



Race to the Top

Technical Review Form - Tier 1



Nebraska Application #3400NE-4

A. State Success Factors

	Available	Tier 1
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it	65	49
(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda	5	2
(ii) Securing LEA commitment	45	34
(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact	15	13

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

The state has an inspiring vision for its school reform agenda. A high value is placed on equitable learning opportunities for all students. Its plan however is more of a plan to create a plan than a well defined design process or model. The plan is responsive to the four areas described in ARRA. The plan does not explicitly build on current state strengths or successes. The budget is indirectly aligned with its reform plans in that it is primarily administrative and logistical rather school based.

LEA commitment is high. 215 of 253 school districts representing 77% of all students signed the state's MOU. This represents 85% of all school districts and 68% of children living in poverty. 87% of school board presidents and 91% of teachers' union leaders also signed the MOU. LEA commitment to implementing RTTT priorities is also high ranging from 95-100% across the 215 school districts. However, one area of concern is found in the MOU's final sentence, which states "the signature of the bargaining unit leader does not make the bargaining unit, or such individual, a party to the agreement." Clearly signatures may not necessarily mean commitment.

Numbers and percentages of LEA commitment clearly indicate the potential for state wide impact. Virtually all districts involved have committed to implementing RTTT's core initiatives.

(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	30	23
(i) Ensuring the capacity to implement	20	15
(ii) Using broad stakeholder support	10	8

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

Although the state reform plan is not well developed, the state has strong and committed leadership and dedicated teams to implement its emerging reform plan. The governor is a strong advocate and chairs Nebraska's P-16 Initiative and also serves on the Board of Directors of Achieve, a non-profit organization working with states to improve education. Recently, the Commissioner and the State Board of Education increased graduation requirements and also approved new reading and math standards based upon external validations from Achieve, McRel, and other recognized experts. The Bright Futures for

Nebraska Students Initiative Committee is a broad based leadership group poised to guide RTTT initiatives. 17 Education Service Units will provide needed professional development to practitioners. Department of Education has organized cross-team groups around program areas. A Bright Futures Roundtable will oversee and implement the RTTT initiative. It will be led by a new Commissioner for school improvement. The Roundtable will meet weekly to manage the first year of implementation. Finally, the Department of Education will assign resource coordinators to each persistently low achieving school.

There appears to be broad stakeholder support from state and local leaders, higher education, tribal representatives, parent, and community based organizations. The president of the statewide teachers association wrote a strong letter of support and also serves on the Bright Futures Initiative Committee. The head of the statewide administrative organization, however, only indicated mild or "general" support in his supporting letter. There is no visible support from charter school authorizers or state

charter school membership association. Overall, stakeholder support appears to be fairly high.

(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps	30	22
(i) Making progress in each reform area	5	4
(ii) Improving student outcomes	25	18
(A)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>Nebraska has made significant progress over the past several years in each of the four education reform areas. It was one of the first states to launch a comprehensive P-16 initiative. It has adopted new standards in reading, mathematics, science and social studies and is moving to a new statewide assessment system. High school graduation requirements have increased. A college and career preparation graduation requirement has been mandated for all students. Over 8000 teachers were trained at Reading First Summer Institutes and over 1100 took part in the Nebraska Mathematics Professional Development Series. ARRA funds were used by 100 school districts to align curriculum with new state standards. Virtually all of Nebraska's teachers meet NCLB highly qualified teacher requirement. Assessment cohorts were created to develop assessment literacy and leadership at the school level. Many other important programs were noted in the application but their participation rates, scope, and outcomes were not discussed i.e. Emerging Administrative Program; The Nebraska Leadership Initiative; Center for Science, Mathematics & Computer Education; the Classroom Assessment Program; etc.</p> <p>Student achievement on statewide assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics has dramatically increased. Furthermore, achievement gaps across all sub groups of students have dramatically closed. The state attributes this growth to building the capacity of staff, the impact of standards, and high expectations for all students.</p> <p>NAEP data on the other hand indicates that while student achievement is slightly above the national average, it remains somewhat flat. Student achievement gaps for all student sub groups are relatively untouched and remain wide.</p> <p>According to the state application high school graduation rates have increased 4.3% from 2003 to 2008, rising to 89% overall. Large increases are noted for all student sub groups across the board. Beginning in 2010-11 Nebraska will use the adjusted cohort rate method to monitor graduation rate and likely will discover a lower graduation rate.</p>		
Total	125	94

B. Standards and Assessments

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

Nebraska is a member of the Common Core Standards (CCS) Consortium comprised of 48 states. The Nebraska State Board of Education is committed to adopting these standards in August, 2010.

(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)		
<p>Nebraska "proposes" to join the SMARTER Balance Consortium consisting of 32 states, but at the time of this application had apparently not formally joined. The application implies that the state has signed an MOU with the SMARTER Balance Consortium, but Appendix G. includes only a sample MOU that has not been filled out or signed. Yet the state claims that it a member of the consortium.</p> <p>In any case, Nebraska is strongly committed to joining the consortium in order to build more of a balanced assessment system. The state is viewed as a leader in formative assessment at the classroom and teacher level. Now it plans to develop its technological infrastructure to support computerized benchmark assessments and common summative tests all aligned to the Common Core Standards.</p>		
(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	20	10
(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>After adopting the common Core Standards, participating LEAs will follow the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) in partnership with regional Education Service Units to work with local school district staff in supporting the integration of the Common Core Standards into local district curriculum. The NDE in partnership with the other consortium states will develop professional development materials including curricular frameworks aligned to the Common Core, instructional improvement strategies, and various interventions. Extensive professional development will be offered to ensure implementation. The University of Nebraska's Virtual High School will allow the dissemination of materials and professional develop to teachers in rural areas.</p> <p>While the states transition plan makes sense and is logical, it lacks specificity. For example, the is no elaboration of what kind of professional development the Education Service Units will offer or how they plan on working with districts to implement the Common Core Standards. Rather general goals have been established with very little specific information.</p>		
Total	70	56

C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

	Available	Tier 1
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	24	8
(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		

Nebraska's statewide longitudinal data system includes four of the twelve elements specified by the America COMPETES Act. The state plans to use the RTTT grant to fully implement the other eight elements.

(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	5	2
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Nebraska's statewide longitudinal data system is emerging. With RTTT funding the state plans on working to implement the eight remaining America COMPETES elements. Partnership roles among school districts, Education Service Units, Postsecondary Institutions, and the Department of Education are clarified with the goal of fully implementing its state longitudinal data system. The application in this section indicates significant progress in designing systems to access and use state data to improve instruction, but gives no examples of how it has done so. Since the plan is emerging, access and use of data by key stakeholder groups appears to be limited.

(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	18	7
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(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)

The state does not clearly define or describe its instructional improvement systems. Furthermore, plans for acquiring such systems are not clearly developed. The application does mention a series of relevant workshops called Leadership for Continuous Improvement that have supported districts in the use of instructional improvement systems. Over the past two years 800 educators from 253 school districts have attended. The workshops are standards based and focus on helping schools create a comprehensive assessment system.

A total of eight state trainers in conjunction with Education Service Units will help districts improve overall data quality. Also the state proposes to have data stewards serve school administrators in managing statistical data more effectively.

The Department of Education appears open to sharing data with researchers. It has done so with researchers from the University of Nebraska, McRel, and community based organizations. Through its SLDS and Data Reporting System (DRS) the Department of Education can provide timely data to researchers. Overall, plans for using data to improve instruction are just beginning to emerge and develop.

Total	47	17
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D. Great Teachers and Leaders

	Available	Tier 1
(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals	21	3

(i) Allowing alternative routes to certification	7	1
(ii) Using alternative routes to certification	7	2
(iii) Preparing teachers and principals to fill areas of shortage	7	0

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

Nebraska has no state statues allowing alternative routes to certification. The state reports in its application that there is not a high need for alternative certification programs in the state because its institutions of higher education graduate a sufficient number of students annually (1500). Within higher education there are several alternative certification programs that graduate small numbers of students annually.

The state conducts an annual teacher Shortage Survey to identify content area shortages. However, it does not have a plan to ensure the equitable distribution of teachers across the state or within school districts. This is left up to the districts themselves. There appears to be no data on principal shortages or distribution needs across the state.

(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	58	44
(i) Measuring student growth	5	2
(ii) Developing evaluation systems	15	15
(iii) Conducting annual evaluations	10	7
(iv) Using evaluations to inform key decisions	28	20

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

Nebraska's approach toward measuring student growth has been unique. Since 2001 districts have been rated on the quality of their local assessment system and the performance of students on reading and math standards as measured by locally developed assessments. Each local assessment system was reviewed by nationally known experts and rated using a rubric. Over the years assessment quality and student scores have increased. Now the state is transitioning to more of a statewide assessment system. Reading will be assessed using the new statewide assessment system in 2010 with math and science to follow in 2011 and 2012 respectively. This will lead to greater accountability and the ability to more easily identify schools needing improvement.

The state is in the process of moving from locally developed teacher and principal evaluation systems to a statewide system of evaluation. The new evaluation systems will be based on student achievement outcomes and professional standards and associated indicators. Greater than 50% of the weighting or scoring systems will be based upon student achievement. The teacher evaluation system will be grounded in the professional standards developed by Charlotte Danielson and the administrative system will be grounded in the Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium ISLLC standards. Broad based stakeholder involvement will ensure the teacher and principal buy-in. The plan will be fully implemented by August, 2012. At that time teachers and principals will be required to have annual evaluations. The state is moving to a performance model that will have new consequences that include additional compensation and removal in cases when results are not met. Factors regarding differentiated compensation are not discussed in detail. The state has good intentions, but its plan regarding annual evaluations is not sufficiently developed, nor are supporting policies and statutes in place.

(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals	25	9
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(i) Ensuring equitable distribution in high-poverty or high-minority schools	15	7
(ii) Ensuring equitable distribution in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas	10	2
(D)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>Currently there is no ability to link teachers to student achievement outcomes. This information will not be available until 2013-14. In the mean time the Department of Education has a plan to identify and encourage veteran teachers and administrators to work in high poverty/high minority schools. Incentives will include financial, professional development, and working condition incentives, and participation in a program called Great Teachers and Leaders.</p> <p>The state reports that it does not have needs in the areas of math, science, special education, and ELL/ESL. Virtually all of its teachers are classified as highly qualified. However, with an aging teaching population and increased standards for the 21st century, it will be necessary to upgrade teacher skills and create incentives attractive enough to encourage equitable distribution of teachers rural and in low achieving/ high minority schools across the state. Significant improvement plans in these areas are at least four years from implementation.</p>		
(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	14	2
(i) Linking student data to credentialing programs and reporting publicly	7	2
(ii) Expanding effective programs	7	0
(D)(4) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>At the time of this application the state was unable to link student achievement and growth data to their teachers or principals. The state needs and plans to create a system which will require significant upgrades to their SLDS. Also no preparation programs have been linked to the effectiveness of their students in the workplace. This data will be made public during the 2013-14 school year. No mention was made of expanding effective preparation programs.</p>		
(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals	20	4
(i) Providing effective support	10	2
(ii) Continuously improving the effectiveness of the support	10	2
(D)(5) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>The state will work with Education Service Units (ESU) to deliver professional development to educators throughout the state. ESUs are mandated by state statute to provide professional development. Currently, however, there is no corresponding requirement for educators to participate in professional development provided by the ESU system. RTTT funds will be used to build the capacity of ESUs to deliver professional development in six focus areas: Math; Reading Writing; Science; Social Studies; the new Performance Evaluation System; and Diverse Learners /Instructional Strategies. Also Professional Learning Networks will be developed to better meet the needs of educators with specialized needs and interests. Specific target dates, activities, and responsibilities have yet to be developed. These goals are reasonable, but appear challenging to achieve.</p>		
Total	138	62

E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

	Available	Tier 1
(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs	10	5
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) Nebraska does not have the legal, statutory, or regulatory authority to intervene in its persistently lowest achieving schools, but does have the authority to intervene in its LEAs through the Nebraska Administrative Code. The topic of intervention is not directly addressed in the application narrative, but may be inferred from a supporting table.		
(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	40	19
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	2
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	17
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) Nebraska has posted this application's definition of persistently lowest-achieving schools on the Department of Education's home page and has notified districts with schools that appear to be be persistently low achieving. This year, 52 schools in 33 districts were identified and targets (unspecified in the application) were identified. However, the state views these targets as provisional at best as Math and Reading assessment will be changing over the next two years to accommodate new state standards as well as the new Core Common Standards. From 2004-05 to 2008-09, 50% of Title I schools and 100% of Title I districts identified as being in school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring have transitioned out of school improvement status. Exact numbers are not specified nor are the reasons for their apparent success. Some of the strategies found in the four intervention models were used, but since no one model was used, the state does not know what factors worked to help these schools make AYP and move out of school improvement status. Plans for turning around low achieving schools will build on the work of the Bright Futures for Nebraska Students initiative. A new structure within the department of education, Intervention Systems and Support, will support interventions into schools. There will be a new Director of Intervention and a cross team of department specialists all focused on school intervention. Resource coordinators will also be assigned to each identified persistently low achieving school.		
Total	50	24

F. General

	Available	Tier 1
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	7
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	5
(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	2
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) Nebraska increased the percentage of total state appropriations used to support public education from 34.47% in 2008 to 35.63% in 2009, an increase of 1.16%.		

The states notes that the 2010 edition of "Quality Counts," an Education Week publication, rated Nebraska A- for school finance equity. Financial support from the state leaves the allocation of support services to the districts. The state however focuses on targeted areas like poverty and Limited English Proficiency. Much of the discussion in this section is complex and formula driven, rather than school specific. The discussion somewhat avoids the question of how the state's policies lead to equitable funding for its high need schools.

