

Digital Learning Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

April 30, 2019

Attendees

- Nick Caruso — CT Association of Boards of Education
- Doug Casey — Commission for Educational Technology
- Jonathan Costa — EdAdvance
- Karen Kaplan — Hamden Public Schools
- Jim Spafford — Manchester Adult Education
- Chris Weiss — Riverside School (Greenwich)
- Scott Zak — Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Agenda

- Open Education Resources
- 5G Implications and Guidance
- Learning Competencies
- Measuring Efficacy of Educational Technology
- Alignment of Efforts with Other Technology Groups
- Current Legislative Session

Meeting Notes

The issues and conversations summarized below represent an assimilation of ideas rather than a strict verbatim or chronological record of points shared.

Welcome

Nick Caruso of CABE and Chair of the Digital Learning Advisory Council called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM. The group welcomed new member Christopher Weiss, Principal of Riverside School in Greenwich. Chris shared a bit of his background, including seven years in his current role. Before coming to Greenwich, Chris served as an assistant principal in Norwalk and taught 4th and 5th grade in Trumbull. He remains an active member of the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), which awarded him a leadership award last year. Four years ago, Greenwich implemented a 1:1 computing program, an initiative that Chris played a significant role in supporting. Following Chris's introduction, the other members of the Council briefly shared their backgrounds and current roles.

Open Education Resources

Doug opened the discussion around open education resources (OER) by providing the group with updates on work that the Commission has completed to date. Over the past two years, an informal working group across K – 12, libraries, and higher education has convened to assess resources and needs around OER. That group has articulated a number of benefits to using open resources, including flexibility, equity of access, and cost savings to institutions and students. The recommendations of that group has led to a campaign to raise awareness of OER use in Connecticut and collect feedback from the broader educational community.

To assist with the campaign, Doug has enlisted a team of undergraduate students in UCONN's Digital Media and Design program, under the direction of Professor John Murphy. The students have developed a logo for the campaign (@GoOpenCT, www.GoOpenCT.org) and filmed testimonials about the benefits of OER by other students and educational leaders. Doug will use these resources and a brief online survey to assess awareness and use of OER in Connecticut. If the survey responses indicate that districts and colleges have interest in sharing resources and engaging in professional development, the Commission can use the collected data to seek funding to support OER in Connecticut.

Karen Kaplan mentioned legislation in the current legislative session ([HB-7162](#)) in support of OER and asked how the GoOpenCT campaign aligns with that proposed law. Doug shared some highlights of the bill, which addresses only the use of OER in higher education in the proposed creation of the Connecticut Open Education Resources Coordinating Council. That proposed law has a limited scope and potentially long time to implement, and the Commission's progress to date around GoOpenCT (a K – 12 and higher education) has existing support and momentum. Jim Spafford echoed the importance of using OER from an equity standpoint and called for considerations around adult education as well. For those interested in research around OER use and attitudes in Connecticut colleges and universities, Doug mentioned the [Open Source Textbook Report](#) from 2017.

The group discussed the need to ensure high quality in learning materials, a topic frequently raised in consider open resources. As part of a network of 20 states that have taken the GoOpen pledge, Connecticut can access many other states' materials. Other state education agencies have committed staff to produce and vet standards-aligned materials, and developing an OER search platform that links to these resources would provide great value to teachers and students. Jonathan Costa also noted that the process of assessing quality of resources represents a critical skill that students and teachers need and that align to the ISTE digital learning competencies. To support information literacy in the state, he also shared that the RESC Alliance has struck a partnership with Newsela, which affords students the ability to read primary source materials at the reading (Lexile) level appropriate for them.

5G Implications and Guidance

During the February Digital Learning Advisory Council meeting, Jonathan had shared ideas about forthcoming 5G networks' impact on teaching and learning. He introduced the topic again by citing several articles (e.g., New York Times, "[Why Controlling 5G Could Mean Controlling the World](#)," February 25, 2019 Podcast) about these next-generation cellular networks. He welcomed a discussion and possible publication from the Council members that addressed the future of digital learning if everyone had cellular connections so fast as to make school networks unnecessary.

Jonathan offered a parallel between cloud computing, now widespread in education, and next-generation cellular networks. With schools now outsourcing their applications and core technology systems (e.g., e-mail) to host services such as Google and Microsoft, why would they pay for IT staff, on-premises network equipment, and data connections if those resources, too, became unnecessary. Students and teachers may also prefer connecting through their own, personal accounts rather than through a school-provided network. Doug pointed to the challenge of defining "school networks" and obligations to provide filtering, even to the implications on E-rate funding if districts have less of a need for centralized connections.

The group discussed the potential impact of ubiquitous, high-speed connectivity on the workplace and workforce; the acceleration of artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, and automation; and how these factors will influence the design of learning, perhaps not for tomorrow but at least for the next generation of students.

As possible next steps to consider these and other scenarios, Jonathan welcomed the idea of having a carrier speak with the group about the future of cellular networks. He also suggested that Advisory Council members share research with each other and later convene to discuss collective findings and recommendations.

Learning Competencies

The Digital Learning Advisory Council members have recommended the adoption and use of competency frameworks, notably the ISTE Student, Educator, and Education Leader Standards, which the full Commission has adopted. Doug introduced ISTE's framework on adult learner standards, known as SkillRise (www.SkillRise.org). In his role with Manchester's adult education program, Jim noted the close alignment of the SkillRise framework with the ISTE Student Standards and current college and career readiness standards. The indicators provide strong definitions of the skills adults need for learning and workforce preparedness, and Jim noted the need to provide support to adult education trainers to integrate the standards into their courses. He indicated that employers often help define the specific skills that students need for success in the workplace.

