

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

Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association A NJ Nonprofit (S282A200020)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	35	34
Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants		
1. Subgrant Applicants	15	14
State Plan		
1. State Plan	35	33
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	15
Sub Total	100	96
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
1. CPP3	3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
1. CPP4	4	4
Competitive Preference Priority 5		
1. CPP5	2	2
Competitive Preference Priority 6		
1. CPP6	3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 7		
1. CPP7	4	3
Sub Total	16	15
Total	116	111

Technical Review Form

Panel #6 - CSP State Entities - 6: 84.282A

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association A NJ Nonprofit (S282A200020)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. a. Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: 34

Sub

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

Strengths:

The applicant clearly presents a rationale in the way it intends to determine subgrant funding amounts. For example, the base award [REDACTED] will be increased based on alignment to project outcomes and goals. An additional [REDACTED] will be awarded if the school is located in the target area and another [REDACTED] will be awarded if at least 250 economically disadvantaged students are enrolled in CSP-funded grades (e42). A direct correlation between funding and goal alignment will increase the applicant's ability to meet project goals. The logic model also clearly connects inputs to outputs and outcomes, given the linkage between technical assistance for subgrantees based on needs assessment data and the proposed outcomes of diversified student populations with improved academic outcomes (e36).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 15

2. (2) 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 project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible; and

Strengths:

Project outcomes are clearly related to project performance measures and will produce quantitative and qualitative data. For example, a project outcome is to increase the number of high-quality charter schools statewide and in Abbott districts (e43). Objective 1-SMART Goal 1.1 clearly aligns to the outcome by setting a target that 28 of the 38 subgrant schools will be located in Abbott districts. There is also clear evidence of quantitative and qualitative data. For example, the applicant will survey New Jersey Department of Education staff on whether technical assistance sessions were relevant and useful. Data from that survey will allow for quantitative data analysis (e45).

Sub

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly align activities, performance measures or performance targets to SMART Goals 1.2 and 1.3 (e43). It is unclear how the goals for economically disadvantaged” student enrollment (SMART Goal 1.2) and maintaining Black/Hispanic student enrollment (SMART Goal 1.3) will be addressed by community meetings, Parent Academies and website materials.

Reader's Score: 14

3. (3) The ambitiousness of the State entity’s objectives for the quality charter school program carried out under the CSP State Entities program

Strengths:

The applicant has proposed an ambitious set of objectives for the project. For example, the applicant sets high targets for goals, including scoring among the top third of all schools on the state performance report and outperforming district averages on State math and ELA assessments (e44). This is an ambitious goal given only 36.6% of charters in the Camden School District score proficient on State ELA assessments (e34). The goals are also ambitious because the state has removed the authorizer approval for material charter amendments, which fast tracks existing schools that want to apply for subgrant funds for expansion (e47).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants

1. b. Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants

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

Strengths:

The applicant provides evidence that viable subgrantees (i.e., local and national operators) exist and the track record of these subgrantees increases the likelihood they will meet project objectives and student results benchmarks. For example, applicants with existing schools must provide disaggregated student performance data as part of the CSP-specific supplemental rubric (e51) and detail how their proposed model and track record will ensure they meet project-related goals (e49). This targeted response to meeting project goals is proactive and will hold grantees accountable. The applicant also addresses the composition of the Peer Review Committee, including charter operation, authorizing, law, governance, and parent engagement experts (e51).

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not specifically address how peer reviewers will be selected from the list of experts mentioned (e51). Details regarding the peer reviewer qualifications posted on the applicant website are not included and the process the project director will use to select peer reviewers from those deemed eligible is also not clearly stated (e52).

Reader's Score: 14

Selection Criteria - State Plan

1. c. State Plan

The State entity's plan to--

Reader's Score: 33

Sub

1. (1) Adequately monitor the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program;

Strengths:

The applicant's monitoring plan is comprehensive. The array of activities reflects both school and grant operations, which is a strength of the proposal. Feedback on monitoring will directly impact school and project effectiveness (e52-e53). Site visits, desk audits and annual subgrantee performance reports are also strengths of the project because they occur at different times during the school year and grant cycle, and provide feedback from multiple viewpoints. The components of planned desk audits (e.g., enrollment, attendance, academics, operations, discipline, federal and state compliance) will be more timely and specific to the individual needs of each subgrantee (e53).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

2. (2) Work with the authorized public chartering agencies involved to avoid duplication of work for the charter schools and authorized public chartering agencies;

Strengths:

The applicant's efforts to avoid duplication are viable. Aligning grant cycles with charter renewal, revision and application processes will, for example, create dual uses for the State's accountability Performance Framework data and documentation (e56) and minimize the paperwork burden (e49). The project team will supplement existing state and partner trainings by providing additional technical assistance to subgrantees (e57). This more focused delivery of services should increase subgrantee accountability and planning efforts, while making each training more impactful. The intent to coordinate required activities (i.e., deadlines, site visit scheduling, financial reporting) with charter schools and the authorizer will also minimize process duplication (e57).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

3. (3) Provide technical assistance and support for--

Sub

- i. The eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity’s program; and**
- ii. Quality authorizing efforts in the State;**

Strengths:

The applicant’s plan to provide technical assistance and support for quality authorizing efforts in the state is sound. For example, subgrantees will receive assistance from application to school renewal through ongoing support on critical topics, including governance, recruitment/retention, students with disabilities and equitable/inclusive practices (e58-e59, e61). Having ongoing trainings will ensure needs are recognized earlier and supports provided quickly.

The applicant’s plan to provide technical assistance and support for quality authorizing efforts in the state is reasonable. For example, the partnership with the Community Training and Assistance Center is a strong component of the model because of their expertise working with high-performing authorizers and grant operations. The needs assessment will provide feedback on what stakeholders need and that will in turn inform how the authorizers meet their needs (e60-e61).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

- 4. (4) The State entity’s plan to solicit and consider input from parents and other members of the community on the implementation and operation of charter schools in the State; and**

Strengths:

The applicant’s plan to solicit and consider input from parents and other members of the community is sufficient. The intent to use focus group and annual report data to understand how information might be better communicated and use its Family Engagement Specialist to conduct parent outreach will provide both face-to-face feedback and an understanding of the current status of parent engagement across the state. The use of the Parent Academy program is one of the strongest elements in the application, given parents will learn more about state charter laws, policies and practices. The creation of parent steering committees will also provide valuable of feedback on needs at the school level (e63). Additionally, parent data collection efforts from the Community Training and Assistance Center CTAC will further provide feedback to inform its parent training on governance models, continuous improvement cycles, and parent leadership councils (e64).

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly address specific strategies to engage the community. References made regarding the community are often coupled with parent activities and not specifically delineated (e51, e61-e63). Additional detail on how the applicant will engage community members that are not parents and a description of how that data will be gathered is not clearly noted (e74).

