

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

Strengths:

The applicant clearly meets the requirement of the competitive preference. It notes the 2015 law which established charter schools was modeled after the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools' Model Law, and, thus was specifically crafted to ensure charter schools had access to adequate facilities (e22).

Evidence offered notes that the state legislature has the authority to issue bonds to charter schools and traditional schools alike and that Alabama Code § 16-13-234 ensures that charter schools receive their share of the Public School Fund (PSF) monies via these low interest loans (e22-23). The state PSF provisions guarantees the charter will receive the same amount per pupil in matched funds.

Assistance with facilities acquisition is also provided through multiple avenues (e23-25). The applicant notes that all charter schools receive comprehensive assistance with facilities identification, acquisition and finance in that Alabama Code mandates that the ALSDE maintain a list of all unused facilities on its website and that the list be updated annually (e23).

Additionally, New Schools for Alabama (NSFA) partners with the department to expand that list to include underutilized facilities and includes buildings that are not exclusively public school buildings. The Charter Facilities Index list also provides an interactive map and preferred geographic areas, all having pictures, footage and price. Related support is offered via the NSFA Priority Growth Document which details population trends and existing educational options and other market analyses (e24).

In addition to the Priority Growth Document, NSFA also provides in-person technical assistance, with deep expertise from former VP of Financing and Lending from the Charter Impact Fund, Chris Reynolds (e24).

By law, Alabama ensures that charter schools have first right of refusal to purchase unused or underutilized public school facilities that are on the market and that the terms of purchase are reasonable (e25-e26).

Finally, evidence is provided that conversion charter schools in the state have access to local mills (e26).

Weaknesses:

There were no weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 4

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

1. Competitive Preference Priority 4: Best Practices to Improve Struggling Schools and Local Educational Agencies

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

Strengths:

The applicant proposes that it uses charter best practices to improve struggling LEAs and charter schools by highlighting in-person and electronic dissemination methods (e27-29).

Noted is ALSDE's commitment to offer a breakout session, including a cross-sector panel, highlighting charter school practices at its annual professional learning conference and the applicant's contractual requirement for its subgrantees to attend at least once (e27). Additionally noted is the dissemination strategy to ensure that conversion charter schools receive relevant charter best practice information via the Alabama Association of School Boards summer conference (e28).

The applicant also details the one-on-one consultation offered to assist with implementing best practices and inform strategic planning of charter schools, along with an annual in-person convening of charter operators, applicants and partners to share best practices (e28).

Finally, the applicant discusses its electronic strategy consisting of providing a repository with resources that include charter best practices which have measurable supporting data (e29).

Weaknesses:

It was not clearly noted how the applicant ensures that struggling schools and LEAs are targeted and supported for performance improvement using charter school best practices.

Reader's Score: 1

Competitive Preference Priority 5 - Serving At-Risk Students

1. Competitive Preference Priority 5: Serving At-Risk Students

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

Strengths:

The Alabama Coalition of Public Charter Schools meets the requirements and offers comprehensive support and technical assistance to charter schools that service at-risk students. The applicant notes the state law's specificity, which states that one of the stated purposes for charter schools is to close achievement gaps between high and low performing groups of public school students (e29).

The state's support of at-risk students is evidenced by its provision to allow charter schools to offer enrollment preference to at-risk students and that the statute specifically requires that all authorizing entities prioritize applications to serve at-risk students (e30). Ala. Code § 16-6F-7 is cited as evidence that every charter school must specifically articulate how it will serve at-risk students (e30).

The applicant notes its strong history of relationship building and recruiting high quality charter operators with a track record of success in serving this population with the specified services, noting that it has successfully recruited operators such as: Democracy Prep, Gestalt Community, KIPP and Freedom Prep. Additionally, the applicant highlights that the first charter school approved in Alabama was ACCEL Day and Evening Academy, a dropout prevention model (e31). Also cited is the history of support for these schools and the applicant's strong relationships with out of state schools that have a track record of providing both dropout prevention and dropout recovery services (e31).

Of additional consequence is the fact that all of the charter schools approved thus far are located in an attendance zone with 60% or more at-risk students (e31).

The applicant notes its specific target of having 12 of the 15 new subgrantees meet the qualifications of serving at-risk and educationally disadvantaged students with such programs (e32).

Finally, the state's support of student programs is detailed as providing categorical funding for such programs, providing a comprehensive suite of resources and training, and online monitoring tools to help schools track and monitor early warning signs (e32-33).

Weaknesses:

There were no weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority 6 - Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

1. Competitive Preference Priority 6: Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

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

Strengths:

The applicant provides a variety of assurances related to quality authorizing practices and to holding schools and authorizers accountable that will ensure best practices in charter school will likely be implemented (e33-37).

Highlighted is the authorizer application requirement to explain the board's capacity for oversight and its commitment to perform quality authorizing per the NACSA standards. The application package requires a commitment to and plans for quality authorizing, including providing support to applicants and approved charters, monitoring school performance, and holding schools accountable (e33-34).

The applicant cites the responsibility of the authorizers to monitor the ongoing performance of the charter schools that it authorizes and the Alabama code that specifically allows the authorizers to not renew or to revoke a charter that fails to meet standards of fiscal management (e37).

It is noted that ALSDE has specific responsibilities under the law to review and evaluate authorizer quality using nationally recognized standards for quality authorizing (e33) and that it has the appropriate authority granted to revoke the chartering authority of both the local school boards and/or the charter commission, if it finds an authorizer not in compliance (e34).

Also highlighted are ALSDE's authorizer monitoring processes which require authorizers to submit a detailed annual report with granular detail on the performance of each charter school it has authorized, including academic, operational, and financial data, including financial audits (e34 and e37).

Finally, the applicant highlights that the Alabama Legislature has provided \$200,000 annually in the budget for the commission's work, that ALSDE currently provides training and technical assistance for both the commission and local authorizers (e35).

Weaknesses:

There were no weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 4

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 04/05/2019 05:24 PM