

**Written Testimony of Delaware Education Secretary Cynthia “Cindy” Marten
Before the Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
Subcommittee on Education & the American Family
Hearing on The Future of K-12 Education in the Age of Artificial Intelligence**

Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Blunt Rochester, and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about one of the most important questions facing education today: how we ensure that artificial intelligence serves students, educators, and families while preserving the human relationships at the heart of teaching and learning.

I come to this conversation with more than thirty years of experience in education. I have served as a teacher, principal, and superintendent. I had the privilege of serving as Deputy Secretary of Education for the United States Department of Education. Today, I proudly serve as Delaware’s Secretary of Education where our focus is to start with students and build for impact.

Across every one of those roles, I have witnessed moments when new technologies changed what was possible in schools. But I have also learned that successful innovation is never really about the technology itself. It is about whether the technology helps us better serve students.

That is the lens through which the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) approaches artificial intelligence. Our AI work directly supports a strategic goal in Delaware’s 2025-2028 Strategic Plan that by June 2028, at least 75 percent of districts and charter schools will use AI tools to support educators and students while maintaining full compliance with governance, data security, privacy, and human-in-the-loop requirements.

To be clear, we do not see AI as an end in itself. We see it as a tool that must advance our mission: preparing every learner for success in college, career, and life. That mission has not changed. Our responsibility is to ensure that the tools students and educators use support that mission while protecting the values that define public education.

Today, AI is already present in classrooms across America. Students are using it to research topics, summarize information, generate ideas, and receive feedback. Educators are using it to draft lesson materials, differentiate instruction, organize information, and reduce administrative workload. Families are hearing about it at their kitchen tables and wondering what it means for their children.

The question before us is no longer whether AI will impact education. The question is whether education systems will provide the guidance, safeguards, and leadership necessary to ensure that AI improves learning rather than undermining it.

In Delaware, the agency decided early that waiting was not a strategy. Under Governor Matt Meyer’s leadership, we are approaching this moment proactively and with urgency by investing in AI literacy and building what we believe is one of the nation’s first AI assurance efforts focused on K-12 education, so schools can adopt these tools responsibly and with public trust.

A few years ago, DDOE worked with then Delaware State Senator and current U.S. Rep. Sarah McBride on the Digital Citizenship Education Act, 14 Del. C. § 4146 (2022), which connected to the agency’s work on generative AI in Delaware education. In 2024, Delaware released statewide guidance to support the safe, responsible, ethical, equitable, and effective use of generative artificial intelligence in education.¹ The guidance was developed through extensive collaboration among educators, technology leaders, policymakers, and practitioners and is organized around four key priority areas:

- Protecting student data.
- Ensuring ethical AI use.
- Promoting equity.
- Enhancing teaching and learning.

These priorities are reflected across Delaware’s guidance documents for district and charter school implementation, classroom integration, professional learning, internet safety policies, acceptable use policies, and classroom management practices. The guidance emphasizes that AI adoption must be grounded in educational goals, human oversight, transparency, privacy protections, and responsible instructional practice.

What has been particularly encouraging is that the broader research community is increasingly arriving at many of the same conclusions.² Recent studies and frameworks consistently emphasize that AI literacy must extend beyond technical proficiency and include critical thinking, ethical reasoning, responsible decision-making, and human agency. Researchers are calling for educator professional learning, thoughtful governance, and sustained attention to equity as foundational requirements for successful AI implementation.

At the same time, emerging research has highlighted concerns about overreliance on AI, diminished critical thinking, misinformation, and the need for students to verify and evaluate AI-generated content rather than accept it uncritically.³

We are hearing many of these same concerns directly from students. In conversations we have intentionally held with Delaware students about AI, one student wisely shared that AI should be viewed as “a collaborator and tool, not something to do all the work for us.” Another emphasized the importance of exercising critical thinking and problem-solving when using AI.

¹ Delaware Department of Education, *Generative Artificial Intelligence in Education Guidance* (Dover, DE: Delaware Department of Education, 2024), <https://education.delaware.gov/educators/academic-support/standards-and-instruction/digital-de/instructional-resources/ai-in-delaware-education/generative-ai/>.

² UNESCO, *Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research* (2023); K. Mills et al., *AI Literacy: A Framework to Understand, Evaluate, and Use Emerging Technology* (Digital Promise, 2024); and M. Chiu et al., “Integrating AI Literacy into Teacher Education: A Critical Perspective,” *Discover Education* (2025).

³ Delaware Department of Education, *Generative Artificial Intelligence in Education Guidance* (2024); K. Mills et al., *AI Literacy: A Framework to Understand, Evaluate, and Use Emerging Technology* (Washington, DC: Digital Promise, June 2024); and Y. Zhang et al., “Generative AI and Student Critical Thinking: Opportunities and Risks,” *Educational Technology Research and Development* (2025).

Others spoke about misinformation, warning that students need to verify information and avoid relying on outputs that may be inaccurate or fabricated. Many raised concerns about data privacy and the importance of protecting student information.

What strikes me most about these conversations is that students are not asking adults to slow innovation. They are asking adults to lead responsibly. They are asking us to teach them how to think critically in a world where information is increasingly generated, curated, and influenced by artificial intelligence. Those student perspectives have significantly influenced Delaware's work.

Significantly, our guidance does not treat AI literacy as simply learning how to use a tool. AI literacy is about helping students understand how these systems work, what their limitations are, how bias can appear in outputs, how information should be verified, and how human judgment remains essential. This approach reflects a growing national and international consensus that AI literacy should become a core component of digital citizenship and future readiness.

