



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF INNOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT

July 29, 2009

Paul Prussing
Acting Director
801 West 10th Street
Suite 200 / P.O. Box 110500
Juneau, AK 99811-0500

Dear Mr. Prussing:

Thank you for your application for funds under the Charter Schools Program (CSP) competition that closed on February 25, 2009. The CSP authorizes the Secretary to award grants to those States that have enacted a State charter law to enable them to conduct Charter School Programs in their States.

This letter is to inform you that your application under the Charter Schools Program (CSP) has not been recommended for funding.

A peer review of applications was conducted March 16 through March 24, 2009. The CSP CFDA No. 84.282A received 10 SEA applications for funding as e-Applications. Applications were reviewed using the selection criteria contained in the statute authorizing this program and published in the Federal Register on December 15, 2008. The top five (5) ranked applications were recommended for funding. Your application did not rank high enough to be included with those recommended for funding.

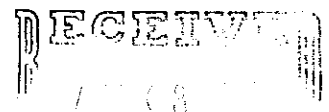
A copy of the reviewer's comments about your application is enclosed with this letter.

We appreciate the time and thought that went into the planning and preparation of this application. If you have any questions concerning the review, please feel free to contact me directly. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Dean Kern
Director
Parental Options and Information

Enclosures



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Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 04/03/2009 12:46 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: State of Alaska Department of Education & Early Development - Alaska Department of Education Teaching and Learning Support (U282A090004)

Reader #1:

	POINTS POSSIBLE	POINTS SCORED
Summary Comments		
1. Summary Comments	N/A	N/A
Selection Criteria		
1. The contribution the charter schools grant program will make.....	30	20
2. The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA	30	10
3. The number of high-quality charter schools to be created	30	12
4. The quality of the management plan...	30	15
5. The quality of the evaluation plan	30	16
TOTAL	150	73

Technical Review Form

Non Dissemination: 84.282A

Reader #1:

Applicant: State of Alaska Department of Education & Early Development - Alaska Department of Education Teaching and Learning Support (U282A090004)

Summary Comments

1. Summary Comments

Alaska's three main objectives of this grant to improve and increase the number of high-quality schools and secure financial stability for charter schools are clear, concise and necessary when looking at the state's demographics. The unique situation of Alaska when dealing with the spread out population and the large Native Alaskan population was not discussed enough in the application. These unique circumstances could have been incorporated in many sections and a program or meetings could have been created to really target this audience. Charters in Alaska have been successful academically, and this grant could help continue that improvement. The performance measures listed were clear and measurable, using various qualitative and quantitative data. While the application touched on all the various sections required, the management plan and evaluation could have been more detailed. Many of the sections to discuss dissemination or how charters are aware of funds were not addressed in a comprehensive way.

Selection Criteria

1. The contribution the charter schools grant program will make in assisting educationally disadvantaged and other students to achieve State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to provide a description of the objectives for the SEA's charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, including steps taken by the SEA to inform teachers, parents, and communities of the SEA's charter school grant program and how the SEA will disseminate best or promising practices of charter schools to each LEA in the State.

Strengths

On pages 24 through 26, the application clearly discusses the three unique objectives of the grant program. The performance measures, discussed in the evaluation section are clear, measurable and relevant to the overall objectives. The objectives are focusing heavily on improving student achievement for charter school students, and data is shown that demonstrates success they have had so far. Objective number three focusing on financial stability is important based on the demographics and unique issues the state of Alaska face regarding such a dispersed population (p. 26). Charters are performing at a

higher level than conventional public schools (p. 15).

Weaknesses

Some of the activities listed are very broad and encompass a few different activities. These could've been separated out into more concise activities for staff members. With a large population of Native Alaskans (p. 6), the applicant really did not take advantage of using this resource and research to its advantage. There was no real discussion of how the current and new charters will continue to help disadvantaged students, and there was no achievement data to highlight progress. Currently, only 3 of the 25 charters are targeting at-risk students (p. 9). There is a very weak discussion on how the SEA will inform others of the grant program, and doesn't go beyond posting information on their web site and making a few calls. No discussion of dissemination.

Reader's Score: 20

2. The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA to charter schools under the State's charter school law.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a description of how the State's law establishes an administrative relationship between the charter school and the authorized public chartering agency and exempts charter schools from significant State or local rules that inhibit the flexible operation and management of public schools.

The Secretary also encourages the applicant to include a description of the degree of autonomy charter schools have achieved over such matters as the charter school's budget, expenditures, daily operation, and personnel in accordance with their State's law.

Strengths

The state law gives charter schools the option of some flexibility in numerous categories, such as curriculum, employment, scheduling, and the formation of nonprofit status (p. 33). The charter does have control over their annual budget, in accordance with their contract.

Weaknesses

The degree of flexibility afforded to charter schools in Alaska is dependent on the written contract between the local school district and the charter school (p. 33). Depending on the attitude of the school board towards a charter, a charter's autonomy could be challenged and they might not be given autonomy. Charter schools are not their own LEA's and funding does go through the district to the school, which depending on the contract, could create problems.

