

While the applicant describes an approach to evaluate these supports through a combination of self-reported surveys and using the state's growth model, self-reports are not a robust or ambiguous approach to measure and evaluate effectiveness. The state proposes to publish annual LEA and school rankings based on these metrics for LEAs to use to guide professional development planning. These data will also be used to help inform CDE's funding decisions for profession development programs.

Total	138	82	85	
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E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs	10	10	10	
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) The applicant explains that the Education Accountability Act of 2009 provide CDE with the statutory authority to intervene directly in its persistently lowest achieving schools and LEAs, including those under improvement or corrective status as defined by ESEA.				
(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	40	30	30	
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	5	5	
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	25	25	
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) The applicant has identified 72 failing schools in its proposal. The school list identifies the sources of data used to categorize each school as low performing. The data points are reading and math proficiencies and graduation rates. The state set ambiguous performance targets for all of its 72 low-performing schools to meet benchmarks for improvement by 2014. The narrative describes efforts started in 2009 to develop a comprehensive approach for intervening in its low-performing schools through partnerships with Mass Insight and Public Impact consulting firms. The applicant explains four ambiguous goals to build its long-term capacity to address struggling schools. The goals focus on helping LEAs identify which of the four required intervention models are appropriate for their local context. The CDE will also provide oversight to ensure quality control of LEA contractors, use financial incentives to increase number of effective educators working in these schools and to support start up of new schools. The applicant provided evidence of its record working with 9 schools through NCLB school improvement efforts. The results for the nine schools were mixed. It is not known whether or not the newly proposed strategies will have more success.				
Total	50	40	40	

F. General

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	10	10	
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	5	5	

(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	5	5	
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)				
The applicant reports a 0.3% increase in total revenues available to the state that were used to support its educational system. The amount of revenue spent on education increased by 5% in 2008-09. The applicant explains a complex formula that provides evidence of a strong policy supporting equitable funding between high-need LEAs and other LEAs, and for high-poverty schools within LEAs.				
(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	39	39	
(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"	8	8	8	
(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes	8	8	8	
(iii) Equitably funding charter schools	8	8	8	
(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities	8	8	8	
(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools	8	7	7	
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)				
<p>The applicant has a strong record of supporting charter schools and other innovative schools. The state has a charter school law that does not prohibit increasing nor does it cap the number of charter schools that can operate in the state.</p> <p>The proposal clearly explains the regulations for charter school authorization. The proposal explains that LEAs are responsible for holding charter schools accountable for performance expectations. The charter school application describes evaluation rubrics used to determine renewal of charter contracts, which includes student achievement and enrollment rate.</p> <p>Its per-pupil funding to charter school students is at the same level as funds provided to traditional public school students with additional funds provided to charters serving high-need students.</p> <p>The state does provide funding for facilities to charter schools and does not impose facility-related requirements that are stricter than those applied to traditional public schools.</p> <p>The state passed the Innovation Schools Act of 2008 that authorizes schools with the flexibility to operate other types of innovative, autonomous public schools. Examples are provided of these types of public schools operating in Denver and Aurora, although alternative schools are not used much in the state.</p>				
(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	3	3	
(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)				
The applicant provides ample evidence of laws and regulations that would appear favorable to educational reform and innovation. The applicant's record of implementing reform programs supported by its regulations and laws that have increased student achievement or graduation rates and narrowed achievement gaps among subgroups is less robust.				
Total	55	52	52	

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
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Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	15	0	0	
Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)				
<p>The applicant does not clearly describe a rigorous course of study in all four STEM subject areas. It does describe strategies for increasing students' access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses in math and science and increasing teachers for these two subject areas. It does not describe a high-quality plan related to technology and engineering subject areas. The state has an impressive list of STEM related industries with expertise in these areas but there are no strategies describing how students will access or interact with technology and engineering experts or curricula. There is no clear plan for providing professional development to teachers in technology and engineering. The STEM in Action funding is minimal (\$600,000) to develop applied STEM content in cooperation with industry experts, museums, universities, research centers and other community partners. STEM content development is only one of six content foci for the content collaboratives, funded through RTTT, to serve as learning communities to engage LEAs in the creation and dissemination of standards-based assessment and instructional materials. There is an additional \$1,000,000 in the budget to expand proven or promising STEM initiatives; however, there is a lack of detail about how recipients will be identified or the criteria to qualify for these incentive awards. There is no clear pathway to ensure that under-represented student groups will have access to the full range of STEM studies and to supports they will need to be successful in rigorous STEM studies.</p>				
Total	15	0	0	

Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		Yes	Yes	
Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)				
<p>The applicant does have a plan to address all four education reform areas. The state has an innovative SLDS system and vision for expanding use of existing SchoolView portal to provide stakeholders with access to resources and data needed to implement statewide reforms. A majority of the state's LEAs have agreed to participation and commit to ensure successful implementing of its goals though only support from local teacher union leaders is minimal. The applicant describes how the state and its participating LEAs will use RTTT funds to support programs and resources aimed at improving student achievement, decreasing achievement gaps, and increasing graduation rates although aspects of the plan are vague including its pathway to fairly evaluating the effectiveness of teachers and principals.</p>				
Total		0	0	

Grand Total	500	319	339	
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E 2 i & ii - During the panel discussion it was made clear that the state is carefully balancing state level guidance and district level autonomy. Regarding school turnaround, the Colorado panelists clarified that a number of the State's persistently lowest achieving schools have, to date, adopted one of the four RttT models and that S.B. 163 ensures the State's right and willingness to intervene. The turnaround process is not delineated in sufficient detail.

