State of the States: 
Open Educational Resources in K-12 Education

November 2014
Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

The implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will create new opportunities for states to collaborate and leverage investments of public funds around materials, resources, and professional development related to digital content that can be more freely accessed, used and shared across states.

Several states expressed an interest to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in exploring the development and dissemination of this digital content in the form of open educational resources (OER), which are teaching materials licensed for free use and repurposing. In response to that interest, CCSSO conducted a survey of states in May 2014 to collect information about the current ‘state of the states’ as it relates to OER. This report highlights those results and provides examples of ongoing work related to OER. This report also strives to inform and connect those chiefs and senior level state education agency (SEA) staff interested in OER to encourage cross-state understanding and collaboration with the potential to both share content and resources in this space.

The survey revealed a number of insights into the work SEAs are taking on around OER and the momentum around digital learning. These findings include:

- Twenty states are currently planning OER initiatives.
- Sixty percent of SEA respondents recognize the value of OER in school districts in their state and are promoting OER as either a supplement and/or replacement for traditional instructional materials.
- States with existing OER programs are utilizing a variety of online methods to develop, curate, and access OER materials and integrate them within school programs.
- Eighty-four percent of respondents would like to collaborate and learn from what other states are doing.

A complete list of the participating states along with a selection of their survey results is available in Table 1. States interested in pursuing an OER initiative can look to Appendix A for links to existing OER programs in a number of states and at Appendix B for a list of questions to consider with regards to OER policies at the state level. The data collected in this survey indicate that states are already planning for and implementing the use of OER in a variety of ways. What remains as key elements for OER adoption is educator buy-in, a supply of high-quality OER which are readily available for use, as well as the right policy conditions to plan and implement OER adoption.
Introduction: OER 101

OER - A Simple Definition

Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge (“Open Educational Resources,” n.d.).

OER provide benefits to teachers and administrators by providing them with cost-effective materials that are available for sharing, accessing and collaborating for personalized learning (Bliss & Patrick, 2013). The findings below expand on previous research into OER implementation by the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) in its 2013 report, “OER State Policy in K-12 Education: Benefits, Strategies, and Recommendations for Open Access, Open Sharing.”

Early proponents of OER believe that the accessibility of open materials, “embedded as an essential element of the teaching and learning process, can have a strong, positive effect in education” (“Open Educational Resources, 2013, p. 3). This effect is being felt in a variety of ways across the world. More than 60 governments, including the United States, are currently working on various OER policies at some level (OER Policy Registry, 2013).

OER and learning materials in the public domain are appealing to state education leaders in the K-12 sector for many reasons. The benefits of using OER include:

• Easy access, collaboration, and sharing amongst educators for accessing learning content (Bliss & Patrick, 2013). OER can provide teachers with materials that are student-centered and more personalized than traditional instructional materials.

• State and district education budgets can be maximized through the use of OER materials, which are available without licensing or royalty fees.

• Optimization of resources across a state’s education system. Instructional improvement systems utilizing OER may allow states to shift funds to support the development and maintenance of these instructional materials.

• Learning materials that are accurate and up-to-date. Compared to traditional learning materials that may be one-size-fits-all, OER allow for vetted open materials to be shared and accessed, often digitally. This means students are learning in the present with materials “that may be more engaging and in-sync with their own interests. Multiple versions of the same concept can be introduced, allowing students to select the option..."
that most piques their interest thereby engaging learners on a much more personal level” (Bliss, Tonks, & Patrick, 2013, p. 5). Creating multiple versions, or “re-mixing” OER allows educators to update materials for different teaching situations, a new target educational level or audience, or to work with different virtual learning environments.

The Boston Consulting Group’s 2013 report on the OER movement highlights three specific uses for OER:

1. OER materials are used to enrich existing instructional materials, perhaps as an added activity or supplement to a traditional textbook (i.e. a video or online demonstration).

