



**DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES  
BUREAU OF ENTERPRISE SYSTEMS AND TECHNOLOGY**

**Online Meeting**

**1:00 – 3:00 PM**

**MINUTES**

**June 1, 2020**

**Commission Members in Attendance**

Raymond, Mark – Commission Chair and Chief Information Officer, DAS-BEST  
Mundrane, Michael — Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer, University of Connecticut (UCONN)  
Baillie, Colleen — Director, West Haven Public Library  
Caruso, Nick — Senior Staff Associate, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education  
Casey, Doug — Executive Director, CT Commission for Educational Technology  
Dillon, Tom — Independent (Minority Leader of the House)  
Dumais, Charles — Executive Director, Cooperative Educational Services (C.E.S.) (Office of the Governor)  
Elsesser, John — Town Manager, Town of Coventry (CT Council of Small Towns)  
Gopalakrishnan, Ajit — Chief Performance Officer, State Department of Education  
La Valle, Dawn — Director, Division of Library Development, Connecticut State Library  
Mavrogeanes, Rich — President, Discover Video (President Pro Tem of the Senate)  
Minikowski, Andrew — Staff Attorney, Office of Consumer Counsel  
Provencher, Maura — Vice President of Research and Administration, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC)  
Shellard, Susan — Director of Administration, Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD)  
Stanco, Bart — Vice President, Gartner (Office of the Governor)  
Stephanou, Steve — Deputy General Manager, Town of Manchester (Connecticut Conference of Municipalities)  
Vittner, John — Director, IT Policy, Office of Policy and Management (OPM)  
Zak, Scott — Senior Director of Learning Technologies, Board of Regents

**Others in Attendance**

Dantos, Evan — Robinson + Cole  
Kocsondy, Ryan — Director, Connecticut Education Network (CEN)  
Racamato, Victoria — Assistant to the State Chief Information Officer



## Welcome

For the purposes of social distancing amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the June meeting took place via Web conference, a recording of which is available from the [Connecticut Network](#). Chairman Mark Raymond called the meeting to order at approximately 1:00 PM. He thanked the members for their ongoing focus on fully utilizing technology to support learning.

## Approval of Meeting Minutes

The Commission members had the opportunity to review [the minutes of the March 2, 2020 meeting](#) prior to today's gathering. Mark welcomed a motion to approve the minutes, which Michael Mundrane offered and Nick Caruso seconded. With no call for discussion or revisions, the Commission approved the document unanimously, with Rich Mavrogeanes and Ajit Gopalakrishnan abstaining because they did not attend the March 2 meeting.

## Report of the Executive Director

Mark invited Doug Casey to share highlights from his [Executive Director's report](#), sent to Commission members prior to the meeting. Doug echoed Mark's comments concerning the shift to virtual learning and commended teachers, professors, and leaders for their efforts over the last two months.

- **Support for Remote Learning**

In early March, the Commission launched its [Remote Learning page](#), an extensive collection of resources across five categories: Guiding Considerations, Planning Frameworks and Checklists, Connecting Students Outside School, Free or Reduced-Price Software, and Free and Open Educational Resources. With the input of Infrastructure Advisory Council members, the Commission most recently published a [Cellular Hotspot Guide](#) to assist schools, colleges, and libraries in reviewing and purchasing these devices. Activity on these Web pages remains strong, and Doug frequently adds new resources to the listing. The Remote Learning guide has seen 7,000 page views since its launch. Doug also shares research and insights through the Commission's Twitter account ([@CTEdTech](#)) using the campaign hashtag [#KeepCTLearning](#).

The past two months have also seen substantial levels of activity in federal legislation and funding to offset the impact of COVID-related closures. Doug mentioned the CARES Act funds, totaling more than \$140M for Connecticut schools, colleges, and libraries. In addition to these one-time awards, several U.S.



Congressional bills propose long-term, programmatic changes that could benefit the use of technology in education. To encourage such changes, in April Mark sent [a letter to the office of Senator Blumenthal](#), who serves on the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, asking him to work with colleagues to provide an additional \$2B in funding for E-rate and to afford the Federal Communications Commission the regulatory flexibility to allow E-rate to fund connections for students and educators at home.

The Commission has long advocated for and created resources to address digital inequities. These issues have become even more acute since the shift to remote learning. Governor Lamont has acknowledged the need to connect all citizens for learning, work, telehealth, and all the other benefits that come with connectivity. As such, he has created the Rapid Connectivity Deployment Group to identify and address gaps in connectivity. Doug mentioned that he, Ryan, and Ajit serve as members of this group, which also includes leaders from the Office of Consumer Counsel and Department of Economic and Community Development. Planning is underway, with goals of identifying gaps by geography and demographic groups; addressing affordability, awareness, and other challenges to connectivity; and designing solutions to get citizens, businesses, and institutions online rapidly. Doug promised to keep the Commission members updated on progress to attain these goals.

- **State K – 12 Technology Report**

Investments in technology to support remote learning have become a top priority for schools, making data about current and planned investments extremely valuable to school districts. In response to this need, Doug designed a survey in April that collected input from schools on digital learning investments across devices, home access, teacher training, and software. The [resulting report](#), shared in late April with Commission members, reflects input from 105 school districts across all demographic reference groups and educating approximately 2/3 of the state's students. Doug shared some of the high-level findings:



- [Digital Divide](#): The most disconnected students generally live in the communities that face the greatest socioeconomic challenges.
- 1:1 Computing: Prior to remote learning, about [half of reporting districts](#) ran 1:1 device programs at the high school and middle school levels. Those numbers have increased since learning went online, with 60,000 new laptops alone being distributed to students in Alliance Districts through funding from the Dalio Foundation.



- Technology Commitments: About [three-quarters of schools](#) plan investments in devices, home Internet, software, and staff training.
- Technology Staffing: Ratios remain low to support growing needs, with approximately one district technology specialist in support of 350 to 1,000 students. Such staff also need to manage other technology concerns (enterprise systems, faculty devices, etc.). Only [four districts committed to increase staffing levels](#) to meet these increasing needs.
- **Remote Learning Investment Recommendations**

As mentioned earlier, the State of Connecticut received more than \$140M in education funding through the CARES Act. While much of this award passed through agencies and institutions to districts and college students, more than \$12M is reserved for discretionary, state-level initiatives. The Commission developed [guidance on how to invest](#) these funds most effectively and equitably for remote and blended learning through a set of recommendations shared with members in advance of the meeting. Doug provided a brief overview of each area of investment:

  - Open Education Resources: Closing the funding gap to allow for the launch of a statewide platform for digital curriculum creation and sharing
  - Educator Supports: Training and credentialing of teachers to support distance learning using technology
  - CEN Upgrades: Refreshing end-of-life edge equipment and increasing capacity to accommodate the increased number of devices that will enter schools in the fall
  - Digital Equity: Providing access to the Internet for all students at home, ensuring continuity of learning as "school" has moved online
  - Educational Software: Expanding the use of LearnPlatform to measure and optimize the use of tools that best support student achievement

Mark thanked Doug for his remarks and noted that the activities schools and universities have engaged in since remote learning began have focused on short-term goals of providing basic educational services. Considering long-term changes to teaching and learning, he asked whether any new thinking had emerged to help reframe education in an era of distance. Doug noted that some districts and universities have had better success in shifting to remote learning than others, moving from "crisis" mode to establishing more predictable, daily instruction models for students. Michael pointed out the distinction between simply delivering a lecture through a camera — the same pedagogy used before COVID-19 — and designing a semester-long course online. He did not see any institution closing the gap between older ways of teaching and effective online learning at scale.



Ajit Gopalakrishnan commended the state's teachers for their shift from 100 percent in-person to completely remote learning. Many have redesigned lesson plans to engage students using online tools and have adopted blended learning approaches. The State Department of Education (SDE) highlighted many of these exemplars in its Webinar series, "[Learning at a Distance: Journeys of Connecticut Schools](#)." Michael acknowledged their work and expressed hope that the population of teachers and professors with experience — and a stake in improving — online learning had reached a critical mass as a result of COVID-related remote learning.

### **Digital Learning Advisory Council Report**

Nick Caruso provided updates from the April 23 meeting of the Digital Learning Advisory Council. Commission members received [minutes of the meeting](#) in advance of Nick's report. He began by acknowledging that much in education has changed since the Advisory Council meeting, and many challenges continue. The shift to remote learning has highlighted existing inequities among communities, especially in access to broadband and devices. He also noted behavioral factors that impede learning. Students who lack strong executive skills and motivation often struggle with distance learning.

Districts appreciate the Dalio Foundation's student laptop donation, but schools overwhelmingly use Chromebooks rather than Windows devices. As a result, many of the schools receiving these computers lack the staff expertise to support fleets of Windows computers. They also face new expenses the next fiscal year, when they will need to pay for license renewals to software bundled with these donated computers. Ajit has been active on the State's Learn from Home Task Force that manages the deployment of these computers and provided a link for more information about the group: <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/COVID19/Learn-from-home-task-force/>.

