



**DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES
BUREAU OF ENTERPRISE SYSTEMS AND TECHNOLOGY**

1:00 – 3:00 PM

MINUTES

September 11, 2023

Commission Members in Attendance

Raymond, Mark — Commission Chair and Chief Information Officer, DAS-BITS
Aylesworth, Ryan — Town Manager, Town of Mansfield (Connecticut Conference of Municipalities)
Baillie, Colleen — Executive Director, West Haven Public Library (Connecticut Library Association)
Caruso, Nick — Senior Staff Associate, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education
Casey, Doug — Executive Director, Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
Cohen, Burt — Staff Attorney, Office of Consumer Counsel
Dillon, Tom — Independent (Minority Leader of the House)
Dumais, Charles — Executive Director, Cooperative Education Services (Office of the Governor)
Gopalakrishnan, Ajit — Chief Performance Officer, Connecticut State Department of Education
Johnson, Barbara — Library Media Specialist, Colchester Public Schools (CECA)
Provencher, Maura — Vice President of Research and Administration, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges
Salvatore, Tony — Co-President, Connecticut Federation of School Administrators (Speaker of the House)
Schander, Deborah — State Librarian, Connecticut State Library
Smith, Josh — Superintendent, Region 15 Public Schools (Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents)
Stanco, Bart — Vice President, Gartner (Office of the Governor)
Suh, Grace — Chief of Staff, Office of Workforce Strategy (Department of Economic and Community Development)
Uche, Chinma — Math and Computer Science Teacher, CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering (Connecticut Education Association)
Williams, Holly — Section Director, Education and Workforce Development, Office of Policy and Management (OPM)
Zak, Scott — Senior Director of Learning Technologies, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities



Others in Attendance

Kocsondy, Ryan — Director, Connecticut Education Network (CEN)
Racamato, Victoria — Assistant to the State Chief Information Officer, DAS-BITS
Thompson, Lauren — Digital Equity Program Manager, Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology

Welcome

Commission Chair and State CIO Mark Raymond opened the meeting by inviting members and attendees to remember the events of September 11, 2001: those who lost their lives, those whose lives were saved, the individuals who acted selflessly to help others, and even those born on that day. He expressed a wish that everyone still struggling with the memory of September 11 would find peace. He noted that the meeting was streamed and available to watch [via CT-N](#) and that all materials were posted on [the Commission's Web site](#).

Approval of Meeting Minutes

As the first action item on the agenda, Mark welcomed a motion to approve the [minutes from the June 12, 2023 meeting](#). Chip Dumais offered the motion, with a second from Tony Salvatore. Barbara Johnson abstained, and the motion carried unanimously.

Report of the Executive Director

Mark invited Doug Casey to share highlights from his quarterly [Executive Director's Report](#). Doug provided updates on the development of Connecticut's Digital Equity Plan, funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The Commission leads this work on behalf of Connecticut, with the goal of developing a five-year plan to help ensure all residents have access to high-speed and affordable Internet and devices, the skills to use them effectively, and technical support.

An intensive research phase is drawing to a close. The digital equity team of Lauren Thompson, the Commission's Digital Equity Program Manager; Sarah Ullom-Minnich, Research Fellow; and Doug have engaged in discussions with more than a dozen state agencies and many social services and advocacy groups to look for alignment between the digital equity plan and statewide supports. Results from a resident survey as well as focus groups conducted in partnership with the University of Connecticut School of Public Policy provide some insights on the digital divide. Many members of covered populations — such as the aging, veterans, those living at or below the poverty line, and racial and ethnic minorities — are less likely to have an Internet connection or device; have lower levels of self-reported digital literacy; and have greater needs around service and device affordability. These and other insights will guide the development of solutions the Commission will propose as part of the State Digital Equity Plan. Doug noted that the Commission has applied for a 120-day no-cost



extension, which the program's administrators at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) have encouraged all states to leverage. Burt Cohen asked if the State would see a delay in the awarding of federal capacity funds, the next phase of the Digital Equity Program, by accepting the extension. Doug shared feedback from the NTIA on this topic, that the early submission of plans would not result in earlier awards in the capacity phase.

