

THAT SINKING FEELING

Spending by school districts on maintenance and operations as a percentage of net current expenditures drops to a 30-year low.

by Joe Agron

TABLE 1

Maintenance & Operations Costs

(Expressed in dollars per student)

	Nat'l Median	<1,000 students	1,000-3,499 students	>3,500 students
Payroll (\$)				
Custodial	\$247.56	\$258.38	\$237.35	\$272.28
Maintenance	\$58.57	\$88.05	\$54.37	\$53.97
Grounds	\$15.01	\$29.07	\$8.53	\$17.83
Outside Contract Labor	\$5.32	\$6.88	\$3.72	\$12.06
Gas	\$60.04	\$80.00	\$54.04	\$44.10
Electricity	\$113.89	\$119.27	\$100.88	\$111.69
Other Utilities	\$31.37	\$42.20	\$28.08	\$27.94
Trash Collection/Disposal	\$8.00	\$10.55	\$7.87	\$6.42
Maintenance Equip. & Supplies	\$38.46	\$47.36	\$39.67	\$22.38
Grounds Equip. & Supplies	\$8.65	\$12.42	\$7.73	\$5.95
Other	\$19.71	\$19.71	\$22.46	\$13.66
TOTAL M&O	\$606.58	\$713.89	\$564.70	\$588.28
TOTAL NCE	\$7,795	\$9,937	\$7,156	\$7,167
M&O as % NCE	7.8	7.2	7.9	8.2

As has gone the economy over the past couple of years, so went spending by school districts on maintenance and operations (M&O).

M&O spending as a percentage of district net current expenditures (NCE)

continued its slide in the 2001-02 school year, sinking to 7.8 percent compared to 8.5 percent the year before, according to *American School & University's* 31st annual Maintenance and Operations Cost Study. This represents the

fifth consecutive years schools have apportioned a smaller percentage of expenditures to M&O, and marks the lowest percentage since this survey's inception.

Even as the effects of inadequate maintenance continue to plague many of the nation's school buildings, M&O budgets continue to be among the first cut during tight financial times—resulting in a classic “pay me now or pay me more later” scenario.

Behind the survey

In January, chief business officials at the nation's public school districts were asked to document various M&O costs, including salary/payroll, gas, electricity, utilities, maintenance and grounds equipment and supplies, outside contract labor and other costs.

In response to reader interest, this year's survey results report the median number for each category (i.e., payroll, gas, electricity, utilities, equipment and supplies, etc.) on a national level and by district enrollment. Data reported identify budgeted ex-

Total gross area of buildings maintained (including corridors and other common and office areas of all district buildings) by survey respondents

