

# California K-12 Online Content Project

## GOING BEYOND THE TEXTBOOKS

September 2019

*A project for California schools*

*fulfilled by the California State Library and the Riverside County Office of Education*



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*For more information, see the California State Library website at [www.library.ca.gov](http://www.library.ca.gov) (see the K12 Online Content icon), or contact California State Librarian Greg Lucas at 916-323-9759 or [Greg.Lucas@library.ca.gov](mailto:Greg.Lucas@library.ca.gov). Questions about training sessions and technical assistance may be addressed to the K-12 Online Content coordinator at 916-323-9758 or [marybeth.barber@library.ca.gov](mailto:marybeth.barber@library.ca.gov).*

# California K-12 Online Content Project

## *Going Beyond the Textbooks*

### Executive Summary

In the summer of 2018, California began offering online research information and materials to its 6,186,278 public school students, 306,261 school teachers, hundreds of thousands of other K-12 administrators and educators, and 1,133 public libraries through a statewide program run by the California State Library and the Riverside County Office of Education.

This statewide program spends \$3 million annually to provide public school students and educators with access to California curriculum curated materials from three content providers: Encyclopedia Britannica, TeachingBooks, and ProQuest.

Every public school in California has access to these online resources. If every district and charter school were to pay for their own individual contracts it would total at least \$13 million.

Data for the first year of this program indicate strong usage. School districts signed up for access on a rolling basis throughout the 2018-2019 school year. By the end of the school year 86 percent of

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*Over 7.4 million unique sessions in these resources and over 33 million actions -- clicks, views, downloads -- in the resources during the 2018-2019 school year*

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California's public school students had access through their school district to the online content provided. Students and educators in California used the K-12 online content over 7 million times and performed over 33 million actions -- clicks, downloads and views.

This is the beginning of what needs to be a bigger investment by the state in its delivery of educational content. This report summarizes the learning opportunities generated during the first year of California's K-12 Online Content Project and its impact during the first school year of implementation.

### Overview of the K-12 Online Content Project

The budget for the 2017-2018 fiscal year authorized the California State Library, in partnership with the Riverside Office of Education, to provide online content to public school students across the state. An ongoing budget appropriation of \$3 million allocated to the Riverside County Office of Education covers the costs of contracts with online content providers.

The first months were dedicated to research, planning and implementation so online resources would be available statewide at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year.

A Request for Proposals was released in the fall of 2017. In January 2018, the State Library and the Riverside County Office of Education conducted a review of the eight proposals submitted.

Professionals from school libraries, public libraries, and local school districts served on the review panel as well as educational curriculum experts and teachers in specific disciplines such as English Language Arts and History/Social Science.

The intent was to create an array of reliable online information, curated to the state’s curriculum, which could be accessed at any time by every public school student.

Based on the analysis from the panel, the California State Library directed the Riverside County Office of Education to contract with three K-12 online content providers – Encyclopaedia Britannica, ProQuest and TeachingBooks. Access for districts, charter schools and county offices began in August 2018.

Over 7.4 million unique sessions in these resources and over 33 million actions - clicks, views, downloads occurred from Aug 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019.

## Overall Usage

These online resources were used millions of times between August 1, 2018, and June 30, 2019. There are two useful categories to look at when examining usage.

Content Provider and Platform	Total Actions	Total Sessions
<b>Encyclopaedia Britannica</b>	<b>26,231,494</b>	<b>3,522,726</b>
Britannica School	25,470,898	3,399,767
Britannica Escolar	760,596	122,959
<b>TeachingBooks.net*</b>	<b>3,104,780</b>	<b>2,136,579</b>
<b>ProQuest (all platforms)**</b>	<b>4,398,159</b>	<i>not available</i>
CultureGrams	1,406,399	185,502
Central Student**	738,816	<i>not available</i>
eLibrary**	615,946	<i>not available</i>
SIRS Issues Researchers***	1,329,591	1,329,591
SIRS Discoverer***	230,617	230,617
School & Educators Complete**	10,417	<i>not available</i>
Research Companion***	66,373	66,373
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33,734,433</b>	<b>7,471,388</b>

\* Please note: TeachingBooks resources are often used in group settings, so that the 49,634 video and audio resources exclusively produced by TeachingBooks viewed by whole classrooms in practice are utilized more than the number of sessions and actions.

