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## The Service Guarantee Means Help from the Publisher

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A legally binding agreement between the textbook publisher and the purchaser can reduce ordering errors, ensure appropriate use, and provide personalized services.

Good service can mean the difference between a textbook program that succeeds or fails. How? As a program consultant for a major textbook publisher, part of my job was to trouble-shoot complaints from various user-schools. Knowing the specific weaknesses of my company's textbooks, I'd arrive fully prepared to correct them. But in far too many cases, the problems were *not* due to flaws in the textbook, but had been caused by serious errors made by the district—for instance, by:

- Placing students in a program at frustratingly inaccurate levels, either too high or too low.

- Ordering the wrong component parts (frequently the wrong copyright was ordered; sometimes an *enrichment* workbook or ditto was ordered instead of the *primary reinforcement* workbook or ditto).

- Using materials incorrectly because teachers did not have enough training in how to employ them with their unique population; or because administrators' decisions conflicted with the philosophy or methodology of the program.

These problems might have been avoided if the school district had

worked with the publisher to obtain a service guarantee. A service guarantee is a written, legally binding statement specifying free services to be provided by the publisher upon purchase of the textbook. Each publisher offers different services. For example, many companies provide a toll-free "help" number where someone is available to immediately answer questions or concerns. Other companies may provide a 48-hour reply service if you call a local consultant. Most companies provide orientation to teachers, and some provide a variety of workshops for teachers and administrators in separate sessions. Still others provide one professional workshop every year for the life of your textbook program or offer summer institutes.

Different subject areas require different services. In math and reading, free placement tests and teacher training are offered on how to accurately place students in the new program. Some publishers also provide teacher

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orientation and professional workshops in science, as well as workshops on holistic scoring in English. To find out what a certain publisher offers, request a service proposal when you ask for sample copies of textbooks at the beginning of your study. By comparing offerings you'll get an idea of the range of possibilities each company offers.

A school district can, however, request unique, personalized services, such as being given an overview of one aspect of the textbook by the program consultant (such as how decoding skills or word problem solving strategies are developed in the program); having the textbook instruction and testing correlated to the district's objectives; or workshops for administrators on how to monitor and evaluate the textbook program.

To find out what to request in a specialized service guarantee for your district, first identify who will be involved in the new textbook change (such as teachers, substitutes, students, administrators, specialists, board members). Then ask them to identify their concerns or provide suggestions on the kind of help they would like.

Analyze your student population. Is it composed of many foreign speaking students? Are you considering the purchase of an advance placement textbook to be used by a more average population? Whatever your unique population, ask your publisher how to adapt its program to these special students.

Examine the experience and training of all teachers who will use the new program. Do they feel insecure about teaching a new hands-on science program? Are they required to teach a new subject or grade due to recent school closings? Do they have a master's degree in the subject and ten

years in the classroom, but no experience with managing several groups at one time? Your specific requests should reflect the majority needs of those who will use the new program.

Summarize, rank, and present these suggestions to your sales agent. Your agent wants the program to succeed as much as you do, so work together to determine the best package. Agents will try very hard to provide as much as is reasonably possible. But remember, these services are extremely costly to the publisher, so the more services you request—and receive—the more textbooks will cost. Also, the amount and type of service provided will be based on the total dollar expenditure. Generally, the larger the purchase, the better the service package is.

Good programs do not need much service; poor programs need more. Since you cannot be certain how successful the program will be, it is best to assume all programs have problems. Then, when everything runs smoothly and you don't *need* any more service, cancel each unnecessary item.

Let's return now to the typical purchaser errors identified at the beginning of this article to see how they might have been avoided through a service guarantee.

**Placement** Each person has a different internal rating system: some people give everything a high rating, others give a low one. The same is true of individual teachers who place students in a new program. Some feel all students need to be challenged and thus place them too high; others place students too low, believing that all students need more review. To correct this, a service guarantee might request the program consultant to not only provide training for all staff in *how* to

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