GETTING STARTED GUIDE

Transition to the use of openly licensed educational resources (OER) to transform teaching and learning

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Welcome to OER

Welcome to our guide that will help you get started or deepen your use of open educational resources (OER).

In this ebook you will learn:

1 The basics of what OER consist of

2 Reasons why OER can help you improve teaching and learning

3 Considerations when transitioning to OER at the district level

4 How to get started, including recommended tools and resources

5 How to join the growing number of states and schools/districts that are part of the #GoOpen initiative through the U.S. Department of Education

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What are OER?

OER are student and teacher-facing digital learning resources that are openly licensed and allow for adaptation, most often through a Creative Commons license. These learning resources include textbooks and shorter texts, planning guides, student activities, rubrics, presentations, videos, informational graphics and much more. All of these materials are shared freely and are intended to be adapted to meet the needs of those who use them.

Going a layer deeper, OER have five basic characteristics known as the "5Rs." OER allow others to do the following with content:
- Retain
- Reuse
- Revise
- Remix
- Redistribute

SETDA, the principal association representing U.S. state and territorial educational technology needs, created a helpful table to clarify the difference between openly licensed resources (which are inherently free) and free resources (which are not inherently openly licensed).

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Why OER?

Transitioning to high quality OER has several distinct benefits:

① They increase the quality of student-facing curriculum.

② They increase the ability to differentiate instruction to better meet the needs of learners and achieve outcomes aligned to standards.

③ The very act of using and adapting OER is an act of Professional Learning (or Professional Development) itself. The process of adaptation requires critical thinking based on a common understanding of what high-quality curriculum looks like. We will dive into this later in this guide.

④ School districts can reallocate funds currently spent on inflexible, static learning materials to OER and the time recommended to plan and collaborate. This investment of time has a multiplier effect of building the capacity of educators with the knowledge, skills and dispositions that can be applied to any aspect of their professional practice.

⑤ They are created by educators from a multitude of different perspectives and contexts, which decreases reliance on a monolithic single curriculum.

⑥ They can provide more timely and up-to-date information than a traditional print textbook. Traditionally, by the time a textbook is written, published and distributed, it takes a minimum of three years, in which time content in that textbook can become inaccurate or outdated.

Why OER and why now?

The importance of high-quality curriculum can't be overstated. OER has the opportunity to address a startling fact:

Each year, "the average student spends 581 or 720 available hours, *which is about 80% of their time in school* on assignments that are not high-quality," according to Claire Kaplan, the Founder and CEO of Fishtank, during the December 2021 #GoOpen online convening about OER.

Kapalan also shared that several major studies have highlighted the critical importance of a high-quality curriculum. One study, published in 2016, stated that OER "led to student achievement gains of 3.6 percentile points," and improved teacher performance that had, "an effect comparable to moving an average performing teacher to one at the 80th percentile".

> ## The average student spends 581 or 720 available hours, which is about 80% of their time in school on assignments that are not high-quality.

Using high-quality OER is a critical part of solving this problem. This begs the question, "What is high quality?" Thankfully EdReports, an independent organization dedicated to increasing the demand for the highest-quality instructional materials, provides a set of guides and criteria to help. Their Evidence Guides and Criteria for selecting materials are an outstanding way to quickly establish a common definition of what high quality means without having to create one from scratch. Once a clear definition of high quality is established, the group can return to it as they grow in the practice and the number of educators involved and complexity of the initiative increases.

Understand how OER work: Licensing

Understanding the basics about how OER are commonly licensed can make it easier to select, use and even publish your own. Most commonly there are two ways OER are licensed (but others exist):

1. Creative Commons license: An example of a Creative Commons license can be found at the bottom of this page since this guide has one assigned to it. For this guide, the license we've chosen means:
    - the contents can be used if the appropriate credit for the book is kept in place
    - that it can't be used for commercial purposes
    - if you remix or adapt the content, you must keep the same Creative Commons license assigned to this ebook.
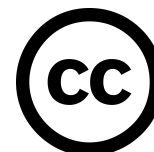
    We recommend considering using a Creative Commons license when you create and share your future OER creations. Learn more about Creative Commons licenses.

2. Another way OER are licensed include items in the public domain.

We recommend checking with your school or district's legal counsel during the early stages of selecting and/or publishing your first OER to ensure a common understanding and approach to assigning licensing of teacher-created content.

Review data and set targeted outcomes

Knowing where to begin can sometimes feel overwhelming. Perhaps you and your team have already started using OER, but the original focus has become blurred. In order to grow and sustain a successful and long term OER plan, we provide you the following high-level recommendations with links to specific tools and resources to help you craft or refine your roadmap:

1. Identify a clear set of desired outcomes.
    a. What problem are you trying to solve by shifting to adopt OER? For example, maybe one or more subjects, grade levels or student subgroups is underachieving, so providing a high-quality curriculum is an identified need.
    b. How is this problem tied to evidence-based outcomes? For example, will the use of OER help increase student test scores or the results in one or more [performance-based assessments](#)?

2. Establish the scope of how many OER you plan to use by leveraging the problem(s) you are trying to solve. You might be looking to do one or more of the following:
    a. Shift the entire curriculum to OER over several years and use OER as part of your comprehensive curriculum. Shift some or all of your supplemental curriculum.
    b. Shift one or more specific subject areas to OER in order to ensure the most up-to-date curriculum for quickly changing disciplines such as STEM.