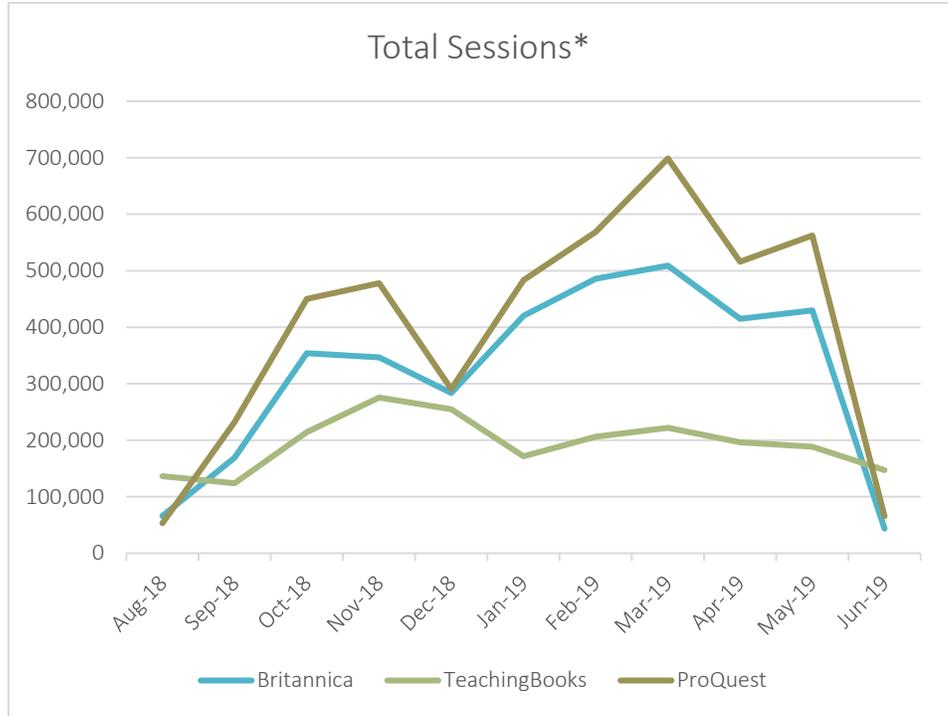
\*\* Total sessions are not available for the Central Student, eLibrary, and School & Educators Complete platforms and therefore not available for the ProQuest (all platforms) calculations.

\*\*\* Total actions for the SIRS platforms and Research Companion are not available. The numbers in this table represent the total number of sessions but not necessarily a count of actions. The session numbers have been included to give an idea of overall usage for comparison, but will underestimate total actions in these platforms.