2. OER is used as the primary source of instructional material in a classroom. Here, either a fully-developed or re-mixed OER resource is used in place of a traditional textbook, but the teacher continues to drive instruction in a traditional brick and mortar classroom setting.

3. OER becomes the basis for a variety of new learning models, where the teacher works to engage student learning from a new perspective and differentiate instruction for unique needs and interests of students.
Background: Setting the Stage

As states work to implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), they repeatedly mentioned the need for high-quality standards-aligned content. For some states, this need has been filled through the creation and use of OER. As other states expressed similar concerns regarding CCSS and questions about OER, it was apparent that a ‘state of the states’ report on OER would be useful to centralize the practices and policies of the states around OER. This report strives to provide that information to state and educational leaders in order to enable the cross-state sharing of resources, strategies, and tools related to OER.

States interested in OER have many options available to them. OER can serve as an alternative or supplement to traditional instructional materials and online course delivery to achieve goals such as cost effectiveness, to add value to resources developed and acquired with public funds, to gain instructional flexibility, to increase services to the underserved inside and outside of school, and to improve performance of students and teachers through differentiation and access to more dynamic materials (Bliss & Patrick, 2013). With the ultimate goal of supporting educators and student learning targeted toward individual needs, states may choose to help educators develop their own OER, or provide the infrastructure for a central repository housing teacher-created or third-party material (Bliss, Tonks, & Patrick, 2013). States can also act as guides for districts and local schools as they work through important questions related to OER implementation: questions about copyright and legal issues, quality considerations, alignment to state academic standards, benefits for various student populations, and how to use OER in the classroom are some of the challenges when looking to implement OER.
The Survey: What We Hoped to Learn

Purpose

The purpose of the survey was to collect information from states on their OER policies and programs in public K-12 education. The survey looked at identifying which states have an OER initiative, the purpose of OER in the state (supplemental/replacement to traditional instructional materials), the vetting process, supports provided at the state level and existence of a repository to store materials. The survey also asked states if they are sharing materials with districts and if there is an interest in collaboration among states. The survey aimed at providing a greater understanding of the national landscape around OER and the results provided insight to state-level work in this area.

Methodology

Survey data for this report were gathered by Hanover Research on behalf of CCSSO, which contacted current state deputies and other SEA personnel in 58 states, territories, and educational entities to answer questions about current OER initiatives. The survey, which was administered online and by phone, also asked state staff to explain the ways OER options are being considered at local, statewide, and national levels. CCSSO received a total of 41 responses, which includes 38 states.1

The initial survey included fourteen questions focusing on state experiences with OER from the following perspectives:

- Familiarity with OER initiatives
- Plans for implementation of OER initiatives
- Use and promotion of OER
- Promotion of OER policy
- Collection and vetting of OER learning materials
- Support and professional development regarding OER initiatives
- Interest in learning more about OER

In addition to the initial survey, states that indicated current work in OER were sent a follow-up survey designed to collect additional information and detail about OER implementation. In total, CCSSO received eleven follow-up survey responses with information about the following topics:

- That state’s working definition of OER,
- OER policies,
- OER models and/or pilot programs, and
- The financial impact (costs and/or savings) of OER

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1 Among the respondents were state directors of policy, learning, technology, and communication, as well as learning specialists, chief academic officers, and state superintendents.
Survey Findings

By the Numbers

36 States want to learn more about curating an OER repository.

20 States are currently planning OER initiatives.

18 States are sharing OER learning materials.

26 States are using or promoting OER.

*Numbers indicate the amount of survey respondents answering “yes” to that option.

This nationwide survey asked state educational leaders in the 50 states, territories, and educational entities to answer questions about current OER initiatives and options for OER implementation at local, statewide, and national levels, with a total of 41 respondents, including 38 states. In a thorough review of surveyed states, one thing is clear: Regardless of a state’s current participation in the creation and curation of OER, a significant shift is underway that demonstrates the value of such educational materials at a state educational level. Most respondents (36) participating in the survey indicated that they want to learn more about curating an OER repository and the creation of OER materials, as well as learning more about what other states are planning. This number includes both states and educational entities already working with OER materials, and those who have yet to get started.

