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Sent: Thursday, April 2, 2026 11:54 AM
To: House Education Committee
Cc: Justine Lutzeld Caldwell
Subject: I Support Bill H7895

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Hello,

My name is Sabrina Weiss, I am a parent of two school age children here in Rhode Island, I am a substitute teacher in their district, and I've served almost three years a President of one of their schools Parent Teacher Group. I am also a member of Fairplay for kids, an organization that seeks to create a childhood beyond brands, and an ambassador for "Screen Strong" an organization that helps educate families and schools about screen safety and harms. I

To borrow words from Jonathan Haidt, Author of "The Anxious Generation", "we have overprotected our children in the real world and under protected them online". This statement is true even of our schools. Under the guise of education, we have allowed self-interested, for-profit companies to embed themselves in our children's learning. And it has been nothing short of catastrophic.

One only must look at our states standardized test scores to see the results in real time. Rather than close the digital divide, screens in school have only contributed to inequity and a widening learning gap. Increased Screen time directly harms our most vulnerable children who need direct teacher instruction the most. Research and data over the past 10 years has shown that when ed-tech made its way into classrooms, learning plummeted.

Even more insidious is what it does to peer and Teacher relationships. At times it is quite literally a barrier between students and their teachers and peers when strong relationships in school are proven to lead to long term academic success. Data shows that schools with heavier screen use have worse attendance, and reports of loneliness at school have almost doubled since 2012. That should be no surprise as every minute spent on a screen is a minute missing out on face-to-face interactions, and building connections that contribute to a positive school culture and make our children healthier and happier.

Additionally, Internet safety labs found over 60% percent of educational apps and platforms in school to be selling Data to third parties. Our children's digital footprints are made enormous, often without parental consent. In the eyes of these companies, our children ARE the product and potential lifelong customers. These companies, just like their social media counterparts, profit from time spent on device and data collected as a result.

Everyday children access harmful materials on school issued Chromebooks, despite the best efforts by school IT departments. There is no meaningful way to stop this, other than to remove

access to these devices except for the rare occasions when they are proven to be the best and only method of delivery outside analogue tools.

Will this be an easy shift for schools where these technologies have enmeshed themselves into the school day? no, but does that mean we should throw our hands up and say its too late? Absolutely not. We owe our students this protection and the best education we can offer.

I also dismiss the argument that this will cost districts money they don't have to fix it. There will certainly be an adjustment period, but it will be a re-allocation of funds away from digital platforms and towards analogue delivery methods and direct teacher instruction. Per pupil spending has only increased exponentially since the introduction of Ed-Tech, and it has not moved the needle at all in terms of outcomes. I would go so far as to argue that reverting back to analogue methods will end in cost savings for schools and for the state.

Ultimately this should not be a decision about cost, this should come down to keeping our children safe and providing them with an education that will make them successful and engaged citizens. While this does require us to teach ABOUT technology, it does not require us to teach every subject using technology. Something that has been greatly conflated by many of our educational leaders and is pushed by these Ed-tech companies and lobbyists with very deep pockets.

As parents, teachers, and leaders we owe our students and children protection from all of these harms. This bill will be one of the first in the nation to protect our kids from the predatory nature of the majority of these Ed-Tech companies. Schools should be a place of learning and protection from outside harms. They should not follow market trends, they should follow what's best for child development and what historically proven to best deliver education, that is experience teachers and staff in a safe and caring environment. I urge you to take the leap and make Rhode Island a leader in education and child safety!

Lastly I am including the "6 myths and facts of Ed-Tech" written by Emily Chernin, as I'm seeing some of these very arguments in opposition letters written by lobbyists and RISSA, both groups that have strong ties to these very companies, and who's testimony should thus be taken with a grain of salt. I'm also including a link to the "Ed-tech Report" from "EverySchool.Org". A research based paper meant to help guide classroom tech use and school policy.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e7f60459beb49266ae92b37/t/6710637f28940b340826ca18/1729127330336/The+EdTech+Report>

Myth #1: "EdTech improves learning."

This wildly popular industry claim– echoed by school administrators– sounds like the following:

- "We can personalize learning to each child."
- "We can make the learning process frictionless."
- "We can accelerate learning."
- "We can provide lifelike support via AI tutors."

Truth #1: EdTech is worse for learning.

At the core of this claim is the fundamental lack of understanding about the science of learning and brain development. In reality, the only people who can truly “personalize” learning are human teachers who ground their knowledge of a student in the context of a relationship with them. Additionally, any decent neuroscientist will tell you that learning requires friction. Learning occurs through moments of struggle and difficulty. When we make learning “easier” we by definition stop the learning process. Friction is a good thing.

