

SCHOOL LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT RESPONDS TO A CHANGING PUBLIC

The landscapes of educational institutions may not represent the highest level of plant selection and care, but they do represent a significant percentage of the acreage maintained in the United States. Approximately two million acres are under the care of physical plant administrators of public and private schools, colleges, and universities in the United States.

Decline of student population after the Baby Boom generation received its education has caused consolidation of public school districts and some school closings. Still, more than 30,000 educational institutions seek to efficiently maintain their landscapes.

A recent *Weeds Trees & Turf* survey showed school landscape managers get by on budgets which increase less than ten percent per year. A fourth of the respondents reported no increase in the past three years, however, public schools utilize requisitions for many purchases which may not be included in the maintenance budget. Improvements for drainage, equipment, and special projects are added if needed. Only 12 percent said equipment purchases had been delayed by economic conditions.

Nearly a third of the schools reporting hire a landscape contractor for a portion of the maintenance of landscapes. The amount of work performed by contractors averaged less than 25 percent. A previous survey of landscape contractors by WTT indicated this type of work was remaining constant but not growing. They also reported problems with specifications, bidding and payment for public work.

The average respondent to the school survey said he has a landscape budget of \$51,000 to maintain more than six facilities on 153 acres. More than half employed 15

or more people to perform the work. Clearly, the landscape budget does not include salaries and benefits.

School landscape managers do most of their planning during the month of May. Secondary planning takes place in late winter and in

Less than half the schools reporting had a certified pesticide applicator on staff.

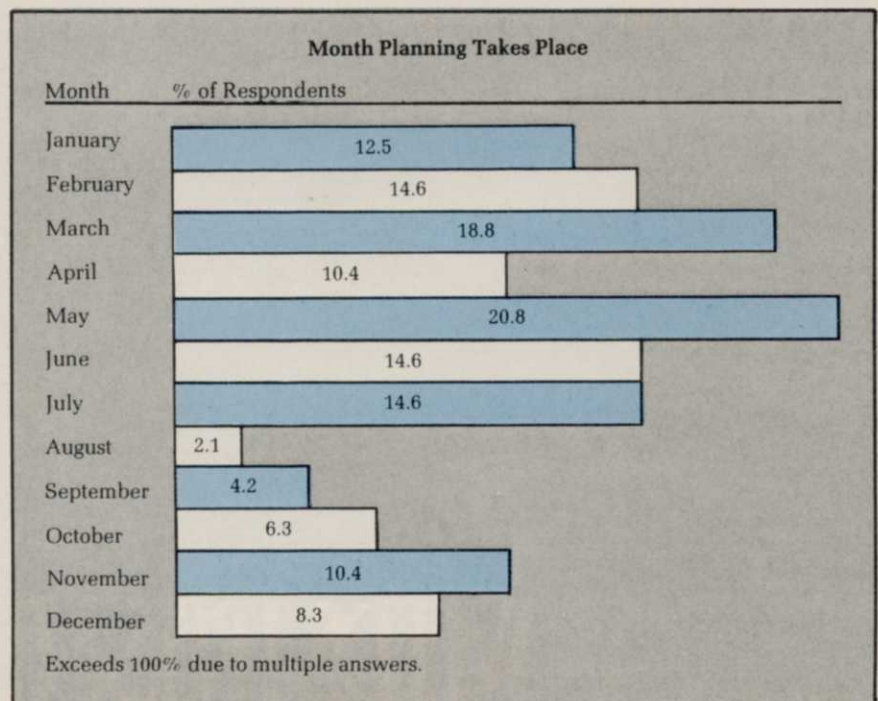
early summer. Purchasing is heaviest from March through June, although more than half reported some purchasing year-round. The least amount of buying occurs in the fall and early winter.

Two thirds of the respondents spend less than \$10,000 per year on equipment, even though more than

half reported repair work on equipment was performed by a full-time mechanic rather than a distributor's service department. The following profiles indicate distributor service is a better idea although turnaround of less than a week is sometimes difficult for distributors.

Following equipment are expenses for irrigation, plant materials, herbicides and fertilizers, all averaging \$5,000 or less per year. Compared to other markets in the Green Industry, these are small amounts. The significance of the market is supported by the volume and the stability.

Schools, like parks, are basically functional, yet low maintenance areas. The athletic fields are the only part of a school landscape receiving special care. Often, it is the contractor performing those functions which exceed mowing and perhaps annual fertilization.



Typical Manager of School Landscape . . .

1. Carries the title of Superintendent of Buildings and Landscape.
2. Is responsible for more than six separate facilities.
3. Cares for an average of 153 acres.
4. Manages a staff of more than 20 persons.
5. Has a budget for landscape supplies of more than \$50,000.
6. Buys materials every month of the year.
7. Hires landscape contractors for specific tasks in 40 percent of the cases.
8. Has a natural turf stadium to manage.
9. Goes to his extension agent with problems first.
10. Has the authority to purchase landscape materials.

Private institutions are more likely to exceed basic maintenance than public ones.

On an average, fertilization, weed control, mowing and overseeding are performed by more than half of the schools responding. More than 80 percent fertilize and apply herbicides once per year. Overseeding is done in slightly

more than half of the schools due to foot traffic wear.

Athletic fields are aerified by more than half the respondents. Topdressing and disease control of athletic areas are performed by less than a third of the school landscape managers. Irrigation is also used by a third. Wetting agents are used by 6 percent of the group.

Turf Maintenance Practices Performed by Schools by Percentage of Total.

Practice	Athletic Areas	Non-Athletic Areas
Fertilization	82	82
Weed Control	78	82
Overseeding	66	58
Aerification	54	44
Disease Control	34	32
Irrigation	34	30
Topdressing	30	28
Wetting Agents	12	6

Forty-four of the school respondents have someone on staff who is certified to apply pesticides. This excludes the use of restricted use chemicals unless the application is performed by outside contractors for more than half of the schools in the country.

Nearly 75 percent have stadia to manage. Since sports events are often the only source of income to schools beside taxes or tuition, the attention to these areas is highly justified. More than ten percent of the respondents have an artificial playing surface for their stadium field.

When a school landscape manager has a problem he goes to his extension agent most of the time. Next to the extension agent, distributor representatives or trade publications are used to find a solution. More than a third belong to or ask support from local or national trade associations.

More than 75 percent of schools have a stadium to maintain.

The school landscape manager makes the buying decision in two thirds of the cases and recommends what to purchase in half the cases.

Public school property is occasionally maintained by the municipal or park landscape staff. Both parks and schools have cut labor in the past two years and looked for ways to increase efficiency. Parks and schools have been major users of chemical trim over mechanical trim. Ornamental plantings have been reduced to cut maintenance.

The future for schools, despite a likely drop in enrollment, is more intensive use of limited space. Management practices will have to improve to provide a safe recreational area for all seasons.

Despite tax-weary citizens, a well publicized and well explained need for landscape improvement of school areas can provide the means to meet wear levels. The following profiles give examples on how school and college landscape managers deal with economic pressures.

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