

Status: Submitted

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

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education -- Curriculum and Instruction Office of Literacy (S371C110016)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Quality of State-level activities		
Quality of State-level activities		
1. State-level activities	37	20.5
Sub Total	37	20.5
Quality of the State subgrant competition		
Quality of the State subgrant competition		
1. State subgrant comp	28	27
Sub Total	28	27
Project management		
Project management		
1. Project management	15	10.5
Sub Total	15	10.5
Adequacy of resources		
Adequacy of resources		
1. Adequacy of resources	20	13.5
Sub Total	20	13.5
Priority Questions		
Competitive Priority		
Effective Use of Technology		
1. Competitive Priority	5	4.5
Sub Total	5	4.5
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	76.0

Technical Review Form

Panel #9 - SRCL - 9: 84.371C

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education -- Curriculum and Instruction Office of Literacy (S371C110016)

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: 20.5

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:

1. An overview of how the SEA will carry out the required State-level activities is provided (p. e1-e4).
2. The overview provides an appropriate plan for carrying out the required state-level activities.
3. The overview provides information regarding how the state will develop, update, implement, and improve the Statewide Literacy Plan through use of the SRCL funds (p. e1).
4. A brief discussion of how SRCL funds will align with the use of Federal and State funds and programs is provided (p. e3).
5. A brief discussion of how the state will make the process and results of the subgrant applicants publicly available is included (p. e3).
6. The plan includes an overview of how the state will ensure the subgrants serve birth to grade 12 (p. e4).

Weaknesses:

1. The plan states that subgrants will not cover all ages birth to grade 12. Instead, the subgrants will cover selected grades throughout this range of ages (p. e3). Due to this decision, a substantial amount of students, to include disadvantaged students, may not be served. In addition, no criteria is presented regarding how the specific grades will be chosen which raises a concern regarding how the grades will be selected.
2. Details regarding the assessment and curriculum plans are limited (p. e4). While a plan is provided for assessing students, the specifics of how the assessments will align with curriculum and classroom instruction is not clear. This is a necessary component of an assessment plan to ensure the adequacy of data collected for the purpose of improving instruction.
3. Descriptions for all areas provided are vague lacking specific details for plan implementation (p.e1-e4).
4. The plan lacks relevancy to early childhood (Pre-K). The plan may need to be modified to ensure an adequate, quality plan to address the needs of early childhood providers and children. Modification may include standards and criteria specific to early childhood as Common Core does not include Pre-K.

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

Sub Question

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:

1. Previous data indicating an analysis of the achievement gap is provided (p. e6).
2. The chart provided demonstrates an effort of the state to analyze the gap between percentage of disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students scoring proficient or above in English Language Arts (p. e6).
3. Two objectives for the state are provided to include: 1) Raising literacy achievement (p.e6-e8); 2) Improving the Impact of Professional Development (p. e8-e11).

Weaknesses:

1. While the state demonstrates an effort to analyze the results of disadvantaged students in comparison to non-disadvantaged students, no clear path is presented describing how the data will be used to close the gap among disadvantaged children when compared to the whole group (p. e6-e11).
2. The objectives provided are broad making it unclear how the objectives will specifically address disadvantaged students for the purpose of closing the achievement gap (p. e6-e11).
3. A continuous process of reviewing data and implementing lessons learned from the reviewed data for the purpose of improving programs in order to close the achievement gap is not included. A specific plan for frequent review of data followed with modification of the program in order to improve instruction needs to be included.
4. Students with disabilities and English Language Learners should be included in the plan.

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:

1. A focused, detailed plan for providing technical assistance and support to subgrantees is provided (p. e11-e16).
2. The plan indicates that technical support to help applicants during the application process as well as throughout the duration of the grant is provided (p. e11).
3. A five-person SRCL leadership team will be created for the purpose of providing technical assistance (p. e12).
4. As indicated in the state's third objective, preferred providers will be required to provide all professional development to subgrant locations (p. e12-e13).
5. As discussed in the state's fourth objective, technical assistance will also be provided regarding the use of assessments (p. e13-e14).
6. A list of classroom assessments to be used for the SCRL is provided (p. e14-e15).
7. In addition to these assessments, curriculum-embedded assessments will be used (p. e15-e16).
8. The fifth objective presented indicates technical assistance to be provided for the purpose of using technology and media strategically to enhance learning (p. e16).

Weaknesses:

1. Details regarding the specifics of on-site technical assistance could provide more detail. Specific roles of key individuals, such as on-site instructional coaches, is not described. While this information is necessary, it is not substantial enough to constitute a reduction in points as such roles have likely been previously established. This, however, is information that should be determined prior to the institution of the grant if such decisions have not yet been made.

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**

Sub Question

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:

1. A plan for who will design and conduct the evaluations as well as what evaluations will be conducted is clearly indicated.
2. The University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (UMDI) will be conducting the evaluation measures for the SRCL grant for the state (p. e18).
3. UMDI will assist the SRCL leadership team in ensuring that evaluation activities are integrated within program activities and that findings are reviewed in a timely manner (p. e18).
4. Specific research questions to be addressed throughout the duration of the grant are adequate to the scope of the program plan (p.e19).
5. Data will be collected from the following sources: key informant interviews, participant surveys, and student assessment data (p. e19-e21).
6. Data will be disaggregated to indicate performance of disadvantaged students at the following points: 4-year-olds, 5th-grade students, 8th-grade students, and high school students (p. e21-e22).

