

# Of Interest to Teachers

## Scarce, Outdated Textbooks Impede Learning, Teachers Say

A lack of up-to-date textbooks interferes with learning in America's elementary and secondary schools, according to a national survey of teachers that was released in March 1996.

Sixteen percent of the teachers who responded to the survey said they did not have enough textbooks for their students, and 46 percent of the teachers reported that they were unable to assign homework because there were not enough textbooks for the students to take home.

The survey, conducted by the Association of American Publishers' school division, along with the National Education Association, included 878 teachers. It found that 25 percent of the teachers reported using textbooks that were more than 10 years old. Slightly more than half the teachers said their students were exposed to outdated information as the result of using out-

dated textbooks.

According to the publishers' association, the U.S. spent more in the past year on fast food, alcohol, tobacco, cosmetics, and pet food than it did on textbooks.

The survey also revealed that teachers rely heavily on professionally prepared classroom materials. Forty-one percent of the respondents said they use textbooks every day; only nine percent said they never used them.—Reported by *Education Week* XV:24 (March 6, 1996).

## Results of the Latest Phi Delta Kappa Poll on Education

Americans do not support the use of tax money to finance non-public schools, nor do they want public schools privatized, except for auxiliary services such as transportation and maintenance. Moreover, the U.S. public flatly rejects the idea that the public schools should be replaced by a system of private and/or church-related schools.

These were some of the results of the 28th annual *Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*, based on a phone interview of 1,329 adults conducted in May 1966.

Other major findings include the following:

- Forty-three percent of people give their local public schools high marks, assigning them a grade of A or B, with almost eight in 10 giving them a C or higher.

- By a margin of 64 percent to 25 percent, respondents believe that it is more important for the federal government to improve public education than to balance the federal budget.

- If more money were available for public schools, then curriculum improvement, technology, and more teachers and staff would top the public's list of spending priorities.

- The trend over time, based on a comparison of polls, is that the public is gradually coming to accept the idea of a longer school day or year.

- While 64 percent of respondents favor retaining compulsory attendance laws, a surprising 30

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Removed

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percent would eliminate them.

- Drug abuse has once again replaced discipline and inadequate funding as the major local school problem mentioned most frequently by respondents. A majority of respondents approve of using random drug testing and trained dogs to sniff out drugs on school grounds.

- The public approves a variety of measures for maintaining order in school, including removing troublemakers from the classroom, requiring students to remain on campus at lunchtime, banning smoking, and outlawing hugging and kissing on school grounds.

- A small majority of the public approves the fast-growing movement for requiring students to wear uniforms in public schools.

- Americans strongly endorse the idea of community service as a requirement for graduation.—Reported in the September 1996 *Phi Delta Kappan*. Copies of the 511-page document are available in bulk at the rate of \$10 for 25 (minimum order, postage paid), with additional copies costing 25 cents each. Write to *Phi Delta Kappan*, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402.

## Textbook Difficulty a Factor in Early Reading Success

How hard textbooks are to read—rather than how teachers teach reading—may be the real key to children's early reading and writing success, according to a University of Georgia researcher who studied 95 first graders at two demographically similar schools. The children were taught to read using two different instructional approaches—traditional, phonics-based teaching; and whole-language methodology.

In the more traditional school, teachers grouped children by ability and used lessons that drew heavily on basal readers and worksheets. In the second school, whole-language instruction called for children to learn to read in much the same way as they learned to talk. They interacted more with their classmates and spent more time writing stories and making entries in journals, rather than filling in worksheets.

Steven A. Stahl and his fellow researchers were surprised that the children in the traditional classrooms turned out to be better writers, and outperformed their peers in the whole-language classrooms.

An even stronger correlation was found between the difficulty of reading materials and children's reading and writing skills. In both environments, children who had read more challenging materials were the better readers, and tended to be the better writers as well.

