OPEN EDUCATION IN THE NORTHEAST

Insights and Innovations from a Regional Perspective (2025 Update)

NEW ENGLAND BOARD
of **HIGHER EDUCATION**

Open Education in the Northeast: Insights and Innovations from a Regional Perspective
(2025 Update)

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About NEBHE

Founded in 1955 by six visionary New England governors who recognized that the region's future prosperity depended on higher education, the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) has since worked to promote greater educational opportunities across New England. NEBHE advances equitable postsecondary outcomes through convening, research and programs for students, institution leaders and policymakers. Our vision is that everyone in New England will have lifelong access to affordable, high-value postsecondary education. Visit nebhe.org.

About the Authors

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Executive Summary

Since the publication of NEBHE's 2020 regional analysis of open education policies, states across the Northeast have significantly expanded their efforts to reduce textbook costs, increase equitable access to learning materials, and strengthen the infrastructure needed to sustain high-quality Open Educational Resources[1] (OER). This 2025 update documents substantial progress across leadership, institutional policy, student engagement, funding, and professional development, while also highlighting persistent challenges and opportunities for continued collaboration across the region.

Rising textbook prices continue to shape the urgency of this work. Textbook prices have climbed at nearly triple the rate of inflation, leaving many students unable to afford required materials and prompting harmful coping strategies such as delaying course participation, taking fewer courses, or skipping meals. These financial barriers reinforce longstanding equity gaps, disproportionately affecting Pell-eligible students, students of color, and working adult learners. OER mitigate these barriers by providing free, permanently accessible learning materials that improve affordability, expand student agency, and support more flexible, culturally relevant pedagogy.

Regional Trends and Themes

1. Expanding Statewide and Cross-Sector Leadership
Since 2020, several states have strengthened or established formal statewide bodies to guide OER strategy. Connecticut's legislated OER Coordinating Council remains one of the most comprehensive leadership structures in the region, while Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine continue to advance collaborative networks that bring together faculty, librarians, instructional designers, system leaders, and state agencies. These leadership structures, whether formal or informal, play a critical role in aligning priorities, sharing resources, supporting institutions with varying capacities, and elevating the voices of both practitioners and students. They also help ensure that private, independent institutions, which serve a substantial share of New England students, are included in statewide OER efforts.

2. Institutional Policies That Recognize and Support OER Work

Faculty continue to be the central decision-makers in selecting required course materials, a trend reaffirmed by recent national data. Yet faculty labor in developing, adapting, and maintaining OER often goes unrecognized in traditional academic evaluation structures. States and institutions across the region are responding by developing clearer policies that value OER within teaching, research, and service, drawing on tools such as the DOERS OER Contributions Matrix. Examples from Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Massachusetts illustrate how institutions are beginning to compensate faculty equitably, integrate OER into tenure and promotion considerations, and build internal systems that support sustainable adoption and creation at scale.

3. Centering Student Voice and Experience

Across the Northeast, states and institutions are increasingly incorporating student perspectives into OER planning, advocacy, and policy development. Student representation on statewide bodies ensures that lived experiences inform priorities and strategies. Student testimonials in state reports underscore the academic and financial stakes of textbook affordability and illustrate how OER reduce stress, prevent delays in course engagement, and enhance overall access. These narratives highlight the essential role of students as both beneficiaries and co-creators of open education.

4. Sustainable Funding and Clear Returns on Investment

Even modest, consistent funding yields substantial cost savings for students and strengthens institutional readiness for broader OER integration. Connecticut's $229,483 investment between 2020 and 2024 generated more than $1.2 million in student savings—a more than 5:1 return on investment. Massachusetts reported $21.4 million in student savings in AY2024 alone, along with lower drop/fail/withdrawal (DFW) rates for courses using no-cost materials. Long-term investments in New York continue to generate significant savings and support large-scale course redesign. These data points collectively demonstrate that sustainable funding—combined with strong statewide leadership—delivers measurable benefits for affordability, student success, and teaching innovation.

5. Strengthening Regional Professional Development

Professional development remains one of the most robust and collaborative areas of OER activity in the Northeast. Connecticut's annual OER Summit, Maine's librarian-led discussion network, and Massachusetts' statewide offerings through the Department of

Higher Education collectively illustrate the region's commitment to building faculty and staff capacity. The practitioner-led Northeast OER Summit further extends this work by convening educators from across the northeastern states for hands-on workshops, shared learning, and cross-state collaboration. These professional networks ensure that high-quality training reaches institutions of all sizes and capacities, including those in rural or under-resourced areas.

Looking Ahead

As the Northeast continues to expand its open education ecosystem, the most successful strategies will be those that pair statewide alignment with institutional autonomy; that value faculty and student contributions; and that invest in the infrastructure—repositories, training, grant programs, data systems—needed to support sustainable change. The region is well-positioned to continue leading national conversations about transparent textbook policies, alternatives to automatic textbook billing, and expanding access to high-quality, low- and no-cost learning materials.

Open education strengthens affordability, teaching innovation, and student success. The continued collaboration across states, systems, independent institutions, and regional compacts will be essential to transforming these individual initiatives into long-term, systemic progress for all learners across the Northeast.

Background

Defining Open Educational Resources

Open Educational Resources (OER) offer an alternative to expensive and copyrighted commercial learning materials, which, according to a 2020 study conducted by U.S. PIRG, [1] are a very real barrier to 66% of students attending institutions of higher education in the United States.

> **"Open Educational Resources (OER)** are teaching, learning and research materials in any medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions." - UNESCO

Open education is the umbrella term that describes the movement to bring the U.S. educational system into the modern world by using technology to provide resources, tools, and practices that are free of financial, legal, or technical barriers and can be retained, reused, remixed, revised, and redistributed in the digital environment for more affordable, accessible and effective teaching and learning.[2] It allows for the expansion of the cost-savings narrative to include the pedagogical benefits that emerge when copyright barriers dissolve and faculty can customize their learning materials to better align with their course learning outcomes, while engaging their students as co-creators of resources that can be shared back into the Knowledge Commons. Open education is built upon and encompasses several foundational theories of pedagogy that center the student both in terms of knowledge access and creation and subsequently place the faculty as facilitators rather than the "sage on the stage."

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[1] NAGLE, C. & VITEZ, K. (2020). FIXING THE BROKEN TEXTBOOK MARKET: SECOND EDITION. U.S. PIRG EDUCATION FUND. ACCESSED AT HTTPS://PIRG.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2022/07/FIXING-THE-BROKEN-TEXTBOOK-MARKET_JUNE-2020_V2-5.PDF

[2] DEFINITION ADAPTED BY NEBHE, ORIGINALLY PHRASED BY SPARC AS "OPEN EDUCATION ENCOMPASSES RESOURCES, TOOLS AND PRACTICES THAT ARE FREE OF LEGAL, FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL BARRIERS ..." (SPARC, OPEN EDUCATION, 2025).

