THE LEGIBILITY SERIES · ESSAY THREE

Buyable Is Not Bought

The fine print behind EdTech's newest procurement pitch, read against every published award on seven contract vehicles.

Eli Jameson

Eli Jameson, Founder, PILLAR

Essay · July 2026 · data harvested 2026-07-23 to 2026-07-24, every row linked to source[1]

Download the full essay (PDF)

counts, not impressions · companion lookup: the Reality Check

KEY POINTS

- Contract vehicle access is real and useful for exactly one kind of company: the emerging software vendor with no award history and no sales team. For most of K-12 EdTech, and for everything classroom-facing, it is necessary, insufficient, and sometimes not even relevant.
- The counts, from a full census of seven vehicles: 16,006 vendor awards, 7,287 reseller-network edges, and core basal curriculum on exactly one contract, which the cooperative that carries it files under "Non-Adopted." You do not sign up for a co-op; you win one or you borrow someone else's, and the borrowed paper is a phone book, 2,239 names deep on one contract alone.
- A contract vehicle answers how a district may pay you. It never answers whether the district may choose you (adoption), whether federal dollars may flow

(EDGAR), or whether anyone wants to buy at all. A vehicle makes you buyable. It does not make you bought.

Every few months, government and education go-to-market produces a new promised shortcut. The current one is contract vehicle access. Onboard with a partner once, the story goes, and your product becomes eligible to sell through the major cooperative purchasing agreements: Sourcewell, OMNIA Partners, TIPS, NASPO ValuePoint, GSA. Months of procurement collapse into a fast, compliant path to the sale.

Before I question it, I want to give the idea its due, because part of it is true. Cooperative contracts are a legitimate and powerful mechanism. A public agency really can buy faster off an existing, competitively solicited contract than by running its own RFP from scratch. And for one specific kind of EdTech company, the emerging software vendor with no award history and no sales team, riding a reseller's technology contract can shorten a sales cycle in a real way. Those companies are not the ones I worry about.

The trouble is the word majority. For most K-12 EdTech, and especially for anything that touches the classroom rather than the server room, the pitch is necessary, insufficient, and sometimes not even relevant. My team recently finished mapping every published award on seven of these vehicles, more than 16,000 contracts, plus the reseller networks underneath them.[2] So what follows is not impressions. It is counts.

1. You do not sign up for a co-op

You win one, or you borrow someone else’s. Getting your own cooperative contract means responding to a competitively bid solicitation and winning it. NASPO ValuePoint does not even offer a general vendor registration.[3] You watch for state-led solicitations and compete. The other route, being added as an authorized vendor underneath a company that already holds the contract, is real and legitimate, but it is not the same as holding the award yourself. You are selling on their paper, at their margin, at their discretion. And you are not alone there: we counted **2,239 software vendors riding a single distributor's national cloud contract**. That is not a fast lane. That is a phone book. The phrase "eligible to be sold through" carries an enormous amount of weight in that sentence, and most readers skip right past it.

2. Look at the vehicles named, category by category

On Sourcewell, OMNIA Partners, and NASPO ValuePoint, the education categories are furniture, food service, transportation, facilities, and technology. We ran the major core curriculum publishers against every award in our database. On those three national vehicles, and on TIPS and Choice Partners, **the core basal publishers hold zero cooperative awards.** There is exactly one exception, and it makes the point more sharply than the absence did. BuyBoard, the Texas Association of School Boards cooperative, does carry them, all on a single contract, number 748-24, which BuyBoard itself titles *Instructional Materials (Non-Adopted).* Savvas, Curriculum Associates, HMH, Pearson, Scholastic, and Amplify sit on that one shelf together, and the co-op has already labeled it for you: these are materials a district may buy, not materials a district has adopted. Great Minds is not even there. It appears nowhere on any of the seven vehicles.[4]

GSA is stricter still: schools and local governments can only reach GSA schedules for information technology and security products, so a curriculum purchase through GSA is not merely unlikely, it is not permitted.[5] The vehicles that do run an instructional materials line, TIPS and BuyBoard, are Texas cooperatives, and holding their paper answers exactly one question: how a district is allowed to pay you. It says nothing about whether a district in an adoption state is allowed to choose you. These vehicles were built to buy commoditized goods and services, not the kind of pedagogical content a school board has to formally adopt.

