at the state and local level, parents, community members, students, etc. The state is planning a data reporting portal that includes a user-friendly "dashboard" to facilitate data-mining which is important to encouraging use of the system by a wide range of constituents. The dashboards will be designed for the various end-users of the system, adding another dimension of user-friendliness which has proven to encourage and sustain data use.

(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	18	18
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(C)(3) Reviewer Comments:
 i. and ii. Full points were awarded for Criterion C 3, as the state presents a comprehensive plan for implementation and use of its LDS that addresses a statewide model for professional development led by regional service centers coordinating with local districts and under the direction of a state director. The application includes a plan for professional development in how to use the LDS in two ways: 1) to access data and information; 2) to use the data to improve instruction. Both are essential to improving student achievement. The plan consists of working through regional service centers in coordination with LEA's. Already mentioned under Criterion C 2 is the planned implementation of "dashboards" to facilitate teacher/administrator access and use through a user-friendly system. The plan for supporting participating LEA's is based on a "train-the-trainer" model that will involve substantial training of local district trainers. While there can be problems with this model, it is probably the only model feasible to most education systems that need to provide professional development and training to districts at considerable distances from the SDE. This model also allows regional service centers to tailor training to each LEA, depending upon their entry level knowledge. The state demonstrates the importance of this ARRA reform area by providing a state level director will oversee statewide implementation working with the regional centers and with feedback from the LEA's. Reflecting an understanding of the complexity of implementing a data system statewide and encouraging heavy use of the system, the state has built-in evaluation so that the state director can make formative changes during implementation. It will be important that this evaluative feedback is frequent so course corrections can be made quickly. Each of the 11 regional centers will have Lead Data Trainers dedicated to assisting participating LEA's with training and use of the state LDS for the purposes of instructional improvement. These Lead Data Trainers will develop a certification program for local district trainers who will be trained in one of two focus areas – technical training and use of data for instructional improvement. The two pronged approach seems smart as both are critical to successful implementation of the professional development that will support use of the LDS by a variety of constituencies. iii. The state plans reflect a comprehensive approach to collecting and sharing appropriate data between and among a variety of relevant state agencies and the state universities and researchers.

Total	47	39
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D. Great Teachers and Leaders

	Available	Tier 1
(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals	21	15

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:
 i. and ii. The state Board of Education has ultimate control over the decision of how teachers in Alabama are trained and who can be certified. It allows several routes to alternative certification, including National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification (as long as the Alabama

offers comparable certification - areas, grade levels, degrees). In addition, business, industry, and military veteran retirees may obtain "provisional" certification for up to three years. There is another alternate route for certification for grades 9 through 12 that can result in eventual full certification through approval of the State Superintendent and follow-up coursework to support the certification. There are also provisions for an "emergency" credential (one year) and alternative route for K-8 teachers of fine arts, foreign language, and physical education. The application did not identify alternative routes that limit coursework or allow for "testing-out." While the state earns points for having some alternative routes to certification, it did not earn full points, as it does not appear to endorse a variety of certifications from providers outside of higher education institutions and most of the alternative routes lead to temporary (1-3 year credentials) rather than full professional credentials. The application does address "selectivity" for participating in alternative certification, as National Board certification has the reputation of being a rigorous program and other routes to certification appear to require passage of a basic skills assessment and the Praxis II subject area assessment. Over the past five years, 14,436 alternative certificates were issued in-state through state-designed programs. In 2008-2009, teachers certified through National Board certification totaled 1,642 teachers. The state does not appear to have any alternative routes to earning principal certification, although the state recently went through a massive reform of its higher education-based principal certification program that resulted in the closing down of all of the principal preparation programs at state colleges to undergo a two-year transition from a focus on administration to a focus on preparing instructional leaders. This effort was informed by a visiting team from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). Demonstrating the state's emphasis on "selectivity," regarding preparation programs, only one of the 13 institutions of higher education were approved on SREB's initial visit. While the state does not provide principal certification by providers outside of higher education, it appears it has ratcheted up requirements for higher education preparation programs. Not providing an alternate route for principal certification, however, results in the state being award half of the score points for D1 (i) and (ii). iii. The state recognizes teacher shortages in the STEM subject areas and special education. It has established the Alabama Teacher Recruitment Incentive Program (ATRIP) which provides \$20,000 scholarships to aspiring teachers in STEM and special education. The first year 500 teachers applied for the 100 scholarships. While this is one route to recruitment of teachers in areas of shortages, it is not a comprehensive approach to this problem.

(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	58	17
(i) Measuring student growth	5	5
(ii) Developing evaluation systems	15	4
(iii) Conducting annual evaluations	10	0
(iv) Using evaluations to inform key decisions	28	8

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

i. The application presents a comprehensive plan for measuring individual student achievement and growth through development and implementation of a state summative assessment aligned to the Common Core Standards and an aligned formative assessment system for local use. The data on achievement and growth is to be available via the state's developing Longitudinal Data System. ii. The application does not score well against this criterion, as it does not address several important evaluation elements, including a system that "differentiates" effectiveness through use of multiple rating categories that take account data on student growth as a significant factor. Regarding evaluation systems, the state plans to use a recently developed "formative" teacher evaluation system that is in its first year of implementation and to implement a new "formative" principal evaluation system in the 2010 school year. While it is understandable to want to continue newly designed evaluation systems, the present systems do not meet the criteria, and the state plan does not reflect any state plans for re-aligning the system to meet the criterion over the next few years. In addition, the letter of support from the Alabama Educators Association reflects an agreement with the state to "not" link student achievement, tenure, and compensation nor tie performance to career decisions. There appears to

have been involvement by teachers and principals in the development of these evaluation systems so some points have been awarded. iii. No points are awarded because it is not clear whether the state requires annual evaluations for teachers and principals. iv. The state receives a low score in this section, as the evaluation system for teachers that is in place and the one for principals to be implemented next year does not appear to reflect a qualifying system that uses evaluations for determining compensation, promotion, granting tenure, and removing ineffective tenured or untenured teachers. In addition, these are called "formative" evaluations and the language around them seems to lessen their strength in the aforementioned areas. In addition, there do not appear to be any plans to re-align the evaluation systems for teachers and principals with the elements listed in the RTTT criteria.

(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals	25	12
(i) Ensuring equitable distribution in high-poverty or high-minority schools	15	7
(ii) Ensuring equitable distribution in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas	10	5

(D)(3) Reviewer Comments:
 i. and ii. The state plan reflects ambitious targets for ensuring equitable distribution of teachers and principals in high poverty and/or high minority schools. The idea of using the state's distance learning system, the Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators, and Students Statewide (ACCESS), to ensure that students in high poverty and/or high minority schools have access to courses in hard-to-staff subject and specialty areas, increases the state's odds of providing the students with more high quality instruction than they might have been receiving in the past, but does not equal having highly qualified teachers and principals in these schools. The state could not provide baseline data on either the distribution of highly effective teachers and principals for the current year or the present distribution of math, science, and/or special education teachers who were evaluated as effective or better. Without this data, not knowing the existing conditions in these areas, it is difficult to give a high score on the state's plan, as confidence in the targets is reduced. The scores for these criteria reflect credit for an ambitious plan, but also reflect concern over whether these targets are achievable.

