

RFP Guidance on Interoperability Requirements

When preparing an RFP for a new classroom or enterprise management system, CoSN recommends that the degree to which the system interoperates with other systems be a main criterion.

The following key considerations have been developed as a guide for preparing interoperability requirements and communicating your district's needs to providers.

Key Considerations

1. Provider has signed and adheres to the [Future of Privacy Forum and SIIA Student Privacy Pledge](#).

WHY THIS MATTERS: Interoperability enables data to flow seamlessly between systems. Identifying where data CAN'T go is just as important as determining where it can. While the pledge may not cover every requirement in your district, signatories have a legally enforceable commitment to safeguard student privacy and information security. [CoSN's Protecting Privacy in Connected Learning Toolkit](#) provides an in-depth guide to privacy laws and additional resources.

2. Provider adheres to common industry interoperability standards used by your district.

WHY THIS MATTERS: Proprietary systems can require custom, complex and costly integrations that have a direct impact on your district's budget and efficiency. While proprietary systems may be interoperable with systems developed by the same provider, the lack of standards-based architecture creates a "walled garden" that can lock-in a district to one provider because it is too costly to change. Unfortunately, the education industry lacks an agreed-upon set of common standards. So it is critical that you advise providers what standards your district uses or will be implementing in the future.

CoSN's [*An Introduction to Interoperability Standards for Education Leaders*](#) is a best-practice resource on interoperability standards for education. [*The Project Unicorn Standards Glossary*](#) provides key information and links for each standard.

3. Provider has signed the Project Unicorn EdTech Vendor Pledge.

WHY THIS MATTERS: Signatories of the pledge have signaled their understanding of the importance of interoperability and their willingness to collaborate with schools to increase the interoperability of their products.

4. Moving data from one system to another does NOT require manual data entry or ETL (Extract, Transform, Load).

WHY THIS MATTERS: Manual data entry and data wrangling is time-consuming, inefficient, and inherently error prone. It pulls teachers, admins, and IT staff away from activities that are value-added. If standards are not the same between systems, this is very difficult to achieve.

5. Provider has automated processes in place to ensure data accuracy and integrity and flags for manual data-cleansing.

WHY THIS MATTERS: Dirty data and fully manual data-cleansing waste time, cost money, create errors, and delay access to actionable information. The ability to flag for manual data-cleansing is important as automatic data-cleansing can create dirty data.

6. Core school data should be stored in a CEDS-aligned format and exportable to a standardized format that is aligned to CEDS.

*WHY THIS MATTERS: Standards-aligned data reduces costs and effort when integrating solutions from different vendors and enables districts to continually select the best-of-breed solutions. [*CEDS \(Common Education Data Standards\)*](#) address educational data across the P-20 spectrum and is supported throughout the U.S. Virtually all common data standards in the U.S. align to CEDS. Should you need to change providers, using CEDS-aligned formats and standards will ensure that data can be transferred with integrity. Note that some providers will have unique data sets that extend beyond the standards, which occurs when their product provides new capabilities not currently covered by existing standards. So while the provider may be able to provide their unique data in a parseable, useable format, some of it may not be standards-aligned to accommodate for the new capabilities and may not be usable outside their product.*

Most providers can provide data in a standards-aligned format. Some may charge a one-time fee and/or on-going fees for providing it. Districts should require that providers disclose any additional associated costs to the district for initial and/or ongoing data integration before final procurement. CoSN's Cost Calculator tools can help you estimate the cost of the LACK of interoperability on your district's budget. For insights

into statewide impact, take a look at the [Michigan study](#) that found those costs totaled \$163,000,000 per year.