

4 tips for breaking through the everchanging and challenging landscape of K-12 procurement



Many K-12 procurement professionals are aware that they operate in a dynamic environment that is continually evolving and frequently presents complex challenges. As the leader in developing resources and navigating finances efficiently and up to standards, these professionals have to be agile and proactive. Research conducted among K-12 procurement professionals in the last quarter of 2024 identified a few trends that show where K-12 procurement is headed.¹

Here are four tips to help break through and get ahead of the trends:

1 Embrace technology

Procurement technology still has room to grow. K-12 public procurement is experiencing significant transformation, driven by industry consolidation and the rise of new digital tools aimed at streamlining various parts of the procurement process.

K-12 procurement professionals have a strong interest in data-driven decision making, especially as they often play the middle-man between the digital data running through the organization and suppliers.² However limitations can include a lack of time, a lack of awareness of available tools and a lack of the necessary infrastructure to collect and analyze procurement data. Smaller districts often rely on simple spreadsheets, while mid-sized and larger districts have begun integrating a broader range of procurement technologies. The COVID-19 pandemic played a significant role in accelerating adoption of various digital tools.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents a major opportunity to increase procurement efficiency across districts in the coming years. Procurement professionals can embrace technology and AI to help increase efficiency and help reduce costs with assistance in spend analysis, supplier and contract management, demand forecasting, procurement automation and more.³

2 Identify different purchasing options

In the current K-12 procurement landscape, decision-making is increasingly influenced by factors beyond just cost, so it's important to assess the total value outside of the price tag. Local purchasing is a growing priority, especially among small districts.

There is a strong willingness to pay more to source locally, and larger districts are also placing a greater emphasis on a supplier's reputation, references, or past performance, with these factors often carrying more weight than price. Superior product quality and overall value can sometimes justify a higher price, and identifying these factors can help make these decisions.



3 Elevate your success through intentional networking

Networking plays an important role in the effectiveness of K-12 procurement professionals. Strong professional connections can help individuals stay informed, share resources and navigate the complexities of procurement processes.

Membership in organizations can allow professionals to learn and grow from one another. Joining organizations like state level Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) chapters can offer valuable opportunities for professional development, access to regulatory updates, and peer collaboration through conferences and meetings.⁴ Additionally, wider-reaching organizations like ASBO International, regional purchasing associations and groups like National Institute of Governmental Purchasing (NIGP) can also serve as important sources of support and expertise.⁵

Joining informal local networks such as email groups, peer listservs, and attending virtual meetups are great opportunities to branch out and exchange vendor references, bid templates and learn updates on new regulations. Additionally, many professionals can benefit from mentorship to help build confidence and strengthen procurement skills.

4 Raise awareness for the profession

Deliberate recruitment is essential to strengthen the profession. A significant portion of the current K-12 procurement workforce is approaching retirement, making it essential to prepare and attract the next generation of procurement leaders. Additionally, many current professionals have transitioned into procurement from other fields such as finance and education, indicating these are key sectors for target recruitment.

As procurement professionals know, the role of K-12 procurement has evolved from routine purchasing to a complex, strategic function. This transformation remains under-recognized outside the profession, so raising awareness about K-12 procurement as a purpose-driven, rewarding career can help attract new talent, especially those considering private sector roles. There are a few ways to expand the candidate pool, including better communicating to the public how a certification through a state ASBO is often sufficient to get in the profession, with master's degree not typically required. This de-stigmatization can help lower the perceived entry barriers and expand the candidate pool.

K-12 school procurement has transformed from a simple transactional function into a complex, strategic operation. Today's procurement professionals are under growing pressure to manage tight budgets, adapt to shifting enrollment trends, and comply with an increasingly intricate web of local, state, and federal regulations. Schools today must respond to growing complexity, increasing demands for transparency, and rising expectations for value-driven decisions.

ODP Business Solutions is uniquely positioned to support K-12 schools in this evolving landscape. With scalable solutions, extensive experience in public sector procurement and a robust catalog of technology solutions, ODP can help districts streamline operations, meet compliance standards and make smarter, more strategic purchasing decisions. To learn how ODP Business Solutions can help, visit www.odpbusiness.com/education.

¹ <https://ed-spaces.com/the-future-of-k12-procurement/>

² <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/operations/our-insights/use-procurements-data-to-power-your-performance>

³ <https://www.govtech.com/education/k-12/how-ai-is-changing-procurement-for-k-12-education>

⁴ https://www.asbointl.org/web/Web/About/Find_an_Affiliate.aspx

⁵ <https://www.nigp.org/our-profession/impact-of-procurement>