



CONNECTICUT COMMISSION FOR EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

June 3, 2024

1:00 – 2:30 PM

MINUTES

Commission Members in Attendance

Raymond, Mark — Commission Chair and Chief Information Officer, DAS-BITS
Mundrane, Michael — Commission Vice Chair and Vice Provost/CIO, University of Connecticut
Aylesworth, Ryan — Town Manager, Town of Mansfield (Connecticut Conference of Municipalities)
Baillie, Colleen — Director, West Haven Public Library (Connecticut Library Association)
Boucher, Toni — First Selectman, Town of Wilton (Minority Leader of the Senate)
Caruso, Nick — Senior Staff Associate, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education
Casey, Doug — Executive Director, Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
Cohen, Burt — Staff Attorney, Connecticut Office of Consumer Counsel
Dumais, Charles — Executive Director, Cooperative Education Services (Office of the Governor)
Gopalakrishnan, Ajit — Chief Performance Officer, Connecticut State Department of Education
Hopko, Peter — Policy Analyst, Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM)
Johnson, Barbara — Director of Technology, Colchester Public Schools (Connecticut Educators Computer Association)
Mundrane, Michael — Vice Provost and CIO, UCONN, and Commission Vice Chair
Salvatore, Tony — Co-President, Connecticut Federation of School Administrators (Speaker of the House)
Schander, Deborah — State Librarian, Connecticut State Library
Stanco, Bart — CEO Advisor and Executive Partner, Gartner (Office of the Governor)
Toomey, Carol Quinn — Managing Director, Connecticut Public Service, Accenture (President Pro Tempore of the Senate)
Uche, Chinma — Math and Computer Science Teacher, CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering (Connecticut Education Association)
Widness, Jennifer — President, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges

Others in Attendance

Racamato, Victoria — Assistant to the State Chief Information Officer, DAS-BITS
Tarsa, Paul — Member Relations Manager, Connecticut Education Network (CEN)
Thompson, Lauren — Digital Equity Program Manager, Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology



Welcome

State Chief Information Officer and Commission Chair Mark Raymond opened the meeting with a warm welcome to all members and attendees. He noted the current cadence of meetings and welcomed input regarding the balance of in-person (June and December) and virtual (March and September) venues. He also highlighted the key topics of the meeting, technology sustainability and artificial intelligence (AI), concerns that other branches of government are addressing. Mark also noted that the Connecticut Network (CT-N) was streaming and recording the meeting, available for viewing at <https://ct-n.com/ctnplayer.asp?odID=23202>.

The Commission now has a full slate of members. Mark welcomed Carol Quinn Toomey, appointed by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, who serves as the Managing Director of Accenture's Connecticut Public Service practice. She brings more than 32 years of experience and insight to the Commission and serves in other volunteer capacities, such as on the Executive Board of the Girl Scouts of Connecticut.

Toni Boucher also recently joined the commission, appointed by the Minority Leader of the Senate. As the First Selectman of the Town of Wilton, she has also served in a variety of roles in state service: State Board of Education Commissioner, State Vo-Tech Board of Education Member, Advisory Board Member of Connecticut Office of Child Advocate, State Representative Minority Leader, and State Senate Chief Deputy Minority Leader.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

As the first order of business, Mark welcomed a motion to approve the [minutes of the Commission's March 4 quarterly meeting](#). Nick Caruso offered the motion, with a second from Burt Cohen. With no discussion, the motion carried with no opposition and Deborah Schander abstaining.

Report of the Executive Director

Doug Casey provided highlights from his [quarterly updates](#), posted in advance of the meeting on the Commission's website, www.CT.gov/EdTech. Several pieces of draft legislation during the recently completed legislative session addressed matters of concern to the Commission. Those include Senate Bills 2 and 5, which would put provisions in place to govern and provide support for the use of AI. The language in Senate Bill 5 did move forward through Public Act 24-151, calling for the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to design [pilot programs for AI use](#) and to collaborate with the Commission in the development of [model digital citizenship curriculum](#). Draft legislation that did not pass, [Senate Bill 3](#), aligns with the Commission's efforts in leading digital equity work for the State. That bill would have ensured access to low-cost broadband services for Connecticut residents.



In early May, Doug visited with members of Connecticut's congressional delegation to provide updates on Commission initiatives including the Digital Equity Program and other work. In addition to this in-person advocacy for educational technology, as chair of the Commission, Mark submitted written support for federal investments in accessible digital learning materials and the [Affordable Connectivity Program](#) (ACP). This latter program ended in May because of a lack of continued appropriation.

Burt expressed disappointment with the outcome of Senate Bill 3, which the Office of Consumer Counsel helped to author. He did share encouraging news that the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit [upheld a New York State mandate](#) that Internet service providers offer an affordable (\$15 or less per month) broadband plan to residents living in that state. The same court has jurisdiction over Connecticut and Vermont, and the decision supports arguments or mandated, low-cost broadband options in future legislation.