(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	4
(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	4
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
The state has no charter school law. Although there are no charter schools in Nebraska, there are a number of innovative school designs and practices. Characteristics include distance education, open enrollment, selection lotteries, Core Knowledge, Montessori, learning communities, and magnets. Innovative schools, with the exception of one high school, do not appear to be autonomous or have the ability to select and replace staff.		
(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	4
(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
Nebraska has a number of significant reform conditions mentioned in its application. The state should be commended for forming one of the nations' first P-16 partnerships, led by the strong advocacy of the governor. Also Nebraska has increased high school graduation requirements to reflect the needs of students prepared for the 21st century workplace and higher education. Its classroom assessment program is a model for the nation. Teachers are skilled at making assessments for learning in the classroom and making adjustments in their instruction on a daily basis. The Early Childhood endowment is another very positive reform that allows early interventions with families and their children before they reach school. Finally the Excellence in Teaching Act allows for the forgiveness of loans for students preparing to teach in high need subject areas and allows teachers to add endorsements in shortage area.		
Total	55	15

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	15	15
Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
STEM discussion and plans are integrated throughout the application. Highlights include a partnership with the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Also the creation of the Nebraska Virtual School (NVS) STEM Academy will partner with local schools to		

strengthen curriculum offerings at the 7th through 12th grade levels, make connections with higher education, and encourage girls and students from underrepresented groups to become actively engaged in STEM initiatives and programs.

Total	15	15
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Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		Yes

Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Nebraska's application comprehensively and coherently addresses all four education areas as specified by ARRA. The state has strong commitment from its LEAs and Teacher Union representatives. It has goals and plans to increase student achievement, close achievement gaps across all subgroups, and continue to raise its high school graduation rates with students that are well prepared for the workplace and/or college.

Total		0
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Grand Total	500	283
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Race to the Top

Technical Review Form - Tier 1

Nebraska Application #3400NE-8



A. State Success Factors

	Available	Tier 1
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it	65	25
(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda	5	4
(ii) Securing LEA commitment	45	15
(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact	15	6
(A)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(i) The plan begins by offering a comprehensive and coherent reform agenda for the state, including summary information on strategies for each of the four educational areas. In addition, the plan summarizes goals the state hopes to achieve during the next four years and beyond, and the path to accomplishing those goals is fairly clear and credible. This summary is consistent with the reforms described throughout its application.</p> <p>(ii) 215 of 253 LEAs in the state (85%) signed the MOU. Of those, the local school board signature was included on 186 MOUs, and the local teacher union leader's signature was included on 196 MOUs. The MOU language itself generally followed the boilerplate offered within the application, but does offer some interesting language which states that "The signature of a bargaining unit leader does not make the bargaining unit, or such individual, a party to the agreement." This statement, and the fact that 9% of the local teacher unions within the participating districts did not sign the MOU raises questions about teacher association support in some districts. Therefore, a low score in the medium range is given.</p> <p>(iii) The 215 participating districts serve 77% of the students in the state, and just 68% of all students in poverty. While these numbers are commendable, they are far from translating into broad statewide impact. Also, the narrative of the plan for this section simply repeats the 4 previous general goals, offering no additional detail to determine if what the state has established are ambitious yet achievable goals. A score in the low range is given.</p>		
(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	30	26
(i) Ensuring the capacity to implement	20	18
(ii) Using broad stakeholder support	10	8
(A)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(i) This section of the plan focused on statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans. Existing state leadership is supportive of these plans, and the proposed Bright Futures Roundtable would appear to offer strong leadership. The proposed new Research and Evaluation Director and cross-team groups to work with participating districts to identify promising practices, evaluating effectiveness, and disseminating information, as well as new School Intervention Specialists make sense. As do the proposed grants management activities, including continued funding to LEAs only if demonstrated progress is made, and specifying allowable uses of funding in accordance with the application's four main goals. Details for</p>		

the coordination of other reform funds is offered, and their take on sustainability post grant is clear. Overall this section offers good detail, and points in the high range are given.

(ii) A significant number of support letters were included, covering all key constituents, including the state education association, the association of school boards, council of school administrators, educational service unit coordinating council, numerous universities, a tribal leader, and a number of foundation and corporate/community/policy leaders. The language in these letters offers strong support for the application, although there are some caveats in the letter from the state education association president (although the letter indicates that all local affiliates were advised to sign their LEA's MOU). A score in the middle of the high range is given.

(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps	30	23
(i) Making progress in each reform area	5	5
(ii) Improving student outcomes	25	18
(A)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(i) Given the local control nature of the state, significant policy changes have been put in place to support rigorous state-wide standards and assessments. Efforts to improve teacher and administrator quality were summarized, and foundational work on robust data systems has occurred. School turn-around efforts have been successfully implemented with some schools. Various federal and state funding sources were used for these previous efforts. Points in the high range are given.</p> <p>(ii) The plan included narrative summaries and appendix charts that profile student outcomes using assessments required and approved by ESEA, as well as NAEP, with such data demonstrating <i>some</i> success in both increasing overall math and reading/language arts, and narrowing the achievement gap for <i>some</i> (but not all) of the minority groups and content areas. For graduation rates, data from Appendix E demonstrates overall group and within subgroups, but the overall growth is 1% (2002/03 - 2007/08) not the 4.3% noted in the narrative. The plan does nicely describe what past (and current) efforts occurred and the assumed link to these improvements. A score in the medium range is given.</p>		
Total	125	74

B. Standards and Assessments

	Available	Tier 1
(B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards	40	38
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality standards	20	20
(ii) Adopting standards	20	18
(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(i) Nebraska is a member of the National Governors Association (NGA)/Council of Chief School Officers' (CCSSO) Common Core Initiative with the goal of adopted Common Core Standards. Copies of the MOU and draft standards were included in the application, and the consortium involves 51 states and territories. Points in the high range are given for having fulfilled these criteria.</p> <p>(ii) Plans call for the State Board of Education to adopt the Common Core State Standards in August of 2010 (although there is still a rule-making process that will take approximately six months to complete). The application offers only general information about intensive professional development being conducted with teams from local participating school districts within one year of adopting the standards (using their existing system of regional Educational Service Units as coordinated by one new Nebraska Department of</p>		

Education (NDE) project manager hire). The budget includes funding to cover just 1 day of training for the state's 2,500 teachers. More detail on such professional development and plans to effectively reach teachers in 215 participating districts would have been helpful. Given the state's large number of small districts, the plan also relies heavily on the development of new state-wide Virtual School STEM Academy which would offer students a full set of high school math and science courses which meet these new standards. A very detailed budget for this Virtual School STEM Academy places about \$10.5 million (over 4 years) and appears achievable since it is building upon an existing Independent study high school program at a university. Points in the middle of the high range are given.

(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)		
<p>(i) and (ii) The state has <i>proposed</i> to join with the SMARTER Balance consortium of 32 states to build a coherent and balanced assessment system, including local district formative assessments and common benchmark assessments and a common summative test (as linked to the Common Core Standards). However, there was no signed MOU included as evidence, nor letter of intent. Thus it is not clear if the state has formally joined this consortium or not. Given this lack of clarity, points in the medium range are given.</p>		
(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	20	14
(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>The plan repeats their goal of having the ESUs conduct integration workshops with teams from participating local districts within one year of adopting the Common Core Standards. The NDE will develop professional development materials and the University of Nebraska's Virtual High School system will be used to help disseminate instructional materials and staff development for classroom teachers in remote areas.</p> <p>In reference to the new assessments, the plan mentions offering PD regarding data analysis, teacher scoring techniques and strategies for intervention, but there is no specific timeline mentioned for such activities (so it is not clear if this is to occur with the standards training or as a separate training).</p> <p>The plan also wisely seeks to develop a new set of preservice requirements to assure that all graduating new teachers will be prepared in the necessary skills related to the Common Core Standards. Less clear is the mention of a 18 hour graduate cohort around the "Leading the Common Core," whereby it is not clear how this is connected to the training all teachers are to receive or why \$200,000 is placed in the budget to support this concept.</p> <p>Although performance measures were optional for this section, there were no clear <i>measurable</i> goals (other than specific tasks to complete). Overall, a score in the higher medium range is given.</p>		
Total	70	58

C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

	Available	Tier 1
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	24	8
(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		

Although great progress toward the implementation of a statewide longitudinal data system appears to have been made during the past 4 years, the plan indicates that only 4 of 12 elements specified by the America COMPETES are fully implemented (E5, E6, E7, E10). 2 points for each implemented element are given.

(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	5	3
(C)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
The plan profiles existing data reporting and usage efforts, and their plans to build upon such systems. The plan convincingly summarizes the role that various partners (e.g., districts, Educational Service Units (ESUs), postsecondary institution, and the NDE) play currently and in the future. Although performance measures were optional for this section, there were no clear <i>measurable</i> goals (other than specific tasks to complete). Overall, a score in the higher medium range is given.		
(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	18	9
(i) Increasing the use of instructional improvement systems	6	3
(ii) Supporting LEAs, schools, and teachers in using instructional improvement systems	6	3
(iii) Making the data from instructional improvement systems available to researchers	6	3
(C)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
(i) and (ii) The plan indicates that existing efforts have already led to many local instructional improvement systems being in place (via accreditation requirements and their AdvancEd model). RTTT funding would be used to expand the network of AdvancEd trainers and to expand their curriculum to include the use of data to improve instruction (which is unclear since they indicate that this is already part of this model, but then indicate that it needs to be added to the curriculum). Local school districts will have an option to use their share of RTTT funding to support their data stewards and their local school improvement coordinators. LEAs will also be supported via RTTT funds to maintain and refocus the duties of 4 existing data trainer positions and 4 additional school improvement trainers, who will work with the ESUs. Points in the medium range are given.		
(iii) The plan states that existing data is already available and used by various research organizations, and that the expanded data systems will allow even better access for research purposes. Although performance measures were optional for this section, there were no clear <i>measurable</i> goals, nor a listing of specific tasks to complete and timelines. Overall, a score in the medium range is given.		
Total	47	20

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 state does not appear to have any real alternative certification statutes or policies that allow the creation of programs that meet the definition offered with the RTTT application, including providers who operate independent of institutions of higher education. State Board policy allows a Career Education Teaching certificate and a Transitional Certification, but these are for special circumstances, with one requiring a request from a local district indicating that they are unable to hire a fully certified teacher. The plan notes that there has not been a teacher shortage in the state, and thus no real need for alternative certification. No points are given.

(ii) #s were offered for teachers and administrators who had been certified via various non-traditional certification programs, but nearly all required the taking of courses offered by institutions of higher education. Exceptions included the Career Education Certificate (with 27 individuals currently teaching under this), and the Native Speaker Program (with 3-4 individuals teaching under this). This section of the plan also included an "educator preparation" table regarding planned activities to review and improve teacher and administrator preparation programs, but this is not described nor connected to other aspects of the plan. Points in the low range are given.

(iii) The plan notes that an annual Teacher Shortage Survey is conducted under the Excellence in Teaching Act, but it does not include detailed information about interventions that districts are using to address any teacher shortages, nor information about projected supply/demand. There is also a table in this section on "equitable distribution of teachers" that appears to be misplaced. No points are given.

(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	58	29
(i) Measuring student growth	5	3
(ii) Developing evaluation systems	15	10
(iii) Conducting annual evaluations	10	4
(iv) Using evaluations to inform key decisions	28	12

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

(i) The state is transitioning from only using locally developed assessments (with some review of those by external experts), to a new system of state assessments, with the first of those assessments occurring in 2010. Plans call for state testing in grades 3-8 and 11, with local assessments being used for other grades. Not enough detail is provided to understand how non-test grades and subjects will be included (per the definition of student growth for this application), and more information on the interconnection between the state and local assessment (as well as information on special populations) would have been helpful to determine whether student growth will indeed be measured for each individual student. A score in the medium range is given.

(ii) Plans call for designing a uniform statewide teacher evaluation system, and one for principals. Both systems are to be built on some foundational work, and with the input of teacher and principals. Both will include a 3-level rating system, and will use student achievement outcomes as the primary factor (with greater than 50% of the weighting). The design for these systems appears sound. What is unclear, however, is what statutory or state policy authority exists to actually ensure that all districts will implement the more rigorous evaluation system (the plan states that they will, but does not explain under what policy authority which should be included as part of a high quality plan). A score in the medium range is given.

(iii) and (iv) Plans call for annual evaluations of both teachers and principals, and the use of such data to inform promotion, tenure decisions, compensation, retention, and improvement/contract discontinuance for ineffective teachers. However, there is no mention of what statutory/state policy authority is already in place to ensure these things occur (e.g., that this is actually "achievable"), nor is there any real detail regarding how such data really is to be used for these many difficult decisions. There is also nothing mentioned how the system will identify "highly effective" teachers and principals. It is noted that these things would be figured out during the 4 years of the grant, with all participating districts having such evaluation systems in place by the end of the grant (although there is no clear information under what policy authority the state

will ensure that these things do actually occur, which should be included as part of a high quality plan). Points in the low end of the medium range are given.

(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals	25	10
(i) Ensuring equitable distribution in high-poverty or high-minority schools	15	8
(ii) Ensuring equitable distribution in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas	10	2

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

(i) The plan calls for an interim Great Teacher and Leaders program which would identify a cadre of experienced teachers who would volunteer to work within high minority schools (with financial incentives provided by the school, and enhanced access to professional development opportunities and assistance). This interim program would be in place until the needed data collection systems are fully implemented to determine highly effective teachers and principals. While this might be a good interim program, inadequate details were given (e.g., whether there would be teachers and principals in those areas willing to take on this task). Also there is nothing ensuring that local districts do indeed offer any such financial incentives. Points in the medium range are given.

