

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

Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Laurens County School District 55 (S374A230030)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Need for Project		
1. Need	20	15
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	25	25
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	25	23
Adequacy of Resources		
1. Resources	30	21
Sub Total	100	84
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	5
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. Diverse Workforce	5	3
Sub Total	10	8
Total	110	92

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - TSL Panel - 1: 84.374A

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Laurens County School District 55 (S374A230030)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Need for Project

1. Need for Project (20 points)

The Secretary considers the need for the proposed project. In determining evidence of the need for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (i) The extent to which specific gaps or weaknesses in services, infrastructure, or opportunities have been identified and will be addressed by the proposed project, including the nature and magnitude of those gaps or weaknesses.
- (ii) The extent to which the proposed project will integrate with or build on similar or related efforts to improve relevant outcomes using existing funding streams from other programs or policies supported by community, State, and Federal resources.
- (iii) The extent to which the proposed project is part of a comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning and support rigorous academic standards for students.
- (iv) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs.

Strengths:

Overview: The narrative and proposal demonstrate a commitment to improving education in Laurens County School District 55 and acknowledge the challenges it faces. However, more specific strategies, particularly in addressing weaknesses and meeting the needs of the target population, could further strengthen the overall proposal.

Strengths: (i) The narrative demonstrates a clear vision and commitment of Laurens County School District 55 to provide quality education, preparing students for success, and continuously improve. (e17)
The district acknowledges the challenges posed by its rural, low-income environment and its commitment to serving a diverse student population. (e17)
The narrative supports its claims with relevant data from the South Carolina Department of Education, showcasing a data-driven approach to identifying weaknesses and gaps. (e17)
The narrative highlights the significant impact of teachers and school leaders on student achievement, emphasizing the importance of addressing teacher turnover and inexperience. (e17)
The narrative clearly identifies several specific weaknesses and gaps, such as high teacher turnover, inexperienced teachers, salary disparities, and underrepresentation of non-White teachers. (e17)
The narrative sets clear goals of improving student academic achievement and closing achievement gaps, ensuring equitable access to education, and supporting students and educators in the post-pandemic landscape.(e17)
(ii) NIET's partnership with the South Carolina Department of Education demonstrates a strong commitment to aligning with state priorities and standards, ensuring consistency and coherence in efforts to improve teaching and evaluation practices. The narrative provides explicit details on how LEARNS will integrate with or build upon existing funding streams from other programs or policies supported by community, state, and federal resources. (e17)
The alignment of NIET teaching standards with the state's Teaching Standards 4.0 and ADEPT evaluation system indicates a seamless integration with existing frameworks and policies, promoting a unified approach to educator evaluation.(e17)
The previous success of introducing new teaching standards through teacher preparation programs and district training showcases NIET's ability to effectively align its initiatives with statewide adoption efforts. (e17)

The proposed bonus compensation program aligns with the priorities of the newly elected State Superintendent of Education, Ellen Weaver, to incentivize teachers to work in high-need schools and improve student achievement. (e17) By creating a model for aligning compensation systems with measures of performance in Laurens County School District 55, the project sets the stage for potential replication and adoption in other districts across the state, contributing to statewide improvement efforts.(e22)

(iii) The proposal highlights the implementation of the evidence-based TAP System, which has a proven track record of success in improving teacher and leader effectiveness and driving student achievement. (e17)(e21)

Partnering with NIET, a national nonprofit organization with expertise in performance-based compensation systems and human capital management, provides valuable insights and support for the district's improvement efforts. (e22-23)

(iv)Not addressed.

Weaknesses:

(i) While the narrative identifies weaknesses and gaps, it lacks detailed solutions or strategies for addressing them. It would benefit from more specific plans and interventions to tackle the identified challenges.(e22-23)

While the district acknowledges the importance of fostering parent engagement, the narrative does not elaborate on specific efforts or initiatives in this area. (e22-23)

The narrative does not provide much information on the state of school infrastructure, which is an essential aspect to consider when addressing gaps in services. (e17) (e21)

(ii) No weaknesses noted

(iii) While the proposal outlines the goals and strategies, it could benefit from providing more specific details on how the TAP System will be integrated and implemented throughout the district.(e22-23)

(iv)How the proposal will successfully address the needs of the target population or other identified needs is not thoroughly addressed. More information is needed in this area.(e22-23)

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. Quality of the Project Design (25 points)

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

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

(ii) The extent to which the design of the proposed project includes a thorough, high-quality review of the relevant literature, a high-quality plan for project implementation, and the use of appropriate methodological tools to ensure successful achievement of project objectives.

(iii) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes.

Strengths:

Overview: The evaluation plan demonstrates a strong commitment to rigor and collaboration, ensuring that data will be used effectively for continuous improvement and assessment of intended outcomes.