Our guidance also recognizes another reality facing schools. Individual districts, charters, and educators should not have to navigate this rapidly evolving landscape alone.

Building a Model for Responsible AI Governance: Delaware's AI Assurance Lab

As Delaware moved from guidance development to implementation, we recognized an important challenge. School districts and charter schools were being asked to make increasingly complex decisions about artificial intelligence tools, often with limited information and limited capacity to independently evaluate vendor claims.⁴ Questions about privacy, security, instructional quality, bias, accessibility, and educational effectiveness were becoming more common, yet many districts and charters were confronting those questions alone.

To better understand the landscape, Delaware conducted a statewide AI Tool Scan. The results revealed that AI adoption is already occurring across Delaware schools, but primarily in educator-facing applications focused on productivity, planning, and operational support. Approximately seventy percent of reported use cases involved adult-facing implementation rather than direct student use.

Our scan also surfaced a governance issue that states across the country are facing. In some cases, school systems do not yet have sufficient visibility into whether and how student data is processed by AI-enabled tools. In addition, districts and charter schools often reported using products in ways that differed from vendor-described use cases. These findings reinforced the need for a more systematic and transparent approach to AI evaluation.

In response, Delaware launched the AI Assurance Lab, what we believe is a first-of-its-kind statewide initiative designed to support the safe, responsible, and ethical use of AI in schools.

⁴ State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA), *Universal Procurement Guidance for Artificial Intelligence in Education* (2024); Consortium for School Networking (CoSN), *Operational AI in Education: Readiness, Realities, and the Road Ahead—A CoSN 2025 Member Survey* (Washington, DC: CoSN, 2025); and UNESCO, *Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research* (2023).

The Lab is helping Delaware understand how AI tools are being used across local education agencies, establish practical evaluation processes, identify high-value educational use cases, and provide clearer guidance to support local decision-making.

Importantly, the Assurance Lab is not intended to replace local authority. It is not a compliance exercise. It is designed to create transparency, shared learning, and stronger decision-making capacity across the education system.

The Assurance Lab is a statewide review and public reporting function designed to provide every district and charter school with access to the same evidence base regarding AI tools used in education. Rather than requiring each district and charter school to independently investigate products, the Lab creates a shared process for reviewing tools, validating claims, identifying risks, and communicating findings.

What makes the Lab unique is its combination of product review and performance review. The product review examines vendor documentation related to privacy, security, accessibility, equity, AI system design, and intended use. The performance review evaluates how tools actually behave in authentic educational scenarios. Trained reviewers, including educators, administrators, and staff from the Delaware Departments of Education and Technology and Information, run structured prompts through the system and assess outputs using a common rubric.

Importantly, the review process pairs vendor documentation with independent testing in realistic educational scenarios. Reviewers test tools using realistic classroom situations, incomplete-information scenarios, and adversarial prompts designed to probe safety guardrails and system limitations. Every output is documented. Every score requires written evidence. Findings are reviewed before publication and vendors have an opportunity to respond, clarify, and provide additional evidence before findings are finalized. The evaluation framework itself reflects both national best practices and local educational priorities.

The rubric is aligned to Delaware's four AI priorities and also incorporates elements from nationally recognized frameworks including the National Institute of Standards and Technology AI Risk Management Framework, the State Educational Technology Directors Association guidance, Stanford University's HELM evaluation framework, MLCommons' AILuminate benchmarks, and child-focused safety benchmarks.

In many ways, the Assurance Lab represents Delaware's answer to a challenge facing education systems nationwide. Artificial intelligence is evolving rapidly. Schools need more than policies. They need practical mechanisms for evaluating tools, sharing evidence, building trust, and making informed decisions.

The goal of the AI Assurance Lab is not to slow innovation. It is to ensure that innovation is worthy of the trust that students, families, and educators place in our schools.

The Future of AI: Keep Students at the Center

As we continue this journey, we know what matters is improving student outcomes, supporting educators and families, and maintaining safeguards. We know that technology adoption alone is not success. Success is whether students learn more, whether educators are better supported, and whether families trust the systems we build.

As policymakers consider the future of AI in education, I believe three priorities deserve continued attention.

First, AI literacy must become a shared responsibility among schools, families, policymakers, and communities.

Second, educators need ongoing professional learning and support. Research increasingly shows that successful implementation depends on educator understanding and confidence, yet many teachers nationally report receiving little formal guidance on AI use. Delaware's approach is designed to close that gap through statewide guidance, professional learning, and practical implementation supports.

Third, governance matters. Responsible innovation requires transparent processes, clear expectations, strong privacy protections, and ongoing evaluation. Public trust is not automatic. It must be earned through deliberate action.

I would like to close where I began...with students.

One Delaware student told us that educators should use AI to remove "busy work" so they can spend more time helping students learn. Another reminded us that teachers should not surrender their expertise to technology and that human judgment remains essential. And another offered perhaps the most important observation of all:

"By using AI thoughtfully and ethically, educators can create more time for what matters most, which is supporting students' growth, confidence, and success."

For me, that captures the opportunity before us. The future of education is not about artificial intelligence replacing human intelligence. It is about ensuring that technology strengthens the relationships, judgment, creativity, and critical thinking that define meaningful learning.

If we keep students at the center of this work, if we lead with strong guardrails and shared responsibility, and if we remain focused on educational outcomes rather than technological novelty, I believe AI can become a powerful tool for expanding opportunity while preserving what matters most about education.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering your questions.