The Honorable Ted Cruz
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science and Transportation
554 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science and Transportation
428 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

January 13, 2026

Dear Chairman Cruz and Ranking Member Cantwell:

Our coalition of education, library, and non-profit leadership organizations is writing to provide our perspective on the value of technology in schools and the importance of continuing federal support for education technology and connectivity. We hope that our thoughts will help inform the upcoming January 15th hearing entitled "Plugged Out: Examining the Impact of Technology on America's Youth", which the Committee is billing as a "Kids Screen Time Hearing."

Our organizations bring deep, real-world experience with how technology, including innovative new tools powered by artificial intelligence, is deployed, managed, and integrated into K–12 learning environments and school administration every day. Educators must balance instructional goals, privacy and security obligations, classroom management and student learning needs, and the vitally important expectations of families and communities. We believe our educational perspective is essential to shaping sound federal guidance and policy on safely and effectively using technology in schools. Finally, it is essential to distinguish between largely unsupervised, entertainment-driven technology use at home and the intentional, monitored, and carefully curated use of technology in schools—where digital tools are employed to support learning and prepare students for future academic and workforce demands.

Broadband Access Is Foundational to Teaching, Learning, and School Operations

Reliable, secure broadband—delivered to rural, urban, and all communities—is foundational to effective teaching and learning. High-quality connectivity enables schools to access digital instructional resources, communicate with families, and support core academic and administrative functions. Broadband access is also critical outside of school. Research from the Quello Center on Media & Information Policy found "...that students who do not have access to the internet, enabling from home or are dependent on a cell phone alone for access perform lower on a range of metrics, including digital skills, homework completion, and grade point average. They are also less likely to intend on completing a college or university degree."[1]

Broadband connectivity also underpins the daily operations of schools. Through the E-Rate program, schools rely on broadband to support student information systems, bus and cafeteria scheduling applications, personnel software, heating/cooling systems, as well as essential safety features (security cameras, door locks, parent/stakeholder communications, etc.).

Beyond schools, broadband access through libraries enables public access and participation in modern school, work, and civic life. Approximately 20% of U.S. households lack home broadband internet service, and America's public libraries work to bridge these gaps with more than 17,000 technology-enabled and convenient locations and trusted staff trained to connect people with the resources they need.[2]

Education Technology Supports Effective, Future-Ready Instruction

When supported by reliable, high capacity broadband, school technology enables educators to leverage the digital tools and rich content that teachers rely on to differentiate instruction, assess student understanding, and create opportunities for small-group and individualized learning opportunities. School technology also helps remove barriers to learning, enabling students with disabilities and students without home internet access to fully participate in modern learning environments.

According to a 2021 Institute of Education Sciences (IES) report, public schools surveyed say that they "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree" that technology use helped students:

- Engage in more active learning (93%)
- Become more independent and self-directed (92%)
- Learn at their own pace (90%)
- Think critically (85%)
- Learn collaboratively with peers (83%)[3]

This use of technology also aligns with family expectations. A December 2025 Morning Consult–EdChoice survey found that more than 80% of parents support schools using laptops and online learning platforms in class, reflecting broad confidence in the role of digital tools when used for instructional purposes.[4]

School technology is also essential to preparing students for the workforce. Employers increasingly expect students to be fluent with digital collaboration tools, online research, data literacy, and artificial intelligence (AI). As the Trump Administration continues to champion AI readiness as a national priority, schools serve as a key pipeline for helping students acquire the skills they need to succeed in a rapidly evolving workforce. Pulling back on educational technology would leave students less prepared for both today's and tomorrow's demands.

Intentional Use of Education EdTech Is Key

Because technology is now integral to the environments in which students live and learn, a school's focus must be on intentional implementation rather than assumptions about "more" or "less" technology. Effective learning depends on selecting the right tools to support specific instructional goals. Fragmented or inconsistent implementation—not technology itself—is what overwhelms teachers and families.