Sub

Reader's Score: 4

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

Strengths:

The applicant clearly indicates that charters in New Jersey have flexibility under the law. Charters can design their own education program and limit enrollment to or prioritize enrollment for educationally disadvantaged or traditionally underserved students. Charters can also determine their own staff, educator evaluation and tenure guidelines under state law.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not specifically address how it intends to maximize the flexibility charters have under the law. Additional detail is needed regarding technical assistance strategies or best practices that will be addressed and specific actions the applicant will take to help grantees understand current flexibilities or specific actions the applicant will take in policy or practice to maximize current flexibilities (e65). Given technical assistance will address such critical subgrantee services such as evaluation and program design, additional detail is needed to fully describe their plan to maximize flexibility available to charters.

Reader's Score: 4

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. d. Quality of the Management Plan

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

Reader's Score: 15

Sub

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

Strengths:

The applicant proposed a comprehensive management plan. The applicant clearly indicated the grant activities, activities' completion date and persons assigned to complete each task. For example, the Project Manager and Family Engagement Specialist will create a family-facing website and materials for the CSP project (e67, e69, e74). These activities will start in October 2020 and continue throughout the project. The applicant also includes the major partners noted in the narrative, which increases the likelihood that partners are accountable for commitments to the project.

Sub

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

2. (2) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project

Strengths:

The applicant provides a sound plan to ensure feedback and continuous improvement. For example, the use of interviews, focus groups, surveys and document reviews as a part of formative evaluation of subgrantee activities are best practices and evidence-based (e75). Having feedback from project staff, subgrantees, New Jersey Department of Education, parents and community members will ensure that progress monitoring will be informed by multiple project stakeholder voices. The Community Training and Assistance Center will also gather annual parent feedback to be used by the applicant to inform operations throughout the grant period (e64). This is a strength of the application because partner data collection efforts may limit any bias in data collection and reporting.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

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

Strengths:

The time commitments allocated for the project director and other key project personnel are reasonable (e76). The Project Director's 54% time commitment is adequate given he will be supplemented by a full-time CSP Program Manager. The Program Manager will be responsible for day-to-day grant administration and coordination of grant activities, partners and vendors. Additional support from Community Training and Assistance Center personnel will provide additional support and oversight for critical administrative and programmatic support, including monitoring subgrantee programmatic and fiscal compliance and evaluation activities (e67).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 2

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 3

1. CPP3 Competitive Preference Priority 3: Equitable Financing

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

Strengths:

The applicant provides clear evidence that the State ensures equitable financing in a prompt manner. For example, 90% of the local tax levy and state equalization aid per student and 100% of student federal funds go directly to the charter school. Also, per pupil charter school funding has increased from 73 cents on the dollar to nearly 80 cents on the dollar compared to district schools (e24). Also, if charter schools feel they are not receiving anticipated funds, they can petition the State Commissioner to have funds deducted from the district and set directly to the charter school (e23).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 4**1. CPP4 Competitive Preference Priority 4: Charter School Facilities**

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

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

Strengths:

The applicant provides sufficient detail that the State offers access to public facilities and allows charter schools to share in bonds. The New Jersey Department of Education's Division of Executive Services provides an online list of available facilities (i.e., closed, unused, unoccupied) to facilitate the identification of potential school locations. The State also addresses access to public facilities through the Charter School Program Act provision that allows a charter to be located in part of an existing public school building, in space provided on a public work site, in a public building, or any other suitable location. For example, a charter school and two public schools are located on the same school property (e25). Finally, the State allows charters to share in bonds. The New Jersey Economic Development Authority offers charter schools access to tax-exempt bond financing. Overall, the state is actively working to provide charter schools with facilities access.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 4

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 5**1. CPP5 Competitive Preference Priority 5: 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 offers strong examples of how the State promotes charter school best practices. For example, the State's Lighthouse District Initiative offers struggling schools' access to strategies for diverse student groups that promote academic improvement in ELA and Math. Individualized approaches to learning and teacher-created exit tests shared with other districts and the Department are best practice and the continuation of that sharing will likely advance performance in struggling schools and LEAs if implemented (e26). The state also offers an online collection of best practices through the Office of Charter and Renaissance Schools website that are aligned to the State's Performance Framework (e26).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 6

1. CPP6 Competitive Preference Priority 6: 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 applicant provides clear evidence that it supports charters schools that serve at-risk students. For example, three charter school operators participate in Newark Enrolls and uses an enrollment preference for free or reduced-price lunch students, students with disabilities, and English learners (e29). The LEAD Charter School serves over age/under-credited students in its program. The applicant will also partner with the National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools and the Community Training and Assistance Center to provide technical assistance on family outreach, inclusive and affirming program design, and effective use of data (e30).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 7

1. CPP7 Competitive Preference Priority 7: 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 some evidence of best practices for charter school authorizing. For example, the applicant will partner with the Community Training and Assistance Center (CTAC) to provide technical assistance to operators and authorizers (e67). The applicant proposes a variety of topics that CTAC will address with authorizers including, financial review and assistance with annual audits, organizational capacity and policy development related to educating at-risk students (e61).

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not specifically address strategies it will use to ensure authorizers actually implement best practices shared through applicant-delivered and partner-delivered trainings. It is unclear how the applicant will encourage or incentive incorporation of best practices given authorizers have autonomy to develop their own policies and practices. The applicant notes that the New Jersey Department of Education created additional guidance, policies and procedures that implemented the 2010 NACSA recommendations regarding authorizing. However, the applicant does not clearly detail steps the applicant itself has taken to ensure that the State, as sole authorizer, continues to incorporate that guidance or guidance from the applicant (e30-e32).

Reader's Score: **3**

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association A NJ Nonprofit (S282A200020)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	35	34
Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants		
1. Subgrant Applicants	15	14
State Plan		
1. State Plan	35	33
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	15
Sub Total	100	96
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
1. CPP3	3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
1. CPP4	4	4
Competitive Preference Priority 5		
1. CPP5	2	2
Competitive Preference Priority 6		
1. CPP6	3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 7		
1. CPP7	4	4
Sub Total	16	16
Total	116	112

Technical Review Form

Panel #6 - CSP State Entities - 6: 84.282A

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association A NJ Nonprofit (S282A200020)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. a. Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: 34

Sub

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

Strengths:

The applicant provides a comprehensive research-based logic model with at least one key element that is strongly informed by research and evaluation that suggests that the key project element is highly likely to achieve the intended outcomes. The applicant provides a strong rationale for each objective (e33-e35).

The applicant notes that the theory of action for the proposed project is driven by the clear and consistent research findings from the 2012 Center of Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) evaluation of New Jersey's charter schools, the 2015 CREDO study of charter school performance in 41 urban readings, and the 2020 Manhattan Institute. From these findings, the applicant states that New Jersey will use CSP funds to support the growth of high-quality charter schools that educate significant numbers of low-income students of color in urban districts. (E34-e35).

