A MIDDAY ADVISORS FRAMEWORK

District-Fluent GTM

A go-to-market framework for K-12 built on how districts actually decide, buy, and adopt — and how sales and marketing move together inside it.

Your sales numbers are soft, and it isn’t only a sales problem, or only a marketing one

Most K-12 vendors run their go-to-market on the same playbook built for SaaS, retail, or enterprise software: build pipeline, run a demo, close the deal, move on. It doesn’t work in school districts, and the sales team gets blamed for the mismatch when it’s actually a strategy problem that sales and marketing share.

Districts don’t buy the way other markets buy. Money moves on a fiscal-year calendar, not a sales calendar. A purchase might need three signatures, or it might need an RFP and a scoring rubric, depending on dollar amount and category. The person who champions a product in October usually isn’t the one who signs for it in April, and neither of them is the one who has to use it with 28 kids in a classroom in September. Ignore any one of those realities and the deal stalls, degrades into a discount, or dies in a committee you never saw.

This is the gap a go-to-market framework must close: not a generic sales methodology, and not a marketing framework handed to sales after the fact, but one built jointly on how districts actually move money, make decisions, and adopt tools. We call it District-Fluent GTM.

What District-Fluent GTM is

District-Fluent GTM is a go-to-market approach, owned jointly by sales and marketing, built around how K-12 districts actually decide, buy, and adopt. It replaces a generic B2B sales motion with one shaped by the district’s fiscal year, its procurement path, the credibility of people near the classroom, the evidence it expects before it asks for it, and what happens in the weeks and months after the contract is signed.

It has five components, each one a place sales and marketing lose or win the deal together:

- **1. Fiscal-Year Fluency** — knowing where a district is in its budget cycle, and what paths exist outside that cycle
- **2. Procurement Flow** — matching the sales motion to how the purchase actually gets approved, from informal sole-source to a scored RFP
- **3. Classroom Proximity** — earning credibility with the people closest to daily use, not just the people who sign
- **4. Proof Before You’re Asked** — leading with evidence instead of waiting to be asked for it
- **5. Post-Sale Follow-Through** — provisioning, rollout, and sustained support that gets a contract renewed

Each one is a lever sales and marketing can pull deliberately, together, instead of discovering too late that one function pulled the wrong one without the other.

COMPONENT 1 OF 5

1. Fiscal-Year Fluency

District budgets run on an annual cycle tied to the school year, not the calendar year, and most discretionary spending gets planned and locked months before it's spent. A vendor who shows up with a great pitch in February, after next year's budget is already set, often asks a district to find money that doesn't exist yet. Fiscal-Year Fluency means knowing where a district sits in that cycle and timing outreach, proposals, and renewal conversations around it, not a quarterly sales target — a timing discipline marketing sets and sales executes.

That said, not every dollar in a district moves on the annual budget calendar. Three real exceptions matter:

Below-threshold purchases. Many districts allow purchases under a set dollar amount (often a few thousand to $10–25K depending on state and district policy) to move without a formal budget line, sometimes on a school credit card or a quick purchase order. **Building-level purchasing authority.** A principal or department head often controls a discretionary budget separate from the central office's annual plan and can move on it faster.

Out-of-cycle funding. Grants, board-approved emergency spending, and end-of-year "use it or lose it" funds can create a buying window unrelated to the normal fiscal calendar. A vendor that only understands the annual cycle will miss all three. A vendor that treats every purchase as if it could be one of these three will misjudge timing on the 80% of spending that really does follow the calendar.

What the research shows: The February-to-June lockup isn't anecdotal. Pennsylvania districts, for example, must adopt a preliminary budget by mid-February and a final budget by June 30, with most real decisions on new spending settled by that February marker, months before the new fiscal year even starts. Other states run similar timelines on different dates. The pattern that matters for a vendor is consistent across them: by the time a district signals that budget season has started, the window for influencing that year's number has usually already closed.

What this looks like in practice: A district's fiscal year runs July 1 to June 30, with budget planning happening January through March. A vendor selling a $40K platform license starts conversations with curriculum leaders in the fall, so district leadership can build the request into the budget they finalize in the spring, rather than pitching it in April when the number is already locked. At the same time, that same vendor keeps a simpler, lower-priced version of the offer available year-round, because a principal with $3K in discretionary funds, or a district that just got a mid-year literacy grant, doesn't care what month it is.

