

# Choosing a district data system:

Questions and considerations



Sourcewell Technology is a trusted adviser to school districts. Our experts – many of them administrators and former educators – have a unique perspective and specialized knowledge. This makes them exceptionally qualified partners to help administrators make decisions to best meet each district's needs. We also provide resources like this to help organizations consider their data and navigation needs and ask the right questions of prospective vendors when looking for a new data system.

Our ultimate goal is to ensure you get the most out of your investments in technology. We hope you find this resource helpful in your purchasing journey.



# Considerations for districts

## Features and functionality needs

- Which problems are your district hoping to solve with a new solution?
- What data-related questions does your district need answered?
- Which data categories do you want the system to support?
- Do you prefer standardization in your new system? Or, what customization needs do you hope to gain from a new system?
- What kinds of automated alerts and notifications does your district need from the system?
- When considering visualizations, what are the needs of your users for simplistic visualizations? What about complex visualizations?
- What level of explorations do you want your users to have from visualizations?
  - Drill-throughs to additional information?
  - Ability to toggle among views?
  - Customizable views?
- Consider the download and export outputs you need the system to support. Which formats does your district use most?

## Support and knowledge base

- What customer-level support or expertise is required for the product?
- Does the vendor provide a knowledge bank?
- How do we, the district, contact support? What are the hours of live support? What other methods of gaining support are provided from the vendor (if any)?
- Change management considerations
  - Whom will this impact?
  - How will the district navigate this change?
- What level of local expertise and/or dedicated staffing will be required to maintain the system?
- Is there a support service level agreement (SLA) available?
- In what manner would any data discrepancies be resolved with the vendor?

# Questions for vendors

## Technical and security requirements

- Are there user-licensing restrictions? If so, what are they?
- What are the hosting and browser options and requirements?
- What are the limitations for the volume of data or number of records retained?
- System integrations: What are the limits (if any) for number of systems. What are the fees?
- How is ongoing data accuracy monitored? (i.e., data accuracy audits)
- Data privacy and security requirements:
  - Compliance with federal and state laws and policies, as applicable:
    - FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act)
    - PPRA (Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment)
    - COPPA (Children Online Privacy Protection Act)
    - GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation)
    - MGDPR (Minnesota Government Data Practices Act) or other applicable state law
  - Compliance with industry standards and policies, as applicable
    - NIST (National Institute for Standards and Technology Center for Internet Security)
    - PCI/DSS (Payment Card Industry/Data Security Standards)
    - FISMA (Federal Information Security Management Act)
    - OWASP (Open Web Application Security Project)
    - OASIS (Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards)
    - The CWE/SANS Top 25 Programming Errors

## Vendor qualifications & capabilities

- What customer journey support is provided?
- What are the profit motivations for the vendor? Government agency, for-profit?
- How does the vendor define and monitor toward successful data system implementation?
- How is successful data system implementation and success defined?
- What level of practitioner experience is desired to support and coach the organization around the use and interpretation of data?
- Who is leading the product management and vision? Educators? Technicians? Data scientists?
- What is the role of education practitioners in product design and delivery?

## Navigation and user interface

- Do users of the system feel empowered? Is the system simple to navigate?
- What system limitations are needed to provide access restrictions for different user groups?
- Does the system allow the ability to incrementally expand and grow product use?
- What degree of data-moving and integration is borne by the company, what falls to the district?

## Implementation and training

- What training is required? What additional training options are available?
- How much total training time is suggested for quality implementation?
- What format of training is provided (e.g., in person, virtual, on-demand)?
- What are the costs associated with training?
- How does the platform provide the ability to self-serve, self-train?
- If there is turnover in personnel, how are new training needs managed?
- Is there support for customers with a change management process related to program implementation?
- Is there support for customers with effective stakeholder communication through implementation?

## Costs

- What is the length of the contract term?
- Are fees charged per user or per student?
- Are multi-year discounts available?
- Are high-volume discounts available?

### Are there additional fees for:

- Hosting
- Onboarding (including training and implementation)
- Standard data integration
- Custom data integration
- Support
- Documentation and training materials
- Data return following contract termination
- User group participation

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## We're here to help drive student and district success.

Interested in learning how Sourcewell Technology's data experts can help maximize your district's data and technology investments? Our dedicated and knowledgeable team of data, technology, and education experts is here for you.

Contact us at: 615-999-6000 | [clientsolutions@sourcewelltech.org](mailto:clientsolutions@sourcewelltech.org)

