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DC COUNCIL'S COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE PUBLIC OVERSIGHT HEARING: TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS

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Greetings Members and Staff of the DC Council's Committee of the Whole. My name is Jessica Giles. I am a Ward 7 resident and the Executive Director of the Washington, D.C. office of the Center for Strong Public Schools Action Fund (CSPS Action Fund DC). CSPS Action Fund DC is a 501(c)(4) organization committed to ensuring every student, especially Black, Brown, and low-income kids, in all eight wards of the District attends a high-quality, well-run traditional public or public charter school. I'm testifying today about the urgent need to address technology in our DC public schools.

AI is here, and many students and educators are using it every day. The question is not whether we agree with the use of AI. The question is: how are we going to support students, educators, and families?

DC has an opportunity to harness the *responsible* adoption and implementation of AI to support — not replace — learning and human instruction. Given the lack of comprehensive federal AI regulations for schools, it's critical that the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) provide guardrails and support, and local education agency (LEA) leaders support educators and protect students.

DC Wants Change from the Status Quo

In February, OSSE surveyed LEAs about AI and only 45% of LEAs reported that they had written guidance or policy for school staff use.[1] Additionally, only 34% of LEAs reported that they had written guidance or policy for student use.[2]

[1] DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education. "AI Survey Results Brief 2026." 2026.
[2] Ibid.

Two months later in April, our nonpartisan affiliate, the Center for Strong Public Schools (CSPS) commissioned a poll that found 80 percent of DC Democratic voters want schools to proactively address the use of AI in classrooms.[3]

And a few months later in August, CSPS partnered with Rep. LaJoy Johnson-Law, Rep. Eboni-Rose Thompson, and many others to host an East of the River Technology Conversation. During that discussion Ward 7 and Ward 8 students, families, educators, and advocates shared the following message: they want technology to strengthen teaching and learning, not replace teachers, foundational skills or critical thinking. They want students to develop digital literacy skills that prepare them for the future while protecting their privacy and safety online. And they want equitable access to technology.

Suffice it to say, there remains a large gap between what DC Democratic voters *want* and the AI policies LEAs have reported putting in place.

What DC Does Next Is Critical

Two policy levers that might seem contradictory at first blush are actually complementary: the need to reduce the noise, distractions, and social-emotional disruptions that are created by personal devices; and the need to prepare students for a world increasingly shaped by AI.

While the growing *Anxious Generation* movement and health experts have rightly warned families about the risks of unrestricted screen time, modern guidance emphasizes quality and context over mere dosage.[4] For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends avoiding screen time before 18 months and limiting it to one hour of high-quality content daily for ages 2–5.[5] These recommendations underscore the

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[3] Center for Strong Public Schools. (2026, April 9). "New polling shows voters want schools to prepare every student, invest in strong schools and career pathways." https://strongschoolsnow.org/blog/new-polling-shows-voters-want-schools-to-prepare-every-student-invest-in-strong-schools-and-career-pathways/

[4] See The Anxious Generation website. See also the American Academy of Pediatrics' 2001 article, "Children, Adolescents, and Television," published in Pediatrics. See also Rady Children's Health's 2026 article, "Updated AAP Recommendations for Screen Time: What Parents Need to Know."

[5] Ibid

importance of age, the type of content, and how children engage with technology, especially when screen use is accompanied by meaningful interaction and conversation.

That same principle should guide how we approach technology in schools. DC needs a comprehensive approach that limits distractions and personal device use that does not support meaningful learning, while ensuring *age-appropriate* classroom technology strengthens instruction and protects student privacy.

The good news: OSSE has already developed a Model School Personal Device Policy[6] and a forward-thinking framework for the LEA AI Model Policy for Staff Use.[7] Notably, DCPS has issued guidelines as well, and is implementing Yourway Learning and other digital platforms, and several charter LEAs are integrating AI into their curriculum. Still, how do we know that schools are using best practices? How are we learning from each other? DC must go farther.

