Race to the Top

Technical Review Form - Tier 1

Alabama Application #2000AL-4

A. State Success Factors

	Available	Tier 1
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it	**65**	**21**
(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda	5	3
(ii) Securing LEA commitment	45	10
(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact	15	8

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) The plan begins by offering a well written executive summary which includes a snapshot of where the state currently is, where it wants to go (i.e., concrete goals), the reforms already in place, and the state's proposed enhancements for each of the 4 educational areas required within the RTTT application. However, after reading the entire plan, the rest of the plan is not comprehensive. Points in the medium range are given.

(ii) 105 of 132 school districts (80%) in the state agree to participate, representing 87% of all students, and 86% of all students in poverty. Each of the 105 LEAs secured the signatures of their superintendent and local board president. None of the local Alabama Education Association Presidents signed (with the plan noting that this was as directed from their state office), but the plan also notes that there is no local collective bargaining in their state. The summary table indicates that not all districts agreed to participate for three of the "great teachers and leaders" reforms (e.g., using evaluations to inform compensation, promotion, retention, tenure and removal), noting that 99 of the 105 (or 90%) agree to all criteria. However, when examining the data for individual LEAs, there are some "no's" listed for other criteria, and when looking at the populations of those not participating in those reforms, it includes the largest LEA (at 36,058 pupils). The lack of local teacher association support, and having some districts not agreeing to participate in the "difficult" teacher evaluation reform, does weaken overall LEA commitment to the plan. The MO followed the standard language provided within the application, and only included a list of the state plan elements (with no added detail). Points in the low range are given.

(iii) As noted, the participating LEAs cover 87% of all students, and 86% of students in poverty (although without teacher association support and a few districts that did not agree to participate in certain teacher evaluation areas). The plan does specifically reference some very ambitious goals for the 4 areas noted in the application, but lacking some key support, they may not be achievable. Points in the medium range are given.

(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	**30**	**8**
(i) Ensuring the capacity to implement	20	5
(ii) Using broad stakeholder support	10	3

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) The plan indicates that no new state-level positions would be created to oversee the grant, but instead existing personnel and resources (e.g., Regional Centers) would be aligned around the 4 areas of the plan. An advisory team comprised of relevant stakeholders is proposed (i.e., Education Reform and Innovation Council (ERIC)). Yet, the overall budget does include about $9.4 million for state personnel (and nearly $38.9 for external contracts). Although the plan indicates that the state's goal is to distribute as much funding to the local districts as possible (and to build capacity at that level), this section of the plan does not convince the reader that existing state personnel, no matter how they are rearranged, can effectively oversee the distribution of $175,000,000. Points in the low range are given.

(ii) The plan contains a number of support letters, many from political leaders and a significant number from higher education institutions (although it should be noted that almost every higher education letter used identical template language). Other key groups represented included the Association of School Boards, Regional Centers, and various corporate and community leaders. Noticeably absent was a letter of support from the state teacher's association, as well as from other K-12 educator associations (e.g., school superintendents, principals). Given the absence of such groups and the generic support language within a portion of the letters, points in the low range are given.

(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps	**30**	**12**
(i) Making progress in each reform area	5	3
(ii) Improving student outcomes	25	9

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) The plan summarizes, within this section as well as the overall introduction to this plan, a number of activities within each of the 4 reform areas are indeed underway. However, nothing was mentioned about how ARRA and other federal funds used to support these efforts. Points in the medium range are given.

(ii) The plan offers summary information which reveals some student performance increases on the state assessments and certain areas of NAEP, as well as some narrowing of the achievement gap. Greatest improvements are found in high school dropout rates (using the older state definition to show trend data). Supporting data had to be extracted from multiple appendices which offered existing summaries not prepared specifically for this application. Moreover, this section did not adequately explain the connections between data improvements and specific actions (although some of this occurred in the opening overview summary section). Points in the medium range are given.

Total	125	41

B. Standards and Assessments

	Available	Tier 1
(B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards	**40**	**22**
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality standards	20	20
(ii) Adopting standards	20	2

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) Alabama is in a consortium being led by the National Governors Association and the Council for Chief School Officers (which the plan noted has 48 states involved), in addition to being involved with ACHIEVE's American Diploma Project, which the plan notes involves 35 states. Having met this criterion, points in the high range are given.

(ii) The plan describes an extensive 3-year process usually used to adopt a new set of standards, but then notes that the state board will waive these traditional mechanisms. Instead a state committee will work to augment the Common Core Standards and adopt them by November 2010 (missing the required August 2nd date to receive high points). In addition, there is nothing in this section detailing a high quality plan for the implementation of such adopted standards. Points in the low range are given.

(B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments	**10**	**10**
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality assessments	5	5
(ii) Including a significant number of States	5	5

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) and (ii) The plan summarizes the many assessments the state currently uses, and indicates that Alabama is participating in the ACHIEVE's assessment partnership (with 27 states noted as participating). Points in the high range for each subsection are given.

(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	**20**	**10**

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The plan contains general information surrounding important planned activities in transitioning to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments, and what is being proposed overall makes sense. Timelines and core activities are also offered, but the plan fails to identify responsible parties. Although a train-the-trainer model and the use of existing regional centers are proposed, the budget appears to be on the low side given the scope of this area (less than $2 million over 4 years). Points in the medium range are given.

Total	70	42

C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

	Available	Tier 1
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	**24**	**20**

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The plan indicates that the state has implemented 10 of the 12 elements (although there are numerous advancements noted in the plan as still being needed for many elements). 2 points for each implemented element is given.

(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	**5**	**1**

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The plan offers information on steps which will be taken to finish the data system and make information available to key stakeholders, but it offers very limited detail. A timeline is offered, but no information on who is responsible for completing each step is offered (which is required within a "high-quality" plan). The plan's budget includes about $10 million in order to complete the system, and then another $2 million for training, which make sense given where the state is in its development of the data system. Points in the low range are given.

(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	**18**	**7**
(i) Increasing the use of instructional improvement systems	6	2

(ii) Supporting LEAs, schools, and teachers in using instructional improvement systems	6	2
(iii) Making the data from instructional improvement systems available to researchers	6	3

(C)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) and (ii) The plan proposes to identify school systems that effectively use data and then use them as models within a train-the-trainer program via their Regional In-Service Centers (using both face-to-face on on-line methods). In addition, local LEAs will be required to document within their local RTTT scope of work how they intend to support instructional improvement systems in collaboration with state support. The plan also notes the state's plans to partner with nationally recognized non-profits to accomplish this training. The budget is about $5 million for these activities, of which $4.1 million is for contractual services. While these ideas have merit, the details do not convincingly depict a systemic plan to ensure use of instructional improvement systems within all participating districts. Points in the medium range are given for both sub-elements.

(iii) The plan describes efforts to create the Alabama Research Triad, linking the state department, LEAs and partner research universities. This is a sound idea, and coupled with the completed integrated data system could lead to having such data being available and accessible to researchers. A timeline is offered, however not enough information on how this is to be accomplished and no responsible parties for each task are identified. Points in the medium range are given.

Total	47	28

D. Great Teachers and Leaders

	Available	Tier 1
(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals	**21**	**0**
(i) Allowing alternative routes to certification	7	0
(ii) Using alternative routes to certification	7	0
(iii) Preparing teachers and principals to fill areas of shortage	7	0

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) and (ii) The plan summarizes 2 types of existing alternative certification programs for teachers, but both require candidates to take university-based courses (although one requires just 12 credits). No numbers regarding usage were provided. In addition, the plan noted that there will be 30 Teach for America teachers in place during Fall 2010, with 60 more during the next 2 years, and that an alternative certification program has been established for them (though no details on the program are provided). The plan notes there is no alternative certification available for principals. Points in the low range are given.

(iii) The plan notes that the state does not currently have a formal system for monitoring, evaluating, and identifying areas of teacher and principal shortages and then preparing teachers and principals to fill these areas of shortage. The plan did provide strategies for beginning such a system, but since this section is focused on existing conditions, no points are given.

(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	**58**	**8**
(i) Measuring student growth	5	2
(ii) Developing evaluation systems	15	3

(iii) Conducting annual evaluations	10	1
(iv) Using evaluations to inform key decisions	28	2

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) The plan includes a resolution passed by the state board of education endorsing the use of multiple valid, reliable and objective student learning results as the predominant measure of teacher and principal effectiveness, calling into action a broad-based group to develop the definitions of each measure in time for full implementation to occur with the first day of school in 2011. Yet the plan does not clarify to what extent a resolution ensures that clear approaches to measure student growth will indeed occur. Points in the low range are given.

(ii), (iii), and (iv). The plan describes the creation of a new advisory committee to the state board called the Education Reform and Innovation Council (ERIC). ERIC is tasked with recommending the design of a comprehensive evaluation system for teachers and principals that will include at least 4 effectiveness ratings, and annual evaluations. In addition, the group is to explore the use of student growth and teacher and principal outcomes for making key human resource decisions. While all this is good in theory, there is no clear requirement that the results of any new evaluation systems will indeed be used within all participating districts in a uniform manner to inform human resource decisions, including compensation, promotion and retention. There is also no mention of any ties to certification. The plan also includes minimal training support from the state (e.g., the creation of a comprehensive training module that LEAs can use), with the responsibility for implementation left to each participating LEA. Points in the low range are given for each criterion.

(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals	**25**	**2**
(i) Ensuring equitable distribution in high-poverty or high-minority schools	15	1
(ii) Ensuring equitable distribution in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas	10	1

(D)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) and (ii) The plan calls for using data to create an annual state "equitable distribution plan," and encouraging each participating district to establish and implement a local equitable distribution plan (with the state providing LEAs will teacher and principal effectiveness data broken down by school, grade level, and subject area). RTTT funds would then be used for recruitment, including interest-free loans of up to $10,000 to promising teachers and principal candidates who enroll in alternative certification programs and commit to work in a hard-to-staff subject (including STEM subjects) and/or a high-need school for at least 3 years (about $11 million in the budget for this). RTTT funds would also be used to develop a centralized staffing center to screen and connect promising teacher and principal candidates to positions, as well as training LEA personnel in effective hiring and staffing practices (the budget calls for 28 HR-related specialists to be hired for this effort, involving about $12 million over 4 years). Competitive grants would also be available for LEAs to design and implement new compensation systems to reward, recognize and retain highly effective teaches and principals. Overall, these ideas are sound in concept, but not systemic and come across as lots of "things" being thrown at a problem. No annual targets were provided, nor were timelines and responsible parties provided for each piece. Also missing is the required evidence (e.g., definition of high-minority and low-minority schools, and the performance measures). Points in the low range are given for each criterion.

(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	**14**	**4**
(i) Linking student data to credentialing programs and reporting publicly	7	2
(ii) Expanding effective programs	7	2

(D)(4) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) The plan calls for determining and publicly reporting the aggregate effectiveness data of teachers and principals for each preparation program, as broken down by graduation year, grade level taught and subject area (all occurring by September 2012). However, no activities and responsibilities are detailed. Points in the low range are given.