(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	14	14
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(D)(4) Reviewer Comments:
 i. and ii. The state plans to create a tool for measuring which teachers' classrooms and principals' schools are the most effective and link this information to the teacher/principal preparation programs in which they were trained and to make this information publicly available. This system will generate reports available to the public that provide selected statistics that are related to student growth/achievement for each credentialing program. This work will be a part of the design and development of the state's LDS, resulting in minimal costs. The state plans to have the tool created and implemented between 2010 and 2011 and the data monitoring built into long-term prep program evaluations by the 2011-2012 school year. The state's plan seems ambitious yet achievable. The state's plan for expanding effective preparation and credentialing programs and shut down those that are not appears aggressive but achievable and so receives a high score. The plan includes identifying highly effective centers of practice and creating a "best practices" repository that will inform others. Ineffective preparation and credentialing programs would be redesigned based upon best practices or shut down. University programs for teachers will continue but there will be greater emphasis on clinical, hands-on experience in real classrooms.

(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals	20	18
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(D)(5) Reviewer Comments:
 The state receives a high score for this criterion, as it presents a comprehensive plan for supporting local districts in providing data-information professional development. Much of this has been reported on under Criteria B and C (implementing the Common Core Standards and Assessments and the state's Longitudinal Data System). The roll-out plans for professional development will be led by key personnel in the state department, be evaluated regularly for course corrections, and utilize the

regional service centers to take professional development to the local LEA's and tailor it to their needs, particularly in the area of data use with the state's LDS. Professional development in technology is planned for more than the LDS. It will also address other 21st Century tools, such as interactive whiteboards, iPods, and other web-based networking tools. The state's plan also includes development of an Educational Leadership Network that will be designed to support educational leaders, share best practices, and build collaborations that result in improved teaching and leadership.

Total	138	76
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E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

	Available	Tier 1
(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs	10	10
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: The state has the legal right to intervene in both schools and LEA's so earns full points on this criterion.		
(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	40	25
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	0
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	25
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: i. The state did not address how it identifies the persistently lowest achieving schools and any non-Title I eligible schools due not having time to correlate the data with the 1003g School Improvement Grant that was changed on the day the RTTT was submitted. ii. The state has been using the transformation turnaround model, as it believes it works best in rural areas where substantial supplies of new teachers and principals are not readily available. Two approaches to the transformation model have been used. Both involve state support and a Turnaround Team Intervention, but one uses an additional program – the Continuous Improvement Residency Program. According to the information in the "Lessons Learned" section, the districts preferred the second model. The state did not provide much analysis on lessons learned. From 2006-2007 to 2009-2010, the number of "Schools in Improvement" in the state has gone from 452 to 121. This data reflects well on state efforts which is why the state scored as well as it did on this criterion considering it did not provide much information on lessons learned and data was missing on the Performance Measures Chart related to the number of schools for which each of the four school intervention models will be used.		
Total	50	35

F. General

	Available	Tier 1
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	0
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: The percentage of the state's total revenues used to support public elementary, secondary, and higher education decreased from 2008 to 2009. Therefore, the score for this criterion is low. The state did not report its policies related to equitable funding between high-need LEA's and other LEA's or between high-poverty schools and other schools.		
(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	8

<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: i.-iv. The state does not currently have legislation that authorizes the creation of public charter schools. The Alabama State Board of Education recently passed (unanimously) a resolution to support legislation authorizing charter schools and a copy of the resolution is include in the appendices. The state also claims that the Governor's Office of Educational Policy and the Alabama Department of Education have been working with the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools to develop possible legislation with a focus on learning. v. The state supports specialized and innovative schools such as magnet schools and schools focused on STEM. Score points are awarded for these schools which include 27 STEM schools that provide engineering and biomedical curriculum, 15 magnet schools (5 with an arts focus), and over 50 career and technical schools.</p>		
(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	4
<p>(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: The state supports magnet schools and has 5 focused on the arts and 27 STEM schools that provide engineering and biomedical curriculum, as well as 50 career and technical schools. In addition, the state has adopted FIRST CHOICE, a program that the state believes has created an environment for secondary level innovation and reform. The points given for this criteria are substantially due to the state allowing these schools to move away from the Carnegie unit toward a mastery approach to learning that has resulted in a substantially increased rate of change in dropout numbers (from a rate of 5% over the past 5 years to 26% this past year), as well as a positive impact on attendance, achievement, and on the number of students graduating college/career prepared.</p>		
Total	55	12

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	15	15
<p>Competitive Reviewer Comments: The state is awarded the points for the STEM Priority because its RTTT plan embeds a focus on STEM from providing rigorous courses in the STEM areas to teacher training and community involvement in STEM projects. A plus point for earning the Stem Priority score points is the fact that Alabama has made a significant investment in the Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) that has been implemented in 50% of the state's schools. AMSTI provides a foundation for the state to build upon that has a track record of success. The state plans to use RTTT funding, if awarded, to scaled-up AMSTI across the rest of the state. AMSTI is a partnership effort between the state and colleges of math and science that is supported by business partners who provide practical application expertise. The state has also designed and implemented an A+ College Ready Advanced Placement Training and Incentive Program that it plans to expand to all schools if awarded an RTTT grant that has a STEM focus. Threaded throughout the state's application were references to STEM projects and initiatives.</p>		
Total	15	15

Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		No
<p>Absolute Reviewer Comments:</p>		

The state's application does not comprehensively and coherently address the four education reform areas. While the state provides a list of activities and programs (some that appear to be promising), there does not appear to be a theory of action around which the state plan and roll-out is organized. It is difficult to see how each piece of the reform fits together into a conceptual framework that will advance significant improvement in the four ARRA areas. In addition, while there appeared to be significant support from a broad range of constituencies, one of the most critical, the state teachers organization, submitted a letter of support that raises questions about the level of commitment the organization has to implementing the state's RTTT plan. The letter from the teachers' organization reflects a very hesitant and tentative approach to many of the types of programs and reform initiatives that the state might want to advance to institute an innovative reform agenda. While the state appears to have implemented many promising programs from which to build, the RTTT plan does not reflect how all of these and other programs and strategies will be woven into a unified plan of action that will result in the closing of the achievement gap and significant improvement in student achievement, advancing all students to new academic heights that will allow them to compete and succeed in the flat world of the 21st Century.

