COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
ANNOUNCES A PUBLIC HEARING
on
Technology in Schools
on
Friday, October 9, 2026, 10:00 a.m.

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson. I am testifying in my individual capacity as Ward 5 member of the State Board of Education, and I am not representing the views of the Board as a whole.

I can share that the State Board's College, Career, and Life Readiness committee is currently considering a resolution on educational technology. We have heard testimony from several public witnesses, hosted an expert roundtable (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KlnVLRLG3mc),[1] and two board members were among the sponsors of an East of the River engagement session on technology last month. Summary notes and, in some cases, recordings of this work are available to the council to inform your consideration of the topic. And we will be sure to share with you any resolution or collective statement passed by the board.

As a representative of Ward 5, I can report that I have been contacted by approximately a dozen Ward 5 families who support the proposals of "Schools Beyond Screens DC" outlined in the blog post: "Getting to a Better Balance v2." I expect you will hear testimony from many members of that group today. I will note that this includes charter school parents, though the blog is directed to DCPS policy. I have also been contacted about this issue by one LEA leader with a Ward 5 campus who supports "balanced integration" of technology that complements hands-on learning and traditional activities without replacing them.

Both parents and the school leader refer to balance, and I do think that is the operative word for this discussion. It should not be, and I don't think it has been for most a discussion of tech or no tech. Rather, the discussion is about when to use ed tech, how much to use it, and what or which tech to use. I will say a few words about and highlight something that I think is worth elevating for each.

For when: there appears to be broad agreement that screen use should be most limited for younger students and that technology use becomes more important and educationally appropriate for older students. There may be some disagreement about the transition period in the middle and the degree of restriction for older students, but consensus that the students need to begin developing computer skills and digital literacy, and to have greater research access as they prepare for college and careers. Critically, I think this necessitates continued commitment to

[1] Participants included David Bickham, Research Director, Digital Wellness Lab, Dominic Caguioa, Director of Educational Technology and Innovation, Los Angeles Unified School District, Denise Marshall, CEO, Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Eleni McCabe, Co-Principal, DC Bilingual Public Charter School, and Lucas Torre, Director, Integrated Learning, District of Columbia Public Schools.

pursuing digital equity to ensure access to devices and internet especially for older students, and assistive technology for students who need it at any age. As I have for years, I continue to support the advocacy of Digital Equity in DC Education to identify and eliminate inequitable access.

For how much: I am persuaded by David Bickham of the Digital Wellness Lab that "not all screen time is the same" and that the context, including the quality of the content, platform, design, and user characteristics contribute to the educational value of the time spent in comparison to alternative uses of that time. This means that strict time limits may be less important than these other considerations, but it also indicates that screen use must meet a standard of educational value to be worth any time at all.

For what: if the quality, design, platform, and how students interact with technology determines its educational value, then LEA and school leaders and educators must be intentional about what technology they purchase and use. Particularly in the case of LEA-wide contracts, the stakes for such choices are high and I think help is warranted. I believe everyone would say that they want to use evidence-based technology and curricula, but the evidence isn't always clear or free of bias or easy to understand. Anne Karabell, who has testified before the State Board and will testify here today, offers specific suggestions to help mitigate these challenges and better equip decisionmakers to make well-informed, evidence-based choices and I want to draw your attention to those suggestions.

Beyond these questions, there are many areas of common ground including the need to protect student privacy and data, the need for transparency about tech use in schools for parents, and the need to ensure access to assistive technology for students with special needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.

Robert Henderson

Ward 5 Member, DC State Board of Education