

**As appearing in**



The weekly newspaper reaching more than 16,000 school administrators in California

## **County Superintendents Launch New Purchasing Cooperative**

A group of California's county superintendents have launched a new purchasing initiative designed to save themselves at least \$1.5 million in the early stages of operation and multi-millions of dollars more for their school districts.

Called EdBuy, the initiative concentrates on three components, best purchasing practices, cooperation, and training.

About 20 counties have joined together through the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) to start the effort, unique in its approach to purchasing and unique in its approach to the management of purchasing contracts. It uses exhaustive research, technology and communication to supplement the core purchasing chores.

To start, the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) led a bid for Standard School Supplies. Using their "best practices" approach, EdBuy and LACOE beat benchmark pricing for office supplies by more than 6 percent. The award went to Corporate Express and is line-for-line better than some of the other most popular purchasing contracts in California.

Collectively, the 20 counties spend in excess of \$30 million on paper, plus basic instructional supplies and office supplies for themselves, apart from their districts. Conducting a study last year, the counties learned they were using not using their buying power leverage to their advantage, and that many of their schools, departments, and divisions were inconsistent in use of purchasing contracts.

Their response was the development of the EdBuy program, whose most visible component is its cooperative purchasing contracts, now being posted on a web site at [www.edbuy.org](http://www.edbuy.org).

CCSESA Executive Director Glen Thomas said, "County superintendents are always interested in best practices and efficiencies, so EdBuy was a natural outcome of our study and the desire to ensure we use taxpayer dollars in the best way possible."

Thomas expects more counties will quickly sign up as EdBuy gets its feet on the ground and develops more contracts. Currently,

most supply contracts are for just-in-time, next-day delivery and are available throughout California. Besides office supplies, the cooperative currently has published its best pricing for paper, instructional supplies, Microsoft software, AlphaSmart keyboards, Scantron forms and paper, Bretford computer furniture, printer ink, and laser toner cartridges.

Any school district in California is eligible to use the contracts, even though a local county office of education may not have yet signed up for the program.

To help districts and county offices easily tap into the program, EdBuy publishes many Procurement Bulletins. The Bulletins are one of the "best practice" communication techniques designed to give buyers the information and findings they need to legally use the "piggybackable" contracts. In addition, all prices and contracts are searchable on the [www.EdBuy.org](http://www.EdBuy.org) web site.

"Our study and research shows that consistent use of a low-priced contract over time will produce lower total cost of ownership for a district than will cherry-picking lowest prices from a variety of vendors," said Thomas. "Overcoming common purchasing myths is one of the reasons why the EdBuy program is also interested in training. We want to show buyers from counties and school districts how to effectively use good purchasing contracts to their advantage."

CCSESA plans to use a variety of techniques to help train districts in best purchasing practices, including literature, articles, and cooperation with other associations in the development of workshops and conference seminars.

To help manage the development of contracts and to communicate them to buyers, CCSESA and uses the technology of the Epylon Corporation of Walnut Creek to post the prices on [EdBuy.org](http://EdBuy.org), envisioning that the cooperative would eventually have to manage tens of thousands of prices as new contracts are awarded.