Total		0
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Grand Total	500	333
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Race to the Top

Technical Review Form - Tier 1

Alabama Application #1000AL-5



A. State Success Factors

	Available	Tier 1
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it	65	32
(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda	5	2
(ii) Securing LEA commitment	45	23
(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact	15	7

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Alabama does a good job of highlighting best practices in its past reform efforts by pointing to initiatives like the Alabama Reading Initiative, which it believes resulted in the state having the highest national 4th grade NAEP scores in 2007. Although Alabama seems to have a good idea of its past reforms, the state does not comprehensively and coherently address the four Race to the Top reform areas. This lack of a connection to the Race to the Top reform areas greatly impacts the scoring of the application. Alabama does not provide any narrative in this part of the application. From the attached tables however, it is clear that the state has done a very good job in attaining strong LEA commitment. Alabama has 85% participation from its LEAs. A copy of a sample MOU between Alabama and participating LEAs is attached to the application. According to a table provided, the state received 100% of the signatures of participating LEA superintendents, 100% of the signatures of participating local school boards and 95% of participating Local Teacher Union signatures. It is very concerning however to see the letter from the statewide union President encouraging the local unions to sign off on Race to the Top but excluding major portions of the reforms. This letter makes it clear that the unions may not truly support all of the reforms. The state also does not include its goals for increasing student achievement, decreasing achievement gaps, increasing high school graduation rates or college enrollment rates and the number of students who complete at least a year's worth of college. This lack of data causes the applicant to not meet all the criteria for this part of the application.

(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	30	16
(i) Ensuring the capacity to implement	20	10
(ii) Using broad stakeholder support	10	6

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Alabama's overall plan to ensure the state has the capacity to implement, scale up and sustain its proposed plans is not very strong. The state does do a good job of laying out the leadership and teams who will be responsible for implementing the statewide education reform plans and therefore receives points in this criteria. The Deputy State Superintendent of Education will be charged with the leadership of the Race to the Top program and will lead senior leadership teams and participating LEA leadership in implementing, evaluating and taking forward the reform plans within the grant application. Alabama has a 'train the trainer' model for support to the LEAs but these roles seem vague, they are not clearly defined. In this section, the state also does not provide information on the process for identifying best practices, evaluating these practices and holding LEAs accountable for progress and performance. According to the narrative, LEAs will receive an increase in the involvement of colleges

and universities as centers of research, development and evaluation and hosts of Regional Centers of support and coordination. Again, here it's not clear what the exact responsibilities will be for LEAs, the universities and these regional centers. As for providing effective and efficient operations and processes, the applicant does speak to having a reporting and accountability system that all local districts are using for federal funding reporting. The state plans to use this system for increased transparency of expenditures. Best Practices will also be gathered, evaluated and provided as open source documents through the Alabama Learning Exchange, a web portal. Here, the state did not clarify how these systems will work to measure and track performance. As for the use of funds for this grant, Alabama's overall budget is aligned to the reforms but it's not clear from the application that Alabama has coordinated, reallocated or repurposed education funds from other federal, state and local sources so that it aligns with the state's Race to the Top goals. According to the narrative, Alabama plans to use positive practices to inform future state budget planning to ensure that the limited funds within Alabama's education budget are expended in an effective and long-term impacting way. It is not clear from the narrative how Alabama will use the fiscal, political and human capital resources of the state to accomplish this goal. Alabama has key support from stakeholders in its LEAs and some letters of support from universities and other constituents. The applicant is lacking key support however from community groups, parent groups, foundations and business leaders. Other than the Governor, there is also no other support from elected officials.

(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps	30	19
(i) Making progress in each reform area	5	4
(ii) Improving student outcomes	25	15
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Alabama has made progress in each of the four education reform areas and has mixed results in terms of improving student outcomes. Alabama is a member of the ACHIEVE America Project, a consortium of 35 states who accept a set of college-and career ready benchmarks. In addition, Alabama has committed to the adoption of the internationally benchmarked Common Core Standards when they are finalized. In terms of data, Alabama currently has 8 of the 12 America COMPETES Act elements in place with the statewide Longitudinal Data System. In terms of great teachers and leaders, the state has redesigned its principal preparation programs to align to a set of leadership excellence standards and to include in-the-classroom training for professional development. There is no mention in this part of the narrative however on using student growth to assess the effectiveness of teachers and principals. As for turning around low-achieving schools, Alabama has put a School Turnaround Team in place that has been responsible for decreasing the number of schools in improvement from 452 to 121 over a period of four years. Overall, Alabama has done a good job historically in advancing the Race to the Top reform areas. In terms of improving student outcomes, Alabama has made strides overall but there is no data to support their progress by student subgroup. According to the narrative, Alabama has been recognized as having the greatest percentage gain in 4th grade reading in the nation on the 2007 NAEP. The state has also seen a steady increase in math scores and an increase on the 8th grade level, which has historically been a problem. The applicant believes that their investment in Alabama Mathematics, Science and Technology Initiative and other STEM efforts is yielding positive results. In terms of the state's reading and math assessment data, Alabama has also made steady progress in proficient and above between 2004 and 2009. Although Alabama states that it has decreased achievement gaps, the data does not confirm that the decreases were dramatic. In terms of graduation rates, the state has decreased the drop out rate by over 5 percentage points between 2003 and 2008 but this does not appear to be a big gain. Alabama does have an attached list of the graduation rates of what appears to be all of their high schools but there is no average captured in the narrative.</p>		
Total	125	67

B. Standards and Assessments

	Available	Tier 1
(B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards	40	40
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality standards	20	20
(ii) Adopting standards	20	20
<p>(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: Alabama is participating in the CCSSO-led Common Core Standards effort. There are 48 states participating in this effort. The MOA for their participation in this consortium is attached along with a draft of the core standards. According to the narrative, these standards are internationally benchmarked and proven to promote college-and-career-readiness. Alabama will be able to adopt the Common Core Standards by August 2, 2010 because the state has been able to secure a waiver to make this possible.</p>		
(B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments	10	10
<p>(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: Alabama is a member of the Consortium Developing Balanced Assessments of the Common Core Standards. A MOU is attached and there is a list of the 36 states participating.</p>		
(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	20	16
<p>(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: Alabama has a plan in place for supporting the transition to common standards but the plan is lacking when it comes to transitioning to high-quality assessments. Alabama has a plan for reaching its goals to adopt common standards and meets this part of the criteria. It's plan for standards adoption includes supplementing the standards if necessary, implementing the standards, providing professional development and summative and formative assessment development and implementation, tracking student progress and growth, build teacher, principal and university leadership and capacity around the core standards, aligning current initiatives around the standards, utilizing technology to support the common core standards and ensuring access to the standards. The state also lays out a 3-year timeline for reaching all these goals along with the responsible parties for adopting and implementing the standards. The challenge with Alabama's plan is that the timeline for transitioning to high-quality assessments seems long.</p>		
Total	70	66

C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

	Available	Tier 1
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	24	16
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: According to the narrative, Alabama has 8 of the 12 America COMPETES Act Elements in place and the status of each element is captured in the narrative of the application.</p>		
(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	5	3
<p>(C)(2) Reviewer Comments: Alabama has a good yet limiting plan to ensure that data from the statewide longitudinal data system is useful and relevant for improving instruction and providing the data necessary for affecting student achievement. In order to ensure the accessibility and usability of the State's LDS data, Alabama plans</p>		

to complete the development and implementation of the Alabama Consolidated Education System (ACES), a consolidated operational data store. Although the applicant mentions that teachers and policy-makers will be able to access data in this system, the applicant does not mention accessibility by other stakeholders. Because this is a new system, training will also be necessary to ensure proper usage of the system and there isn't a mention of what kind of training will be provided to stakeholders on using ACES. Finally, the plan is missing performance goals and targets.