At the intersections of open education and critical pedagogy (an educational approach that promotes critical reflection, challenges inequities, and empowers students as co-creators of knowledge), teaching and learning resources become far more equitable and flexible.
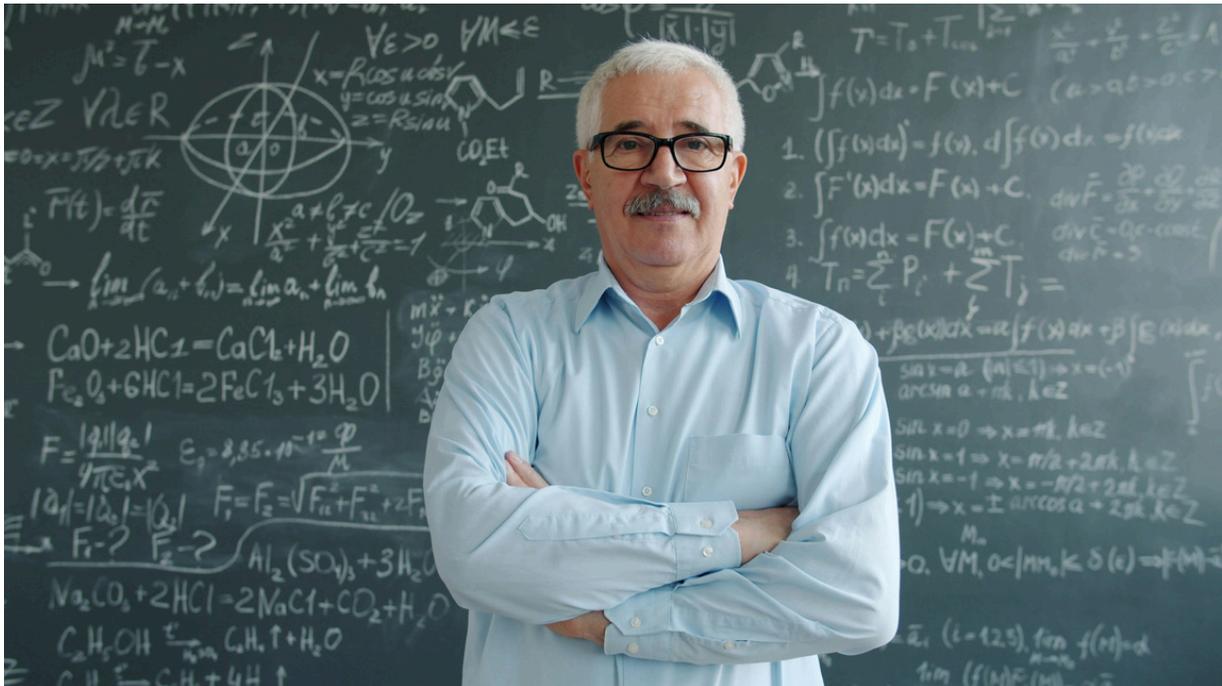
Photo by Vitaly Gariev on Unsplash

Student Access Barriers to Required Learning Materials

Between academic years 2017-18 and 2022-23, average in-state tuition and required fees rose by roughly 6% at community colleges and 15% at public four-year institutions. Across the region, however, these changes varied considerably: community college tuition ranged from a slight decline in New Hampshire to increases of more than 11% in Massachusetts, while public four-year institutions saw increases ranging from about 7% in New Hampshire to more than 27% in Connecticut.[3] Over this same period, the federal maximum Pell Grant increased by about 16.5% (from $5,920 to $6,895)[4], yet it still covers only a modest share of total college costs—particularly in high-tuition states like those in New England— leaving low- and moderate-income students to rely heavily on state, institutional, and family resources to close the remaining gap.

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[3]HTTPS://NCES.ED.GOV/IPEDS/TRENDGENERATOR/APP/ANSWER/13/205

[4]HTTPS://WWW.CONGRESS.GOV/CRS-PRODUCT/R45418

For the past several decades, textbook prices have sharply risen above the Consumer Price Index—the price of textbooks increased by an average of 6% each year, doubling every 11 years and textbook prices continued to rise roughly 3 times the rate of inflation. [5] This increase leaves many students at both public and independent institutions unable to afford the required learning materials for their courses, for which the College Board recommends budgeting nearly $1,520 annually for a public two-year institution and $1,290 for a public four-year institution (p.11).[6]

The Florida Virtual Campus (FLVC) Office of Distance Learning and Student Services conducted a large-scale study in 2022 examine textbook affordability and the associated implications.[7] Among the many key findings, they found that the cost of textbooks negatively impacts student access to required materials for successfully completing course learning outcomes. The study revealed that 53.5% of students did not purchase one or more of their required textbooks because of the cost. When access to required learning materials is financially unattainable, it is not surprising that students perform worse. In fact, 32.4% of students reported earning a poor grade in a course(s) in which they could not afford the textbook and 24.2% ended up dropping a course because of the cost of the required textbook.

As a band-aid solution to affordable access to learning materials, students have long relied on borrowing a copy of their required textbook or materials from a classmate or the campus library, options that have very quickly become obsolete as higher education continues to expand online. Students who cannot afford books either may risk their health and safety—11% of students surveyed by PIRG in 2020 reported skipping meals due to materials costs—or go without the required textbook and risk receiving poor grades.[8]

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[5] HANSON, MELANIE. AVERAGE COST OF COLLEGE TEXTBOOKS. EDUCATIONDATA.ORG, 2024-10-12. ACCESSED AT: HTTPS://EDUCATIONDATA.ORG/AVERAGE-COST-OF-COLLEGE-TEXTBOOKS

[6]MA, J., PENDER, M. & OSTER, M. (2024). TRENDS IN COLLEGE PRICING AND STUDENT AID 2024. THE COLLEGE BOARD. ACCESSED AT HTTPS://RESEARCH.COLLEGEBOARD.ORG/MEDIA/PDF/TRENDS-IN-COLLEGE-PRICING-AND-STUDENT-AID-2024-ADA.PDF

[7]FLORIDA VIRTUAL CAMPUS (2022). STUDENT TEXTBOOK AND COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY AND INFORMATION. ACCESSED AT HTTPS://DLSS.FLVC.ORG/RESEARCH

[8]NAGLE, C. & VITEZ, K. (2020). FIXING THE BROKEN TEXTBOOK MARKET: SECOND EDITION. U.S. PIRG EDUCATION FUND. ACCESSED AT HTTPS://PIRG.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2022/07/FIXING-THE-BROKEN-TEXTBOOK-MARKET_JUNE-2020_V2-5.PDF

How are they coping?

53% Did not purchase a required textbook

44% Take fewer courses

38% Did not register for a specific course

24% Drop a course

How are these choices impacting their learning?

32% Earn a poor grade

19% Fail a course

Are all required books used at some point in an academic career?

