CTEDTECH
Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology

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Digital Learning Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
November 9, 2017

Attendees

- Nick Caruso — CT Association of Boards of Education
- Doug Casey — Commission for Educational Technology
- Kevin Corcoran — Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium
- Larry Covino — Bristol Adult Education
- Josh Elliott — Fairfield University
- Laura McCaffrey — Archdiocese of Hartford
- Greg McVerry — Southern Connecticut State University
- Jim Mindek — Connecticut Department of Education
- Josh Smith — New Milford Public Schools
- Jim Spafford — Manchester Adult Education
- Scott Zak — CT State Colleges and Universities

Agenda

- Innovation Study
- Standards Adoption
- Open Education Resources

Meeting Notes

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

Welcome

The meeting convened at 2:00 PM with a welcome by Nick Caruso, Digital Learning Advisory Council Chair, and Doug Casey of the Commission. Doug opened the meeting with a brief synopsis of the agenda items, with details following below.

Charting New Frontiers in Student-Centered Learning

The forthcoming report on student-centered learning reflects a year's worth of interviews and research into the Connecticut K – 12 educational system. As Doug shared, the study concentrates on the key question of why our state has not seen a more systematic adoption of innovative teaching and learning practices that support personalized learning. The work represents a partnership among the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), Innovation Partners America,

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and the Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology, with funding from the Jacquelyn Hume Foundation, headquartered in the San Francisco area.

The findings represent interviews with 21 of the more than 40 individuals that we approached as stakeholders in the state's education system, from state and district leaders and educators to entrepreneurs and researchers. Readers can download the report from the Commission's Publications page or from this direct link:

www.bit.ly/CT-SCL

The report provides a high-level "map" of the possible areas of collaboration and opportunity to support personalized learning (see www.bit.ly/CTK12Ecosystem), as shown on page 31 of the report. This map provides a visualization of school districts, agencies, advocates, and even key policy that support technology-enabled personalized learning. Details of this "version 1.0" map appear on page 33 of the report, also available at www.bit.ly/CT_K-12_Assets.

The report includes five key recommendations:

- Rallying a Vision around the Graduate of the Future: Develop a common vision of student mastery by the conclusion of high school.
- Aligning Policy with Student-Centered Innovation: Use this new vision to drive an intentional framework for state and local policy, recognizing the need for different pathways to success for a diversity of learners. For example, PA 17-42 permits districts to embrace personalized, mastery-based learning but does not establish supports or a framework around what this looks like at the classroom, school, or district level.
- Leading with Learning: Come to an agreement on best-practice pedagogies so we have more focus as a state on effective teaching and learning practices.
- Building Culture and Capacity for Experimentation: Identify and amplify cross-sector, student-centered pioneers whose work supports this vision of the graduate of the future.
- Leveraging Available Resources to Catapult Innovation: Identify and analyze untapped resources in Connecticut, in regional and national networks, and online.

Among the national readers who provided feedback, one suggested that the introduction position the findings in the context of another overarching question: Do we as a state want to pursue change within the traditional K – 12 educational construct of seat time and age-based grade levels or explore an entirely new, competency-based approach to learning?

Josh Smith commented that discussions currently underway within the CAPSS Technology Council around home-based study during snow days address the same concerns that the report covers. A similar discussion has taken place around "testing out" of physical education classes through the President's Physical Fitness Test. Connecticut districts struggle in complying with "seat time" or Carnegie unit requirements, even while they seek to embrace mastery-based learning.

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Doug underscored the enthusiasm of the stakeholders for improvements in K – 12 educational policy, statute, practice, and networks. He pointed to initiatives already underway, such as the RISE Network, a partnership among school districts (East Hartford, Hartford, Meriden, and New Haven) around initiatives such as improving data collection and decision making, as the prototypes for long-lasting change.

Nick suggested as a next step that members of the Advisory Council review and provided feedback on the report for discussion at the group's next meeting.