(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	18	10
<p>(C)(3) Reviewer Comments: Alabama's has a plan to use data to improve instruction but the plan is not high-quality. In order to increase the adoption and use of the data and instruction improvement systems, as well as support LEAs and schools in providing professional development in this area, Alabama plans to develop a 'train-the-trainer' model. This customized training will be provided by 11 Regional Service Centers. These Service Centers will help in designing the data training and professional development. This approach will allow each LEA to have district level trainers who can work with teachers and leaders to train them on using the data system. The state's plan is over a 3 year period and also includes a partnership with universities and research departments to conduct analysis of available data to be used to develop best practice learning opportunities for students and educators. Although the plan states that it will work with universities to evaluate their effectiveness, there is no detail on how this will be done. It's not clear that this data will be gathered on an ongoing basis and that LEAs will receive support in interpreting this data and applying lessons learned to improving instruction in the classroom.</p>		
Total	47	29

D. Great Teachers and Leaders

	Available	Tier 1
(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals	21	14
<p>(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: Alabama has attached its laws governing alternative certification to the application. The state currently has several in-state offerings that allow opportunities for teachers, mostly in secondary, to find certification in non-traditional ways. Over the past five years, over 14,000 alternative certificates have been issued and Alabama has listed the total number of teachers who were certified in each program last year. The applicant includes the elements of each program for teachers but it appears that most of the alternative programs use institutions of higher education for licensing. There is also no information included on how selective these programs are, beyond having basic requirements like college degrees and minimum test score passage as the entrance criteria. As for principals, Alabama Governor's Congress recently went through an overhaul of principal preparation programs. New principal preparation programs are now based in field experiences, require a trained mentor to oversee internships and are aligned to the Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders. It is not clear from the application however if these programs can operate independently of IHEs. In terms of monitoring, evaluating and identifying areas of teacher and principal shortage and preparing teachers to fill these shortages, the applicant provides information on how Alabama goes about identifying these needs on a year by year basis. The applicant lays out strategies it has in place for recruitment mainly of teachers and speaks to some of the ongoing reform initiatives that came out of the Governor's Congress on School Leadership and Commission on Teaching Quality.</p>		
(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	58	14
(i) Measuring student growth	5	2
(ii) Developing evaluation systems	15	5

(iii) Conducting annual evaluations	10	0
(iv) Using evaluations to inform key decisions	28	7
<p>(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Alabama's plan to improve teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance seems weak since the state has not yet defined an approach to measuring student growth. Although the state plans to define its own student growth metric and track student achievement from year to year on an individual basis, it does not address the Race to the Top definition of growth. By not making a decision on how it will define growth now, it will be difficult for the state to design evaluation systems that will take into account student outcomes. The state recently completed the development of a formative teacher evaluation system based on the Quality Teaching Standards. Student growth will be used to report instructional impact at the classroom and school level but it's not clear from the narrative how significant student growth will be in determining teacher and leader effectiveness nor is it clear what the rating categories will be in this evaluation or if teachers and principals were or will be involved in designing this evaluation. It is also not clear from the application that Alabama will conduct annual evaluations of teachers and principals. The state has laid out plans to improve teacher and principal performance through initiatives like leveraging the Alabama Professional Pathways model to facilitate organic, job-embedded professional development among other activities. The state mentions plans to tie performance to career decisions but it is not clear if performance information will be used to make tenure decisions, grant certification or to remove ineffective teachers out of the profession.</p>		
(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals	25	11
(i) Ensuring equitable distribution in high-poverty or high-minority schools	15	6
(ii) Ensuring equitable distribution in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas	10	5
<p>(D)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Alabama does not provide a clear definition of a high-poverty and high-minority school. The state does not do a very good job of communicating how it will ensure an equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals in high-poverty/high-minority schools. The state writes in the narrative that the distribution of teachers and leaders in these schools will be challenging so they will pursue other options, like distance learning if a teacher cannot teach a class in person. This seems as if this is avoiding the issue of tackling how to get more effective teachers into high-poverty/high-minority schools. In order to address getting more effective teachers in hard-to-staff subjects and areas, Alabama offers initiatives like the Alabama Teacher Recruitment Incentive Program, which seems like a good initiative. It is not clear that Alabama's overall plan will be sufficient in tackling all of its needs for effective teachers in hard-to-staff subjects, specialty areas and in high-poverty and high-minority schools.</p>		
(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	14	8
<p>(D)(4) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Although Alabama states in the narrative that it plans to link student growth to preparation programs and hold those programs accountable for effectiveness, the plan is not strong because the state does not take a stand on the amount of student growth required for a teacher and principal to be effective. The first part of the plan involves creating a state-level tool for measuring which teachers/classrooms are effective and linking those individuals to their preparation programs. The state plans to tie in student growth to effectiveness but does not take a stand on how much growth is equated to effectiveness. The state plans to use RTT funds to help support a design of a system to track this data with preparation programs and publicly report data on their effectiveness. Ultimately, Alabama hopes to use this information to track the most effective preparation programs and eliminate the least successful programs. Additionally, Alabama plans to develop a set of program standards aligned with the Alabama Quality Teaching Standards and hold teacher preparation programs accountable for redesigning programs aligned to the Standards to ensure quality across all redesigned teacher preparation programs. The biggest concern with Alabama's plan is that it's not clear how much growth</p>		

with students is required for a teacher and principal to be considered effective. The state also needs to clarify how much student growth will weigh when looking at all the criteria being used to evaluate the effectiveness of preparation programs.

(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals	20	12
<p>(D)(5) Reviewer Comments: The applicant has a plan in place to provide effective support to teachers and principals but it is missing a strategy for evaluation and continuous improvement. Alabama plans to develop a clear and automated method for providing data that will allow a strong support method for teachers and principals to maintain awareness of their best practices. To reach these goals, the state plans to introduce the SLDS II dashboard into common teacher and principal use, build an educational leadership network, develop technological instructional and leadership support, develop the support structure involved in the Professional Pathways model norm and make available public reports on an annual basis. Based on the plan, it appears as if the centers will be responsible for ensuring these supports to teachers and principals and that benchmarking will be done to trace the effects of these systems. It's not clear however what will happen after this benchmarking happens to ensure continuous improvement in student achievement. The plan does not adequately address how it will support schools and teachers in using data.</p>		
Total	138	59

E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

	Available	Tier 1
(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs	10	10
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: According to the narrative, it appears as if Alabama has the authority to intervene in low-achieving schools and LEAs.</p>		
(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	40	15
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	5
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	10
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: Alabama does appear to have a definition for persistently low-achieving schools. Alabama's plan for turning around its lowest-achieving schools however is not strong. The state plans to identify and post Alabama's persistently low-achieving schools on the Department's web site no later than February 8, 2010. Alabama's plan is to then use a multi-pronged approach to turning around persistently low-achieving schools using such strategies such as the transformation model and graduation coaches. Alabama is mainly proposing the use of the transformational model because it is supported by LEAs in the state. The fact that the state is not using this model based on past results in turning around low-performing schools is concerning. The focus on graduation coaches as a strategy is based on a decrease in drop-out rates of 1.5%. This seems like a more promising strategy given that there is some data on past results. Overall, Alabama's plan here is not very well-thought out.</p>		
Total	50	25

F. General

	Available	Tier 1

(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	0
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: Alabama's narrative states that its total revenue available to public schools has decreased. There is no information on the percentage of the total revenue that was spent on public education this year or last year. There state's policies on equitable funding between high-need LEAs and other LEAs and within LEAs and between high-poverty schools and other schools is not made clear in the application.</p>		
(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	8
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: Alabama does not currently have legislation authorizing the establishment of charter schools in the state. The state has demonstrated its support of specialized and innovative schools through the development of magnet schools and schools focused on the arts and STEM.</p>		
(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	3
<p>(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: Alabama doesn't provide a great deal of information on other significant reform conditions in the state. It does provide information however on an effort called First Choice, which is basically an effort to create an environment for innovation serving students at the secondary level. Within First Choice, schools and systems may waive the traditional Carnegie requirement of seat time as it relates to student proficiency or mastery in academic and elective classes. By doing so students who are advanced in a content area may move through the curriculum at a faster pace and take more rigorous classes while students who are struggling are granted additional time and support rather than falling within the traditional time driven method of awarding credit. This reform has seen strong results in decreasing dropout numbers in the state. Because this is the only reform condition that Alabama lists in this part of the application, it's difficult to assign more points.</p>		
Total	55	11

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	15	15
<p>Competitive Reviewer Comments: Alabama's STEM initiatives are captured throughout the application, the state has a good plan in this area and consistently refers to its plans for improvement in this area throughout the application. The state's big goal moving forward is to complete the implementation of the Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative in all of Alabama's schools to serve as the basis for all other STEM learning activities. To increase the rigor with STEM programs, the state is expanding A+ College Ready Advanced Training and Incentive Program. Supporting the research of supporting female students in STEM classes and careers is Alabama's Girls Engaged in Math and Science University and the culminating STEM activity is Project Lead the Way through which engineering and biomedical academies have been established in 27 of Alabama's schools. Through partnerships with university and industry expects, Alabama is committed to preparing a new generation of learners equipped with STEM content knowledge and skills.</p>		
Total	15	15

Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		No
<p>Absolute Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Alabama is not a strong applicant at this time for Race to the Top funding because it does not do a good job of comprehensively and coherently addressing all of the four reform areas specified in the ARRA as well as the State Success Factors Criteria needed to demonstrate that the state and its participating LEAs are taking a systemic approach to education reform. The state did not articulate its goals in the coming years for improving student achievement, decreasing achievement gaps, increasing high school graduation rates and college enrollment and does not provide enough data to confirm that they are committed to executing the Race to the Top reforms statewide.</p>		
Total		0
Grand Total	500	272



Race to the Top

Technical Review Form - Tier 1

Alabama Application #1000AL10



A. State Success Factors

	Available	Tier 1
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it	65	25
(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda	5	3
(ii) Securing LEA commitment	45	12
(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact	15	10
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>A1 (i) It was difficult to find a coherent theory of action in the state's K-12 reform agenda. The state has joined a consortium for the development, adoption, and implementation of common core standards, one sponsored by Achieve for common summative assessments aligned with the standards, and a Balanced Assessment Consortium of 36 states. Professional development in the form of coaches, mentors, a train the trainer model, and on-line resources is focused on instruction, but few details are provided. A longitudinal data system is being developed, but absent a strong system of evaluation tied to student achievement, the expected outcome of data-driven decision making and increased accountability for student learning may not occur. Because this theory of action is inconsistent through each component of the application, including the timelines, full points cannot be awarded. A1 (ii) Some points were awarded for this sub-criterion because of the sign off of superintendents and presidents of school boards on the state's Memorandum of Agreement which was the standard MOU provided by the U.S. Department of Education. However, a major concern is that sign off by teachers union officials occurred only after major portions of the reform agenda were eliminated. A letter from the president of the state teachers union to local union presidents recommending that they sign the MOU states that the following reform components have been deleted: • Implementing criteria-reference (sic) tests four times a year • Linkages between student achievement and tenure and compensation • Peer evaluation • Developing a new teacher evaluation system • Requiring Teach for America • Differentials in pay for STEM teachers • Tying performance to career decisions. Because of this, implementation of a comprehensive set of reforms according to Race to the Top guidelines is extremely compromised. Also a listing of the Elements of State Reform Plans from the original application for Race to the Top Funds appears to function as a checklist rather than eliciting deep commitment since the deletions noted above are still on the list. This indicates the need for the state and participating LEAs to continue to work with the statewide union and its local branches so that key reform work can get started and be implemented in a meaningful way. A1 (iii) The state's plan, if successful, has a high enough participation rate to make a large-scale impact on problems of student achievement. The state's effort under Race to the Top will affect 85 percent of the state's LEAs, 89 percent of the schools, 90 percent of K-12 students in the state, and 89 percent of students living in poverty. However, expected impact on sub-groups was not included. As a result, full points were not awarded for this sub-criterion.</p>		
(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	30	13
(i) Ensuring the capacity to implement	20	10
(ii) Using broad stakeholder support	10	3

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

A2 (i) The leadership plan and structures to support it at the state and local levels, as outlined in the sub-criterion A2 (i) for (a), (b), and (c), seem relatively easy to put in place. The reform effort will be directly supervised by the Deputy State Superintendent and his office. In that way, effective and efficient operations and processes will be provided by the state. Selected colleges and universities in the state will host regional centers to provide support, technical assistance, and professional development resources to LEAs by region. This portion of the plan is vague because a clear delineation of the exact responsibilities of the state and the LEAs and the accountability mechanisms the state will require of LEAs and the university-based regional centers have not been stated. The budget and budget narrative (d) and the plan for sustainability (e) need more detail about how the state intends to use additional funds it manages to add value to Race to the Top funds. As a result, some but not full points were awarded for building statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain the reform plan. (d) Budget: It is difficult to tell from the budget and budget narrative how the state will leverage other state funds, including state and federal grant programs, entitlements, stabilization funds, private grants, and in kind donations with Race to the Top funds to support reform strategies. Leveraging funds is a key means of sustainability in the future. The budget narrative should reflect the other funding streams that will be used in the total plan. This would eliminate the perception of budget overlap or double billing. For example, the development of a longitudinal data system is reflected in the Race to the Top budget even though the state has applied for a state grant specifically targeted to the data system initiative. Tighter integration of funding sources is needed. (e) The state pledges to continue funding from a variety of sources for reform efforts that are validated as successful. More detail about the validation process would be useful to gauge how realistic the plan for sustainability is. A2 (ii) (a) Teachers union support was contingent on eliminating important reform strategies. There was no evidence submitted to indicate principal and administrator support. (b) The state submitted 12 letters of support for the Race to the Top application, the majority from institutions of higher education. The only letter of support from a government official was from the Governor. No other legislators submitted letters. Parents, business leaders, and community members also did not submit letters supporting the state's application. As a result of lack of evidence of support from major stakeholders, few points were awarded.

(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps	30	19
(i) Making progress in each reform area	5	3
(ii) Improving student outcomes	25	16

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

A3 (i) Although the state claims to have pursued reform efforts similar to those of Race to the Top in the four reform areas, not all of them listed in the application align. For example, under great teachers and leaders the state cites as an example its Quality Teaching Standards for teachers. Yet these do not include linking teacher performance to student performance nor do they base compensation, retention, or promotion on demonstrated effectiveness in raising student achievement. As a result, full points were not awarded. A3 (ii) The state's track record for raising achievement levels and closing gaps in student performance is modest to-date. As a result, some, but not all points were awarded for making significant progress in raising achievement levels and closing the gap. (a) Mathematics performance on state standards-based tests showed a small but steady increase over four years from 2005-2009. Reading scores also showed a small but steady gain over four years. A pattern of decreasing proficiency from elementary grades to middle and high school grades still exists for both reading and mathematics performance. NAEP testing showed higher progress over two years than that of other states, but only a small increase in math for grades 4 and 8 and slight increases in reading at grades 4 and 8. (b) Although the state claims to have made progress in narrowing the achievement gap and there was a slight but steady increase in proficiency for sub-groups, wide gaps still exist. For example, the achievement of African-American and Hispanic students in mathematics and reading was over 20 points less than that of White and Asian-American students. In addition the gap widened to over 30 points between sub-groups from elementary to middle and high school grades.

(c) The state presented the annual graduation rate as a reverse calculation based on a projection from the annual dropout rate. This was a confusing way to present the data. It appears to show a decrease in the dropout rate from 2003 to 2008. However, the numbers are not actual, but projected numbers. Since the data was not reported by race, it was not possible to compare students to determine if a gap in graduation existed and to which races it applied.

Total	125	57
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B. Standards and Assessments

	Available	Tier 1
(B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards	40	40
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality standards	20	20
(ii) Adopting standards	20	20

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:
 B1 (i) In May 2009, the state's Board of Education approved a resolution to participate in an initiative sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices to develop a common core of state standards in English language arts and mathematics. The following week, the State Superintendent of Education signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the CCSSO and NGA. This indicates the state's commitment to working collaboratively with other states on a common core of state standards. The validation process of the sponsoring organizations, as outlined, indicates that international benchmarks were used. Achieve, ACT, and the College Board determined that the standards prepared graduating high school students to be college and career ready. A majority of states (48), as well as two territories and the District of Columbia participated in the standards consortium. As a result, the application earned a "High" rating and was awarded full points for this sub-criterion. B1 (ii) The State Board of Education plans to waive the traditional three year process for adopting standards by subject area to insure the adoption of the Common Core Standards for the state for English language arts and mathematics occurs by August 2, 2010. Currently, a state committee appointed by the Governor and the State Board of Education is expected to augment the Common Core Standards with state specific standards before recommending adoption. It appears from the evidence presented that the process is on track and the state will meet the agreed-upon deadline. As a result, full points were awarded for the "adopting standards" sub-criterion.

(B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments	10	10
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(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:
 B2 The state is participating in a multi-state consortium* for the development of common summative assessments aligned with the Common Core of State Standards in English language arts and Mathematics sponsored by Achieve. The state has also joined a consortium of 36 states to develop Balanced Assessments of the Common Core Standards to include teacher-scored work and other evidence of student learning in addition to paper-and-pencil tests. Especially noteworthy is the state's effort to design standards-based assessments for learners with special needs so that the progress of all students in the state can be monitored and there is accountability for their learning. These efforts demonstrate a commitment to upgrading the work of measuring students' proficiency with standards. *Within the Achieve consortium, there are 27 of the 50 states. Within the State Consortium Developing Balanced Assessments of the Common Core Standards, there are 36 of the 50 states. As a result, the state is working with a majority of states and is awarded full points.

(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	20	12
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

B3 The state's broad plan for transitioning schools to higher standards and more rigorous assessments needs more definition and clarity. For example, great emphasis is placed on professional development for teachers to develop the knowledge, competence, and skill they need to teach to higher standards. The model presented is a train the trainer model with centralized training of regional center staff. It is unclear whether these trainers will provide workshops or engage in over the shoulder coaching and mentoring of teachers in the classroom or a combination of both and/or how frequently they will be engaged in training and how much training each teacher will receive. The application is also vague about who will train the trainers. Another area of concern is using professional pathways for determining who will serve as master teachers. This will be difficult to implement since it was deleted from the MOU signed by the participating LEAs due to the objection of the president of the state teachers union. The plan also calls for these master teachers to oversee classroom education. This is a principal's role. Teachers can support, coach, and mentor colleagues, but they are not trained to supervise instruction. More detail and specificity in this part of the state's plan for professional development is needed for clarity. The timeframe for transition activities is problematic as well. It is not ambitious enough. Waiting until 2013 for new assessments including formative assessments allows too much lag time between adoption of the new standards and assessing whether students are meeting them. Also, the alignment of existing programs – the state's reading initiative and its mathematics, science, and technology program – can and should occur as quickly as possible after standards are adopted. As a result of all these concerns, the application did not receive full points for this criterion.

