Written Testimony for the Record

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Committee on Education and Workforce
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
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Hearing: "*Building an AI-Ready America: Teaching in the AI Age*"

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for the record on *Building an AI-Ready America: Teaching in the AI Age*.

I am Michele Blatt, and I am the West Virginia State Superintendent of Schools. I am a lifelong educator and have served as the 34th State Superintendent of Schools since 2023. As State Superintendent of Schools, I provide strategic leadership for West Virginia's public education system and guide the implementation of our statewide priorities. My work focuses on supporting districts, strengthening school performance, and ensuring that educators have the tools and guidance they need to meet the diverse needs of our students. Over my three decades in education, as a teacher, principal, and state-level leader, I have worked closely with district superintendents, legislators, and partner organizations to improve outcomes for children across the state. My commitment to the well-being and success of every student continues to shape the decisions I make and the initiatives I lead. The goals of our WV education system are to encourage a lifelong pursuit of knowledge, promote personal well-being and community engagement, and respond to workforce and economic demands. These goals have driven our WV Framework of guiding principles for AI in our schools.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has entered education at a pace that challenges traditional policy timelines. Schools must respond while evidence continues to emerge, public understanding remains uneven, and AI itself changes rapidly. Across the country, schools face questions about classroom practice, educator preparation, system-level implementation, student safety, data privacy, long-term sustainability, and supports for students with diverse learning needs. I appreciate the Subcommittee's interest in a fact-finding conversation about how AI is being used across our schools: what is working, where hurdles remain, how teachers and parents are responding, and what supports are needed. My testimony reflects the Subcommittee's focus on classroom practice, educator training, system-level implementation, accessibility for diverse learners, safety and privacy protections, and the practical realities of cost and sustainability.

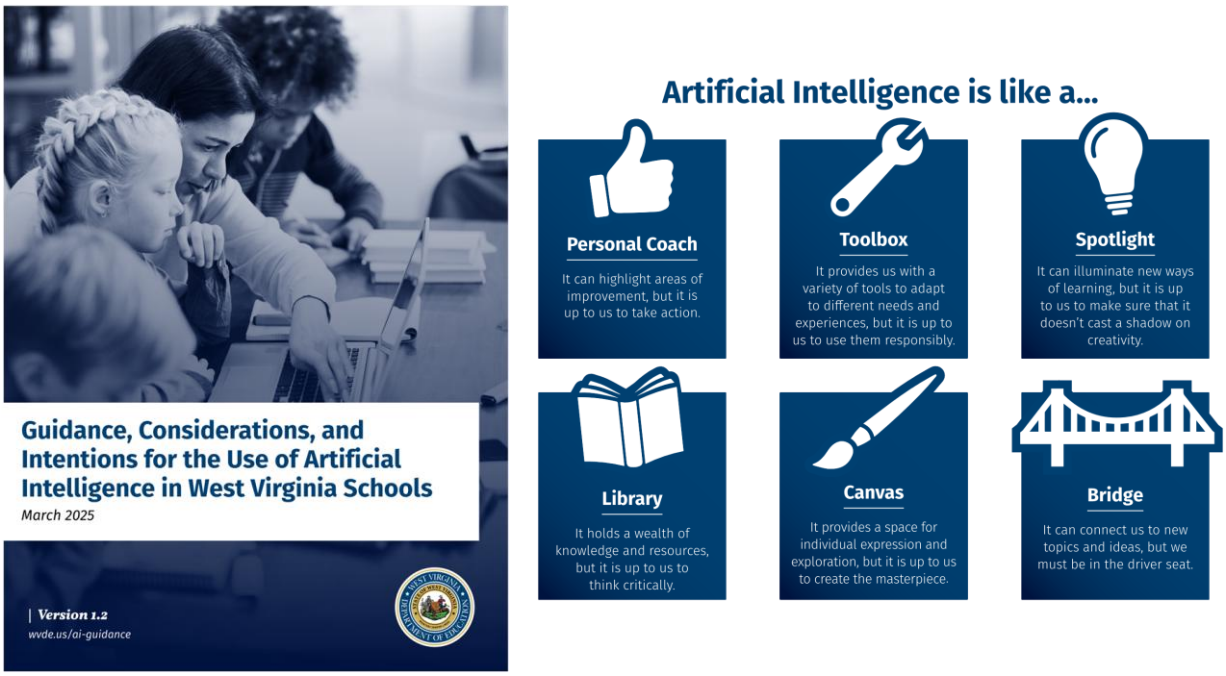
In West Virginia, nearly 235,000 public school students are educated throughout 64 public school districts (of which, 55 are county-based systems, 7 are public charter schools, and 2 are special districts, namely the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, and the West Virginia Schools of Diversion and Transition). District size, staffing capacity, and access to resources vary widely. These conditions shape how new technologies, including artificial intelligence, are understood, adopted, and governed at the local level. The central challenge is how education systems guide the use of AI in ways that protect students, preserve the central role of educators, and align with long-standing educational goals. This testimony focuses on how one state has approached that challenge through guidance, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive implementation. It does not attempt to predict future technological developments or recommend prescriptive federal action.