The applicant provides a timeline for opening, expanding, or replicating New Jersey charter schools during the project period that could potentially add more than 14,000 high-quality seats in 38 grant-funded campuses (e36-e37).

The applicant states that Project Cultivate 38 is explicitly designed to strengthen New Jersey's cohesive statewide approach by integrating the subgrant application and review process and the State's existing performance frameworks. The applicant notes that the existing framework will be used to evaluate the quality of subgrant applications and to determine the project's overall impact on the composition and quality of the State's charter sector (e40-e41).

The applicant provides evidence of support for Project Cultivate 38 in Appendix C with letters of support for the project from federal and state officials, municipal executives, charter school organizations, local and national partner organizations, and leaders from across the State's philanthropic, civic, and business communities (e47).

Sub

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 15

2. (2) **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 project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible; and**

Strengths:

The applicant presents a well-developed plan that contains performance measures that are largely specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely. The performance measures are clearly related to the intended project outcomes of increasing the number of high-quality charter schools statewide and an increase in the overall quality of the State's charter school sector (e43).

The applicant has created a series of interim and summative performance measures directly tied to the intended project outcomes that will be assessed using both qualitative and quantitative instruments. The applicant provides a clear description of the interim and summative performance measures in Table 9: Performance Measures (e43).

The activities, performance measures, and performance targets are specific to the project outcomes and will most likely produce high quality quantitative and qualitative data.

The applicant provides sufficient data points to measure the quality of both the process and the ultimate product of increasing high-quality charter schools serving more high-need, low-income students. The evaluation plan includes project activities, performance measures, and performance targets for years one through five of the grant that will yield qualitative and quantitative data that can be reported on annually.

Weaknesses:

While the applicant includes soliciting community input and engaging parents seeking high-quality public school options as an activity for increasing the number of high-quality charter schools in New Jersey, the applicant does not address methods for targeting non-English speaking families and stakeholders. Lacking a detailed performance measure and a measurable performance target have weakened the response to the priority. (e43).

Reader's Score: 14

3. (3) **The ambitiousness of the State entity's objectives for the quality charter school program carried out under the CSP State Entities program**

Strengths:

The applicant provides achievable objectives that reflect the ambitiousness of the project to add 38 high-quality charter schools of which 28 are targeted for the Abbott district are tied to the project. The applicant notes that the project will allow charter growth in a controlled fashion that prioritizes quality and sustainability leading to a meaningful increase in the number of high-quality public school options available to parents through the opening of new schools, expansion, and replication proposed in the application (e46).

The applicant also notes the actions New Jersey has taken to remove second-order authorization barriers once a material charter amendment has been approved for existing charter schools expansion once the school has reached its enrollment ceilings or to add new grades. Removing this barrier further increases New Jersey's pipeline of high-quality public charter schools with pre-approved expansion plans strongly increases the applicant's ability to attain the target of 38 CSP-funded schools over the next five years (e47).

Sub

New Jersey Public Charter School Association provides PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers)/NJSLA (New Jersey Student Learning Assessment) ELA and Math Assessment Data for 2015-2016 that show the impact of New Jersey charter schools. The applicant states that New Jersey's CSP program will achieve these ambitious objectives, as it will rely upon the historical effectiveness of the State's existing infrastructure in the development and

The applicant presents letters of support in Appendix C for the proposal from key stakeholders across the state that include federal and state officials, municipal executives, charter operators, local and national partners, and leaders from the State's philanthropic, civic, and business communities. This support of key constituencies further increases the likelihood that New Jersey will be able to translate its project design into action thus supporting the achievement of the project's ambitious objectives (e47).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants**1. b. Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants**

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

Strengths:

The applicant provides a well-developed plan that addresses eliciting high-quality applications, the subgrant application components, and the application review process. In addition to a comprehensive list of other requirements to demonstrate compliance and operational readiness to meet the standards of the proposed project (e49-e52). (E49-e52).

The applicant provides detailed methods by which the subgrant competition will be publicized which include the role of key personnel in communicating critical information. For example, the applicant notes that the Project Director will contact the Lead Person at each New Jersey charter school that has received authorization to open additional seats no less than one month after receipt of a formal Notice of Award (e48).

The applicant notes that the same information will be communicated via the New Jersey Public Charter School Association (NJPSA) website, at in-person gatherings including the Association's Annual Conference and quarterly meetings, through weekly newsletters and monthly advocacy calls. Additional information to be publicized on the website will include information about the grant program including deadlines, award sizes, permissible expenditures, application requirements, and review criteria (e48).

The applicant provides a detailed explanation of the subgrant application components that will align with federal statutory requirements pursuant to the law regarding the definition of "high-quality" charter schools. In addition to the statutory components, the applicant provides a list of other requirements that will include the articulation of a detailed budget and budget narrative that explains how subgrant funds will be used to support the opening and preparation for the operation of a new, expanded, or replicated charter school. The applicant also notes that the applicant must provide a detailed explanation of how programming will be sustained after the CSP funding period ends (e49).

Subgrantees will be required to provide an organization chart that delineates roles, responsibilities, and reporting structures among all key individuals, entities, charter management organizations, staff, and external partners. Among other requirements, subgrantees will have to submit a description of how the school plans to enroll significant numbers of

at-risk students and how it plans to provide those students with instructional rigorous and culturally affirming educational experiences (e50).

The applicant provides a clear process and timeline for the application review. Table 10, Subgrant Scoring Criteria provides the scoring rubric that will be used to assign points for application evaluation. The applicant notes that a subgrantee must earn at least 80% of the available points on the scoring rubric and be among the most highly rated applicants during a subgrant cycle (e51).

The applicant states that a Peer Review Committee (PRC) will be created that will consist of nationally recognized experts in charter operations, authorizing law, governance, and parent engagement ranging from nine to 12 members depending upon the number of applications received during a given cycle (e51-52).

The applicant gives a comprehensive description of critical key activities and details that provides for a successful subgrant competition. For example, the applicant provides comprehensive details regarding the process for applying and receiving a subgrant as well as publicizing the subgrant opportunities (e51-e52).

Weaknesses:

While the applicant provides details regarding the composition of the Peer Review Team, it is unclear as to the specific criteria it will use to select the nine to 12 members. The applicant notes the duties, responsibilities, and expectations of these members but information is not provided to that explains how these members will be selected to review the subgrants and score them based on the rubric provided (e52-e53).

Reader's Score: 14

Selection Criteria - State Plan

1. c. State Plan

The State entity's plan to--

Reader's Score: 33

Sub

1. (1) Adequately monitor the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program;

Strengths:

The applicant provides a comprehensive plan detailing the manner in which subgrantees will be monitored to ensure that the CSP funds are being used to meet the educational needs of their students. The details of the plan, which include activities and a timeline of monitoring events, are included in Table 11: New Jersey CSP Monitoring Plan (e52-e53).

