

**U.S. Department of Education - EDCAPS
G5-Technical Review Form (New)**

Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (U282A180024)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	15	12
Objectives		
1. Objectives	20	18
Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants		
1. Subgrant Applicants	15	11
State Plan		
1. State Plan	20	18
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	11
Parent and Community Involvement		
1. Involvement	10	5
Flexibility		
1. Flexibility	5	4
Sub Total	100	79
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
Equitable Financing		
1. Equitable Financing	6	3
Sub Total	6	3
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
Charter School Facilities		
1. Charter School Facilities	6	2
Sub Total	6	2
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
Best Practices to Improve Struggling School/LEAs		
1. Struggling Schools	3	1
Sub Total	3	1
Competitive Preference Priority 5		
Serving At-Risk Students		

1. At-Risk Students	3	2
Sub Total	3	2
Competitive Preference Priority 6		
Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing		
1. Best Practices	5	3
Sub Total	5	3
Total	123	90

Technical Review Form

Panel #14 - Panel 14 - North Carolina - 1: 84.282A

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (U282A180024)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

Reader's Score: 12

Sub Question

1. (1) The extent to which the proposed project demonstrates a rationale

Strengths:

The applicant clearly demonstrates the rationale of increasing access to high quality charter school options to Educational Disadvantaged students throughout the application. The 3 objectives all tie into serving the needs of Educationally Disadvantaged (ED) Students (e16) and the logic model demonstrates outputs leading to the outcomes of reaching more ED students by developing and distributing alongside grantee cohorts the best practices for serving ED students (e29). It is clear that the applicant thought through the strategic planning required from this endeavor.

The applicant provides supportive data to describe how charter schools should be serving more ED students, and has developed an application process which places additional emphasis on serving students in rural areas, increasing ethnic diversity, serving high school (HS) students and developing a charter focused on serving dropout and recovery students (e38); the applicant uses data to demonstrate the gap between traditional and charter schools in terms of serving ED students (e44-45). Utilizing the demographic breakdown of students being served in traditional and charter schools from the annual report helps them to identify which populations in their state.

Weaknesses:

The rationale would benefit more from having evidence to demonstrate how school leaders with experience serving Educationally Disadvantaged students have learned from each other. There appears to be no baseline data to determine what best practices there are and no historical insight into what the best practices are is provided. Finally, no insight is provided into how school leaders and applicants develop and utilize their logic model as a sustainable aspect of their growth.

Reader's Score: 7

2. (2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.

Strengths:

The applicant demonstrates the quality of the overall project by developing three strong objectives with clearly measurable goals, and added a series of performance measures that are linked to each objective. While baseline data is not provided for all of the measures, the applicant will establish benchmark data in year one and measure

Sub Question

growth and achievement from then until the end of the performance period (e48). The performance measures listed on page e48 are tied into the objectives and the goals. For example, the objectives are clearly linked to the goals through performance measures, and are ambitious enough that the applicant has taken the time to thoroughly review and strategically prepare to meet the needs of their state.

For example, some of the performance targets for Objective 1 are: Adding a greater number of educationally disadvantaged students (40-51%) over the course of the grant; at least 40% of sub-grantees will maintain an "A" or "B" School Performance Grade and will meet or exceed growth in years 1-2; at least 50% will do so in years 3-5. As Objective 1 focuses on growing the number of educationally disadvantaged students and their access to high-quality charter schools, the applicant demonstrates the clarity and measurability of the objectives and goal described in application (e48).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Objectives

1. The ambitiousness of the State entity's objectives for the quality charter school program carried out under this program.

Note: In response to this criterion, an applicant may address (or cross reference) some or all of the components of application requirements (I)(A)-(G) in this notice, which require the applicant to provide a description of the State entity's objectives in running a quality charter school program and how the objectives of the program will be carried out.

Strengths:

The ambitiousness of the applicants' objectives can be seen witnessed by meshing the historical data demonstrated on page e50 with the clearly written objectives. Each of the three objectives are well written and align with the data presented, which demonstrate how driven the applicant is in exceeding expectations through this project. For example, on page e50, the Growth in the Number of Charter Schools Operating chart indicates there is a clear need for additional high quality charter schools.

Additionally, Objective 2, which aims to develop cohorts of school leaders with a portfolio of best practices when it comes to serving educationally disadvantaged students, was developed based on the applicant determining that the charter school community has numerous innovative and research based leaders who continue to develop strategies and have the resources and experience to develop best practices for serving educationally disadvantaged students, but need a shared community in which to share those practices (e50).

The applicant's foci on increasing high quality charter schools and providing more opportunities for educationally disadvantaged students to attend, are demonstrable components measured through the collection of data, regular surveying, and enhanced technical assistance to school leaders to develop a series of best practices aimed at serving educationally disadvantaged students (e48-55).

The objectives tie into multiple application requirements, as demonstrated by Objective 1, which can be linked to, including 8(a) (recruitment and enrollment practices to promote inclusion of all students, including by eliminating any barriers to enrollment for educationally disadvantaged students), and 1(A) (Support the opening of charter schools through the startup of new charter schools...), and 13 (work with eligible applicants receiving a sub-grant under the State entity's program to support the opening of new charter schools or charter school models described in application requirement (I)(A)(1) that are high schools). Additionally, the Application Requirement 9 (Share best and promising practices between charter schools and other public schools is directly tied to Objective 3 (Broadly Disseminate Best Practices in Serving Educationally Disadvantaged Students and Foster Collaboration in the Charter School Community

and Between Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools).

Weaknesses:

While the applicant does exhibit evidence of ambitiousness through the goals and objectives (e48-52), the application lacks more compelling information regarding the approach to supporting charter schools at agency's level; long-lasting systematic change at the LEA level would support the applicant's project more effectively.

Reader's Score: 18

Selection Criteria - Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants

1. The likelihood that the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the program will meet those objectives and improve educational results for students.

Strengths:

The data provided in the appendices does appear to indicate that the charter school community is growing in strength and achievement (e56). For example, as listed in the 2016-17 annual report, charter schools are consistently performing well in comparison of performance scores and annual grades given by the state. Specifically, while 3.3% of districts schools received an "A" grade, 6.7 % of charter schools received the same score (e215).

The performance measures listed in the applicant are strong indicators that they will be able to measure growth consistently. For example, 40% of sub-grantees are required to be scoring A or B on the school performance grade by year 3, which demonstrates the applicant's goals outlined in Objective 1, which is to make sustainable change in a), the number of students being served, and b), the development of high-quality charter schools (e48-49).

Weaknesses:

While some data is included that reviews a 3-4 year period, overall the data provided lacks demonstrative growth over a longer period like 3-5 years. One year is not sufficient enough to demonstrate increased achievement (e57-58). Providing additional data would support the application's assertion that charter schools will consistently meet or exceed state expectations.

Reader's Score: 11

Selection Criteria - State Plan

1. The State entity's plan to--

- 1) Adequately monitor the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program;**
- 2) Work with the authorized public chartering agencies involved to avoid duplication of work for the charter schools and authorized public chartering agencies; and**
- 3) Provide technical assistance and support for--**
 - i. The eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program; and**
 - ii. Quality authorizing efforts in the State.**

Strengths:

The applicant provides a strategically developed plan that includes consistent oversight of sub-grantees, including biannual monitoring (e64) and budgetary reviews (e65). School that are struggling by scoring a D or F on the score card, or who are not meeting state expectations will receive additional technical assistance to identify existing challenges (e61).

There is a procedure in place for closing out charter schools should expectations not be met (e65).

