



Business Partner Profile

Cooperative Purchasing - AEPA Style Saving Districts Money

The voters in your district have approved a construction and maintenance bond. You have plans ready to build a new school and make renovations to a few old ones. You'd like to keep the job in-house and in the community, but economy of scale - especially in rural districts - means there's no way you'll get a good price for material.

Changing your buying power might seem impossible, but it's not. That's what the Association of Educational Purchasing Agencies does: by acting as a cooperative, it brings the same economy of scale enjoyed by large districts to smaller districts.

That's what Blaise Bauer found when he worked with AEPA. The voters in Girard, Kansas, approved a \$16 million bond in May, 2014, for maintenance and to upgrade facilities. Bauer, the district's superintendent, had his budget all worked out but before he signed any contracts, he called Brad Stefanoni at Greenbush Southeast Kansas Educational Service Center, a member of AEPA.

Bauer needed crews and material for roofing, restoration, bricks and mortar and the other essentials usually found in a rural district with about 1,000 students in K-12.

He sent the specifications to AEPA. "They had already done the bidding processes. The companies were all well-vetted," Bauer said. Girard bought the materials and hired the crews through AEPA. "They came in and started right away" and they're finishing on schedule, Bauer said.

Here's the bottom line: Bauer saved between \$500,000 and \$750,000 by going through AEPA. "We were able to save a large amount," Bauer said. "It was quite a nice surprise."

AEPA was founded in 2000. It now operates in 26 states and is growing, said Stefanoni, AEPA's president. Stefanoni is also director of procurement for the Southeast Kansas Educational Service Center, located just down the road from Bauer and the Girard, Kansas, district.

"What we do for our school district customers is provide the same purchasing power as large metro school districts," Stefanoni said. "That way, a district like Girard can get the same prices as Wichita, the largest district in Kansas."

AEPA will bid on almost any item - "instructional classroom supplies, roofing, computer technology, track surfaces, copiers and document storage, school furniture - anything they need, we try to work with them to get," Stefanoni said. AEPA won't bid on food, but it will bid on kitchen supplies.

Small and mid-sized districts don't have enough volume to use as leverage to buy things. "We create that leverage. Its high-volume buying at its best," Stefanoni said.

For more information about the Association of Educational Purchasing Agencies, call 620-724-6281 or go to aepacoop.org

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