DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES
BUREAU OF ENTERPRISE SYSTEMS AND TECHNOLOGY
1:00 – 3:00 PM

M I N U T E S

March 6, 2023

Commission Members in Attendance

Raymond, Mark — Commission Chair and Chief Information Officer, DAS-BITS

Mundrane, Michael — Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer, University of Connecticut (UCONN)

Aylesworth, Ryan — Town Manager, Town of Mansfield

Caruso, Nick — Senior Staff Associate, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education

Casey, Doug — Executive Director, CT Commission for Educational Technology

Cohen, Burt — Staff Attorney, Office of Consumer Counsel

Dillon, Tom — Independent (Minority Leader of the House)

Dumais, Charles — Executive Director, Cooperative Education Services (Office of the Governor)

Elsesser, John — Town Manager, Town of Coventry (CT Council of Small Towns)

Gopalakrishnan, Ajit — Chief Performance Officer, Connecticut State Department of Education

Johnson, Barbara — Library Media Specialist, Colchester Public Schools

Provencher, Maura — Vice President of Research and Administration, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges

Schander, Deborah — State Librarian, Connecticut State Library

Smith, Josh — Superintendent, Region 15 Public Schools (Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents)

Uche, Chinma — Math and Computer Science Teacher, CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering (Connecticut Education Association)

Williams, Holly — Section Director, Education and Workforce Development, Office of Policy and Management (OPM)

Zak, Scott — Senior Director of Learning Technologies, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Others in Attendance

Kocsondy, Ryan — Director, Connecticut Education Network (CEN)

Racamato, Victoria — Assistant to the State Chief Information Officer, DAS-BITS

Welcome

Chair Mark Raymond welcomed the members and other attendees to the March 2023 quarterly meeting of the Commission. He remarked how this season can be exhilarating and exhausting for those serving in government, given the long legislative session and the many active bills and topics under review. The Commission plays an active role in advocating for equity of access to technology for learning among students of all ages, efforts that often inform policy and legislation. He encouraged members to continue sharing the work of the Commission with their appointing agencies, offices, and organizations.

Mark noted that since the December 2022 meeting, Mayor Erin Stewart of New Britain has stepped down from her role with the Commission to serve on the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities [Board of Regents](). Commission and DAS leadership are actively seeking a replacement for that position, appointed by the Minority Leader of the Senate, as well as the member seat currently vacant under the appointment of the Speaker of the House.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

As the first item on the [March 6, 2023 meeting agenda](), Mark welcomed a motion to approve the [minutes of the December 5, 2022 meeting](), distributed in advance of today's meeting, Burt Cohen offered the motion, seconded by Nick Caruso. Approval of the minutes carried unanimously, with the abstention of Scott Zak.

Report of the Executive Director

Mark welcomed Doug Casey to share highlights from his quarterly his [Executive Director's Report:]()

- Annual Report: Each year, the Commission issues an annual report on its "progress made in the attainment of the state-wide technology goals" (see [CGS § 61a]()). The [Executive Summary]() and full [2022 Annual Report]() underscore the collaborative work of the Commission, with many measurable impacts. Doug encouraged members to review the report and share it with their appointing offices and professional networks. He noted the growth in use of [Go Open CT](), the State's open education resources portal, over the past year; tools to assist with education technology management; and ongoing cost avoidance through programs such as the Connecticut State Library's [researchIT]() program and the Connecticut Education Network (CEN). He also highlighted common themes from 2022 — especially the sustainability of technology investments — as guiding the work of the Commission as it enters into a season of strategic planning.

- Digital Equity: Among the most prominent elements of the 2022 Annual Report is work to achieve digital equity in Connecticut (www.CT.gov/DigitalEquity). Doug shared updates in the State's work through the Digital Equity Program, one of several broadband grants created and funded through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and administered under the Biden Administration's Internet for All program. The Commission leads the digital equity program on behalf of Connecticut, in close coordination with the broadband expansion efforts of other agencies including the Office of the Governor, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), the Office of Consumer Council (OCC), the Office of Policy and Management (OPM), and CEN.

  In the last quarter, the Commission has forged a partnership with the University of Connecticut (UCONN) School of Public Policy to establish the Connecticut Center for Digital Equity Research to investigate and address barriers to technology access and adoption. Doug thanked members of a volunteer Core Planning Team, including Burt Cohen and Julie Datres of OCC, Dawn LaValle of the Connecticut State Library, David Lukens of OPM, Kevin Pisacich of DEEP, and Adrianna Ramirez of the Connecticut Family Support Network. The coming months will focus on outreach to agencies, regional and local organizations, and residents to identify barriers to digital equity as well as the programmatic resources in Connecticut that help close the digital divide. This work will inform the development of a State Digital Equity Plan, available for public comment this fall.

  Under the category of digital equity, Doug also shared the recent $2.8M award by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to the UCONN's Hartford campus. Funds will support computer science education to students living in the neighborhoods directly surrounding the Hartford campus, as well as cellular hotspots to enable learners to get online outside of school.

- E-rate to Fund School and Library Cybersecurity: In early February, the Commission filed a letter of support for the expansion of the Universal Service Fund to support Internet access to schools and libraries, also known as E-rate. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is exploring the use of funds for cybersecurity protections, not currently covered under the E-rate program. The Commission's letter supports the idea that to ensure safe and uninterrupted access to digital learning tools and resources, schools and libraries need funding for next-generation firewalls and other network security services.

