

STATE OF COLORADO
COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PUBLIC SCHOOL FINANCE DIVISION - INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SERVICES
REQUEST FOR INFORMATION # RFI CDE TB-2015-0028
CONCERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF HOUSE BILL 14-1292 - SCHOOL LEVEL FINANCIAL
TRANSPARENCY REPORTING SYSTEM

BIDDER QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- Question 1:*** Are images and/or links to websites allowed to be submitted as part of a response to this RFI? If images and/or website links are allowed to be submitted should they be embedded as part of a specific item response or do you prefer that they be included as a separate appendix?
- Response 1:*** Yes. Links to websites and images are allowable. Website links can be included in the cell associated with the RFI question. Images should be placed in a separate appendix with a reference back that includes: Functional or Non-Functional, Section # and then row or cell number. Example: "Functional.1.c".
- Question 2:*** Who is the anticipated primary audience/user for the School Level Financial Transparency Report System (SLFTS)?
- Response 2:*** The primary audience is the public. The secondary audience is the legislature, researchers and other Colorado Local Education Agencies (LEA).
- Question 3:*** Will the vendor have any flexibility in modifying the stated process of pulling data from the LEA websites? For example, would it be possible to utilize a "push-based" solution for retrieving data from each of the districts, such as asking districts to upload files via SFTP, provide an API end point, or offer a similar secure way for districts to send their data to the SLFTS?
- Response 3:*** Yes. The State is interested in vendors providing and developing an effective system with the least impact on LEAs. Therefore, the State would welcome alternative proposed solutions for the vendors acquiring data. Responses should articulate how and why the proposed alternative solution(s) is preferable to the current "scraping" method as well as the impact on the resource requirements for the LEAs and the financial impact on the vendor contract. Additionally, all proposed solutions would need to address how the data is protected in transit and while at rest.
- Question 4:*** Has Colorado implemented a single-sign-on or similar identity provider at the state level? If so, what products and/or technology are currently in use? If not, does the Colorado Department of Education have information on what identity providers are used in each district?
- Response 4:*** Yes. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) uses the Oracle Suite of Identity Management tools. CDE is currently upgrading those tools from version 10g to 11g. The vendor should assume 11g for the purposes of your response. CDE currently supports five (5) federated applications that use the Oracle Identity Federation (OIF) and Security Assertion Markup Language (SAML).
- Question 5:*** Is any data in the SLFTS as envisioned considered non-public? If yes, please provide some examples of data that will not be considered public information.
- Response 5:*** No, all data in the SLFTS will be considered public data. However, the system must have a way to limit public access until data is approved for publishing by districts. In addition, districts with small numbers

of students (EG less than 16) may need to have the N size suppressed, and not publish per pupil expenditures.

Question 6: Are permission and control settings required for backend operations (administrators), frontend users, or both?

Response 6: The current vision from the State is that there would not be any permission and control settings for frontend users. Given the response to question 5 above, additional layers of authentication for backend access (administration) may be necessary depending upon the vendors' proposed solution.

Question 7: Is the interest in integration with LEA data warehouses and stores for easy integration with financial or non-financial data? If the interest is non-financial data, can CDE provide an example of this data that would be available locally but not at the state level?

Response 7: Financial data will be provided by the LEAs on the LEA website. Non-financial data, such as demographics of districts, will be provided by CDE for all LEAs.

Question 8: Will CDE provide a data store or data warehouse connection for vendors to use for non-financial data such as school performance measures and demographics? Are these measures snapshots or reflect annualized FTE, average daily membership, etc.?

Response 8: CDE will provide non-financial data necessary for the SLFTS. The demographic data provided by the State will represent annualized data (i.e., a single data point for the full year) to align with the time period of the financial data.

Question 9: Will the SLFTS be expected to perform validation on reported data based on:

- a. Intersect errors, where combinations of account codes are invalid.
- b. Specificity errors, where data are reported to insufficient depth in the chart of accounts.
- c. Unbalanced data, where data are reported where fund balances, expenditures, and revenues are not in balance.
- d. Missingness, where particular accounts that are commonly used are empty.
- e. Some other criteria? If so, please elaborate.

Response 9: The vendor will not be required to validate data provided by the LEAs. However, the vendor will be expected to perform appropriate quality assurance to ensure the website view accurately reflects the data collected from the LEA.

The State would like vendors to provide input based on their work with other LEAs or states outside of Colorado. The State has reviewed several other states' implementations for ideas but is looking for vendors to provide input on alternative approaches which best address the statutory requirement for a website view that provides the greatest degree of clarity and comparability by laypersons of expenditures among school sites and school districts.