Strengths: (i) The proposal's rationale is supported by existing research and studies, showcasing the effectiveness of the TAP System in improving student achievement, educational attainment, and social outcomes. (e24-25)

The proposal presents a well-rounded approach that addresses multiple aspects of teacher and school leader

effectiveness, including fair evaluations, teacher career advancement, professional learning opportunities, and performance-based compensation. (e24-25)

The rationale aligns with Laurens County School District 55's goal of improving teacher and school leader effectiveness to raise student achievement, demonstrating a clear connection between the proposed project and the district's vision. (e24-25)

The success of the TAP System in improving student outcomes in high-need districts across different states provides a strong rationale for implementing this approach in Laurens County. (e24-25)

The proposal highlights the cost-effectiveness of the TAP System, making it a viable option for the district to improve teacher and school leader effectiveness.(e25)(e34)

(ii) The project design is grounded in a comprehensive review of relevant literature, drawing on multiple studies and sources to support the rationale for implementing the TAP System and its various components. (e25)(e34)

The design incorporates evidence-based strategies and practices, such as teacher leadership roles, job-embedded professional learning, and performance-based compensation, which have shown positive impacts on teacher and student outcomes. (e25)(e34)

The proposal provides a detailed and clear plan for implementing the project, including specific strategies, activities, and timelines, which enhances the likelihood of successful execution. (e34)(e38)

The use of valid rubrics for teacher and principal observations, multiple cycles of feedback, and data-driven decision-making reflects the application of appropriate methodological tools to ensure the effectiveness of the project.(e34)(e38)

The project design aligns with Laurens County School District 55's goals of improving teacher effectiveness and raising student achievement, creating coherence between the proposed project and the district's vision.(e34)(e38)

(iii) The evaluation plan is comprehensive, addressing both formative and summative aspects, and involves collaborative efforts between NIET's Research and Evaluation Department and key project personnel. This collaborative approach ensures that evaluation findings can be used to improve the project in real-time.(e34)(e38)

The evaluation plan is closely aligned with the project's logic model, which facilitates clear communication and understanding of the expected outcomes and impact of the intervention. (e25)(e34)

The use of both qualitative and quantitative data sources, including surveys, interviews, administrative records, and longitudinal data, enhances the validity and reliability of the evaluation findings. (e25)(e34)

The evaluation plan emphasizes timely data feedback through quarterly update meetings and regular communication with key project personnel. This facilitates continuous monitoring and improvement of program implementation. (e25 (e34)

The plan outlines a comprehensive dissemination strategy, targeting local, state, and national levels, including conferences, publications, presentations, and media outlets. This ensures that the evaluation findings reach a broad audience and contribute to the broader field of education research and policy. (e25) (e34)

Weaknesses:

(i) No weaknesses noted

(ii) No weaknesses noted

(iii)No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 25

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. Quality of the Management Plan (25 points)

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

Strengths:

Overview: The management plan demonstrates strengths in its clear definition of responsibilities, timelines, and milestones, as well as the qualifications of the project team.

Strengths: The management plan provides a clear breakdown of key personnel, their qualifications, and duties, ensuring that responsibilities are well-defined, and roles are assigned appropriately. (e38)(e43)
The plan includes a detailed timeline with specific milestones and tasks for each quarter over the three years. This enables effective tracking of project progress and ensures that activities are completed on time. (e38)(e43)
The Laurens County School District has previous experience serving as a fiscal agent for grants, indicating their capacity to manage finances efficiently and effectively. (e38)(e43)
Qualified Project Team: The project team consists of highly qualified personnel with the necessary skills and expertise to carry out the project successfully, including experienced individuals in various key roles. ((e38)(e43)
The milestones and tasks are closely aligned with the project's logic model, demonstrating a clear connection between the planned activities and the intended outcomes. (e38)(e43)

Weaknesses:

The budget forecast of \$178,650 for each year for 45 participants to travel to conferences appears unreasonable to the size of the project. It might be helpful to consider the actual needs and costs to ensure successful project implementation. (e38)(e43)

Reader's Score: 23

Selection Criteria - Adequacy of Resources**1. Adequacy of Resources (30 points)**

The Secretary considers the adequacy of resources for the proposed project. In determining the adequacy of resources for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (i) The likelihood that the proposed project will result in system change or improvement.**
- (ii) The extent to which the proposed project is likely to build local capacity to provide, improve, or expand services that address the needs of the target population.**
- (iii) The extent to which the applicant demonstrates that it has the resources to operate the project beyond the length of the grant, including a multi-year financial and operating model and accompanying plan; the demonstrated commitment of any partners; evidence of broad support from stakeholders (e.g., SEAs, teachers' unions) critical to the project's long-term success; or more than one of these types of evidence.**

Strengths:

Overview: Ongoing monitoring, regular evaluations, and contingency planning strengthen the project's ability to sustain itself beyond the grant period.

Strengths: (i) The Laurens County School District 55 has a well-defined vision for systems improvement through the TSL grant. A clear vision provides a strong foundation for the project and ensures that all stakeholders are aligned toward common objectives. (e43-44)

The district's advantage of having multiple educators with successful experience in implementing the TAP System will likely facilitate smoother adoption and implementation of the LEARNS project. Their expertise can serve as valuable resources for training and supporting other educators. (e43-44)

The letters of support from the School Board and community leaders indicate a high level of commitment to the project's success. Strong backing from key stakeholders enhances the likelihood of sustained efforts and resources being dedicated to the project. (e43-44)

The LEARNS project's multi-level approach addresses classroom practice change, school leadership development, and district-level coordination. This comprehensive strategy recognizes the interconnectedness of various educational components, potentially leading to more effective and sustainable improvements.(e43-44)