(ii) The plan indicates that there is not an acute shortage of highly effective teachers in math and science in the state, yet there is no system in place to yet measure if any such highly effective teachers (as defined by the RTTT application) exist in the state. The plan is apparently confusing highly qualified teachers with highly effective. The performance measures for this item were also not completed. Overall, very general ideas were offered with limited detail. Points in the low range are given.

(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	14	3
(i) Linking student data to credentialing programs and reporting publicly	7	3
(ii) Expanding effective programs	7	0

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

(i) The plan describes well the current disconnect between teacher/leader university preparation and school districts, and then describes a number of summits and other activities to address these concerns. However, there are no current policies in place to ensure that any concrete action items will come from such summits, and instead it notes that certain rules will be revised at some point in the future. Overall there are good ideas, but the plan lacks detail and coherence in this section. Points in the medium low range are given.

(ii) Only vague references are made to how credentialing options and programs might be modified. No points given.

(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals	20	2
(i) Providing effective support	10	2
(ii) Continuously improving the effectiveness of the support	10	0

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

(i) A variety of potentially effective professional development ideas and activities are mentioned, using their existing network of ESUs. However, the plan lacks detail by not including timelines and responsible parties for each key task, and is not very realistic in that their goal is having 100% of NE's teachers meeting their highly effective standards (which is quite a goal since highly effective teachers are those demonstrating 1.5 years or more of student growth each year). Low points are given.

(ii) Nothing is mentioned as to how the effectiveness of any professional development activities would be measured and evaluated as part of a continuous improvement system. No points given.		
Total	138	45

E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

	Available	Tier 1
(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs	10	5
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) State law requires all schools to be accredited, and the State Board of Education is tasked with creating the standards for such accreditation. However, the rules associated with such accreditation refers to "public school systems" and what happens to them if they have uncorrected violations. Thus it is clear that the state has legal authority to intervene in persistently low performing school systems (which is often a district), but not clear if this authority allows direct intervention with a given school. Given this unclarity, medium points are given. Indeed, later in their plan, it is clearly noted that they do not currently have legislative authority to directly intervene in schools.		
(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	40	34
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	4
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	30
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) (i) The state has an approved definition for persistently lowest-achieving schools and has identified 52 such schools. However, the plan notes that the established annual targets are provisional given the upcoming changes in student assessments, and there may be some delays in identifying such schools each year. Points in the high range are given. (ii) The plan calls for additional personnel at both the state and local levels, and includes good ideas for a strong partnership of support for these schools. Some success in improving such schools in the past has occurred, although clear data on which specific interventions worked is not available. The goal of decreasing the number of such schools is 10 per year, and that is ambitious, but potentially achievable. Although some additional detail on specific action steps would have been helpful and information on why reforms in the past have worked or not, the approach overall appears sound and a score in the high range is given.		
Total	50	39

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 plan indicates that the state increased their percentage of total revenues available to the state that were used to support public education by 1.16% (between FY2008 and FY2009). Full points awarded.

(ii) Although a number of methods used to equalize funding within the state were detailed (including a recent categorical funding policy for poverty and Limited English proficiency allowances), no specific data was offered to actually show average per pupil revenues and/or expenditures between high-need LEAs and other LEAS, nor within LEAs. Therefore there was no way to determine the specific level of equity between and within these groups. The plan noted that a recent Quality Counts gave the state an A- for school-finance equity, but it is unclear to what extent that assessment looked at high-need and high-poverty school equity issues. A low medium score is given.

(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	5
(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	5
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(i), (ii), (iii), and (iv). The state does not have a charter school law. No points are given.</p> <p>(v) The plan profiles several ways in which districts can (and have) created specialized programs and magnet schools. It also details the extent to which the state has open enrollment within and among districts (and one recent County-wide Learning Community Option). While these things are good, information was only given that one such school (Independent Study High School) actually meets the definition for "innovative, autonomous public schools" as offered in the RTTT application, including that such schools can select and replace their staff, and control their own budgets. Points in the medium range are given.</p>		
(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	4
(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>Several of the significant reform conditions summarized had already been noted within previous sections (and points awarded there), including the P-16 Council, new state standards and assessment, categorical funding policies in high priority areas, effective local assessment, and the excellence in teaching act. One additional reform, not previously mentioned was the early childhood education endowment. Overall, these pieces have indeed created conditions more favorable to education reform and innovation, and data presented in early sections illustrate improved student outcomes. Points in the high range are given.</p>		
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 plan does indeed include activities which would result in the offering of a rigorous course of study in STEM content, in cooperation with university and other partners, and if implemented should prepare more students for STEM-based careers. Although the primary focus of these efforts would be the creation of a new Virtual School STEM Academy, the plan does include information throughout on how this Academy (and efforts surrounding it) would support all four education reform areas.

Total	15	15
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Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		Yes
Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
Yes, although the plan has areas of weaknesses, overall the state has made major strides in the past few years, working toward a state-level accountability and support system. Their plan does address all four reform areas specified in ARRA, and if implemented does represent a systemic approach to education reform.		
Total		0

Grand Total	500	268
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Race to the Top

Technical Review Form - Tier 1

Nebraska Application #3400NE-10



A. State Success Factors

	Available	Tier 1
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it	65	57
(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda	5	5
(ii) Securing LEA commitment	45	40
(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact	15	12

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

Nebraska has a strong vision to address the four educational reform areas with a credible plan outlined in this section of the proposal. The plan is called the Bright Futures Initiative (BFI). The BFI proposes to restructure the state's department of education to strengthen leadership and support for implementing the reforms in the proposal. Proposed changes to the leadership structure include new teams for research and evaluation, school improvement and intervention systems, a BFI leadership roundtable, and state-wide partnerships with all levels of its educational system. The proposed reforms focus on common standards and assessments, improved training for teachers and principals, use of student and system data to inform decisions ranging from instruction to staffing and support for low achieving schools. The vision clearly takes into account contextual factors unique to the state. Unique contextual factors described in the proposal include an existing technology infrastructure that will provide the basis for implementing access to the proposed Virtual High School/STEM Academy and a school transformation approach that accounts for the need to improve rather than replace existing principals due to its majority of districts in rural settings. The state has a strong tradition of local control, which the applicant addressed through a balanced statewide approach that meets RTTT requirements.

The state has strong commitment from its participating LEAs to implement the state's plans in all four areas of reform as evidenced in the MOUs. The scope of work described requires participating LEAs to implement all the proposed reforms in each of the four areas for this grant program. The necessary signatures were obtained from 85% of LEAs in the state, which represents 77% of all students and 68% of students in poverty. Although the terms and conditions in the MOU closely follow the standard MOU from the USDOE, a clause near the end indicates that the bargaining unit leader's signature does not make the bargaining unit a party to the agreement. This clause indicates that teacher union support may be variable among participating LEAs. Omaha, the state's largest district, and several neighboring LEAs did not sign a MOU for participation. While the lack of commitment among a few LEAs may pose a challenge for the state with a strong tradition of local control, other aspects of the proposal indicate that this plan is equipped to meet the challenge to positively impact all teachers and students in the state. For example, the state has formed a steering committee with letters of support from all the major educational associations, significant workforce foundations, Omaha's chamber of commerce, the Douglas-Sarpy County Learning Community's network of 17 magnet and alternative focus schools in the Omaha area, and the University of Nebraska. There are proposed uses of RTTT that directly impact students in Omaha such as expansion of UNO-TAP for purposes of increasing faculty and recruitment and to increase the capacity of the UNO-TAP program to meet ongoing needs in the metropolitan Omaha area. The stakeholders who support this proposal represent a strong state-wide support for the four RTTT reform areas. The University of Nebraska is a key player in this plan and will prepare new teachers for sustainability of the reforms in hard to staff content areas in all geographical locations in the state. The plan will impact existing teachers through its new state-

wide Virtual STEM Academy and strong partnerships with institutions of high education and educational service units serving all LEAs in the state. Its STEM plan is designed to provide access to all students in the state for enhanced college readiness and STEM-related studies. RTTT reforms support reaching the state's new high school graduation requirements which apply to all LEAs in the state. The state is implementing a radical change to teacher evaluation primarily based on student achievement that will be required of all its LEAs.

The plan proposes to reorganize and strengthen collaboration between the state department of education, a new leadership council and local education agencies to increase student achievement. Its new teacher and principal annual evaluation system that meets RTTT criteria is required of all LEAs, which indicates the broad and equitable impact this quality control measure will have on strengthening support for students' learning in all subgroups. The applicant has a strong plan to increase college enrollment through new rigorous high school graduation requirements and highly accessible, high quality college courses offered to all students through its Virtual STEM Academy's partnerships with institutions of higher education. These measures will have a positive impact on increasing high school graduation rates as well. A description about how the plan addresses gaps between subgroups, and reading and math achievement are provided in Section A3, the STEM section and Section D3 of the proposal.

(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	30	28
(i) Ensuring the capacity to implement	20	20
(ii) Using broad stakeholder support	10	8

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

One strength of this proposal is that the state clearly describes a rationale for restructuring its use of existing leadership and making additions to its leadership to fill gaps in expertise needed to implement its plan. Significant changes to leadership include the Bright Future Roundtable, restructuring of the state department of education, additional administrative positions to oversee School Improvement, Research and Evaluation of effective reform practices, data and technical support, and the state-wide Virtual STEM Academy. Most of the consultants in the budget will be drawn from newly funded staff positions at existing Educational Service Units, LEAs, institutions of higher education and professional associations in the state. The NDE also plans to enlist the help of the state's LEA leaders and educational association staff in its proposed work. The plan has a clear design to staff positions to support, coordinate, monitor and measure the effectiveness of efforts by locally controlled LEAs who participate in the proposed reforms. The state has an evaluation plan to track LEA implementation on a yearly basis before annual funds are awarded, and to disseminate and encourage replication of valuable lessons learned at the local level. The state plans to hold an annual networking conference among low performing schools to inform and share effective reform strategies that lead to increasing student achievement. This learning community approach would most likely lead to valuable collaboration, professional learning and development of innovative strategies for addressing special needs of subgroups in diverse geographical locations, i.e. rural and urban. Oversight of allowable use of funds is clearly articulated in the proposal in a way that will be easily communicated to LEAs. The state already has an online grants management system (GMS) that will be used to streamline LEA's application process and funds disbursement. The GMS also monitors expenditures at the LEA level. The budget provides for staffing new positions to manage and monitor use of RTTT funds. The budget detail is easy to follow and appears to be a well-designed use of funds to adequately support the proposed reform activities including a strong emphasis on STEM. In terms of sustainability, the budget shows a 50% in-kind contribution of seven state department of education staff time, which indicates that human resources involved in the RTTT will gain expertise that will continue beyond the four years of the grant. It appears that consultants will be used primarily to set up new data systems and to train the education workforce. These activities, if implemented well, will build sustainable capacity in the state.

The plan describes the Bright Future for Nebraska Students Governor's Committee that consists of a broad base of stakeholders charged with the task of facilitating the flow of communications and progress reports between the state's leadership and local constituencies involved in implementing the reforms. Evidence of

the committee comes from letters of support in the proposal appendix representing legislative leaders, major state educational associations, foundations involved in education and the workforce, major institutions of higher education, and the state's teachers' union. Letters of support also include constituency groups located in Omaha, tribal groups, and civil rights organizations. In total, letters of support indicate a broad span of stakeholder support for RTTT in the state.

(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps	30	25
(i) Making progress in each reform area	5	5
(ii) Improving student outcomes	25	20

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

The state's proposal describes an extensive track record of using ARRA, and other federal and state funds to support implementing reforms aligned with the four goals of RTTT. Of significance is the comprehensive P-16 initiative started in 1998 that has provided a focus for state-wide reforms including a new state assessment system, professional development for principals and teachers resulting in a 99% highly qualified teaching workforce in preparation to implement new rigorous high school graduation requirements in reading, math, and science, and ambiguous college/career readiness and assessment literacy goals. The applicant cites evidence of successfully using a continuous improvement model with the state's lowest performing schools.

The applicant has a track record of successfully increasing student achievement in math and reading since 2003. The state's NCLB assessment (which is currently being replaced by a new assessment) shows a stronger percent of gains in terms of AYP than the percent of gains from NAEP's reading and math scores. Nonetheless, the applicant has managed to maintain a slight increase in NAEP scores above the national average in both math and reading during a time period of increased poverty, ELL and minority student populations. The state has a writing assessment and data showing strong gains in students' writing ability. While students in all subgroups shows substantial gains on the AYP assessments for math and read, the achievement gap between African American and White subgroups only improved slightly since 2003. The state has made substantial progress closing gaps among other subgroups, particularly Hispanic students and those with disabilities. The applicant provides evidence of a positive trend in increasing graduation rates (+4.5% for 2006-07) including a significant gain in students graduating from the 14 lowest achieving schools and districts that the state monitored from 2003 to 2008 (Appendix E Table 1.1.a.5). There also is data in the subgroup tables in Appendix E showing dramatic increases in graduation rates among all subgroups. But this is a recent trend so the overall increase in the graduate rate since 2003 is about 1%.

Total	125	110
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B. Standards and Assessments

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

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

The applicant provided evidence of participating in the consortium of 51 states and territories led by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. This consortium is working on adopting its common set of K-12 standards that have been internationally benchmarked to prepare students for college and 21st century careers by 12th grade. Evidence in the

proposal includes a copy of the MOU signed by the governor and the commissioner of education, a copy of the standards, and an explanation of its rigorous international benchmarking and validation process.

