

What school district buyers buy?

(By Larry Weeks)

As a buyer for the high school district I am often asked, “What do school districts buy?” The answer is “nearly everything”! School district purchases are much more than books, paper and pencils. In fact, you can think of a school campus as a complete facility that; provides food, requires sophisticated computer networking and that uses all of the other goods and services needed to complete the human and educational mission of public education. For starters, a campus is made up of a series of buildings that require facilities maintenance. This includes pest control, general contracting services, grounds services, HVAC services and all the rest of the services, both new and preventative that are required to maintain and upgrade a campus.

In 2002, the high school district solicited 16 Invitations for Bid and 7 requests for proposals. Those numbers may seem low but remember that school districts don't go out for bid unless the dollar amount of the purchase will exceed \$30,000. Although the actual dollar amounts for these projects were much higher, the rough figures in this model suggest that, at minimum, the projects represent about \$700,000. The types of products and services purchased in 2002 included; Legal Services, A&E Services, two Pressure Seal Systems, Insurance, Food Service Management; Science, Athletic, custodial and Office Supplies, Ceramic Equipment, Computer Systems and Parts and General Construction. These projects were in addition to the standard educational contracts the district uses each year.

Before writing this article, I conducted a search at the YEPA website (www.yepa.us) and found 101 Yuma businesses who have signed up with the site to receive bid notifications. The variety of these companies range from banks to sewing to software and it is very likely that the district will buy goods and services from these industries sometime during this school year.

There is no crystal ball available that will indicate what types of goods and services local schools will buy this year, or next. The purpose of this article is to provide insight into what is purchased by schools and to suggest that school district buying is not as predictable as you may have previously thought. A suggested method for saving tax dollars is for school districts to make value-added decisions based on competitive solicitations. Competition doesn't happen without participation! To find out more about the types of contracts currently exist for Yuma school districts, logon to the YEPA website at, www.yepa.us. Once you have registered as a prospective vendor, you can click on; “Awarded Bids” to see a list of current contracts and which companies were awarded the bid.

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