

Supporting Education Business Leaders

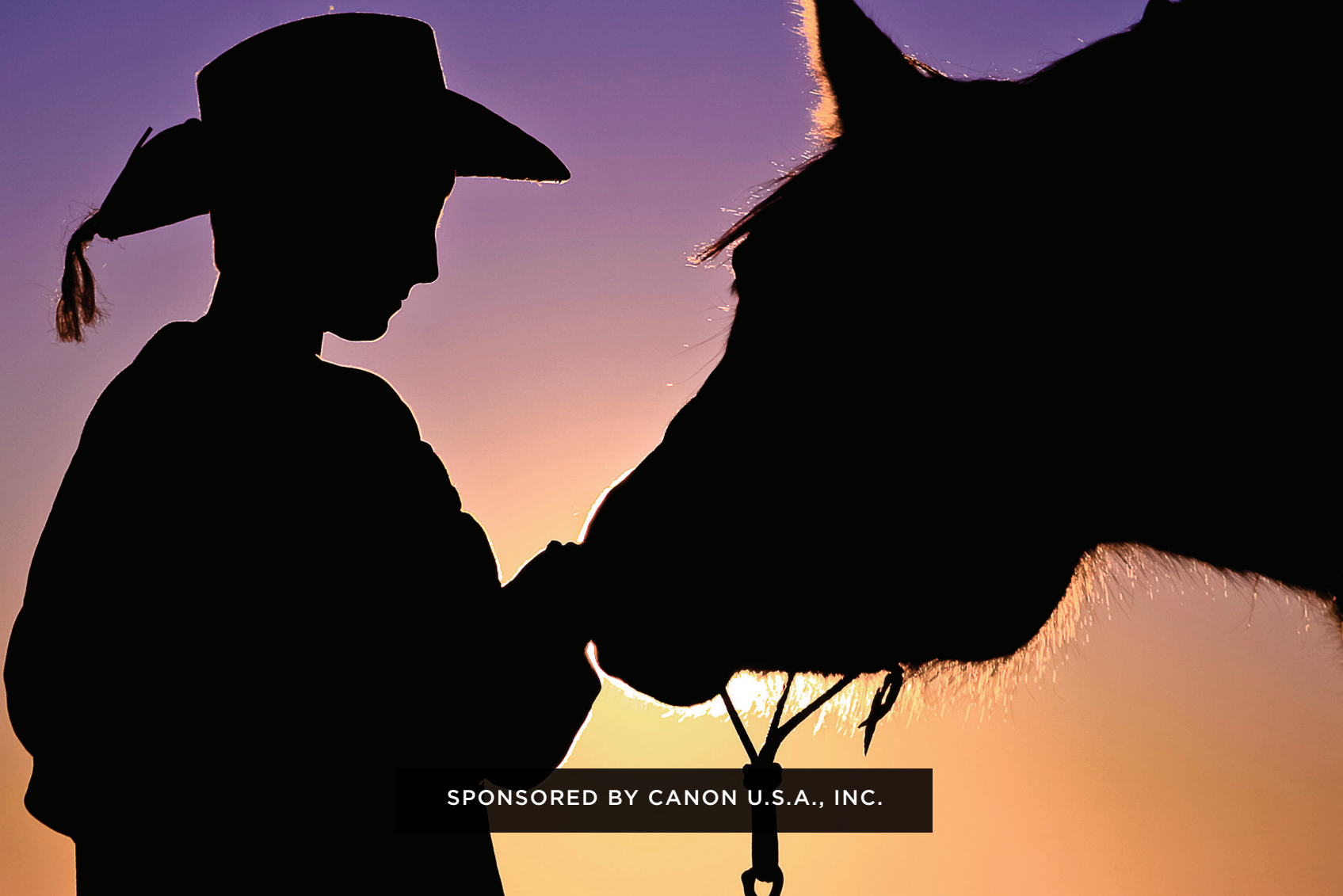
K-12

# EnvisionED

VOL 6 • ISSUE 4

# HOWDY PARTNER

ENGAGING  
STAKEHOLDERS  
TO SUPPORT  
K-12 MISSIONS



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# Canon's commitment

## DEFINITION OF KYOSEI .....

Kyosei is the Japanese concept of living and working together for the **benefit of all**.  
It emphasizes collaboration, respect, and mutual support across communities and nations.