The point isn't that everyone needs to go to a traditional reading model, said Stahl. Rather, he suggested that all teachers find ways to encourage

## SDA Colleges on the Internet

The North American Division Office of Education recently announced the following compilation of SDA colleges with sites on the World Wide Web:

Andrews University	<a href="http://www.andrews.edu">http://www.andrews.edu</a>
Atlantic Union College	<a href="http://www.atlanticuc.edu">http://www.atlanticuc.edu</a>
Canadian Union College	<a href="http://www.rtt.ab.ca/rtt/cuc">http://www.rtt.ab.ca/rtt/cuc</a>
Columbia Union College	<a href="http://www.cuc.edu">http://www.cuc.edu</a>
Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences	<a href="http://www.fhchs.org">http://www.fhchs.org</a>
La Sierra University	<a href="http://www.lasierra.edu">http://www.lasierra.edu</a>
Loma Linda University	<a href="http://www.llu.edu">http://www.llu.edu</a>
Oakwood College	<a href="http://www.oakwood.edu">http://www.oakwood.edu</a>
Pacific Union College	<a href="http://www.puc.edu">http://www.puc.edu</a>
Southern Adventist University	<a href="http://www.southern.edu">http://www.southern.edu</a>
Southwestern Adventist University	<a href="http://www.swau.edu">http://www.swau.edu</a>
Union College	<a href="http://www.ucollege.edu">http://www.ucollege.edu</a>
Walla Walla College	<a href="http://www.wwc.edu">http://www.wwc.edu</a>

Kettering College of Medical Arts and Home Study International/Griggs University websites are under development.

students to tackle more challenging reading material.—Reported in *Education Week*, April 26, 1995.

## Urban Schools and the Challenges of Location and Poverty

Two recent reports from the U.S. Department of Education highlight the challenges of location and poverty for America's urban schools. They compare suburban and rural student outcomes on a broad range of factors with that of students in urban schools. Since urban schools are more likely to serve low-income students, the reports also examine how poverty relates to the characteristics of the students and schools studied.

Some highlights of the reports:

- Students in urban and urban high-poverty schools were less likely than students in other locations to complete high school on time and had much higher poverty and unemployment rates later in life, but were just as likely as others to be working or going to school full time about a decade after high school.

- Students in urban and urban high-poverty schools were at least as likely as students in other locations to have a parent who finished college, to have parents with high expectations for their children's education and who talk to them about school, but were less likely to live in two-parent households and more likely than others to have changed schools frequently.

- Urban teachers had fewer resources and spent

more time on disciplining students, but urban students spent similar amounts of time on homework as those in other locations.

- In each area of students' lives studied—background characteristics, school experiences, and outcomes—there were instances where urban students and urban high-poverty schools were similar to their non-urban counterparts after accounting for poverty concentration, suggesting that urban schools and students may be meeting or exceeding their challenges in these areas.—From *Urban Schools: The Challenge of Location and Poverty* and *Urban Schools: The Challenge of Location and Poverty, Executive Summary*. Available via the Internet at [gopher.ed.gov:10000](http://gopher.ed.gov:10000) or <http://www.ed.gov/NCES/>.

## Comparisons Between Countries on Preschool Enrollment, Use of Technology, and Money Spent on Education

According to a recently released study of industrialized nations done in 1991, pre-primary education enrollment for 3-year-olds ranged from 21 percent in Japan to 98 percent in France. In the U.S., about a third of 3-year-olds were enrolled.

The U.S. fell about mid-range for calculator use among the countries, with 54 percent of students reporting that they used calculators in school. Half of the nations reported a rate of less than 50 percent. States in the U.S. also showed considerable variation, ranging from 47 percent in Mississippi, the lowest, to Maine (88 percent), the highest.

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In 1991, public expenditure for education at all levels comprised 4.6 percent of the Gross National Product in the U.S. This was lower than Canada, the same as in France, and higher than in Italy, West Germany, and Japan.

## Reading Report Card for U.S. Students

The U.S. Department of Education recently released a broad examination of American public and private students' reading achievement between 1992 and 1994.

Highlights from the report include:

- The average reading proficiency of 12th-grade students declined significantly. This decline was observed across a broad range of subgroups. However, the average reading proficiency of fourth and eighth graders remained unchanged.
- In 1994, 30 percent of fourth graders, 30 percent of eighth graders, and 36 percent of 12th graders attained a proficient level in reading. The percentage of 12th graders reading at this level declined between 1992 and 1994. Across the grades,

three to seven percent reached an advanced level.