(ii) The plan notes that the state will start using the effectiveness data to encourage revisions within preparation programs (otherwise the program will risk losing its accreditation in some or all areas, with alternative programs that do not improve 2 years in a row losing the ability to prepare candidates in some or all areas). A competitive grant process involving $2 million in RTTT funds will be developed for teacher preparation programs to redesign their programs in alignment with new expectations and standards. However, such funding may not be adequate to support redesign within 27 traditional and 17 alternative programs, and no activities and responsibilities are detailed. Points in the low range are given.

(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals	**20**	**10**
(i) Providing effective support	10	5
(ii) Continuously improving the effectiveness of the support	10	5

(D)(5) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) and (ii) The plan includes detailed goals with dates and performance targets, and strategies for meeting those goals. Overall, the many strategies appear systemic, and involve a blend of state and local initiatives and support. Missing is information on the responsible parties to accomplish these good ideas and specific budget amounts for activities summarized in this section. Points in the medium range are given.

Total	138	24

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: (Tier 1)

The plan includes information which clarifies that the state board of education does have legal authority to intervene directly in the state's persistently lowest-achieving schools and districts. Points in the top range are given.

(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	**40**	**30**
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	5
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	25

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) The state has an approved definition for persistently lowest-achieving schools, and thus full points are given.

(ii) The plan offers nice detail on planned strategies to support the state's persistently lowest-achieving schools. For the schools with the most severe concerns, the state plans to invoke its authority to become involved in school oversight and the school will be placed in a Reformation School System (a new LEA under joint oversight of the state superintendent and local superintendent). Aspects of a high quality plan, including clear goals with tangible targets are included, as is information on lessons learned from past work supporting the lowest performing schools. However responsible parties and detailed timelines are missing.

Overall, this section has some good pieces, but if more detail was provided may be part of a coherent approach to turning around these schools. Points in the medium range are given.

Total	50	40

F. General

	Available	Tier 1
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	**10**	**9**
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	5
(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	4

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) The plan included data that revealed the percentage of total revenues available to the state that were used to support public education increased by 0.05% (between FY 2008 and FY 2009). Points in the high range are given.

(ii) The state's funding formula was revised in 1995 to deal with equity issues and contains a specific weight for "at risk" students, providing additional per pupil funds to districts with such students. However, no specific data was provided that showed any overall per pupil averages within and among districts and individual schools. Thus it is not possible to determine the extent to which the state's policies have actually led to equitable funding. Points in the lower high range are given.

(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	**40**	**0**
(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"	8	0
(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes	8	0
(iii) Equitably funding charter schools	8	0
(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities	8	0
(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools	8	0

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i), (ii), (iii), and (iv). Despite efforts to pass a law, the state does not currently have a charter school law. No points are given for these subsections.

(v) The plan indicates that through the state's Innovation School Systems option, districts are able to receive much of the same regulatory and policy waiver options as charter schools. However, this concept was only recently created via a State Board resolution that creates a working committee to implement this option. Thus there is no system yet in place. No points are given.

(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	**5**	**3**

(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The plan identifies a number of additional education reform activities the state is engaged in, all of which serve as a foundation for the RTTT reforms. However, no evidence of how these reforms have resulted in measurable outcomes was offered. Points in the middle range are given.

Total	55	12

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	**15**	**0**

Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The plan identifies a number of STEM initiatives already in place and proposes to more effectively and efficiently coordinate such STEM efforts. While the state's existing initiatives and proposed STEM Advisory Council make sense, these ideas alone do not represent a high-quality plan. Also proposed STEM efforts were only minimally discussed throughout the overall application, resulting in limited coordination with other proposed reforms. No points are awarded.

Total	15	0

Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

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

Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Overall, Alabama's plan does not meet this absolute priority of proposing a comprehensive approach to education reform. While the plan proposes some good ideas, as referenced throughout this review there is inadequate detail regarding the execution of such ideas. Therefore, Alabama's proposed plan does not offer what one could consider a comprehensive and coherent set of planned strategies to address the four education reform areas specified in the ARRA.

Total		0

Grand Total	500	187

Race to the Top

Technical Review Form - Tier 1

Alabama Application #2000AL-7

A. State Success Factors

	Available	Tier 1
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it	**65**	**16**
(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda	5	3
(ii) Securing LEA commitment	45	5
(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact	15	8

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) There is a comprehensive and coherent reform agenda set for by Alabama; however, many of the details (especially required timelines for activities) are missing.

(ii) Teacher buy in is imperative, yet no union representative signed an LEA MOU. One of the Participating LEAs that the State included marked "No" on half of the Scope of Work indicators lowering the actual percent of participating LEAs to 78%. Of those remaining 78%, 5 are not willing to use student achievement on the new evaluation system that will inform decisions regarding teachers' tenure or dismissal. Highly effective and effective teachers are identified as the critical component to increasing student achievement, closing achievement gaps, and turning around persistently low achieving schools so the absence of this support id worrisome.

(iii) The application conceded that there is an expectation of LEA attrition as the RTTT plan is put into place. It is difficult to understand how Alabama will be able to implement the Race to the Top plan with broad statewide impact without this support. Moreover without union support the plan will not be successful. Increasing student achievement, decreasing achievement gaps, increasing graduation rates, and increasing college enrollment and success are all contingent on what happens in classrooms with teachers. One positive aspect however, is that 86% of the children in poverty are served by the participating LEAs.

(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	**30**	**2**
(i) Ensuring the capacity to implement	20	0
(ii) Using broad stakeholder support	10	2

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) The budget for A.2.(i) indicates $150,000 for ALSDE personnel for year one, with increasing amounts for the next three years of the grant. It cannot be ascertained from the budget narrative what the responsibilities of these persons are to be. The statement was made in the application that there will be "no state level personnel added to staff the department" so it appears there is a conflict here. Appendix A14 does not indicate any responsibilities, and there is no indication how this restructuring MIGHT change the present structure of ALSDE. No discussion was made concerning supporting activities for participating LEAs to successfully implement the education reform plan. It cannot be determined how RTTT funds will

interface with other funds to provide the capacity required to implement the proposed plan. It is not clear how the State will use fiscal, political, and human capital resources to continue after the period of funding has ended.

(ii) It is clear from the MOUs and the letters of support that there is a lack of union support. Moreover, there are no letters of support from the principal or superintendent organizations in the State. Letters of support are provided from the legislature and higher education institutes, both of which have a financial stake in the implementation of the plan.

(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps	**30**	**4**
(i) Making progress in each reform area	5	1
(ii) Improving student outcomes	25	3

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) There is no mention of ARRA or other Federal and State funding that has previously been used to support the four reform areas.

(ii) The State did not provide longitudinal data from State assessments. It is difficult to understand if connections were made between the data given and actions that contributed to the data, as no reflection was included. No actions were presented that accounted for student achievement gains on State assessments. NAEP and State assessment data do not correlate. There was no closing of the State's achievement gaps, which remain wide. The State's graduation rate is expected to decline to 65.6% when the State begins using the National Governor's Association 4 year cohort model. This will demand a new baseline and determination for graduation improvement. There was neither demonstration nor discussion of the State's ability to improve in any of these areas.

Total	125	22

B. Standards and Assessments

	Available	Tier 1
(B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards	**40**	**24**
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality standards	20	20
(ii) Adopting standards	20	4

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) Alabama has joined 48 other states as part of the Council of Chief State School Officers Common Core initiative.

(ii) A process for adoption and a timeframe of a November 2010 adoption is planned.

(B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments	**10**	**10**
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality assessments	5	5
(ii) Including a significant number of States	5	5

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i & ii) Alabama is in collaboration with 35 states on the American Diploma Program, with 27 states on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers and 45 states on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	**20**	**6**

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

While a Timelines and Activities chart is included, no data has been entered. A plan is presented but many components are weak. A list of activities is presented; however, important and required components such as who will be responsible and how activities will occur are missing. The goal of building principal leadership capacity around the common core is unclear as to how, when, and where this will occur, and what evaluation will be done to ensure translation of standards and assessment data to improve classroom practice.

Total	70	40

C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

	Available	Tier 1
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	**24**	**20**

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The plan indicates that Alabama has 10 components of the America Competes Act; however, several indicate that "Advancements" are still necessary.

(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	**5**	**1**

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Goals and activities are included; however, there is no listed responsible parties nor accessibility to the development of the data system . There was no mention of any use of data to inform decision makers in continuous improvement efforts.

(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	**18**	**7**
(i) Increasing the use of instructional improvement systems	6	2
(ii) Supporting LEAs, schools, and teachers in using instructional improvement systems	6	2
(iii) Making the data from instructional improvement systems available to researchers	6	3

(C)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i, ii, iii) Some evidence of who will take part in activities is in place. Regional In-Service Centers will provide a train-the-trainer model. When this will occur (a timeline) is a required component of the evidence, yet was not provided. There is also a plan for ALSDE, Regional In-Service Centers, and higher education personnel to partner to provide professional development. Again, however, no required timelines for work the are included. Expansion of the data system is planned and access to the information is to be made available to researchers and policy makers. Some timelines are included, but how all of it coordinates to provide necessary information for research to evaluate effectiveness of instructional materials, strategies,

and approaches for educating different types of students was unclear. This section lacks the standard of a high quality plan.

Total	47	28

D. Great Teachers and Leaders

	Available	Tier 1
(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals	**21**	**1**
(i) Allowing alternative routes to certification	7	0
(ii) Using alternative routes to certification	7	1
(iii) Preparing teachers and principals to fill areas of shortage	7	0

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) The first paragraph of the narrative says that Alabama does not currently have in place alternative routes to certification, but envisions alternative certificate programs to train non-traditional candidates in the next five years. Yet the Appendix D3 that was included offers alternative routes to certification. It cannot be determined whether alternative routes to certification exist or not. There is no discussion of plans for alternative certification programs for principals.

(ii) Teach for America is placing 30 students in Alabama schools this fall. The application states that Alabama is "committed to addressing this issue over the next five years." Goals, activities, timelines, or persons responsible which are required components were not included.

(iii) No plan presently exists to prepare teachers and principals to fill areas of shortage. Goals and timelines were included but lacked activities and persons responsible for achieving various aspects of the goals. (These are required components.)

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

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

This section does not meet the standard of a high quality plan.

(i) A Resolution was passed to measure student growth, although a definition of student growth has not been defined within the application. Plans to measure student growth exist but the activities, timelines, and parties responsible have not been included (these are required).

(ii) A vague plan exists for developing teacher and principal evaluation systems. There does not appear to be a commitment to use the definition of effective and highly effective teachers nor student growth as described in the RTTT RFP. The plan is not rigorous nor does there appear to be a commitment to use student growth as a "significant factor" in the evaluation system planned.

