

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

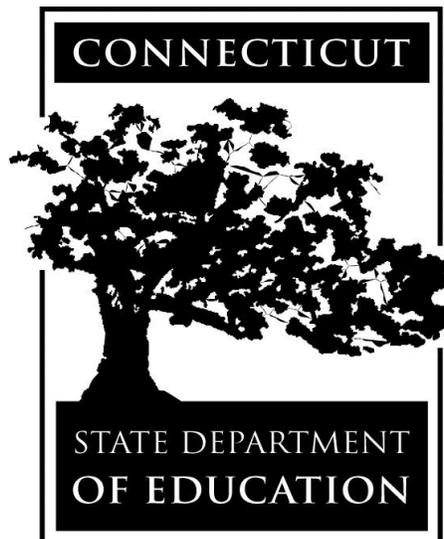
RFI - 13SDE0002RFI

Department of Education

Request for Information (RFI)

For

Connecting Families and Teachers through Technology



**Issue Date:**

October 24, 2012

**Question Deadline Date:**

November 18, 2012, @ 5:00 P.M. EST

**Response Deadline:**

November 30, 2012, @ 5:00 P.M. EST

**Issued by:**

Mark Day, Director of Performance Management and Strategic Planning  
Department of Education  
165 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

1. PURPOSE. ....	4
1.1 Background .....	4
1.2 Objectives of this Project .....	5
2. RESPONSES TO RFI .....	5
2.1 Scope of RFI.....	6
2.2 Quality of Responses.....	6
2.3 Product and Service Availability .....	6
3. REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES FOR QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES .....	6
3.1 Submitting Questions.....	6
3.2 Submitting Responses to the RFI .....	6
4. INFORMATION REQUESTED .....	7
4.1 Technical Specifications .....	7
4.2 Alignment with CSDE Priorities.....	8
4.3 Training Needed.....	9
5. REFERENCES: EXISTING CUSTOMERS.....	9
6. DISCLAIMERS.....	9
7. CONFIDENTIALITY INFORMATION FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT .....	9

## **1. PURPOSE**

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) seeks to develop a program to enhance family engagement and school-home communication through technology. <sup>1</sup> As envisioned, this pilot program will provide the means for frequent, two-way interaction between families and teachers to share information about student progress, school events and other matters. Responses to this RFI will be used for project planning and to inform a future request for proposals.

### **1.1 Background**

Family engagement contributes to children's success in school. No matter what their income or background, students with involved families tend to have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and higher rates of homework completion. They enroll in more challenging classes, have better social skills and behavior and are more likely to graduate and go on to college. Although family engagement provides many positive outcomes, schools and families struggle to develop and maintain productive relationships and frequent, two-way and meaningful communication.

Technology provides new opportunities for enhancing school-home communication. A growing number of families in all demographic groups are accessing digital technologies including use of the Internet and cellphones. For example, a recent report by the Pew Research Center indicates that 76 percent of Hispanic adults, 79 percent of Black adults and 85 percent of white adults have access to cellphone technology. The goal of this project is to promote schools' use of digital technology to build two-way communication with families and engage parents as learning partners.

This project recognizes that technology is not a magic bullet for school-home partnerships. Technology can only be a tool that supports face-to-face communication. Personal, real-time communication must continue to be the root of the parent-teacher relationship. Additionally, multiple means of communication must be employed to meet the needs of all families, including those who do not have convenient access to technology. The intent of this project is to add to the array of options schools have for connecting with families by using social media and other technologies that many families are already accessing for communication in their daily lives.

Connecticut is embarking on an ambitious education reform agenda to improve schools and ensure that all students are college and career ready. Family engagement has been shown to

---

<sup>1</sup> The terms parent or family are intended to mean a natural, adoptive or foster parent, guardian or other adult serving as a parent, such as a close relative, educational guardian and/or a community or agency advocate.

be a fundamental element of successful school reform efforts. Through this innovative project, the CSDE is improving the likelihood that broader education reforms will be successful. This project purposefully enlists parents' participation and creates more opportunities for busy families and teachers to connect and build relationships that support student success.

