DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES
BUREAU OF ENTERPRISE SYSTEMS AND TECHNOLOGY
1:00 – 3:00 PM

M I N U T E S
December 6, 2021

Commission Members in Attendance

Raymond, Mark — Commission Chair and Chief Information Officer, DAS-BEST

Mundrane, Michael — Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer, University of Connecticut (UCONN)

Bailie, Colleen — Director, West Haven Public Library (Connecticut Library Association)

Caruso, Nick — Senior Staff Associate, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education

Casey, Doug — Executive Director, CT Commission for Educational Technology

Cohen, Burt — Staff Attorney, Office of Consumer Counsel

Dillon, Tom — Independent (Minority Leader of the House)

Elsesser, John — Town Manager, Town of Coventry (CT Council of Small Towns)

Gopalakrishnan, Ajit — Chief Performance Officer, Connecticut State Department of Education

Hayes, David — Elementary Teacher, Bristol Public Schools (American Federation of Teachers)

Johnson, Barbara — Colchester Public Schools (Connecticut Educators Computer Association)

Mavrogeanes, Richard — Discover Video (President Pro Tempore of the Senate)

Provencher, Maura — Vice President of Research and Administration, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC)

Schander, Deborah — State Librarian, Connecticut State Library

Stanco, Bart — Vice President, Gartner (Office of the Governor)

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

Doolittle, Ted — Connecticut State Healthcare Advocate

Kocsondy, Ryan — Director, Connecticut Education Network

Racamato, Victoria — Assistant to the State Chief Information Officer, DAS-BEST

Welcome

Chair Mark Raymond called the meeting to order at approximately 1:00 PM. He welcomed the Commission members and remarked on this being the first day of Computer Science Education Week. That initiative aligns with the Commission's charge of broadening access to technology for students, library patrons, and the broader Connecticut citizenry. He informed members and guests that the meeting was streamed by the Connecticut Network (https://ct-n.com/ctnplayer.asp?odID=19161).

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The Commission members had received the minutes of the September 13, 2021 meeting in advance, and Mark welcomed a motion to approve the document. Burt Cohen made a motion to approve the minutes, with a second from Chip Dumais. With no discussion, the members approved the minutes unanimously.

Report of the Executive Director

Mark asked Doug to share highlights from his December Executive Director's Report, which he had shared with members in advance of the meeting:

- Continuing Broadband Initiatives
  Doug began with updates on several COVID relief programs. Community Wireless, part of Governor Lamont's Everybody Learns initiative, continues to offer Internet access at more than 150 locations across the state. An expansion of this program will likely take place in 2022, with $10M in Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds. The Commission will oversee this grant program.

  Burt asked whether the funding for the next phase would address all connectivity needs in public spaces across the state. Doug reiterated that the budget represents an allocation rather than a reflection of the costs to reach every underserved community. He did note that a significant component of the program will include outreach to local leaders to submit applications.

  Hiring continues according to the Governor's broadband bill (Public Act 21-159), with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) interviewing for the state Director of Telecommunications and Broadband and the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) for the Broadband Mapping Coordinator. That statute calls for a statewide map of broadband availability by the end of 2022. John Elsesser asked whether the latter position would work with the other members of OPM's geographic information system (GIS) mapping team, which Doug confirmed.

Household registrations for the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) continue, with progress reflected on a statewide map with town-level detail available at www.bit.ly/CT-EBB-MAP.

- Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
Doug offered high-level summaries of the Infrastructure Act, signed into law by President Biden on November 15. The Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program will provide an initial $100M to Connecticut for broadband expansion and support the development of a 5-year statewide broadband plan. The Middle Mile program remains especially pertinent to the Commission, as CEN serves as the state's middle mile research and education network. Doug remarked on the allocation of funding for the Digital Equity Act, a positive step to ensuring not just access to technology but also its effective use by learners of all ages. The Infrastructure Act replaces EBB with the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) and contains significant funding for cybersecurity, 80 percent of which will flow directly to municipalities.

In the context of this and other relief funding, Burt characterized this period as the "golden age of broadband funding." He noted the significant work ahead of the National Transportation and Infrastructure Administration (NTIA), which will manage the broadband and other programs coming out of the Infrastructure Act. That agency should issue a notice of funding opportunity within 180 days of the bill's signing, likely in May of 2022. He projected the ACP allocation to last 5 – 6 years, hopefully continued through future appropriations.

Mark took a moment to recognize the Commission's efforts to expand access to technology and the skills to use it effectively, noting the potential impact of the Infrastructure Act and other funding sources to support this work. Access to technology opens doors to learning, economic opportunities, healthcare, and other benefits. He applauded Congress for its efforts to finalize the legislation, which will help the country make significant progress toward universal availability of broadband and digital literacy skills.