Likewise, at least 20 respondents are currently planning an OER initiative, with the majority of those planning for districts and schools to develop their own materials as a supplement to traditional instruction. The SEA could support district and school planning, acting as a strategizing resource and organizing force for professional development, infrastructure, and technical support. As many states indicated, there is a value in the local creation of OER materials, and survey data
show that 26 states think they are promoting OER (mostly at the district or school level) through the enactment of OER-related programs to develop or curate materials. Comparatively, fewer than half of respondents indicate their state is promoting OER policy.

In terms of enacting change in the form of support or professional development, fewer than a dozen states indicate they are currently working with local education agencies (LEA) to help educators begin the process of using OER. About as many states are already collecting OER materials, suggesting that without the right kind of professional development or support structures, OER initiatives may be difficult to enact. Eighteen states indicate that they are already sharing state OER resources with LEAs. This number corresponds with the trends noted above.

*Numbers indicate the amount of survey respondents answering “yes” to that option.
What States Want in an OER Initiative

State concerns:

Survey data indicate that while there are topics of importance specific to each state, some of the common goals for OER include:

A) Creation of consistent and supportive policy for states and districts looking to curate OER

States want a clearly defined role in the decision-making process when it comes to the creation of OER-related policies. In order to implement OER effectively, many states want to support LEAs, districts, and schools to ensure OER materials are of high quality, within existing educational policies.

B) Vetting of high-quality materials against quality and academic standards

States want to know that any OER which are accessed and used by educators have gone through an agreed-upon review process to ensure high quality. That process, according to responses from the survey, could be a system for documentation of vetted materials or the creation of standardized rubrics for reviews. The process for vetting content would also need to have transparency to ensure openness related to the organizations and individuals responsible for reviewing OER content.

C) Curation of easy-to-use OER for districts and teachers

States recognize the pressures placed on educators in terms of their time and resources and want to see that any repository used for OER is easy to use, both for educators adding materials and for those who access and re-mix them. Some states see the need to keep materials held in a common repository, where they could be accessed on a state-by-state basis only, ensuring that materials being utilized are in keeping with state academic standards. Other states feel that it is essential for materials to be available more openly, so that all states can gather, use, and reuse OER as desired.
D) Support for collaboration

The extent to which states feel collaboration is important in their curation of OER may depend on their prior experience and history with these types of materials (Bliss & Patrick, 2013). Some states already have an OER repository or the materials needed to create one, while others are just getting started. Still, states see the value of participating in shared OER projects to increase the volume of quality materials and best practices.

E) Dedication of funding to OER projects

In the past, limited financial resources have made it difficult for some states to access quality learning materials (Bliss & Patrick, 2013). With the potential to even the playing field in terms of acquiring educational resources, some states indicated the need for technology or a linked Learning Management System (LMS), such as Moodle or Sakai, to bring multiple repositories together. Additionally, digital content providers charging fees to access proprietary or subscription-based multimedia materials are the subject of some concern among respondents.
Conclusion and Next Steps

The survey data show that at the K-12 level, regardless of current experience with OER materials, states have a demonstrated interest and an overall willingness to explore the potential benefits and promise of OER for educators and students. The states with examples of OER currently in use (see Appendix B) show the wide range of OER implementation underway throughout the country. However, the follow-up survey results also indicate a lack of information around the potential financial benefits of OER and may provide a good opportunity for a follow-up study.

A starting place for states wishing to advance policies that support OER is the iNACOL publication, *OER State Policy in K-12 Education: Benefits, Strategies, and Recommendations for Open Access, Open Sharing*. This policy brief provides case studies and specific policy recommendations for getting a comprehensive OER strategy off the ground.