The applicant intends to require sub-grant applications to be submitted through an online application portal in order to consolidate all of the information in one platform, and track applicants throughout the entire application process. Both the applicant and the authorizer agency will have access to this portal, which helps avoid unnecessary data collection concerns (e66). The applicant will provide technical assistance and support before, during and after the award process by conducting monthly webinars and by hosting face-to-face "office hours" with current applicants.

Once an application has been approved, they will join the North Carolina ACCESS program, a series of five trainings designed to share best practices in serving educationally disadvantaged students with the charter and traditional public school communities (e66-67).

Weaknesses:

The strategic plan could benefit from additional comparison and more context regarding achievements between charter and traditional district schools other, to demonstrate how charter schools are doing over a period of time. Much of the data collected focuses on one year (e217-224).

Reader's Score: 18

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers:**

Reader's Score: 11

Sub Question

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

Strengths:

The management plan follows a series of incremental steps that aim to build, step by step, the capacity of the applicant to meet the project and objectives and measures on an annual basis (e70). For example, staff are hired based on their areas of expertise and will report on their responsibilities to the Program Manager (e68). Plans are aligned to objectives and clearly delineate responsibilities between different staff and contractors, and provides a timeline as to when those will be completed (e72).

Weaknesses:

The timelines lacked significant detail, and the performance measures were not added for context and to support the overall links between all aspects of the application. Another concern stems from the applicant not designating a project lead for each particular side subsection, which would further support the timeline's ability to meet and complete each subproject in the timeline.

Reader's Score: 8

- 2. (2) The extent to which the time commitments of the project director and principal investigator and other key project personnel are appropriate and adequate to meet the objectives of the proposed project**

Sub Question

Strengths:

The time commitments appear to be reasonable for the key project personnel. For example, the budget specialist will devote 80% to technical assistance (TA) and 20% to administrative work, while the TA specialist will devote 90% to TA and 10% to administrative duties (e293-294).

Weaknesses:

The program manager will only spend 10% of his/her time on this project, which just seems unlikely given their role (e292). Additionally, only one resume has been submitted (e84) for a project lead, so there is not enough information to determine if the other staff have the capacity to meet the goals and objectives. No job descriptions were submitted to further support required qualifications.

Also, it is important to note that the Project Director is listed as 5% of the time spent on the project in the budget narrative so it is unclear what role they have to play given the wide range of projects taking place (e161).

Reader's Score: 3

Selection Criteria - Parent and Community Involvement

1. The State entity's plan to solicit and consider input from parents and other members of the community on the implementation and operation of charter schools in the State.

Strengths:

The applicant requires sub-grantees to create and maintain a Parent/Community Advisory Council (e73), which is focused on increasing services for educationally disadvantaged populations by reporting on any potential improvement on charter school operations.

Additionally, time will be reserved during the Charter School Advisory Board meetings for parents and community members to share feedback on any of the sub-grant applications and review the online versions uploaded to the applicant's website (e73).

Weaknesses:

The applicant appears to collect information on parental/community involvement solely from CSP funded schools, and not all charter schools (e73). The practice of soliciting and considering input at the state level from all charter schools and just not CSP funded schools is not articulated thus parent involvement is potentially limited.

Parents and Community members are also invited to an open to the public session held monthly discussion potential sub-grantees to share their opinion on the potential success of the charter school developers (e73), but there is no determination of how this will be used.

There is very little evidence included, other than the inclusion of survey feedback from monitoring visits to the Annual Report (e200), to demonstrate how the state entity will solicit and consider input from parents and other members of the community on the implementation/operation of charter schools.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Flexibility

1. The degree of flexibility afforded by the State's charter school law and how the State entity will work to maximize the flexibility provided to charter schools under such law.

Strengths:

The applicant's state charter school law allows for flexibility over budget, curriculum and operating procedures (e75).

Additionally, the applicant seeks to build regional knowledge and understanding of the flexibility provided to charter schools by planning and implementing an annual two-day policy summit with the North Carolina ACCESS Fellowship program. This summit aims to analyze and share insight into the allowances for flexibility and oversight in state statutes and policies (e75).

Weaknesses:

Any obligations included in charter agreements between the developer and the authorizing agency to determine any major changes or revisions could impact the flexibility and lead to a hampering of the scope of flexibility provided to charter schools through state law. The significance of this is that authorizing agencies could encumber the autonomy of a charter school developer should it feel compelled to, and the developer would be unable to appeal to any authority to assist.

Reader's Score: 4

Priority Questions**Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Equitable Financing**

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located ensures equitable financing, as compared to traditional public schools, for charter schools and students in a prompt manner.**

Strengths:

The applicant demonstrates the provisions of presenting charter schools with assistance with facilities acquisition and supporting access to public facilities by providing a summary of relevant state regulations which pertain to providing charter schools with assistance in locating and purchasing a facility. An example includes 115C-218-105(b), where "Funds allocated by the State Board of Education may be used to enter into operational and financing leases for real property or mobile classroom units for use as school facilities for charter schools and may be used for payments on loans made to charter schools for facilities, equipment, or operations" (e128).

Weaknesses:

It is explicitly stated in state statute that Funds sourced from the State Board of Education may be used for the purpose of finding and developing a facility, yet it is unclear if this is a dedicated source of facilities funding, or why this source of funding is only a portion funding allowed for facility development and purchasing or leasing. While there is a system appeals process in place, no guarantee of equitable costs or access is demonstrated by the applicant. The applicant does not clearly demonstrate that charter schools are given equitable access to other funding sources for facilities, such as low-interest financing or low-cost lease specials, other than the one described.

Additionally, many charter schools do not have a sufficient amount of capital construction funding on hand, which will inhibit the ability of first time operators to find, purchase and redevelop a facility and could lead to the development of barriers to charter school developers purchasing facilities without major assistance.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority 3 - Charter School Facilities

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located provides charter schools one or more of the following:**

- a) Funding for facilities;
- b) Assistance with facilities acquisition;
- c) Access to public facilities;
- d) The ability to share in bonds or mill levies;
- e) The right of first refusal to purchase public school buildings; or
- f) Low- or no-cost leasing privileges.

Strengths:

The applicant demonstrates the provisions of presenting charter schools with assistance with facilities acquisition and supporting access to public facilities by providing a summary of relevant state regulations which pertain to providing charter schools with assistance in locating and purchasing a facility. An example includes 115C-218-105(b), where “Funds allocated by the State Board of Education may be used to enter into operational and financing leases for real property or mobile classroom units for use as school facilities for charter schools and may be used for payments on loans made to charter schools for facilities, equipment, or operations” (e128).

Weaknesses:

It is explicitly stated in state statute that Funds sourced from the State Board of Education may be used for the purpose of finding and developing a facility, yet it is unclear if this is a dedicated source of facilities funding, or why this source of funding is only a portion funding allowed to be used for facility development and purchasing or leasing. While there is a system appeals process in place, no guarantee of equitable costs or access is demonstrated by the applicant. The applicant does not clearly demonstrate that charter schools are given equitable access to other funding sources for facilities, such as low-interest financing or low-cost lease specials, other than the one described.

Additionally, many charter schools do not have a sufficient amount of capital construction costs on hand, which will inhibit the ability of first time operators to find, purchase and redevelop a facility and could lead to the development of barriers to charter school developers purchasing facilities without major assistance.

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority 4 - Best Practices to Improve Struggling School/LEAs

1. **To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located uses best practices from charter schools to help improve struggling schools and local educational agencies.**

Strengths:

The applicant demonstrates the intent to use best practices from charter schools to help improve struggling schools and local education agencies by running a series of robust trainings to “develop a cadre of 100 Charter School Leaders” who will share their experiences by presenting topics on how to best serve educationally disadvantaged students. Each cohort of sub-grantees support the program’ by presenting on their experiences (e43). Additionally, the applicant will run other events designed to support the dissemination of best practices for struggling schools, , including four, day-long training opportunities to assist charter schools that have received a low-performing or continually low-performing designation (e21).