Districts across the country already demonstrate balanced use of digital and nondigital instructional methods, supported by ongoing professional learning that helps educators minimize distractions and use technology with purpose. Clear communication with families builds trust, reinforces healthy habits at home, and aligns expectations across school and family contexts. Yet, according to the IES study, nearly two-thirds of schools said that lack of time for teachers to learn and integrate technology was a moderate or large challenge.[5]

Distinguishing Education Classroom Technology from Consumer Technology

It is important to differentiate between educational screen use and recreational or consumer screen use. In reality, "screen time" is not a single category and should not be evaluated as such. Classroom use of digital tools, aligned to curriculum, guided by educators, and governed by locally developed school district privacy and security policies and related state and federal laws, is fundamentally different from a student's unsupervised or entertainment-based device use.

Data Privacy and Online Safety Protections Are Well-Established

Student information is already protected by federal laws such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), and by more than 40 state statutes that govern data collection, parental consent, security requirements, vendor responsibilities, breach notification, and data deletion. Additionally, for more than 25 years, the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) has required that schools and libraries receiving E-Rate support block harmful content both, on campus and on school-issued devices and hotspots used off campus. This denies access to content that is obscene, pornographic, or otherwise harmful to minors.

CIPA also requires districts to adopt internet safety policies, monitor online activity, and educate students about appropriate online behavior, including safe interactions on social platforms and cyberbullying prevention and response. These longstanding requirements demonstrate both the seriousness with which schools approach online safety and the robust legal architecture to protect students that is already in place. While no filtering system is perfect, children are often

much safer when they are on a school-managed network than on a personal device. Rather than banning education technology from classrooms, the public would be better served by government supporting adequate funding, professional development, and technical support to ensure schools continue to have the most effective filters and safeguards in place. Further, reducing barriers to E-Rate access for libraries and schools would ensure that even more library and school networks have the best technical protections in place to ensure compliance with all CIPA regulations.

Local Decision-Making Matters

Decisions about education devices, classroom technology, and local screen-use practices should remain in the hands of local educators and their families who best understand their own students' needs. Effective education technology use requires strong classroom management strategies, appropriate filtering systems, high-quality teacher training, and transparent communication with families—not one-size-fits-all mandates.

Bans on All Technology Do Not Prepare Students for the World They Will Enter

Rather than efforts to broadly prohibit access to education technology, schools and parents should focus on equipping young people with the skills to use technology responsibly and safely. Schools have a responsibility to ensure that all students have access to the resources needed to complete assignments and fully engage in learning. Parents, with support from schools, should play a leading role in ensuring children develop the skills to self-regulate personal screen use outside of school, including at home.

Next Steps

Our coalition remains committed to sharing on-the-ground insights to help ensure federal policy reflects what best supports teaching and learning. We appreciate the Committee's engagement and welcome continued collaboration on these issues.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
AESA, Association of Education Service Agencies
American Federation of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
American Library Association (ALA)
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Benton Foundation

CoSN - The Consortium for School Networking
Consortium of State School Boards Association (COSSBA)
National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools (NAFIS)
National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS)
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
National Catholic Educational Association
National Education Association (NEA)
SETDA (State Educational Technology Directors Association)
Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition (SHLB)

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[1] Hampton, K. N., Fernandez, L., Robertson, C. T., & Bauer, J. M. Broadband and Student Performance Gaps. James H. and Mary B. Quello Center, Michigan State University, March 3, 2020. Retrieved December 15, 2025 from https://doi.org/10.25335/BZGY-3V91

[2] American Library Association. (2025). Libraries Connecting Communities: Policy Recommendations for the Universal Service Fund. Retrieved December 16, 2025, from: https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/Libraries%20Connecting%20Communities_USF2pager_Oct2025.pdf

[3] Gray, L., and Lewis, L. (2021). Use of Educational Technology for Instruction in Public Schools: 2019–20 (NCES 2021- 017). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, p.5, Retrieved December 15, 2025 from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2021/2021017.pdf

[4] "The Public, Parents, and K-12 Education National Polling Report #63." 2025. https://edchoice.mcdatahub.com/edchoice/Reports/Adults_Aug_Nov_25.pdf.

[5] Gray & Lewis, Use of Educational Technology for Instruction in Public Schools, at p.4.

Cc: Senate Commerce Committee
NTIA Director Arielle Roth