Especially in the case of common, internationally benchmarked college and career-ready standards, there are increased opportunities for collaboration between states around OER. One example of this is the CCSSO-supported K-12 OER Collaborative that began in the spring of 2014. The K–12 OER Collaborative is a state-led initiative with the objective to create comprehensive, high-quality, OER supporting K–12 mathematics and English language arts, aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). These resources would offer additional choice to LEAs, significantly reduce expenditures for instructional materials, and provide much greater flexibility with higher-quality digital educational content. The Collaborative presented its vision to OER survey respondents over the summer and invited additional states to join. The Collaborative currently consists of eleven states and is open to the active participation of all states and territories. The resulting content will be openly licensed and available to all.
References


Open educational resources initial survey (2014). Council of Chief State School Officers.


Appendix A: Selected State Programs and OER Initiatives

Alaska

Alaska’s Learning Network (AKLN) is a coalition of all 54 school districts in the state. Managed by the University of Alaska Southeast and its own advisory board, AKLN improves student achievement through online learning and professional development opportunities by providing distance courses for students taught by highly qualified Alaska teachers and professional development (Welcome to Alaska’s Learning Network, 2014). AKLN has plans to implement OER in the form of supplemental instructional materials that would be developed by the state for district and school use.

Alabama

Alabama is providing districts and schools with the ability to evaluate available openly licensed learning materials and resources using the Educators Evaluating the Quality of Instructional Products (EQuIP) rubric, which gives educators the ability to “improve the quality of instructional materials for use in their classrooms and schools” while at the same time identifying materials that help meet CCSS standards (About EQuIP, n.d.)

California

Although its funding ended in 2014, the California Learning Resources Network (CLRN) continues to maintain a static website to help educators identify supplemental software, video, and Internet resources, as well as content aligned to resources and the state academic content standards (About Us, 2008). CLRN’s website provides resources for educators identify and review information about electronic learning resources through an online searchable database and links to state education technology projects and resources. By evaluating OER resources for their connection to Common Core State Standards, CLRN provided educators with quality and standards-aligned resources, including textbooks and multimedia.
Idaho  

Idaho is one of about a dozen states currently promoting OER policies to support OER and open licensing; Idaho’s educational agencies take OER materials through their “established curricular vetting process” as a potential replacement for traditional instructional materials and with the option for districts and schools to create their own open educational resources. Idaho’s pilot program for the development of OER materials is in its first phase, but is designed to provide OER materials for educators in the state. This program will likely focus on teacher-created work as a means of OER material curation.

Kentucky  
[http://kylearningdepot.org/](http://kylearningdepot.org/)

As one of only a handful of states to consider OER as a supplement and replacement for traditional instructional materials, Kentucky also promotes OER and other open learning materials at all educational levels through its Kentucky Learning Depot, a grades P-20 “repository for quality learning content” (Kentucky Learning Depot, 2014). The Depot facilitates the sharing and reuse of high-quality learning resources across multiple disciplines, encouraging teachers to search for and remix according to state standards.

Maine  
[http://www.syntiro.org/oer](http://www.syntiro.org/oer)  

Maine is currently examining options for an OER clearinghouse as it navigates through decisions involving infrastructure, teacher perception, quality and alignment with standards, and support/maintenance from an active community of users. Maine provides “significant cyberinfrastructure” to districts in the form of a statewide broadband network, 1:1 computing initiatives, and professional development as it applies to OER.
Minnesota

https://www.oercommons.org/hubs/minnesota

Minnesota’s OER Commons pilot is a statewide effort on the part of the University of Minnesota, Minnesota Department of Education, and Minnesota state colleges and universities. The OER Commons is designed to support the creation of “affordable, high quality content solutions” using OER (About Minnesota OER Commons, n.d.) through a statewide training and support collaborative called the Minnesota Learning Commons.

New Hampshire

https://sites.google.com/a/nheon.org/nh-digital-resources-consortium/
http://www.education.nh.gov/networks/

The New Hampshire Department of Education supports districts by helping them find and get the OER materials they need through a variety of networks. The state does not support a single strategy or program for implementing or funding OER projects.