Weaknesses:

The training and professional development opportunities for schools identified as struggling are not required to attend; they only receive a letter inviting them to attend which does not demonstrate how the applicant is applying effective strategies to the dissemination of best practices (e21). Additionally, there is no evidence of the impact these training/ professional development training have any impact on the dissemination of best practices to support struggling schools and districts as no sufficient data was provided.

There is no evidence provided to support the statement on page e41: “the MDE examined the challenges for charter schools in 2018. The results were that charter schools needed accurate educational improvement measures, access to resources, and technical assistance on how to embrace autonomy and oversight.” The applicant does not provide data to support the effectiveness of these training, or to identify the effectiveness of previous trainings.

Reader's Score: 1

Competitive Preference Priority 5 - Serving At-Risk Students

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which it supports charter schools that serve at-risk students through activities such as dropout prevention, dropout recovery, or comprehensive career counseling services.**

Strengths:

The Applicant clearly demonstrates the extent of the services available to serving at-risk students by referring to the DROP-001 policy passed in 2004, which requires dropout prevention and at-risk student services be part of the educational program at every local education agency, including charter schools (e31). This provides clear language explaining the services available to supporting at-risk students, and the applicant then references the implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), which drives school improvement through the effective use of data and “research-based academic and behavioral strategies” (e22) and is particularly focused on supporting growth for students who are at risk of failure or dropping out due to academic or behavioral issues.

The DROP Recovery Program mandates that dropout prevention and at-risk student services be a part of the educational program at every local education agency (LEA), including charter schools (e31).

Additionally, the applicant supports charter schools serving at-risk students by requiring them to develop detailed plans on how to serve at-risk students as part of the pre-requisite for applying for a sub-grant(e115). All applications for funding are evaluated for thoroughness and effectiveness during the application review and charter renewal process, which demonstrates how the applicant is providing TA to upcoming charter developers regarding its policies.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not provide enough effective baseline data on the importance of the MTSS model and its impact, stating that 80% of schools have implemented it, but this does not support its overall effectiveness (e284). Three or more years of data, alongside an example of best practice, would more clearly demonstrating the history of the applicant of working with schools to support at-risk students, and would support the theory that the MTSS system being implemented is effectively serving and addressing the needs of at-risk students.

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority 6 - Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which it has taken steps to ensure that all authorized public chartering agencies implement best practices for charter school authorizing.**

Strengths:

The applicant adequately demonstrates how it has strategized the implementation of authorizing best practices by three separate government units assessing the performance of the authorized public chartering agency (e27) by analyzing statewide performance data accessed through the Annual Performance Framework.

Best practices demonstrated in the application include a fast-track system for advanced applicants who can provide

evidence of multiple years of academic progress and achievement (e26), which reveals how the applicant seeks to implement improvements in charter school authorizing by incentivizing high-quality developers to continue to open schools. Additionally, another best practice implementation by the applicant is the and the requirement that all new applications must submit a series of technical standards, a logic model, and three program specific goals that must be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, rigorous, time-bound) (e246). It is evident that the applicant is employing a rigorous series of steps for applicants to ensure only the most dedicated and high-quality developers submit high-quality applications for funding.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not discuss previous steps taken to implement best practices by the agency, considering charter schools have been in operation since 1994 (e19). Developing a plan for implementing best practices is not enough, more examples are needed to determine how much success, if any, these steps will have. Even though self-assessment is useful for reviewing authorizer practices, it shouldn't be the sole practice in place to measure performance as such may present a false reality of success.

Reader's Score: 3

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 06/12/2018 04:17 PM

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (U282A180024)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	15	13
Objectives		
1. Objectives	20	18
Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants		
1. Subgrant Applicants	15	13
State Plan		
1. State Plan	20	18
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	10
Parent and Community Involvement		
1. Involvement	10	6
Flexibility		
1. Flexibility	5	4
Sub Total	100	82
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
Equitable Financing		
1. Equitable Financing	6	3
Sub Total	6	3
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
Charter School Facilities		
1. Charter School Facilities	6	1
Sub Total	6	1
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
Best Practices to Improve Struggling School/LEAs		
1. Struggling Schools	3	1
Sub Total	3	1
Competitive Preference Priority 5		
Serving At-Risk Students		

1. At-Risk Students	3	1
Sub Total	3	1
Competitive Preference Priority 6		
Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing		
1. Best Practices	5	3
Sub Total	5	3
Total	123	91

Technical Review Form

Panel #14 - Panel 14 - North Carolina - 1: 84.282A

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (U282A180024)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

Reader's Score: 13

Sub Question

1. (1) The extent to which the proposed project demonstrates a rationale

Strengths:

The Logic Model presented on page e29 is well-designed, easy to read, appears to be informed by research and/or evaluation findings, and has clear links between each of the components.

Activities and outputs identified in the logic model (page e29) are clearly key components aligned to delivering on each objective and resulting anticipated outcomes are clear.

A reasonable argument is provided (on page e30) for placing separate targets for the number of subgrant awards to the subgrantee applicant categories of new schools, replications, and expansions, so as to ensure projects with a history of demonstrated quality will be utilized to impact a greater number of students.

Rationale for the three main objective goals that make up the backbone of the logic model is presented along with the objectives in a subsequent section (pages e43-e55). The applicant presents three objectives, each with a strong rationale that builds off the previous one. Each identifies evidence and findings from which key project components are developed, and is incorporated into the overall logic model.

Further, the logic model rationale is based on existing evidence that charter schools are on average serving fewer educationally disadvantaged students, but at the same time are increasing the achievement of these subgroups. The applicant thus catalyzes on the success of one to move the needle on the other. See pages e217-e224

Weaknesses:

While evidence is provided to support each objective, the data presented is broad, and in some cases is not current or is not disaggregated by the educationally disadvantaged subgroups that are the focus of each objective. For example, academic performance by certain educationally disadvantaged subgroup is provided on page e58, but only for math. Likewise, many data points in Appendix F.13 State Board of Education (SBE) Strategic Plan (pages e263-e287) are missing the last three years of charter school data.

Some of the desired "outcomes" presented in the logic model appear to be more outputs than true improved outcomes in terms of initial and long-term impact to the field. However, the purpose of these long-term outputs is

Sub Question

explained within the rationale for each objective presented in a subsequent section.

Reader's Score: 8

2. (2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.

Strengths:

The Logic Model presented on page e29 is well-designed, easy to read, introduces objectives, activities, goals, and outcomes to be achieved by the project, and has clear links between each of the components. Overall, these elements present a clear picture of what is proposed to be achieved by the project in a specified, measurable, and meaningful way. For example, each objective in the logic model has clear activities identified against it, with expected resulting short-term (3-year), medium-term (5-year), and long-term outcomes identified.

Outcomes are expressed in the Logic Model in terms of clear measurable goals with metrics and timeframes identified. Activities and outputs identified in the logic model are clearly key components aligned to delivering on each objective and resulting anticipated outcomes are clear.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Objectives

1. The ambitiousness of the State entity's objectives for the quality charter school program carried out under this program.

Note: In response to this criterion, an applicant may address (or cross reference) some or all of the components of application requirements (I)(A)-(G) in this notice, which require the applicant to provide a description of the State entity's objectives in running a quality charter school program and how the objectives of the program will be carried out.