Standards Adoption

The group moved on to discuss ways that the Commission could support the adoption of student and educator technology proficiency standards in Connecticut classrooms. Doug provided a quick synopsis of progress to date, with the Commission's endorsement of the ISTE Student Standards at the September 2016 Commission meeting and the ISTE Educator Standards at the September 2017 Commission meeting. He is serving on ISTE's technical working group to develop the forthcoming (June 2018) Administrator Standards, out in draft form now.

Discussion ensued over the possible directions that the group could take on supporting implementation of the standards in Connecticut classrooms, including the following options:

- Teacher Preparation
- Educator Self-Assessment and Resources
- School Accreditation
- Integration into Other Standard Sets (e.g., Common Core) and Assessments
- Professional Development
- Users Group
- General Advocacy
- Proposal of Legislation
- Shared Curriculum Materials (Tie to OER)
- School Policy Integration (e.g., Acceptable Use)

Scott Zak raised the issue of measuring impact with any of the above approaches, isolating these as variables that affect school improvement and student achievement. Perhaps conducting research on the effectiveness of one or more of the above approaches would help prioritize efforts among these as levers for effective adoptions. Greg McVerry and Josh Smith pointed to the lack of specific, measurable technology proficiency standards in the rubrics of accreditation bodies such as the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation. The group probed the definition of success, of creating supports for ensuring college and career readiness.

A number of other states have adopted the ISTE Student and Educator Standards, though the recent release of these frameworks makes the measurement of different adoption plans difficult. Nick reminded the group that Connecticut still needs to adopt

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the Student Standards through the State Board of Education, which should encourage broader adoption. Doug shared his efforts to facilitate this process, including work with Deputy Commissioner Cohn to gather public input on the Student Standards in preparation for their review by the State Board's Standards Subcommittee and eventual adoption by the full Board membership.

Josh Smith pointed to policy as a key lever either to enable or prevent adoption of the ISTE Standards. His district has explored "high-leverage" innovations to support 21st century learning, such as doing away with a prescriptive acceptable use policy that highlights what educators and students cannot do with technology. Instead, they adopted a "responsible use policy," and he encourages districts to take a more permissive and less defined approach to using technology, allowing teachers and students to determine the platforms and tools they need to pursue authentic learning.

Jim Mindek reminded the group of the broad spectrum of skills that students need for career readiness, from his perspective within the Connecticut Technical High School System. From general technology proficiency to advanced computer science classes, all students need an opportunity to develop the competencies to be discerning and productive users of technology. He pointed specifically to the importance of teacher preparation programs, professional development, teacher self-assessment (rubric), and administrator supports as promising directions to encourage standards adoption.

Jim Spafford suggested that we reach out to districts in Connecticut to determine which have adopted the new standards, how they have done so, and the results of their efforts. Doug pointed to an ISTE survey that asks these questions, which the Commission will use to provide quantitative feedback to the State Board in support of the standards adoption. He promised to request the Connecticut responses from the ISTE standards team so that the Advisory Council could assess and share promising practices.

Both Larry Covino and Jim Spafford emphasized the importance of sharing the Standards with industry employers to ensure that those frameworks align with the skills those companies seek in prospects. Jim pointed to the partnerships his school system has established with Connecticut companies that both inform curriculum and that have led to a high employability rate among graduates.

Greg McVerry suggested the group consider establishing a certification, or "blue ribbon," that districts could earn from the Commission after demonstrating that they have embraced and adopted the Student and Educator Standards in their schools. Doug welcomed the idea as a possible direction the Commission could take with assistance from the Digital Learning Advisory Council members and pointed to the U.S. Department of Education's Future Ready Schools initiative (www.FutureReady.org) as a model. The group found the idea promising and wanted to make sure that all districts had an opportunity to embrace the Standards and demonstrate adoption. Jim Spafford, Nick Caruso, and Scott Zak addressed concerns about inequalities in human and technology resources to bring about effective adoption, and Scott suggested that

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we develop a means of gathering feedback on challenges to adoption. School district leaders might also offer constructive criticisms of the Standards, leading to possible revisions and improvements to the Standards and how we measure their effectiveness. Josh Smith felt the idea had merit as well but offered concerns about adoption given other, non-negotiable requirements (e.g., ADA Web compliance).