- As compared to the 1992 survey, 12th-grade students in 1994 reported reading for fun less often, having fewer literacy materials available at home, and engaging less frequently in home discussions about their studies. In addition, since 1992, 12th graders reported a decline in the number of pages read for school and at home. They also reported being asked less frequently by their teachers to explain or support their understanding of what they read. Students in the eighth and 12th grades reported less frequent weekly discussion on what they read. The data show that all of these activities are associated with higher reading scores.—From *NAEP 1994 Reading Report Card for the Nation and the States*, available via the Internet at <http://www.ed.gov/NCES/>.

## Getting out the Good News About Your School

As adapted from *The American School Board Journal*, here are some ways to get out the good news that education is working:

- Publish a monthly newsletter packed with good news about your school and pictures of students. Bulk-mail copies to parents and other members of the community (remember administrators at the conference and union, too!).

- Appoint a media representative to meet every newspaper, radio, and television editor in your community, to contact each of them frequently, and to make sure all outgoing information is consistent and accurate.

- Produce a 20-minute video on your school and give it to prospective students and their parents, local churches, and conference and union offices of education.

## High School Graduation Standards Study Available

*What We Expect and What We Get* by Joseph D. Creech is available from Southern Regional Education Board, 492 Tenth St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30318-5790.

## Exams Result in Higher Achievement for European Youth

Youths in three European countries have better academic skills than those in the U.S., largely because of high-stakes national assessments, a recent report argues.

Roughly two-thirds of students in France, Germany, and Scotland pass national tests indicating they meet higher academic expectations—and do so earlier—than their U.S. counterparts, according to an American Federation of Teachers report.

## Guide to Educational Partnerships Now Available

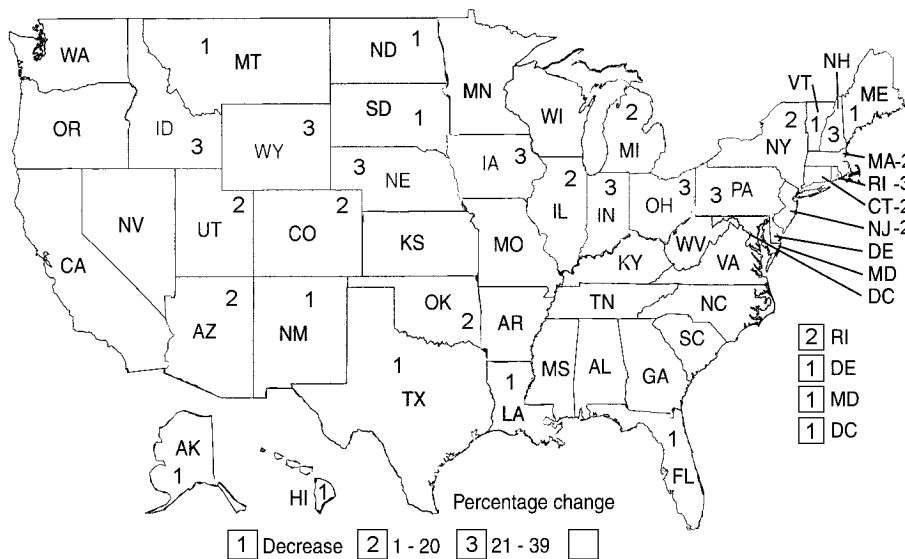
The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement has recently released *A Guide to Promising Practices in Educational Partnerships*, which provides examples of a variety of partnership activities and general information to help those who want to develop similar practices.

The guide presents two types of promising practices: those that support partnership building and those that represent partnership activities. Part I provides successful models for conducting needs assessment, staffing projects, and other key elements of partnership building. Part II offers models for such partnership activities as staff development, student support services, school-to-work transition, and community involvement. Copies are available for \$6 from New Orders, Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954.

## Children who have difficulty speaking English

By law, school systems across the United States must provide services for children from non-English language backgrounds, many of whom have difficulty speaking English. Change in the number and percentage of students who have difficulty speaking English can affect how education resources are allocated within states.

Percentage change in number of 5- to 17-year-olds who have difficulty speaking English, by state: 1980 to 1990



NOTE: English proficiency is determined using responses to the question asked about those who spoke a language other than English at home: "How well does this person speak English?" Possible responses were "Very well," "Well," "Not very well," and "Not at all." Persons who responded less than "Very well" were included in the category "Speak English with difficulty."  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population, 1990 CPH-L98, table ED90-4, "Language Use and English Ability, Persons 5- to 17-years, by State: 1990."