

E. Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

	Available	Tier 1
(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs	10	10
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
Recent legislation provides for the authority for intervening in low performing schools and districts.		
(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	40	11
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	5
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	6
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
E2(i) The narrative and appendices provide a clear definition of low performing schools, and a list of schools that meet the definition is provided in appendix E3.		
E2(ii) The state provides a narrative that describes the recommendations of its Underperforming Schools Task Force, and delineates which of that group's recommendations were and were not fulfilled in the recent Children First Act. The narrative states that MS "will determine what works best" to turn around low performing schools, though there are no activities or timelines to support this learning process or the implementation of the findings of that learning process. Appendix E2 provides plans, but it is not clear what year these plans were created, and they are not reflected in the implementation plans of the transformation goals. The narrative refers to an evidence chart for this criterion that is incomplete. The narrative does not describe how conversion charters and New Start schools, which would otherwise seem to be a primary strategy for the turnaround of low performing schools.		
Total	50	21

F. General

	Available	Tier 1
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	6
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	5
(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	1
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
F1(i) Revenues allocated to education increased from 60.9% to 62.6% from 08 to 09.		
F1(ii) MS has a program to provide extra funding to low income school districts, but provides no analysis of funding per child in its low income-serving districts vs high income serving districts. It is possible that the Mississippi Adequate Education Program reduces the gap between well-funded districts and poorly-funded districts without closing it. The narrative also does not provide analysis regarding funding among schools serving differing communities. The reviewer has little basis for judging whether MS equitably funds its schools or districts, but a point is awarded because the MAEP program indicates awareness of the issue and effort to address it.		
(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	6

(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"	8	1
(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes	8	2
(iii) Equitably funding charter schools	8	2
(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities	8	1
(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools	8	0

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

MS had a charter law that did not function: no charter schools currently exist in the state. The recently passed law allows for persistently low performing schools to be converted to charter status, but only twelve charter schools can be authorized over six years beginning in 2013.

F2i) The scope of this law is limited only to conversions of low performing schools, and only a few of those. The law does not promote the spread of high performing charters.

F2ii) The application requests submission of evidence for this criterion, including a description of the state's approach to charter school accountability and authorization. A brief description is provided in the narrative and the law is included in the appendices, but the law defers the specification of accountability provisions to the board of education, which apparently has not yet acted on this subject.

F2iii) Since the law is new, there is no basis for judging how much funding charter schools will actually receive. Though the law specifies that the schools will receive equitable funding, including the regular state per pupil allocation, it does not mention local per pupil expenditures, which may be a sizeable component of school funding.

F2iv) The charters will be conversions, so they will presumably be located in existing school buildings. However, the law does not address how the charters will access capital funds such as bonds or levies, nor does it discuss building maintenance and whose responsibility that will be.

F2v) The narrative includes a short paragraph about the state "moving toward" the concept of innovation schools led by teachers, but it is not clear from the text if this concept WILL exist or simply MIGHT exist, and there is no funding allocated towards this in the budget and no activities for this idea in the plan. The state touts its existing innovative schools, but these are not autonomous as required in the criterion.

(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	6	1
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(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Healthy schools initiative will support improvements in student health, a key precondition to learning.

Total	55	13
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Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

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

Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

The Center for Professional Futures proposal is impressive, but the narrative overall was scant in its emphasis on STEM teaching and learning. Transformation goal #3 addresses STEM, but the activities listed under this goal are not referenced in the state's proposal, which implies that they are not central RTTT activities for MS.

Total	15	0
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Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

Available Tier 1

Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform	No
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Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Mississippi appears to embrace and commit to major changes in its education system. The teacher/leader evaluation and development system and the student/teacher/school data system as proposed are especially impressive. Buy-in from LEAs is extensive. The state seems to feel urgency to rapidly improve its education outcomes and inequities.

However, the proposal lacks "coherence" as required in this absolute priority. The proposal narrative and the implementation plan and budget do not align well, which makes it difficult to judge whether the proposed activities will take place and on what time scale. The implementation plan, furthermore, contains no benchmarks as required by the application and mainly includes activities only for the first year of the requested grant.

