



CONNECTICUT COMMISSION FOR EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

September 9, 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
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 (Governor's Office)
Elsesser, John — Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Gopalakrishnan, Ajit — Chief Performance Officer, CT State Department of Education
Mundrane, Michael — Vice Provost and CIO, UCONN, and Commission Vice Chair
Provencher, Maura — Vice President of Research and Administration, Connecticut
Conference of Independent Colleges
Schander, Deborah — State Librarian, Connecticut State Library
Smith, Josh — Superintendent, Region 15 Public Schools (Connecticut Association of Public
School Superintendents)
Stanco, Bart — CEO Advisor and Executive Partner, Gartner (Office of the Governor)
Suh, Grace — Chief of Staff, Office of Workforce Strategy (Department of Economic and
Community Development)
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)
Williams, Holly — Section Director, Education and Workforce Development, Office of Policy
and Management (OPM)
Zak, Scott — Senior Director of Learning Technologies, CT State Colleges and Universities

Others in Attendance

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

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Welcome

State Chief Information Officer and Commission Chair Mark Raymond welcomed members and attendees to the September 9, 2024 meeting. With the start of the school year, he noted the expanding nature of technology in teaching and learning, and thereby the increased importance of the Commission's work in policy and program development. He thanked CT-N for coverage of the meeting via live stream and recording (<https://ct-n.com/ctnplayer.asp?odID=23524>) and asked speakers to introduce themselves when contributing to the topics on the agenda.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

As the first order of business, Mark welcomed a motion to approve the [minutes of the Commission's June 3 quarterly meeting](#). Ajit Gopalakrishnan offered the motion, with a second from Burt Cohen. With no discussion, the motion carried with no opposition. Holly Williams and Maura Provencher abstained from voting, given their absence at the June 3 meeting.

Digital Equity Program Updates

State Digital Equity Program Manager Lauren Thompson provided highlights on the Commission's efforts to steward the [State Digital Equity Plan](#). The program aims to ensure access to the connections, devices, skills, and support that all residents need to thrive in today's digital world. Federal program reviewers at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) approved Connecticut's Digital Equity Plan in March, and the Commission has since submitted the State's application for funding to begin implementing the plan. The first wave of Capacity funding would support the following proposed initiatives:

- Pilots: Direct training and support to residents at two separate locations.
- Collaboratives: Establishment of communities of practice to support digital inclusion efforts across practitioners and policy makers.
- Curriculum: Curation of a common learning sequence and resources that any trainer can use to improve the digital skills of residents.



- Asset Map: A searchable resource for residents to identify nearby and affordable connections, computers, and support.
- Evaluation: External support for the design of outcomes into all program elements.

Separate from the federal Capacity phase, the NTIA also offers agencies and organizations the ability to apply for funding through a national Digital Equity Competitive program. The Commission hosted an information session online August 14 in partnership with the NTIA to raise awareness of the Competitive program, with resources available for applicants on the Commission's Digital Equity page, www.CT.gov/DigitalEquity.

Mark thanked Lauren for her report and encouraged Commission members to share the opportunity to apply for funding through the Digital Equity Competitive program, with applications closing Monday, September 23. He did note that as the State's lead on the Digital Equity Planning and Capacity programs, the Commission could not participate in the Competitive program.

Report of the Executive Director

The Commission's Executive Director, Doug Casey, provided highlights from his [quarterly report](#). With the end of pandemic relief funding imminent, many schools and libraries have encountered challenges in sustaining unprecedented levels of technology investments to support learning. In May, the Commission released [a report](#) quantifying the expanded footprint of digital tools and offering guidance to decision-makers on how to support those investments. He thanked John Elsesser — appointed by the Connecticut Council of Municipalities (CCM) to the Commission — for facilitating a [presentation on technology sustainability](#) with CCM's membership on July 17.

School leaders continue to consider ways of safely and effectively integrating artificial intelligence (AI) tools into education. At the June 2024 Commission meeting, Doug shared the Commission's guidance on the topic (www.CT.gov/AlforSchools). He referred members to the statute passed in the 2024 legislative session ([Public Act 24-](#)



[151](#)) that calls for the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to pilot AI use in five districts and to develop a model digital literacy curriculum, in collaboration with the Commission. Doug noted the strong alignment of this work with broader digital inclusion efforts, given that basic digital literacy skills represent a foundation for understanding and leveraging more advanced technologies such as AI. The Commission will continue to work closely with the CSDE on the digital literacy curriculum and AI in education.