The state described its plan to adopt the common set of K-12 standards by August, 2010, and to provide support to integrate the standards into the schools of participating LEAs. The LEA adoption of the new common standards is eased by the state's 2007 standards initiative that closely resembled aspects of the new common core standards. The proposal describes a credible plan for supporting state-wide professional development for implementing the new standards, curriculum frameworks, and instructional materials through its proposed virtual high school and existing educational service units that have the capacity to the delivery professional development to all LEAs within the upcoming school year.

(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)

The applicant proposes to take a leadership role in the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium, which has been working on a rigorous grant proposal to develop high-quality assessments for classroom use to measure formative progress toward the common set of core standards. This assessment consortium involves 32 states. A copy of the consortium's MOU is included as evidence of the strong organizational plan for collaborating on the development of innovative, computer adaptive tests and managing data compilation and reporting.

(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	20	20
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The applicant demonstrates leadership in its plan to leverage the state's existing capacity to support the development of new classroom assessments in collaboration with partners in the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium. The timeline for developing a large item bank and field testing new assessments appears feasible if appropriate vendors are contracted to provide the technical support needed for this development effort. The proposal describes credible goals of developing additional teacher resources, curriculum tools and professional development materials to be accessible through the new virtual high school. In addition, the state plans to conduct research and development activities to enhance its teacher preparation programs' capacity to prepare all new teachers with the skills necessary to implement the new standards and assessments. It will also create an 18-hour graduate program to train a cohort of lead teachers and administrators working at the LEA level. This plan has a reasonable timeline for reaching its goals through a phase-in process to be fully implemented by 2014. The timeline appears feasible because the state explained its readiness to take on these ambitious tasks in earlier sections of the proposal describing its history of assessment literacy training for LEAs.

Total	70	70
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C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

	Available	Tier 1
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	24	14

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

The applicant provides a detailed table which explains that 7 of the 12 America Competes elements are in place although only 4 of these are interoperable. The state says it is on track to complete the requirements

of its state longitudinal data system (SLDS) in accordance with the timeline established by the State Fiscal Stabilization Funds (SFSF).

(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	5	4
(C)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>The applicant describes a credible plan for using RTTT funds to expand, update and improve its data system elements to secure privacy while making data more accessible to stakeholders. The state has established efforts to make data systems accessible to teachers, principals, parents and other stakeholders for purposes of continuous school improvement due to its large rural areas. Nebraska has been building its online data systems and providing technical assistance training workshops to district-level staff in how to use data for school improvement purposes since 2000. The proposal implies but does not cite specific performance measures or benchmark targets for incrementally expanding these efforts to all LEAs.</p>		
(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	18	15
(i) Increasing the use of instructional improvement systems	6	5
(ii) Supporting LEAs, schools, and teachers in using instructional improvement systems	6	5
(iii) Making the data from instructional improvement systems available to researchers	6	5
(C)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>The applicant's proposal to build state-wide capacity for using data to improve instruction has the potential of increasing acquisition, adoption and use of local instructional improvement systems at the local school level. The state's leadership includes an existing P-16 committee and a data advisory committee that has the expertise and experience to steer the NDE in these efforts. LEAs in this state are already required to document and use data related to school improvement processes. The state has trained 800 staff at its 253 LEAs in uses of data. RTTT funds will support scaling up professional development to build capacity at a deeper level within LEAs to expand the use of instructional improvement systems through the Educational Service Units (ESUs) that provide training. The ESU network will serve as a liaison between LEAs and the NDE with regard to dissemination of data use practices. The RTTT funds will double the size of the network's data training team from 4 to 8 people. The state will encourage LEAs to use their RTTT funds to support data stewards who will be trained to monitor the quality of statistical data and metrics used by local schools. The state has a credible vision for creating a national model for use of data to improve instruction with its proposed capacity building for its statewide training network, data stewards, and local school improvement coordinators. In addition, the state already has a MOU and methods in place for making data from instructional systems and the SLDS accessible to researchers. There are two public web sites that host educational data. These efforts also will be improved and expanded through this plan. This section of the proposal would be stronger if it cited specific performance measures or benchmark targets for incrementally expanding these efforts state-wide. Also the reference to "advanced cube technology" it is unclear.</p>		
Total	47	33

D. Great Teachers and Leaders

	Available	Tier 1
(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals	21	13
(i) Allowing alternative routes to certification	7	2

(ii) Using alternative routes to certification	7	7
(iii) Preparing teachers and principals to fill areas of shortage	7	4

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

The state has regulations that allow two alternative routes to certification that meet the RTTT definition. In addition, the state has made recent changes to its regulations to authorize two new certifications that are alternatives to the traditional certification. These are the Career Education Certificate and the Dual Credit Teaching Certificate. It appears that these routes are strongly tied to institution of higher education however.

The Transitional Certification is an established alternative route to teaching that has been in use as a one-year temporary certification to teach in Nebraska schools. It is renewable for up to five years. Teachers with this certification can enroll in the Transition to Teaching Program which provides professional training through the state's institutions of higher education and Educational Service Units. Districts also play a role in the professional preparation of teachers with alternative certifications. Another alternative program is the University of Nebraska at Omaha-Teacher Academy Project (UNO-TAP) that allows individuals with an undergraduate degree related to secondary education content areas to be selected for teaching internships while completing certification within an accelerated one-year timeframe. In addition, there are Provisional Commitment Certifications for teachers and administrators that grant certifications in hard to staff positions and a Career Ladder Certification supporting alternative routes to teaching for Native Americans. Data in the proposal shows that the alternative routes have been adequately meeting staffing needs in Nebraska.

The state uses an Annual Teacher Shortage survey to monitor, evaluate and identify areas of teacher shortages. The applicant does not explain a process for identifying principal shortages. The proposal has a table showing that there were 64 unfilled positions in the state during the 2008-09 school year, which represents about .3% (less than one-third of one percent) of its educational workforce. The applicant's data does not disaggregate shortages into teacher and principal subgroups, however. The educational system in this state clearly does not have a critical workforce shortage problem yet it has data showing useful results from its alternative routes to certification and measures in the proposal to improve shortages that do occur. This is an indication of its strong commitment to providing quality education for all of its students.

(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	58	52
(i) Measuring student growth	5	5
(ii) Developing evaluation systems	15	12
(iii) Conducting annual evaluations	10	10
(iv) Using evaluations to inform key decisions	28	25

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

This state has a strong tradition of multiple approaches to measuring student growth. Assessments in the state include local LEA assessments that have been validated and rated by national assessment experts. The applicant has been steadily working with LEAs to evaluate and improve the quality of learning assessments since 2001. It publishes assessment quality ratings and assessment results in reading and math annually. Assessment results in the chart for this section indicate dramatic gains in both measurement quality and student performance. Very few schools were tagged for school improvement under AYP. The state currently is transitioning to an even more robust statewide assessment system called the Nebraska State Accountability System (NeSA). The NeSA will include individual formative/benchmark and summative assessment scores for all students in the state, which will be used as a primary measure in the evaluation of teachers and principals.

The applicant has an ambitious and well-informed plan for developing Model Teacher and Principal performance templates for annual evaluations based on student achievement on the NeSA and new teacher and principal standards. The design of the new state-wide evaluation system will incorporate and

improve upon existing evaluation instruments and methods developed locally by LEAs, primarily the Omaha Public Schools (OPS) evaluation model. The OPS model will be refined through input from state association leaders, local administrators and teachers from participating LEAs, and Educational Service Unit leaders although the applicant does not provide details about how this process will unfold. The teacher evaluation design is based on Danielson's framework published by ASCD. The principal evaluation design is based on the Interstate Schools Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Performance Expectations and Indicators for Education Leaders and Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards. The proposal has a clear description of the use of multiple rating categories that appear reasonable and fair. Nebraska statute (79-828 R.R.S) appears to support compliance for the new accountability system. The plan includes a reasonable schedule for adopting new teacher and principal standards and the associated evaluation system to be phased in through field testing and involvement with teachers and principals starting in fall 2010 and fully operational by August 2012.

The applicant has a clear plan for conducting newly required evaluations of teachers and principals. The plan has methods for providing feedback and professional development support to address deficiencies found through the evaluation process. The annual evaluation process starts with goals and a professional growth plan in early fall of each school year. For non-tenured teachers, evaluations will be conducted at six progress checkpoints and for veteran teachers at two checkpoints annually. The plan identifies scheduled dates for feedback. The Nebraska Education Certification office will be responsible for developing the new point system for re-certification using RTTT funds. The plan explains phase-in benchmarks that are reasonable performance measures. The benchmarks represent a significant systemic shift from zero to 100% of LEAs using student growth as the primary measure to evaluate and qualify educators for employment in its public school system.

The applicant's proposed evaluation model provides professional development and mentoring support to educators to address any deficiencies found through the rigorous evaluation process that relates to compensation and removal and other decisions regarding quality of work provided by education professionals. The proposed model explains expectations for making improvements and correcting deficiencies that are tied to qualifications of recertification under the new evaluation system. The applicant's new evaluation process includes using data generated to grant tenure and recertification for teachers and principals and to remove ineffective teachers and principals, both non-tenured and tenured, based on a reasonable multi-year timeframe of evaluation results and professional growth interventions. Professionals who persistently exhibit poor job performance based on the new evaluation methods will be subject to probationary status or denial of recertification. As explained earlier in this section, the evaluation system will be based on rigorous standards and research-based frameworks as well as a robust student achievement assessment (+50%). The evaluation and assessment methods described in the proposal are well-aligned with the intent of the RTTT funding program. The state's process for giving professionals additional compensation based on the evaluation system is not clear, however.

(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals	25	17
(i) Ensuring equitable distribution in high-poverty or high-minority schools	15	10
(ii) Ensuring equitable distribution in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas	10	7

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

The state is using its State Longitudinal Data Systems and SFSF grant funds to build a system that easily connects teachers to their students' achievement outcomes, which is a major step to ensure equitable distribution of high quality educators in low performing and high poverty/high minority schools. Steps are planned to provide incentives for teachers and principals to serve in high need schools and subject areas. The RTTT funds will be used to set up a competitive incentive program that encourages teams, but also allows individuals, to work in high need areas. The types of incentives in the plan are financial support to LEAs, and professional development and enhanced working conditions for educators including priority access to service networks, special instructional technology, and release time for professional growth activities. Selection criteria are rigorous and set a high bar for the level of professional effectiveness and experience needed to qualify for these incentives. Prior actions in this area are unknown.

The applicant has an impressive track record and ambitious plans to provide qualified teachers in hard-to-staff subjects. The state has 98% of its math teachers and 99% of its science teachers currently identified as highly qualified under the NCLB criteria. The applicant anticipates a shift in these numbers with the influx of students in STEM studies due to recent upgrades to high school graduation requirements in math and science. To address hard to staff subjects, the state started a forgivable loan incentive program in 2005. The loan program was changed in 2009 to pertain only to teachers in high need content and shortage areas. It is annually funded at \$1,000,000. The proposed Virtual STEM Academy is an additional way the state plans to proactively address anticipated needs for highly effective teachers in hard to staff subjects. However, there are not specific strategies mentioned for teachers in special education and/or ELL. The state will use its new data systems to identify effective and non-effective educators in high need content areas. Baselines will be established by 2012-13 using the new methods of evaluation.

(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)

The applicant has a well-designed plan for how the state is designing its system to link student achievement and student growth data to evaluation of teachers and principals. RTTT funds are requested to help support data analysis. In addition, the plan will link student achievement outcomes to teachers' and principals' preparation programs from which they came through an annual educator preparation program record card intended to become public for 2013-14 data, which will serve as the baseline. Performance targets are to make only 30% of teacher preparation programs' links to student achievement publically accessible by 2013-14. The rationale for this target is unclear.

LEA administrators in the state developed a white paper to articulate changes needed in the state's teacher preparation programs. A Teacher/Principal Preparation Statewide Summit will be designed, taking into account findings from the white paper, and held annually to help improve teacher education programs in the state. In addition, the state proposes to expand opportunities for clinical field-based experiences and to create innovative professional development schools using RTTT funds to conduct needs analysis, examination of research and best practices, implementation of strategies to address deficiencies found in the education workforce through the new teacher and principal evaluation system. Specific performance targets for expanding successful preparation programs are not mentioned in the proposal.

(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals	20	15
(i) Providing effective support	10	10
(ii) Continuously improving the effectiveness of the support	10	5

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

The applicant has a robust and credible plan to strengthen collaborative partnerships between the NDE, Educational Service Units and their LEAs to leverage the work of the new National Center for Research on Rural Education at UN-Lincoln to enhance the quality of methods for effective professional development used to improve student learning in reading/writing, science and math and social studies. Professional development will focus on instructional strategies for diverse learners and support for implementing the new performance evaluation process as well as induction and mentoring at the school level. These efforts will result in Professional Learning Networks, which is an innovative way for the ESUs to deliver high quality professional development in core content areas, assessments and strategies for using data for instructional decisions, induction and mentoring and continuous school improvement.

The applicant is less clear in its plan to measure, evaluate and continuously improve professional supports. It does, however, describe the new partnership initiative as a way to remove barriers to effective

implementation of research-based practices and new resources to support LEAs reaching its RTTT reform goals. The applicant also will set up and enlist the help of new statewide steering committees for each of the six professional support focus areas. It is unclear who will actually measure and evaluate professional development programs.

