



Taino CoLAB High School of New Haven Peer Review Comments and Final Applicant Scores 2025 RFA

Application Details	
Contact Person: Bill Clarke	Contact email: bill@colablearning.org
Application type: New School	Approved Budget: \$1,468,000
Grades Served: 9 th – 12 th grade	New Seats created: 400
Application Status: Awarded	

The following are condensed Peer Reviewer comments and scores for Taino CoLAB Charter School's application for the Great Schools for Connecticut Charter School Program, encompassing Sections 1 through 7 of the scoring rubric. The complete rubric can be found on the GSCT website in the Request for Applications ([RFA](#)) [Guide](#). Please refer to Appendix 3 of the RFA for a complete overview of the scoring rubric.

SECTION ONE Board Capacity and Governance Structure

A competent, trained governing board is essential to the success of a public charter school. Describe how your school has developed a strong governing board with a diverse set of skills. Be sure to include how board members understand their roles and responsibilities and have developed a transition plan and ongoing professional development to maintain board strength going forward.

Subsection 1: *Describe the composition (size, roles, committees) and selection process for the governing board.* {Comments below}

- The applicant appears to have a founding governance council in place. The applicant succinctly and comprehensively justified reasoning behind each member being selected to join the governance council and there do not appear to be any skill gaps provided the quality and varied skillset of the members. The response indicates subject matter expertise and operational expertise is embedded into the founding governance council. Additionally, the governance council continues to recruit stakeholders to join the governance council and has prioritized future membership based on needs or perceived gaps.
- The applicant provides a description of the Board's composition, including charter school leadership, expertise in legislative policy, marketing, community affairs, equity initiatives, legal expertise, educational leadership, and community engagement (2-3). The response affirms an intentional design to select and include board membership that includes expertise in areas relevant and necessary for effective charter school oversight. The response presents an

understanding and planning for additional areas of expertise or perspective to include youth development organizations, business leaders, higher education partners, parents, and other relevant stakeholders. The board composition or planning would benefit from additional expertise in real estate and financial management.

- The Board is strategically composed with expertise in education, finance, law, and community leadership. Recruitment uses a skills matrix to fill gaps.
- Describes the composition of the board and includes 3 of 4 founding board members resumes. Identifies overall what is needed in terms of skills and a light plan for recruiting board members.

Subsection 2: *The board has established clear policies and procedures that guide its oversight of the school.* {Comments below}

- The governance council appears to have developed and adopted clear policies and procedures. During the zero year, the applicant outlined a comprehensive set of board roles and responsibilities. Additionally, the board of directors is responsible for ensuring compliance for all CSP-related activities.
- The applicant demonstrates clear policies, procedures and processes to guide oversight of school. The board of directors has developed a committee structure to carry out the work. Committees include the Executive, Governance, Finance and Facilities, Academic, Development and Community Partnerships.
- A comprehensive set of board roles and responsibilities is described to include compliance with law and regulation, oversight of the Executive Director, annual budget approval, strategic planning, adoption and monitoring of school policy, and promotion of public transparency (4). The response affirms compliance with open meeting laws through the board secretary's position (5).
- Policies are affirmed to be reviewed annually for ongoing compliance (5). The applicant affirms that board members will sign annual conflict of interest disclosures and recuse themselves from voting matters that present direct or indirect financial conflicts of interest (5). The response reflects an appropriate understanding of the role of the board and how its policies and procedures will guide oversight of the school.
- Comprehensive policies (FOIA, conflict-of-interest, annual audits) ensure transparent oversight and compliance.
- Applicant outlines a comprehensive set of board roles and responsibilities and references the Open Meeting and Open records Law. Applicant makes mention of a board manual, but doesn't demonstrate clear policies and procedures. It states that part of the grant will go towards writing the board manual and policies. Therefore it is hard to see the evidence of them already being established.

Subsection 3: *Applicant provides resume of board members, personnel occupying key leadership positions, governing council members.* {Comments below}

- Leadership plans outlined in 1.3.1 were supported in other sections of the application, including the budget in Section 5. Training and selection criteria are clear, concise, and comprehensive.
- Board training is described to include state and federal legal obligations, open meeting laws, good governance practices, oversight of academic performance data, fiscal stewardship and federal compliance, and equity-centered governance and culturally responsive practices (6). The CT Charter School Association is identified as the provider of board training. A leadership succession plan includes scheduled officer transitions, board member pipeline cultivation, and annual self-evaluation (6). Selection criteria and a process for board member onboarding are adequately described.

- The response would benefit from explicit affirmations of members or employees of the governing council not having a financial interest in the school's assets.
- Board and leadership résumés reflect deep expertise. Training and succession plans are built into the governance framework.
- 3 of 4 resumes of board members are included. References hiring consultant to train the board and school leadership, and has allocated funds in the budget for it. No clear criteria and procedures for selecting officers and board members, but a generalized process named.

