



Open-Source Alternatives May Disrupt Billion-Dollar Textbook Industry

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Affton School District in St. Louis [will take part](#) in the U.S. Department of Education's #GoOpen campaign, a new federal effort that aims to disrupt the [\\$14 billion dollar](#) textbook industry. #GoOpen encourages school districts to develop best practices around using free digital textbooks and Affton is one of only ten school districts in the nation selected to participate.

As part of the campaign, the Department of Education has proposed a new regulation that would require all copyrightable intellectual property created with Department grant funds to have an open license. If the federal government pays for it, citizens (who actually paid for it) must be able to access it for free.

What would happen if public schools no longer had to purchase new textbooks every five to seven years? How much would schools save?

Though textbooks only make up [1 percent](#) of overall education spending, over time, these costs add up. Between 2012 and 2014, Francis Howell School District in Saint Charles [spent](#) nearly \$3.5 million on textbook purchases. Using open-source textbooks could cut expenses in half or more.

For example, a 2008 edition of a [high school Biology textbook](#) can be purchased for about \$100 dollars. An [Amazon Fire tablet with Wi-Fi goes for \\$49.99](#), and with that tablet the Kindle edition of [CK-12 Biology](#) can be accessed for free. CK-12 Biology is just one of hundreds of textbooks

available to students at no cost.

In addition to reducing costs, digital textbooks provide differentiation opportunities for teachers. [One study](#) looked at the science performance of 1,651 high school students from three states. The researchers found that reading ability was just as important to a student's state test score as the amount of science knowledge the student had.

With a digital textbook, the text can be manipulated to provide the same subject matter at multiple reading levels. Just as easily, the textbook can be updated throughout the year in response to new discoveries—how many students in Missouri would you think are using a textbook that says Pluto is a regular old planet?

I'm excited to see where innovation in the textbook industry takes learning in Missouri. I hope when it's time for other school districts to enter the digital age, as Affton has, they are ready.

About the Author



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Brittany Wagner was an education policy research assistant at the Show-Me Institute.

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- [8] <http://www.amazon.com/CK-12-Biology-Foundation-ebook/dp/B006VYHU84>
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