Weaknesses:

1. A plan for using data collected to improve the program for the purpose of meeting the needs of all students, including disadvantaged students, is unclear. While the specific points of data collection and data disaggregation are included, the use of this data to improve instruction for the purpose of improving scores among all students is insufficient.
2. A specific plan indicating how data will be used to inform instruction within the classroom and/or modify the program plan as necessary to ensure literacy improvement among students should be included.
3. Standards and assessments specific to early childhood are not included. Common Core Standards do not include Pre-Kindergarten.
4. Data should be disaggregated for all student groups involved in the SRCL program. Disaggregating data among specified grades only diminishes the effectiveness of data collection and analysis for the purpose of improving classroom instruction for all students.

Reader's Score: 5

- 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:

1. A clear plan to provide data to stakeholders and educators is provided.
2. UMDI will publicly post the evaluation reports on the state education website (p. e22).
3. Evaluation reports will be discussed in one of the quarterly seminars for professional development and at the annual two-day summit conference (p. e22-e23).
4. Regional meetings will be held for all birth to age 5 providers, districts, and colleges (p. e23).
5. Literacy specialists will disseminate information to pre-k to 12 districts (p. e23).
6. Annual reports will be presented to the Statewide Literacy Team, state boards of education, at conferences, and in publications (p. e23).
7. A brochure and website will be created to inform school communities (p. e23).

Weaknesses:

1. The plan to provide data to families and the general public is limited. A statement indicating that a brochure and website will be created is included (p. e23). However, a plan for how the brochure and website information will be clearly provided to families and communities is lacking.
2. The plan for disseminating data to the community does not take into consideration families who are English Language Learners or of low socioeconomic status. Information should be provided in various languages appropriate to the population. Information should be provided through avenues which do not

Sub Question

require the internet and a computer.

Reader's Score: 2.5

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: 27

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:

- 1. A detailed plan for awarding subgrants is provided which includes a draft of the RFP indicating how the SEA will review and judge the LEA's or early childhood education provider's capacity to successfully implement its proposal. (Attachment p. e0).
- 2. The RFP includes a rubric for scoring the grants and definitions of terms derived from the Federal SRCL grant (p. e24).
- 3. Two people will review each proposal, scoring it independently, and meeting to arrive at a consensus score (p. e24).
- 4. The comments will be reviewed and ranked by the Office of Literacy and Humanities and MDEEC staff (p. e24).

Weaknesses:

No notable weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 3

- 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:

- 1. A detailed plan for awarding subgrants is provided to include a draft of the RFP (Attachment p. e0).
- 2. The RFP includes a rubric for scoring the grants and definitions of terms derived from the Federal SRCL grant (p. e24).
- 3. Two people will review each proposal, scoring it independently, and meeting to arrive at a consensus score (p. e24).

Sub Question

4. The comments will be reviewed and ranked by the Office of Literacy and Humanities and MDEEC staff (p. e24).
5. Final funding amounts will be approved by the Commissioner (p. e24).
6. Funding amounts will be balanced to ensure the required 15/40/40 (p. e24).
7. Funding is also based upon the number of students served (p. e26).
8. Providers must meet established criteria for percentage of disadvantaged students served in order to be eligible for funding (p. e25).
9. Fund use by subgrants must be consistent with established priorities (p. e25).
10. The RFP application for the subgrant must be informed by a needs assessment and be designed to support effective teaching for the purpose of improving literacy development (p. e28).
11. The RFP application for the subgrant must include how other agencies, nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations, and families are involved (p. e28).

Weaknesses:

No notable weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 8

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:

1. The RFP application for subgrants must demonstrate how the LEA or early childhood provider is aligning activities under the SRCL grant with literacy instruction supported with other funds, such as Title I, Title II, Head Start, etc. (p. e28).

Weaknesses:

1. Examples or specific criteria for aligning the SRCL grant activities with currently funded literacy activities would be helpful to LEAs and early childhood providers for completing the RFP.
2. Inclusion of more specifics or criteria regarding this requirement will help ensure the inclusion of the alignment of SRCL funds to existing Federal funds.

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:

1. Subgrants are open only to providers serving in a school with a high-poverty population. Providers must serve a population in which at least 34% or more of the children are eligible for free or reduced lunch or qualify as a high-poverty provider using other measures as published in the Federal Register (p. e29).

Weaknesses:

No notable weaknesses were found. .

Reader's Score: 6

5. **The extent to which the SEA will give priority to LEAs or providers of early childhood education**

Sub Question

whose applications are supported by the strongest available evidence.

Strengths:

1. Inclusion of research evidence is a strong part of the scoring guide in the subgrant RFP (p. e29).
2. Research and data can come from a variety of sources to include direct experience with interventions or professional development (p. e29).
3. Reviewers will be provided with a reference list of relevant research for use in scoring the RFP (p. e29).
4. The research and data section is worth 27 out of the 100 points on the RFP (p. e30). This indicates the SEA has placed the evidence base provided by the LEAs or providers of early childhood education as a clear priority in the selection process.

Weaknesses:

No notable weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: 4

- 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:

1. While the state is not a textbook adoption state possessing an established process for reviewing and judging curricula and materials, a preliminary plan for judging curricula & materials is included (p. e30).
2. The plan indicates that the state will work with researchers to develop the criteria for use in evaluating the proposed materials (p. e30).
3. A preliminary scoring chart for the Criteria for Reading Materials is included (Table 4, p. e31).

