Infrastructure Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
July 9, 2025

Attendees

- Colleen Bailie — West Haven Public Library
- Joe Campbell — Connecticut Technical High School System (CTECS)
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- George Claffey — Central Connecticut State University (CCSU)
- Kerri Kearney — Manchester Public Schools
- Ryan Kocsondy — Connecticut Education Network (CEN)
- Sam Nanayakkara — CT State Community College @ Tunxis
- Rick Widlansky — Libraries Online (LiON)
- Rob Wilson — Goodwin University

Welcome

At 1:00 PM, co-chair Colleen Bailie called the meeting to order and welcomed Advisory members. She began the meeting by addressing funding concerns across several federal programs that support technology in libraries and schools.

Federal Funding and State Legislation

Colleen raised the issue of funding being terminated through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). As shared from the Connecticut State Library (CSL), the IMLS Library Services and Technology Act Grants to States Program supports much of the statutorily mandated statewide library infrastructure, programs, resources, and services that enable information and education access to the people of Connecticut. In 2024, Connecticut received $2,164,184 through the LSTA Grants to States program for a period ending September 30, 2025. Recent cuts at the federal level have eliminated future funding for this program.

Federal funds support 13 staff members in the CSL Division of Library Development (DLD) and numerous statewide library services provided to all libraries. Federal funds do not directly support public libraries, which are funded locally by their municipalities. Nevertheless, the end of IMLS funding would have local impacts, given the end of programs including the statewide eBook platform; the CT Library for Accessible Books; the Middletown Library Service Center, which includes statewide collections; programming, professional development, and consultants; and professional services to support library applications for funding through the E-rate program and other programs and services. The DLD posts updates with additional details on federal funding at libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/dld/Federal-Library-Funding-CT.

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Ryan Kocsondy mentioned funding through House Resolution 1 (the "One Big Beautiful Bill" or "OBBB") to support "technology adoption" for rural hospitals as part of the Rural Health Transformation Program. He saw potential for Connecticut hospitals to leverage funds for connectivity. The statute requires that investments in technology be part of a broader "rural health transformation plan."

Doug Casey noted the cancellation of Connecticut's award of $9M through the Digital Equity Program on May 9. This was the first of three expected awards totaling $17M. All states and territories have received termination letters for their Digital Equity Capacity Program funds. The related Digital Equity Competitive program was also terminated. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration, which oversees these programs, recommended an award of $12M to Capital Workforce Partners to address the digital skills gap in the state. Both programs and all awards have been terminated.

Doug referred members to the approved Digital Equity Plan (www.CT.gov/DigitalEquity) for Connecticut. The research in that plan points to specific needs and action steps to ensure broader opportunities in learning, economic development, healthcare, and civic engagement through technology. Digital equity work will continue at some level, though funding cuts will significantly reduce the scope and pace of progress.

At the federal level, a recent decision from the Supreme Court found that administration of the Universal Service Fund (USF) for Schools and Libraries ("E-rate") is constitutional. Advisory Council and Commission member Burt Cohen provided a useful digest from Covington and Burling LLP that Doug shared prior to the meeting. Joe Campbell serves as Connecticut's E-rate coordinator; he has not received feedback on the decision from the schools he serves. He did note that the OBBB moved Pell and Perkins grant administration from the U.S. Department of Education to the Department of Labor. The focus of funding has shifted from serving schools to higher education.

At the state level, Colleen noted a new law regarding digital books for loan through libraries (Public Act 25-9). Language in the law addresses the costs of these materials, which schools and libraries pay 10 times more to access than consumers do and which are limited to 26 checkouts or two years. As noted by Deborah Schander in the June 2 Commission meeting, the law includes "trigger language" that puts it into effect within 60 days of another state with a population of more than 7 million people adopting a similar law. A digital book summit took place this spring among the leaders of several states to craft language for use in similar draft legislation.

Related to the topic of collective action to reduce costs for educational resources such as digital books, Kerri Kearney raised concerns about increased licensing costs of the student information system (SIS) PowerSchool beginning this fall. Most Connecticut schools use the system for student enrollment, scheduling and attendance, grading, course catalog management, and other academic and operational purposes. Doug

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referred members to 2017 state legislation (PA 17-220) calling for a feasibility study of a statewide SIS. In 2019 the Connecticut State Department of Education released a detailed analysis of the issue, including a study of other states' experiences and recommendations regarding a single statewide SIS.

Advisory members acknowledged PowerSchool's virtual SIS monopoly in Connecticut, which makes it difficult to negotiate lower pricing. With nearly all schools paying for the service and facing significant indirect and direct costs to migrate to another provider, PowerSchool has little incentive to reduce prices.

Joe described the impact of the price increase on the CTECS, noting that an 8 percent increase year over year would be incredibly costly. This academic year, the CTECS pays more than half a million dollars for PowerSchool licensing. The price increases follow a significant breach of confidential student and teacher data through PowerSchool last year. Joe questioned whether the increases offset the company's costs to investigate the breach, take actions against future issues, and provide credit monitoring and other services to affected individuals.

To offset future cost increases, Ryan suggested that the State create standard terms that any SIS would have to adopt, including caps on price increases. PowerSchool might not adopt these terms, but they could pressure the company to do so and open the door for competitors willing to abide by such assurances. CEN could already provide volume purchasing and standard agreement terms that schools and libraries use for services such as endpoint (e.g., student computer) protection. Ryan offered to explore collective needs from districts across different products but cautioned that providing a wider swath of cooperative purchasing agreements would require additional staff.

George Claffey suggested that a more streamlined approach could be to leverage existing consortium organizations and purchasing vehicles, such as those offered through the Northeast Regional Computing Program (NERCOMP). Ryan welcomed the suggestion and suggested that Connecticut provide a state-specific addendum to an existing contract to accomplish the same goal. Letters of intent to adopt the software under such an agreement may be needed, as has been a requirement for executing agreements for other software solutions.

Doug noted efforts that have come from Advisory recommendations in the past. Specifically, he and a group of eight K–12 technology leaders have convened to analyze school budgets to identify cost-savings opportunities. The group is exploring the development of a common specification for student and teacher computers.

Community WiFi Program
CEN is administering a program to provide high-speed Internet in shared spaces. Ryan provided updates on this Community WiFi initiative (ctedunet.net/cwifi-2/), funded through Connecticut's award of funds through the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The initial call for interest resulted in about 15 applications. A second wave has brought in an additional 15 – 20 applications. Ryan asked members of the Advisory if they would be willing to serve as reviewers of these applications, barring any conflicts of interest. The review process includes an initial read and recommendations, with a final assessment by an executive committee.

Rob Wilson reviewed the initial round of applications and shared that it was easy and did not require a significant time outlay. Ryan thanked him for his service and welcomed others to help in the next round. Several Advisory members agreed to serve.

On a related note, Rob asked about Internet access on school buses. Ryan indicated that there was at least one proposal through the Community WiFi program to equip buses with access to enable students to access educational materials before and after the school day. Joe confirmed that E-rate no longer provides funding for this type of access.

Newcomer Resources for School Technology Leaders
The Advisory members discussed a draft of resources for individuals new to the role of technology leadership in Connecticut, which Kerri had developed and shared (see minutes from February meeting). Doug thanked her for taking this initiative and agreed to develop the list further with her input for final review and posting to the Commission's Website. Another idea shared was the development of a mentor program for school technology newcomers.

The meeting concluded shortly after 2:00 PM, with co-chairs Colleen and Kerri thanking advisory members for their ongoing input and suggestions.