

Infrastructure Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

February 5, 2019

Attendees

- Colleen Bailie — West Haven Public Library
- Joe Campbell — CT Technical High School System
- Doug Casey — Commission for Educational Technology
- Tom Dillon — Independent
- Kerri Kearney — Manchester Public Schools
- Sabina Sitaru — Independent
- Bill Vallee — Office of Consumer Counsel
- Rick Widlansky — Libraries Online (LION)
- Rob Wilson — Somers Public Schools

Agenda

- Strategic and Technology Planning Templates and Resources
- Measuring Statewide Technology Needs and Capacity
- E-rate Report: Recommendations and Next Steps
- Digital Inclusion

Meeting Notes

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

Welcome

The meeting convened at 10:00 AM with a welcome by Tom Dillon, Infrastructure Advisory Council Chair, and Doug Casey of the Commission. Tom provided the group with an overview of the agenda items.

Strategic and Technology Planning Templates and Resources

Doug introduced the first topic, asking Council members about their approach to and use of tools to support strategic planning. He has had conversations with Future Ready (www.FutureReady.org), an organization that has developed several frameworks for strategic planning that support K – 12 schools. Leaders of Future Ready have offered to customize the district planning template to account for Connecticut-specific goals. The broader question that Doug posed to the group is whether a role exists for the Commission to provide support to schools, libraries, and colleges around strategic planning.

Rob Wilson, Kerri Kearney, and Sabina Sitaru shared their impression of current planning at the district level, which may leverage technology but does not always specify how it benefits teaching and learning. Without technology as an intentional part of each goal, the likelihood of its effective use decreases. The portrait of the graduate needs to account for competency standards such as those from the [American Association of School Librarians](#) (AASL) and the [International Society for Technology in Education](#) (ISTE). In Manchester, efforts are underway to integrate these standards into core teaching and learning documents and plans. Joe Campbell pointed to the Technical High School System's use of Future Ready in developing and communicating the district's school improvement plan.

Among libraries, Colleen indicated that strategic plans vary based on the needs and resources of their respective communities. She did underscore the importance of strategic planning to address the digital divide, of connecting learners to computers, broadband, training, and support. Having state-level planning resources should help libraries elevate these issues rather than concentrating only on cost cutting.

The group discussed the importance of planning competencies among building and district leaders. Several members felt that the principal (092) and superintendent (093) certification standards do not require technology planning abilities or an understanding of student and educator technology competencies. Having those standards as benchmarks would inform strategic plans that leverage technology. Leaders and staff also need ongoing professional development to build their understanding of how technology can support teaching, learning, leadership, and operations.

At the Technical High School System, Joe mentioned that school leaders leverage the [Danielson Framework](#) for instruction, with evaluation tied to educators' ability to personalize learning with the help of technology. Staff can use online training resources through [Teq](#), which provides for personalized professional development across thousands of courses, available when teachers have time to engage in the training. The schools also leverage Safe Schools (www.safeschools.com) for annual required training (e.g., bloodborne pathogens).

As next steps, Doug acknowledged the value of engaging the [Certification bureau](#) within the State Department of Education (SDE) regarding the requirement for technology competencies. He also pledged to include planning resources for schools and libraries in the Commission's forthcoming Web site.

Measuring Statewide Technology Needs and Capacity

Technology leaders frequently exchange insights around tools and approaches that benefit their institutions. Through online channels such as e-mail listservs as well as in-person meetings, leaders share valuable information about technology best practices. In this context, Doug raised the question of how the Commission might help centralize or index these insights and called for suggestions. For example, the Commission hosts a K – 12 technology listserv that provides immediate feedback among members but no searchable store of these insights.

Sabina framed a model whereby a community of leaders could complete a survey that indexes the technology they use, with access to the results shared among those who respond to the survey. She pointed to the Government Management Information Sciences (GMIS) “Data Dive” service (www.gmis.org/page/DataDive), a password-protected index of technology used by the organization’s members. For library or K – 12 leaders, the ability to search such a system by application or hardware type, size of town, demographic reference group (DRG), budget, or other criteria would have value. Outcomes of using such a system might include cost savings, efficiencies in procurement, and strengthened peer relationships. In addition, new members of such an online community would have the same historical insights as would long-term members. This would avoid the case where library or K – 12 listserv members ask for information about the same systems or solutions that have come up in previous threads.

