

How schools are using cooperative purchasing to upgrade security

School violence in recent years has heightened the need for increased and comprehensive security measures at schools across the country. Both K-12 and higher education institutions are rethinking security on campus. Many schools lack adequate door hardware or access control systems to safely manage the access and egress of staff, students and visitors on a daily basis—let alone to quickly lock down a facility or campus in an emergency. Most school administrators know their facilities need upgraded door hardware, yet the task—and the cost—of upgrading can seem daunting. The federal government’s Cooperative Purchasing Program, allowable through GSA Schedule 84, provides schools with an efficient procurement vehicle and cost-effective way to upgrade interior and perimeter openings with better security solutions.

Understanding the Cooperative Purchasing Program

Cooperative Purchasing is a federal government program based on the GSA (General Services Administration) Schedule 84. It allows public school districts, colleges and other institutions of higher learning to take advantage of Federal Supply Schedule contracts to purchase safety and security products and services at affordable prices. The program includes:

- Door hardware (locks, exit devices, closers, etc.)
- Alarm and access control systems
- Security cameras and surveillance systems
- Emergency communications equipment
- Security consulting services
- Security design and support services

To use the Cooperative Purchasing Program, schools must purchase products or services from an approved GSA vendor or schedule holder. GSA-approved suppliers undergo an extensive vetting process to ensure they offer “best value” products or services. Best value isn’t just about price. It’s also defined by technical and customer support, installation and training.

The Cooperative Purchasing Program offers educational institutions the following:

- Centralized source for safety and security solutions
- Fair and reasonable negotiated pricing
- Direct contractor relationship
- Qualified (vetted) dealers/installers

Benefits of Cooperative Purchasing

Today’s schools need to do more with less, so it’s critical to identify ways of saving time, money and effort. By its very design, the Cooperative Purchasing Program allows schools to do just that. The program leverages volume to create solutions that meet bid requirements and, ultimately, provide access to a broader number of vetted products, brands, dealers and suppliers.

Doug Otto, Manager, GSA Sales and Services at Allegion, advises many education clients to use GSA’s Cooperative Purchasing Program to find and acquire the solutions they need. “There are numerous benefits to the Cooperative Purchasing Program,” he says. “For starters, it gives schools access to pre-negotiated pricing, which is typically 30 percent less than the list price. The program also lets schools prioritize more than just price.”

When GSA is not utilized, Otto says price often becomes the deciding factor for schools. As a result, lower-quality products are selected due to budget constraints. But with GSA, the focus is on overall value, so other considerations—such as life cycle, warranty, installation and training—are part of the decision.

Streamlined public bid process

GSA also saves time by streamlining the public bid process. Schools are required by law to open bids for products or services from any general supplier. That process can be lengthy, laborious and costly.

“There can be an abundance of submissions, each needing review to ensure it meets the criteria,” Otto says. “Then, the school must evaluate all the submissions—often with the assistance of an attorney—to select three for consideration. It can be a long, complicated process.”

The Cooperative Purchasing Program—with its built-in list of pre-vetted vendors—practically eliminates all those pain points. Schools still satisfy the three-bid requirement by selecting three GSA schedule holders, but without the initial evaluation. Schools choose from comparable vendors meeting best value requirements.

Putting GSA into action

The National Association of Safety and Law Enforcement Officials reports that more schools are taking advantage of GSA's Cooperative Purchasing Program. Examples include:

Alvord Unified School District, Riverside, CA: In 2010, the Alvord Unified School District was awarded a \$3 million security upgrade project, funded by state bonds. With 12 year-round elementary schools, four traditional middle schools, two comprehensive high schools and one alternative/continuation high school, the district wanted to better secure campus perimeters, control foot traffic, minimize entry points, integrate electronic key control and give school principals the ability to lock down a campus in an emergency. The district used the Cooperative Purchasing Program to upgrade all mechanical hardware locks and add Schlage® wireless technology that together, provided a centralized access control system. Control of the system was managed at the individual building level, with capabilities to simultaneously lock down all 19 schools via the district administration office. The program allowed the district to select a pre-vetted integrator and door hardware manufacturer—both of which are audited every year under the program.

Cobb County School District, Kennesaw, GA: The Cobb County School District has used the Cooperative Purchasing Program since 2009 to purchase products. With more than 70 schools, budget is a significant consideration, so the volume discounts provided through additional negotiations under the program are critical to being able to implement a comprehensive security solution. The districted solicited bids from three pre-vetted companies through GSA. Since the first contract, they have renewed their contract two additional times as they continue to upgrade hardware and add security enhancements to all of its schools. They've used the program to purchase Schlage AD Series electronic locks, aptiQ™ readers and Von Duprin® exit devices.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Charlotte, NC: Despite budgetary pressures, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools faced the need for increased security and used the GSA Cooperative Purchasing Program to find a reputable wholesalers who could provide quality product at an affordable price. With an access control software system already in place, the district was seeking to upgrade its locks and add credential management. Through the program, they were able to find a cost-effective security solution that included 1,000 AD-Series electronic locks, 34,000+ proximity cards and 300+ Schlage PIM400-1501 Intelligent Controllers. The program allowed them to avoid the time-consuming bid process by selecting a GSA-approved wholesaler who had already been properly vetted for product, service and reliability.

Getting started

The Cooperative Purchasing Program is available to any school, district or college in the United States. If your school needs to upgrade security with door hardware and access control solutions, the GSA Cooperative Purchasing Program provides a streamlined bid process that connects you with best value solutions.

Contact your local Allegion representative to get started. Allegion/Schlage Lock, LLC is an authorized manufacturer of the program. This means we have a network of suppliers that partner with us to provide the product you need, all through the GSA Schedule. Learn more about our network. You can also contact the GSA Cooperative Purchasing Program by calling **855-472-7088** or visiting www.gsa.gov/saferschools.

About Allegion

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