SECTION ONE OVERVIEW: *Board Capacity and Governance Structure Overall Comments*

- The application presents strong evidence of a highly capable and diverse Board. Members bring deep expertise in education, finance, law, public policy, and community engagement. The governance structure includes clear roles, officer succession planning, committees, and robust compliance measures with CT open meetings law. Policies on conflicts of interest, audits, and board self-assessment are in place, and annual training and professional development are budgeted. The plan also prioritizes parent/community representation and gap analysis for recruitment, ensuring future needs are met. This reflects a comprehensive, mission-aligned approach to governance and oversight.

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 1	
Peer Reviewer 1	15
Peer Reviewer 2	11
Peer Reviewer 3	15
Peer Reviewer 4	13
Aggregate Score for Section 1	54
Average Score	13.5

SECTION TWO

School Leadership and Management

Describe the intended leadership structure of the proposed school. A strong leadership and staffing plan are essential to ensure high-quality implementation and sustainability of a new school.

Subsection 1: *The leadership and administrative roles at the school are well-defined, and comprehensively cover the broad set of responsibilities required of charter school leadership.* {Comments below}

- The school presents a clear and complete organization and management plan, including adding a Dean of Students in future years as the school adds grades 9 & 10. Appropriate performance evaluations presented by the applicant with clear evaluation frameworks developed for the executive director. The procedure consisting of the Executive Director evaluates the leadership team. The Academic Director evaluates the instructional staff and the applicant includes the metrics used for evaluating the instructional staff.
- Staffing plan provided in section two aligns with other sections of the application, including section 5, the budget. Leadership succession plan is alluded to, and the application could have been strengthened by clearly articulating the stakeholder responsible for developing and executing the transition plan for the executive director.
- The organizational structure is described to include the role of the Executive Director, Chief Academic Officer, Academic Director, Operations Director, and Community Outreach

Coordinator (7). The response would benefit from additional detail regarding more specific roles and responsibilities of the Executive Director and Chief Academic Officer to provide greater evidence of capacity regarding the organizational leadership needs of the charter.

- Evaluation of the Executive Director is broadly described under standard and expected categories to include student academic growth, operational performance, fiscal and regulatory compliance, family satisfaction and engagement and strategic performance (8). The evaluation of top leadership is not affirmed to be rooted in a specific and recognized evaluation framework. The specific SMART goals, or a process for naming the specific SMART goals, are not named.
- The applicant adequately describes the criteria that will inform hiring decisions for school leadership in general (8). However, the response would benefit from specific criteria that inform the hiring decision for individual leadership positions, including the Chief Academic Officer, Academic Director, and Operations Director.
- In the Capacity Interview, the applicant explained the job descriptions for leadership positions are in revision and re-drafting.
- The application provides a clear outline of leadership roles, along with thoughtful evaluation systems for the Executive Director and staff.
- The leadership and admin roles are defined on the leadership team, led by an Executive Director. Draft contract with CMO says it leans on them for back office support. It's unclear what is CoLab (and 12% fee paid) vs. CAO, Director Enrollment, etc. I would like to understand that better. Outlines a process for evaluation, but unclear what the protocol for addressing performance concerns will be.

Subsection 2: *The school demonstrates sufficient leadership and governance capability to implement and sustain the new school or expansion projects outlined in this application. {Comments below}*

- The applicant has sufficiently identified the following material operational challenges and key risk factors: acquiring a facility, student transportation, food service, budget and cash flow during start-up, and executing the academic program as approved. To mitigate against these challenges, the school has already started facility discussions. The school has allocated CSP funds for one-time costs to offset the planned challenges associated with transportation and food service. The applicant has a school-year calendar in which professional development and training has been planned for.
- The applicant intends to develop dashboards to identify operational challenges; however, the monthly dashboards to communicate challenges do not identify how the applicant will adjust practices or community challenges identified. The application could have been strengthened by clearly articulating what the school's leadership team and staff will communicate to internal and external stakeholders when challenges are identified.
- The applicant lists key risk factors in the successful opening and operation of the charter to include facilities, transportation, food services, budget and cash flow, and maintaining fidelity to the model. Steps taken to address these factors are broadly described (9). It is not clear from the response how large of a challenge facilities acquisition and management will be, which is a significant component of success. Facilities discussions and budget contingencies are affirmed, but not discussed in substantive detail.
- The applicant states that transportation is a potential risk but does not explain how or why; budgeted amounts for alternative transportation are affirmed but details are not provided (9). The response states that maintaining fidelity to the academic model poses a risk, but does not present a substantial response as to how this risk will be addressed.
- The response does not address the extent to which meeting enrollment targets will pose a risk to the successful operation of the school.
- In the capacity interview, the applicant explained that they are keeping their hand on the pulse of New Haven to understand the shifting needs. They are confident based on family

engagement that approximately 1500 families have expressed interest. For a school of this size in a large city with needs for educational choice, enrollment is not likely to pose a large risk if the school's design and roll-out are well executed. Ongoing recruitment efforts with current 7th graders support the likelihood of meeting recruitment goals.

- Leadership roles are well-defined and the organizational design is sound. However, the absence of a confirmed Executive Director presents a significant gap at this stage. While the recruitment plan is robust, the absence of a confirmed Executive Director remains a significant uncertainty for near-term implementation.
- The school has not yet identified an Executive Director who will then hire the rest of the leadership team. Therefore it's hard to say the "school's" leadership team demonstrates the ability to operate soundly and strategically. Not too much in terms of naming key operational challenges and mitigation of key risk factors (e.g. under-enrollment). Spoke more to that in the interview. Still have open questions around feasibility / timeline and likelihood of finding founding team by March 2026.

