

Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Minnesota Department of Education -- Office of Innovation (S371C110018)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Quality of State-level activities		
Quality of State-level activities		
1. State-level activities	37	26
Sub Total	37	26
Quality of the State subgrant competition		
Quality of the State subgrant competition		
1. State subgrant comp	28	19
Sub Total	28	19
Project management		
Project management		
1. Project management	15	9.5
Sub Total	15	9.5
Adequacy of resources		
Adequacy of resources		
1. Adequacy of resources	20	16
Sub Total	20	16
Priority Questions		
Competitive Priority		
Effective Use of Technology		
1. Competitive Priority	5	2
Sub Total	5	2
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	72.5

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - SRCL - 1: 84.371C

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Minnesota Department of Education -- Office of Innovation (S371C110018)

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: 26

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. Overall, the grant attests to the strength of the state literacy plan which is comprehensive (see Appendix).
2. The action plans for adolescent literacy appear to be particularly well conceptualized and thoughtful (Appendix).
3. The e-learning professional development opportunities are original and thoughtful. Further, the combination of the many e-learning activities (p. 5) should provide significant professional development opportunities for those teachers who use them.
4. Another strength of the plan is the three straightforward priorities of the state (p.1). An advantage of a few priorities is that they can be done well, and participants can focus on a few things rather than many.
5. In addition, the collaboration among so many organizations and institutions is a potential strength of the project, e.g. on p. 3, collaboration among State Literacy Team, Minnesota Early Learning Center, and the Minnesota Board of Teaching.

Weaknesses:

1. The plan is weak on demonstrating or describing the relations among the Minnesota State Standards, the 2010 English Language Arts Standards (Appendix D, p. 40), the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and the English Language Standards. Meshing these together is a complex undertaking, and it is unclear how this will be done to produce a coherent set of standards for use by all teachers.
2. The plan is also weak on K-3 reading instruction. It is unclear exactly what emphasis will be placed on beginning reading, particularly phonemic awareness and phonics. While the individual words are there (Appendix C, p. 13), it does not appear that enough attention will be paid to these critical skills, especially for low-income beginning readers. This is a matter of emphasis, and the writers do not seem to place the emphasis on phonics and beginning reading that needs to be there.
3. The Data Driven Decision Making Model (DDDMM) is too complex to be useful in its last rendition (Appendix B, p. 7).
4. A weakness of the plan is the lack of clarity of the state's Longitudinal Data System (p. 7). It is unclear what type of information will be gathered and how that information can be used to inform and improve instruction.

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

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. The State Educational Agency (SEA) uses their reading proficiency Criterion Referenced Tests (CRTs) to establish data on their students and their students' needs (p. 15).
2. The SEA is to be commended for disaggregating data by race/ethnicity and discussing these figures related to closing the achievement gap (p. 16).
3. The state has established clear goals for their grant as noted on p. 17+.

Weaknesses:

1. The SEA does not explain clearly how data will be used to inform instruction. The data appearing on pp. 15-17 present information about the state's students and disaggregated groups but tells nothing about how the data will be used to inform the project.
2. The lack of specified assessment instruments is one problem. Information presented on number 3 on p. 18 is too vague to fully count as part of the assessment process.
3. Much of the information appears to be left to the Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), and it is unclear how well they will do with it.
4. In addition, the DDDMM (Appendix) remains at a theoretical level until the SEA can show how the model will be implemented through professional development and in classrooms. The information on pp. 4-7 provides a lot of information, but does not address the specific items in the application process.

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:

1. On p. 20-22, the SEA clearly lays out the technical assistance that it will perform and it seems to be solid.
2. On p. 20, the SEA lays out how Core State Level Activities that will take place. These activities are explicit and provide the reader with a clear sense of what the SEA will do to support the goals of the project.

Weaknesses:

1. The text implies that it will use the State Implementation and Scaling Up of Evidence-based Practices (SISEP) (p. 20) as part of its implementation model (p. 1-2, 20-22) and to assist the state in providing the technical assistance necessary to support subgrantees. But information is lacking on what this group is, what it does, and how it will be useful.

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:

1. Using an independent evaluator for summative assessment is a strength of the project (p.23).
2. Project strengths include having criteria for the selection of the evaluator (Appendix F). This will provide a structure for the decision-making process.
3. Using both formative and summative assessment is a strength of the project (pp. 9, 23-25) since both are needed to ensure the assessment/instructional cycle is complete and that teachers are able to use data for instruction.

Weaknesses:

1. Specific formative and summative assessments are not discussed, thereby making it difficult to evaluate their adequacy for this project (p. 9).
2. The combining of formative assessment by the SEA staff and summative assessment by an external evaluator will be complicated and is ripe for errors and misinformation. Many of the evaluation instruments described on p. 24 (teacher observation instrument, differences in knowledge and skills of principals, support teachers, literacy coordinators) will require developing and/or using existing qualitative data. This is difficult to do, and it is not explained how the external evaluator will accomplish these tasks.
3. The SEA depends on the LEAs to monitor most of the progress and growth in learning. Some of that should be expected, but it is also the responsibility of the SEA to monitor such progress (p. 8-9).

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:

1. The SEA will have the evaluator provide annual reports of the progress of the project, thereby monitoring which schools are successful and which are not (p. 25).
2. Formative and summative reports will be shared with varied and appropriate audiences (p. 9, 10, 25).

Weaknesses:

1. Providing only the external annual evaluation report to the public (p. 25) is unlikely to disseminate the information in a way that the public can understand, as the report will be technical and quite specific. As is, it is unlikely to be useful to the public in that particular format.
2. Other formats are recommended, for example, policy briefs for administrators, lay reports for teachers, parents and other laypeople.