Total		0
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Grand Total	500	258
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The state has a history of low expectations for school performance (8 schools identified as needing intervention in their prior identification system; with SIG fund criteria, 200 are considered persistently low performing.) They applied some interventions to these schools, but either make no effort in the application to learn from these efforts, or they simply aren't able to see any positive changes or know what might have caused them. Either way, they do not have a record they can point to of turning around low performing schools. Their plan seems to be to use the recommendations of the taskforce, but there is a leap between the recommendations, and the selection of an appropriate turnaround response and the work it will take to see success. For this section, they are awarded 3 points.

Total	50	18
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F. General

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

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

(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education

In 2008, MS appropriated 60.92% of all general funds for education. In 2009, MS appropriated 62.59% of all general funds for education, for a net percentage increase of funding. Full points are awarded in this section. 5.

(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools

- between high need LEAS and other LEAS

The Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP) ensures that each school district can fund what it costs to adequately educate a child. The minimum guaranteed funding per pupil is known as the base student cost. In a further provision of the MAEP, Mississippi districts are given additional funding based on the number of at-risk students (those qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch.) The application does not list any actual figures as evidence of how this formula brings about equitable funding, however the reviewer will assume this is the case.

- within LEAS between high-poverty schools and other schools

There is not a specific state policy that addresses equitable funding at the school level, though school boards are empowered to use the MAEP to differentiate salaries in high-needs schools and to use the at-risk component of MAEP to target those schools within the LEA that have higher populations of at risk students.

This section is awarded 3 points.

(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	10
(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"	8	0
(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes	8	2
(iii) Equitably funding charter schools	8	4
(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities	8	2
(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools	8	2

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

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

MS passed a new law in 2010, the New Start School Program and Conversion Charter School Act of 2010, to "provide a new process for transforming failing state public schools into New Start Schools and Conversion Charter Schools." This is an incredibly weak law—no new charter schools may open, only conversion schools. Where before 6 conversion charter schools was the limit, they are now allowing 12. The state is awarded 0 points for this section.

(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes

The state has a provision that a set of academic or vocational, or both, performance-based objectives and student achievement-based objectives are required of their future conversion schools. In addition, the schools must meet the 2009 Accountability Model and NCLB standards of student achievement. These are very basic guidelines, empty on important details and with no connection to important elements of the criteria—approval process, closure based on performance, priority to schools that would serve high needs students. For this section, low points are awarded, 2.

(iii) Equitably funding charter schools

Public schools converted to conversion charter school status would receive equitable state and federal funding compared to traditional public schools. This was included in the law. The state gets 4 points for this section because there is no reference to equitable local funding.

(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities, funding for facilities, assistance with facilities acquisition, access, or the ability to share in bonds and mill levies.

According to the law, the state shall not impose any school facility-related requirements on conversion charter schools which are more restrictive than those applied to traditional public schools. The application does not address whether MS provides funding for facilities, assistance with facilities acquisition, access, or the ability to share in bonds and mill levies. Low points are awarded to this section, 2.

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

LEAs are given operational flexibility under the LEA School Board and Superintendent with the

exception of those that are under the Office of School Improvement, Oversight, and Recovery. LEAs may structure the schools within their jurisdiction in ways that meet the needs of the community and students. They cite 6 magnet schools in the Clarksdale Municipal School District. They do not include the minimum evidence as requested in the criterion to describe how the State enables LEAs to operate innovative, autonomous public schools. For this section, they are awarded 2 points.

(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	1
(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
Governor Barbour's administration has passed several iterations of education reform laws, as well as legislation to promote children's health. The application lists a selection of offices and programs that have been established, but makes no connection to their having an effect on increasing student achievement or graduation rates, narrowing achievement gaps, or resulting in other important outcomes as requested in the criterion. For this section, 1 point is awarded.		
Total	55	19

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	15	0
Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
STEM is virtually unmentioned throughout this application. There may have been a misinterpretation on where to emphasize this priority, but it reads purely as an add on, and a minimal one at that.		
Total	15	0

Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		No
Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
As mentioned at the start, this application comes across as a draft in need of much more review in order to better describe where MS is, and where they want to go, to develop a coherent strategy to get there and to explain why they think their plans will work. There are areas where MS has made some strong headway, but those areas are disconnected, and other areas are not at all well positioned for reform.		
Total		0