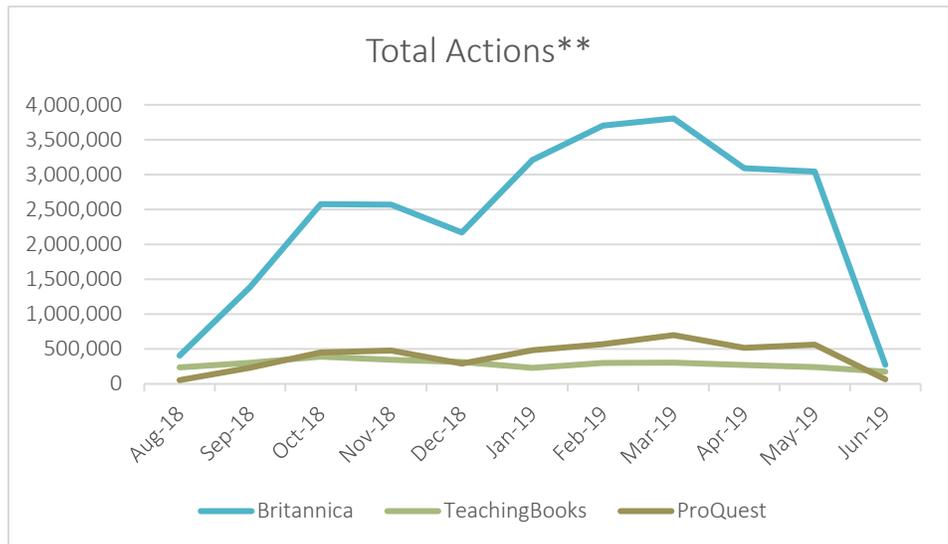
### Britannica Features

- Articles have an audio reader so students can listen to the article spoken aloud while reading along, including articles in Spanish in the Escolar resource.
- Many articles have parallel entries for different age and reading level -- primary, middle, high school -- that are maturity-level appropriate.
- There's an automated translation tool for over 50 languages as well as quick dictionary definitions and audio pronunciation.
- Articles may be saved in Google School and Google Education.
- One-click citation tools create the properly structured citations for the article in a number of styles – Modern Language Association, American Psychological Association, Harvard, and the Chicago Manual of Style.
- Educators can browse lesson plans and search for articles that are aligned to specific state education standards.

The first is “total actions,” which includes sessions, page views, document saves or bookmarks, and queries. The second, “total sessions,” shows how many times students and/or educators log in, even if they went to multiple locations within the resource.



\*Because of how data is tracked, ProQuest session numbers include some actions.



\*\* ProQuest’s overall action numbers are likely undercounted, as in some platforms individual actions are not tracked.

The number of sessions does not indicate how many students and/or educators used a particular online resource. Some students may be heavy users, while others only use the resource once. Because of student

data privacy issues, compiling an exact number of students who accessed an online resource is not included in this analysis.

Individual districts and charter schools may request aggregate usage data from the content providers to determine overall district use and trends. County Offices of Education may also request aggregate data for each district and charter.

## Content Providers

Here are more specifics on what Encyclopaedia Britannica, ProQuest and TeachingBooks provide for students and educators in California.

### Encyclopaedia Britannica

Encyclopaedia Britannica is a publisher known for the classic reference compendium of summary informational articles on a wide range of subjects. There are two main Britannica products offered to K-12 students:

- *Britannica School*, a comprehensive online encyclopedia segmented by **primary**, **middle** and **high-school** levels; and
- *Britannica Escolar*, an online encyclopedia in native Spanish, segmented by reading levels parallel to the **primary** and **middle school** complexity levels.

### ProQuest

ProQuest is an information company used by researchers and librarians around the world. Through its partnerships, ProQuest has built a growing content collection that now encompasses 90,000 authoritative sources, 6 billion digital pages, and primary sources that span six centuries.

California public school students and educators have access to multiple ProQuest platforms.

### ProQuest Features

- Resources are updated continually, with the SIRS and CultureGrams platforms edited on a regular basis and eLibrary and Central Student adding articles daily.
- Content goes beyond newspaper and magazine articles to include websites, videos, multimedia graphics, charts, maps, statistics, primary sources and government documents. Specialized content like the international recipes provided in CultureGrams inspire and interest students.
- Articles may be saved to Google Drive or Google Classroom, or saved as PDFs. Central Student and eLibrary resources may also have additional saving tools like Microsoft OneDrive.
- All ProQuest articles may be auto-translated into Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish, with some platforms having additional languages available.
- The SIRS and CultureGrams articles provide audio reading of text – great for auditory learners – and Lexile measurements that can assist educators with providing appropriate text complexities for learners at various English literacy levels.
- Central Student and eLibrary provide quick-click citation text in multiple formats, while CultureGrams and the SIRS platforms provide Modern Language Association and American Psychological Association citation text.

- *CultureGrams*: Concise cultural information on countries around the world that include perspectives on daily life, including background, customs and lifestyles of the world’s people.
- *ProQuest Central Student*: A collection of millions of articles from more than 10,000 full-text scholarly journals that provides information in science, technology, education, social sciences, humanities and current events.
- *ProQuest eLibrary and eLibrary Guided Research*: A general reference aggregation of periodical and digital media content. The main eLibrary is for general searches, while the eLibrary Guided Research interfaces assist novice researchers in choosing research topics and finding authoritative information to support research claims.
- *SIRS Discoverer*<sup>1</sup>: Content aimed at beginning researchers, especially elementary and middle school students. SIRS Discoverer also provides elementary and middle school educators and students with reliable age-appropriate content for classwork, homework and research assignments.
- *SIRS Issues Researcher*<sup>1</sup>: Content and analysis geared to middle and high school students and educators, with a focus on over 360 of today’s most complex and thought-provoking issues. Among them: Cyberbullying, climate change, immigration, elections, genetic engineering and hundreds more.
- *Schools and Educators Complete*: An online library of electronic books in multiple subject areas.
- *Research Companion*: An instructional resource for research assistance, with 10 learning modules that combine text and video to guide students through the critical thinking processes involved in information and media literacy.

