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## **Infrastructure Advisory Council**

Meeting Minutes

*November 2, 2020*

### **Attendees**

- Colleen Bailie — West Haven Public Library
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Tom Dillon — Independent
- Paul Gouveia — New Fairfield Public Schools
- Kerri Kearney — Manchester Public Schools
- Ryan Kocsondy — Connecticut Education Network (CEN)
- Michael Mundrane — University of Connecticut
- Sabina Sitaru — New Haven Public Schools
- Rick Widlansky — Libraries Online (LiOn)
- Rob Wilson — Somers Public Schools

### **Agenda**

- Connecting Students Outside of School and College
  - Home Connectivity
  - Community Wireless
  - Devices
- Eduroam
  - New Haven Launch
  - Next Steps and Recommendations
- Cybersecurity Corps and Resources

### **Welcome**

Tom Dillon, Chair of the Infrastructure Advisory Council, called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM and provided a brief overview of the agenda topics. He then asked Doug Casey to provide an update on the State's work to connect K – 12 students to the Internet for remote learning.



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### **Everybody Learns Initiative**

Doug provided a quick recap of Governor Lamont's Everybody Learns initiative. To date, the State has purchased 81,000 computers and provisioned more than 70,000 connections for students learning from home. Doug is working directly with cable Internet providers and school districts to identify and provide connections for families without home Internet access. For Altice, Atlantic, Charter, and Cox, districts provide the carrier with addresses for serviceability checks. These providers return to the district the list of addresses ready to be connected as well as outreach materials that schools can use to encourage families to connect. In the case of Comcast, the provider has issued voucher codes for free service that districts distribute to needy families.

Tom highlighted the important role of school leaders to identify needy families and facilitate signups. He raised several questions about eligibility that Doug addressed. The program provides free Internet to families of public school children who are not current customers and have not been so in the past 90 days. Everybody Learns provides for one year of Internet service from the signature date of each agreement the State signs with carriers.

Despite the promise that this program holds to connect offline students, adoption rates have remained low. Doug asked the Advisory Council members to share any perceived barriers to family signups, whether logistical, technical, or attitudinal. Kerri Kearney stated that Manchester plans to send Comcast vouchers to families soon. Her district tracks the needs of students beyond just broadband through family resource and English language learner (ELL) teams. She plans to develop videos for families to encourage them to redeem the vouchers. Kerri did express hesitancy among families to accept the service over fears of incurring charges, or health concerns over allowing a technician into their home to complete service installation. She did note a wide range of challenges to remote learning beyond just technology, including daycare, parent supports, etc. Students often spend the day with grandparents and other family members who may not have a home Internet connection. Addressing these challenges requires committed personnel such as the teams Manchester provides to stay in regular contact with students and families.

Colleen Bailie echoed concerns that some may have about potentially incurring hidden charges through the program. (Doug clarified that the State covers all fees.) In most homes, stress levels have increased, and some families simply do not want Internet service. However, she did note that in West Haven, when patrons borrow a computer and cellular hotspot for use at home, they often see the value of having an Internet connection and later initiate service through a local carrier. She encouraged information sharing about Everybody Learns through community anchors such as town halls and senior centers. Doug mentioned an upcoming outreach campaign to raise awareness of affordable and free Internet options for all Connecticut residents.



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Paul Gouveia of New Fairfield expressed concern that some carriers install equipment with limited wireless capabilities, requiring either a direct Ethernet connection or that students sit in close proximity to the device. He also mentioned the challenge of having multiple students and their parents using a single connection simultaneously.

Regarding efforts in New Haven, Sabina Sitaru shared her district's work in getting students connected through Everybody Learns and other initiatives. Her team has sent Comcast vouchers directly to families and equipped each school in the district with vouchers to distribute. The New Haven truancy team can also identify and address broadband needs when engaging families whose students have not attended school on a consistent basis. She has established centralized tracking of voucher codes to prevent abuse.

In addition to cable Internet connections for students, the Everybody Learns initiative includes funding for 200 community wireless access points. Ryan Kocsondy, who with the CEN team are leading this work, briefly shared progress to date. He described the project as offering "drive-up, walk-up" connectivity for residents. Each installed access point should provide wireless Internet access within a 300 to 350 foot range, allowing people to get online from parking lots and other surrounding locations. Each access point will also include an Eduroam SSID to allow students and educators to authenticate through their home institutions. Installation locations will include libraries, schools, and universities around the state. The CEN team members are engaged in outreach to these institutions, in partnership with the Office of the Governor, to discuss installations and confirm their participation.

Rick Widlansky expressed concern over what he saw as a sustainability challenge, that libraries accepting the access points would need to maintain them — and the increased bandwidth they may demand — after the first year of funding from the State. Ryan agreed and noted the more global challenge of providing home access to Connecticut residents. He expressed the need to identify underserved or unserved areas and create incentives for providers to service people living in such towns, or allow for public networks to reach those communities. He shared that the town of Norfolk is currently pursuing its own network, given the lack of carrier coverage in that community and others in northwest and northeast Connecticut.

Sabina mentioned a pilot initiative in New Haven to extend wireless signal using a device from [Apogee](#). The mini tower promises the ability to expand coverage of existing access points, though it does depend on a clear line of sight. Paul and Ryan noted that whatever source access point that such an antenna connects to will likely limit the number of connections provided via an extender such as the Apogee model.



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### **Eduroam**

Tom opened a discussion around Eduroam in New Haven by thanking Sabina for her leadership in bringing the project to a close. He held up the implementation as a model for other communities, with a strong technology champion who fast-tracked the initiative in partnership with Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU). Sabina has also provided outstanding outreach and communications to school leaders and students about the ability to connect to the New Haven, SCSU, and other wireless networks via Eduroam. The city now has detailed reporting as to how many students log onto wireless networks using their Eduroam-enabled credentials, a powerful tool to demonstrate the return on investment of the project and to map likely areas of connectivity need among students.

Sabina noted that having strong supports from school technology teams remains central to the success of any Eduroam rollout. She also noted the key role that a competent technology partner can play in standing up an array server. New Haven enlisted Total Communications for this work. Both Tom and Sabina noted the importance of having a district leadership champion — in addition to a skilled and motivated technology team — to ensure a successful launch. Tom shared highlights from promising discussions in Bridgeport as a potential site for Eduroam deployment. Several Advisory Council members expressed the need to communicate the value of Eduroam in providing a trusted solution to managing educational wireless access. Using Eduroam provides a trusted connection to end users and allows host institutions to limit access to students, helping to maximize network use for educational purposes. A brief that articulates the relatively small investment and significant return on Eduroam for schools should help secure funding for future deployments.

### **Adjournment**

Tom concluded the meeting by thanking members for their time and insights. He encouraged them to reach out to him or any member of the Commission with ideas or concerns tied to digital learning. He concluded the meeting at approximately 11:30 AM.