Total	138	105
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E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

	Available	Tier 1
(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs	10	5

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

Nebraska’s state laws and regulations cited in the proposal indicate that the state board of education and commissioner of education have the authority to place school systems on probation for violation of meeting accreditation quality and performance standards. All schools in the state have to be accredited in order to operate. If the school system does not correct its violation by Feb. 1 of the first probation year, the commissioner will recommend the school system for non-accreditation for the following year “and shall be subject to loss of authority to operate and reassignment of territory to other school districts.” The commissioner makes the recommendations to the board. The State Board of Education has “general supervision and administration of the school system of the state” and the authority to set up rules and regulations for standards and procedures for the approval and legal operation of all schools and accreditation of all schools. Accreditation standards enforce equity in the quality of instruction and effective schooling for all students in the state. The board of education appears to have the authority to intervene in school systems, but not directly in school buildings, that violate compliance with required educational quality and performance standards for accreditation by reassigning the territory to other school districts that meet the standards and procedures.

(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	40	37
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	5
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	32

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

The state’s definition for persistently low-achieving schools (PLAS) was approved and used to identify 52 schools in 33 of its LEAs that meet the definition.

The state has a strong track record of success at the LEA level for moving persistently low achieving schools (PLAS) out of school improvement, corrective action or restructuring status. The state has a clear history of success with school turnaround, i.e. 100% of it districts and 50% of Title 1 schools previously on the watch list are no longer identified as PLAS. These schools all implemented some components of the RTTT transformation model including replacement of building principals. In 2009-10, the applicant identified 52 schools in 33 districts as PLAS. The applicant predicts it will need to implement an intervention model with 10 PLAS each year. The applicant admits this annual target is provisional because it is based on a prediction about schools’ performance on a new statewide test of student achievement. Given this rationale and acknowledgement that the target may need to be adjusted once the new assessment data is collection, the performance target appears to be reasonable although it is unclear whether or not the 10 are included in the 52 already identified or if these would be new PLAS. The state proposes to strengthen capacity within LEAs for successfully implementing the four RTTT school intervention models by adding new NDE staff to collaborate closely with local school’s intervention project managers. New NDE staff, supported by RTTT funds, will include a director of intervention systems and support who will serve on the Bright Future Roundtable and lead cross-teams of other new and existing NDE staff in efforts to support implementation of intervention models at LEAs. NDE staff will be reorganized to serve as resource coordinators assigned

to each PLAS, a strategy that has been successfully piloted for two years already. The state is requiring a designated intervention project manager position for all LEAs that receive ESEA school improvement grants or PLAS that receive RTTT funds. The intervention project manager's role and responsibilities are to conduct evaluation of school improvement progress and report it to the NDE and to assist the LEA in implementation of its intervention model. The proposed plan will use all four RTTT intervention models including its approved small state transformation model with persistently low-achieving schools. The proposal has credible timelines, activities, and staffing plans for its intervention approach with PLAS. By December, the new NDE staff will be holding monthly meetings with local Intervention Project Managers (IPM), School Intervention Specialists (SIS) and Resource Coordinators (RC). There will be a PLAS Networking Conference in the spring, annual review of RTTT projects to determine continuation funding based on progress data, and technical assistance with annual local review and reporting.

Total	50	42
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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)

The percent of total revenues available to the state for education in FY 2009 was a 1.16% increase compared with FY 2008 education revenues. The state used 35.6% of its state appropriations for education in 2009, which is evidence that it makes education funding a priority.

The state was rated among the top six states in the U.S. with regard to equitable funding according to Quality Counts information included in the application. Nebraska has a complex policy for determining funding support for LEAs. Its basic funding formula addresses horizontal and vertical equity, which allows the state to meet needs of its smallest and largest LEAs under the same policy. It has several ways to provide allowances and adjustments for LEAs with unique high-priority needs for poverty, ELL and special education students. It makes allowances for reduced class size, increased instructional time, transportation, online learning, teacher education levels, and remote elementary sites. It also makes adjustments for per pupil basic funding below the statewide average. Its needs stabilization method is used to fill gaps that occur when local needs exceed local resources. The proposal has two appendices that show the details of appropriations and calculations to provide evidence of its equitable funding.

(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	8
(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	8

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

The state's laws are "silent" with regard to charter schools. The applicant explains that the unique geographical context of this state combined with a majority of small districts and strong local control does

not make the charter school model a strong option for parents, students and educators interested in implementing innovative education. The proposal explains how it supports independent and flexible ways for LEAs and parents to meet students' unique educational needs through a state-wide accredited Independent Study High School (ISHS) that does have the flexibility and authority to define its instructional models and curriculum, select and replace staff based on performance measures, implement new structures and formats for the schooling and control its own budget. Student learning data indicate that the ISHS model is a high-quality educational alternative. Students in the state also have multiple opportunities to attend schools outside their neighborhood through an enrollment option program, specialized intra-district schools, and the Douglas-Sarpy County Learning Community's network of 17 magnet and alternative focus schools in the Omaha area.

(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	5
(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>Data in section A of the proposal indicate the applicant has a strong track record of increasing student achievement and graduation rates in recent years and has made some progress with narrowing achievement gaps among student subgroups. The state performs above the national average of 71% with regard to its overall graduation rate of 89%. This section of the proposal attributes its track record of student learning gains to its educational reform conditions supported by a list of regulations, policies and initiatives discussed throughout the proposal. These include the P-16 Council initiatives, new standards and assessments, categorical funding policies, rigorous college and career ready requirements for high school graduation, assessment literacy and continuous school improvement training for LEAs, early childhood education endowment and its Excellence in Teaching Act which provides forgivable loans to new teachers who stay to serve in the state's high-need subject areas and LEAs.</p>		
Total	55	23

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

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

Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Nebraska's proposal describes a robust and well-designed plan to offer 100% of the state's students in grade 7 through 12 with access to rigorous coursework in mathematics, the sciences, technology, and engineering by establishing a new STEM Academy under the governance of the University of Nebraska's accredited independent study high school. The proposal's detailed STEM budget, which represents approximately 14% of the proposed budget, provides strong evidence of a high-quality plan with 100% of its staff to come from new and existing full-time positions. The STEM Academy budget illustrates a thorough understanding of the administrative, academic and technical staff needed to support this state-wide initiative that will increase students' access to quality STEM studies. The STEM Academy plan is cost-effective due to the state's well-established distance learning infrastructure, online learning know-how, and digital reference libraries. The plan leverages existing STEM curricula in science, computer science, and math. It articulates rigorous, new curriculum development for engineering. The proposed STEM curriculum is well-designed to prepare an advanced workforce to meet the needs of high-growth, high-tech industries. The STEM Academy also addressed access to remedial courses for struggling students to prepare them for the more advanced STEM curricula. There is a clear plan to recruit girls and minority students in to advanced STEM studies. The plan is designed to build a sustainable state-wide capacity within the educational workforce through strong connections with pre-service teacher programs, other college STEM programs, research and international programs, professional learning communities for in-service STEM teachers, coordination with school counselors, and ongoing support for LEA learning coaches and tutors.

This STEM plan has the potential to serve as a national model for high-quality, online learning programs aimed at building capacity in STEM and college readiness for America's students.

Total	15	15
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Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		Yes

Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The applicant demonstrates sufficient LEA participation and commitment among the state's key stakeholders to be successful implementing and achieving its ambiguous goals for continuing to increase student achievement, decrease gaps among student subgroups, and increase high school graduation rates while also increasing graduation requirements aligned for college and career readiness. It has a successful track record and ambitious plans to implement innovative strategies to strengthen the performance of its LEAs in a culture of strong local control. It has increased and maintained student achievement above the national average in both math and reading on NAEP during a time of steady influx of students living in poverty and those with English language learning needs. It has an impressive tradition of building capacity for assessment literacy within its educational workforce and is a leader in the development of common assessments for the new common standards. The design for new teacher and principal evaluations that use student achievement data as a primary determinant in recertification represents a rigorous approach to meeting the goals of RTTT. Its STEM plan is an impressive world-class model addressing critical shortages in college and career preparedness that will be accessible to every student in the state and has the potential to strengthen the workforce of America to compete in global markets of the 21st Century.

Throughout this plan, the applicant clearly articulates how the RTTT funds will be used to support initiatives that strongly align with the intent of the RTTT funding program.

Total		0
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Grand Total	500	398
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Race to the Top

Technical Review Form - Tier 1

Nebraska Application #3400NE-5



A. State Success Factors

	Available	Tier 1
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it	65	15
(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda	5	5
(ii) Securing LEA commitment	45	10
(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact	15	0
(A)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(i) The State has a comprehensive and coherent reform agenda. Nebraska's plan will substantially change the expectations and processes used throughout the educational system by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing Common core standards • Adding Statewide assessments built on the common core standards • Implementing teachers and principal growth opportunities and new expectations for effectiveness • Providing student achievement data for informed decisions on multiple levels including, teacher and principal placement, hiring and retention decisions, and • Providing assistance to persistently low achieving schools. 		
<p>(ii) The statement in the MOU, "The signature of a bargaining unit leader does not make the bargaining unit, or such individual, a party to the agreement." null and voids any commitment on the part of teachers in the State. Commitment cannot be assumed. The scope of work included in the MOU is strong. While Superintendents signed the MOU agreement, 26 of the Superintendents did not receive a signature from the School Board President indicating support. Therefore the level of support from LEAs score is low.</p>		
<p>(iii) There is no way to know from the information given if teachers are willing to accept Nebraska's Race to the Top initiative. Without that assurance increasing student achievement, decreasing achievement gaps, increasing high school graduation, and increasing college enrollment cannot be ensured. Teachers are the critical piece in student achievement. It is unclear if Nebraska can meet the criteria of ambitious and achievable goals.</p>		
(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	30	22
(i) Ensuring the capacity to implement	20	15
(ii) Using broad stakeholder support	10	7
(A)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(i) There appears to be a broad group of people prepared to work to implement the Bright Futures initiative. It is not clear how the ESU personnel, presently responsible for LEA activities such as professional development, will interface with new NDE personnel. It is unclear how the Resource Coordinators and the new School Intervention Specialists responsibilities will differ. There was no definition for the "Small State Transformational model," therefore it could not be determined if this model complies</p>		

with the four models approved for turning around persistently low performing schools. The coordination and use of funds chart was clear and supported the commitment of the State.

(ii) There appears to be a concerted effort to coordinate funds, personnel, and services. It is unclear how NE plans to sustain the activities and salaries of new personnel after the RTTT grant funds are exhausted. Also, the continuance of the broad-based coordinating committee, the Governor's Bright Future for Nebraska Students Governor's Committee, is uncertain.

(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps	30	14
(i) Making progress in each reform area	5	5
(ii) Improving student outcomes	25	9
(A)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(i) Progress in preparing teachers and administrators to tackle tough school reform issues is impressive. It appears a wide range of funds have been widely used and committed for these efforts.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strong leadership and teams have been put in place with funds to support activities. 2. Support, evaluation, and monitoring has assisted LEAs with reform efforts. 3. Nebraska has had experience with grant management and appropriate planning for the RTTT reforms is in place. 4. Allocated from ARRA, SLDS, ESEA, IDEA, HSTW, State and private funds have been brought together to financially support the reform plans for Nebraska. <p>(ii) Recent initiatives have been explained well concerning the efforts being made to increase graduation rates; however, the report from Nebraska Higher Education Progress Report for 2009 in Appendix E indicates only a 1% increase in graduation rates from 2003 to 2008. Gaps in graduation rates for subgroups, however are being closed. There appears to be a significant difference between NAEP achievement, which appear flat, and AYP student achievement. It could not be determined what criteria were used for the AYP student achievement gains nor if any initiatives were being used to address student achievement.</p>		
Total	125	51

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)		
<p>(i) A Memorandum of Agreement with the NGA/CCSO Consortium has been provided signed by both the Governor and Commissioner of Education in May 2009. This agreement is between 38 States including NE working together to develop Common Core Standards that are internationally benchmarked, rigorous and prepare students for college and career readiness upon graduation from high school.</p> <p>(ii) The legal plan for adoption is clearly described which includes Public Comment. It is stated the Board of Education will adopt the new Common Core Standards in August 2010. There is, however, no timeline given for the Rule making process (Rule 10) other than later in 2010. This may not be achievable since it takes a 6 month adoption timeline once the new Standards are presented. There is no evaluation plan</p>		

provided to support the claim, "Participating LEAs will be required to assure "adoption of the Common Core." Local control of the schools and lack of evidence of teacher union support, does not provide sufficient support for LEA adoption because of, as you put it, "the rural nature of the State." Points were given because the plan was complete and there has been previous success of the ESUs in supporting the LEAs with change.

(B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments	10	0
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality assessments	5	0
(ii) Including a significant number of States	5	0
(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) (i & ii) While the grant application states that NE plans to be a part of a consortium of states to develop common assessments, the Memorandum of Agreement included in Appendix G has not been "executed by the State." There is no signature given on the document. This is a requirement of evidence.		
(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	20	15
(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) A viable plan for curriculum rollout exists. The application stated that the plan for statewide assessments would be partly by the classroom teacher and partly on line. In the last section mention was made that all districts could not assess online. There is no plan provided for making the assessment system available to all LEAs.		
Total	70	40

C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

	Available	Tier 1
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	24	8
(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) Four elements of the America Competes Act are in place. E5. A state data audit system assessing data quality, validity, and reliability E6. Yearly test records of individual students with respect to assessments under section 1111(b) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 E7. Information on students not tested, by grade and subject E10. Student-level college readiness test scores Points are only given for elements fully in place at the time of this application.		
(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	5	3
(C)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) NE's plan has been developed with stakeholders including:		

- Organizations represented on the executive committee of the Nebraska P-16 Initiative,
- Nebraska's state education Data Advisory Committee that includes school administrators, teachers, and data experts,
- Representatives of the University of Nebraska system, Nebraska State College system and Nebraska Community College system,
- The Nebraska State Education Association (teachers union),
- The Nebraska Association of School Boards, and
- The Nebraska Council of School Administrators.

