

Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Alabama State Department of Education -- Department of Education Instructional Services Divisio
(S371C110009)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Quality of State-level activities		
Quality of State-level activities		
1. State-level activities	37	16.5
Sub Total	37	16.5
Quality of the State subgrant competition		
Quality of the State subgrant competition		
1. State subgrant comp	28	14.5
Sub Total	28	14.5
Project management		
Project management		
1. Project management	15	8.5
Sub Total	15	8.5
Adequacy of resources		
Adequacy of resources		
1. Adequacy of resources	20	7
Sub Total	20	7
Priority Questions		
Competitive Priority		
Effective Use of Technology		
1. Competitive Priority	5	3
Sub Total	5	3
Absolute Priority 1		
Improving Learning Outcomes		
1. Absolute Priority 1	0	0
Sub Total	0	0
Absolute Priority 2		
Enabling More Data-Based Decision-Making		
1. Absolute Priority 2	0	0
Sub Total	0	0
Total	105	49.5

Technical Review Form

Panel #3 - SRCL - 3: 84.371C

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Alabama State Department of Education -- Department of Education Instructional Services Divisio (S371C110009)

Questions

Quality of State-level activities - Quality of State-level activities

1. In determining the quality of State-level activities, the Secretary considers: See Sub-Criteria

Reader's Score: 16.5

Sub Question

1. How the SEA will carry out the required State-level activities (described in the Additional Requirements section of the NIA) and how it will align those activities with its comprehensive State literacy plan.

Strengths:

Strengths

A.(1). The application thoughtfully addressed the additional requirements mandates. Alabama has developed and is in the process of introducing and implementing the State literacy plan (p.4). Alignment of federal and state funds at the state level will be accomplished through close communication and planning of the State Literacy Team, the State Department of Education (SDE) steering committee, and the SRCL staff. (p. 6). Several personnel will fulfill dual roles, working part time on the SRCL grant and part time in their current positions. This will benefit aligning funds and programs. (p. 6). The process and results of the review of the subgrant applications will be communicated publicly using a letter from the state superintendent, Webinars (also recorded), and the development of a new Website, devoted to supporting literacy efforts in Alabama (p. 7). The funding realized from the grant will address a comprehensive and coherent literacy program, serving students from birth to Grade 12 (pp. 7, 11). Needs assessment will guide the selection of specific activities from the state literacy plan. SDE will collaborate with teacher preparation faculty to plan and prepare professional development resources, materials, online courses, modules, and resource kits. (p. 12). Implementation of the state literacy plan is the focus of the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) professional development, technical assistance, and support for schools. Some assessments have been chosen, e.g., Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test in grades 3-8, and the Alabama High School Graduation Exam in grades 11-12. Language assessments for participating students from birth through age 5 will be named in the subgrant applications. One section of the state literacy plan describes how it will be monitored and evaluated (p. 12). The plan will serve as the foundation of the SRCL subgrant plans. As documented by the examples above, most of the issues in the Requirements section were adequately addressed.

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

Weaknesses

A.(1). Alabama is just introducing its state literacy plan and there was no mention of a process to continuously improve it (p. 4). The assessments mentioned are limiting, and there is no assessment mentioned for students in grades 9 and 10 (p. 14). Districts can name their language based assessments for birth to grade 5 so there will be no standardization of some of the assessment measures across districts. No accommodations were mentioned to ensure that all students are accurately assessed. No specific discussion was provided on the implementation of interventions for all children, or on language and text rich classrooms. (pp. 2 - 8)

Reader's Score: 6

- 2. The SEA's goals for improving student literacy outcomes throughout the State for all students (e.g., limited-English-proficient students and students with disabilities), including a description of the data (which may include data gathered through a needs assessment) that the SEA has considered or will consider and a clear and credible path that the SEA will take to achieve these goals with the support of its LEAs.**

Strengths:

A.(ii). Alabama has adequately outlined its literacy goals and intended outcomes (p. 11). The goals include significantly increasing the amount of time that disadvantaged students are engaged in literacy instruction and intervention, significantly increase the quality of literacy instruction for all students through professional development and ongoing support for teachers, and the collection, analysis, and use of high-quality data to make timely decisions for improving instructional practices and student literacy outcomes. (p. 11)

Weaknesses:

A.(ii). Alabama states that it has included in its State literacy plan, Alabama's Action Plan for Literacy: Birth Through Grade 12, a path for improving student outcomes but a specific description of this path was not addressed in the application. (p. 12) Assessment data are limiting. (pp. 8 - 12) What is provided is a description of assessments that are currently in place including the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test for grades 3 - 8, the Stanford Achievement Test for students in grades 3 - 8, and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (DIBELS) for students in K - 2, and the High School Graduation Exam for students in Grades 11 - 12 (p. 13). Not included in this discussion are assessments for early childhood and grades 9 and 10. (pp. 12 - 14).

Reader's Score: 3

- 3. How the SEA will provide technical assistance and support to its SRCL subgrantees (and, at its discretion, to other LEAs or early childhood education providers) to enable them to implement a high-quality comprehensive literacy program and to improve student achievement in core academic subjects.**

Strengths:

A.(iii). The state has in place a mechanism for providing support and professional development, the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI). It is well staffed and meets regularly (pp. 12 - 13). The Office of School Readiness provides technical support and assistance to pre-kindergarten sites. The ARI technical assistance structure, including state staff, regional teams, LEA contacts, and local coaches, allows for targeted technical assistance and support to subgrantees (p. 13). In addition, subgrantees may designate a local instructional specialist to build sustainability for SRCL activities (p. 13). The state is adequately using several in-place structures to support the grant.

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

A.(iii). ARI has provided professional development and support to every K-3 school in the state and to a very small number of coaches in middle and high school. If ARI is to have a significant role in assisting subgrantees, its role has to be expanded to upper elementary, middle, and high school. The extent of professional development is inadequate. The application specifies that in order to build sustainability, subgrantees MAY appoint a local literacy coach. Therefore only some of the subgrantees will have this support. (p. 13)

Reader's Score: 2.5

- 4. How the SEA will evaluate the State's progress in improving achievement in literacy for children and youth from birth through grade 12, including disadvantaged students, including: (1) whether the evaluation will be conducted by an independent evaluator (whose role in the project is limited solely to conducting the evaluation); (2) whether the evaluation will use methods that are thorough, feasible, and appropriate to the objectives of the proposed project; and (3) how the SEA will use evidence to inform and continuously improve the design and implementation of its activities.**

Strengths:

A.(iv). An independent evaluator will be hired to conduct an evaluation using several state-wide assessments, a language assessment to be named, and other implementation data, e.g., schedules, logs, surveys, observation records, interviews. The evaluator is experienced and knowledgeable. Assessments will inform future actions to sustain program successes. Using an experienced outside evaluator is adequate for assistance in evaluating the State's progress. (p. 14)

Weaknesses:

A.(iv.) The planned assessments (p. 14) are limiting and are not inclusive of every grade level. The evaluation will use results from statewide assessments and language assessments or strategies to be named in the subgrant applications. Discussion on the assessments and the data received from the assessments currently in place is inadequate. It is unclear as to how the information received from the implementation data will be used to measure the effectiveness of the proposed projects. The information provided regarding continuously improving the design and implementation of the activities is insufficient.

Reader's Score: 3

- 5. How the SEA will disseminate information on project outcomes, disaggregated by student subgroup, and in formats that are easily understood by, and accessible to, the public, and how the SEA will make that information useful to varied groups (such as families, educators, researchers, other experts, early childhood education providers, and State leaders).**

Strengths:

A.(v). A variety of communication devices will be used to communicate results, e.g., the Web site that will be developed, online tutorials, and the development of a plan by the State Literacy Team that will disseminate outcomes through local literacy partnerships. (p. 15) Promising practices that are supported by the outcome data will be shared on the Web site in reports for parents, community leaders, early childhood providers, and teachers of elementary, middle, and high school students. (p. 15). These means of communication devices are adequate.

Weaknesses:

A. (v). More specific information is needed regarding the specific subgroups that will receive information. Excluded from the list are administrators, higher education personnel, and the public at large (p. 15).

Sub Question

Reader's Score: 2

Quality of the State subgrant competition - Quality of the State subgrant competition

1. In determining the quality of the applicant's proposed SRCL subgrant competition, the Secretary considers: See Sub-Criteria

Reader's Score: 14.5

Sub Question

1. The extent to which the SEA will run a rigorous, high-quality competition for subgrants, including how it will review and judge:
 - a) The LEA's or early childhood education provider's capacity to successfully implement its proposal.

Strengths:

Strengths

B.(i.a). The SRCL subgrant competition will be similar to the subgrant competition for Reading First, thereby drawing upon what has effectively worked in the past, and even making adjustments based on lessons learned (p. 15). This will be beneficial. Letters will be sent out to LEAs as to the availability of the SRCL subgrants through a letter to superintendents, explaining the objectives, the maximum award amounts, and the application and review process (p. 15). A webinar will be provided and there will be a two day proposal preparation workshop. (p. 17) The workshop will provide information will introduce the State literacy plan, the Needs Assessment process, the process for selecting materials, developing a plan for professional development, and strategies for providing more instructional time to disadvantaged students (p. 17) An adequate discussion on the quality of the state subgrant competition is provided (pp. 15 - 17).