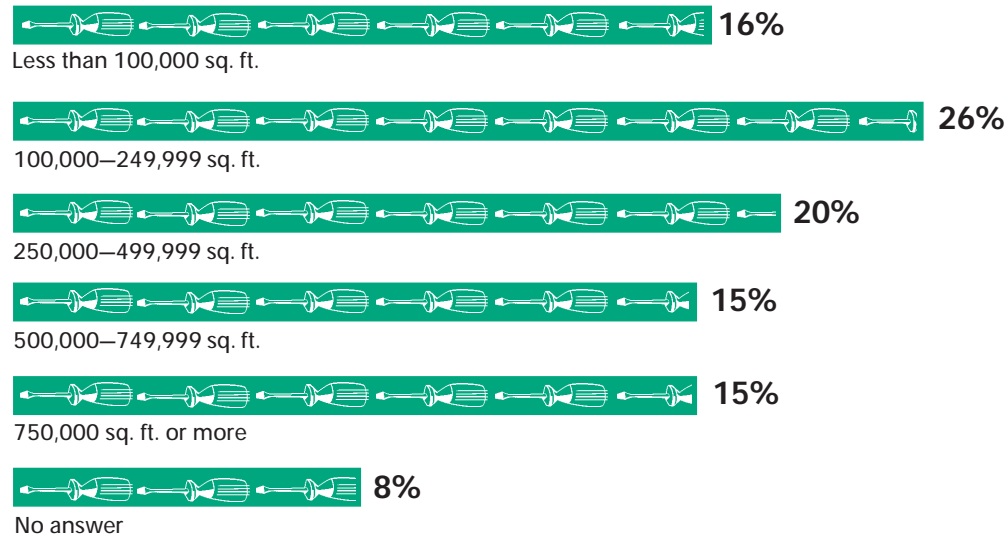


TABLE 2

Maintenance & Operations Costs

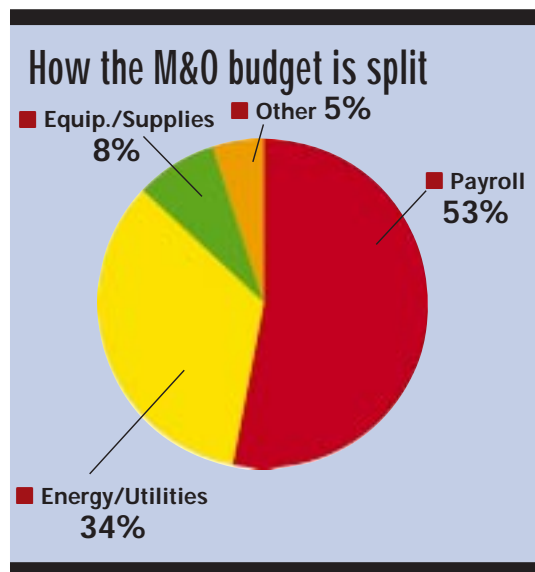
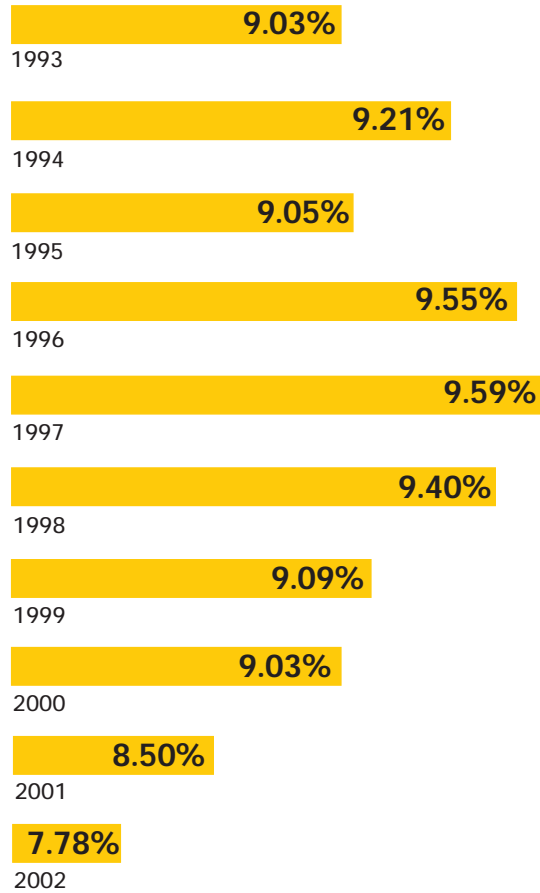
(Expressed in dollars per square foot)

	Nat'l Median	<1,000 students	1,000-3,499 students	>3,500 students
Payroll (\$)				
Custodial	\$1.33	\$1.10	\$1.30	\$1.77
Maintenance	\$0.34	\$0.41	\$0.30	\$0.34
Grounds	\$0.09	\$0.10	\$0.03	\$0.12
Outside Contract Labor				
	\$0.02	\$0.03	\$0.02	\$0.06
Gas				
	\$0.34	\$0.36	\$0.34	\$0.33
Electricity				
	\$0.64	\$0.61	\$0.64	\$0.79
Other Utilities				
	\$0.19	\$0.19	\$0.18	\$0.20
Trash Collection/Disposal				
	\$0.04	\$0.05	\$0.04	\$0.04
Maintenance Equip. & Supplies				
	\$0.22	\$0.29	\$0.24	\$0.15
Grounds Equip. & Supplies				
	\$0.05	\$0.04	\$0.04	\$0.06
Other				
	\$0.08	\$0.08	\$0.17	\$0.07
TOTAL M&O	\$3.34	\$3.26	\$3.30	\$3.93
TOTAL NCE	\$43.32	\$42.33	\$39.70	\$49.35
SF/Custodial Worker	23,985	24,286	24,782	20,440
SF/Maintenance Worker	89,000	80,400	86,204	113,376
Acres/Grounds Worker	30	21	31	48
SF Bldg. Maintained/Student	170.03	223.77	172.70	139.88