Reader's Score: 10

3. The number of high-quality charter schools to be created in the State.

Note: The Secretary considers the SEA's reasonable estimate of the number of new charter schools to be authorized and opened in the State during the three-year period of this grant.

The Secretary also considers how the SEA will inform each charter school in the State about Federal funds the charter school is eligible to receive and ensure that each charter school in the State receives the school's commensurate share of Federal education funds that are allocated by formula each year, including during the first year of operation of the school and during a year in which the school's enrollment expands significantly.

Strengths

Opening approximately three new schools a year is in line with Alaska's previous charter history (p. 35), and given Alaska's population it is reasonable and would not flood the market. There is a comprehensive discussion on how the per pupil allocation is calculated (p. 23) and proposed enrollment drives funding for the first year.

Weaknesses

Opening only a total of six to nine schools over three years is not an ambitious goal. With a cap of 60 schools, there is room to push to open more schools in this time period. Local school boards and the state board both have to approve a charter school application (p. 20), and the state board will not approve without the local school board doing so first. There does also not seem to be any appeals process in place. The department has the final say. Because operating revenues are provided to the charter based on the contract, there is no assurance charters would receive all their funding. There also was not a strong discussion on how charters would be informed about funds for which they are eligible.

Reader's Score: 12

4. 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.

Note: In addition to describing the proposed objectives of the SEA charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, the Secretary encourages applicants to provide descriptions of the steps to be taken by the SEA to award subgrant funds to eligible applicants desiring to receive these funds, including descriptions of the peer review process the SEA will use to review applications for assistance, the timelines for awarding such funds, and how the SEA will assess the quality of the applications.

Strengths

The management plan chart on pages 37 through 39 contains sufficient details on the variety of activities that will be accomplished to meet each objective, a timeline, resources, responsibilities and milestones. With a main goal being to improve academic achievement, the applicant discusses the assistance the district and state will provide to

schools that fail to make AYP (p. 36). There is an overview of how the SEA will award subgrant funds, and the application attached shows how the SEA will measure the quality of applicants (p. 40-41).

Weaknesses

There could have been more activities in objective 2, because the applicant clearly considers academic achievement to be very important and there are only two main activities for an objective that is very broad. There was not enough detail about the peer review process as far as how they will be chosen, and there was not a strong timeline of when the awards will be funded.

Reader's Score: 15

5. The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible.

The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a strong evaluation plan in the application narrative and to use that plan, as appropriate, to shape the development of the project from the beginning of the grant period. The Secretary encourages the applicant to design the plan so that it includes (a) benchmarks to monitor progress toward specific project objectives and (b) outcome measures to assess the impact on teaching and learning or other important outcomes for project participants. In its plan, we encourage the applicant to identify the individual and/or organization that has agreed to serve as evaluator for the project and to describe the qualifications of that evaluator. We also encourage the applicant to describe, in its application, the evaluation design, indicating: (1) the types of data that will be collected; (2) when various types of data will be collected; (3) the methods that will be used; (4) the instruments that will be developed and when; (5) how the data will be analyzed; (6) when reports of results and outcomes will be available; and (7) how the applicant will use the information collected through the evaluation to monitor progress of the funded project and to provide accountability information both about success at the initial site and effective strategies for replication in other settings. Applicants are encouraged to devote an appropriate level of resources to project evaluation.

Strengths

The evaluation model contains a useful logic model, which shows the inputs, outputs and short, middle and long-term goals of each activity related to the three objectives. The performance measures attached to each objective are concise and measurable. The performance measures for academics are high to be attainable, but not easy, and were based on the current public school proficiency levels (p. 47). The evaluation also discusses the organization that has agreed to assist in the evaluation and the qualifications of potential reviewers. The applicant discusses each of the seven required sections of the evaluation in an organized manner. The section on type of data to be collected is very detailed and looks at more than just student achievement (p. 51). Surveys and focus groups will be a part of the evaluation and the applicant discusses how

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Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 04/03/2009 3:08 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: State of Alaska Department of Education & Early Development - Alaska Department of Education Teaching and Learning Support (U282A090004)

Reader #2:

	POINTS POSSIBLE	POINTS SCORED
Summary Comments		
1. Summary Comments	N/A	N/A
Selection Criteria		
1. The contribution the charter schools grant program will make.....	30	18
2. The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA	30	14
3. The number of high-quality charter schools to be created	30	10
4. The quality of the management plan...	30	10
5. The quality of the evaluation plan	30	14
TOTAL	150	66

Technical Review Form

Non Dissemination: 84.282A

Reader #2:

Applicant: State of Alaska Department of Education & Early Development - Alaska Department of Education Teaching and Learning Support (U282A090004)

Summary Comments

1. Summary Comments

Alaska provides clear and relevant objectives for the grant program and explicitly ties performance measures and outcomes to each objective. The number of schools Alaska proposes to open is reasonable and the state demonstrates a strong history of good charter school performance, which indicate the potential for increasing the number of high quality charter schools in the future.

