55 Farmington Avenue
Hartford, CT 06105
(860) 622-2224
www.ct.gov/ctedtech

Infrastructure Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
April 22, 2024

Attendees

- Colleen Bailie — West Haven Public Library
- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Kerri Kearney — Manchester Public Schools
- Ryan Kocsondy — Connecticut Education Network (CEN)
- Michael Mundrane — University of Connecticut (UCONN)
- Sam Nanayakkara — CT State Community College @ Tunxis

Technology Sustainability

Doug Casey welcomed members of the Infrastructure Advisory Council and introduced the single topic of the meeting: sustaining levels of technology access. As context, he pointed to the large, one-time investments in digital tools by schools and libraries to support online learning during the pandemic. Institutions must spend these funds soon, leading to challenges in long-term sustainability. To assist schools and libraries with these challenges, he had outlined guidance for the Advisory members to review, discuss, and enhance.

The group explored opportunities to appreciate cost savings and support institutions' efforts to make informed decisions around technology investments. Trust remains central to doing so at scale. Michael Mundrane pointed to simple practices such as leveraging existing agreements for hardware and software by multiple institutions. Sam Nanayakkara underscored this benefit. CT State Community College at Tunxis uses the contracts that Michael has put in place at UCONN to ensure similar terms and pricing. Rather than engaging in formal consortium purchasing or going out to bid — a process that Ryan Kocsondy noted can take years to complete and be resource-intensive — simply sharing and using contracts can help contain costs. The trust that develops through this process can then lead to engaging in or even creating consortium or volume purchasing programs, as long as they remain optional rather than mandatory.

Colleen Bailie underscored this point, whether through the options that libraries have in using the Connecticut Library Consortium (CLC) for purchasing. She mentioned several other service providers for libraries — Library Connection, Incorporated (LCI); Libraries Online (LiON); and Bibliomation. At the resident level, the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) has helped offset the cost of Internet access for more than 180,000 households in the state. The end of funding for ACP, which libraries have promoted to help offset home broadband costs, has in some ways damaged the relationship between participating residents and the institutions that promoted this program.

55 Farmington Avenue
Hartford, CT 06105
(860) 622-2224
www.ct.gov/ctedtech

Sam shared a vision for a master list of institutions and the software they use, allowing peer-to-peer collaboration and sharing around pricing. He underscored that schools must consider not just licensing costs but also one-time implementation fees and other ongoing operational costs to support technology. Kerri Kearney expanded on this point, using the example of the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN) guidance on network design. Technology leaders can use such resources to underscore the scope, complexity, and value of digital tools — from core network appliances down to classroom software and connected devices such as security cameras.

In addition to reducing friction in purchasing, as Michael pointed out, the Commission may provide guidance around sharing what works to increase student learning. Doug expanded on this point by pointing to the free tools offered by the Commission through LearnPlatform to enable school leaders to monitor ed tech usage. Analyzing actual usage enables decision makers to reconsider investments and explore emerging technology that has proven successful in the field. Sam envisioned a future state where schools shared inventories of technology investments to facilitate peer-to-peer sharing of costs and efficacy.

One deliverable that Doug proposed was a standard budget for schools and libraries. Providing an overview of the types of expenses that educational institutions must account for might provide visibility into the ongoing costs of supporting technology, regardless of funding sources. Kerri suggested that there would need to be several versions of a budget template for different district sizes. Michael underscored this point, given that licensing and support costs often decrease at scale. Kerri also noted that budgets can fluctuate significantly based on outside funding as well as local control. For example, districts often need to accommodate budget cuts even as the cost of maintenance increases. Both at large universities such as UCONN as well as districts and libraries, outfitting and managing capital replacement for classrooms varies by year and can be ad hoc in nature.

The group noted the challenges of reporting on pandemic relief spend, given that districts and libraries invested in different areas. Some common sources of accountability include the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding & Project Inventory Dashboard as well as the Connecticut School and State Finance Project's 2024 District Leader Survey Results on spending investments. Neither provides detail on technology investments, just spending on general categories. Michael pointed to three areas of measurement when considering capital investments: resources, such as people, to enable technology use; spend, in the form of financial and physical investments; and need, both short and long term. This last measure — need — should drive investments. However, allocations at the state and federal level are not based on calculated demand.

Doug thanked the members for their insights and pledged to share a draft of the technology sustainability guidance. The group adjourned at approximately 12:30 PM.