Doug proposed that the LearnPlatform (Connecticut.LearnPlatform.com) might offer a solution, with some modifications. The system currently supports instructional technology reviews and peer-to-peer sharing, with open access to all members. Virtually every district in Connecticut uses LearnPlatform. Tom echoed the potential value of using this existing resource. He stated that technology leaders want to learn from each other, providing leading edge versus bleeding edge (high-risk) solutions to their institutions. The group did discuss the issue of transparency, that is, having member comments about technology solutions open to any registered user. Perhaps tiered privileges could support confidential exchange of insights among a subset of members. Doug agreed to reach out to LearnPlatform to explore the expansion of this resource to support the above needs.

E-rate Report: Recommendations and Next Steps

Prior to the meeting, Advisory Council members were asked to review the draft E-rate report and consider recommendations to include in the final version. Tom introduced the topic by sharing some of his takeaways from the report and underlying survey data. Respondents indicated that they found the services of third-party consultants extremely valuable and worth the investment. These attitudes may also reflect the complexity and inefficiency of managing E-rate for a district or library, which drives the need for outside assistance. He turned to the group for their thoughts on the draft report and possible recommendations to include in the document.

Several members identified common barriers to leveraging E-rate, which the report reflects. Some local board of education members, who control district budgets, do not

understand the program, as Sabina shared, especially the aspect of matching funds. Joe reminded the group that schools receive E-rate funding based on a calculation of the percent of students eligible for free and reduced lunch. Many technology leaders also struggle with positioning these investments as directly supporting teaching and learning, versus the perception of technology merely as an operational expense. Not a central issue in the draft report but nonetheless a reality in some towns, E-rate awards sometimes do not go to offset technology spend. As Joe mentioned, some local education agencies use E-rate funds to cover other, non-technology expenses, which removes the incentive for technology leaders to use the program.

Colleen raised the issue of filtering within libraries, which see this practice as limiting the freedom to information of patrons. Rick Widlansky also mentioned the administrative impact of managing filtering rules and requests to override the system, granting individuals access to blocked sites. However, based on data collected by LION, he does not see a significant number of "false positives," sites that the filter incorrectly blocks. Colleen encourages libraries to try filtering in exchange for E-rate funding, noting that most institutions do not experience much pushback from patrons after libraries have made this decision. Doing so allows libraries to maximize service delivery to these same patrons, stretching technology investments to increase Internet speed and support wireless networks.

The Advisory Council discussed obligations to filter content outside of libraries and schools. Those from the library community stated that they do not filter content on mobile access points loaned to patrons. Schools have a mix of approaches, with some seeing an obligation to block content on school-issued computers, although E-rate does not pertain to devices, just networks.

Tom emphasized the Commission's role to underscore the value and opportunity that E-rate presents. Districts and libraries should engage with consultants to learn more about the program and begin planning for network upgrades, even if for future funding cycles. Outreach to leadership groups such as the Association of Connecticut Library Boards (ACLB), the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), and the Connecticut Association of School Business Officers (CASBO) would help raise awareness among district decision makers. A session on the E-rate program will likely take place at the May CEN Conference.

In addition to encouraging participation in the program, the group discussed a statewide request for proposal for consulting services. This approach would result in a "bid list" of companies that districts and libraries could engage for E-rate assistance. Having companies on this list would streamline procurement for learning institutions, many of which have local policies that require purchasing off the State procurement portal (or development of a separate RFP) if services exceed a given level, such as \$10,000. Having some State oversight of services should also lead to more consistent and transparent pricing tied to discrete services.

The Advisory Council members agreed on two main recommendations for the report: (1) develop an RFP for consulting services on behalf of libraries and schools and (2) continue to communicate the value of E-rate to districts and libraries that do not fully leverage the program.

Digital Inclusion

Bill Vallee introduced this topic by summarizing efforts over the past several years to bring fiber to households in Connecticut communities, citing New Haven as an example. Many towns have some form of middle-mile fiber but not broadband to the home. Bill is speaking with leaders in New Haven to explore the possibility of leveraging CEN handoffs to achieve fiber connections to residences. Other communities that have pursued similar initiatives include East Hartford, Hamden, and Manchester.

The Office of the Consumer Counsel, Bill's organization, has also conducted outreach to communities to raise awareness of resources to connect students to the Internet outside of school. The Advisory Council members also discussed the rollout of high-speed, 5G cellular service and that technology's potential to connect learners to the Internet at any location.

Bill plans to share insights and resources to support digital inclusion during a session at the CEN Conference in May.

Adjournment

Tom thanked the group for their time and input and concluded the meeting at approximately 12:00 PM.