The performance measures tend to focus more on the performance of schools without an adequate discussion of how the grant program will be used strategically to improve school performance, particularly for educationally disadvantaged students. In general, the management and evaluation plans contain vague activities that will be difficult to measure, and at times focus on inputs rather than outcomes

Selection Criteria

1. The contribution the charter schools grant program will make in assisting educationally disadvantaged and other students to achieve State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to provide a description of the objectives for the SEA's charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, including steps taken by the SEA to inform teachers, parents, and communities of the SEA's charter school grant program and how the SEA will disseminate best or promising practices of charter schools to each LEA in the State.

Strengths

The application states that it will encourage charter schools to increase opportunities for educationally disadvantaged students and improve access through the approval process, thereby addressing the grant's focus on these students. The application also outlines clear and relevant objectives for the grant program and describes strategies for notifying parents, teachers and community groups of the grant opportunity (p. 23 - 24). The application also provides objectives for strengthening the fiscal sustainability of Alaska's charter schools. The application provides compelling evidence of the strong performance

of current charter schools, indicating that future charter schools are also likely to be high-performing. It also provides evidence that these charter schools serve a larger proportion of native students

Weaknesses

The application relies on the standard charter application and review process to produce more charter schools focused on serving educationally disadvantaged students and to improve student achievement, without indicating that the Department of Education will engage in additional activities to promote these two goals. The objectives do not provide specific targets as to how many new charter schools will serve educationally disadvantaged students. There is little discussion of dissemination strategies beyond the hope that successful charter schools will spur additional success.

Reader's Score: 18

2. The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA to charter schools under the State's charter school law.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a description of how the State's law establishes an administrative relationship between the charter school and the authorized public chartering agency and exempts charter schools from significant State or local rules that inhibit the flexible operation and management of public schools.

The Secretary also encourages the applicant to include a description of the degree of autonomy charter schools have achieved over such matters as the charter school's budget, expenditures, daily operation, and personnel in accordance with their State's law.

Strengths

The application makes clear that charter schools are exempt from regulations in a few key areas, such as curriculum, textbooks, and scheduling. The charter school has control over principal hiring and the principal has control over other staffing decisions, addressing charter schools' flexibility over personnel decisions.

Weaknesses

Additional charter school flexibility must be negotiated with the LEA during charter review. The application does not give evidence of the extent to which existing charter schools have been able to negotiate freedom from regulations, leaving it unclear as to whether the ability to negotiate flexibility is useful. The regulations limiting a charter schools' ability to enter into long-term fiscal contracts without the approval of the district could potentially hinder charter schools' ability to invest in facilities or other infrastructure to support their educational program. The requirement that charter schools negotiate their annual budget with the district seems like it would be a hindrance to charter schools' autonomy over their budget and expenditures.

Reader's Score: 14

3. The number of high-quality charter schools to be created in the State.

Note: The Secretary considers the SEA's reasonable estimate of the number of new charter schools to be authorized and opened in the State during the three-year period of this grant.

The Secretary also considers how the SEA will inform each charter school in the State about Federal funds the charter school is eligible to receive and ensure that each charter school in the State receives the school's commensurate share of Federal education funds that are allocated by formula each year, including during the first year of operation of the school and during a year in which the school's enrollment expands significantly.

Strengths

The application states that Alaska intends to continue its current trajectory of charter school growth by opening an additional 6 to 9 schools over the three-year grant period. The application also describes the reasoning behind the planning and implementation grant amounts.

Weaknesses

The goal of opening 6 to 9 charter schools is not particularly ambitious and seeks to only continue what Alaska has done previously. The application lists a few methods for informing charter schools of available grant funds later in the application (p. 40), but does not provide any detail, and there is no discussion of how charter schools will receive a commensurate share of funds.

Reader's Score: 10

4. 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.

Note: In addition to describing the proposed objectives of the SEA charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, the Secretary encourages applicants to provide descriptions of the steps to be taken by the SEA to award subgrant funds to eligible applicants desiring to receive these funds, including descriptions of the peer review process the SEA will use to review applications for assistance, the timelines for awarding such funds, and how the SEA will assess the quality of the applications.

Strengths

The application includes a clear management plan that directly addresses the objectives outlined at the beginning of the grant. The application states that certain criteria, such as geographic location, types of students served, and type of educational program will be considered in the grant review process, indicating an interest in supporting a diversity of charter schools. The application provides, in the appendix, additional details about the

charter review process through the rubric used to evaluate charter schools.

Weaknesses

The management plan does not include a specific timeline with months or dates when activities will be completed and many of the activities are listed as 'on-going' when there could be more specific information about completion. For example, the technical assistance workshops are listed as on-going, but there could be more clarity as to when in the grant administration process these will be offered. The milestones do not provide much additional information on how the Department of Education plans to achieve its activities and objectives. Some of the activities are not fully described in the grant narrative and are too vague to effectively assess outcomes. While the application lists certain priorities based on school type and students served, it does not provide sufficient detail to understand how these considerations might impact the outcomes of the charter school program.

