

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Who is Green Schools Alliance?

Green Schools Alliance connects and empowers champions who are creating healthy and sustainable schools. The Alliance is a 501(c)3 organization with a mission to build and scale sustainability programs that make it easier for schools to do more, ensuring a healthier environment for our children.

Why is Green Schools Alliance offering a Purchasing Solution?

We want schools to save money on everyday purchases to better invest in student success. The GSA Purchasing Solution offers cost savings, in addition to quality products and services, and a purchasing process that's easy to use and implement. In addition to offering great pricing on conventional products, schools are supported in purchasing affordable sustainable products and services.

Green Schools Alliance recognizes schools as hubs of the community. By making environmentally friendly options more affordable, we seek to transform markets, policy, and behaviors to foster whole school sustainability. The Alliance receives a portion of the savings on each order to support this work.

How does the Purchasing Solution work?

We blend technology, network buying, product expertise, and school insight to identify areas for savings on the exact same items that schools already buy, or new items they are interested in purchasing. We use cutting edge procurement practices and vendor relationships to create offers to meet each school's specific needs.

The process is maximized when we can analyze your past and current roster of purchases to identify savings across the list of items. At a minimum, we find products and services at cost neutral or lower prices, and on average, schools save an average of 20% when purchasing through the Alliance. Furthermore, we specialize in combining savings on conventional products with purchases of sustainable products, which results in a lower cost for schools. Ultimately, schools save the most when they buy more items with the GSA Purchasing Solution.



ABOUT SAVINGS

What does it cost to use the GSA Purchasing Solution?

There are no fees or costs to schools or districts to use the GSA Purchasing Solution! The price we quote you is the price you pay. We also provide, at no cost to users: a software suite that helps streamline procurement workflow management; and a strong service component to verify product specifications, quality assurance, and logistics. Using these extra services is up to you.

Is this a purchasing consortium?

No. Unlike traditional purchasing consortiums, we adapt to the evolving and unique needs of your school or district. Whether your school or district is large or small, public or independent, we refine our approach to get the products you need within the framework of your organizational structure. But similar to the idea of a purchasing consortium, we use collective purchasing power to make quality more affordable.

How could we use the GSA Purchasing Solution along with an existing purchasing consortium that we are already in?

The GSA Purchasing Solution can complement your existing purchasing consortium. You can link your existing vendor accounts and let us know which relationships you would like to maintain.

Will the prices offered by the GSA Purchasing Solution change over time?

The GSA Purchasing Solution has an internal system that monitors pricing over time - we protect schools against supplier “price creeps” by constantly comparing the original price given with standard industry fluctuation. The GSA Purchasing Solution is a unique platform where prices trend down over time as the network grows.

How does payment and invoicing work?

Payment mirrors your existing vendor relationship. If you are used to invoicing, the GSA will honor your invoicing terms (i.e. net 15, net 30). If you are used to credit card, you can securely checkout through the GSA Purchasing solution.



ABOUT QUALITY

How can I be sure the quality of new products or services I order are at least as good as the quality I have now?

Quality assurance is one of the most crucial aspects of the GSA Purchasing Solution. First, the GSA Purchasing Solution conducts internal quality assurance when dealing directly with the vendors. Second, the GSA Purchasing Solution uses experience and testing from other member schools to help determine quality.

Can I receive samples or a demonstration?

We are always happy to arrange samples of products to be sent as needed. When necessary, demonstrations and webinars can also be arranged.

Is there a guarantee or return policy?

Return policies are very much a case-by-case basis. If the onus is on the vendor, the vendor will remedy the situation swiftly and free or charge. If the school orders the wrong product or quantity accidentally, there may be a shipping and restocking fee associated; however, the GSA Purchasing Solution works diligently to facilitate returns and get associated costs mitigated.

What is the turn-around time on my orders?

Turn-around time is consistent with your existing vendor relationships and delivery time is considered during the sourcing process. Schools can distinguish items that need to be rushed and items that are needed for a date in the future. For items with high consumption (i.e. cleaning, dining, etc.) delivery time will generally be faster than larger ticket items (i.e. machinery, equipment, furniture, etc.).

If I switch products, and the new products require installation, who provides the labor and cost of that?

In most cases, the vendor is happy to provide installation free of charge. For example, we have often had vendors install toilet paper or paper towel dispensers free of cost. Additionally, we have had vendors be willing to service water bottle filling stations for free as well. However, for example, if a school is interested in a new lighting overhaul then installation costs are typically associated and broken out as a line item for the project. These costs are factored in and we seek to mitigate installation and servicing prices when applicable.

Relatedly, if I switch products or services and my staff needs training on using them, is there support from Green Schools Alliance for this?

Support will be provided by both the GSA Purchasing Solution as well as the vendor.

Have you helped schools transition toward making more sustainable purchases?

Yes! We have helped schools transition purchase of conventional items to more sustainable alternatives, or purchase sustainable items for the first time. For instance, one school was using HDPE trash liners in 13 gallon, 32 gallon, and 45 gallon sizes. We worked to understand the exact specifications (i.e. durability, density, etc.) of the needed bags so we could find a suitable alternative whose quality we can assure. We then used the school’s broader purchase history to understand the quantity they regularly buy and the price they historically paid. With all of this information we guaranteed superior bags that are compostable/ biodegradable/ eco-friendly and fit within their budget.

What kind of sustainable products can you offer?

Anything - just ask for a quote! We source products and services for classrooms, offices, grounds, food service, cleaning purposes, and more. Please see our **Case Studies** for more examples.



ABOUT EASE

How do I continue to use multiple vendors?

The GSA Purchasing Solution gives schools and district one website where purchasing is organized. Instead of having multiple logins and passwords for different vendors, there are multiple options for different materials and supplies in one place. With the GSA Purchasing Solution, schools can streamline procurement -- especially where purchasing is decentralized.

How can my school or district start purchasing products with you?

We will work with you to select a product category or group of products where you want to see a positive change. To start, all we need is: product names, specifications, and purchase history (quantity and current price). It also helps us to know if you have vendors on contract or ones that you frequently use. Schools often have different entry points for trying out the GSA Purchasing Solution. We’ll customize the onboarding process to fit your needs.

How can I get my school or district to use the GSA Purchasing Solution when we have a very regimented procurement process with a list of qualified vendors?

The GSA Purchasing Solution is extremely flexible and can complement your existing policy and procedures. The solution can be fine-tuned to only consider a specific subset of vendors (i.e. preferred source, local, veteran-owned, etc.). The Solution can also help enforce specific procurement parameters that you provide.

Do you have additional resources?

Our GSA Purchasing Solution Toolbox has everything you need to get started transitioning your current purchases or making new purchases to start saving money. The Green Schools Alliance website also hosts a Purchasing and Materials group, in the online Resource Center. Here, users can connect with other GSA Purchasing Solution users, and find related resources and success stories. This is the place to connect with other sustainability champions to discuss what is working for them, help troubleshoot, share resources, and celebrate achievements. You can find the Toolbox and the Resource Center at www.greenschoolsalliance.org/purchasing.

What customer support do you offer?

We want to help you succeed in making your first purchase with the GSA Purchasing Solution! We are available via phone and email to help you take the first steps and get started. Also, we have an online Toolbox with guidance for the person who will shepherd the transition and initial purchases. The Toolbox includes editable materials to educate your team on the value of the GSA Purchasing Solution and how it works.

You can contact Zach Garippa, Purchasing Coordinator at Green Schools Alliance, at zgarippa@greenschoolsalliance.org.

SAVINGS • QUALITY • EASE

greenschoolsalliance.org/purchasing