2.6 required textbooks

Wasted Student Money

average number purchased but NEVER used
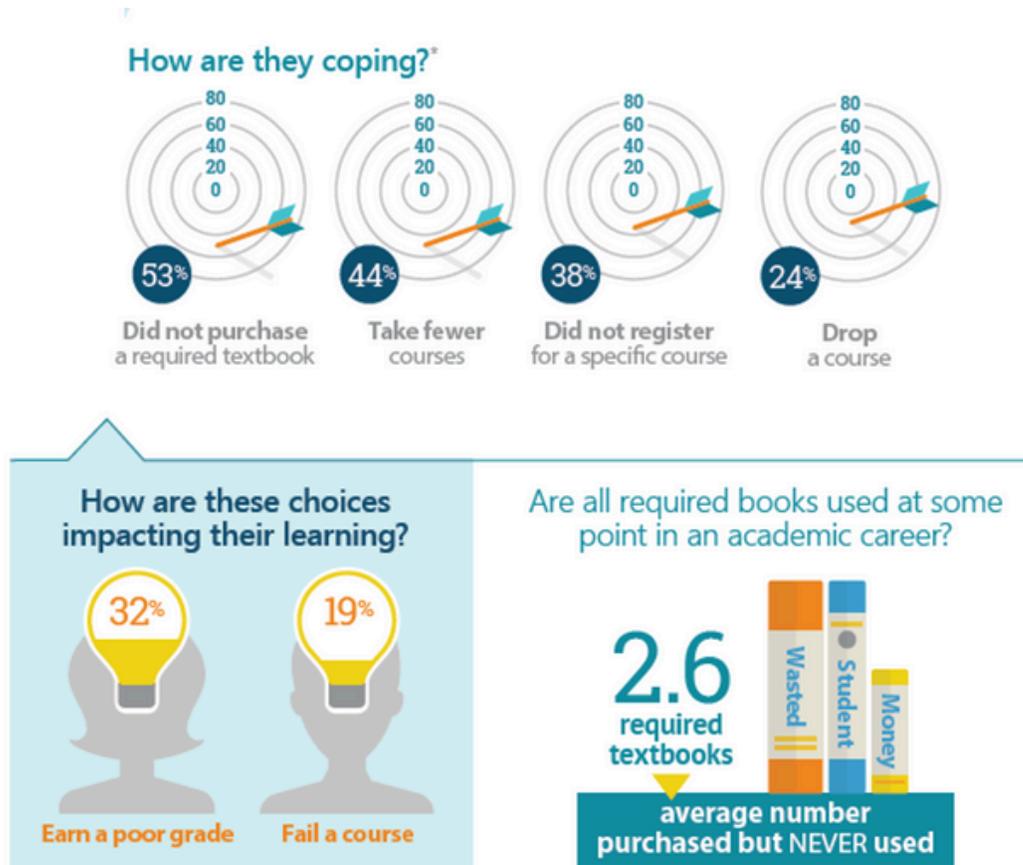
Data taken from 2022 FLVC Student Textbook & Course Materials Survey. Tallahassee, FL.

Publisher Monopolies and Automatic Textbook Billing

In recent years, commercial publishers have responded to rising student concerns about textbook prices by promoting a model they brand as "inclusive access"—a term that can mislead faculty and is often mistakenly associated with OER. In practice, this model is a form of automatic textbook billing: colleges and universities sign contracts that place the cost of digital course materials directly onto a student's tuition or fee bill. Although these programs promise first-day access, the materials are not free, and students are automatically charged unless they navigate a short, often confusing opt-out window at the start of the term. The similarity in marketing language obscures the fundamental difference between OER—free, openly licensed materials that students can keep permanently—and automatic textbook billing programs, which are tied to commercial licenses, include mandatory fees, and often remove student access to the materials once the term ends.

In June 2020, U.S. PIRG Education Fund reviewed 52 of these contracts across the country.[9] The report revealed that a significant number of the contracts "fail to deliver real savings for students, reduce faculty and student choice, and give even more power to a handful of monolithic publishing companies."

In a subsequent report released in 2024, U.S. PIRG examined 171 contracts at 92 two- and four-year public colleges and universities or consortiums of public high education institutions.[10] This analysis found that assessing the financial benefits of institutional contracts with publishers, bookstore operators, and digital content platforms is often complex, and in some cases, such agreements yield little measurable savings. Many publisher contracts link discounts to high student participation in automatic billing programs, which can limit institutions' ability to promote lower-cost textbook options or ensure transparent opt-out mechanisms. In addition, revenue-sharing and commission structures embedded in bookstore contracts, frequently tied to automatic billing sales, may create financial disincentives for institutions to invest in OER that could generate greater long-term savings for students and foster a more competitive course materials market.

Photo by Wander Fleur on Unsplash

[9]VITEZ, K. (2020). AUTOMATIC TEXTBOOKS BILLING: AN OFFER STUDENTS CAN'T REFUSE? U.S. PIRG EDUCATION FUND. ACCESSED AT HTTPS://PUBLICINTERESTNETWORK.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2022/07/USPIRG_TEXTBOOK-AUTOMATIC-BILLING_FEB2020_V3-2.PDF

[10]RIDLINGTON, E. & XIE, D. (2024). AUTOMATIC TEXTBOOK BILLING: LIMITED CHOICE, UNCERTAIN SAVINGS. 2024 STUDENT ORGANIZING, INC. ACCESSED AT HTTPS://PUBLICINTERESTNETWORK.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2024/06/AUTOMATIC-TEXTBOOK-BILLING-JUNE-2024-1.PDF

Additionally, few students actually pay the print retail price in the first place. According to the 2022 FLVC survey, 88% of students engage in some kind of cost avoidance strategy, such as buying books from another source or reserving a copy of the textbook at the library, so the savings purported by publishers in automatic textbook billing contracts are not actually savings given it is unlikely students would have spent that much money in the first place.[11]