Reader's Score: 10

5. The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible.

The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a strong evaluation plan in the application narrative and to use that plan, as appropriate, to shape the development of the project from the beginning of the grant period. The Secretary encourages the applicant to design the plan so that it includes (a) benchmarks to monitor progress toward specific project objectives and (b) outcome measures to assess the impact on teaching and learning or other important outcomes for project participants. In its plan, we encourage the applicant to identify the individual and/or organization that has agreed to serve as evaluator for the project and to describe the qualifications of that evaluator. We also encourage the applicant to describe, in its application, the evaluation design, indicating: (1) the types of data that will be collected; (2) when various types of data will be collected; (3) the methods that will be used; (4) the instruments that will be developed and when; (5) how the data will be analyzed; (6) when reports of results and outcomes will be available; and (7) how the applicant will use the information collected through the evaluation to monitor progress of the funded project and to provide accountability information both about success at the initial site and effective strategies for replication in other settings. Applicants are encouraged to devote an appropriate level of resources to project evaluation.

Strengths

The evaluation plan clearly links the outcomes to the stated objectives. Some performance measures include measurable goals that can be evaluated and provide a timeframe to monitor progress. The identification of the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory as an evaluator is a solid choice, with a qualified, independent evaluator. The application provides an overview of the type of data that will be included in the evaluation.

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Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 04/03/2009 7:32 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: State of Alaska Department of Education & Early Development - Alaska Department of Education Teaching and Learning Support (U282A090004)

Reader #3:

	POINTS POSSIBLE	POINTS SCORED
Summary Comments		
1. Summary Comments	N/A	N/A
Selection Criteria		
1. The contribution the charter schools grant program will make.....	30	20
2. The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA	30	14
3. The number of high-quality charter schools to be created	30	17
4. The quality of the management plan...	30	16
5. The quality of the evaluation plan	30	15
TOTAL	150	82

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Non Dissemination: 84.282A

Reader #3:

Applicant: State of Alaska Department of Education & Early Development - Alaska Department of Education Teaching and Learning Support (U282A090004)

Summary Comments

1. Summary Comments

The state of Alaska has unique challenges and is committed to using charter schools as a strategy for meeting its needs. This proposal has a strong logic model linking its activities to its objectives. A more detailed management plan and a stronger evaluation plan would improve the proposal. Additionally more information about the state's technical assistance would be useful. Charter schools are held to a higher standard and may need more support.

Selection Criteria

1. The contribution the charter schools grant program will make in assisting educationally disadvantaged and other students to achieve State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to provide a description of the objectives for the SEA's charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, including steps taken by the SEA to inform teachers, parents, and communities of the SEA's charter school grant program and how the SEA will disseminate best or promising practices of charter schools to each LEA in the State.

Strengths

In general, charter schools in Alaska were better than traditional public schools (abstract) and an increase in their number is likely to increase the state's capacity to assist educationally disadvantaged students. For this program, the applicant has selected three clear goals supported by appropriate activities (p.24-25) The table on pages 44 through 49 clearly shows the applicant's logic model linking its activities with its outcomes.

Weaknesses

The application states that the program will encourage charter schools to increase opportunities for students in need of improvement, but does not state how it will do this (p.31).

The state has minimal outreach activities to encourage the opening of new schools that will serve educationally disadvantaged students.

Reader's Score: 20

2. The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA to charter schools under the State's charter school law.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a description of how the State's law establishes an administrative relationship between the charter school and the authorized public chartering agency and exempts charter schools from significant State or local rules that inhibit the flexible operation and management of public schools.

The Secretary also encourages the applicant to include a description of the degree of autonomy charter schools have achieved over such matters as the charter school's budget, expenditures, daily operation, and personnel in accordance with their State's law.

Strengths

In Alaska, charter schools are exempt from the school district's textbook, curriculum, and scheduling requirements (p.34). The charter school board has the liberty to hire a principal and the principal then hires and supervises other personnel (p.34).

Weaknesses

There are several features in the Alaska school law that appear to limit charter school flexibility. A charter school application must receive both state and local approval to open (p.21). The school's budget must be approved by the school district (p.22). It is not clear how much flexibility charter schools have over personnel regarding dismissal, contracts, unionization, or pay schedules. Charter schools have little flexibility in contracting.

Reader's Score: 14

3. The number of high-quality charter schools to be created in the State.

Note: The Secretary considers the SEA's reasonable estimate of the number of new charter schools to be authorized and opened in the State during the three-year period of this grant.

The Secretary also considers how the SEA will inform each charter school in the State about Federal funds the charter school is eligible to receive and ensure that each charter school in the State receives the school's commensurate share of Federal education funds that are allocated by formula each year, including during the first year of operation of the school and during a year in

which the school's enrollment expands significantly.

