

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/21/2020 03:33 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Soaring Heights Charter School (S282E200003)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the eligible applicant		
1. Quality of the applicant	30	27
Quality of the Continuation Plan		
1. Continuation Plan	10	10
Significance of contribution for students		
1. Assisting Students	20	9
Quality of Project Design		
1. Quality of Project Design	25	23
Project Personnel and Management Plan		
1. Personnel and Management	15	15
Sub Total	100	84
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Rural Community	7	0
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
1. Native American Students	5	0
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
1. Single School Operators	3	3
Sub Total	15	3
Total	115	87

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - FY20 Developers 84.282e - 1: 84.282E

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Soaring Heights Charter School (S282E200003)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of the eligible applicant

1. In determining the quality of the eligible applicant, the Secretary considers the following factors:

Reader's Score: 27

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, post-secondary enrollment and persistence rates, including in college or career training programs, employment rates, earnings and other academic outcomes) 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. (NFP)

Strengths:

With a school population that includes 50% who are educationally disadvantaged the school has outperformed the local school district, New Jersey charter schools, and the state average for over 10 years. (e13 and e20). The school was named an ESEA Distinguished school in 2018, one of only 100 in the country. (e20) The school outperformed the state average by 16 points in math and 25 points in ELA during the 2019 school year. (e23) The school's performance has been consistently above the state average for the last five years. (e24) The school's attendance rate was 97.8%. (e25)

Weaknesses:

A significant proportion of students with disabilities are not proficient in reading or math. This is inconsistent with the performance of other educationally disadvantaged students. (e27-28).

Reader's Score: 8

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. (NFP)

Strengths:

The applicant has never had a charter revoked or a school closed. (e29)

Sub

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

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. (NFP)**

Strengths:

The school has not had any significant issues in the areas of financial or operational management or student safety. It has maintained a Tier 1 ranking, the highest offered by the state. (e29)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

4. (iv) **The extent to which the schools operated or managed by the applicant demonstrate strong results on measurable outcomes in non-academic areas such as, but not limited to, parent satisfaction, school climate, student mental health, civic engagement, and crime prevention and reduction. (NFP)**

Strengths:

More than 97% of parents surveyed were satisfied with the school across a variety of areas. (e30) No incidents of violence or vandalism occurred during the 2019-2020 school year. (e31) There were no reports of cyberbullying during the school closure. (e31)

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not provide evidence about outcomes in other non-academic areas, particularly civic engagement.

Reader's Score: 4

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Continuation Plan

1. **In determining the quality of the continuation plan, the Secretary considers the extent to which the eligible applicant is prepared to continue to operate the charter school that would receive grant funds in a manner consistent with the eligible applicant's application once the grant funds under this program are no longer available. (NFP)**

Strengths:

For all of its operating history, since 1997, the school has maintained a positive fund balance. (e31) The school plans to build capacity in its staff and operations and secure and equip a new facility. Once the school accomplishes these objectives it will be able to sustain itself solely on entitled local, state, and federal aid while maintaining a positive fund balance. This is convincing evidence that the plan will continue to be successful financially beyond the grant period. (e32)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Significance of contribution for students

1. In determining the significance of the contribution the proposed project will make in expanding educational opportunity for educationally disadvantaged students and enabling those students to meet challenging State academic standards, the Secretary considers the quality of the plan to ensure that the charter school the applicant proposes to open, replicate, or expand will recruit, enroll, and effectively serve educationally disadvantaged students, which include children with disabilities and English learners. (NFP)

Strengths:

The school has maintained a population of about 50% of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch despite continued economic growth in the community. This is strong evidence that the applicant has been successful in continuing to recruit and enroll educationally disadvantaged students. (e34-35)

Weaknesses:

The school does not serve significant numbers of students with disabilities or students who are English learners. (e34)
The applicant does not indicate how they plan to recruit and enroll more students who are disadvantaged.

