



September 1, 2021

A Request for Proposals for an Evaluation of Colorado's K-12 Education Accountability Systems

OSA Responses to Bidder Inquiries

1. Can you clarify the difference between objectives d and e in section C (Services Required)?

We have listed the objectives as they appear in House Bill 21-1294. The two objectives ask similar questions and there may be no substantive differences in terms of the work needed to address them. It is reasonable at this point for bidders to treat these two objectives together when preparing proposed work plans.

*Based on a plain reading of the language, we note that Objective D appears to emphasize the effectiveness of interventions **for school outcomes**, whereas Objective E appears to emphasize the effectiveness of interventions **for students**. Also, Objective D lists (1) schools that serve predominantly students of color and (2) interventions that focus primarily on increasing students' performance on statewide standardized tests as additional relevant factors to consider when determining the effectiveness of interventions for school outcomes.*

It is possible that a review of the bill's legislative history and committee testimony (<http://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb21-1294>) could provide additional information. This may also be an area for further follow-up clarification with the bill's prime sponsors, if needed, once a contract is in place.

2. Can you provide insight on the motivation behind the statement in objective d, "including interventions that focus primarily on the increasing of students' performance on statewide standardized tests in lieu of other non-testing-related courses and activities within a school"?

We do not have any additional information about the motivation behind that part of the language in Objective D. It is possible that a review of the bill's legislative history and committee testimony (<http://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb21-1294>) could provide additional information. This may also be an area for further follow-up clarification with the bill's prime sponsors, if needed, once a contract is in place.

3. What contract type does the Colorado Office of the State Auditor expect to award for this work?

The OSA will use a fixed-price contract for this engagement. Accordingly, proposals must state the total inclusive maximum fee for completing the requested scope of work (see Section II(H)(2) of the RFP). A copy of the OSA's contract template was included in Section IV – Supplemental Information of the RFP. Section 7 of the contract template is where the maximum amount payable to the Contractor under the contract will be specified.

4. What is the expected contract value for this work?

The OSA has not established a specific contract value for this project. We will rely on the selected proposal to define this parameter based on the proposed work plan. The OSA encourages bidders to propose a work plan that satisfies the project's objectives in as efficient and cost-effective manner as possible within available resources. With the passage of House Bill 21-1294, the OSA received a \$300,000 appropriation for Fiscal Year 2022 and, consistent with the fiscal note for House Bill 21-1294, the OSA will receive an additional \$100,000 appropriation for Fiscal Year 2023. Thus, a total of \$400,000 is budgeted for the evaluation. Also see responses to Questions #19 and #33.

5. What types of “intervention” data are available? (Referring to Objectives D and E)

Interventions may include the school/district Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) strategies, which are publicly available on the Colorado Department of Education's (CDE) website (<https://www.cde.state.co.us/uip>). Interventions may also include the State Board-directed actions that are publicly available on the CDE website (<http://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability/stateboardaccountabilityactions> and <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeboard>).

6. We see that current School Improvement Plans are available. For what additional years are School Improvement Plans available?

The CDE website includes School Improvement Plans for the most current year of submission. Past plans can be pulled from the Online UIP System beginning in the 2015 school year. Plans prior to that year (2009 to 2015) would need to be pulled by CDE staff from CDE systems, as they were received in PDF format.

7. Through the data-sharing agreement, will de-identified student level data be available from the Department of Education?

Student-level data, without names or student IDs, will be accessible from CDE through the Data Sharing Agreement (DSA). Masked student IDs can also be provided, depending upon the exact data needs of the evaluation.

8. Beyond those reported for accountability purposes, are there additional workforce and postsecondary data available? Is this data available through the Department of Education or through a different department?

Statewide, CDE has graduation and dropout rates and matriculation rates in the School and District Performance Frameworks. In matriculation rate data, CDE has 2-year and 4-year colleges and credential attainment. CDE has concurrent enrollment participation data during high school, as well as AP and IB course enrollment data. CDE can gather FAFSA completion rates. CDE also has some industry credential/certification completion and self-reported military enlistment data.

The Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) is also a potential source of data:

- [CDHE Report: Postsecondary Access and Success for Colorado's High School Graduates](#)
- [CDHE District-at-a-Glance Tool](#)

9. Are data available for Charter schools consistent with the data available for other public schools?

Yes.

10. What is the budget for this project?

See responses to Questions #4, #19, and #33.

