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February 15, 2013

Statewide Student Information System Procurement Process

There have been a number of questions about the procurement of a Statewide Student Information System (SSIS) that the Department of Administration (DOA) conducted on behalf of the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Please allow me this opportunity to explain the process that led the evaluation team and DPI to its decision. At its essence, the procurement process ensures that the best vendor offering the best services at the best price is selected, without any political influence on the process.

To begin with, we understand that people may be disappointed that a Wisconsin company was not the highest scorer in this instance, and many have asked why Wisconsin companies are not given preferential treatment. The answer lies in Wisconsin's state law and fair trade law among the states.

The law states that if a Wisconsin company receives preferential treatment in Wisconsin's procurement process, other states will give preferential treatment to their own in-state companies instead of considering Wisconsin vendors on an equal basis. Since many Wisconsin companies do business across the nation, Wisconsin's scoring system does not favor them during the proposal process so they are not unfairly blocked from competing in other states.

Understanding that background, we can then look at the DPI Statewide Student Information System procurement. The law creating a Statewide Student Information System was adopted in 2011 Act 32 with a goal of creating a single statewide data warehouse for student information for more than 440 school districts and non-district public charter schools in Wisconsin.

At its core, this initiative was undertaken to reduce cost, improve efficiency, ensure equity across districts, improve data access and security, and extend Student Information Systems features beyond what many districts have today. The intention is to utilize technology to create a seamless system for information sharing between districts all around the state, which allows parents, school districts and state officials to make better informed decisions. While some school districts have portions of their own systems, they do not communicate with one another.

Following the passage of Act 32, DPI studied other states' systems and conducted an extensive outreach process with end-user stakeholders to develop objective system requirements and selection criteria for the SSIS. These stakeholder groups included school nurses, school district IT professionals, special education teachers, regular education and advanced learning teachers, principals, superintendents and administrative support staff. Based upon the objectives and requirements provided by DPI for the SSIS, our agency administered and managed a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process that began in May 2012.

When any RFP is posted, there is an opportunity for any interested vendor to protest the evaluation criteria and methodology before the evaluation process begins. Our agency did not receive any protests about the evaluation criteria or methodology for the SSIS solicitation.

Under Wisconsin law, the procurement process is designed to prevent any political influence. Elected political officials, including the Governor and state legislators, are intentionally removed from the process to ensure undue influence cannot be exerted on the process. An evaluation team follows statutory guidance to ensure a fair, unbiased recommendation based upon merit.

The process also encourages input from experts and end-users. In this case, each of the vendor proposals underwent an exhaustive review process by a knowledgeable, experienced evaluation team to ensure the vendor selected met the needs of DPI, Wisconsin school districts, and was in the best interest of the taxpayers. The evaluation team was made up of education professionals representing a wide variety of Wisconsin school districts and one DPI civil servant who had experience with existing student information systems. Education professionals were able to provide input based on their individual school and district needs.

In addition to these steps, an independent third-party monitored the entire process and issued an extensive report. Key findings of the report include:

- The RFP “was drafted to identify the best possible vendor for the job at the best possible price.”
- “...the vendor with the highest total score was the clear winner. The Evaluation Team unanimously recommended that the SSIS contract be awarded to the highest scoring proposer. The vendor recommendation was fair to all vendors, and consistent with the RFP and applicable state law.”
- In addition, the selection process included “an exhaustive qualitative review of the proposals submitted against pre-written benchmarks and an objective cost component. Finally, based upon my observations, the Evaluation Committee did not appear to be subject to any outside influence on the selection process.”

As a result of the procurement, transparent process, Infinite Campus, a company based in Minnesota, received the Notice of Intent to Award. Once the Notice of Intent letter has been issued, vendors have the opportunity to protest if they feel the contract award was not made in accordance with Wisconsin law. A protest for the SSIS procurement has been received by DPI, and the vendor will be provided a fair opportunity to have their concerns objectively reviewed.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Marquis
Communications Director
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