Members of the Digital Learning Advisory Council supported the [Commission's recommendations for statewide CARES Act investments](#), including money for an open education resources (OER) portal and programming. Nick reminded the Commission that districts already share instructional materials, so having a place to create and curate them centrally would bring enormous benefits. He encouraged Commission members to revisit the five-year [State Educational Technology Plan](#) and consider changes or additions to the goals and initiatives it contains, in light of the rapid adoption of technology over the past two months. He also recommended a return to fully funding the Connecticut Education Network (CEN). As districts face their own budget crises with the decline of local tax revenues, coupled with increases in operational costs to support remote learning, he felt the State should remove the



burden of paying for Internet connectivity. He also called for the expansion of CEN's footprint beyond the current minimum of one connection per district.

Nick invited Chip Dumais to describe some of the work underway through the six regional advisory groups created by the SDE and operated through the regional education service centers (RESCs). Chip shared that the groups continue productive discussions about how schools can reopen in the fall, though he noted that local budgets cannot support the new requirements associated with safe teaching and learning in person. Such reopening plans come with increases in many areas, such as transportation, personal protective equipment (PPE), and staff hours, to name just a few. For these reasons, many districts still see heavy reliance on remote learning, at least for the start of the year. He echoed earlier comments that schools are operating now in an emergency mode not optimized for online learning.

Mark thanked Nick and Chip for their comments and noted that the scope of and funding for CEN's services were established in statute. State-level discussions are taking place around the role of technology to support all aspects of citizenry, including education, though possible changes would not necessarily mean an increase in overall funding but a shift in current levels of investment. He also pointed to the economic challenges that the State will face with declining tax revenues over the next two years resulting from the COVID-related economic downturn. He welcomed the conversation but cautioned that members should temper their expectations, given the economic challenges that individuals, towns, and State agencies face. He then transitioned the meeting to Tom Dillon for his report on the Infrastructure Advisory Council.

### **Infrastructure Advisory Council Report**

Tom greeted the Commission members and provided a summary of the April 30 Advisory Council meeting, details of which appear in the [minutes](#) shared prior to the full Commission meeting.

As with the Digital Learning Advisory Council, the Infrastructure group discussed in detail the current challenges to remote learning and how best to marshal resources to support students, libraries, schools, and colleges. Both groups recognized teacher professional development as a key priority, second only to connecting students and educators to the Internet. A subgroup subsequently met several times to discuss a proposed conference in June or July to address instructional design and how best to translate specific teaching approaches to online environments. In the midst of the planning, the group learned that the RESC Alliance had already issued a [call for presentations](#) for a conference in July. The planning team welcomed the news and agreed to submit individual session proposals and promote the event rather than running a separate conference.



The Infrastructure Advisory Council meeting also included an in-depth discussion around ensuring digital equity for all learners. Members shared their approaches to connecting learners, both K – 12 students in Connecticut and college students across the country. The use of [Eduroam](#) remains promising, allowing students to connect to networks in other institutions. However, the current social distancing requirements limit access to schools and colleges that provide this sign-on option. Tom also shared a synopsis of the group's discussion around cellular hotspots. Members felt that the selection of devices and programs remains confusing, a difficult challenge for technology leaders to arrive at an "apples-to-apples" comparison of options across carriers. As an action item, a subgroup of Advisory Council volunteers provided feedback on a [Cellular Hotspot Guide](#) that Doug developed and launched in May.

Noting the strong collaboration taking place across many institutions to support remote learning, Tom cited Sabina Sitaru's continued engagement in the Advisory Council and willingness to assist Stratford with the rollout of computers in that town.

Tom also summarized the group's discussion on the Dalio laptop donation. Regarding the donated computers, Ajit noted that each comes with end-point security and tracking so that students should be able to use them out of the box. He acknowledged that the software bundled on the devices may not be standard to most districts but offered that technology departments can re-image them this fall when students (likely) return to school. He is working to minimize renewal costs for anti-virus, filtering, and other software that come with the laptops.

Mark thanked Tom for his report and asked if members had any other comments and expressed his gratitude for the work of Tom, Doug, and the Advisory Council members.

### **Remote Learning Priorities and Takeaways**

Given the shift to remote learning since March, Doug asked the Commission members to share any lessons learned that might have implications for the five-year [State Educational Technology Plan](#). He welcomed all feedback in the context of the Commission's specific [recommendations to support remote learning](#), already shared with the Office of the Governor, Office of Policy and Management, and SDE.