Weaknesses:

1. Since the state is not a textbook adoption state, knowledge regarding the process of aligning standards to curricula and materials may be limited. While this is not substantial enough to deduct points as a preliminary plan is included, it is suggested that the researchers chosen to assist in this process should be well versed in the process of choosing curricula and materials based upon established standards. In addition, it is desirable that this process must be at the implementation stage upon the beginning of the grant.

Reader's Score: 5

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: 10.5

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.**

Sub Question

Strengths:

1. A complete timeline of the grant period with specified responsibilities and milestones is included (Table V: SRCL Timeline 2010-2016, p. e34).
2. The timeline includes the dates of completion, the specific tasks to be completed, and the person(s) responsible for completing the tasks (Table V, p. e34).
3. The timeline is for September 2010 to September 2016 (p. e34-e40).

Weaknesses:

1. The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives within budget is unclear. While specific tasks are listed along with the persons responsible for completing the tasks, how the budget will support these tasks is not always clear. The addition of budgetary categories, as well as any other funding such as Federal or State that is necessary for the completion of these tasks, within the timeline would provide more clarification while ensuring the project remains within budget.

Reader's Score: 4.5

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

Strengths:

1. The Director of Literacy and Humanities and the Associate Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction will be responsible for the overall administration of SRCL (p. e41). Based on the curriculum vitae of the Director of Literacy and Humanities (p. e7-e9), the individual currently is leading the implementation of the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts, supervises staff in the area of literacy, and previously developed state standards in English language arts. Through previous leadership positions related to literacy, the individual seems to possess the skills necessary to lead the SRCL grant. Based on the curriculum vitae of the Associate Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction (p. e2-e6), the individual currently oversees the Office of Literacy and previously served as Assistant Superintendent of Schools along with an array of other positions. In addition, the individual holds a Doctor of Education degree. While literacy does not seem to be a strength of the individual, the individual clearly possesses the background necessary to oversee the administration of the SRCL grant.
2. The proposed plan states that literacy staff members will provide expert support and professional development for districts (p. e41).
3. The proposed plan states that regional literacy specialists provide ongoing professional development directly to districts (p. e41-42).
4. The budget allocates funds to hire three new full-time educational specialists and assign one senior member of the Office of Literacy for the implementation of SRCL (p. e42).
5. Experts in various other areas will also be asked to assist (p. e42). While not all key personnel possess a literacy background, most have a background in a related area such as the grant process, technology, etc.

Weaknesses:

1. While the plan states that DESE literacy staff members will provide expert support and professional development for districts, it is unclear which of the individuals who provided curriculum vitae is considered DESE literacy staff. Therefore, qualifications of the literacy staff members for the purpose of providing expert support and professional development for districts for the SRCL grant cannot be determined.
2. While the plan indicates that regional literacy specialists will provide ongoing professional development, it is unclear which of the individuals who provided curriculum vitae is considered a regional literacy specialist. As such, the qualifications of the literacy specialists to provide ongoing professional development directly to districts for the SRCL grant cannot be determined.
3. Based on curriculum vitae (Attachment) along with the description of the qualifications of key personnel (p. e41, e42), the roles related to the SRCL grant for the individuals who provided curriculum vitae is unclear. In addition, not all individuals who provided curriculum vitae possess a background related to literacy development.
4. The plan for hiring new staff simply indicates educational specialists, not literacy specialists (p. e42). A job description or other details need to be provided to ensure the new staff members possess a strong background in literacy.

Sub Question

Reader's Score: 3

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:

1. The State Literacy Team includes stakeholders from an array of backgrounds to include members of higher education, public schools, private consultants, organization, libraries, the College Board, Principals Association, Writing Project, Business Alliance for Education, Reading Recovery Council, and Reach Out and Read (p. e43).

Weaknesses:

1. While the State Literacy Team includes stakeholders from an array of backgrounds (p. e43), the inclusion of families in the State Literacy Team is lacking.

Reader's Score: 3

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: 13.5

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:

1. A detailed budget is provided indicating reasonable costs per category in relation to the presented plan. Allocations include personnel, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contractual costs, space use, consultants/trainers, and indirect costs totaling \$3, 158, 932.00 over the course of 5 years (Attachment p. e0-e6).
2. Indirect costs equal \$591,068.00 for 5 years (p. e6).
3. The majority of funds are allocated to the subgrants at a total of \$71,250,000.00 for 5 years with \$14,250,000.00 awarded yearly (p. e6).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 10

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.**

Sub Question

Strengths:

1. An overview of how the SEA will allocate funds to subgrants is provided.
2. A statement that the distribution of subgrant funds will be monitored to ensure 15/40/40 per SRCL requirements is included (p. e45).

Weaknesses:

1. No specific plan is provided indicating how the SEA will ensure the 15/40/40 requirement. While a statement is provided, a description of the logistics necessary to ensure the funding allocation is lacking. A detailed logistical plan to ensure the 15/40/40 requirement is needed at the implementation of the grant to ensure the funding requirement is followed.

Reader's Score: 1

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:

1. The SEA describes how the SRCL grant is connected to state initiatives (p. e46).
2. The plan describes how the grant's emphasis is similar to the states tiered system of support (p. e46).
3. The SEA indicates that a state literacy line item of approximately \$2 million per year can be used to support the initiatives of SRCL (p. e46).

Weaknesses:

1. While the SEA states that a line item of \$2 million can be used to support the grant, a specific alignment of SRCL grant funds to state and federal monies is unclear. Details regarding the alignment of these funds with the SRCL grant funds are necessary to determine the extent to which activities will continue.