Reader's Score: 9

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 the following factors:

Reader's Score: 23

Sub

1. (i) The extent to which the proposed project demonstrates a rationale (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) . (34 CFR 75.210(c)(2)(xxix))

Strengths:

The applicant has a clear rationale for mentoring and training new teachers and acquiring a new space for the expanded school. They thoroughly lay out their plan for how teachers will first work in supported roles before taking on full responsibilities. The applicant also provides a strong outline of the process for acquiring their new space for the school. (e37)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

2. (ii) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable. (34 CFR 75.210(c)(2)(i))

Sub

Strengths:

The majority of the goals and objectives are clearly specified and measurable, such as those focused on specific hiring outcomes, academic outcomes, and the opening of a new home for the school. (e60)

Weaknesses:

It is unclear how the preservation of the school culture will be measured. (e60)

Reader's Score: 8

- 3. (iii) The extent to which the design for implementing and evaluating the proposed project will result in information to guide possible replication of project activities or strategies, including information about the effectiveness of the approach or strategies employed by the project. (34 CFR 75.210(c)(2)(x))**

Strengths:

The school's strategy of training teachers in advance with master teachers before having them lead their own classrooms is one that will be possible to replicate and determine the effectiveness of during the grant. (e40) They plan to share their knowledge through the publication of a methods manual. (e41)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Project Personnel and Management Plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the personnel who will carry out the proposed project and the management plan. In determining the quality of project personnel and the management plan, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 15

Sub

- 1. (i) The extent to which the applicant encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability. (34 CFR 75.210(e)(2))**

Strengths:

The school actively recruits with diversity in mind and currently has a staff that is 45% non-white. This is convincing evidence that the applicant is successful in encouraging applications from underrepresented groups.(e42)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 2

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

Sub

Strengths:

Many of the key project personnel have extensive experience working at the school and have been there since it was founded. Additional staff have significant charter school experience and have worked through previous grant processes successfully. (e43-46)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

3. (iii) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project. (34 CFR 75.210(g)(2)(ii))

Strengths:

The school has set up various processes for collecting and analyzing data throughout the project. (e46)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. Competitive Preference Priority 1—Rural Community. (0 or 7 points).

Under this priority, applicants must propose to open a new charter school or to replicate or expand a high-quality charter school in a rural community.

Strengths:

No strengths noted.

Weaknesses:

The school is not opening or expanding in a rural area.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 3

1. Competitive Preference Priority 3—Opening a New Charter School or Replicating or Expanding a High-quality Charter School to Serve Native American Students. (Up to 5 points)

Under this priority, applicants must—

(a) Propose to open a new charter school, or replicate or expand a high-quality charter school, that—

(1) Utilizes 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;

(2) Has 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

(3) Has or will have a governing board with a substantial percentage of members who are members of Indian Tribes or Native American organizations located within the area to be served by the new, replicated, or expanded charter school;

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

(c) Meaningfully collaborate with the Indian Tribe(s) or Native American 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:

No strengths noted.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not plan to serve a high proportion of Native American students.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 4

1. Competitive Preference Priority 4—Single School Operators. (0 or 3 points)

Under this priority, applicants must provide evidence that the applicant currently operates one, and only one, charter school.

Strengths:

The applicant is a single school operator. (e22)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Soaring Heights Charter School (S282E200003)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the eligible applicant		
1. Quality of the applicant	30	27
Quality of the Continuation Plan		
1. Continuation Plan	10	10
Significance of contribution for students		
1. Assisting Students	20	10
Quality of Project Design		
1. Quality of Project Design	25	21
Project Personnel and Management Plan		
1. Personnel and Management	15	14
Sub Total	100	82
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Rural Community	7	0
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
1. Native American Students	5	0
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
1. Single School Operators	3	3
Sub Total	15	3
Total	115	85

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - FY20 Developers 84.282e - 1: 84.282E

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Soaring Heights Charter School (S282E200003)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of the eligible applicant

1. In determining the quality of the eligible applicant, the Secretary considers the following factors:

Reader's Score: 27

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, post-secondary enrollment and persistence rates, including in college or career training programs, employment rates, earnings and other academic outcomes) 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. (NFP)

Strengths:

Soaring Heights Charter School (SHCS) is a K-8 campus that is doubling the number of students it serves from 250 to 500. (e20) It has been approved by the New Jersey authorizer to add a PreK component once space is available. (e20-21, e44) The school is also relocating to a new school site, which is in an Opportunity Zone. (e22) Two factors that provided evidence for the expansion request are the New Jersey highest Tier 1 school ranking and recognition as an ESEA Distinguished School by the U. S. Department of Education. (e20) SHCS is at the 90th percentile rank in the district, 88th percentile for charters, and 85th rank for all schools in the state. (e24-25, e 69)

Academic achievement by SHCS is well documented across a longitudinal analysis (e24-25, e66-69). Current assessment scores have SHCS outperforming the local school, charter schools, and the state average in New Jersey by more than 25 percent in both math and English Language Arts. (e20, e65-69)

