

Digital Learning Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
November 12, 2019

Attendees

- Katie Bauer — Trinity College
- Nick Caruso — CABE
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Kevin Corcoran — Connecticut State Colleges and Universities
- Jonathan Costa — EdAdvance
- Andy DePalma — EASTCONN
- Josh Elliott — Fairfield University
- Shannon Marimón — ReadyCT
- Jim Mindek — Connecticut Technical High School System
- Brandon Rush — New Milford Public Schools
- Josh Smith — Region 15 Public Schools
- Jim Spafford — Manchester Adult Education
- Shelley Stedman — Bridgeport Diocese
- Chinma Uche — CREC

Agenda

- 5G to Support Learning
- Technology Purchasing Efficiencies
- Open Education Resources Report and Next Steps
- Student Data Privacy

Meeting Notes

The items below represent an assimilation of ideas rather than a strict verbatim or chronological record of points shared.

Welcome

The group convened at 1:00 PM with a welcome from Nick Caruso, Digital Learning Advisory Council Chair, and Doug Casey of the Commission. Nick thanked the members for their continued engagement and turned the meeting over to Doug.

5G to Support Learning

Doug opened the topic of 5G cellular service by commending Jonathan Costa for raising the initial question of how new technologies may impact education. At the Commission's September 9 meeting, members discussed the topic and encouraged the Advisory Council members to make suggestions for the Commission to consider (see pages 8 – 9 of the meeting minutes at CT.gov/EdTech). He noted the Council on 5G Technology, created in the last legislation session through [Public Act 19-163](#). Nick suggested that the Council on 5G might include a member of the Commission to help ensure equity of access for learners with the rollout of high-capacity, cellular networks.

Jonathan highlighted the expansive capabilities of 5G beyond just speed, including low latency and support for many users in a concentrated geographic area. He noted applications for virtual reality and augmented reality that could benefit schools. He also offered a word of caution, as students and adults opt into and are the subjects of data collection and surveillance, made even more widespread through 5G. Jonathan shifted the discussion to what is possible, looking at the role of the Advisory Council and Commission to suggest ways that 5G could positively support learning innovations and disruptions to traditional education structures (e.g., seat time, physical limitations of the classroom, etc.). To that end, Doug mentioned the Verizon 5G EdTech Challenge (<https://www.5gedtechchallenge.com>), which has awarded more than \$1M to research institutions to design solutions for K – 12 learning.

Josh Smith echoed this need for innovation, noting that technology should support student and teacher creativity, with leaders articulating and fostering the essential conditions for digital learning. Despite technology's promise and potential, he noted the competing priorities teachers and leaders still face (school structures, district bureaucracies, assessment, etc.) even when technology is available. Furthermore, "success" in K – 12 (e.g., matriculation, college acceptance) is still measured by traditional assessments, so changing those measures is key to bringing about more personalized, competency-based education frameworks. Finally, Josh noted the importance of pre-service programs to use technology effectively, a practice that most teacher preparation programs do not do effectively, if at all. Jim Mindek agreed, noting the importance of strengthening teacher and teacher candidates' skills.

As the Advisory Council and Commission members consider new technologies and applications, Andy DePalma encouraged the group to reflect on and learn from past lessons. Some of the original promises of technology from 20 years ago, such as instructional differentiation, have not yet reached and benefitted all students. He also noted that content and applications at the highest levels of quality and complexity (e.g., gaming, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence) remain difficult to produce.

While innovative, new technologies can provide breakthroughs in immersive experiences such as virtual reality, Katie Bauer noted that often simple applications can have the most profound impacts. For example, the Palm Pilot helped revolutionize medical education simply by providing access to information in a mobile format.

Concerning technology's potential to strengthen education, Chinma Uche advocated for defining the learning spaces of the future, staff-to-student ratios, and new pedagogies. Innovating remains difficult with the other obligations that teachers carry, as Josh noted earlier. She felt that a shared bank of lessons would help, along with virtual support for students. Such tools would help address equity of access to high-quality teachers and learning materials. As an award-winning computer science teacher, she expressed a need to make educators' lives easier in order to encourage creativity and innovation.

From a secondary and adult learning perspective, Jim Spafford noted the lack of alignment across K – 12, higher education, and the workforce and encouraged any visioning of technology to address these institutional barriers. Shelley Stedman echoed the need for alignment and engagement, noting that students will spend plenty of time learning if activities (e.g., gaming applications) are engaging.

Nick and Doug summarized the takeaways by noting the importance of articulating a vision for technology's potential. Nick suggested that this topic would make an excellent workshop at the May CEN Conference, helping to articulate and spur dialog on the opportunities afforded by 5G and other new technologies.

