

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Alma S. Adams (NC-12)

Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

"Building an AI-Ready America: Higher Education in the Age of AI"

Wednesday, June 03, 2026 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer theoretical. Students are using it. Faculty are using it. Universities are adopting it. Employers are expecting familiarity with it. The question before us is no longer whether AI will shape higher education—it already is. The real question is whether we will shape it responsibly.

Right now, students across the country are trying to decide whether pursuing higher education is still worth it in a rapidly changing economy, largely driven by AI. New graduates entering the workforce hear every day that automation may replace the jobs for which they are trained. Faculty and educational professionals are being asked to adapt tools overnight, even as they evolve faster than institutions can respond. Fear and uncertainty are growing because there are few clear rules, few protections, and limited coordinated federal leadership.

AI can absolutely be a tool that helps Americans progress. It can support learning, expand access to tutoring and research assistance, and can help institutions better serve students. But these tools must remain tools. They cannot replace instruction, replace educators, or undermine the student learning. We need clear guardrails to ensure AI strengthens education rather than weakens it.

Unfortunately, the current Administration's policy is moving us in the wrong direction.

At a moment when stronger oversight is needed, we are seeing hesitation, fragmentation, and the weakening of the very institutions responsible for protecting students and educational professionals. As private companies rapidly collect data and expand AI systems into classrooms and campuses, students and institutions are increasingly at risk.

What makes this moment especially concerning is that the Trump Administration is weakening the very institutions responsible for protecting students while simultaneously pushing to rapidly expand the use of AI. This Administration says it wants to "unleash AI," yet it has supported efforts to dismantle and weaken the Department of Education, reduce capacity within the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), eliminate the office responsible for educational technology guidance and support, and has scaled back workforce preparation, including the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. That is deeply counterproductive.

These gaps matter because AI systems are not neutral. They can reinforce bias, misuse student data, and create discriminatory outcomes that directly impact access to education, financial aid, disability accommodations, and academic opportunity.

Without strong federal oversight, students, faculty, and educational workers are left vulnerable with little recourse when their rights are violated by these systems.

That is why it is our job to step in.

We need strong guardrails and infrastructure that match the scale of this technological shift. And that means restoring and strengthening federal educational technology leadership. It means rebuilding OCR's capacity so that complaints involving AI discrimination and data misuse can actually be investigated. It means establishing clear accountability standards around transparency, data protection, auditing, and oversight for AI systems used in higher education.

Most importantly, higher education institutions need coordinated federal guidance instead of being left to navigate this alone, campus by campus.

AI is already here. Ignoring it will not stop it. But failing to govern it responsibly will deepen inequality, weaken trust in education, and leave students unprotected during one of the most significant technological transitions of our time.

We have an obligation to ensure AI is used ethically and responsibly to serve students, educators, and the public interest.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.