

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici (OR-01)**  
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education  
*"Screentime in Schools"*

Tuesday, June 10, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today. We appreciate your time and your expertise. We all want students to grow up and learn in a safe and healthy environment where they're protected from harm and equipped with the tools and knowledge they need to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Now that cellphones, laptops, and tablets have become an integral part of our everyday lives, schools need to be equipped with the latest technology and high-speed internet. Being fluent in technology is a necessity, not a luxury, especially when students will be entering the workforce in a modern, global economy.

But access to and use of technology must come with guardrails. Research shows that unrestricted and unmonitored screen time is likely to have negative consequences on students' mental health, as well as their learning and development. I noted the part in the written testimony where there was a study of students studying on their laptops, and it took them six minutes to go from studying to scrolling. I told that to my son, who was a high school teacher, and he said, "I'm surprised it's that much."

Most states, including my home state of Oregon, are working at the state and district level to implement comprehensive policies on this issue. For example, Portland Public Schools recently adopted a districtwide policy requiring all students to have their phones off and other personal electronic devices off during school hours. They made exceptions, of course, for students with disabilities and approved academic activities.

Although I acknowledge the importance of this topic — and it is important — I also note that many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle and officials in the Administration often say that the federal government should not be making decisions for local schools. As with curriculum decisions, technology policies should be managed by state and local officials. In our role as federal officials, we can and should be supporting that important research, which the Chairman mentioned — research-based decisions, the guidance, the partnerships, and the professional development on this topic, which is especially important to small and rural school districts that might not have the staff or resources or research needed to draft effective policies.

Again, this is an important topic, but I hope we don't lose sight of the many other issues that are clearly within our committee's control and jurisdiction and how they affect students as well. For example, the Trump Administration's actions, coupled with harmful proposals in the Congressional Republicans' "Big Bad Ugly Bill," pose a significant and urgent threat to students' well-being and academic achievement.

The testimony we are going to hear today explains that as we have seen an increase in screen time, we have also seen an increase in need for behavioral health care. But earlier this year, and without warning, the Trump Administration cancelled more than \$1 billion in funding for student mental health services that were funded

through the *Bipartisan Safer Communities Act*. These programs ended without notice to states and without recourse to help the students who depend on them.

The grants provided funding for mental health professionals, for support services, and for suicide prevention resources for schools and districts that desperately need them. Portland Public Schools used these grants to fund 21 school psychologists — they provided nearly 8,000 mental health services to students during the 2023-2024 school year.

Moreover, the Administration's plans to eliminate the Department of Education will have significant consequences for schools and public education as we know it. It will deepen the inequity and instability we're already seeing across our public education system.

Also, the Department recently reportedly dismissed all of the employees in the Office of Education Technology. Among other things, this office assisted districts and states in implementing best practices for technology — such as how to effectively use screens and other devices — in schools.

And lastly, but perhaps most urgently, this “Big Bad Ugly Bill” that my colleagues across the aisle championed will gut the programs that help kids show up to school ready to learn. Programs that provide food, health care, and stability to millions of families, are now being squeezed to pay for tax cuts for billionaires.

Let me say it plainly: Students cannot focus on their schoolwork if they are hungry. Students cannot reach their full potential if they are unable to access medical care.

So, yes, although we are concerned about students' screen time, we should also focus on what we can control by asserting our role as members of this committee who were elected by our constituents to engage in oversight of the Administration. By restoring the bipartisan mental health funding that many of us voted to authorize, protecting the Department of Education's ability to do that important research and offer guidance to states and local schools about technology, and supporting programs that provide children with food, health care, and a safe, supportive school environment.

I expect that we will all agree that states have control over screen time, and I appreciate again the expertise and time of these witnesses. But I hope we can also work on the urgent challenges that are within our power and jurisdiction, so we get to the point where every student has the opportunity to learn and thrive.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.