Strengths:

Three main interconnected objectives are presented by the applicant (pages e43-e55), each with a strong rationale that builds off the previous one. Together these three objectives present a very impressive, and ambitious focus on not just increasing the number of educationally disadvantaged students service in charter schools, with best practice collection to serve as technical assistance to the CSP subgrantee cohorts, but also on establishing dissemination activities to equip all schools to better serve educationally disadvantaged students to close academic gaps in performance. The objectives proposed also seek to innovatively break down barriers between types of schools by sharing usable best practices resources from the charter community with traditional public schools. This doubly ambitious focus not only has the potential to transform educational approaches to better serve educationally disadvantaged students, but also transform the entire public school community by bringing it together to collectively implement proven strategies across the state.

The objectives are presented in significant detail, address key priorities identified for this year's CSP State Entity grant competition, and innovatively incorporate the core application requirements that make up the backbone of the federal Charter Schools Program. The objectives collectively have the potential to work together to, over time, exponentially improve the quality of educational provision for educationally disadvantaged students in the state.

Weaknesses:

The ability to achieve the long-term goal of lasting, systemic change in the provision of quality services to educationally disadvantaged and at-risk students would require active support and involvement of LEAs under Objective 3 to achieve the expressed goal of cementing lasting and systemic change. Thus, more information on how the dissemination activities would specifically incorporate best practice professional development for Local Education Authorities is necessary to determine the potential for long-term, significant impact.

Reader's Score: 18

Selection Criteria - Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants**1. The likelihood that the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the program will meet those objectives and improve educational results for students.****Strengths:**

The applicant provides evidence (page e56) that the percentage of quality charter schools, as indicated by performance rating, is improving. This is further demonstrated by 70% of charter schools statewide in 2016-17 meeting or exceeding academic growth expectations (pages e56-e57). In addition, evidence was presented that charters are exceeding the performance of traditional schools on most of the measures indicated on page e57. Together this evidence suggests that the charter school sector is engaged in improving its own practices to continually serve students better year after year, thus demonstrating an increasing likelihood that a CSP subgrant applicant would be able to demonstrate their ability to meet the proposed objectives outlined in this proposal, as well as improve educational results.

Additionally, more charter schools (as presented on page e59) are starting to serve an increased percentage of educationally disadvantaged students in recent years through utilizing a weighted lottery. The availability and increased use of a weighted lottery suggests that potential CSP applicants may be more likely to demonstrate their commitment to serving a significant or increased educationally disadvantaged population by utilizing this tool, enabling underserved students and their parents (often with less agency/social capital) to have improved chances of being selected in the school lottery, and enabling CSP subgrantees to broaden the number of educationally disadvantaged students they serve. In addition, existing high-quality providers are identified by the applicant as already successfully serving educationally disadvantaged populations have indicated their desire to replicate in order to serve more educationally disadvantaged students with a high-quality school option (page e59). These existing replication/expansion schools would serve as experienced, core members of the Cadre identified for Objective #2, which would increase the likelihood of CSP subgrantees serving educationally disadvantaged kids to a high-quality. These elements speak to the applicant's desired focus on increasing the number of educationally disadvantaged students served by CSP subgrant recipients (Objective #1, pages e44-e50), but also the likelihood of achieving improved educational results for these students due to the contribution of the Cadre members experienced in serving these students with quality (Objective #2, pages e50-e52).

Strong authorizing practices appear to result in fewer than half of charter school applicants in recent years successfully receiving a charter contract (page e60). This suggests that perhaps only the highest quality charter proposals are being authorized, thus increasing the likelihood that in turn these quality applicants will seek to apply for the CSP subgrant.

Despite an increased number of charter schools since the state's 2011 cap was lifted, schools still maintain waitlists statewide (average is 400 pupils, with highest at 3,500). This provides evidence that the educational marketplace is not yet saturated with enough high-quality, appealing options for students and families, thus demonstrating community motivation to reward high-performing charter schools with their business. With discerning and choice-seeking parents in the community, school accountability and expectations from the community are likely to help produce stronger charter school candidates.

The responses provided by the applicant under Selection Criteria (a) outline a variety of technical assistance elements directed at assisting CSP subgrantee applicants to develop and submit a quality proposal both for authorization and for the CSP subgrant (beginning on page e31). Within this part of this application, an emphasis is identified for CSP subgrant applicants who desire to serve educationally disadvantaged students, and thus they are required to identify a plan in their

CSP subgrant intent and application on how they will fulfill that commitment (page e31). A minimum threshold of points needed, in order to receive a CSP award, sets a floor to ensure only applicants of a sufficient quality are considered for funding (page e37). Further, a competitive preference of 3 additional points for CSP subgrant applicants that seek to serve one or more of the 4 identified underserved populations also serves to ensure applicants have a higher potential toward meeting the expressed goals of additional educationally disadvantaged students served and done so with higher quality.

Weaknesses:

While the applicant has provided a variety of supportive evidence, more clear and specific articulation on how each piece of evidence explicitly leads to a higher quality CSP Subgrant applicant is necessary to determine the degree of quality likely for each subgrant applicant.

Reader's Score: 13

Selection Criteria - State Plan

1. The State entity's plan to--

- 1) Adequately monitor the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program;**
- 2) Work with the authorized public chartering agencies involved to avoid duplication of work for the charter schools and authorized public chartering agencies; and**
- 3) Provide technical assistance and support for--**
 - i. The eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program; and**
 - ii. Quality authorizing efforts in the State.**

Strengths:

1) & 2) – In an effort to prevent duplicative reporting burdens on CSP subgrantees, the applicant utilizes the state's statutory Annual Performance Framework for charter schools to assess and monitor CSP subgrantee performance (page e61). The Annual Performance Framework collects a wide variety of data from academic, operational and financial measures, serving as a complementary tool to the state's School Report Card and Performance grades, by including OCS governance compliance findings and their ongoing risk assessment findings (page e62), as well as further data from other state program offices such as early childhood, Title I, and Career & Technical Education, to present a comprehensive collection of all the data currently collected and available for charter schools. The applicant then utilizes the risk assessment and other data to determine which charter schools require more intensive monitoring and technical assistance. Further, subgrantee specific monitoring includes monitoring of completion of a "Ready-to-Open process in the planning year, quarterly desk review of the above documents, and mid & end of year site visits to monitor school-specific subgrant goals, parent/community activities, and survey strategies and implementation for serving educationally disadvantaged students. Schools that receive two consecutive non-compliance findings on reviews or site visits will have their subgrant terminated.

3) The technical assistance provision is outlined in selection criteria (a) (pages e31-e32) and (c) (pages e56-e60), as well as five one-hour sessions at the annual charter school leadership institute (page e48). Also provided are monthly TA webinars, 6 in-person trainings, TA office hours, and the Fellowship program participation identified under Objective #2 and the subsequent development of dissemination resources under Objective #3). Specific subgrant technical assistance includes an initial orientation that covers program info and guidelines, reimbursement processes, program expectations, and accountability measures.

Thus, monitoring and technical assistance efforts present a myriad of supports to CSP subgrantee applicants/recipients to sufficiently assist them.

For authorizing technical assistance, at least one state program staff member attends the annual National Association of Charter School Authorizers conference each year and subsequently facilitates for CASB and SBE members two one-day workshops to encourage maintaining knowledge of best practices and strategies for quality authorizing (page e67).

Weaknesses:

Monitoring of Charter School Program (CSP) subgrantee grants fiscal performance is a key area of usual CSP subgrantee monitoring that is only briefly touched on here under monitoring activities. Given this is an area where many charter schools struggle, additional information on fiscal technical assistance is needed to demonstrate a comprehensive CSP subgrantee technical assistance plan.