Automatic textbook billing models also strip students of their rights under the "first sale doctrine" that so many have taken advantage of before the age of digital textbooks.[12] This doctrine, codified at 17 U.S.C. § 109, states that an individual who knowingly purchases a legal copy of a copyrighted work (in this case, a textbook) from the copyright holder, receives the right to sell it in the secondhand market. No longer are students able to recover a portion (no matter how small) of their course materials cost by re-selling.
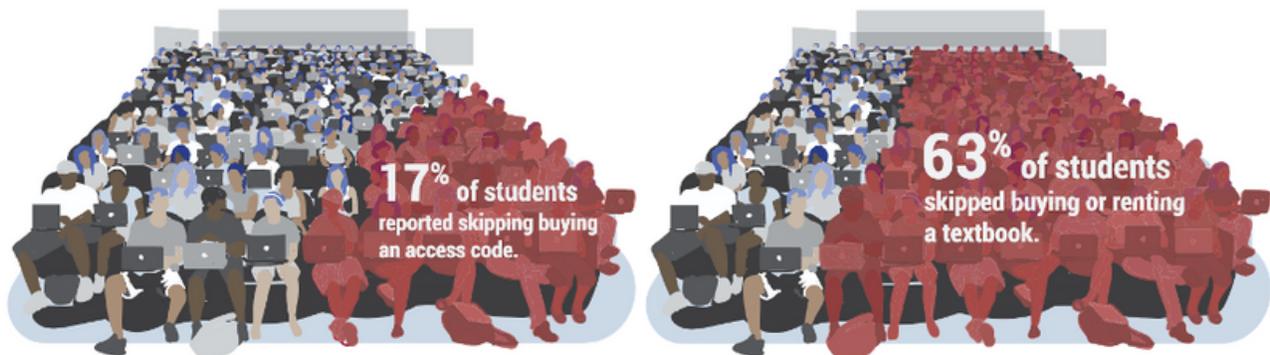
Images taken from 2022 FLVC Student Textbook & Course Materials Survey. Tallahassee, FL.

Finally, with inclusive access programs students lose access to these materials after the semester ends because of copyright restrictions and limited license agreements between the publisher and the institution. In contrast, open licenses allow students to retain learning materials in perpetuity, serving students and learners of all ages and stages.

[11]FLORIDA VIRTUAL CAMPUS (2022). STUDENT TEXTBOOK AND COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY AND INFORMATION. ACCESSED AT HTTPS://DLSS.FLVC.ORG/RESEARCH

[12]CRM 1500-1999. 1854. COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT -- FIRST SALE DOCTRINE. U.S. JUSTICE DEPARTMENT. ACCESSED AT HTTPS://WWW.JUSTICE.GOV/ARCHIVES/JM/CRIMINAL-RESOURCE-MANUAL-1854-COPYRIGHT-INFRINGEMENT-FIRST-SALE-DOCTRINE

This is important for students who may have to retake a course or who are enrolled in a sequence, for example, Biology I and Biology II, where having access to the previous semester's book is essential. The flexible licensing structures of OER can help students participate and complete coursework during times of personal, societal and systemic disruption.

OER Promotes Student Success

"Education is the key to advancing society's greatest goals, from building a strong economy to leading healthy lives. By increasing access to education and creating a platform for more effective teaching and learning, Open Education benefits us all." – SPARC Europe

Academic hardships aren't the only repercussions of expensive textbooks for our students. Many are forced to make tough decisions like skipping meals, falling behind on rent and other cost-of-living bills to afford their course materials. [13] In a related survey at a Hispanic-Serving Research 1 institution, 102 respondents (32.38%) reported that the cost of textbooks interfered with their ability to meet their basic needs, including some students who mentioned eating as little as possible to keep food costs down.[14]

The staggering and accelerating gap between state funding and tuition is putting an increased burden on students and their families to fund their education. It should be noted that textbooks are the third highest expense for students after tuition and room and board. For community college students, it is their second highest expense.[15]

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[13] FLORIDA VIRTUAL CAMPUS (2022). STUDENT TEXTBOOK AND COURSE MATERIALS SURVEY AND INFORMATION. ACCESSED AT HTTPS://DLSS.FLVC.ORG/RESEARCH

[14] LO, L.S., JORDAN, J. AND SURBAUGH, H. (2023) THE COST OF SUCCESS: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF TEXTBOOK COSTS AT A HISPANIC-SERVING R1 INSTITUTION. OPEN PRAXIS, 15(2), P. 134– 148.

[15]MA, J., PENDER, M. & OSTER, M. (2024). TRENDS IN COLLEGE PRICING AND STUDENT AID 2024. THE COLLEGE BOARD. ACCESSED AT HTTPS://RESEARCH.COLLEGEBOARD.ORG/MEDIA/PDF/TRENDS-IN-COLLEGE-PRICING-AND-STUDENT-AID-2024-ADA.PDF

While faculty have little to no control over tuition costs, they can exercise their academic freedom and elect to use OER to help alleviate the high cost of textbooks, which helps all students. A 2018 study by Jhangiani et al. found that cost-savings associated with OER do not compromise the quality of the resources or student performance, rather, students perform the same or better than those assigned a traditional, commercial textbook.[16]

Notable OER student success benefits include:
- **Academic performance:** A 2018 study by Colvard, et al. found that OER also benefits student success metrics like increasing grade point average and reducing drop, fail, and withdraw rates for all students, but particularly for those who are non-white and Pell-eligible.[17]

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[16] JHANGIANI, R. S., DASTUR, F. N., LE GRAND, R., & PENNER, K. (2018). AS GOOD OR BETTER THAN COMMERCIAL TEXTBOOKS: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND OUTCOMES FROM USING OPEN DIGITAL AND OPEN PRINT TEXTBOOKS. THE CANADIAN JOURNAL FOR THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING, 9 (1).

[17] COLVARD, N. B., WATSON, C. E., & PARK, H. (2018). THE IMPACT OF OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES ON VARIOUS STUDENT SUCCESS METRICS. INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION, 30(2), 262-276.

- **Time to completion:** Students make faster progress towards degrees than their peers who take no OER courses[18] and graduate at higher rates.[19]
- **Return on investment**: Students have lower drop rates and therefore a reduction in tuition refunds,[20] earn more credits over time,[21] and reinvest dollars saved back into their education.[22]
- **Enrollment and Retention**: 61% of students shared that textbook costs impact their selection of an institution to attend or return to.[23]

> **"[OER] goes beyond textbooks and traditional lectures—it's about empowering learners and making education more inclusive, accessible, and impactful" - Jennifer Croughwell, Eastern Connecticut State University student**

[18] GRIFFITHS, R., MISLEVY, J., & WANG, S. (2022). ENCOURAGING IMPACTS OF AN OPEN EDUCATION RESOURCE DEGREE INITIATIVE ON COLLEGE STUDENTS' PROGRESS TO DEGREE. HIGHER EDUCATION, 84(5), 1089-1106.

19] SOLODUKHIN, L. D., MACDONALD, M., FALKENSTERN, C., LANE, P., & JONES, K. (2025). NO-COST/LOW-COST AND OER IMPACT ON TIME-TO-CREDENTIAL: AN EVENT HISTORY MODELING STUDY. JOURNAL OF OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION, 3(1).

[20] HILTON III, J., FISCHER, L., WILEY, D., & WILLIAMS, L. (2016). MAINTAINING MOMENTUM TOWARD GRADUATION: OER AND THE COURSE THROUGHPUT RATE. INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF RESEARCH IN OPEN AND DISTRIBUTED LEARNING, 17(6), 18-27.

[21] GRIFFITHS, R., MISLEVY, J., & WANG, S. (2022). ENCOURAGING IMPACTS OF AN OPEN EDUCATION RESOURCE DEGREE INITIATIVE ON COLLEGE STUDENTS' PROGRESS TO DEGREE. HIGHER EDUCATION, 84(5), 1089-1106

[22] IKAHIHIFO, T. K., SPRING, K. J., ROSECRANS, J., & WATSON, J. (2017). ASSESSING THE SAVINGS FROM OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES ON STUDENT ACADEMIC GOALS. INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF RESEARCH IN OPEN AND DISTRIBUTED LEARNING, 18(7).

[23] SEAMAN, J. E., & SEAMAN, J. (2024). APPROACHING A NEW NORMAL? EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN US HIGHER EDUCATION, 2024. BAY VIEW ANALYTICS. ACCESSED AT: HTTPS:// WWW.BAYVIEWANALYTICS.COM/REPORTS/OER_2024_NEW_NORMAL.HTML

Regional OER Policy Highlights

Overview

While there is no one-size-fits-all policy, model or practice in open education, several northeast states engaged in this work have identified and demonstrated practical approaches to successfully advance initiatives at both the state and institution level. Barriers that inhibit OER adoption such as funding, faculty recognition in the tenure and promotion process, and practitioner support can all be addressed by well-developed, informed and flexible policies and programs. The following section describes observations of sound practice NEBHE has observed. These include regional exemplars addressing several approaches to these barriers that advance OER adoption and awareness and support of Open Education.

Since 2020, states across the northeast have continued to advance OER and open education practices, with several establishing new coordinating bodies, reinstating faculty grant funding, and launching statewide repositories and discussion networks. While the policy landscape remains varied, the region has seen increasing collaboration among state agencies, public systems, and independent institutions. Many early initiatives have continued to mature, such as New Hampshire's Open Education Consortium, Massachusetts' statewide OER Advisory Council, and Connecticut's OER Coordinating Council, while new efforts have emerged in areas including statewide OER repositories, model policies, and expanded professional development opportunities. This update integrates these developments into each thematic section below, highlighting both enduring strategies and new opportunities that reflect the Northeast's evolving policy priorities, funding structures, and infrastructure to support OER.

1. Empowering diverse and representative leadership

When considering what successful policies look like that advance the adoption and use of OER, it is essential to identify a broad spectrum of key in-state, system or campus leadership. One of the main barriers that grassroots practitioners, senior leaders and legislators encounter is a lack of means to communicate with one another about how to

effectively, logistically and sustainably move this work forward. Since 2020, statewide leadership structures in the Northeast have expanded beyond early advisory councils and steering committees. Many states have built ongoing networks, both formal and informal, that connect faculty, librarians, system leaders, and state agencies. While not every state has a legislated OER body, nearly all have established some type of cross-institutional leadership mechanism that supports alignment, resource sharing, and professional development.

> **"Collaborating with faculty on OER adoption has been tremendously fulfilling, and I'm proud to have been involved in such initiatives like breaking down barriers of affordability and accessibility of textbooks."**
> **- Wei Cen, Director of Campus Library Services, CT State Middlesex**

Examples of Statewide committees include:

The Massachusetts Department of Education OER Advisory Council, whose membership comprises a broad representation of librarians, instructional designers, administrators, faculty and students, has been effective in fostering collaboration across the state and most importantly, bringing several different perspectives to the table in advising the MA Department of Higher Education of recommended best practices like steering clear of endorsing programs and practices that on the surface look good but are actually harmful to students, like automatic textbook billing. The advisory council has also identified areas inhibiting the scaling of OER adoption at public institutions in the state and have formed committees to directly address and present solutions for these and other issues. Large committees are often unwieldy, but this council seems to have found a balance that offers broad representation without compromising size.

Connecticut offers one of the most comprehensive statewide leadership structures for OER in the Northeast through its statutorily established OER Coordinating Council. Created under Public Act 19-117, the Council includes faculty, librarians, instructional designers, administrators, and students from public, private, and independent colleges, ensuring broad representation across institutional types and sectors. In addition to its diverse membership, the Council collaborates closely with statewide partners such as the Council of Connecticut Academic Library Directors, the Connecticut Commission for

Photo by Vitaly Gariev on Unsplash

Educational Technology, and the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) OER Advisory Council. This interconnected leadership structure provides consistency, fosters cross-institutional alignment, and ensures that OER policy recommendations reflect the needs and experiences of institutions with varying capacities. Few states in the region have built a standing, cross-sector leadership body with comparable breadth of expertise and statutory stability.

Rhode Island's Higher Education Library Information Network (HELIN) and Connecticut's OER Coordinating Council each have member representation from both public and private institutions, which is particularly important because independent institutions make up about 42% of New England's colleges and universities and a much higher share of undergraduates enroll at 4-year independent institutions in New England than across the nation, yet they have traditionally been left out of opportunities to contribute their voice and experiences in state initiatives. Often, the way OER is marketed and supported at public and private institutions can vary greatly, and having committees that broadly represent the different needs, challenges and opportunities from each sector has

significant benefits to both institution-types. More cross-pollination between public and private institutions increases the availability and quality of OER across multiple disciplines and lessons learned can be shared, and challenges tackled collectively.

Affordable Learning Pennsylvania (ALPA) represents a statewide community of practice that brings together academic libraries, faculty, and higher education partners in Pennsylvania to advance textbook affordability and open education through education, collaboration, and advocacy. ALPA includes a broad coalition of over 60 campus partners representing a diverse mix of public universities, state-related universities, independent colleges, community colleges, and research institutions across the Commonwealth. This model illustrates how library-led statewide networks can play a central convening role in cross-institutional OER leadership outside formal legislative structures.

New Hampshire now has one of the most sustained statewide leadership structures in the region through the New Hampshire Open Education Consortium. Created by the University System of New Hampshire and the Community College System of New Hampshire, the consortium serves as a coordinating entity for professional development, shared resources, and statewide strategy. Plymouth State University and the Community College System continue to lead institutional implementation and cross-system alignment, providing a model for a collaborative statewide network without legislation.

In New Jersey, the Open Textbook Collaborative (OTC), administered by Middlesex College and supported by a multi-year federal Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant, established a statewide leadership structure for open education despite its project end date in 2023. The consortium included 17 community colleges and one four-year institution, cross-institution partnerships with libraries, and an open publishing module built into the statewide repository (OpenNJ). While the formal grant cycle has concluded, the infrastructure and leadership networks seeded by the OTC continue to inform open education practices in New Jersey.

The City University of New York (CUNY) has built a broad, system-wide OER infrastructure that supports campus-level leadership and collaboration across its 25 colleges. Through the Office of Library Services and partnerships with campus librarians and faculty, CUNY coordinates OER and zero textbook cost (ZTC) efforts, enabling cross-campus planning and shared resource development that reflect the diversity of institutional contexts.