Lauren provided a brief overview of the "Listening Session" she facilitated on August 24 at the East Hartford Public Library. DAS Commissioner Michelle Gilman welcomed nearly 30 digital equity advocates and experts to the event, underscoring the agency and State's commitment to connecting and equipping residents. At the event, Doug shared research takeaways, and Lauren facilitated several activities to elicit ideas for the Digital Equity Plan, addressing broadband and device affordability as well as suggestions for "digital navigation" programs. Lauren has recorded a brief video overview of the program with a form open to the public, inviting suggestions for the five-year plan. These and other materials are available at www.CT.gov/DigitalEquity.

Following this overview of the Digital Equity Program, Bart Stanco asked if the Commission could review the plans already submitted by other states. Doug and Lauren directed members to an [NTIA Web page](#) with links to all previously submitted state plans. Doug noted that he, Lauren, and Sarah have spoken with members of other digital equity teams from other states that received planning funds earlier than Connecticut did, especially those from Maine and Ohio. These conversations have helped in the development of Connecticut's plan and have helped with program design considerations. Doug highlighted the importance of leveraging efficiencies at the state and regional levels while tapping into the relational strength of local groups such as neighborhood revitalization zones.

In addition to writing the State Digital Equity Plan, the Commission also plans to issue a letter to members of Congress calling for the continued funding of the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). Since the program's inception in 2021, the ACP has provided \$30 in monthly credit for Internet service to more than 170,000 qualifying households in Connecticut, saving them a collective \$23M. The program also provides for low-cost computers; more than 25,000 households now have a device through ACP, saving them more than \$2.5M total.

Doug concluded his report by highlighting several newly released resources to aid schools and libraries in defending against cyber-attacks. The U.S. Department of Education and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) published [K-12 Digital Infrastructure Brief: Defensible & Resilient](#), which highlights the Connecticut Education Network (CEN) for its network-level and end-point protection services. Other



resources include free training courses and materials from CISA and private sector partners including Amazon Web Services, Cloudflare, and PowerSchool.

Advisory Council Retreat and Strategic Planning

Following the Executive Director's report and discussion on digital equity, Mark invited Tom Dillon, Chair of the Commission's Infrastructure Advisory Committee, to discuss outcomes of the summer strategic planning retreat. The event took place August 8 at the Lyceum in Hartford, where 25 members of the Infrastructure and Digital Learning Advisory Councils met for an initial full-group discussion followed by breakout planning. These smaller groups developed vision statements and action steps for each proposed component of the Commission's next strategic plan:

- Data Privacy: Protection of student and school data
- Digital Equity: Broadband, devices, skills, support, and resident services
- Digital Literacy: Especially concerning the use of social media
- Online Learning: Uses of remote and hybrid learning
- Open Education: Free, high-quality courses and materials
- Sustainability: Post-pandemic support of devices and software
- Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Education: Especially large language models

Nick Caruso, Chair of the Digital Learning Advisory Council, acknowledged the strong work of John Prins, the event facilitator, and thanked Lauren for her support the day of the retreat. He noted that the above priorities have emerged over the course of several years. Notes from group discussions during the retreat validated these topics as top priorities for the education community and provide a foundation for the Commission's next five-year plan. Josh Smith and Chinma Uche both participated in the retreat and spoke about the value of meeting in person, which accelerated the planning process.

Following this overview, the Commission members provided feedback on current and proposed initiatives. Doug referenced the 2022 Annual Report, with a [summary on page 12](#) of progress in support of the current strategic plan. Considering those priorities, members used an online polling tool to respond to the following questions:

Question: Out of the current initiatives in the 2017 – 22 plan, what areas should the Commission NOT continue?