11. Is the audit expected to review the role of the state accountability system and state testing data in the oversight of charter schools by charter school authorizers?

Charter schools fall within the scope of this evaluation to the extent that they are subject to the same statewide system of standards and assessments and statewide education accountability system as any other public K-12 school in Colorado.

12. Given disruptions to the accountability model due to COVID-19, what is the most recent year of accountability model data the contractor will be responsible for evaluating?

The most recent year of data available for the full implementation of the state accountability system is the 2019-2020 school year. It should be noted that portions of the accountability system have continued to be implemented during the accountability pause (e.g., request to reconsider, improvement planning).

13. Will the contractor have access to student-level data and test scores for individual students on a test-by-test basis? If so, what demographic variables would be included?

De-identified student level data for CMAS Mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) and PSAT/SAT Math and Evidence-based Reading and Writing are available through CDE based on the Contractor's data request and subject to the terms of the DSA. Expected demographics include:

- *Gender*
- *Free/reduced lunch status*
- *Race/ethnicity*
- *Disability status (IEP yes/no)*
- *English learner status*
- *District association*
- *School association*

Score data will be overall test (ELA and math) performance level and scale score information.

Much of the state assessment data are also available publicly at an aggregate level for all students and by subgroups. Links to the public facing data are available at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment>

14. What information is available (and in what format) regarding assistance actually provided to each school as part of the improvement models?

CDE provides assistance through a wide array of services depending upon the needs of the district or school. The format of technical assistance is available in a variety of modes (e.g., weblinks, pdf, spreadsheet, interview with CDE staff). At the universal level, trainings, resources, data visualizations, and customized assistance are available. Most resources can be found on the accountability website (<http://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability/stateaccountability>), SchoolView (<http://schoolview.org/>), and improvement planning (<http://www.cde.state.co.us/uiip>). At the targeted level (e.g., schools on the clock), a support coordinator (department staff with school improvement experience) is assigned to each district with an identified school.

Some example web resources include information about the accountability clock (http://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability/accountability_clock) and a school improvement grant—the Empowering Action for School Improvement (EASI) grant (<http://www.cde.state.co.us/fedprograms/easiapplication>). More intensive supports are provided for schools and districts with a State Board-directed action. Progress monitoring reports and State Board actions are available on CDE’s website (<http://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability/stateboardaccountabilityactions> and <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeboard>).

15. For the purposes of this audit, how does the state define and operationalize learning opportunities?

Neither statute nor CDE have specifically defined “learning opportunities.” The Contractor will need to develop a working definition for purposes of the evaluation based on common/accepted practices and the Contractor’s subject-matter knowledge and expertise.

16. By what date can we potentially expect to be contacted about the interview if we qualify?

The OSA will identify up to the top three bidders for interviews no later than 8:30 a.m. MT on Wednesday, September 14, 2021. As stated in Section III(A) of the RFP, all interviews will take place on Thursday, September 16, 2021.

17. For the purposes of meeting with the TAP, can an executive session be called at any time?

The Department recently informed the OSA that the TAP is unable to convene in executive session. Therefore, the OSA will work with the Department and the Contractor on other options available for consulting with the TAP as authorized by House Bill 21-1294.

18. What are the expected in-person meetings or presentations required for this contract, including whether any meetings occur over multiple days?

As stated in Section I(C) of the RFP, bidders should plan to conduct the majority of work for this engagement remotely (e.g., phone, email, remote meeting technologies). However, the Contractor must be present in person for the Legislative Audit Committee (LAC) hearing at the end of the engagement when the final report is publicly released and presented. LAC hearings are held over the course of 2 days; however, this evaluation will not be the only item on the agenda. The presentation for this report will occur on a single day. LAC presentations for large projects such as this one typically last approximately 2 hours.

Once the report is publicly released, additional presentations will be required if the House and Senate Education Committees and/or the State Board of Education request such a presentation. The Contractor should anticipate in-person presentations for both entities. The OSA will work with these entities to obtain as much advance notice as possible for any requested presentations. The OSA will also work with these entities and the Contractor to ensure as much coordination as possible when scheduling, including whether any remote options are available at that time.

19. How much of the \$300,000 appropriated for the implementation of the act and audit (or additional funding sources) is available for this contract?

The full appropriation is available for this contract; it will not be used to cover the OSA's staff time or resources for the engagement. Also see responses to Questions #4 and #33.