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

Sub Question

- 1. The extent to which the SEA will run a rigorous, high-quality competition for subgrants, including**

Sub Question

how it will review and judge:

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

Strengths:

1. Requiring the subgrantee to partner with an early childhood learning provider helps assure of a rigorous process and competition. Early childhood providers will be required to collaborate and coordinate instruction and will help with vertical alignment among early childhood providers, elementary schools and high schools (p. 25). This discussion allows all subgrantees to see a common vision for literacy development. This common vision is critical to the success of the project.
2. Linking early childhood education providers with schools will provide the assistance many providers may need for success since they can partner with, in some cases, more knowledgeable others, e. g. principals, curriculum coordinators, and reading specialists.

Weaknesses:

In order to run a rigorous, high-quality competition, the subgrant competition should have measurable goals. On p. 27, the SEA bullets six goals, only two of which are stated in measurable terms. Collecting, analyzing and using timely data is not a goal. Neither is teacher professional development. These goals must be corrected so that the SEA is clear about what it is doing.

Reader's Score: 2

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. The SEA lays out a reasonable subgrant application that includes high quality literacy instruction (p 27+) and meets the requirements set out in paragraph (d) of the Additional Requirements section in the NIA.
2. A strength of the proposal is the subgrant competitive edge to LEAs that use other funding to build on the initiatives of the project (p. 30).
3. The LEAs are required to conduct a needs assessment to support their application (p. 31) and to use that assessment to support the design of activities specifically targeted to struggling readers.
4. Multiple stakeholders and teams consisting of other agencies and institutions will impact the implementation of the grant proposal in providing multiple and varied perspectives on the problems for disadvantaged students (p. 3).
5. It is clear from the proposal that the SEA addresses the needs of struggling readers and disadvantaged students (p. 35).

Weaknesses:

More explicit guidance in several areas is needed on the subgrant application. The SEA leaves it to the LEA to determine how much time is spent in reading instruction (p. 31). The SEA leaves it to the LEA to determine the assessment instruments and process (p. 32-33). This leaves much room for LEAs to use unreliable and invalid measurement instruments.

Reader's Score: 6

Sub Question

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 SEA has been thoughtful about asking the LEAs to relate the goals and objectives of their plan to other funding sources and their objectives and goals, as demonstrated by the detailed chart on pp. 10-12. This chart is detailed and will provide a solid guide for the LEAs to use in their collaboration with other agencies and institutions.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

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:

1. The SEA provides sufficient information related to high poverty schools based on state data (p 15+).
2. The report addresses the needs of disadvantaged students, especially by rank-ordering applications based on the numbers of such students (p. 35). This should ensure that the neediest students are represented and that the LEAs will be high up on the list.

Weaknesses:

1. It is unclear whether high poverty students will receive the full advantage in the LEA application since the application also requires a "Meets Standard" or "Exemplary" status. It will be not be obvious what the reviewers should do if the less needy LEAs receive all the "Meets Standard" or "Exemplary" status (p. 36). It is unclear if the less needy schools would therefore receive funding and the most needy schools would not.
2. It is unclear how special education and other groups will be integrated with disadvantaged groups to establish who will receive funding (p. 36). It may be that the neediest students in some LEAs will not be funded because of the requirements for standards set by the SEA.

Reader's Score: 3

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:

1. Providing LEAs with information from the What Works Clearinghouse and the Doing What Works Website will assist the LEAs by exposing them to the latest and strongest available research (p. 36). Further, this evidence must be included in the LEA application package.
2. Reviewers will be selected who have research expertise, thereby increasing the odds that knowledgeable experts will be reviewing the proposals (p. 35-36). These individuals should know the research and be able to evaluate the LEAs' knowledge of that research.

Weaknesses:

Having SEA personnel complete a second round of reviews and make recommendations for the funds could result in awarding grants without the latest research evidence evident, since these individuals may not know that research.

Sub Question

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:

1. A strength of the proposal is that the SEA explains the process by which LEA applications will be reviewed and judged (p. 36-37).
2. Using the rubric from the Consumer's Guide to Basal Reading Program from the University of Oregon (p. 37) adds strength to the grant proposal in that it matches well to most state standards for curricula and materials. This guide has been widely recognized in the reading field as research-based and is used at the state and district levels to evaluate the reading programs that LEAs will purchase as part of their literacy materials. Using the Guide will

Weaknesses:

1. The text does not provide information about how the SEA will make the process and result available to the public in various ways that inform different groups of people (p. 37).
2. Posting information on a website is insufficient for making the results public (p. 37).

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: 9.5

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:

1. The Technical Assistance and Implementation Timeline for SRCL Sub-grant Programs (pp. 37-43) is an excellent source of information for the grant and lays out the goals, activities and benchmarks for the project clearly.
2. Collaborative work with the University of Minnesota team (p. 39) will strengthen the professional development activities considerably. Faculty at the University of Minnesota are among the nationally recognized cadre of reading leaders in the field.

Weaknesses:

1. Several of the goals that the timeline lists are unclear. It would be expected that the goals on pp. 37-43 match the goals listed at the beginning of the document, such as the priorities listed on pp.1-14; but, they do not.
2. Some of the goals could be improved. For example, it is difficult to evaluate the goal of one year's literacy growth for every student (pp. 37-38) when there is no knowledge of the assessment instruments to be used. As a second example, the Minnesota CRTs evaluate levels of proficiencies, not yearly growth.

Sub Question

Increased knowledge and skills related to scientifically and evidence-based literacy instruction (p. 40) is evaluated by pre-post survey and by the completion of school work plans. It is unclear what these are and how they will be used. Other benchmarks for determining goals are unclear (p. 41 weekly work logs).

3. The goal on p. 42 (left hand column) is difficult to measure in any appreciable way. Attendance is important, of course, but an unlikely measure of teacher or professional development growth.