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.**

Strengths:

1. The SEA anticipates being able to fund approximately 100 subgrants (p. e46). The goal to fund this number seems to indicate that the SEA will award SRCL subgrants to serve a significant number of students.
2. The budget will be reviewed after the first year (p. e46). This is in order to determine non-recurring items purchased during the first year leading to a possible adjustment of the subgrant amount. This is completed in order to possibly award additional subgrants during the second year of the SRCL grant (p. e46-47).

Weaknesses:

1. The maximum subgrant awards based on number of students served may not be of sufficient size to adequately support the project at the subgrant locations. (Table 4; p. e26). No explanation is provided to indicate how funding must be used by subgrants, such as for on-site coaches, materials, etc. As such, this suggests that funding may not be adequate to provide any level of quality improvement in instruction as monies indicated may be insufficient for supporting the number of students served (p. e26). While a significant number of students should be served, subgrant awards should be sufficient enough to ensure an improvement in instruction while serving the most students possible.

Sub Question

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:

1. Assistive technologies will be used to further develop the literacy skills of students with disabilities (GEPA Statement).
2. Online instructional materials will be provided to support effective instruction (Abstract).
3. The focus of the online instructional materials, universal design for learning, aligns with the overall goals and priorities of the plan (Abstract).
4. Online instructional materials will include videos of effective literacy instruction and coaching (Abstract).
5. The SEA plans to partner with the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) which provides a strong evidence base of research for the use of technologies along with Universal Design for Learning for the purpose of improving student learning outcomes.

Weaknesses:

1. The plan does not specifically include how the online instructional materials will be used. Specifics regarding how technology will be used to increase student engagement and achievement and/or increase teacher effectiveness would be helpful. In addition, a plan for providing professional development on the use of the online instructional materials to classroom teachers for the purpose of supporting the principles of universal design for learning in order to address student learning challenges would be useful.

Reader's Score: 4.5

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:

Improving learning outcomes for disadvantaged students is stated as the primary purpose of the program. The subgrant program is only open to sites with a population of low SES students (GEPA Statement).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found. This priority is met.

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:

Program will disaggregate data by ethnicity, disability, income, and English proficiency status, comparing the data for these subgroups to the general population (GEPA Statement).

Priority 2 of the program explains that formative classroom-embedded performance assessments will be used while providing professional development on the use of such data to inform instruction (Abstract).

Weaknesses:

Use of this data to close the achievement gap among disadvantaged groups is vague. A plan for collecting and analyzing data is clear. However, the plan for using data for continuous improvement among all students, to include disadvantaged students, is not clear. Regardless of this weakness, this priority is met.

Reader's Score: 0

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education -- Curriculum and Instruction Office of Literacy (S371C110016)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Quality of State-level activities		
Quality of State-level activities		
1. State-level activities	37	28
Sub Total	37	28
Quality of the State subgrant competition		
Quality of the State subgrant competition		
1. State subgrant comp	28	26
Sub Total	28	26
Project management		
Project management		
1. Project management	15	12
Sub Total	15	12
Adequacy of resources		
Adequacy of resources		
1. Adequacy of resources	20	15
Sub Total	20	15
Priority Questions		
Competitive Priority		
Effective Use of Technology		
1. Competitive Priority	5	5
Sub Total	5	5
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	86

Technical Review Form

Panel #9 - SRCL - 9: 84.371C

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education -- Curriculum and Instruction Office of Literacy (S371C110016)

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: 28

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) Overall, this proposal presents a cohesive, solid state plan. Activities are well integrated with those of the State Literacy Plan. Collaboration established for that plan also undergirds this project and the project timeline integrates activities between the two grants. Needs are demonstrated with student achievement data, which clearly shows disparities among sub-groups of children. Standards for children are the same across the state, include K-12, and are reflected in state required assessments and in types of interventions promoted (based on the Common Core State Standards (p. e2, e5). The existing state/regional technical assistance system will be used as the framework for this project, and project funds will be used to hire new staff to support the project. Sub-grant funds will be targeted toward high-need LEAs and programs, based on a published list that will be known prior to application for sub-grants, using specific criteria addressing poverty level within sites. Data from assessments, which can be disaggregated for sub-groups, will be used for continuous improvement at all levels. On-line teacher education modules are available and will be developed to support the purposes of the grant. The child-care agency in the state is a major partner with the SEA in supporting the birth-5 portion of this project.

Weaknesses:

(i) The primary weaknesses relate to the early childhood portions of the project, which are less well developed with respect to state-level activities. Early childhood will be addressed through contracted early childhood providers. However, who the providers might be (e.g., Head Start, LEAs, Part C) and what they currently do with respect to literacy should be described; a relationship to the k-12 literacy standards should be established. Needs assessment based on text will not be possible for younger children, who are not yet readers, nor is it appropriate that text serve as the primary focus of the intervention. Outcomes and benchmarks are needed for early childhood as well as for the lower elementary grades that are not a part of, or not well developed, in the Common Core standards. For example, the overall focus on the use of text (p. e1, e9) should be supplemented in younger children and for students who are delayed in reading by providing a more explicit focus on a broader array of emergent and early literacy skills. Outcomes and benchmarks are needed for these children within different skill areas. It also appears that intervention may occur only at selected grade levels (p. 4, PP. 121-122), which would not be productive for achieving continuity of learning across grades.

