CONNECTICUT
Administrative Services

Digital Learning Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
October 15, 2024

Attendees

- Nick Caruso — Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE)
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Jonathan Costa — EdAdvance
- Larry Covino — Connecticut Association for Adult and Continuing Education
- Andy DePalma — EASTCONN
- Josh Elliott — Fairfield University
- Jody Goeler — Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE)
- Barbara Johnson — Colchester Public Schools
- Karen Kaplan — Independent
- Jim Mindek — Connecticut Technical High School System
- Josh Smith — Region 15 Public Schools
- Scott Zak — Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Welcome

Nick Caruso opened the meeting at 2:00 with a welcome to Advisory Council members. To strengthen the process of agenda planning and welcome an additional, expert voice in preparing for Council meetings, Nick asked Josh Smith to serve as co-chair of the group. Josh has accepted the role and pledged to offer his insights to the group as co-chair and to the Commission as its CAPSS-appointed member.

Artificial Intelligence Pilots

During the most recent legislative session, the Connecticut General Assembly passed Public Act 24-151, which calls for the State Department of Education (CSDE) to conduct a pilot of artificial intelligence (AI) use in K – 12 schools (sections 143 and 144). Section 145 of the law calls for the CSDE to establish a digital literacy curriculum. Doug provided a brief overview of the statute. He welcomed input from the group on how best to design and implement the AI pilot.

Various members helped frame the current landscape of current AI use in schools. Jonathan Costa noted the important work at EdAdvance, including the rollout of a student-facing AI tool (Sidekick AI) with eight prompts that meet the data privacy requirements under Connecticut law. More than a dozen districts have been using this

450 Columbus Boulevard | Hartford, CT 06103
Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer

toll for capstone projects and personal interest projects. Given the toolset and field experience already present in Connecticut, he encouraged the use of in-state resources to support the pilot. EdAdvance also has many teachers pursuing an AI certification (microcredential) that his agency has developed in partnership with Southern Connecticut State University. Karen Kaplan agreed with the approach to leverage in-state resources, noting the extremely short timeline for planning and implementing the pilots.

Given the ambiguity in the language regarding the pilots, several members discussed the possible types of AI use in schools. All assumed the intent to be student use, but many other applications exist, from teacher lesson planning and professional development to operational activities such as optimizing bus routes. Whatever the specific applications, Karen encouraged use cases that districts could easily replicate. Student use of AI should support existing teaching and learning, she argued, to ensure relevance to current work. Beyond its use in K – 12 schools, AI holds great potential for higher education and adult learning, as Larry Covino noted.

In terms of outcomes, Josh Smith shared the idea of an event that would allow the dozens of districts already using AI to share their experiences. Doug offered the 2025 CEN Conference May 7 – 8 as one venue for this type of sharing, and Jonathan noted the May 2 EdAdvance Conference. Both underscored the importance of sharing a broad swath of "case studies" from districts with deep prior experience, rather than a narrow focus on the five proposed pilot sites.

As an action item, Nick proposed holding a separate conversation with Irene Parisi, the State Department of Education (SDE) Chief Academic Officer, who is designing the AI pilot program. Doing so would allow Advisory members to share directly with her these suggestions for maximizing the impact of the proposed AI work.

Digital Literacy Standards

Section 145 of Public Act 24-151 calls the SDE, in collaboration with the Commission for Educational Technology, to develop a model digital citizenship curriculum. Doug welcomed input on how best to approach this work. Barbara Johnson shared the work over the past few years from the Digital Citizenship, Internet Safety, and Media Literacy Advisory Council. That group released best practices and curriculum to support best practices for students and teachers on technology use for learning. She favored the adoption of an existing set of resources, such as those from Common Sense Media and the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). Josh Elliott, who leads teacher preparation and advanced degree programs at Fairfield University, echoed the quality of ISTE and other resources that his students use. He welcomed Advisory

450 Columbus Boulevard | Hartford, CT 06103
Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer

members and anyone interested in this and other related topics to attend the Fairfield's Educational Technology Forum, taking place Friday, November 1.