(ii) The LEARNS project prioritizes building local capacity by providing targeted support to address the specific needs of teachers, school leaders, and students in the responding districts. This approach ensures that resources and efforts are directed where they are most needed. (e45-46)

Clearly The District Instructional Framework with clearly defined indicators for instructional excellence provides a structured and measurable framework for improvement. This clarity can help guide capacity-building efforts and monitor progress effectively. (e45-46)

The collaboration between NIET and Laurens County School District 55 in identifying high-impact action steps and providing coaching for district leaders fosters a partnership approach, promoting ownership and sustainability of improvements. (e45-46)

Focused Professional Learning: Providing quarterly collaborative meetings for school leaders and teacher leaders based on school visits and observations ensures that professional learning is relevant, timely, and aligned with identified areas for improvement. (e45-46)

The project's emphasis on developing leadership capacity through collaborative meetings and targeted support for school leaders and teacher leaders can lead to more effective leadership practices and improved school outcomes. (e45-46)

The systematic approach of holding collaborative meetings for school leaders, teacher leaders, and master teachers can promote consistency in evaluating classroom practices and instructional approaches. (e45-46)

(iii) The project demonstrates a comprehensive and thoughtful approach to financial sustainability beyond the grant period. The district's Superintendent has experience in securing long-term funding, and a multi-year financial sustainability and management plan has been developed. (e46)

The district is currently using its existing funds, including local funding and Title II(A) funding, to support the ongoing implementation of some project components. This demonstrates the district's commitment to sustaining the project beyond the grant duration. (e46)

The district shows a proactive approach to seeking additional funding streams to support efforts aimed at improving educator effectiveness. Pursuing diverse funding sources can enhance financial stability. (e46)

The project surpasses the minimum match requirement of 50% by providing in-kind contributions, including time and effort from career teachers and school leaders, and in-kind support from NIET. This demonstrates the commitment and collaboration of stakeholders. (e46)

The transition of the structure of the school day to support cluster meeting schedules and personnel time and effort demonstrates the district's commitment to aligning existing resources with project objectives.(e46)

Weaknesses:

(i) No weaknesses noted

(ii) No weaknesses noted

(iii) The project did not demonstrate a comprehensive and thoughtful approach to financial sustainability beyond the grant period.

The long-term sustainability plan did not clearly include building collective buy-in among stakeholders, which is crucial for continued support and success. Capacity building through training and support further strengthens the project's sustainability. (e46)

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. Competitive Preference Priority 1: Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities (Up to 5 points).

Under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate that the applicant proposes a project designed to promote educational equity and adequacy in resources and opportunity for underserved students.

a. In one or more of the following educational settings:

- (1) Elementary school.
- (2) Middle school.
- (3) High school.
- (4) Career and technical education programs.

b. That examines the sources of inequity and inadequacy and implement responses, and that may include one or more of the following:

- (1) Increasing the number and proportion of experienced, fully certified, in-field, and effective educators, and educators from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds or the communities they serve, to ensure that underserved students have educators from those backgrounds and communities and are not taught at disproportionately higher rates by uncertified, out-of-field, and novice teachers compared to their peers.
- (2) Improving the retention of fully certified, experienced, and effective educators in high-need schools or shortage areas.

Strengths:

Overview: Laurens County School District 55, a Local Education Agency (LEA) in rural South Carolina, is seeking a Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program grant to develop and implement a new human capital management system (HCMS), inclusive of a performance-based compensation system and career advancement opportunities.

Strengths: In supporting educators and their professional growth, the project will contribute to improved recruitment, outreach, preparation, support, development, and retention of a diverse educator workforce. The strategies and new human capital practices adopted will be focused on goals related to building district leadership that mirrors the growing student population to support educators and their professional growth. Educators will receive real-time feedback to help them improve in key areas. The performance review system will also be redesigned with educators as partners to ensure evaluation metrics are transparent. By implementing these strategies and adopting new human capital practices, the project aims to build district leadership that mirrors the growing student population. Educators will receive real-time feedback, have a voice in the evaluation process, and access professional growth opportunities. This comprehensive approach will contribute to improved recruitment, outreach, preparation, support, development, and retention of a diverse educator workforce, ultimately enhancing the overall educational experience and outcomes for students.(e13)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses Noted

Reader's Score: 5

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

**1. Competitive Preference Priority 2:
Supporting a Diverse Educator Workforce and Professional Growth to Strengthen Student Learning (Up to 5 points).**

Projects that are designed to increase the proportion of well-prepared, diverse, and effective educators serving students, with a focus on underserved students, through building or expanding high-poverty school districts' capacity to hire, support, and retain an effective and diverse educator workforce, by developing data systems, timelines, and action plans for promoting inclusive and bias-free human resources practices that promote and support development of educator diversity.

Strengths:

Overview: Laurens Educators Achieving Results to Net Success (LEARNS) will reach 428 teachers, 22 school leaders, and 5,180 students across the LEA's nine high-need schools.