While legislation and state funding can certainly help advance OER initiatives, it's not always required to successfully get efforts off the ground. The investment and attention of a key leader on a campus can significantly impact the momentum and faculty buy-in of OER adoption. In Maine, statewide infrastructure for postsecondary OER is still emerging, but librarians have established a regular cross-institutional OER discussion group that meets three times each semester. This group, initiated by state librarians, functions as a de facto statewide network by supporting collaboration, sharing practices, and maintaining momentum even without formal legislative or system-level coordination. Maine has also continued to build OER leadership in the K–12 space through MOOSE—the Maine Online Open-Source Education platform, which provides free resources and has strengthened the state's overall capacity and familiarity with open practices.

In Vermont, the Vermont Higher Education Council continues to provide cross-sector coordination among public, private, and proprietary institutions. While the state does not have a legislated OER council, the Agency of Education previously partnered with OER Commons (2016) to build statewide K–12 OER infrastructure, and Vermont maintains a "VT Open" discussion group on OER Commons. These communities function as statewide hubs for educators engaged in OER discovery, remixing, and sharing.

Image from CT OER Advisory Council 2024 Legislative Report

Statewide "challenges" issued by governors, legislators, or state agencies, rather than formal legislative mandates, can also catalyze meaningful progress in open education. A notable example was the 2016 Rhode Island Open Textbook Initiative, in which the Governor challenged all public and private higher education institutions to collectively save students $5 million over five years through the adoption of openly licensed textbooks. Although the initiative itself has concluded, it demonstrated how a high-visibility challenge can motivate institutions to take ownership of OER implementation in ways that align with their campus cultures, strengths, and priorities.

These less formal approaches give institutions greater flexibility and autonomy, while still generating momentum and accountability. They also require campuses to build internal structures—such as cross-functional teams to collect data on enrollment, cost savings, course redesign, and faculty participation—to measure impact and sustain progress beyond the initial challenge.

2. Inclusive and sustainable institutional policy making

Developing institutional policies that encourage the adoption and creation of OER requires intentional support for the faculty and staff who make this work possible. While OER remove financial barriers for students, they require significant time and expertise to develop, adapt, and maintain; work that needs to be recognized and rewarded. Yet OER contributions are not consistently valued within traditional academic structures, particularly in tenure, promotion, and reappointment processes. Part-time faculty, faculty of color, and others with limited access to professional development or compensated opportunities often face additional barriers.

Institutions are increasingly addressing these gaps by creating policies that provide clear recognition for OER work, compensate for time equitably, and ensure that all faculty have access to meaningful professional development. The Driving OER Sustainability for Student Success (DOERS) Collaborative has contributed important tools to these efforts, including its OER Contributions Matrix and accompanying case studies, that help institutions map OER activities to teaching, research, and service. These resources give campuses adaptable language and evidence-based frameworks to elevate OER within faculty evaluation processes and to build sustainable, equitable support for open education. The following state examples illustrate how institutions across the Northeast are putting these principles into practice through policies that more effectively support and recognize faculty engagement in OER.

At Rhode Island College (RIC), OER efforts have been supported by the institution's American Federation of Teachers (AFT) union chapter, whose engagement has played an important role in building faculty confidence and recognition for open practices. The AFT adopted a national resolution supporting open textbooks in 2009, and this statement of support was shared with the president of the RIC AFT chapter when the Rhode Island Open Textbook Initiative began. This helped establish early alignment between statewide affordability goals and faculty governance structures, reinforcing that OER adoption was consistent with union values around academic freedom, student affordability, and instructional quality.

Institutions participating in the New Hampshire Open Education Consortium have increasingly aligned their OER policies and mini-grant programs around shared definitions, equitable eligibility, and common reporting expectations. Both the University System of New Hampshire and the Community College System of New Hampshire support inclusive grant structures that provide equal access to full- and part-time faculty, along with professional development opportunities to build capacity for creation and adaptation. These coordinated efforts help sustain OER work regardless of changes in local leadership or budget cycles.

Photo by Vitaly Gariev on Unsplash

Massachusetts provides a strong example of how coordinated funding and structured recognition can support faculty labor and expand high-quality OER creation. A consortium of three state universities and three community colleges recently secured a $1.3 million, three-year federal Open Textbook Pilot grant to fund faculty stipends, professional development, and wraparound supports for the creation and adaptation of 27 inclusive, culturally relevant, accessible textbooks, 12 of which are STEM-focused. This work demonstrates how compensation and structured support enable faculty to take on the intensive labor of OER creation. In addition to federal and state funding, Massachusetts has also invested in formal recognition programs through the statewide OER Advisory Council, which has awarded Gold, Silver, and Bronze Faculty OER Awards annually for the past three years. These awards include both a certificate and a monetary honorarium, acknowledging the substantial time faculty devote to OER work and encouraging broader participation across campuses.

Connecticut has emerged as a regional leader in sustainable OER policy development through its statewide Model OER Policy, created by legislative mandate and recommended for adoption across all higher education institutions in the state. The policy provides clear definitions of OER and NoLo (no or low cost) course materials, establishes expectations for course materials transparency within student information systems (course marking), and outlines data collection requirements for measuring OER use, persistence, and academic performance. The Model Policy also includes guidance for bookstore practices, registrar workflows, and faculty governance bodies, reflecting a holistic understanding of what is required to institutionalize OER at scale.

3. Supporting student voice and interest

OER help break down existing barriers to student access to essential educational resources that support their learning and success. Incorporating their voice and participation is a key consideration when crafting policies and strategies for advancing the adoption of OER.

Connecticut's statewide OER work places strong emphasis on elevating student voice, both through formal representation and through documented student experiences. Student members participate directly in the OER Coordinating Council, ensuring that lived experiences inform statewide recommendations, policy development, and annual reporting.

The Council's 2024 legislative report[24] includes compelling student testimonials describing how OER alleviated financial stress, prevented delays in course participation, and removed barriers to enrollment. These firsthand accounts, such as students reporting falling behind because they could not afford textbooks until weeks into the semester, highlight the urgency of continued investment in OER as an equity strategy. Connecticut's OER Summits also frequently spotlight student speakers, reinforcing the central role of learners in shaping statewide affordability and access initiatives.

Photo by Brooke Cagle on Unsplash

[24] CONNECTICUT OPEN EDUCATION RESOURCES COORDINATING COUNCIL (2025). 2024 LEGISLATIVE REPORT. ACCESSED AT HTTPS://DRIVE.GOOGLE.COM/FILE/D/1PXKLA7-E0C5P5L3EKHOIE1-IYGHCFPCU/VIEW

In 2017, the University of Rhode Island developed a set of videos to share with its faculty to raise awareness of the need for more affordable learning materials. The newest Bay View Analytics report (2025)[25] confirms that faculty continue to play the central role in determining course materials. In the survey, 75% of faculty reported requiring a textbook for their largest course, and comments throughout the report reinforce that faculty generally select the materials themselves, evaluating cost, accuracy, and ancillary resources. Faculty also consistently cited affordability as a major factor in their decision-making, with the "cost to students" category receiving the lowest satisfaction scores among all curriculum metrics: 33% of faculty gave student costs an F grade. These findings reinforce what earlier studies showed: decisions about required materials remain primarily faculty-driven, and student affordability concerns continue to influence faculty choices. Video campaigns or other strategies that highlight student experiences can therefore be powerful and authentic tools for encouraging faculty engagement with OER adoption.