Years prior to the mainstream adoption of and familiarity with generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), West Virginia was already conducting research and exploring small-scale applications via natural language processing (NLP). For example, the West Virginia Department of Education employed a computer-assisted, algorithmic approach to classify and analyze thousands of open-ended stakeholder survey responses collected through the WV Voice Education Forums, a series of statewide public engagement events and surveys designed to solicit stakeholder

input on education reform. In 2019, the Center for Business and Economic Research at Marshall University independently reviewed this NLP-based methodology, examined the underlying analytic programming code, and validated both its integrity and effectiveness. That third-party analysis found the automated classifications to be largely accurate when compared against independent human reviewers and concluded that the approach meaningfully strengthened the validity of the qualitative findings while supporting, rather than replacing, expert human judgment. On a separate project, the West Virginia Department of Education partnered with Smith College statistical and data science students to develop an NLP-based algorithm that evaluated the "actionability" of written feedback provided to teachers during classroom observations. That project applied text analysis and machine-learning techniques to anonymized large-scale evaluation data collected statewide and demonstrated how computational methods could support more specific, contextual, and improvement-oriented feedback without displacing professional judgment.

West Virginia responded to the widespread emergence of GenAI by issuing statewide guidance in late 2023, followed by two subsequent updates (see Figure 1). In fact, West Virginia was an early leader in this space and was the third state in the nation to release guidance for our districts and schools (Education Week, 2024). The guidance is intentionally descriptive rather than directive. It establishes shared language, clarifies ethical considerations, and reinforces that people remain in control of educational decisions. The guidance addresses three audiences: the general public, educators, and schools or districts. It emphasizes alignment with existing policies, transparency in use, protection of student information, and the importance of academic integrity. It also includes optional planning tools for educators and encourages districts to approach AI use and procurement with caution and clarity.

Figure 1. West Virginia Department of Education Guidance on Artificial Intelligence.



Districts operate within existing policy frameworks related to acceptable technology use, student data privacy, accessibility, academic integrity, and student behavior. Artificial intelligence intersects with these frameworks, and it does not replace them. Any guidance must therefore align with established expectations rather than create parallel systems. Accordingly, we guided West Virginia districts to review specific, existing West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE) policies (which can be located and reviewed at https://wveis.k12.wv.us/wvboe/policies/) and to use the policies when evaluating AI technologies. While not an exhaustive list, we reference WVBE policies in the guidance such as:

- WVBE Policy 2460 – *Educational Purpose and Acceptable Use of Electronic Resources, Technologies and the Internet*
- WVBE Policy 4350 – *Procedures for the Collection, Maintenance and Disclosure of Student Information*
- WVBE Policy 2419 – *Regulations for the Education of Students with Exceptionalities*
- WVBE Policy 2520.14 – *West Virginia College- and Career-Readiness Standards for Technology and Computer Science*
- WVBE Policy 4373 – *Expected Behavior in Safe and Supportive Schools*

The West Virginia Department of Education has established principles for safe, ethical, and effective AI integration that balance innovation with student privacy and human accountability. Essentially, our work is focused on two streams: Educational Excellence and Integrity and Safety, Privacy and Literacy. Both are critical as we expand the use of AI in our schools.

The three goals of Educational Excellence and Integrity are:

1. Support educational goals through AI to improve student learning, teacher effectiveness, and bridge the digital divide.
2. Ensure people remain responsible and accountable for all pedagogical and organizational decisions.
3. Uphold academic integrity by maintaining expectations of honesty and requiring students to credit AI sources where appropriate.

The three goals of Safety, Privacy, and Literacy are:

1. Protect student privacy by never sharing personal identifiable information with consumer-based AI systems.
2. Educate staff and students on how AI works, its use, and associated risks by promoting AI literacy.
3. Evaluate continuously and update policies to keep pace with rapidly evolving AI technology.