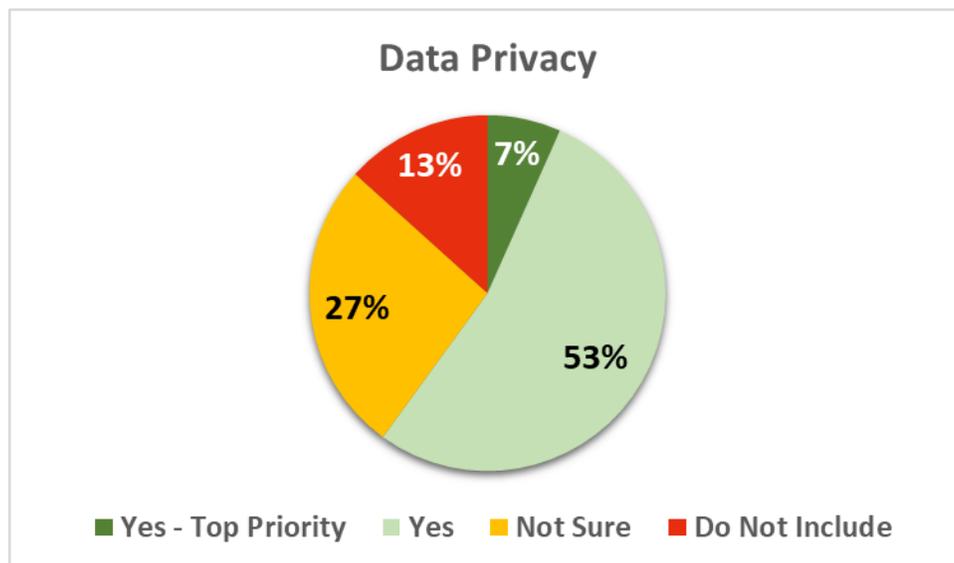
Initiative	Percent
E-rate Maximization	40%
Competency Standards	14%
Open Education	14%
Personalized Learning	14%
Student Data Privacy	11%
Digital Equity	3%



Based on the results of the poll, Nick Caruso clarified that while the Commission may not continue investing resources into any particular area, other groups may champion the work. For example, Mark discussed how other leadership organizations have helped to define the competencies that students need to use technology effectively. The Commission has partnered with and endorsed the standards of organizations such as the [International Society for Technology in Education](#) (ISTE).

Doug then posed a series of prompts regarding proposed initiatives or focus areas for the next strategic plan.

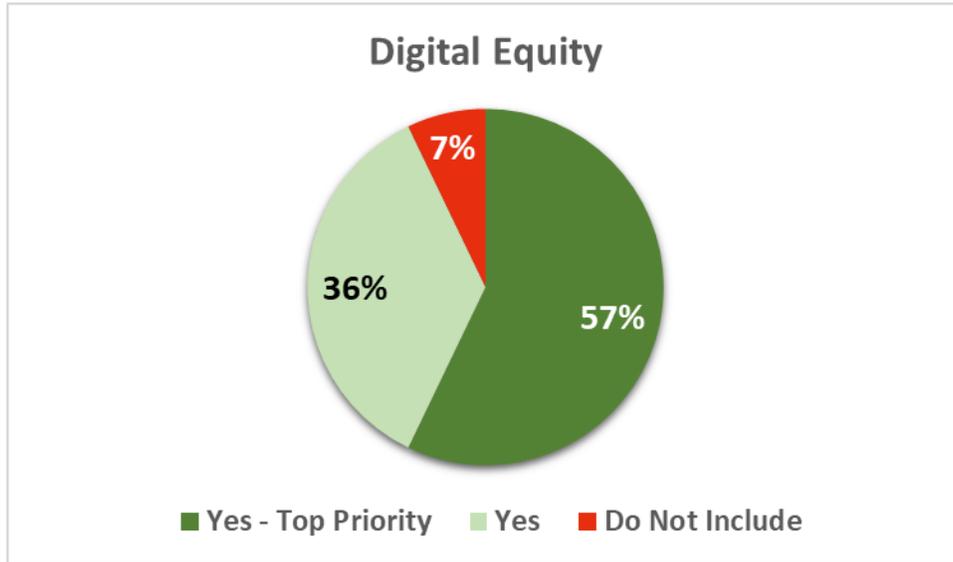
Question: Should the Commission include Data Privacy in its next strategic plan?



