CT Commission for Educational Technology 2021 Annual Report
Year in Review

Disruptions to "traditional" teaching and learning that began last year with the outbreak of the Coronavirus continued in 2021, leading to many innovative uses of technology. If 2020 was the year of educational technology adoption, 2021 defined itself as a year of transition. The advent of vaccines and other public health protections enabled schools, universities, and libraries to return to in-person learning while using digital tools as part of a broader "hybrid" approach. This mix of learning modalities — often changing from one week to the next — brought its own set of challenges.

The Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology's work expanded to equip educators and leaders in making effective use of technology for learning, aligning with its State Educational Technology Plan. Staff and members of the Commission worked to ensure that the unprecedented levels of federal education relief funding would provide immediate and long-term benefits to students. These efforts addressed the essential conditions for learning with technology — access to broadband and devices— through the continuation of the Everybody Learns initiative and partnering with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to help Connecticut schools and residents leverage funding for free Internet access. The Commission provided guidance on educational technology use to K – 12 districts, which collectively received $1B in funding through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Prior Commission efforts around digital learning standards and open education resources helped maximize State-level ARPA investments in these areas.

The transition from technology deployment to sustainability may serve as a central theme for the Commission's work in 2022. Even with forthcoming programs to expand broadband access, digital literacy skills, and cybersecurity protections, schools, universities, and libraries face concerns about how to leverage and fund digital learning into the future. As Commission research indicates, educational institutions have significantly expanded the use of devices, bandwidth, and software for learning, straining the capabilities of educators and support staff. Challenges await in leveraging limited budgets and staff to support an expanded educational technology footprint.

In 2022 and beyond, the Commission will address these demands by continuing to provide guidance and solutions that help institutions maximize and sustain the use of technology for teaching and learning. As a leader and enabler of digital learning approaches, the Commission has already laid significant foundations for the creative use of technology in education. The launch of Connecticut's open education resources portal (GoOpenCT.org) in 2021 will help reduce the cost and expand the use of high-quality learning materials. Advocacy around data privacy will help ensure safe and efficient access to personalized learning tools. Expanded Internet access through the Connecticut Education Network (CEN) and State-led broadband efforts will reduce barriers to advancement for millions of residents. Through these and other initiatives, the Commission will help ensure equitable access to digital learning for students of all ages. CT Commission for Educational Technology 2021 Annual Report

9,000
Courses

The launch of www.GoOpenCT.org, the Commission's open education resources site, makes nearly 9,000 courses and other digital learning materials available to every educator in Connecticut.

→ See Open Education Resources, page 15

700
Teachers

The AccelerateCT program, led by the CSDE with Commission input, covered the cost for more than 700 Connecticut educators to develop skills in teaching with technology through the ISTE Summer Learning Academy.

→ See Professional Development, page 16

90,000
Connections

Concerted promotion of the Emergency Broadband Benefit program has spurred more than 90,000 households in Connecticut to take advantage of free Internet access.

→ See Broadband Programs, page 19

$40M
Awarded

Guidance from the Commission has encouraged Connecticut schools and libraries to apply for free home Internet access for students and patrons through the Emergency Connectivity Fund, with $40M in awards to date.

→ See Broadband Programs, page 19

100%
Increase

2021 saw a doubling of the number of districts using the LearnPlatform Inventory Dashboard, a free resource that empowers decision-makers to assess the usage and return on investment of more than 5,000 educational software titles.

→ See Educational Software Hub, page 20

$4M⁺
Cost Avoidance

Since its 2017 launch, the Commission's Educational Software Hub has saved districts an estimated 40,000 hours in staff time — in addition to legal fees — to comply with Connecticut's data privacy law. The Hub helps schools leverage innovative technology solutions and comply with state statute.

→ See Educational Software Hub, page 20

$40M⁺
Savings

The Connecticut State Library continues to deliver exceptional value through researchIT, the digital library free to all Connecticut residents. This service delivered $43M in digital content subscriptions at a cost to the state of $1.5M.

→ See researchIT CT, page 28

$30M
Cost Avoidance

The CEN delivers Internet connections, federally mandated content filtering, and cyber protection services to schools, colleges, libraries, towns, and open access members at a cost that saved these institutions more than $30M this year alone.