## TeachingBooks

Launched in 2001, TeachingBooks offers literacy tools and a suite of instructional resources to enrich the fiction and nonfiction books read by children and young adults.

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<sup>1</sup> Over the decades, ProQuest consolidated with other information resource companies to expand their offerings. The SIRS platform, originally “Social Issues Resources Series,” was initiated by a former teacher in the 1970s as a compilation of contemporary social issues information to complement textbooks and address current events in a timely manner.

## TeachingBooks Features

- Read-along capabilities and transcripts of more than 50,000 minutes of author name pronunciations and book readings.
- Transcriptions and flyers can be auto-translated into more than 100 languages.
- Audio can have captions and read-along highlights computer-translated into more than 100 languages to support non-English speaking students and families.
- More than 80,000 lesson plans that can be saved, edited, and distributed via Google Classroom.
- Citation tools provide complete Modern Language Association and American Psychological Association citations for resources on the site.

Search tools aid in discovering literature that speaks to a child's particular cultural identity and reading level. Interviews with and information about authors give students a personal look at the background, purpose and content in the books they read.

Instructors who use it say TeachingBooks is a key resource for English language arts and English language development. TeachingBooks also supports other subject areas like history/social science, STEM and visual and performing arts.

Among TeachingBooks's features are:

- Book guides and lesson plans, literature-based vocabulary lists, "meet-the-author" videos and book readings,
- Tools to help educators find diverse books across a wide spectrum of literature and nonfiction that can appeal to a multi-cultural classroom;
- Suggested strategies teachers and school librarians can use to present information to students about why a book was created, including discussion questions, video book trailers and audio performances.

## Usage by Individual Content Provider

### Britannica School and Escolar Usage

As the most commonly known of the three content providers, Encyclopedia Britannica's school products were heavily used in California during the 2018 - 2019 school year. Usage was likely enhanced by the company voluntarily making their online content available to public libraries as well as schools.

**Total actions including sessions, downloads and queries: 26,231,494**

The Britannica resources were quickly utilized across the board by schools and students. By October, more than 2.5 million actions were taking place each month. As with all three resources, actions dipped during the winter break, and then jumped in the early spring.

**Total sessions: 3,522,726**

### TeachingBooks Usage

As a suite of authoritative materials about children's and young adult books, TeachingBooks very specifically addresses reading and literacy efforts. Usage was likely enhanced by the company voluntarily allowing use of TeachingBooks in public libraries.