(iii) Earlier in the application it was stated that there is expected attrition of participating LEAs. From the narrative, it appears that conducting annual evaluations is where this expectation may happen. The State does not appear to be taking a strong stand on the issue of evaluations. There is no evaluation system in place and plans for the development of one are nonexistent.

(iv) There is no plan in place to use teacher/principal evaluations with student growth/achievement as a significant factor for human resource decisions including professional development, compensation, tenure or removal.

(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals	**25**	**2**
(i) Ensuring equitable distribution in high-poverty or high-minority schools	15	0
(ii) Ensuring equitable distribution in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas	10	2

(D)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) At this point in time there is no system in place to ensure an equitable distribution of teachers and principals so that students in high-minority/high poverty schools have access to highly effective educators. Timelines are not presented for putting a system in place. There is also no definition of high-minority and low-minority schools. A Performance Measures data chart was not provided.

(ii) Goals are set forth to increase the number and percentage of effective teachers in hard-to-staff subject areas, but how this will be accomplished is not discussed. There are no activities, timelines or responsible parties identified. A Performance Measures data chart was not included. These are required components. It is impossible to determine if the proposed goals are achievable without more detail.

(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	**14**	**4**
(i) Linking student data to credentialing programs and reporting publicly	7	2
(ii) Expanding effective programs	7	2

(D)(4) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) There are some goals in place to expand the data system, as well as use the data to inform decisions and inform the public. There are, however, no activities, or responsible parties included. These are required components.

(ii) The plan to redesign all of the teacher preparation programs is an ambitious undertaking; however, there are few activities listed and no responsible persons identified, despite being required components. The goal of having 15 of these preparation programs ready for students in the 2012-13 school year is stated, but the required Performance Measure Data chart was not included.

(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals	**20**	**5**
(i) Providing effective support	10	3
(ii) Continuously improving the effectiveness of the support	10	2

(D)(5) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) It is unclear if Alabama has, or is planning to develop, criteria for effective teachers as defined in the RTTT RFP. The Professional Pathways for Alabama Teachers program calls for a repurposing of State funds to provide instructional specialist activities; however, it is not discussed which funds will be used. The plan is ambitious but unclear on who is responsible for completion of activities, so this reviewer cannot determined if the plan is achievable.

(ii) The plan is brief; including only two activities: evaluate professional development and publish LEA data on teacher/principal effectiveness. It does not include any information on how these will be

accomplished. It cannot be determined if the plans are achievable. This section does not meet the standard of a high quality plan.

Total	138	12

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: (Tier 1) Legal authority is provided for the ALSDE to intervene in low-performing schools and districts.		
(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	**40**	**32**
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	5
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	27
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) (i & ii) A plan and specific criteria for identification of the PLAS in Alabama are in place. It is unclear how many low performing schools will be included in the 2010-12 cohort for improvement, or the second cohort turnaround. Success has been shown for assisting schools in the past. Activities and timelines are shown through July 2010. A detailed plan is in place, which includes the State and local collaboration for oversite, (a determination of what the most efficient model will be used to quickly turn around each school), and the human resource decisions necessary to put the plan in place. This plan is ambitious and provides the constant support that may make this plan achievable.		
Total	50	42

F. General

	Available	Tier 1
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	**10**	**10**
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	5
(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	5
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) (i) Alabama provided a larger percentage of funds to education in 2009 than in 2008. (ii) In 1995, legislation was passed that provided for te equitable funding of schools.		
(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	**40**	**1**
(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"	8	0
(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes	8	0
(iii) Equitably funding charter schools	8	0

(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities	8	0
(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools	8	1

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i-iv)) Charter schools are not allowed in Alabama.

(v) Alabama does not have a process in place for creation of autonomous public schools but Alabama provides innovation in LEAs which include:

- Waivers for innovation
- Waivers of Carnegie Unit constraints
- Dual enrollment to community colleges

Autonomy cannot be determined from the information provided. The resolution does not identify what rules can be waived, but appears to be in place to set up a committee.

(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	**5**	**3**

(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

There is movement toward innovation as demonstrated by:

- The Alabama Reading Initiative
- The Alabama Math Science and Technology initiative
- Reduction of time constraints on credit acquisition and
- Requirement of the Advanced Academic Endorsement diploma for all 9th graders this fall.

No discussion of how to reduce student achievement gaps or increase graduation rates is provided.

Total	55	14

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	**15**	**0**

Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

STEM has not been a strand throughout the application. STEM is not addressed across grade levels. How Alabama will meet the needs of the underserved has not been met.

Total	15	0

Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

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

Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

There is a lack of broad stakeholder support, missing detail for how goals will be implemented, answers of extreme brevity for many responses, and the application does not meet the comprehensive plan threshold.

Total		0

Grand Total	500	158

Race to the Top

Technical Review Form - Tier 1

Alabama Application #2000AL-8

A. State Success Factors

	Available	Tier 1
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it	**65**	**19**
(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda	5	3
(ii) Securing LEA commitment	45	12
(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact	15	4

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(A)(1)(i) Alabama has not established in its plan a strong, comprehensive and coherent foundation for a reform agenda that clearly articulates its goals for implementing reforms in the four education areas described in the ARRA and for improving student outcomes statewide. The plan lacks a clear and credible path for achieving many of its goals, and is not consistent with the specific reform plans proposed throughout its application. This despite a foundation, that precedes by several years, the objectives of the RTT initiative. The established initiatives of this foundation include a commission on high school graduation and dropouts, a move toward internationally bench marked standards, a state-wide data system, and plans to intervene in persistently low performing schools .

(A)(1)(ii) The applicant puts forth a modest commitment by participating LEAs to the state's plans for effective implementation of reform in the four education areas, as evidenced by Memoranda of Understanding and related support documentation, such as, table A (1) (iii), which shows 80% of districts have signed on to the state's RTT plan. However, numerous LEAs have chosen not to commit to various elements of the plan.

(a) Terms of the MOU reflect a weak commitment by the participating LEAs to the state's plan. It also appears that LEAs may opt out of any programs and initiatives at the LEAs discretion. This opt out clause is outlined on page 12 under section (A)(1)(iii) of the plan;

(b) Scope of work descriptions that require participating LEAs to implement all or significant portions of the state's Race to the Top plans is lacking, because the level of commitment is determined by each LEA for each initiative outlined in the scope of work; and

(c) While signatures from LEA superintendents and presidents of the local school boards is at 80%, no local teacher union leaders signed on to the MOUs.

Overall commitment to the state's application is weak.

(A)(1)(iii) It is questionable whether the LEAs that are participating in the state's Race to the Top plan will translate the applicant's goals into broad statewide impact, allowing the State to reach its ambitious yet achievable goals. This is because while the state has plans for — (a) Increasing student achievement in reading/language arts and mathematics; (b) Decreasing achievement gaps between subgroups in reading/language arts and mathematics; (c) Increasing high school graduation rates, and (d) Increasing college enrollment and increasing the number of students who complete at least a year's worth of college credit that is applicable to a degree within two years of enrollment in an institution of higher education - the

level of commitment demonstrated in table (A)(1)(iii) and section (A)(1)(iii) of the narrative does not represent a strong commitment state-wide and among all key stakeholders.

(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	**30**	**23**
(i) Ensuring the capacity to implement	20	20
(ii) Using broad stakeholder support	10	3

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(A)(2)(i) Alabama has a good foundation and ambitious intentions to build the capacity required to implement its proposed plans by providing strong leadership and dedicated teams to implement the statewide education reform plans the state has proposed. The Governor, Chief State School Officer State Board of Education, leadership in the state legislature, and other key figures in Alabama education express enthusiastic support for the state's reform goals. Plans to build this capacity by adding professionals to the SEA and contracting with IHEs, NGOs, and for profit corporations are listed in the application. This will expand support for participating LEAs to facilitate successful implementation of the education reform plans the state has proposed, such as identifying promising practices, evaluating the effectiveness of the practices, ceasing ineffective practices, and widely disseminating and replicating the effective practices statewide. The state will also provide for holding participating LEAs accountable for progress and performance, and intervening where necessary. Furthermore, the increased capacity has potential to provide for effective and efficient operations and processes for implementing the Race to the Top grant in such areas as grant administration and oversight, budget reporting and monitoring, performance measure tracking and reporting, and fund disbursement. The state plans to use the funds for this grant, as described in the state's budget and accompanying budget narrative, to accomplish the plans and meet its targets, including, where feasible, by coordinating, reallocating, or redirecting education funds from other Federal, State, and local sources so that they align with the state's Race to the Top goals. The applicant also expects to use the fiscal, political, and human capital resources of the state to continue, after the period of funding has ended, those reforms funded under the grant for which there is evidence of success.

(A)(2)(ii) The state will be challenged to use support from a broad group of stakeholders to better implement its plans, as evidenced by the strength of statements or actions of support. The state's teachers, as represented by the unions, do not support the plan. Principals are not represented among the letters of support. Many other critical stakeholders, such as the state's legislative leadership, business leaders, community groups, civil rights groups, education associations, parent and teacher associations, nonprofit organizations, local education foundations, community based organizations, and institutions of higher education have come forward to endorse the application. However, the rate of support from LEAs and the lack of support from teacher unions across the state puts into question the overall viability of the state's plan and its ability to fully implement the programs and strategies it hopes to achieve.

(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps	**30**	**18**
(i) Making progress in each reform area	5	3
(ii) Improving student outcomes	25	15

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(A)(3)(i) - The state recognizes that it faces big challenges in order to make progress in each of the education reform areas. NAEP data over the past several years shows minimal improvement and an overall picture of stagnation relative to its ranking among other states.

(A)(3)(ii) Some "green shoots" are presented in the application relative to improved student outcomes overall and by student subgroup since at least 2003. These data are presented as connections between the actions that have started from its reform agenda and have contributed to: (a) Increasing student achievement in reading/language arts and mathematics, both on the NAEP and on the assessments

required under the ESEA; (b) Decreasing achievement gaps between subgroups in reading/language arts and mathematics, both on the NAEP and on the assessments required under the ESEA; and (c) Increasing high school graduation rates. Unfortunately, while some positive growth is reported for state assessments, NAEP reports that positive movement on its assessments for the state are not statistically significant. Although some progress is in evidence, achievement gaps persist for all subgroups of concern.		
Total	125	60

B. Standards and Assessments

	Available	Tier 1
(B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards	**40**	**25**
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality standards	20	20
(ii) Adopting standards	20	5

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(B)(1)(i) - Alabama is a member of the 48 state CCSSO consortium, which is developing high quality internationally benchmarked standards. This fully meets the expectations for this criterion.

(B)(1)(ii) - Alabama's existing process for the development and adoption of a state course of study meshes well with the plan outlined in this application to adopt high quality internationally benchmarked standards. The state also intends to expedite its normally three year process to have high quality internationally benchmarked standards in place by November 2010. Unfortunately, the high points are only earned for standards adoptions that are made by August 2010.

