

# PK-12 OER

## Key Benefits and Sustainable Implementation

According to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (2015), open educational resources (OER) are “high quality teaching, learning, and research resources that are free for others to use and repurpose.” OER can range from full courses and digital textbooks to individual images, videos, and assessment items. Unlike proprietary educational resources, such as textbooks traditionally adopted by state and local educational agencies, OER can be regularly updated and reused in a variety of settings to ensure that instructional materials continue to be relevant for students.

### OER’s Key Benefits for PK-12 Schools

A national survey conducted by the Babson Survey Research Group (2017) found that 16% of school districts are using openly licensed curricular materials. As this work grows, and more educators integrate proprietary, free, and openly-licensed digital content, OER stakeholders have tracked the progress of this movement and documented how states and districts are leveraging OER to benefit students and teachers. Some of the most beneficial impacts include: empowered teachers, expanded access to high-quality materials, reinvested funds, and a more collaborative culture.

#### Empowered teachers

OER initiatives have an opportunity to enhance teacher collaboration and student learning, especially when coordinated at the school or district level. This is most impactful when the OER implementation process recognizes teachers as creative professionals with subject matter, design, and pedagogical expertise. When approached this way, the process enables those in the classroom to determine which resources most support the unique needs of their students. While teachers benefit from this flexibility to mold learning experiences that traditional learning materials may not support, students also benefit from more personalized learning opportunities. OER implementation has also helped increase teachers’ proficiency with their standards and curricula. Jeanette Westfall, executive director of curriculum, instruction, and staff development at Liberty Public Schools, explained that the transformative power of OER has been realized through the development of systems that deliberately engage, support, and recognize teachers in implementing new learning materials.

#### Expanded access to high-quality materials

OER provide districts with powerful flexibility to develop engaging curricula tailored to local contexts and student interests. For example, earth science teachers at Broken Arrow Public Schools enhanced their classroom discussions by incorporating themes from local, current events resulting in improved student engagement. Additionally, teachers are able to select and curate learning materials that are culturally diverse and representative of their students. And because, open licenses permit free distribution, high-quality learning materials can reach wider student populations.

#### Reinvested funds towards personalized student learning and professional development

By relying less on proprietary learning materials, districts can reallocate a significant portion of their budget. The dollars saved can be used to accelerate the transition to digital learning through supports for a robust technology infrastructure, new leadership roles and professional development for educators who create or curate OER, and expanded personalized learning opportunities for students. For example, Garnet Valley School District leverages their funds saved by investing in their teachers. The money is used to compensate teachers for developing OER and financing professional learning opportunities.

#### A more collaborative culture

States and districts interested in OER can learn from an established network of educators involved in the work. A successful transition to OER is challenging for a single district to accomplish without this access to external wisdom of practice. The PK-12 OER community offered

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additional support to states and districts by sharing instructional resources, lessons learned, and best practices. Community members – including teachers, state and district leaders, researchers, and nonprofits – were and continue to be enthusiastic about reaching out to those new to OER implementation. Liberty Public Schools, for example, shares many of its resources, including budgeting guidelines, OER development contracts, and OER-using courses published under a Creative Commons license.

## Key Elements of Building and Sustaining OER Implementation

Through two convenings, extensive interviews, and multiple site visits with the PK-12 OER Learning Network – comprised of state and district leaders, researchers, and nonprofit organizations – ISTE and New America identified four key elements that require further investment to provide momentum to the growing PK-12 OER movement and sustain this work.

### 1. Enabling district and state policies

The success of any initiative is heavily impacted by relevant policies. Therefore, unambiguous, supportive state and district policies regarding textbook and curriculum replacement cycles, allowable fund usage, teacher flexibility to deviate from traditional learning materials, compensation and recognition for professional learning, and protecting student data must be in place to ensure unobstructed OER implementation.

### 2. Mentoring and support structures

Mentoring and support structures serve as critical resources to help states and school districts effectively implement and continuously improve their OER initiatives. Building the trajectory of student learning can be challenging for a single teacher to accomplish without support. Mentorship opportunities allow teachers to participate in an ongoing peer-to-peer exchange of best practices. Support structures ensure that teachers are guided by a team of visionary leaders willing to invest in their professional learning and success.

### 3. Ensuring a broad leadership team

From the observation of dozens of OER implementation teams across the country, the most successful teams were those that took a systemic, coordinated approach. These implementation teams included representation from experts in curriculum design and curation, licensing, infrastructure, material maintenance, student privacy, and funding. A wide range of experts enables a state or district to craft a sustainable model for OER implementation and achieve the cultural change necessary for long-term engagement and expansion.

### 4. Extending PK-12 OER research

Much of the existing OER research examines its use in higher education settings. On the other hand, PK-12 OER research to date has been minimal, comprised of case studies looking at limited samples and OER awareness surveys. There is a need for more in-depth, peer-reviewed PK-12 OER research as well as dedicated funding to both document best practices and establish the impact on states, districts, educators, and students.

#### Additional Resources

- New America PreK-12 OER in Practice: <https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/prek12-oer-in-practice/>
- #GoOpen District Launch Packet: <https://tech.ed.gov/open/districts/launch>

#### References

**Allen, I. E. & Seaman, J. (2017).** *What we teach: K-12 school district curriculum adoption process*, 2017. Oakland, CA: Babson Survey Research Group. Retrieved from [https://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/k12oer2017/whatweteach\\_2017.pdf](https://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/k12oer2017/whatweteach_2017.pdf)

**William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. (2015).** *Open educational resources: Advancing widespread adoption to improve instruction and learning*. Retrieved from <https://hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/OER-strategy-memo.pdf>

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