



Infrastructure Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

October 22, 2024

Attendees

- Joe Campbell — Connecticut Technical High School System
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Burt Cohen — Office of Consumer Counsel
- Kerri Kearney — Manchester Public Schools
- Sam Nanayakkara — CT State Community College @ Tunxis
- Rick Widlansky — Libraries Online (LiON)

Welcome

Doug Casey began the meeting at approximately 1:00 PM by sharing the good news that Kerri Kearney, the Information Technology Director of Manchester Public Schools, has agreed to serve as Co-Chair of the Infrastructure Advisory Council. She joins Tom Dillon in helping to develop meeting agendas and prioritize the work of the Council. He commended her dedication to the work and the insights she brings, tying together the interests of schools, colleges, and libraries. Kerri welcomed the opportunity to serve and echoed the value of convening leaders representing the entire education community.

Technology Sustainability

The brief agenda began with a discussion of ways to introduce greater efficiencies in technology purchasing. For context, the Commission published a report with data and recommendations for schools in May 2024, "[K – 12 Technology Sustainability: Guidance for School and Community Leaders](#)." That document details the breadth of technology use in schools, from instructional software and student laptops to school networks, operational systems, and staffing.

During the July 15 Advisory meeting, a member suggested reviewing data captured in the State Department of Education (SDE) [Education Financial System](#) (EFS) for technology investments to understand trends and baselines. Since that meeting, Commission member and SDE Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan shared general trends over time. That district-reported data shows an increase in technology spending during the pandemic, with a decrease following the return to in-person learning.

Rick Widlansky sees the overall increase in time of technology use within the library community. His organization provides technical support to libraries, and he noted the demand for assistance in network management, cybersecurity, and the wide footprint of operational technologies, from printers to phone systems. Kerri asked if the



Connecticut Education Network (CEN) would provide volume licensing for voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone services. Burt saw this as a valuable opportunity and cautioned that if CEN were to offer phone service, the Network would need to register as a telecommunications provider. Sam mentioned the work among the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities to shift to VoIP, which requires addressing issues such as identifying resident locations for 911 calls.

Doug welcomed other ideas for helping educational institutions contain costs and maximize technology investments. Kerri noted a recent discussion on the Commission's listserv regarding a shared solution for managing cybersecurity logs. An entity such as CEN could provide the ability to collect and analyze such data to help districts, libraries, and universities identify and address cybersecurity threats. Doing so could bring additional value by enabling a statewide view of trends and actors, much as CEN's distributed denial of service (DDoS) mitigation services do.

Kerri connected this topic to the goal of digital equity. She noted that larger districts can achieve some efficiency of scale through purchasing, whereas smaller local education agencies (LEAs) do not have the same purchasing power. Per-pupil technology expenditures may actually increase because of this challenge with scale. And some LEAs may simply go without advanced cybersecurity services, for example, because of costs, leaving software systems, educators, and learners more at risk than in districts with greater purchasing power.

Digital Equity

Doug provided a brief synopsis of the initiatives the Commission plans to launch with the support of pending federal funding under the Digital Equity Capacity program:

- **Digital Navigator Pilots:** Taking place at two locations in the state, the programs would train approximately 200 residents to improve their skills in using technology for learning, work, health and wellness, and civic engagement.
- **Digital Navigator Sub-Grant Program:** Likely launching in the first or second quarter of 2025, the Commission will design a program that awards start-up and scale-up funds for organizations that train residents in the use of technology. Doug noted that the Commission will ask Advisory members for help with the design of the program and scoring of applications.
- **Regional Digital Equity Collaboratives:** These groups would convene at the six regional education service centers (RESCs) to provide capacity for and leverage the expertise of digital navigation experts. Doing so would create and foster a community of practice among experts engaged in digital equity work.
- **Digital Navigation Curriculum:** These free resources — either developed internally or curated from existing best practices — will help organizations looking to start or expand digital navigation efforts.



- Statewide Digital Equity “Asset Map”: This public-facing resource would assist residents with getting online, finding an affordable computer, and obtaining digital skills training.

He clarified that much planning has taken place to speed the launch of the above programs, though much of the procurement and planning work cannot take place until the Commission receives the Capacity Phase funds.

Doug also mentioned the recent federal Digital Equity Competitive program, with an application window that closed September 23. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), which oversees all federal Digital Equity programs, received [more than 700 applications for the Competitive program totaling \\$6.5B+](#), nearly three times the program's total budget. This obviously strong interest in the program reflects the broader need to connect residents, equip them with computers, and ensure they have the skills necessary to thrive in today's digital world. Doug noted the recommended threshold for applying, with the NTIA looking for proposals between \$5M and \$12M. Burt Cohen suggested that the \$6.5B total does not reflect the collective need for funding, given that many organizations with smaller budgets did not apply. Doug agreed and suggested that there may be another round of funding through the Competitive program.

Kerri and Doug thanked the members for their insights. The group adjourned at approximately 2:00 PM.