(B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments	**10**	**10**
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality assessments	5	5
(ii) Including a significant number of States	5	5

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(B)(2)(i) The applicant presents information about working in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College toward jointly developing and implementing common, high quality assessments that are aligned with the consortium's common set of K-12 standards.

(B)(2)(ii) The applicant meets the criterion for working with a significant number of states in the development of high quality assessments that are aligned with the consortium's common set of K-12 standards.

(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	**20**	**20**

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(B)(3) - The state has outlined an extensive plan for supporting a statewide transition to and implementation of internationally benchmarked K-12 standards that build toward college and career readiness by the time of high school graduation, and includes high quality assessments tied to these standards. The plan includes evidence of involving LEAs, IHEs and other key stakeholders. Curricular development, professional development, and articulation through the grades are also envisioned in the plan.

Total	70	55

C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

	Available	Tier 1
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	**24**	**20**

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(C)(1) - The Alabama Consolidated Education System (ACES) meets 10 of the 12 elements of the America COMPETES program. Still in development are elements dealing with student level transcript data, and data that provide additional information related to success in post-secondary education.

(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	**5**	**5**

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(C)(2) - Appropriate key stakeholders will have access and use of state data. A dashboard system full of information will be made available. The state has a high quality plan to ensure that data from ACES are accessible to, and used to inform and engage, as appropriate, key stakeholders, such as, parents, students, teachers, principals, LEA leaders, community members, unions, researchers, and policymakers. The system is planned so that data support decision makers in the continuous improvement of efforts in such areas as policy, instruction, operations, management, resource allocation, and overall effectiveness.

(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	**18**	**18**
(i) Increasing the use of instructional improvement systems	6	6
(ii) Supporting LEAs, schools, and teachers in using instructional improvement systems	6	6
(iii) Making the data from instructional improvement systems available to researchers	6	6

(C)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(C)(3)(i) - Data are planned to be used to improve instruction. In collaboration with its participating LEAs the state a high quality plan for using a Trainer of Trainers Model will be undertaken. Instructional and administrative personnel will learn how to access and use the new data system. The plan will be operated through the state's Regional Inservice System.

(C)(3)(ii) - The Alabama System for Collaborative Education Needs Data Warehouse will support LEAs and schools as they move to improve instruction and, as described above, train instructional and administrative personal in the use of the system.

(C)(3)(iii) - The state has started a dialogue among institutions of higher education and like research institutions in an effort to use the data systems to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional materials, approaches to teaching, and services for student subpopulations.

Total	47	43

D. Great Teachers and Leaders

	Available	Tier 1
(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals	**21**	**0**
(i) Allowing alternative routes to certification	7	0
(ii) Using alternative routes to certification	7	0
(iii) Preparing teachers and principals to fill areas of shortage	7	0

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(D)(1)(i) - The state currently has provisions for alternative routes to certification for teachers. Seventeen alternative licensure programs are reported to exist around the state. The application speaks to plans to expand alternative routes to include certification for principals, which do not currently exist.

(D)(1)(ii) - The state uses its provisions for alternate routes to certification and has entered into an agreement with Teach for America as part of its strategies for hard to staff schools. Principals are not part of this effort.

(D)(1)(iii) - A process for monitoring, evaluating and identifying areas of teacher and principal shortage does not exist, but is planned.

Because the state does not yet have an alternative route for principal licensure, it does not meet the requirements for these criteria.

(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	**58**	**25**
(i) Measuring student growth	5	5
(ii) Developing evaluation systems	15	7
(iii) Conducting annual evaluations	10	3
(iv) Using evaluations to inform key decisions	28	10

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(D)(2)(i) - The applicant has outlined a reasonable approach to measuring student growth, including methods for tracking individual students.

(D)(2)(ii) - On May 2010 the State Board of Education adopted the Education Effectiveness Resolution, which includes plans for a Education Reform and Innovation Council (ERIC). ERIC will be tasked to define teacher and principal effectiveness. Development is projected to take place in the 2012-13 fiscal year and piloting during the 2013-14 year. Teachers and principals will be part of ERIC. The plan and timeline for this evaluation system are not compelling.

(D)(2)(iii) - The state's application indicates that participating LEAs, "will be asked" to conduct annual evaluation, which implies voluntary participation.

(D)(2)(iv) - The state's plan to use the developed evaluation system for decisions about professional development, compensation, promotion, retention, tenure and dismissal are vague.

Scores for items ii, iii and iv reflect concern about the state's ability to implement its plans related to improving teacher and principal effectiveness. The application does not speak to the need for legislation to implement what is designed and piloted by ERIC or other explicit methods for bringing plans to fruition.

(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals	**25**	**9**
(i) Ensuring equitable distribution in high-poverty or high-minority schools	15	4
(ii) Ensuring equitable distribution in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas	10	5

(D)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(D)(3)(i) - The state has a variety of plans to use its data system to identify high poverty and high minority schools in need of equitable distribution of highly effective teachers. However, the plan is based on a model that envisions adding newly trained teachers and principals to these schools. LEAs will be asked to develop local plans and participate in the program. Grants and other incentives are planned to encourage participation. It is not clear how this plan will ensure an equitable distribution.

(D)(3)(ii) - The application lists strategies to provide incentives for educators with certification in hard to staff subjects and specialty areas to move to hard to staff schools. Unfortunately, this plan does not meet the criteria for a high quality plan since it lacks sufficient information about implementation strategies.

(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	**14**	**14**
(i) Linking student data to credentialing programs and reporting publicly	7	7
(ii) Expanding effective programs	7	7

(D)(4) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(D)(4)(i) - Alabama will have the capacity to link student performance data by teacher and principal to teacher and principal preparation programs through its ACE system.

(D)(4)(ii) - The state indicates it will expand successful programs identified through its system by using grants and other incentives for participating IHEs and other preparation programs.

(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals	**20**	**16**
(i) Providing effective support	10	8
(ii) Continuously improving the effectiveness of the support	10	8

(D)(5) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(D)(5)(i) - The applicant has outlined a comprehensive plan that addresses many, but not all, of the criteria for providing support to teachers and principals through a program of extensive staff development designed in cooperation with participating LEAs. The plan calls for mentoring of teachers and principals and data informed continuous improvement programs.

(D)(5)(ii) - Alabama repeatedly reports in its application its commitment to continuously improving its systems and processes for reaching high quality education in the state. The state includes information about several promising plans for improving the effectiveness of the support it provides to its teachers and principals.

Total	138	64

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: (Tier 1)

(E)(1) - The state has statutory authority to intervene in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs. This authority moves through a set of evermore progress steps of state intervention up to and including appointing new leadership for the school district. This fully meets the criterion.

(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	**40**	**30**
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	5
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	25

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(E)(2)(i) - The state has a detailed method for identifying its lowest performing schools. It uses a three tiered approach in its Turnaround Process. Identification is based on a combination of data from the state assessment program and dropout statistics for both Title I and Title I eligible schools. Over 300 schools have thus far been located.

(E)(2)(ii) - Alabama plans to use its Reformation School System to support LEAs and address the needs of its lowest performing schools. Under this plan some of the four turnaround models are available: restart; closure and turnaround. However, conversion to a charter school is not an option available to the state. Combined with the state's plans for increasing its supply of high quality teachers and principals, and its systems for extensive professional development for educational personnel, the state presents a reasonable strategy for its intervention model.

Total	50	40

F. General

	Available	Tier 1
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	**10**	**10**
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	5
(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	5

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(F)(1)(i) - The state has maintained its fiscal effort from FY 2008 to FY 2009. Total state revenues went from 77.95% in FY 08 to 78% in FY 09. This fully meets the criterion for this item.

(F)(1)(ii) - Alabama uses a foundation approach in its school finance system. This method assures equitable distribution of resources between high wealth and low wealth school districts. Furthermore, the state also uses a weighted student mechanism in its finance system to direct additional funding to schools with high rates of at risk students.

(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	**40**	**2**
(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"	8	0
(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes	8	0
(iii) Equitably funding charter schools	8	0
(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities	8	0
(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools	8	2

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(F)(2)(i)(ii)(iv) - Alabama does not have a charter school law.

(F)(2)(v) - The Alabama State Board of Education adopted a resolution on May 27, 2010 in support of a new initiative called the Innovation School Systems. The intent of this proposed program is to enable LEAs to operate innovative, autonomous public schools. Yet, it is not clear whether the resolution alone provides sufficient authority to implement the Innovation School Systems.

(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	**5**	**5**

(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(F)(3) - The applicant has initiated an array of programs that are favorable to education reform and innovation, and that strive to increase student achievement, graduation rates, narrow achievement gaps, and result in other important outcomes. Examples of such programs are: FIRST CHOICE; Capstone Courses; the Alabama Mathematics, Science and Technology Initiative; and, the Alabama Reading Initiative.

Total	55	17

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

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

Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The state presents a strong commitment to STEM and evidence of extant programs and plans for the future. This includes program targeted to under represented STEM populations like women and girls.

Total	15	15

Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

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

Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The state of Alabama has expressed a commitment to embark on extensive and systemic reform to its education system. It has identified key areas for redesign and improvement and has laid out some ambitious plans to achieve the goals it has identified that are crucial to success. Overall, however, the state plan lacks sufficient depth to present a convincing case that success is possible, is incomplete in scope, and too often does not meet the threshold for a comprehensive plan. In addition, while eighty percent of its LEAs have signed on to the application, no teacher unions support the application. Furthermore, the plan indicates LEAs may pick the reform areas they wish to pursue or not pursue. The lack of a charter school law diminishes options for reform. As configured, the plan raises concerns about the prospect for full implementation. The application does not meet the Absolute Priority.

Total		0

Grand Total	500	294

Race to the Top

Technical Review Form - Tier 1

Alabama Application #2000AL-5

A. State Success Factors

	Available	Tier 1
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it	**65**	**27**
(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda	5	3
(ii) Securing LEA commitment	45	12
(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact	15	12

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) Alabama has set finite goals for achieving proficiency in math and reading at the 4th and 8th grades by S/Y 2013-14. These goals are ambitious. It would be helpful to provide some rationale as to why these and other particular improvement percentages were chosen to lead us to an understanding that they are at least achievable within the timeframe indicated. For instance, in predicting a 20% decrease in the performance gap among subgroups within this same period of time, it seems reasonable to expect that this change be based on some relevant information that would lead the reader to believe that this too is achievable. The goals are clearly articulated and do follow the four education areas described in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and is consistent with the reform plans proposed by the state.

(ii) The applicant states that 105 of its 132 school systems have committed to the reform criterion and claims that this represents a broad statewide impact. Yet, 27 LEAs or 20% of the districts have not signed on to the proposal, leaving out 210 schools and over 93,000 students. Fifty-six thousand of these students live in poverty. This is somewhat less than a statewide effort. While acknowledging that the MOUs represent a large number of participating districts and students in poverty, this section has been rated within the low point range due to the total lack of Alabama Education Association Presidents' signatures. The capacity to carry out the reform agenda in D2 (i), (ii), (iii), (iv) under Great Teachers and Leaders appears to be seriously compromised. It would be of help to the reader to provide some explanation as to how the program could be successfully implemented without the teacher organizations as partners in this effort.

