

Federal Stimulus Funds Boost Innovation In Online Learning: Schools Use Open Educational Resources To “Race To The Top”

MONTEREY, Calif., June 10, 2009 – Tough economic times could be the catalyst for retooling education in the United States. As school districts across the nation work to balance their budgets and meet the needs of their students, they are also scrambling to best use the billions of dollars in federal funds flowing in from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). Many educators are looking at utilizing Open Educational Resources (OER), an innovative approach to online learning, to meet ARRA’s mandate to raise teacher effectiveness, prepare students for college and careers, upgrade data gathering systems and improve low performing schools.

The OER movement offers high quality educational materials free of charge to anyone with access to the internet.

“The intention of OER is to improve teaching worldwide. Everyone is entitled to an education no matter where they live or what their circumstances are,” said Gary Lopez, executive director of the Monterey Institute for Technology and Education. “OER content can be readily adapted to meet local needs - whether in an online, blended or face-to-face classroom environment.”

Online classes serve a broad spectrum of learners by providing increased access to core curriculum, elective and advanced placement coursework, greater flexibility in scheduling, as well as tools to help students succeed at classes they’ve previously failed.

“Online learning is the single most important investment to make a difference for kids – it works, and if you invest in OER, that content will always be available,” said Susan Patrick, president and chief executive officer of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, “the ARRA funding is a once in a lifetime opportunity for states to build or expand their virtual schools.”

Some states have already started using the federal stimulus funding to get involved in the OER movement through a membership in the National Repository of Online Courses (NROC) which offers a library of top-notch online classes.

“Our NROC membership will allow us to provide online advanced placement coursework for students and to create 21st century classrooms with high quality content,” said Cathy Poplin, deputy associate superintendent for education technology at the Arizona Department of Education, “it helps address the equity issues in rural areas for underserved students.”

Identified as the best of their kind, NROC courses utilize an array of digital options like interactive simulations, flash objects and iPod downloads to engage students in dozens of subjects, ranging from algebra to U.S. history. The content is available in separate modules for greater flexibility and aligns with popular textbooks and state standards. Classroom teachers can select materials to support their lesson plans.

NROC content is refined through a ground-breaking process called social authoring. This unique online collaborative method functions within a non-profit structure to create high-quality courses.

“ARRA is a great opportunity to accelerate the OER movement,” said Barbara Chow, education program director for The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. “It works, it is cost effective, it improves instruction and it can have a profound impact on improving student outcomes.”

By joining NROC, educational institutions support OER and receive a variety of benefits including customizable content, specialized support and professional development resources. NROC’s content is also accessible to individual learners free of charge at www.hippocampus.org.

NROC is an OER project of the Monterey Institute for Technology and Education, supported by a grant from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Learn more about spending guidelines for stimulus funding at: www.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/guidance/uses.doc.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation makes grants to address the most serious social and environmental problems facing society, where risk capital, responsibly invested, may make a difference over time. The Foundation places a high value on sustaining and improving institutions that make positive contributions to society. Grants in the foundation’s education program promote long-term institutional or field development, reform or knowledge creation in four priority areas: improving achievement, improving educational outcomes in California, the open educational resources initiative, and opportunity. www.Hewlett.org

iNACOL, The International Association for K-12 Online Learning, is a non-profit organization that facilitates collaboration, advocacy, and research to enhance quality K-12 online teaching and learning. iNACOL strives to ensure all students have access to a world-class education and quality online learning opportunities that prepare them for a lifetime of success. www.inacol.org

Arizona Department of Education is the state education agency for Arizona public schools. Under the leadership of Superintendent Tom Horne, the ADE is dedicated to promoting academic success for all Arizona public school students. The agency is designed to be service-oriented with the overall goals of developing “Better Schools, Better Teachers, Better Curriculum.” www.azed.gov

The Monterey Institute for Technology and Education is a non-profit educational organization committed to helping meet society’s need for access to effective, high-quality educational opportunities in an era of rapid economic, social and personal change. The Monterey Institute for Technology and Education was founded in 2003 as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Learn more at www.montereyinstitute.org

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