Weaknesses:

Weaknesses

B.(i.a). A rubric will be used to evaluate the extent to which the applicant has proposed a comprehensive literacy program that meets all of the Additional Requirements of the SCRL grant. A sample of this rubric (p. 34) was provided but there are no descriptors or criteria included for the categories. Only the categories of "does not meet standard," "meets standard" or "exemplary plan" are presented. Therefore it not apparent as to how Alabama will judge and review the capacity of a LEA (Local Education Agency) or early childhood provider to successfully implement its proposal (p. 15) based on the use of this rubric. The ARI has 60 regional coaches who have experience working with schools in each of the LEAs. Due to their experience and ongoing work, Alabama feels these coaches can obtain a true picture of the LEAs' capacity to carry out a comprehensive proposal. It is not stated how the coaches would carry out this task. More detailed information of the process that would be used is needed. (p. 19) In sum, the discussion on how the SEA will review and judge capacity is not adequate.

Reader's Score: 1

2. (b) The extent to which each SRCL subgrant applicant has proposed a comprehensive high-quality literacy program that meets all of the requirements set out in paragraph (d) of the Additional Requirements section in the NIA and that:
 - (1) Addresses the needs of disadvantaged students and proposes to implement activities in schools and early learning programs with the highest levels of need and capacity for improvement.
 - (2) Is informed by a needs assessment described in the application and is designed to support

Sub Question

effective teaching and to improve student achievement of struggling readers.

(3) Involves other agencies, nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations, and families in activities that promote the implementation of effective literacy instruction for disadvantaged students.

Strengths:

B.(i.b). The State is proposing that each SRCL subgrant applicant include a comprehensive high-quality literacy program that meets all of the requirements set out in paragraph (d) of the Additional Requirements section. (pp. 17 - 19)

B.(i.1). It is clearly stated that priority will be given to LEAs or early childhood providers that serve disadvantaged students . (p. 19) Applicants will be required to give specific criteria used to identify disadvantaged students.

B.(i.b.2). The State acknowledges that districts will be required to describe their needs assessment process in their applications. (p. 20)

B.(i.b.3). The State mentions that applicants will be required to describe the process used to establish local partnerships (p. 20). The applicant must describe how the community partnerships will be utilized to carry out the SRCL activities in support of disadvantaged students.

Weaknesses:

B.(i.b). There is limited discussion provided on the comprehensiveness of a high-quality literacy program which meets the requirements set out in paragraph (d). Not appropriately addressed are topics such as the aligning of curriculum and instructional materials with the State standards, use of assessment data to inform instruction, the provision of language and text-rich classrooms, schools, and early learning program environments. (pp. 17 - 19) The information provided is limited and insufficient. (p. 18) The discussion on the use of a needs assessment is limited and insufficient. LEAs and early childhood providers are asked to describe its needs assessment process but no additional explanations or descriptions of a needs assessment process are provided. (p. 18). Discussion on the involvement of other agencies is insufficient. (p. 20) Applicants are just asked to describe the process used to establish a local literacy partnership including families, caregivers, schools, local businesses, organizations, and other community agencies to enhance literacy support in the community. No further information is provided.

Reader's Score: 3

- 3. (c) The extent to which each SRCL subgrant applicant demonstrates that it will implement a coherent strategy to improve literacy instruction that aligns activities under the SRCL subgrant with literacy instruction supported with other Federal funds, including with funds the entity receives under Title I, Title II-A, and Title III of the ESEA and, as appropriate, the Head Start Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, and State and local funds.**

Strengths:

B.(c). The provided discussion on this question notes that applicants for the subgrant must describe how they will leverage all existing resources, and the budget and budget narrative must provide the necessary evidence. At an orientation meeting immediately following the award announcements, subgrantees will begin to develop a sustainability plan to use SRCL funds that are used to support the proposed SRCL activities. The sustainability plan must address the use of SRCL funds to expand, and strengthen all current resources. (pp. 20, 22 - 34) A preliminary discussion on this topic was provided.

Weaknesses:

B.(c). Discussion of implementing a coherent strategy to improve literacy instruction that aligns activities under the SRCL subgrant with literacy instruction supported by other funding is insufficient. (p. 20) There is no clear explanation on how the activities proposed in the grant proposals would align

Sub Question

with other funding sources. (p. 20) It merely states that LEAs and ELCs must leverage other State and Federal Funds to enhance and align the activities to increase the effectiveness of literacy instruction for disadvantaged students. (p. 27)

Reader's Score: 1

- 4. The extent to which the SEA will give priority to LEAs or providers of early childhood education that propose to serve high-poverty schools or a high-poverty population, based on a definition of poverty and process for applying the priority provided by the State.**

Strengths:

B.(ii). The State clearly states that priority will be given to those applicants with the highest numbers or percentages of students eligible for free and/or reduced lunch. (pp. 20, 23). An eligibility rubric will be developed to provide LEA information about numbers and percentages of students in poverty, of students scoring below proficient on state required assessments, of LEP enrollments, and of students with disabilities. This will be helpful for ensuring that the most needy students will be served by the grant. (pp. 16, 19, 32).

Weaknesses:

B. (ii) There are no identified weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 6

- 5. The extent to which the SEA will give priority to LEAs or providers of early childhood education whose applications are supported by the strongest available evidence.**

Strengths:

B.(iii). The State acknowledged the need and commitment in working with important stakeholders (p. 21). Included was a discussion on providing a process for determining which strategies and materials have the strongest base for improving literacy outcomes. Included in the best practices discussion were references to the expert reviews available from the Florida Center for Reading Research, the What Works Clearinghouse, and Doing What Works (p. 21). These reviews are excellent resources.

Weaknesses:

B.(iii). Alabama only mentions helping identify effective strategies and materials but makes no mention of how it will give priority to applications supported by this evidence. (p. 21) Also, the State does not specify how the review reports from the Florida Center for Reading Research, the What Works Clearinghouse, and Doing What Works will inform decisions to prioritize the subgrantee applications. Insufficient information was provided as to the tools that are recommended in the area of language development (p. 14). It is stated that growth in language development will be determined by comparing results from evidence-based assessments or strategies. These strategies are to be named in the subgrant applications.

Reader's Score: 1.5

- 6. The extent to which the SEA will develop or update a process, or use an existing process, to review and judge the evidence base and alignment with State standards for the curricula and materials that LEAs propose to use in implementing their subgrants, and how the SEA will make the process and results of any such review publicly available.**

Strengths:

B.(iv). Alabama will use reviewers who are familiar with the expert reviews available from several sources (p. 21), e.g., Florida Center for Reading Research, What Works Clearinghouse, and Doing What Works. The use of knowledgeable reviewers for judging the evidence base and alignment of curricula and materials is reasonable for this activity. (p. 21) The evidence base for any materials selected for SSRCL

Sub Question

will be judged using one of the aforementioned resources.

Weaknesses:

B.(iv). Many aspects of this question are not addressed. The process that is to be used is unclear, as is how this process and results of any reviews will be communicated to the public. Merely provided is the use of the reviews from the sources cited previously. There is no in-depth discussion provided regarding how the process and results of the reviews will be made publicly available. (p. 21)

Reader's Score: 2

Project management - Project management

- 1. The Secretary considers the following factors in determining the quality of the project management plan: See Sub-Criteria**

Reader's Score: 8.5

Sub Question

- 1. (i) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.**

Strengths:

C.(i). The management plan is adequate with its inclusion of a well defined timeline and a description of the roles and responsibilities of various groups and/or personnel. The management plan is detailed through the year 2014. This shows evidence of the State's commitment to long-term planning. (pp. 35 - 42).

Weaknesses:

C. (i). Each of the specialists will work half-time in the development of SRCL activities and half-time in their areas of expertise. As described in the major responsibilities of some key personnel, e.g., the Project Director, it is apparent that these responsibilities are extensive. If the personnel are to undertake these responsibilities along with those in their other half-time position, the grant may be understaffed. This could compromise oversight of the grant and its intended outcomes. (pp. 35 - 42)

Reader's Score: 4

- 2. (ii) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key personnel.**

Strengths:

C.(ii). An adequate overview of the roles of key personnel who will be involved in the project management is provided. The project director has experience with other State projects such as the Alabama Reading Initiative. (pp. 42 - 43)

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

C. (ii). Since there were few resumes provided for key staff, it is difficult to judge the qualifications of the key personnel. The intended staff members include the Project Director, and four staff members including an early childhood specialist, an elementary specialist, and a technologist specialist. (p. 35) Insufficient information is provided for the project director (p. 35) as to her ability to manage the budget and oversee the grants. It is not clear that the expertise and capacity of the key personnel are adequate for the responsibilities and duties necessary for overseeing the grant.

