

Digital Learning Program Develops OER Courses

Earlier this year the Wickenburg Digital Learning Program (WDLP) started the process of developing Open Educational Resource (OER) courses, which will ultimately replace the current NovaNET curriculum. The plan is to transition to an OER curriculum over the next three years at WDLP. It will be a big task, but will pay huge dividends once complete.

OER courses are online classes which are developed by local teachers using resources that are available through other online schools, the web and through various educational foundations. The idea is that educational curriculum should not come at a cost to individuals and institutions, but rather should be shared across systems. The OER movement is an International concept and schools across the world are beginning to share resources to enhance each other's educational offerings.

The benefits of developing an OER curriculum are many-fold, but let me speak to two in particular. The first benefit is that because educational resources have literally exploded in scope over the past five years, teachers have access to tremendous amounts of material. It used to be that a teacher was given a textbook and that was the scope of their curriculum. Today, via the Internet, a plethora of resources are available. The benefit with this scenario is that by having a locally developed OER curriculum, teachers can make curricular adjustments as new, more effective resources, are found. This will revolutionize how we teach and keep our students on the cutting edge with their learning.

A second benefit is that maintaining an OER curriculum is more cost effective than paying annual fees to an online curriculum provider. Although there is a cost to develop and maintain OER courses, those funds are being spent to pay local teachers as opposed to a corporate entity. At this point WUSD pays over \$50,000 per year in online curricular costs and once the OER system is up and running these expenses will be dramatically reduced. A reduction in cost will enable us to better staff our digital learning program. Our director and the teachers in the program do an amazing job moving students to the next level, but additional staffing will be needed as the program grows.

I will continue to keep the community abreast of WDLP's progress in developing an OER curriculum and I look forward to the benefits it will ultimately provide students and teachers here in Wickenburg.