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

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Aspire Public Schools (U282M180034)
Reader #1:   **********

	Points Possible	**Points Scored**
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the eligible applicant		
1. Quality of the Applicant	45	44
Significance		
1. Disadvantaged Students	30	29
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Evaluation Plan	10	8
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	12
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
Promoting Diversity		
1. Promoting Diversity	3	2
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
Reopening Poor-performing Public Schools		
1. Reopening Public Schools	3	0
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
High School Students		
1. High School Students	3	2
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
Replicating/Expanding High-quality Charter Schools		
1. Replicating/Expanding	3	0
Total	112	97

Panel #1 - CMO - 1: 84.282M

Reader #1: **********

Applicant: Aspire Public Schools (U282M180034)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of the eligible applicant

 1. **Selection Criteria 1: Quality of the eligible applicant**

Reader's Score: 44

Sub

1. **(i) The extent to which the academic achievement results (including annual student performance on statewide assessments and annual student attendance and retention rates and, where applicable and available, student academic growth, high school graduation rates, college attendance rates, and college persistence rates) for educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant have exceeded the average academic achievement results for such students served by other public schools in the State.**

 Strengths:

 Aspire's three regions have outperformed their low income peers on the state exam for almost every one of the past four years. Further, in the case of the Bay and LA areas, students at these campuses have had a much steeper growth curve than their Aspire Central Valley peers who were notably outperforming California's low income students from the start (p e9).

 When comparing results by Aspire region, Bay Area students across all major minority group (black and Latinx), English learners, low income and those with disabilities outperformed their district peers on the most recent state exam in math and ELA, and often matched or even exceeded state performance (p e9-12)

 Aspire's LA students outperformed their district and state-level low income peers across most subgroups in ELA and even more dramatically in math (p e13).

 The Central Valley region is the largest and crosses two chartering districts. On the most recent state exams, Central Valley exceeded district performance across every subgroup and often outperformed their low income peers at the state level by a small margin. This region's math performance was even more impressive as they outperformed their district counterparts in all subgroups and regularly exceeded state performance as well (p e16).

 Overall on state exams, Aspire's students have universally been closing the gap for the past few years with their peers at the state level regardless of race, income, native language or disability. It's impressive to see such consistently strong and tight results across the regions.

 The applicant did not have access to attendance or retention comparables for the state or district. However, given that all regions' average attendance was over 95%, this is a high enough indicator of performance on its own and leaves a small margin for improvement. The attendance rates for subgroups showed vary little variance demonstrates strong overall participation (p e20). Retention showed a bit more variance across subgroups. At one Central Valley campus retention was 59% for African American students and 90% for Asian students. However many schools also saw perfect retention across specific subgroups and had overall retention numbers in the 90's; these results may be skewed if small populations of one race are driving high retention numbers, but based on the information in the application overall Aspire schools are doing a good job retaining students (p e21).

 In all regions, Aspire's regional graduation rates outpaced their districts and the state of California. Where available by subgroup, individual campus results largely outpaced their district counterparts (p e22).

Sub

Little data was available for college matriculation and persistence, but Aspire outperformed the district here as well (p e23). Overall it is clear that Aspire campuses have a largely consistent academic model that is able to get strong results across students of differing races, socioeconomic status and need that consistently outperforms their chartering district.

Weaknesses:

On page e35 ELL performance did not exceed the state and was lagging in results.

Reader's Score: 14

2. **(ii) The extent to which one or more charter schools operated or managed by the applicant have closed; have had a charter revoked due to noncompliance with statutory or regulatory requirements; or have had their affiliation with the applicant revoked or terminated, including through voluntary disaffiliation.**

Strengths:

Despite the large number of Aspire campuses in operation over the past 2 decades, no campus has had their charter revoked or terminated (p e23).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 15

3. **(iii) The extent to which one or more charter schools operated or managed by the applicant have had any significant issues in the area of financial or operational management or student safety, or have otherwise experienced significant problems with statutory or regulatory compliance that could lead to revocation of the school's charter.**

Strengths:

Aspire has had no significant operational issues that could threaten its campuses (p e43).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. **Selection Criteria 2: Significance of contribution in assisting educationally disadvantaged students**

In determining the significance of the contribution the proposed project will make in expanding educational opportunities for educationally disadvantaged students and enabling those students to meet challenging State academic standards, the Secretary considers the following factors:

Reader's Score: 29

Sub

1. **(i) The extent to which charter schools currently operated or managed by the applicant serve educationally disadvantaged students, particularly students with disabilities and English learners, at rates comparable to surrounding public schools or, in the case of virtual charter schools, at rates comparable to public schools in the State.**

   Strengths:

   Aspire was founded to serve students of need and its overall demographics largely reflect this in that their students are 94% of color, 82% low income, 28% English learners and 8% with special needs. They serve a larger number of minority and disadvantaged students compared to the surrounding districts. The results on pages e10-22 recapped in detail by subgroup how Aspire's students are consistently outperforming their district and state counterparts not only on state exams in math and ELA, but also in terms of attendance and graduation rates.

   Weaknesses:

   The applicant clearly demonstrated the results their students have achieved across all major subgroups however in all instances of the 3 target areas, they are serving a lower number of students with disabilities and in the Central Valley region a notably lower number of ELL students (p e26-27).