COMPONENT 2 OF 5

2. Procurement Flow

A district doesn't have one buying process. It has two, and sales and marketing both need to know which one a given opportunity is in. Below a dollar threshold set by state or district policy, or when a product qualifies as sole-source, a purchase can move informally: a champion builds a case, a few people sign off, and a PO gets cut. Above that threshold, the purchase usually has to go out to bid, and the decision is made against a scoring rubric, often with several people reviewing proposals independently and scoring them against stated criteria, not with a single buyer making a judgment call.

That second path isn't an informal "buying committee" sitting around a table. It's closer to a graded exam: there's a rubric, there are reviewers scoring independently, and the vendor's job before the RFP ever drops is to have already shaped what that rubric rewards — content marketing's job as much as sales's. By the time a formal bid is posted, a vendor who hasn't already built relationships and demonstrated fit is competing on paper against someone who has.

Procurement Flow means mapping both paths for a given opportunity early: is this likely to stay under threshold and move informally, or is it headed for a scored RFP, and if so, who's writing the specs? The sales motion, the content a marketing team produces, the people a vendor needs to reach, and the timeline all change depending on the answer.

What the research shows: The thresholds that separate these two paths aren't a vendor's guess. They're public record. State procurement codes and each district's board-adopted purchasing policy spell out, in writing, the dollar amount above which a purchase must go out to competitive bid. A vendor willing to read a district's actual policy, rather than assume one national number applies everywhere, knows which path a given deal is on before the district ever says so.

What this looks like in practice: A district is evaluating a new assessment tool. A vendor identifies early that the purchase will exceed the state's bid threshold and will go out as a formal RFP next fall. Instead of waiting for the RFP to post, the vendor spends the spring and summer building relationships with the curriculum director and a few building principals, offering a pilot, and making sure the capabilities that matter to this district are visible and understood well before the rubric gets written. When the RFP lands, the vendor isn't introducing itself. It's responding to criteria it already helped shape.

COMPONENT 3 OF 5

3. Classroom Proximity

The person signing a contract is rarely the person who will live with the product every day. A superintendent or procurement officer can approve a purchase, but a teacher, instructional coach, or building principal decides whether it gets used, and their skepticism or enthusiasm travels fast inside a district. A pitch that only speaks to district-level priorities, without showing it understands what Tuesday morning in a classroom actually looks like, reads as outside noise to the people who will decide whether the tool survives real use.

Classroom Proximity is messaging and positioning, built by marketing and carried by sales, that's credible to the people closest to daily use, not just the people who hold budget authority. That doesn't mean ignoring the administrators who sign; it means earning credibility with both audiences, not just one, because the classroom-level audience often says "we tried this before and it didn't work" or "this one's actually good" long before procurement gets involved.

What the research shows: A NewSchools Venture Fund and Gallup survey of educators found that 94 percent say they seek out other teachers' input when selecting ed-tech products, more than the share who rely on online reviews (84 percent), social media (58 percent), or official district-approved lists (49 percent). A separate EdWeek Market Brief survey of district leaders found a more mixed picture: more than half said they seldom roll a product out district-wide based solely on recommendations from teachers who piloted it. Read together, the two surveys point to the same tension this component is built to manage: classroom-level trust is where adoption starts, but it isn't automatically where the authority to buy sits.

What this looks like in practice: A vendor selling a classroom intervention tool builds its case studies and demo content around specific teacher workflows, like how a 20-minute block gets structured, not just the district-level outcome data a superintendent cares about. The sales rep working a deal makes sure a few teachers or instructional coaches get hands-on time with the product before the final decision, because a champion who can say, "My teachers already like this," closes doors that a glossy district-level pitch deck cannot.

COMPONENT 4 OF 5

4. Proof Before You’re Asked

In a tight-budget environment, evidence of impact is table stakes, not a differentiator. The old model waited for a district to ask for proof late in the sales cycle, treating it like a test the vendor had to pass under scrutiny. Proof Before You’re Asked flips that: evidence, case studies, and third-party research — built by marketing, deployed by sales — should be visible early and offered without being requested, so the district never has to go looking for a reason to trust the product.

That doesn’t make the proof automatically persuasive. Whether a case study lands depends on whether the district sees itself in it. A rural district of 2,000 students doesn’t see itself in a case study from a large urban system, no matter how strong the results were. If the evidence a vendor already has doesn’t match who the district is, offering it before being asked doesn’t help, and the honest move is to say so and either point to evidence that does fit or offer to build it, through a pilot or a smaller-scale study with that specific district.

