

Infrastructure Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

August 6, 2020

Attendees

- Colleen Bailie — West Haven Public Library
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Tom Dillon — Independent
- Fred Kass — Trinity College
- Kerri Kearney — Manchester Public Schools
- Michael Mundrane — University of Connecticut
- Sabina Sitaru — New Haven Public Schools

Agenda

- Everybody Learns Program
 - Devices and Connectivity for K – 12
 - Public Hotspots
- Eduroam Updates
- "How We Feel" Applications

Welcome

The meeting convened at 1:00 PM with a welcome by Tom Dillon, Infrastructure Advisory Council Chair. He thanked the members for their time, especially given widespread power and Internet outages resulting from Hurricane Isaias, and turned the meeting over to Doug Casey.

Everybody Learns Initiative

Doug welcomed the members and shared the exciting news of the Governor's Everybody Learns Initiative (ELI). This program, funded through federal CARES Act dollars, provides Internet and devices for public school students as well as public wireless access points through libraries across the state. The [announcement and press conference](#) July 28 provided details about the team working to plan and support the program, including Nick Simmons and other members of Governor Lamont's office, Commission member Ajit Gopalakrishnan of the State Department of Education (SDE), Commission member Burt Cohen of the Office of Consumer Counsel, leaders from the Department of Economic and Community Development, Ryan Kocsondy of the Connecticut Education Network (CEN), CEN co-founder and Internet2 vice president Rob Vietzke, and Doug.

Devices and Connectivity for K – 12

The program addresses the “digital divide,” with the goal of providing devices and Internet connections to students who do not have them so that they can participate along with their connected peers in remote and blended learning. District responses to surveys from the Commission in April and SDE in May have helped to quantify the gap between digital haves and have-nots. Doug provided the group with a brief overview of how the initiative would address this gap. First, districts provide an updated estimate of students needing a computer and access to the Internet. For connectivity, school leaders indicate their total need for cable broadband (preferred) or cellular hotspot connections. Following a review of these requests, the ELI team will work with districts, computer resellers, and broadband carriers to ensure that needy students receive devices and connections.

Sabina Sitaru asked about the timeframe for rolling out Internet connections. Doug explained that several contracting and procurement steps need to take place before the State can move forward with student connectivity needs, and the team was working to provide access to students as close to the start of the school year as possible. Those contracts need to address many scenarios — such as student mobility and availability of service — prior to contract execution and the start of fulfillment.

Colleen Bailie mentioned the Urban Libraries Initiative, funded through the CARES Act, which has provided laptops and cellular hotspots. About a dozen libraries statewide have received devices and will have hotspot connection fees waived for a year through the fund. Colleen also spoke to the support that West Haven Public Library and other libraries are providing to residents. Many come in to get online and access state services, file unemployment claims, and respond to Census surveys. The staff in local libraries provide invaluable assistance to residents with these and other activities that remain challenging without guidance and Internet connectivity.

Public Hotspots

To provide open Internet connections in communities throughout the state, the program also allots more than \$2M to create public wireless access points. As the lead partner in this aspect of the initiative, CEN will install more than 200 access points at libraries to allow for walk-up and drive-up access to the Internet for learners of all ages.

Regarding the overall effort to address the digital divide, Fred, Kerri, and other members lauded the Everybody Learns Initiative as an exemplary effort to cut through bureaucracy and address an urgent need among learners, educators, and families statewide.

General Connectivity

In addition to providing devices and connections to students as well as public access points, the initiative includes an awareness and outreach campaign. Targeted at Connecticut citizens who have inadequate or no access to the Internet, the campaign will call attention to the benefits of being online, including the ability to access

telehealth and employment resources, state services, and continuing education providers, among others. Through a variety of media outreach channels, the campaign will provide citizens with information about free access (e.g., via local libraries) as well as connecting via the local carriers serving their region.

Eduroam Updates

Tom Dillon transitioned the discussion to the topic of Eduroam, the global network providing wireless authentication to the education community. He shared the good news of progress in New Haven under Sabina's leadership to include Eduroam as part of the wireless buildouts in that city. Sabina provided additional details of the initiative, which started with extending wireless access from Lincoln-Bassett Community School into the local neighborhood. That project proved successful, providing access up to three blocks in every direction. New Haven Public Schools (NHPS) has similar wireless initiatives underway in 12 other schools. The project also includes similar efforts through the New Haven Public Library system.