Given the range of responses, with some Commission members feeling that data privacy should be a top priority and others arguing not to include it in the next strategic plan, Mark encouraged individual members to share their thoughts on the topic. Josh Smith felt this should continue as a priority in the next plan, given the expanding footprint of student data captured and utilized, especially through the use of AI in education. Nick disagreed, not that data privacy is not an important topic, but just that the Commission has limits in what it can accomplish and felt other areas were of higher priority.

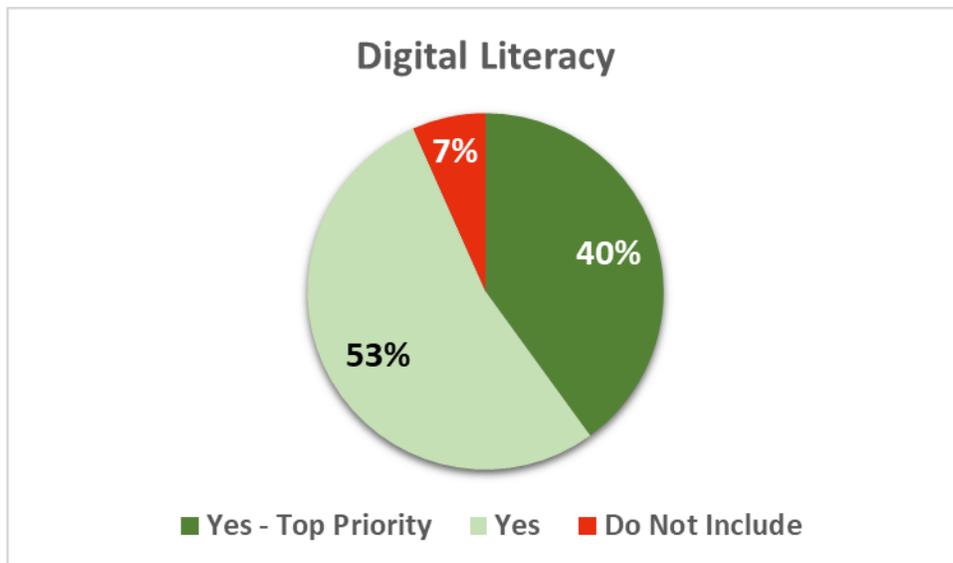


Question: Should the Commission include Digital Equity in its next strategic plan?



Bart acknowledged the importance of this work in general and encouraged a focus on efforts that would directly support student achievement and educators' access to materials that improve their ability to support learners.

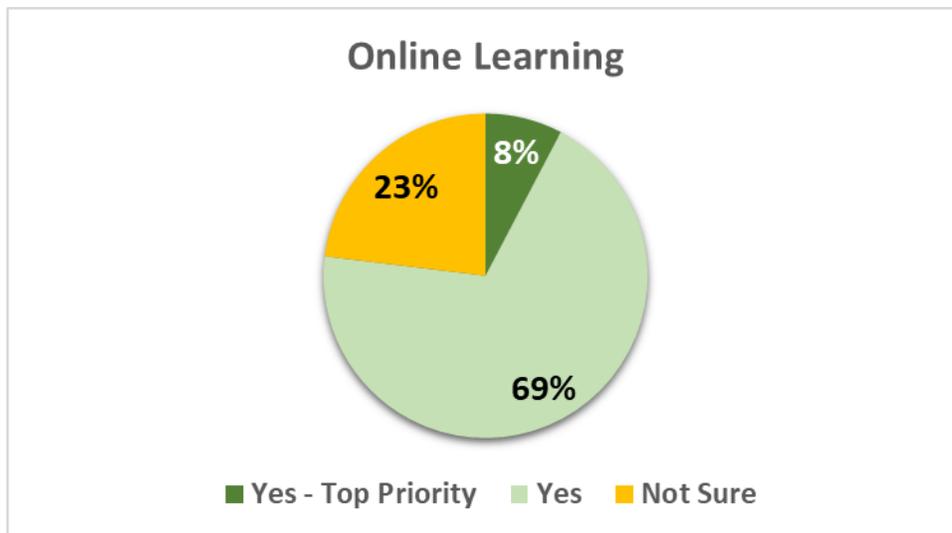
Question: Should the Commission include Digital Literacy in its next strategic plan?