Total	50	39	45	
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F. General

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	10	10	
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	5	5	
(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	5	5	
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)				
<p>F 1 i - The percentage of total revenues available to the State that were used to support elementary, secondary and public higher education increased from 47.9 percent in State fiscal year 2008 to 48.2 percent in fiscal year 2009. The amount of revenue spent on education increased 5.2 percent from fiscal year 2008 to fiscal year 2009. In 2000, Colorado passed Constitutional Amendment 23 requiring the State to increase base per-pupil K-12 funding by at least inflation plus one percent annually for 10 years, and by at least inflation thereafter.</p> <p>F 1 ii - In Colorado, average per-pupil funding in high-needs LEAs is \$10,100 compared to \$9,800 to LEAs not considered high-needs. Quality Counts 2010, for example, ranks Colorado ninth in the nation for funding equity using restricted range differences. Additionally, Colorado's School Finance Act (CRS 22-54-101 et seq.), uses a funding formula that adjusts base funding to LEAs according to student and LEA characteristics and LEAs are required to allocate at least 75% of at-risk funding to school, or LEA-wide instructional programs for at-risk students or for staff development associated with teaching at-risk students. This is the only earmark required by the State.</p>				
(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	36	36	
(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"	8	8	8	
(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes	8	5	5	
(iii) Equitably funding charter schools	8	8	8	
(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities	8	8	8	
(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools	8	7	7	
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)				
<p>F i-Colorado's Charter Schools Act ranks fifth in the country according to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. Colorado's Charter Schools Act places no limits on the number of charter schools in the State or on the number of students who may attend charter schools and the law prohibits LEAs from placing moratoria on the number of charter schools in their LEAs. More than 153 charter schools educate approximately 8 % of the State's students. Since 2006 nine charter schools have been closed.</p>				

F ii -The LEA is responsible for holding charter schools accountable for local and State performance expectations. Nine charters were closed over a five year period (F 2 ii Table 1). This may indicate a very high success rate for charters in the state or raises concerns as to the level of oversight and accountability for outcomes. The rating on F2 ii is in response to the lack of a full explanation concerning accountability.

F iii & iv -Charter schools receive 100% of LEA per pupil operating revenues and since 2004 receive additional funds if their at-risk population is at least 40%. There are multiple facilities funding sources including a dedicated annual appropriation, equal access to certain State funds, a dedicated bond enhancement program and an opportunity to participate in local bond issues to support facilities.

F v - The Innovation Schools Act of 2008 encourages LEAs to manage diverse portfolios of schools, and encourages innovation in many aspects of schooling. The Act provides a means for LEAs to authorize one or more schools to implement a package of waivers and also provides for the authorization of innovation zones, consisting of a set of schools with common interests. Bargaining unit members at the school must approve such waivers by a 60% vote. Four Denver Public Schools have received such waivers. While the statutory authority for autonomy exists it is only minimally utilized perhaps suggesting a challenging environment for innovation.

(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	4	4	
(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)				
<p>The State's application notes that Colorado has had an education reform agenda with bi-partisan political support for over a decade. The application provides information suggesting these reform efforts are closely aligned to RttT assurances and provides the framework for the proposed RttT goals, activities and initiatives as set forth in the application. Based on past efforts and unmet needs CDE is being restructured (administratively and fiscally) to align with new strategic priorities detailed throughout the application. Since 2009 and for the next three years, CDE will fund partnerships to reduce high school dropout rates, expand learning options, promote school health and wellness, enhance blended learning opportunities and expand local innovation around early childhood education. Several of these efforts are supported by specific requirements in the Education Accountability Act or other legislation noted in the application. It is too early to have data supporting student progress as a result of these efforts, but research suggests that attention to these underlying needs of children of poverty is essential if academic efforts are to succeed. However there is scant evidence that previous efforts have resulted in progress toward closing the achievement gap.</p> <p>There is no mention of how the state monitors or measures these efforts.</p>				
Total	55	50	50	

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	15	15	15	
Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)				
<p>Threaded throughout the CO proposal are STEM initiatives. Since 2006 Colorado has been among the several states engaged by an National Governors' Association grant to develop a State STEM network. There is a STEM community in the state that has promoted STEM education and provides a framework for continuing attention to this Competitive Preference Priority. Absent is a coherent plan to bring what feels like disparate parts together.</p>				

Total	15	15	15	
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Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		Yes	Yes	

Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Colorado's application comprehensively and coherently addresses the four reform areas. The plan is generally systemic with each area informing and supporting the work in another area. There is an elaborate system of support from CDE, Regional Support Teams and Data Coaches. There is a great deal of local control of the plan which is to be commended. However, two strong caveats: 1) local union leadership does not appear to be on board and there are no plans noted to garner their support and 2) the turnaround activities in particular seem to rely on LEAs determining their own brand of turnaround absent a specific timeline of requirements ensuring they must, under specified conditions, choose from among the four proposed RttT interventions.