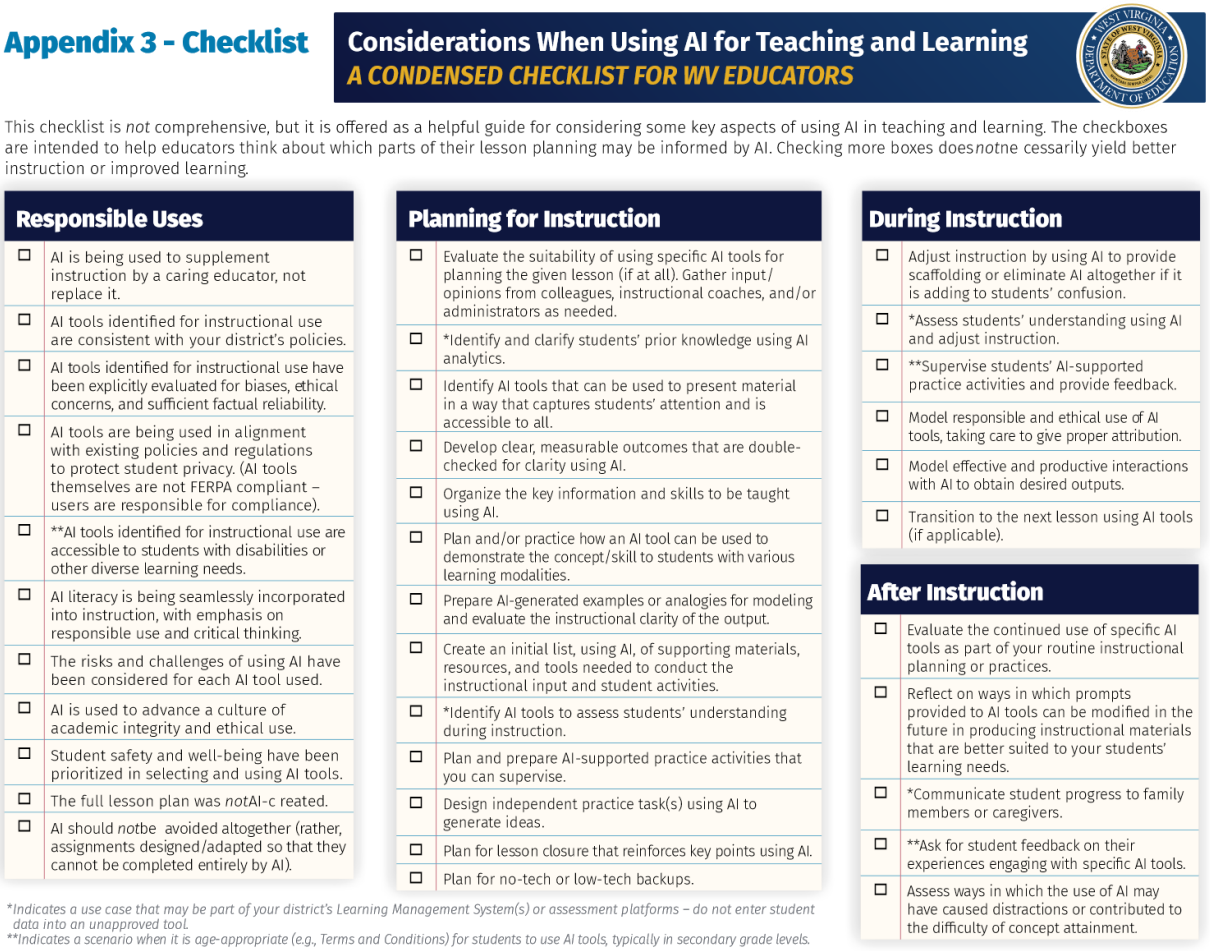
AI-powered resources assist our teachers with lesson planning, grading, and identifying areas where students may need extra help. The West Virginia Department of Education provides ongoing professional development to ensure educators are well-equipped to utilize the various tools. Our professional development focuses on the science of teaching with AI integration (Pedagogical AI for New Teaching or PAiNT).

Our middle school students are earning micro-credentials through Prodigy Learning and Minecraft while some of our high schools are piloting Thunkable which allows students to create apps. Both courses provide training to teachers of any content area to quickly be able to

use the software in their classrooms. As technology has evolved, there is not a need for the teacher to be the computer science expert.

Professional learning resources continue to expand through the state's learning management system. These materials support informed decision-making rather than promote specific tools or products. Educators currently have access to an expansive resource site within our statewide professional learning platform, which contains more than 50 resources/guides/toolkits. Additionally, the Department's AI Guidance also has a checklist for educators (see Figure 2) to optionally use as they consider the instructional opportunities and risks of using AI as they plan, deliver, and self-evaluate their classroom instruction.