SECTION TWO OVERVIEW: *School Leadership and Management Overall Comments*

- The leadership plan demonstrates strong organizational design, with well-defined roles (Executive Director, CAO, Academic Director, Operations Director, Community Coordinator). Systems for evaluation, succession planning, and external coaching are clearly described. The application identifies key risk factors such as facilities, transportation, budget management. It also provides mitigation strategies. A robust performance evaluation framework for the Executive Director and leadership team is included. The only gap is that a founding Executive Director has not yet been hired; while the recruitment plan is solid, the absence of a confirmed school leader reduces certainty about execution.

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 2	
Peer Reviewer 1	9
Peer Reviewer 2	7
Peer Reviewer 3	9
Peer Reviewer 4	7
Total Score	32
Average Score	8

SECTION THREE

Student Demand and Community/Local/Family Support

The school must demonstrate that a Community Needs Analysis has been completed in planning for the new school / expansion / replication. This includes demonstrated presence of community demand, and that the proposed new school / expansion / replication is in tune with community needs and priorities, and how management intends to engage with parents / families / community to enhance access and equity for at-risk populations.

Subsection 1: *School vision and design communicates high standards for student success.*
{Comments below}

- In section 3.1, the applicant describes the myriad of community engagement and co-design strategies that have gone into developing the school. Strengths include a partnership with a

local advocacy group and a survey which garnered more than 3,000 responses. The letters in appendix C support the applicant's written narrative.

- The response affirms extensive outreach to assess local needs and solicit stakeholder input, providing the specific guiding questions that informed the outreach which align with the criteria (10). Listening sessions, youth design workshops, and surveys in-person and online resulted in 3000 community responses.
- The applicant cites dozens of letters of support that highlight the need for the model and support from specifically named organizations (10).
- A specialized focus for the school is described under a “4D Quantum Learning Matrix” that includes inquiry, design thinking, creativity, and service learning. Pillars, or more accurately goals, that emerged from community conversations included reduced disengagement and dropout, improved postsecondary readiness, strengthened family-school trust, and activation of youth leadership (11).
- The response does not explicitly connect the needs of the community with the school’s design or overall educational programming. Specific evidence of demand for the seats is not explicitly provided. However, in the capacity interview, this concern is assuaged with more specific evidence, including letters of interest and high levels of engagement with 7th grade families.
- Vision is high-quality and supported by extensive surveys and letters of support, showing strong demand.
- The application speaks of its vision and how it will meet the needs families have identified (e.g. Families asked for schools that prepare students not only for tests, but for life, leadership, and liberation). There isn’t any data (e.g. waitlists, summarized survey responses) to concretely justify the key instructional and curriculum design elements, but in the capacity conversation team spoke to the amount of community engagement, especially with LEAD as a key partner that is student, family facing, that justified their vision.

Subsection 2: *Enrollment forecast is well articulated, clear data, rationale for enrollment growth (includes grades and ages of students to be served, clear picture of community demand for school).*
{Comments below}

- Applicant appears to have addressed questions as outlined and provided strong evidence for rationale behind enrollment plan. Applicant appears to lead with an equity-mindset and expresses interest and supports necessary for serving all students who would apply. Applicant continued to document different community organizations actively involved in pre-planning activities and expressed the vision is made concrete through our 4D Quantum Learning Matrix, an interdisciplinary approach integrating:
 - o Inquiry
 - o Design Thinking
 - o Creativity
 - o Service Learning
- The applicant affirms that the anticipated racial and socio-economic makeup of the school will closely resemble New Haven Public Schools, with 89% racial minority and 80% free or reduced lunch (12). Impact on the district’s socio-economic diversity would be nominal with a small school size and likelihood of enrollment representative of the district as a whole (11).
- The response affirms recruitment, admission, and enrollment tactics that are likely to result in a proportionally representative student body to include culturally and linguistically accessible outreach, targeted outreach, flexible event times, and partnership networks. The response under this “Access and Equity” section would benefit from additional detail on outreach methods to ensure the likelihood of the equitable access affirmed by the applicant.
- Strategies for identification, engagement, and accommodation of families with differing needs are described broadly and without substantive detail (12-13).

- Community support is well-documented and survey data is compelling. However, enrollment projections are somewhat optimistic given the scale-up pace to 400 students within four years. Given the competitive landscape of New Haven high schools, the scale-up pace to 400 students may be ambitious without stronger evidence of intent-to-enroll commitments. While strategies for outreach and equity are comprehensive, additional evidence of confirmed commitments would strengthen confidence in meeting enrollment targets.
- Gives a clear admission policy and description of how the school will engage and accommodate families. No quantitative analysis of high school demographic landscape, enrollment projects (outside of 100 per year), in the interview the team spoke to the high school landscape in New Haven, total enrollment (20,000 high school students) and how the school will be another option for families unique in 3 key ways: project based learning, early college, AI forward.