Total		0	0	
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Grand Total	500	427	435	
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performance standards that include goals, indicators and specific timelines, establish knowledge management systems to share best practices among low performing schools. In addition to these strategies the State is also considering student involvement in the decision about the intervention strategies and plans.

The State has set goals and approached the strategies for its lowest performing schools with the same ambition it exhibits throughout the application. The State is bringing the full scope of its resources to bear on these schools. The State has laid out a comprehensive and intentional game plan supported by grant funds and experienced resources. However, given the State's history of not closing the achievement gap and not turning around its lowest performance schools over the past five years it is questionable that the State will achieve its goals. This issue is compounded by the large number of schools, the learning curve of internal and external resources and the immense coordination of resources required in a newly restructured organization.

Total	50	33	33	
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F. General

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	8	8	
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	3	3	
(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	5	5	

(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(F)(1)

(i) The percentage of total State revenues available to support elementary, secondary and public higher education increased from 47.9 percent in fiscal year 2008 to 48.2 percent in fiscal year 2009. This reflects a .3 percent increase in revenues which is substantially unchanged from fiscal year 2008 to fiscal year 2009.

(ii)

(a) Equitable funding is the total of State and local funds allocation. The State funding formula sets a base amount per pupil which is then adjusted by factors that take into account each LEA's cost of living, personnel costs and population size to arrive at a Total Per Pupil Funding. Using the Total Per Pupil Funding the State then considers a number of additional factors, such as, the percentage of students in the LEA who are eligible for Federal free and reduced lunch subsidies and students who did not take State assessment because of their English language learning status and on-line enrollment status. The State's share of funding for 2009-2010 is 65 percent. The local share of funding is determined from property tax and vehicle ownership taxes. If the local share is insufficient to fund the LEA's Total Program the State funds fill the gap. LEA's receive additional funding based on six other considerations (e.g. gifted and talented, ELL, Special Education, etc.). Based on the formula used the result is that in Colorado the average per-pupil funding in high needs LEAs is higher than in other LEAs.

(b) The School Finance Act requires LEAs to allocate at least 75% of its at risk funding to school or LEA-wide instructional programs for at risk students or for staff development associated with teaching at risk

students in the LEA. Alternative funding models are currently being tested or piloted to address the issues of at risk funding and the equitable distribution of LEA revenue.

(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	40	40	
(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"	8	8	8	
(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes	8	8	8	
(iii) Equitably funding charter schools	8	8	8	
(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities	8	8	8	
(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools	8	8	8	

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(F)(2)

(i) The State has no caps on the number of charter schools operating in the State and an LEA may not place a moratorium on the number of charter schools in the LEA. LEAs may not limit place limits on enrollment in schools. There are exceptions. A charter school and its authorizer may agree to certain limitations to achieve the school's mission and goals or to stay within the school's physical capacity.

(ii) Laws governing charter schools are in place to govern charter school applications, operations and student performance. An important aspect of charter schools in Colorado is to provide expanded learning experiences for low achieving students. There are three means by which a charter school is governed – an LEA, Colorado Charter School Institute or as an independent charter school. In each case the governing body is responsible for holding its charter school accountable to state and local performance expectations and has jurisdiction over renewals and closings based on its ability to make progress towards student performance goals and fiscal management. Since 2006 a total of 9 charter schools have been closed.

(iii) The State's charter schools receive 100% of LEA per-pupil operating expenses. Since 2004-2005 charter schools that have 40% or more at-risk students receives additional funds. The LEA must direct a proportionate share of Federal and State funds for aid programs to charters schools. Unless otherwise specified the LEA provides the charter school with Federally required educational services.

(iv) The State's charter schools have options and various means to acquire funding to support capital improvements and acquisition of facilities that are similar to those for public schools. This can be accomplished through the local LEA, through the Charter School Capital Facilities Act, The Public School Capital Assistance Fund, or The Public School Capital Assistance Fund. These resources provide charter schools with the opportunity to be involved in local bond issues, to receive cash grants, to be provided funding for lease-purchase agreements and capital construction projects.

(v) The Innovations School Act provides an avenue for LEAs to operate innovative, autonomous schools. The Act also provides for Innovation Zones which allows for a set of schools with common interests. To apply for Innovation School status the school must submit a plan that describes the mission, reason to seek innovation status, proposed innovations and collective bargaining waivers. LEAs are also free to experiment with their own versions of autonomy to pilot best practice models.

(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	3	3	
(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)				
(F)(3)				
<p>The State has created conditions for innovation and reform through a combined emphasis on the State's policies, legislative commissions, a revamping of CDE infrastructure, programs and strategic partnerships and LEA local autonomy and accountability (detailed in Appendix A-8). Based on information provided in the narrative the State is also involved in national reform efforts that provide exposure to best practice reforms. The reform agenda has three goals: to close the achievement gap, decrease high school drop outs and increase student's accumulation of college degrees and certificates. In addition, the CDE partners with foundations to focus on innovations that include expanded learning options, school health and wellness, blended learning and early childhood learning. The CDE innovations provide a foundation for P-20 strategies to make progress in the four reform areas.</p> <p>Even with the State's demonstrated commitment to creating reform conditions, the State's focused effort have had little impact on student achievement. CSAP and NAEP results indicate that the State has not closed the achievement gap among the subgroups and has resulted in level or modest growth with the subgroups. Colorado's average graduation rate in 2009 was 75%. This reflects a 1% increase from 2006. African American, Hispanic and American Indian students scored below the State's average.</p>				
Total	55	51	51	

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	15	0	0	

Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Competitive Priority

Throughout the application the State has referenced its STEM initiatives and has included a description of Colorado STEM Network collaborative and STEM in Action program. What is described in the application is a series of what appear to be STEM focused, yet, unrelated initiatives designed to engage educators, industry, higher education and business to integrate STEM content into the State's reform agenda. The efforts focus on building teacher capacity in STEM content through the STEM Content Collaboratives, using technology (SchoolView) to support STEM professional development, STEM programs for rural areas, training for high school AP teachers and \$1 million in incentive grants to expand STEM efforts aligned with the State's agenda. Colorado has also allocated more than \$2 million of the RTTT grant targeted to STEM initiatives.

Although the State is focused on STEM education and has invested in STEM initiatives, the application lacks a comprehensive and cohesive high quality STEM plan and strategy that addresses the criteria for a rigorous course of study in mathematics, the sciences, technology, and engineering; cooperation with industry experts, museums, universities, research centers, or other STEM capable community partners to prepare and assist teachers in integrating STEM content across grades and disciplines and offering applied learning for students; and preparing more students for advanced study and careers in the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics, including addressing the needs of under represented groups, women and girls in the area of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. In addition, the State did not present a plan to link and integrate STEM initiatives into the reform agenda in a way that includes key goals, key activities including a rationale for the activities, a timeline for implementation, the responsible party or parties, as well as performance measures and supporting evidence of its efforts.

Total	15	0	0	

Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		Yes	Yes	
Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)				
<p>Colorado's plan describes a large scale effort built on a foundation of legislative policy to support the State's Success Factors and drive LEAs to achieve performance outcomes. Colorado's five Success Factors align with the Race to the Top reform agenda by focusing on teacher mastery and the delivery of common standards and assessments, leveraging high quality information to drive increase student performance, access for all student to effective teachers and leaders, turning around persistently low performing schools and building a statewide system of accountability and support to accomplish and sustain goals.</p> <p>Colorado's legislative environment creates the conditions for reform and the legislative action establishes an independent standard for the State to generate commitment to its agenda. This legislative authority which is an underlying aspect of the strategies outlined in the application may give the State confidence in its ability to achieve its goals.</p> <p>Student, teacher and principal success are the focal point of each of the strategies detailed in the application. Each strategy describes goals, activities, timelines and stakeholder responsibility. Each tactic appears to balance improvement with accountability through the intention to monitor LEA progress. Overall, the timelines described use the first two years of the grant for evaluation, to build capacity and define and embed new processes. These efforts to gear up capacity shifts the impact of innovations towards the end of the 4 year continuum. As a result, students, it appears, won't benefit from systemic improvements for 3 or more years.</p> <p>The State has more than 90% of its LEAs committed to the Race to the Top grant criteria. Of these, only 5% of the LEAs have local union leadership signatures on the MOU. In an environment of collective bargaining this brings into question the impact this will have on the State's ability to harness local support to move the agenda forward. The budget outlines how the RTTT grant funds will be used to support each area of the reform agenda.</p> <p>The State's theory of change focuses on the use of data and prescribed processes to hold LEA accountable and the use of financial incentives to change and drive behavior. The plan leverages the disciplines of human capital management, knowledge management, professional development, leadership, accountability, instructional capacity, data driven informed action and assessment literacy to drive reform. Formal structures, at the CDE and regionally, will be put into place to ensure the development and delivery of technology and expert resources. There is a dependence upon the addition of new employees and contracted resources to support and implement the plan. Through the Effective Educator Unit, CDE strategies are designed to embed a comprehensive performance improvement system driven by goals and supported by Regional Training Teams and Content Collaboratives. It is not evident how the CDE, beyond its plan to hold LEAs accountable and monitor LEA progress, will leverage the the aforementioned disciplines and supporting structures to ensure that LEAs build resident capacity to create and sustain systemic change beyond the grant period.</p>				
Total		0	0	
Grand Total	500	364	377	

By September 2010, through an annual school performance review using Colorado's performance framework and Federal AYP measures, the Colorado Department of Education proposes to identify 100% of its lowest performing schools and to prioritize them for turnaround intervention. Colorado defines persistently lowest achieving schools as any Title I school that: (a) is among the lowest achieving and growing 5% of Title I schools whose status is improvement, corrective action, or restructuring; (b) is a high school that has had a graduation rate that is less than 60% over three years; (c) is any secondary school that is eligible for, but does not receive, Title I funds and is among the lowest achieving and growing 5% of secondary schools in the State that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I funds; (d) as well as other appropriate criteria.

(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools

REVIEWER'S EVALUATIVE COMMENTS:

Colorado proposes to turn around 72 failing schools by 2014. Given the state's statutory authority, combined with an ambitious reform plan, this reviewer is convinced that the State is positioned to accomplish this goal. It is noteworthy that beginning in 2009, Colorado was one of five states to begin working with Mass Insight. (*Mass Insight is described in the application as a collaborative three year, multi-million dollar public-private partnership to create scalable and sustainable strategies for turning around clusters of the lowest achieving schools.*) Colorado will be one of six partner states—along with Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts and New York—to participate in this partnership. Additionally, Colorado has directly engaged Public Impact, a national education policy and management consulting firm. Public Impact consults nationally with leading organizations to create policies and approaches that give schools the freedom, motivation, and capacity to develop a comprehensive approach for intervening in the lowest achieving schools. Additionally, in 2009, the CDE established within the agency a Turnaround and Intervention Unit and dedicated resources focused specifically on the effective and efficient execution of State turnaround strategies. By December 2011, the CDE Turnaround and Intervention Unit will be expanded in order to build internal expertise in designing and implementing turnaround strategies. The Turnaround and Intervention Unit will design and provide tools and processes to help LEAs determine which type of reform intervention model is most appropriate in each identified persistently low-achieving school. For those LEAs that choose to work with an external contractor in one or more schools, the CDE Turnaround and Intervention Unit will provide oversight and recommendations regarding the development of contracts between LEAs and external providers including key performance conditions and expectations regarding achievement goals, autonomy and financial responsibilities. *NB, In this reviewer's judgment, this is perhaps the most substantive, well-argued component of Colorado's RTTT plan.*

Total	50	50	50	
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F. General

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	10	10	
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	5	5	
(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	5	5	
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)				
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority				
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education				

REVIEWER'S EVALUATIVE COMMENTS:

The percentage of total revenues available to the Colorado that were used to support elementary, secondary and public higher education increased from 47.9 percent in State fiscal year 2008 to 48.2 percent in fiscal year 2009. The amount of revenue spent on education increased 5.2 percent from fiscal year 2008 to fiscal year 2009. Colorado notes in its application that, as in other states, fiscal year 2009 was an extremely difficult year for Colorado's economy and the State's revenues. The State's sales tax collections were down 9.1 percent over fiscal year 2008 and the State's individual income tax collections, which fund the State Education Fund, were down 12.9 percent. In 2000, voters in Colorado passed Constitutional Amendment 23 in response to the decline in K-12 education spending during the 1990s. Amendment 23 requires the State to increase base per-pupil K-12 funding by at least inflation plus one percent annually for 10 years, and by at least inflation thereafter.

(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools

REVIEWER'S EVALUATIVE COMMENTS:

Colorado's average per-pupil funding in high-needs LEAs is higher than in other LEAs. In 2008-2009, per-pupil State and local funding for high-needs LEAs was more than \$10,100 compared to \$9,800 for LEAs not considered high-needs. In its application, Colorado states that independent organizations have rated Colorado's school funding policies as equitable relative to most other states. Quality Counts 2010, for example, ranks Colorado ninth in the nation for funding equity using restricted range differences. The state's school funding equity derives from Colorado's School Finance Act (CRS 22-54-101 et seq.), which uses a funding formula that adjusts base funding to LEAs according to student and LEA characteristics. Each LEA receives a base amount per pupil set by the state legislature, and increased by Amendment 23, which is then adjusted by factors that take into account each LEA's cost-of-living, personnel costs and population size to arrive at Total Per-Pupil Funding. The formula also calls for additional funds for the percentage of students in the LEA who are eligible for Federal free-lunch subsidies and students who did not take State assessments because of their English language learning status. Colorado's School Finance Act requires each LEA to allocate at least 75% of its at-risk funding to school or LEA-wide instructional programs for at-risk students or for staff development associated with teaching at-risk students in the LEA. This is the only earmark required by the State. It emphasizes Colorado's priority on equitable distribution of fiscal resources for high-poverty students and schools.

