

[Article in School Management, March 1966]

A survey of textbook purchasing practices

Are your students using obsolete books? Compare your textbook purchasing practices with those of 2500 districts reporting from all over the nation.

■ ■ ■ "In a day of complicated 'hardware' many people seem to be ignoring the most basic teaching tool—the book."

This was the opening line—and premise—of a major national survey of textbook purchasing practices recently completed by SCHOOL MANAGEMENT magazine.

More than 2,500 districts filled out a two-page survey form, contributing information on book adoption, distribution, paperback usage and dollar expenditures.

Among the most important conclusions:

■ State adoption practices seriously hamper the efforts of local districts to provide the most modern textbooks for their students. The survey showed cyclical adoptions to be the single most important reason that textbooks are not adopted more often—and more quickly.

■ Other teaching tools are getting more attention. While textbook purchases have increased over the years, purchases of other teaching materials have increased at over twice the rate.

■ While most schoolmen feel that today's textbook is better than ever, many feel it is no longer the basic teaching tool it once was.

■ The cost of textbooks has become a serious problem to a great many districts. Many administrators feel an effort must be made to reduce prices—even if book quality and construction must suffer.

■ More high school students must buy—or rent—their own textbooks than ever before. Only 60% of the districts polled distribute high school textbooks free of charge.

■ Paperback books are becoming a major force in the school market. Over 85% of the districts polled use them—one in four as texts.

■ Despite the increased emphasis on building school libraries, the median district in the United States spends only \$2.25 per elementary student and \$3.27 per secondary student for library books. These figures are far below generally accepted minimum needs.

How and why

Last December SCHOOL MANAGEMENT mailed questionnaires to over 7,500 schoolmen throughout the nation. They were asked five basic questions:

1. The last year in which a new textbook or series was adopted in high school American history and biology, junior high school general science and elementary school math and reading. These five areas were chosen because they show up as courses in virtually every district. They affect almost all students and they are easily definable as courses. Further, they presented an opportunity to study the different buying patterns as they show up in the sciences and the social sciences.

2. If no textbook had been adopted in one of