Question 10: How will the CSFP task force be involved in data collection and submission planning?

Response 10: CDE is unfamiliar with the acronym CSFP in this context. Based upon the requirements of HB 14-1292, the Financial Policies and Procedures Advisory Committee formed a sub-committee which CDE and a representative from the Governor's Office of State Planning and Budgeting are working with to

ensure that a financial transparency website is created and is available to the public no later than July 1, 2017, and that the website is updated annually.

Question 11: What is CDE’s vision for the presentation, use, and distribution of data?

- a. How many data points will there be?
 - i. How will data points shift depending on head counts (e.g. October Counts)?
 - ii. How will data points shift depending on changes in numbers of employees throughout the school year (e.g. midyear hires)?
 - iii. How will data points shift depending on differences in personnel between districts (e.g. districts where employees take on multiple roles versus districts where employees have more clearly defined roles)?
- b. What information will users be able to access? What, if any, information will be limited?

Response 11: The State would like vendors to provide input on the presentation, use, and distribution of data based on the vendors current knowledge of the Financial Policies and Procedures (FPP) Chart of Accounts and their work with other LEAs or states outside of Colorado.

The number of data points will be driven by the LEA data based upon the FPP Chart of Accounts as well as the number individual school sites. The demographic and financial data will be based on the same timeframe (e.g., 2016 October Count will represent a single data point for the full year and will coincide with FY 2016-17 Financial Data). Information will include financial data that is supported by the audited financial statements of the district. This will be available to the public.

CDE and the vendor with which CDE contracts, will work with the FPP advisory committee and a representative from the Office of State Planning and Budgeting in designing the presentation of data on the website view to ensure the greatest degree of clarity and comparability of expenditures among individual school sites, school districts, the State Charter School Institute and Boards of Cooperative Services. The State has reviewed several other states’ implementations for ideas but is looking for vendors to provide various approaches which best address the statutory requirements of HB 14-1292.

Question 12: How will data be made compatible between vastly different districts and schools?

- a. Will processes be established to improve uniformity between districts and schools?
- b. How can users be informed if data are not compatible?
 - i. What steps can be taken to ensure users understand when schools or districts are not appropriately comparable, because of factors like difference in numbers of students?
 - ii. What steps can be taken to ensure that the data presentation allows for appropriate questions and appropriate comparisons between schools?
- c. What is the desired end result? For example, is the primary intention to facilitate evaluation or analysis, or simply present the data in a uniform format?

Response 12: The State would like vendors to provide input based on current knowledge of the FPP Chart of Accounts and their work with other LEAs or states outside of Colorado. Decisions on these types of issues will be addressed as part of the discovery and requirements gathering phases of this project.

The software vendor will be responsible for presenting LEA data in a manner which provides clarity and comparability for a layperson. This would include the ability of a layperson to compare similar or dissimilar districts or schools with an understanding of the similarities and/or differences (e.g., student population size, urban/rural locations, economic factors, etc).

In addition to the presentation of the actual data, one of the requirements of the system will be that the LEAs have the ability to add explanations on each and every financial data field. Known issues and or caveats will be documented in those explanation fields which will provide further clarity on the comparisons.

As stated above, the desired end result is a website view that provides the greatest degree of clarity and comparability for a layperson of expenditures among school sites and school districts.

Question 13: Districts submit financial, demographic, staffing, and performance data to CDE – will the vendor have access to these data?

Response 13: Any non-financial data used for the website view will be provided by CDE.

Question 14: Is participating in the RFI a requirement for participating in the RFP?

Response 14: No.

Question 15: Would it be acceptable to recommend an alternate data gathering mechanism (e.g., web submission) as opposed to visiting each LEA website?

Response 15: Yes. The State is interested in the vendor developing an effective system with the least impact on LEAs. Therefore, the State would welcome alternative proposed solutions for acquiring data.

Question 16: Is there an expectation that LEA personnel will have editing access to the data in web tool?

Response 16: Yes. The State's vision for the system includes a period of time where each LEA could reconcile their data before publishing it for public use.

Question 17: Is the expectation that LEA personnel will have individualized accounts and roles, or share one master LEA account?

Response 17: The CDE's cyber security policies do not support sharing of any user accounts or passwords. CDE encourages every LEA user to have its own individual account and private password.

Question 18: When you refer to “customers,” are you referring to LEA personnel, or end-users?

Response 18: The word customer throughout the RFI refers to LEA and CDE personnel. End-users viewing the website view will also be customers.