

EDUCATION

How to Buy Access Control

A deployment playbook, procurement checklist, and readiness assessment for security, IT, and facilities leaders in K-12 and Higher Education. Built from the intelligence in the State of the Verticals Benchmark Report 2026.

VERTICAL

Education — K-12 & Higher Ed

AUDIENCE

Security, IT & Facilities Leaders

YEAR

2026

SOURCE INTELLIGENCE

State of the Verticals Benchmark Report

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome and thanks for downloading this guide. If you have read the State of the Verticals Benchmark Report, you already have a clearer picture of where education is headed than most of your peers. That report was the intelligence and now it is time for action.

The Benchmark Report told you what is true about the market: mandates are arriving, mobile credentials are gaining traction, and the conversation is shifting from lockdown speed alone to daily operational safety. The platform shift from door hardware to identity infrastructure is underway, unevenly, across districts and institutions of every size. Good to know. Not enough to act on.

This guide is where you go deeper. It takes those findings and turns them into something you can actually use on your desk: a way to score your own district or institution against the benchmark, the exact questions your board and community are going to ask you anyway, and a phased playbook for structuring the buy so you are not just reacting to the next mandate, you are ahead of it.

This document brings together all three Acre Buyer Enablement Tools for this vertical:

- **HOW TO BUY**
— the questions, the framing, and the mandate you need before you write an RFP
- **READINESS AND ASSESSMENT TOOL**
— the scorecard for grading your own district or institution against the benchmark
- **DEPLOYMENT PLAYBOOK**
— the five phases for structuring and sequencing the buy

Fill in the blanks as you go. Use it to walk into your next vendor conversation already knowing what you are buying and why.

DOCUMENT DETAILS

VERTICAL

Education — K-12 & Higher Ed

AUDIENCE

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YEAR

2026

SOURCE REPORT

State of the Verticals
Benchmark Report

FROM THE BENCHMARK REPORT

Mandates establish baseline requirements, but they rarely generate the budget authority required for a platform-level investment on their own.

PART 1 OF 3

How to Buy

The questions, the framing, and the mandate you need before you write an RFP.

WHERE YOU STAND

Mandates are arriving. The gap is daily operational safety.

Districts and institutions have spent a decade investing in lockdown speed. The challenge now is not the worst day, it is every other day: the governance gaps that new construction, consolidations, and siloed IT decisions have opened up over time. Before you buy anything, you need an honest read on where your estate actually is.

YOUR DISTRICT OR INSTITUTION PROFILE — COMPLETE BEFORE PROCEEDING	
DISTRICT / INSTITUTION NAME	
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS OR CAMPUSES	NUMBER OF REGIONS
PHYSICAL SECURITY BUDGET OWNER (TEAM / FUNCTION)	
IT DEPARTMENT JOINT GOVERNANCE AUTHORITY OVER ACCESS CONTROL (YES / NO / PARTIAL)	
ACQUISITIONS, CONSOLIDATIONS, OR NEW BUILDS (LAST 5 YEARS)	LEGACY ACCESS CONTROL SYSTEMS INHERITED

THE THREE QUESTIONS EVERY EDUCATION BUYER MUST ANSWER

These are the questions your board, your leadership, and your next integration project will ask. **If you cannot answer all three today, that gap is your procurement mandate.**

QUESTION 01

Can this platform give staff a single, unified workflow across access, video, and notification during a lockdown or door-force alarm?

OUR ANSWER TODAY

SYSTEMS CURRENTLY PREVENTING THIS

QUESTION 02

Can it onboard a new or acquired campus's infrastructure without requiring full system replacement?

MONTHS TO BRING OUR LAST INTEGRATION INTO OUR SECURITY GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

PRIMARY FRICTION POINTS

QUESTION 03

Can it produce compliance reporting for mandates like Alyssa's Law — which requires silent panic alarms in schools across multiple states — across every building, without manual reconciliation across multiple systems?

MOST RECENT AUDIT OR MANDATE-RELATED FINDING

TIME TO REMEDIATE

FROM THE BENCHMARK REPORT

Mandates establish baseline requirements, but they rarely generate the budget authority required for a platform-level investment on their own. What generates it is a bond measure, a security incident, or a mandate deadline — Alyssa's Law compliance dates are a common trigger in the states that have adopted it. All three expose gaps that the normal annual budget cycle cannot address quickly enough.

KEY PRINCIPLE

Stop leading with the cost of hardware. Lead with the operational cost of managing what you already have.

PART 2 OF 3

Readiness & Assessment Tool

The scorecard for grading your own district or institution against the benchmark.



SCORE YOUR CURRENT STATE

The fragmentation audit. Do this before you write an RFP.

The highest-cost problem in education is not hardware fragmentation. It is governance fragmentation. Rate each area honestly.