Reader's Score: 2

- 3. (iii) The extent to which the State will ensure a diversity of perspectives in the design and implementation of the proposed project, including those of: families, teachers, early childhood education professionals, officials from other State and local agencies, Head Start Advisory Councils, professional organizations, institutions of higher education, community-based organizations, and libraries.**

Strengths:

C.(iii). The State Literacy Team consists of representatives from many diverse organizations, which should aid in providing diversity of perspectives. Included are appointees from the Alabama State Department of Education, the Department of Children's Affairs, the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, the State Legislature, the State Board of Education, the State Teacher's Association, the State Reading Association, the State Principals' Association, a local superintendent, a high school principal, an elementary reading coach, and a university professor of special education. There are also members from the research community and from community and local foundations. Membership is adequate for representing diversity. (pp. 44 - 45)

Weaknesses:

C.(iii). To ensure diversity, it might be useful if the State Literacy Team included representatives from early childhood professionals, middle school professionals, libraries, and families. (pp. 44 - 45)

Reader's Score: 2.5

Adequacy of resources - Adequacy of resources

- 1. The Secretary considers the following factors in determining the adequacy of resources for the proposed project: See Sub-Criteria**

Reader's Score: 7

Sub Question

- 1. (i) The extent to which the costs described in the SEA's budget are reasonable in relation to the number of objectives, design, and potential significance of the proposed project .**

Strengths:

Strengths

D.(i). The State has provided a budget and a narrative as to how the funds will be allocated and mentions that there will be a plan for staggering the costs across the funding years for the LEAs. A discussion is provided on aligning funds with the number of objectives, design, and potential significance of the proposed project. Detailed information is provided for each of the years of the grant (pp. 1 - 20). Salaries of key personnel are shared with the ARI.

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

D. (i). Some of the personnel and travel costs are not well justified and are lacking in detail for discerning how the amounts allocated align with the stated objectives. It is unclear as to how some of the suggested numbers were obtained, e.g., salaries of the personnel, fringe benefits, travel costs for face-to-face professional development. (pp.- 1 - 20) With the exception of the clerical help, the salaries provided to key personnel are budgeted for \$80,000. It is not clear how this number was achieved and why it is the same for all key personnel. The fringe benefits appear to be high at 35%. Travel costs are expected to run around \$240,000 which seems high.

Reader's Score: 2

2. (ii) The quality of the SEA's plan to ensure that SRCL subgrant funds are allocated as follows:

*** At least 15 percent to serve children from birth through age five.**

*** At least 40 percent to serve students in kindergarten through grade five.**

*** At least 40 percent to serve students in middle and high school, through grade 12, including an equitable distribution of funds between middle and high schools.**

Strengths:

D.(ii). The state mentions the funding allocations of at least 15 % for birth through grade 5, 40 % to serve K-5 and 40% for middle and high school in several places in the application (pp. 24, 44), adequately demonstrating a commitment to this funding dispersion.

Weaknesses:

D. (ii). Limited information is provided as to how the funding allocations will be adhered to over the funding years. (pp. 24, 44)

Reader's Score: 2

3. (iii) The extent to which the SEA will use the grant to leverage other State and Federal funds in order to maximize the impact of the grant and how it will support LEAs and early childhood education providers in integrating funds with other local, State, and Federal funds and in developing a plan for sustaining funding after the end of the subgrant.

Strengths:

D.(iii). The state proposes that resources provided through other local, state, and federal funds will be available to support the ongoing commitment to advance literacy skills as SRCL funding is reduced. The intent is to have districts develop sustainability plans based on sustainability resources. (p. 45). The sustainability plans will focus SRCL funds over three years to repurpose, expand, and strengthen all currently available resources in order to accomplish the intended goals. (p. 45)

Weaknesses:

D.(iii). No clear description is provided as to how the state will use the grant to leverage other State and Federal funds. The plan for sustaining funding after the end of the subgrant is limited. It is stated that at the end of Year 1 of the grant, subgrantees that meet the intended outcomes will have the option to use SRCL funds to support the sustainability plans (p. 45). No other suggestions or recommendations are provided if subgrantees do not exercise this option. At the end of Year 2, subgrantees that continue to be successful will receive a reduced amount. It is unclear how subgrantees will be able to sustain their efforts with the reduced support. (p. 45)

Reader's Score: 1

4. (iv) The extent to which the SEA will award SRCL subgrants of sufficient size to support projects that improve instruction for a significant number of students in the high-need schools or early learning programs serving children birth through five that the SRCL subgrantee would serve.

Sub Question

Strengths:

D.(iv). The State has adequately addressed the provision of serving a significant number of students in high need schools or early learning programs serving children birth through age five. One of the eligibility priorities for subgrant applicants is the number or percentage of disadvantaged students to be served (p. 45). Documents that will be used for the pre-application Webinar (with a Pre-Application Rubric) will identify those LEAs and early education providers that serve the largest numbers of high-needs students (p. 46).

Weaknesses:

D. (iv). Insufficient information is provided to ensure that the subgrant awards will be of sufficient size to support the proposed activities. (pp. 45 - 46) The applicant's estimates of the numbers of children to be served and the amount spent per child are not clearly explained (pp. 15, 45 - 46). Therefore it is difficult to determine whether a significant number of students will be served.

Reader's Score: 2

Priority Questions

Competitive Priority - Effective Use of Technology

1. **To meet this priority, an applicant must (1) propose to use technology--which may include technology to support principles of universal design for learning (as defined in the NIA)--to address student learning challenges; and (2) provide, in its application, an evidence-based (as defined in the NIA) rationale that its proposed technology program, practice, or strategy will increase student engagement and achievement or increase teacher effectiveness.**

Background: The effective use of technology is a critical tool for improving learning outcomes and providing teachers with high-quality professional development. Use of concepts, ideas, programming techniques, and computer-assisted text displays that give access to the text for students who cannot access traditional print, including limited-English-proficient children and students with disabilities, is a basic tenet of universal design for learning (as defined in the NIA) and can help improve students' literacy and language development and identify and address student learning challenges.

Strengths:

The State proposes that SRCL funds will help subgrantees make more effective use of technology through highly engaging intervention and instructional software made available to students and to teachers to increase the amount of instructional time, increase student engagement, student achievement and teacher effectiveness (p. 1). In addition, the State proposes to use online courses, tutorials, professional development modules, and resources available on the Web site will support sustainability for SRCL activities. (pp. 6, 21, 27). The Web site will provide a link to a comprehensive data reporting site to be developed to help literacy stakeholders collect, analyze, and use high-quality and timely data to make more informed decisions. (p. 6) A technology specialist will be hired to enhance the State's technology initiatives (p. 36; Budget Summary, 3).The State's proposal adequately describes the use of technology and its importance for the SRCL grant.

Weaknesses:

The State was not specific in its description of technology to be used for instruction. (pp. 6, 21) Moreover, it stated that it was going to use data from Year 1 of implementation as the basis for professional development initiatives, disregarding information gained from other years of grant implementation (pp. Budget Summary, 14, 19)

Reader's Score: 3

Absolute Priority 1 - Improving Learning Outcomes

1. **To meet this priority: An applicant must propose a project that is designed to improve school readiness and success through grade 12 in the area of language and literacy development for disadvantaged students.**

Background: Improving the language and literacy development of disadvantaged students is essential to improving academic achievement for these students in all content areas. The 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results show disproportionately large numbers of disadvantaged students struggle with developing the necessary pre-literacy and literacy skills needed to read, comprehend, and use language effectively. This results in persistent gaps in academic achievement through the elementary and secondary school years and in high school graduation rates, and presents civic and economic difficulties for these students later in life. Meeting the language and literacy needs of disadvantaged students, including limited-English-proficient students and students with disabilities, is a particular focus of the SRCL program.

Strengths:

The grant proposal describes in sufficient detail that advancing their students' literacy skills is a main priority and focus of the grant (pp. 1, 12, 23, 25). They offer their success stories in promoting literacy acquisition with other initiatives and report that they are pleased with their progress, not their pace. They are to be commended for the gains they have achieved (pp. 8, 9, 12) and for wanting to further advance the literacy skills of their student population.

The State of Alabama has met Priority Question 1 - Improving Learning Outcomes.

Weaknesses:

There are no identified weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 0

Absolute Priority 2 - Enabling More Data-Based Decision-Making

1. **To meet this priority: An applicant must propose a project that is designed to collect, analyze, and use high-quality and timely data, especially on program participant outcomes, in accordance with privacy requirements (as defined in the NIA), to improve instructional practices, policies, and student outcomes in early learning settings and in elementary and secondary schools.**

Background: Accurate, timely, relevant, and appropriate data, and the effective use of that data for informed decision-making, are essential to the continuous improvement of children's literacy and language development. In developing comprehensive literacy plans and programs, it is important for States to consider strategies that provide educators, as well as families and other key stakeholders, with the data they need and the capacity and training to use those data to improve school readiness, respond to the learning and academic needs of students, improve educator effectiveness, inform professional development practices and approaches, and make informed decisions that increase student pre-literacy, literacy, and language development.

