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## **Idaho plans statewide, opt-in system for special education records management**

(BOISE) – Students, families, and special education professionals across the state are expected to benefit from a new, web-based system to create Individualized Education Programs for students with disabilities.

“The beauty of this system is that it was chosen by the folks responsible for providing individualized plans for students throughout the state, and that’s a great signal that this is the right choice for Idaho,” Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra said. “And the choice doesn’t end there. Every local district or charter school will be able to decide whether to join the statewide system, keep its current provider or choose a new one.”

An IEP is both a process and a document that details a school’s provision of agreed-upon instruction and services specially designed for students who qualify for special education.

In recent years, special education directors around the state have reached out to the State Department of Education seeking an option for a statewide system to create and store Individualized Education Program (IEP) documents. During the 2017-18 school year the SDE surveyed Idaho district and charter school leaders and found an overwhelming majority favored a statewide IEP management system, even if their districts do not plan to opt in.

In July, a committee of special education directors and IT professionals from large and small school districts representing all regions of Idaho came together to review proposals and see product demonstrations from eight system vendors. The committee scored companies in five categories – demonstration, business information, technical proposal, solution and professional development. A sixth category, cost, was not considered by the committee in assessing the companies’ products, but was later factored in.

Public Consulting Group (PCG) had the highest score among the eight bidders, coming in at No. 1 in four of the six categories and placing second and third in the other two. As a result of this process, the SDE plans to issue PCG a one-year contract, renewable for up to five years. While the SDE will direct this contract, use of the system will be optional for Idaho school districts and charters.

[According to its website](#), PCG is the largest web-based special education case management company in the nation, “used by districts spanning 30+ states to achieve and maintain federal and state compliance and improve processes and procedures in their special education programs.”

The SDE intends for the contract's first year to focus on tailoring PCG's system to Idaho's needs, providing professional training on system use, and running a small pilot program. For 2019-20, the contract is likely to handle IEPs for around 10,000 students – roughly one-third of all IEPs in Idaho.

"IEPs are complicated," said committee member Susan Morrison, special education director in North Idaho's Lakeland School District, "and giving my staff the tools to ensure they are writing them to best meet the needs of our students while staying compliant with IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) is my number one concern as a director."

In considering a statewide system for Idaho, close attention was paid to other 'local control states'," Dr. Charlie Silva, SDE director of Special Education Services, said. In other states where adoption of a statewide system was optional, school districts and charters quickly recognized the many benefits of uniform implementation, but appreciated being able to opt in according to their own needs and time line.

"If the platform adopted by the state meets everyone's needs, (the hope is that) most, if not all, of the districts statewide will voluntarily eventually be on the same platform if for no other reason than one statewide platform eases the paperwork burden on our already overburdened special education teachers," said committee member Kelly Hall, special education supervisor for the Boise School District. "Currently many districts do not have an easy or efficient means of monitoring the special education process for compliance or to ensure that students are receiving appropriate services in a timely manner when they move from one district to another."

The primary advantage of a shared system is increased efficiency in the IEP process, Silva said. Students and families have higher involvement and satisfaction in plan development, and reduced redundancy in paperwork and meetings allows teachers more time to focus on educating students with disabilities. Idaho schools will benefit from minimized reporting burdens, quick transfer of student records school-to-school, and the resource savings of a collectively negotiated contract, she said.

"There's likely to be a major cost savings, especially for small districts," SDE Contracts and Procurement Officer Kathy Corless said.

No state funds will be used for the contract. The money will come from federal funds received by the SDE to provide special education services across the state. The total five-year cost estimate is \$1.2 million, Corless said.

Annual contract costs, based on the number of participants, are not set, but will include a per-student fee plus professional development. Per-student license fees are \$14 per student, but will be discounted at \$10 per student for the first year of the contract, Corless said.

"I think having a statewide IEP writing platform will be advantageous for districts, students and families," said committee member Sherry Bingham, special education director for the Minidoka School District.

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