

MEMOS TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

To: The RSD17 Board of Education

Date: August 8, 2023

Submitted for Board meeting dated: August 15, 2023

Re: SPED Audit RFP Selection

Purpose of memo: Board Action

Executive Summary:

Board Action:

A motion for the Regional School District No.17 Board of Education to award the Special Education Audit /Program Review contract to New Solutions K12 to be completed during the 2023-2024 school year.

Process Steps Taken:

We received your April 24, 2023 memo regarding the need for a Special Education program review. The RFP protocol was followed.

- An RFP was created. It was advertised in the newspaper and posted on the district website. Submissions were due by July 9, 2023.
- Five were received. They were opened publicly and date stamped.
- We reviewed the submissions and analyzed the information relative to our needs.
- Interviews were conducted with three firms. Questions were created in collaboration with the Special Education department. The interview committee consisted of three administrators in addition to the Assistant Superintendent and Superintendent.
- The Board attorney reviewed the proposal.

In summary, the RFP process was followed with fidelity.

Enclosures:

[SPED Audit RFP Executive Summary](#)



TO: Jeffrey Wihbey
FROM: Jennifer Miller and David Solin
DATE: August 7, 2023
RE: Special Education Audit RFP

We received your April 24, 2023 memo regarding the need for a Special Education program review. The RFP protocol was followed.

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- Five were received. They were opened publicly and date stamped.
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- The Board attorney reviewed the proposal.

In summary, the RFP process was followed with fidelity.



TO: RSD 17 BOE

FROM: Jeffrey S. Wihbey, Superintendent of Schools

DATE: May 31, 2023

RE: SPED Program Review

RSD 17 will undergo a process audit of special education and student services during the 2023-24 school year. The Board budgeted for this work to be completed. We are in the midst of an RFP process with potential vendors to complete this process.

Program Review Specifications

Goal: The goal of this work is to help the district improve student outcomes and improve the work life of staff in a cost effective manner. The major processes/programs to be reviewed are:

- Staffing and services for students with special needs
- Staffing and services for students who struggle and do not have a disability
- Staffing and services for students with challenging behaviors
- General education staffing at the middle school

The work directly aligns with SOP priorities #1 & #3

- STRATEGIC PRIORITY (GOAL) #1: Student Learning & Well-Being
- STRATEGIC PRIORITY (GOAL) #3: Operational Efficiency

RFP

The District will engage with potential service providers through an open public bidding process.

Scope of work

- 1. Build an inclusive team to help guide the work.**
 - Include general educators, special educators, district leaders, school based leaders and others
- 2. Collaboratively Draft a communication plan and messaging to inform staff and parents of the goals, purpose and process of this study.**
- 3. Provide best practices professional development.**

Key topics include:

- Proven strategies for closing the achievement gap

- Practical advice on how to address missed and unfinished learning due to the disruption caused by the pandemic
- Ways to reduce general education and special education staff stress and burnout
- Leading edge approaches to behavior management and support
- Realistic approaches to providing high levels of services after ESSER funds expire
- Precision staffing to enrollment
- Two PD sessions to be provided.

4. Understand current practices related to the target programs

To gain a comprehensive understanding of current practices:

- Review existing strategic plans, prior studies, and other written documents
- Host small group, in-person and remote interviews with approximately 75 people representing a wide range of roles and responsibilities
- Visit classrooms
- Collect data on student placement, achievement, and spending
- Review and analyze staffing levels in all targeted programs

The research should cover a wide range of topics including:

- Academic performance of students with and without special needs
- Academic programming and teaching practices for students who struggle, both general education and special education offerings
- Services and strategies for supporting students with challenging behaviors
- Disproportionality of identification, services and discipline
- Attendance and discipline trends
- Staffing levels, by type of staff
- Staff perspectives on program effectiveness, organizational structure, professional development, and district support
- Role of paraprofessionals
- Numbers of students identified for special education services, by disability
- The prevalence and effectiveness of serving students with disabilities in the general education setting
- Staffing to enrollment at the secondary level

The review should also consider a number of staffing issues, including:

- How to make the work more rewarding and sustainable for staff
- How to navigate special education staffing shortages
- How are IEP meetings conducted to ensure effectiveness and efficiency
- How to thoughtfully set staffing levels and caseloads in all targeted programs

This data will help answer key questions, such as:

- What service delivery models are used, and are they consistent across the district?
- How do current service delivery models compare to best practices?
- What role do paraprofessionals play in each school?
- Can social, emotional, and behavioral support be expanded?
- How precisely does secondary staffing match course enrollment, existing class size guidelines and best practices?