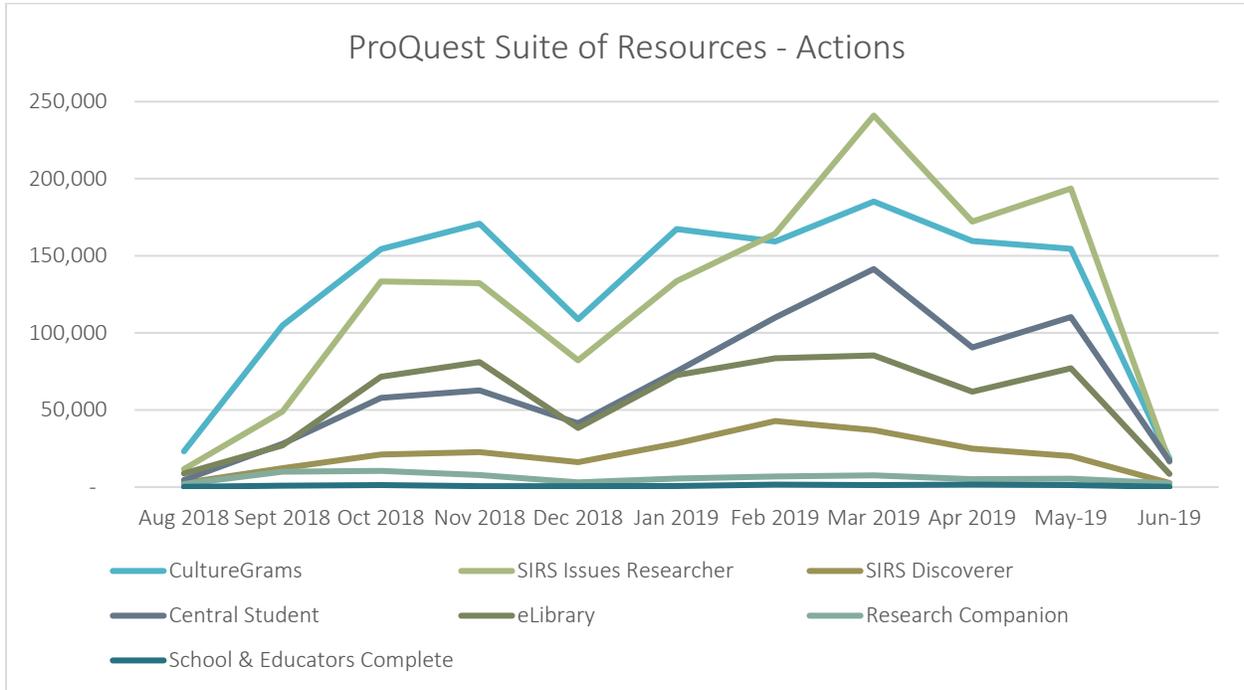
**Total actions including sessions, record views, and searches: 3,104,780**

The TeachingBooks resources were quickly utilized across the board by schools and students. By October 2018 over 300,000 actions were taking place per month. Actions dipped during the winter break, then jumped in the early spring.

**Total Sessions: 2,136,579**

## ProQuest Usage by Platform

The ProQuest contract includes multiple platforms for students and educational staff. These include CultureGrams, CentralStudent, eLibrary, SIRS Discoverer, SIRS Issues Researcher, Research Companion, and School and Educators Complete.



Each of the separate ProQuest resources showed usage for the first year of the program rivaling TeachingBooks, but not as high as Britannica. This was likely due partly to ProQuest not allowing access to its resources through public libraries.

Further, implementing the ProQuest suite into a district's online offerings and learning management systems was not as streamlined as the other two vendors. Set-up took longer and involved additional steps. The auto-generated access-name and access-code for each resource was not user friendly and required adjustments by IT technicians.

Once these implementation complexities were addressed, there was strong use of the ProQuest suite of content. Assisting individual districts with ProQuest set-up and providing training for instructors will be a key focus for the second year of the K-12 Online Content project.

Like the other two content providers, ProQuest generally saw a steep increase during the fall months, a drop-off during the long winter break, and then an additional increase in the spring.

## CultureGrams Usage

CultureGrams provides information and local perspectives on more than 200 countries, including a resource for US states, Canadian provinces, and a version for younger students or English readers who may benefit from a lower Lexile level. Usage numbers indicate that, on average, users visited over seven different sections of the CultureGrams platform each session.

**Total Actions including sessions, downloads and queries: 1,406,399**

**Total Sessions: 185,502**

### **ProQuest Central Student and eLibrary Usage**

The ProQuest organization was initiated in the 1930s as a compiler of journals and periodicals that libraries and universities stored on microfilm or microfiche. Over the decades the organization adapted through the use of technology. These materials and others are now available online and typically segmented by topic areas.

Aimed primarily at providing scholarly resources for high school students, ProQuest Central Student brings together journals and articles about science, technology, education, social sciences, humanities and news. It's a useful tool for students writing high-level research papers to prepare for college and career. ProQuest tracks the number of "retrievals" of different items in its collection, which can translate to total actions for usage tracking purposes.

**ProQuest Central Student Retrievals: 738,816**

Usage for ProQuest Central Student gained steady momentum throughout the year, with the expected decrease during the winter break time period. Its highest use was in the spring, which matches research paper due dates in high school.

**ProQuest eLibrary Retrievals: 615,946**

As with ProQuest Central Student, eLibrary gained steady momentum, with a decrease during the winter break time. It had its highest use in the spring. Given the value of this resource for a variety of grades and uses, a key training objective for the 2019-2020 school year will be to increase usage across the board – or have the eLibrary serve as a complement for guided research resources from ProQuest's SIRS platform.

### **SIRS Issues Researcher and SIRS Discoverer**

California students and educators have access to two of this series' platforms: SIRS Discoverer and SIRS Issues Researcher. Both may be used to introduce information and media literacy to students – SIRS Discoverer for Grades Three to Six, and SIRS Issues Researcher at middle school.

Use in the SIRS platform was more robust at the middle-school grades with Issues Researcher than at the younger grades with Discoverer. The pattern of growth in the fall, drop-off during winter break, and then a steep increase in use in the spring parallels all the K-12 online content offerings. As with the entire ProQuest suite, the focus for the 2019-2020 school year will be an expansion of technical support and training for growing implementation throughout California.

ProQuest is able to track the sessions for California students and educators using the SIRS platform overall but doesn't track total actions on these platforms.

**SIRS Issues Researcher Sessions: 1,329,591**

**SIRS Discoverer Sessions: 230,617**

### ProQuest Research Companion Usage

Research Companion is a learning tool developed by writing instructors and librarians to help students overwhelmed by the volume of information and data in the research process environment.

**ProQuest Research Companion Sessions: 66,373**

### School & Educators Complete Usage

This package is an online digital educational textbook and educational eBook service intended for educators. The School & Educators Complete platform has been difficult to roll out technically. Continued effort on implementation will be a key focus for the 2019-2020 school year.

While the subject matter of the available resources is quite diverse, over a quarter of the searches were for history and social science texts (28 percent), with literature (12 percent), education (7 percent) and fine arts (6 percent) noteworthy as well.

**School & Educators Complete Actions: 10,417**

### Technical Sign-up for Access

During the first full school year the online content was available, the State Library worked with ProQuest, Britannica and Teachingbooks.net to provide access to as many districts, schools, and students as possible.

Outreach included publication of press releases, contact with educational media, announcements to various groups such as the California School Library Association, the California Library Association, and direct emails to educational networking organizations in specific subjects like history/social science, science, arts and English language development.

The State Library contacted every school district and county education office directly by email, and the state's superintendent of public instruction sent an official letter to all district superintendents. Information was also disseminated to charter schools and charter-school networks through email and various professional charter-school networking organizations in California.

**Tech Specs.** Information is needed from each local school district, county office of education or charter school to implement access. This includes **website and email domains, IP addresses** for all schools and district offices, relevant technology such as **learning management systems and library management systems**, and **contact information** for both technology and library or online curriculum.

Local education agencies submit the information through an online form that is coordinated by TeachingBooks and shared with Britannica and ProQuest. Each of the content providers invested a significant amount of time to insure access across California by contacting local districts and county offices of education and encouraging technical sign-up for access. Within one school year, the efforts resulted in thousands of schools with access capacity representing 86 percent of K-12 students in California public schools.

As of June 30, 2019, almost all districts with more than six schools have provided the tech information necessary to access the three K-12 online content providers<sup>2</sup>

Assuming full implementation by the school district, there are 8,380 schools – 82 percent of all public schools -- with access representing over 5.3 million K-12 public school children, or 86 percent of all K-12 students.

Harder to connect have been small school districts and non-traditional schools such as those run in coordination with county social services -- sometimes referred to as community and court school -- and the schools operated in juvenile facilities at the state level. Only 45 percent of these types of schools had filled out the technical form as of June 2019.

Efforts to reach these entities are ongoing. For example, outreach and in-person training by State Library staff was provided in January and February 2019 to Division of Juvenile Justice staff and a consortium of administrators for the court and community schools. This effort continues.

### Next Steps – 2019-2020 School Year

Given the logistics of establishing separate access for each of the more than 1,035 school districts, 10,500 public schools and 1,300 charter schools in the state, this program has gotten off to a solid start. A high percentage of large and medium-sized school districts provided the necessary technical information so that 86 percent of the K-12 students in public schools now have access to these resources.

