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Can Good Curriculum Transcend the Charter-District Divide?

Claire Kaplan / March 21, 2019



Several years ago, a few charter management organizations (CMOs) with high-performing schools announced that they would share their curricula and other educational resources with schools and districts across the country.

These announcements prompted some excitement, but also raised some important questions: could these open source curriculum websites, launched by charter organizations, gain widespread traction beyond charter schools? And how would they stack up against existing published curricula?

A few years into this experiment, we are starting to see that teachers across school types will embrace quality content regardless of its origin—and that a home-grown school curriculum can compete with big publishers when it comes to quality indicators.

Indeed, the curriculum published by charter organizations are beginning to see widespread adoption from teachers outside of their direct networks—via organic means such as Google searches—and is gaining high-regard for its rigor and alignment to standards.

One such example of this trend is the recent growth of our own curriculum—Match Fishtank, a relatively new player in the open source space.



Match Fishtank (2018)

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Our small Boston-based CMO, Match Charter Public School, serves just 1,250 students in grades pre-K-12, but our curriculum is now being used by teachers across the country. We were one of the lesser known charter organizations to plunge into the open source world when we launched our free curriculum website in 2016.

Two years after launching the site, we are on track to reach half a million teachers annually, with over 4,000 unique visitors every day. Notably, Match Fishtank's elementary ELA curriculum just received high marks from EdReports, an independent non-profit organization tasked with reviewing instructional materials. This review has allowed us to join Open Up Resources as one of the only two highly rated open source ELA curricula on the market.

Achievement First, Success Academy, New Visions for Public Schools, and Brooke Charter Schools also have invested in creating open source curriculum websites, and each organization is sharing amazing content built by teachers and instructional leaders over decades. By investing in sharing our curriculum we are working to fulfill one of the original goals of the

It's the best open-source curriculum I've seen, and it far surpasses many of the paid options out there.
Curriculum Facilitator (NC)

Your curriculum is among the best I have used. It is thorough, deep, and it connects to the CCSS. More, it is student-centered.
HS Department Chair (WI)

The books are amazing. The themes are relevant and very thought-provoking. It makes the students think and discuss ideas....Students are very engaged!"
Teacher (NJ)

90% of survey respondents say they are very likely to recommend Match Fishtank to other teachers

charter school movement—to create schools that serve as laboratories of innovation to help identify and spread best practices across the larger education system.

The growth of Match Fishtank’s following has been almost entirely organic. Teachers typically find us through searching for specific lesson planning content (e.g., “ninth grade ela curriculum”) online or through referrals from fellow teachers. We see teachers from all over the country and from all types of schools access our content—including teachers who have never heard of our small Boston school. In fact, only a small percentage of our user base is even situated in Massachusetts: we have large numbers of teachers in Florida, Texas, and Georgia using Match Fishtank.

And as it turns out, Match Fishtank’s charter school origins are seldom a topic of conversation: as far as teachers are concerned, good content is good content.

Claire Kaplan is the executive director of Match Export, Match Education’s effort to share its knowledge base and lessons learned from twenty years of running schools and training teachers. Under Claire’s leadership, Match Education has launched three websites: Match Fishtank, its open source curriculum website, Match Minis, a web library of animated videos on teaching and coaching teachers, and Match Schoolhouse, a new kind of online professional development designed for new teachers and teacher coaches.