

Digital Learning Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
August 9, 2018

Attendees

- Nick Caruso — CT Association of Boards of Education
- Doug Casey — Commission for Educational Technology
- Kevin Corcoran — Connecticut State Colleges and Universities
- Jonathan Costa — EdAdvance
- Shannon Marimón — RISE Network
- Laura McCaffrey — Archdiocese of Hartford
- Karen Skudlarek — University of Connecticut
- Josh Smith — New Milford Public Schools
- Jim Spafford — Manchester Adult Education
- Scott Zak — Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Agenda

ISTE Standards

- Education Leader Standards
- Ongoing Supports: Student and Educator Standards

Open Education Resources

- Federal Grant Opportunity
- Advocacy and Repository Efforts

Alternative Learning Days

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 1:00 PM with a welcome by Nick Caruso, Digital Learning Advisory Council Chair, and Doug Casey of the Commission. Nick welcomed the group and invited members to re-introduce themselves. Josh Smith shared that he would be leaving New Milford Public Schools to serve as superintendent in Region 15 Public Schools at the beginning of August, and Shannon Marimón announced her upcoming

move from the RISE Network to serve as executive director of the Connecticut Council for Education Reform.

ISTE Standards

Education Leader Standards

Doug Casey provided a brief overview of the [ISTE Standards for Education Leaders](#), which directly support the ISTE Educator and Student Standards that the Advisory Council and full Commission had previously endorsed. As a member of the Technical Working Group that developed the new Standards for Education Leaders, he strongly endorsed the diversity of perspectives and insights of his colleagues from across the country who contributed to the work. They include superintendents, principals, teachers, and researchers, with strong support from the ISTE Standards and senior leadership teams.

Nick saw the Standards as a set of strong exemplars of current leadership skills and competencies, with technology as a support — rather than the end point — to achieving them. He noted the upcoming second anniversary of the Commission endorsing the Standards for Students as a departure point for providing districts with guidance on classroom integration. With the goal of operationalizing rather than just endorsing these standard sets, Nick offered one example of boards of education using the new Leader Standards as the basis for assessing candidates for administrative positions.

Josh Smith concurred and felt the new Leader Standards provide strong guideposts for administrators and boards. He pointed to the need for stronger connections across other standard sets to ensure alignment and relevancy, rather than having the ISTE Standards become “one more thing” that leaders need to address as part of their responsibilities. He has seen a disconnect between such professional standards and the actual competencies and bodies of work that graduates of leadership (e.g., 092 and 093) programs demonstrate. For example, some administrators do not have basic technology skills to enable them to analyze data sets in Excel that would support important decisions about students and educators. Some leaders and educators who cannot keep up with new systems (e.g., digital software to support teacher evaluation) have left the profession. He felt that professional development to address these gaps remains important. Nick remarked that in traditional education settings, the onus for training resides with the school or district, whereas in most other workplaces, employees themselves take responsibility for their professional development needs. He sees ownership of professional development now shifting more to the leader and educator in many districts.

Laura McCaffrey shared that beginning this year, the Archdiocese of Hartford will include technology proficiency as a component of the evaluations of principals across the system's 46 schools. Given that technology represents a key support for learning, leaders need to understand how to use it effectively as professionals. They also need to understand how to develop the educator and student competencies necessary for college and careers. She offered as an example training she provides to principals on

how to use SMART® Boards. Her intent is to build awareness of the capabilities of the technology, rather than a mastery in one specific platform or another, so that administrators can support effective digital learning.

Jim Spafford saw the Systems Designer standard as particularly relevant, a call for school leaders to work across organizations and remove bureaucratic barriers to champion innovation and student success. He also pointed to the importance of partnerships not just within the traditional K – 12 space but also through active engagement with employers to provide insights on the skills that students will need in the workplace. On that note, Doug mentioned the most recent estimate of more than 4,000 unfilled cyber security jobs in Connecticut (see page 27 of the [Connecticut Cybersecurity Strategy](#)), with a relatively small number of graduates prepared to fill those positions. This example points to the opportunity for tighter connections between the demands of employers and the skills taught in K – 12 and higher education.