The applicant provides thorough details of the duties and responsibilities of the three-person Project Cultivate 38 team that will be charged with monitoring subgrantee programmatic and fiscal compliance. Each team member

Sub

possesses the specific expertise to carry out the duties assigned. For example, the Program Manager will coordinate and spearhead monitoring activities and will possess specific expertise in grants management, risk assessment, and mitigation of potential or actual non-compliance. The Program Manager will also be responsible for identifying early warning signs, requiring corrective actions, coordinating appropriate technical assistance, and determining whether subgrantees must be subjected to specific conditions warranting enhanced monitoring or additional reporting. (e53-e54).

The applicant plans to further use SchoolLens, an interactive data dashboard that the Association has already optimized to allow school administrators to monitor their planning against key accountability measures in real-time. SchoolLens visualizations permit members of the grant oversight to review the performance of individual schools benchmarked against absolute and comparative performance targets (e54-e55).

The applicant shares the processes Project Cultivate 38 has for evaluating how subgrantees plan to sustain their programs beyond the CSP grant period, which includes both fiscal and programmatic components (e56).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

2. (2) Work with the authorized public chartering agencies involved to avoid duplication of work for the charter schools and authorized public chartering agencies;

Strengths:

The applicant provides a thorough description of the Project Cultivate 38 will integrate into New Jersey's existing cohesive statewide system that meaningfully reduces data collection, reporting, and compliance burdens on both charter schools and NJDOE (e57-e58).

According to the applicant, Project Cultivate 38 will significantly reduce NJDOE's Office of Charter and Renaissance Schools' administrative burden in three additional ways. The applicant notes that technical assistance and dissemination supports will eliminate the need for the authorizer to seek out and finance these activities independently. A second support for reducing the administrative burden of the authorizer is by structuring the grant cycle around NJDOE's existing timeline for rendering decisions on new school proposals, renewal applications, and material revision requests. This is significant because the authorizer will not need to adjust its calendar in order to facilitate a smooth operation of the State's CSP program. Lastly, the NJPSCA intends to enter into a memorandum of understanding with NJDOE that includes a strong data-sharing provision (e58).

The applicant plans to coordinate its oversight activities with both operators and authorizers in order to alleviate undue burdens on school and Department officials mandated by the School Ethics Act that are exclusively furnished by the New Jersey Boards Association. By doing so, this avoids duplicative training to trustees, as the technical assistance will focus on training that directly affects the capacity of the board to discharge its fiduciary duties in a manner that enhances a school's ability to positively influence educational outcomes for at-risk students (e57).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Sub

3. (3) **Provide technical assistance and support for--**
- i. **The eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program; and**
 - ii. **Quality authorizing efforts in the State;**

Strengths:

The applicant clearly documents the level of technical assistance to support subgrantees in opening and operating new schools, and in replicating and expanding high-quality charter schools. The plan provides specific details regarding technical assistance training, training providers, and the modes in which training will be provided. The applicant will provide training in promoting the implementation of equitable and inclusive practices, strengthening overall school culture, and improving learning environments for students and teaching climates for educators with most specific and customized topics under the broad heading. The applicant will also offer trainings in areas that address meeting the educational needs of students with disabilities, and maximizing the flexibility provided under the law (e58).

The applicant provides pre-application training led by the CSP Program Manager aimed at supporting subgrantees on how to structure a subgrant budget in order to ensure all proposed expenditures will be found allowable and how to report during the life of the active grant expectations (e58).

To ensure quality-authorizing efforts in the State, the applicant notes it will draw upon the local and national expertise to provide technical assistance that will focus primarily on ensuring that the authorizer conducts its oversight duties with transparency and consistency. The applicant identifies the Project Cultivate 38 Project Director, who has deep expertise in working with high-performing authorizers across the country, including the implementation of CSP State Entities and CMO (Charter Management Organization) grants to lead authorizing efforts (e60).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

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

Strengths:

The applicant presents adequately developed plan grounded in the New Jersey charter legislation that provides for all applicants to include a description of the procedures to be implemented to ensure significant parental involvement in the operation of the charter school (e61).

The applicant provides a detailed plan of the methods to ensure that parents are authentically engaged and empowered starting with filling the role of Engagement Specialist who will conduct focus groups with families in high-need areas and review both annual reports and other high-stakes accountability documents. The results of these efforts will be used to shape the manner in which the availability of CSP funds is publicized and technical assistance designed throughout the five-year grant period (e62).

Sub

Weaknesses:

While the plan provides a robust discussion of soliciting input from parents, the plan lacks a timeline of specific activities to be conducted. Moreover, the plan does not address activities to engage the community, data to be collected from the community, and how that data will be used in the implementation and operation of the charter schools in the State (e61-e62).

Reader's Score: 4

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

Strengths:

The applicant presents a well-developed plan that details how the applicant will work to ensure the State's charter schools are aware of the flexibilities afforded by the State's charter school law and how it will work to support the charter schools in maximizing these flexibilities.

The applicant convincingly describes the Project Cultivate 38 comprehensive approach to maximize the flexibility allowed by law. The applicant notes that the Charter School Program Act imbues charters with broad operational autonomy, vesting boards of trustees with the "authority to decide matters related to the operations of the school including budgeting, curriculum, and operating procedures" (N.J.S.A. 18A:36A-14(a)) (e64).

The applicant acknowledges that even under the New Jersey Charter School law has limitations, charter schools still possess important flexibilities in areas including but not limited to educational program design, serving at-risk students, staff, educator evaluation, and tenure (e64-65).

The applicant also shares that charter schools have wide latitude to develop policies and practices that best suit the needs of their students, families, and communities. The applicant's plan includes providing technical assistance in specific topics that ensure subgrantees are aware of the flexibilities and on empowering them to maximize their statutory and regulatory autonomies for the benefit of their school communities (e64-65).

Weaknesses:

While the applicant provides comprehensive details regarding the flexibilities afforded by the State's charter school law including the wide latitude charter schools have as it relates to developing policies and practices best suited to the needs of its students, the applicant does not provide specific details regarding strategies to ensure the implementation of these flexibilities.

Reader's Score: 4

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. d. Quality of the Management Plan

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

Reader's Score: 15

Sub

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

Strengths:

The applicant presents a comprehensive, fully developed management plan with clear timelines and milestones that are realistic and appropriate for the objectives. The applicant provides detailed summaries of the personnel affiliated with the management team along with resumes in Appendix B. The summary and resumes demonstrate that the key personnel has the necessary qualifications to contribute to the success of the project (e66-70).

The applicant provides a thoroughly developed management plan that details implementation milestones, benchmarks, a timeline for completion, and persons responsible for managing the activities. The information provided in the management plan aligns with project objectives and intended outcomes (e70-74).

