Mesquite Independent School District (Mesquite ISD) Firewall Refresh

Request for Proposal (RFP)

Project Title: Next-Generation Firewall Refresh
Issuing Agency: Mesquite Independent School District (Mesquite ISD)

1. RFP Timeline & Key Dates

Vendors must adhere to the timeline set forth below. All inquiries, questions, and final bid submissions must be completed prior to the listed deadlines.

Event / Milestone	Date / Deadline
RFP Posting Date	11/17/2026
Vendor Question Submission Deadline	11/27/2026
District Question Response / Addendum Posting Date	12/2/2026
Final Bid Submission Deadline	12/15/2026

2. Introduction & Project Objective

Mesquite Independent School District (Mesquite ISD) is seeking comprehensive, competitive proposals from qualified technology vendors and network integrators to deliver, configure, and support a comprehensive Next-Generation Firewall (NGFW) infrastructure refresh.
As a premier K-12 public school district in Texas, Mesquite ISD operates a high-capacity, mission-critical network environment connecting dozens of elementary, middle, and high school campuses, alternative learning centers, and administrative facilities. The district network serves tens of thousands of concurrent students, faculty, and operational devices, requiring robust data protection, high-throughput decryption, and uninterrupted service availability.
The primary objective of this project is to replace the district's aging or capacity-constrained core security perimeter with a highly resilient, scalable, and modern threat prevention architecture. To support Mesquite ISD's strict performance, bandwidth, and zero-trust security objectives, the district has established a performance baseline modeled around the capabilities of the Palo Alto Networks PA-5540 platform. Proposing vendors may bid the baseline model or any certified equivalent architecture that meets or exceeds the technical performance, session handling, and data center throughput thresholds outlined in this document.

3. Scope of Work & Hardware/Service Quantities

To ensure vendors can submit the most accurate bid possible, the required quantities for appliances, licensing, and services are detailed below:

Item #	Description / Specification	Quantity
1	Core Next-Generation Firewall Appliances (Palo Alto PA-5540 or certified equivalent)	1
2	Enterprise Security Software Subscriptions / Licenses (Threat Prevention, AV, IPS, URL Filtering, TLS Decryption or equivalent - 1, 3 , and 5 Year)	1
3	Direct OEM Technical Support & Hardware Maintenance (24x7x365, 4-Hour Onsite / NBD or equivalent)	1
4	Professional Implementation, Migration, & Deployment Services	1

4. E-Rate Compliance & Itemized Cost Structure

Because Mesquite ISD participates in the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) E-Rate program, all submitted bids must strictly adhere to USAC and E-Rate program requirements:

- **Itemized Pricing Requirement:** Standard E-Rate guidelines support basic firewall functionality under Category Two. Vendors MUST provide fully itemized pricing separating all E-Rate eligible costs from E-Rate ineligible costs (e.g., advanced threat subscriptions, un-eligible management features, or ineligible professional services).
- **Cost Allocation:** If a proposed component or service contains both eligible and ineligible functions, the vendor must explicitly provide the percentage and dollar breakdown for the cost allocation to support evaluation and Form 471 filing.

5. Bid Evaluation Criteria

In accordance with FCC E-Rate regulations (47 C.F.R. § 54.504), proposals will be evaluated based on the criteria listed below. The price of E-Rate eligible products and services serves as the primary and most heavily weighted factor in the evaluation process.

Evaluation Criteria Factor	Weight / Points
1. Price of E-Rate Eligible Products and Services (Most heavily weighted factor)	**30%**
2. Technical Architecture & Baseline Specifications	25%
3. Vendor Experience & Engineering Staff Qualifications	20%
4. Price of E-Rate Ineligible Products and Services	15%
5. Prior Experience & References with K-12	10%

Evaluation Criteria Factor	Weight / Points
School Districts	
Total Weight	**100%**

6. Detailed Evaluation Criteria & Scoring Factors

The criteria listed below provide the detailed scoring methodology corresponding directly to each evaluation factor in Section 5. Proposals will be evaluated and scored against these specific requirements to determine total points awarded under each weighted category.

1. **Price of E-Rate Eligible Products and Services (30% Weight)**
   Scoring Breakdown: Evaluated strictly on the total cost of E-Rate eligible firewall hardware, core operating software, and eligible basic maintenance services. As required by FCC E-Rate regulations, this serves as the primary and most heavily weighted evaluation factor. The lowest eligible bid receives maximum points, with higher bids scored proportionately lower.
2. **Technical Architecture & Baseline Specifications (25% Weight)**
   Scoring Breakdown: Evaluated on technical performance, architecture quality, and capacity metrics:
   - *SSL/TLS Decryption Throughput:* Maximum points awarded for architectures demonstrating 20 Gbps+ Threat Prevention and Decryption throughput with all security services enabled.
   - *Hardware Acceleration:* Higher points awarded for dedicated hardware crypto-acceleration engines vs. generic CPU processing.
   - *Session Capacity:* Higher points for meeting/exceeding 4M concurrent sessions and 700K new sessions per second.
   - *TLS 1.3 & PFS Support:* Higher points awarded for native inspection of TLS 1.3/PFS without external appliances.
3. **Vendor Experience & Engineering Staff Qualifications (20% Weight)**
   Scoring Breakdown: Evaluated on vendor stability, OEM partnership tiers, and technical expertise:
   - *OEM Partnership Tier:* Maximum points awarded to vendors holding top-tier OEM status.
   - *Engineering Certifications:* Higher points awarded for designated lead engineers holding expert-level certifications.
4. **Price of E-Rate Ineligible Products and Services (15% Weight)**
   Scoring Breakdown: Evaluated on the total itemized cost of non-eligible components (e.g., advanced threat intelligence subscriptions, ineligible cloud management features, or non-eligible professional implementation services). The lowest overall cost for ineligible scope receives higher scoring points.
5. **Prior Experience & References with K-12 School Districts (10% Weight)**
   Scoring Breakdown: Evaluated on verifiable success delivering similar large-scale firewall deployments in K-12 public school environments:
   - *K-12 Project References:* Higher points awarded for positive client references from peer K-12 school districts of similar size and network complexity.
   - *Track Record:* Demonstration of successful past performance, deployment timelines, and ongoing district support experience.