M&O COST STUDY

M&O expenditures over the decade

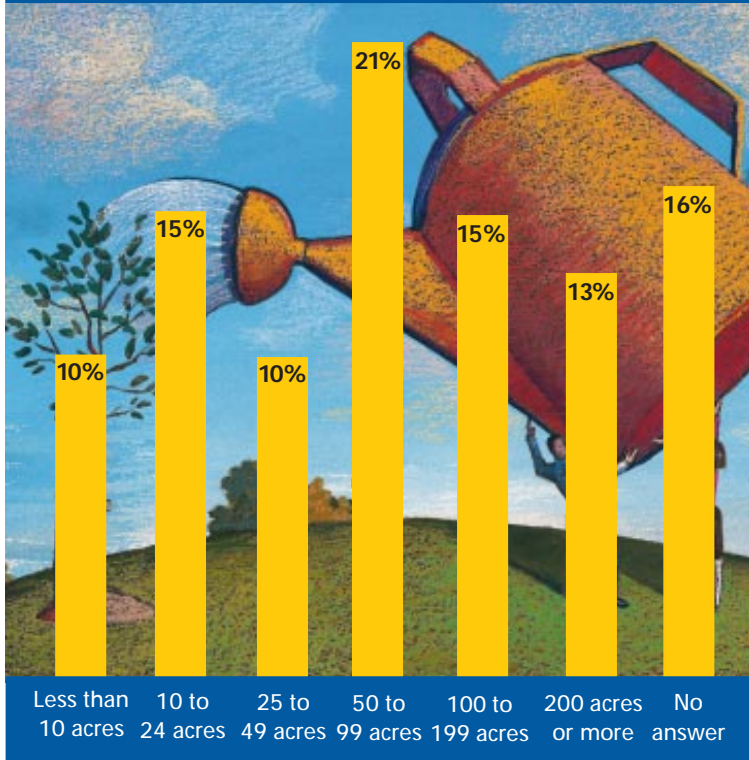
Spending on maintenance and operations as a percentage of net current expenditures has decreased for the fifth straight year—and is at its lowest level in three decades. The breakdown over 10 years:



31ST ANNUAL M&O COST STUDY

Total gross area of grounds maintained

by survey respondents

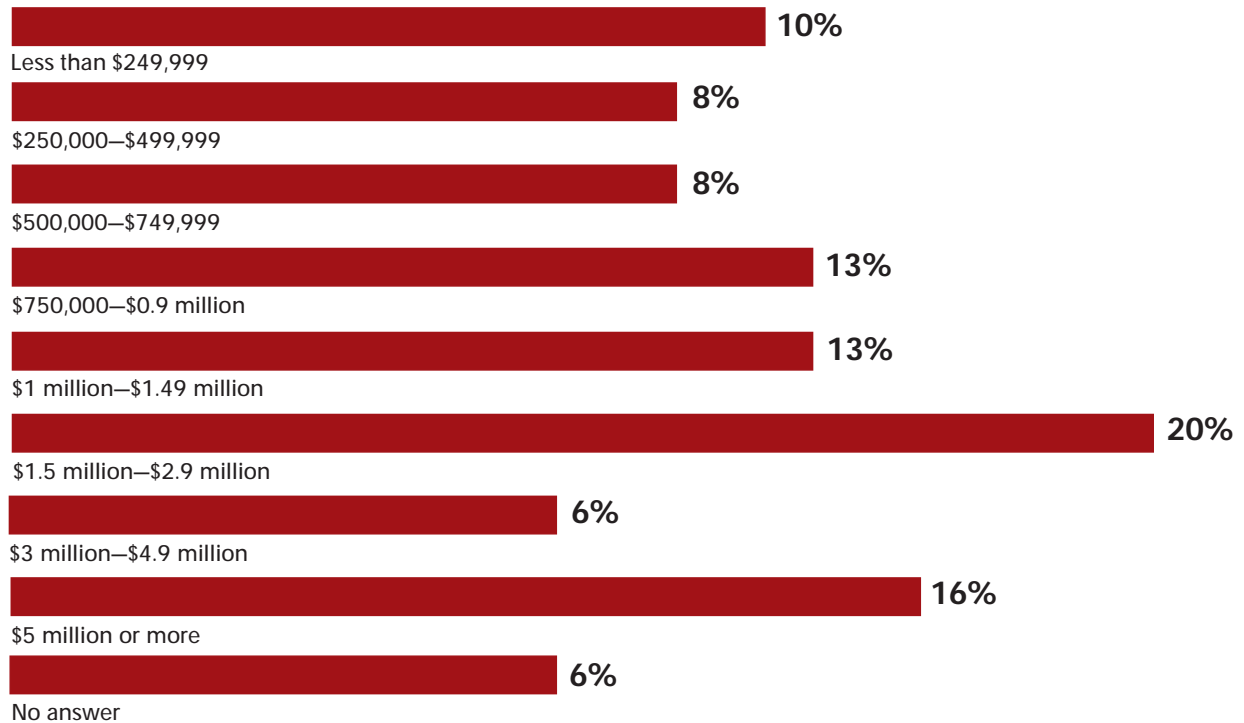


penditures for M&O per student and per square foot for the 2001-02 school year.

Categories used in the survey questionnaire:

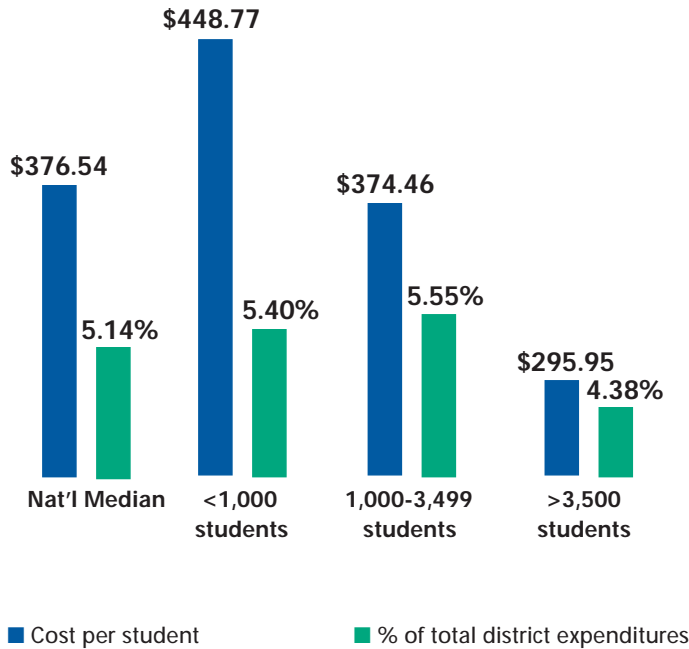
- **Budgeted:** Amounts for the 2001-02 school year.
- **Per student:** Based on enrollment (average daily attendance as of November 2001).
- **Per square foot:** Based on total gross area of all district buildings maintained, including corridors, offices and common space.
- **NCE (net current expenditure):** Total district expenditures, including teacher salaries, minus the cost of capital outlay, debt service and transportation.
- **Total maintenance and operations (M&O) expenditures:** Including salaries, benefits, gas, electricity, utilities, equipment and supplies, outside contracts, etc., for custodial, maintenance and grounds.
 - **Custodial:** Those individuals responsible for building upkeep and cleaning.
 - **Maintenance:** Those individuals who perform skilled jobs, such as HVAC, electrical or plumbing repair.
 - **Grounds:** Those individuals responsible for landscape upkeep and maintenance.
- **Payroll:** Including benefits.
- **Average salary:** Annualized, excluding benefits.
- **Outside contract labor:** Those hired for spe-