   Reader's Score: 14

2. **(ii) The quality of the plan to ensure that the charter schools the applicant proposes to replicate or expand will recruit, enroll, and effectively serve educationally disadvantaged students, particularly students with disabilities and English learners.**

   Strengths:

   The applicant's logic model demonstrates the key inputs valued by Aspire that will continue to drive their expansion of existing schools and the opening of new campuses; one of the key inputs is a focus on educationally disadvantaged students in a small school model with personalized learning (p e24). Aspire notes that they already serve higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students than the district or state in 2 of 3 regions (p e26-27). Latinx and black students are also notably served at higher rates than the state and often the district in 2 of 3 regions. Aspire outlines a robust and well-established approach to recruitment that combines media advertisements, local outreach through various community and school partners, outreach and materials in English and Spanish and targeted efforts to reach families of students with special needs (p e27-28). The applicant also acknowledges the important role parents and community partners play in the overall impact of a school and have numerous opportunities to engage parents in their child's learning and decision making at each campus (p e29-31).

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses noted.

   Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. **Selection Criteria 3: Quality of the evaluation plan for the proposed project**

   In determining the quality of the evaluation plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the proposed project, as described in the applicant's logic model, and that will produce quantitative and qualitative data by the end of the grant period.

Strengths:

The applicant presents a logic model on pages e24-e25 that carries consistent outcomes through the project period and is tied to the model and approach embraced by Aspire campuses. Beginning on page 45 they go into detail on the two long-term outcomes highlighted earlier around increasing access to high quality education and increasing the number of 4-year college graduates among their alumni base; the applicant outlines in detail the overall measure for the performance period and, in some cases, annual smaller milestones that will track good progress to the larger goal. All goals are measurable, time bound, specific, and span the performance of students through college graduation (p e46-e48).

Weaknesses:

What the applicant does not provide is detail on who will lead this evaluation and how they will be held accountable. The applicant acknowledges on pages e38-39 the major assessments and dashboards, (internal and external) and qualitative inputs that will provide the data needed to assess performance up through high school, however they don't identify their data sources for college persistence and graduation, which can be much harder to come by.

Reader's Score: 8

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

 1. **Selection Criteria 4: Quality of the Management Plan**

   In determining the quality of the applicant's management plan, the Secretary considers the following factors:

Reader's Score: 12

   Sub

  1. **(i) The ability of the applicant to sustain the operation of the replicated or expanded charter schools after the grant has ended, as demonstrated by the multi-year financial and operating model required under section 4305(b)(3)(B)(iii) of the ESEA (5 points). (NFP)**

   Strengths:

   As referenced throughout the application and on page e50, the applicant has prior experience managing two previous CSP grants and other major Department of Education grant programs, and is well versed in common practices, reporting requirements, and legal parameters on the use of CSP funding. The applicant plans to appropriately spend grant funds on start-up costs in the first few years of the project period and has planned for all ongoing expenses to be shouldered by public funds once expansion and replication schools are at capacity (p e50). The applicant has a strong track record of spending while scaling to ensure sustainability on public funding alone as they have successfully used their model with their existing 36 campuses.

   Weaknesses:

   Aspire acknowledges a degree of risk that comes with being able to afford the new construction that will support many of the expansions under this grant, however they note past experience with managing and affording new construction as over 40% of their current facilities portfolio is new construction sustained on public funds (e51). This is definitely more of a risk given the scope and rate of the growth supported by this grant, though Aspire has the experience to manage it if things go according to plan. What is unknown is how the growth under this grant compares in scale to past growth, given the short timeline for the project.

Sub

> **Reader's Score:** 4

2. **(ii) 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. (34 CFR 75.210(g)(2)(i))**

   Strengths:

   Aspire's growth plan under the grant is aligned to the current organizational strategic plan so it has the full backing and support of the leadership of this large CMO (p e53). Aspire employs a Director of Growth & Strategy to spearhead growth and determine which areas within Aspire's network meet the criteria to proceed; this individual works closely alongside their executive team and local school leaders. Once a possible growth site has been pressure tested against the criteria of the Green-lighting Framework, plans proceed in earnest (p e53). As things proceed through the Growth & Real Estate team and the start-up process Aspire has a system for cross-functional communication across all levels (local to national) of the organization to ensure intentional and smart growth. Aspire has also noted that their start-up process can take 18 to 30 months depending on the parameters of the campus; this demonstrates their acknowledgement of a need for a long runway to plan effectively and the recognition that all projects are not the same and need to be adjusted to local conditions and challenges (p e54).

   Weaknesses:

   One of the major elements not included in their management plan was the selection of the school leader; this role assumes responsibilities for planning somewhere around 2 years out from the opening (p e55), but is a key element of a school's success as it is established and grows.

> **Reader's Score:** 4

3. **(iii) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel. (34 CFR 75.210 (e)(3)(ii))**

   Strengths:

   Aspire's CFO will lead the management of this grant and has extensive experience with federal grants supporting educational institutions to likely do so effectively (p e56-e57). The Aspire leadership team has a wealth of experience that has touched all levels of the Aspire network, they draw from the public and private sector and bring direct classroom experience to their work (e56-e60).

   Weaknesses:

   Aspire currently is operating with an interim CEO as they gear up for a major phase of expansion. While transitions happen and the interim CEO has a deep history with Aspire and its growth, this is worth noting. It would be good to know when Aspire intends to install a permanent CEO to see how that would align to their growth and the project period. Also of note, their Director of Growth & Strategy, a key player in the growth supported by this grant, is also operating as interim Chief of Staff. Again it would be good to know of plans and a timeline to scale him back to a single role within the organization (p e59).

> **Reader's Score:** 4

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority 1 - Promoting Diversity

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 1— Promoting Diversity.**

   Under this priority, applicants must propose to replicate or expand high-quality charter schools that have an intentional focus on recruiting students from racially and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds, and maintaining racially and socioeconomically diverse student bodies in those charter schools, consistent with nondiscrimination requirements contained in the U.S.

