Digital Learning Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
November 2, 2023

Attendees

- Colleen Bailie — West Haven Public Library
- Joe Campbell — Connecticut Technical High School System
- Nick Caruso — Connecticut Association of Boards of Education
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Burt Cohen — Office of Consumer Counsel
- Jonathan Costa — EdAdvance
- Andy DePalma — EASTCONN
- Tom Dillon
- Josh Elliott — Fairfield University
- Shaune Gilbert — ReadyCT
- Barbara Johnson — Colchester Public Schools
- Ryan Kocsondy — Connecticut Education Network (CEN)
- Laura McCaffrey — Archdiocese of Hartford
- Jim Mindek — Connecticut Technical High School System
- Rick Widlansky — Libraries Online (LiON)
- Scott Zak — Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Discussion

Commission member Tom Dillon opened the meeting by welcoming the Advisory members in attendance. He noted that the meeting was a joint convening of the Infrastructure Advisory Council, which he chairs, as well as the Digital Learning Advisory Committee, which Nick Caruso chairs. This meeting would provide a final opportunity for Advisory members to weigh in on initiatives proposed for the next five-year state educational technology plan, a draft of which Doug Casey shared in advance of the meeting.
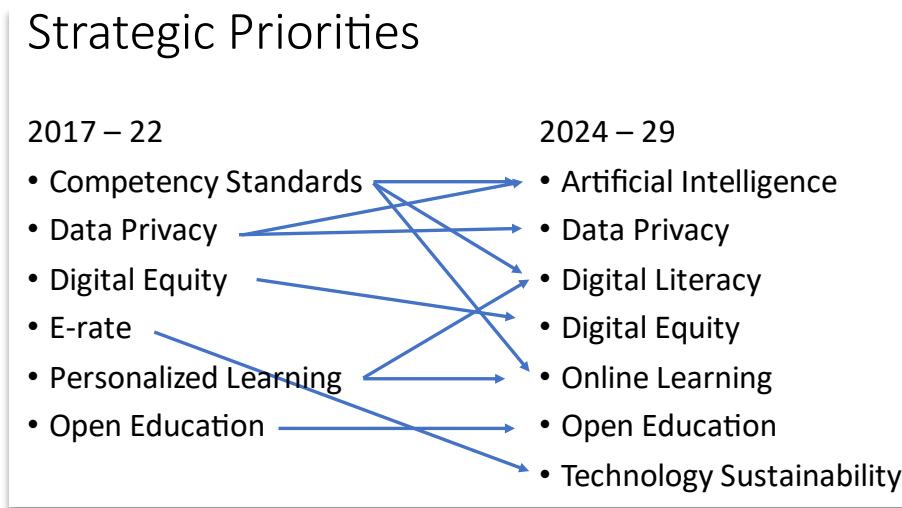
Nick also thanked the meeting attendees for their ongoing engagement and insights that have provided strategic direction toward drafting the proposed plan. He turned the meeting over to Doug Casey to review the proposed initiatives.

Doug provided a brief overview of the steps taken to date to prepare the draft plan. At the Advisory Council's suggestion, the Commission conducted a survey of technology-enhanced practices adopted during the pandemic that should continue. The findings of the survey subsequently led to the Commission developing and issuing a resolution

underscoring state priorities around leadership, essential conditions necessary for learning, equity, and educator supports. In early 2023, the Commission members provided input from their appointing organizations to help guide the next state educational technology plan. That input introduced some new topics, such as artificial intelligence (AI), which align well to the prior plan's initiatives. Doug pointed to the map of priorities from the most recent to the proposed plan:

Strategic Priorities

2017 – 22
- Competency Standards
- Data Privacy
- Digital Equity
- E-rate
- Personalized Learning
- Open Education

2024 – 29
- Artificial Intelligence
- Data Privacy
- Digital Literacy
- Digital Equity
- Online Learning
- Open Education
- Technology Sustainability

These proposed initiatives fit within the five proposed categories within the plan:

- Technology-Enabled Learning: The tools and processes to accelerate, scale, and personalize learning
- Digital Equity: Affordable devices, connections, training, support, and services to provide learning and advancement opportunities
- Competencies: The skills and mindsets that students, educators, and leaders need to use technology effectively in education
- Sustainability: The programs and policies necessary to ensure that institutions can maintain the technology-related costs of education
- Data Privacy and Security: The infrastructure, tools, and behaviors necessary to protect against the misuse of personal and educational data and information

Following this overview, the group discussed the initiatives in each of the above categories.

1. **Technology-Enabled Learning**
   Regarding the use of open education resources (OER), George Claffey suggested in advance of the meeting to include no-cost and low-cost educational materials, regardless of licensing. He felt the Commission should encourage colleges and universities to consider adopting such materials to help

remove cost barriers, which can dissuade students from enrolling in courses or even choosing majors with traditionally high materials costs.

At the K – 12 education level, Doug noted that few schools have taken advantage of the full capabilities of www.GoOpenCT.org, which the Commission put in place to enable individual teachers as well as groups within or across districts to create and share materials that address the same academic standards that all schools have adopted. He noted the State Department of Education's use of the site to post curriculum materials. While this has driven visits to the site, Doug stated that teachers will need training on the use of GoOpenCT for there to be wider adoption of, and benefits from, the platform.