Subsection 3: *Demonstrates significant planning and effort, can provide examples of strategies to meaningfully engage current and prospective families and community members (including current or former teachers and other educators) in implementation and operation of the school. {Comments below}*

- The applicant provided evidence and demonstrated significant planning and effort. Examples include: establishing a designated parent representative on the governance council, developing an instructional model aligned with community needs and aspirations.
- The response affirms one Board position to be filled by a parent or guardian of a student of the school, along with the establishment of a School Governance Council to act as an advisory group (13). The role of families and other stakeholders in the development and refinement of the school's programming is broadly described without significant detail. The response affirms standard and expected methods of communication on educational options to include Open Houses, Community Events, and Student Showcases (13).
- The response is broadly stated, but offers an outline of the roles of parents and community members in the school's decision making to approach the criteria.
- Parents, educators, and community members are embedded in decision-making through councils and forums.
- Put money in the budget for these activities and outlined a plan for engaging parents. 3,000 community responses and pages of community letters of support are evidence of meaningful engagement of the community. Estimated 50% of those are from families with middle school aged students. In the interview, the team spoke about student-facing afterschool and summer programs that are part of recruitment / marketing that CoLab is hosting and how LEAD is engaging the community.

Subsection 4: *Applicant details comprehensive approach to achieving / sustaining equitable access, including mitigating barriers, including practices around discipline, transport, enrollment and retention that could impede access to their programs. {Comments below}*

- The applicant has hosted a variety of community events and is planning on future training to teach families about how school works.
- The response is brief and does not substantively address a comprehensive approach to achieving or sustaining equitable access, including mitigating barriers around discipline, transportation, enrollment and retention.
- In the capacity interview, the applicant acknowledges an ongoing process to learn about transportation within New Haven district. Based on location, a high percentage of walkers is anticipated. The applicant is exploring transportation limits and opportunities.

- Policies reduce barriers in discipline, enrollment, and retention, ensuring diverse student participation.

Subsection 5: *Applicant outlines transportation plan for students (meeting requirements of C.G.S 10-66ff(f)) (page 11/27) {Comments below}*

- Extensive transportation plan provided in this section and appears throughout the entire application.
- The applicant broadly yet adequately addresses the criteria, affirming steps being taken to prevent transportation from becoming a barrier to access. These include prioritizing facility choices that are within a mile of public transportation options and budgeting for private transportation to accommodate extended school year or after school program schedules (13-14). The plan indicates that coordination with New Haven Public Schools will allow for transportation, though the nature of this transportation agreement with the district is not well explained.
- Collaboration with NHPS and contingency plans ensure transportation access for all students.
- References the plan and includes money in the budget in plan falls through (e.g. prioritizing transportation to meet the needs of families), but still some big questions about transportation to figure out in next 2 years.

SECTION THREE OVERVIEW: *Student Demand and Community/Local/Family Support Comments*

- The application provides abundant evidence of student demand and community support. Over 3,000 surveys and dozens of partner letters from civic, nonprofit, and cultural organizations demonstrate strong community investment. The enrollment plan is clear and inclusive, projecting growth to 400 students across grades 9–12 with equity-focused recruitment and retention strategies. Plans for accessibility (multilingual materials, flexible enrollment sessions, partnerships with LEAD) are comprehensive. Family engagement is embedded in governance through a School Governance Council and advisory roles. The transportation plan is thoughtful, with contingency funds for supplemental services. Overall, the section reflects deep community roots and robust demand.

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 3	
Peer Reviewer 1	24
Peer Reviewer 2	20
Peer Reviewer 3	25
Peer Reviewer 4	18
Total Score	87
Average Score	21.8

SECTION FOUR

Instructional Practices, Student Academic Achievement

Fully describe the design of the academic program (including specialized focus, if any) of the school. Provide data that justifies / supports the school's mission and overall goals, providing a brief description of key instructional and curriculum design elements and how these will be leveraged to meet the school's performance objectives and community needs. Be sure to include data / references supporting the instructional and curriculum design and how these align to state and federal requirements.

Include a description of why this educational model was chosen and how students will be assessed, how assessment practices are aligned to state standards and state assessment requirements.

Subsection 1: *Explains key design elements for the proposed educational model (has clear plan for ongoing development, improvement of curriculum).* {Comments below}

- Pedagogical approach is compelling and builds off of previous sections outlined in the application. The applicant identified approaches and pedagogical processes. Although specific materials were not identified in this section, the budget includes specific materials. Additional strengths of the section include the applicant's clear and concise description of leveraging Understanding by Design (UbD), along with the 4-part model of inquiry, design-thinking, creativity, and service learning.
- The applicant describes a "4D Quantum Learning Matrix" to include instructional pillars of Inquiry, Design Thinking, Creativity, and Service Learning (14). Specific information regarding curricular materials is not provided, such as examples of curricula that the school intends to purchase or what informs the decision about which curricula to purchase.
- The response lacks substantive detail as to why and how the chosen approach is likely to improve students' academic performance. Research or data from previous implementations within similar student demographics is not offered.
- In the capacity interview, the applicant emphasized that the selling point is not higher test scores, but rather a different approach that would appeal to a sub-group of students.
- The 4D Quantum Learning Matrix is innovative, standards-aligned, and supported by research.
- Identifies specific curriculum for Math and overall pedagogy for ELA and Science. Describes the core curriculum, but does not include research/data for a compelling case of how these design elements translate into student achievement. Does not reference a way of evaluating the curriculum in written application, mentioned rubric they use in interview and spoke more to how that curriculum is being developed with ASU partner, etc.

