

# Flood of Online Learning Resources Overwhelms Teachers

[Sarah Schwartz](#)



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Teachers are overwhelmed by the flood of online educational resources on social media since schools across the country began a rapid and unexpected transition to remote learning in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Professional organizations, school districts, and individual teachers have started running lists of materials and programs. Many curriculum companies have made portions of their offerings free for the next few months, while nonprofit organizations like the Smithsonian Institution have posted free resources specifically for educators. Several states, including California, have also developed curated collections of free materials as part

of their remote learning guidance for districts.

For teachers, sifting through the outpouring of lessons, videos, simulations, and activities can feel like trying to drink from a firehose.

"Anyone else feeling a bit overwhelmed with all of the resources shared?" [asked one teacher on Twitter](#) last week. "It is an abundance of awesome for sure but not quite sure how to navigate it."

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Many experts say that even while teachers will have to transition to new platforms and ways of interacting with students, now isn't the best time to switch over to a new curriculum or set of materials.

The school year has been disrupted on an unprecedented scale. "There is a bit of a risk here in fragmentation," said Amy Briggs, the president of Student Achievement Partners.

"Ensuring continuity and coherence is essential."

## **Leverage What Is Already Adopted**

While some teachers have guidance from their principals or administrators on what to use, others are cobbling together an online classroom themselves, said Briggs.

"I've talked to people who have seen nothing from their district. I've talked to parents whose kids are already in day two of daylong Google classroom," she said. "I think it's a real range right now."

For teachers who are pulling together their own online materials, it can be

unclear where to start. How much of their curriculum should they plan to use? And if they're looking for new resources designed for online learning, how do they evaluate the quality?

If schools already have a full-year curriculum sequence in place, that can be the starting point for teachers, said Eric Hirsch, the executive director of EdReports, a nonprofit curriculum reviewer.

"Leverage what your district has adopted that's already online and available to you," added Briggs. A lot of high-quality curricula have online resources teachers can access, she said.

These recommendations are also reflected in some of the plans that states and large districts have already put together for online learning in the months ahead.

In Kansas, where Gov. Laura Kelly has ordered all school buildings to remain closed through the end of the academic year, the state's learning plan for the rest of the semester emphasizes continuity. One of the guiding principles is to "encourage use of materials, resources, and platforms that are already in use."

This advice also surfaces in plans for general e-learning that some states were already using before COVID-19 in the event of snow days or other short, unexpected school disruptions. In Indiana, for example, instruction during e-learning days is expected to cover the same content that students would have learned if they were in the classroom.

Michael Quist, a high school chemistry and Spanish teacher in Eminence, Ky., tried to keep his students engaged in the same readings that they were doing in Spanish class when they switched over to online learning last week.

He read aloud from the short novel they were studying in class, and posted the video recordings to Flipgrid, a platform that his students were already familiar with. "I think that was the key for making this work. I wasn't doing anything unusual, weird, unexpected," Quist said.

Still, schools should be prepared to pare back their expectations of what teachers and students can get done during this time, said Trena Wilkerson, the president-elect of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

"What are the key things?" Wilkerson said. "We're not going to be able to do everything we had planned for the academic year."

## **'Too Many New Resources'**

For many teachers, though, using new resources—and new platforms—will be inevitable. Kaitlyn Barker, a 10th grade English/language arts teacher at Avon Community School Corporation in central Indiana, said she's trying to introduce them slowly.

"I don't want to throw too many new resources at them at once," she said. She's started with some videoconferencing, so that she can have class discussions with her students about the book they're reading.

There are sources that teachers can turn to for evaluating materials and online curricula. Briggs' recommended the EQUiP rubric, designed to evaluate ELA and math lessons against the Common Core State Standards.

And while Hirsch emphasized that EdReports only reviews full-year curricula, its reviews include information about specific pieces of curricula—for instance, which lessons or units are especially strong on application or fluency, he said.

Educators should be working toward the same standards that they were before schools shut down their physical locations, but ultimately, materials are just one piece of the puzzle, Hirsch said. "There's the curriculum and the content, and then there's the instruction around it," he said.

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