Strengths:

The state of Alabama has adequately described several means of collecting and analyzing data to improve instructional practices, policies, and student outcomes including a data reporting site on their proposed literacy Web site (p. 6). This data site will help literacy stakeholders collect, analyze, and use high quality and timely data to make more informed decisions (p. 6). The state has also hired an independent evaluator, who holds excellent credentials for conducting large scale evaluations (p. 14). The independent evaluator will use data to prepare annual performance reports and comparing progress at participating and nonparticipating schools. The evaluator will meet with SRCL staff and the SDE Steering Committee to design the implementation design. Other implementation data, e.g., schedules, logs, surveys, observation records, and interviews will also be utilized (p. 14).

The State of Alabama has met Priority Question 2 - Enabling More Data-Based Decision Making.

Weaknesses:

The description of data collection and analysis needs to be richer and more detailed (p. 6). Assessment data on some student populations such as grades 9 and 10 are missing in the proposed achievement measures. (p. 14)

Reader's Score: 0

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Alabama State Department of Education -- Department of Education Instructional Services Divisio
(S371C110009)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Quality of State-level activities		
Quality of State-level activities		
1. State-level activities	37	20
Sub Total	37	20
Quality of the State subgrant competition		
Quality of the State subgrant competition		
1. State subgrant comp	28	17
Sub Total	28	17
Project management		
Project management		
1. Project management	15	4.5
Sub Total	15	4.5
Adequacy of resources		
Adequacy of resources		
1. Adequacy of resources	20	6.5
Sub Total	20	6.5
Priority Questions		
Competitive Priority		
Effective Use of Technology		
1. Competitive Priority	5	3
Sub Total	5	3
Absolute Priority 1		
Improving Learning Outcomes		
1. Absolute Priority 1	0	0
Sub Total	0	0
Absolute Priority 2		
Enabling More Data-Based Decision-Making		
1. Absolute Priority 2	0	0
Sub Total	0	0
Total	105	51.0

Technical Review Form

Panel #3 - SRCL - 3: 84.371C

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Alabama State Department of Education -- Department of Education Instructional Services Divisio (S371C110009)

Questions

Quality of State-level activities - Quality of State-level activities

1. In determining the quality of State-level activities, the Secretary considers: See Sub-Criteria

Reader's Score: 20

Sub Question

1. How the SEA will carry out the required State-level activities (described in the Additional Requirements section of the NIA) and how it will align those activities with its comprehensive State literacy plan.

Strengths:

(i) (a) In response to the SRCL, Alabama formed an initial State Literacy Team to develop a state literacy plan (p. 1-3). This State Literacy Team will be responsible for a statewide initiative to develop, update, and implement and improve their existing efforts. This will provide an initial base to more fully develop this project.

(b) To ensure accountability, the applicant will require LEAs to demonstrate how the use of funding sources is aligned with Title 1; II-A III and so forth.

(c) The applicant mentions that the State Literacy Team will disseminate information about the SRCL subgrant process and review by sending letters to all LEAs and ECE providers, providing a webinar to clarify the application process, and also posting information on the State Department of Education (SDE) website (p. 5). These efforts should make the process and results of subgrant applications publicly available. The applicants' intended procedures used to review the applications and their proposed curricula and materials are described in section B below.

(d) (1) The applicant mentions a plan for developing a website devoted to the SRCL project to anchor implementation of the statewide literacy plan and its sustainability. The website is intended to provide what the applicant describes as a "wealth of resources" and will offer on-line courses, professional development, lesson plans, activity guides and so forth (p. 5). The applicant states it will provide professional development and technical assistance to subgrantees (p. 4) carried out by faculty from (unspecified) colleges of education (p. 11).

(6) The applicant mentions using SRCL funds to develop a data reporting link located also on the website that will be used to generate reports to stakeholders to identify student needs, professional development, and to document progress toward their goals for their literacy plan (p. 5). Online tutorials will be provided to help stakeholders understand and use the information in the data reports.

Weaknesses:

The plan for the state level activities is not well described. That is, the example of a "sample page" from the state literacy plan (p. 6-7) contains what is referred to as "action steps". While these steps describe, in part, WHAT the plan intends to do, it does not specify HOW or WHY. It would be helpful to

Sub Question

demonstrate how the goals of the plan aligned with the "steps," and then to provide an elaboration of how the steps would be accomplished. The one paragraph description of the literacy plan (page 11), and specifically the description of the "action planning section," do not convey a "powerful step-by-step plan to enhance high quality instruction". For example, it is not clear what is particularly "powerful" or even novel about identifying responsibilities; listing needed resources; or setting target dates. These seem to be fairly common steps in any systematic intervention. This proposed framework is severely lacking in detail and appears not very well conceived.

(b) The applicant mentions that federal and state funding will be leveraged by having the key SRCL staff, the director and specialists work half time on the SRCL program while working the other half in their current positions (p. 4). It is not clear, given the magnitude of the SRCL program that this is a good strategy. Overall, the project overall appears under-staffed (see comments below under resources) and this splitting of responsibilities may compromise oversight of the SRCL program and its intended impact.

(d) (1-5) On the state level, the overall plan outlined in the proposal does not appear to be well thought out. The basic ideas seem to be there, but the details are missing. For example the proposal narrative lacks specificity in explaining exactly how the applicant will ensure that LEAs implement an intervention that ensures all children are served appropriately; provides engaging language- and text-rich learning environments to motivate children; and monitors and tracks the implementation and outcomes at all levels- LEA, ECE, school, classroom and student.

Reader's Score: 4

- 2. The SEA's goals for improving student literacy outcomes throughout the State for all students (e.g., limited-English-proficient students and students with disabilities), including a description of the data (which may include data gathered through a needs assessment) that the SEA has considered or will consider and a clear and credible path that the SEA will take to achieve these goals with the support of its LEAs.**

Strengths:

In several tables, the applicant provides evidence for the need to improve student literacy outcomes (p. 7-10) across the state with a particular need to focus on ECE as evidenced by children's Dynamic Indications and Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) scores.

Weaknesses:

On page 10 the applicant lists two sets of goals for the SRCL.

First there are three goals for the LEAs (presumably at the subgrant level); i.e., to significantly increase time disadvantaged students are engaged in literacy instruction, increase quality of instruction through ongoing professional development, and collect and analyze data to make informed decisions).

Second, there are four primary goals for Alabama (presumably the state level): 1) increasing disadvantaged pre-K children's (i.e., 4-year-olds) oral language skills; 2) increasing disadvantaged Grade 5 and 8 students' math test scores; increasing high school students' scores on the AL HS Graduation Exam; 3) increasing teacher professional development as evidenced by "implementation data"; 4) collaboration among stakeholders as evidenced by implementation data.

It is not clear how these seven goals are aligned or how they will be addressed. It would also be helpful to know how implementation data is defined and what might constitute "an increase in..." "percentage in..." and "significant gains in..." (p. 10). These are not very specific indicators of "progress" and will not be useful in trying to show specific gains as a result of the intervention. More specific outcome variables should be specified.

The goals are not stated in a way that they can be easily operationalized and do not seem to target the full range of an effective literacy intervention. There is no evidence of a clear and credible path to achieve even these minor goals.

Sub Question

Reader's Score: 4

3. How the SEA will provide technical assistance and support to its SRCL subgrantees (and, at its discretion, to other LEAs or early childhood education providers) to enable them to implement a high-quality comprehensive literacy program and to improve student achievement in core academic subjects.

Strengths:

The applicant describes a plan for determining the personnel who are responsible for supporting the LEAs (p. 11-13) and how their efforts will be coordinated.

Weaknesses:

none

Reader's Score: 5

4. How the SEA will evaluate the State's progress in improving achievement in literacy for children and youth from birth through grade 12, including disadvantaged students, including: (1) whether the evaluation will be conducted by an independent evaluator (whose role in the project is limited solely to conducting the evaluation); (2) whether the evaluation will use methods that are thorough, feasible, and appropriate to the objectives of the proposed project; and (3) how the SEA will use evidence to inform and continuously improve the design and implementation of its activities.

Strengths:

The applicant mentions that the SRCL program will be evaluated by an independent consultant from MA. Student test scores gathered statewide from DIBELS (K-2); state math tests (Grade 3-8) and the AL High School Graduation Exam (Grades 11-12) (p. 13).

Weaknesses:

Assessments of the pre-K children will be left to the LEAs to determine and will be limited to children's growth in language development (p. 13). This may not be optimal because (a) the assessments may not be comparable across the classrooms, schools, and sites, or be aligned with the goals of the SRCL, and (b) by specifying only language growth the applicant is not targeting the full range of early literacy.