Constitution and Federal civil rights laws.

Strengths:

Aspire's diversity varies widely by campus but is largely reflective of the unique populations in their California regions; collectively Aspire's California schools serve a relatively racially diverse group of students (p e5). The socioeconomic diversity of their campuses varies, but all three regions have seen a very significant increase in the number of free and reduced lunch (FRL) students served, which demonstrates an increasing need within their communities. Most notable are the Bay Area and Los Angeles serving FRL populations of 87% and 95% respectively. All regions slated for grant support exceed the 40% FRL requirement for the grant (p e6).

Weaknesses:

The applicant demonstrates the current diversity of the regions that they are committed to maintain, but does not outline a specific action plan to intentionally increase diversity.

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Reopening Poor-performing Public Schools

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 2— Reopening Academically Poor-performing Public Schools as Charter Schools**

   Under this priority, applicants must:

   (i) Demonstrate past success working with one or more academically poor-performing public schools or schools that previously were designated as persistently lowest-achieving schools or priority schools under the former School Improvement Grant program or in States that exercised ESEA flexibility, respectively, under the ESEA, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB); and

   (ii) Propose to use grant funds under this program to reopen one or more academically poor-performing public schools as charter schools during the project period by--
   (A) Replicating one or more high-quality charter schools based on a successful charter school model for which the applicant has provided evidence of success; and
   (B) Targeting a demographically similar student population in the replicated charter schools as was served by the academically poor-performing public schools, consistent with nondiscrimination requirements contained in the U.S. Constitution and Federal civil rights laws.

   Strengths:

   The applicant did not address this competitive preference priority.

   Weaknesses:

   The applicant did not address this competitive preference priority.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority 3 - High School Students

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 3— High School Students.**

   Under this priority, applicants must propose to:

(i) Replicate or expand high-quality charter schools to serve high school students, including educationally disadvantaged students;

(ii) Prepare students, including educationally disadvantaged students, in those schools for enrollment in postsecondary education institutions through activities such as, but not limited to, accelerated learning programs (including Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses and programs, dual or concurrent enrollment programs, and early college high schools), college counseling, career and technical education programs, career counseling, internships, work-based learning programs (such as apprenticeships), assisting students in the college admissions and financial aid application processes, and preparing students to take standardized college admissions tests;

(iii) Provide support for students, including educationally disadvantaged students, who graduate from those schools and enroll in postsecondary education institutions in persisting in, and attaining a degree or certificate from, such institutions, through activities such as, but not limited to, mentorships, ongoing assistance with the financial aid application process, and establishing or strengthening peer support systems for such students attending the same institution; and

(iv) Propose one or more project-specific performance measures, including aligned leading indicators or other interim milestones, that will provide valid and reliable information about the applicant's progress in preparing students, including educationally disadvantaged students, for enrollment in postsecondary education institutions and in supporting those students in persisting in and attaining a degree or certificate from such institutions. An applicant addressing this priority and receiving a CMO grant must provide data that are responsive to the measure(s), including performance targets, in its annual performance reports to the Department.

(v) For purposes of this priority, postsecondary education institutions include institutions of higher education, as defined in section 8101(29) of the ESEA, and one-year training programs that meet the requirements of section 101(b)(1) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (HEA).

Strengths:

(i) Aspire will add four new high schools targeted to serve a total of 2,160 new students under the grant (p e6).

(ii) Aspire's post-secondary program provides a good amount of supports to students while in high school to help them explore college and career options. These include: an Early College Scholars program allowing participants to earn college credits in high school; career and technical programs at some of Aspire's campuses to help students identify career interests; support with financial aid applications and some scholarship funding for a limited number of graduates; workshops for students and parents to support the application process; multiple college visits; and personalized college counseling (p e6-e7).

(iii) Aspire's post-secondary program achieves some of the elements suggested as best practices in the application question with a program that includes:
•   Support with college admissions tests and financial aid applications
•   Quarterly alumni data collection to measure outcomes
•   Pathways partnerships with a number of local colleges to support Aspire career training
•   A peer mentoring program for alumni (p6-7).

(iv)Aspire outlines four ambitious performance measures focusing on college graduation and support that they aim to achieve over the project period. Effectively doubling graduation rates from 16% to 32% and 27% to 50% for 4-year college graduates will not be easy in such a short time (5 years), but the applicant has a robust post-secondary program that give students a variety of college and career access and credit earning opportunity in high school while also providing on going supports, mentorship, and social activities to connect and support alumni (p e7-e8).

Weaknesses:

(i) No weaknesses noted.
(ii) No weaknesses noted.
(iii) After reviewing the application and appendix I, Aspire doesn't mention ongoing counseling for graduates, only

personalized counseling for their high school students. Supports for graduates could be a key lever in removing barriers to college persistence and increasing the college graduation rates of their alumni. While the partnership with college institutions puts some of the onus on the institution to get students enrolled, it doesn't extend to college persistence and graduation.

(iv) Even if Aspire weren't to achieve the ambitious college graduation goals outlined on pages e7-e8, there is definite room for improvement on these metrics that should be the focus of their attention for the post-secondary program.