Jonthan mentioned EdAdvance's Social Balance curriculum, which focuses on responsible social media use. Andy DePalma emphasized that using any of these platforms must support district goals around the portrait of the graduate. Jonathan agreed, pointing to skills such as critical thinking and problem solving that effective use of technology can support. Digital literacy is a means toward achieving these higher levels of mastery.

Barbara shared the crosswalk she has developed across standard sets including those from the American Association of School Librarians, ISTE, National Council for the Social Studies, Computer Science Teacher Association, and Common Core. Doug shared a similar framework at www.CT.gov/ISTE. Josh Smith has done similar work with his team, leveraging AI large language tools to create these crosswalks and to support teacher goal-setting.

Digital Equity

Doug provided a brief synopsis of the initiatives the Commission plans to launch with the support of federal funding under the Digital Equity program:

- Digital Navigator Pilots: Taking place at two locations in the state, the programs would train approximately 200 residents to improve their skills in using technology for learning, work, health and wellness, and civic engagement.
- Digital Navigator Sub-Grant Program: Likely launching in the first or second quarter of 2025, the Commission will design a program that awards start-up and scale-up funds for organizations that train residents on the use of technology.
- Establish Regional Digital Equity Collaboratives: These groups would convene at the six regional education service centers to provide capacity for and leverage the expertise of digital navigation experts.
- Create/Curate Common Digital Navigation Curriculum: These free resources — either developed internally or curated from existing best practices — will help organizations looking to start or expand digital navigation efforts.
- Launch Statewide Digital Equity "Asset Map": This public-facing resource would assist residents with getting online, finding an affordable computer, and obtaining digital skills training.

Nick thanked Doug and Digital Equity Program Manager Lauren Thompson for their efforts stewarding the Digital Equity Program in Connecticut.

450 Columbus Boulevard | Hartford, CT 06103
Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer

Open Education Resources
Following the brief update on Digital Equity, Doug welcomed input from Advisory members on the goals concerning open education resources (OER) in the Commission's Strategic Plan:

- Goal 1.3: Encourage the use of open education resources (OER) as well as low or no-cost commercial materials at all grade levels to reduce financial barriers to high-quality instructional and learning materials.
- Goal 1.4: Host the GoOpenCT.org OER repository to allow schools, universities, libraries, and other institutions the ability to co-create and use OER.
- Goal 1.5: Pursue resources to enable pilot or statewide training on the effective use of OER.

Jim welcomed these goals to achieve cost savings for schools, noting the increasing costs of software and instructional materials within the Connecticut Technical High School System. Jonathan noted the work of EdAdvance using a ChatGPT-enabled bot to design "durable" curriculum that leverages power standards, ensures student agency, and that AI tools will not likely be able to undermine. He encouraged the creation and sharing of such high-value curriculum on Go Open CT to increase visits to the site. Nick asked if the challenge of adoption of the Go Open resources is one of awareness, the lack of support and training for teachers, or both. Doug welcomed the question, stating that the goal of the OER site has always been to foster collaborative curriculum development, rather than simply having a Web site that educators visit to download materials.

To this end, Josh and Jody — a current and former superintendent, respectively — noted the broader challenge of culture. Districts tend not to collaborate, even when they have shared goals of developing high-quality curriculum supporting the same academic standards. Past examples of successful collaborations include EdAdvance's US History curriculum as well as a group of districts Josh mentioned that developed a Spanish 1 curriculum. Another factor vying against the development of learning materials from scratch is AI in the form of large language models (LLMs). As several Advisory members pointed out, use of ChatGPT, Claude, and other tools can generate high-quality lesson plans that educators can then refine for their instructional purposes. Jonathan suggested uploading into Go Open CT prompts such as those in EdAdvance's library to assist with lesson planning, another incentive for educators to visit the OER site. Doug suggested that the Go Open CT authoring tools should include AI features that allow teachers to leverage LLMs in their curriculum writing and pledged to share this idea with the platform developers.

450 Columbus Boulevard | Hartford, CT 06103
Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer

Nick and Josh welcomed these ideas, many of which they would share with the full Commission at its December 9 meeting. They adjourned the Advisory discussion at approximately 3:30 PM.

450 Columbus Boulevard | Hartford, CT 06103
Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer