

Infrastructure Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
November 30, 2016

Attendees

- Colleen Bailie — West Haven Public Library
- Doug Casey — CET
- George Claffey — Western Connecticut State University
- Brynn Deprey — Connecticut Education Network (CEN)
- Tom Dillon — Independent
- Kerri Kearney — Manchester Public Schools
- Michael Mundrane — University of Connecticut
- Susan Shellard — Department of Economic and Community Development
- Sabina Sitaru — Metro-Hartford Information Systems
- Rick Widlansky — Libraries Online (LION)
- Rob Wilson — Somers Public Schools

Agenda

Digital Equity Update

- Speak Up! Survey
- Planning with CT Economic Resource Center

CEN Services

- Value of Current Offerings (Attached)
- Promise of Potential Future Offerings:
 - Advanced Content Monitoring and Notifications
 - Data Privacy Compliance
 - Educational Software Purchasing, Licensing, and Hosting
 - Eduroam (Authentication)
 - eRate Support
 - Managed Security (e.g., Monitoring, Forensics, CISO Services)
 - Single Sign-On (SSO)
 - Others
- Gathering and Assessing Input
- Cost Models and Next Steps

Meeting Notes

The points below represent an assimilation of ideas rather than a verbatim or chronological record of points shared.

Digital Equity

The meeting began with a discussion on gathering data around Internet access for students outside of school. The September meeting included this topic, with a call to action to identify existing sources of data to identify needs and attitudes toward broadband access. Doug shared that Bill Vallee of the State Broadband Office, Alissa DeJonge of the Connecticut Economic Resource Center (CERC), and he had begun exploring the development of a survey to collect such data. Alissa had indicated that there could be funding and certainly expertise from CERC to develop a survey for students and families. During that conversation, Doug shared data that he had received from the nonprofit Project Tomorrow's "Speak Up" survey. This instrument has provided excellent data on national as well as community-level student, family, and educator broadband access, attitudes, and challenges. Unfortunately, the data set is thin for our state. Only Newington Public Schools has seen a relatively high number of survey responses in past years.

Discussion ensued around the reasons why there have not been better response rates to the Speak Up survey, given that it offers school districts detailed information about its student and family broadband access and usage. Kerri Kearney indicated that the length of the survey posed an impediment to adoption, and Doug confirmed that it takes an average of 20 minutes to complete the instrument. Questions arose about data on abandoned (partially completed) surveys. Various members of the Advisory Council noted the difficulty in getting students and families to respond to simple surveys, let alone lengthy ones. Doug took as an action step to reach out to the Speak Up team, whom he met in October at the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA) conference, regarding abandon rates, ideas on increasing response rates, etc.

The group then discussed the possibility of developing a briefer survey in multiple languages as well as ways of engaging students and families to respond to such a survey through various channels. Michael Mundrane remarked that we need to define the what, why, and how of this initiative:

- What: The likely outcomes of the effort (e.g., better data, stronger ability to define needs)
- Why: The objective of the survey collection (e.g., value to stakeholders, such as asking for additional funds to support home broadband, tie-ins to digital learning initiatives, etc.)
- How: The mechanisms and partners we will tap to accomplish the data gathering

Colleen Bailie and Susan Shellard suggested that we reach beyond school buildings or parent surveys to engage local citizens in libraries and anchor institutions. Even a simple question asked of all patrons such as “Do you have Internet access at home?” would provide value. Doug asked Susan if the Department of Economic and Community Development had collected data on broadband access through the lens of business development and job growth. To her knowledge, no such survey work has taken place, but all agreed that the proposed data gathering would be useful from an economic development as well as educational perspective. Michael suggested that whatever data we gather, we should assess the results against national data sets.

Regarding successful data-collection efforts, George Claffey noted that Newington, where he lives, asks parents to complete the Speak Up survey while waiting for parent-teacher conferences, leveraging their time as a “captive audience” and helping to boost response rates. The group agreed that reaching out to Newington leaders would shed light on successes and challenges in this survey work.

The question arose from the last Advisory Council meeting about the possibility of gathering data through the State Department of Education (SDE). Doug mentioned that he had spoken with Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Chief Performance Officer with the SDE. Ajit had looked into adding home broadband access to existing data collections through school districts but was adamant that this additional “ask” would not find the support needed to require it.

Kerri suggested that the Infrastructure Advisory Council and greater Commission could provide options and frameworks to schools and other anchor institutions on how to collect data, then leave it to them to adopt the data-collection practices that work best in their communities. She gave the example of weaving home broadband access questions into the school climate survey that her district (Manchester) and virtually all other districts conduct at least annually. Rob Wilson noted that in Somers, he plans to request feedback from families at the beginning of next year (fall of 2017) when families complete online registration materials.

Doug thanked the group for the creative ideas and lively discussion and suggested that a smaller group convene to plan the survey initiative, addressing issues such as potential funding sources, survey design, marketing and communications, and partnership with other state agencies and groups (e.g., CTETL, CECA, CAPSS, etc.).

Connecticut Education Network (CEN) Services

The next topic on the agenda addressed the question of what types of services the CEN should offer its members. Doug shared a list of current offerings, and Brynn Deprey provided details on these services as questions arose. He also shared a list of services provided, for example, by the Missouri research and education network (REN) MOREnet (see <https://www.more.net/services/categories>).

Fred Kass welcomed the discussion and shared that, in his discussions through the QUILT group (association of RENs), he sees CEN as doing an exceptionally strong job in delivering high-quality broadband and Internet services, when compared with other RENs. He cautioned that CEN should not take on additional services that could threaten the quality of other, existing offerings.

The group addressed different delivery models, from direct services provisioned by staff members of the CEN, to the reselling of products and services managed through the CEN, to pass-through services managed and billed completely by trusted partners. Brynn mentioned that this last option already exists, whereby members have the option of purchasing high-quality, low-cost services through relationships brokered by CEN staff and delivered by other firms. These types of agreements and relationships tend to carry relatively low risk and remain efficient to manage, when compared with the cost of hiring and overseeing staff for in-house offerings.

Fred remarked that current efforts and past success in building the network offered the opportunity to provide additional services. He gave the example of connecting directly through New York City to Amazon and VMWare, which could offer CEN the chance to resell or provide competitive pricing for highly attractive services delivered by these companies.

Tom Dillon agreed and noted, from his professional experience running a network services firm, that general services provision carries risks and liabilities. He pointed to the Eduroam offering as one that would deliver high value to members with relatively low risk and costs. Michael agreed that the Eduroam service promised great returns in terms of building loyalty among members and increasing the perceived value of the Network.

Doug asked the group for ideas on approaching a broader audience to solicit input on the value of current and future services through the network, suggesting surveys and focus groups, for example. Tom cautioned that casting too wide of a net could lead to decisions to add new services with high risks (e.g., negative financial returns, staff burnout, customer dissatisfaction). He encouraged the Network leadership to focus on scalable solutions developed by a small number of leaders and stakeholders. Fred countered by suggesting that a broader survey would provide data indicating member needs without obligating the CEN to begin offering these products or services.

As action items, Doug promised the group to continue the discussion, with potential outcomes being the assembly of focus groups, such as the higher education CIO roundtable that CEN has hosted in the past. He also agreed to work on garnering input from other RENs to identify the advantages and challenges of various service offerings. This initial research would assist with the design of a broader member survey of needs.