☒ ☐ ☐ Limited
 ☒ ☒ ☐ Partial
 ☒ ☒ ☒ Strong

CAPABILITY AREA	WHAT TO ASSESS	YOUR SCORE
Identity Lifecycle Management	How well does your organization manage credential revocation for staff and contractors across all sites?	☐ ☐ ☐
Unified Emergency Workflow Visibility	How mature is your organization's ability to give staff one workflow, not multiple screens, during an emergency?	☐ ☐ ☐
Consolidation and New Build Absorption Readiness	Does your current platform have a documented integration path for new sites that does not require full replacement?	☐ ☐ ☐
IT + Security Convergence	Are your IT and security teams operating under a shared governance framework for access control decisions today?	☐ ☐ ☐
Visitor and Contractor Management	How reliably are visitor and contractor credentials revoked at end of engagement across your full district or institution?	☐ ☐ ☐
Open Platform Posture	How open and interoperable is your current access control infrastructure across legacy and new buildings?	☐ ☐ ☐

THE SHADOW DATABASE PROBLEM

Every system that was never fully deprovisioned after a consolidation or new build is a shadow database. Credentials that exist outside your governance framework are not just an operational inefficiency. They are a compliance liability and a safety gap. Count them before your next incident does.

DEFINE YOUR MANDATE

This is your business case.

DEFINE YOUR MANDATE — FILL IN AFTER SCORING

OUR BIGGEST GAP

THE BUSINESS RISK THIS CREATES

ESTIMATED % OF DEPARTED STAFF OR CONTRACTORS STILL WITH ACTIVE CREDENTIALS ACROSS OUR SITES

CURRENT AVERAGE CREDENTIAL REVOCATION TIME (MINUTES)

SYSTEMS / MANUAL STEPS REQUIRED TO PRODUCE A CONSOLIDATED COMPLIANCE REPORT TODAY

MOST LIKELY BUDGET TRIGGER EVENT (INCIDENT / MANDATE DEADLINE / ALYSSA'S LAW COMPLIANCE DATE / BOND MEASURE / BOARD DIRECTIVE)

EXECUTIVE SPONSOR (NAME / ROLE)

PART 3 OF 3

Deployment Playbook

The five phases for structuring and sequencing the buy.



HOW TO STRUCTURE THE BUY

Five phases. One non-negotiable principle: buy for governance first.

Districts and institutions do not buy access control. They buy the ability to report compliance status to their board and community, meet the next mandate, and absorb the next new build or consolidation without creating a new safety liability. Structure your evaluation and deployment around those three outcomes, not around product features.

1

PHASE

Define the Governance Outcomes First

Write the board report you want to be able to produce. Work backward from that document to the platform capabilities required to generate it. RFPs that lead with feature lists produce feature-based evaluations. RFPs that lead with governance outcomes produce platform-level conversations.

2

PHASE

Map Your Fragmentation Before You Write the RFP

Count every distinct access control system and every adjacent system that touches it across your sites, including recently acquired or newly built ones. Document which systems are integrated into your tuition, HR, and student information workflows and which are managed manually. That inventory is your integration requirement list.

3

PHASE

Require a Demonstrated Hardware Absorption and Emergency Workflow Scenario

During vendor evaluation, present a realistic multi-building environment with disparate legacy hardware and ask each vendor to walk through how their platform absorbs it, alongside a live demonstration of the emergency workflow. Vendors who cannot walk through this credibly are point solutions dressed as platforms.

The capability you're testing for has a name in the market — non-disruptive migration, the ability to absorb and modernize legacy infrastructure without ripping it out. Vendors who treat it as a core platform discipline rather than a professional-services project are the ones who can do this at enterprise scale.

4

PHASE

Align IT, Security, and Facilities Before Shortlisting

Platform consolidation projects fail when stakeholder alignment happens after vendor selection. Get IT, Security, and Facilities to a shared definition of success before any vendor enters the room. The vendor who wins a district or institution platform deal wins it across three stakeholders, not one.

5

PHASE

Phase the Deployment Around Risk, Not Budget Cycle

Start with the highest-risk locations: sites with the oldest hardware, buildings from recent consolidations, locations with open safety findings. Don't default to the easiest sites. The value of a platform deployment is demonstrated by what it solves, not by how smoothly it rolls out.

YOUR DEPLOYMENT BRIEF

This is your go / no-go document.

YOUR DEPLOYMENT BRIEF — FILL IN AFTER VENDOR CONVERSATIONS

PHASE 1 SITE COUNT	STARTING SITES (HIGHEST-RISK FIRST)
PLATFORM UNDER EVALUATION	
90-DAY SUCCESS MEASURE (WHAT YOU CAN PRODUCE WITHOUT MANUAL RECONCILIATION)	
GO / NO-GO DECISION DATE	DECISION OWNER (NAME / ROLE)

WHAT YOU ARE BUYING

The ability to report compliance status to your board and community, meet the next mandate, and absorb the next new build or consolidation without creating new safety liability.

WHAT WINNING LOOKS LIKE

One platform. Unified workflow visibility across every building. Credential lifecycle management that does not depend on a person remembering to turn off a badge.

THE VENDOR WHO WINS YOUR DEAL

Has both the wood and the arrowhead. Deep integration reliability plus modern cloud, mobile, and AI capability. Neither alone is sufficient at the district or institution level.