20. Can/should stipends for focus group panelists be included if focus groups are planned outside normal workday hours (i.e., evenings or weekends)?

Payment of stipends/honoraria to focus group participants is not prohibited. However, any stipends/honoraria must be paid out of the total maximum amount payable to the Contractor; the cost will not be separately reimbursed under the contract. Also see Response #3 regarding the OSA's use of a fixed-price contract for this engagement. If payment of stipends/honoraria to focus group participants is being planned, the submitted proposal should provide a detailed cost estimate as part of the project's pricing breakdown (see Section II(H) of the RFP).

21. Should Section I (Delivery Schedule) of the proposal copy the timeline from page 15 – 18 of the RFP? What additional milestones should be included in the Delivery Schedule beyond those already listed?

Yes, it is acceptable for proposals to copy the overall project timeline as outlined in Section I(C) of the RFP. However, to the extent possible, we strongly encourage bidders to include additional interim deadlines during the Fieldwork Phase as a way to communicate how the evaluation team's proposed work plan will flow within the overall project timeline. For example, review of CDE documentation, studies, analyses, and reports, interviews, focus groups, etc. might be the focus of work completed earlier in the project timeline while the Contractor is working with CDE to request and obtain data for analysis that is planned for later in the project timeline.

22. If the contractor plans to utilize consultants with particular expertise, must they be named in the proposal, or can the proposal indicate planned limited use of unnamed consultants?

As stated in Section II(E) of the RFP, the proposal must identify any subcontractors or specialists that will be used as part of the proposed evaluation team. Only indicating the planned use of unnamed consultants is not acceptable. This disclosure is important for properly assessing the proposed evaluation team's qualifications and its independence for the engagement. Also see response to Question #23.

23. We infer the use of the term “joint venture proposals” implies two organizations cannot form a separate entity for bidding on this scope. However, we assume a prime contractor can still use a subcontractor if necessary to complete some aspects of scope under this contract. Can the state confirm our understanding is correct or provide clarification if needed?

Your understanding is correct. The OSA permits the Contractor to use subcontractors to complete work under this contract. Also see response to Question #22.

24. Exhibit H provides the details of the final deliverables. This does not list special versions (such as a 508 compliant version). Should we consider 508 compliance or other versions of the deliverable(s) into our cost proposal?

Apart from providing the final printed hard copies and an electronic PDF file that adhere to the OSA's standard reporting format (see Exhibit H of the OSA's standard contract template which was included in Section IV – Supplemental Information of the RFP), the OSA does not have any additional special reporting requirements that need to be factored into bidders' proposals.

25. The language in Section F. Submission of Proposals reads, “The State Auditor shall have the right to use all ideas, or adaptations of these ideas, contained in any proposal received in response to this RFP.” Then, Section G of the RFP reads, “Any questions or issues with the terms and conditions in the OSA’s standard contract and its related exhibits must be identified and described as part of the proposal, including alternative language the bidder is proposing.” Is OSA amenable to removing the language in Section F from this RFP? If not, can OSA clarify how ideas and methods from bidders might be used?

The OSA will not remove the language from Section I(F) of the RFP. Although not a frequent occurrence, the OSA may rely on proposals that we receive as a source of information to help with project development. For example, the OSA may rely on information provided in proposals to help redefine a project's scope of work, if needed. The OSA may also rely on proposals to help generate ideas for other audits and evaluations, or to identify methodologies and approaches that could have applicability on other audits and evaluations.

26. Do Colorado schools administer consistent measures (across some or all high schools) to address college and career readiness beyond measures identified in Section B. Background Information of the proposal (i.e. graduation rates, dropout rates, scores on college entrance exams, matriculation rates for college and other postsecondary options)? For example, a workplace readiness assessment? If so, would the evaluator have access to these data from the state or would we need to work with individual districts and/or schools to access?

The consistent measures are included in the School and District Performance Frameworks (graduation rates, dropout rates, PSAT and SAT scores, and matriculation rates). The DSA with CDE can include this data. In addition, in matriculation rate data we have disaggregated data for 2-year and 4-year colleges and credential attainment. We have concurrent enrollment participation data during high school, as well as AP and IB course enrollment data, if applicable. CDE can gather FAFSA completion rates. Statewide this is what CDE has available. There is not a statewide workplace readiness assessment.

The Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) is also a potential source of data:

- [CDHE Report: Postsecondary Access and Success for Colorado's High School Graduates](#)
- [CDHE District-at-a-Glance Tool](#)

27. Does Colorado maintain a database of course offerings across schools and would the evaluator have access to the database?

CDE does not maintain a statewide database of course offerings. CDE collects data on courses offered, but these data would not be considered all-inclusive or up-to-date at any point in time. Accurate course offering data would need to be requested from districts.

28. If a contractor proposes collecting additional data for the purpose of this evaluation (e.g., focus group data, workplace or other quantitative data directly from a school or district) would we need to establish a separate data sharing agreement with the school or district, or would this be covered by the state-level DSA discussed in Section C?

Any data request made of an individual district must follow that district's data request policies and processes. If the request includes PII, it will likely require a DSA with that district. CDE has a district-populated data governance committee (Education Data Advisory Group or EDAC) that helps evaluate requests made to a large number of districts. If needed, CDE will request that EDAC create an expedited process to review requests associated with this evaluation. This should help communicate the need for data to the districts and speed up the process. If the Contractor requires data from a small number of districts, the contractor may go directly to those districts.

The OSA reminds bidders that, as stated in Section II(C) of the RFP, state statute [Section 2-3-127(4)(a), C.R.S.] requires that the Contractor obtain the information required for the evaluation from CDE to the greatest extent possible. This expectation was established as a control measure to help ensure completion of the evaluation within the timelines established in statute and to limit the cost of the evaluation. We caution bidders about submitting work plans that rely too heavily on information and data that must be obtained from individual districts and/or schools, even if this causes some barriers and limitations for the evaluation work.

29. Will the state administer a survey to district leaders, principals, and/or parents during the 21-22 school year? We note that CDE administered a survey related to the accountability system in 2017-2018. If so, is it possible to add additional questions to this survey? If not, is it permissible to administer our own surveys to these populations? Could CDE facilitate this sort of survey administration?

CDE does not currently plan to conduct a survey this year. The Contractor is able to administer its own survey if that is part of the proposed work plan. CDE can expedite this process if the Contractor takes their initial survey request through the EDAC process (see response to Question #28), which will help with initial outreach and district contact for any survey.

30. Can OSA or CDE provide a detailed theory of action that specifies the specific indicators defining success for students, schools, and districts?

See the accountability webpage on CDE's website for a description (<https://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability>). The District Accountability Handbook may be another good resource (http://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability/district-accountability-handbook-2020_final_9-10-2020).

31. How valuable is gathering the perspectives of key stakeholders through interviews and/or surveys versus technically assessing the modeling choices embedded in the accountability system through quantitative analyses of extant data?

As stated in Section I(C) of the RFP, the OSA will not prescribe or dictate the evaluation's methodology or work plan. However, the Contractor is responsible for ensuring the overall sufficiency and appropriateness of the evidence used to support its findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Obtaining and relying on multiple types and sources of evidence whenever possible generally provides a stronger basis for findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Testimonial evidence obtained through interviews, surveys, focus groups, etc. can be important for providing qualitative, contextual information that helps to interpret or corroborate quantitative data analysis.

32. What is the maximum budget allocated to this evaluation?

See responses to Questions #4, #19, and #33.

33. Does this RFP have a cost limit, above which offerors will be excluded from consideration? If yes, what is that limit?

Bidders with proposals that exceed the resources available for the project will not be automatically excluded from consideration; however, proposed costs are a factor in the OSA's evaluation of proposals. The OSA encourages bidders to propose a work plan that satisfies the project's objectives in as efficient and cost-effective manner as possible within available resources. Also see responses to Questions #4 and #19.

34. Will the research conducted be able to be used as the basis for publishing academic research in a peer reviewed journal?

No. The Contractor will not be permitted to use any data obtained or work completed as part of this engagement for any other purpose, including but not limited to publishing academic research in a peer reviewed journal. As the OSA's authorized agent, the Contractor's access to data and information is solely for the purpose of conducting the evaluation.

35. Will the organization be allowed/encouraged to recommend improvements to the accountability system, or would recommended changes be outside the scope of this evaluation?

Yes, the Contractor will be able to make recommendations for improvements, as appropriate, based on the results of the evaluation's fieldwork. Findings, conclusions, and recommendations will be a topic of routine discussion between the Contractor and the OSA as the fieldwork is being completed and the report is being drafted, as outlined in the "Deliverables and Timelines" section of Section I(C) of the RFP.