Doug concluded his updates by sharing the most recent data ([2023 – 24 school year](#)) submitted by districts on their use of the state data privacy exemption. As a requirement of [Public Act 18-125](#), schools need to track and share their use of software used for students with individualized education plans (IEPs) and those needing accommodations under Section 504 of federal statute.

Regarding the data exemption reporting, Mark asked for input on whether the reports serve the original purpose of providing insights to decision makers. Doug referred members to the longitudinal report provided by the Office of Policy and Management and noted a spike each year in views just before the due date of June 30. He has not received any questions or input, sent yearly to members of the General Assembly's Education Committee, since the beginning of this reporting mandate in 2019. No Commission members had additional insights into how the data is being used, if at all.

On a separate topic, Burt Cohen raised concerns about the July 24 ruling by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals regarding administration of the Universal Service Fund (USF) by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC). As background, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) authorizes USAC to oversee USF programs, including E-rate, which helps offset the cost of Internet service to and within schools and libraries, both core constituents of the Commission. Page 42 of the [Fifth Circuit Court ruling](#) found USAC's administration of USF (including E-rate) unconstitutional, characterizing USF as a "private entity" that had overstepped its authority to invest USF dollars into the programs it administers. Burt recommended that the Commission as a body and its members through their appointing organizations consider outreach in opposition to the ruling, including contacting members of the Connecticut Congressional delegation.



When posed with the question of whether eliminating the E-rate program would impact schools and libraries, several Commission members offered their perspectives. Colleen Bailie underscored the critical importance of the program, especially given that some libraries depend on the significant savings (up to 90 percent of the cost) appreciated through yearly E-rate awards. Nick agreed and positioned the E-rate program as instrumental in ensuring digital equity across schools. Michael clarified that the ruling did not find E-rate or the broader USF unconstitutional, just that the FCC had delegated USAC to operate these programs. Burt clarified that the E-rate program will continue in its current form. Changes would require a final ruling from the Supreme Court. He did warn that though the objection was structural, corrections to that structure may threaten the continuation of the E-rate program.

On a related note, Colleen mentioned that the Connecticut State Library (CSL) was ending its support of the Connecticut Library Fiber Consortium, which provided a consolidated filing for connections on behalf of dozens of libraries.

Doug referred members to the Commission's 2019 report on [utilization of E-rate in Connecticut](#). He also shared the advanced reporting tools from USAC that enable site visitors to review [reimbursements over time](#) for all schools and libraries. John raised a motion that the Commission communicate to Connecticut's Congressional delegation the importance of E-rate and the impact that terminating or hampering the program would have on our state's libraries and schools. Colleen seconded the motion. Michael appreciated the nature of the motion and underscored the Commission's role as an advocate versus taking legal action. Raising a concern around process, Ajit requested that he first share any outreach to the Congressional delegation with others at the CSDE before endorsing such a communication. Holly Williams echoed the need for time to conduct her own research into the matter and to enlist feedback from her appointing agency, OPM, on any language she would be asked to vote to endorse as a member of the Commission. That said, both she and Ajit underscored the strong value of the E-rate program.

Given this input from various Commission members, John rescinded the motion, with concurrence from Colleen, with the suggestion that Commission staff draft language that members could review at a future regular or special meeting.



Personal Technology Use in Connecticut Schools

Mark turned the floor over to Ajit, who provided an overview of the State Board of Education's guidance on Personal Technology Use in Connecticut Schools. He referred members to the [August 21 press release](#) that encourages local development and adoption of policies governing student use of cell phones. He prefaced the discussion by noting the power of technology to personalize and extend learning for all students. Personal technology (i.e., cell phone) use in schools, however, can often be disruptive and vie against a positive school climate. He also cited the significant research finding that excessive technology and social media use impacts student wellbeing.

The [Policy Guidance](#) includes several sections covering different topics. First, the document addresses potential uses at different grade levels. It also addresses considerations for how teachers, school leadership, and families can play complementary roles in the development and implementation of technology policies. He underscored the need for local, holistic approaches that engage stakeholders and include provisions for professional development at the pre- and -in-service levels. He also shared current studies taking place through the [Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration](#) regarding personal device use.

