



Request for Proposal No.	23-002
Title	Special Education Program Review
Date Issued	May 15, 2023
Issued on behalf of	Regional School District 17
Proposals Due	June 9, 2023 @ 4:00 P.M.
Submit Responses	Deliver/Mail to: Regional School District 17 Attn: David Solin, RFP 23-002 57 Little City Road Higganum, CT 06441
Deadline for questions	June 2, 2023
Contact for Questions/Project Manager	David Solin, Director of Fiscal Operations (dsolin@rsd17.org)
Bid Opening	June 12, 2023 @ 2:00 pm

Introduction

Regional School District 17 (the “District”), Haddam and Killingworth, Connecticut is requesting proposals from a qualified Educational consulting firm for a district-wide Special Education Program Review. The full scope of work is described in the scope/specifications appended hereto.

RFO/RFP SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

In order for Regional School District 17 to learn more about your organization's qualifications and the scope of work, please prepare a written response to the following:

1. Describe your experience in other K-12 districts where you have successfully conducted a special education audit/program review.
2. Provide 2 or 3 references from other studies you have recently conducted and successfully completed and, if possible, with emphasis on districts similar to Regional School District 17.
3. Describe a typical process for conducting this type of program review.
4. Provide profile/s of the staff that you are proposing to lead this effort.
5. Describe the audit/program review approach and the methodology to be utilized in order to respond to the areas identified and questions posed.
6. Provide the average length of time from initiation of the study, the timeline for phases of the study through to successful completion.
7. Describe how you intend to work with the school staff and others, as appropriate, during this study.
8. Provide a cost to conduct the audit/study and include costs for two similar studies done recently.

Attendance and a presentation at a Board meeting will be required. It is possible that you will be requested to present at a leadership and/or staff meeting, not to exceed three presentations in total. The schedule will be mutually coordinated and in advance.

Inquiries

All technical inquiries regarding this RFP must be in writing and must be addressed to the Technical Contact identified on the cover sheet. The deadline for submitting questions related to this RFP is 5 working days before the due date. Responses to all questions will be furnished through a formal addendum following the closing date listed herein.

Incurring Cost

The District will not be held responsible for any costs incurred by the proposer for work performed in preparation and production of a proposal or for any work performed prior to the issuance of a contract.

Rejection/Acceptance of Proposals

The District reserves the right to refuse for any reason deemed to be in the District's best interest any and/or all proposals submitted under this RFP.

This RFP is not an offer to contract. Acceptance of a proposal neither commits the District to award a contract with any firm, even if all requirements in this RFP are met, nor limits its right to negotiate in the best interest of the District. The District reserves the right to contract with any firm for any reason. The District is not required to accept the low bidder's proposal.

Addenda to RFP

Amendments to this RFP may be necessary prior to the closing date and will be furnished to all prospective proposers. Failure to acknowledge receipt of amendments in accordance with the instructions contained in the amendment may result in the proposals not being considered.

Submission of Proposals

Each proposer must submit their proposal by the date and time stated on the cover sheet. Proposals received after the date and time prescribed shall not be considered for contract award and shall be returned to the proposer. Neither faxed nor emailed RFP responses will be accepted as qualified RFP submissions.

Proprietary Information

The District will not disclose any portion of the proposals except to members of the proposal evaluation team prior to contract award. The District retains the right to disclose the name of the successful proposer, the financial considerations, and any other information in the proposal that is pertinent to the selection of the proposer.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM REVIEW SCOPE/SPECIFICATIONS

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Scope and Goals of the Special Education Program Review

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 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 scope of work shall include:

- 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

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 supports be expanded?
- How precisely do secondary staffing match course enrollment, existing class size guidelines, and best practices?
- Are human resources being effectively used to meet the needs of students with IEPs?
- Should current programs be revised, expanded, or replaced in order to better meet the needs of students with IEPs?

- Do current programs contain an appropriate continuum of service options for students with IEPs?
- What kind of professional development opportunities would best help to support RSD 17 staff members in meeting the needs of students with IEPs moving forward - including both special education and regulation staff members?

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

- Partner 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.
- Partner 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 the 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 databases of the 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,

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 of 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

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