Total	70	62
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C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

	Available	Tier 1
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	24	16
(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: C1 Based on self-report data, the state has in place eight of the twelve elements outlined in the America COMPETES Act. Elements to be completed include the following: capacity to communicate with higher education data, student-level transcript information, data necessary to address alignment and preparation for success in postsecondary education, and information regarding successful student transitions to postsecondary education. Two points per America COMPETES Act element were awarded for a total of 16 points.		
(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	5	3
(C)(2) Reviewer Comments: C2 The many enhancements proposed to the state's current longitudinal data system need to be more tightly integrated with each other so the system truly supports the state's multiple users. The state's plan calls for further development of the system so that the data it contains can be converted into usable knowledge for improving student learning by teachers, principals, superintendents, parents and other stakeholders. New developments in the system will include elements outlined in the America COMPETES Act that are missing from the present system, the design of a metadata storehouse, a data reporting portal, pre-designed reports, achievement tracking by standard for individual students, a catalogue of instructional strategies mapped to assessments, and dashboards for various end-users. Performance Measures and annual targets for users of the system are not presented. As a result, full points were not awarded.		
(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	18	9
(C)(3) Reviewer Comments: C3 (i) and (ii) It is unclear whether an existing method or system for data analysis for instructional improvement and planning will be used or whether the state will develop its own. The state proposes a		

structure for providing support and professional development - both the technical training needed to use the system and training in how to use data to improve teaching practice – through a state level director and 11 full time lead data trainers based in each of the 11 regional centers. Their role will be to conduct training sessions for teachers and principals in the districts covered by their regions as well as to identify, train and certify district level trainers to conduct sessions for other teachers in the district. The train the trainer model will be used. The timeline calls for the immediate hiring of lead trainers (first two quarters of 2010) with a pilot ready for implementation in the third quarter of 2011. The lag time – over a year - between hiring the lead data trainers and their actual work with teachers is too great. Other professional development to supplement the train the trainer model should be described. As a result, some, but not full points were awarded. C3 (iii) A proposed data warehouse for sharing information among and between state agencies as well as providing access to data for researchers to conduct studies seems promising. However, the narrative did not provide a description of how the state will insure that the components of the reform effort are evaluated using this data.

Total	47	28
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D. Great Teachers and Leaders

	Available	Tier 1
(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals	21	14
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: D1 (i) and (ii) Limits in state law and evidence presented in the application indicate that alternative certification programs for teachers are not generally available or used in the state. All require affiliation with institutions of higher education. As a result, few points could be awarded for these sub-criteria. The state Board of Education has rules for the authorization of alternative certification for teachers. Currently, by state code, alternative certification is only open to teaching candidates for grades nine through twelve or at elementary grades (K-8) in certain subjects. Alternative certificates are time bound and cannot be renewed for longer than a three year period. Emergency certifications may be authorized by the State Superintendent for Education for a period of one year. In 2004, the state redefined the process for licensing school principals and redesigned principal preparation programs to include more field experience and direct mentoring. A practitioner group appointed by the State Superintendent for Education approves the content of the courses for certification of administrators and evaluates the programs. These programs require the involvement of institutions of higher education. The state also developed a set of standards for teachers – Quality Teaching Standards – that spell out expectations and levels of teacher performance. Some evidence was provided regarding alternative teacher certification programs in the state that include the five elements defined by the Race to the Top application. D1 (iii) Because the state has a system for identifying teacher shortages and an approach to solving the problem, full points were awarded for this sub-criterion. The state’s incentive system for recruiting teachers for areas of shortage or high need provides a \$20,000 college scholarship/loan forgiveness program for aspiring teachers in critical needs areas – mathematics, science, and English language arts. One hundred scholarships are awarded annually. The state has a system identifying patterns of teacher shortage by subject area through the Governor’s Commission on Quality Teaching. Shortages exist in science, mathematics and special education and there is an ongoing need for teachers of English language arts.		
(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	58	19
(i) Measuring student growth	5	5
(ii) Developing evaluation systems	15	7
(iii) Conducting annual evaluations	10	0
(iv) Using evaluations to inform key decisions	28	7

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

D2 (i) According to the application narrative, the state's current longitudinal data system does not have unique student identification numbers to track student growth over time. The state's plan is to have this in place by the end of 2010 and to have a metric for measuring student growth and an operating system for following student achievement by mid-2013. Because the system can currently track student achievement by school, a system for linking student achievement to principals is already in place. As a result, full points were awarded for this criterion. D2 (ii) This part of the application is extremely underdeveloped. While the state does have Quality Teaching Standards that include levels of teacher performance and an evaluation instrument based on the standards, both documents describe teaching behaviors rather than outcomes. There is no link currently to student achievement and growth as a significant factor in teacher effectiveness. The timeframe and activities are vague and do not include performance measures or annual targets. As a result, few points were awarded. D2 (iii) For principals: The state currently provides data on student achievement by school to principals. The application does not state whether superintendents conduct annual performance evaluations of principals or use this data in their reviews. For teachers: The application does not state whether teacher evaluations are conducted annually. The application also does not state that evaluations are linked to student achievement. Not enough evidence is provided to award any points for this sub-criterion. D2 (iv) Performance measures, baseline data, and annual targets were not presented in the application. This makes it difficult to gauge how the state will demonstrate progress on the reform elements of Race to the Top and build a culture of accountability for student achievement. It is not clear from the application narrative that coaching and professional development for teachers and principals is linked to the performance of students. What is stated is that interactive modules with video clips (to be developed) for the Quality Teaching Standards from the teacher evaluation instrument and the Standards for Instructional Leaders from the principal evaluation process will be provided for teachers and principals. The evaluation system, as outlined here, if not linked to student outcomes, could weaken rather than strengthen the accountability requirements of Race to the Top. Since student growth and achievement is not used in the evaluation process, designations that could lead to career opportunities such as "teachers recognized for outstanding teaching" and "high performing principals" and "strong principals" appear to be subjective rather than based on transparent and fair evaluations. The state proposes to develop "effectiveness impact reports" for teachers and principals, but this aspiration is not reflected in any of the timelines. As a result, few points were awarded for this sub-criterion.

(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals	25	10
(i) Ensuring equitable distribution in high-poverty or high-minority schools	15	5
(ii) Ensuring equitable distribution in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas	10	5

(D)(3) Reviewer Comments:

D3 (i) The state's plan involves the future use of distance learning through its statewide network, ACCESS and the redesign of teacher preparation programs (found in the timeline, not the narrative, so no details were presented.) Again, performance measures, baseline data and annual targets were not provided. This considerably weakened this part of the application. Given the importance of this element of school reform, a more ambitious and aggressive approach than distance learning is needed. As a result, full points were not awarded for this sub-criterion. D3 (ii) The state's plan to scale up its incentive system for recruiting teachers for areas of shortage or high need by providing a \$20,000 college scholarship or loan forgiveness to aspiring teachers in critical needs areas – mathematics, science, and English language arts – is commendable. However, this part of the plan is not reflected in the timeline. One hundred scholarships are awarded annually. This baseline data along with expected annual increases are needed to gauge the degree of the scale up.