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority 4 - Replicating/Expanding High-quality Charter Schools

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 4— Replicating or Expanding High-quality Charter Schools to Serve Native American Students.**

   (i) Propose to replicate or expand one or more high-quality charter schools that--
   (A) Utilize targeted outreach and recruitment in order to serve a high proportion of Native American students, consistent with nondiscrimination requirements contained in the U.S. Constitution and Federal civil rights laws;
   (B) Have a mission and focus that will address the unique educational needs of Native American students, such as through the use of instructional programs and teaching methods that reflect and preserve Native American language, culture, and history; and
   (C) Have a governing board with a substantial percentage of members who are members of Indian Tribes or Indian organizations located within the area to be served by the replicated or expanded charter school;

   (ii) Submit a letter of support from at least one Indian Tribe or Indian organization located within the area to be served by the replicated or expanded charter school; and

   (iii) Meaningfully collaborate with the Indian Tribe(s) or Indian organization(s) from which the applicant has received a letter of support in a timely, active, and ongoing manner with respect to the development and implementation of the educational program at the charter school.

   Strengths:

   The applicant did not address this competitive preference priority.

   Weaknesses:

   The applicant did not address this competitive preference priority.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 02/12/2019 05:06 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Aspire Public Schools (U282M180034)
Reader #2: **********

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the eligible applicant		
1. Quality of the Applicant	45	43
Significance		
1. Disadvantaged Students	30	24
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Evaluation Plan	10	9
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	14
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
Promoting Diversity		
1. Promoting Diversity	3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
Reopening Poor-performing Public Schools		
1. Reopening Public Schools	3	0
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
High School Students		
1. High School Students	3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
Replicating/Expanding High-quality Charter Schools		
1. Replicating/Expanding	3	0
Total	112	96

Panel #1 - CMO - 1: 84.282M

Reader #2:   **********

Applicant: Aspire Public Schools (U282M180034)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of the eligible applicant

1. **Selection Criteria 1: Quality of the eligible applicant**

    Reader's Score: 43

    Sub

1. **(i) The extent to which the academic achievement results (including annual student performance on statewide assessments and annual student attendance and retention rates and, where applicable and available, student academic growth, high school graduation rates, college attendance rates, and college persistence rates) for educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant have exceeded the average academic achievement results for such students served by other public schools in the State.**

    Strengths:

For the most recent comparison year Aspire schools in the Bay Area region outperformed the local comparison district (Oakland) in ELA and Math on the SBAC for all students as well as in the demographic categories of Black, Latinx, Students with Disabilities (for ELA only), ELL, and Economically Disadvantaged and exceeded state averages for Latinx and Economically Disadvantaged students (p. e30) in ELA and Math.

The applicant also notes that for the 2016-2018 time period the percent of students meeting or exceeding standards increased by 2.8 points overall, exceeding the growth for the local district and for the state (p. e30-31).

In the Los Angeles area overall performance exceeded the local district for ELA and Math for all student categories except Black (p. e33). For the 2016-2018 time period the percent of students meeting or exceeding standards increased by 5.6 points overall, exceeding the growth for the Los Angeles comparison district and for the state (p. e33).

In the Central Valley Region, ELA performance on the SBAC exceeded that of the local districts for overall results, Black, Latinx, ELL, and Economically Disadvantaged students and in Math for overall results, Black, Latinx, ELL, and Economically Disadvantaged (p. e36). Average attendance rates equal or exceed 95% across all regions, and retention rates range from an overall of 84.1% to 89% (p. e41).

The applicant notes that Aspire schools in the Bay Area high schools have a graduation rate 9.3 percentage points higher than OUSD, Central Valley high schools have a graduation rate 8 percentage points higher than Lodi and 15.3 percentage points higher than Stockton, and the Los Angeles high school outperforms LAUSD by 16.5 percentage points (p e42).

College matriculation rates in the Bay Area region reported by the applicant are 85%, which exceeds the comparison district average of 25% (p. e43).

Sub

Weaknesses:

The state average performance on the SBAC exceeds Aspire schools in the Bay Area for ELA and Math in all areas except for Latinx and Economically Disadvantaged students (p. e30) with the same groups below the state average in the Los Angeles area with the exception of ELL performance on the Math SBAC (p. e33).

In the Central Valley region performance on the ELA SBAC was below the state average in overall performance as well as students with disabilities and ELL student groups (p. e36).

Reader's Score: 13

2. **(ii) The extent to which one or more charter schools operated or managed by the applicant have closed; have had a charter revoked due to noncompliance with statutory or regulatory requirements; or have had their affiliation with the applicant revoked or terminated, including through voluntary disaffiliation.**

Strengths:

The applicant notes that no Aspire school has had their charter revoked, had their affiliation with Aspire terminated, or been closed due to issues with financial or operational management, student safety, or statutory or regulatory compliance (p. e43).

Weaknesses:

There are no weaknesses noted in the applicant's response.

Reader's Score: 15

3. **(iii) The extent to which one or more charter schools operated or managed by the applicant have had any significant issues in the area of financial or operational management or student safety, or have otherwise experienced significant problems with statutory or regulatory compliance that could lead to revocation of the school's charter.**

Strengths:

The applicant notes that Aspire has a clean record of regulatory compliance and student safety, and has experienced no issues with regards to safety, compliance, or financial or operational management (p. e43).

Weaknesses:

There are no weaknesses noted in the applicant's response.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. **Selection Criteria 2: Significance of contribution in assisting educationally disadvantaged students**

   In determining the significance of the contribution the proposed project will make in expanding educational opportunities for educationally disadvantaged students and enabling those students to meet challenging State academic standards, the Secretary considers the following factors:

Reader's Score: 24

Sub

1. **(i) The extent to which charter schools currently operated or managed by the applicant serve educationally disadvantaged students, particularly students with disabilities and English learners, at rates comparable to surrounding public schools or, in the case of virtual charter schools, at rates comparable to public schools in the State.**

   Strengths:

   The applicant notes that Aspire serves 15,271 students, of whom 94% are students of color, 82% of whom qualify for free and reduced price lunch, 28% of whom are English Language Learners, and 8% of whom are special education students (p. e46).

