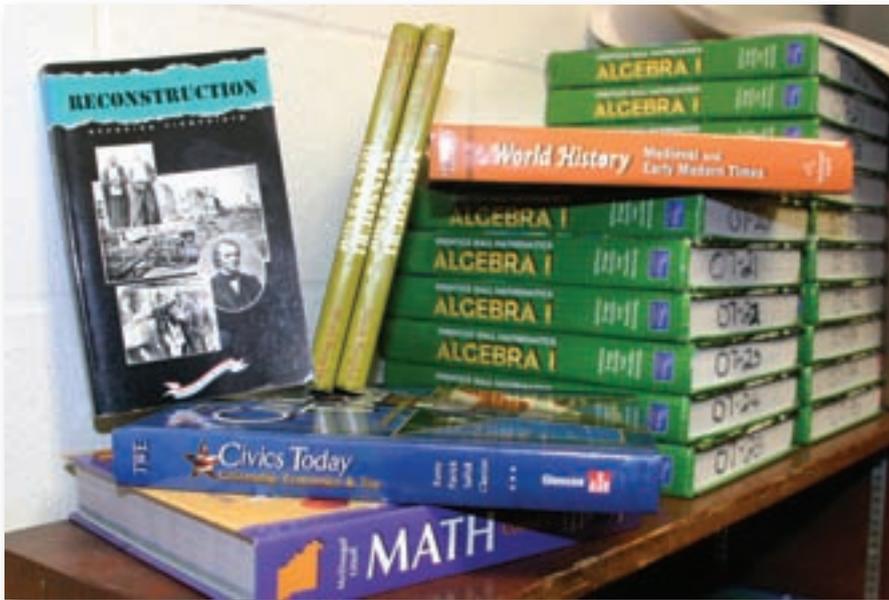


The Economic Impact of Pre-Owned Textbooks

By Park Anders



The costs associated with education outpace inflation every year, more than doubling it over the past 20 years. The latest data from the National Center for Education Statistics calculate that school expenditures from all funding sources topped \$400 billion for the 2006–2007 school year. Only 3% of these expenditures are earmarked for instructional materials, including textbooks.

Although actual spending on textbooks varies widely per school, the National Center for Education Statistics reports that the average per-pupil expenditure for instructional materials is \$257. Currently, textbook prices range from approximately \$30 to over \$100. Conservatively expressed, the estimated average price for a new textbook is \$48. With some text-

books exceeding \$100—especially those for core subjects, such as science and math—the demand for more affordable alternatives to new textbooks has grown.

For decades, school districts have saved money by providing students with used books, but the strategy is particularly relevant today. Escalating book prices combined with the economy's effect on funding are driving interest in more affordable learning materials. As a result, the demand for pre-owned textbooks is increasing as schools struggle to provide the books their students need as economically as possible. The average price of a pre-owned textbook is \$29, compared to the average new textbook price of \$48.

School districts can save money in several ways:

- Rewrite the entire curriculum to incorporate used textbooks.

Districts that are unable to adopt curriculum because of the prohibitive costs of new textbooks are able to bring in a new curriculum using pre-owned textbooks.

- Fill in shortages or supplement the curriculum mid-adoption cycle. Schools that experience unanticipated registrations or accept new students mid-adoption cycle can provide used textbooks as a cost-effective way to close that gap.
- Replace damaged or missing books. Between 10% and 20% of books must be replaced every year due to loss or ruin, costing districts hundreds of thousands of dollars. Replacing these books with used editions is a cost-effective solution that can save up to 75% of the cost of new textbooks.

The nation's schools could save an average of \$20 million per year by purchasing pre-owned books. Districts and schools can use these savings to bolster their budgets in other areas or to purchase more of the books they need for their students.

Used Book Savings

Coolidge School District in Arizona illustrates the challenges that America's school districts are facing today. Located near the Phoenix metropolitan area, Coolidge schools are facing budget cuts for staff, purchases, and new curriculum adoption. The district has a recurring issue with replacing missing books due to its mobile population, as well as a frequent need to add classrooms due to area growth. The resultant costs exceed \$200,000 per year.

By purchasing used textbooks, the district could redirect more than \$30,000 toward underfunded programs and purchase additional textbooks and other learning materials.

Escalating book prices combined with the economy's effect on funding are driving interest in more affordable learning materials.

Janine Balding, curriculum coordinator for Coolidge City Schools, reports: "With the budgetary constraints and the need for additional books, we purchased used instead of new textbooks. These books served many purposes, such as filling in for lost or damaged books, furnishing a new school with used books, and [possibly] providing new adoption materials. Every penny saved can be used for another purchase."

The Book Sale

When districts adopt a new curriculum, the outdated books are usually handled in one or a combination of three ways:

- Warehoused
- Disposed into landfills
- Recycled if appropriate recycling facilities can be located

But books that may not be needed in one state may still be used in other regions of the country. During the past decade, schools and districts have generated upward of \$100 million in needed funds by selling out-of-adoption or surplus textbooks and clean workbooks. The dollars generated can be directed toward purchasing instructional materials, improving the facility, or helping save jeopardized programs.

Buying used textbooks and selling unwanted books are two strategies for dealing with the current lack of education funding. Students get the books they need, and the district can operate more efficiently in a challenging economic climate.

Park Anders is the president and CEO of Budgetext.
Email: park.anders@budgetext.com

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