(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	37	37	
(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"	8	8	8	
(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes	8	8	8	
(iii) Equitably funding charter schools	8	8	8	
(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities	8	8	8	
(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools	8	5	5	

(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools

(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"

REVIEWER'S EVALUATIVE COMMENTS:

Colorado's Charter Schools Act places no limits on the number of charter schools in the State or the number of students who may attend charter schools. The Act expressly prohibits LEAs from placing moratoria on the number of charter schools in their LEAs and states that authorizers may not place limits on enrollment at a specific school. The exception is that a charter school and its authorizer may agree upon limits that are necessary to achieve the school's mission and goals or to stay within the school's physical capacity. As a result, 100% of the schools in Colorado may hypothetically be charter schools, and 100% of Colorado's students may attend charter schools.

(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes

REVIEWER'S EVALUATIVE COMMENTS:

Any person or entity may apply to open a charter school in Colorado. The application itself must include a mission statement, goals and objectives with respect to student performance; evidence of adequate public support; a research-based educational program; the process by which the school will collect and analyze longitudinal student data; procedures for corrective action in the event student learning goals are not met; a proposed budget and other evidence that the plan for the school is financially sound; a description of proposed governance and operation; the relationship between the charter school and its employees; employment policies; a transportation plan; an enrollment policy; and a dispute resolution process. Colorado's LEAs are responsible for holding their charter schools accountable for local and State performance expectations consistent with Colorado's Education Accountability Act of 2009 and for reporting information on its charter schools to the State. Charter schools may apply for renewal of their contracts and the renewal application must contain information about the progress of the school relative to its goals and objectives with respect to student and operational performance. The LEA may revoke or non-renew a contract with a charter school if the school committed a material violation of its contract; failed to make reasonable progress towards its goals for student performance; failed to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management; or violated any provision of applicable law. There are currently 130 charter schools in Colorado operating under a charter with an LEA.

(iii) Equitably funding charter schools

REVIEWER'S EVALUATIVE COMMENTS:

Under Colorado's School Finance Act, charter schools receive 100% of LEA per pupil operating revenues. The authorizer may choose to retain up to 5% of these funds for the charter school's share of central administrative overhead costs. Any charter school that (1) began operations in the 2004-2005 school year or after, (2) is located within an LEA that has been given exclusive chartering authority, and (3) has a student population consisting 40% or more of at-risk students receives additional funds through the state's alternate at-risk funding calculation. This formula would appear to give charter schools a proportionate share of the at-risk funds provided to the LEA through the School Finance Act.

(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities

REVIEWER'S EVALUATIVE COMMENTS:

The Colorado Charter School Capital Facilities Financing Act provides that charter school capital needs must be considered for inclusion on LEA ballot issues using the same priority assessment used for other LEA schools. The Public School Capital Assistance Fund, established in 2008, uses monies from income derived from State school land trusts to provide cash grants and enter into lease-purchase agreements for capital construction purposes.

(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools

REVIEWER'S EVALUATIVE COMMENTS:

Colorado's Innovation Schools Act of 2008 gives schools increased flexibility to meet the changing needs of students. It also encourages LEAs to manage diverse portfolios of schools that can meet different needs and to encourage innovation in areas such as curriculum, educational programs, provision of services, teacher recruitment, hiring, compensation, governance and school management practices. Any Colorado public school may apply to its LEA for Innovation School status and groups of schools may apply for Innovation Zone status. The innovation plan must include the school's mission, reason for seeking innovation school status, proposed innovations and State, LEA and collective bargaining agreement waivers required to implement the innovations. A majority of the teachers, administrators and members of the school accountability committee at the school must indicate support for the application. It is within the discretion of the LEA to approve the application, which results in a waiver of the requested LEA policies. The LEA then applies to the Colorado State Board of Education for the waivers of State law and regulations on behalf of the school which the State board is required to grant unless it determines that the waivers are likely to result in a decrease in student achievement or are not fiscally feasible. To date, the innovative, autonomous public school option has been sparsely used in Colorado. In 2009, Denver Public Schools (DPS) presented 3 schools to the State Board of Education (SBE) for its approval to receive innovation school status. All three were approved. A fourth DPS school was approved in 2010 and at least two other Colorado schools are scheduled to be presented to the SBE later in 2010. Close monitoring of the use of the law would contribute to assurances that it is indeed an effective option for LEAs to utilize.

(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	5	5	
(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)				
(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions				
REVIEWER'S EVALUATIVE COMMENTS:				
Colorado's key education reforms over the past decade are closely aligned with the RTTT selection criteria and encompass a P-20 alignment strategy. The state's Great Teachers and Leaders Bill (SB 191), the Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K), the Education Accountability Act of 2009, the Educator Identifier Act, the Innovation Schools Act, the establishment of the School Leadership Academy, the Colorado Growth Model and other critical advancements are central to Colorado's reform plan and provide substantial examples of the state's commitments to educational reform.				
Total	55	52	52	

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	15	15	15	
Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)				
REVIEWER'S EVALUATIVE COMMENTS:				
In this reviewer's judgment, Colorado has responded appropriately to the conditions defined in the Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM. The State develops its response to the criterion in relation to an existing statewide STEM initiative by systematically adding elements				

embedded in its RTTT reforms. These relate directly to each of the priorities described in the criterion.