The review also looks at systems and procedures, including:

- IEP referral process and IEP determination methodology
- Integration of special education with RTI (Response to Intervention) / MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports)
- Special education organizational structure, reporting lines and clarity of roles, responsibilities and decision making
- Communication strategy and effectiveness of district communications

5. Conduct a secondary staffing and course analysis

- Partners will coordinate with school and district staff to collect detailed course and staffing information and prepare the data for a series of extensive analyses (outlined below) to inform potential findings.
- Partners will share data templates with the district to collect the data and conduct a series of checks to clean and validate the returned data to ensure its comprehensiveness and accuracy for analysis.

Staffing analysis will help answer the following questions:

- How much staff is needed in each department based on student needs and existing class size guidelines and norms as well all collective bargaining requirements?
- Which departments have capacity to offer more course offerings, expanded intervention, or new enrichment services?
- In what ways does teacher workload vary across departments?
- In what ways does teacher workload vary across schools?

Course analysis will help answer the following questions:

- Are existing class size guidelines reflected in the schedule?
- Do existing class size averages differ by level or subject?
- Do existing class size averages differ by school?
- To what extent do students have access to interventions and how does this vary by grade, school and department?

6. Benchmark to best practices

Compare district current practices to the best practices. Points of comparison should include:

- State and national database of prevalence of identifying students for special needs, in total and by disability
- Recommendations of the *What Works Clearing House*, a leading source for field-proven best practices and other published studies
- Recommendations of the National Reading Panel and The Science of Reading, the preeminent source for reading instruction, especially for students who struggle academically.
- John Hattie's "Visible Learning Effect" size study
- *Six Shifts for Improving Special Education and Other Interventions* (Harvard Education Press, 2020)

7. Create a short list of opportunities and a practical path forward

Provide a written report (not just PowerPoint) including:

- Summaries of best practice research
- A short list of the highest impact opportunities that can help raise student achievement, improve equity, and make the work more sustainable for staff.
- Extensive analysis about the district's current approach, services, and staffing
- Benchmarking of the district's current approach to best practices and best practice districts

- Opportunities to staff more effectively

8. Begin planning for implementation

Host a planning retreat to review findings, answer questions, and prioritize next steps

Selection of Consulting: Required background and experience

In order for the findings to be well respected in the district and the community, it is important that the consulting firm also is well respected and highly experienced as such the provider must have, at a minimum the following experience:

- Minimum 5 years' experience as a consultant supporting school districts in implementing best practices for improving special education in a cost neutral manner
- Minimum 5 years' experience as a consultant supporting school districts in implementing best practices for improving outcomes for students who struggle without disabilities
- Minimum 5 years' experience as a consultant supporting school districts in implementing best practices for student centered, cost effective staffing
- Experience supporting several school districts in improving special education and supports for students who struggle without disabilities
- Minimum 5 years' firsthand experience as a district leader implementing best practices in improving special education in a cost neutral manner
- Minimum 5 years' firsthand experience as a district leader implementing best practices in improving outcomes for students who struggle without disabilities
- Minimum 5 years' firsthand experience as a district leader implementing best practices for student centered, cost effective staffing
- Documented results that outcomes improved for students with disabilities during the period of first hand district leadership
- Deep understanding of Connecticut school districts and experience supporting several in the state

Desired, but not required experience

Since some of the findings may be new to some staff and community members, we prefer a partner who can bring a great deal of national credibility to this work. Ideally, the lead consultant will be a nationally recognized thought leader, with related experience including:

- Have conducted primary research and published white papers with well-established educational think tanks
- Advised at least 5 school districts improving special education



Document Notes: