

**DETERMINATION AND FINDING
FOR A SOLE SOURCE PROCUREMENT**

AGENCY: District of Columbia Public Schools
IMPACT, Office of Instructional Practice

**PROPOSED
CONTRACTOR:** Tripod Education

FINDINGS

1. **AUTHORIZATION:** DC Official Code 2-354.04, 27 DCMR Sections 1304 and 1701.

2. **MINIMUM NEED:**

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) requires a student perception survey vendor to support the district-wide administration of a student survey of instructional practice. In 2017, over 40,000 students are expected to take the survey across DCPS and the results will be used to calculate high-stakes IMPACT evaluation ratings for approximately 2,000 DCPS teachers. Because the surveys will be used in a performance evaluation context, the survey must be externally validated, research-based, and assess measurable teaching behaviors. In addition, the student survey vendor must be reputable in the marketplace (i.e., cited in the Gates Foundation MET report) and have significant existing and local support staff to meet the needs of DCPS immediately after award of the contract.

Like all districts that use student surveys for the purposes of evaluation, DCPS requires a survey vendor that can provide a secure online administration platform, data security protocols and assurances, and robust data quality checks. However, the high stakes of IMPACT and unique needs of DCPS drive additional quality requirements for the student survey vendor.

3. **ESTIMATED COST:**

The estimated cost is \$150,000.00 from October 1, 2017 to September 30, 2018.

4. **BACKGROUND AND HISTORY**

DCPS began exploring the inclusion of student surveys in IMPACT over two years ago. This process began with a review of the Gates Foundation's Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) report, which established that not only are student surveys appropriate for inclusion in teacher evaluation, but also that they are often as (or more) accurate than other common metrics used in teacher evaluation systems. DCPS found this compelling and committed significant capacity to a robust research phase in which the district 1) reviewed technical reports and materials of the student survey vendors named in the report as high quality (6 total), 2) liaised with other states and districts already using student surveys, 3) began communicating with the vendors named in the

MET report to explore a student survey pilot for DCPS, and 4) published a Request for Information (RFI).

The student survey pilot was conducted in approximately 25% of DCPS schools. Based on the preliminary research and review of technical reports, DCPS partnered with 2 of the 6 vendors named in the MET study to conduct the pilot: 1) Tripod Education and, 2) My Student Survey. Following the pilot, the DCPS central office visited participating schools to gather feedback from teachers and school leaders. This feedback, which favored the Tripod Education survey, was used to inform the decision to seek sole source procurement for Tripod Education.

As a final step in the research phase of the student survey implementation process, DCPS published a Request for information (RFI). An invitation to submit was provided to all 6 vendors named in the MET study; 4 vendors responded (Tripod Education, My Student Survey, Corwin, and Panorama). Each of these responses were reviewed by the IMPACT team and evaluated according to a set of defined criteria (see supporting documentation). Tripod Education emerged as the vendor that best met these criteria.

As a result of this two-year research phase, DCPS determined the following core goods and needs to be essential to the success of the project. DCPS also determined that only one vendor provides all requisite components; this vendor is Tripod Education.

Subsequent to the aforementioned determination, DCPS was privately funded for one year to move forward with the Student Survey using Tripod Education. In March 2017, the IMPACT team requested that the Student Survey procurement request be moved forward, as the private donation funding was expiring and the requirement is ongoing. The Office of Contracts and Administration (OCA) on behalf of the IMPACT team, completed an additional Request for Information as an additional verification that the information submitted by the 4 vendors in 2016 was still accurate. Of the 3 alternate vendors that were contacted, only 1 responded (Panorama). The response was reviewed by the IMPACT team and evaluated per the same set of defined criteria. Tripod Education remained as the vendor that best met these criteria.

5. SCOPE OF THE REQUIREMENT

In addition to the minimum needs described above, the following core goods and services are critical needs of DCPS:

- a) **A robust national data set (1,000,000+ student data points annually), a significant portion of which includes large urban district students (districts with 50,000+ students).** A large national data set allows DCPS to compare its teachers with similar teachers to a high degree of specificity (e.g., 6th grade math teachers in high-poverty schools with 25 students with high prior achievement). These comparisons ensure that factors such as student age, which are not relevant to the content of the survey, do not affect survey outcomes. Tripod Education is the only vendor with a national data set this size and variety.
- b) **A survey instrument with strong psychometric reliability and validity evidence, and the ability to differentiate the quality of instructional practice.** DCPS reviewed the technical reports of all vendors to whom the RFI was sent. The technical reports were evaluated based on the presence of strong reliability and validity evidence that included statistically significant and positive correlations between the survey and other established measures of teacher effectiveness (e.g., value-added, observation). Tripod Education demonstrated strong reliability and validity evidence, and produced the greatest amount of differentiation in instructional practice.
- c) **A large customer service team that can provide: logistics support to central office leading up to and following survey administration, consultation services in developing a data treatment methodology and translation protocol (as needed), extensive data quality and confidentiality management processes, ability to work within tight timelines, and local customer service support for school-based staff members.** DCPS has limited capacity to provide direct support to schools—a service that the pilot revealed is critical to project success. Throughout the pilot, Tripod Education demonstrated the ability to provide extensive and local support to both the central office and the schools. As part of the RFI, Tripod also submitted letters of reference from other partner districts attesting to the level of support they provide.

- d) **An existing, research-based data treatment that includes student and classroom-level control variables to account for construct-irrelevant variance in the data.** Research shows that certain variables, such as class size, affect student survey outcomes. To account for these differences, DCPS will explore the use of a data treatment that makes statistical adjustments to account for these factors. Tripod Education is the only student survey vendor that provides a research-based, established data treatment based on a robust national data set.

A student survey instrument with a consistent Likert scale across items. While multiple vendors offer Likert scale item responses, this criterion, along with the above criteria, establish Tripod as the only

6. FACTS WHICH JUSTIFY A SOLE SOURCE PROCUREMENT

As noted previously, DCPS conducted a two-year research process and piloted student perception surveys with Tripod Education and My Student Survey. This research phase, including the pilot, illuminated specific needs (listed above) in order for district-wide student survey implementation to be successful. As the table below demonstrates, only Tripod Education meets all of these critical needs.

| Critical Need | My Student Survey | Panorama | Tripod Education | Corwin |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| A robust (1,000,000+ student data points annually) national data set, a significant portion of which includes large urban district students (districts with 50,000+ students) | | | X | |
| A survey instrument with strong psychometric reliability and validity evidence, and the ability to differentiate the quality of instructional practice. | X | X | X | |
| A large customer service team that may provide: logistics support to central office leading up to survey administration, consultation services in developing a data treatment methodology and translation protocol, extensive data quality management processes, ability to work within tight timelines, and local customer service support for school-based staff | | X | X | |

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|---|
| members. | | | | |
| An existing, research-based data treatment that includes student and classroom-level control variables to account for construct-irrelevant variance in the data. | | | X | |
| A student survey instrument with a consistent Likert scale across items. | X | | X | X |

5. The Proposed Vendor's Qualifications:

While there are other vendors that provide student perception surveys, Tripod Education provides several goods and services that are unique to Tripod (vendor), and are necessary for successful implementation of student surveys in DCPS.

- a) **A robust national data set (1,000,000+ student data points annually), a significant portion of which includes large urban district students (districts with 50,000+ students).** Tripod has the largest presence in the national marketplace and thus the most robust national data set at over 1,000,000 student data points per year. This allows DCPS to compare the instructional practice of DCPS teachers to similar teachers at an unparalleled degree of specificity (e.g., physical education teachers of fifth grade students with a class size of 32 in a high-poverty school). Research indicates that comparing teachers to their peers in the most specific way possible yields the most accurate student survey data.

- b) **A survey instrument with strong psychometric reliability and validity evidence, and the ability to differentiate the quality of instructional practice.** While the student survey vendors that responded to the previous RFI presented strong validity evidence and were mentioned in the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) report, Tripod was the only student survey vendor actually used in the study. Tripod is, therefore, the soundest choice for inclusion in DCPS' IMPACT performance evaluation system.

- c) **A large and knowledgeable customer service team that may provide: logistics support to central office leading up to survey administration, consultation services in developing a data treatment methodology and translation protocol, extensive data**

quality management processes, ability to work within tight timelines, and local customer service support for school-based staff members. As the largest student perception survey vendor nationwide, Tripod Education has the largest support staff with the most diverse set of expertise.

- First, Tripod Education will provide a lead research team and regional implementation team to support DCPS central office staff and conduct in-person meetings and training materials as needed. This requirement is especially important given limited capacity on the central office IMPACT team and the need to execute the project quickly and effectively.
- Second, Tripod Education also has an extensive technical support staff to liaise with schools leading up to and during the student survey administration window. In other words, Tripod can provide services and supports that the DCPS central office cannot independently provide and that are essential to the success of the project.

d) **Experience partnering with DCPS and a working understanding of district policies and practices.** Because the timeline between award of the contract and opening of the survey administration window is narrow, DCPS needs a vendor with working knowledge of DCPS policies and practices and relationships with central office staff so the information-sharing phase of the project is as brief as possible. Prolonged delay of the project will have a measureable negative impact on implementation and IMPACT teacher evaluations. Tripod possesses this institutional knowledge based on a student survey pilot jointly conducted between Tripod and DCPS in the 2015-2016 school year pursuant to private funding. In addition, during the pilot phase, Tripod Education and DCPS collaborated extensively, at no cost to DCPS, about how the district would approach a district-wide roll-out in subsequent years. This pre-work will be instrumental in ensuring the project, and evaluation processes move forward quickly and productively in year one of implementation. Also of note, contracting with a different vendor would delay the timeline for survey administration, which has already been communicated with teachers and school leaders, and lead to a severe disruption and significant confusion in schools.

- e) **An existing, research-based data treatment that includes student and classroom-level control variables to account for construct-irrelevant variance in the data.** Tripod Education is the only vendor that responded to the RFI and has a robust, existing, research-based data treatment readily available. Tripod developed this data treatment through extensive research, and it includes control variables at weights established by the research to be proportionate to the effect of the variable. Any vendor other than Tripod would have to develop such a model, meaning this data treatment would not be available in year one of the project (should DCPS move forward with a data treatment for survey data that includes control variables). Tripod Education uses their current model with comparable states and districts across the nation including Pittsburgh, Tulsa, and the state of Hawaii.
- f) **A student survey instrument with a consistent Likert scale across items.** After the student survey pilot, DCPS teachers provided feedback indicating that consistency of the response options was essential for students to comprehend and accurately respond to the survey. In response to this feedback, DCPS seeks a vendor with a validated item set that includes the same Likert scale responses across the survey; Tripod offers such a survey.

While many vendors provide a student perception survey, Tripod is the only vendor that provides ALL of the following:

- A secure online administration
- Satisfactory data security protocols and assurances
- Demonstrated ability to link students to teachers within the platform
- A national data set including 1,000,000 student data points annually
- A large and knowledgeable customer service team, including local personnel from the leadership team
- Extensive validity evidence and significant differentiation of the data
- An established, research-based data treatment
- Experience working with DCPS
- Consistently scaled items

Contracting with a vendor other than Tripod Education introduces all or some combination of the following risks:

- Delayed survey administration window
- Inaccurate survey data
- Inability to pursue appropriate data treatments
- Insufficient implementation support
- Inability to assess practice relative to comparable settings

In light of the above findings, a contract with Tripod Education is in the best interest of DCPS to provide a valid and reliable student survey metric in the IMPACT evaluation system. A sole source award is the most efficient and cost-effective procurement method to fulfill this DCPS requirement.

CERTIFICATION BY THE DCPS PROGRAM:

I hereby certify that the above findings are correct and the anticipated cost to DCPS is fair and reasonable.

Date

IMPACT Designs, Director

CERTIFICATION AND DETERMINATION

Based on the above findings in accordance with the above cited authority, I hereby determine that it is not feasible or practical to invoke the competitive bidding process under Section 27 DCMR 1304 and 1701.

Date

Contracting Officer