Digital Content Primer

Schools are transitioning to digital learning and web based resources. Copyright laws, Digital Rights, state & district content rules and standards must be observed when choosing content for your students. Below is a quick primer on digital learning materials for caching with a focus on Open Educational Resources (OER). URcast makes no recommendation or endorsement of any digital learning resource(s).

WHAT IS OER?
Many districts are now recognizing the value of Open Educational Resources (OER). OER is defined as any type of educational materials that are in the public domain or introduced with an open license. The nature of these open materials means that anyone can legally and freely copy, use, adapt and re-share them. OER may include everything from a single video or lesson plan to a complete online course or curriculum and also include the software platforms needed to create, change, and share the materials. But some OER have conditions, i.e. under a video under a Creative Commons designation may be used but not altered or repurposed.

WHY OER?
To provide students with more current and dynamic learning resources for today's digital environment. OER also reduce or eliminates content material costs such as textbooks. Users have downloaded some or all of EngageNY, NY state's open library of materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards, more than 50 million times.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OER and DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS:
Teachers using digital subscription materials may not be able to download and share this content as it violates the publisher's digital rights or copyrights. But many publishers will allow downloading if there is a school or districtwide subscription purchase.

HOW IS OER USED?
Many districts use open materials as formal or ad hoc supplements to an existing curriculum or program. For example, teachers may use an open lesson plan to add an enrichment activity for students or to provide additional practice for students struggling with a concept. A teacher with a limited science lab might use open videos to craft demonstrations of classic experiments.

Some schools and districts have curated collections of open materials into a single digital library to make it easier for teachers to find specific lesson plans or materials for their grade level and subject. And some districts, i.e. Grandview, Wash., are moving away from traditional textbooks entirely in some subjects and instead creating digital curricula made up only of open resources. These can be updated as new materials come in, but they require commitment to review and catalog materials for teachers.