(iii) As noted above, a significant number of schools and students are not included in the plan. This weakens the applicant's broad statewide impact. However, 87% of the students are located in participating school districts and will be impacted through this plan with respect to increasing student achievement, decreasing achievement gaps between subgroups, increasing high school graduation rates and increasing college enrollment. As noted in the previous subgroup, the total lack of commitment by teachers to the plan is a cause for great concern about the ability of the state to effectively carry out the plan.

(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	**30**	**8**
(i) Ensuring the capacity to implement	20	6
(ii) Using broad stakeholder support	10	2

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) The reorganization of the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) to better accommodate the implementation of the reform plan is an excellent move. On the other hand, the lack of detail in this section is troubling. This response would be bolstered by showing the teams and their responsibilities for each component of the reform agenda, the qualifications of the Department and expert personnel to be employed and a timeline that shows when these responsibilities would be carried out over the four year period. The four year 125 million dollar budget is a combination of in-kind services and contractual arrangements which specify services to be offered under the RTTT grant. In addition, over 26 persons will be hired for the purposes set out for the grant under D2 Great Leaders and Teachers, contradicting the narrative statement that no new state level personnel will be added to staff the Department. While the narrative states that grant alignment will take place for grants such as the School Improvement Grant, Longitudinal Data System Grant and Teacher Incentive Fund, there is little evidence of this within the budget itself. Therefore, it is not clear how, when and where this will take place. There is no doubt that many if not all of the activities are necessary for the reform to take place successfully. The sustainability of these reforms once the so-called "funding cliff" is reached has not be seriously addressed in this section or within the budget narrative and requires further information. The turnaround efforts found in Section E fall upon the efforts of two individuals. This seems insufficient to accomplish what is surely among the most difficult reform efforts in the program and would be strengthened by explaining how this can be managed effectively under such short-handed staffing. For the above reasons, the response to this section has been ranked at the lower end of the middle point range.

(ii) The applicant states that the proposal is fortunate to enjoy a broad range of support from education organizations, businesses, foundations and community partners. While it is true that legislative and higher education signatories have given ringing endorsements of the proposal, the impression from the letters of support contained in the Appendix is that broad support beyond these groups is missing. Only the Business Council, two non-profit education organizations and the Alabama Association of School Boards (AASB) have provided letters of support. The lack of support from statewide teacher and principal organizations and other critical stakeholders such as parents, teachers, students, community, and civil rights based organizations does not illustrate a strong support system for this proposal and is a weakness that places the response in the low point range.

(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps	**30**	**10**
(i) Making progress in each reform area	5	3
(ii) Improving student outcomes	25	7

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) Alabama has undertaken a number of initiatives leading to the development of standards and assessments, some of which are in the process of being implemented or approved. These are targeted for the reform agenda found within the RTTT application. These initiatives were not noted in the budget, which leaves the reader with a question as to whether they will be implemented apart from the application funds, using ARRA and/or other federal and state funding to pursue reforms. Regardless, these are important steps in developing the reform agenda, although in the assessment area it was noted that two of the assessment consortia were several years away from implementation. The foundation for a longitudinal data system is in place. This is a positive step especially for this program which links teacher performance and student outcomes. In addition, the revision of quality teaching standards is another positive step, but no mention is made of work within the leadership area. The section dealing with turning around persistently lowest-achieving schools received a great deal of attention in the Appendix and provided a basis for rewarding schools failing under Annual Yearly Progress (NCLB) with financial incentives and strategies for reversing direction. With the above caveats in mind, this falls in the high middle point range and would have been stronger if more time was spent on providing more complete information regarding the current status of these initiatives.

(ii) The information provided in this section does not illustrate any statistically significant improvement in math and reading language arts test scores since 2003. The achievement gaps between Hispanic, Black and White students has remained for the most part fairly constant, although the lack of Hispanic scores in this case could not be ascertained due to a reporting failure. Having changed the graduation rate calculation, it is difficult to evaluate the graduation gains that are cited. What is significant is the reduction of the dropout rate and the work that the Committee has done in recommending strategies to increase graduation rates. As noted earlier, the goals for each of these areas represent a percentage increase in both achievement and graduation rates. It is difficult to judge if these rates of improvement are realistic given the substantial lack of progress in student achievement and graduations over the time that is represented here. This lack of progress is the principal reason for rating this at the upper end of the low point range.

Total	125	45

B. Standards and Assessments

	Available	Tier 1
(B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards	**40**	**25**
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality standards	20	20
(ii) Adopting standards	20	5

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) Alabama is participating in the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and National Governors Association (NGA) led Common Core of Standards effort together with 48 additional states.

(ii) The applicant described the process prescribed by law for adoption of the Common Core of Standards and has waived the usual process that is used in adopting such standards. This is scheduled to be submitted to the State Board of Education on November 18, 2010. As per the requirements for this section, it has been assigned low points for adoption past the August 2, 2010 deadline but prior to the end of 2010.

(B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments	**10**	**10**
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality assessments	5	5
(ii) Including a significant number of States	5	5

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) The applicant is involved in the Achieve consortia, a partnership of states committed to pursuing the development and implementation of summative assessments that are aligned to the common core standards, that can be used with states as part of a statewide assessment system, and that will enable compatibility of results across a maximum number of states.

(ii) Achieve involves 27 states including Alabama.

(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	**20**	**5**

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

This section requires the applicant to provide a high quality plan to support the transition to and implementation of standards, such as those that will be placed before the State School Board in November 2010. The elements of a high quality plan are not present. In its place are 10 goals which have not been

supported by specific activities, the identification of persons responsible, or a specific timeline for implementation to address each goal completely. The proposed activities are not sufficiently detailed. The timeline, submitting quarters for specific dates, seems inaccurate. For instance, the approval of the common core is stated as being presented to the State Board in November 2010, yet the adoption process is shown as being completed during the second quarter of 2010. Given the magnitude of the job, it seems that professional development should be ongoing and not contained only in the first three quarters of 2011. Building teacher leadership and capacity around the common core through the Professional Pathways Program is described as being introduced to 15 schools during Year 1 and to all schools by Year 4. However, the timeline appears to end during the 2nd quarter of 2011. It is puzzling that after having identified 10 goals, these have goals have not been used to drive the activity, timeline and individuals responsible. There are a number of activities that could support the goals of the program (i.e. professional development, on-line technology, and regional in-service centers) but without a strong plan, the likelihood of their effective implementation is undermined. Low points have been assigned to this section due to the lack of a high quality plan.

Total	70	40

C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

	Available	Tier 1
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	**24**	**20**

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Alabama has a statewide longitudinal data system that includes 10 of the America COMPETES Act elements.

(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	**5**	**1**

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

This section requires a high-quality plan to ensure that Alabama's SLDS data is used to inform and engage key stakeholders. The minimum requirements for this section have not been met. Information regarding a timeline, responsible parties and detailed activities have been omitted. Instead, the narrative provides a general overview that falls below the specificity required by a high-quality plan. Only two goals have been offered: (1) Providing data through Alabama Consolidated Education System (ACES) to support student growth and (2) providing data to support decision-making and improvement efforts through ACES. These goals do not have a high-quality plan for implementation. A third goal is not actually a goal but compliance with Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Mention is made of a robust and technically compliant suite of products, but these "products" are not identified. There is very little information regarding how information gathered through ACES can actually be used to improve instruction. The involvement of key stakeholders apart from schools and LEAs has been overlooked in this section. The mentioned activities are listed but they are not clarified, leading the reader to question how they will be applied. The plan appears to end during the first quarter of 2011 and no explanation of this has been provided. More information in this section is required to see an actual plan that could take place to inform instruction. The lack of a viable high-quality plan places this response in the low point range.

(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	**18**	**6**
(i) Increasing the use of instructional improvement systems	6	2
(ii) Supporting LEAs, schools, and teachers in using instructional improvement systems	6	2

(iii) Making the data from instructional improvement systems available to researchers	6	2

(C)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) This response relies heavily on Regional In-Service Centers. Little information is provided that illustrates their capacity to deliver the train-the-trainer model, the number of centers that are spread throughout the state or what their experience has been in delivering the services described. How this approach will enable both systems and administrators to use the data in assessing the success of educational programs is not clear. Identifying school systems to serve as models is a good approach, but the actual process of getting this into the hands of other systems has not been described with the necessary detail required by this section. The question of how this will increase the use of instructional improvement systems has not been fully addressed.

(ii) The ALSED recognizes the need for proper training and support in the use of instructional data but offers little in the way of a plan except to indicate that it will coordinate activities with the Regional In-Service Centers and partner with nationally recognized non-profits. This section lacks the high-quality plan needed to show how support can be delivered and maintained during and beyond the grant period.

(iii) The goals of this program include (1) creating a more complete set of student data, (2) creating a system that is flexible, easy to access and user friendly, and (3) creating a research and development relationship between the ALSED, participating LEAs and research universities. While these goals are responsive to this section, the mechanics of how this data will be made available is lacking. The memorandum of agreement that is mentioned would be helpful to show the exact relationship between researchers and the state, researcher's access to data and how the state could support academic improvement through this data.

The narrative in all three sections is extremely general in nature and lacks the necessary specificity to provide a clear picture of how these data systems will support instruction during the grant period and beyond. The requirement for a high-quality plan has not been met to the extent needed for clarity.

Total	47	27

D. Great Teachers and Leaders

	Available	Tier 1
(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals	**21**	**2**
(i) Allowing alternative routes to certification	7	2
(ii) Using alternative routes to certification	7	0
(iii) Preparing teachers and principals to fill areas of shortage	7	0

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) Alabama does not have any alternative pathways for principals. Alternative pathways are offered to teachers--Special Alternative Certificate (SAC) and Alternative Baccalaureate Certificate-Level (ABC). The narrative indicates that Appendix (D1) lists approved alternative certification programs and coursework, but does not indicate if they can be provided by various types of qualified providers other than an IHE. Outside of requiring a Bachelor's degree, no selection requirements are noted. There is a mentor relationship during employment and the individual may opt out of some coursework requirements and receive the same professional certification requirements as other candidates. The absence of alternative pathways for principals and the exclusion of providers other than IHEs places this in the low point range.

(ii) Alabama has identified two alternative pathways in use for teachers--the Special Alternative Certificate and the Alternative Baccalaureate-Level Certificate. No evidence is offered regarding the

institutions providing these alternative pathways and no evidence is provided to indicate that teachers have been certified through these programs in recent years.

(iii) Alabama does not currently have a formal system for monitoring, evaluating and identifying areas of teacher and principal shortages and preparing educators to fill these vacancies. Since no process exists, this section receives no credit.

