



55 Farmington Avenue
Hartford, CT 06105
(860) 622-2224
www.ct.gov/ctedtech

Digital Learning Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

November 2, 2022

Attendees

- Nick Caruso — Connecticut Association of Boards of Education
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Andy DePalma — EASTCONN
- Jim Mindek — Connecticut Technical High Schools
- Karen Skudlarek — University of Connecticut
- Jim Spafford — Manchester Adult Education

Discussion

Nick Caruso, Chair of the Digital Learning Advisory Council, began the meeting with a warm greeting to the members. This marked the first in-person meeting of the Council since early 2020, given the need for social distancing brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

He referred members to the [Resolution Concerning Ongoing Support for Digital Learning in Connecticut Public Schools](#) that the Commission adopted during its June 6 meeting. Doug provided a brief overview of each of the four pillars of the Resolution: Leadership Commitment, Essential Conditions for Digital Learning, Digital Equity, and Educator Supports. Nick welcomed specific action steps that members would recommend the Commission take — or that the Commission should recommend other education stakeholders take — to ensure equitable access to learning through the use of technology. This input will also inform the forthcoming state educational technology plan, for development in 2023.

Leadership Commitment

The members discussed several factors in the education system that make it difficult to attract and retain teachers and to help educators make effective use of technology for learning. State, district, and school leaders can look at addressing these concerns to ensure that teachers receive the coaching and professional development (PD) they need to ensure student success. Districts need an overall framework that ensures the inclusion of digital learning best practices into curriculum development, instruction, teacher evaluation, PD, and student assessment.

The group suggested that certification programs for building administrators (e.g., principals and assistant principals) and for district administrators (e.g., superintendents) require some level of technology integration. Leaders with these credentials should have the ability to provide supervision and evaluation of educators regarding their effective use of technology. Unless leaders understand how digital tools can support



55 Farmington Avenue
Hartford, CT 06105
(860) 622-2224
www.ct.gov/ctedtech

best practices such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and mastery-based learning, they cannot provide proper supports and guidance for teachers in these practices. The State has recently led two successful programs that support technology integration for teachers, the [ISTE certification and training](#) and current [Future Ready cohort](#). For each, strong district leadership has proven to be an essential component to success in teacher PD and district capacity-building.

Essential Conditions for Digital Learning

Regarding the need to provide ongoing access to broadband and devices, Andy DePalma pointed to the particular challenge of smaller districts. He suggested that the State explore additional resources to streamline purchasing and PD so that smaller districts can appreciate volume discounts.

Teacher Supports

Advisory Council members provided several suggestions to strengthen teachers' ability to use technology effectively. First, they called for technology integration as part of teacher pre-service, certification, and required PD. They also pointed to the burden of mandated annual PD in areas not directly tied to effective teaching. They proposed an expert review of such mandates with possible outcomes being less frequent increments for certain topics (e.g., once every three years for blood-borne pathogens). Doing so would free up time for teachers to learn about innovative instructional methods. This review could take the form of recommendations for the Connecticut General Assembly to consider in an effort to streamline PD requirements. Andy also pointed to the need for statewide PD for teachers, including after-hours help.

Jim Spafford echoed this need, underscoring the demand for ongoing support beyond once-a-year trainings. In terms of content, Karen Skudlarek pointed to UDL as helping to address the "why" of technology use: personalized instruction for deeper learning. She shared several frameworks for the effective use of digital tools, including [TPACK](#), [SAMR](#), and [Bloom's Taxonomy](#). Karen also encouraged an approach that looks for incremental goals for all educators.

On the topic of addressing teacher shortages at the K – 12 and adult education levels, Advisory Council members encouraged the State to consider ways to leverage individuals with demonstrated subject-matter expertise and teaching ability, regardless of certification status, to serve as educators. For example, Andy pointed to paraprofessionals with decades of teaching experience who face financial burdens of obtaining their certification to allow them to teach. Jim Spafford suggested that non-certified experts could teach at the adult education level. Both pointed to demonstrated instructional mastery rather than strict credentials as the benchmarks to providing high-quality teaching.

Nick and Doug thanked the members for their insights and time, calling the meeting to a close at 12:30 PM.