Subsection 2: *Describes how the choice of curriculum will help the school meet Connecticut's required school performance standards for charter schools.* {Comments below}

- The school included the core curriculum areas of ELA, math, science, and social students. The applicant also included a college and career program by mentioning enrollment opportunities into ASU's early college program. Although the applicant included a statement that Taíno CoLAB's instructional model is grounded in research and aligned with CT standards, the section could have been strengthened by clearly articulating and describing how the curriculum was chosen.
- The response affirms aspects of individual subject areas that support alignment with CT standards. The response is brief and does not present a compelling explanation for how a specific curriculum will enable the charter school to meet the CSDE accountability standards for academic achievement and growth (15).
- In the capacity interview, the applicant discussed rubrics for curriculum evaluation and a wealth of experience on the team for developing and adopting curriculum. The use of collaborative partners to build competency based pathways built around design thinking was discussed in appropriate detail.
- Curriculum and assessments are directly aligned with Connecticut performance and accountability standards.
- Does not reference the CSDE accountability standards for academic achievement and growth and so hard to say how the choice of curriculum will help meet them.

Subsection 3: *Describes instructional techniques / methods that will facilitate high quality teaching and learning, and how these are appropriate for all students (including educationally disadvantaged students).*
{Comments below}

- Applicant describes methods by which students will learn. The applicant described how students with disabilities will be supported and students in other populations such as ELA.
- The applicant broadly lists instructional techniques and strategies to include culturally, responsive pedagogy, PBL, and Universal Design for Learning utilizing mixed-ability grouping, real-world case studies and multimedia content, Socratic seminars and literature circles, flipped classroom models in STEM, personalized learning playlists, and studio-style workshops (15).
- The response affirms in broad detail support for EL students, students with disabilities, and the use of an MTSS. This section of the application is lacking in substantive detail to provide evidence of capacity for identification, progress monitoring, and support of various sub-groups.
- In the capacity interview, the applicant discussed the use of Summer Academy to support incoming 9th graders and assessing readiness to prepare for differentiated instruction. The master schedule has built in daily reflection on the learning and collection of qualitative and quantitative inputs to allow for real-time differentiation.
- Instruction integrates UDL, culturally responsive teaching, and project-based learning for diverse learners.
- Describes pedagogical strategies at a high level, referencing educationally disadvantaged students (e.g. SPED and ELL).

Subsection 4: *Clear plan for monitoring and assessing student and teacher performance (including how school will use classroom and standardized assessments to determine needs of students and differentiate instruction.* {Comments below}

- The applicant presented a clear plan and a systematic approach for monitoring and assessing student and teacher performance. The plan includes how the school will use classroom and standardized assessments to determine needs of students and differentiate instruction.
- An assessment plan is broadly outlined to include NWEA MAP, various formative and summative assessments, and opportunities for Performance-Based Assessments. Project-Based Learning assessments are not specifically referenced in this section despite being stressed in other sections of the application (16). The response provides more of a listing of assessments as opposed to a clear plan for monitoring student performance and systems and structures to determine the needs of students and differentiate instruction.
- The applicant provides an overview of teacher professional learning but does not explicitly address the prompt regarding monitoring and assessing of teacher performance (16-17).
- In the capacity interview, the applicant explains being agnostic about adopting a specific framework and wants to adopt appropriate aspects of recognized models for a bespoke model for teacher evaluation given the unique nature of the school. Pulling from Danielson and other frameworks, and collaborating with ASU on this portion of the application.
- Multi-layered assessments (MAP, SBAC, PBAs) with regular data reviews ensure continuous improvement.
- Outlines a plan for monitoring student performance via an assessment strategy with specific measurements (e.g. MAP, SBAC). Speaks to teacher professional development, and CT SEED model for evaluation.

Subsection 5: *Consistent with the definition of a charter school in ESEA §4310, the school can justify how key elements have been chosen to utilize autonomies and flexibilities granted to charter schools under state statutes to create programs that meet the unique needs of the school's anticipated demographic.*
{Comments below}

- Although the applicant mentioned charter school autonomy and flexibility occurs by students having choices in coursework and early college entry including skill credentialing and field-based projects, the applicant did not mention specific federal or state laws the charter contract aimed to circumvent. Additionally, the section could have been strengthened by highlighting flexibilities in local, state, and federal law. Although the applicant has clearly engaged the local community as demonstrated in other sections of the application; it's unclear how that community feedback and stakeholder engagement has impacted the autonomy or flexibility potentially provided by the development of a charter school.
- The applicant affirms the use of autonomy and flexibility in several listed categories, but does not provide meaningful detail on how the allowed autonomy and flexibility will impact these aspects of the school.
- School leverages autonomy for early college programs, electives, and innovative pathways.
- States "Charter school autonomy and flexibility is demonstrated throughout the Taíno CoLAB model, including electives and pathway coursework, early college credit and university partnerships, educator-designed courses, skill credentialing and field-based projects, and culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy." It's not explicit how this utilizes autonomies or is different from other high schools.