Strengths

The applicant estimates that the state will open six to nine charter schools during the grant period (p.35). This number seems reasonable given the state's history and experience opening charter schools.

The department notifies charter schools about grant opportunities through its website, e-mail and direct mail (p.28).

Weaknesses

While the department identifies funding opportunities for charter schools, it does not appear to take a role in ensuring charter schools receive their commensurate level of federal funds from the district. For example, it does not appear to require assurances from the district or conduct monitoring.

The application states that the subgrant program will be competitive (p.40). With only two to three schools created each year, it is difficult to see how such a program could be competitive. Likewise the application states that consideration will be given for diversity and geographic location but with only two to three schools applying, it is difficult to imagine what that consideration would be.

The requirement that charter schools receive approval from both the district and the state could be an impediment to the opening schools.

Reader's Score: 17

4. 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.

Note: In addition to describing the proposed objectives of the SEA charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, the Secretary encourages applicants to provide descriptions of the steps to be taken by the SEA to award subgrant funds to eligible applicants desiring to receive these funds, including descriptions of the peer review process the SEA will use to review applications for assistance, the timelines for awarding such funds, and how the SEA will assess the quality of the applications.

Strengths

The management plan provides information about each activity including a basic timeline (p.37-39). The application provides information on how it will conduct its subgrant program including the amounts and process (p.40-41).

Weaknesses

The management plan is not sufficiently detailed. It does not provide details about responsibilities of individual staff. The timeline is very general. A more detailed management plan would provide a stronger roadmap and assurance that activities will be completed on time and result in the intended outcomes.

The proposal does not provide details about the technical assistance and guidance it intends to provide (p.36). Little attention is given to the financial technical assistance to support school fiscal viability.

Reader's Score: 16

5. The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible.

The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a strong evaluation plan in the application narrative and to use that plan, as appropriate, to shape the development of the project from the beginning of the grant period. The Secretary encourages the applicant to design the plan so that it includes (a) benchmarks to monitor progress toward specific project objectives and (b) outcome measures to assess the impact on teaching and learning or other important outcomes for project participants. In its plan, we encourage the applicant to identify the individual and/or organization that has agreed to serve as evaluator for the project and to describe the qualifications of that evaluator. We also encourage the applicant to describe, in its application, the evaluation design, indicating: (1) the types of data that will be collected; (2) when various types of data will be collected; (3) the methods that will be used; (4) the instruments that will be developed and when; (5) how the data will be analyzed; (6) when reports of results and outcomes will be available; and (7) how the applicant will use the information collected through the evaluation to monitor progress of the funded project and to provide accountability information both about success at the initial site and effective strategies for replication in other settings. Applicants are encouraged to devote an appropriate level of resources to project evaluation.

Strengths

The applicant has selected the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory to conduct its evaluation (p.50). The application includes a description of the kinds of data the evaluator will collect and how (p.51-53).

Weaknesses

The evaluation plan is entirely focused on the performance of charter schools. It does not

address the goals of the application and the performance of the charter school office in accomplishing these tasks. While it is appropriate to focus some of the plan on charter school performance because there are multiple performance measures regarding school achievement, the evaluation plan should also measure how well the applicant performs its duties in the program. As written, it does not assess the success of the applicant in meeting goals, timetables and benchmarks. The evaluation plan does not describe how the applicant will use the evaluation to improve its performance.

Reader's Score: 15

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 04/03/2009 7:32 PM

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Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 04/03/2009 12:20 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: State of Alaska Department of Education & Early Development - Alaska Department of Education Teaching and Learning Support (U282A090004)

Reader #4:

	POINTS POSSIBLE	POINTS SCORED
Summary Comments		
1. Summary Comments	N/A	N/A
Selection Criteria		
1. The contribution the charter schools grant program will make.....	30	20
2. The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA	30	15
3. The number of high-quality charter schools to be created	30	18
4. The quality of the management plan...	30	15
5. The quality of the evaluation plan	30	17
TOTAL	150	85

Technical Review Form

Non Dissemination: 84.282A

Reader #4:

Applicant: State of Alaska Department of Education & Early Development - Alaska Department of Education Teaching and Learning Support (U282A090004)

Summary Comments

1. Summary Comments

The applicant should concentrate on improving the recommended weaknesses of the application. Once the weaknesses are addressed the applicant will have a clearer picture of the overall grant application process needed to address the criteria listed in the application.

Selection Criteria

1. The contribution the charter schools grant program will make in assisting educationally disadvantaged and other students to achieve State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to provide a description of the objectives for the SEA's charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, including steps taken by the SEA to inform teachers, parents, and communities of the SEA's charter school grant program and how the SEA will disseminate best or promising practices of charter schools to each LEA in the State.