No timeline for activities was provided as required in criterion.

(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	18	9
(i) Increasing the use of instructional improvement systems	6	3
(ii) Supporting LEAs, schools, and teachers in using instructional improvement systems	6	3
(iii) Making the data from instructional improvement systems available to researchers	6	3
(C)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(I, II, III) Use of the ESUs has proven successful in the past to support the school improvement process and the plan to use them to forward the new data system should be useful. Completion of the data system is an integral part to this plan and many components of the data system are not presently in place. Without the data it will be difficult for the LEA staff to make decisions appropriate for an increase in student achievement. In addition, it will be difficult for researchers to evaluate materials, strategies, and approaches for educating sub populations. There was no timeline for the activities you described in the plan which is required.</p>		
Total	47	20

D. Great Teachers and Leaders

	Available	Tier 1
(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals	21	3
(i) Allowing alternative routes to certification	7	0
(ii) Using alternative routes to certification	7	2
(iii) Preparing teachers and principals to fill areas of shortage	7	1

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

(i) While there was mention of "several [alterative programs] operating in the state," no evidence was provided for any State laws, statutes, regulations, or other documents allowing for alternative routes to certification for teachers and/or principals. Evidence is required.

(ii) It is unclear, given the statement in section (i) about career education teachers, whether these alternative programs are for all teaching certificates or only for career education certificates. No data was available for # of administrators certified through alternative routes last year, this evidence is required.

(iii) A plan to address the issue of teacher and principal shortages has been developed if RTTT funds are available. The Teacher Shortage Survey shows shortages in small/rural districts. Beyond this survey the State has nothing in place to evaluate teacher/principal shortages and limited capacity to meet the need.

(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	58	32
(i) Measuring student growth	5	3
(ii) Developing evaluation systems	15	10
(iii) Conducting annual evaluations	10	5
(iv) Using evaluations to inform key decisions	28	14

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

(i) It is unclear why, if all schools will be required to administer State generated reading tests to all students 3rd – 8th grade this fall, the State only expects 25% of the LEAs to measure student growth by the end of 2012. The plan, while achievable, does not appear to be ambitious.

(ii) NE has an ambitious timeline for implementation of a new teacher/principal evaluation system. The need to include all stakeholders in the development of the system has been recognized. Commitment on the part of the Nebraska Education Association is doubtful, so while the plan is ambitious it may not be achievable because of the lack of union support.

(iii) There may need to be legislation to change evaluation from local control. No discussion of how this will take place. There was insufficient specificity for how teachers and principals will be provided data on student achievement.

(iv) It is not apparent how the evaluations will inform key decisions. Presently all evaluations are done at the local level using locally approved criteria. This loosely coupled evaluation system has been approved by the unions at each local level. While the application asserts that certain events will occur, there is no discussion about how the transition will occur, nor if the plan is achievable given the resistance on the part of the union. Further there is no discussion of how teachers and principals found to be ineffective will be removed using rigorous standards and streamlined, transparent, and fair procedures.

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

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

(i) Incentives for teachers/principals to work in high poverty/high minority schools are impressive. Teachers will be nominated and an opportunity to be chosen to work in a low-performing school will be an honor bestowed on only the best that Nebraska has available. Release time for professional development unique for these teacher/leaders, educational technology available in their new classrooms, and support activities networking this team together will be incentives beyond additional remuneration. There were no Performance Measures data provided with annual targets which are required.

(ii) Acknowledgement that a plan is necessary is made. The plan development will be left to the STEM higher education institution that receives a grant to be paid for out of RTTT funds. There appears to be no plan in place at this time. In addition there were no data provided for neither Performance Measures nor annual targets which are required.

(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	14	0
(i) Linking student data to credentialing programs and reporting publicly	7	0
(ii) Expanding effective programs	7	0
(D)(4) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(i and ii) The challenge of linking student achievement and growth to teachers and principals, then to the credentialing institution, and then reporting this data to the public appeared to be an overwhelming activity. The plan to address the challenge must be rigorous and achievable. Systems are not in place to accomplish this task. RTTT funds are required to put the infrastructure in place. There is no plan to expand successful credentialing programs because there are no data to inform decisions on this issue. The plan consists mainly of summits to engage stakeholders in a discussion of the issues surrounding the need to identify successful credentialing institutions. The plan is not ambitious. Given the identified constraints, it appears that the plan is not achievable within the timeframe of this grant.</p>		
(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals	20	9
(i) Providing effective support	10	7
(ii) Continuously improving the effectiveness of the support	10	2
(D)(5) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(i) Nebraska's Education Service Units, intermediate education agencies mandated by state statute (Section 79-1204-1249/Rule 84) to provide professional development for educators as a part of state defined core services has proven successful in the past to implement new legislative mandates and school improvement initiatives. However, teacher/principal participation is optional. Nebraska has a plan to include the National Center for Research on Rural Education (NCRRE) located at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Steering Committees made up of LEA representatives will also guide resource development and coordination of services through the development and utilization of Professional Learning Networks (PLNs), a group of individuals sharing a common need or goal to improve skills and knowledge in a specific area. Professional Learning Networks may be created for an ESU region, for statewide delivery, or use within specific local district settings. This plan is ambitious and achievable. No timelines are presented. These are required.</p> <p>(ii) Improving the support system through evaluation plans is unclear. No reference to measures to evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development support was given. Plans to use student achievement does not exist.</p>		
Total	138	53

E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

	Available	Tier 1
(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs	10	5
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>States applicable laws appear to be strong in allowing the State to intervene in districts that are not providing effective schooling for its students..</p>		

"The Nebraska Legislature has enacted several statutes authorizing the State Board and Commissioner to act with respect to the operation of school districts. Section 79-318(5)(c) states that the State Board of Education shall through the Commissioner establish rules and regulations which govern standards and procedures for the approval and legal operation of all schools in the state and for the accreditation of all schools... Neb. Rev. Stat. Section 79-703(4) requires all public schools in the state to be accredited and subsection (5) indicates that it is the intent of the Legislature that all students shall have access to all educational services required of accredited schools. Section 79-703(1) requires that all public schools in the state meet quality and performance based approval and accreditation standards prescribed by the State Board of Education. The section continues with the statement that accreditation standards shall be designed to assure effective schooling and quality of instruction regardless of school size, wealth, or geographic location." this allows the State to ensure districts are accredited and can intervene if they do not meet accreditation standards. The State cannot intervene directly in schools.

(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	40	33
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	5
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	28
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
(i) 52 schools in 33 districts have been identified as persistently low achieving schools (PLAS) have been identified.		
(ii) Since there were no data collected concerning what strategies were used by schools and districts to move out of PLAS status, there were no lessons learned from past efforts to turn around these schools. The evidence chart could not be completed. There is no way of knowing if any of the turn around models were used. Support for future efforts is substantial; the plan is ambitious and achievable. NDE efforts to support the PLAS include:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restructuring roles and adding responsibilities to the NDE staff, • Assignment of NDE staff to PLAS to create relationships and bring expertise to the schools, • Creation of local Intervention Project Monitors to coordinate school improvement activities, and • Annual reviews to evaluate success of school improvement efforts. 		
Total	50	38

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) Evidence provided. The State of Nebraska increased the percentage of total state appropriations used to support public education (elementary, secondary, and postsecondary) from 34.47% in FY2008 to 35.63% in FY2009, an increase of 1.16%. Percentage of total State revenues for FY 08 was 34.47%. Percentage of total State revenues for FY 09 was 35.63%.		
(ii) A strong legislative system is in place to support equitable funding of schools. Nebraska's primary funding formula for elementary and secondary education is the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act (TEEOSA) at Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 79-1001 et seq. (2008), as amended by LB 545 and LB 5,		

2009 Neb. Laws. In 2008, the formula was modified by LB 988, 2008 Neb. Laws and more recently by LB 545, 2009 Neb. Laws, and LB 5, 2009 Neb. Laws, First Special Session. The equalization formula provides aid for operational support to school districts where formula need exceeds local formula resources. Additional resources beyond the per pupil state aide are provided to districts. This equity policy provides additional resources on need to:

- Minimize financial disparities,
- Provide greater resources to districts with higher at-risk populations, and
- Account for scale such as transportation.

(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	8
(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	8

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

(i) through (iv) states there is no information provided.

(v) Options outside of a charter school system for students in Nebraska are substantial. They include:

- Independent Study High School (ISHS)The University of Nebraska–Lincoln Independent Study High School provides a complete distance curriculum to 2,500 high school students in Nebraska.
- Nebraska public school children have many opportunities to attend schools outside of the neighborhood where they live. These opportunities include the enrollment option program, specialized intra-district schools, and the new Douglas-Sarpy County Learning Community, which provides for expansion of magnet and focus schools throughout a two county areas made up of 11 school districts and creation of elementary learning centers that are available to any family in the two county area.
- Nebraska established an Enrollment Option Program in 1989 to enable any kindergarten through twelfth grade student to attend a school in a neighboring school district in which the student does not reside, subject to certain limitations. An option student is a student that has chosen to attend an option school district. Over the past ten years the number of Nebraska students annually taking advantage of the Enrollment Option Program has grown from 11,679 to 16,931 (5.9% of all students).
- Nebraska law provides great flexibility to local school districts to create programs or schools that meet the individual interests and needs of students and families.
- The new Douglas-Sarpy County Learning Community is made up of eleven Omaha area school districts comprising over 1/3 of Nebraska’s public school enrollment (over 100,000 students). This new political subdivision seeks to bring the eleven Douglas and Sarpy County School Districts into a cooperative partnership. The Learning Community concept was created in 2007 and allows all students in this metropolitan area the choice to attend any school.
- Nebraska’s largest school district, the Omaha Public Schools, operates a system of magnet schools (three at the high school level, six at the middle school level and eight at the elementary school level). The magnet schools are open to all students on a lottery basis with the intention of allowing students and families an option beyond their attendance area schools.

(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	5
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(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Multiple reform conditions were well described. They include:

- Governor Heineman instituted the P-16 Executive Committee, a coalition of thirty-one (31) Nebraska organizations in education, business, and government. The P-16 Council meets regularly and has jointly developed a set of goals to guide the education of students at all levels in Nebraska.
- Rigorous New Standards and High Quality Statewide Assessments (LB 1157): Passed in 2008, the Quality Education Accountability Act required the development of rigorous new state standards and established new statewide assessments for reading/language arts, mathematics and science phased in over the next three years (reading/language arts in 2010, mathematics in 2011, and science in 2012). Pursuant to this statutory change, the State Board of Education has adopted new standards.
- Categorical Funding Policies in High Priority Areas (LB 988): Passed in 2008, LB 988 modified the Nebraska school finance formula to create an accountability mechanism for poverty and limited English proficiency allowances.
- the State Board of Education adopted college and career preparation graduation requirement for all students in December 2009 and the governor approved the requirements in January 2010.
- In 2006, Nebraska passed L.B.1256 creating a new public private early learning partnership called the Early Childhood Education Endowment or "Sixpence." This important initiative provides at risk children greater access to high quality, comprehensive early learning opportunities, by helping parents and caregivers provide safe, stimulating environments that spark learning through meaningful interactions.
- In 2005, the Nebraska legislature authorized funding for the Attracting Excellence to Teaching Act which provides forgivable loans to individuals preparing to teach in Nebraska.

Total	55	23
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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 criteria states that, "The competitive preference priority will be evaluated in the context of the state's entire application." . . . STEM supports and NE plans only include, grade 7-12 students. While mention is made here and there about females and underrepresented students, there is no specific plan to reach out to these students. There is no discussion of foundational classes for students below 7th grade to prepare them for the rigorous STEM offerings. Therefore STEM points are not given.

Total	15	0
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Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

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

Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Nebraska has an ambitious plan for education reform, however the threshold for Absolute Priority has not been met for the following reasons:

1. The State's infrastructure is weak to make the plan achievable. One example is the lack of State testing. Without a standard state testing system issues arise for consistent student achievement

assessment, which leads to an inability to evaluate teachers based on student achievement, so higher education institutes cannot be identified as excellent.

2. The lack of union support is a major concern. Without strong teacher support, any education reform is mute. All reform must begin in every classroom statewide.
3. While State law provides for some innovation within the existing public school system, the need for charter school legislation persists.
4. The Education Service Units have proven effective to this point, however local control of schools is robust and solidly in place. While there has been progress in turning around persistently low achieving schools, the State does not know what strategies were successful, therefore those strategies cannot be replicated without data collection and study. In addition many more schools are expected to be identified as PLAS once standardized state testing is in place.

Total		0
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Grand Total	500	225
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Race to the Top

Technical Review Form - Tier 1

Nebraska Application #3400NE-6



A. State Success Factors

	Available	Tier 1
(A)(1) Articulating State's education reform agenda and LEA's participation in it	65	20
(i) Articulating comprehensive, coherent reform agenda	5	3
(ii) Securing LEA commitment	45	12
(iii) Translating LEA participation into statewide impact	15	5

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

(A)(1)(i) Nebraska's overall reform agenda as stated in response to this criterion appears to be solid. Its overarching vision for Nebraska's education reform, A Bright Future for Nebraska's Students Initiative, is fairly comprehensive, focused on students, schools, LEAs, and teachers and principals. The goals as stated are the four ARRA education areas. Support for Persistently Low Achieving Schools (PLAS) (item D in this response), focused solely on the Small State Transformation Model, without mention of any additional strategies for supporting PLAS which is a significant weakness for this criterion. While a clear path was not established (explaining how one reform area ties into another and timeline overviews), it is sufficiently comprehensive to earn three points.