   Compared with the state and surrounding districts in the Los Angeles Area and the Central Valley a greater proportion of Aspire scholars are Black or Latinx (p. e46).

   Aspire schools on average serve a slightly higher percentage of Latinx students in all areas (p. e47). The percent of students who are English Language Learners exceeds the state and district averages for the Bay Area region.(p. e46-47)

   Weaknesses:

   The percentage of students with disabilities served by the applicant is below the state average in all areas and below the percentage for surrounding districts (p. e46-47).

   The percentage of students who are English Language Learners is below the state and district averages for the Los Angeles and Central Valley regions (p. e46-47).

   The percent of Black students served is below the district and state average in the Bay Area and Los Angeles region (p. e46-47).

Reader's Score: 11

2. **(ii) The quality of the plan to ensure that the charter schools the applicant proposes to replicate or expand will recruit, enroll, and effectively serve educationally disadvantaged students, particularly students with disabilities and English learners.**

   Strengths:

   The applicant describes a comprehensive recruitment and enrollment plan for educationally disadvantaged students that includes developing enrollment timelines, mass and social media marketing efforts, outreach through community organizations, school information availability in English and Spanish, open houses, and targeted recruiting for students with disabilities (p. e47-48).

   Weaknesses:

   The applicant notes that the strategies discussed in the enrollment and recruitment plan have been successful in the 40 schools in operation (p. e48); however, there is not evidence provided that the applicant has deployed additional strategies in those areas where disparities exist in the numbers of educationally disadvantaged students served when compared to local districts and the state.

Reader's Score: 13

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. **Selection Criteria 3: Quality of the evaluation plan for the proposed project**

   In determining the quality of the evaluation plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the proposed project, as described in the applicant's logic model, and that will produce quantitative and qualitative data by the end of the grant period.

   Strengths:

   The applicant describes seven clearly stated and measurable quantitative intermediate outcomes:

   -expand five existing Aspire schools to serve an additional 1,015 scholars by 2024;
   -replicate the existing Aspire model at six new schools to serve an additional 2,985 scholars by 2024;
   -improve student outcomes by increasing the students who score met or exceed on the ELA and Math on the SBAC by 3-5% points in each of the 5 years of the grant linked to the objective performance measures;
   -double the percentage of Aspire graduates who finish 4-year college in 4 years from 16% to 32%;
   -increase the percentage of Aspire graduates who finish 4-year college in any timeframe from 27% to 50%;
   -increase the percentage of Aspire graduates who finish any postsecondary certificate or degree by 5% annually;
   -increase the percentage of alumni whereabouts known by 10% annually) which are directly linked to the objective performance measures described (p. e44-45).

   The applicant further describes measurable outcomes in the project goals and effective measures listed (p. e66-68) that define the broad goals of increasing access to educationally disadvantaged students and increasing the number of college ready graduates who matriculate to and graduate from a four year college.

   Weaknesses:

   The applicant does not describe any qualitative performance measures in the Logic model presented (p. e46-47).

Reader's Score: 9

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. **Selection Criteria 4: Quality of the Management Plan**

   In determining the quality of the applicant's management plan, the Secretary considers the following factors:

Reader's Score: 14

   Sub

   1. **(i) The ability of the applicant to sustain the operation of the replicated or expanded charter schools after the grant has ended, as demonstrated by the multi-year financial and operating model required under section 4305(b)(3)(B)(iii) of the ESEA (5 points). (NFP)**

Sub

Strengths:

The applicant notes that the budget described will support one-time startup costs for the replication schools and will consist primarily to support planning year staffing including a Principal, Business Manager, Community Outreach Manager, and Student Recruitment Manager during the planning year as well as to purchase curriculum, supplies, equipment, and furniture necessary to open the schools (p. e70)

The applicant notes that each of the described components supported by project funds are either one-time costs or can be sustained on public funds at full scale. In addition, the applicant notes that each of the current schools rely on per-student for all operations and are not supplemented by philanthropy (p. e71).

The applicant also notes extensive experience in opening and operating school facilities (p. e71).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses are noted in the applicant's response.

Reader's Score: 5

2. (ii) 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. (34 CFR 75.210(g)(2)(i))

Strengths:

The management plan is broken down into objectives to accomplish the expansion initiative including Growth Strategy & Planning, Site Search & Due Diligence, and School Start Up. The School Start-Up plan is further broken into discrete tasks that relate to each start up element, with an "owner" (staff member) assigned and a timeline for completion (p. e73-76).

Weaknesses:

The timeline described by the applicant is in broad intervals (for example 18-24 months, 6-9 months) with no specific start date or end date listed, which makes some aspects of the timing of activities difficult to pinpoint, which could lead to overlapping personnel responsibilities or delays in project completion (p. e73-76).

Reader's Score: 4

3. (iii) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel. (34 CFR 75.210 (e)(3)(ii))

Strengths:

Key personnel are described by the applicant, including the current CFO, who has a number of experiences managing federal grants, including Title III grants, HSI grants, and TRIO grants. (p. e76).

The interim CEO has 7 years of experience with Aspire managing building projects and school start ups (p. e77). The Chief Schools Officer and Chief Academic Officer have a wide range of experience in the replication of curriculum models and programs (p. e77-78).

The Director of Growth and Strategy developed Aspire's five-year growth strategy and led the development and opening of ten Aspire schools (p. e77-79.)