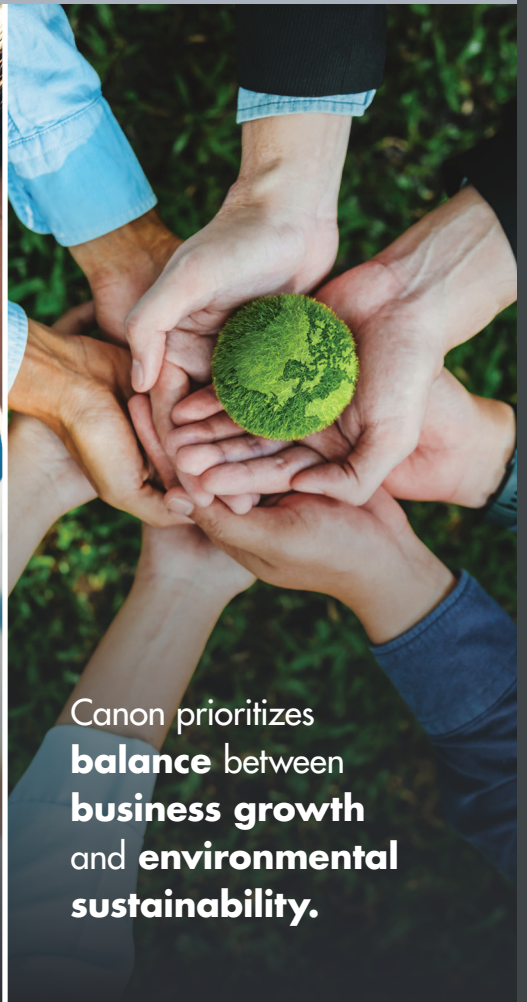
## WHERE KYOSEI LIVES IN CANON .....



We strive to align  
our goals with the  
**planet's wellbeing.**



Our success is tied  
to the **health of  
our communities.**



Canon prioritizes  
**balance** between  
**business growth**  
and **environmental  
sustainability.**



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## THE CRITICAL SKILL: COMMUNICATION

There's a passion in public procurement that's hard to match. For years, procurement in K-12 was viewed as transactional, where professionals were seen as cogs in a much larger wheel. But that perception has changed dramatically. Today, procurement professionals have become the great connectors of the K-12 ecosystem.

*"While we live in a digitally connected world, those same tools can sometimes lead to a filtering, gatekeeping, and even the hindering of true connection."*

Because they're tapped into virtually every investment a district makes, from technology to transportation to facilities, they have their finger on the pulse of what's next. In many ways, they've evolved into incubators of new ideas, and in some cases, new revenue streams. Their role has become as dynamic as any in education today.

That evolution puts a spotlight on one skill above all others: communication. While we live in a digitally connected world, those same tools can sometimes lead to a filtering, gatekeeping, and even

the hindering of true connection. The leaders we've spoken with through our advisory board have reminded us time and again that live, in-person communication is the lifeblood of effective procurement and leadership.

Adaptability will always matter. But the ability to listen, share, and connect meaningfully across departments, campuses, and communities is what will define the next generation of K-12 leaders.

That's why Canon created *EnvisionED K-12* and why we continue to talk directly to the people in countless districts across the country. We believe that connecting beyond the digital is how we all learn, grow, and elevate the field together.

Enjoy this issue as we remain committed to putting inspiring, market-based content in front of you. We always want to create the kind of content that stimulates new ideas and highlights the people shaping excellence in K-12 operations.

