Digital Learning Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
November 4, 2020

Attendees

- Katie Bauer — Trinity College
- Nick Caruso — CABE
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Kevin Corcoran — Connecticut State Colleges and Libraries
- Jonathan Costa — EdAdvance
- Larry Covino — Bristol Adult Education
- Andy DePalma — EASTCONN
- Josh Elliott — Fairfield University
- Barbara Johnson — Colchester Public Schools & CASL & CECA
- Karen Kaplan — Hamden Public Schools
- Dawn La Valle — Connecticut State Library
- Shannon Marimón — ReadyCT
- Laura McCaffrey — Archdiocese of Hartford
- Greg Mcverry — Southern Connecticut State University
- Brandon Rush — New Milford Public Schools
- Karen Skudlarek — University of Connecticut
- Jim Spafford — Manchester Adult Education
- Chinma Uche — CREC Aerospace Academy & CT CS Teachers Association
- Scott Zak — Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Agenda

- Connecting Students Outside of School and College
  - Home Connectivity
  - Community Wireless
  - Devices
- Recommendations and Lessons Learned from Remote Learning
- Media Literacy and Digital Citizenship Week Planning
- Go Open CT (Open Education Resources)
- Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification

Welcome

Nick Caruso, Chair of the Digital Learning Advisory Council, called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM and provided a brief overview of the agenda topics. He then asked Doug Casey to update the group on the State's work to connect K – 12 students to the Internet for remote learning.

Connecting Students Outside of School and College

Doug shared the progress to date through Governor Lamont's Everybody Learns initiative. The State has purchased 81,000 computers, committed to installing 200 community wireless access points, and provisioned more than 70,000 connections for students learning from home. Districts have provided information to cable Internet providers about the number of students needing Internet access, and Doug is working with schools and the carriers to encourage families to connect. Despite significant outreach efforts on behalf of the State, schools, and the providers, many families have not taken advantage of these offers for free Internet during the 2020 – 2021 school year.

Doug has engaged with district leaders individually and through focus groups, which have helped identify barriers to adoption. Families may not trust carriers, have reservations about having companies coming into their homes for installations, have misconceptions about the offerings, for example. Language barriers have also presented challenges, according to some district leaders. The State is developing a formal outreach campaign to encourage all residents to get online, especially families with children in school. Doug welcomed feedback from Advisory Council members as to why families may not connect through the Everybody Learns program and how to increase participation.

Greg Mcverry underscored the importance of leveraging local community groups through platforms like Facebook. Messaging that comes from such trusted peer groups should lead to higher adoption rates than broad-based outreach from the State. He also shared a creative approach in New Haven, where Southern Connecticut State University students work coach adults in English language classes on digital literacy skills. Jim Spafford echoed the importance of understanding and appreciating the benefits of online access among all residents. Doing so remains a key to Manchester's adult education program success, which has 200 students engaged in online classes with an 80 percent completion rate. His experience has shown that students with access and digital literacy skills are much more likely to complete courses.

Representing the Connecticut Technical High School system, Jim Mindek noted that some parents are simply not engaged in their children's learning, whether online or in person. His schools provide free computers and Internet, via cellular hotspots, and yet some students remain unengaged. He encouraged school outreach to families to support student learning. He also suggested using time at the beginning of the year for intensive teacher professional development around digital learning pedagogies and

troubleshooting. Nick emphasized the key role of school staff — not just district-level leaders — to reach out to families for interventions. Principals, teachers, and student support teams are usually the best to know which learners need help.

Dawn La Valle reminded the group that public libraries remain key partners in supporting learning. The Everybody Learns initiative provided more than $2M in funding to 62 libraries statewide, mostly around accommodations to increase capacity for patrons. Most libraries remain at 25 percent capacity, with the goal of reaching 75 percent through the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other measures. Katie Bauer mentioned the capacity of private colleges such as Trinity to support their communities by providing free wireless and digital literacy guidance.

Recommendations and Lessons Learned from Remote Learning
Nick opened the next topic by encouraging members of the Advisory Council to suggest specific considerations or actions for the Commission around digital learning. Doug echoed that request and asked for suggestions stemming from nearly eight months of remote and blended learning precipitated by the outbreak of the Coronavirus.

Greg Mcverry underscored the importance of teacher preparation programs. Teacher candidates need hands-on experience that builds competencies in digital learning best practices. Unfortunately, standards from the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Preparation (CAEP) as well as those from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) do not directly address these needs, nor does the Connecticut System for Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED). Doug asked Advisory Council members of the higher education community whether they had seen any shifts in curriculum or practices for teacher candidates, in order to meet the new demands of teaching online. Kevin Corcoran noted the innovative work taking place at Fairfield University under the leadership of Josh Elliott. Josh has for years championed digital learning best practices, and Fairfield is one of only two institutions of higher education to offer the ISTE certification. From the demand perspective, Doug suggested that superintendents and other district leaders can update their position descriptions when considering new hires and work with teacher preparation programs to address digital competencies among teacher candidates.

