



Digital Learning Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

April 30, 2025

Attendees

- Nick Caruso — Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE)
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Larry Covino — Connecticut Association of Adult and Continuing Education
- Andy DePalma — EASTCONN
- Shaune Gilbert — ReadyCT
- Tom Goldenberg — Southern Connecticut State University
- Jody Goeler — Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE)
- Clint Kennedy — Groton Public Schools
- Jim Mindek — Connecticut Technical High School System
- Karen Skudlarek — University of Connecticut (UConn)
- Josh Smith — Region 15 Public Schools
- Scott Zak — Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Welcome

Advisory co-chair Nick Caruso welcomed members to the meeting and encouraged suggestions that he, Josh Smith, and Doug Casey could take back to the Commission at its June meeting. Following brief introductions of all members and a welcome to new member Clint Kennedy, Director of Technology for Groton Public Schools, Nick handed the agenda over to Doug.

Digital Opportunity Competitive Grant

The Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology has begun taking notices of intent (NOIs) through its Web site (www.CT.gov/DigitalOpportunity). The Commission is investing \$5M of its \$9M allotment through the federal Digital Equity Program to fund initiatives that will help residents get the devices, connections, and skills they need to flourish in society. The program favors sustainable initiatives that will benefit a large number of residents. The NOI period is intended to identify likely applicants and the regions they serve and will close the week of May 5. The formal application period will begin in mid-May. So far, Doug shared that the Commission has received 30 NOI submissions.

Several Advisory members offered questions and feedback. Given his service to the museum community through the Department of Economic and Community

Development, Jim Mindek asked if museums could apply for funding. Doug confirmed that as “community anchor institutions,” museums are eligible to apply. He also encouraged Jim to share with museums the connectivity funding available through the Community WiFi program (<https://ctedunet.net/cwifi-2/>), administered by the Connecticut Education Network (CEN).

Jody Goeler encouraged the Commission to consider the ability of smaller nonprofits to apply for funding, given their often-constrained resources. Doug welcomed the advice and noted that one of the purposes of the NOI process was to identify concepts from smaller-scale organizations and connect them to other partners for combined, larger-scale proposals. He also shared that, while final program guidance is still in draft format, the Commission is considering two classes of applications: larger, regional concepts as well as local, smaller-scale proposals. Doug concluded the topic by welcoming members of the Advisory to serve as proposal reviewers if they have no conflicts of interest.

Online Courseware Study

At the January Advisory meeting, members provided feedback on the study in progress regarding online courseware. Since then, governor’s fellow Sana Shaikh has conducted interviews with district leaders, and the Commission has gathered quantitative feedback from 66 districts on their use of online courseware. Doug Casey shared preliminary results of the survey:

- Common platforms: Apex Learning, Virtual High School, others
- Primary use cases: Expanding coursework access and supporting credit recovery (i.e., situations where students need to re-take courses they have not passed)
- Course delivery methods: In-person, in-school facilitated by certified teachers as well as fully remote
- Common enrollment of students in courses at colleges and universities (dual enrollment)
- A regional collaboration in the LEARN region was highlighted as a model for cooperative online courses.
- The top barriers to successful use of online courseware include struggles to keep students engaged as well as training and support for teachers to support online learning

Larry Covino clarified that this is a K – 12 education study. He offered to share results of a similar survey he recently conducted on the same topic for adult education programs.

AI in Education

Nick introduced the next topic, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in teaching and learning. He noted that virtually all school districts are considering ways to introduce the safe and effective use of AI tools into education. He encouraged Advisory members to suggest any needs they see from the field that the Commission should consider addressing.

Josh Smith expressed his desire to allow local education leaders to implement emerging technologies such as AI in ways that advance student learning. He cautioned against trends to create prescriptive policies and legislation that limit the use of technology. The advent and rapid development of AI tools reiterates the need to strengthen students' critical thinking skills. On that topic, Andy DePalma pointed to the "cognitive offloading" that can easily take place when students and the adults in their lives depend too heavily on AI tools. Jim Mindek encouraged local policies that protect student data and social-emotional well-being.

Clint saw a wide variance across districts in the understanding and use of AI tools. All leaders need to have a common understanding of AI technology to enable informed conversations and decision-making, within local schools and in the broader education community. He and others commended the work of the RESCs, specifically EdAdvance, in creating a community of practice to advance the safe use of AI.

Nick agreed and felt that a recommendation to the Commission from this group is that AI decision-making should take place at the local level, with state agencies and legislators serving as guides and enablers rather than generators of absolute policies.

Federal Funding

Nick Caruso prompted discussion on potential risks to federal education technology funding. Several members expressed their concerns about the following programs:

- E-rate, which provides funding to connect schools and libraries to the Internet
- Title I and II funds, particularly if shifted to state block grants, and the impact such cuts would have access to teacher professional development
- The Digital Equity program, which includes the Capacity allocation administered by the Commission and currently receiving funding, as well as the Competitive awards, with funding recommended for award — but currently on hold — to a number of Connecticut entities

From the federal perspective, Karen Skudlarek asked if the Commission planned to support districts and municipalities in meeting the 2026 deadline to comply with the [2024 Title II ADA regulations](#). Doug noted the work taking place through the Bureau of



Information Technology Services (BITS) within Connecticut Administrative Services to support other agencies in meeting their compliance obligations. Karen will present on the topic with the BITS lead in this work, Jeff Corriveau, at the May 8 CEN Conference. Jim mentioned the investment of \$7M toward this work at the state level, and Karen reiterated the need for support in this work to small towns with limited technology resources.

Nick thanked the advisory members for their insights and recommendations and adjourned the meeting at approximately 12:20 PM.