Reader's Score: 18

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers:**

Reader's Score: 10

Sub Question

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

Strengths:

The management plan (page e67-e72) clearly describes the activities aligned to each objective, milestones to ensure pacing and timely delivery, team members and stakeholders responsible, and project year identified for completion.

The management plan is supported by a budget narrative on pages e292-e303, which provides sufficient funding allocations to carry out the activities identified in the management plan.

The plan is sufficiently scoped and detailed to serve as a road map for staff, when hired. The milestones appear realistic and feasible for accomplishing the identified tasks within the given project year.

Weaknesses:

While activities and milestones are identified by project year, more detailed target dates for completion would help better determine if the timeline for of the activities and milestones is sufficiently paced to be realistic and feasible within the budget provided.

While key staff responsible for each activity are identified, it is unclear which staff member would ultimately be responsible for delivery of each activity. This may undermine the efficiency with which activities are implemented.

More specific scoping of the timeline of activities and milestones and clear identification of a lead personnel on each project is necessary to ensure the plan can be achieved on time and within budget.

Sub Question

Reader's Score: 7

2. (2) The extent to which the time commitments of the project director and principal investigator and other key project personnel are appropriate and adequate to meet the objectives of the proposed project

Strengths:

The applicant has identified a project director that will devote 5% of his time to direction and oversight of the program (though the budget narrative states on page e292 approximately 10% of his time would be dedicated); his salary would not be paid for via the CSP budget, but travel and related expenses to CSP grant activities would be. In addition, there are 4 full-time staff identified with general position descriptions and desired experience/expertise. This staffing model should be adequate to cover the grant activities and number of subgrantees described in the management plan and overall application. The staff responsibility focuses are complementary and will provide a comprehensive team skillset to address the activities and milestones identified.

Intended contracted work is identified, and a description is provided for the type of contractor / experience necessary/desired for each. Funds are included in the budget for the identified contractors.

Weaknesses:

Without clear identification of the skills, experience, and expertise of the project director with respect to the identified CSP project objectives/requirements (such as through a resume or job description), it is unclear if the allotted FTE of the project manager is sufficient to hire to and launch the project.

Identifying specific staff per task in the management plan and/or the time allotment of staff for each task/milestone would help to better determine if there is sufficient staff time and effort identified to accomplish tasks. (page e67-e72)

Reader's Score: 3

Selection Criteria - Parent and Community Involvement

1. The State entity's plan to solicit and consider input from parents and other members of the community on the implementation and operation of charter schools in the State.

Strengths:

The applicant articulates an adequate system of parent and community feedback and involvement through Parent/Community Advisory Councils hosted by CSP subgrant schools. CSP Subgrant recipients would be required to maintain a Parent/Community Advisory Council "focused on increasing and improving services for educationally disadvantaged populations and soliciting feedback regarding potential improvements on the operational aspects of charter schools" (page e73), with requirements for the minimum number of parents and community members.

Parent and community feedback will be solicited by the Charter School Advisory Board during the CSP subgrant application review period. (page e73). Parent and community members will also have their feedback solicited as part of mid-year and end of year onsite reviews of subgrantees (page e74) in order to provide parents and stakeholders an opportunity to share their perspectives on any progress or concerns they have with the subgrant implementation and/or charter school operation.

Weaknesses:

The parent and community involvement elements described in this section of the application relate specifically to CSP subgrant applicants and recipients; however, the criterion indicates a complete response should address parent and community input for charter schools across the state, not just those engaging with the subgrant program.

Also, it is not clearly articulated how the applicant intends to consider information learned through parent and community input, so it is difficult to judge if and how that input might be included in decision-making processes.

Reader's Score: 6

Selection Criteria - Flexibility

1. The degree of flexibility afforded by the State’s charter school law and how the State entity will work to maximize the flexibility provided to charter schools under such law.

Strengths:

State statute cited states broad flexibility is provided to state statutes, namely “charter school is exempt from statutes and rules applicable to a local board of education or local school administrative unit.” (citation provided, see page e74)

In general, the applicant clearly states that the charter school’s governing board has complete authority over the school, including instructional program, operations, and the budget (page e75).

The applicant’s program staff are intended to implement an annual 2-day policy summit as part of Objective #2 to allow charter community representatives to conduct analysis of allowances for flexibility for charters schools under current statutes and policies. Following the summit, a formal report will include that will be shared with the state’s Charter Schools Advisory Board; should CSAB support the recommendations they will put it forward to the State board of Education. (page e75)

Weaknesses:

While the applicant identifies broad flexibilities for charter schools, the charter contract, however, can have “terms and conditions imposed” that could potentially could limit flexibility (page e74). This indicates that the state’s efforts to maximize the flexibility it affords charter schools could be undermined through the authorizer charter contract process. Examples of “terms and conditions imposed” generally included in charter contracts are needed to determine whether contract provisions contribute to or limit the broad flexibility to charter schools afforded in statute to determine if flexibility is meaningfully provided in practice.

Reader's Score: 4

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Equitable Financing

1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located ensures equitable financing, as compared to traditional public schools, for charter schools and students in a prompt manner.

Strengths:

State statute requires that charter schools be paid the same per pupil allocation as other schools in its LEA. Citation provide: NCGS 115C-218.105(a) mandates that each charter school receive “an amount equal to the average per pupil allocation for average daily membership” from the LEA in which the school is located (page e19). English Language Learner and Special Education funding are also additionally allocated. Amounts are to be annually adjusted based on student enrollment figures. This shows that for per pupil and some categorical funding that the state has statute in place to guarantee equal funding to charter schools as compared to traditional schools.

Other LEA funds are also required to be proportionally passed to charter school. Citation provided: “per pupil share of the local current expense fund of the [LEA] for the year” (page e19-e20). This must be done within 30 days of receiving the funds (page e128), ensuring prompt distribution.

Weaknesses:

The applicant states funds are not required to be transferred to charter schools until November 1 of each year (page e20). It is unclear if this would fiscally impact new charter schools, who may not have access to funds at the beginning of the fiscal/academic year. Thus, more information is needed to determine if the timing of the funding is sufficiently and meaningfully prompt.

It is unclear from the application if there are any additional categories of funding to which charter schools are not guaranteed equal access, such as access to grants or other categorical funding beyond English Language Learners and Special Education students.

Also, the \$1,000 non-refundable fee to submit a charter school application is also a financial inequity (page e133).

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority 3 - Charter School Facilities

1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located provides charter schools one or more of the following:

- a) Funding for facilities;
- b) Assistance with facilities acquisition;
- c) Access to public facilities;
- d) The ability to share in bonds or mill levies;
- e) The right of first refusal to purchase public school buildings; or
- f) Low- or no-cost leasing privileges.

Strengths:

The application identifies minimal support for facilities through some access to facilities. The application states charter schools are permitted to lease available public facilities that sufficiently meet the needs of their students/program. Citation provided: “Per NCGS 115C-218.35, charter schools may lease any available building or land from the LEA of the school administrative unit in which the school is located, unless the board demonstrates that the lease is not practical or that the LEA does not have adequate classroom space to meet its enrollment needs” (page e20). Charter schools may appeal an LEA’s facility decision at the county commissioner level. This demonstrates there is some access to public facilities.

Weaknesses:

The Application states that SBE funds may be used for facilities purposes, but it is unclear if this is a dedicated source of facilities funding, or if this is merely permission to utilize a portion of their SBE-provided per pupil funding for facilities

needs.

While leased access is permitted to available LEA facilities, it is not specified if charter schools receive priority access, such as first right of refusal. Further, it is not clear if charter schools are able to lease public facilities at low costs. Thus, more information is needed to determine if public facilities access is meaningfully available.