4. While the text says on p. 46 that the SEA Leadership and Implementation Team will work closely with the State Literacy Team and State Literacy Advisory Council, the SEA does not explain how this will be done. Without defined responsibilities for each of these SEA groups, it is difficult to know how these teams will accomplish project tasks. At this point, which teams will be responsible for and accomplish which tasks is unclear.

Reader's Score: 3

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

Strengths:

1. The individuals listed (p. 44) all have master's degrees in reading which is a strength of the proposal. These individuals should have expertise in reading instruction and thereby help meet the goals and activities of the project.

2. The various individuals appear to have strengths in several different areas that will help the overall implementation of the grant. For example, one has experience with Reading First grants, another has experience on Minnesota standards. Their experiences are clear from their vitae (Appendix).

Weaknesses:

It would be helpful to have one leader with a Ph.D. in literacy. Such a person would have a much deeper knowledge of reading that can come in handy as the research is addressed and discussed.

Reader's Score: 4

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:

A strength is that the State Literacy Team and the Advisory Council (assuming they are working together) should have a diverse set of perspectives with all the different representations on the Advisory Council, including community, parent and business members (p. 45).

Weaknesses:

It is unclear how the State Literacy Team and the Advisory Council will work together and will actually influence the direction of the project (p. 45). It would be helpful to discuss their actual role in designing the project and implementing the project. For example, it would be helpful if they met with the SEA on a regular basis. Weekly or biweekly meetings where the agenda is to discuss the project would be helpful.

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: 16

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. There appears to be thought, care and consideration that has gone into how many children and schools will be affected, maximizing opportunities for many Minnesota children. The SEA makes a solid case for how the funds will be used (p. 46).
2. The dispersing of funds is appropriate (p. 47).
3. The costs are reasonable in meeting the objectives of the grant proposal (p. 46-47).
4. The chart on p. 47 will be very helpful in examining the numbers and percentages of disadvantaged students in the state. These figures assist in the evaluating the potential significance of the proposed project.

Weaknesses:

1. The budget sample in the Appendix is only available for one year (e0) and is inconsistent with what is in the narrative (p. 47).
2. Literacy coordinator positions are unclear (p. 44) in the budget narrative (e0). For example, there is information on two individuals, but it is unclear just how much time is being spent by them on the project. The budget narrative has 3.5 individuals rather than 2.5 (p. e0 1). Just how much FTE will be spent on the project by how many experts is important and should be clarified.

Reader's Score: 7

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 SEA's plan meets this criterion as stated on p. 46. The explanation is adequate.

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.**

Strengths:

The SEA addresses the need for leveraging other funding (p. 49) so there is evidence that the SEA acknowledges that other funds need to be used to support Striving Readers and the state reform effort in reading.

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

On p. 49, the SEA states, "The MDE (Minnesota Department of Education) is currently developing a funding structure (provided in Section A) so that each of these state and federal funding sources will contribute to the on-going support and guidance districts, schools and early learning providers receive from the MDE in order to effectively implement the state literacy plan." This statement is unclear and is not explained in Section A. It is not clear how the various funding source will be used to sustain the project over time and after monies have run out. It is hypothesized that LEAs will need support and assistance in their leveraging funding resources in order to sustain the project.

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 amount provided to each school or agency over the five year period is adequate to make significant improvements in fostering high quality instruction. Overall numbers on pp. 47-48 appear to be appropriate.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

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. There is mention of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) which uses technology to design curriculum and improve learning for all students (p. 13-14).
2. Mention is also made of using technology to assist in the data gathering process itself (p. 13-14).

Weaknesses:

1. It is unclear what is to be done with UDL and how it will be done (p. 13-14).
2. It is also unclear how professional development will assist and support teachers in learning UDL (p. 13-14). Learning how to teach using UDL design and principles takes time and energy, potentially taking time and energy away from other important goals.

3. It is difficult to determine from the information the extensive time and energy that will be needed to be spent on UDL professional development (p. 13-14).

Reader's Score: 2

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:

MET

1. There are many systemic infrastructure elements in this proposal that will assist the SEA in planning for state-led instructional improvement within the LEAs. For example, the personnel at the SEA level should have the expertise to assist LEAs in their efforts (p. 43).
2. The State Comprehensive Literacy Plan (Appendix) is particularly good at the older grades levels.
3. In general, the process and plan for the LEA subgrants is well done (p 25+), especially for disadvantaged students.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

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:

MET

1. The SEA provided information about how they will use data throughout the implementation of the grant (p 18, 19, 20, 23).
2. Both formative and summative data will be used throughout (p. 25).
3. Collaborating with the external evaluator is a useful idea (p 23).

Weaknesses:

There is no evidence presented that teachers in Minnesota now use data as part of the teaching/learning process (p. 27), and there is no evidence presented here that will assure that they will learn how to do this .

Reader's Score: 0

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Reader #2: *****

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Absolute Priority 2		
Enabling More Data-Based Decision-Making		
1. Absolute Priority 2	0	0
Sub Total	0	0
Total	105	82

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - SRCL - 1: 84.371C

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Minnesota Department of Education -- Office of Innovation (S371C110018)

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: 31

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:

The applicant demonstrates a commitment to scientific based interventions (p. 2). Appropriate connections are drawn from the literature; for example, on page 2, the applicant cites Fixsen, Blase, Horner & Sugai's (2009) work on educational practices. The plan covers B-12 and includes all children ages birth through graduation. Appropriate collaborations are indicated across the State Educational Agency (SEA), the board of teaching, research at University of Minnesota, agencies, districts, and foundations (p. 3-4), for example, United Way and McKnight Foundation. There is a strong emphasis on data driven decision making (p. 5, 7). The plan is tied to state standards and contains thorough plans for continuous improvement (p. 8-9). Chart 1 (p. 10-12) demonstrates specific connections between this project, the B-12 literacy plan, and federal resources.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

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:

The use of disaggregated current state data demonstrate a strong need including students who receive free and reduced lunch, English language learners, minority students, and low achievers. SEA's goals are extensive and detailed taking into account struggling learners (p. 17-21). A specific goal is geared towards disadvantaged learners and students with disabilities (p. 17, 26). Regional and statewide leadership ensures widespread subgrantees will be reached (p. 18). The applicant has developed a thorough plan for including disadvantaged learners and others to improve literacy outcomes (p. 19). Core activities clearly link partnerships, standards, and professional development with data (p. 20).