Weaknesses:

There are no weaknesses noted in the applicant's response.

Sub

   Reader's Score: 5

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority 1 - Promoting Diversity

 1. **Competitive Preference Priority 1— Promoting Diversity.**

    Under this priority, applicants must propose to replicate or expand high-quality charter schools that have an intentional focus on recruiting students from racially and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds, and maintaining racially and socioeconomically diverse student bodies in those charter schools, consistent with nondiscrimination requirements contained in the U.S. Constitution and Federal civil rights laws.

    Strengths:

    In the most recent three year period the applicant has increased the percentage of economically disadvantaged students in two of the three California regions where the replication/expansion schools will be located as well as Aspire's statewide (82%), exceeding the California state average (60%) (p. e24).

    The applicant notes that compared with the state and surrounding districts in two out of three regions a greater proportion of Aspire scholars are Black or Latinx (p. e46). The applicant describes a student recruitment and enrollment plan (p. e47-48) that details efforts to increase the enrollment of economically and racially diverse students.

    Weaknesses:

    No weaknesses are noted in the applicant's response.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Reopening Poor-performing Public Schools

 1. **Competitive Preference Priority 2— Reopening Academically Poor-performing Public Schools as Charter Schools**

    Under this priority, applicants must:

    (i) Demonstrate past success working with one or more academically poor-performing public schools or schools that previously were designated as persistently lowest-achieving schools or priority schools under the former School Improvement Grant program or in States that exercised ESEA flexibility, respectively, under the ESEA, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB); and

    (ii) Propose to use grant funds under this program to reopen one or more academically poor-performing public schools as charter schools during the project period by--
        (A) Replicating one or more high-quality charter schools based on a successful charter school model for which the applicant has provided evidence of success; and
        (B) Targeting a demographically similar student population in the replicated charter schools as was served by the academically poor-performing public schools, consistent with nondiscrimination requirements contained in the U.S. Constitution and Federal civil rights laws.

    Strengths:

    The applicant did not address this competitive preference priority.

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not address this competitive preference priority.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority 3 - High School Students

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 3— High School Students.**

   Under this priority, applicants must propose to:

   (i) Replicate or expand high-quality charter schools to serve high school students, including educationally disadvantaged students;

   (ii) Prepare students, including educationally disadvantaged students, in those schools for enrollment in postsecondary education institutions through activities such as, but not limited to, accelerated learning programs (including Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses and programs, dual or concurrent enrollment programs, and early college high schools), college counseling, career and technical education programs, career counseling, internships, work-based learning programs (such as apprenticeships), assisting students in the college admissions and financial aid application processes, and preparing students to take standardized college admissions tests;

   (iii) Provide support for students, including educationally disadvantaged students, who graduate from those schools and enroll in postsecondary education institutions in persisting in, and attaining a degree or certificate from, such institutions, through activities such as, but not limited to, mentorships, ongoing assistance with the financial aid application process, and establishing or strengthening peer support systems for such students attending the same institution; and

   (iv) Propose one or more project-specific performance measures, including aligned leading indicators or other interim milestones, that will provide valid and reliable information about the applicant's progress in preparing students, including educationally disadvantaged students, for enrollment in postsecondary education institutions and in supporting those students in persisting in and attaining a degree or certificate from such institutions. An applicant addressing this priority and receiving a CMO grant must provide data that are responsive to the measure(s), including performance targets, in its annual performance reports to the Department.

   (v) For purposes of this priority, postsecondary education institutions include institutions of higher education, as defined in section 8101(29) of the ESEA, and one-year training programs that meet the requirements of section 101(b)(1) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (HEA).

   Strengths:

   The applicant notes that the four new high schools will replicate the existing post-secondary access program which describes as its outcomes a nearly 100% college acceptance rate
   in each of the past 10 years (indicator i), and a consistent 4-year college completion rate 2.5 times the national rate for students from similar demographics (p. e26).

   The applicant states goals for the high school program for the expanded schools by 2024 including increasing the percentage of Aspire graduates who graduate from postsecondary institutions in four years from16% to 32%, total postsecondary completion from27% to 50%, and increasing postsecondary certifications or degrees at a rate of 5% annually (indicators iii and iv) (p. e27-28).

   On pages e44-45 the applicant notes specific goals linked to the high school expansion, including doubling the percentage of Aspire graduates who finish 4-year college in 4 years from 16% to 32%; increasing the percentage of

Aspire graduates who finish 4-year college in any timeframe from 27% to 50%; increasing the percentage of Aspire graduates who finish any postsecondary certificate or degree by 5% annually; and, increasing the percentage of alumni whereabouts known by 10% annually.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses are noted in the applicant's response.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority 4 - Replicating/Expanding High-quality Charter Schools

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 4— Replicating or Expanding High-quality Charter Schools to Serve Native American Students.**

   (i) Propose to replicate or expand one or more high-quality charter schools that--
      (A) Utilize targeted outreach and recruitment in order to serve a high proportion of Native American students, consistent with nondiscrimination requirements contained in the U.S. Constitution and Federal civil rights laws;
      (B) Have a mission and focus that will address the unique educational needs of Native American students, such as through the use of instructional programs and teaching methods that reflect and preserve Native American language, culture, and history; and
      (C) Have a governing board with a substantial percentage of members who are members of Indian Tribes or Indian organizations located within the area to be served by the replicated or expanded charter school;

   (ii) Submit a letter of support from at least one Indian Tribe or Indian organization located within the area to be served by the replicated or expanded charter school; and

   (iii) Meaningfully collaborate with the Indian Tribe(s) or Indian organization(s) from which the applicant has received a letter of support in a timely, active, and ongoing manner with respect to the development and implementation of the educational program at the charter school.

