Digital Learning Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
October 26, 2021

Attendees

- Katie Bauer — Trinity College
- Nick Caruso — Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE)
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Kevin Corcoran — Connecticut State Colleges and Universities
- Andy DePalma — EASTCONN
- Karen Kaplan — Education Consultant
- Dawn La Valle — Connecticut State Library
- Jim Mindek — Connecticut Technical High School System
- 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

- Thought Exchange: Recommendations on Responses to the Following Prompt:

  What about technology use during the pandemic is worth keeping as we return to in-person education?

  o Specific Recommendations
  o Means of Sharing

- Digital Literacy Supports for Adults
  o Libraries
  o Adult and Continuing Education
  o State Opportunity

Welcome
Nick Caruso, Chair of the Digital Learning Advisory Council, called the meeting to order at 10:30 AM. He introduced the first topic, concerning the uses of technology during remote learning that should continue.

Thought Exchange Recommendations

Members of the Advisory Council discussed the final results from the Thought Exchange survey that ran from July 8 through September 17, asking for responses to this simple prompt:

> What about technology use during the pandemic is worth keeping as we return to in-person education?

Doug provided some details behind the responses. Of the 190 participants, 140 were school teachers, 31 were parents, and the remainder a mix of K – 12 students and some members of the higher education community. Nick began the discussion by noting that responses called for the continued use of digital tools to support virtual parent-teacher meetings, use of learning-management systems, support for remote learning during inclement weather (e.g., snow) days, and the need for continued teacher professional development. He expressed disappointment in not seeing more ideas tied directly to improvements in instruction and welcomed feedback from the group.

Karen Kaplan suggested that the results may not be surprising, in that what took place during the pandemic did not represent best practices or innovations in remote and blended learning, but a rapid response to school and university closures. The simple adoption of technology for learning does not necessarily lead to innovative or effective teaching practices. Andy DePalma agreed, describing remote learning during the pandemic as an "emergency versus planned response."

Karen Skudlarek underscored the importance of having basic technology access as a departure point for more advanced uses of digital tools and teaching approaches. Nearly ubiquitous access to computers and the expansion of broadband to students' homes in Connecticut has helped establish that baseline. She shared two adaptations — from Jackie Gerstein and Anthony VonBank — of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, from an educational technology perspective, to illustrate this pyramid of ascending capabilities. She suggested that the occurrence of online meetings and conferences increased because doing so is relatively easy, sitting lower on the hierarchy of technology applications. She expressed hope that, as these essential conditions are met, more innovative applications of technology for learning will take place.

Chinma Uche shared her experience teaching during the pandemic, highlighting the importance of support for parents as well as students and educators. To engage in activities such as conferences and virtual open houses, many parents required technical support and coaching, a need that will continue as educators leverage technology to strengthen school-family ties. She also shared the importance of churches and community organizations to provide support to learners of all ages.

Jim Spafford spoke to best practices shared among adult education programs and shared that 5 – 7 percent of Connecticut's population participates in adult education

programs. These services play a pivotal role in equipping the 332,000 residents in the state without a high school diploma with skills and competencies for the workplace and higher education.

Dawn La Valle drew parallels between what took place in schools and the challenges that libraries faced. In the same way that teachers needed to adapt to remote instruction, so did librarians find ways of conducting formerly in-person programs — from book signings and readings to puppet shows — using technology. She referenced resources to support this shift available from the Public Library Association.

The Advisory members discussed the option of writing a set of recommendations for remote and blended learning, backed in part by the survey results, other published standards, and the expert opinion of the members. Nick defined three cornerstones he would like to see in such guidance: provision of devices for all students, home Internet access, and support for teachers to strengthen instruction using technology.

Karen Kaplan suggested a more assertive approach, calling for changes to legislation or specific action items tied to teaching and learning, rather than just a set of recommendations. She suggested that groups such as CAPSS could appeal to the State Board of Education or General Assembly's Education Committee to bring about changes to education statute that require the integration of technology into learning. Other sources of expert input could include Connecticut's completely online institution of higher education, Charter Oak State College, as well as the recently created Remote Learning Commission. Nick and Doug agreed to consolidate the Advisory's input into specific recommendations for the full Commission to consider at its December 6 meeting.

Digital Literacy Supports for Adults
The discussion of adult and community education transitioned to the next agenda topic regarding digital literacy training for adults. While students in K – 12 and higher education have at least some exposure to, and supports around, the use of technology, Connecticut adults must find help on their own from local libraries, continuing education programs, or self-paced courses if they want to assess and improve their technology skills.

Members of the Advisory Council agreed that direct, one-on-one instruction for adult learners proves most effective in building digital skills. Doug cited the Connecticut State Library Digital Navigator pilot program, funded by American Rescue Plan funds through the Institute of Museum and Library Studies as a scalable model. Dawn La Valle, whose Division of Library Development leads the pilot, described the coordinated work of the participants — East Hartford Public Library, Stamford's Ferguson Library, Hamden Public Library, and Hartford Public Library — as bringing training to the community. With a focus on personalized instruction, these programs assist adults in obtaining devices,

getting online at home, and mastering skills that will allow them to take advantage of benefits such as remote work, applying for jobs, telehealth, tapping State services, and staying connected with family and friends. Dawn called for a coordinated, state plan to help scale the work taking place at these pilot locations.

Doug asked if a uniform set of competency standards and performance assessment to demonstrate mastery would help advance adult digital literacy skills. Dawn agreed that establishing benchmark skills, perhaps with a microcredential or "badge" to prove competency, could be valuable. This approach would require buy-in from Connecticut employers, who would need to acknowledge and ascribe value to the credential for hiring or advancement. Andy suggested that demonstrating skills such as cyber awareness could provide the impetus for banks and loaning institutions to provide discounts or other incentives to their customers. He endorsed the Stop.Think.Connect curriculum and resources from the National Cyber Security Alliance.

Adjournment
Nick thanked the Advisory Council members for the engaged conversation and sharing of ideas. He concluded the meeting at approximately 11:40 AM.