Attendance rates at SHCS exceed the state with 19.7% of their students with perfect attendance. (e25) Their school retention rates have been around 96.7% over time. (e26, e70)

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not provide academic achievement data that was disaggregated across student subpopulations including educationally disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners. The lack of specific indicators for these critical student groups was a significant deficit. (e23-28)

There was also inconsistent reporting of local school and state academic achievement results which impacted the ability of the reviewer to clearly assess the school's performance based on those missing performance indicators. (e23-28)

There was a significant variance in the school's scores and those of the students with disabilities subpopulation in

Sub

both reading and mathematics. No specific strategies were included to address this lack of academic performance. (e27-28)

Reader's Score: 8

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. (NFP)**

Strengths:

SHCS documents it has had no operational or management issues and meets regulatory requirements as evidenced in the Commissioner of Education's correspondence. (e70, e77-78) Currently, SHCS is ranked in the highest category for charter schools (Tier 1) by the New Jersey Department of Education. (e29) Since its inception in 1997 SHCS has been renewed five times. (e29)

Weaknesses:

No weakness found.

Reader's Score: 10

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. (NFP)**

Strengths:

SHCS documents that there have been no fiscal or operational management or student safety issues that could lead to revocation of the charter. (e29)

Documentation includes a letter from the Commissioner citing their lack of deficiencies (e77-78) and the renewal of their charter for five years. In fact, the charter has been approved for an expansion to double the size of the students served. (e70, e20, e44)

SHCS is ranked by the New Jersey Department of Education as a Tier 1 school. (e20)

Weaknesses:

No weakness found.

Reader's Score: 5

4. (iv) **The extent to which the schools operated or managed by the applicant demonstrate strong results on measurable outcomes in non-academic areas such as, but not limited to, parent satisfaction, school climate, student mental health, civic engagement, and crime prevention and reduction. (NFP)**

Strengths:

One indicator of parent satisfaction is the retention rate of students within the charter school which was over 96.7% last year. (e26, e70) This fact is enhanced with parental survey data from June 2020 which indicated high satisfaction rankings reported with over 97.8% rankings. (e30)

The applicant reported that after transitioning to a virtual learning environment due to COVID-19, there were no

Sub

incidences of cyberbullying nor any episodes during the school year. There were no episodes of violence within the student body. (e30-31) SHCS does track indicators of school climate, including vandalism, disciplinary suspension rates, and harassment.

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not provide a comprehensive set of outcomes, that were measurable, that focused on nonacademic areas noted in the criteria. The only indicator provided was a parental satisfaction survey but the return rate was only 46.07% which is very low. (e30) This tool did not include a measurable outcome and the data provided did not include a comprehensive set of results providing limited data.

Reader's Score: 4

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Continuation Plan

- 1. In determining the quality of the continuation plan, the Secretary considers the extent to which the eligible applicant is prepared to continue to operate the charter school that would receive grant funds in a manner consistent with the eligible applicant's application once the grant funds under this program are no longer available. (NFP)**

Strengths:

SHCS has initiated a strategic planning effort that will result in a five-year written plan. (e31-32) The plan does reflect the outcomes and objectives of this grant application and so the strategic plan will be aligned with the grant's requirements and results. (e33) The overview of the strategic plan's purpose based on the narrative does suggest that even without the grant funds, SHCS will be able to expand.

Financial projects do indicate that once the expansion is completed, the school can be sustainable based on revenues generated from state funds. (e32-34) The projections have an increase of local and state funds based on increase enrollment from [REDACTED]. (e91-92)

Weaknesses:

No weakness found.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Significance of contribution for students

- 1. In determining the significance of the contribution the proposed project will make in expanding educational opportunity for educationally disadvantaged students and enabling those students to meet challenging State academic standards, the Secretary considers the quality of the plan to ensure that the charter school the applicant proposes to open, replicate, or expand will recruit, enroll, and effectively serve educationally disadvantaged students, which include children with disabilities and English learners. (NFP)**

Strengths:

SHCS has evidence of high academic achievement by its aggregate student body that exceeds local, state charter, and state assessment scores. (e29, e70)

It has been recognized as New Jersey's highest Tier 1 school ranking and recognition as an ESEA Distinguished School by the U. S. Department of Education. (e20)

SHCS is at the 90th percentile rank in the district, 88th percentile for charters and 85th rank for all schools in the state. (e24-25, e69)