(A)(1)(ii) The respondent has used the standard MOU with two modifications. The first is an additional item under II. Project Administration, A. Participating LEA Responsibilities: "7) Complete the Final Scope of Work as set forth in III (4) of this MOU before it will be considered a participating LEA for purposes of determining (i) sub-grant shares of funding and (ii) eligibility to receive funding". The second is the last paragraph under IV. Modifications: "This agreement is between the State of Nebraska and the school district, and a signature by the Superintendent or other representative of the district authorized to sign on behalf of the local School Board is required, as is a signature by a representative of NDE. Other signatures are optional. The signature of a bargaining unit leader does not make the bargaining unit, or such individual, a party to this agreement."

This paragraph is instructive for two reasons: first, it seems to emphasize the fact that local school board endorsement is optional (for reasons noted below), and second, the (optional) signature of a bargaining unit representative "does not make the bargaining unit, or such individual, a party to this agreement." It appears that this caveat is an opt out feature for local unions, so that in fact, even if the union representative did sign the MOU as most (91%) did, the signature is not binding. The reason the section regarding the option of local school board signatories is important is because five (5) School Board Presidents replied "no" and 25 spaces for School Board signatures were left blank in the Detailed Participating LEA Table for (A)(1) found in Appendix C (87% of local School Board Presidents did sign the MOU as noted in Summary Table (A)(1)(ii)(c)). While these LEAs are small, conceptually they represent a lack of support for the State's reform plans under RTTT. It would have served the applicant well to have acknowledged these LEAs and offered some explanation, especially regarding the 25 that were left blank.

For this peer reviewer, the "opt out" clause in the State's MOU represents a lack of commitment (or at the very least, confidence) on behalf of the unions and their constituents (teachers) and therefore undermines Nebraska's Bright Future for Nebraska Students Initiative and Nebraska's RTTT proposal.

(A)(1)(iii) The applicant states that 85% of the eligible LEAs in the state (representing 215 out of 253 LEAs) and 77% of the state's public school students (representing 218,017 out of a total 283,321 students) will participate in the activities outlined in this RTTT proposal. While the majority of larger city school districts such as Lincoln, Millard, and Papillion-LaVista public schools have signed the MOU with 68% of students in poverty (representing 79,381 out of a total

117,246 students in poverty), it seemed more high need students should be included in this proposal. Upon a closer review of Table (A)(1), it appears that Omaha, Nebraska's largest city, has not signed the MOU. As the largest city in the state, it is likely to have the highest number of in high need. If the Omaha Public School District has in fact not agreed to participate in this proposal, a very large number of the students who have need of and would benefit from a successful implementation of the RTTT reform areas will not be served. This is a major flaw in the State's proposal and should have been addressed in the proposal.

(A)(2) Building strong statewide capacity to implement, scale up, and sustain proposed plans	30	15
(i) Ensuring the capacity to implement	20	10
(ii) Using broad stakeholder support	10	5

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

(A)(2)(i) A large portion of this response is focused on (A)(2)(i)(a) Leadership. From the Governor's office down to the Educational Service Units, there are many interacting, cross-section teams. While support for this initiative from the top is imperative, there seem to be more committees than required. As part of a high quality overall plan (A)(2), persons responsible need to be identified. Responses to (A)(2)(i)(b-d) appear adequate. However, the response to (A)(2)(i)(e) sustainability does not seem to adequately account for a number of new positions outlined in the proposal including an Intervention Systems and Support Director, and the four additional Educational Service Units staff focused on data.

(A)(2)(ii) Regarding union support, as noted earlier in (A)(1)(ii) above, the LEAs' teachers union support is questionable and according to the letter of support from the Nebraska Council of School Administrators, the Executive Director offers his organization's "general support"; hardly outstanding. However, the criterion seeks use of supports to better implement its plan and in a number of places throughout the plan the State includes union representation and/or input.

The response to (A)(2)(ii)(b) regarding critical stakeholders does not include any discussion of parents/guardians, families or local community organizations.

(A)(3) Demonstrating significant progress in raising achievement and closing gaps	30	15
(i) Making progress in each reform area	5	3
(ii) Improving student outcomes	25	12

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

(A)(3)(i) Nebraska's P-16 initiative was launched in 1998. In order to judge progress on the P-16 initiative goals, a listing of the original and updated goals as well as data on measurable objectives is required, but not included. For each of the four education reform areas, LEA data regarding use of ARRA funds is provided. An example or two in each of the four areas would have given qualitative depth to the quantitative data presented, offering a clearer understanding of actually HOW ARRA funds were expended. Under the category of Great Teachers and Leaders, none of the many programs cited offered any data on number of staff served, number of students impacted, teacher or administrator evaluation or the programs, etc. The lack of specificity in a proposal of this magnitude is disturbing. It is difficult to give full points when important details are missing.

(A)(3)(ii) The increase in student achievement overall and by subgroup differs markedly between locally developed assessments required under the ESEA and the NAEP assessment. Since there was no statewide reading assessment until spring 2010, the question arises as to how the State determined "statewide" increases in student achievement when the disaggregated subgroup scores are based on different locally developed LEA assessments. An explanation of how the scores were aggregated is required to assess their validity for this criterion. With respect to the NAEP assessments, grade four reading results are essentially flat with minor growth in grade eight scores. On the fourth grade mathematics assessment there was an 11 point increase from 2002 to 2004 and minor increases (2 points or less) in the years thereafter. Small but steady increases are seen in eighth grade scores from 2002-2007. It will be

informative to see how the scores from the initial statewide reading and mathematics assessments align with both the locally developed assessments and the NAEP in the future.

Similarly, with regard to closing achievement gaps, gaps were reported to be narrowed for all subgroups as measured on local assessments (without explanation on how the scores were aggregated), but mixed results in closing the gaps are reported on the NAEP. While a small sample of students is used for the NAEP, the results may be more accurate than those from the local assessments.

The applicant reports that the four year graduation rate rose 4.3% to 89% overall. Increases range from 9.3% for African American students (68.7% total) to 11.4% for Native American students (67.4% total) to 15.4% for Hispanics (73.7% total). These graduation rates remain lower than the graduation rates for whites at 92.7% and Asians/Pacific Islanders at 90.6%.

Overall it is difficult to judge achievement growth and reduction in achievement gaps with the varied assessment measures used across the state.

In (A)(3)(ii)(a) the State credits professional development aligning curriculum, instruction and assessments to the state standards with the increased achievements they have experienced on their locally developed assessments.

Total	125	50
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B. Standards and Assessments

	Available	Tier 1
(B)(1) Developing and adopting common standards	40	33
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality standards	20	18
(ii) Adopting standards	20	15
(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(B)(1)(i) Nebraska has submitted a signed Memorandum of Agreement on the Common Core Standards with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA). Draft copies of the Mathematics and English language arts standards are also submitted, as is documentation regarding the international benchmarking process. The applicant states that this Consortium has 51 states/territories as members; however, the list of states in this Consortium that would serve as proof of the number of states participating is missing as the wrong state participation list was submitted in Appendix F.</p> <p>(B)(1)(ii) In response to this criterion, the applicant states that the Nebraska State Board of Education will adopt the Common Core Standards in August 2010. This criterion also specifies a "high quality plan toward which the State has made significant progress, and its commitment to implementing the standards thereafter in a well-planned way". Many of the components of a high quality plan are missing such as key goals, timelines and performance measures. Fully half of this response centers around the Nebraska Virtual School (NVS) STEM Academy. In addition, information regarding examples of how participating LEAs would show adoption of the Common Core was missing.</p>		
(B)(2) Developing and implementing common, high-quality assessments	10	8
(i) Participating in consortium developing high-quality assessments	5	3
(ii) Including a significant number of States	5	5
(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(B)(2)(i) With respect to assessments, for the past ten years Nebraska has focused on a local assessment system. In 2008 the state legislature enacted assessment legislation for statewide summative exams in reading, math and science in grades 3-8 and high school. The reading exam was administered online in spring 2010. This was the first state developed statewide summative exam ever given in Nebraska. The State proposes joining the SMARTER</p>		

Balanced Assessment Consortium. Given the State's limited experience with statewide assessments, joining this consortium should prove very beneficial. (The MOU found in Appendix G is not a signed copy.)

(B)(2)(ii) The SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium includes a significant number of states, 38, as required for a high score and a list of the states is also included in Appendix G.

(B)(3) Supporting the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments	20	16
(B)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(B)(3) In response to this criterion, Nebraska has included some components of a high quality plan. A goal of developing additional teacher resources, curriculum tools and professional development materials was stated. Activities such as professional development in data analysis and technology for reporting was noted as was teaching teachers how to unpack standards to get to the skills inside the standards. A chart was provided outlining key activities, timelines and responsible parties.</p> <p>While the ideas are good, most are not as specific as they need to be to be considered a component of a high quality plan. For example, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), in partnership with the University of Nebraska plans an 18 hour graduate course cohort entitled "Leading the Common Core" for both teachers and principals. While a sound and admirable concept, a few more specific details would have strengthened the idea and given the reviewer a fuller picture of the proposed program. For example, LEA staff could benefit from the coursework and the camaraderie developed with teachers and principals in a cohort would benefit a district. However, it is not noted whether or not LEA staff would be able to participate. Likewise, an incentive to participate might be enhanced eligibility for newly created positions at NDE or in the Educational Service Units (ESUs). NDE staff enlightened with current leadership course content might prove refreshing at the Department. Details of the proposed coursework such as these would have provided a more complete picture of the project and resulted in an increased score.</p>		
Total	70	57

C. Data Systems to Support Instruction

	Available	Tier 1
(C)(1) Fully implementing a statewide longitudinal data system	24	8
(C)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(C)(1) After four years collecting data using a state longitudinal data system, Nebraska has fully implemented four of the 12 America COMPETES elements, resulting in a score of eight per the criterion directive. Of the eight remaining elements, three more are due to be fully implemented by September 2011.</p>		
(C)(2) Accessing and using State data	5	3
(C)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(C)(2) The applicant's response to this criterion is confusing to the reviewer. There appear to be two different responses to the same criterion, (C)(2). The first response refers to Nebraska's Data System Plan. A chart is provided that specifies the tasks/duties of the districts (LEAs), Educational Service Units, Postsecondary Institutions, and the Nebraska Department of Education. The next part focuses on the Data Reporting System, which was never mentioned as part of the Data System Plan. As the criterion calls for the engaging of key stakeholders, two very important stakeholders, parents and families and the community at large are not mentioned at all. Due to the poor presentation of the response and the omission of key stakeholders, only a mid score could be awarded.</p>		
(C)(3) Using data to improve instruction	18	12

(i) Increasing the use of instructional improvement systems	6	5
(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	3
(C)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(C)(3)(i) Nebraska uses a school improvement process from AdvancEd that utilizes the seven Standards for Effective Schools. Nearly 800 educators from 253 LEAs have been trained in this school improvement process in the past two years. This training will be expanded utilizing Race to the Top (RTTT) funds. Local LEAs will have a choice in how to use their share of RTTT funds with regard to school improvement and data staff. This response was clearer than others in this application and was filled with important details, such as how many staff had been previously trained in these school improvement methods and within what time period.</p> <p>(C)(3)(ii) Had the decision to add four data trainers as well as data stewards (at LEA request) been substantiated with needs assessment or evaluation data, it would have strengthened this response. In addition, provision for maintaining the positions (or discussing a phase out of the new positions) after RTTT could also have had a positive impact on this section's score.</p> <p>(C)(3)(iii) While the applicant speaks to use and availability of the State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) to researchers and the creation of a new Research and Evaluation Team at the NDE, the response does not mention any of the instructional improvement systems as required by the criterion, such as reviewing data that would provide insight into the effectiveness of instructional improvement systems for high poverty, high needs students.</p>		
Total	47	23

D. Great Teachers and Leaders

	Available	Tier 1
(D)(1) Providing high-quality pathways for aspiring teachers and principals	21	9
(i) Allowing alternative routes to certification	7	0
(ii) Using alternative routes to certification	7	6
(iii) Preparing teachers and principals to fill areas of shortage	7	3
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(D)(1)(i) The applicant states that there are no legal, regulatory or state statutes addressing alternative routes to certification. Therefore the applicant receives no points based on the guidance for this criterion.</p> <p>(D)(1)(ii) The definition for Alternative Routes to Certification (in this notice) in part states: "(a) can be provided by various types of qualified providers, including both institutions of higher education and other providers operating independently from institutions of higher education". Nebraska has several alternative routes in use that are all connected to institutions of higher learning including a Career Ladder/Indigenous Roots Teacher Education Program and a Native Speaker Program. Therefore, while the State has alternative routes to certification, none are codified in statute, and they all operate in conjunction with an IHE. As a result, full points were not awarded.</p> <p>(D)(1)(iii) There was no discussion of the identification, monitoring or evaluating of principal shortages in this response. A 2008-2009 Teacher Shortage Report is included with information gathered from the annual Teacher Shortage Survey. However, the criterion requests, "A process for monitoring, evaluating, and identifying areas of teacher and principal shortage...". The response notes teacher shortage areas but does not identify a process for monitoring or evaluating these shortage areas. The applicant hopes to expand the current Transition to Teaching program and University of Nebraska at Omaha's Teacher Academy Project (UNO-TAP) with RTTT funds.</p>		

(D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance	58	44
(i) Measuring student growth	5	3
(ii) Developing evaluation systems	15	14
(iii) Conducting annual evaluations	10	7
(iv) Using evaluations to inform key decisions	28	20

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

Criterion (D)(2) requests a high quality plan and ambitious yet achievable annual targets.