Ajit Gopalakrishnan asked about the impact that the end of the ACP would have on students and families. As context, he noted the significant efforts during the pandemic to get students connected and equipped with computers (see [meeting minutes from June 1, 2020 meeting](#)). Even though schools are open for in-person learning, students still need connections at home to study and complete assignments. Doug noted that ACP, launched during the pandemic and providing \$30 per month of credit for broadband to qualifying households, served more than 180,000 families in Connecticut when it ended. Those households are now at risk of losing access if they cannot make the \$30 monthly payment.

Colleen Bailie described the work that libraries have done to encourage people to get online through ACP, noting that 1 in 8 Connecticut families were enrolled in the program. Libraries are also promoting the federal [Lifeline program](#), which provides a \$9.25 monthly telecommunications subsidy for qualifying individuals. Toni and Mark both echoed the critical role that libraries provide in helping residents get online, through federal programs as well as through free wireless access available at virtually every library in the state. Mark also noted that the end of ACP further reinforces the belief of many residents that the government wants to get them connected only to allow them to face higher costs as they become accustomed to service. This was one of the points that the [results of focus groups and surveys](#) conducted in the development of the State Digital Equity Plan.

Ryan Aylesworth highlighted work in his town to implement its own digital equity plan. Those efforts include "digital navigators," residents hired to help their peers get online and develop the skills they need to engage in today's online world.



Digital Equity Program Updates

Mark thanked the members for their thoughtful input on the topics covered during the Executive Director report and handed the floor to Lauren Thompson, the Commission's Digital Equity Program Manager. Following the successful completion and acceptance by the US Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) of the [Everyone Connected](#), the State's digital equity plan, she and Doug submitted a proposal for funding through the federal Digital Equity Program's "Capacity" phase. Highlights of this proposal appear in the quarterly [Digital Equity Report](#). The notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) for that phase included some unexpected changes to what had previously been communicated to states. Most prominently, funding allocations would come in three rather than one award. For Connecticut, the expected total should come in tranches of approximately \$9M in 2024 and \$3.2M in 2025 and 2026, respectively.

Because of this change, the Capacity application from Connecticut includes a limited scope of work focusing on a competitive grant program to support digital navigators. As Mark alluded earlier in the meeting, the research behind the State's digital equity plan revealed significant needs around skill development and training, provided by trusted sources. The Commission aims to build awareness of such needs — and the impact of digital navigation to address them — toward permanent funding of similar digital equity work.

Mark followed the report with a question about the Competitive phase of the federal Digital Equity Program. Lauren explained that the program includes the Planning and Capacity phases, designated for states and territories only, as well as a Competitive phase. The Competitive phase will launch no later than 30 days after the first Capacity award. As of this writing, the Commission understands from the NTIA that the Competitive phase should open in July 2024. State agencies *not* leading the Planning and Capacity phases (i.e., in Connecticut, agencies other than DAS) as well as other institutions such as towns, schools, libraries, and nonprofits are eligible to apply for the Competitive program. Lauren clarified that the federal Competitive program is separate from the planned sub-grant program, which is part of the State's digital equity plan. She did note that Competitive program applicants should align their proposed initiatives with the State's plan. Mark thanked Lauren for this information and encouraged Commission members to communicate the launch of the Competitive phase NOFO once the NTIA makes it available.

Digital Learning Advisory Report

Commission member and Digital Learning Advisory chair Nick Caruso provided an update on that group's most recent meeting, [minutes of which](#) are available through the Commission's Web site. Advisory members have provided valuable feedback on the topic of AI in learning. Nick provided key points from those discussions, including input from Jody Goeler, CAFE's Senior Staff Associate for Policy Services. He and others on the Advisory acknowledge the potential risks of AI use and nonetheless encourage a focus by leaders and educators on "responsible use," rather than "acceptable use" of AI and other emerging technologies. In other words, the use of AI holds great promise in personalizing learning, and schools should prepare students to learn how to use such tools effectively. To do so, teachers will need training and time to learn about and integrate AI tools into their practice.

Doug acknowledged these and other points that helped inform the recent development and launch of the Commission's Guidance on AI (www.CT.gov/k12ai). Topics include types of AI and their applications, instructional and decision-making best practices, risks, policy, and resources for further exploration. The guidance exists as a Web page that he expects to update frequently, given the rapid pace of innovation in AI.

Toni highlighted the importance of technology-related policies, in both K – 12 schools and universities. Appropriate use of mobile phones for learning rather than distraction as well as AI continue to be important topics in her community and others. Mark thanked Nick for the report and the Advisory members for their input on the guidance. He predicted that the 2025 legislative session will include more bills around AI, likely addressing different aspects of this technology's use as it evolves.