3. Create a multi-year plan by tackling a discrete goal first.
    a. Start with the big goal in mind but tackle the first stage of your plan with a small beginning initiative. This will help you refine the process of selecting, adapting, using and reflecting upon the changed professional practice with a small group of educators before rolling it out to a larger department, grade level or school/district-wide. For example, perhaps you notice that students in grade five across schools are routinely underperforming on geometry-related assessments. The focus of your initiative might be to leverage OER as a part of a plan to address this need. You'll find more on how to assess high-quality OER later in this guide.

Choosing the initial team

1. Establish your initial rollout team and keep it small, perhaps five to seven people. Include your existing district level curriculum and instructional leader(s) to ensure that there is coherence across other system-wide initiatives.
   a. Include leaders that can help ensure systemic alignment between using OER and other district level initiatives so that the combined result is a unified approach to addressing data-driven needs.
   b. Consider adding additional folks for this initial rollout team including Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs) and instructional coaches who would be directly supporting classroom teachers participating in this first rollout. Also include two or three classroom teachers who would be the first round of those making the transition to OER. This group can become your initial [Community of Practice](#) (or CoP).

Establish ongoing professional learning at the beginning

A quote attributed to John Dewey says it best, "We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflection on experience." Educators, no matter their position, will need a common dedicated release time to reflect, share best practices, problem-solve together, exchange resources they have discovered and review feedback from students around the use of OER.

To ensure long term success we recommend the following:

1. Create a plan for providing ongoing support from the start.
   a. Build a network of district-level leaders and teachers who use OER over time. The initiative will have a much better chance of surviving administrative turnover and new teachers coming into the district since there will be a culture of OER and related support systems to help ensure its long term success.

1. Facilitate one group calibration activity a semester.
   a. Reestablish a common understanding of what a high-quality OER includes.
      i. Use a set of OER, from a range of different authors.
      ii. Leverage a review tool such as the [Review Tools](#) published by EdReports or a rubric found elsewhere. It is likely that the members of your launch team will evolve their understanding of what high quality is after putting OER into practice, and going through a planned calibration process makes the collective learning actionable by reviewing and agreeing to what a high-quality OER is.

2. Plan for structured and purposeful time to reflect and refine professional practice around OER.
   a. Use feedback processes, such as the [Tuning Protocol](#). This can be a great way to provide specific and actionable feedback for participants.
   b. We encourage all members of the initial rollout team, regardless of position, to bring their related work to each session for feedback in order to build trust, increase communication and create a unified approach to implementation.

3. Identify funding to support professional learning long term. Repurpose existing funds to ensure ongoing support. One way to fund release time can include reallocating funds, tasks and time previously spent related to reviewing, purchasing and maintaining a traditional print curriculum.

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Why focus on professional learning related to OER?

As Lisa Petrides, the Founder and CEO of the Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education (ISKME), recently stated during the [#GoOpen online convening,](#) "OER is one part pedagogy and one part resources."

The success of your OER initiative will likely hinge upon a long-term and intentional set of professional learning and support opportunities. To this end, the importance of establishing a plan for this from the beginning cannot be overstated.

Selecting OER

Every OER initiative needs a solid foundation of high-quality resources to begin. The following are a few of the several sites offering high-quality OER that you can adapt and reuse according to the Creative Commons license assigned by the author. We have curated the following shortlist based on both the quality and breadth of content they offer in order to save you time as your initiative gets started. As your needs grow in complexity, you may need to seek resources from additional OER providers and create your own.

Open Repositories (No Fee)

- [Fishtank Learning](#) provides standards-aligned OER including free unit plans, lesson plans and rubrics.
- [OER Commons](#) offers free OER created by several different agencies and also has a great tool to share your creations.
- [OpenSciEd](#) is a growing collection that offers OER science materials aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards for students in kindergarten through high school, all without a fee.

Creating your own OER

Share your creations by contributing to the growing set of OER by using Open Author found on the OER Commons website.

Share your own "hub," or collection of resources on OER Commons, or share individual creations for others to freely use. There is no fee charged to share your OER, and there is a tool that guides users through each step in the process. Importing files via Google Drive and Microsoft OneDrive are supported as well.

While you may choose to publish OER directly through your district's website, participating in OER Commons increases the likelihood that your high-quality content can reach others, like yourself, who are looking for a single place to search for what they need.

#GoOpen: A National Movement

Join a growing set of individuals, districts and states committed to increasing their use of OER through pledging their support. The pledge, started by the U.S. Department of Education and now being lead by ISKME, supports states, districts and educators choosing to transition to the use of openly licensed educational resources to transform teaching and learning. This pledge has two sets of commitments that can help further refine your vision and strategy for using OER. The first pledge is for states and districts to complete and the second is for individual educators. Learn more about this initiative and pledge your support.

Finding the right platform for your teachers and students

OER is a powerful way to increase teaching and learning outcomes, and a tool to use them is an important part of the equation. Here are some critical considerations:

1. When sharing resources, how will your students most easily access and find them later?
2. How will students collaborate with one another and their teacher?
3. How will the teacher respond to questions, collect formative feedback and provide their input?
4. How will student-facing resources be returned to the teacher for grading (when relevant)?
5. How will educators easily find OER used within their district?
6. How will the person responsible for the district curriculum have insight into the materials available to educators in order to help provide coherence with district initiatives and priorities?
7. Can learners engage with the content on any device, including mobile phones, whether they are at home or school?
8. Will the content be accessible to those who need or desire accommodations?

At Hāpara, we are passionate about providing a way for teachers and students to thrive by getting access to differentiated learning resources, including OER, that best meet their needs and match their context. We design the tools within our platform, including Hapara Workspace, to do just that.

To learn more about how we can help you get started with a sustainable and scalable OER initiative.

Contact us today!

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