

CALIFORNIA PUBLIC WORKS COMPLIANCE BRIEF

OCTOBER 2026 | 4-MINUTE READ | A CLIENT SERVICE FROM COLBI

CDE Consolidates CUPCCAA Guidance

The bottom line: The California Department of Education has released a new School Construction Toolkit that brings CUPCCAA, bidding, school facility funding, and debt financing guidance into one place. It does not change the law or establish new thresholds, but it gives districts a practical benchmark for reviewing existing procedures.

WHAT WE'RE WATCHING

A new school construction reference

CDE published its School Construction Toolkit on October 6, 2026. Designed especially for smaller districts, it provides practical guidance on CUPCCAA, public bidding, facility funding, debt financing, and project delivery.

This is general guidance, not a statute, regulation, or change to existing bidding thresholds.

WHAT HAPPENED

CUPCCAA guidance in one place

CDE's new CUPCCAA resource consolidates information districts previously had to assemble from several sources. It covers adoption, State Controller notification, informal bidding procedures, annual contractor lists, contractor and trade journal notices, awards, maintenance, emergencies, and recordkeeping.

CDE also summarizes the current three-tier structure:

1

\$75,000 or less

Force account, negotiated contract, or purchase order may be used without formal or informal bidding.

2

\$75,001 to \$220,000

The district may use its adopted informal bidding procedures.

3

More than \$220,000

Formal public bidding is required, subject to a limited award exception up to \$235,000.

The limited exception permits a four-fifths board vote when all informal bids exceed \$220,000 but do not exceed \$235,000 and the board determines that the original estimate was reasonable.

WHY IT MATTERS

Your resolution, procedures, and workflow should align

The toolkit does not create new legal obligations. It does provide districts with a current CDE reference for evaluating how their CUPCCAA program operates in practice.

Participating districts are expected to maintain contractor lists, follow applicable thresholds, use required notification procedures, follow adopted informal bidding policies, avoid bid splitting, and preserve estimates and procurement records.

MAINTENANCE NEEDS A SECOND LOOK

Including maintenance changes the bidding path

CDE states that a district may apply CUPCCAA procedures to maintenance only when maintenance is clearly included in its CUPCCAA resolution.

The general school maintenance bidding threshold is approximately **\$119,100** effective January 1, 2026. If maintenance is included under CUPCCAA, the district instead uses the CUPCCAA three-tier process, and informal bidding begins above **\$75,000**.

CDE also cautions districts against switching between maintenance and public works classifications from project to project. Classifications should be applied consistently and in accordance with adopted procedures.

PRACTICAL EXPECTATIONS

Build the record before selecting the method

CDE recommends defining the project and preparing a reasonable written estimate before selecting the procurement method. Even for projects at or below \$75,000, it recommends written contracts, prevailing wage provisions, insurance requirements, and payment bonds when required.

Districts should retain project estimates, bid notices, contract documents, board approvals, procurement records, and project accounting records.

WHAT TO CHECK

Three questions for your team

1

Resolution

Does it clearly state whether maintenance is included, and do written procedures match that decision?

2

Lists and notices

Is responsibility assigned for annual solicitation, list maintenance, contractor notices, and trade journal notices?

3

Estimates and records

Does the team document its estimate before selecting the method and retain the complete procurement record?

HOW COLBI CAN HELP

Support the workflow, not the legal determination

QualityBidders and **CUPCCAA Complete** can support annual contractor list solicitation, contractor information management, list reporting, and district training.

SecureBids can support opportunity posting and help preserve an organized solicitation, bid, and award record. It does not replace any separately required notice to trade journals or builders' exchanges.

Need assistance? COLBI can help your team identify where its existing QualityBidders and SecureBids workflows support the practices described in the CDE toolkit. Each district remains responsible for its board policies, procurement decisions, required notices, and legal compliance.

KEEP IN MIND

The toolkit is guidance, not a new rule

The new CDE toolkit does not itself establish a new CUPCCAA bidding threshold, Proposition 2 contractor prequalification requirement, OPSC regulation, or DIR enforcement rule. It is a practical resource for applying existing requirements.

NEED A REFRESHER?

Training is unlimited and included.

[Reply and we'll schedule it.](#)

PEER COMMUNITY

Need a peer sounding board?

PPWG is an agency-centered, sales-free forum where California public professionals discuss construction, maintenance, bidding, contracting, RFQ/PS, and related procurement challenges. Each meeting concludes with a focused 15-minute instructional segment.

No pitches. Just peers helping peers.

[REQUEST A PPWG INVITATION >](#)

GO DEEPER

Primary sources

- [CDE School Construction Toolkit](#)
- [CDE CUPCCAA guidance](#)
- [State Controller CUPCCAA program](#)

This brief provides general educational information and is not legal advice or a complete statement of applicable law. Agencies should consult legal counsel regarding their specific circumstances.