Opening Statement of Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici (OR-01)
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Hearing
"Building an AI-Ready America: Teaching in the AI Age"
Tuesday, February 24, 2026 | 2:00 p.m.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses. It's encouraging that there is a lot of common ground, Mr. Chairman, in the things you brought up today and the opportunities and the challenges.

We know that artificial intelligence is already being used in schools across the country, for better or worse. AI technologies can provide teachers and students with personalized materials and adaptive learning systems that can tailor classroom activities to individual students. But there are still many concerns, as you noted, Mr. Chairman. And if used inappropriately, AI could violate students' privacy, exacerbate existing disparities, and quash critical thinking skills. There must be caution in implementing AI in our children's education, and to minimize risks, students and teachers need appropriate tools and resources to educate responsibly in a world increasingly driven by technology.

To responsibly incorporate AI into education, there should be a focus on the people who will directly administer it: the teachers. Right now, teachers are routinely being asked to do more with less, often while receiving inadequate support and sometimes inadequate pay. Chronic underfunding of public education and cuts to funding for professional development contribute to widening achievement gaps.

Many teachers are turning to AI to lighten their load and to help them. Some use AI to create lesson plans, to translate languages, and to provide personalized instruction, as I mentioned. Those can be beneficial if done properly by educators who have received the appropriate knowledge and training, but unfortunately, that's not what is happening. For example, in a full committee hearing just last month on January 14, 2026, Alexandra Reeve Givens from the Center for Democracy & Technology testified that one-third of students report having personal conversations with AI using school-provided devices or platforms, but only one in ten teachers had training or information about how to respond if they suspect a student's AI use is detrimental to their well-being. Ms. Reeve Givens also testified that, in one study, half of students agreed that using AI in class makes them feel less connected to their teacher, and seven in ten teachers worried that AI weakens important skills that students need to learn. I would like to enter the testimony of Ms. Reeve Givens into the record. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Many concerns have been raised about the possibility of AI affecting critical thinking, as you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, and I share that concern. I understand that today we are discussing K-12 education, but it's important to note that many tech companies are now hiring humanities majors because they can think critically and creatively. For example, Daniela Amodei, the President and co-founder of Anthropic, studied literature. Here's what she said her company looks for: great communicators, high emotional intelligence, kindness, compassion, curiosity, and people who want to help others. I would like to enter an article from Business Insider titled "Anthropic Cofounder says she doesn't regret her literature major – and says AI will make humanities majors 'more important'" into the record. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I bring that up today because that kind of learning starts early, and it's important to today's conversation.

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I am working on a comprehensive, human-centered framework to address AI education and workforce readiness. Among other things, my bill will support educator and institutional readiness by promoting professional development, evidence-based practices, shared resources for responsible AI use, and model curricula backed by research on AI's effects on teaching and learning. My framework recognizes educators as essential to a thriving workforce and provides resources for schools to adapt AI thoughtfully and responsibly without federal mandates on curriculum or pedagogy.

The rising use of AI in schools – and in society – without federal oversight is indicative of a wider problem. Without proper resources and funding, overwhelmed educators may be left with little choice but to use under-resourced and [under researched] technologies to try to meet their goals. Unfortunately, instead of using our power in Congress to help teachers and schools, my Republican colleagues appear to support the Trump administration's dismantling of the Department of Education which, I will note, eliminates the Office of Educational Technology, and illegally withholding education funds from states.

This issue has serious short-term and long-term consequences. The Department of Education should play a pivotal role in helping close achievement gaps so all students can have access to high-quality public education, and that includes funding professional development. Historically, the Department has helped provide critical resources to assist states, schools, and districts in navigating technological challenges. What this administration has done to the Department has diminished or obliterated its capacity to provide these critical resources.

If we are serious about helping those who choose to leverage AI in classrooms to close achievement gaps, *all* students and teachers must have access to these tools. I represent a lot of rural communities, and I will tell you that the Department uses Title I funds to provide resources to schools that need it the most, including rural and underserved communities. And according to the National Education Association, at least 16 million students still live without access to the resources necessary for technology education. Without the Department's leadership – or without the Department – many schools, particularly in less affluent areas, will go without new technologies. This will likely further widen achievement gaps and leave more children behind.

We also must be vigilant that the AI tools teachers use to prepare lessons and instruct students do not reinforce existing biases or discrimination. Biases in AI algorithms could lead to unfair decision-making in how and what students need in the classroom. If left unchecked, this could have catastrophic effects for millions of students and teachers. Our role in Congress should be straightforward but far from simple: a public school system in which every student has access to high-quality education. So, Congress must rise to the occasion, provide responsible guardrails for the use of AI in classrooms, increase federal investment in education and particularly technology education, and see that teachers are paid a fair salary. So, with that in mind, I would like to enter into the record the American Federation of Teachers' *Commonsense Guardrails for Using Advanced Technology in Schools* report.

It is often said that education is a calling. House Democrats will continue the fight to give teachers and students the resources and tools they need to fulfill that calling and provide the best education to students today, tomorrow, and for generations to come. I look forward to the testimony, and I yield back.