Infrastructure Advisory Report

Given that Infrastructure Advisory chair Tom Dillon was unable to attend the Commission meeting, Doug provided highlights from that group's last convening and directed Commission members to review [the April 22 minutes](#). The key topic for discussion was the financial and other resources necessary to sustain technology in schools. That input informed the Commission's recent publication, [K – 12 Technology Sustainability Guidance](#). The document provides background on school technology levels before and after the shift to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and provides actionable ways that leaders can help ensure continued access to technology for learning. Schools depend on technology for virtually every aspect of teaching as well as operations, from food service and transportation to payroll and benefits administration.





The report points to federal and state resources that districts can use. For example, the federal [E-rate program](#) offsets the cost of connections to and within schools. The Commission provides schools with a [free dashboard](#) of ed tech usage that enables leaders to assess the return on investment of the digital tools they pay for every year. And schools can consider replacing paid materials with free ones available through the Commission's open education resources (OER) portal, www.GoOpenCT.org. He concluded his remarks by asking Commission members for suggestions on how to reach key stakeholders in technology sustainability, including school board members, superintendents school business officers, and parent groups.

Nick committed to sharing the guidance with CAFE members, especially the elements of a technology budget that many leaders may not be aware of besides computers. He noted a cybersecurity attack last year that took place through the Internet-based system controlling a school's heating and cooling (HVAC) system. He stated that members of the [Connecticut Conference of Municipalities](#) (CCM) should read the guidance, given the oversight role that city and town leaders have.

On the topic of cost avoidance, Toni mentioned the opportunity that volume and cooperative purchasing holds. Mark acknowledged this potential and pointed to the excellent example of the Connecticut Education Network (CEN). The Network provides an estimated \$30 – 35 million in savings to its members, enabling them to make other educational investments in areas such as teachers and instructional materials. The Network exists through years of investment and commitment at the highest levels, and Mark noted the difficulty in establishing and running such programs. He did mention the need for efficiencies similar to what Connecticut appreciates through CEN to provide for cybersecurity protections. To do just that, Mark highlighted the hard work that has gone into the design and launch of the [State and Local Cybersecurity Program](#).

In the area of cooperative purchasing, it can be difficult to convince providers to offer reduced license and unit costs for technology without guaranteed sales volume. The State does offer municipalities and other institutions the ability to purchase off existing contracts available at <https://portal.ct.gov/das/ctsource/bidboard>. The State also uses its list of approved vendors to conduct reverse auctions through the [Capitol Region Council of Governments](#) (CRCOG) through which providers bid on the sale of a minimum number of items, such as computers. Other avenues that exist include the [Connecticut Library Consortium](#) (CLC), which Barbara Johnson mentioned as providing bulk purchasing services.

Beyond formal purchasing programs, Michael Mundrane highlighted the value of simple peer-to-peer sharing of contract terms, which can provide leverage for universities, libraries, and schools to secure below-market pricing. Doug reiterated this



point, giving the example of the Commission's email listserv — a relatively old and simple technology — that has had enormous benefit over the years as a venue for sharing pricing, product reviews, and vendor terms of agreement.

CEN Report

Paul Tarsa, CEN's Member Services Manager, highlighted a few elements of the [CEN quarterly report](#). The Network continues to add tremendous value to its members through the mitigation of cyber-attacks and through expansions that enable intensive, high-capacity computing for academic institutions.

On May 8 – 9, the CEN Conference took place, with half-day, intensive sessions taking place on the first day, followed by a second day of keynotes, shorter-form presentations, and plenty of time for networking and the exchange of ideas. The event saw a 15 percent increase in attendance over the 2023 conference, with 755 individuals attending. The event attracted dozens of partners, with all sponsorship opportunities sold out for the conference. The CEN team are now planning the fall 2024 Cyber Nutmeg event (ctedunet.net/cybernutmeg) in partnership with the Connecticut National Guard.

Investments through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) have made possible upgrades to CEN's infrastructure, benefitting all member institutions. The ARPA-funded programming also funds new connections to libraries, charter schools, councils of government, and towns. The CEN team is also planning a competitive program that will increase by approximately tenfold the Community WiFi initiative. Those with interest in these opportunities can visit ctedunet.net/cen-connect for more information.

Public Comment

There was no public comment offered.

Scheduled 2024 Meeting Dates

Mark reminded members of the two remaining meetings for 2024:

- Monday, September 9 (Virtual)
- Monday, December 2 (In Person)



Adjournment

Just prior to adjourning the meeting, Mark welcomed any other comments from the Commission members. Tony Salvatore acknowledged that two members of the Connecticut Federation of School Administrators were asked to participate in a recent US Department of Education roundtable on the use of AI in education: Peter Michaelson, Principal of Vogel-Wetmore Elementary School in Torrington, and Gavin Craig, Assistant Principal in Torrington Middle School. Mark thanked Tony for sharing this good news and commended both administrators for this honor and their leadership.

He then welcomed a motion to adjourn the meeting. With a motion from Toni and a second from Michael, the members unanimously voted to conclude the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Douglas Casey'.

Douglas Casey
Executive Director

Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology

55 Farmington Avenue
Hartford, CT 06105
(860) 622-2224

Doug.Casey@ct.gov
www.ct.gov/ctedtech