

About the Survey

Educators want an independent “snapshot” of open source in K–12. Why do schools use open source, or why not? How effective is it? What do experienced users recommend?

Our survey explores and reports on these questions. Educators listen to each other, so we invite you to talk. We’re especially interested in school or districtwide deployment.

If you’re using open source software in K–12, please take our survey:

www.netc.org/surveys/oss/oss.asp

Next: Open Courseware

Open publishing is similar to open source, except the issue is content instead of software. We’re investigating open publishing and the implications for schools. Universities like MIT are sharing their curriculum for free. Should K–12 schools join this open courseware movement?

Are you using open courseware?
Please contact us: oss.survey@nwrel.org

About Open Options

Open Options is an independent research project serving K–12 educators. We’re not advocating for open source software. *Our goal is to provide pragmatic information and decisionmaking tools.* We want to honor educators’ efforts to meet their stakeholders’ needs—with or without open source. We don’t try to duplicate other resources for technical implementation.

NETC at NWREL

The Northwest Educational Technology Consortium (NETC) is a federally funded center at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), a private, nonprofit institution. We are not affiliated with any company or open source project.



www.netc.org



www.nwrel.org

Northwest Educational Technology Consortium
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 S.W. Main St., Ste. 500
Portland, OR 97204
1-800-211-9435

Members of the Northwest Educational Technology Consortium (NETC) include the State Departments of Education in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington, and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon.

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Making Decisions
About Open Source
Software for K–12

BACKGROUND

What is open source software?

PROS & CONS

Advantages and controversy

K–12 EXAMPLES

What are educators using?

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Educational
Technology
Consortium



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Educational
Laboratory

About the Web Site

www.netc.org/openoptions

Open Options is designed to help educators understand the implications of open source software. Our site provides background and analysis based on the advice and experience of current K–12 users. We also offer criteria for deciding whether open source can meet your educational needs.

We welcome your suggestions for the site. Here's an overview of what you'll find.

BACKGROUND

[What is open source software?](#)

We start with some background and history. We define *open source software* as “any computer program with accessible source code. Anyone is legally and technically able to change and/or redistribute the software for free.”

- ▢ What does “open” mean?
- ▢ What does “free” really mean?
- ▢ What are the implications of closed and open software?

PROS & CONS

[Advantages and controversy](#)

Open source may provide some advantages other software doesn't. For example, it's free and modular. At the same time, the software may be more technically challenging and migration may be complicated. We explain the controversy, and what it really means to schools.

- ▢ Is the total cost of ownership really lower?
- ▢ Is it mature enough for schools?

K-12 EXAMPLES

[What are educators using?](#)

Using our survey results and detailed interviews, we provide examples of teachers and schools using open source. We examine the motivations and decisionmaking of current users, and share the lessons they have learned.

- ▢ Where can you use open source?
- ▢ Why do educators choose open source?

DECISIONS

[Is it right for you?](#)

Can it save money? Close digital divides? Support effective schools? Every school or district is unique. Decisionmakers and their stakeholders should carefully weigh all the advantages and disadvantages based on where they want to spend time and money.

- ▢ Consider your needs and goals
- ▢ Look for “low threshold” opportunities

If you choose open source, we offer some advice on joining the open source community. We also suggest how you should think about the future.

Open source is more than Linux

Linux is an open source operating system with hundreds of quality programs. There are also many open source programs for Microsoft Windows or Apple Macintosh. Here are some examples of open source in K–12.

Purpose

Web browser
Office suite
Image editor
Web server

Software

Mozilla
OpenOffice.org
The GIMP
Apache