



Digital Learning Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

January 30, 2025

Attendees

- Nick Caruso — Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE)
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Jonathan Costa — EdAdvance
- Andy DePalma — EASTCONN
- Jody Goeler — Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE)
- Jim Mindek — Connecticut Technical High School System
- Sana Shaikh — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Chinma Uche — CREC Aerospace Academy
- Scott Zak — Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Online Learning

Following a brief welcome at approximately 3:00 PM from Commission member and Advisory co-chair Nick Caruso, Doug Casey introduced the topic of online learning. Goals 1.1 and 1.2 in the Commission's [State Educational Technology Plan](#) address opportunities to expand learning opportunities for students. Leading the development of a landscape study on this topic is Sana Shaikh, who joined the Commission in late 2024 as a governor's fellow.

Sana introduced the objectives of identifying current common and best practices across platforms and pedagogy, then exploring opportunities to share and expand options for students. To begin the discussion, she prompted advisory members with the question of how they define “online learning.” Jonathan Costa framed it as a process of using technology that produces mastery and skill development by encouraging student agency and engagement. He provided the example of EdAdvance's [Personal Interest Project](#) and [Capstone Program](#). Educators coach students through the highly interactive experience of framing a research question and then leveraging technology — including an artificial intelligence (AI) sidekick — to develop a solution. He offered to share insights and data about the impact of these initiatives.

Andy DePalma touched on the importance of having skilled instructors to support online learning. He estimated that providing instruction in an online course is 80 percent different from teaching a class in person. Nick this difference as having potential changes in teacher certification and recruitment. Should there be different standards for instructors who serve in online-only or blended environments. Should the state widen

the teacher candidate pool beyond its borders if instructors can serve anywhere? On this topic, Doug referred members to the Connecticut State Department of Education's [Standards for Remote Learning](#) as well as the 2022 [report of the Remote Learning Commission](#).

Jonathan and underscored the importance of having a positive, collegial culture among administrators, instructors, families, and students to undergird any online learning offering. Both mentioned the extensive catalog offered through [Virtual High School](#) (VHS), offered through the RESC Alliance. Schools use the service to enable, for example, 8th-grade students to take high school – level courses not offered in their district. He noted the past success of Odysseyware (since acquired by Edgenuity) for credit recovery. Students who did not pass certain courses could take a pre-test to gauge the specific areas they needed to master, then receive instruction and test out of those areas, rather than repeat the entire course. Jonathan also offered as a resource input from the 54,000 residents who responded to EdAdvance's prompt regarding online learning.

A thread that multiple advisory members highlighted and that Jim Mindek summarized is that there is a continuum of "online learning" modalities and tools. He gave the example of a digital textbook for a course to more advanced integrations with synchronous and asynchronous instruction to project-based, adaptive, and mastery-based learning tools. These considerations should be taken into account when assessing the types of tools and approaches in use across schools.

Scott Zak pointed to learning-management systems and digital courseware as promising sources of data to track student engagement and learning. Such systems can capture and provide reporting on learners' interactions with digital content to help scale and personalize learning for improved student outcomes.

As next steps for the landscape study, key questions that Sana will pose should include, "What does State statute allow for districts to use online courses and modalities," "What districts are using online tools in novel ways to expand course options," and "What quantitative data do we have to indicate the baseline and common uses of online courseware?" Sana welcomed the input from the advisory members and encouraged them to reach out with additional insights as she pursues next steps with the study.

Digital Learning and Artificial Intelligence

Nick welcomed Doug to provide a brief overview of the next topic, a focus on the skills students and teachers need to make effective use of technology for learning, work, and civic engagement. Doug referred to the [State Educational Technology Plan](#) Goals 3.1 – 3.4, which address teacher professional development and a common "portrait of

the graduate," among other topics. On a related note, he mentioned the recent endorsement of the Common Sense Media curriculum through the Commission's open education resources (OER) site, [Go Open CT](#), as part of the Connecticut State Department of Education's work to curate and develop model curriculum.

Jonathan encouraged the assessment of current teaching approaches for potential applications of AI. What methods are vulnerable to AI (e.g., do not require critical thinking, easy for students to "game" or cheat) and which are durable to AI. The challenge of our time, he argued, is how to jettison outdated standards (e.g., seat time) to create space for what we agree are the skills students need (e.g., critical thinking, problem-solving, use of emerging technologies, etc.). As a start, he encouraged the use of AI tools to assess curriculum and identify areas that are "AI-vulnerable" and suggest ways to remove these shortcomings.

In addition to looking at existing curriculum materials as "vulnerable" and "durable," Jody Goeler encouraged teachers to consider the use of AI from a "technical" and "transformational" perspective. There are steps that educators can take to use new tools at a basic level, and then there are advanced skills such as those Jonathan noted that lead to stronger, transformational learning experiences.

Whether in the use of AI tools or engaging in online courseware, Chinma Uche underscored the critical role of teachers. She encouraged blended learning approaches, with at least a mix of in-person and online learning, to allow educators to assess firsthand student understanding and unique learning needs. Nick agreed and brought up the continued challenge of enabling educators to gain new skills that translate into better teaching within the current framework of required professional development mandates that monopolize the time to learn those new skills. Several members noted that a task force to review and streamline teacher professional development had convened and removed approximately 20 percent of those mandates. However, subsequent legislative sessions have added new requirements, effectively eliminating any free time that teachers would have gained.

Jonathan grounded the conversation by sharing a framework for change, from articulating a vision, providing rationale, defining a pathway, and ensuring accountability. Starting with agreement on the "why" — whether expanding opportunities through online courseware or using AI for deeper learning — this model holds promise for sustained innovation and change.

Nick and Doug thanked the advisory members for their insights and recommendations and adjourned the meeting at approximately 4:30 PM.