3. Federal dollars change the rules

A large share of K-12 curriculum and intervention spending runs on Title I, IDEA, and, until recently, ESSER money. The moment federal funds enter the picture, EDGAR and the federal Uniform Guidance (2 CFR 200) apply, and the cooperative contract itself has to have been procured in a way that complies with those standards before a district can use it with those dollars.[6] That is a contract-by-contract question, not a co-op-by-co-op one, which is why the cooperatives themselves publish EDGAR compliance documentation and why auditors keep flagging piggybacked purchases that skipped the check. So the exact budget curriculum vendors most want to reach is the budget that demands the most verification before the shortcut applies.

4. Adoption is not a step you can skip

Roughly twenty states run formal instructional materials adoption cycles, with standards alignment, board review, and in some cases a state-approved list. No cooperative contract bypasses any of that. The vehicle can tell a district how it is allowed to pay you. It says nothing about whether you are allowed to be chosen in the first place.

The universe, vehicle by vehicle

Here is the ground those four claims rest on, as of July 24, 2026, so nobody has to take my word for anything.

SEVEN VEHICLES · 16,006 PUBLISHED VENDOR AWARDS

TIPS (Region 8 ESC, Texas): 10,018 vendor awards across 178 category solicitations. Academic and educational categories carrying supplemental and intervention vendors. Zero core basal publishers.

BuyBoard (Texas Association of School Boards): 2,468 awards across 103 contracts. The only vehicle where the core publishers appear, and all on one contract, number 748-24, which BuyBoard titles “Instructional Materials (Non-Adopted).” Savvas, Curriculum Associates, HMH, Pearson, Scholastic, and Amplify hold it. Great Minds does not.

Sourcewell: 1,069 awards. Furniture, food service, facilities, transportation, technology. Zero core curriculum.

Choice Partners (Harris County, Texas): 841 awards. A K-12-focused catalog of educational materials, food service, and facilities. Zero core curriculum.

Texas DIR: 769 prime contracts, with 2,763 authorized reseller relationships registered underneath them. Information technology and telecom only.

OMNIA Partners: 664 awards. The K-12 Education category is furniture, food, roofing, and janitorial supply.

NASPO ValuePoint: 177 awards. Cloud and technology portfolios. No education category at all.

The borrowed-paper layer: a single distributor's published rider lists carry 2,239 vendors on its NASPO cloud contract, 1,693 on OMNIA, and 592 on TIPS.

Harvested 2026-07-23 to 2026-07-24 from the vehicles' published directories · searchable row by row, every row linked to source, at the Contract Vehicle Reality Check

Who the pitch is actually for

There is a segmentation hiding underneath all of this, and it is worth making explicit, because the access pitch is being marketed to everyone while describing the situation of a few. Ask who actually lacks contract vehicle access, and the answer is the emerging vendor with no award history and no one to run the motion. Ask who already has it, and the answer is everyone else. Renaissance holds TIPS paper in four separate categories. Lakeshore holds sixteen awards spread across four different cooperatives. McGraw Hill, Amplify, IXL, and Lexia are already there, and the established companies that sell through technology contracts already ride the major resellers' paper. For an established EdTech company, an access pitch is a ladder onto a field it is already standing on. What that company actually lacks is something no vehicle provides: knowing where to point the machine it already built. Which districts have the money, and from which fund, with which strings attached. Where the incumbent is weak. When the next adoption window opens. Which of its own accounts are quietly at risk because the budget that paid for the last renewal no longer exists. Every one of those is an intelligence question, and not one of them is answered by a contract.

Buyable is not bought

One confusion sits underneath all four points, and it is worth saying plainly. A contract vehicle makes you buyable. It does not make you bought. Access is not demand. Being listed on a piece of paper somewhere does not create a budget line, a standards-aligned fit, an implementation plan, or a champion willing to spend political capital to get the money approved. For the majority of K-12 EdTech, none of those is the real constraint, and the contract vehicle least of all. Ask any founder who has lost a deal in what looked like procurement, and the honest ones will tell you the deal actually died earlier, for want of budget, fit, or an internal owner.

So before anyone accepts a blanket promise to get them onto every cooperative agreement, three questions settle the matter quickly. Which agreements do you hold the prime award on, and in which product categories? Is my specific category actually one of them? And is that contract compliant with EDGAR for purchases made with federal funds? If the answers arrive vague, what is being sold is attention, not access.

