The Trust Cycle

A practical guide to relationships and account growth in K–12

By Jesse Leib and Corey Murray

A good introduction creates a chance to be heard. Growth depends on what happens before that meeting, what you learn in it, and how well you help the buyer take the next step.

We've both built education businesses, pitched solutions, and sold in K–12. In our experience, relationships become more valuable when positioning, content, and sales work together. This guide helps you apply that thinking to one account or opportunity you want to grow.

Listen → clarify value → engage → learn → advance → grow → listen again

Start with one real opportunity

Choose an account where there is a plausible need for your solution. Write down the problem, who owns it, what you know about the decision, and the next action you hope the buyer will take. Mark anything you are assuming. Those assumptions are what your next conversation should help test.

Listen before you sharpen the offer

Ask what the district is trying to change, how it handles the problem today, and what would make a different approach worth the effort. Listen for competing priorities and implementation concerns as carefully as enthusiasm. A trusted relationship can make candid feedback easier to get; your willingness to act on it determines its value.

Make your value specific

Use what you learn to explain the problem you solve, the change a buyer can reasonably expect, and the evidence behind it. A useful test: could a district champion repeat your case to a colleague without you in the room? If the answer is no, sharpen the story before asking for a larger meeting.

Working question: What do we know about this buyer that actually changes our approach?

Use content to qualify interest

Useful content gives a buyer a reason to engage and gives your team something to learn. Choose the asset around a decision the buyer needs to make.

Teach something that matters to the buyer

A short guide can help a leader define a problem. A panel can surface competing approaches. A feedback session can test whether your solution addresses a priority. A case example can show how a similar organization evaluated and implemented a change. Each should help the audience think more clearly, even if they never buy from you.

Ask for a meaningful next step

Match the invitation to the content. After a guide, ask which issue is most relevant. After a discussion, offer to compare their situation with the example. After a case story, ask whether it would be useful to examine the conditions needed for a similar approach. Make the step small enough to take and specific enough to tell you something.

Distinguish interest from an opportunity

A download tells you that a topic caught someone's attention. It does not tell you that a purchase is likely. Look for evidence: a named problem, a person responsible for solving it, willingness to share context, and an agreed next action. Budget, approvals, procurement, and timing still need to be understood.

Let feedback improve the next conversation

Bring the questions buyers ask into your messaging, meeting preparation, and proposals. If several leaders raise the same concern, address it in a short resource your team can use again. Content becomes sales enablement when it helps answer a real objection, explain value, or support an internal decision.

An example to adapt

A company selling teacher coaching could host a discussion about what makes coaching usable in busy schools. A participant who asks about staffing, shares an implementation challenge, and agrees to a follow-up offers more useful qualification signals than attendance alone. The follow-up should address that challenge and establish whether there is a reason to explore the solution.

Working question: What will this asset help the buyer decide, and what will their response help us learn?

Help the relationship move forward

A productive conversation ends with a shared understanding of what comes next. Use that next step to decide where to invest your time.

Prepare for the people and the decision

Before a meeting, establish who will attend, what matters to each person, what evidence is relevant, and what you need to learn. Agree on a useful outcome. Afterward, record what changed, what remains uncertain, and who owns the next action. Share a concise recap the buyer can correct or circulate.

Make a pilot answer a buying question

Where a pilot makes sense, agree on the problem it will test, who will participate, how success will be evaluated, and who will review the result. Clarify the possible path beyond the pilot before it begins. A pilot should produce evidence for a decision, rather than simply prolong a conversation.

Work from the account's actual timing

Ask when priorities and budgets are set, which approvals are needed, and how the purchasing process works for this opportunity. Confirm implementation readiness as well as purchasing readiness. Districts and funding sources differ; a universal quarterly calendar cannot replace this account-level understanding.

Write the proposal around what you learned

Connect the scope to the buyer's stated problem. Make the expected benefit, responsibilities, evidence, commercial terms, and next decision clear. Before sending it, confirm who will review it and how. A proposal should document an understood opportunity and give the buyer a practical way to move forward.

Build expansion on delivered value

After a sale, the client's delivery team needs to meet the commitments made. Stay close to the outcome: what is working, what needs attention, and whether another school or team has a relevant need. Renewal and expansion conversations are stronger when they build on evidence and a relationship that remains useful.

Working question: Do we have a next step the buyer has agreed to, or only one we hope they will take?

Find the gap in your opportunity

Bring these five questions to your next pipeline discussion. Answer with something you can point to: a buyer's comment, a document, an agreed action, or a result. "We think so" is a prompt to learn more.

1. Buyer understanding

Can we name the buyer's priority, the person responsible, and what makes the issue worth acting on?

2. A credible case

Can a champion explain our value and support it with relevant evidence?

3. Useful engagement

Does our content help the buyer make a decision and reveal something about their needs or readiness?

4. A path to a decision

Do we understand the stakeholders, timing, approvals, and next action the buyer has agreed to?

5. Capacity to deliver

Can our team implement what we are proposing and demonstrate the value needed for renewal or expansion?

Choose the unanswered question most likely to change your next move. Resolve that before adding more outreach or producing another asset. There is no score to chase; the purpose is to improve your judgment about the opportunity.

Where Jesse and Corey fit

We work with K–12 education and edtech companies with $2M–$30M in annual revenue. We bring nearly two decades each of experience, longstanding relationships, and integrated sales and marketing work to the opportunities we believe we can help advance.

You work directly with both of us on positioning, strategic relationships, meeting preparation, useful content, and deal strategy. We scope each partnership individually, with a minimum six-month engagement, and only take on as many partners as we can support.

If this guide surfaced a gap you want experienced partners to help address, tell us about your business and the opportunity.

Apply to work with Jesse and Corey