



Open Education Resources Advisory Committee Final Report

Introduction

The Open Education Resources Advisory Committee initiated its course of study at the beginning of the 2007 Interim with two main objectives in promoting the use of open education resources in the Commonwealth: leverage free and low-cost open education resources as a cost saving measure for Commonwealth and improve the quality and relevance of educational materials in the Commonwealth.

Legislative Members:

Senator John Watkins, Chairman
Delegate Sam Nixon
Delegate Chris Peace

Other Members

Eric Finkbeiner, McGuireWoods Consulting
Anne H. Moore, Virginia Tech
Daniel Morrow, The Jamestown Exploration Company
Kelly Porell, Virginia21
Karen Richardson, College of William & Mary
Alicia Sanchez, Defense Acquisition University
Jeffrey Sili, Caroline County, Virginia Schools Technology Committee
James Firebaugh, Office of Middle and High School Instruction, Virginia DOE

Summary

At its first meeting, the advisory committee received presentations on the K-12 textbook adoption process and open education resources to provide background for the study. Dr. Beverly Thurston, from the Virginia Department of Education made a presentation highlighting the K-12 textbook adoption process in the Commonwealth. Dr. Thurston explained that it generally takes the State Board of Education one and a half years to adopt textbooks for a particular subject. Following the state adoption process, many localities initiate their own adoption process. The advisory committee identified this duplication in effort as a possible issue the advisory committee could address in future meetings.

Mark Burnet, from the Virginia Open Education Foundation (VOEF), presented on the work of the VOEF and open education resources. Mr. Burnet explained the mission of the VOEF is to "bring easily usable, quality open curriculum and educational content resources to all students in Virginia." Mr. Burnet briefly explained some of the intellectual property concerns that arise when using OERs and current initiatives meant to alleviate these concerns. The advisory committee discussed the importance of educating teachers on Creative Commons licensing, which offers a low cost alternative to the copyrighting process and may incentivize teachers to share more of the material they develop. At the conclusion of the first meeting the advisory committee narrowed the focus of its study to grades K-12 and the textbook adoption process in the Commonwealth.

Henrico as a Model

At its second meeting the advisory committee heard from Eric Jones, Director of High School Education at Henrico Public Schools. Henrico's efforts to bring their school system into the digital age has received national attention and is seen by many as a model locality for implementing technology in the classroom.

Building from interest in the first meeting, advisory committee members were interested in the current use of content created by Henrico County teachers. Mr. Jones stated that education resources utilized by Henrico are 50% self-created and 50% commercial. Members questioned whether there are intellectual property concerns with content created by teachers. Mr. Jones explained that the majority of these concerns have dissipated as more teachers have developed content. One member of the advisory suggested briefing the teachers on the use of Creative Commons licensing.

From a technical perspective, Henrico hosts 90% of the electronic materials used by teachers in the county, which allows officials to ensure consistent quality and access. Although outside access is valuable, Mr. Brown stated that the less a student needs to reach the internet, the more confident he can be of the quality of the material and safety of the student.

Operating and capital expenditures of the Henrico program were discussed. Henrico currently employs 84 information technology professionals, roughly 800 student computers per support technician. By comparison, school divisions that do not have a 1:1 computer/student ratio have about 400 student computers per support technician. To provide the level of implementation needed to truly adopt OER's and more technology based programs, hiring sufficient support staff must be an essential component. As a note, Mr. Brown explained that interest in the Henrico program has sparked over 4800 national and international inquiries to date.

The Publisher's Viewpoint

To balance the interests of all parties, the advisory committee requested Mr. Clint Hubbard, Virginia Publisher's Association, to provide a presentation on the background

of textbook publishing and the current views of publishers. Representatives from textbook publishers, McGraw-Hill (Donna Moody) and Pearson Education (Richard Herath), were available to answer questions on behalf of the Virginia Publisher's Association.

Mr. Hubbard explained how the South Carolina policy of utilizing a central repository of state textbooks helps textbook publishers in assessing demand because the state orders all the textbooks it needs at one time. Publishers have a more difficult time assessing the demand in the Commonwealth because the textbooks are purchased incrementally by localities. He stated that with a centralized purchasing system, publishers pay more attention to the needs of the purchasing state.

Members also expressed interest in the publishers' business models used to market technology related supplemental materials. Mr. Hubbard explained that publishers present their supplemental offerings to localities and that generally adoption is dependant on the local committees' opinion of technology use in the classroom. Under the current system, the electronic materials are still considered supplemental, or gratis, with the purchase of the paper textbook.

Focusing on the Textbook Purchasing Process

At its final meeting the advisory committee heard from Tom Barber, VP of Customization and Special Markets at Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. Mr. Barber provided an overview of the progressing textbook market from a publisher's perspective. The advisory committee was particularly interested in Mr. Barber's opinions on textbook purchasing policies in other states. Mr. Barber stated that Florida and Texas have emerged as leaders in textbook purchasing/utilization policies. Mr. Barber noted that although a few states are leaders, individual localities in other states, such as Henrico, can emerge as leaders. The advisory committee asked Mr. Barber if his company offered the option of printing select chapters, at a reduced cost. Mr. Barber responded that he could envision this type of option for the middle grade sciences at some point in the future, but it is not their current practice to offer that option.

Moving back to the state adoption process, Mr. Barber explained how Texas leverages its large purchasing contract to control the market, especially with respect to content development. Another advantage for Texas under this model is their decision to fund purchasing on a per textbook basis, as opposed to a per student basis.

Delegate Peace asked a representative from Pearson Education if his company had made any efforts to offer more adaptive learning materials in Virginia. The representative stated that his company proposed offering six years worth of consumable lessons, but the Board of Education stated that the offer would not be allowed under state code because the materials would not last for six years, which is required for textbook contracts.

At the conclusion of the last meeting of the Interim Delegate Peace requested staff and the Department of Education to research the current textbook purchasing policy in

Virginia and determine if the lack of a definition for "textbook" restricted a locality from adopting electronic materials that could substitute for traditional textbooks. The advisory committee agreed that the first step towards enhancing the use of open education resources in the Commonwealth would be to make sure there are no barriers in the Code of Virginia that would delay implementation.

Final Recommendations

The Open Education Advisory Committee recommends JCOTS endorse legislation drafted by the Department of Education that will redefine and reorganize the textbook purchasing policies in the Commonwealth. A copy of the draft legislation accompanies the materials for the 12/10/07 meeting of the Joint Commission on Technology and Science.