Across the New Haven networks, Sabina plans the rollout of Eduroam to authenticate students. She has worked closely with Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) under Chief Information Officer Dennis Reiman to allow NHPS students to get online through SCSU's wireless network, which reaches the neighborhoods that surround the campus. This work will especially benefit students attending the Strong 21st Century Communications Magnet and SCSU Lab School, part of NHPS and located on SCSU's campus. Tom shared that Dennis has been an outspoken advocate of technology as an instrument of social justice and sees the sharing of network access as a way to provide all students with equal access to learning opportunities. Dennis has shared sample reports from Eduroam that provide insights on where institutional (e.g., SCSU) as well as guest (e.g., NHPS) learners connect. Such data will help in the future to identify those students who may need assistance in connecting outside of school.

Doug noted that New Haven provides a perfect environment to roll out wireless access supported with the Eduroam authentication and analytics. Sabina concurred, noting discussions underway with Yale University and the University of New Haven to allow students onto their networks using Eduroam. As Sabina transitions out of the role of NHPS Chief Information Officer, the new lead for school technology, Gilda Herrera, will continue to lead the Eduroam and wireless buildouts. The work has already garnered interest in neighboring towns. Colleen Bailie shared the New Haven work with the West Haven Public School Board members, who had strong interest in deploying Eduroam in that town.

Tom asked Fred Kass of Trinity about discussions concerning an Eduroam rollout in Hartford. Leaders in that city's schools have expressed interest in working with Trinity and other community anchors to connect students to wireless networks via Eduroam, but no progress has occurred recently. Fred did mention the [recent announcement](#) that the Dalio Foundation would fund the buildout of a wireless mesh network in Hartford, an initiative that could benefit from the use of Eduroam to support universal

authentication. Some Advisory Council members expressed concern that investments such as that of the Dalio Foundation are welcome and should be coordinated with other initiatives, such as the ELI program. Doug agreed and pledged to reach out to the Dalio Foundation to help ensure alignment of efforts to make the most efficient use of technology investments to the benefit of as many students as possible.

“How We Feel” Applications

The next agenda item addressed the possible use of a mobile app to provide insights into the impact of COVID-19 on educational communities. Doug introduced the topic by providing background on “How We Feel,” the app [endorsed by Governor Lamont in an April 20 announcement](#). Those who download and use the app respond to questions through daily check-ins on a variety of topics: how the individual is feeling overall that day, whether they have left their home, protections they have taken to reduce the spread of the Coronavirus, whether anyone in their household has or may have COVID-19, and how they would rate their levels of stress, anxiety, gratefulness, and other indicators of emotional well-being. The app provides users with longitudinal insights on their activities and well-being. At an aggregate level, How We Feel provides insights into collective behaviors — e.g., the self-reported likelihood to practice social distancing, by day — using anonymous user data.

After sharing screen shots of the app, Doug asked the group whether they could see an opportunity to leverage the data collected to benefit educational communities. He had spoken with David Cheng, CEO of Arbor Biotechnologies and one of the How We Feel partners, about the possibility of inserting questions by region or ZIP code into the app. The How We Feel team could then share aggregated results to local school or university leaders to provide better insights into how parents or college students were feeling physically and emotionally, and request input on how they feel about school and campus reopening. (Use of the app is currently restricted to those 18 or older.)

Several members of the Advisory Council shared their institution’s efforts around data collection, testing, and contact tracing. Michael Mundrane has been working with the University of Connecticut’s Student Health Services for months. At UCONN, the use of a Qualtrics solution allows for data collection and analytics on COVID testing data as well as end-user feedback such as that collected via How We Feel. Fred shared that Trinity has engaged with the Broad Institute to conduct COVID testing. Both he and Michael noted the state requirement to submit data on students testing positive at the testing centers at their respective institutions.

From the K – 12 community, Kerri Kearney discussed Manchester Public Schools’ efforts to collect input from families via automated phone calls and touch-tone responses. Questions center on comfort levels and preferences in learning approaches — in-person or hybrid — among staff and families. Her district and others have been putting measures in place to gauge student well-being, the social and emotional learning (SEL) needs of learners, which the How We Feel app does not currently support. Manchester

is exploring other K – 12 specific solutions to capture data on what her districts has designed as an “Interactive Mood Meter.”

Adjournment

Tom thanked the members for their time and encouraged them, as always, 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 2:15 PM.