All the best,  
**Peter Kowalczyk**  
*EVP/Client Services Group President*  
Canon U.S.A., Inc.

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# HOWDY PARTNER

ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS TO SUPPORT K-12 MISSIONS

**W**hen Hilary Sontag talks about the “#StVrainAdvantage,” she’s not pitching a slogan—she’s describing a movement. As Executive Director of Advancement & Strategic Partnerships for St. Vrain Valley Schools, Sontag says the district’s success begins with a mindset: Students don’t just graduate—they launch.

For St. Vrain, the administration believes in what they call the #StVrainAdvantage, where students graduate with a strong, competitive advantage. That advantage comes through design thinking, engineering, work-based learning and incredible arts and athletics programs. “We were early adopters of career-connected learning—making our schools more relevant to the outside world,” says Sontag, who has spent the past seven-plus years specializing in fund development and strategic partnerships for the Longmont, Colorado, school district.

**“Make time for the business that wants to help you. Find that flexible teacher who can coordinate and keep things moving.”**

— Drew Schlosberg, Member, Classroom of the Future Foundation



# 3 WAYS TO STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS

1

## START WITH YOUR “WHY”

Partnerships grow when everyone knows the purpose. Whether it’s work-based learning or family engagement, lead with mission—not metrics.

2

## OVERCOMMUNICATE

Don’t assume one email or meeting builds connection. Share updates, celebrate wins, and keep partners in the loop. Busy people stay engaged when they feel informed.

3

## FOLLOW THROUGH; EVERY TIME

If you make a commitment, deliver it. Reliability is the difference between a one-off event and a long-term relationship.

That relevance shows up everywhere. Across St. Vrain’s schools, more than half of all high-schoolers are enrolled in a career-connected course spanning over two dozen pathways. From cybersecurity and health sciences to media arts and engineering, each program links classroom learning with real-world experience.

“We recognized early on that community partnerships were critical to that work,” Sontag says. “Our teachers don’t necessarily know what it’s like to be a doctor or a drone pilot or a television casting director. Only those professionals do, so we rely on those real-world opportunities for our students to test-drive careers.”

Sontag believes those connections lead to powerful outcomes. She points to the district’s student drone performance team—20 high-school pilots who recently performed at the world’s largest space industry conference in Colorado Springs. “Our students have become so skilled that our 18-year-old pilots are regularly flown across the country to pilot shows in other cities.

Multiple students have been offered \$60,000 piloting jobs straight out of high school, with salaries increasing to \$80,000 after a two-month trial period.”

Behind those stories is a network of teachers, families and industry partners pulling in the same direction. Many of the district’s partnerships originate with parents who serve on boards and community committees. “Families are critical in supporting school partnerships,” Sontag says. “When someone reaches out to us—whether with a concern or an opportunity—we move quickly. Our kids are too important to respond any other way.”

For Sontag, collaboration isn’t just strategic, but cultural. The most important thing is having staff and school leaders with a strong sense of their mission and vision. “In schools with strong cultures, partnerships come naturally. And when everyone returns to their ‘why,’ you create incredible opportunities for students.”

**“In schools with strong cultures, partnerships come naturally. And when everyone returns to their ‘why,’ you create incredible opportunities for students.”**

— Hilary Sontag, Executive Director of Advancement & Strategic Partnerships, St. Vrain Valley Schools

*Sources: Hilary Sontag, St. Vrain Valley Schools; Drew Schlosberg, Classroom of the Future Foundation*

Her advice to other administrators is simple: Start small and dream big. “This work takes time and patience. Be creative, be optimistic, and keep students at the center. When we bring partners in, we try to speak as little as possible—students will always represent us best.”

### **Sustaining the Connection**

“It’s been in the ethos of the Classroom of the Future Foundation ever since we were started in 1997,” says Schlosberg, who has produced the longest running community podcast in the country, “Spotlight on the Community.” “The whole goal was to unite businesses with schools through technology.”