CSPS Action Fund DC offers five recommendations for the DC Council's consideration:

1. **Protect and Support Students**

DC must ensure LEAs implement OSSE's existing safeguards for student privacy and human oversight. There are many valid concerns about AI's impact on critical thinking, student data privacy, equity, and learning. We must protect students, period. Full stop.

And those concerns are not unfounded. A RAND study found that two-thirds of surveyed students believe AI use could harm critical thinking.[8] That's why strong safeguards are essential. Student data must not be used to train AI models without appropriate legal protections, explicit authorization, and a clearly defined educational purpose. AI must not make student discipline or special education eligibility decisions, and any permitted AI

[6] DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education. "Model School Personal Device Policy." March 2026.
[7] DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education. "LEA AI Model Policy for Staff Use: 2026-27 School Year." September 2026.
[8] RAND Corporation. "More Students Use AI for Homework, and More Believe It Harms Critical Thinking." March 17, 2026. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA4742-1.html.

assistance with grading, academic placement, or special education must remain subject to review and final decision-making by educators.

2. Vet AI Tools

DC should establish a consistent process to vet AI tools before adoption and evaluate whether they improve student learning. The truth of the matter is not all AI tools are created equal. A September 2026 AI in Action Learning Tour by Instruction Partners examined 20 AI-powered products, drawing on 32 classroom observations across 16 school systems in seven states.[9] They found that some tools provided faster feedback, more practice and stronger instructional support, while others delivered experiences that were no better, or even worse, than traditional instruction. In addition, they found that products designed for specific instructional purposes, with clear roles for teachers and AI, appeared to provide the strongest and most consistent experiences.

Such a process could evaluate the efficacy and safety of new tools, oversee pilots, monitor whether tools improve student learning after adoption, and update guidance. Tools that fail to demonstrate educational value or meet student safety and privacy standards should be restricted or discontinued. With many LEAs already incorporating AI, we should be learning from their experiences and sharing best practices across the city and country. This could be housed at OSSE and work with employers and DC agencies to identify high-demand career pathways related to AI and emerging technologies. All of this should have student, parent, and educator input.

3. Engage Parents

DC should develop a coordinated strategy to engage and educate parents about AI and technology in schools. This means that DC parents will need proactive communication and education about how technology is being used, its potential benefits and risks, and opportunities to provide input on its use in classrooms.

4. Support Educators

[9] Instruction Partners. "AI in Action Learning Tour: A Practical Look at AI's Role in Instruction." September 2026.

OSSE should expand access to sustained, practical professional learning and technical assistance on AI. State-level support and investment is needed. AI should support instruction, not replace teachers. In this evolving landscape, educators will need ongoing training about how to incorporate AI tools. Such professional learning will need to cover how educators can effectively incorporate AI into existing pedagogical functions; and the ethics of AI use, both among teachers and students.

5. Effectively implement AI and Digital Literacy

States are moving quickly to address AI in education. Some states, including Alabama and Utah, have established requirements for AI and digital literacy instruction. [10] DC has already taken steps through the DCPS Digital Equity Act of 2022, but we need to ensure all students are explicitly taught AI and digital literacy, and there is equitable access to technology. AI could be addressed in the SEL standards, alongside broader AI literacy instruction. It's also not clear if there are data science and AI pathways for students, including pathways that are vertically integrated from elementary through high school.[11] OSSE should establish clear, age-appropriate expectations for AI and digital literacy instruction across grade levels, building on the competencies already reflected in DC's graduate profile.

In closing, the world is changing, and DC can either lead or get left behind. DC must develop a clear multi-pronged response to this critical issue beyond guidance and inconsistent implementation. DC needs clear expectations for implementation, and the DC Council should use its oversight authority to ensure schools are following them. Thank you for allowing me to testify, and I look forward to working with you to ensure every student attends a strong public school.

[10] FutureEd. "Legislative Tracker: 2026 State AI in Education Bills." Oct. 6, 2026.
[11] Shank, Perry. "Building the Pathway: Preparing Students for Data Science and AI Careers." CodeVA, Oct. 7, 2026.