Strengths: By increasing educator diversity, the applicant proposed that the human capital practices implemented as part of the project will be focused on recruiting and supporting a more diverse educator workforce that mirrors the growing student population. A system of professional learning for leaders focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion will ensure they implement professional development that fosters an inclusive and supportive school climate for diverse leaders. They want to make sure that educator diversity can closely resemble the student population. They will ensure that educators of color received individualized support, professional development, and mentorship. (e57)(e138)

Weaknesses:

While the applicant mentions They want to make sure that educator diversity can closely resemble the student population, it does not clearly demonstrate how they will make this happen. The diversity connection is not explicitly stated. (e57)(e138)

Reader's Score: 3

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Laurens County School District 55 (S374A230030)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Need for Project		
1. Need	20	16
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	25	25
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	25	22
Adequacy of Resources		
1. Resources	30	22
Sub Total	100	85
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	5
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. Diverse Workforce	5	2
Sub Total	10	7
Total	110	92

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - TSL Panel - 1: 84.374A

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Laurens County School District 55 (S374A230030)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Need for Project

1. Need for Project (20 points)

The Secretary considers the need for the proposed project. In determining evidence of the need for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (i) The extent to which specific gaps or weaknesses in services, infrastructure, or opportunities have been identified and will be addressed by the proposed project, including the nature and magnitude of those gaps or weaknesses.
- (ii) The extent to which the proposed project will integrate with or build on similar or related efforts to improve relevant outcomes using existing funding streams from other programs or policies supported by community, State, and Federal resources.
- (iii) The extent to which the proposed project is part of a comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning and support rigorous academic standards for students.
- (iv) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs.

Strengths:

Overview: The applicant adequately demonstrates a need for the project through most elements of the selection criteria but does not adequately address others. The application adequately identifies and addresses specific gaps in services and linking programs/strategies and grant activities to improve relevant outcomes. The application is limited in demonstrating how it is part of a comprehensive effort aimed at improving teaching and learning and in its implementing, strategies aimed at successfully meeting the needs of the target population.

Strengths:

(i) The applicant demonstrates significant gaps in service with 48% of students were non-White with 21% of teachers being non-White, the district is rural and 77% of the students are in poverty, and all Laurens County schools are high-need schools which will be addressed through the LEARNS grant program (e.18, e.95).

The applicant demonstrates a gap in opportunities with 8.9% of teachers teaching out-of-field and 23.3% inexperienced teachers which are both higher than the state average, and one-year teacher retention of 81.5%, lower than the state average which will be addressed through the use of teacher leader rolls to attract and retain highly effective teachers and develop a leadership pipeline (e.18).

State testing demonstrates indicates that Laurens County School District is below that of the state as whole in ELA, Math, and Science which the proposed project will address through job-embedded, teacher-led professional learning opportunities (e.20).

(ii) Applicant will build on related efforts to improve student outcomes and build a more effective instructional staff which includes enhancing the NIET teacher preparation and training program which has proven to be a highly effective strategy for the adoption of state standards, to include additional support for educator evaluation, the State Superintendent of Education has proposed the creation of a bonus compensation program for teachers who agree to work in high-need schools and additional incentives for increases in student achievement, allowing this grant to create a model for other districts in the state to model (e.22).

(iii) The proposed project will support the collaboration between Laurens County School District 55 and NIET, a national nonprofit organization that will benefit the district and provide insight for the state and other districts who wish to address instructional improvement and establish a culture of high expectations, enhance effectiveness of its teachers and school leaders through its partnership with NIET, and refine the district's evaluation process through LEARNS (e.23).

(iv) The project aims to attract, develop, and retain a highly effective and diverse teaching workforce, providing opportunities for advancement, promote equity, enhance teacher and leader effectiveness, and drive student achievement (e.23).

Weaknesses:

(iv) As part of the proposed project, the application mentions that character education will be part of the district's vision for improvement and alignment of the HCMS and defines what character traits they hope to address. However, there is not a lot of information on the specific program or strategies that teachers will be implementing to promote character education (e.34).

The proposed project plans to implement and integrate the TAP system, which the application defines, describes, and gives the benefits of well throughout the application. However specific information on how the TAP system will be implemented and integrated has not been provided, making it unclear of the proposed project will build on previous funding streams. (e.17-e.22).

Reader's Score: 16

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. Quality of the Project Design (25 points)

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

- (i) The extent to which the proposed project demonstrates a rationale.**
- (ii) The extent to which the design of the proposed project includes a thorough, high-quality review of the relevant literature, a high-quality plan for project implementation, and the use of appropriate methodological tools to ensure successful achievement of project objectives.**
- (iii) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes.**

Strengths:

Overview:

The project's design clearly addresses all elements of each of the selection criterion. It identifies a rationale and includes a high-quality review of the relevant literature, the use of appropriate methodological tools to ensure successful achievement of project objectives and identifies the extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes. Includes a high-quality plan for project implementation.

Strengths:

- (i) The proposed project's use of Theory of Action is well-conceived and is likely to lead to sound project implementation due to the strong alignment between the proposed project activities, outputs, and short and long-term outcomes outlined

in the logic model provided (e.50).

The applicant's proposed systems of support include strengthening of fair evaluation that include actionable feedback, opportunities for teacher career advancement and additional compensation, job-embedded and professional learning opportunities, and alignment of the HCMS, which all contribute to the rationale that increases in teacher and school leader effectiveness will result in increases in educator skills and recruitment and retention of effective, diverse educators (e.24).

(ii) The applicant has provided recent and relevant research to support the project, including research on the positive impact of the TAP System on school leader, teacher, and student outcomes, TAP System's Theory of Action, and shifts from traditional leadership structures toward an approach with administrators working with teacher leaders to drive instructional improvements (e.25-e.28, e.149-e.154).