Weaknesses:

The school's demographic data (e57) indicates a drop in percentage for economically disadvantaged students from 2016 to 2019. There was no data reported for English Language Learners. (e35-36) The statistics for Hispanic and students with disabilities show little progress in increasing the percentages enrolled with only a 2% increase across the reported four years of enrollment. (e57) None of these demographic data indicators had a comparison to the local district or the state which is significant since the applicant defines their community as one of the "most diverse communities in the country." (e57)

The applicant did not provide a comprehensive recruitment plan that included strategies specially designed to recruit and enroll educationally disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and other student subpopulations who are considered educationally disadvantaged. There were no research-based or targeted recruitment strategies that would provide recruitment tools translated into their home language or specifically detail the services that would support these students and increase their participation in the lottery. (e35-36)

The applicant did not provide any hard data on the academic achievement results for educationally disadvantaged students. The data they did provide two school-identified student subpopulations which were the percentage of students on free and reduced lunch, and the percentage of students of color but there was no academic achievement data disaggregated for the two subgroups only a report of enrollment percentages. (e34)

Examination of disaggregated data would provide specific findings relate to how well SHCS is serving educationally disadvantaged students, children with disabilities, and English Language Learners as compared to the school population. The charts (e27-28) documents significant differences in proficiency rates for students with disabilities with 67% not proficient in ELA compared to 13% for the general population. In math, the students with disabilities were 57% not proficient compared to general education at 37%. (e28) The applicant stated, "the discrepancy between proficiency rates of special education students and general education students ... is typical of public school across the country". (e28)

Reader's Score: 10

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 the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 21

Sub

- 1. (i) The extent to which the proposed project demonstrates a rationale (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) . (34 CFR 75.210(c)(2)(xxix))**

Strengths:

SHCS delineated three specific objectives for the first year of implementation of its plan to expand enrollment and move into a new building. (e36)

There was a five-year strategic plan included in the narrative that supported the objectives as a list of management tasks. (e37-38)

Sub

A logic model was submitted. (e60-61)

Weaknesses:

The logic model was not comprehensive based on the fact that it did not include all four program objectives listed in the Project Objectives document (e156-159) including academic achievement, recruitment, and building staff competencies.

Reader's Score: 9

2. (ii) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable. (34 CFR 75.210(c)(2)(i))

Strengths:

SCHS has identified five Project Objectives supported by a total of nineteen performance measures. (e156-158) This is evidence of their commitment to expanding their student population while addressing academic achievement and other outcomes such as expanding their teacher workforce and occupying a new building.

There are specific performance measures for Hispanics (English Language Learners are not indicated in any of the performance measures) and economically disadvantaged student subpopulations. (e156-157)

There is also a Project Objective focusing on recruitment of student subpopulations. (e158-159)

There are three specific student enrollment expansion indicators (1.c,1.d,1.e). (e156)

Weaknesses:

The project objectives are not written in measurable terms (e156-159) and some of the measurement indicators do not include the Quantitative Data required to establish what is the specific criteria used to evaluate performance. For example, neither of the two performance measures under Objective four are measurable. (e158-159)

A total of six performance measures did not have quantitative data included which is 31.5% of the listed performance measures. (e156-159) Each of these performance measures was written as a documentation of an activity or action, not a measurable outcome.

Based on the high academic status of SHCS, the academic performance measure in mathematics was not rigorous. The outcomes listed include these proficiency scores: for Hispanic (47.06%), aggregate (61.5%), SHCS's own category defined as "not (1.h) economically disadvantaged students" (64.29%) and economically disadvantaged students (65%). The criteria defined as the performance measure are to maintain or increase the current levels of proficiency which is not a rigorous goal. (e156)

The subpopulation scores were to be examined only at the end of year one and there were plans to review longitudinal growth indicators for math over time. (e157)

Expansion of the student population is a stated goal for the initiative, the fact that the project objective (#4) focusing on expanding student subpopulations but it does not have defined performance measures. The plan also does not indicate a measurable target for the expansion of subpopulations. (e158-159)

Reader's Score: 7

3. (iii) The extent to which the design for implementing and evaluating the proposed project will result in information to guide possible replication of project activities or strategies, including information about the effectiveness of the approach or strategies employed by the project. (34 CFR 75.210(c)(2)(x))

Sub

Strengths:

SHCS had a significant set of tools and operational design elements that would be beneficial in the replication of their specific design. The development and publication of the Soaring Heights Methods Manual created with Kean University is a strong tool that delineates the school's success over the core practices of its implementation strategies. (e41). This paired with their focused approach to build the capacity of teachers and leaders that includes embedding of new staff in the existing classrooms before the expansion would allow other charter operators to assess the benefits of this strategy compared to the cost of the implementation. (e40)

Weaknesses:

No weakness found.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Project Personnel and Management Plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the personnel who will carry out the proposed project and the management plan. In determining the quality of project personnel and the management plan, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 14

Sub

- 1. (i) The extent to which the applicant encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability. (34 CFR 75.210(e)(2))**

Strengths:

SHCS has an affirmative action plan and a recruitment process utilizing a wide range of preparatory institutes. The applicant provided data documenting the shift from a white-only staff to one that is 45% non-white. (e42)

Weaknesses:

No weakness found.

Reader's Score: 2

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

Strengths:

SHCS provided narrative details regarding the leadership team and personnel involved with the grant implementation and management. This included their educational backgrounds and defined their leadership role in the application (e43-46) which was supported by their resumes in the Appendix. (e105-111)

Weaknesses:

No weakness found.

Reader's Score: 10

Sub

3. (iii) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project. (34 CFR 75.210(g)(2)(ii))

Strengths:

SHCS stated a commitment to gathering feedback (via surveys or academic performance) and detailed on the strategy of engaging the community with town hall meetings. (e46-47)

Weaknesses:

While there is a commitment to ensure feedback and continuous improvement there was not a specified plan on how that would occur. The narrative provided some data collection tools but there was no evidence of a structured way the data would be collected, assessed by a diverse set of constituents and staff, or communicated widely to the school's staff and supporters. There was no defined timeline for review of grant outcomes which would provide an opportunity for continuous improvement to be examined with the decision if any modifications should occur. (e46-47) No staff was assigned this responsibility and there was no indicator of a collaborative process that included staff and community members.

Reader's Score: 2

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. Competitive Preference Priority 1—Rural Community. (0 or 7 points).

Under this priority, applicants must propose to open a new charter school or to replicate or expand a high-quality charter school in a rural community.

Strengths:

This competitive preference priority was not addressed.

Weaknesses:

This competitive preference priority was not addressed.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 3

1. Competitive Preference Priority 3—Opening a New Charter School or Replicating or Expanding a High-quality Charter School to Serve Native American Students. (Up to 5 points)

Under this priority, applicants must—

(a) Propose to open a new charter school, or replicate or expand a high-quality charter school, that—

(1) Utilizes 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;

(2) Has 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

(3) Has or will have a governing board with a substantial percentage of members who are

members of Indian Tribes or Native American organizations located within the area to be served by the new, replicated, or expanded charter school;

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

(c) Meaningfully collaborate with the Indian Tribe(s) or Native American 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:

This competitive preference priority was not addressed.

Weaknesses:

This competitive preference priority was not addressed.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 4

1. Competitive Preference Priority 4—Single School Operators. (0 or 3 points)

Under this priority, applicants must provide evidence that the applicant currently operates one, and only one, charter school.

Strengths:

The applicant has only one charter school authorized since 1997.(e22) Soaring Heights has been issued a unique school code (7830) which designates it as a single separate charter school. (e64)

Weaknesses:

No weakness found.

Reader's Score: 3

Status: Submitted

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Applicant: Soaring Heights Charter School (S282E200003)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the eligible applicant		
1. Quality of the applicant	30	27
Quality of the Continuation Plan		
1. Continuation Plan	10	10
Significance of contribution for students		
1. Assisting Students	20	11
Quality of Project Design		
1. Quality of Project Design	25	23
Project Personnel and Management Plan		
1. Personnel and Management	15	14
Sub Total	100	85
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Rural Community	7	0
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
1. Native American Students	5	0
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
1. Single School Operators	3	3
Sub Total	15	3
Total	115	88

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - FY20 Developers 84.282e - 1: 84.282E

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: Soaring Heights Charter School (S282E200003)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of the eligible applicant

1. In determining the quality of the eligible applicant, the Secretary considers the following factors:

Reader's Score: 27

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, post-secondary enrollment and persistence rates, including in college or career training programs, employment rates, earnings and other academic outcomes) 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. (NFP)

Strengths:

The applicant provides a robust set of overall academic achievement data on Pages e23 and e24, as well as organized by subgroup on Pages e27 through e29. In most subgroups, the applicant demonstrates it has exceeded the academic performance of both the home district and overall state average. In addition to high rates of student proficiency, the applicant's student growth percentile has been consistently above New Jersey's mean average (Page e26). The applicant's attendance rate has historically hovered around 97% (Page e25) when the statewide average was 93%.