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 8

- 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:

Technical assistance will be provided at multiple levels (p. 21). For example, literacy experts and grant writing assistance will be provided. Qualified and diverse staff described in this plan should ensure support (p. 21). The plan effectively builds on existing partnerships (p. 22).

Weaknesses:

No details were provided about the high quality literacy program. With vague description and lack of detail, it is difficult to judge if it is of high quality. It is also difficult to determine if it is comprehensive when little detail is provided. No mention is made of core academic subjects.

Reader's Score: 3

- 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 evaluation described is both formative and summative. The evaluation is thorough in its examination using various data collection procedures and examining both small scale (such as teacher level) and large scale (such as building and resource level) change (p. 24). An external evaluator will complement an internal evaluator (p. 23). Internal staff will complete the formative evaluations while the external evaluator assists with the summative. The assessments will appropriately measure teacher, school, and project levels (p. 24).

Weaknesses:

Consideration is not given to how evidence will inform the project. There is a lack of continuous improvement addressed. It is vague how evidence collected will inform project activities.

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:

Both formative and summative data will be provided in reports (p. 23). Reports will be given to multiple groups including stakeholders (p. 25). Reports will be available in print and on the web (p. 25).

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

Accessibility for underrepresented groups is not addressed. It would be helpful to disseminate to a larger group by disseminating more than just the report. The information should be provided in a user friendly format for parents and others.

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: 22

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:

An informational letter will be sent out across the state, thereby making all Local Education Agencies (LEAs) aware of the competition (p. 25). Multiple attempts to inform of the competition will be made (p. 25) such as the letter, a workshop, and a newsletter. Comprehensive attempts to prepare subgrantees will be made (webinars, proposal workshops) (p. 26-27). A detailed sample application is provided. The SEA will judge the capacity of the LEA to impelement their proposal through the use a rubric that measures the effectiveness evidenced by the proposal (p. 12, 25-26, 28).

Weaknesses:

Early learning centers must be linked with K-12 schools in order to be considered. The K-12 schools must be inclusive of younger grades. This limits certain groups that may be competitive from applying. The applicant should consider separating out these groups so that each may apply even if they are not linked to the other. A rubric should have been included for evaluating the applications.

Reader's Score: 2

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:

The applicant has earmarked priority for disadvantaged youth (p. 35). The application for subgrantees requires detailed accounts of need and requires documentation of such need (p. 29-30). A specific and credible point system is provided to show how subgrantees must address needs and improve student

Sub Question

achievement. Applicants must be collaborating with other groups, ensuring that collaboration will be a part of the proposed projects. Overall, the proposed literacy program should support effective teaching and literacy instruction.

Weaknesses:

There is little connection made to family activities. The applicant may want to consider families as a group that can be collaborating with LEAs.

Reader's Score: 7

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:

On pages 10-12, the applicant outlines how funds will be aligned. The chart provided shows a detailed alignment of federal resources to the state literacy plan. This should ensure a seamless delivery system.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

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:

Applications from high poverty schools will be given priority via a ranking system. The applicant ensures that districts with highest need will be awarded (p. 35). Awards will only be given to LEAs that have a numerical score in the "meets standard" or "exemplary" range and have a high percentage of disadvantaged students (p. 35). This will be determined across grade levels.

Weaknesses:

It is unclear how high poverty students will be separated from other subgroups which may limit funds available to the highest poverty students. Also, if needy LEAs meet all standards they may receive funds in place of higher-need LEAs (p. 35).

Reader's Score: 4

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:

A detailed plan for review of applications is provided (p. 36). Expert reviewers who have knowledge of evidence-based literacy, have implemented this and trained others, have advanced degrees in reading, and have published scientifically based research articles will be identified and each application will be reviewed by multiple reviewers (p. 36). A point system will determine funding.

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

More details about the rubric or types of evidence provided would have been helpful. Although information was given to the "how", little was provided about the "what" (p. 36).

Reader's Score: 3

- 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:

Applicant will utilize "what works" which is a well respected identifier of evidence-based strategies. Applicant is creating a rubric using effective resources, such as "Identifying and Implementing Educational Practices Supported by Rigorous Evidence", to judge applicants (p. 36-37). Rubrics will be clear and made available to applicants (p. 37). This will ensure applicants are aware of critical elements to include in their applications.

Weaknesses:

As written, it is possible that the Minnesota Department of Education can override the score on the rubric. This leads to questions about whether the evaluation will be objective (p. 36).

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: 11

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:

A clear plan was presented for goals, timelines, activities, and benchmarks. The timeline is appropriate for meeting goals suggested (p. 37-43). Effective benchmarks are provided to ensure that tasks are completed. The specific plan of activities shows that the applicants have thought this through. The plan appears manageable, and therefore feasible to be completed.

Weaknesses:

The goals on p. 37-43 do not align directly with the original project goals which would have been helpful. Additionally, if the table on p. 37-43 tied activities and benchmarks to responsible parties, there would be more accountability for completing tasks.