State educational leaders in New Hampshire know the value of OER for collaboration and sharing purposes, as indicated by survey responses. The state Department of Education assumes the role of support and guidance for schools and educators to support the work they do, and encourages the free exchange of resources and materials through the NH Network Strategy, which lets users “connect to educators, reach out to experts in the field, [and] explore hundreds of curated resources,” as well as the NH Digital Resources Consortium, an online meeting space for collaboration and communication (New Hampshire Network, 2012; New Hampshire Digital Resources Consortium, 2012). The purpose of these various roadways toward the provision of resources for educators and students is to “nurture the now, next and future, while also fundamentally changing how [they] support districts. The goal is to move away from compliance and towards greater supports” (The New Hampshire Network, 2013, p. 4). The Strategy is comprised of both professional learning networks and a network platform, geared to providing space for virtual collaboration.
New Mexico  http://idealnewmexico.org/

Using a statewide Learning Management System (LMS) to disseminate its OER materials, New Mexico’s education leaders understand that it is important to and provide the technology needed by teachers so they can to “collaborate and share OER benefits,” while also providing education about OER itself.

New Mexico offers all districts and state-chartered schools a free LMS to encourage collaboration and sharing of OER materials through its online site, Innovative Digital Education and Learning-New Mexico (IDEAL-NM), which is a statewide e-learning program (Ideal New Mexico, 2014). The state has also piloted a virtual learning community to support OER development. This is a result, in part, of a partnership with the state initiative and math/science teacher support group MC2, as well as Xplor and related partners Khan Academy and Discovery Ed.

North Carolina  http://explorelor.org/

The North Carolina Learning Object Repository (NCLOR) is managed by the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) but is a collaborative effort between the NCCCS, University System of North Carolina, NC Department of Public Instruction, NC Virtual Public Schools, and Independent Colleges and Universities. Launched in 2009, the NCLOR is a repository of digital learning content that is accessible by all PreK-20 educational institutions in North Carolina, “eliminating the duplicative costs of content development and allowing seamless integration with an LMS” (About the NCLOR, n.d.)
Utah has taken on an OER initiative with a focus on free and openly licensed textbook creation, and the state continues to create OER materials for teachers, students, and parents which support the Utah Core Standards, instruction, and teaching. These materials are created by groups of content and teaching experts, including university faculty, district and school specialists, teachers, and Utah State Office of Education staff. In 2010, administrative Rule R277-111 was enacted in Utah, which “explicitly allows for open licensing of materials created by state employees using public funds and gives copyright ownership to the content creator” (Bliss & Patrick, 2013, p. 6). The adoption of this rule opened doors to educators and paved the way for the state’s first OER initiatives, which have come to fruition and are currently being used by Utah educators and students.

The state’s first OER textbook initiative, the creation of science textbooks, was made possible by partnerships with the Hewlett Foundation, the CK12 Foundation, and Brigham Young University, (Open Educational Resources, n.d.) Utah also has projects underway to provide OER for secondary English language arts and mathematics. Additionally, Mountain Heights Academy, formerly Open High School of Utah, is a tuition-free, online public charter school available to all Utah students in grades 7 – 12. Founded in 2009, Mountain Heights Academy gives students the choice to complete assignments when and where they choose each week, as a part of its weekly modules system.
Virginia

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/

The state of Virginia recognizes the need to help “teachers personalize materials,” which can be achieved through OER. By working with OER, Virginia understands that it has the potential to not only be a “substitute for regular curriculum, but use the potential of OER for changing instruction” and wants to help give a digital pathway to teachers and students to help manage OER use. The state of Virginia is currently looking at “integration of OER tools in state virtual school,” and is working at the university level on projects that may serve as models for staff training and curating. The state provides “technical support for SEA divisions to help them increase broadband capacity,” as well as professional development.