## 1.2 Objectives of this Project

The CSDE expects that the technology used in this project will include social media (such as text messaging) and other convenient forms of electronic communication to foster dialogue and increase families' participation in their children's education. It is expected that the eventual project will align with the following description of a "21<sup>st</sup> Century Communications Plan" (Ferriter, Ramsden & Sheninger, 2011).

Messages can be delivered and received anytime and from any place using an Internet-connected device. Messages regularly include interactive content—like video clips from school performances, photos from athletic events, podcast recordings of important messages, and links to external sites for continued exploration—captured and shared in real time. While customized for individual stakeholder groups and often shared in traditional ways, messages can also be accessible to broader audiences and posted in several different social media forums in an effort to reach out to digitally connected parents, students, and stakeholders. Messages are crafted and delivered instantly at the school level. The principal has complete control and flexibility over message frequency and content. Messaging patterns provide ongoing opportunities for two-way interaction between stakeholders and school staff members.

The essential components of the electronic communication system are expected to:

- **Create and/or leverage existing technology:** The system will develop a technology platform and/or use existing technology and devices that are widely available and easily accessible to users, such as text messaging and social media applications.
- **Identify parent training and support needed:** The system will include training and ongoing technical support for parents so they can use the technology to support their children's learning and success.
- **Identify professional development for educators:** The system will include professional development for school and district staff and administrators so they can use the technology effectively for engaging families.

## 2. RESPONSES TO RFI

### 2.1 Scope of RFI

Responses to this RFI will be used by the CSDE to gather company and system availability information from vendors with the capability of providing any or all portions of the program to enhance family engagement and home-school communication through technology. No contract will result directly from the RFI process. The responses to this RFI will be used to determine whether an Request for Proposals (RFP) should be issued.

## **2.2 Quality of Responses**

Well-organized and concise responses are encouraged in order to facilitate the CSDE's evaluation. Responses must follow the same order as this RFI document and utilize the same section numbering system.

## **2.3 Product and Service Availability**

The CSDE expects that the system and services described in response to this RFI are generally available as of the date that responses are due. Responders must explain any exceptions.

## **3. REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES FOR QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES**

This Request for Information (RFI) document outlines the relevant facts and information being solicited from vendors and includes guidelines for content and format of responses. From this RFI's issuance date, interested vendors will have three weeks to submit questions and five weeks to submit their completed written responses.

### **3.1 Submitting Questions**

Written questions must be submitted no later than 5:00 p.m. EST on **November 18, 2012**. All questions must be submitted using electronic mail and addressed to:

Mark Day  
Director of Performance Management and Strategic Planning  
State of Connecticut  
Department of Education  
[mark.day@ct.gov](mailto:mark.day@ct.gov)

Please use "RFI Question" in the subject line of the e-mail.

### **3.2 Submitting Responses to the RFI**

Responses must be submitted no later than 5:00 p.m. EST on **November 30, 2012**. Late responses may or may not be considered, and the CSDE will determine this. The postal address for RFI responses is:

Mark Day  
Director of Performance Management and Strategic Planning  
State of Connecticut  
Department of Education  
PO Box 2219  
Hartford, CT 06145-2219

Interested parties must to respond to this RFI in writing by submitting one original and four complete copies. Respondents may also provide additional information in other media (e.g., video, Web-based formats, etc.).

Responses will be reviewed by CSDE and, depending on the results of that review, additional information or product/service demonstrations may be requested. No contract will result directly from this RFI. Following the review of submitted information, the CSDE will determine the best course of action. This RFI process is intended to help CSDE research a variety of available services.

#### **4. INFORMATION REQUESTED**

Each of the following topics in this section should be acknowledged and answered thoroughly. Responses should clearly address both transitional and ongoing issues. The CSDE may request to meet with responders to this RFI to discuss their proposals.

##### **4.1 Technical Specifications**

This project will provide families and teachers with an effective platform for enriching their interaction. Though many existing technologies/applications may be used (e.g., Twitter or Facebook), they must be integrated into a single, coherent whole.

Responses to the RFI should consider, but are not limited to, the following technical specification and functions. Responses may omit a technical specification listed below but should provide a rationale for doing so.

- Use of widely available and free platforms to minimize barriers of usage
- Aggregator functionality (i.e., ability to receive/read messages from multiple sources, such as e-mail and text in one spot and send messages to multiple media from one spot)
- Compatibility with mobile technologies/devices
- Seamless integration with existing school technologies (e.g., Power School)

- Highly flexible system architecture that is both scalable and sustainable
- Accessible ‘developer’ tools to allow power users to make changes and add functionality
- Federated identity management and role-based access to platform functionality
- Engaging, user-friendly interface
- Multi-person communication through various media (e.g., text, chat, voice, video)
- Online storage for templates, documents and recorded video
- Form creator capability
- Opt-in features where user can specify their preferences
- Metric capture and dashboard output capability to track usage and bugs
- Multi-language capability (e.g., translation tools)
- Connection to marketing campaign software to launch platform

#### **4.2 Alignment with CSDE Priorities**

Please identify how the system described above will promote the priorities the CSDE has established for this project. Specifically, how will the system align with the following goals?

- Digital communication between home and school is ongoing and two-way.
- Messages are delivered and received anytime and from any place using an Internet-connected device.
- Messages may include interactive content—like video clips from school performances, photos from athletic events, podcast recordings of important messages, and links to external sites for continued exploration—captured and shared in real time.
- While customized for individual stakeholder groups, messages can also be accessible to broader audiences and posted in several different social media forums in an effort to reach out to digitally connected parents, students, and stakeholders.
- The communication system is easy to use, accessible and low cost for families and schools.

#### **4.3 Training Needed**

Please describe the anticipated need and design for training for each of the following groups:

- Parents
- Teachers
- Administrators

## 5. REFERENCES

The respondent should provide at least three references similar in size to the State of Connecticut. For each reference, provide:

- The reference organization's name
- Contact person name
- Address
- Telephone number
- E-mail address
- A brief description of the services provided to named reference

## 6. DISCLAIMERS

The CSDE intends to review all information received in response to this RFI. ***This RFI is intended for information gathering purposes only.*** Generally speaking, the RFI process will assist the CSDE in determining if the State will pursue RFPs with the intent to enter into a contractual agreement for such programs or services.

**All RFI responses submitted by vendors will become the property of the State of Connecticut.**

## 7. CONFIDENTIALITY INFORMATION - FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

The respondent understands that due regard will be given for the protection of proprietary or confidential information contained in all responses received. However, respondents should be aware that all materials associated with this RFI are subject to the terms of the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA") and all corresponding rules, regulations and interpretations. It will not be sufficient for respondents to merely state generally that the proposal is proprietary or confidential in nature and not, therefore, subject to release to third parties. Those particular sentences, paragraphs, pages or sections that a respondent believes

to be exempt from disclosure under the FOIA must be specifically identified as such. Convincing explanation and rationale sufficient to justify each exemption consistent with Section 1-210(b) of the FOIA must accompany the proposal, as it may be modified from time to time. The rationale and explanation must be stated in terms of the prospective harm to the competitive position of the respondent that would result if the identified material were to be released and the reasons why the materials are legally exempt from release pursuant to the above-cited statute. The State has no obligation to initiate, prosecute or defend any legal proceeding or to seek a protective order or other similar relief to prevent disclosure of any information that is sought pursuant to a FOIA request. Respondents have the burden of establishing the availability of any FOIA exemption in any proceeding where it is an issue. The State shall have no liability for the disclosure of any documents or information in its possession which the State believes are required to be disclosed pursuant to the FOIA or other requirements of law.