Grand Total	500	257
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- (i) The State provided its method for identifying its persistently lowest-achieving school and provided a list of these schools.
- (ii) The State's plan for turning around its lowest-achieving schools lacked clarity and cohesiveness. The criterion specifically asks the State to detail which of the four intervention models the it will be using to turn around low performing schools. Information could not be located that describes the models the State intends to use. The applicant describes a series of recommendations from the Mississippi Task Force on Underperforming Schools and Districts, but does not indicate which recommendations have been formally approved by the MDE, the State Board of Education, or the legislature. It appears that the State's role is largely one of enforcement and not one of support or capacity building. The State did not provide information on lessons learned on models it has used in the past. The State did not indicate if it would support the firing of principals or other staff required in several of the turnaround models. The State did not address the issue of hiring or developing leaders for the specific mission of turning around the lowest-achieving schools in the state. Similarly, it is not clear what supports the State would provide to LEAs in aiding them in turning around low-performing schools. The State has budgeted \$1.1 million for 50 leaders to attend trainings based on models developed by the National Institute for School Leadership and University of Virginia but the narrative does not discuss how these leaders will be selected for and assigned to turnaround schools.

Total	50	18
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F. General

	Available	Tier 1
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	8
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	5
(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	3
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
(i) The percentage of revenues available to the State used to support elementary, secondary, and public higher education increased from 60.9% in FY2008 to 62.6% in FY2009.		
(ii) Although the State's funding formula supports adequacy rather than equity between high and low poverty districts, district's receive supplemental funding based on the number of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch. Points were withheld because the State does not directly ensure funding equities at the school level.		
(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	20
(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"	8	1
(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes	8	1
(iii) Equitably funding charter schools	8	8
(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities	8	6
(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools	8	4
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
(i) As the application notes, Mississippi historically has not been supportive of charter schools; furthermore,		

Technical Review

current laws significantly restrict the creation and operation of charter schools. The current charter school legislation, passed in 2010, only allows chronically underperforming public schools to be converted to charter schools; no other types of charter schools may be authorized by the State or local authorizing bodies. At least 50% of the families must vote to convert an underperforming school to charter status. The legislation caps the number of conversion charters at 12 over a six-year period and allows for no more than three schools to operate in each of the State's four congressional districts. The legislation states that charter schools cannot be operating until July 1, 2013. While the State has taken a first step in reforming its charter school laws, the current cap and restrictions severely inhibit charter school growth.

(ii) While the recently passed charter school legislation requires schools converted to charter status to set performance-based and student-achievement based objectives, a clear and cohesive plan on how schools would be held accountable for student outcomes could not be located. It is not clear how schools will be monitored for student performance or if they can be closed if the schools do not meet performance targets. Because there are no charter schools currently in operation under this new legislation, there is no historical evidence on how the State has held charter schools accountable for student outcomes.

(iii) Conversion charter schools are treated the same as any other school within the districts in which they operate in terms of school funding.

(iv) While the narrative indicates that charters have equal access to facilities, the legislation lacks clarity on if districts include charters in bond levies or other methods of accessing capital. It also is not clear if districts must pay for maintaining facilities.

(v) While the State has enabled LEAs to operate innovative public schools, cannot be determined from the evidence if these schools are autonomous. For example, the application discusses an open-enrollment program in Clarksdale Municipal School District that allows students to enroll in one of six magnet schools. It is not clear if these schools can set their own policies, develop curriculum, or have control over staffing or budgets independent of the district.

	5	4
(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions		

(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
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Throughout its application, Mississippi detailed its commitment to reform aimed at improving student outcome through legislative action including:

- The Education Reform Act of 2006 which supported reforms
- The MS Dropout Prevention Plan and "On the Bus" campaign designed to provide supports to youth at-risk of dropping out and to raise awareness of the dropout prevention program;
- The Children First Act of 2009 which allows for the placement of underperforming school districts in conservatorship;
- The Health Student Act focusing on reducing childhood obesity; and
- The New Start School Program and Charter School Conversion Act of 2010 which provide a process for turning around low-performing schools.

