Appendix D

Guidelines for Distinguishing Between Supplies and Equipment

One common accounting challenge districts face is that of distinguishing between supplies and equipment, between equipment and improvement of grounds, and between equipment/building fixtures and service systems. Nevertheless, districts must correctly identify each expenditure if they are to achieve the necessary uniformity of accounting.

Whether an item should be classified as equipment or as supplies is determined on the basis of the length of time the item is serviceable and on its contribution to the value of the district. For example, supplies are constantly being consumed and replaced without increasing the value of the physical properties of the district. Equipment has relatively permanent value, and its purchase increases the value of the physical assets of the district.

Expenditures made by districts for equipment, improvement of sites, building fixtures and service systems are charged as capital outlay; expenditures for supplies are charged as current expense The purchase of equipment either as direct purchase or lease-purchase must be recorded in objec classification 6400, Equipment.

Supplies are items of expendable nature that are consumed or worn out, deteriorate in use, or are easily broken, damaged or lost. Examples include paper, pencils, cleaning materials, nails, scissors, test tubes, and keys.

Items that have a relatively short service life (less than one year) and that, therefore, must be replaced frequently are also charged as supplies. Examples include brooms, tools, and rubber stamps.

Computer software and hardware could fall into either category, supplies or equipment, depending on the cost and useful life. To determine which category of expenditure an item belongs, follow the questions and/or guidelines listed below.

Some articles clearly cannot be classified as either supplies or equipment. They have the characteristics of equipment, but they have a low unit cost or are frequently lost, broken or worn out and replaced in normal use. To obtain uniformity, the district should assign items to the various classifications on the basis of the answers to the questions in the list below:

1. Does the item lose its original shape and appearance with use?
2. Is it consumable, with a normal service life of less than one year?

NOTE: It is important to note that the policies of a district may override any of these guidelines. Districts may also wish to include in their historical inventories, audit trace inventory system, or any other acceptable inventory system those items whose acquisition costs are less than the amount cited in the Budget and Accounting Manual. It may be desirable for individual districts to establish and maintain Capital Accounts for charging noninventoriable equipment that do not warrant the keeping of inventory records.

Repair parts that the district purchases for buildings, equipment and grounds, regardless of cost, are normally charged as supplies and would be accounted for under object 4000. Examples include plumbing fixtures; compressors, if part of a larger unit; bus transmissions; engines; and timer devices for automatic sprinkling systems.

Repair costs are those outlays which are necessary to keep an asset in its intended operating condition but which do not materially increase the value or physical properties of the asset. These costs would be accounted for under object 5000.

In contrast, all additions and betterments to fixed assets should be charged to a Capital Outlay account when acquired or when construction or installation is completed. An addition refers to a physical extension of some existing asset. A betterment exists when part of an existing asset is replaced by another and the replacement provides a significant increase in the life or value of the asset.

Capital Outlay expenditures are those that result in the acquisition of capital assets or additions to capital assets. They are expenditures for sites, improvement of sites, buildings, improvement of buildings, building fixtures, service systems, and purchase of initial or additional equipment.