
REPORT OF THE FREE TEXT-BOOK BRANCH.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT, FREE TEXT-BOOK BRANCH.

VICTORIA, B. C., January 8th, 1909.

*To the Honourable Henry Esson Young, M. D., LL.D.,
Minister of Education :*

SIR,—I beg to submit, for your information, the following report on the operations of the Free Text-book Branch of the Education Department for the past six months, that is, from July 1st, 1908, the date of its establishment, to December 31st, 1908 :—

The adoption of a free text-book system is a natural outcome of free schools. Already several Provinces of the Dominion of Canada have adopted such a system and are furnishing the pupils of their schools, free of charge, with all or nearly all the books required for the common school course. In the Province of Alberta, the school-books supplied by the Education Department become the property of the children who receive them. The Province of New Brunswick has taken steps to place school-books in the hands of pupils at cost price to the parents. But last year, when British Columbia decided to supply free text-books, it chose a middle course or plan of lending the books to the pupils on certain conditions, a printed copy of which is pasted inside the front cover of each text-book. The free text-books supplied to each school in British Columbia thus form a Lending Library, a book being charged to a pupil when received and marked off when returned. With the first shipment of books to any school, a Teacher's Record is always supplied for the purpose of enabling the teacher to keep an account of the number and names of books received as well as of their disposition. To secure a strict compliance with this important requirement of the lending system, a post card was in November last addressed to each teacher in the Province whose school had drawn free text-books, enquiring, among other things, if the proper entries of all receipts and disbursements had been made as required. It may also be added that before the first requisition for school-books made by any Trustee Board was honoured at the Free Text-book Branch, the members of that Board were required to sign an agreement undertaking to provide suitable accommodation (book-case or book-cases) for all free text-books and supplies furnished by the Education Department; and further to see that the teacher or teachers employed by them fulfil all the duties with regard to free text-books and that he or they keep a proper record of all these books.

The Free Text-book Branch of the Education Department of this Province was opened in the basement of the Parliament Buildings on July 1st, 1908, but much work of a preparatory nature had necessarily to be done before that date. The ordering of books, the furnishing of suitable quarters, the preparation of circulars, requisitions, receipts, agreements, record books, etc., occupied a good deal of time. On May 27th, 1908, explanatory circulars with blank requisitions and forms of agreement were mailed to all the School Boards of the Province, informing them of the recent decision of the Education Department to supply the public schools of the Province (except high schools), free of charge, with certain text-books and school requisites and pointing out that full directions with other particulars were printed on back of accompanying requisition forms for preparing a requisition which would be honoured, within certain limits, at the Free Text-book Branch.

As far as I can determine, all the common and graded schools of the Province, with perhaps two or three exceptions, have taken advantage of the offer of free text-books made by the Education Department. The Provincial Normal School was also supplied from this Branch. From July 1st, 1908, to December 31st, 1908, 729 requisitions were filled by the Free Text-book Branch. Of these, 489 were for the first term, 237 for the second term, 2 for School Inspectors and 1 for the Education Department of Nova Scotia, in order to give samples of British Columbia text-books. The 489 first-term requisitions represent the needs of 410 public schools. In order to distribute all the supplies called for by the 726 public school requisitions referred to, it was necessary to ship 569 cases and about 530 parcels. The total weight of the shipments was over 90,000 lbs. In the majority of instances these supplies were forwarded to their destination by freight as the cheapest mode of carriage, although both express and post were also employed. The sum of \$35.72 in stamps (drawn from the general fund) was expended for the last-named service. It is satisfactory to be able to state that, as far as known, all the shipments for the first term reached their respective destinations in good condition, although seven (7) receipts are still outstanding. It may be explained that with every shipment of books a receipt form, which includes a list of the text-books forwarded to a particular school, is sent to the Secretary of the Board, with the request that the contents of boxes or parcels be checked with list and with copy of requisition, and that the receipt form be then promptly returned, after having been signed and dated. All this appears very simple, but to secure the return of some 480 receipts cost the Free Text-book Branch several hundred letters of request and many duplicate receipts.

