

E-book Initiatives

Several educational agencies have begun the process of making e-books available to students. "As of September 2012, 22 states have endorsed digital textbooks in some official capacity" and the Obama administration has asked states to give all students access to digital materials by 2017 (Scott, 2012).

Washington, DC Area Schools

Middle and high school students in Fairfax, began using electronic textbooks in the fall of 2011. After a pilot study in eighteen schools, the district chose to spend \$5.3 million on social studies texts for all middle school students. The district is not, however, supplying students with laptops or mobile devices, so issues of access remain in question.

The district's is instituting a five-year plan which will lead to the adoption of e-textbooks in math, science, and language arts. The initiative is designed to achieve several goals, including a reduction in the weight of textbooks students have to carry around and a capitalization on the way that today's students live natively in a digital world.

Other Washington area schools, Loudoun and Montgomery County, are also interested in exploring electronic textbooks but are waiting until the cost comes down and the quality of the e-books improves.

California Free Digital Textbook Initiative

The state of California has taken the lead in the United States toward the implementation of e-books in education with its California Free Digital Textbook Initiative. In May 2009, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger announced the plan to make digital textbooks available to all students in the state. Later that year, the California legislature passed a law, Senate Bill 48, demanding that all postsecondary institutions in the state make available electronic versions of textbooks, in whole or part, by 2020.

In 2009, 16 digital high school science and math resources were released for student use at the beginning of the 2009–2010 school year. The next year, 10 more math and science textbooks were added to the collection available to high school students.

Content for the digital textbooks are submitted to the California Learning Resources Network (CLRN) for review by a panel of practicing California teachers and subject matter experts. E-textbooks are aligned to standards in geometry, Algebra II, trigonometry, calculus, physics, chemistry, biology/life sciences, and earth sciences.

The e-textbook program is expected to bring about several benefits:

- Savings in the purchase of traditionally published textbooks
- Ability of teachers to print content more cheaply than textbooks, even when students have no access to computers or other e-reading devices
- Timely updating of content to enable students to compete in the global economy
- Potential for making learning more interactive with embedded media

Other relevant legislation which will, no doubt, have an impact on electronic texts in K-12 education was signed into law in 2012 by Governor Jerry Brown. These laws require that digital textbooks be made available for many introductory courses at the university level.

Although some educators are enthusiastic about the possibilities of e-books, others have reservations, noting that many students do not have access to a computer or other e-book device. Most school districts anticipate taking small steps as they take advantage of the state's free e-textbooks.

Digital Textbooks in Texas

In a speech to a computer education gaming conference, Governor Rick Perry urged the use of digital textbooks to save money and engage students who are comfortable and motivated with technology. His comments follow a law passed by the state legislature that allows schools to use state funds allotted for textbooks to purchase electronic content and computer hardware. A second bill, passed in June 2009, permits schools to purchase open-source digital content without the approval of the State Board of Education

The idea of using digital textbooks as a supplement to or replacement for traditional textbooks has not been universally accepted across the state; it faces political, financial, and practical objections. The State Board of Education, for example, sees the movement as a way to limit their control over educational content and to reduce the quality of instructional materials. Others reject the idea that digital textbooks would be cheaper. They argue that, in Texas, publishing companies charge the same amount for digital as for traditional textbooks although costs may be lower in other states. Finally, as with all technology, purchase and maintenance of hardware and technology infrastructure can be costly.

Most school districts in Texas are still exploring the possibilities of digital textbooks. Plano School District will begin by offering electronic textbooks to secondary English language arts students.

For more information about e-books and e-readers, see **E-book Resources** and **E-book Readers**.

References

- Brown, E. (2011, October 2). Online textbooks moving into Washington area schools. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/online-textbooks-moving-into-schools/2011/09/27/gIQAwN0KGL_story.html
- Education chief wants textbooks to go digital. (2012, October 3). eSchool News. Retrieved from <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2012/10/03/education-chief-wants-textbooks-to-go-digital/>
- Meyers, J. (2010, April 29). More school districts look at whether to switch to online textbooks. *Dallas Morning News*. Retrieved from www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/politics/state/stories/DN-onlinetexts_19met.ART.State.Edition2.4c70f7b.html
- Office of the Governor of the State of California. (2009, June 8). *Leading the nation into a digital textbook future* [Fact Sheet]. Retrieved from <http://gov.ca.gov/index.php?/fact-sheet/12455>
- Scott, D. (2012, September 24). States Continue Plugging Into Digital Textbooks. *Governing the States and Localities*. Retrieved from <http://www.governing.com/blogs/view/gov-states-continue-plugging-into-digital-textbooks.html>
- Shannon, K. (2010, April 7). Governor: Texas should move to online textbooks. *Associated Press*. Retrieved from www.businessweek.com/ap/financialnews/D9EUFAVG0.htm