In light of the fact that public facilities might not be meaningfully available, no other additional assistance with facilities support is mentioned, such as access to bond or mill levy funds is not directly mentioned or assistance with facility acquisition, to demonstrate other meaningful facilities support.

Reader's Score: 1

Competitive Preference Priority 4 - Best Practices to Improve Struggling School/LEAs

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located uses best practices from charter schools to help improve struggling schools and local educational agencies.**

Strengths:

The applicant identifies its annual offering of four single-day training opportunities to showcase best practices specifically to low-performing or continually low-performing charter schools. Two single-day “huddles” where charter schools can highlight successful practices in academics, finances and operations are also held annually. Additionally, an annual statewide charter school leadership summit provides opportunities to learn best practices from leaders and staff from successful charter schools. (page e21)

In addition to these charter-specific efforts, the North Carolina’s Educator Support Services team provides leadership, technical assistance, professional development, resources, and consultative services to both traditional public and charter schools, and the Federal Program Monitoring and Support team provides assistance in developing and implementing assistance to school improvement plans for schools with low or continually-low performance. (page e22)

Weaknesses:

The narrative on pages e21-e22 does not directly address supports in best practices provided to help struggling LEAs. Further, it is unclear if struggling traditional schools or LEAs are encouraged or required to attend the best-practices training opportunities.

Overall, while efforts are made to collect and disseminate best practices from charter schools (page e21), if and how they have been demonstrated to improve struggling charter or non-charter schools or struggling LEAs is not addressed.

Thus, there is no evidence provided that demonstrates there has been meaningful impact of these dissemination efforts to improve struggling schools or LEAs.

Reader's Score: 1

Competitive Preference Priority 5 - Serving At-Risk Students

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which it supports charter schools that serve at-risk students through activities such as dropout prevention, dropout recovery, or**

comprehensive career counseling services.

Strengths:

The applicant demonstrates some intentional supports for serving the State's at-risk students through the following activities:

- A state dropout prevention fund exists with the aim of increasing the number and range of services to at-risk students (page e22).
- The applicant requires that dropout prevention and at-risk student services are required to be included in the educational programs of each school, including in charter schools (page e22). For charter schools, programming in these areas needs to be included in its charter application.
- The department also provides assistance to schools, including charters, on implementation of a Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS), which assists all schools (including charter schools) in meeting the needs of at-risk students (page e23). The applicant identifies that 80% of the charter schools in the state are accessing this resource (page e23).

Weaknesses:

Details on current or historic access by charter schools to the state dropout prevention fund is not provided (page e22), and so it is unclear the extent to which these funds are meaningfully available to charter schools.

Measures/metrics and results concerning the impact of MTSS implementation support on addressing the needs of at-risk students are not provided, and so it is difficult to determine the extent to which these efforts are successful at supporting schools to achieve improved outcomes for these students. (page e23)

Reader's Score: 1

Competitive Preference Priority 6 - Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which it has taken steps to ensure that all authorized public chartering agencies implement best practices for charter school authorizing.**

Strengths:

Pages e23-e26 provide an overview of authorizer practices, including the multi-step review and approval process for charter schools, which incorporates a variety of best practices in authorizing, including:

The applicant has a state-approved charter school application process and timeline (page e23). A copy of application & timeline provided in Appendix F.3.

A planning year is required during which charter schools must demonstrate their ability to open with quality (page e23).

An accelerated authorizing process is utilized for successful schools wanting to replicate (page e26-e27).

Further, the state board may accelerate the mandatory planning year under specific circumstances, which is also an established best practice for differentiated authorizing for high-quality replications and expansions.

A self-assessment process is also in place for the sole authorizer in the state (page e27), which is used to establish charter schools and authorization goals are included in the state's strategic plan.

These collectively demonstrate that some steps have been taken to seek out and implement a variety of best practices in its authorizing activities.

Weaknesses:

As there is only one charter authorizer in the state, more information is needed concerning activities of the state authorizer staff and board in pursuit of improving their authorizing knowledge and practices beyond the self-assessment (such as conferences regularly attended, external support and consulting, investment in developing and maintaining internal expertise, etc.) to determine if the applicant is taking steps to ensure their own understanding of best practice is continually improving and to challenge the validity of their self-assessment. (pages e23-e26)

Reader's Score: 3

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 06/12/2018 04:17 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 06/12/2018 04:17 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (U282A180024)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	15	12
Objectives		
1. Objectives	20	18
Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants		
1. Subgrant Applicants	15	11
State Plan		
1. State Plan	20	18
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	9
Parent and Community Involvement		
1. Involvement	10	7
Flexibility		
1. Flexibility	5	4
Sub Total	100	79
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
Equitable Financing		
1. Equitable Financing	6	5
Sub Total	6	5
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
Charter School Facilities		
1. Charter School Facilities	6	2
Sub Total	6	2
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
Best Practices to Improve Struggling School/LEAs		
1. Struggling Schools	3	1
Sub Total	3	1
Competitive Preference Priority 5		
Serving At-Risk Students		

1. At-Risk Students	3	2
Sub Total	3	2
Competitive Preference Priority 6		
Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing		
1. Best Practices	5	3
Sub Total	5	3
Total	123	92

Technical Review Form

Panel #14 - Panel 14 - North Carolina - 1: 84.282A

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (U282A180024)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

Reader's Score: 12

Sub Question

1. (1) The extent to which the proposed project demonstrates a rationale

Strengths:

The application demonstrates a clear need to increase equity of access to high quality charter schools for economically disadvantaged students in North Carolina, given the current imbalance shown by the chart on page e45. The performance data from charter schools from the 2016-17 year presented in the statewide annual report (e217-224) shows that at least in the prior school year, the State's charters have demonstrated success in getting students in disadvantaged subgroups to outperform their peers in traditional schools. In order to successfully serve higher numbers of economically disadvantaged students, charter schools will need to learn strategies to do so and the proposed fellowship program (e50-52) is designed to meet that need. As the projection for subgrants is for 18 expansions and 32 new charters, some of which will be replications, a substantial number of the fellows will come to the program with prior experience they can share with less experienced peers from new operators. The fellowship program requires some elements of collaboration between charter and traditional public schools, which could help to address a current concern about the separateness of the sectors (e53-54).

Weaknesses:

The logic model provided on page e29 does not provide research or evaluation findings that support its validity. The narrative projects that expansion and replication grants will be \$600,000 on average, as opposed to \$400,000 for planning and implementation (e47), but rationally, replication and expansion should require fewer resources than opening an entirely new school. Ideally the application would provide more evidence of how the proposed fellowship program would target the dissemination of strategies that have proven effective specifically for economically disadvantaged students (beyond broad statements, e40 and cursory agenda, e131). A potential weakness in the fellowship model regarding its goal of charter-traditional collaboration is that as a program open only to charter leaders, some of whom may be new and inexperienced, leaders of traditional schools may feel excluded and harbor resentment toward the program, decreasing the likelihood they will seek to take advantage of fellowship resources.

Reader's Score: 7

2. (2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.

Sub Question

Strengths:

The application does an excellent job of establishing clear performance measures. All measures other than website traffic/downloads have a precise numeric target and clear explanation of the metric. This includes percentage of subgrantees serving majority-economically disadvantaged students (e48), subgroup proficiency rates across subgrantees (e52), and number of presentations delivered by fellows (e55).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were identified.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Objectives

1. The ambitiousness of the State entity's objectives for the quality charter school program carried out under this program.

Note: In response to this criterion, an applicant may address (or cross reference) some or all of the components of application requirements (I)(A)-(G) in this notice, which require the applicant to provide a description of the State entity's objectives in running a quality charter school program and how the objectives of the program will be carried out.