Tom expressed his strong opinion that digital literacy remain a top priority for the Commission. The ability of all residents, including students, teachers, and education leaders, to use technology for learning and personal advancement should remain essential to the Commission's work. He did suggest that the group rethink the term "literacy," which some can see as judgmental, that those who have not had the privilege of accessing connections, devices, instruction, and support should not be labeled as not "literate." Burt agreed and suggested that the Commission use terms such as "digital skills" and acknowledged the definition of "digital literacy" in state statute (see PA 21-159). Mark welcomed these suggestions, which he saw as complementary, and encouraged the adoption of inclusive, positive language when speaking about technology adoption and use.

Question: Should the Commission include Online Learning in its next strategic plan?



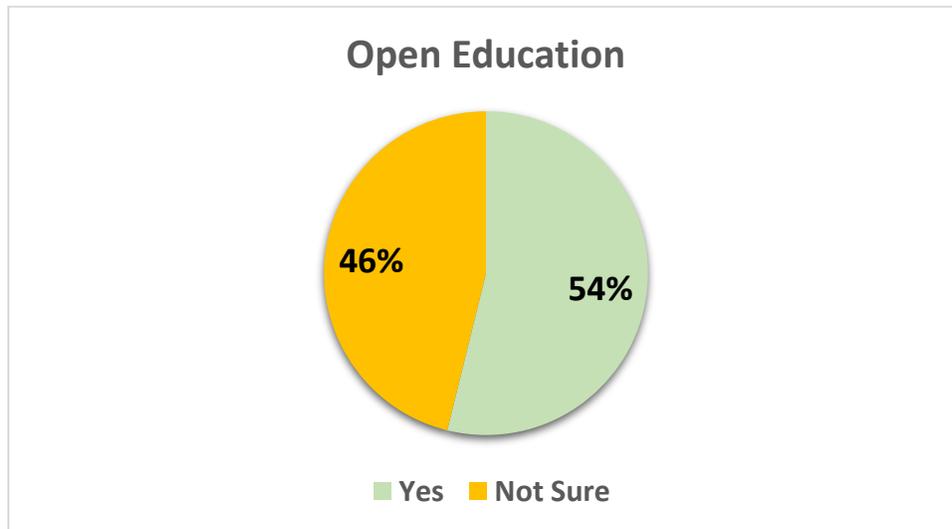
Deborah Schander saw a strong connection between the development of digital skills, or "digital literacy," and online learning. As educators gain the ability to teach with technology, and students to use it, barriers to engaging in online learning in its various forms will fall. Nick agreed, pointing to work by CAPSS in years past that calls for a shift from time as a constant and learning as a variable to using technology for mastery-based learning, allowing learning to become the constant. Holly Williams welcomed a reframing of education that could include more flexible uses of technology to support personalized learning, including applications outside of the classroom to address achievement gaps. Access to online learning remains an equity issue, overlapping with the priority of "digital equity." Mark agreed and saw the strong ties between and among the proposed initiatives.



Burt answered "Yes" to the above prompt for two reasons. First, he felt the state should be ready to provide online and remote instruction in the case of another pandemic or other unforeseen event that leads to school closures. Additionally, he acknowledged the potential of online classes to provide students with learning opportunities they might not have in their home district, given staffing or course constraints. Ryan Aylesworth agreed that online learning presents great potential. He also cautioned against the over-reliance on technology and underscored the importance for social and developmental priority of in-person learning for students and teachers.

Doug noted that many of the initiatives have a supporting body of work and interest from other groups in the state. For example, he commended the work of the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and specifically that of Commission member and CSDE Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan and his colleague CSDE Chief Academic Officer Irene Parisi in their work through the [Remote Learning Commission](#). Under CSDE Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker, that Commission has developed research-based standards for online learning that the Commission for Educational Technology can reference and leverage.

Question: Should the Commission include Open Education in its next strategic plan?