Total	55	32
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Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

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

Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Mississippi has met the criteria for the competitive priority addressing STEM. Mississippi demonstrated a strong commitment from many sectors of the STEM community, including significant financial support from

Technical Review

the Toyota Corporation which has funded an endowment to enhance the State's educational system. Members of the STEM community have collaborated to create the Center for Professional Futures (CPF) to offer a rigorous a STEM-centered course of study for students in three counties. Faculty from the State's colleges and community colleges will form an adjunct teaching corps for the CPF. Instruction will be provided in such fields as pre-engineering and architecture, computer graphics and animation, and health science technology. The CPF will target groups that have been underrepresented in STEM fields including those from low-income backgrounds, minorities, and females.

Total	15	15
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Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		No

Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Mississippi has demonstrated that it is committed to implementing the RTT reforms and has received the participation of 93% of its districts in supporting the State's RTT reform agenda. The State has provided evidence that it will restructure the educational system beginning at the SEA and stimulate change at the local level through the existing RESA structure. However, throughout the application, the State lacked clarity and specificity in how it would implement its RTT program. The State failed to set benchmarks in several key areas making it impossible to determine if the State would be able to scale-up and implement the reforms within the grant period. The application was particularly disappointing in its lack of a cohesive approach to turning around the State's persistently lowest-performing schools. The State's plan lacked a commitment to the children in these schools who could most benefit from the intensive reforms required under RTT.

The application falls short in setting ambitious goals for improving student outcomes and aggressively implementing reforms in each of the four RTT areas with a high-quality plan. Therefore, the State does not meet the absolute priority for this competition.

Total		0
Grand Total	500	269

(E)(1) Intervening in the lowest-achieving schools and LEAs	10	10
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) (E)(1) The State can legally intervene directly in failing LEAs and schools.		
(E)(2) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools	40	13
(i) Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools	5	5
(ii) Turning around the persistently lowest-achieving schools	35	8
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) (E)(2)(i) The State employs a logical, balanced approach for identifying persistently lowest-achieving schools. (E)(2)(ii) This section discusses: (1) recommendations from the Mississippi Task Force on Underperforming Schools and Districts (established in 2008); (2) technical assistance provided by the Office of Student Achievement and Growth; and (3) technical assistance provided by the Federal Program Office. However, the discussion of the use of the four RTTT intervention models for turning around underperforming schools is limited. Elsewhere in the application, the State describes the State's New Start School Program and Conversion Charter School Act of 2010 which creates a new process for transforming some failing state public schools into "New Start Schools" and "Conversion Charter Schools." While it appears these initiatives could aid efforts to turn around the lowest-achieving schools, they are not integrated into this section. Hence, the section lacks clarity and coherence.		
Total	50	23

F. General

	Available	Tier 1
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	9
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	5
(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	4
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) (F)(1)(i) K-12 funding as a percent of total state general fund revenue rose by over 1 percentage point from FY2008 to FY2009. (F)(1)(ii) State funding policy aims to make equitable the distribution of education funding among LEAs, but does not directly address funding equity as it relates to individual schools. The narrative notes, however, that LEA school boards have the authority to allocate district funding equitably among schools.		
(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	19

(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"	8	1
(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes	8	2
(iii) Equitably funding charter schools	8	8
(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities	8	6
(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools	8	2
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
(F)(2)(i)		
"The State Board of Education ... may approve up to twelve (12) conversion charter schools during a period of six (6) years, ... which such conversion charter schools shall not begin operations before July 1, 2013," which is < 5% of the State's 912 schools.		
(F)(2)(ii)		
The new Conversion Charter School law details a set of logical requirements for charter school creation, approval, funding, evaluation, and reauthorization. Unfortunately, the cap and time table of the law render the presence of charter schools nominal.		
(F)(2)(iii)		
Statutorily, conversion charter schools would receive fair and equitable funding.		
(F)(2)(iv)		
All charter schools in the State would be conversion charters, so they would take over extant facilities.		
(F)(2)(v)		
The narrative notes that LEAs may structure their schools "in ways that meet the needs of the community and students." Examples offered include magnet schools and the concept of effective teachers running schools. While innovative, it is not clear that such schools are also autonomous (e. g., can select and replace staff or control their budgets).		
(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	3
(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
(F)(3)		
Effective education presumes certain critical prerequisites such as safety and good health. In this section, notably the application provides a list of other programs that aid the State's educational programs, with a focus on the Office of Healthy Schools.		
Total	55	31