Reader's Score: 4

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

Sub Question

Strengths:

The project director has ample grant experience that includes state Reading First grants (p. 44). There is a diverse background of experience across key personnel. Details about experience related to this project were provided, particularly experience with research-based practices and standards implementation with school districts (p. 44).

Weaknesses:

Neither of the key personnel have B-preK experience. Neither has expertise with struggling or disadvantaged readers in particular.

Reader's Score: 4

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 leadership and implementation team brings in more diverse expertise across age and specialty. Early childhood is more effectively represented here, as is special education. Key groups are included here including agencies (such as Head Start) and state representation (such as Minnesota Department of Human Services and Health) (p. 45).

Weaknesses:

Families are underrepresented still. Consider adding a parent group. Although they may be represented on advisory councils, they should play a more prominent role. This would ensure the family perspective is being considered when planning and implementing the reading initiatives.

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: 16

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 number of LEAs served is appropriate with the budget provided. The objectives and design of the project warrant the budget requested. An impressive number of educators will be reached given the budget (p. 46). The potential significance of this project is adequate given the budget proposed (budget section).

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

The budget narrative is only provided for one year. Costs will increase in future years based upon new cohorts starting during overlap. The budget summary is inconsistent with the plans written out in the narrative, particularly as related to the literacy coordinators.

Reader's Score: 7

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 requires each subgrantee to budget within the given parameters (p 46). Continuous reporting will monitor these percentage rates. Amounts are pre-budgeted for awardees to guide spending (p. 47).

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.

Strengths:

Applicant proposes to create a plan to align state and federal literacy initiatives with federal funding streams (p 49). They intend for LEAs to align these funds for seamless delivery. This should lead to sustainability of new initiatives after this funding is over (p. 48-49).

Weaknesses:

No details were provided for how this plan would work. More guidance needs to be provided to SEA if they are expected to make this alignment.

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:

Three cohorts of 13-15 or 8-10 district-community partnerships (varying by year) will be allocated funding (p. 50). The applicant has created a process to ensure that these funds go to the neediest districts. Funding to each group appears adequate to meet this purpose (p. 50, budget).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

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:

Innovative technology is mentioned in the abstract as a sustainable outcome. On pages 13-14, previous work with innovative technology is outlined.

Weaknesses:

Not much detail about these technologies or their use is mentioned in the narrative. These technologies could have been tied in to points for subgrantee applications. It is unclear how universal design for learning will be tied into the professional development (p. 13-14).

Reader's Score: 2

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:

Throughout the proposal, attention is given disadvantaged students. Grant funds will be earmarked for schools with high levels of disadvantaged youth. Points are awarded based upon this. This priority has been met.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

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 entire project is based upon data collection of subgrantees and requiring subgrantees to propose their own means of collecting data on themselves. These data are tied into project goals. They are also tied into the application process for subgrantees. This priority has been met.

Weaknesses:

No mention is made of privacy requirements.

Reader's Score: 0

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

Status: Submitted

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

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Minnesota Department of Education -- Office of Innovation (S371C110018)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Quality of State-level activities		
Quality of State-level activities		
1. State-level activities	37	31
Sub Total	37	31
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	11
Sub Total	15	11
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	78.5

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - SRCL - 1: 84.371C

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: Minnesota Department of Education -- Office of Innovation (S371C110018)

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: 31

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:

The Minnesota (MN) literacy plan addresses the key aspects required to impact change from birth to grade 12 (p. 4-8; Appendix C). While the evidence base is not specified in the plan, the details provided are consistent with current educational practices and research. The plan differentiates key features (e.g., curriculum, instruction, assessment, differentiating instruction, and professional development central to the subsequent creation of an infrastructure targeted on change and a positive impact on the language and literacy learning of children. Recognizing that teachers are at the heart of educational change, the professional development plan (Appendix A) provides excellent details of the support to be provided to teachers. Further, the three priorities ensure that the project will have long-term effects on literacy education in MN (p. 1-10). Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has detailed the what and how of educational change and provided a clear path forward. Because MDE is attentive to planning, implementation and monitoring of each component of its plan, the likelihood of success in achieving the priorities is enhanced (p. 3). The comprehensive data driven decision-making model (Appendix B) that includes inquiry groups coming together to study the data, coupled with job-embedded professional development for the teachers in the use of evidence-based practices, and the ongoing monitoring of instructional practices and student achievement provide convincing evidence that the priorities will be achieved and the literacy achievement of disadvantaged students improved.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses identified.

Reader's Score: 10

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:

Improved literacy outcomes for disadvantaged students will only happen if attention to instructional practices is a key component of the path forward. MDE provides numerous details, including tools it will develop to assess the implementation of practices (p. 18), tools that may prove useful to other projects

Sub Question

as they seek to assess changes in classroom instructional practices. The disaggregation of achievement data gathered over the past four years serves as a critically important guide forward (p. 15-17). Core activities clearly link data with instruction and assessment (p. 20).

Weaknesses:

Student performance data will only be gathered at four grade levels (K, 3, 5, and 8) (p. 18). Teacher data will be self-report and satisfaction surveys and focus groups. Neither is sufficiently comprehensive for the MDE to have a clear and credible path forward, making it difficult for MDE to achieve their defined goals.

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:

The professional development plan for achieving the goal of changes in instructional practices acknowledges the significance of several key indicators of quality professional development (e.g., job-embedded, monitoring of impact on classroom practices, administrators as educational leaders). Partnering with nationally-recognized centers ensures high quality professional development (p. 19). Linking group professional development with classroom-based support will help to ensure that the research-based strategies are implemented into the classrooms. Each feature of the professional development plan is consistent with the latest research findings regarding high quality professional development that has shown promise in impacting student achievement. The specific attention to the professional needs of B-5 educators through the partnership with the early childhood center is commendable (p. 19). There is a clear path forward (p. 21-23), with monitoring progress toward aligning policies and procedures to the Literacy Plan (p. 20-21).