CFF’s roots stretch back to its founding inside the San Diego County Office of Education. What began as a tech-driven collaboration evolved into a system built around college and career pathways—a focus Schlosberg helped champion almost a decade ago. “We said we need to really focus on pathways because that’s where

the relevance is—connecting what kids learn to why they’re learning it,” says Schlosberg, who also is President of XTRA Weekly.

That focus inspired the group’s College and Career Pathways Summit, now entering its ninth year. The event draws educators, business leaders and students for breakout sessions on everything from AI and cybersecurity to innovative teaching models. But Schlosberg says the most powerful voices always come from students. “We had a panel of students who were very candid. They told us schools should do a lot more to focus on relevance and linking what they learn to why they’re learning it. They were respectful but blunt—and we loved it.”

The conversation led to direct impact. All three students on that panel found jobs. Two were hired by Schlosberg’s Cloudcast Media company (of which Schlosberg is a partner), to produce podcasts and one joined a local innovation center. “When you create authentic opportunities, the partnerships sustain themselves.”

Still, Schlosberg believes lasting collaboration depends on something simple: follow-through. “If you make a commitment, deliver it. It’s not tough stuff—it’s relationships. When schools keep their word, businesses always come back.”

For Schlosberg, that mindset starts with leadership. “Administrators need to be marketing oriented. Superintendents are the mayors of their districts, and principals are the faces of their communities. The successful ones are out there making connections—showing up and following through.”

He believes every school can take small, consistent steps to get there. “Make time for the business that wants to help you. Find that flexible teacher who can coordinate and keep things moving. Because when you open the door, the community shows up.” ■

# TO SCALE

Facilities management  
in the digital era



# W

hen the world shut down, Moises G. Aguirre found himself thinking about roll-up doors. As superintendent of California’s Sweetwater Union High School District, he saw how quickly the pandemic turned every classroom, lab and hallway into a test case for flexibility. “During the pandemic, this issue got

magnified. All of a sudden, we needed classrooms with roll-up doors and hybrid spaces that could open up or close down depending on what was happening.”

That simple image—doors rolling up to reveal new possibilities—has become a metaphor for how Sweetwater now approaches design. From modernization projects at Bonita Vista High School to a districtwide rethink of hybrid and virtual learning, Aguirre’s team is working to create spaces that don’t just adapt to change but anticipate it.

At Bonita Vista, what was once an automotive technology lab is being redesigned with flexibility built in. The new layout includes two large roll-up doors, open-air flow, and modular equipment that allows the space to serve as both a traditional shop and a hands-on hybrid classroom. “It’s not just about the programs we have now,” Aguirre says. “It’s about being ready for what comes next.”

That same mindset drives the district’s newest experiment in partnership and design—a collaboration with the City of Chula Vista that turns a brand-new public library into the home of Sweetwater’s Launch Virtual Academy. The library, known as Millenia, will host 35 to 40 virtual teachers in tech-enabled studios complete with green screens and motion-tracking cameras.

“It’s a beautiful example of how we can be smarter with our construction funding,” Aguirre says. “The city covers the cost of the building, and we handle the tenant improvements. We get a modern teaching environment, and they get a dynamic community hub. Everyone benefits.”

**“If we make our students and staff feel comfortable, then we’ve enhanced the environment to support learning outcomes from high-quality instruction.”**

— Timothy A. Oldenburg, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools, Tonawanda City School District

The Launch Virtual Academy serves roughly 700 to 800 students, a niche group that thrives in flexible environments—athletes balancing travel, students working to support their families, and those pursuing arts or other specialized programs. For them, the new space isn’t just a studio; it’s a bridge between access and opportunity.