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	15	0
Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
Priority 2: STEM		

The narrative describes an incomplete plan for STEM. The State embraces a plan developed by philanthropists for a Center for Professional Futures (CPF) (funded by Toyota), which emphasizes STEM. Based on the experience of CPF, which will operate in 3 counties and 8 LEAs, the State would expand the concept to its other approximately 80 counties. However, no plan (e. g., time table, budget) is delineated for this expansion.

Total	15	0
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Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		Yes
Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) Overall, the State's application meets the conditions of the Absolute Priority. The application lays out a somewhat comprehensive and coherent reform agenda that delineates a clear vision, mission, and specific targets and strategies for pursuing those targets. The State has established ambitious student outcome targets. To pursue these targets, MS will integrate its current efforts at transformation with the four ARRA areas. MS plans to adopt world class standards and assessments developed by national state consortia. To advance its efforts to develop a state-of-the-art statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS), MS will take steps to link student-level PK-12 data with post-secondary data. To promote improvements in the quality of teachers and school leaders, MS will continue to employ various alternative routes to certification such as Teach for America (TFA). Moreover, MS is committed to the ongoing training and evaluation of teachers and principals. To aid its persistently lowest-performing schools, MS will continue to monitor these schools closely and, as applicable, intervene in their operation – for example, place them under receivership and/or develop policies that support the development of alternative schooling models.		
Total		0

Grand Total	500	285
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local superintendents, businesses, and the governor. The task force created a series of recommendations focused on accountability, leadership, teaching, funding, community involvement, and takeover regulations. The recommendations are all high level and general, such as "The Legislature should consider..." and "The Legislature should provide funds..." Mississippi will transform the lowest performing schools by following the recommendations of the Task Force. They will use data to determine what works and as the practices are identified the state will be in a better position to support LEAs. Numerous concerns arise from this plan, the greatest of which is what would happen if the Legislature did not carry through on the recommendations of the Task Force. In addition, there is little detail about how a researcher will gather best practices and how these might be applied to the lowest performing schools. Mississippi has tried a variety of approaches to the lowest performing schools; however, "because of the many different types of support, it is difficult to determine which specific strategy was successful in helping schools improve student achievement." There is little data provided to determine the extent to which there was an increase in student achievement.

Total	50	21
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F. General

	Available	Tier 1
(F)(1) Making education funding a priority	10	8
(i) Allocating a consistent percentage of State revenue to education	5	5
(ii) Equitably funding high-poverty schools	5	3
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) The percentage of total revenues available to the state to support public education increased from 60.92% in 2008 to 62.59% in 2009. Mississippi districts are given additional funding based on the number of at-risk students, defined as those qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch. This leads to equitable funding between high-need LEAs and other LEAs. There is no official state statute or policy regarding equitable funding at the school level, other than school boards are allowed to use the at-risk component of state funding to target schools within the district that have higher proportions of at-risk students within the district. The policy of allowing, but otherwise not requiring, equitable funding within a district will not lead to equitable funding.		
(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools	40	18
(i) Enabling high-performing charter schools "(caps)"	8	1
(ii) Authorizing and holding charters accountable for outcomes	8	2
(iii) Equitably funding charter schools	8	8
(iv) Providing charter schools with equitable access to facilities	8	5
(v) Enabling LEAs to operate other innovative, autonomous public schools	8	2
(F)(2) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1) Mississippi has an extremely limited charter school law. A law passed in 2010 that provides the capacity to create "Conversion Charter Schools" which can accept money from outside the normal funding stream, can receive money under the Race to the Top program, and are authorized to operate conversion charter and autonomous public school programs that are high-performing. It is unclear if a program is the same as a		

school. A reading of the law indicates that these conversion charter schools are only for low-performing schools. The number of schools allowed is double the number allowed in the former law, but the application does not say how many schools that is or what percentage of all the schools that is. The law states that there may be no more than three per Congressional District. Mississippi has four Congressional districts, so no more than 12 are allowed. This is much less than 5% of the total number of schools in the state.

