CEN Leadership in the Pandemic Response

CEN provides more than a network of vital infrastructure and digital connectivity. It is a network of people and organizations extending into each and every Connecticut community, connecting anchor institutions (CAI) that serve all citizens. This comprehensive reach allows the CEN team and its CAI members to provide vital services at a time of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has created crises across all facets of life. In March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced a global shift to remote applications. CEN utilized its leadership role to solve problems and provide resources to support public health, student safety, education, and digital citizenry.

In concert with the Governor, state, and municipal leadership, CEN has demonstrated its unique value to the state by leading the way with numerous pandemic response initiatives including:

- Hosting member training
- Ensuring student safety for learning at home
- Supporting field hospitals
- Bridging the digital divide for hybrid instruction
- Providing K-12 low cost bandwidth
- Increased peering capacity in preparation for heavy video conferencing for remote learning and work (Google Meets, MSTeams, Cisco WebEx, Zoom)

Hosting Member Training

CEN's immediate response to the crisis was to create forums for sharing resources and events to train members as they dealt with the disruptive consequences of the pandemic. The in-person annual member conference was quickly transformed into the virtual CEN UNconference series. Although apart, this was a perfect time to come together, learn, and share solutions. CEN's UNconference included monthly member focused sessions that provided a space for discussion on the topics that mattered most to our community at the time. Sessions have included relevant topics such as "Keeping Students Safe at Home- Featuring iboss," and "Network Recommendations in the Age of Covid-19."

Ensuring Students Safety

In March, with over 500 thousand students suddenly required to learn from home, expanding student safety beyond the classroom environment became an urgent need. CEN partnered with Securly to provide members with a trusted security and device management tool for K-12 learners in-class and at-home. Securly provides full visibility into student's online activity, coverage and security wherever the device is in use, and scans in real-time with AI based notifications for nudity, bullying, self-harm or violence. Securly has been critical in the protection and security of students learning at-home.

Along with Securly, CEN also pushed for the quick implementation of additional iboss cloud services to members to extend CIPA compliant safeguards to the student computers used for in-home learning. These added services were free of charge to libraries and K-12 members. The increase in services allowed for members to support 1:1 initiative at scale, back multiple operating systems in their environment, and increase visibility and reporting without having to worry about online appliances. The CEN iboss Cloud offering provides core features such as CIPA compliant web filter, SSL inspection, safe search enforcement, and students at risk identification.

> "Wilton Public Schools worked with CEN, iboss, and Novus insight to quickly set up and deploy CEN iboss filtering for distance learning on Chromebooks. We really apricate CENs ability to quickly help us design, deploy, and manage our remote users."
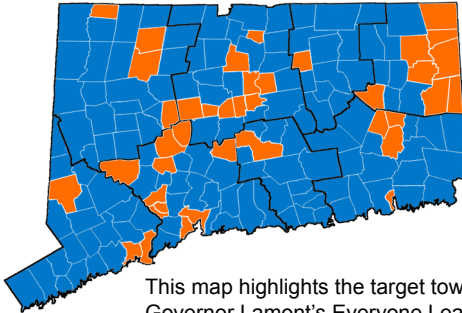>
> **Erik Haakonsen**
> Wilton Public Schools
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> "From day one, the transition of the filter, ease of setup, daily management, and regular alerting has been phenomenal. With very few clicks and little wasted time, administrators can configure filters, review activity, adjust filters."
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> **Matt Ross**
> Farmington Public Schools

Supporting Field Hospitals

The state's pandemic response included the utilization of several state college and university sites as field hospitals and testing facilities. As the primary Internet provider to these sites, CEN supported the implementation and operation of Connecticut's multiple COVID Field Hospitals at CCSU, SCSU, WCSU, and Tunxis Community College. The CEN team quickly collaborated with member state universities, healthcare providers, and state organizations to supply the necessary equipment and access to vital Gig Internet speed and network resources in a matter of hours/days. As the field hospitals were decommissioned, connections at the state universities are being re-used for clinical providers administering COVID tests.

Bridging the Digital Divide

EVERYONE LEARNS INITIATIVE
BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE
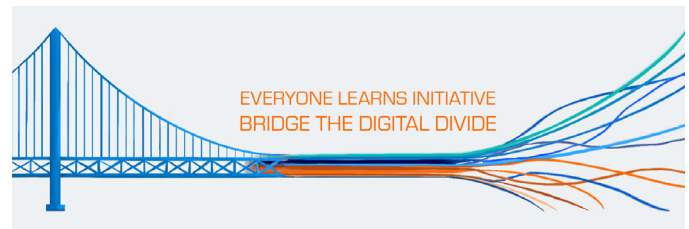
The Digitial Divide in Connecticut, the 2020 report commissioned by the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), highlights approximately 321,000 households in Connecticut as lacking a broadband connection. The pandemic exposed this vulnerability and its implications for students and adults working from home. This crisis prompted CEN's involvement in Governor Lamont's *Everyone Learns Initiative*. CEN led the project to bring connectivity to those who need it the most with the installation of public Wi-Fi hotspots in the 40 Connecticut cities and towns with the lowest levels of broadband service. The public hotspots were created at public schools, libraries, and town facilities with CEN connectivity. The installation and operation of this new community facility for the first year is accomplished without any resource investment from the participating towns.

This map highlights the target towns for Governor Lamont's Everyone Learns Initiative

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Everyone Learns Initiatives Quick Facts

Funding	Governor Lamont's 43.5M
Location	20 Urban & 20 Rural towns
Number of Wi-Fi Access Points	200
Key Feature	Walk/ Drive Up and Connect

Providing K-12 Low Cost Bandwidth

With the unexpected shift to remote learning in 2020, Connecticut K-12 schools, colleges, and universities had to quickly transform their teaching models. With many schools choosing to run on a hybrid classroom schedule, their bandwidth demands increased substantially. CEN's Bandwidth Bonus Program provided K-12 members the additional bandwidth required to meet these demands with minimal impact on their operating budgets. For a one-time charge of $500 to cover transceiver and provisioning costs, this program has been utilized by over 55 members to multiply their bandwidth capacities by up to 5 times without jeopardizing their E-Rate eligibility. With this program, CEN made available an additional 144 Gbps of bandwidth capacity to members at a net savings of $733.5K in FY21.

Under the dark cloud of the COVID-19 pandemic, CEN's leadership role with its members providing critical services to Connecticut citizens quickly, effectively, and at minimal cost has shone a bright spotlight on the unique and substantial value of CEN's collaborative model.

""The CEN is more than an ISP to our district. It is a partner in our instructional mission. When the Covid crisis struck, the CEN came to the rescue with a bandwidth expansion at no additional cost. This "Bandwidth Bonus Plan" allowed us to rapidly convert to a distance learning model despite not having planned for that in our budget. The CEN has always fostered a sense of community among its members and shared its wealth of industry knowledge with them. Their response to the pandemic was an extraordinary expression of that partnership."

Jason Casey
Simsbury Public Schools

"CEN is committed to helping our member community and improving the state's digital citizenry. In a time when internet connectivity is imperative, we recognize that everyone needs access to a reliable, high performance network. Through the 'Bandwidth Bonus Program' and 'Everyone Learns Initiative', CEN is providing stability for school's needs, and partnering with our member community by bridging the digital divide for CT Citizens through Wi-Fi access across 40 towns in need."

Ryan Kocsondy
CEN Director