In general, the evaluation plan is lacking in specific detail. The applicant mentions implementation data will be used as outcome measures in the evaluation. Implementation data are defined as "schedules, logs, surveys, observation reports, interviews" but it is not clear what is contained in these data. The applicant needs, to specify for example, what and who will be observed or surveyed, and when; and will how these data turn into measurable outcomes that map onto the goals of the project and represent indicators or direct measures of degree and quality of instruction (p. 13). These methods are not feasible and will not yield any systematic empirical results. Therefore, the plan to disseminate whatever data are collected is also compromised and unlikely to inform decision-making and planning.

Reader's Score: 3

5. How the SEA will disseminate information on project outcomes, disaggregated by student subgroup, and in formats that are easily understood by, and accessible to, the public, and how the SEA will make that information useful to varied groups (such as families, educators, researchers, other experts, early childhood education providers, and State leaders).

Sub Question

Strengths:

The applicant states data about the project will be disseminated via the website that will be developed for the SRCL. Online tutorials will be provided to help individuals/stakeholders understand the information that is contained on the website (p. 14).

Weaknesses:

none

Reader's Score: 4

Quality of the State subgrant competition - Quality of the State subgrant competition

1. In determining the quality of the applicant's proposed SRCL subgrant competition, the Secretary considers: See Sub-Criteria

Reader's Score: 17

Sub Question

1. The extent to which the SEA will run a rigorous, high-quality competition for subgrants, including how it will review and judge:

a) The LEA's or early childhood education provider's capacity to successfully implement its proposal.

Strengths:

(i) (a) The State of AL provides an initial, baseline plan for intending to use methods similar to their Reading First competition for the SRCL competition (p. 14). As mentioned in (a) above, letters will be sent out to school district superintendents with information about the competition. Access to a webinar will be provided and there will be a 2-day proposal preparation workshop. The work shop will provide information to potential applicants about the state literacy plan, how to select instructional materials that are based in scientific reading research and aligned with the state literacy objectives and professional development. (p. 16).

Subgrant applications will be reviewed and scored by reviewers who have demonstrated expertise in evidence-based literacy practices (i.e., training, experience, and education) (p. 16-18 & 20) and the State Literacy Team (p. 16-18).

These efforts will provide some organization to the subgrant competition.

Weaknesses:

Because only a "sample" scoring rubric was provided (p. 33), it was not possible to determine how the applicant will be able to effectively judge the capacity of the subgrantees to carry out a systematic literacy focused intervention. This is an important part of the proposed project and the scoring of the subgrant applications should be presented in considerably more detail.

The applicant mentions that the State Literacy Team will also review the applications (p. 17), but it is not clear what they will be specifically evaluating or why they will be reviewers. A rationale for their efforts and their responsibility should be provided.

Mention is also made of using 60 regional coaches to review the LEAs' relative capacity to carry out a comprehensive program (p. 18). However, it was not made clear specifically, what "regional coaches" do, what they will be evaluating in the subgrant review process, and on what basis.

Sub Question

Overall, the reviewing of the subgrants was not well described.

The applicant provided a sample subgrant application on pages 21-32. Most of this information was repeated from pages 10-11 and appeared in other parts of the proposal. Therefore, this "sample" did not add to, but rather duplicated what was already presented. Overall, this example was not helpful in determining the subgrantees' capacity to implement a high quality literacy program.

Reader's Score: 1

2. **(b) The extent to which each SRCL subgrant applicant has proposed a comprehensive high-quality literacy program that meets all of the requirements set out in paragraph (d) of the Additional Requirements section in the NIA and that:**

- (1) Addresses the needs of disadvantaged students and proposes to implement activities in schools and early learning programs with the highest levels of need and capacity for improvement.**
- (2) Is informed by a needs assessment described in the application and is designed to support effective teaching and to improve student achievement of struggling readers.**
- (3) Involves other agencies, nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations, and families in activities that promote the implementation of effective literacy instruction for disadvantaged students.**

Strengths:

(b) (1) (2) (3)

The applicant has set out an initial plan to screen the applicants and better target their efforts. For example, to determine whether the subgrant applications meet the requirements, a sort of triage process will be used to initially screen out LEAs or ECE providers that do not meet the absolute priorities. Accordingly, the applicant will require subgrant applicants to complete a pre-application form containing three items: the number/percentage of disadvantaged students; effectiveness in improving literacy in disadvantaged students; and effectiveness in providing professional development. Applicants will need to have a high or moderate rating on the three items (p. 15 & p. 18) to continue to the application process and these priority ratings will be used in making final subgrant awards.

Weaknesses:

Given the weak overall state plan for improving student literacy scores, the SEA may have difficulty in ensuring that the LEAs are proposing a high quality literacy plan outlined in the additional requirements. In other words, because the state plan is lacking in substance and detail, the alignment of the SEA efforts is somewhat compromised.

Reader's Score: 4

3. **(c) The extent to which each SRCL subgrant applicant demonstrates that it will implement a coherent strategy to improve literacy instruction that aligns activities under the SRCL subgrant with literacy instruction supported with other Federal funds, including with funds the entity receives under Title I, Title II-A, and Title III of the ESEA and, as appropriate, the Head Start Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, and State and local funds.**

Strengths:

The applicant will require each subgrantee to discuss how they would align with other funding sources.

Weaknesses:

The plan does not fully describe how the instructional efforts will be aligned with other efforts funded by other sources (p. 20).

Sub Question

Reader's Score: 1

- 4. The extent to which the SEA will give priority to LEAs or providers of early childhood education that propose to serve high-poverty schools or a high-poverty population, based on a definition of poverty and process for applying the priority provided by the State.**

Strengths:

Subgrant applicants will be required to describe how they identified disadvantaged students, their needs assessment process, and how literacy partnerships will be established (p. 19). Programs serving high poverty children will be given some priority. This will help to ensure the most needy children will be served by the applicant's efforts.

Weaknesses:

none

Reader's Score: 6

- 5. The extent to which the SEA will give priority to LEAs or providers of early childhood education whose applications are supported by the strongest available evidence.**

Strengths:

The applicant states that LEAs and ECE subgroup proposals who demonstrate a "strong evidence" base for improving student outcomes will be given priority (p. 20).

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not specify HOW the review reports obtained from the Florida Center for Reading Research and What Works Clearing House will inform their decisions to prioritize subgrantee applicants (p. 20).

Reader's Score: 2

- 6. The extent to which the SEA will develop or update a process, or use an existing process, to review and judge the evidence base and alignment with State standards for the curricula and materials that LEAs propose to use in implementing their subgrants, and how the SEA will make the process and results of any such review publicly available.**

Strengths:

The applicant describes a process that was used to develop their core reading programs four years ago (pages 20-21). They intend to use this method again to align LEA curricula and materials with state standards.

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not make it clear how this process will be made publicly available. Also, the applicant did not clarify how this prior method will be adopted for the current programmatic efforts (p. 20).

Reader's Score: 3

Project management - Project management

- 1. The Secretary considers the following factors in determining the quality of the project management plan: See Sub-Criteria**

Reader's Score: 4.5

Sub Question

- 1. (i) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.**

Strengths:

The applicant provides a time line detailing activities and responsibilities detailed out to year 2014 (p. 36-42). This is evidence of the applicant's long term planning.

Weaknesses:

The applicant intends to leverage the project staff efforts (and accordingly their salaries) by having the key SRCL staff, the director, and specialists work half time on the SRCL program while working the other half in their current positions (p. 4, 35). It is not clear, given the magnitude of the SRCL program that this is a good strategy. Overall, the project overall appears under-staffed (see comments below under resources) and this splitting of responsibilities/dual role for staff may compromise oversight of the SRCL program and its intended impact.

The project director seems overly committed (p. 34-35). It does not appear that there is enough key staff to adequately carry out this project.

Reader's Score: 2

- 2. (ii) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key personnel.**

Strengths:

none

Weaknesses:

There does not appear to be any staff with birth to pre-k (age 5) experience. There were only two CVs for key staff. It is difficult to judge the qualifications of the key staff to administer a large federally funded grant. These individuals do not have the relevant experience and training; especially with regard to ensuring grant compliance and oversight (p. 35).

Reader's Score: 0

- 3. (iii) The extent to which the State will ensure a diversity of perspectives in the design and implementation of the proposed project, including those of: families, teachers, early childhood education professionals, officials from other State and local agencies, Head Start Advisory Councils, professional organizations, institutions of higher education, community-based organizations, and libraries.**

Strengths:

In two sentences, the applicant states the State Literacy Team as being made up of a diverse group of individuals (p. 43). These individuals include many state officials and school and university personnel.

Weaknesses:

Parent representatives would broaden the scope.

Sub Question

Reader's Score: 2.5

Adequacy of resources - Adequacy of resources

1. The Secretary considers the following factors in determining the adequacy of resources for the proposed project: See Sub-Criteria

Reader's Score: 6.5

Sub Question

1. (i) The extent to which the costs described in the SEA's budget are reasonable in relation to the number of objectives, design, and potential significance of the proposed project .

Strengths:

The applicant has provided a budget and a narrative for how the funds will be allocated (p.46) and mentions there will be a plan for staggering the costs across the funding years across the LEAs.