Total maintenance and operations expenditures (per survey respondents)

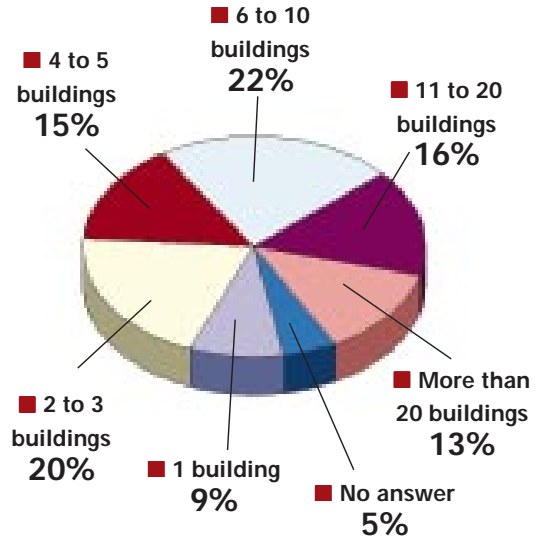


In the driver's seat

Median cost for transportation per student and as a percentage of total district expenditures:



Total number of buildings in district (of survey respondents)



cialized jobs to maintain or repair building systems or equipment, such as HVAC maintenance or repair.

- **Other utilities:** Including water, telephone, etc.

- **Other:** Most often identified as clerical costs, travel expenses, equipment repair and rental, and insurance.

As you compare your school district's M&O expenditures with the medians reported, keep in mind that all costs are greatly affected by a number of factors, including the age and overall condition of buildings, climate, the labor market in your area, as well as other aspects over which school administrators have limited control.

Of particular interest

Among the highlights of this year's survey:

- While total NCE per student increased 12 percent over last year's figure, total M&O spending per student grew a mere 2 percent.

- The cost per student of gas nearly doubled to \$60.04 from \$34.88 last year.

- The amount of square feet maintained per custodian increased to 23,985 from 22,222 square feet last year. Square feet maintained per maintenance worker jumped to 89,000 from 82,349

The salary scene

Median salaries for custodial, maintenance and grounds personnel at school districts:

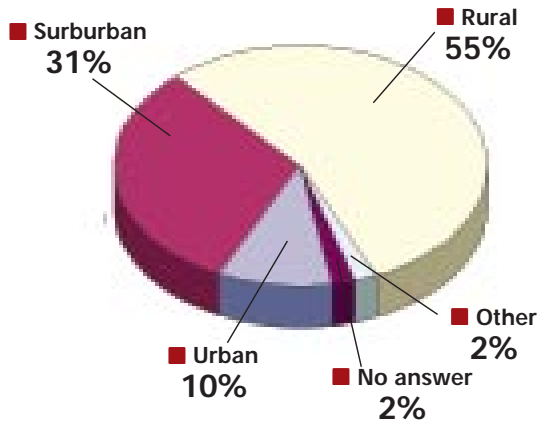
	Nat'l Median	<1,000 students	1,000-3,499 students	>3,500 students
Custodial	\$24,203	\$22,505	\$23,599	\$29,443
Maintenance	\$33,076	\$34,264	\$30,028	\$37,136
Grounds	\$28,125	\$25,143	\$26,807	\$32,421

The people picture

Median number of full-time custodial, maintenance and grounds personnel at school districts:

	Nat'l Median	<1,000 students	1,000-3,499 students	>3,500 students
Custodial	15	4	16	46
Maintenance	4	1	4	7
Grounds	1	1	1	3

School classification of survey respondents



square feet last year.

- National median salaries increased this year for all titles surveyed. Maintenance was reported at \$33,076 (up 13 percent from last year), grounds at \$28,125 (up 18 percent) and custodial at \$24,203 (up 7 percent).

- The median public school district has 15 full-time custodial, four full-time maintenance and one full-time grounds personnel.

- Transportation costs increased this year. The median school district spends 5.1 percent of its total budget and \$376 per pupil on transportation (4.4 percent and \$333 per pupil last year).

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