Infrastructure Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
February 2, 2023

Attendees

- Colleen Bailie — West Haven Library
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- George Claffey — Central Connecticut State University
- Burt Cohen — Office of Consumer Counsel
- Tom Dillon — Independent
- Kerri Kearney — Manchester Public Schools
- Rob Wilson — Somers Public Schools

Discussion

Tom Dillon, Chair of the Infrastructure Advisory Council, welcomed members and provided a brief overview of the agenda topics, including the state Digital Equity program, the Commission's next state education technology plan, and the expansion of the Community Wireless program.

Digital Equity

Doug provided a brief update on the state's Digital Equity program, funded through Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The Commission is leading efforts to develop a federally funded plan to address the barriers to technology access and adoption. He noted that the Commission will soon hire a Digital Equity Program Manager to provide day-to-day leadership of the program.

Strategic Plan

Ensuring equitable access to technology for learning is a central component of the state educational technology plan, which the Commission will update this year. Doug shared an overview of progress made against the current plan and draft 2022 Annual Report. He also noted the additional projects that the Commission undertook during the pandemic, including efforts through the Everybody Learns initiative to connect students at home for remote learning. A proposal came up during the Digital Learning Advisory Council meeting earlier that week to hold a strategic planning summit. This event would include members of the Commission, its advisory councils, and education leaders and stakeholder groups.

Tom thanked Doug for the background and welcomed input from advisory council members on the next state educational technology plan. Burt Cohen pointed to the importance of legislation that would encourage innovation in teaching and learning

and provide for "digital learning resilience." He referred to the Commission's June 2022 Resolution Concerning Ongoing Support for Digital Learning in Connecticut Public Schools, which calls for action in the areas of leadership, technology access, skill development, and educator supports. He also underscored the critical role of libraries, which play a major role in technology adoption and digital skill development, whether in urban areas or in small towns. He encouraged the group to consider ways to integrate libraries' role in supporting educational technology for learners of all ages.

Colleen Bailie echoed Burt's emphasis on the role of libraries. Kerri Kearney agreed and highlighted the need for close connections between libraries and their local school districts. For example, the plan could include incentives or supports that ensure libraries remain open to support local residents after hours. She also called for the teaching and modeling of digital literacy skills, especially for students at the youngest grade levels.

Advisory council members discussed a summit to draft the state educational technology plan. Steps would include pre-work to identify current learning challenges, priorities, and a focused agenda to help define specific outcomes. Potential attendees include members of the Commission, advisory councils, members of the General Assembly, and other education leaders. George Claffey offered to host the event at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) and share the details with attendees of an upcoming education event at CCSU.

Community Wireless
Tom provided some brief background on the Community Wireless program, with expansion funding provided through Governor Lamont's allocation of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) awards. The Connecticut Education Network (CEN) will manage the next phase of the initiative, run as a competitive program with oversight from the Commission.

George offered as a next step the use of a letter of intent, as discussed in prior advisory council meetings. Allowing potential applicants to provide high-level details through such a letter would allow CEN and the Commission to have a gauge of how many towns, organizations, schools, or collaboratives may apply for funding to provide public wireless access. Collecting letters of intent would also provide insight into complementary initiatives whose organizers might combine efforts that result in greater efficiencies and broader impact on Connecticut communities. George has used a similar approach at CCSU for program administration and found success in determining demand and providing feedback to potential applicants. The letter and hosted listening sessions help identify common questions that lead to program improvements.

As next steps, Tom and Doug agreed to work with Ryan Kocsondy of CEN to draft a letter of intent for the Community Wireless program. They would share the draft with likely applicants as well as Commission and CEN advisory council members for review before sharing the letter and call for submissions publicly. Doug would check with the

Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM), which serves as the point of contact with ARPA grant administrators, to make sure that taking this approach is permissible, given that CEN has not yet received approval to implement the program.

Burt also cautioned that some members of Congress have recently indicated a desire to shift ARPA funds to projects that benefit rural areas, a potential risk to this program and others, given that few locations in Connecticut qualify as "rural." As additional context for the Community Wireless initiative, Doug shared the recently published 2022 Connecticut Broadband Report from the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) with input from the Commission, Office of Consumer Counsel, OPM, and others. Among other findings, the report reflects the significant gap between broadband availability (near universal) and adoption, with additional details available at OPM's site, BroadbandMaps.CT.gov.

Tom thanked the Advisory Council members for their contributions during the extremely productive meeting and adjourned the group at 11:45 AM.