Strengths:

The applicant proposes concise yet aggressive objectives that will, if achieved, strengthen the quality of the charter sector across North Carolina. Awarding 50 subgrants and establishing a school leadership fellowship of 100 members within 5 years is an ambitious project.

The gap in the average percentage of economically disadvantaged students attending charter schools versus traditional schools is substantial (e45), and thus an effort to close the gap is ambitious. Based on the table provided on page e47, the applicant has a plan to push for a steady increase in the number of charter schools each year over the five-year grant period, and to increase the performance expectation from years 1-2 to years 3-5 (e48-49). By "striving for a ratio of applications to awards of at least 3:1 for new school grants and at least 2:1 for expansion and replication grants," (e48), the applicant shows a commitment to making the awards competitive. A high level of competition will push rigor on the application process, increasing the chances that eligible applicants are qualified and prepared to improve student outcomes.

The proposed fellowship program will require participants to present at a "conference that attracts a significant number of attendees from both charter and traditional public schools" and host a "Collaboration Confab" (e54). Such inclusion will initiate connections between charter and traditional schools across the state. Increased collaboration across schools and access to new resources will facilitate school leaders adopting practices that improve student outcomes and establish a higher performance standard.

The application requirements for subgrants (e34-39) thoroughly and directly address many of the application requirements including the plans for closure and the supports for disadvantaged students. Competitive preference standards and priority consideration characteristics (e38) address additional requirements like support for underserved areas and secondary school models.

Weaknesses:

Other than a weak sample "training camp" agenda (e131), the application does not provide any examples of specific strategies, techniques, models, or best practices on which the leadership fellows will receive training in order to achieve better outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students. Without any such specific examples or qualifications of prospective expert trainers, the description is incomplete and it is not possible to fully assess the quality or ambitiousness of the proposed fellowship program and its likelihood to ultimately improve outcomes for a higher number of

disadvantaged students in North Carolina. While a charter school must state plans to serve English Learners (e149) and provide transportation (e159, e116-117) as part of a charter application in North Carolina, the application narrative does not directly discuss how subgrantees would be held to standards of equity on such issues.

Reader's Score: 18

Selection Criteria - Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants

1. The likelihood that the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the program will meet those objectives and improve educational results for students.

Strengths:

One charter school in the state has demonstrated high success improving outcomes for disadvantaged students (e58) and provided a letter of support indicating interest in replicating (e97). Existing charter schools within the state have shown an improvement trend as a sector over the last few years (e56-57). In 2016-17, students in charter schools statewide and the economically disadvantaged subgroup demonstrated proficiency in reading and math at higher rates than students in traditional schools, except for grade 3 math (e217-224). Such data show the existing charter sector in the state has the ability to effectively serve disadvantaged students. While evidence of eligible applicants specifically prepared to serve high populations of economically disadvantaged students is not fully articulated, the proposed fellowship program would serve as uniquely intensive technical assistance and increase the likelihood of post-award success. Additionally, the ability of eligible applicants to implement a weighted lottery (e35, e118) increases the ability of subgrantees to meet objective 1 by serving more educationally disadvantaged students.

Weaknesses:

A large number of applications received from charter developers (e60) does not necessarily indicate that there is a high-quality pool of eligible applicants. Eligible applicants for replication who have developed a successful model to serve non-disadvantaged students (e59-60) will not necessarily continue to be successful when the same model is applied to a primarily disadvantaged student population. Another weakness is that the supporting performance data demonstrating the success of the charter sector serving disadvantaged students is limited to only one school year (e58, e217-224) rather than a demonstration of consistent year-over-year success for three to five years prior.

Reader's Score: 11

Selection Criteria - State Plan

1. The State entity's plan to--

- 1) Adequately monitor the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program;**
- 2) Work with the authorized public chartering agencies involved to avoid duplication of work for the charter schools and authorized public chartering agencies; and**
- 3) Provide technical assistance and support for--**
 - i. The eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program; and**
 - ii. Quality authorizing efforts in the State.**

Strengths:

The application describes a robust monitoring program for subgrantees, with two meetings in a planning year, quarterly desk reviews and semiannual site visits in first year implementation, and two desk reviews and one site visit in subsequent implementation years (e63-64). Much of the monitoring will be supported by existing DPI data collection processes (e61), which will minimize duplication of work for charter schools. Given that DPI both handles the administrative work of the authorizer and is the applicant organization, a control on duplication of work for the authorizer is

inherent. The entire fellowship program proposed as part of the project is an exceptionally strong mode of technical assistance. The initial four-day fall institute and two-day spring institute (e40), coupled with monthly meetings (e39-40) will ensure that leaders from subgrantee organizations set aside time for intensive learning opportunities as part of the grant program. There is also a provision for technical assistance for members of the Charter School Advisory Board (CSAB) and State Board of Education (SBE) in their roles supporting the authorizing process (e67).

Weaknesses:

The description of technical assistance for quality authorizing does outline a plan, but it lacks detail (e67). Given the high level of responsibility borne by a single statewide authorizer, all individuals fulfilling authorizing responsibilities should be explicitly required to participate in the training offered. Further, given the vast yet organic scope of a single statewide authorizer's work, there is an expectation of a detailed technical assistance framework including potential topics as well as evidence that such assistance yields improved outcomes for the charter sector statewide in academic, operational, and financial performance.

Reader's Score: 18

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers:**

Reader's Score: 9

Sub Question

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

Strengths:

The application presents a comprehensive plan with project timelines (e30-34, 42), a management plan organized by project objective across all five years of the grant period (e70-72), summaries of qualifications for project staff to be hired (e68), and delineated roles for contractors (e69). The budget lists all notable associated costs.

Weaknesses:

Given the number of site visits built into the monitoring plan (4 visits for a 3-year grant for 50 grantees = 200 visits) (e63-64) and the size of the state, the travel budget (e294) might be insufficient. The amounts budgeted for conference travels are quite low (e295). In order to attract truly high quality speakers for the fellowship program, the budgeted amount (e298) may be insufficient. These budget concerns do pose some risk to the project, as it could prevent the applicant from carrying out the planned monitoring visits and the quality of the technical assistance provided at the fellowship program meetings. The management plan (e70-71) lacks milestones by month and/or date rather than just year as well as more references to specific positions responsible for tasks rather than just "program staff."

Reader's Score: 7

- 2. (2) The extent to which the time commitments of the project director and principal investigator and other key project personnel are appropriate and adequate to meet the objectives of the proposed project**

Sub Question

Strengths:

The applicant is planning to hire four full-time staff to work on the project (e68), which demonstrates recognition of the substantial personnel burden of administering the planned project. The personnel section of the budget (e292-294) and the narrative description of program staff (e68) demonstrate that the applicant has given some thought to the time commitments and division of responsibilities between staff.

Weaknesses:

The narrative projects that the Director of the Office of Charter Schools will serve as project director in 5% of his time (e68) while the budget (e292) puts the figure at 10%; such discrepancies make it difficult to assess the applicant's intent, and there is not sufficient information in the application to determine whether either percentage commitment is realistic. The application states that day to day administration of the project will be delegated to a program administrator, but there are several concerns with this. The hiring process for this position would not begin until the award announcement yet project responsibilities begin at the time of award (e30). Further, a complete job description for the position is not included, which leaves open the possibility that the individual to be hired could lack the necessary experience to independently manage project administration with only 2-4 hours per week of supervisory support. Additionally, planning two annual multi-day conferences and booking 10 or more speakers per year are major logistical undertakings that require substantial time; the fact that the application does not call out those planning responsibilities demonstrates a lack of awareness of the time commitment required.

