From Chalkboards to Chatbots: The Impact of AI on K-12 Education

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Chair Kiley, Ranking Member Bonamici, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in K-12 education. My name is Dr. Julia Rafal-Baer, and I am the CEO of ILO Group, a women-owned national education policy and strategy firm supporting over 200 state and district superintendents, collectively serving more than 1 in 3 students in America. I also founded Women Leading Ed, the largest national nonprofit network in the country for women in education leadership. My experience spans twenty-one years in education—beginning as a special education teacher and progressing through roles as a researcher, policymaker, and executive across government, nonprofit, and private sectors. Today, I advise education leaders nationwide and serve on multiple federal and national boards, including the National Assessment Governing Board.

Beyond these professional roles, I speak to you as a mother of two children in public schools, which deepens my commitment to ensuring AI technologies serve students safely, ethically, and effectively.

Artificial Intelligence is rapidly becoming one of the most impactful innovations across all industries. It has the potential to transform how educators teach, how students learn, how school systems operate, and how prepared our future workforce will be to leverage emerging technologies. However, realizing AI's benefits demands intentional, strategic, and careful implementation. Without careful oversight and research, AI technologies could inadvertently compromise student or employment data privacy or create unintended consequences within educational settings.

Recent findings from our Women Leading Ed Insight Survey reveal both the rapid adoption and concerning preparedness gaps in education:

- 81% of education leaders anticipate AI significantly impacting their systems, a 25% increase from last year
- Two-thirds of superintendents report AI is already shaping daily operations, compared to just 30% last year

- Despite this acceleration, fewer than 10% of education leaders report they have adequate resources or clear guidelines for effective, safe implementation
- Only 16% of districts have explicit policies allowing student AI use, while 33% report students using AI tools without formal governance

Given this reality, we must ensure every student, educator, caregiver, and community member is equipped not merely with digital literacy but comprehensive AI literacy. The 2024 Bipartisan House Taskforce on AI rightly recognizes the importance of AI literacy and the need for resources for it. AI literacy goes beyond understanding how to use a device or app; it encompasses critical thinking, ethical reasoning, the ability to examine the accuracy of AI-generated outputs, and informed decision-making about when and how to delegate tasks to AI tools. This preparation is critical for safeguarding our students' futures and ensuring their success in an increasingly AI-driven world.

At ILO Group, our specialized AI-focused [AiLO division](#) develops practical solutions for the safe, responsible implementation of AI in K-12 education. Our work includes:

- Publishing two comprehensive AI implementation frameworks—one tailored for [K-12 districts](#) and another for [state education agencies](#), across all divisions inside these systems, from academics to school improvement, to compliance, to research, to communications, and beyond
- Releasing the [AiLO Coach for Education Leaders](#), a unique, free customized chatbot resource offering personalized, on-demand guidance for leaders addressing real-world AI challenges in their schools and systems
- Partnering directly with superintendents to navigate the political, operational, technical, and fiscal complexities of AI integration

Through ILO Group's work across communities nationwide, we've identified key approaches to risk mitigation, professional development, and research-based implementation that balance innovation with responsible oversight.

First, it is essential to establish robust foundations for responsible AI usage through meaningful community engagement. AI implementation should reflect local priorities and values, making community involvement not just beneficial but essential to establishing practical guidelines and ethical guardrails. States are ideally positioned to support districts in making locally grounded decisions that align with their unique goals, context, and community expectations. States can ensure their efforts align with their unique workforce and economic strategies. At ILO Group, we support districts and states through vision-setting forums, community surveys, and facilitated stakeholder sessions to ensure AI is introduced transparently, ethically, and with broad community input. These efforts foster trust, alignment, clear accountability structures, and ethical guidelines, enabling successful long-term adoption.