Reader's Score: 6.5

Sub Question

- 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:

(ii) Data used to establish need are also used to establish goals for the project, which are stated in terms of lowering the achievement discrepancy a given percent of students per year (pp. e6-e7). Appropriate measures (PALS Pre-K, PALS-K) will be used for preschool and in the lower grades, where assessments related to the Common Core Standards are not available. The Woodcock-Munoz, a norm-referenced test that is available in both English and Spanish, will also be used across years in order to track children across grades. The proposal as a whole demonstrates a clear, credible path toward its goals.

Weaknesses:

(ii) Again, the weaknesses are primarily at the early childhood level; at a minimum, goals related to benchmarks should be established for entry into Kindergarten, and preferably for entry into preschool as well, so that progress in relation to the percentage of children at benchmark can be evaluated. While it's admirable to include a measure that crosses age levels, the Woodcock-Munoz has very few items at the lower age levels, making it less reliable as a way of tracking progress for the younger as compared to the older children. Adaptations for students with disabilities and who do not speak English as a first language should be described.

Reader's Score: 6

- 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:

(iii) Technical assistance will be provided through the existing statewide-regional system of technical assistance to LEAs, and will add three new staff specific to this project as well as an overall statewide coordinator (p. e12). A list of approved providers will also be developed; these individuals will be trained by the SEA to provide technical assistance, ensuring consistency across the state.

Weaknesses:

(iii) It is not clear how or whether new staff will be integrated into the current regional system and how responsibilities will be integrated within districts and programs receiving sub-grants. A set of specific criteria should be established for selecting contracted professional development providers who will be available to the sub-grantees, with respect to their experience in using processes such as on-site mentoring; as part of the selection process, these providers also should agree to use the processes deemed important by the SEA (i.e., to provide a specific amount of mentoring to classrooms in sub-grantee programs).

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.**

Sub Question

Strengths:

(iv) Common data used across LEAs will allow aggregation of state data and disaggregation by age and student characteristics (pp. e13). Results can be used to determine progress toward project goals as well as for continuous feedback at the state, LEA, and (for those grades included in the benchmark assessment) for classrooms. An independent evaluator will be hired to provide summaries of data for both formative and summative purposes and to fulfill GPRA (Government Performance and Results Act) reporting requirements (pp. e21-22). Data gathered from interviews and surveys will provide information on teaching as well as on student achievement. The evaluator also will follow cohorts over time for comparison to other students.

Weaknesses:

(iv) Learning standards prior to Kindergarten are not described. Addressing the GPRA measures in early childhood is based on the Woodcock-Munoz, which has very few items at lower age levels. The purposes of the instruments listed in Table 3 (p. e15) are not described. Standards are needed across all levels in order to establish benchmarks and assess whether the SRCL sub-grants are moving children toward benchmarks and demonstrating that discrepancies are being addressed. The evaluator will seek to establish a relationship between changes in classrooms and student outcomes (p. e19); this will not be meaningful using all self-report teacher data. A description is needed of how instruction will be adjusted regularly, based on student data.

Reader's Score: 8

- 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:

(v) Evaluation reports will be posted annually on the websites of two state agencies (education, child care), be discussed at quarterly meetings of professional development providers and school leaders, and presented to the SRCL leadership teams in each participating SRCL site. A brochure and web-site will be developed that sub-grantees can customize for different audiences.

Weaknesses:

(v) More specific plans are needed to make sure that meaningful information is accessible to families and to other specific types of stakeholders, including families for whom English is not a first language.

Reader's Score: 3.5

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: 26

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.**

Sub Question

Strengths:

(i.a.) As a general approach, the SEA will use much of the federal RFP language in the sub-grant RFP, as well as many of the same criteria. A bidder's conference will be used to provide technical assistance on interpreting the RFP and meeting the criteria outlined. Capacity will be judged based on the sub-grantee's responses to criteria in the RFP (e.g., establishing specific need, describing technical assistance, use of assessments, collaboration). An initial, draft RFP is provided.

Weaknesses:

(i.a) Wording of the RFP may need to be modified to cover the range of early childhood programs and providers who may apply (e.g., Head Start, Part C, child care). In addition, the state may want to consider requiring participation in the quality rating system for any early childhood programs to whom it applies (rather than using it as a competitive priority), to ensure a basic level of knowledge and skill in relation to emergent and early literacy. To ensure that what projects provide is appropriate to younger children and to those who are not yet ready to read text, criteria should address the applicant's knowledge of the content and process of teaching and learning early language and literacy.

Reader's Score: 2.5

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:

(i.b.1). The SEA will provide prior to the application process a list of the LEAs and early childhood programs eligible to apply, based on specific criteria that relate to the level of poverty in the community. Therefore, only eligible potential sub-grantees will apply. (pp. e25-26)

(i.b.2). The same data are collected from all LEAs, and are aggregated across the state as well as at the LEA level. Potential sub-grantees will be evaluated in relation to their ability to set goals that are compatible with state goals for SRCL and also reflect needs demonstrated by their individual district data.

(i.b.3). Collaboration is built into the RFP as a topic that potential sub-grantees will address.

Weaknesses:

(i.b.1) No weaknesses noted here.

(i.b.2) No weaknesses noted here except that types of data and the research base for early childhood differ somewhat; this should be accounted for in the RFP.

(i.b.3) No weaknesses noted here.

Reader's Score: 7.5

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.

Sub Question

Strengths:

(i.c.) It will be the responsibility of the applying sub-grantee to demonstrate alignment with literacy instruction supported by other Federal funds inside of the SEA system, and as appropriate, outside of that system (e.g., across agencies) (p. e28). This will ensure that this criterion is met at the sub-grantee level.