On the sustainability side, Sweetwater Union High School District views the strategy as a responsibility. Sweetwater has been quietly building its green footprint for years, long before it became a statewide mandate. Nearly every campus in the district now operates with solar panels, a move that has cut energy costs and served as a hands-on teaching tool for students learning about environmental science and technology. “We were early adopters of solar,” Aguirre says. “It’s not anything recent—it’s part of how we’ve learned to be good stewards of our environment.”

That stewardship extends beyond rooftops. The district is in the midst of phasing in electric buses—about a dozen so far from a fleet of 80—and installing charging infrastructure strategically across its north, south, east and west boundaries to keep routes efficient. Each phase is carefully tested, from how the buses handle California heat to how battery range is affected when air conditioning or heating is in use. “We decided to start small and learn,” Aguirre says. “These investments take a long time and a lot of resources, so before we make those commitments, we want to make sure there’s a sustainable long-term plan.”

It’s the same mindset that guides every facility decision at Sweetwater—thoughtful, deliberate and grounded in

real-world performance. Whether it’s solar power, battery backup systems or the next evolution of electrification, Aguirre’s team approaches innovation with one principle in mind: test first, scale second.

## Designed for What's Next

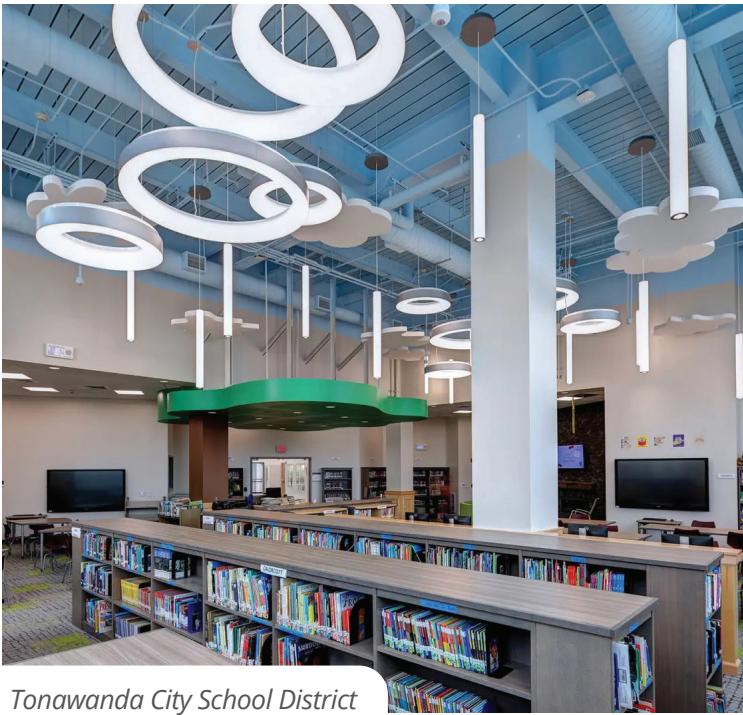
At Tonawanda City School District in upstate New York, Superintendent Timothy A. Oldenburg, Ed.D., sees every inch of school space as an opportunity to inspire—and adapt.

Take the planning and implementation of building-wide WiFi systems, which have been a tremendous support in enabling more building spaces to be instructional and support environments for students and staff. From classrooms and cafeterias to media centers and playgrounds, flexibility has become the foundation of modern learning.

The district’s newly reimagined Media Center represents this shift in full color. Out are the walls of shelving and static furniture. In are modular tables, reconfigurable seating, and interactive displays that make collaboration and creativity the default setting. “We engaged with the furniture provider early on in the process,” Dr. Oldenburg says. “That allowed us to design spaces around the types of furniture that would be used within them.”



*The Millenia Library, Chula Vista*



Tonawanda City School District



Tonawanda City School District

The result—rooms that can morph to meet any learning style, from small group discussion to sensory support or outdoor exploration. Even kindergarten classrooms have been designed with moveable seating that stacks, rocks and encourages movement.