Learning also requires time. A new skill is not built on the first try; it is through layers of effort and mistake-making and struggle that we achieve a new skill. If we go to the gym and lift weights for one day it will not result in big muscles by night. Anything worth doing requires time, and this is especially true for children learning new skills (regardless of whether or not those skills are academic or social– both matter).

As educational neuroscientist Dr. Jared Cooney Horvath points out, “Today’s generation of kids is the first generation to be cognitively worse than their parents. On every single cognitive measure, they perform worse than we do: tests of critical thinking, general IQ, creative thinking, memory span, divergent thinking, and more.” Historically, we have watched each subsequent generation outperform the former. For the past one hundred years, this has been the norm. Until now. We are the first generation in history where that trend is reversed.

There is also plenty of international evidence now that the onslaught of computer-based learning has not delivered on its claims. As one brief example, a report by OECD (the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) found that students who used computers at school performed worse on learning outcomes. Across the globe, test scores in math, reading, and science have fallen substantially since the early 2010s, coinciding with the transition of schools to computer-based learning around 2012. In the United States, the Nation’s Report Card shows that any gains made in reading since 1971 have been virtually erased since 2012 and math scores of 13-year-olds began to decline rapidly around the same time.

Finally, the learning impediments caused by the introduction of these tools in schools coincides with an international mental health crisis and loneliness epidemic among young people, in many ways connected to their increased use of smartphones and social media. As schools move to ban phones from campuses to better protect students’ mental health and improve social connections, the other “technologies of isolation” (as author Emily M. Bender refers to them) such as 1:1 internet-connected school-issued devices and AI tutors and chatbots should be removed.

Myth #2: “EdTech helps teachers.”

EdTech companies claim they have a technological solution to the “problem” of “overworked teachers overwhelmed by their large classes.” The old model of education, a “sage on the stage,” needs to evolve to a “guide on the side.” This stems from the technology industry’s obsession with “scaling”– using technology to increase the number of widgets produced by a single widget-making machine.

Truth #2: EdTech is ruining teaching.

If this claim makes you cringe, good, because to think of children (or teachers) as widgets is morally abhorrent and deeply offensive. It undervalues the wealth that both children and caring educators bring to the learning process, which is rooted in communities and relationships. Yet the core of the technology industry's business model is not about improving education; it is to make money.

If there are 36 students in a 7th grade English class, the EdTech solution is not to decrease her class sizes, but to tell her to offer her AI tools to assess the student writing she can't keep up with and to implement surveillance technology to monitor student behavior on school-issued computers. How does this improve teacher-student relationships, the foundation of any meaningful learning experiences? How does this build and support trust, a critical component of any relationship?

EdTech doesn't help teachers; it helps EdTech companies. Schools have given kids internet-connected distraction devices and then expected teachers to monitor them for "misuse." The best teacher in the world cannot compete with the dopamine-driven design features of YouTube or internet games, which children use and access regularly on their school devices. What time does a teacher have left for actual teaching if she is also expected to monitor two dozen students too? If the children didn't have internet-connected distraction devices in front of them, a significant amount of a teacher's time could be spent on actual relationship-building and instruction. As Vauhini Vara writes in her recent Bloomberg piece "How Chatbots and AI Are Already Transforming Kids' Classrooms," the outreach from Silicon Valley [to schools] "seems to follow a playbook developed during a decades-long attempt to turn public education into a market for private products."

As a result, EdTech hasn't made teachers effective "guides on the side" either; instead, teachers are now IT administrators and surveillance police. Instead of removing the 1:1 devices, school districts purchase "secondary EdTech" products like GoGuardian, which allows teachers to remotely monitor all student screens from a teacher's computer. But GoGuardian requires teachers to surveil students, which erodes trust, which is the foundation of relationships, which are required for meaningful teaching and learning. (And as one teacher recently told me, "The district wasted their money on GoGuardian. The kids just find the workarounds or use hotspots on their phones.")

In reality, the end goal of EdTech companies is to scale teaching, not help children. Beyond the impossibility of doing this (as evidenced by the failures and harms of introducing computer-based learning into education over the past decade or so), this is a morally reprehensible idea. Children are not widgets. Teachers are not automatons. To achieve "success," the EdTech industry goal of scaling would mean having fewer teachers serving more students. By increasing teacher workload, class sizes, and demanding they use more tech for everything, it's no wonder teachers are quitting or retiring early.

Myth #3: "EdTech closes the achievement gap."

EdTech companies claim their products will democratize education and close achievement gaps. Since it can be difficult to recruit teachers to low-income districts or because there aren't enough school counselors to go around, the argument goes, support for underserved children can be provided via EdTech tools and platforms, like AI "buddies" and AI counselors.

Truth #3: EdTech worsens inequities.

Far from improving equity, EdTech products have actually created three new “digital divides”: a digital safety divide, a digital learning divide, and a digital advocacy divide. The use of GenAI tools severely exacerbates all three divides.