Weaknesses:

(i.c) No weaknesses noted here.

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.**

Strengths:

(ii) Only LEAs and early childhood providers meeting specific criteria related to need will be invited to apply as sub-grantees (p. e25).

Weaknesses:

(ii) No weaknesses noted here.

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:

(iii). The RFP will request that submitters use direct experience, data, and research to support each of the components of the sub-grant applications. Grant reviewers will be provided with a bibliography and will look for evidence of research-based approaches. (pp. e26-29)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted here.

Reader's Score: 4

- 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:

(iv). State standards have been adopted, and an example is provided of how text-teaching, a primary teaching approach advocated in this state, can be gradually, systematically increased in complexity across grades, based on a careful analysis of text (pp. e30-31). As a part of the SRCL grant, criteria will be developed that districts and the state can use to evaluate texts and other literacy materials for complexity and in relation to content standards, and an example is provided. Sub-grantees will be expected to include a description of how they will do this in their proposals. The review process and results will be made available through a meeting with eligible sub-grantees.

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

(iv) Standards for curricula and materials need to be applicable to early childhood settings as well as to K-12. Adaptations for students learning English and students with disabilities should be described. Avenues for reaching early childhood providers outside of the public school system with respect to the review process should be designed so that they reach all types of early childhood programs.

Reader's Score: 4

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: 12

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:

(i) The management plan (Table V, p. e34-34) specifies tasks, timelines and persons or groups responsible for each of the tasks. A particularly strong aspect of the table is that it shows integrated activities for this SRCL grant, Race to the Top, and state activities related to adoption of Common Core Standards and assessments across 42 states. An interagency coordinating committee will provide leadership for the project in order to coordinate SEA activities with early childhood activities under the state agency in charge of early education and care. New staff will be assigned to regional areas in which funded projects are located.

Weaknesses:

(i) The relationship between the SEA and DEEC (Department of Early Education and Care) needs to be carefully spelled out with respect to expectations for early childhood programs. It also is not clear how birth-3 or other types of early childhood programs outside of child care fit within agencies or how they are included within the whole sub-grant process. The relationship between new staff and staff in regional positions also need clarification, particularly since these will be serving the same district. The role of SEA grant staff with respect to early childhood also needs to be clarified for sub-grants that are not within an LEA. Training of teachers to implement assessments for collecting progress data should be included among the activities in the management plan.

Reader's Score: 4

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

Strengths:

(ii) Key personnel are well qualified for their roles on the project (pp. e41-43). In addition to key staff, literacy staff within the SEA include content experts in literacy as well as grant coordinators and regional professional development providers. There is good representation of highly qualified individuals across ages, content areas, and sub-populations such as English language learners and special education.

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

(ii) Education specialists hired by the grant (p. e42) should be required to have experience in literacy teaching and learning.

Reader's Score: 4.5

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:

(iii) The grant will form an interagency leadership team together with early childhood-related agencies and higher education (p. e43). The State Literacy Team will act as an advisory group for this grant, and has broad representation across ages, settings, and types of individuals.

Weaknesses:

(iii) It is not clear how the State Literacy Team will obtain input of families (e.g., whether parents or parent organizations will be included on advisory committees or task forces).

Reader's Score: 3.5

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: 15

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:

(i) Much of the administrative cost goes to personnel to support sub-grantees, and the majority of funding going to sub-grants. All components of the design can be accomplished using the resources allocated. There is a match between project components and use of funds.

Weaknesses:

(i) No weaknesses noted here.

Reader's Score: 10

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.**

Sub Question

Strengths:

(ii) To ensure allocation of funds, those applying for the sub-grants will be asked to submit different budgets for each level to be served (e.g., birth-5, K-5) as well as an overall budget. Sub-grants will be awarded to achieve the appropriate allocation at the state level. (pp. e24-25)

Weaknesses:

(ii) It is not clear how the process of allocation will be put into practice. The logistics of trying to achieve an appropriate allocation at the state level could mean that some districts may end up serving only some portion of their students and some classrooms within the same LEA may not be participating.

Reader's Score: 3

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:

(iii) The SEA will address integration of funds through its work with Common Core activities such as those mentioned in #6 on page 33 (e.g., measuring the impact of community services to improve birth-grade 12 and adult literacy). The grant states that different efforts will be integrated (p. 46).

Weaknesses:

(iii) Specific strategies for integrating streams of funding are not provided. Current intra- and inter-agency collaborative efforts should be described. Letters in the Appendix indicate that some of this work is already going on, but specific information on how such integration will occur should be provided.

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.**

Strengths:

(iv) The sub-grants would address the needs of a large number of children.

Weaknesses:

(iv) The sub-grant amounts do not seem sufficient for accomplishing the kind of change desired (i.e., table, p. e26). This is especially true for probably the most important component of the sub-grants, professional development. If professional development is to go beyond workshops, then the amounts provided are not enough to support it. For example, the \$45,000 anticipated for 500 students (p. e26), if applied toward mentoring for teachers in approximately 20 classrooms, would only cover part or all of one coach's (professional development provider's) salary. The intensity of coaching that would be achieved, i.e., one coach to approximately 20 classrooms, would not be sufficient to result in substantial change in teaching practice. If the technical assistance state staff assigned to sub-grantees are going to be providing this kind of support rather than providers hired through the grants, this should be clarified in their job descriptions, and more information provided on this aspect of their jobs..

