

Responses to SBE Questions re Istation Amendment 1

1. How does the price of this proposed contract of shorter duration compare with the previous contract, the best and final offer by other bidders, and the price presented to the State Board last May when we authorized the original Istation contract?

The best and final offer submitted by the unsuccessful bidder was higher at a total cost of \$12,091,080 for three years with less functionality and less professional development than the successful bid offer. The first-year cost for the unsuccessful bidder would have been \$4,312,210.

The original contract presented to the State Board in May 2019 was for a total cost of \$8,405,820 for three years. The original cost for year one was \$2,901,940.

While the difference in pricing for this proposed contract is due to the addition of more services, specifically Tier 1 support, the cost per year is still less than the cost per year of the unsuccessful bidder.

Additionally, Istation worked for no charge from June 2019 until January 2020, so the total cost for year one will be less than even the amount approved by the State Board in May 2019.

The scope of work for the proposed contract is comparable to the January 2020 contract as well as the June 2019 contract. The differences are the shorter contract term, prorated subscription costs for that shorter term, and additional support services as requested by DPI.

2. Why is it that this proposed contract is for four months to July 31, which is past the end of the fiscal year and closer than might be appropriate to the new year depending on how the pending dispute is resolved and whether some form of a rebid is required?

The proposed contract runs through July 31 in order to provide appropriate data on students' reading abilities until the end of the Read to Achieve reading camps as well as to comply with the Read to Achieve legislation. (Also now, with the rapidly evolving coronavirus response, school will not resume until at least May 18, 2020.)

The proposed contract extends through July 31 due to Read to Achieve reading camps, which are required by N.C. Gen. Stat. § 115C-83.1 et seq. An amendment to the contract extending services through the end of the school year and providing for reading camps is necessary because most of the reading camps are held in June and July.

Continuing to use data from Istation's Indicators of Progress, Early Reading (ISIP ER) provides consistency for educators and yields continuous assessment results that can be used for decision making. Regardless of the final decision in the ongoing contract dispute, ISIP ER data are needed throughout the remainder of this school year and during reading camps to monitor students' progress in literacy skills.

Discontinuance of RtA reading assessments prior to the end of reading camps would have legal implications as legislation requires local school administrative units to “provide at least one opportunity for students not participating in a reading camp to demonstrate reading proficiency appropriate for third grade students on an alternative assessment or through a student reading portfolio process approved by the State Board of Education prior to retaining the student.” N.C. Gen. Stat. § 115C-83.8

N.C Gen. Stat. § 115C-83.10 (b1) states: “Each local board of education shall report annually in writing to the State Board of Education by November 15 of each year, for the prior school year, (i) the number and percentage of third grade students who did not demonstrate proficiency upon entering reading camp and who became proficient after completing reading camp and (ii) for each grade level, the number and percentage of first and second grade students who demonstrated reading comprehension below grade level upon entering camp and who demonstrated reading comprehension at or above grade level after completing reading camp.” In order to meet these legislative requirements for reporting, educators need data from the state approved diagnostic reading assessment, Istation, to determine proficiency after completing reading camp.

3. This annualizes to roughly \$10.8M. This seems a lot higher than the original contract.

The calculation in this statement is incorrect. The amendment provides a four-month extension at a total cost of \$1,178,142. Again, Istation provided services at no cost from June 2019 to January 2020, so the total cost for year one will be less than the amount approved by the State Board in May 2019.

If this cost was extrapolated to an annualized cost, (not discounting the work done at no charge in 2019), it would be \$3,534,426, which would still be lower than the first-year cost of the unsuccessful bidder (which would have been \$4,312,210).

4. What is Tier 1 support?

Tier 1 support is when the vendor provides direct customer support to schools and parents by receiving direct support requests from educators and parents. Tier 1 support refers to the first level support requests that involve accessing and using the system by individual users. Technical and functionality issues that impact large number of users simultaneously are escalated to Tier 2 vendor staff who have more specialized technical skills.

Istation provides the following support services for operational maintenance and support:

- Questions/ Helpdesk / Support options
- Escalation and incident resolution procedures
- Training / Professional development
- Communication
- Reporting and Analysis Escalation

The full SLA has much more specific, technical information if you would like to review it.

5. What level of customer support was Istation providing from June 2019 through the execution of the emergency contract? How did that work in practice?

From June 2019 through execution of the emergency contract, Istation provided Tier 1 support. All Istation services, including this Tier 1 support, were provided at no charge during that time period. (See previous answer for how customer support works in practice).

6. Why are we now paying for Tier 1 support services that were a part of the original contract?

Tier 1 support is required to fulfill the Transformation Committee's work to fully implement the recommendations of the EY report. Also, Tier 1 support services have been requested by DPI, K-3 Literacy, and schools and will be important for parents during this coronavirus crisis.

As a comparison, PowerSchool has switched to Tier 1 support as well to fulfill the Transformation Committee's work to fully implement the recommendations of the EY report. For a similar workload, DPI currently pays PowerSchool \$58,333 per month for Tier 1 support. The Istation contract would cost \$49,186 per month for Tier 1 support.

7. The May 1, 2018, EY organizational assessment of DPI recommended that the agency procure Tier I support service from vendors. Did the RFP require Tier 1?

Tier 1 support was a Technical Specification, (not a requirement), of the RFP.

8. To date, what service level agreements have governed technical support provided by Istation? How does the proposed amended service level agreement differ?

Istation has maintained its previous level of support services throughout the current contract. The amendment memorializes service expectations in an SLA and incorporates strict incident resolution and downtime timeframes and penalties. To date, Istation's responsiveness to technical support requests and the uptime for the solution have met or exceeded DPI's standard requirements.

9. What will Istation be doing over the next few weeks (maybe months) during school closure and should we rescale this proposed contract to reflect that?

Currently, Istation's online resources are available and already in place to serve as a remote learning resource during the closure of schools in NC. Home access has doubled since schools closed. That opportunity for home access will cease if the contract is not extended. Also, it will be critical to have a quick formative assessment ready when schools get back in session so that we will be able to measure the impact on student learning during their time out of the classroom.

Students have access to Istation's Ipractice. Ipractice offers literacy activities, including digital books, printable books, literacy games, and animated songs. Ipractice for students can be accessed on PC's, Macs, laptops, or tablet devices, including Android tablets and phones, iPads, and Amazon Fire.

Parents have access to Istation's Parent Portal, which provides skill-building lessons that a parent can do with their child and includes printable materials for use at home. The Parent Portal can be accessed on any device with a browser, such as smartphone, tablet, or PC.

Also, without having to rescale this contract, Istation can activate the progress monitoring solution for home use, which will let teachers understand how their students are doing during this transition. In this school closure environment, progress monitoring will be more important than ever. Teachers would benefit from understanding if their students are undergoing a loss of critical literacy skills. Any progress monitoring conducted at home would be flagged as such so teachers can easily differentiate between activities at home versus at school. This approach preserves the fidelity of assessment data used by the state and districts while still providing valuable insights.

Included in this contract at no additional cost (without having to rescale this contract), Istation is offering ongoing professional development and training (now all remote) to all teachers, parents, and students during this time of need:

- For teachers: Webinars, recorded videos, how-to modules are all being developed to help teachers with a "school-to-home" connection during school closures. The training will focus on remote learning and how to enable the parent portal, remotely monitor student progress, and develop lesson plans using Istation.
- For students: Short how-to videos are being developed for students so they can learn how to log in and use Istation from home if they haven't already.
- For parents: Webinars and how-to videos are being developed to share with parents what activities are available for them to use at home. These trainings will also focus on ways to use Istation effectively during school closures; how they can interpret student data and results; and what activities and lessons might be best suited for a parent and child to participate in together.

10. Do we have any feedback from the field on Istation to understand how this is working and whether there are other amendments we need?

Depending on the outcome of pending litigation, an amendment may be necessary to gather data for students who may still be enrolled in reading camp during August and September; however, this would be a limited number of students.

In the event of extended school closure, for K-3 students, it will be critical to consider plans

to deliver comprehensive literacy instruction via means that are familiar to students and teachers. This is a developing situation and a separate contract would be necessary if the State Board wants to add additional remote learning capabilities. Below are some options:

- Assignment Feature: Istation offers the ability for teachers to assign practice activities to a whole class, small groups of students, or individuals. In addition, teachers can monitor their students' progress remotely and guide assignments to fit emerging needs.
- Personalized Curriculum: Istation can offer personalized curriculum to all students that meets them directly where they are in their learning journey. Interactive lessons digitally present content with engaging animation. Explicit and direct instruction connects lessons and activities to help increase understanding and engagement. Responsive re-teaching supports student-centered classrooms to ensure students master concepts before progressing. The personalized curriculum leverages the progress monitoring data to ensure that the most relevant instruction is presented. This solution guides students through appropriate and engaging instruction without requiring oversight or intervention by parents.
- Additional Subjects: Istation can expand access to other subjects, specifically math and Spanish. It can do so while maintaining the same login credentials, so connection is seamless and easy.

See below for some recent feedback from the field.

“I just participated in the mission possible webinar! I just happened to join in and I am soooo thankful that I did! Will this be offered again or was it recorded? I so want to share all of it with my staff. It aligns to what we are doing with goal setting and student data chats 100%. Thank you for the session! It was very helpful!”

Principal

“Thank you...we appreciate your support. I was just on Istation and we have many students who have accessed it today from home! I appreciate the support documents you sent me last week for at home access. We are excited to have the first webinar next week to provide virtual professional learning to our teachers who will be working from home.”

Director of Elementary ELA

“We had a great morning at ASC furthering our understanding and use of Istation data and reports. Thank you @IstationNC for the wonderful training...Our Kindergarten teachers had fun learning more about Istation with a scavenger hunt during our grade level PLC.”

Literacy Instructional Specialist

“The @IstationNC spelling subtest is gold! A close look at spelling errors to drive phonics instruction. One of our favorite on-demand assessments.”

Literacy Coach

“Teachers were being pulled in so many directions that we needed to show how this

comprehensive solution would make everything easier. We continue to make the connection that ultimately this will make their jobs easier and help the district as a whole reach its mission.”
Elementary Curriculum Director

“ISIP is student user friendly. It is the teachers who do not want [to] let go of the old ways of assessing. I am concerned NC will not give Istation a fair chance. So much social negativity will make it hard for teachers/parents to give honest opinions.”
Literacy Coach

“This is a student friendly assessment and I think students will like it better than MCLASS.”
Teacher

“[Istation] gives the teachers back their instructional time, provides at home practice for students, and more. I am excited!”
Teacher

“Our kids beg to get on it. They are showing growth as the teachers use the data to drive instruction. It gives a more detailed and objective evidence of their performance, not subjective. They can see their own growth as well. Istation has been a great partner to have in doing PD. They are willing to answer any questions our teachers have on the spot and have been very supportive in every aspect. The parents love the parent portal, too, so they can access reports at home and focus on skills needed.”
Instructional Coach

11. Is this an emergency contract?

No, the amendment is not an emergency purchase. The amendment extends the current contract that was approved by DIT and executed in January. DPI acted under the guidance of DIT to prepare this amendment, and DIT has approved this amendment.