The applicant has provided both an overview of the LEARNS strategies and activities, as well as descriptions of each activity to address key strategies, which provide the rationale behind each of the strategies selected demonstrating a strong plan and encouraging the success of implementation (e.28-e.34).

Key features of the applicant's plan that set it apart as being high-quality include research-based practices to embed character and social-emotional learning support within their work, prioritization of professional learning based on needs, and creation of a Master and Mentor teacher program which includes \$4,000 and \$7,000 stipends (e.30-e.34, e.180).

The project will utilize both qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments, with fidelity of implementation to include program artifacts, surveys, and interviews with partners, and includes NIET's annual school review process, as well as triangulation of data to allow for a higher level of validity in the qualitative research (e.36).

(iii) The timeline for gathering and analyzing project data, which aligns with research questions and applicable sub-questions, which includes an evaluator that will ensure quality of the program and ensure reliability and validity, as well as the sharing of reports at local, state, and national levels, allows for meaningful assessment of project progress (e.36-e.38, e.144-e.147)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted

Reader's Score: 25

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. Quality of the Management Plan (25 points)

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

Strengths:

Overview:

The quality of the management plan adequately addresses some elements of each selection criterion but does not adequately address others. The proposed project is adequate in its ability to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing tasks. However, it is limited in demonstrating the appropriateness of all parts of the budget for the plan.

Strengths:

The proposed project includes detailed information on the project team members' job descriptions and bios, which illustrate that the project team is qualified with necessary skills and the indication that their expertise will lead to successful implementation of the project (e.39, e.53-e.63).

The project includes a Milestones and Key Tasks Summary which aligns with the project's logic model and project description, with the five project strategies, responsible party, and quarter to be met supporting the successful implementation of the project (e.40-e.43).

Included budget and narrative is thorough in its explanation of where funds will be coming from and what they will be used for, with a project director and individual from finance that will determine that the project is within budget (e.39, e.162-e.184).

Weaknesses:

The proposed budget has allocated \$31,275 per year for registration and \$67,500 for travel of 45 participants to attend the NIET National Conference. It includes \$24,750 per year for registration as well as \$55,125 for travel per year of 45 participants to attend the NIET Summer Institute as well, each for three years. The cost alone for attendance at both of these events is \$178,650 a year. While there will be training, the applicant should consider decreasing the number of staff that attend and find a way to support through better dissemination of the information (e.177, e.181).

Reader's Score: 22

Selection Criteria - Adequacy of Resources

1. Adequacy of Resources (30 points)

The Secretary considers the adequacy of resources for the proposed project. In determining the adequacy of resources for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (i) The likelihood that the proposed project will result in system change or improvement.**
- (ii) The extent to which the proposed project is likely to build local capacity to provide, improve, or expand services that address the needs of the target population.**
- (iii) The extent to which the applicant demonstrates that it has the resources to operate the project beyond the length of the grant, including a multi-year financial and operating model and accompanying plan; the demonstrated commitment of any partners; evidence of broad support from stakeholders (e.g., SEAs, teachers' unions) critical to the project's long-term success; or more than one of these types of evidence.**

Strengths:

Overview:

The adequacy of resources addresses some elements of each selection criterion but does not adequately address others. The proposed project clearly demonstrates that it will result in system change or improvement and clearly addresses the extent to which the proposed project is likely to build local capacity to provide, improve, or expand services that address the needs of the target population and has the demonstrated commitment of partners and support from stakeholders. The application provides limited evidence that it has the resources to operate the project beyond the length of the grant, including a multi-year financial and operating model and accompanying plan.

Strengths:

(i) LEARNS will result in systematic change at the classroom, school and district level through the provided strategies implemented at each of these levels combined with the use of data to set goals. Having a plan that is rich in detail and utilizing data to make plan decisions will ensure greater success of the proposed plan (e.44).

(ii) The project will utilize the District Instructional Framework with clearly defined indicators for district instructional excellent that is used as a reflective tool for districts to assess current practices and determine priority areas of improvement and improve access to high-quality teachers (e.130-e.141).

Through collaboration with NIET and Laurens County School District 55, high-impact action steps will be identified to establish district-level structures for delivering professional learning and coaching for school and teacher leaders, as well as creation of a district leadership team to provide strategic supports for schools to support building capacity at the teacher, leadership, and district level (e.44-e.45).

The district leadership team will take over quarterly collaborative meetings initially led by NIET, with school leaders focusing on specific areas of improvement which are based on school visits and observations, which will build leadership capacity and impact success by addressing in the moment issues (e.45).

(iii) The project currently exceeds the 50% match requirement through in-kind time and effort of career teachers and school leaders demonstrating commitment of the district which will promote that the project will continue beyond the funding of the grant (e.45).

The district is supporting strong support through making changes to the transition structure of the school day to support activities related to the project which demonstrates commitment (e.46).

The district will continue using local funding and title II(A) funding which is currently being used to support ongoing implementation of some of the project components demonstrating successful access to resources which will support successful implementation of the project (e.45).

The applicant has included letters of support from agencies that will be working with the school district, community support, board members, and numerous letters from district staff as well as a math intent and ability letter from the district showing commitment to the proposed project (e.65-e.84, e.92).