- Open Education Resources
Progress continues in the expansion of content through the Commission's open education resources (OER) site, www.GoOpenCT.org. The portal expands access to high-quality, standards-align courses, units of study, lesson plans, and textbooks through a rich authoring, sharing, and curation toolset. Doug discussed the recent addition of curriculum from Common Sense Media and Connecticut Humanities. A strong partnership continues with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) in the development of the African

American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino Studies course, the first of its kind in the country. The CSDE and State Education Resource Center (SERC) developed the core curriculum, and a team of teachers is now using GoOpenCT to build and review lesson plans. Doug noted that funding is now in place for a team to provide support to Connecticut's teachers and professors who use the platform.

Mark thanked Doug for his report and ongoing efforts to keep the Commission's work relevant and connected to other educational priorities across the state. He then asked Doug to speak to the next topic on the agenda, the Commission's work in reporting around student data privacy.

Data Privacy Exemption Reporting
As background to the discussion, Doug reminded members of the law requiring local education agencies (LEAs) to report on their use of an exemption to the student data privacy law. That language (PA 18-125) set aside cases where schools had a compelling reason to use software for students' individualized education plans (IEPs) or for accommodations under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ("504 plans"). The statute requires LEAs to report each year to the Commission on their use of the exemption but does not specify what, if anything, the Commission should do with those submissions. Each year since the law's inception, Doug has provided a detailed report to the Connecticut General Assembly but has yet to receive any feedback on that information. He directed members to the data sets and charts provided in the 2021 report and asked them what feedback they have received from LEAs or other education stakeholders regarding the reports.

Ajit Gopalakrishnan, who oversees the CSDE's district data collections and reporting, pointed out that the IEP and 504 language represents one narrow exemption to the broader statute. The existence of the law since 2016 has heightened awareness among schools of their need to have sound data-sharing agreements with third parties. Evidence of that has come in the form of increased inquiries to the CSDE about the privacy terms and practices of educational software providers. He posited that the relatively small number of exemptions may reflect this increased awareness of and adherence to best practices in protecting student data. Tools from the Commission, such as the Model Terms of Service Addendum and list of compliancy-pledged apps through LearnPlatform, have also helped districts and software providers alike.

John Elsesser expressed concern that only 43 percent of LEAs reported last year, leaving open the question of how non-reporting districts may be adhering (or not) to the data privacy statute. He encouraged the use of stronger language to encourage schools to submit their reports, in that they are legally obligated to do so.

Mark noted that one utility of the exemption reporting requirement has come through school leaders' considering the questions required in the reporting interface. That process may have increased awareness of data privacy best practices and the choice to use software with compliant terms. Regarding the question of whether the Commission should continue producing annual reports when not required to, he underscored the need to be efficient with limited staffing resources and suggested a discussion with the original bill's sponsors. Doing so aligns with the Commission's role as the State's liaison to the General Assembly for all educational technology matters.

Digital Learning Advisory Council Report

Nick Caruso chairs the Digital Learning Advisory Council and offered two key topics for discussion raised during the group's October 26 meeting, the minutes of which members received in advance. He began by summarizing the final results of the statewide survey conducted this summer, which posed the following question:

> "What about school during the pandemic is worth keeping as we return to in-person education?"

A total of 190 individuals responded, 140 of whom identified themselves as school teachers. Most pointed to the benefits of using technology for tactical purposes, such as conducting parent-teacher conferences. The Advisory Council members felt that such responses reflect the emergency nature of technology use during the pandemic rather than more planned and innovative applications.

While the Advisory Council is still considering specific recommendations to the Commission based on the survey results, and Nick shared the group's focus on three areas: the provision of devices for all students, home Internet access, and support for teachers to strengthen learning using technology. While Connecticut has seen progress in all three of these areas through State and local emergency relief investments, concerns remain about long-term sustainability.

In addition to the survey, the Advisory Council members discussed the need to support the digital literacy needs of adults. The group discussed the idea of developing training materials and a credential that learners could earn when they demonstrate a level of competency in their use of digital tools. Nick underscored the work already underway to provide training through libraries as well as adult and continuing education programs. He posed to the Commission members whether they saw value in such an undertaking, and whether the Commission should lead or coordinate this work.

Burt expressed interest in the proposed work and encouraged a partnership with the Connecticut AARP, which already has programs in place to expand access to

technology and skill-building among that organization's members. He noted that the Digital Equity components of the Infrastructure Act identify the senior population as a priority group for program design and delivery. Deborah Schander welcomed the idea and pointed to the work underway in Connecticut libraries to train adults in using technology. She also suggested engaging with institutions of higher education, many of which have begun to include digital literacy credentials on student transcripts. Colleen Bailie referenced senior centers both as areas of need and partners in delivery.

From a content perspective, Barbara Johnson noted the [adoption](#) on December 1 by the State Board of Education (SBE) of the American Association of School Libraries (AASL) National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries. These standards, along with those from the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) and the National Computer Science Teachers Association (NCSTA) now replace the 2006 CSDE Technology and Literacy Framework.

Mark welcomed the discussion and encouraged both Advisory Councils to share with the Commission general statements of need in addition to specific recommendations. Those insights can help frame future discussions among Commission members around ways of addressing these challenges.