   Strengths:

   The applicant did not address this competitive preference priority.

   Weaknesses:

   The applicant did not address this competitive preference priority.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 02/12/2019 05:06 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Aspire Public Schools (U282M180034)
Reader #3:   **********

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the eligible applicant		
1. Quality of the Applicant	45	45
Significance		
1. Disadvantaged Students	30	30
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Evaluation Plan	10	9
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	11
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
Promoting Diversity		
1. Promoting Diversity	3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
Reopening Poor-performing Public Schools		
1. Reopening Public Schools	3	0
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
High School Students		
1. High School Students	3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
Replicating/Expanding High-quality Charter Schools		
1. Replicating/Expanding	3	0
Total	112	101

Technical Review Form

Reader #3:   **********

Applicant: Aspire Public Schools (U282M180034)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of the eligible applicant

1. **Selection Criteria 1: Quality of the eligible applicant**

Reader's Score: 45

Sub

1. **(i) The extent to which the academic achievement results (including annual student performance on statewide assessments and annual student attendance and retention rates and, where applicable and available, student academic growth, high school graduation rates, college attendance rates, and college persistence rates) for educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant have exceeded the average academic achievement results for such students served by other public schools in the State.**

   Strengths:

   The applicant included achievement results that showcased how Aspire's schools outperformed California's educationally disadvantaged students every year since implementation of SBAC (statewide assessments in California) which is shown for ELA and math on page e29. English language learners exceeded in math at nearly twice the rate and African American students also showed an increase at 2.8 times the state rate. Data charts support academic achievements in areas for subgroups in state assessments in ELA and math in 16-17 and 17-18. The average daily attendance rate in all 3 regions is greater than 95% which is also higher than California's average daily attendance rate in other public schools.

   Weaknesses:

   None noted.

   Reader's Score: 15

2. **(ii) The extent to which one or more charter schools operated or managed by the applicant have closed; have had a charter revoked due to noncompliance with statutory or regulatory requirements; or have had their affiliation with the applicant revoked or terminated, including through voluntary disaffiliation.**

   Strengths:

   The applicant has a 20 year track record of successful management of 80 schools in Tennessee and California collectively. Aspire currently operates 36 schools in California, as noted on page e43, and no evidence provided for closures or revocations.

Sub

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 15

3. **(iii) The extent to which one or more charter schools operated or managed by the applicant have had any significant issues in the area of financial or operational management or student safety, or have otherwise experienced significant problems with statutory or regulatory compliance that could lead to revocation of the school's charter.**

Strengths:

On page e43, the applicant indicates that in 20 years of managing 80 schools, Aspire has not had any financial or operational management issues or non-compliance.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. **Selection Criteria 2: Significance of contribution in assisting educationally disadvantaged students**

   In determining the significance of the contribution the proposed project will make in expanding educational opportunities for educationally disadvantaged students and enabling those students to meet challenging State academic standards, the Secretary considers the following factors:

Reader's Score: 30

Sub

1. **(i) The extent to which charter schools currently operated or managed by the applicant serve educationally disadvantaged students, particularly students with disabilities and English learners, at rates comparable to surrounding public schools or, in the case of virtual charter schools, at rates comparable to public schools in the State.**

Strengths:

The applicant included achievement results that showcased how Aspire's schools outperformed California's educationally disadvantaged students every year since implementation of SBAC (statewide assessments in California) which is shown for ELA and math on page e29. English language learners exceeded in math at nearly twice the rate and African American students also showed an increase at 2.8 times the state rate. Data charts support academic achievements in areas for subgroups in state assessments in ELA and math in 16-17 and 17-18. The average daily attendance rate in all 3 regions is greater than 95% which is also higher than California's average daily attendance rate in other public schools.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Sub

   Reader's Score: 15

2. **(ii) The quality of the plan to ensure that the charter schools the applicant proposes to replicate or expand will recruit, enroll, and effectively serve educationally disadvantaged students, particularly students with disabilities and English learners.**

   Strengths:

   On page e47, there is a plan to have recruitment events such as open houses, advertisements, brochures, church events, preschool events, and flyers in neighborhoods that will represent dual languages to ensure to diversify population. The application is on a lottery process in which students who receive free/ reduced lunch are a priority according to page e52.

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses noted.

   Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. **Selection Criteria 3: Quality of the evaluation plan for the proposed project**

   In determining the quality of the evaluation plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the proposed project, as described in the applicant's logic model, and that will produce quantitative and qualitative data by the end of the grant period.

   Strengths:

   There is a clear logic model with specific outcomes by 2024 with clear metrics, objective performance measures, of the intended outcomes of the proposed project. Aspire was founded to serve educationally disadvantaged scholars as noted on pages e44. On pages e70-e75, Aspire has experience managing the public funds and grants.

   Weaknesses:

   It is unclear what measurement system will be used to meet the high school college acceptance rates as noted on pages e44.

Reader's Score: 9

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. **Selection Criteria 4: Quality of the Management Plan**

   In determining the quality of the applicant's management plan, the Secretary considers the following factors:

Reader's Score: 11

   Sub

1. **(i) The ability of the applicant to sustain the operation of the replicated or expanded charter schools after the grant has ended, as demonstrated by the multi-year financial and operating model required under section 4305(b)(3)(B)(iii) of the ESEA (5 points). (NFP)**

   Strengths:

   On page e71, Aspire owns 16 out of 36 of their own facilities. Also, as noted on page e70, Aspire has previous experience in managing grants without philanthropy as they can operate on the use of public funding alone. Previous grant awards included i3 grants, Gates Foundation, and Bell Foundation.