Dawn La Valle shared some highlights of how the State Library has responded to COVID-related closures. Through the CARES Act, Connecticut received approximately \$300,000, which will help offset the costs of deploying items to support digital access and inclusion, especially in high-need communities. Many libraries have made efforts to extend wireless access to parking lots under [flexibilities](#) afforded by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to do so using E-rate funding. She noted Hartford's efforts to connect learners by parking its WiFi-enabled Bookmobile in neighborhoods



throughout the city. Since the closing of libraries, the Connecticut State Library (CSL) has made access to researchIT open to students from home. On a national level, the CSL continues to advocate for increased and broader funding for the E-rate program.

From a service delivery perspective, libraries have quickly shifted to providing patrons with assistance online in areas ranging from general research to job retraining and searches. CARES Act funds have also allowed the CSL to purchase licenses to software to help unemployed workers develop new skills and apply for jobs, part of the State's [broader efforts to address job loss](#).

Colleen Bailie of West Haven echoed Dawn's comments, noting that staff at her library have quickly pivoted to provide online support to patrons, from technology assistance to job searching. West Haven has also increased its digital collections to support remote learning and research. She has seen an increase in new library card requests, reflecting the ongoing need of citizens to access digital resources and how they recognize libraries as trusted sources of support.

Mark thanked Dawn and Colleen for their comments and ongoing efforts, especially in addressing the unemployment crisis. Libraries remain key partners in helping citizens gain new skills, network with potential employers, and apply for jobs. He expressed regret that as a state, Connecticut still sees connectivity gaps, as reflected in the [school technology report](#). In a state with solid fiber infrastructure, providing Internet access to all citizens remains an achievable goal.

## **CEN Updates**

Ryan Kocsondy provided highlights of his [quarterly report](#) posted to the Commission's Web site, aligned with [CEN's strategic plan](#). The recent addition of the iBoss Cloud service through CEN provided a timely solution to districts to ensure device-level content filtering. Ryan offered to work with Ajit and his colleagues at the SDE to deploy the iBoss or other no-cost products to the donated laptops to eliminate renewal fees for the filtering software loaded onto those devices.

Under the "Ignite Innovation" category, Ryan highlighted the availability of CEN's Rapid Private Interconnect (RPI) Service. This solution provides partners with the opportunity to connect directly with educational and service providers. Given the switch to online learning, many of CEN's members may have interest in exploring this fee-based service.

While CEN cancelled its in-person annual conference scheduled for May, members of the Engagement and Development Advisory Council and CEN staff have developed a [series of virtual events](#) to address timely concerns, such as contact tracing technologies, keeping students safe at home, and the implications of remote learning on network planning. He also acknowledged the outpouring of peer-to-peer support



over the past two months through channels such as the Commission's listserv. The state's technology leaders continue to help each other resolve remote learning challenges through creative, collaborative solutions and plan for reopening in the fall. Regarding this last topic, the CEN team continue to work with members to identify likely changes and increases in bandwidth needs, given the significant increase in devices and applications in use when learners return to libraries, schools, and universities.

Following Ryan's report, Tom Dillon asked about overall Network bandwidth activity. Ryan noted the sharp decline in usage, given that learning and research primarily take place at home. In some cases, upload and download volumes have flipped, given the absence of large numbers of students and professors but the continuation of institutional computing activities that result in data sharing. He again cautioned that members should assess pre-COVID bandwidth demands based on the number of devices and level of online learning against the likely needs they will experience with a marked increase in devices and applications in the fall.

Nick expressed his appreciation for Ryan and Doug representing the Network and Commission well over the past two months, providing insights and supports for remote learning. Mark echoed these sentiments and noted the additional assistance that Ryan provided in connecting surge hospitals to the Internet. Ryan thanked his team, noting that these connections took place in less than two days, and expressed gratitude to technology leaders across the state for their partnership. Mark also thanked Doug for his work in developing support and communication resources for state employees who needed to master multiple technology solutions in their shift to remote work.

### **Public Comment**

Following the CEN report, Mark issued a call for public comment, with none given.

### **Scheduled 2020 Meeting Dates**

Mark noted the following Commission meetings scheduled for the remainder of the 2020 calendar year:

- Monday, September 14
- Monday, December 7



## Adjournment

Having addressed the agenda items, Mark called for a motion to adjourn. Nick provided the motion, Michael Mundrane the second, and the members voted unanimously to conclude the meeting at approximately 2:45 PM. Mark thanked the Commission members for their continued service and invited them to reach out with any insights, future agenda items, or concerns between now and September.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Casey  
*Executive Director*

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