



CONNECTICUT COMMISSION FOR EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

March 4, 2024

1:00 – 3:00 PM

MINUTES

Commission Members in Attendance

Raymond, Mark — Commission Chair and Chief Information Officer, DAS-BITS
Mundrane, Michael — Commission Vice Chair and Vice Provost/CIO, University of Connecticut
Aylesworth, Ryan — Town Manager, Town of Mansfield
Caruso, Nick — Senior Staff Associate, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education
Casey, Doug — Executive Director, Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
Cohen, Burt — Staff Attorney, Office of Consumer Counsel
Dumais, Charles — Executive Director, Cooperative Education Services (Office of the Governor)
Elsesser, John — Independent Consultant (Connecticut 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
Salvatore, Tony — Co-President, Connecticut Federation of School Administrators (Speaker of the House)
Smith, Josh — Superintendent, Region 15 Public Schools (Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents)
Stanco, Bart — CEO Advisor and Executive Partner, Gartner
Suh, Grace — Chief of Staff, Office of Workforce Strategy (Department of Economic and Community Development)
Uche, Chinma — Math and Computer Science Teacher, CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering (Connecticut Education Association)
Zak, Scott — Senior Director of Learning Technologies, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Others in Attendance

Dantos, Evan — Robinson + Cole
Racamato, Victoria — Assistant to the State Chief Information Officer, DAS-BITS
Tarsa, Paul — Member Relations Manager, Connecticut Education Network (CEN)
Thompson, Lauren — Digital Equity Program Manager, Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
Toomey, Carol Quinn — Managing Director – Connecticut Public Service, Accenture

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Welcome

Commission Chair and State Chief Information Officer Mark Raymond welcomed members and other attendees to the [first meeting of the 2024 calendar year](#). He began by recognizing the milestone of the Commission's longest-serving member, Nick Caruso of CABE. As the most recent issue of [The CABE Journal](#) noted, Nick has convened 1,600 workshops for Connecticut boards of education, providing invaluable coaching and facilitation services over the past 30 years.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

As the first action item on the agenda, Mark welcomed a motion to approve the [minutes from the December 4, 2023 meeting](#). Ryan Aylesworth offered the motion, with a second from Chinma Uche. With no abstentions, the motion carried unanimously.

Report of the Executive Director

Following approval of the meeting minutes, Mark asked Doug Casey to provide highlights from his [quarterly report](#). Over the past three months, the Commission has released several reports and plans of note. Doug encouraged members to review the Commission's [2023 Annual Report](#). That document details the Commission's mission and membership as well as sections that highlight the impact of its work over the past year. The report closes the reporting period for the 2017 – 2023 State Educational Goals and Plan.

In January, the Commission officially launched the [2024 – 2028 State Educational Tehcnology Plan](#). Initiatives falling under five categories — technology-enabled learning, digital equity, technology competencies (skills), sustainability, and privacy and security — make up the new plan. Doug also noted that the plan draws connections between the work mapped in the recently released [National Educational Technology Plan](#) (NETP) from the U.S. Department of Education and [Connecticut Digital Equity Plan](#). He underscored the importance of coordinating and aligning efforts across plans to bring efficiencies of effort to maximize benefits to students, teachers, and institutions.

Shifting from strategic plans to the current legislative session, Doug shared an overview of two draft laws that pertain to the Commission's efforts to increase access to technology for teaching and learning. Both [Senate Bill 2](#) (An Act Concerning Artificial Intelligence) and [Senate Bill 3](#) (An Act Concerning Consumer Protection) propose steps that State agencies would take to widen and boost awareness of affordable broadband programs. He referred members and attendees to [the written](#) and [in-person](#) (recorded) testimony that Mark and Doug provided in late February.



Mark thanked Doug for his efforts over the past quarter and acknowledged the significant effort of Advisory Council members to help draft the new State Educational Technology Plan. On the topic of Senate Bill 2, he noted the potential unintended consequence of introducing greater restrictions on developing products and services that leverage artificial intelligence. Doing so may bring improvements to the use of AI and could disincentivize companies from offering such solutions in Connecticut or developing them in the state.

Digital Equity Program Updates

Mark invited Lauren Thompson, the Commission's Digital Equity Program Manager, to provide highlights from [quarterly report](#). Since the last Commission meeting, the digital equity team completed the state plan, available at www.CT.gov/DigitalEquity; conducted a period of public comment; and submitted the revised plan for final review with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). The Commission received more than 400 comments prior to finalizing the plan, and Doug commended Lauren for her outstanding efforts to enlist the volume of input through presentations and direct outreach to partner organizations.

The NTIA has indicated that the application materials ("notice of funding opportunity," or NOFO) for states to apply for Capacity funds to implement digital equity plans should be available soon. Lauren clarified that the Commission will respond to the NOFO, with the expectation of receiving approximately \$17M by early 2025 to support implementation of the Digital Equity Plan.

She completed her updates with a call for Commission members to consider assisting with the "challenge" process that she is helping DEEP to facilitate. As part of the sister [Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment](#) (BEAD) program, the "challenge" process allows residents to contest areas listed as "served" by one or more broadband carriers.

