CTEDTECH
Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology

Digest of Priorities and Opportunities from CET Member Discussions

Winter 2016

Compiled and Presented by

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March 7, 2016

Contents

Introduction

This document offers a digest of ideas, priorities, and opportunities expressed through the course of meetings between the executive director of the state's Commission for Educational Technology (CET) and the following CET members:

Colleen Bailie	Dawn Lavalle	Bart Stanco
Nick Caruso	Rich Mavrogeanes	Bill Vallee
Tom Dillon	Jim Mindek	Jen Widness
Liz Donahue	Michael Mundrane	Ken Wiggin
John Elsesser	Lisa Pellegrini	Scott Zak
Russell Feinmark	Scott Shanley	
Jeffrey Kitching	Susan Shellard	

These findings appear under four focus areas, the core of the CET's activities:

- Infrastructure
- Capacity
- Digital Learning
- Data & Privacy

Findings shared here do not reflect the sum total of all discussion content, merely the common threads that emerged across member meetings. The intent of this brief is to share insights, spur further discussions, and provide a departure point for strategic planning and future initiatives.

Infrastructure

CEN – Nutmeg Network

Content: Almost every member expressed strong support for and interest in growing the Connecticut Education Network (CEN). Recommendations include the following:

- Increase the variety and depth of content hosted on the CEN, including streaming video and even basic cable service
- Bolster and promote colocation and hosting services
- Increase use of the network (increase overall traffic)

Awareness and Promotion: Another common theme was increasing awareness of the CEN's impact and benefits, with suggestions such as the following:

- Share with stakeholders the capacity of the network, especially in comparison with the public broadband capacity (or lack thereof) in other states
- Establish a larger budget for communications
- Provide background (boilerplate) information about the CEN and CET

Sustainability: This topic came up in virtually every conversation, with different models proposed, including a levy through commercial carrier customers (similar to the federal Universal Service Fund but on a state level). In support of the self-sustaining model, members also expressed interest in having the CEN bring on board staff resources to pursue grant and other revenue sources.

Connections and Upgrades: Connecting all state libraries remains a work in progress, supported by federal (BTOP) dollars. Approximately 90 libraries still use slow (e.g., DSL) connections. In higher education, strong interest exists for increasing connection speeds across the state and community college system. The term "quality bandwidth" came up, underscoring the importance of providing broadband to community anchors including schools, libraries, and municipal buildings.

Municipal Connections: Municipal members expressed a need to support expansion of the Nutmeg Network into towns and to help resolve logistical and regulatory issues such as the municipal gain and other, often expensive make-ready provisions.

Equity

This theme emerged across several conversations. From K – 12 to universities as well as libraries and continuing education, access to connected devices remains a priority.

- Wireless: Models exist elsewhere to bridge the "homework gap" by providing WiFi-enabled busses to support learning en route to and from schools and even as mobile, community hotspots when parked overnight in high-needs neighborhoods.
- Computers: Libraries need more devices to support patrons who do not have their own personal computers. Investments in hardware will help maximize investments in broadband.

Use of Facilities

Schools and libraries are exploring ways to leverage physical space to full advantage and to offer innovative programs. For example, maker spaces, equipped with supportive staff and expensive technology such as 3D printers, are becoming popular among the K – 12 and public library communities.

Efficiencies

Across all stakeholder groups (K – 12, higher education, libraries, and towns), efficiencies emerged as a common topic. Many institutions are actively migrating away from on-premises services and hosting, for example, and moving to more cost-effective "cloud" services. Sharing human resources remains an opportunity for the Commission to explore, with models proposed that include IT specialists supporting our collective technology needs on a community or regional level, brokered between organizations or through a trusted third party (CEN, RESCs, etc.).

Practices

Standards and Training

This general term refers to establishing technology standards for students, teachers, librarians, and parents and supporting the effective use of technology at all levels. These

suggestions fall in line with the CET's statutory charge to adopt and promote such proficiency standards (e.g., ISTE NETS for K – 12 students and teachers). Members also underscored the importance of training for these groups to support learning and professional development. Specific examples follow:

- Parent Training: The libraries already offer the cost-efficient and highly effective Teach for All program for parents, for example.
- Literacies: Among the library community, specific emphasis for "literacy" training came up several times, providing resources for digital, financial, health, and legal literacy instruction in and through our libraries and schools.
- Higher Education Incentives: Members of the higher education community noted programs in other states that provide financial or other incentives to professors to leverage technology in research and instruction, such as publishing or adopting free and lower-cost open educational resources (OERs).

Workforce Development

Several members offered suggestions in support of workforce development:

- High School Internships: The Commission could consider the formation or adoption of an internship program that connects secondary students with an interest in technology careers to local businesses.
- General Technology Training: The CET should look for ways to train students of any age in technical skills, especially as they support high-needs shortages in the state workforce. Doing so would in turn help attract and retain workers and businesses in the state.

Digital Learning

A number of topics came up during conversations on the tools and resources used to support digital learning:

- Open Educational Resources: The OER model holds promise to save schools and students significant amounts of money by leveraging free or low-cost instructional and reference materials. Other states (e.g., New York and California) have made significant strides in this area and offer platforms and resources that Connecticut might leverage. The CEN could provide the platform for hosting online textbooks, assessments, and other digital learning materials.
- Shared Research and Content: The Commission should pursue ways of linking the research and library catalog holdings among institutions of higher learning. A possible "master catalog" would provide a searchable window into holdings across the state, possibly leveraging the CEN at least as a delivery platform if not also for hosting or other services.
- Online Courses: For both credit recovery as well as expanding the catalog of schools, colleges, and adult education programs, online courses hold promise for Connecticut's learners. The Commission may wish to look at the resources, standards (e.g., mastery versus Carnegie Units), and legislation necessary to promote the use of online or blended courses.
- Electronic Books (eBooks): The Connecticut State Library is expanding its collection of titles and is looking to provide a platform for self-publication.

Data & Privacy

Various members of the CET expressed concerns about the storage and transfer of data, both within the CEN to trusted partners (e.g., State Department of Education) as well as with third parties (e.g., educational technology companies hosting student data). Opportunities that came up during these conversations include the following:

- Reporting Efficiencies: The Commission could save schools huge time savings by looking into ways to streamline or centralize the data-reporting demands on K – 12 districts. With the near uniformity of many data standards and systems across schools, the CET could look to partner with RESCs, for example, to support regional data reporting through shared human resources.
- Connectivity Among Systems: Because many K – 12 schools have similar "back-end" data systems (e.g., PowerSchool and IEP Direct), an opportunity exists to save time and money by looking at connectors between these systems and state reporting platforms.
- Hosting: The CEN, in partnership with CCAT and the RESCs, for example, could look at group hosting of common systems such as PowerSchool. Districts already outsource hosting of many of their data systems, and having these platforms reside on the CEN would provide a local support presence, protections against external attacks, and resilience to Internet outages.