The applicant provides a comprehensive budget narrative that details the expenditures over the life of the grant. The proposed budget aligns with the project narrative. The budget narrative includes details and justification for all budgetary category expenditures (1-12).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

2. (2) **The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project**

Strengths:

The applicant provides a strong plan for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement. The applicant notes that the Community Training and Assistance Center (CTAC)'s Evaluation Lead will conduct annual formative evaluations based on the project Logic Model that monitors the efficacy and fidelity of project implementation (e75).

The applicant presents a timeline for data collection activities that will begin in the spring that focus on conducting interviews and focus groups with key constituencies, surveys of key constituencies at grant-funded schools, and artifact and administrative data review to determine adherence to the project plan and alignment with project objectives. The applicant indicates that data will be analyzed during the summer months with findings being presented to the Project Team during its standing October meeting.

The applicant notes that timeline for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data gives the Project Team ample time to review the findings and make needed adjustments to the subgrant applicant process, monitoring system, technical assistance topics and modalities, and the community engagement strategies during the subsequent subgrant cycles (e75).

The applicant provides detailed description for managing the work of external partners by identifying key personnel and the roles and responsibilities of each (e66-e70).

Sub

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

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

Strengths:

The applicant provides a detailed plan that illustrates the time commitments of the project director and other key personnel including the percentage of time each staff member plans to spend on the project. The applicant documents this in Table 15: Key Personnel Time Commitments, which shows each member critical to the project, the project role, and time commitment (e75).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 2

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 3

1. CPP3 Competitive Preference Priority 3: Equitable Financing

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

Strengths:

The applicant provides a detailed explanation of the State's efforts to ensure charter schools receive equitable financing as provided by the State law, governing the distribution of local tax levy and state equalization aid per student than traditional public schools receive. The law also provides that charter schools receive 100 percent of all federal funds attributable to each student (N.J.S.A. 18A:36A-12(b) (e23).

The applicant explains that duties of districts to pay charter schools their allocable share of per-pupil revenues in 12 equal installments on the 15th of each month and must remit to charter schools their allocable shares of state per-pupil revenues and categorical aid in 20 equal semi-monthly installments between September and June pursuant to the law (e24).

The applicant provides in detail the flow of the funds from the district to the charter schools and the timeline of the disbursement of funds pursuant to New Jersey charter school legislation (e23).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 4

1. CPP4 Competitive Preference Priority 4: Charter School Facilities

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

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

Strengths:

The applicant provides a fully developed explanation of the extent to which New Jersey provides assistance to charter schools in funding for facilities, assistance with facilities acquisition, access to public facilities, and the ability to share in bonds (e24)

The applicant notes that the NJDOE Division of Executive Services is required by law to maintain a list of closed, unused, or unoccupied school facilities on its website. The law further permits charter schools to use State and local funds for the rehabilitation or expansion of a facility (e25).

The applicant provides a clear explanation of the charter schools' ability to have access to tax-exempt bond financing through the New Jersey Economic Development Authority at which time more than [REDACTED] in bonds have been issued to support the construction or purchase of charter school buildings (e26).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 4

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 5

1. CPP5 Competitive Preference Priority 5: 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 provides convincing evidence of efforts to improve struggling schools and local education agencies. Both New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) and the New Jersey Public Charter School Association (NJPCSA) use best practices from charter schools to help improve struggling schools and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) (e26).

The applicant provides some specific examples of best practices that have been used by NJDOE and NJPCSA to improve struggling schools as shown in Table 2: Best Practices Resources. The support opportunities are the results of a collaborative effort between the NJPCSA, Community Training, and Assistance Center, National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools, and NJDOE (e26).

As a resource to both charter schools and traditional public schools, NJPCSA convenes an annual conference for school leaders, teachers, parents, and trustees that offer training and information on topics that include best practices in instruction, operations, leadership, and governance. The applicant notes that non-charter audiences are explicitly invited to attend the annual conference (e26).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 6

1. CPP6 Competitive Preference Priority 6: 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 applicant presents a comprehensive and fully developed plan that details the manner in which at-risk students are and will be supported (e28-e29).

The applicant explains that New Jersey uses a weighted school funding formula which includes multipliers to account for the supplemental needs associated with educating students who qualify for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch, students identified as limited-English proficient, and student eligible for special education services pursuant to the New Jersey legislation.

The applicant explains how the School Funding Reform Act provides extra funds to districts with high concentrations of students from low-income families (e28).

The applicant provides clear details of the how the NJDOE (Department) encourages and incentivizes charter schools to provide services to at-risk students in a number of ways. For example, the Department publishes access and equity guideline for charter operators that is a two-tiered application process that includes access and equity considerations at each stage (e28).

The applicant provides significant details about the "Closing Gap" indicators the NJDOE uses to assess how effectively schools are educating students in identified subgroups as noted in Appendix F-10, page 5. New Jersey also permits "single-purpose" charter schools that "limit enrollment to a specific population of educationally disadvantaged or traditionally underserved students" pursuant to the New Jersey charter school law (e29).

The applicant strongly states that NJPSCA fully supports charter schools that serve at-risk students through activities such as dropout prevention, dropout recovery, and comprehensive career counseling. The applicant provides evidence of these supports as outlined in Table 4: Selected Supports for At-Risk Charter School Students (e29-e30).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 7**1. CPP7 Competitive Preference Priority 7: 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 presents a well-developed explanation of the efforts NJDOE has taken to ensure that it implements best practice in charter school authorizing that lead to state agency being scored by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) in the top two scoring tiers (e30-e31).

To ensure that the authorizing chartering agency implements best practices, the applicant provides a detailed explanation of the steps; NJDOE has to work on implementing the recommendations resulting from the 2010 and 2014 evaluation of the authorizing process, which resulted in the establishment of three major areas of focus. These include establishing and publishing a Performance Framework that provides clear academic, organizational, and financial criteria, a Charter Agreement that incorporates the charter application and the Performance Framework and lastly, the expedited renewal review process for high-performing charter schools with no major fiscal or compliance issue pursuant to the law(e31).

Additionally, the applicant notes that the NJDOE worked with the State Board of Education to adopt regulations that promote autonomy and maximize the flexibility afforded pursuant to the law. Specifically, NJDOE devised an alternative route to licensure program that aligns with the provision in the law that mandates the Commissioner to "expedite the certification of persons who are qualified by education and experience." Through this work, the NJDOE created a streamlined tenure process that outlines the manner in which eligible staff may acquire tenure within charter schools and permitted charters to develop education evaluation systems that incorporate qualitative measures of educators' practice and quantitative measures of student learning growth.
(e31).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 4

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 06/25/2020 04:32 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 06/29/2020 12:57 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association A NJ Nonprofit (S282A200020)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	35	35
Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants		
1. Subgrant Applicants	15	15
State Plan		
1. State Plan	35	33
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	15
Sub Total	100	98
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
1. CPP3	3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
1. CPP4	4	3
Competitive Preference Priority 5		
1. CPP5	2	2
Competitive Preference Priority 6		
1. CPP6	3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 7		
1. CPP7	4	3
Sub Total	16	14
Total	116	112