Weaknesses:

(iii) The proposed project mentions a multi-year financial sustainability and management plan; however, this is not included in the application making it difficult to know if the plan can be sustained beyond the three-year grant. (e.182-e.183)

Reader's Score: 22

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

**1. Competitive Preference Priority 1:
Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities (Up to 5 points).**

Under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate that the applicant proposes a project designed to promote educational equity and adequacy in resources and opportunity for underserved students.

- a. In one or more of the following educational settings:**
 - (1) Elementary school.**
 - (2) Middle school.**
 - (3) High school.**

(4) Career and technical education programs.

b. That examines the sources of inequity and inadequacy and implement responses, and that may include one or more of the following:

(1) Increasing the number and proportion of experienced, fully certified, in-field, and effective educators, and educators from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds or the communities they serve, to ensure that underserved students have educators from those backgrounds and communities and are not taught at disproportionately higher rates by uncertified, out-of-field, and novice teachers compared to their peers.

(2) Improving the retention of fully certified, experienced, and effective educators in high-need schools or shortage areas.

Strengths:

Overview: The application clearly demonstrates promoting equity in student access to educational resources and opportunities. The proposed is designed to promote educational equity and adequacy in resources and opportunity for underserved students in elementary, middle, and high school settings. The project examines the sources of inequity and inadequacy and implements responses that include increasing the number and proportion of experienced, fully certified, in-field, and effective educators, and educators from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds or the communities they serve as well as improve the retention of fully certified, experienced, and effective educators in high-need schools or shortage areas.

Strengths:

Through a partnership with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) the project proposes to implement a fair evaluation of educators using the District Instructional Framework, which will be paired with specific and actionable feedback which will improve effectiveness of teachers (e.16-e.17).

The project proposes that high-impact action steps will be identified to establish district-level structures for delivering professional learning and coaching for school and teacher leaders, as well as creation of a district leadership team to provide strategic supports for schools to support building capacity at the teacher, leadership, and district level (e.44-e.45).

The project proposes two school-based roles which include master teachers who will conduct professional learning, classroom observations, and feedback and mentor teachers who will provide intentional support while remaining in the classroom, with both positions getting a stipend for their work will support retention of effective educators in high-need schools (e.30).

Development of a high-performance compensation system based on observations and student growth will help to retain effective educators as well as promote the increase of effective teaching skills of the staff (e.33).

The project proposes to implement a school leader compensation program based on performance to support retaining effective school leaders (e.50).

Applicant will build on related efforts to improve student outcomes and build a more effective instructional staff which includes enhancing the NIET teacher preparation and training program which has proven to be a highly effective strategy for the adoption of state standards (e.22).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

**1. Competitive Preference Priority 2:
Supporting a Diverse Educator Workforce and Professional Growth to Strengthen Student Learning (Up to 5 points).**

Projects that are designed to increase the proportion of well-prepared, diverse, and effective educators serving students, with a focus on underserved students, through building or expanding high-poverty school districts' capacity to hire, support, and retain an effective and diverse educator workforce, by developing data systems, timelines, and action plans for promoting inclusive and bias-free human resources practices that promote and support development of educator diversity.

Strengths:

Overview:

The proposed project lacks evidence that the project is designed to increase the proportion of well-prepared, diverse, and effective educators serving students, with a focus on underserved students, through building or expanding high-poverty school districts' capacity to hire, support, and retain an effective and diverse educator workforce, by developing data systems, timelines, and action plans for promoting inclusive and bias-free human resources practices that promote and support development of educator diversity.

Strengths:

The proposed project's LEARNS program will reach 428 teachers, 22 school leaders, and 5,180 students across the LEA's nine high-need schools, which supports the district's ability to build the capacity of the teacher workforce (e.13).

The proposed project states that it will enhance the training and support provided to new teachers from diverse preparation experiences and ensure they receive the support addressing their unique backgrounds, which will support and promote the development of educator diversity (e.21)

Weaknesses:

The application mentions that it will utilize coaching and training of district leaders to refine a strategic compensation plan that will advance a more effective staffing structure and more diverse faculty in schools. However, the application lacks evidence of what specifically the district will be doing to promote diversity within its faculty (e.138).

Reader's Score: 2

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Laurens County School District 55 (S374A230030)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Need for Project		
1. Need	20	15
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	25	22
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	25	22
Adequacy of Resources		
1. Resources	30	22
Sub Total	100	81
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	5
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. Diverse Workforce	5	3
Sub Total	10	8
Total	110	89

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - TSL Panel - 1: 84.374A

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: Laurens County School District 55 (S374A230030)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Need for Project

1. Need for Project (20 points)

The Secretary considers the need for the proposed project. In determining evidence of the need for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (i) The extent to which specific gaps or weaknesses in services, infrastructure, or opportunities have been identified and will be addressed by the proposed project, including the nature and magnitude of those gaps or weaknesses.
- (ii) The extent to which the proposed project will integrate with or build on similar or related efforts to improve relevant outcomes using existing funding streams from other programs or policies supported by community, State, and Federal resources.
- (iii) The extent to which the proposed project is part of a comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning and support rigorous academic standards for students.
- (iv) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs.