Behind the walls, technology quietly keeps pace. Tonawanda’s facility systems reflect a growing trend among K-12 districts—designing for comfort, sustainability and intelligence. HVAC and lighting controls adapt automatically to changing conditions, ensuring fresh air, balanced temperatures, and customizable lighting for each classroom.

Teachers can adjust dimming and tone to match lessons, while IT-connected sensors alert facilities management to energy fluctuations in real time. “If we make our students and staff feel comfortable, then we’ve enhanced the environment to support learning outcomes from high-quality instruction,” Dr. Oldenburg says.

Safety also has evolved beyond locked doors and surveillance cameras. Tonawanda’s new elementary school combines physical design with smart technology—a single controlled entrance, impact-resistant glass and a comprehensive monitoring network tied to smart door access, motion sensors and adaptive public address systems with color-coded visual alerts. “We wanted a

building that was secure but still welcoming to our students, families, and community,” Dr. Oldenburg says.

**“It’s not just about the programs we have now. It’s about being ready for what comes next.”**

— Moises G. Aguirre, Superintendent,  
Sweetwater Union High School District

Sustainability threads through every design choice, from preserving the original 1936 school structure to integrating daylighting, green materials and efficient MEP systems. Even lighting systems respond to ambient sunlight, automatically dimming to conserve energy while improving student well-being. “The relationships we maintain with our architects and construction management firms are vital,” Dr. Oldenburg says. “These partnerships give us a refined perspective on long-term planning and help us design spaces that grow with our students.”

In many K-12 school districts across the country, the blueprint is spaces that think, breathe and evolve with the people who use them. In the digital era of K-12 education, facilities management isn’t just about maintaining buildings; it’s about designing living systems that learn right alongside their students. ■

# Pressure Cooking

According to the 2024 EDspaces/EmeraldX report “Future of K-12 Procurement,” K-12 procurement complexity is driven by budget pressures from declining student enrollment, more complex regulations, increased ed-tech purchases (with cybersecurity/data privacy considerations), inflation and supply-chain issues. The implication is that K-12 procurement must manage these external risks, which elevates the role from “buying supplies” to “strategic resource management.”

Source: <https://tinyurl.com/m4sf6wb5>



## THE SHIFT

# 93.4%

According to the report from EDspaces/EmeraldX, procurement in K-12 has “transitioned, out of necessity, from transactional to strategic” over the past decade.

### Larger districts dominate student population and procurement scale

of U.S. public school districts have fewer than 10,000 students, yet the 7 % of districts with more than 10,000 students account for 54% of all K-12 students.

—meaning procurement professionals in these districts deal with more complexity, bigger budgets, more stakeholders; smaller districts may operate differently.

Source: <https://tinyurl.com/m4sf6wb5>





# DECISIONS, DECISIONS

According to K12 Prospects data:

**83%**

of district officials believe the key procurement decision-makers are superintendents, assistant superintendents, curriculum directors, and principals.

**91%**

of decision making involvement comes from chief academic officers, assistant superintendents or curriculum directors (for school-level purchases).

A “month-by-month” breakdown of the U.S. school/district purchasing cycle indicates:

- **July:** Beginning of fiscal year, budgets allocated, large supply orders processed.
- **August:** Final preparations for school year; large purchases like tech upgrades, textbooks, furniture.
- **October:** First budget reviews; requests for proposals (RFPs) may start being drafted.

Sources: <https://tinyurl.com/5n92hdea>, <https://tinyurl.com/sz2ka7bp>

# BUNDLE WORKS

A working paper looked at K-12 broadband procurement and determined that bundling demand and cooperative purchasing yields substantial savings.



In one instance (New Jersey), bundling schools into regional groups reduced internet price by

**≈ 37% AND INCREASED BANDWIDTH BY ~500%**

(Mbps) relative to baseline.