Josh remarked on the “effective communication” component of the Visionary Planner standard and noted the difficulty in defining such terms. He commended the recommendations of the policy working group and suggested that a set of similar indicators would help administrators. Jonathan Costa suggested the development of, for example, a set of analog communication indicators and electronic communication indicators. He also pointed to the ISTE Standards as excellent conversation starters among parents, boards, and leadership teams around defining and embracing concepts such as “innovation.”

Shannon questioned how current administrators gain the skills defined in the ISTE Standards and pointed to the now-outdated (2009) [Common Core of Leading](#) from the State Department of Education (SDE) and subsequent [Evidence Guides](#), written four years ago. Nick asked Doug how the ISTE Standards for Leaders might align with other common standard sets. Doug shared that the technical working group did develop some preliminary crosswalks with other national standard sets, including the [Professional Standards for Educational Leaders \(PSEL\)](#), [the National Educational Leadership Preparation \(NELP\) standards](#), the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN) [Framework of Essential Skills](#), and the [Future Ready Principals standards](#). All of these frameworks have significant connections with and complement the ISTE Standards for Education Leaders. Nick also drew connections between the ISTE Standards and the Lighthouse standards that he uses to train board members on effective leadership.

Action Items

- Consider Detailed Leader Indicators
- Recommendation for Commission to Adopt Standards for Education Leaders

Nick tied up the conversation by entertaining a motion for him to put before the Commission a recommendation to endorse the ISTE Standards for Education Leaders. Jonathan made the motion, seconded by Scott Zak. The group voted unanimously to carry the recommendation, with no abstentions. Nick thanked the members for their engaged discussion and committed to share the recommendation with the Commission at the September 2018 meeting.

Ongoing Supports: Student and Educator Standards

As Nick had noted earlier, the intent of the Commission's work around standards is to see them operationalized, with leaders, educators, and students mastering and applying technology competencies. To that end, Doug shared his work in partnership with the SDE's Academic Office to propose adoption by the State Board of Education of the ISTE Standards for Students. In June, the Board did adopt the ISTE as well as the Computer Science Teachers Association (CSTA) standards. Melissa Hickey and Jennifer Michalek of the Academic Office will host a Webinar in the fall to introduce districts to the two standard sets.

Doug shared some details on the Commission's awareness campaign to promote the ISTE Standards, with plans to highlight one standard per month beginning in the fall. Jonathan supported the idea and stated that tying the Student, Educator, and Leader standards would underscore their coherence and relevancy to current teaching and learning. Doug has received strong support from and engagement with ISTE and the Connecticut ISTE chapter, the Connecticut Educators Computer Association (CECA), to highlight exemplary practices and educators. He mentioned that ISTE's professional learning communities already contain a wealth of examples of how leaders and teachers can support the development of student digital learning skills, and the campaign will leverage those deep resources. The annual CECA conference, taking place Monday, October 22, will have as its central theme the ISTE standards and their relevancy to other frameworks.

Another way to encourage awareness and adoption of the standards has come through meetings between Doug and leaders in teacher preparation programs across the state. To encourage teachers to develop the digital learning skills defined in the Educator Standards, ISTE recently launched a [certification program](#) for teachers. Doug has connected the RESCs and various Connecticut colleges and universities to ISTE to encourage more institutions to become providers of the training that supports teacher certification in the ISTE standards.

Nick highlighted another important means of encouraging adoption of digital learning standards in the form of policy revisions. He referred to the document "Guidance on District Policy Revisions to Support Digital

Learning" that the policy working group, with guidance from CABE's policy team, drafted recently. The guide defines the types of policies that encourage 21st century, digital learning, providing specific recommendations on language to adopt. The document highlights policies that boards should consider when looking to update their manuals to reflect best practices in current teaching and learning. Suggestions to revise the "Acceptable Use Policy" for students to a "Responsible Use Policy" would shift the focus on how best to use technology rather than only point to risks associated with digital tools and devices.

Action Item

- Call for Commission Support of "Guidance on District Policy Revisions to Support Digital Learning"

Josh noted that boards meet regularly to consider policies. Many would appreciate the guide's practical recommendations regarding specific policies (e.g., Graduation Requirements) to encourage the adoption of digital learning practices.

