



April 19, 2017

Dear State and Area NAACP Conferences:

Providing all students an equitable education has been a cornerstone of NAACP since the origination's inception. For too many years, too many children, particularly African American, other minorities, and poor from all groups have been subjected to lesser educational opportunities, leading to lesser opportunities for success in their personal and work lives. A major contributing factor to the disparities continues to be the lack of appropriate instructional materials. One effective solution becoming widespread nationally is the use of open educational resources (OER). These materials encompass both print and other media that are generally free and readily available to schools and school districts. In addition, they address a range of subject areas and grade levels as well as educational needs from instruction to assessment. Most important, OER can help school districts in their efforts to close elusive achievement gaps by providing resources that many educational institutions could not otherwise economically afford.

In an attempt to address the disparate situation of many schools regarding resources, in 2016 the Maryland State Conference endorsed a resolution advocating the use of open education resources (OER) by schools and school districts. The resolution was then submitted to the national NAACP and ratified as policy in that same year. According to that action, NAACP state and area conferences across the country are being asked to inform their local units about the availability of these resources and their potential benefit to schools and districts, particularly those confronting financial issues. Essentially, OER help "level the playing field" and can assist schools in their efforts to provide all students quality academic experiences.

Please refer to the attached listing of strategies developed in collaboration with the Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education (ISKME), an independent, education nonprofit whose mission is to improve the practice of continuous learning, collaboration, and change in the education sector, and an internationally recognized leader in OER. The strategies relate how state and local NAACPs can work with schools, districts, as well as local and state agencies and groups to take advantage of open education resources and their inherent benefits.

For additional information related to OER, ISKME may be contacted at 323 Harvard Avenue Half Moon Bay, CA 94019; Phone (650) 728-3322; and info@iskme.org.

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OER: How States and Advocates Can Participate

The NAACP’s embracing of open education resources (OER), as detailed in the 2016 *Advocacy to Promote Use of Open Education Resources Resolution*, suggests a way forward that brings together the resources and knowledge of state education agencies and the grassroots influence of civil rights advocates. Together, they can create the conditions that can advance the use of OER in schools across the state—which, in turn, can help create better educational opportunities for every student. Among the strategies these coalitions may consider:

Establish a state-level OER task force to explore how open resources are being used in the state and make recommendations for increasing awareness, investment, training, and the use of OER.

Bring together a broad coalition. Civil rights groups, teachers and union leaders, heads of parent organizations, community leaders, and other advocates can create a shared agenda that ensures that open resources are responsive to community needs.

Learn from existing users of OER—both in and out of schools. Along with classroom teachers, librarians, homeschoolers, college faculty, leaders of cultural agencies, technology companies, and other stakeholders can provide insights on advancing the use of open resources in ways that meet the needs of all students.

Invest in release time and training for teachers, librarians, and other school professionals. In schools across the country, we have seen teams of librarians and teachers work together to curate and learn to use OER content. Providing resources and materials to encourage school-level exploration and use of open resources is one of the strongest levers to encourage their adoption at scale.

Incorporate OER into existing alignment work. In several states that have already established OER hubs, teams of teachers and other educators evaluate materials to ensure they align with state standards, often with the same rubrics used to evaluate textbooks and other commercial materials. These teams also could help evaluate and curate materials that are particularly effective in increasing success in teaching state standards in challenging subjects such as STEM.

Provide technical support to districts. While the “digital divide” is still very real, in many places the bigger issue is that the technology is available—but there’s little support to help educators access and use OER. State education agencies should provide both technical support and training to empower districts and schools to help educators understand how to work with these materials.

Shift resource allocations. While saying that OER are a replacement for traditional textbooks oversimplifies their potential impact, states and districts still can take advantage of cost savings to support professional development, technical support, and OER training.

Develop policy agendas. At the state level, coalitions can help ensure that state education leaders, governor policy advisors, state chiefs, board members, and legislators understand the value of making OER more broadly accessible. At the national level, coalitions can advocate to ensure that OER is supported more at the federal level and loosen procurement policies that favor long-term contracts with commercial publishers.