Weaknesses:

The applicant's academic performance among Hispanic students in math and special education students in ELA and math on Pages e28 and e29, is lower than other public schools within the state. There is no discussion of English learners as a subgroup nor any associated academic performance, and the lack of explanation is unclear given the applicant's desire to expand the number of English learners served by its program.

Reader's Score: 8

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. (NFP)

Strengths:

The applicant provides its Tier 1 rating on Page e29 and explains the tiered rating system in New Jersey. Tier 1 rating is the highest achievable rating for a charter school. Additionally, the charter has been renewed four times, with the most recent renewal in 2016, as evidenced by the renewal letter from the New Jersey Department of

Sub

Education on Page e78.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses present.

Reader's Score: 10

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. (NFP)**

Strengths:

The applicant cites its tier rating status on Page e29 as one of the most highly rated charter schools in the state of New Jersey. The latest audit starting on Page e80 reveals no findings or financial difficulties or compliance issues.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses present.

Reader's Score: 5

4. (iv) **The extent to which the schools operated or managed by the applicant demonstrate strong results on measurable outcomes in non-academic areas such as, but not limited to, parent satisfaction, school climate, student mental health, civic engagement, and crime prevention and reduction. (NFP)**

Strengths:

The applicant provides a robust discussion of how it assesses and measures parental satisfaction and school climate on Pages e30 and e31. The data provided indicates high levels of parent satisfaction (greater than 95%), and the limited truancy, suspension, and incident data indicate a highly positive school climate.

Weaknesses:

Participation within the parental satisfaction surveys detailed on Pages e30 and e31 is less than 50%, and the applicant does not make clear whether it is representative or not of overall parental satisfaction.

Reader's Score: 4

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Continuation Plan

1. **In determining the quality of the continuation plan, the Secretary considers the extent to which the eligible applicant is prepared to continue to operate the charter school that would receive grant funds in a manner consistent with the eligible applicant's application once the grant funds under this program are no longer available. (NFP)**

Strengths:

On Pages e31 through e33, the applicant lays out an extensive analysis of the financial and programmatic capacity to handle the expansion to 500 students. The applicant proposes to develop a five-year strategic plan tied to specific goals, objectives, and strategies tied to school growth. The applicant provides several indicators via financial projections prepared on Pages e93 through e95 that suggest it will be able to financially support the program with or without the grant, including a growing fund balance year over year.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses present.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Significance of contribution for students

- 1. In determining the significance of the contribution the proposed project will make in expanding educational opportunity for educationally disadvantaged students and enabling those students to meet challenging State academic standards, the Secretary considers the quality of the plan to ensure that the charter school the applicant proposes to open, replicate, or expand will recruit, enroll, and effectively serve educationally disadvantaged students, which include children with disabilities and English learners. (NFP)**

Strengths:

On Pages e34 and e35, the applicant establishes that a majority of the students it serves are designated as educationally disadvantaged. The applicant points to the ELA and math academic proficiency evidence provided for the overall student body on Pages e24 and e25, as well as the ELA and math proficiency evidence for key subgroups on Pages e27 and e28, to provide demonstrate that the proposed expansion will effectively serve educationally disadvantaged students on the whole.

Weaknesses:

The applicant provides limited discussion of recruitment and enrollment strategies for economically disadvantaged students. On Page e40, the applicant sites that it has a waiting list of 401 students, but there is no indication whether those students will increase or decrease the overall percentage of educationally disadvantaged students of the entire school population. The applicant cites on Page e35 that its low number of students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is not reflective of exclusionary practices, as all students are admitted by random enrollment, but that rather it speaks to accommodating the needs of younger students earlier on with targeted interventions, and that the school's focus on communication and social emotional well-being is especially welcoming to families with special needs students. The applicant fails to provide evidence of how it quantifies the appeal of families with special needs students prior to lottery and enrollment.

