

How cooperative purchasing offers a key advantage for schools

Developing and posting a Request for Proposals (RFP) and then poring over multiple bids before choosing a service provider and signing a contract can help schools find value in purchasing, but it's an onerous and time-consuming process. When buyers need essential supplies right away, they don't have the luxury of waiting.

This is why a growing number of K-12 school systems are turning to cooperative purchasing to fill their needs. Education buyers are finding that cooperative contracts give them the same great value as **competitive bidding** — without all the time and aggravation.

WHAT IS COOPERATIVE PURCHASING?

The use of cooperative contracts reduces the cost of goods and services by aggregating the collective buying power of public schools and agencies.

Using a contract from a nationally recognized cooperative such as [OMNIA Partners](#) or the Association of Educational Purchasing Agencies ([AEPA](#)) — or one of the many smaller state and regional co-ops available throughout the United States — helps schools streamline the buying process by meeting all state and local competitive-

bidding requirements on large purchases without having to put these items out to bid for themselves.



Instead of seeking quotes, bids, or proposals, K-12 buyers can simply choose products and services from the cooperative contract's service catalog. These services have been pre-selected by the agency behind the cooperative through its own competitive-bidding process. In essence, the cooperative has done this work for schools already, and so buyers are complying with all local, state, and national procurement laws when they make purchases through a co-op.

WHY THIS IS SIGNIFICANT

With cooperative purchasing, K-12 schools can buy items much more quickly and easily than going out to bid, saving weeks or even months of hassle. This is especially significant when buying large quantities of items that are needed right away, such as cleaning and disinfecting supplies or other health and safety equipment during the pandemic.

Compare the use of purchasing cooperatives with the traditional procurement process:

Purchasing cooperatives significantly streamline the purchasing process.



**Efficient,
Easy Process**

- Identify the Purchasing Need
- Research coops for a contract specific to your need
- ⊘ Approval by School Board or Governing Body
- Utilize Cooperative Contract
- Done in as little as a few days



**Lengthy Traditional
Process**

- Identify the Purchasing Need
- Write RFP/Bid specific to the need
- ⊘ Advertise the RFP/Bid
- ⊘ Solicit responses to RFP/Bid
- Review responses to RFP/Bid
- ⊘ Approval by School Board or Governing Body
- ⊘ Utilize RFP Bid

Traditional procurement is a lengthy and inefficient process that can take months to complete. By contrast, cooperative purchasing is a simple, four-step process that eliminates the need to write and advertise an RFP, solicit bids, and review responses. Once schools have identified their purchasing needs, all they have to do is identify and compare co-ops that have contracts specific to their needs, then secure approval and use an online catalog to place their order.

This benefit of faster, streamlined purchasing is a key reason why procurement through public bids and RFPs has taken a big hit during the pandemic, EdWeek Market Brief reports. The education sector saw a 31-percent drop in purchasing using these methods during the second quarter of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.

“Some of the declines in procurements may be attributed to districts’ urgency to make purchases and unwillingness to wait for the long process of publishing bids and RFPs. School systems relied on sole-source (non-competitive) procurements or turned to cooperatives, which gave them a chance to quickly purchase ‘mission critical’ products like custodial services [and] personal protective equipment,” the newspaper wrote.

WHY SCHOOL SPECIALTY

School Specialty is included on cooperative purchasing agreements through major national purchasers such as OMNIA Partners and AEPA, as well as many state and regional co-ops.

School Specialty provides a wide range of essential materials, from furniture and teaching aids to

cleaning supplies and PPE. Here are just some of the industry-leading product lines available through School Specialty:

- Abilitations special-needs supplies
- Childcraft early childhood products
- Classroom Select furniture and equipment
- Frey Scientific science materials
- Sax art education supplies
- School Smart school supplies
- Sportime health and physical education materials

With such a wide range of products available from School Specialty through cooperative purchasing, K-12 schools can satisfy virtually all of their needs with a single online order.

Not only will schools receive competitive discounts by taking advantage of cooperative purchasing through School Specialty, but they can get other special benefits as well — such as professional development for many products and services and additional discounts on high-volume purchases.

To learn more about how School Specialty can help K-12 schools and districts with cooperative purchasing, contact Greg Harbaugh, VP National Contracts & Strategic Agreements, Greg.Harbaugh@SchoolSpecialty.com.