Weaknesses:

The interface between the two University of Minnesota centers that will partner with MDE and the regional networks to be established is not described (Appendix A). Further, how MDE will ensure that the experts and the providers are knowledgeable about the literacy plan is not provided (p.19).

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 evaluation plan is comprehensive, appropriately focusing on students, educators, and activities. Formative and summative data of child achievement and teacher instruction will be gathered. The independent evaluator will disaggregate the student data by the nine NCLB categories annually (p.23), thus allowing MDE to understand the comparative impact of the project on groups of students and to make data-driven changes to the project. A key component to the success of the project is continuous monitoring; MDE proposes the use of several monitoring protocols (p. 8-9). These data will allow adjustments to be made in the project. Appropriately, the annual reports are high stakes for the sub-grantees; poor performance could result in MDE discontinuing the funding. The criteria for selecting the external evaluator (Appendix E) appropriately requires skills in large-scale evaluation, evidenced-based instruction and programs and work with schools with disadvantaged students.

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

How the evaluator will complete the external evaluation and how the formative data will be gathered by the MDE staff are not fully specified. Those who make exemplary progress will be identified publicly; MDE does not define exemplary progress. The expert review criteria (Appendix E) are inconsistent with the B-12 scope of the project. The evaluator will gather no onsite observation of instruction; instruction data will be teacher self-report data through surveys and focus groups (p. 19-20). Though the independent evaluator may propose a sample of participating teachers for the focus groups, there is no suggestion that a sample of classrooms will be visited to observe instructional practices in action to confirm the data provided by the verbal report of the teachers.

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:

Formative and summative reports will be shared with appropriate audiences at the local and state levels (p. 9-10, 25). MDE appropriately differentiates which results will be shared with whom (p. 25), but intends to share the results broadly (p. 9). The Commissioner of Education will serve as the final voice in making the high stakes decisions and recognizing those who perform in an exemplary manner (p. 9-10). Appropriately, the aim of each report is to provide specific recommendations to improve instruction and achievement (p.10). Sub-grantees identified as not making annual progress will be required to prepare a report detailing their plans for corrective actions (p. 10).

Weaknesses:

The specific formats for sharing the data are not specified. Rather, the proposal narrative focuses on the audiences with whom the data will be shared, the purposes, and the place (i.e., webpage) (p. 25). While annual reports will be required, how this information will be translated so that it is useful to various groups is not provided. Guidelines for preparing the reports are not provided (p. 25).

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:

MDE will judge the capacity of a LEA to successfully implement a proposal through a potentially interesting procedure, a rubric focused on the record of effectiveness evidenced by the LEA and early childhood provider in three areas (p. 12, 25-26, 28). Further, LEAs will be required to use the Quality Rating and Improvement System, a state system, in the selection of preschool providers (p. 4); requiring

Sub Question

the use of this system is wise. MDE included a detailed sample application guidelines with the key criteria defined (p. 27-35). This draft could provide a rich point of discussion among the selected proposals.

Weaknesses:

The rubric is key to understanding how MDE will judge the capacity of LEAs to successfully implement their proposal; the rubric is missing from this proposal. MDE did not define the level of quality required for preschool program/provider participation. The number of points MDE will assign to the eligibility items of the sub-grantee proposals are minimal (p. 29-30).

Reader's Score: 2

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) MDE provides a comprehensive definition of disadvantaged students (p. 28-29). It defines the number of points to be awarded to LEAs who provide evidence of serving the greatest number of disadvantaged children. The criteria to be addressed are very comprehensive, requiring the sub-grantees to cite the evidence base and to include the use of technology.

(2) The draft proposal calls for the sub-grantees to describe their needs assessment process and the student and teacher data gathered as a result of the implementation of the process (p. 31). The Improving Learning Outcomes guiding questions suggest that sub-grantee proposals will be very comprehensive in nature. MDE has considered the broad range of items needed to improve student learning and prepared a set of excellent proposal guideline criteria (p. 31-34).

(3) MDE models the inclusion of multiple perspectives in the implementation of this project (p. 3). Appropriately, MDE will require sub-grantees to describe other stakeholders who will participate in planning and implementing their SRCL activities (p. 34). In addition to participating in the planning and implementation of the activities, MDE will require sub-grantees to report findings to these various groups.

Weaknesses:

(1) MDE will provide competitive edge points to sub-applicants who evidence the integration of other state and federal funds with the SRCL funds (p. 30), but will not provide competitive points to sub-applicants demonstrating that they serve the highest number or percentage of disadvantaged children.

(2) No weaknesses noted.

(3) Which stakeholders are key to improving student outcomes varies by age. For example, at the B-5 level, it is critically important to engage parents in the education of their children so that they become advocates for their children, while for high school student community partnerships are more important. The guidelines (p.34) make no effort to differentiate by age.

Reader's Score: 6

Sub Question

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:

MDE provides an extensive list of federal and state resources and details for LEAs on how these funds can be aligned with their sub-grantee proposals and with the B-12 literacy plan (p. 10-12). The aim of establishing a seamless delivery system, linking these various funding sources together in a focused way to serve the language and literacy needs of disadvantaged students, is admirable and definitely required if student achievement is the goal. In addition, the awarding of five points to LEAs who blend various funding sources will ensure that LEAs are attentive to this criterion (p. 30).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

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:

MDE provides a definition of disadvantaged students that is inclusive of students who live in poverty (p. 28). In the review process, districts will be rank ordered based on need, with only those with one of the highest percentages of disadvantaged students eligible to receive a subgrant award (p. 35). This procedure might result in the LEAs with the most disadvantaged students being funded.