Total	15	15	15	
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Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		Yes	Yes	
Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform It is the judgment of this reviewer that Colorado meets and substantially exceeds the specifications defined for the RTTT Absolute Priority criterion with the singular exception of the failure to gain the endorsement of the CEA. Having said this, it is essential to add that Colorado's RTTT proposal, taken in its entirety, is substantive, persuasive, powerful and far-reaching in its potential consequences for improving student achievement throughout the state. The plan is carefully articulated, fundamentally bold, and replete with the kind of cutting edge thinking sought by the RTTT initiative.				
Total		0	0	

Grand Total	500	445	455	
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F. General

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	10	10	
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	5	5	
(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	5	5	
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)				
<p>Colorado has demonstrated a commitment to education funding with increased appropriations to education in the General Fund, as well as utilized SFSF funds for furthering educational reforms in Colorado.</p> <p>In 2000, Colorado voters demonstrated their support for education funding by passing Constitutional Amendment 23 to increase base per-pupil funding, and in 2008, the largest investment to date in school facilities was enacted with the Building Excellent Schools Today Act. Funds are equitably distributed, utilizing a formula that results in average per-pupil funding for high-needs LEAs to be higher than other LEAs. In addition, Colorado provides equitable funding for charter and innovation schools.</p> <p>The percentage of total revenues available to the State that were used to support elementary, secondary and public higher education increased from 47.9 percent in State fiscal year 2008 to 48.2 percent in fiscal year 2009. The amount of revenue spent on education increased 5.2 percent from fiscal year 2008 to fiscal year 2009.</p> <p>In Colorado, according to the application, average per-pupil funding in high-needs LEAs is higher than in other LEAs. In 2008-2009, per-pupil State and local funding for high-needs LEAs was more than \$10,100 compared to \$9,800 to LEAs not considered high-needs. Quality Counts 2010 ranks Colorado ninth in the nation for funding equity using restricted range differences. This equity derives from Colorado's School Finance Act which uses a funding formula that adjusts base funding to LEAs according to student and LEA characteristics. Each LEA receives a base amount per pupil, set by the State legislature, and increased by Amendment 23, which is then adjusted by factors that take into account each LEA's cost-of-living, personnel costs and population size, to arrive at Total Per-Pupil Funding. Next, the formula calls for additional funds for the percentage of students in the LEA who are eligible for Federal free-lunch subsidies and students who did not take State assessments because of their English language learning status. An online student, regardless of LEA, is funded at a set amount.</p> <p>The State's School Finance Act requires each LEA to allocate at least 75% of its at-risk funding to school- or LEA-wide instructional programs for at-risk students or for staff development associated with teaching at-risk students in the LEA. The legislature recently passed House Bill 10-1183, which created the Alternative School Funding Models Pilot Program to encourage school districts and charter schools to develop alternative models for distributing funding within an LEA. The bill specifically asks the applicants to this program to address the challenges of at-risk funding, and further expresses the goal as identifying the most equitable distribution of LEA revenue.</p> <p>Colorado's actions demonstrate a commitment to increasing education funding, to distributing that funding equitably across high-needs schools, districts and LEAs, and to equitably fund charter schools and innovation schools.</p>				
(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	40	40	
(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"	8	8	8	
(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes	8	8	8	
(iii) Equitably funding charter schools	8	8	8	
(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities	8	8	8	