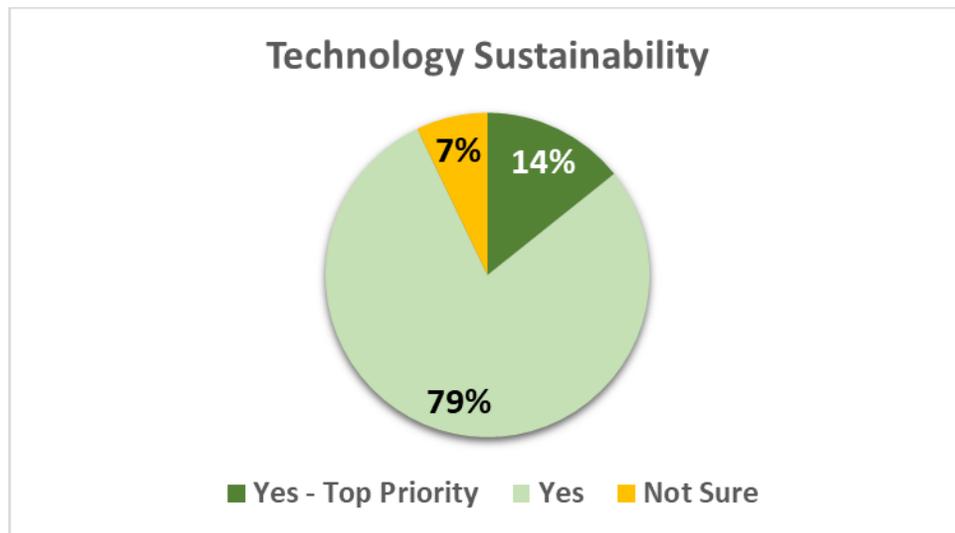


Deborah saw open education as an essential component of digital equity. Ensuring access to affordable and high-quality learning materials remains essential to removing educational barriers to students. She also spoke to the need to raise awareness of open education's benefits among professors and to look at incentives, perhaps tied to tenure and other systems, for professors to create and share open learning materials. Tom



voted “not sure” from a belief that open education remains an important topic, but that perhaps another agency or group might take the lead in this work. Nick and Mark agreed, celebrating the work completed to date and clarifying its role as a policy leader rather than an agency designed to provide operational capacity.

Question: Should the Commission include Technology Sustainability in its next strategic plan?

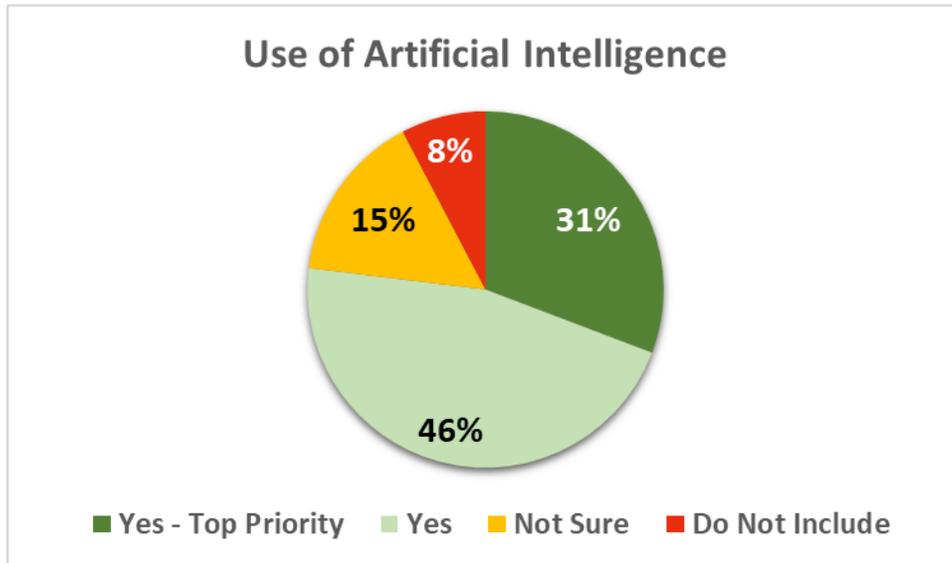


Doug clarified that by “technology sustainability,” the prompt pertained to the end of federal funding for technology through pandemic relief programs. The definition could also include environmental sustainability, reducing the impact of hardware production and maximizing re-use and recycling of computers.