SECTION FOUR OVERVIEW: *Instructional Practices, Student Academic Achievement Comments*

- The proposed instructional model (the 4D Quantum Learning Matrix) is innovative, rigorous, and aligned with CT standards. The integration of inquiry, design thinking, creativity, and service learning is supported by strong curricular frameworks (UbD, NGSS, C3). The application details support for multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and struggling students through MTSS, co-teaching, and inclusive practices. A coherent assessment system is in place (MAP, SBAC, PBAs), with clear alignment to performance goals. Teacher professional development is continuous, embedded, and responsive. The use of charter flexibilities is evident in early college credits, pathway electives, and educator-designed courses.

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 4	
Peer Reviewer 1	25
Peer Reviewer 2	18
Peer Reviewer 3	24
Peer Reviewer 4	15
Total Score	82
Average Score	20.5

SECTION FIVE **Financial Management and Monitoring**

Describe how the school intends to achieve financial stability and viability through implementation of proposed activities, keeping in mind federal guidelines around Allowable Costs. Refer to 2CFR 200 as the guiding document for a comprehensive understanding of allowable costs, non-regulatory guidance, and the Allowable Cost Guide when constructing a school budget. In this section explain the school's plan to be strategic, compliant and a responsible fiduciary of federal funds. All proposed expenditures and grant-supported activities will need to align with at least one of the SMART Goals applicant indicates in Section 6 (SMART Goals).

Subsection 1: *Budget Template and Narrative: Are complete and demonstrate clear understanding of allowable, allocable costs. Implementation and planning periods are broken out clearly (planning period not to exceed 18 months). School provides three-year CSP grant budget with justification for activities, complete descriptions of activities and expenditures. School provides five-year school operating budget in addition to CSP grant budget to show that there will be financial sustainability after the CSP grant period ends.* {Comments below}

- The budget provided is strong evidence of the applicant's ability to plan for opening a school. The school provided a 5-year operating budget in addition to the CSP grant budget. The operating budget demonstrates the level-of-enrollment necessary to implement a staffing plan needed to execute the ambitious educational program outlined in the application.
- A three-year CSP grant budget is provided which includes expenditure descriptions, amount of funds, timeline, relation to Activity or SMART Goal and a Justification. The budget requests appear largely allowable and reasonable, given the scope and scale of the project. The narrative would benefit from greater itemization, particularly as it relates to the Physical Plant, In-Service Staff Development, Advertising & Recruitment, and Computers and Hardware.
- A five-year operating budget is provided, consistent with the overall narrative and demonstrating an operating surplus in each of the first five years of operation.
- CSP and operating budgets are conservative, detailed, and tied directly to SMART goals.
- Budget template and narrative are complete and demonstrate clear understanding of allowable, allocable costs (e.g. one time in nature during planning, not ongoing operational expenses).

Subsection 2: *Applicant demonstrates understanding that charters have a high degree of autonomy over budget, operations, personnel decisions (e.g. by making requests in the budget that are allowable but diverge from the suggested subgrant structure in Table 2 of the RFA (Size and Structure of Subgrants)).* {Comments below}

- At first glance the budget appears to be top-heavy with administrative salaries, however, by year 3, during the 2030 FY, applicant is projecting and 18.5% of overall revenue going administrative salaries (\$1,004,780 / \$5,415,000) with only 60.7% going to all personnel for salaries and benefits (\$3,291,000 / \$5,415,000). If the applicant is able to execute the budget provided, the school will have significant revenue to dedicate to educational programming and the innovations outlined in the application.
- The response affirms a financial management plan rooted in best practices with rigorous oversight systems (17). Specific examples of autonomy over budget, operations, and personnel decisions are not clearly described.
- The applicant outlines its process for grant oversight and compliance, fiscal control policies, and internal controls and oversight (18). The use of the third party financial services provider is described in adequate detail to ensure systems and structures for financial accountability (18).
- Leadership and Board maintain strong oversight of funds, staffing, and operations.

Subsection 3: *Applicant completes annual reporting requirements to CSDE (including submission of financial audit, other required submissions).* {Comments below}

- Required documents submitted and attached to application.
- The applicant affirms that proper CSDE reporting requirements will be met (19).
- Commitment to audits and CSDE reporting ensures fiscal accountability.

Subsection 4: *Applicant submits a sound facilities plan that includes: Concrete location, a timeline for acquiring, developing, and / or remodeling as well as equipping the new school or expansion facility. If facility is not identified there is a viable plan for obtaining one to ensure timely opening / expansion of the school.* {Comments below}

- The facilities plan includes projected lease information. Space appears to be reasonable for enrollment projection of a secondary school with 400 students.
- Facilities plans are described in the broadest possible terms, with the applicant explaining the need for a 60,000 square foot facility at a cost of \$6.50 per square foot (19). The response does not provide a discussion of the square footage needed per student or classroom, or of the additional needs for the facility beyond total square footage. The applicant affirms that monthly rent or mortgage payments are included in the operating budget with hopes of having these costs forgiven. This is based on commitments from partner organizations with forgivable loans.
- Facilities planning is underway with viable options identified, but the lack of a secured facility at the time of application introduces uncertainty. While contingencies are described, the absence of a finalized lease or agreement reduces assurance of readiness for timely launch.
- Evidence of conversation with the city and viable plan for obtaining a facility, with money in budget for improvements and significant support from others.