Reader's Score: 2

Selection Criteria - Parent and Community Involvement

- 1. The State entity's plan to solicit and consider input from parents and other members of the community on the implementation and operation of charter schools in the State.**

Strengths:

Requiring all subgrantees to form parent/community advisory councils that must meet specific criteria is an ambitious method of assuring parent and community involvement, and feedback will be conveyed to high levels up to and including the General Assembly (e73). Collecting parent and community feedback during monitoring is a strategic use of resources (e74). It is also important to note that community feedback is solicited and considered as part of the charter application process (e73), allowing for pre-implementation input.

Weaknesses:

The application does not include a substantive statement on implementation of suggestions collected from parent and community input, which means that there is no demonstration that the state entity will consider the input as stated in the selection criterion. Furthermore, the application (e73-74) only describes the collection of parent and community input regarding subgrantees – it does not address the collection of such input regarding non-grantee charter schools.

Reader's Score: 7

Selection Criteria - Flexibility

- 1. The degree of flexibility afforded by the State's charter school law and how the State entity will work to maximize the flexibility provided to charter schools under such law.**

Strengths:

State law provides for a large degree of flexibility over areas such as budget, staffing, curriculum, and facility selection (e74). Program staff will provide an annual two-day policy summit which will primarily function as a forum to discuss future policy improvements, but the analysis, conversation, and report related to this process will also assist charter schools with maximizing the flexibility provided for under existing laws (e75-76).

Weaknesses:

While statute cited (e114-5) mandates that "no other terms may be imposed on the charter school as a condition of receipt of local funds," the law does not explicitly provide for any restrictions on the terms and conditions of a charter that SBE may require. Therefore, SBE appears to have the latitude to remove any of the flexibilities made available under the law.

Reader's Score: 4

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Equitable Financing

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located ensures equitable financing, as compared to traditional public schools, for charter schools and students in a prompt manner.**

Strengths:

State law provides for equal per-pupil funding for charter schools from both state and local allocations (e19-20). The clear statutory requirement on transfer of local funds (e128-129) is a strong guarantee of equitable funding. The November 1 date for state funds (e20) ensures schools are paid promptly as far as the latter four fifths of the school year and the 30-day payment deadline for local funds (e128) ensure that schools are paid promptly for local funds throughout the year.

Weaknesses:

The November 1 deadline (e20) may not guarantee that charter schools have sufficient cash flow for the first few months of the school year, particularly for new schools. This is a concern for promptness of payment, and thus for cash flow and the ability of the school to meet critical payment obligations such as payroll and lease payments.

Reader's Score: 5

Competitive Preference Priority 3 - Charter School Facilities

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located provides charter schools one or more of the following:**
 - a) Funding for facilities;**
 - b) Assistance with facilities acquisition;**
 - c) Access to public facilities;**
 - d) The ability to share in bonds or mill levies;**
 - e) The right of first refusal to purchase public school buildings; or**
 - f) Low- or no-cost leasing privileges.**

Strengths:

State law provides for access to public facilities for charter schools (e116), subject to an approval process (e20). Although the extent of this access is limited, such access is codified in statute which assures that the State does provide it. Providing charter schools with access to public facilities is a means of lowering a barrier to charter school opening and operation in order to educate students.

Weaknesses:

While charter schools may use their funding allocations toward facilities costs (e20), the state does not provide special facilities funding. This could create a barrier to charter schools being able to purchase facilities of their own. The ability to purchase could be important given the restrictions on ability to lease public facilities (e20). This is also important given that state funding may not be received up until November 1 (e20), making the ability to pay monthly lease commitments challenging. Access to public school facilities is at the discretion of the LEA, and although there is an appeal process for

access rights, this process could be burdensome and there are few details provided on the mechanics and likelihood of success in this process either in the narrative (e20) or the statute itself (e116). Further, the LEA appears to retain control of pricing, and this is therefore not a guarantee of low or no-cost leasing. Overall, this is not an especially strong system of facilities support for charter schools.

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority 4 - Best Practices to Improve Struggling School/LEAs

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located uses best practices from charter schools to help improve struggling schools and local educational agencies.**

Strengths:

The state facilitates several intensive workshops where high performing charter schools can share best practices with struggling charter schools (e21). The fact that these are hosted and facilitated by individuals with "significant experience operating high quality charter schools" (e21) ensures that the trainers are qualified. The learning topics covered include such areas as student interventions and observation of successful schools (e131). These subjects would help leaders from struggling charter schools better understand effective strategies that they could potentially implement at their own schools in order to improve.

Weaknesses:

The application describes ways in which the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) supports struggling schools (e21-22), but does not indicate that any of the support for traditional schools or LEAs is based upon best practices gleaned from charter schools. While struggling charter schools are provided with the opportunity to attend "huddles" (e21) with other charter schools, this is merely an opportunity and not a requirement. This is, therefore, not evidence that even charter schools have adopted best practices from other charter schools. The application does not state whether any struggling schools or LEAs have actually adopted best practices learned from charter schools, and if so whether adopting these practices led to improvement.

Reader's Score: 1

Competitive Preference Priority 5 - Serving At-Risk Students

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which it supports charter schools that serve at-risk students through activities such as dropout prevention, dropout recovery, or comprehensive career counseling services.**

Strengths:

All charter schools in the state are required to implement dropout prevention services for at-risk students. These services are also evaluated at application and renewal (e22). Further, DPI provides technical assistance with a support system which 80% of charters in the state currently use (e22-23). The state has established a "dropout prevention fund" (e22) to financially support these activities.

Weaknesses:

No data is provided on charter school access to or usage of the dropout prevention fund (e22). Insufficient evidence exists to demonstrate the extent to which the MTSS model is being used by "80%" of charter schools (e23). For example, the number or percentage of students within the participating schools who are being supported by the program is not provided. There is also no data provided to indicate the level of success of the at-risk programs, either in this section of

the narrative (e22-23) or any of the attachments such as the charter school annual report (e200-239).

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority 6 - Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which it has taken steps to ensure that all authorized public chartering agencies implement best practices for charter school authorizing.**

Strengths:

The proposed project would provide for a "program staff member ... planning and facilitating two one-day workshops annually for members of the CSAB [Charter School Advisory Board] and ... SBE [State Board of Education]" (e67) on this topic in the future. As there is only one authorizer in the state (e19), the number of people requiring technical assistance regarding best practices for charter authorizing is small. Training can therefore be conducted with efficiency and improvements to authorizing practices can quickly be made uniform across the state. The application outlines a thorough, multi-step review process for new applications over pages e23-28, which includes evaluation based on a rubric by external evaluators and the CSAB before the final decision of the SBE.

Weaknesses:

While the application incidentally conveys that the state's single authorizer is already observing some best practices for authorizing, the application does not explicitly state what steps DPI has taken in the past to ensure that the SBE implements best practices (e23-28 & e67). Training would be critical as the SBE has ultimate authority and is not bound by the recommendations supported by the extensive administrative review process (e25), meaning that the SBE could potentially exercise its discretion to approve unqualified applicants. The approval of unqualified applicants would create a risk for the project's success as it could lead to school closures that would work against attainment of the goal to open 32 new schools (e49). The statute included on page e112 (115C-218.5(a)) does not require the academic goals of an applicant seeking to open a new charter school to be ambitious. Another risk is lack of clarity regarding the standard required for non-renewal. While 115C-218.95 (e126-127) includes provisions like failure to meet the terms of the charter as valid reasons for non-renewal, statute cited on page e112 (115-C218.5(d)(2)) may conflict with this by setting a higher standard to initiate non-renewal (that is, lower expectations for charter schools). Per 115C-218.5, the non-renewal process can only be initiated for academic reasons if the outcomes of the charter school have not been comparable to the local district for the past three years.

Reader's Score: 3

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