Technology Purchasing Efficiencies

Nick opened discussion on this topic by noting the ongoing need among districts to minimize instructional and operational expenses. The subject of technology cost savings often arises among district leaders, who want to maintain independence while appreciating efficiencies.

Josh expressed his district's needs in cybersecurity and the need for off-site storage. The small size of most districts removes their volume purchasing leverage, so cooperative purchasing may help introduce cost savings. He pointed to the Uniform Chart of Accounts data store as a potential source of insights that might reveal common expenses across districts that, if taking place in aggregate, could lead to efficiencies. Regarding data systems, however, he noted that the volume purchase of licenses remains different from having common instances of software. Challenges remain in aligning data structures and workflow processes across schools. He noted that in Connecticut, there remains tension between the strong, independent nature of districts and their need for cost savings, a push and pull of autonomy versus efficiency.

From the State level, Doug shared that the Department of Administrative Services (DAS), where the Commission resides, is actively pursuing a "stack" of technology services that towns and districts could leverage at reduced costs, through streamlined procurement channels. In addition, CEN offers at no charge to members its Cloud Connect service, direct peering to major storage providers including Amazon, Google, and Microsoft. The State's [Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations \(ACIR\)](#) represents town interests in appreciating cost and process efficiencies and remains a collective voice to support savings in municipal and education operations. He acknowledged the

frequent call for volume purchasing of software licenses, citing PowerSchool as an example, but said doing so would need to come with substantial cost savings to districts. Andy echoed the need to explore cost savings with software, pointing to virtualization licenses as a line item that did not exist several years ago.

The group addressed the possibility of statewide instances of software solutions, with Shelley noting the single emergency medical services (EMS) system used across towns. Doug mentioned work by the State Department of Education (SDE) around a single instance of software for individualized education plans (IEPs), overseen by Ajit Gopalakrishnan and Bryan Klimkiewicz. Shannon Marimón described the ongoing challenge of having longitudinal data for students who change schools, with rates of mobility particularly high in urban areas. Statewide instances of data-tracking systems would facilitate a single, coherent set of records for each student, insights from which would allow schools to serve them better.

Nick concluded the topic by welcoming suggestions for streamlining technology purchasing and procurement. He suggested that a statement, perhaps to DAS, from the Commission could also highlight statute or policies that make procurement cumbersome and hinder the sharing of data.

Open Education Resources Report and Next Steps

The Commission recently published the report, "Open Education Resources: Survey Results and Opportunities for Connecticut Schools and Universities" (<https://bit.ly/OERinCT>). Responses from leaders and educators in K – 12 and higher education reflect the current creation, use, and posting of OER as well as needs that include professional development and a shared platform for sharing. Doug welcomed feedback on the report and its recommendations.

Josh found the recommendations solid, based on the data, but noted what he saw as a relatively small number of responses. He and Jim Spafford highlighted concerns about the quality of shared materials, though Josh gave the example of educators using poor or mediocre materials that they source from sites such as Teachers Pay Teachers or social media platforms such as Pinterest. He stated that assurances of quality might come from district-level review and posting of materials to the wider education community. Kevin raised an important benefit of OER in that it allows for modular use of content. Educators can leverage only those parts of a unit or lesson plan that they find valuable, for example. He also encouraged the use of high-quality materials coming out of well-funded OER initiatives in other states such as New York, California, and Wisconsin. Doug agreed and noted Connecticut's membership in the national GoOpen network of states (<https://tech.ed.gov/open>).

Katie cautioned against building a repository, and Doug concurred, noting the ready availability of mature and supported OER platforms. Andy shared with the group the Measure Success site, a materials-sharing platform developed at EASTCONN several years ago through funding from the SDE but no longer in active use.

Student Data Privacy

Andy asked about any legislative agenda concerning student data privacy laws in Connecticut, specifically around making them less burdensome for districts. Doug noted the work of the Student Data Privacy Task Force, defined in the original statute, which produced a report and set of recommendations in March 2019 (see <https://bit.ly/CT-SDP-Recs>). Task Force members — experts in K – 12 law, instruction, leadership, and technology — provided a set of recommendations that include streamlining compliance, clarifying ambiguous terminology, and conducting a thorough impact assessment, among other conclusions. Doug chaired the Task Force and has not received any response from the Education Committee on the document. He encouraged members to contact their legislators directly with any concerns they wish to share.

Adjournment

Nick thanked the members for their time and input and encouraged Advisory Council members to continue bringing topics of concern and opportunity to this group and the Commission. He concluded the meeting at approximately 2:45 PM.