Reader's Score: 11

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 the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 23

Sub

- 1. (i) The extent to which the proposed project demonstrates a rationale (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) . (34 CFR 75.210(c)(2)(xxix))**

Sub

Strengths:

The applicant lays out a clear rationale on Page e36 that is mapped to key goals and objectives and further demonstrated by a logic model on Pages e60 and e61. The logic model provided on Pages e60 and e61 includes several project components that are informed by various evaluative findings the applicant has made and are informed by operating the existing charter school that suggests the applicant will be successful with the proposed expansion, such as the value of building staff capacity in advance of any enrollment growth.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses present.

Reader's Score: 10

2. (ii) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable. (34 CFR 75.210(c)(2)(i))

Strengths:

The applicant generally provides clearly specified and measurable goals, objectives, and outcomes summarized on Pages e36 and e37, as well as Pages e60 and e61 and pages e156 through e159. They are clearly specified because the applicant has not grouped the goals, objectives, and outcomes in a way that's obfuscates what achievement will look like. They are measurable because the applicant provides quantitative and qualitative indicators on what achievement will look like.

Weaknesses:

While the goals and objectives are layered across the timing of the five-year grant, the applicant does not provide an appropriate level of detail with respect to timeline and instead aligns outcomes to being demonstrated either in the short-term, immediate, or long-term. The lack of timeframe details, most notable on Pages e60 and e61, of the objectives, goals, and associated outcomes make the goals, objectives, and outcomes challenging to evaluate as adequate or not.

Reader's Score: 8

3. (iii) The extent to which the design for implementing and evaluating the proposed project will result in information to guide possible replication of project activities or strategies, including information about the effectiveness of the approach or strategies employed by the project. (34 CFR 75.210(c)(2)(x))

Strengths:

On Page e41, the applicant proposes the dissemination plan for an expansion manual in collaboration with Kean University, adding further credibility that the implementation and evaluation of the applicant's proposed project will lead to resources to guide others in replication of project activities and strategies, as well as their effectiveness.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses present.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Project Personnel and Management Plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the personnel who will carry out the proposed project and the management plan. In determining the quality of project personnel and the management plan, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 14

Sub

- 1. (i) The extent to which the applicant encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability. (34 CFR 75.210(e)(2))**

Strengths:

On Page e42, the applicant describes an affirmative action in place, whereby the school actively recruits from a broad range of teacher training institutions, as well as from communities that are profoundly diverse. The applicant affirms its commitment to ensuring that it attracts a diverse applicant pool, and it cites that 45% of faculty and staff are non-white.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses present.

Reader's Score: 2

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

Strengths:

The applicant provides the backgrounds of five staff members on Pages e43 through e46, as well as the relevant resumes on Pages e105 through e111. One of the staff members listed on Page e45 has direct experience working with other CSP and dissemination grants, suggesting capacity to successfully participate in both the execution and the administration of the proposed project and associated grant.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not draw a connection directly as to what each person will or will not do in the context of the proposed expansion or in the administration of the grant.

Reader's Score: 9

- 3. (iii) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project. (34 CFR 75.210(g)(2)(ii))**

Strengths:

The applicant outlines methods for collecting project data on Pages e46 and e47 to ensure feedback across various stakeholders, including parents and staff, both individually and in townhall style settings.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses present.

Reader's Score: 3

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. Competitive Preference Priority 1—Rural Community. (0 or 7 points).

Under this priority, applicants must propose to open a new charter school or to replicate or expand a high-quality charter school in a rural community.

Strengths:

No strengths present.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not address this competitive preference priority anywhere in the application narrative.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 3

1. Competitive Preference Priority 3—Opening a New Charter School or Replicating or Expanding a High-quality Charter School to Serve Native American Students. (Up to 5 points)

Under this priority, applicants must—

(a) Propose to open a new charter school, or replicate or expand a high-quality charter school, that—

(1) Utilizes 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;

(2) Has 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

(3) Has or will have a governing board with a substantial percentage of members who are members of Indian Tribes or Native American organizations located within the area to be served by the new, replicated, or expanded charter school;

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

(c) Meaningfully collaborate with the Indian Tribe(s) or Native American 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:

No strengths present.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not address this competitive priority anywhere in the application narrative.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 4

1. Competitive Preference Priority 4—Single School Operators. (0 or 3 points)

Under this priority, applicants must provide evidence that the applicant currently operates one, and only one, charter school.

Strengths:

The applicant asserts it operates one school on Page e22 and provides a copy of its renewal letter on Page e78.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses present.

Reader's Score: 3

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 08/21/2020 03:33 PM