The evaluation plan for the Schools and Families Centered on Technology grant proposal very thorough. The most critical factors in determining evaluation plan quality; data sources, collection methods, evaluator qualifications, and evaluation procedures; are robust. The plan lists multiple data sources, to include standardized tests, participant surveys, and reviews of student work performed. The data collections methods are a mix with best practice methods being employed. It is, for the most part, well formatted. The project is slated to run over a three year period, and is based on a year long pilot program run by the same professor who will lead the evaluation. This will need some attention as a possible conflict of interest may exist here. The parameters for performing the evaluation, personnel, allotted time, and budget all seemed to be adequate to excellent based on similar proposals. There was a lot to like about this evaluation plan, and indeed the proposal as a whole. The goals of the project are worthwhile, the hoped for outcomes aggressive, and the commitment from the involved institutions and individuals significant.

There were a few details which were troubling. First, there was no title page at the outset, which was confusing. It is necessary to read through the introduction to discover out who the stake holders are, why various people/agencies are involved in the project, and what, exactly, are their stakes in the project outcomes. Second, the project goals section lists ‘increasing participants’ access to health and human services...’ This goal is not supported in the data collection or in the measured results.

Third, there is some troubling language in the objective description tables where the proposal lists that certain objectives would be achieved, which might be construed as prejudicing the data toward a positive outcome. For example, in the Framework for Evaluation section, under the header: “The evaluation design will provide evidence that:” The project attains the goals and meets the objective... This may be the hoped for outcome, and perhaps this kind of optimistic hyperbole is standard practice in grant writing. However, in any objective evaluation, a neutral stance is preferable. The evaluation should be performed to see if the objectives are met, not to prove they have been. The difference may seem inconsequential, but in terms of influencing members of the evaluation team towards a positive outcome, such language might be significant.

Finally, and most importantly, the evaluation plan does not sufficiently define the participants. They are described as ‘at risk’ and ‘low achieving’ students, but the program seems to include all fifth grade students, not just the ‘at risk’ and ‘low achieving’ children. There is no precise description of exactly how ‘at risk’ and ‘low achieving’ are being defined in terms of the evaluation procedures. Without that starting point being
precisely delineated, it is difficult to feel good about estimating the likelihood of a positive outcome.