

but she worries that it could increase disparities between students in poor schools and those in middle-class or wealthier districts.

Schwarzenegger's proposal would also require schools to invest more money in technology to access the online material and pay for professional development classes so teachers could effectively use it.

"From a policy perspective, it's absolutely the right way to go. But to sell it as a savings tool to districts to deal with the budget crisis is a little disingenuous," said Hilary McLean, spokeswoman for state Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell.

California school districts have lost billions of dollars from their budgets over the past two years as the recession has drained the state's tax revenue, and Schwarzenegger has proposed another \$5.3 billion in education cuts next year.

The budget for textbooks and instructional materials dropped to \$350 million last year from \$419 million the previous year.

In many schools, learning already is moving online. A bill pending in the California Legislature would approve electronic readers such as the Kindle as acceptable alternatives to traditional textbooks.

Neeru Khosla, founder and executive director of the CK-12 Foundation, a nonprofit organization seeking to make textbooks available online for free, said she has 30 high school texts available digitally. Most of them are in science, math and engineering.

While many individual teachers or districts might incorporate material they find online, Khosla

said the only other state she knows that has promoted that material on a systemwide basis is Florida, which adopted a free online reading program for elementary schools.

Khosla said lack of technology should be not be an excuse for inaction. Not every student needs a computer, as long as the teacher has access to one, she said. They can print out materials, or use classroom projectors to display pages.

"In the short term, maybe we're not going to save money," Khosla said. "But long term, it will be changing the way we do things. ... Content shouldn't cost."

110

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Gov. wants texts online

Armando Martinez, center, of Los Angeles, joins hundreds of others demonstrating against Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's budget plan at the Capitol in Sacramento on Wednesday.



ECONOMY & EDUCATION

Says making students, schools pay for textbooks not sensible today
By JULIET WILLIAMS
The Associated Press

SACRAMENTO — In the state that gave the world Facebook, Google and the iPod, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger says forcing California's students to rely on printed textbooks is so yesterday.
The governor recently launched an initiative to see if the state's 6 million public school students can use more online learning materials, perhaps saving millions of dollars a year in textbook purchases.
"California is home to software giants, bioscience research pioneers and first-class university systems known around the world. But our students still learn from instructional materials in formats made possible by Gutenberg's printing press," Schwarzenegger wrote in a recent op-ed in the San Jose Mercury News.
In a state with a projected \$24 billion budget deficit, Schwarzenegger has asked education officials to review a wealth of sources that already are on the Internet, many of which are free, and determine whether they meet curriculum standards.
The governor is starting with math and sciences and has asked that providers submit their online postings to

See TEXTS on page A6

Continued from page A1
TEXTS
Last week, Schwarzenegger promoted his initiative to lawmakers as the first step toward a learning revolution.
"We expect the first science and math books to be digital by this fall," Schwarzenegger said. "If we expand this to more textbooks, schools could save hundreds of millions of dollars a year, and that's hundreds of millions of dollars that could be used to hire more teachers and to reduce class sizes."
Kathy Christie, chief of staff at the Education Commission of the States, said Schwarzenegger's plan appears to be the most ambitious of its kind in the nation, although Illinois is also studying digital textbooks.
"It is unusual certainly for a state to be looking at it statewide," she said.
But Schwarzenegger's plan will probably not produce the budget bonanza he envisions — at least not anytime soon.
The online material would supplement textbooks that teachers already use, meaning California will continue buying traditional books.
Also, California's K-12 standards for core subjects are among the most rigorous and complex in the nation, meaning that much of the material online may not measure up. Textbook publishers who provide most classroom content will not give their work away for free, so it's unclear how much savings the state ultimately could realize.
Most publishers already offer online content, including study material, teachers' guides and digital versions of books that accompany hardcover texts.
"Many of them are just as happy to produce the material in digital form. But the schools lack the hardware to access the digital materials," said Jay Diskey, executive director of the school division at the Association of American Publishers.
Because of its sheer size, California is a trendsetter for public school textbooks across the country. And if more groups answer Schwarzenegger's call for free learning material, it could lead to changes in school districts across the country.
One factor that could undermine the initiative is the extent of technology in California classrooms. On average, California schools have just one computer for every four children — a situation that prompted Education Week to give the state a D-minus this year for its use of education technology compared with other states.
"Every kid, every classroom, needs access to the Internet and to a computer if you're going to talk about putting textbooks on the Internet," said Alameda County Superintendent of Schools Sheila Jordan.
She said Schwarzenegger's proposal has merit.