Weaknesses:

The costs are not well-justified.

In the abstract on page 1 (and on p. 45) the applicant estimates serving 35 to 38,000 students at \$750 to \$1,000/ per student for two years. It would be helpful to know how this number was derived, how it might vary across age/grade and program, location, site. Also unclear, are the estimates of the number of sites, e.g., they range from 10 to 24 for ECE; 24 to 40 for elementary; 12 to 20 (each) for the middle and secondary. Given these rather large ranges it is difficult to determine relative costs and capacity. In contrast, the estimates for the allocation of the rest of the funds for the project operation itself, are quite detailed.

Apart from the clerks, the salaries for nearly everyone else are budgeted at an even 80K. It is unclear if that is an accurate estimate. The SRCL specialists seem high at 80K; given that the applicant mentioned working with faculty from the colleges of education for the professional development activities. The fringe benefits also appear high at 35%. The travel costs for the school personnel also seems high at \$240,000. Perhaps the applicant could make use of conference calls or web based communication (p. e 4) to reduce this line item.

Reader's Score: 1.5

2. (ii) The quality of the SEA's plan to ensure that SRCL subgrant funds are allocated as follows:
- * At least 15 percent to serve children from birth through age five.
 - * At least 40 percent to serve students in kindergarten through grade five.
 - * At least 40 percent to serve students in middle and high school, through grade 12, including an equitable distribution of funds between middle and high schools.

Strengths:

The applicant has followed the SRCL guidelines in allocating the funding at the relevant percentages across the three levels as specified in the criteria.

Weaknesses:

There was limited information about how the allocations will be maintained/ensured as specified in the proposal over the funding years (p. 24; 44).

Reader's Score: 2

Sub Question

3. (iii) **The extent to which the SEA will use the grant to leverage other State and Federal funds in order to maximize the impact of the grant and how it will support LEAs and early childhood education providers in integrating funds with other local, State, and Federal funds and in developing a plan for sustaining funding after the end of the subgrant.**

Strengths:

There is plan for leveraging funding (p. 4).

Weaknesses:

As mentioned above, the applicant intends to leverage the project staff salaries by having the key SRCL staff, the director and specialists work half time on the SRCL program while working the other half in their current positions (p. 4). It is not clear, given the magnitude of the SRCL program that this is a good strategy. Overall, the project overall appears under-staffed and this splitting of responsibilities/dual role for staff may compromise oversight of the SRCL program and its intended impact. There was no evidence of planning for sustaining these efforts once the funds have been exhausted.

Reader's Score: 1.5

4. (iv) **The extent to which the SEA will award SRCL subgrants of sufficient size to support projects that improve instruction for a significant number of students in the high-need schools or early learning programs serving children birth through five that the SRCL subgrantee would serve.**

Strengths:

The applicant will give priority to high need children and there are criteria in their intended review of the subgrantee applications to ensure LEAs are targeting these groups (p.45).

Weaknesses:

Because the applicant's estimates of the numbers of children to be served and the amount to be spent per child are not well-justified or explained, it is difficult to determine whether a significant number of students will be served and whether the efforts will make a significant impact (p. 45). For example, it would be helpful to know how the numerical and economic estimates were determined and that these are reasonable estimates to make a significant impact on high need children.

Reader's Score: 1.5

Priority Questions

Competitive Priority - Effective Use of Technology

1. **To meet this priority, an applicant must (1) propose to use technology--which may include technology to support principles of universal design for learning (as defined in the NIA)--to address student learning challenges; and (2) provide, in its application, an evidence-based (as defined in the NIA) rationale that its proposed technology program, practice, or strategy will increase student engagement and achievement or increase teacher effectiveness.**

Background: The effective use of technology is a critical tool for improving learning outcomes and providing teachers with high-quality professional development. Use of concepts, ideas, programming techniques, and computer-assisted text displays that give access to the text for students who cannot access traditional print, including limited-English-proficient children and students with disabilities, is a basic tenet of universal design for learning (as defined in the NIA) and can help improve students' literacy and language development and identify and address student learning challenges.

Strengths:

The applicant mentions a plan for developing a website devoted to the SRCL project to anchor implementation of the statewide literacy plan to these proposed efforts. The website is intended to provide what the applicant describes as a "wealth of resources" and will offer on-line courses, professional development, lesson plans, activity guides and so forth (p. 5) that are intended to assess and strengthen students' literacy development.

Weaknesses:

There was no clear plan for directly increasing students' literacy and language development.

Reader's Score: 3

Absolute Priority 1 - Improving Learning Outcomes

- 1. To meet this priority: An applicant must propose a project that is designed to improve school readiness and success through grade 12 in the area of language and literacy development for disadvantaged students.**

Background: Improving the language and literacy development of disadvantaged students is essential to improving academic achievement for these students in all content areas. The 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results show disproportionately large numbers of disadvantaged students struggle with developing the necessary pre-literacy and literacy skills needed to read, comprehend, and use language effectively. This results in persistent gaps in academic achievement through the elementary and secondary school years and in high school graduation rates, and presents civic and economic difficulties for these students later in life. Meeting the language and literacy needs of disadvantaged students, including limited-English-proficient students and students with disabilities, is a particular focus of the SRCL program.

Strengths:

criteria met.

The proposal outlines a plan for increasing literacy in children from birth to grade 12.

Weaknesses:

The applicant has not fully addressed the requirements for improving school readiness. The state literacy plan (p. 6-7) contains unclear "action steps". These steps describe, in part, WHAT the plan intends to do, but not HOW or WHY. The goals of the plan are not aligned with the "steps" and there is no clear description for how the "steps" would be addressed or accomplished. The one paragraph description of the literacy plan (page 11), and specifically the description of the "action planning section," do not convey (as the applicant maintains), a "powerful step-by-step plan to enhance high quality instruction". For example, it is not clear what is particularly "powerful" or novel about identifying responsibilities; listing needed resources; or setting target dates. These seem to be fairly common steps to take in any systematic intervention.

Reader's Score: 0

Absolute Priority 2 - Enabling More Data-Based Decision-Making

- 1. To meet this priority: An applicant must propose a project that is designed to collect, analyze, and use high-quality and timely data, especially on program participant outcomes, in accordance with privacy requirements (as defined in the NIA), to improve instructional practices, policies, and student outcomes in early learning settings and in elementary and secondary schools.**

Background: Accurate, timely, relevant, and appropriate data, and the effective use of that data for informed decision-making, are essential to the continuous improvement of children's literacy and language development. In developing comprehensive literacy plans and programs, it is important for

States to consider strategies that provide educators, as well as families and other key stakeholders, with the data they need and the capacity and training to use those data to improve school readiness, respond to the learning and academic needs of students, improve educator effectiveness, inform professional development practices and approaches, and make informed decisions that increase student pre-literacy, literacy, and language development.

Strengths:

criteria met.

The applicant has mentioned developing a website to guide the project, to inform stakeholders, and the public as needed (p. 35).

Weaknesses:

This criteria was not well addressed. The applicant mentions that implementation data will be used as outcome measures in the evaluation. Implementation data are defined as "schedules, logs, surveys, observation reports, interviews" but it is not clear what is contained in these data. The applicant needs, to specify for example, what a "log" contains, what schedules will be examined, who will be observed or surveyed, and when. There is no rationale for collecting these data and it is not clear how these data will become measurable outcomes that map onto the goals of the project. It is not clear these items (implementation data as the applicant refers to them) represent indicators or direct measures of degree and quality of instruction (p. 13). These methods are not feasible and are not likely to yield any systematic empirical results that can inform the project implementation and decision-making.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 6/23/11 12:00 AM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 6/23/11 12:00 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Alabama State Department of Education -- Department of Education Instructional Services Divisio
(S371C110009)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Quality of State-level activities		
Quality of State-level activities		
1. State-level activities	37	21
Sub Total	37	21
Quality of the State subgrant competition		
Quality of the State subgrant competition		
1. State subgrant comp	28	19.5
Sub Total	28	19.5
Project management		
Project management		
1. Project management	15	7.5
Sub Total	15	7.5
Adequacy of resources		
Adequacy of resources		
1. Adequacy of resources	20	9
Sub Total	20	9
Priority Questions		
Competitive Priority		
Effective Use of Technology		
1. Competitive Priority	5	4
Sub Total	5	4
Absolute Priority 1		
Improving Learning Outcomes		
1. Absolute Priority 1	0	0
Sub Total	0	0
Absolute Priority 2		
Enabling More Data-Based Decision-Making		
1. Absolute Priority 2	0	0
Sub Total	0	0
Total	105	61.0

Technical Review Form

Panel #3 - SRCL - 3: 84.371C

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: Alabama State Department of Education -- Department of Education Instructional Services Divisio (S371C110009)

Questions

Quality of State-level activities - Quality of State-level activities

1. In determining the quality of State-level activities, the Secretary considers: See Sub-Criteria

Reader's Score: 21

Sub Question

1. How the SEA will carry out the required State-level activities (described in the Additional Requirements section of the NIA) and how it will align those activities with its comprehensive State literacy plan.