Jonathan, part of the policy working group, recommended that a *CABE Journal* article would help raise awareness and adoption of the recommendations by Connecticut public school boards. He also pointed to the opportunity for CABE to develop services around policy revisions to support digital learning. Nick suggested that the CABE's audit service might offer a specific "digital learning" lens to provide boards with feedback on how to update their policy manuals. Jonathan drew a parallel between this approach and his own experience in developing strategic plans for school districts. Josh underscored the value of such assessments and pointed to board policy rather than relying on other measures (e.g., superintendent evaluations) as having a significant impact on promoting digital learning.

Action Item

- Pursue an Article in the *CABE Journal* to Highlight the Digital Learning Policy Recommendations

Jonathan mentioned that the accreditation requirements from the [New England Association of Schools and Colleges \(NEASC\)](#) will soon reflect the [ACE standards](#) of the Council on International Education. The ACE standards call for a focus on student agency, critical thinking, and other competencies that the ISTE Standards already include. The ACE standards also point to schools' capacity to develop and support teachers' ability to model and foster these digital learning skills.

Nick committed to share the policy recommendations guide with the Commission in September and ask for their formal endorsement of the document.

Open Education Resources

Federal Grant Opportunity

On the topic of Open Education Resources (OER), Kevin Corcoran provided the group with a brief overview of the requirements and timing behind a U.S. Education Department (USED) grant to support OER in higher education. The [Open Textbooks Pilot](#) program opportunity posted in the Federal Register on July 30, with applications due August 29. A total of \$5M will go to at least one and at most three awardees. Kevin doubted that the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities would submit a proposal, either alone or in partnership with other organizations, given the unusually tight deadline for submissions and the lack of public comment that ordinarily accompanies similarly large grant opportunities. U.S. Senators Durbin, King, and Smith sent [a letter](#) to Secretary DeVos expressing their disappointment that USED did not provide more time to respond to or wider opportunity for feedback on the RFP. They also state that USED did not solicit input on the grant from any parties that have successfully implemented an OER program.

Advocacy and Repository Efforts

Shifting from the national to the state landscape, Doug noted that OER proponents in Connecticut have expressed interest in developing shared communications and advocacy pieces as well as defining requirements for a statewide OER object repository. He has enlisted working groups around each of these initiatives, inviting members to share resources as well as their needs in these two areas.

The first group will develop and share advocacy materials to increase awareness and understanding of OER, speaking to the benefits to different stakeholder groups (e.g., college professors, K – 12 curriculum directors, etc.).

The repository work would help define the desired feature set and governance supports around a K – 20 state repository. The requirements would help provide a cost and timing scope for this initiative, enabling the state to assess specific platforms, pursue funding, and identify pilot institutions. He mentioned his engagement with groups such as the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), which leads a monthly convening of leaders in states that have taken USED's GoOpen pledge. Many states have adopted the [OER Commons](#) platform for developing, curating, and sharing OER.

Jim asked about the potential to leverage OER objects (e.g., high-quality, standards-aligned lesson plans, unit plans, assessments, tutorials, etc.) from other states. Doug appreciated the question, which highlights one of the core requirements of the repository. He noted the substantial collections that states such as New York, Florida, and Georgia have developed through professional curation efforts. Connecting to such collections remains a top requirement for a Connecticut repository.

Jim also expressed a need, if possible, to import existing K – 12 collections into a repository. Josh echoed this requirement, referring to district collections of lesson and unit plans that reside in the cloud or on local storage drives and are indexed through curriculum-mapping tools. Jonathan provided the example of EdAdvance's use of the Google toolset to support its P21 curriculum collections. A consideration for any school or district that has already invested significant resources into another planning and indexing tool (e.g., [Atlas Rubicon](#)) would be the ease or difficulty in migrating those resources into, or indexing them in, a state repository.

Doug appreciated the feedback and noted that several repositories include the capability of connecting with widely used indexing, planning, and learning-management systems (e.g., [Google Classroom](#), [Schoology](#), etc.). He pointed to national trends to promote interoperability across data educational systems, championed by groups such as [CoSN](#) and [Project Unicorn](#). In addition, more than 20 states have taken the GoOpen pledge, which includes interoperability commitments. These states have strong cooperative purchasing and product design influence, which may help Connecticut's ability to secure a highly interoperable and cost-effective OER repository solution.