Second, comprehensive AI literacy initiatives must extend far beyond educators and students alone, encompassing families, caregivers, and entire communities. Effective AI literacy ensures everyone understands how to responsibly leverage AI tools, critically evaluate AI-driven

information, and maintain accuracy, fairness, and objectivity in all interactions. A student recently engaged by our team in supporting a local school system emphasized that her district needs to operate at "a 9 or 10" in AI readiness. She explained that jobs have already evolved, and her classmates are missing out on critical upskilling opportunities. She emphasized that students who lack preparation now risk losing future opportunities to better-prepared peers elsewhere. Policymakers at the state level must define and support AI literacy broadly and ground it in clear state-level data collection and research agendas.

States can play a powerful role in both advancing effective implementation within their own systems and setting a foundation for the success of local districts in doing the same. In a number of states, we see teams exploring AI to support customer service functions by providing easier access to shared information typically found across multiple databases and documents, such as certification and reciprocity information. States also hold an important role in convening task forces, launching research agendas, and promoting comprehensive digital and AI literacy across communities. States can conduct AI and cyber-readiness assessments, create specialized AI assurance labs, and explore innovative funding approaches, all in efforts to ensure state-approved AI use cases are implemented safely to support public trust and transparency. This should focus on safety and privacy, transparency (how an AI system communicates its actions), explainability (the decision-making processes it followed), and interpretability (the comprehensibility of its outputs).

Based on ILO Group's AI-specific work over the past two and a half years as practitioners working with researchers, experts, and districts and states across the nation, I will offer three specific recommendations for federal policymakers to consider:

First, the federal role should be intentionally limited, allowing states and districts the flexibility and autonomy to lead AI integration efforts that reflect their unique contexts. Given the rapidly evolving nature of AI technologies, decisions about AI literacy specifically should remain local rather than federally defined. When communities engage directly in determining what AI literacy means for their students, they can establish more relevant frameworks for the skills and knowledge students will need for life beyond the classroom and to successfully navigate real life in the real world. This approach ensures that AI education responds dynamically to evolving technologies while AI literacy and its standards and curriculum remain grounded in local educational priorities and workforce needs.

Second, significantly strengthening data security and privacy protections must be an immediate priority as AI adoption accelerates. Here, the federal government has an appropriate role to provide consistent cybersecurity and data guidance across all states and agencies. Education systems increasingly face sophisticated AI-enhanced cybersecurity threats, making standardized protections essential. Recently, district leaders we advised highlighted innovative community-led initiatives, such as a Tech Data Privacy Coalition involving local parents and technology experts who actively guide data security practices. States can amplify these effective strategies by promoting similar local coalitions, instituting clear cybersecurity protocols, and implementing rigorous practices like data minimization and identity anonymization—similar to approaches used by defense agencies. Federal policymakers could develop a comprehensive

data privacy bill that supports effective policies and best practices related to online safety and data privacy that are broadly disseminated down to Governors and state education leaders, helping to mitigate risks from deepfakes and emerging cyber threats, thereby safeguarding our students and school communities nationwide.

Third, the federal government has a critical role in funding research that rigorously assesses AI's impact on education, and helps to build a national agenda. This research must evolve to maintain relevance as technologies advance. The federal government is uniquely positioned to research and evaluate where AI tools enhance educational quality, relevance, and efficiency—and to evaluate emerging applications, assess risks, and conduct cost-benefit analyses at a scale states cannot achieve independently. States cannot navigate these complex issues in isolation. Federal support is essential for analyzing and sharing evidence-based practices while ensuring all research rigorously protects student, teacher, and school privacy in accordance with federal regulations. We recommend convening a White House Summit on AI and Education to examine both opportunities and limitations. The federal role is vital in monitoring AI applications nationwide and establishing processes for rapidly disseminating critical information when impacts require broader consideration.

In conclusion, thoughtfully integrated AI can transform educational outcomes, but achieving this requires careful planning, prioritizing deep stakeholder engagement, comprehensive AI literacy, and robust security measures. In doing so, we can safely and effectively harness AI's immense potential and learn to work alongside AI. The future success of our students—and by extension, that of our communities and economies—depends on how effectively we navigate this pivotal moment.

Thank you again for your leadership on this critical issue and the opportunity to speak with you today about issues we take very seriously at ILO Group. For more detailed information and resources, please visit https://www.ilogroup.com/services/ailo/. I look forward to your questions and working with you going forward.