What the research shows: Trade coverage of K-12 purchasing increasingly treats evidence of effectiveness as a live purchasing dynamic, not a nice-to-have. EdWeek Market Brief has reported that the amount of evidence a district wants varies by product type and by the size and location of the system buying it, and outlets like EdSurge have covered school leaders actively asking vendors to prove their products work before a deal moves forward. The specific bar for “enough evidence” differs district to district. What doesn’t vary is that districts ask this question earlier than they used to.

What this looks like in practice: A vendor publishes a case study library organized by district size, demographics, and use case, rather than one generic success story, and references it unprompted in early conversations. When a prospective district doesn’t match any existing profile, the vendor says so directly and proposes a limited pilot, with an agreed way to measure it, rather than stretching an unrelated case study to fit or waiting for the district to ask what else they’ve got.

COMPONENT 5 OF 5

5. Post-Sale Follow-Through

A signed contract is not a won deal. It's a renewal risk clock starting. Districts increasingly scrutinize what happens after the purchase order is cut: how smoothly the product gets set up, whether stuck teachers find help quickly, and whether anyone checks in before the renewal conversation forces the question. A product can be the right fit on paper and still lose the renewal because the last mile of ownership was left to chance — a mile marketing and sales are both on the hook for, alongside customer success.

Post-Sale Follow-Through has three parts. Provisioning is getting accounts, access, and technical setup done correctly and quickly, so the product is actually usable on day one instead of day thirty. Rollout is the initial training and onboarding that gets staff comfortable enough to start using it for real. Ongoing support happens in the weeks and months after that: making sure educators who get stuck don't stay stuck, and holding periodic check-ins with both the people who bought the product and the people using it, since a happy buyer and a frustrated end user don't make for a stable position.

A license nobody logs into regularly won't renew, no matter how good the sales process was.

What the research shows: LearnPlatform's 2019 Usage Trends Report, based on usage data from hundreds of districts, found that, on average, 27 percent of a given ed-tech product's licensed seats were never activated. EdWeek Market Brief covered the broader pattern under the headline "More Than $1 Billion in K-12 Ed-Tech Licensing Fees Go to Waste." That data suggests that a contract that gets signed and then left to run itself is more often the rule than the exception.

What this looks like in practice: After a contract is signed, a vendor assigns a named point of contact who runs a structured 30-60-90 day check-in cadence: provisioning and technical setup in week one, a rollout training session in week two or three, then usage check-ins at 30, 60, and 90 days that include both a conversation with the purchasing administrator and a pulse check with teachers actually using the product, flagging any building or classroom where login activity has dropped off before it becomes a renewal problem.

Putting District-Fluent GTM to Work

Midday Advisors built this framework because we kept seeing the same pattern: good products, capable teams, and a go-to-market approach borrowed from a market that doesn't buy the way school districts buy, with sales and marketing running separate plays instead of one. Fixing that isn't about working harder on the sales side, or the marketing side alone. It's about rebuilding the strategy underneath both.

We work with K-12 companies and education nonprofits in three ways:

Fractional CMO & CRO.

Senior marketing and revenue leadership, embedded in your team, without a full-time executive hire. We run strategy, build the team, and own the number.

Strategy & Audit.

A focused engagement to diagnose what's working, what isn't, and where District-Fluent GTM is or isn't showing up in your current go-to-market motion, with a concrete plan to close the gaps.

Advisory for Education Leaders.

Ongoing counsel for leadership teams that want a sounding board and a second set of eyes on marketing and revenue decisions without adding headcount.

If you recognize your own go-to-market in any of the gaps described here, let's talk about what District-Fluent GTM would look like applied to your business.

Schedule a conversation — calendly.com/scott-noon

Sources

Pennsylvania School Boards Association, Budget Process 2023-24.

NewSchools Venture Fund and Gallup survey, as covered in EdWeek Market Brief, "Teachers' Word Carries Weight in Choosing Products, Survey Finds."

EdWeek Market Brief, "Districts' Desire for Evidence Base Varies by Ed-Tech Product."

EdSurge, "Schools Are Looking for Evidence From Their Ed-Tech. Are Companies Ready to Provide It?"

LearnPlatform, 2019 Usage Trends Report, as covered in eLearning Inside and EdWeek Market Brief, "More Than $1 Billion in K-12 Ed-Tech Licensing Fees Go to Waste."