Weaknesses:

Because the MDE definition of disadvantaged is inclusive of several categories and poverty status is not clearly tied to each category, it is possible that a LEA with high percentages of special needs students and/or ELL students, with high percentages of students in neither group from low-income homes, may consider themselves eligible to apply for SRCL funds (p. 28-29). In addition, it is not clear how the rank ordering interfaces with the point totals awarded in the sample application (p. 35). Further, it is not clear in the selection of the sub-grantees how percentages of disadvantaged students will be weighed (p. 36). Finally, it appears the LEAs might select early childhood centers or LEAs that do not serve high numbers/percentages of disadvantaged children (p. 29-30). Collectively, these items could result in LEAs who do not serve large percentages of disadvantaged children receiving SRCL funds.

Reader's Score: 3

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 sample application calls for LEAs to provide several kinds of evidence (e.g., previous effectiveness on several dimensions [p. 29-30] program description [p. 30-31]). Because citing evidence is woven throughout the sample application, it is likely that LEA proposals will attend to providing an evidence base for each component of the application.

Weaknesses:

MDE has not defined the kind of evidence it requires LEAs to cite in their applications (p. 29-32). MDE has not indicated how points will be distributed within the broad Part C category (p. 31-34). Without specific points awarded for each subcategory and the elements within each category, it is possible that

Sub Question

this criterion will go unmet.

Reader's Score: 2.5

- 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:

The two-step review process is a version of what other grant agencies use to select the best proposals (p. 35-36). The use of expert independent reviewers who meet specific criteria is appropriate (p. 36); this independent review should lead to the identification of the best proposals. MDE will provide assistance to LEAs in the selection of evidence-based materials and strategies; this is important to the selection of materials and strategies with an evidence base, rather than a publisher professing that the material has an impact on student performance (p. 36-37). Following the announcement of the availability of the funds, MDE will appropriately support LEAs in the application process using a variety of procedures (p. 25-26).

Weaknesses:

How the second stage of the review process will interface with the expert panel review stage is unclear. The description reads as though it is possible for MDE to overrule the expert panel to select proposals that did not receive the highest points (p. 36). No information is provided regarding how the 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: 11

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:

MDE has defined a clear timeline, activities, and benchmarks, linked to goals (p. 37-43). The benchmarks are appropriately specific, leading to the potential for high quality LEA proposals that impact student performance. Stage 1 includes the acknowledgement of the importance of stakeholders and staff buy-in for project success, with a specific level of support required (p. 38); this is key to the success of the project and must be a requirement of early childhood partner staff as well as the LEA staff. Adding strength to the expert review process, reviewers will be trained in the sub-grant application process in a two-day workshop (p. 39). Assessment, analysis of data, problem solving, and reporting are at the heart of the activities, improving the potential for success (i.e., p. 39-40). The plan for ongoing group professional development is specific, with attention to student performance mandated within the Professional Learning Community work (p. 40-41). The degree of specificity is appropriate to the achievement of the project goals.

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

The proposal would be improved by clearly specifying who is responsible for completing each activity; this would hold people accountable for meeting the benchmarks (p. 37-43); sometimes, but not consistently, the responsible party is noted in the activity. Though the second cohort is brought on in 2012-2013, the structure of support the MDE will provide to them in proposal development stage is not clear (p. 41-42). For quality second round proposals, the MDE will need to repeat the cycle of support provided to cohort 1 (p. 38-39). Finally, several of the goals that the timeline lists lack clarity. The goals on page 37-43 should be consistent with the goals at the beginning of the proposal.

Reader's Score: 4

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

Strengths:

The project director appears to have the background of training and experience for the position, as does Kari Ross (p. 44). Having worked with Reading First, the project director should possess the knowledge and skills to ensure the implementation of this project. The specificity regarding the Literacy Coordinators time at their implementation sites ensures weekly contact that is important to the success of the project.

Weaknesses:

The qualifications of some of the Leadership and Implementation Team are missing, as is a job description for the Assessment Coordinator (p. 44-45). The proposal contains no Appendix G (p. 44). There is a discrepancy between the number of sites to which each Literacy Coordinator (LC) will be assigned in the proposal narrative (p. 3-5) and the budget narrative (p. 3-6). Given the tasks assigned to the LCs and the requirement that they work at each site once a week, the number seems large; it will be difficult for the LC to do the important tasks assigned with potentially less than one full day a week at each site (Budget Narrative, p. 2). The budget narrative and p. 46 suggest that consultants will be hired. There are no qualifications specified for this position. There is no information provided about the Early Learning Specialist and her background in language and literacy (p. 45) or regarding who has the background to work with the early childhood providers.

Reader's Score: 3.5

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:

Two state groups will work closely with the implementation team. These two state groups bring a diversity of perspectives to the project (p. 45). MDE intends to continue receiving guidance from at least two councils and a collaborative (p. 3); the diversity of perspectives will be helpful to the implementation of the project. The focus of one of the two councils is B-age 8; this perspective is particularly important to the success of the project. Early care centers are different from LEAs. LEAs will need assistance understanding the cultures of its partners. The Early Childhood Council has considerable clout in the state, reporting to the Governor, Cabinet, and Legislature; this is a key partner (p. 45).

Weaknesses:

MDE is not gathering information from families regarding the design and implementation of the proposed project.

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 budget narrative for the SEA portion of the requested funding seems reasonable (Budget Narrative, 1-5). MDE will distribute a majority of the funds to the sub-grantees thus placing the funding where it can have a direct impact on students (p. 5).