Reader's Score: 1

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:

Using technology effectively is one of the objectives of the project. The SEA has two existing technology partners, one a center specializing in Universal Design for Learning and the other a PBS affiliate. Previous work with the former has resulted in on-line literacy teaching products that will be recommended for use by sub-grantees. These allow embedded instruction and individualized support based on student needs, responses, and disabilities. The PBS affiliate has developed an educator resource website for literacy. The SEA will partner with the PBS affiliate to produce video examples of effective literacy instruction. Other federal funds have been used to develop online courses for educators. Effective use of technology will be included in the sub-grant RFP as a competitive preference.

Weaknesses:

None noted

Reader's Score: 5

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:

This priority has been MET. This project directly addresses disparities in learning outcomes demonstrated through state student achievement data. Goals are stated with respect to closing gaps. Support is provided for teachers to learn specific teaching strategies related to literacy outcomes.

Weaknesses:

The primary weaknesses of the project relate to conceptualizations of how the grants will support emergent and early literacy from birth-5. Another weakness is that support for teachers should attend to code-based skills that are required for decoding text, particularly for children who are still learning these skills.

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:

This priority has been MET. Data on student achievement will be aggregated across the state and disaggregated for feedback to teachers, administrators, and the state. Data from different sub-populations can be examined within schools and across the state, and used for improvement. Data collected at this level will relate directly to goals in literacy learning areas. Other types of assessments for different grade levels are listed in Table 3; some of these will provide information that is relevant for making instructional decisions.

Weaknesses:

Training on data-based decision-making is not directly addressed in the grant proposal, but presumably would be part of the content covered by professional development providers. Use of Curriculum-Based Measures are mentioned but not described.

Reader's Score: 0

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 6/24/11 12:00 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education -- Curriculum and Instruction Office of Literacy (S371C110016)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Quality of State-level activities		
Quality of State-level activities		
1. State-level activities	37	29
Sub Total	37	29
Quality of the State subgrant competition		
Quality of the State subgrant competition		
1. State subgrant comp	28	27
Sub Total	28	27
Project management		
Project management		
1. Project management	15	13.5
Sub Total	15	13.5
Adequacy of resources		
Adequacy of resources		
1. Adequacy of resources	20	14
Sub Total	20	14
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	86.5

Technical Review Form

Panel #9 - SRCL - 9: 84.371C

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education -- Curriculum and Instruction Office of Literacy (S371C110016)

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: 29

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:

This section provides an overview of how the proposal will be carried out and how it aligns with the comprehensive state literacy plan.

The statewide literacy team of 50 PreK-12 educators that were involved in the development of the development of the state's RTTT/CCSS were also involved in the development of SRCL state plan and grant proposal (e2) and will be involved in reviewing subgrant applications and annual reviews of program outcomes. This provides for a strong alignment among various federal grant funded priorities.

Collaboration between the state department of education, department of ECE and higher education (e1) provides a strong partnership of support.

Implementation of an online needs assessment and EDI planning and project management for subgrant applicants will ensure the best use of funding to meet the needs of the students in each school.

Weaknesses:

It is not clear if or how all levels (early childhood - 12) will be included in the funding.

Outcomes and benchmarks for early childhood care providers are not included.

Reader's Score: 8

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.

Sub Question

Strengths:

The data to support the state's SRCL project goals for meeting the needs of disadvantaged students (e6), the approaches to be developed for professional development (e7), and for implementation of instructional strategies using complex texts supports the objectives of 1) raising literacy achievement; 2) improving the impact of professional development; 3) ensuring a high level of professional learning; 4) providing models of coherent assessment systems; and 5) and using technology and media strategically to enhance learning are based on research and best practices.

Use of multiple measures of literacy and annual student growth data ensures a comprehensive view of students' growth.

Weaknesses:

Formative assessments do not include ELL students and students with disabilities (e14).

K-3 formative assessments do not include comprehension, which is at the heart of the proposal (e14).

Reader's Score: 7

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:

An extensive technical support plan is provided including the creation of a 5 person SRCL leadership team with literacy expertise and 6 regional literacy specialist (already funded through other sources) who will be responsible for monitoring the district work and for providing technical assistance (e12) that will help to ensure subgrantees are successful with implementation.

Weaknesses:

The relationship between the roles of newly hired SRCL leadership team and the 6 current regional literacy specialists is not defined.

A description of the role of the literacy coaches is not provided nor is a description of how they will work with classroom teachers to improve instructional strategies for reading complex texts.

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:

The outside evaluator, UMDI-a public service and outreach unit of UM's president's office-will be the independent evaluator and a higher education partner with the state department. The application demonstrates that UMDI has extensive experience in the design and implementation of evaluation plans including other federally funded literacy projects such as Reading First making them a credible source for the evaluation of the project.

The research questions are thorough, assessing whether the activities of the SRCL project will achieve the stated student outcomes. Both quantitative and qualitative data will be collected to inform the research

Sub Question

questions

Weaknesses:

It is not clear how annual evaluation data will disseminated to classroom teachers or if teachers are involved in the analysis of data for improved classroom instruction.

It is unclear as to whether data will be collected at all grade levels or just those from which state and national tests are administered.

Reader's Score: 7

- 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:

Annual evaluation reports summarizing all of the formative and summative data will be compiled with performance measures disaggregated for disadvantaged students which provides data for informing ongoing instruction, assessment and professional development on a regular basis.

Annual reports will be disseminated through a wide variety of venues that will cover a large number of constituents in the state and will be used for quarterly seminars for professional development providers.

Weaknesses:

Though a brochure and website will be developed so districts can customize information to inform their school communities, this does not go far enough to ensure that the information is useful to varied groups such as the parents of ELL students who may not speak English or families without electronic access.