(D)(2)(i) Nebraska is in the process of transitioning from locally developed assessments to statewide assessment, the Nebraska State Accountability System (NeSA) in reading (2010), mathematics (2011) and science (2012). Beginning in 2010 the State has administered the new online, statewide assessment in reading in grades three through eight and grade 11. A pilot of the new statewide mathematics assessment was also administered in 2010.

With high school assessment occurring only in grade 11, a question arises regarding the lack of statewide assessment during the span of time between grades eight and eleven, particularly near the high school transition grades nine and ten. Parents, the community and the students themselves need firm, statewide data to track and measure students' academic achievement during the early years in high school that are crucial to students' success and impacts on their decision to remain in school and earn a diploma.

On the Performance Measures chart, the applicant's response to (D)(2)(i), Percentage of participating LEAs that measure student growth (as defined in this notice), needs further explanation as they have annual targets set at: 25% by the end of SY 2011-12; 75% by the end of SY 2012-13 and 100% by the end of SY 2013-14. It is not clear to the reviewer why there is a phase in of participating LEAs that measure student growth through 2014, as the Applicant responded in C1 that element E6 of the America COMPETES Act, "Yearly test records of individual students with respect to assessments under section 1111(b) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965" is fully implemented.

(D)(2)(ii) Nebraska's Teacher and Leader evaluation models, which will be based on Nebraska Teacher/Principal standards, will be designed with a minimum of two tracks for both teachers and leaders. For teachers, the two tracks will be Beginning/New to the Profession (probationary status for three years) and Veteran Teachers. For principals there will be similar tracks, not named in the response. Importantly, Nebraska's proposed educator (teacher and principal) appraisal system will use student achievement outcomes as the primary factor in performance evaluations for teachers and principals, with greater than 50% of the weighting or scoring system based on this component.

The proposed model will use a three level rating system: (1) Exceeds Expectations; (2) Meets Expectations; and (3) Does Not Meet Expectations. This model will require the state to support teachers and principals in utilizing the new statewide assessment model as a professional growth and recertification tool.

The statewide model for principal evaluation/appraisal will also include student achievement outcomes as a significant component of the overall evaluation. It will also include other components similar to the teacher appraisal requirement: professional growth expectations, self-analysis and reflection, and structured observation and feedback requirements. In addition, the State proposes to use the Interstate Schools Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Performance Expectations and Indicators for Education Leader as the foundation for the Nebraska model for principal evaluation.

For both models the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) intends to involve stakeholders such as state association leaders, local administrators and teachers from participating districts, and Educational Service Unit leadership (related to their roles of providing professional development and potential training for administrators and teachers in the new educator evaluation models).

The applicant has developed a thorough plan for developing fair and rigorous rating systems; the targets set forth are achievable and the timeline is reasonable, earning the applicant a high score for this sub-criterion.

(D)(2)(iii) Nebraska will require an annual evaluation process, based upon the proposed model, for all teachers and principals in Nebraska school districts. The evaluation will be based, in part, on a professional growth plan to be

developed annually and submitted to the appropriate supervisor at the beginning of the school year. Feedback should include data on student growth for their students, classes, and schools but was not specifically included in the response. This omission is reflected in a mid-range score.

(D)(2)(iv) The professional growth plan to be developed annually by every teacher and principal will serve as the benchmark against which much of teacher and principal evaluations will be based. Formal and informal classroom visits and progress checks regarding performance goals will be conducted throughout the school year: at least two times a year for veteran professionals, with the process including a system for intervention if deficiencies are noted. If deficiencies are noted in the work performance of any probationary employee, the evaluator shall provide the teacher or administrator with: a list of deficiencies, assistance with modification to the professional growth plan to support improvement and identify resources for assistance in overcoming the deficiencies, and follow-up evaluations and assistance.

The State indicated, "By March 15 of each school year, the teacher/administrator will submit a written summary of progress on the professional growth plan to the appropriate person. A final summary conference will be conducted by April 15 and will be used to inform promotion, tenure decisions, compensation, retention, and improvement/contract discontinuance for ineffective teachers." The State also acknowledges that, "Moving to a performance model that relates to compensation, removal, and other decisions regarding teacher and principal activities will be a significant change for Nebraska schools and teachers. This model will require a phase-in period to assure that the model is valid and defensible, evaluators are appropriately trained to effectively administer the evaluations, and professional development and support structures proposed in this application are in place."

While there was no discussion regarding professional development in this response, it is presented in detail in other areas of this proposal.

(D)(3) Ensuring equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals	25	19
(i) Ensuring equitable distribution in high-poverty or high-minority schools	15	12
(ii) Ensuring equitable distribution in hard-to-staff subjects and specialty areas	10	7

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

(D)(3)(i) The Applicant states that since data to link teachers and principals to student achievement outcomes as part of teacher/principal evaluations will not be available until 2013-14, they propose the development of an interim alternative plan to identify and encourage selected veteran teachers and administrators (Great Teachers and Leaders) to work in high poverty/high minority schools with priority given to placement in school buildings which are identified as low performing. Specific ideas for both financial and non-financial incentives, nomination process and selection criteria are indicated. While evidence of their understanding of, and focus on, improving student achievement is important, whether or not they have actually improved student achievement, even by current measures, would be a worthwhile addition to the selection criteria. A timeline and specifics regarding those responsible for development and implementation would have strengthened this otherwise credible plan and response.

(D)(3)(ii) The NDE states that the few teacher shortages that do exist in the state are in rural secondary schools the state. They plan to address the problem by: 1) increasing the Excellence in Teaching Act loan forgiveness program, utilizing the Virtual School STEM Academy, and recruitment of college math and science majors into the teaching profession. There was no discussion of foreign language or Special Education teacher shortages, although there are only 350 language instruction teachers listed under Performance Measures (D)(3)(ii).

(D)(4) Improving the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs	14	12
(i) Linking student data to credentialing programs and reporting publicly	7	7
(ii) Expanding effective programs	7	5

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

(D)(4)(i) Nebraska indicates that it will create a system to link student achievement and student growth data to teachers and principals and then link this information to the Nebraska institution where teachers and administrators were prepared for certification. In addition, it will also create an annual educator preparation program Report Card based on the educator preparation programs' and graduates' relationship to their students' achievement outcomes. According to the State, "The Educator Preparation Program Report Card will be incorporated into the State of the Schools Report on an annual basis in order to create transparency regarding the performance of the state's educator preparation institutions." Timelines and responsible parties are identified. These requirements of the criteria are fulfilled.

(D)(4)(ii) The applicant proposes several additions to the preparation process for new teachers such as, expansion of and increased field-based experiences throughout the preparation experience; increased collaboration among schools, districts and teacher preparation institutions, utilizing the laboratory or professional development schools model; and, through legislation, evaluate and update the minimum preparation program requirements established in Rule 20, Teacher Education Program Approval. Importantly, however, this response expands preparation but not credentialing programs and few of the suggested strategies include principal preparation as required in the criterion.

(D)(5) Providing effective support to teachers and principals	20	11
(i) Providing effective support	10	6
(ii) Continuously improving the effectiveness of the support	10	5
(D)(5) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(D)(5) The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) plans to develop a collaborative professional development system partnering with LEAs and the Educational Service Units from throughout the state and also will develop a system for high quality induction/mentoring to strengthen supports for beginning teachers and administrators. The State's plan relies heavily on the current Educational Service Units (ESUs). There is a question as to whether the ESUs - even with increased staff funded through RTTT- can sufficiently scale up to effectively implement all of the programs and activities proposed in this document. To their credit, the NDE cites two major issues with respect to ESUs: 1) there is currently no corresponding requirement that educators participate in professional development provided by the ESU system and 2) there are no performance requirements for the educational service units to ensure that their state mandated professional development activities are of high quality and focused on statewide and/or local needs for effectively improving student achievement. However, they do not offer any strategies to address these issues that will greatly impact implementation of the planned professional development system.</p> <p>The concept of Professional Learning Networks is a good one as is working with the recently funded National Center for Research on Rural Education (NCRRE). While a collaboration with this center is a good idea, it should be noted that it usually takes a full year for such projects to get up and running. Requirements of this criterion such as collaboration time for teachers and principals and job-embedded professional development were not broached, nor is there much discussion of continuous evaluation of the effectiveness of the proposed professional development and mentoring/induction systems. These omissions are reflected in a mid-range score.</p>		
Total	138	95

E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

	Available	Tier 1
(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs	10	5
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		

<p>(E)(1) According to Rule 10: Regulations and Procedures for the Accreditation of Schools, Title 92, Nebraska Administrative Code, Chapter 10, the State Board of Education can intervene in a "public school system", that is to say, an LEA, but there is no mention of intervention in individual public schools, therefore, a score of 5 is given as required by (E)(1) guidance.</p>		
(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	40	29
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	4
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	25
<p>(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)</p> <p>(E)(2)(i) Respondent has identified 52 schools defined as Persistently Low Achieving Schools (PLAS) for the 2009-2010 school year. While not required, a fuller response could have acknowledged the large increase in PLAS, from 7 in 2007-2008, to 17 in 2008-2009, to 52 in 2009-2010 with some indication of why this increase has occurred. What the State does acknowledge is that the number of PLAS identified using the new statewide reading and math assessments will increase. It is not clear to the reviewer why the State feels that, "the identification of PLAS will be dependent upon standard setting processes and State Board approval which may cause delays", as the reading assessment has already been administered in 2010 and the math assessment is being piloted in 2010.</p> <p>(E)(2)(ii) It seems curious that in the very first paragraph of Nebraska's response to this criterion they would state, "because there was no standard framework for intervention, we do not know what worked to move these schools to make AYP and move out of school improvement status". It would seem that 1) the State and the LEA would want to know what worked for schools to make AYP sufficient to move out of school improvement status, and, 2) they would have some sort of record as to the policies, strategies, activities, etc. that were used in these successful schools. Be that as it may, the State subsequently notes that its new Intervention Systems and Support plan in addition to other things, "standardizes the process for turning around schools". All of the basic components of a high quality plan as called for in this criterion are present in this response: key goals, key activities, timelines, and responsible parties. Omitted details in the activities section of the chart are reflected in an upper mid-range score.</p>		
Total	50	34

F. General

	Available	Tier 1
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	7
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	5
(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	2
<p>(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)</p> <p>(F)(1)(i) The state of Nebraska increased the percentage of total state appropriations used to support public education (elementary, secondary, and postsecondary) from 34.47% in FY2008 to 35.63% in FY2009, an increase of 1.16%. Therefore, the applicant scored a "high" point score of five as indicated in the guidance for criterion (F)(1)(i).</p> <p>(F)(1)(ii) According to the applicant, "Recent modifications to the needs calculation endeavor to direct resources to schools with high concentrations of poverty through allowances, adjustments and a need stabilization factor...". Specifically when these 'recent' modifications were enacted would be helpful information to assist in judging this criterion. It is not totally apparent whether there is equitable funding for high poverty schools in the response given.</p>		
(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)		
<p>(F)(2)(i-iv) Nebraska currently has no charter school law, therefore, no points can be awarded for romanette levels (F)(2)(i-iv) per guidance for this criterion.</p> <p>(F)(2)(v) Nebraska has a number of innovative school programs. The Enrollment Option Program began in 1989 and enables any kindergarten through twelfth grade student to attend a school in a neighboring school district in which the student does not reside, subject to certain limitations. Approximately 5.9% of all students participate in this program statewide. There was no discussion regarding transportation for this program which may be a barrier for some students and families. Specialized intra-district schools have been created to expand student choices by different interests and needs. There are also magnet school programs and the interesting University of Nebraska–Lincoln Independent Study High School that provides a complete distance curriculum to 2,500 high school students in Nebraska, throughout the United States, and in 135 countries. It is accredited by three agencies: the Nebraska Department of Education, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement, and the Commission of International and Trans-Regional Accreditation. These examples suggest that Nebraska is open to and promotes innovative public schools.</p>		
(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	3
(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>(F)(3) Of the five Nebraska State legislative or State Board adoptions, there are few results reported in the response that have increased student achievement or graduation rates, narrowed achievement gaps, or resulted in other important outcomes as required in this criterion. The Nebraska P-16 initiative is broad-based with strong goals, but as noted in a previous criterion, there are no reported results on any of the initiative's early goals nor more recent goals. While the State is very proud of their locally developed assessments, the jury is still out as to how these assessments will fare when compared to the results of the new statewide assessments. However, all of the legislation and programs listed have the potential to reduce achievement gaps and increase student achievement and graduation rates.</p>		
Total	55	16

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	15	15
Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
<p>The Nebraska Virtual School (NVS) is a concept that holds promise for large numbers of Nebraska's students, particularly those who live in extremely spread out rural communities. To the State's credit, the idea of pairing the NVS with STEM to help fill Nebraska's needs in the state makes sense. Many parts of the plan are thorough, such as the Instructional Resources and Professional Learning for Teachers sections, while other parts are less so, like the Technology Support section, for example.</p> <p>The plan does state that NVS STEM will be governed and supported by the Independent Study High School at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. However, the specific NDE offices, directors and liaisons to the University are not</p>		

listed. Nonetheless, the State overall presents a sound STEM plan, and it is hoped that schools in remote areas of the state will have the technological infrastructure to access the program when it is implemented.

Total	15	15
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Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		Yes

Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

It does not appear that the participating LEAs represent the best opportunity for high poverty and minority students to benefit from this proposal due to the fact that the Omaha Public Schools, the largest LEA in Nebraska, has not signed the MOU to participate in this Race to the Top reform initiative. There was no discussion with reference to the missing LEA. It would have been instructive if the State shared the reasons for the Omaha Public Schools' lack of participation. Despite this omission of consequence, this Absolute Priority has been granted.

Total		0
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Grand Total	500	290
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