Technical Review Form

Panel #6 - CSP State Entities - 6: 84.282A

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association A NJ Nonprofit (S282A200020)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. a. Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: 35

Sub

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

Strengths:

The applicant demonstrates a strong rationale based on reporting of the success of current charter schools, "Across the State's proverbial Big Six school districts (Camden, Elizabeth, Jersey City, Newark, Paterson, and Trenton), students attending charter schools have routinely outperformed their peers attending traditional public schools on English Language Arts (ELA) and Math assessments over the past five years (e33)." The rationale provides research evidence of program success, "In 2015, the Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO) conducted a study of charter school performance in 41 urban regions. Relative to the comparison sets of traditional public schools, Newark's charter schools were found to have the second largest impact on student performance in both ELA and Math of any urban charter sector in the country (e34)." Additionally, "Charter high schools graduate 84.9% of their students in four years compared to 78.1% in their host districts. Similarly, Black and Hispanic students attending charter schools graduate at higher rates than do their peers attending traditional public schools (e34)." Building on the rationale based on program success, another key rationale is the demand and need to expand the program and offer new seats in charter schools throughout the state. Finally, as a result of waiting list for charter schools throughout the state, "CSP funds will allow preapproved seats to be unlocked and will accelerate the growth of high-quality schools so that the gap between actual and maximum enrollment decreases. As the State's lone authorized public chartering entity, New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) is able to impose universal academic, operational, and financial standards that all New Jersey charter schools must meet (e40)." Finally, a logic model demonstrates detailed resources; activities; outputs; and a timeline of short-term; middle-term; and, long-term expected outcomes (e36)."

Weaknesses:

No Weaknesses were noted.

Reader's Score: 15

2. (2) 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 project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible; and

Sub

Strengths:

The applicant has provided specific performance objectives that will produce outcomes that will be assessed using both qualitative and quantitative instruments. As seen in Table 9, each objective includes at least one specific performance measure that can be reported on annually. These data points are sufficient to measure the quality of both the process (efficient and aligned subgrantee awards) and the ultimate product (new/expansion/replication schools serving more high-need, low-income students) to be realized by Project Cultivate 38 (e43).

The applicant uses a tiered approach in funding that includes student population groups. “The expectation that at least 85% of our subgrantees will maintain an economically disadvantaged enrollment of at least 70% of their student populations (SMART Goal 1.2) is rooted in current demographic data that show 72% of all charter school students in New Jersey to fall within that subgroup (e45). “

The applicant projects a successful outcome for Project Cultivate 38, by indicating that “95% of subgrantees to outperform the proficiency rates in their surrounding districts starting in their second year of operation, is based on current data that show 83% of charter schools statewide outperform their respective districts’ median proficiency rates even when district proficiency rates include scores from selective-admissions programs such as county vocational and magnet schools.” (e46)

Finally, the Logic Models breakout target populations and performance objectives with activities to deliver project accountability and success.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were noted.

Reader's Score: 15

3. (3) The ambitiousness of the State entity’s objectives for the quality charter school program carried out under the CSP State Entities program

Strengths:

The project is clearly ambitious based on indicators, such as, “New Jersey School Performance Report driven by the current reality that 54 out of 83 (65%) of charter schools statewide with valid data are currently performing in the top third in their respective districts (e46).”

The applicant cites legal jurisdiction unique to the state, “New Jersey does not impose any second-order authorization barriers once a material charter amendment has been approved. Therefore, New Jersey’s pipeline of high-quality public charter schools with pre-approved expansion plans makes our target of 38 CSP-funded schools over the next five years both ambitious and eminently attainable (e47)”.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants

1. b. Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants

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

Strengths:

The applicant provides a detailed approach of how every phase of the process will roll out. Further, in order, “to receive a subgrant, applicants must (a) earn at least 80% of the available points on the scoring rubric; and (b) be among the most highly rated applicants during a subgrant cycle given the finite number of awards New Jersey anticipates making. NJPCSA will create a Peer Review Committee (“PRC”) composed of nationally recognized experts in charter operation, authorizing, law, governance, and parent engagement (e51).

It is a noted strength that roles and responsibilities have been delineated for the review process, the “Project Director will be responsible for empaneling the PRC, whose appointment will be based on qualifications that are publicly posted on the NJPCSA website. Project Cultivate 38 staff will provide onboarding and orientation support to all PRC members, who will be expected to demonstrate a refined understanding of the New Jersey educational landscape and the CSP project aims before assessing the extent to which a given proposal will enhance the quality of a community’s educational opportunities (e52)”.

It is also a strength and proactive that, “New Jersey has engaged in preliminary conversations with a number of high quality operators from around the country who have expressed interest in partnering with communities across the State to provide public school alternatives for parents seeking additional options. These national networks have been identified, in large measure, on account of their track record in driving educational outcomes for at-risk students (e52).

The applicant provides a variety of metrics for determining quality of subgrant applicants.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - State Plan**1. c. State Plan****The State entity’s plan to--**

Reader's Score: 33

Sub**1. (1) Adequately monitor the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity’s program;****Strengths:**

The applicant has an organizational team with designated roles to monitor all phases of grant development and a timeline of activities and responsibilities. “A three-person team will be responsible for monitoring subgrantee programmatic and fiscal compliance.

The Project Cultivate 38 Program Manager will coordinate and spearhead all (Project Cultivate 38) activities. The Program Manager will possess specific expertise in grants management, risk assessment, and mitigation of potential or actual noncompliance and will be responsible for identifying early warning signs, requiring corrective action, coordinating appropriate technical assistance, and determining whether subgrantees must be subjected to specific conditions such as enhanced monitoring or additional reporting (e54).”

The applicant, "NJPCSA will develop a custom SchoolLens interface that allows us to conduct programmatic monitoring based on CSP-specific targets (e55)." Many of the monitoring activities are fiscal management targets; however, “On the programmatic side, subgrantees will be required to provide evidence of organizational health — including parental and community support (e.g. responses to school environment surveys), enrollment demand (e.g. waitlist, year over-year retention numbers), succession planning at the board and administrative levels, and school-

Sub

wide instructional and operational systems development — in their annual performance reports (e56).

A monitoring plan with an accompanying organizational team with timelines of activities has been established.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

2. (2) Work with the authorized public chartering agencies involved to avoid duplication of work for the charter schools and authorized public chartering agencies;

Strengths:

The applicant has a plan to integrate operations and organizational duties with the authorizer, "by utilizing NJDOE's Performance Framework to conduct preliminary application screens and leveraging its percentile rankings to establish our ambitious project objectives, our approach avoids subjecting operators to duplicative reporting requirements (e56)."

Additionally, "the Project Team will coordinate our oversight activities — including deadlines, site visit scheduling, and financial reporting obligations — with both operators and the authorizer in order to alleviate undue burdens on school and Department officials (e57)."

As stated, "NJPCSA intends to enter into a memorandum of understanding with NJDOE that includes a strong data-sharing provision (e57)."

The data-sharing provisions are greatly facilitated by the use of, SchoolLens allows a charter school to measure its test scores against the Charter School Performance Framework (the basis for charter school renewals); compare itself with any other public school (traditional or charter), as well as with districts or customized collections of schools; report performance and demographic school data (e54)."

Background information on school performance at individual sites and a background on existing monitoring activities to be enhanced through a new grant cycle was evident.

The use of technological and site-based monitoring will help to ensure project success.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were noted.

Reader's Score: 5

3. (3) Provide technical assistance and support for--

i. The eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program; and

ii. Quality authorizing efforts in the State;

Strengths:

The applicant has demonstrated the use of technology throughout the application, especially, the use of SchoolLens to monitor implementation milestones and assessments.

"Once an applicant has been awarded a subgrant, the Program Manager will proactively provide technical assistance on an as-needed basis to recipients identified as needing additional support in the development and implementation of strong financial controls (e58)."

Training is an integral part of capacity building and providing on site and virtual monitoring and assistance. The schedule of training activities for subgrantees, includes:" Meeting the needs of all students, particularly those in designated ESSA subgroups and those in danger of disengaging from school, with training's covering instructional supports, dropout prevention and intervention, effective use of data, family engagement, and inclusive and affirming program design (e58)."

Finally, as stated, "Project Cultivate 38's experienced team of partners will also provide operational technical

Sub

assistance to active subgrant recipients targeted to their needs as stated in their subgrant (e58)." A table is also provided (Table 12. Technical Assistance for CSP Subgrant Recipients) which outlines topics, such as recruitment, expansion, retention and others. This training will be offered in a variety of modalities (in-person training's, lead webinars, and host capacity-building sessions on videoconferencing platforms) as needed to implement and enhance charter school development.

Technical assistance will be provided to ensure quality authorizing through, "the Texas Authorizer Leadership Academy (TALA), the state-branded flagship authorizer support initiative he Texas Authorizer Leadership Academy (TALA), the state-branded flagship authorizer support initiative implemented under Texas' 2017 ESSA grant, will continue to offer training via competency-based online modules and an intensive cohort-style academy. TALA will be further developed with support from an external support organization aligned with national authorizer best practices implemented under Texas' 2017 ESSA grant, will continue to offer training via competency-based online modules and an intensive cohort-style academy. TALA will be further developed with support from an external support organization aligned with national authorizer best practices (e60)." Further support will be provided through "TALA, with deeper technical assistance and executive coaching over a two-year program cohort (e60)."

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were noted.

Reader's Score: 10

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

Strengths:

The applicant states, "NJDOE conducts parent focus groups during renewal visits and scrutinizes a school's family and community engagement efforts as part of its Organizational Performance Framework (e62). Regarding the evidence of input from parents and the community, "the Department's Guidelines for Access and Equity (Appendix F-9) in New Jersey Charter Schools mandate that all application materials and lottery information be provided "in all applicable languages (e62)."

The applicant cites a targeted plan for parental/community involvement, "In order to obtain additional information about the types of schools parents and community members are seeking, our Family Engagement Specialist will conduct focus groups with families in high-need areas and review both annual reports and other high-stakes accountability documents that take into account perceptual data from these key constituencies. These collected insights will shape the manner in which we publicize the availability of CSP funds and structure technical assistance offerings throughout the five-year grant period (e62)."

There is strong evidence of community and parental support, such as: "a statewide coalition of parents, students, and advocates launched the #ILoveMyCharter campaign to demand equity and fairness for charter school students. Through this campaign, more than 1,050 public charter school parents, teachers, and supporters turned out to charter review events in Newark, Paterson, Trenton, Jersey City, Camden, Atlantic City, and Plainfield to share their stories and to demand fair funding (e63).

A key personnel, "the Family Engagement Specialist — will help each new and replication school form a parent steering committee and will provide guidance on how to use parental input to shape the school's approach to meeting the educational needs of its entire student population (e63).

Gathering input from parents and other community members is a strength of this application in every phase of charter school development.

Weaknesses:

The applicant provided goals to solicit and consider input from parents and community on implementation and operation of charter schools in the state; however, more information of specific activities, a timeline or logic model

Sub

demonstrating milestones, and expected outcomes is needed to demonstrate a targeted plan for parental and community involvement.

Reader's Score: 4

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

Strengths:

Although the state's "charter law has limitations, charter schools possess important flexibilities in a range of areas, including: educational design; serving at-risk students through weighted lotteries that increase access for economically disadvantaged students; staffing; educator evaluation; and tenure.

This flexibility is maximized through a "focus on best practices in striking the appropriate balance between autonomy and accountability and on ensuring the authorizer remains equipped to implement an oversight regime that emphasizes impact and outcomes rather than onerous compliance inputs (e65)."

Weaknesses:

Although there is evidence of flexibility through the state charter school law, greater evidence of how this impacts individual schools as they develop charters, is lacking.

Reader's Score: 4

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. d. Quality of the Management Plan

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

Reader's Score: 15

Sub

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

Strengths:

The applicant has a veteran charter school specialist who has "authorized more than 15,000 additional high-quality public charter school seats. His unique combination of experience in multiple roles in two divisions at the New Jersey Department of Education, in charter school operations and strategy, and now as spokesperson for New Jersey's charter sector position him as both a highly valued resource and the exact driver for change this project needs to ensure tens of thousands of students get the high-quality educations they deserve through CSP State Entities funding. As project Director, he will directly guide the work of the project's full-time Program Manager and Family Engagement Specialist (to be hired), who will provide day-to-day administration of the CSP program, fiscal and programmatic oversight (e48-49). Resumes and designated roles and responsibilities are provided for all project leaders. A management plan is provided with timelines and milestones of implementation which begins with funding notice through spring 2021 and ongoing (e72-73).

Sub

Weaknesses:

There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 10

2. (2) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project

Strengths:

The procedures in place for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement are as follows: "Data will be analyzed during the summer months, and findings will be presented to the Project Team during their standing meeting each October.

This timeline ensures the Project Team will have ample time to review findings and make adjustments to the suburban application process, the monitoring system, the technical assistance topics and totalities, and the community engagement strategies during the subsequent subgrant cycle.