Yet ability to access and actual usage are two different things. More teachers, administrators, technicians, parents, and students need to be aware of these resources. Districts and individual schools will be provided reminders about how to increase use of these resources, including training and implementation recommendations. Among these efforts are:

- Direct email reminders about the resources in general to district administrators, IT leads and curriculum and library experts;
- Direct email reminders to IT staff about the webpage template text that can be incorporated into websites and learning management systems;
- Continuation of the twice-monthly newsletter with information about on-site training, recorded webinars, vetted open-source resources, and similar professional development updates;
- In-person professional development trainings throughout the state from all three content providers at no cost to the participants;
- Direct outreach to districts and charters that have not yet provided the technical information needed for access;

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<sup>2</sup> For districts with more than 40 schools, 97 percent have signed up for access, and 86 percent of districts with between seven and 40 schools have signed up for access.

- Usage data examination by county or by district to determine potential training needs;
- Informal surveying of users to gather information about success of access, questions about content providers, and additional suggestions for expanded outreach;
- Expansion of eNewsletter and other outreach, potentially through social media; and
- Collaboration with the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the California Department of Education, various county offices of education, professional and specialized K-12 subject networking organizations, and community outreach organizations for parents and students.

With 6.2 million public school children and more than half a million teachers, administrators and educational support staff, sustained and wide-ranging outreach is essential, particularly as new resources are added.

### Future of the K-12 Online Content Project

A larger annual investment needs to be made to offer California students the tools they need to succeed in a new economy in which creativity, critical thinking and collaboration are equally as important as literacy and mathematic skills.

The content provided now allows for retrieval of information, not deep subject matter exploration. Online content that offers more in-depth investigation is available. Every other state, to lesser and greater degrees, provides that content through statewide contracts that make the resources available to all.

### Expanding California's Online Offerings

The initial Request for Proposals for this project elicited responses from multiple content providers offering a wide variety of resources. Three quality content providers were selected, but other highly rated proposals were left unfunded and not made available statewide. Adding some of these resources would increase the in-depth subject matter content options K-12 students need for success.

There are also providers of specialized content that are ideal for California's diverse population, but who were too focused on a particular subject or age group to be eligible for the initial launch of this effort. The initial Request for Proposals required generalized resources for all K-12 students.

Some resources that should be included are specialty products aimed at particular populations, like Career Technical Education or Science, Technology, Engineering Art and Math education products. Others have content geared towards a particular age group, or specific subjects.

There are also image and video subscriptions that would allow students to create multi-media projects without fretting over copyright issues. School assignments today go beyond a simple term paper and routinely include multi-media design and presentation – a capability currently not available to all California public school students.

## Conclusion

The initial launch of the K-12 Online Content Project provides quality online content to all public school districts and charter schools throughout the state in a cost-effective manner by utilizing economies of scale. The articles, multi-media content and instructor resources from Encyclopaedia Britannica, TeachingBooks and the multiple platforms from ProQuest are available to all public school educators and students in California.

These tools provide comprehensive and diverse content to enhance learning in English language arts, history/social studies, science, and additional subjects like math, world languages, health and visual and performing arts.

Expansion of these resources will improve learning in media and information literacy. These resources give students the ability to explore information and learning that is self-directed and student-focused, allowing them to analyze, evaluate, and use information and media – key skills necessary for critical thinking.

The California K-12 Online Content Project could provide much more to California public schools. The need for direct training and ongoing monitoring of the program is high. Access to vetted resources through the open web and/or local libraries exists, but is scattered.

This type of resource investment may assist school districts throughout California provide high-quality education in ways that redress the inequities of the past. A focus on providing quality content at no cost to a local school district or charter means the local education agency doesn't have to make the tough decision between devices and content.

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With an additional investment, all educators will have the flexibility to go beyond textbooks to guide all learners – using the medium that K-12 students turn to for information. Students can search online through quality educational and informational sources curated for California's curriculum, enhancing media literacy and digital citizenship.

And California will become the leader it should be in using technology and the Internet to provide diverse and meaningful content for a successful 21st Century education.