None of this makes cooperative purchasing a gimmick. It is a serious tool, and the companies that use it well know exactly which vehicle fits which product, for which buyer, under which funding source. That precision is the entire point, and it is the first thing to disappear when access gets marketed as a single button that works for everyone. It is also why we track these vehicles award by award, and the reseller networks underneath them, inside PILLAR. The numbers in this essay are queries, not opinions, and the whole universe is open for you to check at the Contract Vehicle Reality Check. Look your own company up. Look your competitors up.

Which leaves the question I would actually like people to answer. In K-12 specifically, has contract vehicle access ever been your true constraint? Or have we spent a decade getting very good at the second-hardest problem in EdTech go-to-market, while the hardest one, creating real demand and getting it funded, sits exactly where it has always been?

In the series · Reward Follows Legibility, on why the market can’t reward what it can’t see · Follow the Money, on what one state’s checkbook reveals · and the live companion to this essay, the Contract Vehicle Reality Check.

Check any vendor yourself

16,006 awards and 7,287 reseller edges, free to search, every row linked to its source.

Open the Reality Check

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eli Jameson is the founder of PILLAR, which builds revenue and evidence infrastructure for the EdTech and GovTech markets. This essay examines a category of marketing claim, not any single company, and every figure in it is reproducible from the public directories cited in the notes.

NOTES

1. All counts are from PILLAR Vertical Intelligence's cooperative-contracts census, harvested 2026-07-23 to 2026-07-24 from the vehicles' published directories: the TIPS all-contracts listing (tips-usa.com), BuyBoard's per-state current-vendor exports (buyboard.com), Sourcewell's awarded-contract directory, OMNIA Partners' supplier directory, the Texas DIR active cooperative contracts dataset (data.texas.gov, first-party, including prime-to-reseller authorizations), Choice Partners' public vendor directory, NASPO ValuePoint portfolio award

lists, and Carahsoft's published contract-vehicle vendor pages. The full row-level data, each row linked to its source, is searchable free at pillargtm.com/vertical-intelligence/contract-vehicle-reality-check. ↩

2. Vehicles covered: TIPS, BuyBoard, Sourcewell, Choice Partners, Texas DIR, OMNIA Partners, NASPO ValuePoint; 16,006 vendor awards and 7,287 reseller-network edges as of the harvest date. 1GPA, AEPA, PEPPM, and HGACBuy were not yet covered at this writing. Counts are snapshots; vehicles re-bid categories and distributors update rider lists continuously. ↩

3. NASPO ValuePoint, "How to Become a Supplier": a supplier becomes a supplier by submitting a proposal to an open competitive solicitation run by a lead state with a multistate sourcing team; there is no general vendor registration. naspovaluepoint.org/how-to-become-a-supplier/. TIPS states the same rule for its own awards (tips-usa.com FAQ). ↩

4. The precision matters. On the other six vehicles (TIPS, Choice Partners, Sourcewell, OMNIA, NASPO ValuePoint, and Texas DIR), no core basal curriculum program from Savvas, Curriculum Associates, HMH, Pearson, Scholastic, or Great Minds appears at all. The single exception is BuyBoard contract 748-24, which BuyBoard titles "Instructional Materials (Non-Adopted) for PK-12, Special Education, and Career and Technology" (expiration 2027-10-31): Savvas, Curriculum Associates, HMH Education Company, Greenwood Publishing (Heinemann), Pearson, Scholastic, and Amplify all hold it. Great Minds, Zearn, Eureka, and McGraw Hill hold no award on any of the seven vehicles or the 7,287 reseller edges. The contract's own title makes the point: buyable is not adopted. ↩

5. U.S. General Services Administration, Cooperative Purchasing Program: state, local, and tribal governments (including school districts) may purchase through GSA schedules only for information technology (formerly Schedule 70), and security and law-enforcement products (formerly Schedule 84). gsa.gov, "Learn about Cooperative Purchasing." ↩

6. 2 CFR 200.318-.320 (procurement standards under the federal Uniform Guidance, adopted by the U.S. Department of Education through EDGAR). See also state and municipal guidance on piggybacking, e.g., MRSC, "The ABCs of Piggybacking" (2022): the purchasing entity must verify that the underlying solicitation satisfied its own most-restrictive applicable standards and document eligibility, scope, and pricing. ↩

Mission & Values

Vertical Intelligence

Email the Founder