



The #GoOpen initiative:

A renewed focus on open educational resources to improve teaching and learning

What is the Go Open initiative?

On December 10, 2021, the United States Department of Education, in collaboration with the Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education ([ISKME](#)), hosted a virtual convening to help reenergize the [Open Educational Resources](#) (OER) movement in K-12. This initiative, known as #GoOpen, is dedicated to increasing educational equity through access to high-quality learning materials and helping school systems to reallocate significant funds currently spent on inflexible, static learning materials to resources and activities that accelerate the transition to digital learning.

More specifically, this online event, with speakers representing multiple sectors, including K-12 education, non-profits private companies, philanthropic organizations, academia, and federal government, signaled that the original work of the [2015 launch of #GoOpen](#) is indeed alive and well. #GoOpen's goal is to, "support states, districts, and educators choosing to transition to the use of openly licensed educational resources to transform teaching and learning." In plain terms, Amee Evans Godwin, the Vice President of Research and Development at the ISKM put it this way, "It's about sharing what you have & sharing what you know, in order to make teaching and learning better."



Background of the OER movement and #GoOpen

OER are student and teacher-facing digital learning resources that are openly licensed and allow for adaptation, most commonly through a [Creative Commons license](#).

Here's a quick history lesson for those new to OER. The idea of OER is not new. The formal OER movement has been around for 20 years, and some may argue that it has existed, while less formalized, for longer than that. In [2001, MIT announced](#) it would make all the learning materials used by their faculty available on the Internet with free use and adaptation as part of the terms of use. That single act inspired countless other individuals and organizations to join the movement, including the U.S. Department of Education's 2015 convening in which 10 states helped launch #GoOpen. Since that time, countless OER, in the form of lesson plans, student-facing resources, presentations, text, assessments and much more, have been created and shared freely with others, most often using a Creative Commons license.

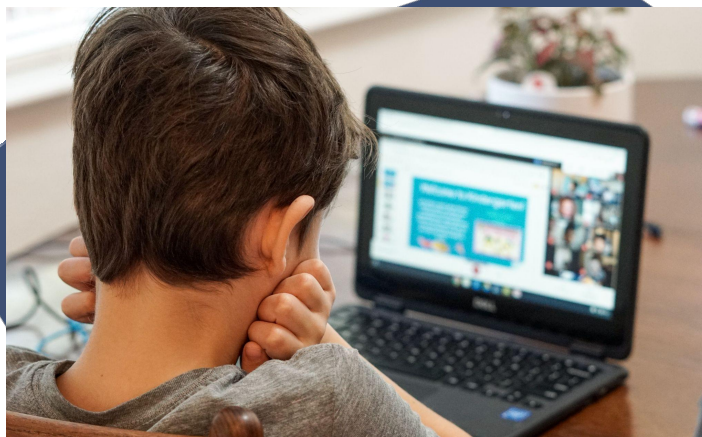
The term the "5Rs" is frequently used to define what qualifies as OER. These types of resources allow others to Retain, Reuse, Revise, Remix, and Redistribute. SETDA, the principal association representing U.S. state and territorial educational technology needs, created a [helpful table](#) to clarify the difference between openly licensed resources (which are inherently free) and free resources (which are not inherently openly licensed).

Why OER and why now?

This online convening highlighted that, while OER isn't new, the need to re-engage with them has never been greater. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic created an increased learning gap. This issue, coupled with the growing realization that a single textbook can't effectively meet the needs of each learner, the sheer diversity of OER helps solve these issues. OER is also quickly accessible, reflects current information and provides timely resources. Additionally, high-quality OER, when aligned to standards and learning outcomes, provide a platform upon which educators can adapt content for their needs and those of their students. Identifying and adapting an OER is a form of professional learning in itself, making it beneficial for both teachers and their students.