(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	**58**	**12**
(i) Measuring student growth	5	2
(ii) Developing evaluation systems	15	5
(iii) Conducting annual evaluations	10	3
(iv) Using evaluations to inform key decisions	28	2

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) Alabama has the means to measure student growth through the data system described as ACES. The definition used in the narrative is similar to the USDOE definition for this grant program. Since this is already in place, it is not clear why three years are necessary to develop, in collaboration with the Education Reform and Innovation Council (ERIC), a program that will not be fully operational until the last year of the grant. According to the chart found on page 86, the principal goals are involved in developing the evaluation system and implementing phase I of the evaluation in S/Y 2012-13 while at the same time implementing new policies and programs during this same year. Additional clarity to the plan is needed to show the steps involved in this process in more detail, including who will be responsible for assembling this information and a timeline that sets specific benchmarks for the conclusion of activities. This section needs more depth for the reader to understand the rationale behind the prolonged implementation of the plan to measure student growth.

(ii) The narrative supports an inclusive and collaborative approach towards designing a rigorous, transparent and fair evaluation for both principals and teachers. The multiple rating categories involved in spelling out "effective" are not mentioned in specific terms, although the narrative does mention that effectiveness will be predominantly judged by student growth. Additional information concerning the plans for rating principal and teacher effectiveness would be helpful.

(iii) LEAs will conduct annual evaluations and provide timely and constructive feedback to their teachers and principals. The process of how this will be achieved has been left open to development by the ALSDE and ERIC, as will the comprehensive training module used for training in this evaluation. No improvement goals can currently be recommended since the state does not have a clear idea of the distribution of teachers and principals by effectiveness levels. This section is general and lacks sufficient detail.

(iv)

(a) It is not evident how the evaluation system will yield a more nuanced view of each educator's strengths and weaknesses since the actual system has not been fully described outside of evaluating individuals based upon multiple measures including student growth. Although the potential for enhanced evaluation exists, the data system and evaluations have not been fully explained to lead to this conclusion.

In Sections (b) through (d) of item D2, iv, the brevity of the response does not provide any worthwhile information other than stating that key human resource decisions will be left to ERIC. Section (iv) does not have a high-quality plan associated with using evaluations to inform key decisions since much of the information required by this section has been omitted.

(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals	**25**	**7**
(i) Ensuring equitable distribution in high-poverty or high-minority schools	15	2

(ii) Ensuring equitable distribution in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas	10	5

(D)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) This section has ambitious goals geared toward providing the equitable distribution of teachers and principals in high poverty and high minority schools. By S/Y 2013-14, the state projects an increase in highly effective and effective teachers by 30%. What this means in terms of the teaching force is not provided. For that reason, it is difficult if not impossible to determine if these goals are achievable. The evaluation of these goals is further compounded by not having a picture of the current state of teachers and principals who have been identified as ineffective. In addition, the narrative gives no indication of the number of high poverty, high minority schools and the teachers within these schools who were identified as ineffective. No prior action or data to support the plan is provided to ensure that such a plan will be effective. The narrative states that LEAs will be held accountable for meeting the goals set by the plan, but does not provide additional detail. While the strategies for this plan are reasonable, the lack of information regarding its impact and potential for ultimate success does not provide the most highly effective plan desirable. No definition of high minority and poverty schools is offered. In addition, performance measures are not provided. Weaknesses that the application is required to address make this portion of the application deficient.

(ii) This section like the previous section suffers from a lack of information pertaining to shortages in hard-to-staff subjects. It does not appear that the state presently collects information of this nature. The status of hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas is not addressed, therefore no forecst or analysis is possible. The approach seems reasonable in this section, but would be helped by providing some general information relating to shortages in these subject areas.

(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	**14**	**8**
(i) Linking student data to credentialing programs and reporting publicly	7	4
(ii) Expanding effective programs	7	4

(D)(4) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) The applicant has a credible plan for linking student data to credentialing programs and publicly reporting this data. This is based upon a vision, strategy and goals that are reasonable. The plan is structured as statements of what will be done rather than a strong plan that assigns responsibilities and provides a clear cut method of arriving at this outcome.

(ii) The plan that is proposed has the potential of improving the teacher education programs and providing more effective classroom teachers and principals. However, the state does not currently have a comprehensive and credible approach to measure graduate effectiveness, which makes it difficult to see how enhanced performance could ensure the desired outcome. The brevity of these responses lead to an incomplete picture of the implementation of the plan.

(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals	**20**	**14**
(i) Providing effective support	10	7
(ii) Continuously improving the effectiveness of the support	10	7

(D)(5) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) The applicant has laid out a credible plan for providing support in the area of professional development to increase the effectiveness of teachers and principals. The goals for this section are ambitious. They have set a goal of S/Y 2013-14 to increase the percentage of effective teachers and principals by 20% above the baselines. Lacking a definition of effective teachers or baseline data, it is difficult to determine if these goals are appropriate or feasible. The statement that in S/Y 2010-11 100% of new teachers will need to complete the goal begs the question: "What goal?" This seems incomplete since the reader is unsure

what goal is expected. This is not a criticism of the goal as much as an acknowledgement of missing data to support it. Otherwise, the emphasis on designing professional development is left up to the LEA, based upon the needs of each individual school and teacher/principal. The model offered seems appropriate for the design, especially the strong feature of providing time for collaboration among teachers. The information provided could go further than that presented, especially with regard to designing instruction to meet the specific needs of high-need students and removing barriers to effective implementation practices designed to improve student learning outcomes.

(ii) The measurement, evaluation and continuous improvement of the effectiveness of the supports has not been developed to the extent that this reviewer is confident it will achieve the desired results. Additional detail would help the reader understand how the state will coordinate the data collection on multiple levels to improve upon the supports leading to the improvement of student achievement.

Total	138	43

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: (Tier 1)

The state has the ability to intervene in both LEAs and schools under Alabama Code Section 16-6B-3 and 16-6B-6.

(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	**40**	**31**
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	5
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	26

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) The state currently has a process in place to identify the lowest-achieving Title I schools, as well as non -Title I eligible secondary schools that would be considered "persistently lowest achieving" schools if they were eligible to receive Title I funds. The plan proposes a Reformation School System (RSS) superintendent and one other person within the budget to address the needs of 264 or (17.4%) of the total number of LEAs who are low performing. Information regarding the identity of the lowest performing schools is needed.

(ii) The RSS office is the support system for improving persistently low achieving schools. Districts may chose one of the four turnaround models. Given the number of the low performing schools, the reader questions whether the staffing for the RSS Office is sufficient to deal with the 20 schools scheduled for turnaround in 2010-11. The need appears substantial from the evidence collected. The performance measure deals only with this first year and leaves future support open to other schools based on need, but no explanation is given for providing support in subsequent years. Since the state has identified and can rank persistently low performing schools, it would seem reasonable to be able to forecast additional schools that need to implement one of the intervention models in the future.

Total	50	41

F. General

	Available	Tier 1

(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	**10**	**8**
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	5
(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	3

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) The percentage of state revenues increased in 2009-10 by one half of one percent.

(ii) The state employs a weighted calculation of aid to support at risk students based upon poverty and academic achievement. The actual mechanics of this are not provided. From the information that is provided, it is difficult to interpret the details of the calculation. How districts distribute these funds to high need schools is not addressed other than to say that at risk funds are appropriated to particular schools within an LEA for the development and support of programs to address the needs of at-risk students. It does not say whether the district or the state makes the decision regarding which schools receive the funds. Information pertaining to the poverty data used and the formula it is based on is required for a more complete understanding of this financial aid.

(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	**40**	**0**
(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"	8	0
(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes	8	0
(iii) Equitably funding charter schools	8	0
(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities	8	0
(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools	8	0

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i)-(iv) Alabama does not have a charter school law.

(v) The appendix contains a resolution pertaining to the Innovation Schools, but does not indicate whether or not these schools are autonomous. The system is described as a contractual agreement between local school systems and the state board of education, through which the Innovation Schools can receive much of the same regulatory and policy waiver options as provided to charter schools. This information does not stipulate if these schools meet the RTTT definition of an autonomous school. The other offerings, such as FIRST CHOICE and Community Colleges, also do not meet the autonomous design required by this section.

(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	**5**	**3**

(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

This section does show some important reform initiatives occurring in Alabama. Examples include FIRST CHOICE, Capstone courses including Algebra II with Trigonometry and class offerings for two years of a foreign language. The narrative also mentions the Alabama Reading Initiative; the Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative; the Alabama Learning Exchange; and the Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators and Students Statewide. Other reforms dealing with increasing student achievement, narrowing the achievement gap between subgroups or increasing graduation rates are not presented.

Total	55	11

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	**15**	**0**

Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The applicant has laid out a number of initiatives in math, science, engineering and technology that would advance the study of STEM. To date, these efforts seem to only include a small number of the LEAs. The partnerships with businesses and others are not described outside of stating that these partnerships will continue. The plan states that there will be a coordinated effort *among all STEM efforts and providers,* although this effort is not described nor are the providers identified. The goal of providing effective STEM teachers for all students is mentioned but goes no further than a general statement. The attention to underserved groups, including girls and women, is commendable. This is especially true in the support system designed for girls (GEMS_U). But while STEM education is mentioned in several places within the proposal, it has not been taken to the next level by infusing it throughout the application. From the evidence provided, it does not seem to be an essential part of the overall plan.

Total	15	0

Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

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

Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The lack of participation by the teacher unions is a major stumbling block to this proposal. The very people most affected by this proposal have not indicated their willingness to carry out the reform plan. It is difficult for this reader to see how the plan can meet any success without this teacher involvement. Apart from this, there are numerous weaknesses that have been described in the previous remarks sections. These include the need for:

1. Broader statewide support;
2. Details surrounding management of the project;
3. Support from critical stakeholders;
4. Data on current progress in raising achievement and closing academic gaps between subgroups;
5. Detailed information surrounding the high-quality plans;
6. Alternative credentialing pathways for principals;
7. Describing the necessity for substantial delays in rolling out planned initiatives;
8. Details for the many responses which are addressed so briefly; and
9. The presence of a charter school law and other innovative, autonomous public schools.

The general nature of comments throughout do not provide substantial evidence that the reforms will take place successfully.