Strengths:

Applicant provides a synthesized discussion of how they intend to carry out the state-level activities. Applicant provides sound foundational information that illustrates prior literacy related efforts across the last several years beginning with the Reading First Fund in 2002. The foundational structures already in place (e.g. Alabama Reading Initiative ---ARI and Office of School Readiness) provide much to build upon (pages 2-4). Clear references are provided to the Alabama Action Plan for Literacy: Birth Through Grade 12 with areas articulated on p. 12.

Weaknesses:

Limited specifics are provided regarding the anticipated increases that are targeted within and across each of the four outcomes (p.11). For example the the proposal lacks specificity in discussing how the applicant will ensure that LEAs implement an intervention that ensures all childre are served appropriately; and monitors and tracks the implementation and outcomes at all levels. Given the magnitude of this project, the dual role of key personnel may not provided needed oversight (p. 40).

Reader's Score: 5

2. The SEA's goals for improving student literacy outcomes throughout the State for all students (e.g., limited-English-proficient students and students with disabilities), including a description of the data (which may include data gathered through a needs assessment) that the SEA has considered or will consider and a clear and credible path that the SEA will take to achieve these goals with the support of its LEAs.

Strengths:

Experience with large scale projects points to the capacity of this applicant in being able to fulfill the demands of the current proposal. The applicant describes the development of the State Literacy Team and that plans are underway for statewide implementation (p. 4). Applicant articulates committee plans for collaboration and communication with multiple stakeholders (e.g. Steering Committee, State Literacy Team, Institutions of Higher Education, Parents and Community).

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

The project goals are not stated in a way that they can be easily operationalized and do not seem to target the full range of an effective literacy intervention. There is no evidence of a clear and credible path to achieve all goals stated on page 10.

The applicant provides insufficient information regarding indicators about specific gains across the project path (p. 12).

Reader's Score: 5

- 3. How the SEA will provide technical assistance and support to its SRCL subgrantees (and, at its discretion, to other LEAs or early childhood education providers) to enable them to implement a high-quality comprehensive literacy program and to improve student achievement in core academic subjects.**

Strengths:

The State of Alabama explains effective technical assistance efforts with plans for a new web site (p. 6) along with webinars and field supports.

Weaknesses:

Insufficient information (e.g. professional development) is provided that focuses on a credible path for achieving goals for improving student literacy outcomes throughout the State for students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities.

Reader's Score: 4

- 4. How the SEA will evaluate the State's progress in improving achievement in literacy for children and youth from birth through grade 12, including disadvantaged students, including: (1) whether the evaluation will be conducted by an independent evaluator (whose role in the project is limited solely to conducting the evaluation); (2) whether the evaluation will use methods that are thorough, feasible, and appropriate to the objectives of the proposed project; and (3) how the SEA will use evidence to inform and continuously improve the design and implementation of its activities.**

Strengths:

Synthesis of overview of statewide accountability data profiles provided on pp. 8-11 illustrate progress with current initiatives but also points to the need for continued focused literacy needs.

The applicant mentions that the SRCL will be evaluated by an independent consultant and that student scores from DIBELS (K-2); state math test (Grades 3-8) and the AL High School Graduation Exam (Grades 11-12) will be used (p. 13).

Weaknesses:

Insufficient information (e.g. evaluation plan and use of assessment tools) is provided that focuses on a credible path for achieving goals for improving student literacy outcomes throughout the State especially as this relates to students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities.

The evaluation plan is lacking in specific detail. The applicant mentions implementation data will be used as outcome measures in the evaluation. Implementation data are defined as "schedules, logs, surveys, observation reports, interview" but it is not clear what is contained in these data. The applicant needs to specify for example, what and who will be observed or interviewed and how those data will inform measureable outcomes that objectively determine if the goals are met.

Sub Question

Reader's Score: 4

- 5. How the SEA will disseminate information on project outcomes, disaggregated by student subgroup, and in formats that are easily understood by, and accessible to, the public, and how the SEA will make that information useful to varied groups (such as families, educators, researchers, other experts, early childhood education providers, and State leaders).**

Strengths:

Applicant describes reasonable efforts to disseminate project progress with multiple stakeholders (p. 15). For example, the applicant plans for a webinar to be used to share information with participating school and early education centers. Recommendations will also be shared with the State Literacy Team.

Weaknesses:

Insufficient information regarding how results will be disaggregated by student subgroups (particularly for students with limited English proficiency and those with disabilities) (p. 15). For example it is not clear how disaggregated data by subgroups (e.g. students with disabilities) can be easily accessed by the public.

Reader's Score: 3

Quality of the State subgrant competition - Quality of the State subgrant competition

- 1. In determining the quality of the applicant's proposed SRCL subgrant competition, the Secretary considers: See Sub-Criteria**

Reader's Score: 19.5

Sub Question

- 1. The extent to which the SEA will run a rigorous, high-quality competition for subgrants, including how it will review and judge:**
a) The LEA's or early childhood education provider's capacity to successfully implement its proposal.

Strengths:

The applicant explains effective efforts such as requiring a local needs assessments as part of the application process (p. 7), providing information regarding five essential elements in the action steps for assessment (p. 7) and articulating a timeframe (p. 14) for that announcement of the subgrants by the superintendent and electronically with accompanying training.

The subgrant applications will be reviewed and scored by reviewers who have demonstrated expertise in evidence-based literacy practices (pp. 16-18) and the State Literacy Team (pp. 16-18).

Weaknesses:

The applicant provides a sample scoring rubric on page 33. It is not clear as to how the applicant will be able to effectively judge the capacity of the subgrantees to carry out a systematic literacy focused intervention. This is an important part of the proposed project and the scoring of the subgrant application should provide for guidance. The applicant provides a sample subgrant application on pages 21-32. Most of the information was the same as that provided on pages 10-11 and appeared in other parts of the proposal. Therefore, this sample did not add to but rather duplicated what was already presented. Overall, this example was not helpful in determining the subgrantees capacity to implement a high quality literacy program.

Sub Question

Reader's Score: 1.5

2. (b) The extent to which each SRCL subgrant applicant has proposed a comprehensive high-quality literacy program that meets all of the requirements set out in paragraph (d) of the Additional Requirements section in the NIA and that:
- (1) Addresses the needs of disadvantaged students and proposes to implement activities in schools and early learning programs with the highest levels of need and capacity for improvement.
 - (2) Is informed by a needs assessment described in the application and is designed to support effective teaching and to improve student achievement of struggling readers.
 - (3) Involves other agencies, nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations, and families in activities that promote the implementation of effective literacy instruction for disadvantaged students.

Strengths:

Applicant articulates how existing structures (ARIU technical assistance, p. 13) will be mobilized to provide professional development.

The applicant explains an adequate description of the hierarchy of the work supported by the regional teams (p. 13). The applicant has developed an extensive listing of the components that subgrant applicants must submit (pp. 22-34).

It is appropriate that the requirements of subgrant applications will be planned for in subsequent training workshops as needed professional development will surface as implementation unfolds (p. 35).

Weaknesses:

Given the weak overall state plan for improving student literacy scores, the SEA may have difficulty in ensuring that the LEAs are proposing high quality literacy plans as outlined in the additional requirements. This means that because the state plan is lacking in detail and substance, the alignment of the SEA efforts may be compromised. LEAs will rely on the SEA for leadership with direction in implementing activities in schools and early learning programs that is informed by a needs assessment.

Reader's Score: 5

3. (c) The extent to which each SRCL subgrant applicant demonstrates that it will implement a coherent strategy to improve literacy instruction that aligns activities under the SRCL subgrant with literacy instruction supported with other Federal funds, including with funds the entity receives under Title I, Title II-A, and Title III of the ESEA and, as appropriate, the Head Start Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, and State and local funds.

Strengths:

The applicant has developed an extensive listing of the components that subgrant applicants must submit (pp. 22-34). The requirements of subgrant applications will be described in training workshops. The applicant will require each subgrantee to discuss how they will align with other funding sources.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not fully describe how the instructional efforts will be aligned with other efforts funded by other sources (p.20).

Reader's Score: 2

4. The extent to which the SEA will give priority to LEAs or providers of early childhood education that propose to serve high-poverty schools or a high-poverty population, based on a definition of poverty and process for applying the priority provided by the State.

Sub Question

Strengths:

Subgrant applicants will be required to describe how they identified disadvantaged students, their needs assessment process, and how literacy partnerships will be established (p. 19). Programs serving high poverty students will be given some priority which helps to ensure that those in most need get services.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 6

5. The extent to which the SEA will give priority to LEAs or providers of early childhood education whose applications are supported by the strongest available evidence.

Strengths:

The State of Alabama explains an effective array of supports for subgrant applicants (p. 17), clearly stressing the need for evidence-based resources that have been thoroughly vetted (e.g. Florida Center for Reading Research, What Works Clearinghouse and Doing What Works, p. 17). The applicant states that those subgrant proposal who demonstrate a "strong evidence" base for improving student outcomes will be given priority" (p. 20).