The current Massachusetts OER Advisory Council was born out of the statewide Student Advisory Council (SAC) in April 2018, when the student organization presented a resolution to the state Board of Higher Education asking for recognition of OER as a viable means to save students money on textbooks. SAC then called on the State Department of Higher Education to explore and identify opportunities for implementing OER on a broader scale. The Massachusetts Student Advisory Council (SAC) remains active in advocating for textbook affordability and OER expansion and continues to hold voting seats on the statewide OER Advisory Council. These student representatives contribute directly to statewide recommendations, campaign alongside Student PIRGs, and advise the Department of Higher Education on priorities such as clearer textbook labeling, expanded Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) pathways, and the development of OER in high-enrollment courses.

In partnership with the Pennsylvania Academic Library Consortium (PALCI) and Bay View Analytics, Affordable Learning PA has supported statewide surveys of course material affordability, highlighting student concerns about material costs and their academic impacts, and underscoring the importance of open education strategies for student spell

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[25] SEAMAN, J.E. & SEAMAN, J. (2025). DEEPLY DIGITAL: EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION, 2025. BAYVIEW ANALYTICS. ACCESSED AT HTTPS://WWW.BAYVIEWANALYTICS.COM/REPORTS/DEEPLYDIGITAL2025.PDF

out or define success. This work provides localized evidence that, like in other states, student cost concerns in Pennsylvania influence academic decisions and outcomes.

Having students as peers and equals on state committees allows for powerful collaborations that can inspire and cultivate real-time and direct benefits for students who are struggling with the out-of-pocket costs of learning materials. Several institutions in the Northeast have active Student PIRG hubs including University of Massachusetts Lowell, University of Connecticut, and Rutgers University. OER efforts exist to fulfill student access needs, which are ever-changing: not including them in these conversations would be contradictory and possibly harmful.

4. Sustainable funding & return on investments

State-level support for OER efforts which encourage initial steps and actions, no matter how small, can have a significant impact on return on investment with minimal but sustained funding. In the Northeast, the best success is seen where state support is more inclusive in terms of who can participate in resource allocation and training, further bridging the gap between public and private institutions. Small investments can lead to substantial savings for students; however, states, systems, and institutions should move away from a project mindset and toward making these investments part of a larger cultural shift that normalizes supporting faculty adoption and creation of OER.

> **"Since I began using OER in the fall of 2018, my students have collectively saved more than $100,000." - Dr. Nicolas Simon, Associate Professor of Sociology, Eastern Connecticut State University**

Since 2020, the Northeast has continued to see strong returns on even modest state and system-level investments in OER. Many states have shifted from short-term pilot funding toward more consistent, predictable grant programs, professional development support, and shared infrastructure such as repositories and statewide training. Although funding is uneven across the region, the most successful states have combined small financial incentives with stable leadership structures, such as statewide councils or cross-system networks, to ensure that return on investment extends beyond student cost savings to include improved pedagogy, expanded access, and institutional capacity-building.

Although budgets are tight, significant savings can still be observed in New England states like Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island, where small amounts of seed money have been granted to public institutions in a variety of ways to support faculty adoption and creation of OER in the curriculum.

OER saves students and institutions money.
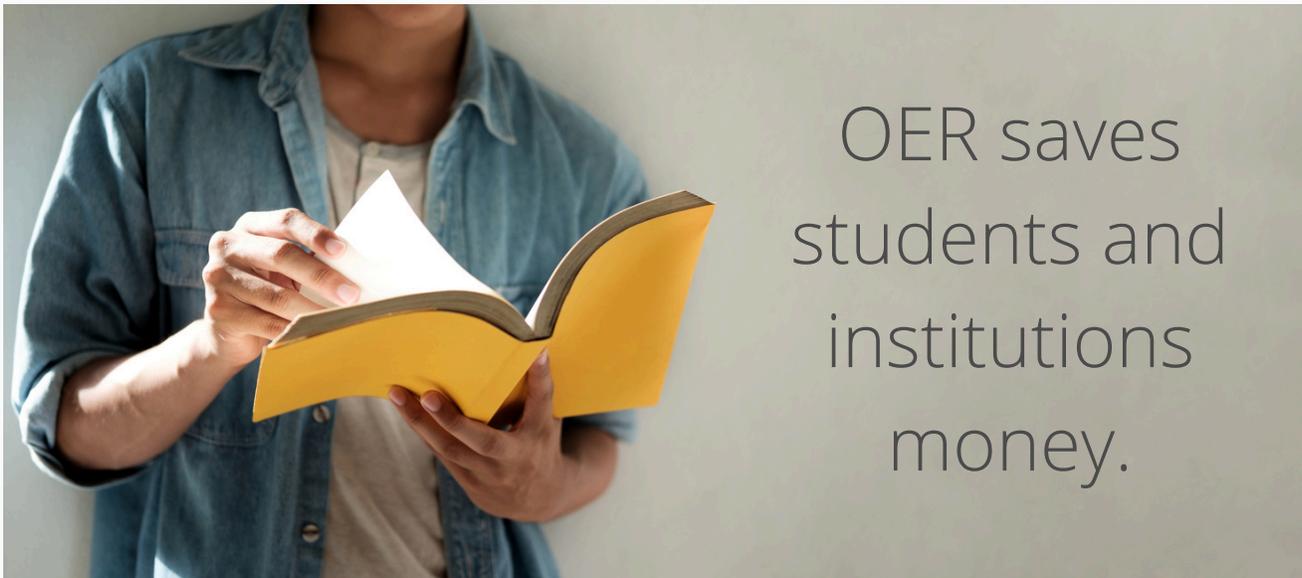
In 2023-2024 academic year, the OER Advisory Council in Massachusetts collected and reported OER Key Performance Indicators. They found that students had saved $21.4 million (up from $7.6 million in AY2022) using no and low-cost textbooks based on 20% course/section utilization (up 33% from 15% in AY2023). This represents a return on investment of over $58:1. That is, every public dollar spent resulted in $58.83 in savings over a three-year period. Finally, DFW (grades D, F and withdraw) rates were lower for no-cost than for low-cost or traditional textbooks across most demographics including race, gender, ethnicity and Pell eligibility. OER is not only saving students money but also improving student success.[26]

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[26] MASSACHUSETTS OER ADVISORY COUNCIL (2025). OER KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: FY24. ACCESSED AT HTTPS://WWW.MASS.EDU/STRATEGIC/DOCUMENTS/OER%20KEYPERFORMIND-AY24.PDF

