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PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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Mr. Anup Popat
Chief Executive Officer
Systems Technology Group, Inc. (STG)
3155 W. Big Beaver Road, Suite 220
Troy, Michigan 48084

Dear Anup:

I am writing this letter to thank you and your team's efforts for a job well done. I would certainly recommend STG for future IT Applications work in the future.

In 2010 the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) Office of Education Assessment and Accountability (OEAA) decided to implement a new Item Bank system to improve and automate the processes pertaining to item development, item review, item revision, and test development for all statewide educational assessment programs for K-12 students. The visibility and high-stakes nature of the OEAA assessment and reporting activities necessitate exacting timelines that allow for no deviations in procedures or delays in timelines for either the item or test development activities. The goal was to build a system that will allow for the creation and tracking of edits and various other attributes of assessment items, as well as to create our own assessment forms based on electronically stored item attributes, characteristics, and psychometric information. Additionally, the system should restrict the amount and type of information available to each user through an end user role-based security structure.

MDE awarded a multi-year contract to Systems Technology Group, Inc. (STG) to define, design, develop, test and implement the new Item Bank System.

The new Item Bank System will impact roughly 1.5 Million students enrolled in the Michigan public schools. During the course of their study these students will be assessed for proficiency in various content areas across six major statewide assessment programs, including the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) and Michigan Merit Exam (MME). The new Item Bank database houses around 25,000 test items across various subject areas and programs.

STG helped develop a fully integrated solution leveraging state of the art web based technologies using mature well-defined business processes. STG assisted MDE in the detailed definition of processes towards the creation, enhancement and review of test items and contexts (materials used by multiple items). These items and contexts are then used to automatically generate test maps. MDE appointed Content Leads and Psychometric Leads review the test maps using an intensive test map development/validation process.

STG's solution provides interfaces to export item and context data in XML format for a test map to develop PDF item objects (one-per PDF's) and all other test related content including media asset collection, reader scripts, directions for administration, "Do Not Read Aloud" directions and Braille notes that will used in test booklet development. The new system supports multiple media types including graphics and audio in multiple formats.

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MDE has already utilized the new Item Bank system developed by STG to develop test maps for the Spring 2012 assessments with great success. Additionally MDE has developed over 2,000 new items and contexts that will be used in future assessments.

MDE has also observed the following benefits:

- The new Item Bank System (IBS) is a 100% online system that permits development and review of items and contexts from any location. The State of Michigan no longer needs to use contractors to maintain, manage and host item development systems. This has resulted in significant cost savings to State.
- STG's solution allows MDE to bring all items and contexts (highly confidential) in-house in to database servers securely administered by the Michigan Department of Technology Management and Budget. This has given State of Michigan full custody of the test item data with improved security, eliminating risk of leakage.
- Critical features of the new system include wizard-driven blueprints and layout development; and automated test map generation have helped significantly reduce the test development cycle time from ten weeks to less than two weeks
- The online system permits Committee review of the items and contexts without the need for printed copies and associated security concerns
- STG's solution automatically generates Psychometric reports with Test Characteristic Curves and Test Information functions immediately after a test map is submitted, thereby allowing psychometric leads to assess the statistical validity of the test maps and make the necessary item changes

STG delivered a solution that is of top quality. All phases of the development and deployment were completed on time with minimal issues. After the system was launched, we have had no major code defects. STG successfully migrated all past production data in to the new system. The new system is running smoothly and the State has already started enjoying the operational and financial benefits of the system. The MDE has received very positive feedback from all users including the external development vendors. We are very proud of this system that STG has built for us.

STG's attention to quality and schedule control exceeded all our expectations. Considering the business critical nature of the project and the complexity of the business processes, we needed a partner that had significant depth and experience in executing and managing projects of this size and complexity.

STG not only provided that capability, but also demonstrated great partnership spirit by working closely with State of Michigan personnel throughout the project towards ensuring success. STG's management staff, software designers and programmers were extremely professional and helpful. The devoted partnership shared by MDE staff and STG staff assured the success of the project.

I am looking forward to working with STG throughout the maintenance phase of Item Bank System and look forward to working with them in the future as we add enhancements and updates to the system. I highly recommend STG for similar projects.

Sincerely,



Joseph Martineau, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Bureau of Assessment and Accountability
Michigan Department of Education