Weaknesses:

While an Assessment Coordinator for Literacy is identified on p. 45, this person is not included in the MDE budget request (p. 1-2, Budget Narrative [BN]). There is a discrepancy between response to C(ii) which says that 3.5 Literacy Coordinators (p. 44) will be hired and the budget narrative which says that 2.5 will be hired (BN, p. 1-2). Given the concern expressed earlier regarding the ratio of Literacy Coordinators to sites, a reduction to 2.5 Literacy Coordinators suggests a further diminution of potential impact these coordinators can have on each site. When additional cohorts are added, the costs need to be adjusted (i.e., more Literacy Coordinators). If the grant cycle is two years and each LEA receives the funds for each year, then the cost of line 8 in the MDE budget would need to double each year beyond year one to cover the cost of a new and old cohort. This is not the case in the current proposed budget summary.

Reader's Score: 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:

MDE has a careful plan for overseeing the LEAs use of the funds (p. 47); this is important to the wise and appropriate spending of funds. MDE created a formula for the distribution of funds to districts that distributes the funds as directed by the federal government (p. 47-48). The structure of the funding ensures that LEAs purchase specific items (Literacy Coordinator, professional development, materials), while granting LEAs considerable freedom selecting materials appropriate to the needs of their students (within the framework set forth earlier in the proposal). An important feature of the formula is the per student rate; LEAs with greater numbers of disadvantaged students will secure, appropriately, additional funds (p. 47-48). The combination of a base amount (p. 47) with a student adjusted amount (p. 48) ensures equity, but with MDE controlling an aspect of the budget.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses identified.

Reader's Score: 4

3. (iii) The extent to which the SEA will use the grant to leverage other State and Federal funds in

Sub Question

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:

MDE provided a funding structure table in Section A that detailed how it would leverage other funds to support this effort (p. 49). MDE showed its value for the integration of funds by planning to award competitive points for LEAs who include this information in their proposals (p. 30). This coordinated approach is important to serving the needs of disadvantaged students well and should ensure that progress achieved is sustained after the SRCL funds end.

Weaknesses:

The proposal provides no indication of how LEAs will be directed to include information on the funds leveraged in their budget narrative (p. 49-50). Such guidance is important to the actualization of this requirement. The discussion of the linkage should be more than a chart; the budget and corresponding narrative should define what will be purchased to support the project goals/objectives and the associated funding source. In this way, MDE will be able to make judgments about the nature of the matching funds. This would provide a concrete means of awarding the competitive points.

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:

MDE has a plan for the distribution of the funds to sub-grantees (p. 50). MDE developed a scheme for distributing the funds to sub-grantees with base funding for all LEAs and additional funding based on the number of disadvantaged students (p. 47-48). This structure creates the potential for LEAs to be supported at the level needed to provide quality education for disadvantaged children.

Weaknesses:

The proposal does not describe how MDE made the decision about the size of the total sub-grantee award or the assignment of \$100 for each point generated in the developed child count scheme. Therefore it is difficult to know whether or not the amount is what sub-grantees will need to implement to accomplish their goals (p. 50). Additionally, the amount from other funding sources that LEAs will be able to use to supplement the SRCL funding is unknown. Therefore, it is difficult to know if the sub-grants are of sufficient size to ensure that LEAs will be able to serve the needs of disadvantaged students. There is inconsistency in the proposal regarding the maximum amount of the sub-grants (i.e., \$850,000 [p. 25], \$950,000 [p.50]).

Reader's Score: 3

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:

MDE provides an extensive description of their previous technology work and Universal Design for Learning, work supported by an earlier grant (p. 13-14). Enthusiasm for both is expressed. Support for the use of technology is woven throughout the proposal. The criteria listed in the sample sub-grant application indicate that sub-grantees must provide details on how technology will be used to improve disadvantaged language and literacy development of children (p. 30), as an instructional tool or strategy (p. 32), and in professional development opportunities for educators. This suggests that MDE recognizes the value of technology as a resource to enhance the learning of both students and educators.

Weaknesses:

MDE has used the language of technology throughout the proposal, but provided few details regarding which instructional materials and strategies will be recommended to enhance the achievement of disadvantaged students. Further, the effective use of technology would be an appropriate criterion for competitive points in the sub-grant application process, given that it receives competitive points in this review process.

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:

MDE has developed a Literacy Plan for the state that details its view of appropriate learning outcomes, instruction, and assessment of its young citizens. It will provide districts with an assessment of the number/percentage of disadvantaged students in the district; this will assist districts in deciding whether or not to apply for the SRCL funds. Once sub-applications are submitted, the MDE will rank order the submitted applications by percentage of disadvantaged students. In addition, the draft application guidelines for the sub-grants clearly frame the importance of working with disadvantaged students. Further, the number of disadvantaged students ultimately determines the size of the sub-grant award (p. 48). Finally, MDE has developed a cohesive, comprehensive B-12 literacy plan; LEAs will be required to design proposals to address the features of this plan.

MET

Weaknesses:

None identified.

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:

MDE specified three priorities, with the 3rd related to this priority. The aim is to ensure that data are used for decision-making at all levels. Beginning with a needs assessment, MDE disaggregated its MN accountability test data to better understand the performance of subgroups of students. Similarly, sub-grantees will disaggregate their district data to reveal the performance of subgroups. Monitoring student outcome data at the school, classroom, and student level, again disaggregating by subgroups, is a required component of the sub-application criteria. The stated aim must be the use of data to improve instruction across all literacy settings. In addition, teacher data will be gathered and analyzed to determine how to adjust professional development to ensure impact on teaching practices.

MET

Weaknesses:

While ongoing assessment is recommended, MDE does not provide suggestions for LEAs regarding the kinds of instruments to use to gather data linked to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), now MN standards. Further, there is no indication how the assessment tools to be used map onto the CCSS. In addition, accountability data will not be gathered at each grade level, and no accountability data will be gathered at the preschool level. Each of these create challenges to providing data for decision-making.

Reader's Score: 0

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