Subsection 5: *The budget contains the following:*

- *CMO fees, if any, and delineates how these will be paid*
- *Sufficient budgetary resources to fulfill program requirements for educationally disadvantaged, at-risk students.*

Comments:

- The applicant affirms that there are no CMO fees related to the partnership with CoLAB Education (19). The response does not explain how the applicant will operate with a CMO but not pay CMO fees. The sufficiency of the budgetary resources to fulfill program requirements for educationally disadvantaged at-risk students is not explained within the narrative response.
- This was explained in the interview; there will be no CMO agreement while Adrian Manuel is still the Board Chair as it would present a conflict of interest. When he steps aside from the Board Chair position, there will be a place for the CMO fee.
- The budget adequately supports at-risk students, with no CMO fees diverting funds.
- It says no CMO fees, but it is still unclear to me what the relationships between CoLab and the school are - and in one place does suggest fees. I would like to better understand. Budget resources reflect a focus on educationally disadvantaged at-risk students.
- The interview clarified why there isn't a CMO fee in the budget, yet stated in the draft contract ~12%. It sounds like this is still under review, with the long term goal of a CMO relationship but in the short term will be support vs. pay for services. Budget resources reflect a focus on educationally disadvantaged at-risk students.

Subsection 6: *Applicant has a plan to mitigate the risks associated with projected enrollment, and financial resources sufficient to adequately serve student population.* {Comments below}

- The applicant projected a surplus in revenue every year. However, the section could have been strengthened by outlining the planned delays for delays in CSP reimbursement and potential cash-flow challenges during start-up until consistent per-pupil allocations become available.

- Operating surpluses are indicated for each of the first five years of operation. Plans for mitigating risks associated with projected enrollment are not discussed in substantive detail (19).
- Conservative projections and reserves provide safeguards against enrollment or revenue shortfalls.
- Have a surplus in projects (which could counterbalance risk of under-enrollment) and states it anticipates delays in cash flow from CSP. Well funded grant wise.

SECTION FIVE OVERVIEW: *Financial Management, Monitoring Overall Comments*

- The financial management plan is comprehensive, with conservative assumptions, surplus projections, and strong fiscal controls. The budget narrative is clear, tying CSP expenditures directly to SMART goals. Systems for grant oversight (separate accounts, dual signatures, quarterly reports, external audits) are well defined. The facilities plan is realistic, with identified potential sites and contingency funding. No CMO fees are included, ensuring all funds support the school directly. Risk mitigation strategies (delayed reimbursements, enrollment fluctuations) are built into projections. Long-term sustainability is addressed through diversified revenue streams, entitlement funds, and philanthropic partnerships. This demonstrates excellent preparedness for financial stewardship.

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 5	
Peer Reviewer 1	28
Peer Reviewer 2	26
Peer Reviewer 3	29
Peer Reviewer 4	22
Total Score	105
Average Score	26.3

SECTION SIX Grant Project Goals

Identify 3-5 SMART grant project goals. Justify each goal through its value in supporting the planning and implementation of the proposed school. All grant spending, including future budget revisions must fit clearly within your stated project goals. All proposed expenditures and grant- supported activities need to align with at least one of the SMART Goals outlined in your Project Narrative.

Subsection 1: *Each grant project goal is a quality goal, and the set of goals fulfill minimum requirements for content including:*

- *At least one project goal addresses how the school intends to achieve Connecticut's targets for school performance (School Performance Index) and academic growth (Smarter Balanced Growth) in Math and ELA*
- *A minimum of three project goals are clearly articulated with trackable time-bound measures and outcomes for each goal (at least one goal must address how to meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged students).*

Comments:

- Five measurable SMART goals. Clear goal directly connected to Connecticut's target for school performance. Community engagement goal and school retention goal connect to other requested requirements.
- The response establishes SMART Goals related to NWEA MAP growth, MLL and IEP growth goals that are internally measured, enrollment in early college courses, annual student retention at the school, and measures of family engagement (21). The goals are largely measurable, specific, and aligned with the overall project narrative. Growth goal requirements are achieved through the use of NWEA MAP, but the applicant does not address proficiency targets for school performance. The response would benefit from additional detail regarding the selection of Arizona State University for college credit and the nature of this partnership.
- Five SMART goals are specific, measurable, and equity-focused, meeting CSP and CT requirements.
- There are 5 SMART goals, with one around academic growth shown on MAP (not on Smarter Balance Growth though). Delineates what year would be looking for these milestones (I'm assuming that is the year of the school vs. planning). The 2nd goal is around educationally disadvantaged students, the others speak to retention of students and families and college and career readiness.