Figure 2. Optional checklist for educators to use when considering AI in their instruction.



Appendix 3 - Checklist

Considerations When Using AI for Teaching and Learning
A CONDENSED CHECKLIST FOR WV EDUCATORS

This checklist is *not* comprehensive, but it is offered as a helpful guide for considering some key aspects of using AI in teaching and learning. The checkboxes are intended to help educators think about which parts of their lesson planning may be informed by AI. Checking more boxes does*not*ne cessarily yield better instruction or improved learning.

Responsible Uses

- ☐ AI is being used to supplement instruction by a caring educator, not replace it.
- ☐ AI tools identified for instructional use are consistent with your district's policies.
- ☐ AI tools identified for instructional use have been explicitly evaluated for biases, ethical concerns, and sufficient factual reliability.
- ☐ AI tools are being used in alignment with existing policies and regulations to protect student privacy. (AI tools themselves are not FERPA compliant – users are responsible for compliance).
- ☐ **AI tools identified for instructional use are accessible to students with disabilities or other diverse learning needs.
- ☐ AI literacy is being seamlessly incorporated into instruction, with emphasis on responsible use and critical thinking.
- ☐ The risks and challenges of using AI have been considered for each AI tool used.
- ☐ AI is used to advance a culture of academic integrity and ethical use.
- ☐ Student safety and well-being have been prioritized in selecting and using AI tools.
- ☐ The full lesson plan was *not*AI-c reated.
- ☐ AI should *not*be avoided altogether (rather, assignments designed/adapted so that they cannot be completed entirely by AI).

Planning for Instruction

- ☐ Evaluate the suitability of using specific AI tools for planning the given lesson (if at all). Gather input/ opinions from colleagues, instructional coaches, and/or administrators as needed.
- ☐ *Identify and clarify students' prior knowledge using AI analytics.
- ☐ Identify AI tools that can be used to present material in a way that captures students' attention and is accessible to all.
- ☐ Develop clear, measurable outcomes that are double-checked for clarity using AI.
- ☐ Organize the key information and skills to be taught using AI.
- ☐ Plan and/or practice how an AI tool can be used to demonstrate the concept/skill to students with various learning modalities.
- ☐ Prepare AI-generated examples or analogies for modeling and evaluate the instructional clarity of the output.
- ☐ Create an initial list, using AI, of supporting materials, resources, and tools needed to conduct the instructional input and student activities.
- ☐ *Identify AI tools to assess students' understanding during instruction.
- ☐ Plan and prepare AI-supported practice activities that you can supervise.
- ☐ Design independent practice task(s) using AI to generate ideas.
- ☐ Plan for lesson closure that reinforces key points using AI.
- ☐ Plan for no-tech or low-tech backups.

During Instruction

- ☐ Adjust instruction by using AI to provide scaffolding or eliminate AI altogether if it is adding to students' confusion.
- ☐ *Assess students' understanding using AI and adjust instruction.
- ☐ **Supervise students' AI-supported practice activities and provide feedback.
- ☐ Model responsible and ethical use of AI tools, taking care to give proper attribution.
- ☐ Model effective and productive interactions with AI to obtain desired outputs.
- ☐ Transition to the next lesson using AI tools (if applicable).

After Instruction

- ☐ Evaluate the continued use of specific AI tools as part of your routine instructional planning or practices.
- ☐ Reflect on ways in which prompts provided to AI tools can be modified in the future in producing instructional materials that are better suited to your students' learning needs.
- ☐ *Communicate student progress to family members or caregivers.
- ☐ **Ask for student feedback on their experiences engaging with specific AI tools.
- ☐ Assess ways in which the use of AI may have caused distractions or contributed to the difficulty of concept attainment.

**Indicates a use case that may be part of your district's Learning Management System(s) or assessment platforms – do not enter student data into an unapproved tool.*
***Indicates a scenario when it is age-appropriate (e.g., Terms and Conditions) for students to use AI tools, typically in secondary grade levels.*

In addition, the West Virginia Department of Education conducted a public stakeholder survey to better understand perceptions and concerns. Survey responses were received from a total of 1,025 stakeholders in Spring 2024, representing school and district staff, as well as family and community members. Questions asked about various perceptions and concerns related to the

use of AI in educational settings. Nearly 97% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that essential learning skills (i.e., literacy, numeracy, research, critical thinking) need to remain a focus of public education, and that students should not become overly dependent upon AI. Similarly, almost all stakeholders wanted to see transparency surrounding AI usage. Approximately 4 in 5 respondents expressed some degree of concern or worry surrounding the uses and adoption of AI. Nonetheless, opinions were still mixed across various other topics. Roughly 6 in 10 respondents see AI as an inevitable part of the future of education and the workforce. Numerous open-ended responses from educators and family members advocated for ensuring that WV students have opportunities to learn about AI so that they will be better prepared for the future which awaits them, and so they won't be left behind and at a competitive disadvantage as they prepare for post-secondary success. In fact, the full report contains a representative sample of direct quotes that we received from our stakeholders.