Total		0

Grand Total	500	207

Race to the Top

Technical Review Form - Tier 1

Alabama Application #2000AL-6

A. State Success Factors

	Available	Tier 1
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it	**65**	**23**
(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda	5	3
(ii) Securing LEA commitment	45	12
(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact	15	8

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The state has not set forth a comprehensive and coherent reform agenda that clearly articulates its goals for implementing reforms in the four education areas described in the ARRA. The reforms are not fully developed according to RTTT reform plan criteria, which requires applicants to identify key goals supported by specifically linked activities that bring about change, timelines for implementing the activities, parties responsible for implementing the activities, annual targets with performance measures and clearly identified performance targets. The applicant articulated an ambitious reform agenda, but failed to present commitment and support from a significant number of LEAs, nor evidence of support from local teacher's unions. This lack of support decreases the state's likelihood of successfully implementing their goals statewide. MOUs were signed by 105 of the 132 LEAs, even though Alabama presented a choice option for participation to the schools. Of the 411,119 students living in poverty, 354,737 (86%) of Alabama's children living in poverty would be impacted by the proposed reform initiatives. The state plans to award funds to those LEAs that demonstrate a strong plan of action for implementing the state's planned reforms. 20% of LEAs statewide opted not to participate in the state's proposed reform initiative. Also, only 99 of the 105 schools support Great Teachers and Leaders elements of the state reform plans under (2) (iv) (b) (c) (d). Despite the state office's directive, zero of the local Alabama Education Association presidents signed MOUs. The state's explanation is that it does not have collective bargaining and the lack of signatures from local unions will not hinder reform efforts. Alabama does include goals for improving student achievement in their reform plan; however the state does not provide a clear and credible path to achieving these goals that is consistent with the specific reform plans proposed throughout the application. Also, without the support of significant stakeholders, it does not appear that Alabama's reform initiatives will translate into broad statewide impact, allowing the state to reach its ambitious goals.

(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	**30**	**12**
(i) Ensuring the capacity to implement	20	8
(ii) Using broad stakeholder support	10	4

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Alabama does not provide a comprehensive plan for building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans. Although Alabama's Governor by executive order and the State Board of Education provided required signatures of support, the state did not receive signatures of support from a significant number of school administrators nor their state associations, demonstrating a lack of strong

leadership and support for the state's RTTT reform initiative. To establish an avenue for RTTT administration and grant management , the state plans to reorganize the Alabama Department of Education to establish the Alabama State Department of Education leadership team (ALSDE). This team will be headed by the Assistant Superintendent, who is charged with coordinating the development and implementation of the reforms proposed for RTTT. The Alabama Department of Education plans to establish the Division of Teaching and Learning, also headed by the Assistant Superintendent. The new department will include the offices of Standards, Instruction and Assessment, Educator Education, Evaluation and Professional Learning, School Improvement, Innovation and Support, and Data, Research and Accountability. Under the direction of the Assistant Superintendent, efforts to implement the RTTT plan will include an advisory council of stakeholders (ERIC),and Alabama will establish eleven regional centers located on eleven college/university campuses. Although Alabama plans to reorganize the state department of education and allocated funds to support the proposed new state level positions created to guide its reform initiatives, the state has not provided adequate details of how this system will provide effective and efficient operations and processes for implementing its Race to the Top grant in such areas as grant administration and oversight, budget reporting and monitoring, performance measure tracking and reporting, and fund disbursement. Also, the state has not clearly articulated its plans to support participating LEAs in successfully implementing the proposed education reform plans, and it is not clear how the state plans to monitor the successful implementation of its reform initiative, using lessons learned to inform decisions. Alabama's budget structure includes budget projects that do not appear sustainable (salaries of the new DOE staff), and the state does not provide the required 50% sub grant as a part of LEA allocations for each budget year, with the exception of project year two ($50,274,357 total budget and $21,875,00 funding sub-granted to participating LEAs is not 50%). Alabama does not adequately address how grant administration and oversight, budget reporting and monitoring, performance measure tracking and

reporting, and fund disbursement will be addressed, nor does the state provide adequate descriptions of how it plans to use fiscal and human capital resources of the state to continue after funding has ended.

(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps	**30**	**11**
(i) Making progress in each reform area	5	3
(ii) Improving student outcomes	25	8

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The state's current student assessment program is not aligned to college readiness. Alabama has made some progress in each of the reform areas and has provided evidence of past actions. For example, the state has built the basic foundations for expanding and improving in the area of standards and assessments (ACT suite of assessments for college and career readiness); data systems (ACES state data system campaign and expansion);Great Teachers and Leaders (EDUCATE Alabama new teacher evaluation system and ACLD leadership Council's PLUs for Leadership Development); and Turning Around Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools (State Reward and Intervention Plan providing LEA coaches).

Even though the state reported small gains in the improvement in math and reading readiness on NAEP (8 point gain on 4th grade reading 2007 & 2009 is a positive exception), Alabama's overall scores continue to fall under the national average and there continues to be an achievement gap between white students and students of color. In addition, the 4 year projected dropout rate decreased from 13.52% to 5.98% in 2008, correlating with the high school graduation from 81.56% to 86.72% based on the average freshman graduation rate during the same year. The state now calculates this data based on the Four Year Cohort Model with a 66.06% graduation rate. Present reform efforts have not yet resulted in positive trend data that are part of the RTTT program expectations.

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Total	125	46

B. Standards and Assessments

	Available	Tier 1
(B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards	**40**	**25**
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality standards	20	20
(ii) Adopting standards	20	5

(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Alabama documents participating in a consortium developing high-quality standards, and is one of 48 states participating in Common Core Standards in partnership with with CCSSO, NGA, ACHIEVE, ACT and the College Board. The state's MOU indicated participation in the Common Core Standards Initiative (48 states) and that it initiated procedures for adoption of Common Core Standards well before August, 2010. The state provided a current draft of the standards and documented its involvement since May 2009. However, the standards are scheduled to go to the state board for adoption on November 2010, which is past the August deadline.

(B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments	**10**	**6**
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality assessments	5	3

(ii) Including a significant number of States	5	3

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Alabama provided evidence of incorporating individual math standards and the end of high school benchmarks as documentation of these standards' usage in Alabama. The state plans further compliance with the American Diploma Project's goals of establishing a state longitudinal data system to align its high school standards beyond the end of high school requirements to include college and workplace standards. Through its affiliation with the America Diploma Project since 2004, Alabama is a member of a multiple state consortia including a significant number of states that focuses on the development of high level assessments that can be adapted to particular state, regional and local LEA needs to assess student growth and to guide curriculum and instruction. These efforts did not clearly enhance the state goals under RTTT to develop and implement valid and reliable student assessments to support reform.

(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	**20**	**8**

(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Alabama reports its history of articulating standards and related assessment systems that were translated into actionable policies and procedures; however, this was not as evident statewide at the LEA level. The state has identified 10 goals to support its transition to common standards and high quality assessments. Through the adoption of Common Core Standards by the State Board of Education and the new standardized assessments aligned to common core standards, the state hopes to ensure that student growth and improvement occurs. The implementation plan and supporting training and transition processes are not adequately explained and do not include clear goals with detailed supporting activities, timelines, persons responsible, annual targets, and performance measures.

Total	70	39

C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

	Available	Tier 1
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	**24**	**20**

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Alabama has invested in the Consolidated Educational System(ACES), the state's longitudinal data system. Currently the state reports having completely achieved ten of the twelve America COMPETES Act Elements.

(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	**5**	**2**

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Alabama lists 3 goals for accessing state data which are based on the state's plans to complete the development and implementation of the Alabama Consolidated Education System (ACES). Even though the state has made some progress towards development of several ACES components, the state is depending on RTTT funding to fully operationalize its goals. The criterion for this component requires the state to provide a detailed plan, including goals, activities, timelines and responsible parties; however the plan lacks depth, detail, and supporting evidence.

(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	**18**	**12**
(i) Increasing the use of instructional improvement systems	6	4
(ii) Supporting LEAs, schools, and teachers in using instructional improvement systems	6	4
(iii) Making the data from instructional improvement systems available to researchers	6	4

(C)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The state described a workable plan for increasing the use of instructional improvement systems. Alabama plans to develop a "Train the Trainer' model as its differentiated service delivery system, where customized training and support will be provided through the state's Regional In-service Centers. The state anticipates that this model will increase participation in teacher and administrator training, while also ensuring data training and support for professional development is specific to teacher and administrative needs. With student growth and achievement included in the summative component of the state's evaluation system as a means to inform human capital decisions such as tenure, professional development, retention and dismissal, the state deems it important that all staff have a comprehensive understanding of how data can be used to inform, improve and reflect on effectiveness.

Alabama recognizes that the critical link to the success of the state's plan is to provide support for LEAs, schools and teachers in using instructional improvement systems. Alabama outlines five specific areas of support, that the Regional In-service Center personnel will collaborate with the State Department of Education staff to provide to LEAs. These supports include coaching, mentoring, training and producing tools (including technology) that specifically support LEAs in building capacity within local schools in the areas of balanced assessment and instructional power of formative assessment; using data to identify replicable instructional best practices in instruction; and providing student growth data to determine educator effectiveness.

Through a MOU with between agencies, Alabama system for Collaborative Education Needs Data Warehouse (ASCEND) will connect data that will be shared through the creation of a common data store by 2012. This system will allow data systems to be available for research and development.

Although the planned components are positive, unfortunately critical and specific details about how these endeavors will connect teachers to real time instructional support need more clarity.

Total	47	34

D. Great Teachers and Leaders

	Available	Tier 1
(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals	**21**	**5**
(i) Allowing alternative routes to certification	7	3

(ii) Using alternative routes to certification	7	0
(iii) Preparing teachers and principals to fill areas of shortage	7	2

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) Alabama offers two routes for alternative certification for teachers, including the Special Alternative Certificate (SAC) and the Alternative Baccalaureate Level Certificate (ABC). The state does not currently provide alternative certification programs for principals. The state clearly outlines the criteria for both teacher and principal alternative programs, along with a detailed description of the State's laws and statutes for teacher alternative certification.

(ii) The list of alternative certification programs includes the elements of each program; however, no information on the number of teachers that successfully completed each program in the previous academic year is provided, nor is there any information provided on the total number of teachers and principals certified statewide in the previous academic year.

(iii) The state does not provide a comprehensive plan for improving and expanding alternative preparation programs, with a vision of developing a high quality program for teachers and principals that prepare promising and non traditional candidates to teach STEM or other hard to staff subjects, as well as teaching in and leading schools that serve high percentages of high-need students.

(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	**58**	**21**
(i) Measuring student growth	5	4
(ii) Developing evaluation systems	15	8
(iii) Conducting annual evaluations	10	4
(iv) Using evaluations to inform key decisions	28	5

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

2Alabama2 presents an ambitious plan for improving teacher and principal effectiveness that falls under the recently adopted Educator Effectiveness resolution, which uses student growth as the predominant factor for determining teacher and principal effectiveness. The plan is to establish a statewide performance-based evaluation system in which the state will develop a clear definition of effectiveness that includes student growth measures, with enhanced standards and high-quality assessments for all grades and subjects.

The ALSDE will work with an advisory group, the Education Reform and Innovation Council (ERIC), to develop teacher and principal effectiveness measures. LEAs will also be responsible for implementing the new system and the state will encourage LEAs to establish annual improvement goals based on teacher and principal effectiveness. The state will monitor the progress of participating LEAs in meeting these goals. The evaluation instruments will be based on effectiveness ratings, to be used uniformly across the state beginning with the 2012-2013 school year. The plan does not provide adequate details for how the planning components link to form one comprehensive, coherent, and cohesive effort.