Scott noted the importance of engaging educators to contribute to the repository so that it does not become a collection of outdated materials. Doug agreed and noted that a relatively small percentage of users can help keep a repository current. He shared the example of [Wisconsin's state repository](#), which has a relatively large number of regular visitors, of which only 4 percent regularly contribute content. Scott agreed that even a relatively small percentage of users might constitute a "critical mass" of individuals to keep a repository active and valuable to its user base.

Doug closed out the conversation by recommending that members of the group attend the annual Northeast OER Summit, taking place in the early summer of 2019 at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. The event features presentations by OER practitioners, mostly from institutions of higher education and increasingly from the K – 12 community as well.

Alternative Learning Days

Jonathan shared his draft Alternative Learning Day Plan with the group, a framework for districts to consider in designing instructional days that take place outside of school. The work stemmed from conversations across multiple districts as well as groups including the technology committee of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) and the state's CoSN chapter (Connecticut Educational Technology Leaders, or CTETL).

Districts struggle with meeting the Connecticut legislative requirement of providing 180 days of instruction, given the annual impact of snow days and, in the case of this past year, power outages resulting from storms that closed many schools late in the school year. The document provides guidance for districts to consider ways to provide learning continuity in such special circumstances. He called attention to similar initiatives in other neighboring states (e.g., Massachusetts and New Hampshire), some of which have made legislative changes to codify the ability of schools to count structured at-home study to count for instructional time.

The document includes two general approaches to non-standard learning days. The first would leverage digital tools and devices to provide instructional continuity. For example, the night before or morning of a snow day, the superintendent would notify staff and students that they would work virtually to complete assignments and perhaps even conduct online group work. Given the relatively low percentage of districts that have K – 12 1:1 computer programs for students who all have home broadband, only a few districts might entertain this purely digital approach. The second means of conducting an alternative learning day would be to provide students ahead of time with prepared, printed lessons and activities. Cancellation messages would then instruct students and families on which packets, activities, etc. to work on during the day, with assignments due within a certain period (e.g., 10 days after the snow day).

Jonathan shared the framework and options with Commissioner Wentzell, who he said did not oppose the concept but expressed that her legal team felt that districts could not adopt such procedures without specific legislation allowing them to do so. This

contradicts the advice that Jonathan has received from school law attorneys, who see state statute as sufficiently vague in defining “instructional days” to allow for studies outside of the physical school grounds.

As next steps, Jonathan will present the document to the CAPSS technology committee in September and work with that organization and CBE to draft legislation for consideration within the Connecticut General Assembly’s Education Committee that would allow for alternative learning days.

Josh has been a longtime proponent of affording districts the ability to develop flexible approaches to alternative learning days. He mentioned some of the extreme cases this year of districts scrambling to meet the 180-day requirement, such as Danbury. In that district, the first day of school that students attend in August 2018 will count as the last day of the 2017 – 18 school year. In his own district of New Milford, the last day of school (June 28) actually took place after graduation. He endorsed the idea of allowing districts to pilot alternative learning day approaches, noting that they place an emphasis on learning rather than seat time. Such practices would support the State Board of Education’s stated commitment to mastery-based learning.

Josh and other members of the group commended Jonathan’s work and felt it provides a strong foundation for drafting sound legislation. Doug noted that pursuing legislation, though delaying the ability of districts to adopt alternative learning approaches during the 2018 – 19 school year, will elevate the topic, bringing it to public debate at a state level and hopefully codifying the ability to pursue common-sense approaches to adopting these measures.

Nick closed the conversation by acknowledging Jonathan’s work and committing to share it with members of the Commission. It stands as an excellent example of how schools can make effective use of technology to provide continuity of learning. As the statutorily defined body that serves as the chief policy advisor on educational technology to the Governor’s office and General Assembly, the Commission should advocate for such applications of technology.

<p>Action Item</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Share Alternative Learning Day Plan with Commission as Example of Effective Use of Technology and for Possible Endorsement

Nick thanked the group for their time and input and concluded the meeting at approximately 3:00 PM.