Mark thanked Lauren for her updates and ongoing efforts in leading the program. He called attention to the fact that NTIA reviewers will not require any "curing" of the plan. Given that most other states have gone through multiple rounds of revisions, the success that the Commission has had in its review speaks to the in-depth research, collaboration, and design that went into the plan. Burt echoed Mark's comments and underscored the difficulty of the federal program requirements. As the State Broadband Coordinator, he remarked on how well-connected Connecticut is, a sign that the BEAD program may have significant funds left over to increase access to devices, training, and technical support for residents.

Regarding the research shared on page 6 of the [Executive Summary](#), Ajit Gopalakrishnan inquired about the definition of "covered households" as at or below



150 percent of the poverty line. He gave the example of eligibility criteria for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) as at or below 200 percent of the poverty line and encouraged alignment of definitions across programs. Mark suggested that the Commission advise the NTIA to provide flexibility to states to expand this eligibility definition, especially in states with high costs of living, such as Connecticut.

Digital Learning Advisory Report

Following the discussion around digital equity, Mark asked Nick Caruso, Chair of the Digital Learning Advisory, to provide updates from that group's January 30 meeting. Nick referred members and other attendees to the [posted minutes](#) and highlighted the recommendations that came out of that meeting. Doctor Jody Goeler, formerly the superintendent of Hamden Public Schools and CAFE's Senior Staff Associate for Policy Services, has joined the Advisory and brought up the topics of cell phone and AI use in schools. He argued for guidance and policies that focus on the potential value of using technology for learning, rather than issuing policies that aim only to curb the use of digital tools. He called for district leaders and teachers to model effective use for students.

Josh Smith, a member of the Digital Learning Advisory, agreed with these points, calling for policies that focus on behavior more than technology. Even well-intentioned [calls from the Governor](#) during his 2024 State of the State address to limit student cell phone use (now reflected in [Senate Bill 14](#)) should address the benefits of technology. Michael Mundrane has seen the use of cell phones as encouraging student curiosity, in addition to serving as a potential distraction.

Mark thanked Nick and others for their comments and suggested that the Commission as a body, as well as individual members, can weigh in on the proposed legislation. He will also share these recommendations with the Governor at an upcoming meeting.

Infrastructure Advisory Report

Doug provided updates from the January 26 Infrastructure Advisory, with minutes posted on the [Commission's website](#). The central topic of that meeting was technology sustainability, one of the Commission's core initiatives in its [five-year plan](#). Advisory members discussed the challenges of replacing and maintaining technology investments made possible through one-time pandemic relief and philanthropic contributions. The general education community recognizes this need, often with a focus on computers. Sustainability also must include investments into school networks, educational software — especially with use expanding in schools 50 percent year over year — and even categories of spend such as security cameras and bus-routing software.



The Advisory members agreed that developing guidance that explains these different categories of technology and includes best practices and resources for addressing those operational costs would help school district leaders. Mark noted discussions within the Interagency Council to End the Achievement Gap, in which Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz raised concerns about device lifecycles and replacements. He encouraged cross-agency collaboration on this topic, given the shared concerns across these groups.

CEN Report

To close out reporting for the March 4 meeting, Member Relations Manager Paul Tarsa of the Connecticut Education Network (CEN) provided [quarterly updates](#) on the Network. He began by highlighting the ongoing benefit of dedicated denial of service (DDoS) protections that CEN provides to its member institutions. The last quarter saw the largest attack yet, with mitigation efforts ensuring continuity of service to the 600+ members.

Through several coordinated programs, CEN has been able to connect schools and libraries in need of high-speed Internet for research and learning. Progress continues through the Connecticut Library Fiber Consortium, in partnership with the Connecticut State Library. The CEN Connect initiative will invest funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) program to offer no-cost connections to additional anchor institutions. The program will also fund much-needed network upgrades and support community wireless access.

The annual [CEN Conference](#) will take place May 8 – 9, with longer form, intensive workshops taking place the first day, followed by the traditional, shorter sessions and keynotes on day 2. Coming in October, CEN will co-host with the Connecticut National Guard the [Cyber Nutmeg](#). School, university, municipal, and public safety leaders will appreciate this opportunity to learn the latest cybersecurity best practices. On the topic of conferences, Mark also noted that the annual conference of the Quilt — the affinity group for research and education network such as CEN — will take place in Hartford in September of this year. The CEN team will proudly serve as the host network for this event.



Public Comment

There was no public comment offered.

Scheduled 2024 Meeting Dates

Mark reminded members of the three remaining meetings for 2024:

- Monday, June 3 (In Person)
- Monday, September 9 (Virtual)
- Monday, December 2 (In Person)

Adjournment

Mark welcomed a motion to adjourn, offered by Burt and with a second from Nick. With a unanimous vote to conclude the meeting at approximately 2:15 PM, Mark thanked the Commission members for their contributions to the thoughtful and engaging discussion.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Casey
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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Douglas Casey'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and 'C'.