The Project Director and Program Manager will bear ultimate responsibility for determining how the project should be modified and for overseeing execution of all mid-course improvements. This is a project strength that allows for corrections and modifications in a timely manner.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 3

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

Strengths:

Key personnel and their time commitments are clearly delineated with family program specialist and CSP program manager, having full time commitments to the project (e76). The applicant specifies, "all Project Team members will devote significant time to fulfillment of the program's objectives (e76)." It is significant to note that the Project Manager and Family Engagement Specialist will devote 100% of their time to the project with remaining personnel devoting 30 to more than 50% to the project.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses

Reader's Score: 2

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 3

1. CPP3 Competitive Preference Priority 3: Equitable Financing

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

Strengths:

New Jersey senate legislation, (S2) "increased the overall amount of funding directed to charter schools. Under the School Funding Reform Act, Abbott districts such as Camden, Elizabeth, Newark, Paterson, and Trenton had historically been among the most underfunded in the State relative to what the formula theoretically should have provided. With S2 having reshaped the State's funding environment, those districts will enjoy significant funding increases (e23). The state also provided greater and more equitable funding as they, "increased the percentage of State aid categories to which charter school have access. Critically, S2 began the phase-out of State adjustment aid, the only remaining substantive funding category excluded from the denominator in the 90% calculation in N.J.S.A. 18A:36A12(b) (e24).

Weaknesses:

There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 4**1. CPP4 Competitive Preference Priority 4: Charter School Facilities**

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

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

Strengths:

The applicant does provide assistance and share local resources with charter schools, The Charter School Program Act provides that a New Jersey charter school "may be located in part of an existing public school building, in space provided on a public work site, in a public building, or any other suitable location (e25). It further provides financial assistance, "Charter schools have access to tax-exempt bond financing through the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (e25).

Weaknesses:

The "assistance with facilities acquisition" amounted to providing a list on the state website and charter schools may, "use State and local funds for the rehabilitation or expansion of a facility (e25). These provisions are required under existing regulations. A detailed outline of assistance with timelines and milestones is would be more helpful for charter schools in development.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 5**1. CPP5 Competitive Preference Priority 5: 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 provided a comprehensive chart from New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), of "Best Practices Resources," which include: Best Practices Collection, a listing of best practices; The NJDOE, "Lighthouse Initiative," which highlights districts using effective practices and encourages them to share with struggling schools; and an Annual Conference update; Monthly Webinars and a Resource Library (e26-27).

The Lighthouse District Initiative, highlights districts that have, over the past several years, demonstrated academic improvement in ELA and Math with diverse student groups (e26) This NJDOE initiative, "expressly encouraged by the State to share best practices with other districts and to share policy recommendations with the Department (e26)." These and other measures demonstrate the extent to which the State uses best practices from charter school to help improve struggling schools and local educational agencies.

Weaknesses:

No Weaknesses

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 6

1. CPP6 Competitive Preference Priority 6: 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:

New Jersey offers a "two-tiered application process that includes access and equity considerations at each stage. During Phase One, operators must provide evidence that they will enroll a representative "cross-section of the community's school-age population including at-risk, special education and English language learning students".

During Phase Two, they must specify "programs, strategies, and supports" they will use to address the needs of Limited English Proficiency (LEP), Students with Disabilities (SWD), and students "at-risk of academic failure or dropping out (e28-29)."

In fact, "Suggested elements of the school model include methods for identifying students, specific instructional practices, plans for monitoring and evaluating the progress and success of students with diverse needs, and plans to attract qualified staff (e29)."

These strategies, monitored by the New Jersey Public Charter School Association (NJPCSA), fully supports charter schools that serve at-risk students through activities such as dropout prevention, dropout recovery, and comprehensive career counseling.

Finally New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) uses "Closing Gaps" indicators that assess how effectively schools are educating students in identified subgroups (see Appendix F-10, page 5). New Jersey also permits "single-purpose" charter schools that "limit enrollment to a specific population of educationally disadvantaged or traditionally underserved students (e29)."

Weaknesses:

No Weaknesses were noted.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 7

1. CPP7 Competitive Preference Priority 7: 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:

Under leadership of the project director, the applicant has “established and published a Performance Framework that provides clear academic, organizational, and financial criteria against which charter applicants and operators are assessed; created a charter agreement that incorporates the charter application and the Performance Framework by reference, delineates the authorizer’s oversight responsibilities, and sets forth clear benchmarks pursuant to which all high-stakes decisions — including renewal, expansion, revocation, and intervention — will be made; and created an expedited renewal review process for high performing charter schools with no major fiscal or compliance issues (N.J.A.C. 6A:11-2.3(c)) (e31).

Of further note, the authorizer has gained commendations for its use of best practices ,National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) in 2014 scored NJDOE in the top two scoring tiers (“Well Developed” or “Approaching Well-Developed”) in each category of its Quality Authorizing Practices rubric (e32).

Efforts to ensure that public charter school authorizing agencies implement best practices, include, "Texas Authorizer Leadership Academy (TALA). With its 2017 CSP Grant, TEA launched its TALA training. TEA contracted with NACSA to design and provide training to district authorizers aligned to NACSA’s principles, standards, and essential practices (e34)."

Weaknesses:

Although the Performance Framework provides criteria for the use of best practices, it is not clear how the implementation of best practices will be monitored and embedded at each charter school site.

Reader's Score: 3

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 06/29/2020 12:57 PM

Technical Review Form

Reader: CSP Staff

Applicant: New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association (S282A200020)

Total CPP1 and CPP2 Score

6

Competitive Preference Priority 1: Spurring Investment in Qualified Opportunity Zones

Under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate that the area in which the applicant proposes to provide services overlaps with a Qualified Opportunity Zone, as designated by the Secretary of the Treasury under section 1400z-1 of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC). An applicant must--

- a) Provide the census tract number of the Qualified Opportunity Zone(s) in which it proposes to provide services; and
- b) Describe how the applicant will provide services in the Qualified Opportunity Zone(s).

Note: In responding to this priority, an applicant is encouraged to explain how it will encourage prospective subgrantees to open, replicate, or expand one or more charter schools in a Qualified Opportunity Zone and how that might align to the application requirement response for (I)(C)(i).

Strengths:

- a. The applicant discusses how there are 20 schools in QOZs – noted in a chart along with charter school campus, city, and county names - with seats that have been approved but not yet offered. The applicant will help alleviate barriers to allows the schools to make these seats available more quickly for families in need. (p. e20-21)
- b. The applicant will incentivize sub-grantee applicants to provide services in QOZs by providing competitive preference priority for additional points and additional funding. (p. e22)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 4

Competitive Preference Priority 2: One Authorized Public Chartering Agency Other than a LEA, or an Appeals Process

To meet this priority, the applicant must demonstrate that the State--

- a) Provides for one authorized public chartering agency that is not an LEA, such as a State chartering board, for each individual or entity seeking to operate a charter school pursuant to State law; or
- b) In the case of a State in which LEAs are the only authorized public chartering agencies, allows for an appeals process for the denial of an application for a charter school.

Note: In order to meet this priority under paragraph (b) above, the entity hearing appeal must have the authority to approve the charter application over the objections of the LEA.

Strengths:

- a. NJDOE is the sole charter school authorizer in the State of New Jersey and is not an LEA. (p. e22)
- b. The applicant notes that state law provides that charter schools may appeal decisions of the Commissioner to the Appellate Division of the Superior Court. (p. e22)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 2