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses noted.

   Reader's Score: 5

2. **(ii) 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. (34 CFR 75.210(g)(2)(i))**

   Strengths:

   The management plan has objectives for the proposed project on time and within budget. The project includes three construction projects with the assistance of the Greenlighting Framework as indicated on page e73-pge75. There is a clear process that there is a strategy of school growth and opening with timeline.

   Weaknesses:

   More information about the firm, Greenlighting could have been helpful to understand the defined responsibilities and reasonableness of the timelines and milestones for the construction portion of this project.

   Reader's Score: 3

3. **(iii) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel. (34 CFR 75.210 (e)(3)(ii))**

   Strengths:

   The key project personnel has the experience and relevant training necessary to carry out this project as indicated through the resumes on page e83.

   Weaknesses:

   Aspire currently has an interim CEO in place with limited access to this project. While the key personnel will manage this project, a new CEO could steer this in a different direction and this could be an indirect concern.

   Reader's Score: 3

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority 1 - Promoting Diversity

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 1— Promoting Diversity.**

   Under this priority, applicants must propose to replicate or expand high-quality charter schools that have an intentional focus on recruiting students from racially and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds, and maintaining racially and socioeconomically diverse student bodies in those charter schools, consistent with nondiscrimination requirements contained in the U.S.

Constitution and Federal civil rights laws.

Strengths:

The applicant proposes to replicate and expand their high quality charter schools with the intention to recruit and enroll students from racially and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds as indicated on page e26.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Reopening Poor-performing Public Schools

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 2— Reopening Academically Poor-performing Public Schools as Charter Schools**

   Under this priority, applicants must:

   (i) Demonstrate past success working with one or more academically poor-performing public schools or schools that previously were designated as persistently lowest-achieving schools or priority schools under the former School Improvement Grant program or in States that exercised ESEA flexibility, respectively, under the ESEA, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB); and

   (ii) Propose to use grant funds under this program to reopen one or more academically poor-performing public schools as charter schools during the project period by--
   (A) Replicating one or more high-quality charter schools based on a successful charter school model for which the applicant has provided evidence of success; and
   (B) Targeting a demographically similar student population in the replicated charter schools as was served by the academically poor-performing public schools, consistent with nondiscrimination requirements contained in the U.S. Constitution and Federal civil rights laws.

   Strengths:

   The applicant did not address this competitive preference priority.

   Weaknesses:

   The applicant did not address this competitive preference priority.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority 3 - High School Students

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 3— High School Students.**

   Under this priority, applicants must propose to:

   (i) Replicate or expand high-quality charter schools to serve high school students, including educationally disadvantaged students;

   (ii) Prepare students, including educationally disadvantaged students, in those schools for enrollment in postsecondary education institutions through activities such as, but not limited

to, accelerated learning programs (including Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses and programs, dual or concurrent enrollment programs, and early college high schools), college counseling, career and technical education programs, career counseling, internships, work-based learning programs (such as apprenticeships), assisting students in the college admissions and financial aid application processes, and preparing students to take standardized college admissions tests;

(iii) Provide support for students, including educationally disadvantaged students, who graduate from those schools and enroll in postsecondary education institutions in persisting in, and attaining a degree or certificate from, such institutions, through activities such as, but not limited to, mentorships, ongoing assistance with the financial aid application process, and establishing or strengthening peer support systems for such students attending the same institution; and

(iv) Propose one or more project-specific performance measures, including aligned leading indicators or other interim milestones, that will provide valid and reliable information about the applicant's progress in preparing students, including educationally disadvantaged students, for enrollment in postsecondary education institutions and in supporting those students in persisting in and attaining a degree or certificate from such institutions. An applicant addressing this priority and receiving a CMO grant must provide data that are responsive to the measure(s), including performance targets, in its annual performance reports to the Department.

(v) For purposes of this priority, postsecondary education institutions include institutions of higher education, as defined in section 8101(29) of the ESEA, and one-year training programs that meet the requirements of section 101(b)(1) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (HEA).

Strengths:

Aspire intends to accelerate the learning of their high school students by ensuring that students complete high school with 5 college courses and/ or 15 college units prior to high school graduation. On page e26, the class of 2017 had students complete 3,279 college courses prior to high school graduation. Aspire was founded to serve educationally disadvantaged scholars as noted on page e44.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority 4 - Replicating/Expanding High-quality Charter Schools

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 4— Replicating or Expanding High-quality Charter Schools to Serve Native American Students.**

   (i) Propose to replicate or expand one or more high-quality charter schools that--
      (A) Utilize targeted outreach and recruitment in order to serve a high proportion of Native American students, consistent with nondiscrimination requirements contained in the U.S. Constitution and Federal civil rights laws;
      (B) Have a mission and focus that will address the unique educational needs of Native American students, such as through the use of instructional programs and teaching methods that reflect and preserve Native American language, culture, and history; and
      (C) Have a governing board with a substantial percentage of members who are members of Indian Tribes or Indian organizations located within the area to be served by the replicated or expanded charter school;

   (ii) Submit a letter of support from at least one Indian Tribe or Indian organization located within the area to be served by the replicated or expanded charter school; and

(iii) Meaningfully collaborate with the Indian Tribe(s) or Indian organization(s) from which the applicant has received a letter of support in a timely, active, and ongoing manner with respect to the development and implementation of the educational program at the charter school.

Strengths:

The applicant did not address this competitive preference priority.

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not address this competitive preference priority.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 02/12/2019 05:06 PM