Infrastructure Advisory Council Report

Mark turned the floor to Tom Dillon, chair of the Infrastructure Advisory Council, to share updates from the November 3 meeting of that group, [minutes of which](#) the Commission received separately. Tom raised the topic of how to track access to technology among K – 12 students. He shared the context of this subject, a report by the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA) that provides information on how states collect this data (www.bit.ly/SETDA-Dig-Div-Report).

Tom summarized the discussion among Advisory Council members, who include K – 12 technology leaders. Conducting local surveys that roll up to state totals remains challenging, given that districts already struggle to meet data collection and reporting activities. Doing so also depends on a high level of parent input. He highlighted the challenge of tracking data over time, as students may have changes in residence, school enrollment, etc. during the course of a school year. He underscored that the objective is to equip and connect students, and he welcomed input from the Commission on how best to identify students in need.

Michael reiterated the challenges of data collection and that the Advisory Council had not settled on a single recommendation. He did question whether districts, which would be charged with collecting this information, are in the best position to do so. There remains broad consensus that the digital divide demands attention and resources, but

he questioned the practicality of mandating reports that depend on a high level of parent responses.

Doug referenced the framework of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), referenced in the SETDA report, for state-level data collections. Those standards can also serve school districts by providing uniform questions that all schools could use, as well as guidance for the frequency of data collections. He referred Commission members to several recommendations from the Advisory Council, such as conducting a pilot data collection among several districts, a statewide survey of current district data-collection practices, and guidance to the General Assembly to require local reporting of technology access.

Burt noted that the Commission already has a role to play in measuring the digital divide. The Governor's broadband bill (PA 21-159) calls on the Commission to work with DEEP and OPM to assess statewide goals of universal access to broadband.

Rather than a survey, Bart suggested leveraging usage data from districts. He noted the ability of schools to cull login and other student data to assess where and when they access instructional applications. Information about which students do not log in from home could help identify those learners who lack Internet access. These results could also help identify the neediest communities for prioritizing the allocation of federal broadband funds.

Mark drew a parallel between this topic and the broader challenges of designing digital government solutions. Identifying a problem represents the first step, followed by research to identify one or more solutions. The question remains how specific the data collection needs to be in order to address the root causes and remedies to the challenge at hand. Often times, constituent-level (in this case, student- or household-level) analysis may not be necessary. He thanked Tom and the members of the Infrastructure Advisory Council for bringing this topic to the Commission for ongoing consideration.

CEN Updates

Ryan Kocsondy, Director of CEN, provided brief highlights from his quarterly report, posted on the Commission's December 6 meeting Web page. He noted that service rates will remain unchanged for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2022, following last year's overall reduction in rates by 2 percent.

Next, Ryan provided updates on the Connecticut Library Fiber Consortium. To date, the initiative has connected 146 of 191 (76 percent) of libraries statewide to CEN, along with 26 of 47 branches (55 percent). To assist libraries with internal networking, the

Connecticut State Library is funding internal upgrades through the Consortium. Ryan shared that patrons and staff often experience slow Internet connections not because of the fiber running to the building but because of the limited capacity of outdated internal networking equipment. The expansion of the Consortium work to address internal networking will address this challenge. In response to a question from John Elsesser about eligibility, Ryan stated that the program is for projects that do not already have dedicated infrastructure budgets, unlike library renovations, which generally include capital allocations to replace networking equipment.

On the frequent topic of Eduroam (www.eduroam.us), the global authentication framework that CEN and the Commission have championed for years, Ryan shared preliminary results of a recent survey. That data indicates that schools, libraries, and universities remain enthusiastic about offering Eduroam authentication and have most of the technical components to do so. The survey will remain open to garner additional feedback from CEN member institutions.

Ryan also touched on two practices that the CEN advisory councils have documented and posted (ctedunet.net/policies). The Service Lifecycle procedures define how CEN identifies the need for, launches, maintains, and sunsets various member services. The Member Continuity procedures state that CEN will continue to offer member institutions special assistance in a non-binding fashion during times of crisis. Doing so helps to codify ongoing practices and helps protect the Network from liability in providing pro bono help in times of need. Mark commended Ryan and the CEN team for their demonstrated dedication to Network members, especially in crisis situations.

Finally, Ryan invited Commission members to attend the 9th Annual CEN Member Conference, taking place on May 5, 2022 at the Connecticut Convention Center in Hartford. He encouraged members and their constituent groups to submit proposals through the form available at ctedunet.net/annual-conference. Doug echoed this invitation, noting the broad range of topics that the Conference Committee welcomes, from highly technical subjects to ways of leveraging technology for learning in the classroom, library, and lecture hall.

Public Comment

Following the CEN report, Mark issued a call for public comment, with none given.

Scheduled 2022 Meeting Dates

Mark noted the upcoming meeting dates for the following year, also published in the meeting agenda:

- Monday, March 7
- Monday, June 6
- Monday, September 12
- Monday, December 5

Adjournment

With no further questions or discussion, Mark entertained a motion to adjourn. Michael offered the motion, Burt seconded, and with no objections the meeting ended at approximately 2:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

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