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not specify how the review reports obtained from the Florida Center for Reading Research and What Works Clearing House will inform their decisions to prioritize subgrant applications (p. 20).

Reader's Score: 2

6. The extent to which the SEA will develop or update a process, or use an existing process, to review and judge the evidence base and alignment with State standards for the curricula and materials that LEAs propose to use in implementing their subgrants, and how the SEA will make the process and results of any such review publicly available.

Strengths:

The State of Alabama effectively describes a comprehensive plan that relies on the published findings of the national reading panel (NRP) in aligning Alabama's reading standards (p. 21) and identifies that alignment in the Expert Review of Core Reading Programs (p. 21). The applicant intends to use their process that has been previously used to align LEA curricula and materials with state standards.

Weaknesses:

The process for public availability is not clear. The applicant did not clarify how the prior method will be adopted for the current programmic efforts (p. 20).

Reader's Score: 3

Project management - Project management

1. The Secretary considers the following factors in determining the quality of the project management plan: See Sub-Criteria

Reader's Score: 7.5

Sub Question

1. (i) **The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.**

Strengths:

Applicant is maximizing the benefits of existing structures and stakeholders (e.g. State Literacy Team, the SDE Steering Committee and the SRCL staff, p. 35).

The stated timeline (p. 37-42) provides an adequate overview of tasks and responsible personnel across a period from the onset of the project until 2014. This is evidence of the applicant's long term planning.

Weaknesses:

Insufficient information provided regarding milestones of targets as aligned with project goals and outcomes. This project may be understaffed as evidenced by the magnitude of the responsibilities of the project director.

Reader's Score: 3.5

2. (ii) **The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key personnel.**

Strengths:

The applicant provided a clear listing of responsibilities for the Project Director, (p. 35).

The applicant provided an adequate overview of positions for key personnel, (Project Director and four specialists), pp. 42-44.

Weaknesses:

Insufficient information provided in vita for the project director regarding her ability to manage a budget and ensure compliance to quality assurance standards.

The applicant did not provide evidence of expertise in birth to five.

Insufficient information provided on qualifications of any personell to meet the needs of disadvantaged youth.

Reader's Score: 1.5

3. (iii) **The extent to which the State will ensure a diversity of perspectives in the design and implementation of the proposed project, including those of: families, teachers, early childhood education professionals, officials from other State and local agencies, Head Start Advisory Councils, professional organizations, institutions of higher education, community-based organizations, and libraries.**

Strengths:

The applicant provides a commitment to eliciting a diversity of perspectives (p.44) including a high school principal, and elementary reading coach, and a university professor of special education in addition to an array of personnel in state-level positions (e.g. state legislature, the State Board of Education, the state Teacher's association, and the state Reading Association).

Weaknesses:

Insufficient explanation of who will hold expertise unique to the field of disadvantaged students, especially related to the issue of disproportionality, special education and linguistic and cultural diversity (p. 44).

Parent perspectives would broaden the scope.

Sub Question

Reader's Score: 2.5

Adequacy of resources - Adequacy of resources

1. The Secretary considers the following factors in determining the adequacy of resources for the proposed project: See Sub-Criteria

Reader's Score: 9

Sub Question

1. (i) The extent to which the costs described in the SEA's budget are reasonable in relation to the number of objectives, design, and potential significance of the proposed project .

Strengths:

The applicant acknowledges staggered expenditures across the period of the grant (p. 46).

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not provide a clear justification for the budget. For example how the applicant is determining how many sites will be planned and how the relative costs per student will be allocated.

The applicant estimates serving up to 38,000 students at \$750 to \$1,000.00 per student for two years. It would be helpful to know how this number was determined, how it might vary across ages and grades and programs.

Additionally, it would be helpful to understand the estimates of the number of students per site. For example, the applicant mentions that the numbers range from 10-24 for ECE; 24-40 for elementary; and 12-20 for both middle and secondary sites. It is difficult to determine the relative costs and capacity due to those large ranges.

The travel costs (\$240,000.00) appear high and it would be helpful to hear how webinar delivery might be useful.

Reader's Score: 1.5

2. (ii) The quality of the SEA's plan to ensure that SRCL subgrant funds are allocated as follows:
- * At least 15 percent to serve children from birth through age five.
 - * At least 40 percent to serve students in kindergarten through grade five.
 - * At least 40 percent to serve students in middle and high school, through grade 12, including an equitable distribution of funds between middle and high schools.

Strengths:

The applicant acknowledges the requirements of the funding allocations (p. 44) at the three levels and percentages required.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 4

3. (iii) The extent to which the SEA will use the grant to leverage other State and Federal funds in order to maximize the impact of the grant and how it will support LEAs and early childhood education providers in integrating funds with other local, State, and Federal funds and in developing a plan for sustaining funding after the end of the subgrant.

Sub Question

Strengths:

The applicant provides a plan to leverage funding (p. 4).

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not provide a clear plan for sustainability (p. 44). For example it would be helpful to learn what proactive steps will be taken to ensure efforts carry-on after funds have been exhausted.

Reader's Score: 2

- 4. (iv) **The extent to which the SEA will award SRCL subgrants of sufficient size to support projects that improve instruction for a significant number of students in the high-need schools or early learning programs serving children birth through five that the SRCL subgrantee would serve.**

Strengths:

The applicant will give priority to children in high needs schools and provides criteria in their intended review of the subgrantee applications to ensure LEAs are targeting these groups (p. 45).

Weaknesses:

Incomplete description of a strategic plan for identifying disadvantaged youth and what supports will be provided in the webinar trainings to help local education agencies identify those students (p. 45-46).

Reader's Score: 1.5

Priority Questions

Competitive Priority - Effective Use of Technology

- 1. **To meet this priority, an applicant must (1) propose to use technology--which may include technology to support principles of universal design for learning (as defined in the NIA)--to address student learning challenges; and (2) provide, in its application, an evidence-based (as defined in the NIA) rationale that its proposed technology program, practice, or strategy will increase student engagement and achievement or increase teacher effectiveness.**

Background: The effective use of technology is a critical tool for improving learning outcomes and providing teachers with high-quality professional development. Use of concepts, ideas, programming techniques, and computer-assisted text displays that give access to the text for students who cannot access traditional print, including limited-English-proficient children and students with disabilities, is a basic tenet of universal design for learning (as defined in the NIA) and can help improve students' literacy and language development and identify and address student learning challenges.

Strengths:

Applicant is committed to developing and delivering online professional development (p. 12). The proposed website will be a supportive way to provide the public with information about the status of this project (p.15). The proposed new website will provide house what the applicant calls a "wealth of information" including on-line courses, professional development, and lesson plans (p. 5).

Weaknesses:

There is no clear plan for directly increasing students' literacy and language development with new technology.

Reader's Score: 4

Absolute Priority 1 - Improving Learning Outcomes

1. **To meet this priority: An applicant must propose a project that is designed to improve school readiness and success through grade 12 in the area of language and literacy development for disadvantaged students.**

Background: Improving the language and literacy development of disadvantaged students is essential to improving academic achievement for these students in all content areas. The 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results show disproportionately large numbers of disadvantaged students struggle with developing the necessary pre-literacy and literacy skills needed to read, comprehend, and use language effectively. This results in persistent gaps in academic achievement through the elementary and secondary school years and in high school graduation rates, and presents civic and economic difficulties for these students later in life. Meeting the language and literacy needs of disadvantaged students, including limited-English-proficient students and students with disabilities, is a particular focus of the SRCL program.

Strengths:

Comprehensive efforts across the required space of school readiness.
This priority was met.

Weaknesses:

Limited attention to the unique challenges those with disabilities and those from diverse backgrounds and with diverse linguistic needs display.
No data provided regarding disproportionality patterns across the state and within specific school districts.

Reader's Score: 0

Absolute Priority 2 - Enabling More Data-Based Decision-Making

1. **To meet this priority: An applicant must propose a project that is designed to collect, analyze, and use high-quality and timely data, especially on program participant outcomes, in accordance with privacy requirements (as defined in the NIA), to improve instructional practices, policies, and student outcomes in early learning settings and in elementary and secondary schools.**

Background: Accurate, timely, relevant, and appropriate data, and the effective use of that data for informed decision-making, are essential to the continuous improvement of children's literacy and language development. In developing comprehensive literacy plans and programs, it is important for States to consider strategies that provide educators, as well as families and other key stakeholders, with the data they need and the capacity and training to use those data to improve school readiness, respond to the learning and academic needs of students, improve educator effectiveness, inform professional development practices and approaches, and make informed decisions that increase student pre-literacy, literacy, and language development.

Strengths:

There is a commitment to utilize the benefits of the proposed website to report project progress.
This priority was met.

Weaknesses:

Limited discussion of individual student performance patterns to report individual student growth.
Limited discussion regarding the intersection of student performance on individual student literacy plans or individualized educational plans (IEPs).

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

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