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: 27

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 state will provide technical support to help eligible applicants conceptualize three-year grants, increasing the likelihood that the LEAs will be successful (e23). The state will provide a rubric that will be used for scoring the proposals, making the process transparent (e24). Eligibility requires potential LEAs

Sub Question

to have specific percentages of disadvantaged students in order to qualify for grants ensuring that funding will reach the target population (e25). The structure of the RFP requires that the LEAs meet SRCL minimum requirements.

The plan requires subgrantees to reapply after three years and to use data to demonstrate growth in student outcomes in order to continue for the final two years. This requires subgrantees to carefully analyze the results of the targeted instruction on student outcomes and reflect on more effective ways to meet students' needs if the instructional approaches are not working for all students.

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 3

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:

- (1) Presents a credible plan that provides assurance for targeting districts with at least 34% low income populations and LEAs or non-profit early education providers with 50% low income populations.(e25)
- (2) Describes how a needs based assessment will be used to identify and design effective literacy teaching strategies ensuring funding will be used to meet students' needs of the identified population. (e-28)
- (3) Eligibility of subgrantees is contingent upon partnering with a public or private nonprofit organization or agency with a demonstrated record of effectiveness. This expands the reach of the LEAs to a broader constituency and encourages sharing of resources such as effective professional development (e25).

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 8

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:

Provides adequate details on how subgrantees will align with literacy efforts of other federally funded programs, ensuring alignment of priorities. (e28) Early childhood care providers will be required to participate in MDEEC's quality rating and improvement system, further supporting consistency in alignment of priorities (e29).

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

None

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.**

Strengths:

The subgrant is only open to LEAs that serve 34% or more of students who receive free or reduced lunch or early education and care providers that serve at least 50% low income children and agree to work with the MDCEC's Quality Rating and Improvement initiative and to target the highest poverty populations of early childhood students.

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:

Subgrant reviewers will look for evidence of research and data in applications ensuring that priority is given to those with the most demonstrated understanding and synthesis of research findings by awarding up to 27 out of 100 possible points. (e30)

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 4

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:

A proposed set of criteria is offered to be used for evaluating text purchases, ensuring consistent selection of quality materials for all subgrantees and alignment with SCLR priorities.

Weaknesses:

Criteria for ELLs, students with disabilities and early childhood care providers needs to be addressed.

The state did not indicate that the review process or and results will be made publicly available.

Reader's Score: 4

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: 13.5

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:

Multiple levels of support will be provided for LEAs by the state to ensure successful implementation. This will include site visits. (e32)

The timeline is detailed and ensures the state has allowed for adequate time to coordinate and implement all activities and make certain all objectives are achieved. (e 34-40).

Weaknesses:

The management relationship between the state and the early childhood care providers is not evident, especially for data collection.

Reader's Score: 5

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

Strengths:

A list of the qualifications of key personnel and major responsibilities ensures alignment of all federal funding priorities (e41).

The grant application includes a list of expert working groups and resumes of staff which shows the strengths and expertise of personnel involved with implementation and administration of the grant. (e0-e39).

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 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 list of expert working groups and the inclusion of individual staff resumes and letters of support indicates a diverse representation of expertise ensuring a more diverse perspective in the design and implementation of the proposed project. (e43)

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

No evidence of participation of family members or parent organizations is provided.

Reader's Score: 3.5

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: 14

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 state's budget outline is detailed and supports the objectives, design and significance of the project which is estimated to impact 2,000 teachers and administrators and 60,000 students (e43-46, e5)

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 10

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 State assures that required percentages and equitable distribution of funds is accounted for through separate budgets for each level of students from each LEA and collective district budgets (e45).

Weaknesses:

There is no plan to ensure that the specific targeted percentages are achieved in each area.

Reader's Score: 1

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 state's proposal places responsibility for the alignment of priorities across federally funded projects on the subgrant applicant. (e46)

Weaknesses:

There is no description of how integration across various federally funded projects occurs at the state level.

The state does not describe a plan for sustaining the subgrantees' projects after the end of the SRCL grant funding.

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 state's plan is to fund 100 subgrants of up to \$120,000 depending on the number of children to be served. A plan for using non-recurring budget items, such as funding for computers, is presented. (e46).

Weaknesses:

The ratio of funds provided to students served is not adequate to provide the services required by the state for each subgrantee. For example, a school with 500 students could only receive a maximum amount of \$45,000 which will not fund the salary of a literacy coach/specialist, the cost of purchasing and administering assessments, the cost of purchasing materials or for collecting and reporting data.

Reader's Score: 1

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:

Objective 5 on p. e16 outlines in detail how the state will employ its ongoing partnership with CAST and WGBH at all grade levels. These resources are supported by research into effective ways of incorporating technology within instruction and professional development.

Weaknesses:

A detailed plan for how teachers will receive professional development for the effective integration of technology into the classroom or use them for in professional development is not provided.

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:

THIS PRIORITY IS MET.

The state presents an adequately defined project designed to improve school readiness and success through grade 12 in language and literacy development. Priority one is specifically addressed on p. e5 which outlines the state's needs with proposed project goals.

Weaknesses:

None

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's application outlines a solid plan for collecting, analyzing, and using high-quality and timely data that if implemented as designed, will inform professional development, classroom instruction and project outcomes. (e13-15)

Weaknesses:

Some assessments may need to be adjusted to ensure collection of data that specifically address diverse students and the target outcomes.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

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