The second part of this ambitious plan is to explore the use of student growth and teacher and principal effectiveness outcomes to make human resources decisions related to professional development, compensation, promotion, retention, grant of tenure and removal ineffective performers. Development of guidelines to provide such a plan will include extensive professional development and levels of support. The current evaluation system for teachers and for principals, need further clarification in how these plans more cohesively comply and align with RTTT criteria for developing teachers and principals, including by providing relevant coaching, induction support, and/or professional development.

Alabama's ambitious target of full implementation of its educator effectiveness evaluation system uniformly across the state beginning with the 2012-2013 school year needs further clarification, including clearly

defined goals with specific supporting activities, persons responsible, timelines, performance measures and evaluations.

(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

(D)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Alabama does not present a comprehensive plan for ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals; however the state does provide a series of strategies consisting of four primary focus areas which include: developing a statewide plan for preparing, hiring, supporting, retaining and equitably distributing teachers and principals; equipping participating LEAs with teacher and principal disaggregated effectiveness data in order to develop local equity plans; conducing annual teaching and learning conditions surveys; using the outcomes to inform decisions; and increasing qualified staff for STEM and other hard to staff subjects. Alabama's plan does not provide adequate details on how the state will roll out its goals. It is because of this resolution that Alabama does not appear to have the authority and support to achieve its goals. For example, Alabama asserts that the primary focus of their plan will center on an analysis of multiple and objective measures of individual educator impact on student growth. These teacher/principal effectiveness outcomes will allow the state to pinpoint the distribution of teachers and principals by effectiveness level and by LEA, school, grade level, subject area and preparation programs. However, the plan does adequately address the required elements of a comprehensive plan (clearly defined goals, specific supporting activities, timelines, persons responsible, performance measures and evaluation). Also, the proposed plan is dependent on the implementation of an expanded data system that has not been fully implemented, further implicating that the proposed plan may not be achievable since there will be no system allowing staff to drill down to the LEA level for critical data elements. The professional development components of the plan that focus on enhancing the skills and knowledge of teachers and principals are operational; however, there was limited evidence provided to show that enough highly qualified teachers and principals for hard to staff subjects and speciality areas would result from these efforts.

(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	**14**	**7**
(i) Linking student data to credentialing programs and reporting publicly	7	4
(ii) Expanding effective programs	7	3

(D)(4) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) Alabama's plan is based on its vision to create a high quality teacher and principal preparation program that prepares effective teachers and principals as measured by student growth. The two strategies to achieve this vision are not described adequately and do not include sufficient details on linking student growth to individual teacher and principal effectiveness and use of the data to improve preparation. The redesign of teacher preparation programs with a focus on effectiveness and the establishment of an alternative preparation program to prepare principals to effectively turn around high-need schools in urban and rural areas does not include specific details on implementation. The state intends to leverage recent enhancements made to its data system to enable the linkage of individual student learning outcomes to students, teachers, and principals, as well as individual teachers and principals to their credentialing programs. The new policy permits the use of student growth to evaluate teachers and principals, and adds additional improvements to the previous data system.

(ii) The thirteen leadership preparation components were redesigned through a collaborative effort with program providers and LEAs; the first cohort of students to enroll in these programs is projected for the fall of 2009. At this time the state is unable to provide data and supporting evidence to determine the impact of their preparation program changes on student growth. Although there are 27 traditional and 17 alternative

certification programs for teachers, the state concurs that it lacks a comprehensive and credible approach to measure graduate effectiveness and does not have a reliable indicator to determine which programs produce the most effective teachers.

(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals	**20**	**9**
(i) Providing effective support	10	6
(ii) Continuously improving the effectiveness of the support	10	3

(D)(5) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i) Alabama presents a multi-faceted though not a comprehensive plan to provide effective support to principals and teachers. The intent of the plan is to support individuals at all levels, using data to inform the the design and evaluation of professional development. The state appears committed to providing teachers and principals with standards-based, job-embedded opportunities to continually improve effectiveness and plans to work collaboratively to design and implement its wrap-around supports system for on-going teacher learning. The planned system of support for teachers will include coaching, flexible scheduling to allow for team planning and assessment; frequent classroom observation and feedback;and creating a culture of learning. The focus of providing support for school leaders will include leadership development; data analysis; increased capacity of local systems/schools to implement job-embedded learning and support for teachers at all levels; and building upon successes from reading and STEM initiatives; and mentoring. The state provides detailed explanations and examples but does not include specific performance measure.

(ii) Alabama did not adequately address the extent to which it plans to measure, evaluate, and continuously improve the effectiveness of the supports to improve student achievement.

Total	138	51

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: (Tier 1)

Alabama appears to have statutory authority to intervene in the lowest achieving schools and LEAs.

(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	**40**	**30**
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	5
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	25

(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Alabama's plan to turn around the lowest achieving schools is comprehensive and includes a combination of current initiatives along with innovative programs. Alabama currently identifies the lowest performing schools based on its recently developed definition approved by the US Department of Education. The process established for categorizing these schools into one of three Tiers. The state reports 39 schools in Tier I's persistently lowest-achieving five Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring; 6 schools in Tier II's Title I-eligible secondary schools that are the persistently-lowest achieving; and Tier III's 219 schools that include any remaining Title I schools in school improvement, corrective action or restructuring status not previously identified. Alabama revised the Rewards and Intervention Plan to include persistently lowest achieving schools and expanded the categories for higher performing schools. The resulting expansion includes intervention categories (Reformation School System; Restructuring Schools,

Renewal Schools); Recognition Categories (Quality Schools; Innovation School System) and Reward Categories (Reward Schools; Torchbearer Schools) that ensure that all of the state's schools are involved in the improvement process, reflecting the state's support of continuous improvement. The state envisions a program that will produce models of best practices, and combined these initiatives to have the potential for creating success. Although the state has future plans to provide detailed tracking of lowest performing schools, one area of concern is that the state's system for historically tracking performance for turning around lowest performing schools has been somewhat limited. It would have been helpful if Alabama could have demonstrated how LEAs could benefit from the state's efforts to historically track performance for turning around lowest performing schools and how strategies from lessons learned could be utilized.

Total	50	40

F. General

	Available	Tier 1
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	**10**	**10**
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	5
(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	5

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Alabama has increased the percentage of state revenues that were available to support education beginning with an increase of 78.00% in 2009 compared to 77.95% for 2008 (including all state appropriations). The specific calculations for the total state revenues for 2008 totalled more than $8 million; and of that $8 million, more than $6 million, was solely appropriated for educational purposes. In 2009 as the state's economy declined, the collection of state taxes available for appropriations totalled over $7 million, and of that amount, the state dedicated more than $5 million in state funds to education. This was an increase in the percentage available of .05% between the two years. This accomplishment is admirable, considering the challenges of the national recession and tough economic times.

Alabama has continued to be proactive in ensuring equitable funding among and within LEAs, specifically high need LEAs. The state revised its state law regarding how schools were funded in 1995, creating a much improved state funding distribution method known as the Foundation Program. Essentially, the Foundation Program supplements state dollars by providing support ranging from a low of 48% in the most affluent LEAs to almost 80% in the poorest.

Improvements of services to at-risk students are significant. The calculations are appropriated on a school by school basis in part based on the number of students that are enrolled in those schools. Alabama further distributes state revenues via a weighted formula used to support the unique needs of at-risk students, targeting particular schools within an LEA for the development and support of programs that address these students' needs. These funds are calculated based on poverty data and academic achievement, and are used to provide additional services that increase the amount and quality of instructional support to those specific students. Examples of program enhancements include extended learning times, summer programs, tutoring programs, mentoring efforts, behavioral support, parenting efforts, and other services that meet identified critical needs of at-risk students..

(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	**40**	**6**
(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"	8	0
(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes	8	0

(iii) Equitably funding charter schools	8	0
(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities	8	0
(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools	8	6

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(i- iv) Alabama is one of 11 states without legislation through which charter schools may be established. The Governor and the State Superintendent led the initiative for a bill to be developed and introduced in the 2010 regular session of the Alabama Legislature to create charter schools in Alabama. The state reports that the bill was defeated by an "intensive lobbying effort of the teacher union in Alabama, the Alabama Education Association."

(v) The state shows support of flexibility for innovation creating the Innovation School Systems option for LEAs desiring to promote student achievement through alternative school models. Through contractual agreements between the LEA and the State Board of Education, school systems can receive a waiver option similar to the regulatory and policy waiver options available to charter schools. The state's FIRST CHOICE initiative allows local school systems to have the option for student scheduling that is not dependent on the traditional Carnegie Unit, paving the way for schools to create schedules that include high interest, non-credit bearing learning opportunities. The flexibility of learning time and the addition of successful programs in rural schools allows for interventions, accelerations and co-curricular opportunities to be available to students.

(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	**5**	**3**

(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Alabama has been successfully engaged in a number of innovations before the Race to the Top grant competition. Examples include the First Choice high school program, which offers the Advanced Academic Endorsement option and moves students toward college and career options; a statewide Reading Initiative (ARI) which provides reading coaches; The Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative (AMSTI), which promotes STEM competitive priority; and the Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators and Students Statewide (ACCESS), which is the state's distance learning initiative. Alabama has also created a teacher effectiveness initiative which will tie evaluations to student achievement data. Together these initiatives support school reform. Although Alabama has engaged in numerous activities with hopes of positively impacting student achievement, their NAEP data shows an increase in the achievement gap and a decrease in the performance of African American students.

Total	55	19

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	**15**	**0**

Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Alabama does mention STEM initiatives throughout its application. However, the state does not present a comprehensive plan to address the need to offer a rigorous course of study in mathematics, the sciences, technology, and engineering; integrate STEM content across grades and disciplines; promote effective and relevant instruction; offer applied learning opportunities for students; and prepare more students (especially the underrepresented groups of women and girls) for advanced study and careers in the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Total	15	0

Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

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

Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Alabama has attempted to address all of the four education areas specified in ARRA as well as the state success factors criteria. The state's plan is ambitious and involves the radical redesign of the state's data system, teacher and principal evaluations, teaching and learning, and policy and procedure. While the ARRA areas are addressed, there are some critical areas of concern regarding the state's efforts to fully and successfully implement reform. The application is strongest in its plans for improving standards and assessments; however the plan is rather weak in its strategies for improving teacher and principal effectiveness and school turnaround. The state does not have a charter school law that provides choices and options for students and families. The state teachers union does not support some key reform strategies; and the state reported that the teachers union played a key role in leading the defeat of a recent charter school bill. The proposed budget presented areas of concern. For example, the requirement to allocate 50% for LEAs for each budget year is not met. Alabama has crafted a very ambitious plan that requires massive systemic changes and targeted and coordinated support statewide from all stakeholders; however, the applicant does not provide convincing evidence of strong support from all stakeholders. The timelines presented for this type of drastic systemic change are ambitious, and will require more time than is allocated to achieve. Therefore, the state's application did not present a comprehensive and coordinated approach to education reform as required by Race to the Top.

Total

Total		0
Grand Total	500	229