Rather than legislation, Nick pointed to the general category of "Advocacy" as a lever to encourage adoption. He suggested enlisting the support of influencers such as the State Department of Education and professional organizations rather than pushing for new laws with accompanying obligations.

A broader discussion ensued about the challenge of finding qualified teachers for instruction in professional trade disciplines and current technologies. Scott Zak asked if districts could outsource this work, hiring teachers part time. Doug pointed to the RESCs as existing service providers, offering brokered positions across a range of disciplines. In the meantime, large technology providers such as Microsoft and Google offer programs that include authoring toolsets, professional development, and curriculum to encourage adoption of their specific technologies to prepare the talent pipeline.

Nick concluded the discussion on standards by pointing to two separate "streams" of the initiative, influencing teacher behavior to support student outcomes. The two standard sets work hand in hand, with one complementing the other.

Open Education Resources

The group shifted to a discussion around open education resources (OER) and action steps behind the GoOpen framework. Doug reminded the group of the feedback from the higher education and library communities that he had received and summarized in a document he had shared with the group. He pointed to the enthusiasm expressed by community college leaders of potentially creating and sharing educational materials with the K – 12 community. This work could provide standards-aligned curriculum and learning objects to the community colleges, which have struggled with a lack of standardization, and provide college-level resources to secondary schools wanting to offer more challenging courses for high school students. Both groups would benefit from ongoing ties that span the K – 16 continuum.

Members commented on the merits of various OER platforms for Connecticut, including those from Microsoft, Amazon, and OER Commons. Greg McVerry expressed support for the OER Commons platform, given its backing by a group dedicated to the OER movement, rather than a commercial entity that may not support OER in the future.

The group then addressed issues of quality control, with Greg McVerry and Kevin Corcoran pointing to the peer review and ranking mechanisms built into many OER platforms that can lead to higher rankings for better quality materials. Nick expressed concern that depending on peer review for quality assurance would not guarantee that districts adopt curriculum that adheres to state standards. Greg pointed out that, while curriculum can remain fixed by each local Board, a teacher may create or

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choose materials from the OER repository that support that curriculum. In fact, this type of peer-to-peer sharing takes place today through Web downloads, e-mailing materials, and social networking sites. Teachers still assume responsibility for preparing students for assessments that measure mastery of the standards.

Doug offered a quick synopsis of what other states that have taken the GoOpen pledge have done recently in terms of platform adoption. He mentioned that many have spoken highly of OER Commons, with recent adoptions or endorsements by Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Kevin suggested that we use the term "Referatory" rather than "Repository" as the state platform. Universities and districts that already have a means of curating and indexing materials would not likely manage a second library of resources. However, we could include them by providing a platform that indexed and provided search results pointing to assets in these existing libraries. He encouraged the creation of affinity groups (K – 12, higher education, libraries, etc.) as in the case of other states that intentionally and voluntarily point to high-quality materials, while allowing for the posting and sharing of content by any educator.

As a means of encouraging adoption of the platform and OER methodologies, Greg suggested an "edcamp" event in which educators could share best practices and help define specific use cases for OER in Connecticut. The group then discussed different group interests, with Kevin cautioning how we message the platform. He underscored the importance of it serving all communities, not just K – 12 or higher education.

In terms of professional development, Josh Elliott recently hosted an event that introduced teachers from 18 local districts as well as students in the Fairfield University School of Education to open approaches and tools in order to encourage OER adoption. Kevin has also spoken widely in the state, engaging teacher candidates on the benefits of OER. He noted the Northeast OER Summit taking place May 31 and June 1 next year at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. The event will include a K – 12 track, with planning assistance from Kristina Peters, formally the OER lead for the Office of Educational Technology of the U.S. Department of Education and now serving with the New America Foundation. Details of the event will come out early in 2018, and the summit will afford an opportunity to share progress in Connecticut and support the OER communities in our state.

With no further input from the group, Nick thanked the members for their insights and adjourned the meeting.