Several Commission members commended the State Board, with strong support from the CSDE, on the guidance. Toni Boucher noted the work taking place in Wilton in the design and rollout of thoughtful personal technology policies. Nick thanked Ajit for this work, complementing the CSDE on the process of enlisting many stakeholders into the development of the document. Josh Smith lauded the emphasis on local policy; the broad nature of the guidance to accommodate new forms of technology (e.g., Google glasses, etc.); and underscored the importance of addressing technology use outside of school as well as during the day.

Advisory Council Report

Nick Caruso shared highlights from the joint meeting of the Digital Learning Advisory Council and Infrastructure Advisory Council, minutes of which are available on the [Commission's website](#). He began by sharing that on September 8, 1999 — 25 years and one day ago — he attended his first meeting of the Joint Commission on Educational Technology, the precursor to the Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology.



While the state has made enormous progress in making technology accessible and ensuring its effectiveness for teaching and learning, many similarities exist between the concerns of 1999 and those on today's meeting agenda. Mark, Michael, Burt, and other members commended Nick for his service and thanked him for the insights he continues to share through the Advisory Councils and broader work of the Commission.

Nick covered the topic of AI in schools in the context of the Commission's guidance on the topic. Advisory members — representing schools, libraries, colleges, and adult education programs — expressed strong support for the use of emerging technologies such as AI to prepare students for higher education and the workforce. They also expressed caution and the need for sound local policy to help protect against the misuse of these tools and the data they leverage (e.g., personal student information, copyrighted material, etc.).

The Advisory members also discussed the question of technology investments, with specific input on the recently published [K – 12 Technology Sustainability](#) report. Nick encouraged sharing of the report, especially the section, "Anatomy of a K – 12 Technology Budget" (page 5). Decision makers including members of the Connecticut General Assembly and members of organizations such as CABE, CAPSS, CAS, CASBO, and others need to grasp the breadth and depth of technology staff, applications, and infrastructure necessary for instruction and school operations.

CEN Report

Following the Advisory Council report, Mark turned the floor over to Ryan Kocsondy, Director of the Connecticut Education Network (CEN) to provide his quarterly updates, also posted in detail on the [Commission's website](#). This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Network's founding, and members will have a chance to celebrate at the two-day CEN Conference taking place May 7 – 8, 2025 at the Hartford Convention Center. Much sooner, CEN will host the annual conference of The Quilt, the affinity organization of research and education networks, in Hartford October 17 – 19. Sessions will include an opening keynote from Mark Raymond as well as panel discussions with Michael Mundrane and Doug Casey. On October 11, CEN will host the [Cyber Nutmeg Conference](#) in partnership with the Connecticut National Guard. Mark reinforced the



value of the Cyber Nutmeg event, with key updates from federal leaders designed for municipal audiences.

Next summer, The Connecticut Department of Homeland Security and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency will host regional incident response workshops, with CEN support. Toni welcomed these workshops and recommended that CEN and its partners promote the sessions with emergency management stakeholders such as school and town leaders and first responders.

On the topic of federal broadband funding, CEN participated in the challenge process of the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program administered by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). The CEN team culled and shared more than 500 location records to help DEEP identify community anchor institutions already served by high-speed broadband.

With funding through the American Rescue Plan, the CEN Connect projects include Community WiFi, with applications likely opening in early 2025. This initiative will fund the expansion of publicly available, high-speed wireless networks across the state. The suite of CEN Connect projects will also connect additional schools, libraries, and councils of government to the Network. To date, the CEN team has been in contact with 123 prospective members, 43 of which have committed to connecting.

Ryan noted the addition of Anthony DiBenedetto to the CEN team. Anthony serves as CEN's Information Security Officer and Cybersecurity Services Manager. Ryan also acknowledged the contributions of Dick LeFave, who recently passed away. Dick served as an invaluable volunteer advisor to CEN for more than five years. He was a champion of CEN, contributing to its growth helping to communicate its enormous value to members. Dick received CEN's Outstanding Leader Award in 2022.

Public Comment

There was no public comment offered.

Scheduled 2024 Meeting Date

Mark reminded members of the last meeting for 2024, scheduled to take place in person at the Legislative Office Building on Monday, December 2.



Adjournment

With no other topics on the agenda, Mark welcomed a motion to adjourn the meeting. Toni provided the motion, with a second from Holly. The full Commission unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at approximately 2:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Douglas Casey
Executive Director

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