CUT SOFTWARE COSTS WITH OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE
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"Open Source" (OS) software is a way to significantly reduce software costs and still maintain high quality. This is particularly important because of nationwide budget cuts affecting universities and K12 schools.

You have probably heard about the Linux Operating System and the OpenOffice.org suite of office software. They are distributed under OS licenses. The software is free to download and will run on most PCs. Linux and OpenOffice.org, with their easy to use graphical interfaces, provide an acceptable alternative to Windows and Microsoft Office. The popular OS Firefox Web Browser is frequently used as a Microsoft Internet Explorer replacement.

Strictly speaking, "Open Source" is a term used to describe a legal contract for the distribution of software. An OS software contract states, among other things, that the blueprints or "source code" must be part of the exchange and that the recipient must abide by these terms if he redistributes the software. Even though "Open Source" describes a legal contract, most people think of OS software as the huge collection of software offerings under this name.

OS software is usually free. Please don't think "it can't be very good if its free." Most OS software, including the examples previously mentioned, is of the highest quality. The combination of no cost and high quality account for the popularity and success of OS software. In addition "Open Source" is competition, always a good thing, for Microsoft and Apple.

Who is using OS software? Google, Facebook, eBay and Amazon use OS server software. Educational institutions are saving money with OS web, email and network servers. Moodle is a leading web based "Course Management System (CMS)" used by K12 schools and universities. The commercial CMS's cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and, in my opinion, the free one is better. Whenever you have a web browsing experience the chances are better than half that you are connected to an OS Apache Web Server.

I encourage you to look at your student's and school's software requirements and determine if an OS solution will work for you. You can get more information with Google. A search on "Open Source in Education" yields over 100 million hits. If you have never used OS software, get a free copy of an "Ubuntu Linux Live CD." You can try OS software applications on your PC without permanently installing them.