



BUYING A SCHOOL ROOF THROUGH COSTARS

*A practical guide for Pennsylvania school business administrators
and facilities directors*

How to fund a roof project, what to compare beyond price, and how to skip
the bid while staying fully compliant.



The two hard parts of a school roof

For most Pennsylvania districts, the roof is the single largest deferred-maintenance item on the books. And the two hardest parts of replacing one have almost nothing to do with the roof itself:

- **Paying for it** without disrupting instructional budgets or asking taxpayers for more.
- **Procuring it** without losing an entire construction season to the formal bid process.

This short guide is about those two problems. It explains, in plain language, how cooperative purchasing through COSTARS lets your district buy a quality roof faster and stay fully compliant - and how to think about cost and funding so the decision holds up to your board, your auditor, and your community.

It's written to be useful whether or not you ever work with Metal Alliance.

What COSTARS is, in plain language

COSTARS is Pennsylvania's statewide cooperative purchasing program, administered by the Department of General Services (DGS). The state competitively bids and pre-negotiates contracts with vetted suppliers — and any registered public entity, including your school district, can then purchase directly off those contracts. Roughly 9,500 Pennsylvania public organizations are registered COSTARS members.

What it means for your district

No bid to run. The competition already happened at the state level, so you can buy off the contract without advertising and adjudicating your own solicitation.

Compliant by design. Purchasing through a COSTARS contract satisfies the Commonwealth Procurement Code's competitive-procurement requirement — the box your auditor looks for is already checked.

Quality over lowest bid. Members may choose suppliers on quality, service, and geography — not price alone.

Always your choice. Participation is voluntary; you continue to follow your own board policies and approval process.

How to buy a roof through COSTARS — in 3 steps

Step 1 — Define the project. Assess the roof's condition, scope the work, and confirm which building(s) and an approximate budget. A free, no-obligation assessment can produce all of this for you.

Step 2 — Choose a COSTARS-authorized supplier. Confirm the supplier holds a current COSTARS contract in the right category, then request a quote that references the contract number. Compare on quality and lifecycle value — not just the install price.

Step 3 — Purchase off the contract. Issue your purchase order against the COSTARS contract, document the contract reference for your records and your board, and schedule the work — typically around summer break.

The time you get back

Running a formal bid can add two to four months — advertising, the bid period, adjudication, and award. COSTARS removes that step. For a summer roof project, that's often the difference between building this year and waiting until next.

Lifecycle cost vs. lowest bid

The lowest bid and the lowest cost are rarely the same roof. A roof is a 20-to-50-year decision, and the cheapest system today often costs more over the life of the building — in repairs, energy, and early replacement. Here's what to compare beyond the sticker price:

What to compare	Lowest-bid lens	Lifecycle-cost lens
Expected lifespan	~15-20 yrs (many membrane systems)	40+ yrs (quality metal systems)
Maintenance	Frequent patching & service calls	Minimal and predictable
Energy	Standard absorption	Reflective / cool-roof options reduce cooling load
Disruption	Replaced again sooner — during a future school year	Often once per building generation
Warranty	Shorter coverage	Long-term system warranties available
30-year total cost	Frequently higher	Frequently lower

An honest note: metal doesn't win every project. But on long-lived public buildings, it frequently wins on the total cost of ownership. Whatever you're considering, ask any supplier to show you the 30-year picture — not just the price to install.

How Pennsylvania districts pay for it

You usually have more options than the general fund. The most common mechanisms districts use for roof projects:

Funding source	What it is	Good to know
Capital reserve fund	Money set aside specifically for capital projects	Often the simplest path for planned roof work
General obligation bonds / financing	Borrowing for major capital improvements	Spreads cost over the asset's long life
Public School Facility Improvement Grant (PSFIG)	State grant via DCED / Commonwealth Financing Authority	\$500K-\$5M for projects of \$500K+; explicitly covers roof work; competitive; application window opens early in the year — confirm current dates with DCED

Funding source	What it is	Good to know
Public School Environmental Repairs Program (Act 33 of 2023)	State funds to remediate environmental hazards (mold, water, etc.)	Relevant when a failing roof has caused mold or water damage
Operating / general fund	Annual budget dollars	Best suited to smaller-scope repairs

About PlanCon: Pennsylvania's PlanCon school-construction reimbursement program is not currently accepting new applications, so don't build a plan around state construction reimbursement for a new project. Confirm the current status with the Department of Education.

Stack the grant with the no-bid purchase

A roof project of \$500,000 or more may be eligible for the Public School Facility Improvement Grant — and can be purchased through COSTARS. Pursuing grant funding for part of the cost while using a compliant, no-bid COSTARS purchase for the procurement is a powerful combination. Confirm each program's own procurement requirements with your business office and solicitor before you proceed.

Quick self-check: is your roof a candidate?

If two or more of these are true, a roof project is worth a closer look this year:

- ☐ The roof is more than 15 years old, or past its warranty
- ☐ You're patching leaks more than once or twice a year
- ☐ You've seen interior water damage, ceiling stains, or mold complaints
- ☐ Heating and cooling bills are climbing in the affected building(s)
- ☐ A renovation, addition, or HVAC project is planned (bundle the roof in)
- ☐ You have capital reserve, bond capacity, or grant eligibility
- ☐ You'd like the work done over a single summer break

Checked two or more? A no-obligation assessment will turn these into real numbers you can take to your board.

Your next step

Request a free, no-obligation roof assessment. There's no cost and no commitment. We'll evaluate the roof's condition, scope realistic options, and give you budget-level numbers for your board — along with exactly how the purchase would work through COSTARS.

Metal Alliance is an authorized COSTARS supplier for metal roof and wall systems, serving schools districts across Pennsylvania with union-built quality and statewide service.

Talk to us

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This guide is general educational information for Pennsylvania public school entities and is not legal, financial, or procurement advice. Program details, grant windows, and procurement rules change; confirm current requirements with your business office, solicitor, DCED, and the Department of Education before acting. Metal Alliance is a COSTARS-authorized supplier, not a financial or legal advisor.