Digital Learning Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
January 30, 2023

Attendees

- Nick Caruso — Connecticut Association of Boards of Education
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Kevin Corcoran — Connecticut State Colleges and Universities
- Jonathan Costa — EdAdvance
- Andy DePalma — EASTCONN
- Josh Elliott — Fairfield University
- Barbara Johnson — Colchester Public Schools
- Tom Lonsdale — Goodwin University Magnet School System
- Laura McCaffrey — Archdiocese of Hartford
- Jim Mindek — Connecticut Technical High Schools
- Karen Skudlarek — University of Connecticut
- Josh Smith — Region 15 Public Schools
- Jim Spafford — Manchester Adult Education
- Chinma Uche — CREC Aerospace Academy

Discussion

At 1:00 PM, Nick Caruso, Chair of the Digital Learning Advisory Council, called the meeting to order and greeted the Advisory Council members, especially Tom Lonsdale, the newest member.

Strategic Planning

Nick welcomed input on ways to expand the Commission's June 2022 Resolution Concerning Ongoing Support for Digital Learning in Connecticut Public Schools as the basis for developing the next state educational technology plan. He noted that the Digital Learning Advisory Council had provided specific suggestions on ways to operationalize the Resolution in the fall 2022 document, Potential Action Steps for Commission Resolution. Doug referred members to the current plan as a reference point, noting the progress made against all of its objectives.

Advisory Council members made a number of concrete suggestions. Jim Spafford asked that any reference to K – 12 or higher education also include considerations for adult education. Andy DePalma called on the next strategic plan to address the mental health impact on students of non-instructional technology use (e.g., bullying, misinformation campaigns, etc.

Barbara Johnson noted a bill in the New Jersey legislature requiring information literacy to be taught in schools. She suggested that Connecticut take steps to ensure that all students receive instruction on digital citizenship, digital literacy, and online safety, across all age groups. Doug welcomed the recommendation, which could build off of the work already in place through the State Digital Citizenship, Internet Safety, and Media Literacy Advisory Council. Kevin Corcoran noted that within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU), conversations are taking place regarding digital readiness of both students and professors around the effective and ethical use of technology for learning. One approach would be to include digital learning competencies as a component of educator evaluation frameworks and assessments.

Chinma Uche noted the role that state computer science (CS) curriculum and standards can play in supporting digital literacy in students and called for ways to scale the availability of CS courses in Connecticut. Existing CS legislation has broadened access, but not all students have the opportunity to engage in CS offerings or benefit from CS integration into early childhood education. Barbara suggested that the State develop a CS endorsement for educators.

To expand on these ideas, identifying next steps, stakeholders, policies, and funding sources, Jonathan Costa recommended a one-day convening to draft the next state educational technology plan. Organizers should prepare attendees with a list of curated topics and priorities. Josh Smith suggested that attendees also have a sense of the Commission's progress to date in reaching the goals in its current state plan, with considerations given as to which initiatives should continue and what new goals to add. Doug provided a brief overview of the Commission's goals and progress from the draft 2022 Annual Report as context. He also highlighted how the Commission's next strategic plan aligns with the goals of the Digital Equity program, which the Commission is running for the state.

Nick suggested that the next Advisory Council meeting include a review of the proposed summit agenda and priorities. He wanted to ensure that any proposed legislation that might come out of the summit aligns with existing school law and that it should support learning outcomes. The summit should include representatives from the Office of the Governor, the Commission for Educational Technology and its advisory council members, the Connecticut General Assembly, the State Department of Education, leadership groups such as CABE and CAPSS, employers, and school policy experts. Doug welcomed the suggestions and offered as a next step to schedule a separate meeting to plan the summit.

Jim Mindek cautioned that advanced technology use can sometimes seem secondary to the concerns of teachers and administrators on pressing topics such as low attendance rates. From his experience with family and student engagement, Jonathan saw a strong connection between the next plan and core educational outcomes. He

noted the divide students express between their daily lives in school and their future career opportunities.

Artificial Intelligence in Education

Prior to the meeting, Jonathan Costa had recommended adding the topic of artificial intelligence (AI) to the agenda. The launch and widespread debate over ChatGPT have spurred discussions about the use of AI in teaching and learning, given the likely expansion of AI in different forms and applications throughout society.

The group discussed the application of AI in education, such as the ability to generate written content for essays or programming assignments. Other considerations include how the future of AI will influence employment opportunities. If automation eventually eliminates certain types of jobs that focus on repeatable, automated activities, how can schools, universities, adult education programs, and libraries best prepare learners for meaningful careers? And, what types of jobs may exist as a result of AI's spread into different aspects of the economy? Learners need the design, organization, and critical thinking skills that (hopefully) no form of AI can easily replicate.

Josh, Jonathan, and others underscored the critical role that educators have in understanding and modeling effective technology use. Chinma raised the important issue of preparing students to use AI tools in fields such as aerospace, and engineering. Jonathan offered the example of using ChatGPT to help troubleshoot faulty code, as well as other applications that do not generate content but help students look critically at text or code.

Nick suggested that the March 2023 full Commission meeting include the topic of AI in education. That group will likely bring different perspectives on automation based on the diversity of organizations that Commission members represent, with considerations toward policies that capitalize on the promise of AI and encourage its responsible application in education.

Nick thanked the members for their insights, as always, and called the meeting to a close at 2:20 PM.