On that note, Doug mentioned the launch of Upward Hartford, a technology incubator, and the expansion of Tech Talent South to the Hartford area. The organization provides "bootcamp"-style training in 16-week sessions. Cohorts gain technology as well as career-readiness training to prepare them for collaborative,

project-based challenges that draw on soft as well as technical skills. Tech Talent South is designing these cohorts with institutions of higher education and local employers to prepare learners for the specific needs of those companies.

Jonathan welcomed the SkillRise competencies and pointed to the need for districts to ensure students have these higher-level skills upon graduation. He noted that most districts have defined a “portrait of the graduate” in broad terms but felt that the State’s definition of institutional success, reflected in the [Next-Generation Accountability System](#) indicators, does support these student competencies well. He and Karen acknowledged the more enlightened aspects of the new indicators, such as growth, but hoped for stronger support for the ISTE and other student competency frameworks.

Both Jonathan and Karen recommended that the Digital Learning Advisory Council and full Commission prioritize support for student competency standards with the new Commissioner, once the [State Board of Education](#) has appointed that individual. The group also pointed to deficits in professional development opportunities. They felt that the learning teachers engage in should lead to similar, higher-level competencies and come through applied, personalized, project-based learning rather than traditional “sit-and-get” training. From his perspective in working with boards of education, he acknowledged the work of districts such as Greenwich in designing their strategic plans around the portrait of the graduate.

Measuring Efficacy of Educational Technology

Doug opened this topic by mentioning the increasing dialog he has seen around the learning sciences and measuring efficacy of tools and instructional practices. Groups such as ISTE, SETDA, and others have called for connections between learning research and classroom practice. For example, SETDA will soon launch a Promising Practices Program in educational technology. The initiative will link private companies with school districts and researchers to address specific student learning or professional practice needs through a process of rapid-cycle evaluations of educational technology. He asked the group whether such scientific approaches to assessing new tools and practices would resonate with districts.

Karen expressed skepticism, given that even carefully designed pilots often do not see fidelity in implementation across students, classrooms, educators, and schools. For example, the provider of an educational technology solution to boost numeracy skills might indicate a certain “dosage” of use of its product. If schools and teachers do not follow these recommendations, then results will vary, and it may remain difficult to assess the impact of the tool or instructional approach. Chris echoed this challenge in isolating the variables in new approaches to teaching. He noted the differences across the 11 elementary schools in Greenwich when his district implemented its 1:1 computing program. Differences in school leadership approaches, culture, and support resources, for example, all may play into the ability to measure effectiveness.

The group concluded that such pilot programs as well as the general need to connect research to practice hold promise, but outcomes remain challenging to measure.

Alignment of Efforts with Other Technology Groups

Nick briefly raised the importance he sees in aligning priorities around digital learning across leadership groups in Connecticut. He noted that Josh Smith, Doug, and he serve on the CAPSS Technology Committee, which often addresses some of the same concerns that the Digital Learning Advisory Council, the full Commission, and CABE address. Jonathan provided the example of shared work to develop “alternative learning day” models to allow work on days when school does not take place for weather-related reasons to count for instructional purposes. The CAPSS Technology Committee, Digital Learning Advisory Council, and groups of districts have all addressed this need. Doug mentioned similar discussions on this and other topics among leaders of other groups such as CASL, CECA, and CTEL. Nick closed the topic by offering to promote open communications and alignment across all groups that support best practices in digital learning.

Current Legislative Session

With the end of the session approaching, the group concluded the meeting with a brief discussion of proposed legislation. Prior to the meeting, Doug welcomed a discussion of all bills and offered the following list, by topic, for consideration:

- Computer Science ([HB-7010](#), [SB-573](#), [SB-669](#), [SB-957](#))
- Common Curriculum ([HB-5009](#), [HB-7082](#), [HB-7083](#), [SB-669](#))
- Data Privacy ([HB-5242](#))
- Open Education Resources ([HB-7162](#))

Questions among the members arose around changes to the student data privacy law ([CGS §§ 10-234aa – dd](#)) through House Bill 5242. Doug noted the lack of detail in the bill language but did offer the extensive list of recommendations that he and the other members of the Data Privacy Task Force offered in their [Report to the General Law Committee](#). He noted the strong diversity and expertise of the Task Force members, who argued that the law does not define additional punitive measures, given Connecticut’s existing consumer protection laws. Instead, the Legislature may consider making a clearer connection between these two sets of statute and looking at ways of enforcing both. Chris noted that the restrictions the law imposes has quashed the use of some educational technology. For example, students in Greenwich could not use the district’s 3D printers for six months last year while negotiations around data privacy took place with the vendor.

Doug also called attention to the four bills calling for common curriculum in support of African-American studies, Puerto Rican and Latino studies, and computer science, with associated fiscal notes. The group acknowledged that free and low-cost curriculum materials already exist in these subjects, tying back to the earlier discussion around open education resources.

Nick and Doug concluded the discussion by encouraging members to speak with their legislators with concerns and recommendations regarding specific bills, especially to provide insights on unintended consequences of proposed legislation.

Adjournment

Nick thanked the group for their time and input and concluded the meeting at approximately 4:00 PM.