State law authorizes the State Board of Education to approve charters, and the Board can take them away. Because charters must meet standards of achievement in the Accountability Model charters are held accountable based, to some degree, on student achievement. The application does not explain how charter school authorizers approve, monitor, hold accountable, reauthorize and close charter schools, nor does it explain how it encourages charter schools that serve student populations similar to local district populations. The law enabling charter schools just passed, so the lack of detail may be due to the lack of time to put regulations and guidelines in place.

By statute, the Conversion Charter Schools are to receive full funding from the local, state and Federal governments and can receive additional funding from donations, grants, etc. There is no history to show how the law may be implemented, especially regarding local funding.

The application states that Conversion Charter Schools are to be treated no differently than traditional schools regarding facilities, "and that the state shall not impose any school facility-related requirements on conversion charter schools which are more restrictive than those applied to traditional public schools." However, the application does not address key criteria that are critical for on-going maintenance of facilities - "the ability to share in bonds and mill levies, or other supports." Without this assurance, charter schools' facilities could suffer over time.

LEAs in Mississippi have operational flexibility, but they are not autonomous, as called for by the criteria. The application provides two short examples of innovative schools, but their existence alone does not satisfy fully the requirements for this section.

(F)(3) Demonstrating other significant reform conditions	5	1
(F)(3) Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
The application provides the example of the Office of Healthy Schools that has received support from a myriad of entities around the state. While this is an admirable effort, there is no information provided to show the extent to which this effort has increased student achievement or graduation rates or narrowed achievement gaps.		
Total	55	27

Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM

	Available	Tier 1
Competitive Preference Priority 2: Emphasis on STEM	15	0
Competitive Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)		
Mississippi describes an exciting program in support of STEM in the state called the Center for Professional Futures. With significant funding for ten years from Toyota and managed by the CREATE Foundation, the program will serve three counties in Mississippi. Students from area high schools will go to the CPF to get cutting edge, real world classroom experiences through a STEM-centered course of study. An adjunct faculty from universities and STEM-related companies and communities will help staff the facility. The CPF admirably has developed a marketing plan to appeal to groups that have been historically underrepresented in the STEM field such as students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, minorities, and females. The program is not fully funded yet. The hope is to replicate this across the state "in regions that have the capacity and leadership to provide the type of education to workforce access in the STEM		

fields needed..."

While this is an exciting and potentially impactful program, it does not satisfy all criteria of this priority. It looks to provide a rigorous course of study in the STEM fields, and it does cooperate with industry experts in offering applied learning. However, it addresses only high school students, and elementary and middle school students have no opportunity to get support in STEM. In addition, while the funding from Toyota is admirable, it is questionable if it is sustainable or scalable. According to the information in the Appendix, the CPF still needs to attract \$35 million for the facility and equipment. It seems extremely difficult for another center to be able to attract both the money for the facility and a match for the Toyota grant.

Total	15	0
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Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform

	Available	Tier 1
Absolute Priority - Comprehensive Approach to Education Reform		No

Absolute Reviewer Comments: (Tier 1)

Mississippi's application addresses all of the four education reform areas. The state has strong commitment from LEAs and is part of key consortiums for developing and implementing common core standards and high quality assessments. The state has envisioned a structure to deliver support and professional development to teachers and principals that should be sustainable and could build capacity statewide. Throughout the application, however, the state presents a high level vision for different components, but the application lacks detail in how that vision would come to reality, and no section of the plan has a high-quality plan to implement the vision. The budget lacks detail as well, and the activities described in the budget do not clearly match the activities in the application. Often the reader is directed to the Appendices for more information, but the information there seldom provides additional insight in how activities would develop into a high quality plan. In most places where performance measures are requested, the state has not provided any, usually due to lack of data. The lack of data and understanding why programs from the past may have been successful or unsuccessful also is a significant concern and brings into question the extent to which the state will be able to learn from experience. While the application does address all four reform areas, it is neither comprehensive nor fully coherent.

Total		0
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Grand Total	500	263
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