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LD 643

Testimony in support of LD643 “Resolve, to Study the Effects of Artificial Intelligence, Cellular Telephones and Social Media on Public Education”

1) My name is Matt Pines. I'm a parent of a cellphone-free 8th grader, director of a device-free summer camp for teens for over 25 years, a PhD candidate at Muskie, co-author of a MEPRI report on social media's impact on adolescent mental health, and advisor to Sapien Labs, a non-profit global mind health research group. I'm also a member of local parent groups committed to reclaiming schools and communities for childhood and education such as Turn the Tide Coalition.

2) I worry we are following AI down a trail blazed by SM. We now know that Social Media was designed in such a way that it was dangerous for kids and adolescents to use, but was pushed to them anyways, and here we are picking up the pieces 15 years on. Why do I think we are following the same path again? Because all the same companies that were involved in the “move fast and break things” phase of social media development are involved now in AI rollout. The same developers, the same financial backers, and the same CEO's that created Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter are behind the major AI companies. But there is no need to rush down the same path in pursuit of AI. We can afford to sit back, take a conservative approach, and wait and see. This technology is incredibly new, and as such, volatile. If it is going to be as incredible and powerful as the hype suggests, it'll be there. We don't need to worry about missing the boat. But if it's destined to be the next Social Media, or Virtual Reality, we would be better off spending our time and money elsewhere.

3) Because at one point, Social Media was being propped up as an educational tool. “It's a way to increase engagement!”. Soon after, it was VR (Virtual Reality). “It's a way to increase engagement!”. Engagement is not learning. We are hearing similar claims now being made about AI in the classroom. Let's not fall for that claim yet again.

4) I'm also deeply troubled by the fact that AI is an absolute quagmire of moral, ethical, and environmental concerns. AI models are implicated in the largest theft of copywrite materials ever; have been instrumental in a myriad of harmful behaviors among users, everything from suicide to the creation of deepfake revenge porn; and are an environmental nightmare of massive electricity and fresh water usage. On top of that is the rapacious nature of the VC and tech companies funding the development of these tools. No one should be under any illusion that AI companies have any concerns whatsoever about user safety if it stands in the way of profitability.

5) You will likely hear from lobbyists that there are no issues with AI in the classroom, that it is the bright and shiny future, that it is an inevitability, and that it's not worth looking into potential downsides because of that inevitability. We've heard this tune before, maybe most poignantly with the development of some incredible chemistry from the 40's and 50's, the development of chemicals we now call PFAS. These chemicals were developed, then marketed as a solution that then went looking for problems. We put them in everything, because their manufacturers and the scientists who worked for them told us it was totally safe to put them in everything. They knew for decades how harmful these products were, but kept pushing them to market for another couple of decades. Replace the initials PFAS with AI, and we are seeing the same story play out again. A “solution” to every problem. Put it in your phone, your car, your kitchen, and your kids classroom. Its safe. Trust us.

6) You are also likely to hear testimony against this bill today, especially around social media, on the grounds that it violates a student's 1st amendment rights. Students' right to free speech was established in the 1969 supreme court case Tinker vs Des Moines. The smartphone and social media were developed some 4 decades later. It is ridiculous to suggest that somehow cellphone use, or social media access, in school is inexorably linked to student speech. Further, student speech is limited when

it interferes with education, we can and do limit it. Cellphones and social media use definitively impacts student achievement, there is no issue with limiting it on 1st amendment grounds

7) This bill, and the workgroup it establishes, is overdue. We're hearing about cellphones a lot today, and social media, and now AI. We need a comprehensive overview of the expanded role of EdTech, in every aspect of our students lives. As EdTech has expanded in our classrooms over the last 25 years, student achievement has fallen. Teacher retention has fallen. Where is the promised land? Where is the personalized, perfected education for every student, the teachers freed from tedium of paperwork? Where is the increased achievement across the board? The reality has yet to match the hype. You need to pause any further investment in these tools until the outcomes can be guaranteed.

Invest in people, not algorithms.