Washington

http://digitallearning.k12.wa.us/oer/

Washington is currently providing technical assistance, rubrics, and vetting information to districts considering working with OER materials. The state finds value in the idea of a “nationwide effort to review/vet OER with agreed-upon rubrics.” The Digital Learning Department of the Washington Department of Public Instruction has an OER portal to help disseminate OER-related news, grant information, and resources. The state’s OER project has developed a review process that acts as a model for districts considering the adoption of full-course OER, and within the last year, five school districts in Washington State have been awarded a total of $90,000 in OER grants (Open Educational Resources, 2014). The awards will help support district adaptation and implementation of openly licensed educational material aligned with state standards. All content created or modified with Washington OER grant funds will be openly licensed and available to everyone.
The dissemination of OER learning materials in Wisconsin has been handled in a variety of ways, including webinars, building awareness with a Google + community for learning, and working with virtual school partners such as the WI library division. The state is also currently looking at the integration of OER tools and platforms, with work happening at the state university level. Wisconsin also sees potential for OER materials to align with personalized learning and 1:1 initiatives. The state has worked with Achieve and collaborated with other states in the past. Wisconsin is working on its own vetting and curating process for OER resources as it builds its WISELearn portal, an online collection of news and resources for educators in that state (WISELearn, n.d.) Teachers using WISELearn have access to open resources in standards, instruction, assessment, personalized learning, professional development, and more. One of the current challenges for WISELearn is to have enough tagged and searchable material available to make finding resources easy for teachers.
Appendix B: Considerations for States

For those states considering OER or in the early stages of OER implementation, it is helpful to highlight some questions for decision makers to consider when planning an OER initiative. Some of these considerations include:

- **Whether to develop and create original content, remix existing content, or use third-party content?**
  - By attaching an open or public domain license at the time of creation, states, districts, or schools can ensure their materials are available for sharing for all educators and students (Bliss & Patrick, 2013). This could help states “divide and conquer the range of learning materials, professional development, and academic curriculum needed in their efforts” to implement standards (Bliss, Tonks, & Patrick, 2013, p. 6). Additionally, states with instructional materials lists can include OER to make them more easily accessible (Bliss & Patrick, 2013).

- **How, where, and with whom to employ OER initiatives?**
  - All partners within an OER collaboration must share the same vision, values, and expectations (Bliss, Tonks, & Patrick, 2013). This can include agreeing on team members’ roles, content creation tasks, and elements of quality materials. Additionally, partners should decide whether instructional materials and other funding can support the “development, maintenance, and infrastructure” for OER development (Bliss & Patrick, 2013, p. 2).

- **Which schools and which students can be served by an OER initiative?**
  - Not all OER content is currently customizable to every learner population. It is important to consider the ability of all learners, including English-language learners or exceptional students to benefit from OER when creating it and evaluating it for quality.

- **What vetting processes of OER will be used to ensure quality and alignment to state academic standards? Is the current vetting process for traditional materials sufficient?**

Addressing these considerations is important to ensure OER materials are being shared and vetted appropriately such that the benefits of OER are realized. Employing OER policy and programs at the state, district, and local level will allow public funds to be maximized. Open materials can be shared through a vetted, curated repository to ensure that educators can easily access materials.
## Table 1: A Selection of State Survey Responses

<table>
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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Is your state currently planning any OER initiatives?</th>
<th>Does your state currently use or promote OER at any level (state, district, school)?</th>
<th>Is your state promoting policies to support OER and/or open licensing of other publicly funded learning materials?</th>
<th>Is your state currently collecting OER learning materials and/or maintaining an OER repository?</th>
<th>Does your state have a vetting process for OER learning materials?</th>
<th>Does your state see value in a nationwide repository of OER learning materials?</th>
<th>Is your state interested in learning more about OER, and/or what other states and partners are developing?</th>
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<td>Is your state currently collecting OER learning materials and/or maintaining an OER repository?</td>
<td>Does your state have a vetting process for OER learning materials?</td>
<td>Does your state see value in a nationwide repository of OER learning materials?</td>
<td>Is your state interested in learning more about OER, and/or what other states and partners are developing?</td>
<td>Is your state currently planning any OER initiatives?</td>
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