Strengths:

Overview:

The applicant makes a strong case for the needs for the project. The district is rural and suffers from lack of strong candidates for its positions due to its location. The student achievement gaps are present in the district and there are issues with retaining quality teachers and principals. The district personnel who will support the grant have had some previous experience in working with the program to be installed. The proposal can be seen as a comprehensive effort to have the components to impact teacher growth and student learning. In many ways, the project is appropriate for the identified population. (p. e 13)

Strengths:

(i) One of the areas of need or gaps identified is the lack of qualified teacher candidates to be hired by the district. The applicant notes that unfortunately, the least experienced and least qualified teachers tend to teach in the most challenging schools. The challenges faced by this applicant is the rural nature of the district, the poverty facing its students and community, and the lack of student achievement due to the inability of the teaching cadre to address these concerns in a meaningful way. (pp. e 17-18)

(ii) Despite some improvements in student achievement recently, the overall performance of students in the district remains below that of the state. (p. e 20) In order to deal with these issues, the applicant will develop and implement a new human capital management system which will include a performance-based compensation system and career advancement opportunities in the LEA's nine high-need schools. (p. e 23)

(iii) The applicant notes that the proposed project will build on similar related efforts to improve relevant outcomes using existing funding streams from other programs. For example, the superintendent has experience in creating long-term funding for this work and has convened senior leaders in the district to create a multi-year financial sustainability and management plan. (p. e 45)

(iv) The design of the proposed project is appropriate and will meet the demands of the students to be served. For example, the existing staff is lacking in strategies and processes to improve instructional practice. However, the project has a number of elements that will assist with that weakness. Support for school leaders includes quarterly collaborative meetings initially led by the contractor that will later be facilitated by a member of the district leadership group. and focused on specific areas for improvement based on school visits and observations. This collaboration will develop strong practices and a shared commitment to district goals. In addition, this activity will build leadership capacity. Through these meetings, principals will develop a more consistent approach to evaluating classroom practice and reinforce effective teaching at all the campuses. (p. e 45)

Weaknesses:

(i) A weakness in the application is the lack of details regarding the inclusion of the character education component and how that part of the project will impact teachers and students, in line with the grant's goals. (p. e 17)

(ii) Another weakness is the lack of detail regarding TAP, the overall framework for the project. Details about the nature and the selection of program are lacking. (p. e 22)

(iii) None observed.

(iv) None observed.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. Quality of the Project Design (25 points)

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

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

(ii) The extent to which the design of the proposed project includes a thorough, high-quality review of the relevant literature, a high-quality plan for project implementation, and the use of appropriate methodological tools to ensure successful achievement of project objectives.

(iii) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes.

Strengths:

Overview:

The application presents a strong and very detailed rationale and provide some aspects of a high-quality plan for the project that is based on relevant literature supporting the project's strategies and implementation plans. In addition, the proposal notes the use of methodological tools and methods of evaluation to ensure successful implementation and to provide actionable feedback for the project. However, there is a weakness regarding the lack of detail regarding the character education component. (pp. e 24-25)

Strengths:

(i) The application presents a strong and very detailed rationale. One of the details that make it valuable is the statement of the problem, which is framed as a lack of qualified teachers resulting in poor student academic achievement. The rationale behind the project is that increases in teacher and school leader effectiveness will result from both increases in the skills of current educators as well as improved recruitment and retention of effective, diverse educators. This will come about due to the combination of increased support and opportunities for increased compensation, leadership roles, and job satisfaction. (p. e 24)

(ii) The design of the proposed project includes a thorough, high-quality review of the relevant literature, a high-quality plan for project implementation, and the use of appropriate methodological tools to support educators and their professional growth through four research-based strategies. Use of the system chosen by the district will strengthen implementation of fair evaluations that are combined with specific feedback. Another strong strategy is to create enhanced and set ways for teacher career advancement. Finally, the project will provide job embedded, teacher-led professional learning opportunities and develop a system of performance-based rewards. (p. e 24)

(iii) The application provides several important methods of evaluation. These will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress in the grant. For example, the external evaluator will lead a formative and summative evaluation with two purposes. One goal is to supply the district with timely data to improve the project for the populations served. Secondly, the evaluation will assess program impacts. The outcomes sought and in need of feedback are an increase in teacher and principal effectiveness and improvement in student academic achievement. (p. e 35) The evaluation will seek feedback on several key questions to determine effectiveness of implementation. They include how well the project is being implemented and to what extent is implementation sustainable. The feedback to answer this question will come from data such as results of interviews, focus groups, trainings attended, and so on. (p. e 144)

Weaknesses:

- (i) A weakness in the project design for the application is the lack of detail about the character education aspect of the program. The proposal notes that its inclusion in other similar situations resulted in some success, but the proposal does not provide enough detail about the program so that its efficacy can be fully evaluated as a key part of the project. (p. e 34)
- (ii) None observed.
- (iii) None observed.