The 729 requisitions just referred to called for the distribution of the following:—30,979 Primers and Readers; 19,465 Arithmetics; 36,668 Copy-books; 108,486 Scribblers; 410 Union Jacks; 803 Teacher's Records; 100 Principal's Records. The items are:—5,530 First Primers; 4,610 Supplementary Primers; 4,339 Second Primers; 4,008 First Readers; 4,031 Second Readers; 4,284 Third Readers; 4,177 Fourth Readers; 8,687 Arithmetics (First Book); 7,237 Arithmetics (Second Book); 3,541 Arithmetics (Third Book); 6,117 Copy-books (No. 1); 5,995 Copy-books (No. 2); 5,559 Copy-books (No. 4); 4,557 Copy-books (No. 5); 4,247 Copy-books (No. 6); 5,817 Copy-books (No. 8); 4,376 Copy-books (No. 9); 19,327 Scribblers (No. 1); 52,888 Scribblers (No. 2); 21,305 Scribblers (No. 3); 14,966 Scribblers (No. 4). If the parents of the thirty-three thousand school children throughout the Province had purchased the text-books called for by the 726 school requisitions at the prevailing retail prices, it would have meant an outlay for them of \$27,347.25. The stock of books on hand, December 31st, 1908, would at similar prices retail for \$5,026.25.

In dealing with the various requests for free text-books, the utmost care has been exercised by me in order to give each school what it appeared to need, as well as what it was entitled to according to the enrolment by grades entered on requisition form presented to the Free Text-book Branch. It was necessary also freely to exercise the right to question requisitions and even to decline to fill them, except in part, when they appeared to be excessive. Some criticism may have been passed upon the officer in charge for exercising this right, but it seems to me better, if err one must, to commit a fault on the side of reasonable economy than on that of careless generosity. For instance, when a school of 38 pupils, not 30 of whom are fit to use a text-book in Arithmetic, asks for 36 of these text-books, after having been supplied with 28, it seems proper to question such a requisition. And this is only one of many cases of a somewhat similar, though not nearly so unreasonable, a character. To have honoured every requisition in full would have proved a somewhat expensive and fruitless course.

In ordering the necessary books and other school supplies for free distribution, great care has been exercised so as to secure the lowest possible prices; no contracts were entered into at

any time. The total expenditure of the Free Text-book Branch of the Education Department to December 31st, 1908, was \$23,794.68, made up as follows:—

Books, labels, etc.	\$17,327 01
Union Jacks	1,783 00
Freight, labour, drayage, etc.	1,919 82
Distribution (freight, boxes, cartage, etc.)	1,076 80
Salaries of staff of three (3)	1,688 05
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	\$23,794 68

On the books received to December 31st, 1908, the Branch, however, still owes \$1,231.67. The cost, therefore, to December 31st, 1908, is \$25,026.35. From this amount the sum of \$1,783, paid for Union Jacks, must be deducted in order to get the true cost of free text-books to December 31st, 1908, viz.: \$23,243.35. As nearly one-half the second term's requisitions were filled before the close of the past calendar year, it is probable that the outlay for the succeeding six months will not exceed \$7,000 in addition to what has already been spent and guaranteed. Nor does it seem likely that during the next school-year the demand for bound books will be so great, since the supply at present in use should, with the exception of the primers, last for several years. Of course, additional shipments will require as in the past to be sent out frequently, as books are filled (as in the case of copy-books and scribblers), are destroyed, lost, worn out, or burned by order of the Medical Health Officer, and as the number of schools and school children increases. All this only proves again that it is the initial step which costs; the succeeding stages usually prove less expensive.

As the people of the Province collectively are the principals in the purchase and distribution of these free text-books for the use of their children, it is proper that they should learn whether or not this experiment has been of advantage to them financially. It has already been stated that the Free Text-book Branch of the Education Department distributed during the past six months text-books and supplies which would have cost the parents, at prevailing retail prices, the sum of \$27,347.25. To place these books in the hands of the public school children through the medium of the Free Text-book Branch required an outlay of \$20,084.19, made up as follows:—

Text-books (laid-down cost)	\$17,319 34
Distribution—Freight, etc.	1,076 80
" Salaries of staff	1,688 05
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	\$20,084 19

The net profit on the half-year's business is therefore \$7,263.06, and the percentage of profit 36.1.

In conclusion, I beg to assure you that this new departure in connection with the free school system of the Province seems to have been most favourably received by all who patronise the public schools, and that it can only be regarded as a further proof of the progressive spirit of those who initiated it.

I have the honour to be

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

DAVID WILSON,

Officer in Charge of the Free Text-book Branch.