(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	14	10
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(D)(4) Reviewer Comments:

D4 (i) A strength of this portion of the application is the state's willingness to immediately work on the redesign of the state's 27 teacher credentialing programs and the 15 principal preparation programs to align with the state's Quality Teaching Standards and Standards for Instructional Leaders even before the longitudinal data system has the capacity to provide data on student achievement, link it to individual teachers and principals, and then back to their preparation programs. The application does not state whether the State Board of Education and the college, university, and alternative certification programs will use the same definition of student achievement and student growth for the purposes of identifying effective teachers and their preparation programs. It is important to have agreed-upon achievement and growth targets to insure uniformity in this measurement. D4 (ii) The state proposes to add a New Principal Mentoring/Principal Residency Program to its list of credentialing options for principals. No information is provided on the expansion of credentialing options and programs for teachers. As a result, full points were not awarded.

(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals	20	10
<p>(D)(5) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>D5 (i) The state's use of 11 regional centers with a statewide director and 11 lead data trainers was presented in another part of the application as a support to train teachers and principals in the technical aspects of data use as well as to develop a systematic way of analyzing data on student achievement and applying it to the solution of problems of student learning. It is unclear from the application whether the lead data trainers will have the skills and expertise to engage in other forms of professional development, such as conducting courses and workshops in the teaching of mathematics, leading study groups, and providing over-the-shoulder coaching and mentoring for teachers. The need for deeper professional development may emerge from a thorough review of student achievement in relation to the new standards. This portion of the application should include a presentation of the multiple roles the 11 regional trainers will have in their work with participating LEAs and more clearly define their responsibilities. It should also describe how the LEAs will develop the capacity to lead the reform work locally. As a result, full points were not awarded for this criterion. D5 (ii). This portion of the application did not include a description of the evaluation system and measuring instruments, such as surveys, observations, and other tools in addition to data from the longitudinal data system that will be used to measure the effectiveness of professional development. The process for continually refining and improving professional development was also not outlined. As a result, because of the lack of specificity, full points were not awarded for this sub-criterion.</p>		
Total	138	63

E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

	Available	Tier 1
(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs	10	10
<p>(E)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>E1 (i) By state law and federal NCLB requirements, the State Superintendent of Schools has the authority to intervene in low-performing schools and districts. The state also has a plan for working with them called the Department of Education's Rewards and Intervention Plan. Elementary and secondary schools with the lowest average scores in reading and mathematics over a 6 year period are designated as persistently low achieving and in need of restructuring. As a result, the application is awarded full points for this criterion.</p>		
(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	40	20
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	5
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	15
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p>		

E2 (i) and (ii) The state plans to scale up a model it believes has met with success in turning around its lowest performing schools and has some elements of the Race to the Top Transformation Model. Strengths of the state's plan are intensive attention and support and the implementation of components that include intervention with a turnaround team coupled with a continuous improvement residency program, training for school staff to increase graduation rates, multiple models of pathways to graduation, including credit recovery programs, incentives for low performing schools to show progress, and integrating technology as a tool for learning in all turnaround schools. The plan will also involve increasing statewide support through a state coordinator managing the efforts of field staff currently engaged in supporting the schools. The state will also request that LEAs dedicate one staff member to each low-performing school in the district. While points were gained for the state's plans, points were lost because the application provided no data on the grade levels of the schools and how the state balanced the numbers of elementary and secondary schools. In addition, in a couple of places personnel were mentioned only in the timeline not in the narrative. For example, a "school turnaround specialist" was mentioned in the timeline, but the position's roles and responsibilities were never defined or clarified. Similarly, reference to a continuous improvement residency program was made as a strong component of the state's success, but it was never described. No actual table data was presented in the application about the number of schools for whom this intervention was successful. One sentence in the application states that the number of schools in improvement decreased from 452 to 121, but no timeframe was given. It is difficult to infer the historic performance of the state on school turnarounds with such limited data. Also, no performance measures or baseline data were provided. According to the evidence presented, the state's interventions were based on the AYP designations of the NCLB Act. With more rigorous standards - the Common Core Standards - and more challenging common assessments the results and lessons learned from the past may not be transferable. As a result, full points were not awarded to the application on this criterion.

Total	50	30
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F. General

	Available	Tier 1
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	5
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: F1 (i) According to evidence provided by the applicant, the state's expenditures for K-12 and Higher Education in FY2009 decreased from those of FY2008. However, the state does use a funding formula that reduces expenditures the Department of Education makes from its share of property taxes to local school systems that raise more property tax in order to distribute more state funds to local districts that raise less taxes. As a result of this effort towards equitable funding, some points were awarded for this criterion.		
(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	8
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: F2 (i) The state does not currently have legislation authorizing the establishment of public charter schools. Legislation is being introduced by the Governor during the current legislative session 2010 to authorize the establishment of charter schools in areas of need. Since the state has established magnet schools and schools focused on the arts and the STEM disciplines and at least two of the schools have a charter school-like governance structure and board of directors, some points were awarded for this criterion.		
(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	5
(F)(3) Reviewer Comments:		

F3 The state has implemented a number of innovations prior to the Race to the Top grant competition, including the First Choice high school program, the A+ Program, more rigorous high school requirements in mathematics and science, a statewide Reading Initiative that placed a reading coach in all K-3 schools in the state, an Adolescent Literacy Program, a Mathematics Science and Technology Initiative involving 50 percent of the state's schools and virtual learning courses for high school students.

Total	55	18
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Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	15	15

Competitive Reviewer Comments:

The state has initiatives that involve STEM disciplines. These include a Mathematics, Science, and Technology Initiative that currently involves 50 percent of the schools in the state, First Choice that increased the mathematics and science requirements for high school graduation for all students, virtual high school courses in mathematics, science, engineering, and technology, and the A+ Program that earned the state recognition from the National Institutes of Science and Mathematics and the College Board for making STEM disciplines a priority. The Longitudinal Data System (Criterion C) will include data on student performance in STEM disciplines. As a result, the application is awarded full points for the STEM competitive priority

Total	15	15
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Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		No

Absolute Reviewer Comments:

While many elements of Race to the Top's reform agenda are mentioned in the application, some salient concerns affecting a comprehensive approach to education reform should be noted. The state lacks a charter school law that provides choices and options for students and families. The state teachers union does not support some key reform strategies. The budget does not match the narrative in several places. There was an inconsistent use of performance measures, baseline data, and annual targets throughout the application. Key data tables and documents for evidence were missing. As a result, the state's application did not present a comprehensive and coordinated approach to education reform as required by Race to the Top.

Total		0
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Grand Total	500	273
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