Strengths

The applicant has three secondary charter schools in Alaska that target and serve at-risk secondary students. pp-9

The applicant's Charter Expansion Program will continue to focus on increasing the numbers of secondary students served through the current application process. pp-9

The applicant state is one of 10 states that have been approved by the U.S. Department of Education to use a Student Growth Model in conjunction with the required AYP calculations. This allows the state to monitor student growth with a district, school, and subgroup on a yearly basis. pp 10

Weaknesses

The applicant's goals are reasonable but not innovative.

The applicant's activities were too broad to determine how much change would take place.

The goals and objective were not linked to performance measures of the project.

Reader's Score: 20**2. The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA to charter schools under the State's charter school law.**

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a description of how the State's law establishes an administrative relationship between the charter school and the authorized public chartering agency and exempts charter schools from significant State or local rules that inhibit the flexible operation and management of public schools.

The Secretary also encourages the applicant to include a description of the degree of autonomy charter schools have achieved over such matters as the charter school's budget, expenditures, daily operation, and personnel in accordance with their State's law.

Strengths

The applicant will use the Alaska Performance Incentive Program to determining individual student growth. The Performance Incentive Program is a new program authorized by Alaska statute and regulation in 2006.

The applicant's program will provide an incentive payment to the school employees where the students have demonstrated growth in academic achievement based on the Standards Based Assessments given annually in April. Essentially, the staff at schools which show the largest gains in student growth receive cash bonuses for achieving such growth. In 2007, six charter schools received PIP awards for outstanding, excellent, and high academic growth in student achievement.

The applicants program will track individual student growth from year to year. For the first time in the state's history, the department will be able report all student's yearly growth each year.

Weaknesses

The applicant does not clearly show all the ramifications of full autonomy in the state's charter school.

The applicant does not detail how the State's charter school law establishes an administrative or board relationship between the charter school and the authorized public chartering agency.

The applicant does not clearly specify a description of the degree of autonomy charter

schools have achieved over such matters as the charter school's budget, expenditures, daily operation, and personnel in accordance with their State's law.

The district's regular public school's appear to have more autonomy than charter schools in the district.

Reader's Score: 15

3. The number of high-quality charter schools to be created in the State.

Note: The Secretary considers the SEA's reasonable estimate of the number of new charter schools to be authorized and opened in the State during the three-year period of this grant.

The Secretary also considers how the SEA will inform each charter school in the State about Federal funds the charter school is eligible to receive and ensure that each charter school in the State receives the school's commensurate share of Federal education funds that are allocated by formula each year, including during the first year of operation of the school and during a year in which the school's enrollment expands significantly.

Strengths

The applicant's Charter schools will be monitored on an individual basis by a site visits on a five year cycle, which is dependent upon the opening of the school. During site visits, EED staff will meet with teachers, principles, and members of the Academic Policy Committee, the governing body of the charter school. Official documentation is requested in each monitoring visit. All monitoring visits seek to evaluate the charter schools not just on student achievement but also by reference to statutory and regulatory adherence. pp15

Weaknesses

The applicant does not clearly detail how the SEA will inform the schools in the state about federal funds.

The applicant does not specify how the state's charter schools will expand their enrollment.

The applicant states that there are are tremendous accomplishments for the state however does not detail the accomplishments that have been made.pp 19

The applicant does not detail or clearly stipulate how the funds in the state's charter schools will be evenly distributed to increase the enrollment or expansion of charter schools in the district.

Reader's Score: 18

4. 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.

Note: In addition to describing the proposed objectives of the SEA charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, the Secretary encourages applicants to provide descriptions of the steps to be taken by the SEA to award subgrant funds to eligible applicants desiring to receive these funds, including descriptions of the peer review process the SEA will use to review applications for assistance, the timelines for awarding such funds, and how the SEA will assess the quality of the applications.

Strengths

The applicant will Provide at least two technical assistance workshops as well as ongoing assistance for charter school operators on governance, leadership, and financial management. pp e-38

The applicant will Review annual performance reports, audits, and grant progress reports, conduct visits, and provide recommendations for improvement. pp e-38

The applicant will Evaluate the program's effectiveness in supporting schools to become fiscally solvent for long-term sustainability.

Weaknesses

The applicant's school districts appears to have most of the control over the charter school' and appears to grant little autonomy as it relates to fiscal and academics matters to the charter schools in the district. pp19

The management plan does not specify how it will evaluate the effectiveness of the charter school program. pp 37

The applicant does not detail how they will evaluate the program's effectiveness in supporting schools to become fiscally solvent for long-term sustainability. pp e-38

The applicant does not clearly define the responsibilities, time lines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

Reader's Score: 15

5. The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible.

The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a strong evaluation plan in the application narrative and to use that plan, as appropriate, to shape the development of the project from the beginning of the grant period. The Secretary encourages the applicant to design the plan so that it includes (a) benchmarks to monitor progress toward specific project objectives and (b) outcome measures to assess the impact on teaching and learning or other important outcomes for project participants. In its plan, we encourage the applicant to identify the individual and/or organization that has agreed to serve as evaluator for the project and to describe the qualifications of that evaluator. We also encourage the applicant to describe, in its application, the evaluation design, indicating: (1) the types of data that will be collected; (2) when various types of data will be collected; (3) the methods that will be used; (4) the instruments that will be developed and when; (5) how the data will be analyzed; (6) when reports of results and outcomes will be available; and (7) how the applicant will use the information collected through the evaluation to monitor progress of the funded project and to provide accountability information both about success at the initial site and effective strategies for replication in other settings. Applicants are encouraged to devote an appropriate level of resources to project evaluation.

Strengths

The applicant will enlist the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development Program to assist in seeking an outside entity to perform a solid evaluation of the effectiveness of the project, and activities, and expected outcomes. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory has agreed to do the evaluation for Alaska's Department of Education & Early Development. pp e-49

The applicant will use both qualitative and quantitative data sources and the means to collect these data will be identified. pp 50

Weaknesses

The applicant did not provide adequate information on the roles, responsibilities, and qualifications of the evaluators for the project.

The overall evaluation plan was vague and lacked details that would have enhanced the project's accountability.

The applicant states that both qualitative and quantitative data will be used but does not identify the means by which this data will be collected. pp 50

The applicant does not specify in detail the benchmarks to be used or identify who will monitor the progress toward specific project objectives and outcome measures to assess and determine the impact on teaching and learning or other important outcomes for project participants.

The applicant did not detail which resources would be used to enhance the project's evaluation plan.

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Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 04/03/2009 12:58 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: State of Alaska Department of Education & Early Development - Alaska Department of Education Teaching and Learning Support (U282A090004)

Reader #5:

	POINTS POSSIBLE	POINTS SCORED
Summary Comments		
1. Summary Comments	N/A	N/A
Selection Criteria		
1. The contribution the charter schools grant program will make.....	30	15
2. The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA	30	10
3. The number of high-quality charter schools to be created	30	15
4. The quality of the management plan...	30	10
5. The quality of the evaluation plan	30	15
TOTAL	150	65

Technical Review Form

Non Dissemination: 84.282A

Reader #5:

Applicant: State of Alaska Department of Education & Early Development - Alaska Department of Education Teaching and Learning Support (U282A090004)

Summary Comments

1. Summary Comments

The application is complete and demonstrates good opportunities for charter school growth in the state. It would have been helpful to see more information about the existing student/parent/community demand for this growth, in order to determine how feasible and ambitious the state's goals for new charter opening might be. The limited amount of flexibility and autonomy for charter schools is a concern, as are the methods and plans for communicating about these schools and weaving them into the larger educational structure.

Overall the application is technically complete, but it would have been helpful to see more strategic thought incorporated.

Selection Criteria

1. The contribution the charter schools grant program will make in assisting educationally disadvantaged and other students to achieve State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to provide a description of the objectives for the SEA's charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, including steps taken by the SEA to inform teachers, parents, and communities of the SEA's charter school grant program and how the SEA will disseminate best or promising practices of charter schools to each LEA in the State.

Strengths

Alaska charter schools appear to be serving a large number of native populations, which have unique needs and concerns. The opportunity to create high-performing charters in service of these students is a positive.

The program objectives (found earlier in the application - on page 24) appear to be sound. It is especially interesting to see the development of five indicators of financial viability (page 27).

Activities to notify parents, teachers and communities are found later in the application

(page 37).

Weaknesses

Objectives related to academic growth and financial viability could include more explicitly-stated targets and starting points. It is difficult to see how much growth will occur, or how much improvement is needed or how it will be attained in a measurable, meaningful way. Ambitiousness is difficult

The need among native populations is clear, but given the small student population statewide it is not immediately obvious where the charter schools would be placed or how badly they are needed/demanded by those to be served.

More evidence is needed to show that charters provide a substantially different approach to meeting student needs than the existing schools already in place. Given the structure of these schools and their relationship to the LEAs that authorize them, it is not obvious how these schools will provide a substantially different alternative.

It would be helpful for the applicant to include or reference all relevant information in the section in which it is requested, to prevent grant reviewers from having to search.

Reader's Score: 15

2. The degree of flexibility afforded by the SEA to charter schools under the State's charter school law.

Note: The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a description of how the State's law establishes an administrative relationship between the charter school and the authorized public chartering agency and exempts charter schools from significant State or local rules that inhibit the flexible operation and management of public schools.

The Secretary also encourages the applicant to include a description of the degree of autonomy charter schools have achieved over such matters as the charter school's budget, expenditures, daily operation, and personnel in accordance with their State's law.

Strengths

Charter schools are freed from specific district-level regulations and operate as separate non-profit entities.

Weaknesses

There is actually very little freedom in place here. The charter school is tied so closely to the district - even unable to enter into multi-year fiscal obligations without prior express written approval by the district - that no meaningful flexibility or autonomy appears to exist. No contracts may be entered into without approval of the authorizing district; this effectively gives control over many curriculum and programming decisions to the

authorizing district.

The charter school budget is established in the charter contract, which means that it must be negotiated and therefore is not in the complete and autonomous control of the school.