Barbara Johnson stated that members of her organization, the Connecticut Association of School Librarians (CASL) have used the site, and she recommended partnering with district curriculum directors to broaden adoption. The time to use the site is when districts are developing units of study, when they can build courses natively within GoOpenCT. A barrier may be migrating existing district curriculum from sites like Google Drive into the state OER portal.

2. **Digital Equity**

   Doug noted that the Commission is leading the State's federal Digital Equity Program (www.CT.gov/DigitalEquity), funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The Commission should have a draft five-year Digital Equity Plan, a requirement for the program, available for public review and comment by the beginning of 2024. The plan will address access to affordable broadband and devices, training for residents of all ages, and technical support.

   Colleen Bailie welcomed this initiative and underscored the critical role that libraries play in supporting residents in getting online and strengthening digital literacy skills they can apply to learning, career advancement, accessing healthcare resources, and a host of other purposes.

   Ryan highlighted the Connecticut Education Network (CEN) as a key resource to ensuring equity of access to safe, high-speed broadband in community anchor institutions. The Community WiFi component of the CEN Connect program (ctedunet.net/CEN-Connect) will expand public wireless access in towns across the state. He encouraged any plan — whether the Commission's Educational Technology Plan or the separate Digital Equity Plan — to highlight the cost-savings and performance benefits of CEN to the entire state. The Commission and its partners need to continue advocating for the Network to ensure leaders and lawmakers appreciate its role in digital equity.

3. **Competencies**

Doug summarized the Commission's work in the areas of digital literacy and competencies for students, teachers, leaders, and adult learners. He cited the adoption of the ISTE standards (www.CT.gov/ISTE) as well as other complementary efforts, such as the Digital Citizenship, Internet Safety, and Media Literacy Advisory Council, which created downloadable resources for school districts. Kerri Kearney noted the release by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) of the K – 5 computer science curriculum on Go Open CT, which includes digital citizenship lessons.

Andy stated that the Commission should include the effective use of AI in efforts to strengthen digital literacy. Students will need to know how to interact with AI tools to iterate ideas and generate feedback in areas such as writing, coding, and general research. In terms of teaching practice, educators need to understand how to use emerging technologies such as AI, underscoring the need for strong foundations in teaching practices. Artificial intelligence is simply the latest technology innovation to enter the classroom.

Kerri noted that public schools in Connecticut must earn accreditation through the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). The NEASC standards require that students demonstrate competency in the use of technology, which can help drive the integration of technology into teaching and learning. Specifically, NEASC principle 2.9 requires that, "Learners use technology across all curricular areas to support, enhance, and demonstrate their learning." She also encouraged the Commission and CEN to share digital learning standards and best practices with teacher and administrator preparation programs.

On that topic, Josh Elliott cited the Digital Equity Transformation Pledge. This initiative through ISTE, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education, has received support from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), the Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation (AAQEP), the Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education (SITE) and the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). The Pledge initiative is intended to encourage educator preparation programs to ensure that candidates develop competency in teaching with technology.

In Connecticut, Jonathan Costa shared that he is facilitating a council through the CSDE to define the skills educators will need to teach in 2036. While still in the early stages, one of the ten characteristics of future educators is to be "technology savvy." He hopes some level of technology competency will make it into the final model of Connecticut teaching proficiency.

Tom noted that ensuring the development of digital competencies supports the goals of Digital Equity, above. By design many of the Commission's proposed initiatives complement and reinforce each other.

4. **Sustainability**

The pandemic led to the rapid adoption of instructional and operational technologies in the form of laptops, software, networks, and services. Federal relief programs helped offset the costs of these incremental investments, and funds from the American Rescue Plan expire in 2024. The Commission will explore ways, through guidance and advocacy, to help educational institutions transition away from these one-time funding sources.

Kerri noted that support of network equipment, including those for non-instructional components such as security cameras, remains challenging. Standard or volume pricing for hardware would help contain costs and provide transparency for budgeting purposes. Ryan suggested that CEN could play a role in offering cooperative or volume purchasing options to help address common needs across schools, libraries, and universities. There may be opportunities that emerge for cost savings, such as those provided through agreements that CEN has with Securly and iBoss, through an audit of technology usage. The group agreed that having a baseline of school technology costs would help to define categories, investments, and potential cost savings based on volume purchasing of products currently procured by districts independently. Colleen cited the [Connecticut Library Consortium](#) as a potential partner in this work. She pointed to the disparities across library budgets in general and specifically in the area of technology.

5. **Data Privacy and Security**

The Advisory members had no feedback on the topic of data privacy. Doug reiterated that the Commission plans to continue supporting best practices in protecting student and staff data, extending beyond compliance to exploring opportunities to use rapid-cycle evaluations toward evidence-based ed tech adoption.

Nick closed out the conversation by thanking Doug for the draft plan, a culmination of input from the Advisory members across the initial pandemic-related survey to the Commission resolution, and now a renewed five-year state educational technology plan. He emphasized the role of school policy to drive change. Jonathan pointed to positive, proactive policy language around learning opportunities, rather than on risk mitigation. Doug referred Advisory members to the [Policy Recommendations to Promote Digital Learning](#) that the Commission and CABE issued in 2017.

Tom saw the format of the draft plan as simple enough to monitor and keep as an accountability baseline, his preference over a longer-form document that may prove difficult to track. As next steps, he called for the Commission members to help operationalize the plan by enlisting the help of other partner organizations and agencies.

Both Nick and Tom thanked the Advisory members for their ongoing insights and guidance. They closed the meeting at approximately 2:15 PM and wished everyone well.