Mark welcomed innovative uses of technology for learning and wanted to see that any initiatives, such as 1:1 computer programs, come with an element of sustainability. Josh agreed and held up CEN as an example of technology sustainability. A centralized, high-speed network connecting all institutions helps ensure access to broadband and cyber protections. He encouraged the Commission to look for efficiencies in other areas, such as ongoing and costly educational software subscriptions. Deborah raised this concern for libraries as well as schools and universities.



Question: Should the Commission include the use of Artificial Intelligence in its next strategic plan?



Scott Zak acknowledged the novelty of artificial intelligence (AI) applications but felt the Commission should not invest resources in this nascent topic. Nick disagreed and saw the Commission as a key leadership organization to help set policy in the appropriate use of AI in learning. Deborah agreed and saw the use of AI as part of general digital literacy. She cited the use of AI for years in areas such as legal research and review. Tony concurred and urged the Commission to develop or come alongside policies that protect student data and ensure that learners use AI tools effectively and appropriately.

Several Commission members expressed support in making AI a priority. Holly made the connection between AI use and social media use and called for resources to equip families, teachers, and students with an understanding of how to engage in using these tools in a safe and appropriate manner. Chinma pointed to the opportunities that exist for students to learn more about how AI applications work and develop the next generation of tools. Bart cited broader trends in AI adoption and specifically the use of it in tutoring. Josh noted that many students are already using these tools and have a deeper understanding of them than do their teachers. He indicated that now may be an inflection point that requires the Commission's engagement.

Mark pointed to AI as a topic of concern for individuals around the world as well as leadership organizations. Tom suggested that one or both of the Advisory Councils track developments in the field of AI and provide updates at future Commission meetings.



Mark thanked the members for their engagement in discussing the proposed priorities. Doug echoed that appreciation and promised to develop a draft strategic plan for review at the December Commission meeting.

CEN Updates

Given the lengthy discussion on strategy, CEN Director Ryan Kocsondy kept his updates brief and encouraged members to review his [quarterly report](#) in detail. He highlighted the value of distributed denial of service (DDOS) protections for all CEN member institutions. The list of members continues to expand as the Connecticut Library Fiber Consortium program ends, with connections to 150 out of 191 libraries statewide.

The CEN team did not receive funding through the highly competitive Middle Mile program, part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Ryan expressed hope that other state or federal programs could provide funding to support the work defined in CEN's Middle Mile proposal. Separately, the "CEN Connect" proposal for infrastructure and expansion investments had not received approval as of September 11. As of this writing, however, Ryan did learn that the U.S. Department of the Treasury approved this American Rescue Plan Act application. The CEN Connect program will receive nearly \$73M for Network upgrades, new connections to charter schools and libraries, and an expansion of the Community Wireless initiative.

Plans are underway already for the annual CEN Conference, a two-day event taking place May 8 and 9 at the Connecticut Convention Center in Hartford. Before then, CEN is partnering with the Connecticut National Guard to hold the [Cyber Nutmeg](#) conference Friday, October 20 at Central Connecticut State University. Sessions are designed for state, municipal, and education leaders and include a briefing from the Connecticut Counter Terrorism and Intelligence Center as well as tabletop scenario exercises. Mark encouraged all Commission members to consider attending the event and thanked Ryan for his report.

Public Comment

There was no public comment offered.

Scheduled 2023 Meeting Date

Mark noted the remaining meeting date for 2023, scheduled to take place in person at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford on Monday, December 4.



Adjournment

Mark welcomed a motion to adjourn, offered by Deborah and with a second from Chinma. With a unanimous vote to conclude the meeting at approximately 3:00 PM, Mark thanked the Commission members for their contributions to the thoughtful and engaging discussion.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Casey
Executive Director

Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas Casey". The signature is written in a cursive style.