Challenges with OER

Challenges for the OER movement were addressed in this online event and included a call to action to address these in practical ways. Claire Kaplan—the Founder and CEO of Fishtank, an OER website—shared these challenges, including finding high-quality OER, and developing a cohesive plan to fit it in a larger curriculum. According to Kaplan, “Studies have found that students of color and students from low-income backgrounds are half as likely as white students and students from higher-income backgrounds to be in classrooms with [high-quality curriculum]. OER is seen as a means to address this inequity. Additionally, teachers need support to adopt and implement OER. These challenges require systemic solutions or support, which is why the pledge at the school system level is so important.



Benefits of using OER

Lisa Petrides, the Founder and CEO of ISKME, pointed out that, “when the pandemic started, we found that those institutions who had already incorporated aspects of [open education](#) [including OER] to their classrooms were able to maneuver more easily into the whole virtual online world and it.” A critical component of this, according to Petrides, was the prior capacity building with teachers who adapted OER using rubrics and frameworks to help them assess what high-quality OER looks like. She concluded her remarks on this subject by saying, “OER is one part pedagogy & one part resources.”

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Jemelleh Coes, Director of Teacher Leadership at Mount Holyoke College, pointed out that educators using OER at the beginning of the pandemic, “really appreciated the opportunities to change them as they needed them,” because remote teaching created new challenges that traditional textbooks couldn’t address.

Claire Kaplan 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”. While that seems like a “given”, Kaplan cited a statistic that 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.” Using high quality OER is a critical part of solving this problem.

Jim Soo Song, Broadband Advisor for the U.S. Department of Education, noted the high levels of stress that teachers have been experiencing due, in part, to being isolated from their peers as they taught from home during the pandemic. One way to lighten the stress is by providing increased opportunities to collaborate with other educators to share their ideas and collectively leverage OER to address the needs of their students.



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Get involved:

The #GoOpen pledge

Kristina Ishmael, the Deputy Director of the Office of Ed Tech at the United States Department of Education shared that over 20 states, impacting over 500 districts, have previously committed to promoting the use of OER within their school system before the convening. She then closed the meeting with an invitation for more states, school systems, and individuals to pledge to promote the practices discussed during the convening.

According to Amy Evans Godwin, the pledge is a “guide for our strategy and decision making for nurturing motivation and professional learning and for sustaining statewide and district-wide implementation.” This step is a first for school systems to demonstrate their commitment to using OER practices, including their creation, sharing, and use.

For states and districts, the four commitments include:

- 1 Sharing new opportunities for open education alongside knowledge and evidence about what works, *in our communications* to all interested parties;
- 2 Emphasizing open education as a means for providing equitable access to high-quality, flexible, low or no-cost teaching and learning materials *in our policies*;
- 3 Supporting ways for educators to adopt and use OER and include students as beneficiaries, contributors, and co-creators of OER, *in our practices*; and
- 4 Offering rigorous and engaging learning experiences that are inclusive, culturally responsive, and accessible to all learners, *in our commitment to equity and continuous improvement in education*.

Individual educators were also encouraged to pledge their support by:

- 1 Endorsing open education as a mechanism for providing equitable access to high-quality, adaptable, low or no-cost teaching and learning materials;
- 2 Adopting OER and open educational practice;
- 3 Sharing knowledge and evidence about successes and challenges locally and nationally;
- 4 Supporting others to adopt OER and open educational practice, including students; and,
- 5 Supporting learning experiences that are inclusive, culturally responsive, and accessible to all learners, *in my commitment to equity and continuous improvement in education.*

Open education resources provide schools with the opportunity to realize the goal of meeting every learner where they are and giving every single child a high-quality education. The #GoOpen initiative plays a critical role in helping schools across the country achieve this goal. If schools take advantage of this initiative, then learners will benefit for years to come.

Hāpara provides schools worldwide with the technology to efficiently curate and distribute OER. If you would like to start building your school's OER collection, Hāpara's Workspace can help.

[Contact us to learn how](#)