Aggregating demand or leveraging cooperative purchasing strategies can yield major cost savings. For K-12 procurement professionals, exploring cooperative buying, consortia or bundling may be a strategic lever.



### Leading with Purpose

A conversation on the landscape of K-12 procurement

As Chief Operating Officer for Chicago Public Schools, Charles Mayfield oversees one of the largest and most complex K-12 systems in the nation. With a background in procurement and a passion for people-centered leadership, Mayfield is helping redefine what operational excellence looks like in education. In this conversation, he shares

insights on the evolving role of procurement, the integration of AI in school operations, and the culture of continuous improvement that drives his team forward.

**How is selling now a part of procurement?**

You definitely need both buying and selling skills to be effective. You're constantly engaging with suppliers and departments to find the right fit for your organization. It's a back-and-forth process of selling others on why a product or service benefits them while making sure it aligns with organizational needs. Procurement is all about building that ecosystem where everyone benefits.

**The K-12 landscape has changed so much in recent years. What are the biggest shifts and challenges you're seeing?**

Procurement in K-12 isn't just a back-office function anymore, it's a cornerstone of the organization. From buying curriculum and food to managing facilities and services,

it's all part of shaping the student experience.

**“When you lead with that mindset, you create open communication and people feel empowered to share ideas, and that’s when the best innovation happens.”**

At Chicago Public Schools, we support more than 514 district-run schools and 634 schools overall, serving over 320,000 students and families. The biggest challenge right now is technology—particularly AI. It's not new anymore. Students use it every day, so our focus is on

putting the right guardrails and training in place. We're upskilling teachers, educating students on responsible use, and even piloting AI tools in procurement. My team is using AI to improve productivity—things like writing scopes of work and enhancing negotiations. It's going to be a game-changer for how we work.

**That's a forward-thinking approach. How are you helping teachers and administrators adapt to AI responsibly?**

We've created a guidebook for the district that outlines how AI should be used by teachers, students, and administrators. It's not an official policy yet, but it establishes clear expectations like not sharing sensitive information and always reviewing the AI's output. AI is a tool, but the

human element is still essential. It can assist, but it can't replace judgment, context, or empathy.

**You talk about the human element a lot. How do you balance technology and people in operations and procurement?**

AI is only as good as the information you feed it. You still need people to verify, interpret, and make decisions. No one's turning off AI tomorrow, so we need to grow with it and put the right parameters around its use. But ultimately, procurement and operations are people-driven. Relationships, communication, and leadership still matter most.

**If you were speaking to the next generation of procurement professionals, what would your message be?**

I love that question. Our veteran professionals are incredible at compliance, guidance, and support. The next generation—Gen X, Gen Z—brings curiosity. They ask the right questions: the "what ifs" and "whys." They're reimagining how procurement can evolve over the next five to ten

years while still maintaining quality, service, and delivery standards. They'll play a big part in shaping what comes next.

**Communication seems to be a common theme for you. How do you help your team develop that skill?**

I focus a lot on leadership and culture. My philosophy is continuous improvement—plan, do, check, adjust. I call it our "operational spirit," built around four principles:

- > **Be diligent:** Always do the right thing.
- > **Be humble:** You don't know everything, and you'll need support from others.
- > **Be positive:** Attitude is everything.
- > **Be better:** Constantly look for innovative ways to improve.

When you lead with that mindset, you create open communication and people feel empowered to share ideas, and that's when the best innovation happens.

**What advice would you give to young professionals looking to build a career in K-12 procurement?**

Ask a lot of questions. Get involved in organizations like NIGP—places where you can connect with others who do what you do. Procurement is one of those hidden professions that people often stumble into, but once you're here, you realize how meaningful it is. My degree is in marketing, so I started as a seller and ended up a government buyer. Now, as COO of the fourth-largest school district in the nation, I can tell you—it's a career that touches every part of an organization. Be curious, stay forward-thinking, and remember the fundamentals: cost, quality, and delivery of service. ■



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