Following the report, Burt asked if there were any bills in the current legislative session that pertain to the Commission. Mark noted [House Bill 6852](#), "An Act Concerning the Affordability of Utilities." As of the time of this writing, that bill contained language that would allow the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) to deposit penalties collected from telecommunications providers into the Commission's education technology fund. Doug shared [House Bill 5429](#), "An Act Concerning Minors and Digital Privacy," which would limit the data collection practices of online service providers. Burt directed Commission members to [Senate Bill 20](#), "An Act Concerning Acquisitions and Mergers of Cable and Telecommunications Providers," which OCC supports. That legislation would apply checks and balances to proposed corporate mergers that could impact pricing and services.

Mark welcomed the discussion and thanked Doug for his report. He highlighted the excellent work of the Commission as reflected in the 2022 Annual Report and encouraged members to share the document with their appointing offices and professional networks.

Infrastructure Advisory Council Report
Commission member and Infrastructure Advisory Council chair Tom Dillon provided brief comments on that group's February 2 meeting, the [minutes of which](#) were posted in advance on the Commission's Web site. He highlighted the advisory council's input on the next phase of the [Community Wireless program](#), administered by CEN with oversight from the Commission. Council member George Claffey, the CIO of Central Connecticut State University, recommended that CEN solicit letters of intent from potential program applicants. Doing so would enable CEN and the Commission to review the volume and type of likely requests and to encourage institutions in the same communities to combine applications to appreciate cost efficiencies, speed deployment, and deepen impact. On a related note, Nick thanked Ryan for his team's work in this area. As someone who frequently visits libraries and schools to facilitate training, he appreciates the availability of robust wireless access made possible through the first phase of the Community Wireless program.

Burt thanked Tom for these updates and asked when CEN expects to receive approval to expend funds for the next phase of the program. Ryan noted that the program is funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) through the U.S. Department of the Treasury. He has not received input from that agency regarding the program application submitted in early January 2023. Award delays have likely resulted from the Treasury's staff shortages. Burt also noted that the Treasury was not established to oversee broadband programs as efficiently as, for example, the NTIA, which administers the Digital Equity programs.

Digital Learning Advisory Council Report

Nick Caruso, chair of the Digital Learning Advisory Council, provided highlights of that group's January 30 meeting. Commission members received the [detailed minutes from that meeting](#) in advance of March 6. Nick expressed the group's concerns over the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in education, given the recent explosion in AI applications, such as ChatGPT from Open AI. He encouraged the Commission to consider AI as part of its next strategic plan and promised to bring back from the advisory council any specific recommendations on this topic.

The advisory council members also discussed the Commission's next strategic plan, including its scope, timing, and topics. The idea of a "summit" to enlist input from state leaders arose, with a desire to rethink and address some of the key barriers to effective teaching and learning. The advisory council did not end up recommending such an event and returned to narrow but nonetheless essential charge of the Commission, which is to address ways to maximize the potential of technology in teaching and learning.

Strategic Planning

In a seamless transition to the next topic, Nick grounded the advisory council discussion into a simple request to Commission members, that they share the top two or three priorities pertaining to educational technology from their appointing organizations. John Elsesser asked if Nick or Doug could provide specific language so that he and other Commission members could fulfill this request. Doug promised to provide this guidance, welcoming other input on the next strategic plan, including its format and scope. He also encouraged Commission members to share other pertinent strategic plans and frameworks that would inform the Commission's work. He mentioned the revised [National Educational Technology Plan](#) as well as the forthcoming Connecticut State Board of Education plan as examples. Doug promised to collect and create a digest of input from Commission members for discussion at the June 2023 meeting.

Mark closed the topic by underscoring the importance of collecting input on priorities. The Commission has successfully completed the work laid out in its five-year plan, as highlighted on [page 12 of the 2022 annual report](#). The next plan will serve not just as a list of deliverables but also as a decision-making lens through which the group decides which endeavors to undertake.

CEN Updates

Mark asked Ryan to cover highlights of the Network's efforts over the last quarter, with details provided in the [written report](#) on the Commission's Web site. Ryan noted the expansion of services through CEN against distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks. The CEN team remains vigilant in ensuring these cyber protections, which provide enormous direct and indirect cost savings to schools, libraries, and universities.

Connections to the Network continue to increase, with several libraries joining, and efforts to improve internal connections for libraries taking place through the audit of 41 locations. To expand CEN's capacity and reduce costs of reaching new member institutions, Ryan and his team have applied for funding through the IIJA Middle Mile program. Central to that proposal is the "Connecticut Scaled Open Access Network and Anchor Resiliency (CT-SOANAR) project. Ryan has recently heard from the NTIA grant team and hopes for final approval in the near future.

The annual [CEN Conference](#) will take place May 11 at the Connecticut Convention Center in Hartford. Connecticut State Historian Emeritus Walt Woodward will provide the keynote, followed by dozens of engaging workshops and time for CEN members to connect at what has become the top educational technology event in the state. Mark extended his appreciation to Ryan and his team for their efforts and encouraged Commission members to attend the conference. Michael Mundrane echoed this endorsement and pledged once again to sponsor his staff to attend the event.

Public Comment

There was no public comment offered.

Scheduled 2023 Meeting Dates

Mark noted the remaining scheduled meeting dates for 2023:

- Monday, June 5
- Monday, September 11
- Monday, December 4

Adjournment

Mark concluded the meeting by calling for a motion to adjourn, made by Nick and seconded by John. With a unanimous vote to conclude the meeting at approximately 2:00 PM, Mark thanked the members for their continued service to the Commission.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Casey
Executive Director
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