> **"While we always talk about how OER increases affordability, we are happy to report that our FY24 OER Key Performance Indicators noted that students using no cost textbooks also had a DFW rate almost 20% lower than those using traditional textbooks." – Massachusetts OER Advisory Council**

The University System of New Hampshire has supported approximately 45 faculty per year for multiple years, offering small stipends and coordinated support through the New Hampshire Open Education Consortium. This ongoing commitment has produced measurable student savings and strengthened institutional readiness for larger-scale OER initiatives across both the university and community college systems. At Plymouth State University (PSU) in New Hampshire, student voice is intentionally woven into open education efforts through the university's CoLab initiative, which facilitates ongoing student–faculty partnerships around OER. PSU's "Share & Save Through Open Education" resources highlight how students collaborate directly with faculty to identify, adapt, and even create open materials, positioning students as contributors to the curriculum rather than passive recipients. These partnerships give students meaningful influence over course content, reduce financial barriers, and provide experiential learning in knowledge creation and digital scholarship.

Connecticut's OER grant program provides one of the clearest illustrations in the region of the high return on modest, sustained investments. Between 2020 and 2024, the state invested $229,483 in OER grants and infrastructure, generating more than $1.2 million in student savings and supporting nearly 10,000 students across 373 redesigned course sections at 28 institutions. This represents a 5.23:1 return on investment.[27 The program's five grant cycles funded 121 awards and supported 161 faculty, who collectively expanded OER use across multiple disciplines and modalities. Although statewide funding was eliminated for FY24 and FY25, the state reinstated $50,000 annually for FY26 and FY27, demonstrating recognition of the program's effectiveness even in austere budgeting seasons.

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[27] CONNECTICUT OPEN EDUCATION RESOURCES COORDINATING COUNCIL (2025). 2024 LEGISLATIVE REPORT. ACCESSED AT HTTPS://DRIVE.GOOGLE.COM/FILE/D/1PXKLA7-E0C5P5L3EKHOIE1-IYGHCFPCU/VIEW

Rhode Island's statewide OER activity has shifted from the earlier Open Textbook Initiative toward a more integrated approach under the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner, aligning affordability efforts with broader equity and workforce goals. While there is currently no dedicated state budget line for OER grants, the statewide consortium continues to support institutional OER efforts through membership in the Open Education Network.

New York continues to invest significant resources in both the State University of New York (SUNY) and the City University of New York (CUNY), with a budget line item of $4 million per year for the past eight years. This investment led to significant numbers of courses being redesigned to no- or low-cost materials. From 2017 through Fall 2024, SUNY reported helping students and families save more than $105.7 million across the SUNY system.

5. Professional Development

Professional development has become one of the most consistently funded and collaboratively coordinated aspects of OER work across the Northeast. States and systems increasingly recognize that sustainable OER adoption depends on building faculty and staff capacity in areas such as copyright and licensing, accessibility, course redesign, open pedagogy, and digital publishing. Even where direct faculty grant funding has diminished, professional development networks, statewide summits, and repository training have continued to strengthen the region's infrastructure for open education.

Photo by Sincerely Media on Unsplash

Connecticut has significantly expanded statewide professional development opportunities through its OER Coordinating Council, including hosting an annual Connecticut OER Summit during Open Education Week. These events provide faculty, librarians, instructional designers, and administrators with training in licensing, accessibility, inclusive pedagogical design, and the use of Go Open Connecticut. The Council's Model OER policy also includes recommended structures for institutional professional development, illustrating how statewide coordination can help campuses provide consistent training even with varying levels of local resources.

Affordable Learning PA offers an "Open Champions Course," a structured professional development experience designed to help faculty, librarians, and staff deepen their understanding of open education practices and lead affordability initiatives on their campuses. Offered each summer, the course combines self-paced learning with collaborative activities to equip participants with practical skills in OER adoption, creation, and advocacy, reinforcing statewide capacity for sustainable open education implementation. Affordable Learning PA also hosts an annual ALPA Summit that brings together librarians, faculty, instructional designers, and other practitioners from across Pennsylvania for presentations, panels, and collaborative sessions focused on building networks, sharing OER practices, and strengthening statewide affordability efforts.

In Maine, the statewide librarian-led OER discussion group acts as a professional development hub for librarians and faculty across the state. These meetings, held three times per semester, cover topics such as Creative Commons licensing, resource discovery, accessibility considerations, and collaborative course redesign strategies. This model has proven particularly valuable for small colleges and campuses in rural areas where local PD resources may be limited.

Massachusetts continues to invest in statewide PD through the Department of Higher Education, supporting Train-the-Trainer programs, Open Textbook Library workshops, and faculty development tied to the Commonwealth's Innovation Fund. In AY2024, campuses reported 110 professional development opportunities, totaling 317 hours of training for faculty and staff, with 546 faculty participating. Professional development topics included open pedagogy,

accessibility, content creation, licensing, and OER integration into curriculum and learning design. The statewide OER Advisory Council also facilitates shared PD resources across institutions, enabling faculty and librarians to connect with each other, participate in national networks such as the Open Education Network, and access licensing, accessibility, and instructional design training regardless of institutional size.

Regional collaboration also strengthens professional learning across New England. Each year, the practitioner-led Northeast OER Summit, organized by a steering committee of faculty, librarians, and instructional designers from institutions across the region, offers workshops, presentations, and shared learning on OER, open pedagogy, and equitable course design. By convening practitioners from multiple states each year, the Summit creates a shared regional learning space that expands professional capacity, accelerates the spread of effective practices, and fosters cross-state collaboration that complements individual states' initiatives.

Summary

Open education continues to offer powerful pathways for engaged, learner-centered teaching and for pedagogical approaches that prioritize equity, accessibility, and student agency. As institutions and states across the Northeast build on more than a decade of OER work, they are increasingly embedding Universal Design for Learning principles, open pedagogy, and culturally sustaining practices into course design, and expanding opportunities for students to participate as creators, collaborators, and contributors to shared knowledge.

Sustained progress depends on policies and practices that make it possible for students to access their materials freely and perpetually, and for faculty and staff to receive the time, resources, and recognition necessary to adopt, adapt, and create OER. The region's continued investments in strengthened statewide councils, cross-system networks, shared repositories, recurring grant programs, and coordinated professional development demonstrate significant returns for both faculty and students.

Importantly, the Northeast continues to benefit from diverse leadership structures that bring together public and private institutions, faculty and librarians, administrators and state agencies, and increasingly, students whose lived experiences shape more responsive and inclusive policies. As states discourage automatic textbook billing models and instead reward transparent, student-centered approaches, cross-sector collaboration remains essential. The more coordinated the region becomes in building policies that value openness, the more capacity it will have to deliver high-quality, affordable learning materials and to ensure equitable access for all learners across their educational journeys.