Following the survey collection efforts, the West Virginia Department of Education convened an Artificial Intelligence Technical Advisory Committee composed of nationally recognized experts in artificial intelligence, education, and policy to provide independent, *pro bono* guidance on the responsible use of AI in PK-12 education. The committee included researchers from West Virginia institutions and external universities and organizations, and it met virtually to review survey findings, discuss data-informed policy considerations, and examine current and future safeguards for AI use in schools. While the committee held no decision-making authority, its role was to offer expert analysis that could support, refine, or challenge ideas under consideration by state education leaders, as it supported the evidentiary basis for AI-related policy development.

In a larger statewide context, the West Virginia Task Force on Artificial Intelligence was established under West Virginia Code §5A-6-9 to guide the responsible adoption of artificial intelligence across state government. The Task Force has been given responsibility for developing best practices, examining ethical and privacy considerations, and offering recommendations that include model policies for AI use in schools. The State Superintendent of Schools, or a designee, serves as a statutory member of the Task Force, which places the West Virginia Department of Education in an active, ongoing role within the state's AI governance framework. Similarly, the West Virginia Department of Education has maintained an ongoing working relationship with the state Legislature on artificial intelligence in education, which has included a presentation to the Joint Standing Committee on Education. Other presentations have occurred at meetings such as the WV Digital Government Summit, as well as other statewide conferences which support educators' professional learning surrounding AI.

In an even larger regional and national context, the West Virginia Department of Education has actively been engaged in the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Commission on Artificial Intelligence in Education, which consists of policymakers, education leaders, and business leaders from SREB's 16 states. These efforts have been paired with numerous presentations at national education conferences related to the Department's AI Guidance as well as our systems and processes. Moreover, West Virginia was also invited to present to the Maryland Joint Committee on Cybersecurity, Information Technology, & Biotechnology. In these efforts, we strive to support and inspire the work of others across our nation. Our key partners and sources have been TeachAI, Code.org, International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), Common Sense Media, and the U.S. Department of Education Office of Technology.

Early experience suggests that artificial intelligence presents both promise and risk. On the opportunity side, educators see potential for instructional support, improved accessibility, differentiated learning experiences, and efficiency in time-intensive tasks. These uses can support teaching when applied with care and professional judgment. At the same time, stakeholders have raised concerns about student dependency, erosion of independent thinking, academic integrity, privacy, and social development. Families and educators have also expressed unease about technologies that operate without transparency or clear safeguards.

These impacts affect student well-being as a whole. They influence how students learn, how educators teach, and how trust is maintained between schools and communities. Observations to date reinforce the need for deliberate, people-centered approaches rather than rapid or unexamined adoption.

Several challenges persist. First, uncertainty remains high. Many educators and families continue to seek clarity about appropriate use, especially as tools evolve. Second, capacity varies across districts. Smaller systems often lack dedicated staff for technology review, data governance, or specialized training. Third, the broader information environment influences perceptions. Public narratives about AI often emphasize extremes rather than practical classroom realities. These challenges do not point to a lack of interest or effort. They reflect the complexity of integrating emerging technologies into systems designed to prioritize stability, balance, and trust.

State experience suggests several high-level considerations that may inform ongoing discussion:

- Clarity and consistency support responsible local decision-making;
- Flexibility allows states and districts to respond to evolving conditions;
- Professional learning opportunities for educators often lead to more effective implementation than mandate-based approaches; and,
- Support for research and evaluation can help education systems distinguish between promise and proven impact over time.

These considerations aim to support thoughtful implementation rather than prescribe uniform approaches. AI presents education systems with a complex set of opportunities and risks. Experience in West Virginia suggests that progress depends on people-centered guidance, alignment with existing policies, and sustained attention to student well-being.

The West Virginia Department of Education appreciates the Subcommittee's interest in learning from state practice. Continued dialogue across levels of government will remain important as schools navigate this evolving landscape.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

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