The administrative relationship between the district authorizer and the charter school is not described in such a way as to imply anything other than that the district has a tremendous amount of control over the charter school.

Little freedom appears to exist. No evidence of accountability for failure to perform is provided. It is curious, however, why a number of these schools have chosen to convert back to traditional schools.

Reader's Score: 10

3. The number of high-quality charter schools to be created in the State.

Note: The Secretary considers the SEA's reasonable estimate of the number of new charter schools to be authorized and opened in the State during the three-year period of this grant.

The Secretary also considers how the SEA will inform each charter school in the State about Federal funds the charter school is eligible to receive and ensure that each charter school in the State receives the school's commensurate share of Federal education funds that are allocated by formula each year, including during the first year of operation of the school and during a year in which the school's enrollment expands significantly.

Strengths

The state took time to research the national averages on planning and implementation grants.

Growth plans appear to be realistic based on past experience.

Federal funds questions are answered beginning on page 27 and appear to be consistent with the state's legal structure. Opportunities for verification exist.

Weaknesses

Growth targets do not appear to account for any evidenced levels of demand in the state. It would be helpful to have some stronger sense for parent and community interest in charter schools, or perhaps account for charter schools as part of a broader state plan for educational service delivery.

Growth levels do not appear to be particularly ambitious. Diversity is not realistically going to be ensured given the small number of schools to open.

It is not clear how the federal funds flow through the authorizing district. It would appear that the local district is responsible for equitable distribution to its charter schools,

which could prove problematic. Timing of the arrival of funds is also not addressed.

Reader's Score: 15

4. 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.

Note: In addition to describing the proposed objectives of the SEA charter school grant program and how these objectives will be fulfilled, the Secretary encourages applicants to provide descriptions of the steps to be taken by the SEA to award subgrant funds to eligible applicants desiring to receive these funds, including descriptions of the peer review process the SEA will use to review applications for assistance, the timelines for awarding such funds, and how the SEA will assess the quality of the applications.

Strengths

The management plan is well organized and includes milestones.

Activities appear to be reasonable to accomplish the specified goals.

Weaknesses

No staffing descriptions are provided.

Inadequate methods of communications are described, particularly given the unique communications challenges posed by the enormous geographic size of the state. More is needed in this area.

Academic achievement improvement is an ambitious goal and needs a great deal more attention than two action steps. It would be useful for the state to discuss the approaches it will use, and how will they differ for charter schools than they do for all districts statewide.

There are similar concerns around the discussion of financial sustainability. A more complete and thorough description of how the state will work to encourage and sustain this effort is required. In addition, the five indicators of financial viability (page 27) was omitted from this list. This is an activity that deserves considerably more exploration.

Reader's Score: 10

5. The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible.

The Secretary encourages the applicant to include a strong evaluation plan in the application narrative and to use that plan, as appropriate, to shape the development of the project from the beginning of the grant period. The Secretary encourages the applicant to design the plan so that it includes (a) benchmarks to monitor progress toward specific project objectives and (b) outcome measures to assess the impact on teaching and learning or other important outcomes for project participants. In its plan, we encourage the applicant to identify the individual and/or organization that has agreed to serve as evaluator for the project and to describe the qualifications of that evaluator. We also encourage the applicant to describe, in its application, the evaluation design, indicating: (1) the types of data that will be collected; (2) when various types of data will be collected; (3) the methods that will be used; (4) the instruments that will be developed and when; (5) how the data will be analyzed; (6) when reports of results and outcomes will be available; and (7) how the applicant will use the information collected through the evaluation to monitor progress of the funded project and to provide accountability information both about success at the initial site and effective strategies for replication in other settings. Applicants are encouraged to devote an appropriate level of resources to project evaluation.

Strengths

The use of a logic model is a positive.

The external evaluator appears to be experienced and qualified.

Planning around the collection of data, the types of data to be used, and the timelines for each are provided.

Weaknesses

It would be helpful to include interim benchmarks to determine how progress is made throughout duration of project period.

Growth in all three objectives is not particularly ambitious. On page 49, for example, having fewer than 10% of schools in a financial emergency is not as strong as having zero schools in financial emergency. Fewer than ten percent could be incidental to the life of the schools themselves and is not tied directly back to the impact of the proposed project. Similarly, other measures could be strengthened to make the program evaluation more compelling. The AYP goals stated on page 45 are similarly situated; more ambition relative to these goals and a more clear relationship back to project activities would be useful.

on page 45 the applicant indicates 100% of students will be assessed. This is an input or tool relative to the evaluation itself, not a measurable outcome.

The state's performance is never really addressed according to its measures; only the school performance and outcomes are discussed. While it is important to consider the

outcomes of the grant project in terms of the school success being achieved, it is equally important for the state to assess and evaluate itself and its activities in a rigorous and objective fashion. This is a significant issue relative to the proposed evaluation plan.

Reader's Score: 15

Status: Submitted

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