Reader's Score: 22

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. Quality of the Management Plan (25 points)

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

Strengths:

The application provides a management plan that will drive the project to achieve the objectives on time and within budget, and it includes responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for project accomplishment. (pp. e 39-43)

Strengths:

The management plan is based on three key components, including the project milestones and tasks, the main key staff who will perform these tasks, and lastly, the timeline for completing them. For example, the proposal names the four key members of the management team, led by the superintendent who will serve as the principal investigator. She will be joined by the project director who will give 50% of her time to manage all aspects of the project, the financial manager for the grant, who will provide a 20% FTF contribution, and an administrator at the district level who will serve as the instructional lead, at 30%. These personnel will be supported by the team from the contractor who will aid and assist them. Some of the duties outlined in the management plan include the hiring of master teachers in the second quarter of the first year of the grant, with the project director taking responsibility overall for that task. Another task and associated milestone is the implementation of monthly quality meetings for the project. (pp. e 41- 42)

Weaknesses:

A weakness in the application is the excessive amount of funds to be spent over the course of the grant for travel. Spending \$178,650 per year for 45 participants to attend a single conference is excessive. At least some of that funding should go to other identified more critical areas. (pp. e 177-179)

Reader's Score: 22

Selection Criteria - Adequacy of Resources**1. Adequacy of Resources (30 points)**

The Secretary considers the adequacy of resources for the proposed project. In determining the adequacy of resources for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (i) The likelihood that the proposed project will result in system change or improvement.
- (ii) The extent to which the proposed project is likely to build local capacity to provide, improve, or expand services that address the needs of the target population.
- (iii) The extent to which the applicant demonstrates that it has the resources to operate the project beyond the length of the grant, including a multi-year financial and operating model and accompanying plan; the demonstrated commitment of any partners; evidence of broad support from stakeholders (e.g., SEAs, teachers' unions) critical to the project's long-term success; or more than one of these types of evidence.

Strengths:

Overview:

The application notes that there is likely to be improvement in outcomes and gives some assurances that there are adequate resources available, especially in terms of capacity building and sustainability after the grant is over. (pp. 43-44)

Strengths:

- (i) The likelihood that the proposed project will result in system change or improvement is high. One key component is to build local capacity that address the needs of the target population. The project will prioritize building local capacity to provide, improve, and expand services. The vendor will support district leaders in improving district practices and embedding those improvements in existing structures and systems to ensure sustainability. (pp. e 44-45)
- (ii) In terms of capacity building on the part of the applicant, the superintendent has experience in creating long-term funding for this work and has convened senior leaders in the district to create a multi-year financial sustainability and management plan. The contractor will collaborate with identifying high-impact action steps to improve instruction and provide coaching for district leaders aligned to those action steps. (p. e 45)
- (iii) The district is currently using existing districts funds to support ongoing implementation of some of the project components and will continue to use these funds moving forward. Funds that are currently being used, and will continue to be used, include local funding and Title II(A) funding. In addition, the district will aggressively pursue other streams of funding that support efforts like these. (pp. e 45-46)

Weaknesses:

- (i) None observed.
- (ii) None observed.
- (iii) While the application notes that it intends that the project will go forward and be supported by the district at the end of the grant period, plans for a comprehensive multi-year financial and operational plan sustainability of the work of the grant

are lacking in detail. (pp. e 43-44)

Reader's Score: 22

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

**1. Competitive Preference Priority 1:
Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities (Up to 5 points).**

Under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate that the applicant proposes a project designed to promote educational equity and adequacy in resources and opportunity for underserved students.

- a. In one or more of the following educational settings:**
- (1) Elementary school.**
 - (2) Middle school.**
 - (3) High school.**
 - (4) Career and technical education programs.**
- b. That examines the sources of inequity and inadequacy and implement responses, and that may include one or more of the following:**
- (1) Increasing the number and proportion of experienced, fully certified, in-field, and effective educators, and educators from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds or the communities they serve, to ensure that underserved students have educators from those backgrounds and communities and are not taught at disproportionately higher rates by uncertified, out-of-field, and novice teachers compared to their peers.**
 - (2) Improving the retention of fully certified, experienced, and effective educators in high-need schools or shortage areas.**

Strengths:

Overview:

The application demonstrates its commitment to the project designed to promote educational equity and adequacy in resources and opportunity for underserved students. (p. e 144)

Strengths:

The applicant notes that its project will result in improvement in student academic achievement. This improvement is to be part of the research questions. Associated evaluation methods will guide the evaluation of the program effectiveness towards these goals. (p. e 144)

Weaknesses:

None observed.

Reader's Score: 5

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

**1. Competitive Preference Priority 2:
Supporting a Diverse Educator Workforce and Professional Growth to Strengthen Student Learning (Up to 5 points).**

Projects that are designed to increase the proportion of well-prepared, diverse, and effective educators serving students, with a focus on underserved students, through building or expanding high-poverty school districts' capacity to hire, support, and retain an effective and diverse educator workforce, by developing data systems, timelines, and action plans for promoting inclusive and bias-free human resources practices that promote and support development of educator diversity.

Strengths:

Overview:

This project is clearly designed to increase the proportion of well-prepared, diverse, and effective educators serving students, with a focus on underserved students, through building or expanding high-poverty school districts' capacity to hire, support, and retain an effective and diverse educator workforce.

Strengths:

The application notes its determination to implement reforms in its human capital system and institute pay for performance for its staff to acquire an effective and diverse set of educators. (p. e 144)

Weaknesses:

Although the proposal mentions the need for diversity of the teacher population, there is not enough detailed information on how that outcome will be achieved. (pp. e 17-18)

Reader's Score: 3

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