First, safer versions of EdTech tools cost more. To even have the option to provide safer EdTech, schools must pay more. Schools with smaller budgets and fewer resources, which often serve students within lower-income neighborhoods, will thus receive less safe versions of the product. For example, the safest tier of services available in Google’s Chrome Education products costs money. The “free” version lacks crucial safety settings. Schools that cannot pay get less-safe products.

Historically, poor children get worse quality education. Today, EdTech products with embedded GenAI are being pitched to schools as an opportunity to increase equity. But as Emily M. Bender and Alex Hanna write in their excellent book The AI Con: How to Fight Big Tech’s Hype and Create the Future We Want (bold mine):

“We know from a long history of EdTech that this simply will not be the case. If we don’t get off the hype train, a privileged set of students may benefit from these tools, used in conjunction with close supervision by attentive, less-burdened human instructors. Meanwhile, most students will find themselves in classrooms led by harried, precariously employed adjunct faculty, who the academic administration expects to handle overfull classes by using these automated tools in lieu of actual instruction.”

Chronically underfunded schools do not need more technology; they need more teachers, guidance counselors, and learning specialists. They need humans, not robots. Internet Safety Labs found that the lowest income students also receive the lowest amount of vetting of EdTech products for safety and receive the highest percentage of educational apps with ads. Commercialization of childhood has numerous negative effects on children and has long been a fight of those concerned about protecting children and childhood. Unfortunately, as Elisha Roberts of the Colorado Education Initiative (CEI) points out, the “negative impacts of tech always impact low-income black and brown communities first and most.”

EdTech tools do not close the achievement gap. As Dr. Velislava Hillman, author of “Taming EdTech” pointed out recently in her Op-Ed, “Big tech has transformed the classroom – and parents are right to be worried” in The Guardian, one study found that children would have to spend hours on one math app over a year to achieve the equivalent of a single grade increase “with no evidence this closed attainment gaps for the least advantaged.”

Look where technology executives send their children to be educated– nature-based, low-tech schools. As drug dealers often caution, “don’t get high on your own supply.” When they want something better for their own children, wealthy parents can and will choose low- and no-tech options for their children because they can afford it. They have both the time and resources– significant forms of privilege in today’s world.

Finally, advocacy isn’t free or easy. Working parents can’t spend hours meeting with principals and teachers to ensure their children’s EdTech is used rationally or testifying at school board meetings to fight back. I fully recognize that my own ability to advocate for lower-tech options at my child’s school depends heavily on having the personal time, resources, and expertise to do that work. There is no way I could do this work and also hold down an entire second career. As Bender and Hanna write, those with

means will be able to access “personalized, bespoke services” while tech companies and AI-evangelists “disconnect the rest of us from social services.” The parts of schooling that really matter– quality time spent with real humans in the context of meaningful relationships– will be devalued and widen inequity, making life even worse for the most vulnerable in our society.

Myth #4: “EdTech is safe.”

Visit any EdTech company website and you will see statements about safety like these:

- “Our comprehensive security strategy safeguards student, family and educator data.” (PowerSchool)
- “Learn more about our longstanding privacy promises and compliance with FERPA, GDPR, and other regulations.” (SeeSaw)
- “We deeply appreciate the importance of protecting the personal information of our students and staff. We do this by maintaining the confidentiality, availability, and integrity of the personal information entrusted to us.” (MagicSchoolAI)
- “Chromebooks are secure, versatile, easy-to-manage devices designed for education.” (Google)

Truth #4: EdTech harms children.

Technology companies claim they can keep your children’s data safe and private and prevent your children from being exposed to unsafe people and content on school-issued devices.

Unfortunately, as numerous lawsuits and news stories have revealed, EdTech companies will sell your children’s data (if it isn’t stolen first) and have no incentive to prevent children from accessing horrifying and inappropriate content online. Remember, technology companies rely on user data and time on devices to generate profits. This is true not just of Meta and TikTok, but EdTech products like MagicSchoolAI, Google Classroom, and Seesaw too.

Safety is extremely important to parents and educators who understand that children lack the developmental skills and cognitive ability to navigate the internet. Most concerns around safety tend to focus on content (what children can access or view on their school devices) and quantity (how much time children spend on devices). Less understood are the threats to data privacy, but as data breaches surge, our children’s private information is a valuable commodity. Internet Safety Labs found that 96% of EdTech apps sell children’s data to third parties. The U.S. Department of Education found that a student’s educational record is worth \$250-350 on the black market. There are nearly 50 million children enrolled in American public schools. Collectively, this means our children’s data is worth roughly \$15 billion dollars, which is a market too large for hackers to ignore.