(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools	8	8	8	
<p>(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)</p> <p>One of the first states to adopt charter school legislation in 1992, Colorado has improved upon the strength of this legislation. In Colorado’s application it is noted that the Charter Schools Act ranks fifth in the country according to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools’ recent report <i>How State Charter Laws Rank Against The New Model Public Charter School Law</i>. This report assesses the strengths of each State’s charter school law against the 20 essential components of a strong law, which is contained in the new model public charter school law released by the Alliance in June 2009. Colorado has passed legislation to permit any school to gain “innovation school status,” providing charter-like autonomy.</p> <p>Colorado’s Charter Schools Act places no limits on the number of charter schools in the State or the number of students who may attend charter schools. The Act prohibits LEAs from placing moratoria on the number of charter schools in their LEAs, and provides that authorizers may not place limits on enrollment at a specific school. The exception is that a charter school and its authorizer may agree upon limits that are necessary to achieve the school’s mission and goals or to stay within the school’s physical capacity. As a result, 100% of the schools in Colorado may be charter schools, and 100% of Colorado’s students may attend charter schools.</p> <p>Under the Charter Schools Act, a charter school may be authorized by an LEA, by the Colorado Charter School Institute (CSI) or by the State as a result of a turnaround process.</p> <p>Until recently, authorizing practices for charter schools were left largely to local development efforts. In the last few years, several important efforts have improved the quality and ease of authorizing and overseeing charter schools. In 2004, a partnership between the CDE, the Colorado League of Charter Schools, LEA charter school liaison, and CSI resulted in a recommended common charter school application and rubric. Improvements in authorizing practices have led to fewer appeals to the State Board of Education from would-be charter schools from the denial of charter applications. It was noted in Colorado's application that Colorado was one of six states selected by the National Governors Association (NGA) to receive a grant to improve state support for quality authorizing practices and its work in that effort has been nationally recognized.</p> <p>The CDE has told LEAs that they must equitably share funding obtained from Race to the Top with the charter schools they authorize. Under the School Finance Act, charter schools in Colorado receive 100% of LEA per-pupil operating revenues. The authorizer may choose to retain up to 5% of these funds for the charter school’s share of central administrative overhead costs and must provide an accounting for all such funds withheld. The authorizer must refund any of these funds not actually used for central overhead costs. (For LEAs with fewer than 500 students, the LEA may retain up to 15% for overhead costs.) Any charter school that began operations in the 2004-2005 school year or after, is located within an LEA that has been given exclusive chartering authority <i>and</i> has a student population consisting 40% or more of at-risk students receives additional funds through the alternate at-risk funding calculation. This formula gives charter schools a proportionate share of the at-risk funds provided to the LEA through the School Finance Act.</p> <p>Costs for facilities continue to represent a significant cost to charter schools. Charter schools in Colorado have access to a variety of potential funding sources for their facilities, including a dedicated annual appropriation, equal access to certain State funds, a dedicated bond enhancement program and an opportunity to participate in local bond issues to support facilities.</p> <p>The Innovation Schools Act of 2008 was passed to give schools increased flexibility to meet the changing needs of students. The Act sets out provisions for LEAs to manage diverse portfolios of schools that can meet different needs, and to encourage innovation in areas such as curriculum, educational programs, provision of services, teacher recruitment, hiring, compensation, governance and school management practices. The Innovation Schools Act provides a means for LEAs to authorize one or more schools to implement a package of waivers. These waivers are from LEA policy, State laws and regulations and collective bargaining agreement provisions, if applicable. In addition to authorizing individual innovation schools, the act also provides for the authorization of innovation zones, consisting of a set of schools with common interests.</p> <p>One demonstration of Colorado’s charter and innovation school success is demonstrated by steadily increasing enrollment, which is now at approximately 8% of the total student population. Colorado supports these schools through legislation, equitable funding, and by improving the quality and ease of authorizing.</p>				
(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	5	5	

(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Colorado's education reforms are closely aligned with the Race to the Top selection criteria and encompass a P-20 alignment strategy. The Great Teachers and Leaders Bill (SB 191), Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K), the Education Accountability Act of 2009, the Educator Identifier Act, the Innovation Schools Act, the establishment of the School Leadership Academy, the Colorado Growth Model and other critical advancements are critical pieces to Colorado's reform plan described throughout this Race to the Top proposal.

Colorado supports charter and innovation schools, and reforms aimed at closing the achievement gap, increasing school and post secondary and workforce readiness, and increasing the high school graduation rate. The State's laws, regulations and other policies provide support for possible improvement in these areas. Student outcomes have shown improvement over time, and with Race to the Top funding, Colorado could accelerate the increase in student achievement, growth and readiness, to help prepare all of Colorado's students to succeed in post secondary education and the skilled workforce by the time of graduation.

Total	55	55	55	
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Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	15	15	15	

Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Colorado's RTTT proposal integrates STEM initiatives throughout the Selection Criteria. These initiatives may help Colorado further its agenda to increase capacity, replicate best practices, and increase representation of minorities and girls in STEM-related careers. Over \$2 million of Colorado's budget will be invested in a variety of initiatives discussed throughout the application that advance this agenda including: aligning STEM instructional content with Colorado's standards and creating STEM content learning communities, Increasing the social network capacity of the existing Colorado STEM Network and its regional STEM Centers, previously created through an NGA grant, Developing a STEM in Action multimedia outlet that links informal science education organizations, universities, and business and industry scientists and research to K-12 schools through SchoolView.

Total	15	15	15	
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Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1	Tier 2	Init
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		Yes	Yes	

Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Important reforms included in Colorado's Race to the Top application are codified in State law. Some new policies will have statewide impact and will remain in place for districts that sign on to Race to the Top and for those who don't. The proposed reforms will be in place statewide after the Race to the Top funding ends and the MOU's are no longer valid. Investments made as a result of a Race to the Top award will facilitate reforms that will be

implemented. Fundamental changes to the Colorado education system as detailed in the proposal are expressions of the principles of Race to the Top.

Total		0	0	
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Grand Total	500	455	465	
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