For current teachers, Barbara Johnson strongly suggested that evaluation rubrics — including elements that address student engagement, parent outreach, lesson planning, etc. — include digital proficiencies. She also asked the Commission to support the important role of libraries and librarians in supporting digital education. In addition to championing the ISTE standards for students, educators, and education leaders, the Commission should consider endorsing standards from the American Association of School Librarians (AASL). They define not only competencies for students and librarians but also staffing levels for school libraries to provide budgeting guidance for districts.

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On the topic of professional development, Jim Spafford shared the model that Manchester Adult Education uses to develop staff training and supports based on twice-a-year teacher input and self-assessment of competencies. Outcomes include targeted supports for instructors, with breakout rooms assigned by competencies, followed by monitoring of progress through the teacher evaluation system. Measures include evidence of digital literacy practices integrated into the curriculum, lesson plans, and classroom instruction. A key takeaway is the importance of personalizing professional development, leveraging existing systems to develop and measure continuous improvement plans.

Regarding current teacher training opportunities, Nick called attention to the challenge of finding time for educators to receive the support they need. He suggested the need for flexibilities in State-mandated annual professional development in areas such as bloodborne pathogens, sexual harassment, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation. He acknowledged all these areas as important but also noted that most teachers have received training on these topics for years, if not decades. Putting a temporary hold on such trainings would help address the need for training and planning time. Jim Mindek echoed the proposal and noted that technology staff face similar challenges in meeting State mandates such as data reporting, which take away their ability to support teachers.

Jonathan Costa encouraged such flexibilities as well. He noted that while the education community had hoped that this would be a "normal" year with the regular rules of operation applying and making sense, it simply is not. He pointed to the need for creative problem solving to support blended and remote learning, including the adoption of such flexibilities in training and data collection, removing obligations that are unhelpful in a crisis.

With more time, Karen Kaplan could see an opportunity to provide meaningful professional development. She called on the Commission to help define "student engagement" and provide guidance on how to measure it based on student learning outcomes. The State has helped address key components such as connectivity, but teachers need direct support. She offered the example of students in Hamden identified as "engaged" but still failing their courses and suggested that many learners across the state fall into the same category. She called for some simple checklists that administrators could use to assess teacher efficacy, with a focus on the strategies of teaching. Having 200 local education agencies tasked with defining, delivering, and measuring best practices in teaching and learning remains highly inefficient.

Karen also called attention to remote learning as an equity issue. For example, in Hamden, about a quarter of students living in wealthy families participate in fully online learning, whereas half of relatively poor students — predominantly students of color — do. Widely available public health and workforce data point to the increased risk of

Coronavirus exposure among poorer workers whose duties require in-person activities. This increased risk and lack of workplace flexibility impacts students, whose parents may not be able to pick them up and drop them off from school, and who may need to quarantine because of parent exposure to the Coronavirus.

Media Literacy and Digital Citizenship Week Planning
Barbara Johnson briefed the other members on efforts this fall to promote Media Literacy and Digital Citizenship Week, October 19 – 23. She curated most of the resources shared through the Department of Education's playlist and recommended a longer planning period to prepare and share materials for next year. Barbara also called for resources to include lesson plans for students rather than just a teacher professional development playlist. Doug agreed and committed to engaging with CECA, CASL, and other leadership organizations well in advance of next year's Media Literacy and Digital Citizenship Week, taking place October 25 – 29, 2021.

Go Open CT (Open Education Resources)
Doug provided a brief update on work around open education resources (OER). The Commission received funding to provide a statewide repository, or searchable Web site, where teachers can create, share, curate, and find standards-aligned instructional materials. This news follows on the launch last year of the Go Open CT site and awareness campaign. After he completes the necessary procurement work in securing the portal, Doug promised to reach out to OER stakeholders in the state to begin work around the platform design, including workflows and quality standards. He expressed his gratitude to Kevin Corcoran, the State's foremost OER champion, for his leadership and support in this work.

Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification
Greg Mcverry raised the final topic around the Department of Defense (DoD) Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification (CMMC) for colleges and universities that handle secure information from the DoD. The program requires institutions of higher education to certify their staff on cybersecurity best practices. Doug shared that prior to today's meeting he had met with State Chief Information Security Officer Jeff Brown about the CMMC. On a related note, Jeff indicated that the State was developing a virtual cybersecurity apprenticeship using the NIST NICE framework.

Adjournment

Nick thanked the Advisory Council members for their time, insights, and engagement and summarized two action items to share with the Commission members:

- Discuss adoption of the AASL library standards
- Address flexibilities in training and data reporting mandates

He encouraged members to continue to reach out to him or any member of the Commission with ideas or concerns tied to digital learning. He concluded the meeting at approximately 11:00 AM.