EdTech curricula and tools are internet-based. A Chromebook is really just a web browser that requires an internet connection for its tools and services to run properly. GenAI tools are built on models, such as OpenAI and Anthropic, that are trained on unsafe and inappropriate data (and whose own terms of use stipulate users must be 13 or 18 years old or older, respectively).

Finally, just as there is no such thing as a safe cigarette, there is currently no such thing as safe AI or a safe internet for children. GenAI is not a separate tool; it is embedded into the existing EdTech tools and platforms schools already use with children. In spite of the hype, AI is making all of the same issues with

EdTech much, much worse. AI tutors are AI chatbots. Referring to a school-based AI service as a “tutor” does not make the product any different from Character.ai or ChatGPT or a companion bot. The emerging evidence of harm due to use of chatbots is serious, significant, and deeply concerning.

AI chatbots should be nowhere near children, especially in the context of a learning environment. What children need to thrive are human relationships with human teachers. The degradation of skills in the name of “improving learning via technology” is a serious and significant threat to our democracy. As harm to humans using chatbots increases, we must ask why such tools are being given to children with vulnerable brains in the name of education.

Myth #5: “EdTech prepares kids for the future.”

This claim is repeated in every Big Tech marketing meeting, professional development training, and technology conference: “In order to be successful in the future, children must have technology now.”

Truth #5: Children need skills, not screens.

If it were true that children needed technology to be successful in the future, then I would be using my Oregon Trail skills at work every day. The truth is, the very same tech titans making these claims did not use their own technology in their childhoods, and they seem to have been quite successful.

Technology has changed rapidly (look at the roll out of GenAI tools across so many sectors), but what children need has not. While the jobs of the future may utilize technology, the skills that children need to use it effectively will come from learning the skills like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem solving.

I recently spoke to the head of a top engineering firm who said their new hires come from the top university engineering programs. In spite of whatever technical skills they may possess, however, she warned that these new hires are “completely unable to function as humans.” They cannot problem-solve, communicate, or interact with colleagues, and it is causing significant issues in the workplace. (It is worth noting that these new hires are likely in their early 20’s. The iPad is barely 15 years old. The true deskilling wave has yet to hit the job market, and when it does, it will be a tsunami. Whatever jobs AI will replace– most likely the ones that can be automated, though even those will require human oversight– higher skilled jobs will continue to require higher-order human skills. Excessive reliance on digital technology displaces that.)

Children need technology skills, to be clear. But do not confuse “EdTech” with “TechEd.” If curriculum is what you teach; pedagogy is how you teach it. Children should learn about technology: what is “the internet”; how does it work; what is an “algorithm”; how does AI work and how is it built, how to discern fact from fiction; what does it mean that AI is built on “data”; why is protecting your data important; and so much more.

But none of that is EdTech. EdTech is giving a child an iPad to do math games or a reading program. TechEd is teaching about technology, but not using technology to do so. Increasingly, schools of the future will be tech-intentional™ and that will include teaching TechEd skills long before screen-based tools are introduced for “learning.”

Myth #6: “We can’t fight EdTech. It’s too late.”

“The toothpaste is out of the tube”; “The horse is out of the barn”; “Technology is here to stay.” Statements like these stem from highly persuasive marketing tactics that tap into our very human fear of being left out. “If you don’t use it now, it’ll be too late,” the argument goes.

Truth #6: EdTech is not a foregone conclusion.

Any societal change starts with something seemingly insurmountable. This doesn’t have to be our future. We can change that.

We were told the same thing about smoking and gay marriage– that change is too hard or the efforts come too late or won’t matter. But today smoking is at an all time low and gay marriage is enshrined as a right. Because change happens.

We will have technology in the future. We will use it. I do not dispute that. But if we get this fight right, children will not be harmed in their exposure to it. We will build a safer internet, regulate technology companies, and protect children’s data and privacy as the default. We will force technology companies to align their business practices with the needs of children and teachers, and in doing so, may fundamentally change the way they operate. That’s okay. That’s what happened with Big Tobacco. People can still buy cigarettes, but kids aren’t smoking them in third grade classrooms.

We cannot and will not accept that just because a powerful industry with an enormous marketing budget has misled school leaders and politicians and parents and educators for years that we must accept this as our fate.

In truth– and truth is very important here– we are right to be concerned. We are right to ask questions about EdTech’s business model and data mining and woefully inadequate content moderation and ineffective quality control. We are right to want to protect all children from commercialization and exploitation and the overreach of a greedy and powerful industry that cares nothing about actual children and only about profits.

The EdTech industry is not the first (nor will it be the last) to make claims about products that are faulty at best and harmful at worst, as the children of their leaders quietly send them to low-tech and nature-based schools. We’ve seen this before. And we can envision a different ending.

Let’s go back to David and Goliath for a moment. Because remember, it is the conclusion of the story that is actually the part of this analogy that matters:

David won.

thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,

Sabrina Weiss