Subsection 2: *Clear alignment exists among project goals, and overall mission and goals of the school. Each goal should have a justified purpose that supports the charter school in reaching performance goals. All grant measures must be appropriately rigorous for the targeted student population and measured by standard assessments.* {Comments below}

- The applicant connected each SMART goal directly to CSP expenditures with a justified purpose. SMART goals are also tied to the mission and vision of the school. The SMART goals are aligned to other sections throughout the application, specifically, in section #5 the budget is aligned with the SMART goals. The applicant also connects the SMART goals to providing necessary supports to students with disabilities and students in the EL population which is referenced in section #2 and #3.
- Goal alignment to the school's mission is not completely clear as the school's mission is not explicitly stated. The project goals are consistent with the overall narrative describing the school's educational programming, but details on the programming are limited so the alignment cannot be fully evaluated.
- Goals are tightly aligned to the mission and accountability framework with rigorous measures.
- All grant activities are mapped to these performance goals, although they are the overall goals of the schools, not specific to the individual grant projects. Standards assessments are used.

SECTION SIX OVERVIEW: SMART Goals / Grant Project Goals Overall Comments

- The application outlines five SMART goals that are specific, measurable, and aligned with state performance targets. Goals address academic growth, success for disadvantaged students, early college credit, student retention, and family engagement. Each goal includes clear benchmarks, tools, and reporting systems, with subgroup disaggregation to ensure equity. CSP expenditures are tightly aligned to these goals. The goals are rigorous, feasible, and well integrated with the school's mission and instructional model.

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 6	
Peer Reviewer 1	10
Peer Reviewer 2	9
Peer Reviewer 3	10
Peer Reviewer 4	6
Total Score	35
Average Score	8.8

SECTION SEVEN

Grant Points

Priority points may be awarded to applicants for the competitive priorities below. Applicants will have to provide supporting documentation to evidence that their project narrative in the grant application meets the criteria for priority point awards.

Subsection 1: *Two additional priority points may be awarded to applicants that demonstrate in their grant application how they will promote high-quality educator and community centered charter schools to support underserved students.* {Comments below}

- Clear and concise collaboration opportunities with New Haven Public Schools outlined in the application.
- The applicant seeks priority points for high-quality educator and community-centered design, citing teachers co-designing at least two electives per year, educators serving as pathway leaders, and instruction supported through coaching cycles and professional development (23). The response would benefit from greater detail and explanation as to how these elements contribute to educator and community design.
- The application was developed with extensive educator and family input, reflecting authentic community needs.
- I see reference to finding educators for the board, but I didn't pick up on a timeline for key milestones during the school's planning, development and implementation.

Subsection 2: *Two additional priority points may be awarded to applicants that articulate how they will collaborate with at least one traditional public school, or traditional public school district.* {Comments below}

- Evidence of local education forums and community engagement activities outlined in 7.2.1 and 7.2.2.
- The applicant affirms collaboration with New Haven Public Schools and plans to conduct planning and placement team meetings, determine student eligibility for special education, share data and participate in ongoing student progress monitoring, coordinate evaluations for Section 504, and provide services aligned with IDEA and Section 504 (22). These are all legal requirements and as such do not qualify for competitive preference priority points.
- Additional methods of collaboration with New Haven Public Schools to be conducted in the future are broadly listed (23).
- In the capacity interview, the applicant explained the sharing of the 4D curricular model as a professional development partner with the district. This would allow the school to serve as an incubator for AI and early college with support from the district as a professional development partner.
- There is an MOU with New Haven Public Schools that covers shared services and professional development.
- No reference to this in the application but in the interview the team spoke about opening doors for professional development to the district and other forms of collaboration.

Subsection 3: *Two additional priority points may be awarded to applicants that articulate a plan to serve and intentionally meet the unique needs of students in rural geographic areas.* {Comments below}

- The applicant does not intend to serve students in a rural geographic area.

Subsection 4: *Two additional priority points may be awarded to schools that provide a high-quality high school program.* {Comments below}

- Up to 400 high school students will be served when the applicant reaches capacity.
- The applicant affirms a high-quality high school program through opportunities for college credit, industry-aligned pathways, relevant course inclusion, flexible blended learning and credit-bearing internship options, and mastery-based performance assessments (24). The response would benefit from greater detail on specific aspects of the educational program that warrant the claim of a high-quality high school program.
- This program is a rigorous 9–12 program with early college, pathways, and mastery-based assessments.

SECTION SEVEN OVERVIEW: *Priority Points Overall Comments*

- The school meets three of the four priority criteria. Collaboration with New Haven Public Schools is underway with an MOU in development for shared services. The design is community- and educator-led, with deep engagement of over 150 families and educators. The school is a high school program offering dual enrollment and career pathways, directly addressing demand for high-quality high school options in New Haven.

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 7	
Peer Reviewer 1	6
Peer Reviewer 2	6
Peer Reviewer 3	6
Peer Reviewer 4	4
Total Score	22
Average Score	5.5

TOTAL SCORES
Across all sections

Peer Reviewer Scores for all sections	
Peer Reviewer 1	117
Peer Reviewer 2	97
Peer Reviewer 3	118
Peer Reviewer 4	85
Total Score	417
Average Score	104.3