

SB0720 - Education - Artificial Intelligence - Guidelines, Professional Development, and Collaborative (Artificial Intelligence Ready Schools Act)

Written Testimony (Favorable)

Submitted by: Betsy Tao, MCCPTA Technology Committee Chair, Distraction Free Schools Maryland

To Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and esteemed members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

My name is Betsy Tao, and I have two children in Montgomery County Public Schools. I represent the Montgomery County Council of PTAs (MCCPTA) as its Technology Committee Chair. I also serve as the Maryland state lead for Distraction Free Schools Policy Project. In both roles, I advocate for a learning environment that is free of the harmful distractions of digital media, whether it's on personal mobile devices or school-issued laptops.

I am grateful to Senator Hester for putting forward a bill that seeks to provide guidance on use of artificial intelligence in Maryland schools, as that guidance is desperately needed at the local level. Here in Montgomery County, we have no clear guidelines on use of artificial guidance by educators and students, and yet AI chatbots have popped up like mushrooms after a spring rain all over student Chromebooks, as software updates on previously approved applications. When we raised this issue with MCPS's Central Office, there did not seem to be an easy way to turn these features off. I accidentally learned of these chatbots only because my 7th grade daughter told me that she was playing with Flexi, one of the chatbots on her Chromebook, in class.

What I'd like the committee to understand is that artificial intelligence tools are quietly entering an ecosystem where students are already overusing devices at the detriment of learning. The one-to-one laptop policy has been a failure and led to a significant decline in student performance based on international, national and state testing. It's no wonder students struggle with reading and writing, when they carry around a Chromebook all day instead of books, and spend a significant amount of time playing games, watching videos, and engaging in other distractions during class. The MCCPTA Technology conducted a survey of MCPS families from November to January and collected over a thousand responses. Over 70% of respondents are concerned about Chromebook use in schools. Almost 90% wanted more textbooks and paper over screens. A copy of the report and the many testimonials provided by parents and educators and included with my testimony.

AI, especially generative AI (and soon, agentic AI) features, supercharge the negative effects that screens already have on learning. It is a pernicious myth that "AI is inevitable, and students need to learn to use it." To say any technology is inevitable is to deprive all of us of agency. Moreover, modern technology products do not require expertise to use. They are literally designed to be usable by anyone. Ironically, Gen Z demonstrates less computer literacy on international testing than generations before it, despite spending the most time on computers, thus exposing this myth.

Instead, what students need is to gain the breadth of knowledge, reading comprehension and reading stamina, critical thinking skills, writing skills, socio-emotional skills, and mental acuity to even hope to be able to use AI as a tool. The science of learning shows that those skills are best gained through what has always been proven to be most effective – the teacher-to-student mentor relationship, early

literacy and daily reading (of print materials!), regular writing and mental struggle with ideas and self-expression, facility with logical problem-solving, time for creativity and exploration, and interpersonal interactions. Because of that, students should never be encouraged to shortcut and undermine that process by using generative AI to do their work. Instead, they should be learning *about* AI – what Large Language Models are, how they work, what they’re built on, what information comes out of those models and why they often are biased or inaccurate, and what the inherent risks are of relying on AI, especially for students. Unfortunately, people who provide AI literacy often skip past the “should you use it?” to “how to use it,” counseling students to “be aware that AI can hallucinate” without considering whether students even have the breadth of knowledge to tell the difference.

Due to these concerns, the MCCPTA unanimously passed a “Resolution on Intentional, Effective, and Safe Use of Technology, including Artificial Intelligence, in MCPS Schools.” The resolution details the risks with generative AI in education and makes a number of recommendations to MCPS, including taking a hard look at how technology is used in schools now, and taking a cautionary approach with respect to AI. Digital tools should be used until it has been shown, through independent assessments, that it will yield better learning outcomes than alternative means. I applaud Senator Hester for including provisions to establish a collaborative working group of stakeholders that will provide oversight and consult on AI use in K-12 education. No members of the working group should have financial ties to the multi-billionaire-dollar tech industry so desperate to force AI tools into our schools.

I submit this testimony to educate the committee on what parents and caregivers in MCPS, the largest school district in Maryland, care about when it comes to technology and AI. We continue to advocate at the local level, but we welcome any efforts at the state level to provide more guidance and direction to county boards on these issues. More than guidance, school districts need guardrails because “best practices” are easily ignored. My hope is that this bill is the first step to providing those guardrails on AI use in our schools.

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Enclosures:

- MCCPTA Technology Committee Report: Community Feedback on School Chromebook Use (Jan. 26, 2026)
- MCCPTA Resolution on Intentional, Effective, and Safe Use of Technology, including Artificial Intelligence, in MCPS Schools (Jan. 27, 2026)
- Written Testimony, Dr. Jared Cooney Horvath, PhD, MEd Neuroscientist and Educator Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation (Jan. 15, 2026)