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Comments to the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development

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Subject: H.650

I. Introduction
Good morning, members of the Committee. My name is Patricia Aigner, and I serve as a Technology Director at the RCPS in Vermont. I am also a Vermont parent of a child who has attended school here. This is my 31st year in education. In that time, I have worked as a middle school teacher, K-5 tech coach, and technology director. I am licensed in Vermont as a teacher, principal, and superintendent.
I appreciate the opportunity to discuss H.650. I want to thank you for considering how we can best protect students from a consumer safety perspective. It is essential work, and I appreciate the facts that all of the experts have brought to bear on this topic.
I want to share a bit about our software implementation process, which is very similar to the information Jeff Wallace shared with you. It is nice to see consistency across school systems, and it is not uncommon for technology directors to adopt the same practices as a result of our collaborative work on student data privacy through the AOE, COSN, and Vita-Learn, our ISTE/ASCD affiliate.

II. How do we select software?
In our districts, the vetting process starts with the experts closest to the students: our teachers, department heads, and curriculum specialists. We choose software based on specific academic goals. In our schools, decisions are made by professional, licensed staff based on content expertise.

III. The Intake Process: Who and How
I want to take you through a typical software implementation cycle. We have established clear entry points for any new technology request:

Who Initiates Requests?
   a. **Teachers** recommend classroom-specific software.
   b. **Curriculum Specialists** focusing on Math, ELA, or Science.
   c. **Departments** such as World Language or Technology.

     d. **CTE teachers or Directors** requesting technical reviews for industry tools.

     e. **School Administrators** or Principals.

     f. **District Leadership**, including Assistant Superintendents or Special Education Directors.

How the Process Starts:

     a. Staff can email the Tech Director directly.

     b. Submit a helpdesk ticket regarding the process.

     c. We ask them to complete a formal request form to document the age of students, the purpose of the software, and much more.

     d. Once the request is made, we connect with our principals and assistant superintendent so that they can guide the process from an educational perspective, determine if there is a need for the software, if the software is critical and not redundant, and decide if we should pursue a data privacy agreement. Sometimes the agreements exist for Vermont, and sometimes they don't. If they do, we leverage the work completed by other school systems by adding their agreement to our portal.

     e. Our process is very much like the process Jeff Wallis explained on 2/6/2026, and it covers many of the areas found in the Bill.

IV.   There is a Collaborative Flowchart for Checks and Balances

Once a request is made, it follows a specific, multi-layered flowchart to ensure curricular and environmental fit, data privacy, account management, and budgetary and funding considerations. We purchase very little new software as a district. If a software solution is not a good fit, we actively consider replacing it, but in general, very little new software is purchased at the district level. In fact, we have spent the post-COVID era weeding out vast amounts of free, duplicative software offered by vendors. After all, nothing is truly free. That is why we have a vetting process.

Request Source	Collaborative Workflow
Teacher Level	Teacher - Department—Principal- Assistant Superintendent - Technology Department Review and DPA Creation
Department Level	Department—Principal-Assistant Superintendent - Technology Department Review and DPA Creation

Request Source	Collaborative Workflow
Curriculum Level	Content Specialist/Coach - Content Committee -- Assistant Superintendent - Technology Department Review and DPA Creation
Principal Level	Principal - Assistant Superintendent - Technology Department Review and DPA Creation
District Leadership	Assistant Superintendent - Technology Department Review and DPA Creation

V. Most School Safety Nets Are Robust

We utilize layers to our safety net:

a. **Legal Protections:** We leverage the Student Data Privacy Consortium (SDPC), which Jeff Wallis shared on 2/6/2026, to sign National Data Privacy Agreements (NDPAs) that were edited for Vermont. This includes district ownership of data, the right to audit vendors, and much more. These are reviewed and renewed regularly with beginning and end dates.

b. **Active Monitoring:** School districts around Vermont use tools like GoGuardian Teacher and Hapara for instructional management to provide teachers with data on how technology is being used, allowing them to manage screen time in real-time. Teachers can see if students are on task or in the wrong place and correct without singling students out. They can also consider engagement data and time spent online across these software products and other software tools.

c. **Single Sign On:** School districts use products like Clever and ClassLink for a software launchpad and single sign-on. Some products collect engagement, usage, and other data.

d. **Filter:** Go Guardian and Securely are products that allow schools to filter on the go, in addition to firewalls on-premises. We do face challenges when students try to circumvent filters to access games and other blocked content. And sometimes blocking impacts educationally viable information.

e. **Common Standardized Practices**: As a district, if a teacher requests free software that will not sign a DPA through the Student Data Privacy Consortium, we block the software. We block all games and a wide variety of websites. We block websites that display advertising, even those that comply with the COPPA Safe Harbor Services. YouTube is blocked for student searches on our Google

education domain; teachers must create links to resources and review them before sharing them.

VI. School Tech
   a. We have a wide variety of adopted software suited to different purposes. As children get older, the software becomes more specialized. We may purchase music composition software, science software (biology, chemistry), statistics software, design and CAD software, world language software, and much more as we move from middle to high school. Some of the software we purchase includes library software, SIS, special education software, assessment software, Google Education Domain, reading and writing support software, parent engagement software, video design software, robotics software, school lunch software, and the content area software mentioned earlier. There are some broadly adopted software programs that curriculum specialists review, then content committees, and then the assistant superintendent, which are gamified and geared toward learning and practice in math or literacy. If gamified learning software is not approved with a data privacy agreement, and we see it, we block it. Students tend not to ask for time in gamified content software. They are doing additional practice in an area where they may already be struggling, so even if it is gamified, they aren't consistently engaged because they still have to do math or literacy work. Just because something is gamified doesn't mean they want to use the software.
   b. It is worth mentioning that students will ask about working with robots, laser cutting, and 3D printing. Many students like hands-on activities like this, as well as hands-on engineering and STEAM activities.

VII. So, what does technology look like in schools?
   a. In our schools, we believe in a developmentally appropriate philosophy: prioritizing human connection and scaling tech usage for maturity as students prepare for college and careers.
   b. As a parent and educator, I personally don't believe that kindergarten students should use computers regularly. The work of kindergarten is to understand what it means to be a student and a citizen of a school. How to be a good friend and classmate. And what it means to be an active learner. Computers are sometimes used in kindergarten, but it is not required, except on occasion for assessments such as phonological awareness or number sense, which are guided 1-on-1 with a teacher. In fact, I expressed to K2 principals that I do not support technology in

kindergarten, and I think many educators sighed with relief. As you can imagine, if students can't read their letters and numbers, they can't log in.

    c. Students in 9-12 have some heavy lifting to do to prepare for the workforce or college. If you look at the [Future of Jobs Report 2025 by the World Economic Forum,](#) you will see how technology is trending. For example, teaching about AI will be essential, as the workforce expects fluent users. Today's college students take courses online and in person, with heavy reliance on technology in instruction and assessment. CTE and other employment tracks require the use of Microsoft Suite, specialized medical software, engineering software, auto repair software, you name it. If you look at how agriculture has changed in Vermont, you will see how even businesses like syrup production are beginning to rely on data analytics, AI, and smart monitoring systems, leak detection and alerting, and much more.

VIII.   What I hope you will consider as you work toward making educational technology consumer safe:

    a. State and national assessments partially drive the need for technology understanding and usage. Students need to be able to navigate the software, use a mouse, access tools, type, and more by third grade so that they can take the VTCAP, later on the NAEP, or perhaps WIDA. This is how you measure if our school is providing a good or bad education. If students cannot read online, type, navigate, or perform other basic functions, they will not be able to complete the required tests. I'd be happy to go back to paper-and-pencil testing in K-4, but I don't know if vendors are offering Scantron on a national test. National testing has changed, and it has changed our school reality.

    b. Technology is a global reality. If you look at the ISTE standards for students, teachers, and leaders ([https://iste.org/standards/students),](https://iste.org/standards/students) you can better understand the work we need to do in K-12 and why technology is essential for our children and young adults. The student standards cover digital citizenship, being an empowered learner, a knowledge constructor, an innovative designer, a computational thinker, a creative communicator, and a global collaborator. That is the best kind of work enabled by technology.

    c. I am wondering if centralization would be tricky for schools with the volume of software mentioned by Jeff and a deadline of June 30, 2027. An ongoing software implementation could be complex for some areas. Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs require highly specialized software. For example, in Health Sciences, students might rely on industry-standard software for the Licensed Nurse Assistant (LNA) role. If the state acts as a sole gatekeeper, these

niche tools could be trapped in a state-level bottleneck for months. This would effectively freeze learning and prevent students from meeting the certification or graduation requirements necessary to enter the workforce. It was suggested that the vendor would pay for it. And I do not think these companies would pay for researchers to vet their tools for 9-12 students, or be motivated to pay the fees. If that is the case, then who would do the work in this model? Would these tools be exempt?

IX. Could this type of vetting process cause problems for K-12?
   a. I wonder if it will cause a bottleneck and slow decision-making and access. The AOE and other state agencies do not have the capacity to be nimble and responsive to schools and the needs of K-12 and CTE. We use hundreds of products. Would we need to stop using them? What would happen in that instance? Textbooks are not as readily available as they were 20 years ago, and sometimes a teacher needs something quickly. We can do this through the SDPC because they have lawyers and staffing.
   b. It may cause issues with the educational purpose and review process. The AOE and other state agencies lack the content-area expertise to select software for such diverse needs. We could end up with the wrong software because the vetting and selection process will not align with the educational needs. The methods we use in school districts support reasonable decision-making authority and educator initiative, as well as departmental and cross-functional or cross-grade-level collaboration. We can offer more value to students and the classroom teacher by working with schools rather than relying solely on state-level vetting, streamlining internal processes, engaging our content experts, implementing internal review processes, and establishing post-implementation software review processes and feedback loops on effectiveness, engagement, and related metrics.

X. What if we could change how schools review software using a district-based Standardized Educational Software Lifecycle?
   a. To streamline digital tool management, the Agency of Education (AOE) would develop comprehensive guidelines covering the entire software lifecycle. This initiative will be spearheaded by a multi-district committee and integrated into the school consolidation process to ensure statewide consistency. The Agency of Education (AOE) and schools could develop comprehensive guidelines covering vetting, procurement, and recurring audits. This model empowers local content experts, ensures legal protection through existing alliances like TEC and SDPC, and maintains the nimbleness required for Vermont students to thrive.

     b. Key Components:

        i. **Pre-Acquisition Vetting:** Formalize criteria for privacy, security compliance, and pedagogical value. Should we update the VT State Data Privacy Agreement via SDPC to align with consumer privacy concerns? That would be logical, leverageable, and a win for all.

        ii. **Procurement & Implementation:** Establish standard protocols for purchase and onboarding new software.

        iii. **Post-Implementation Review:** Define a recurring process for auditing usage, costs, and educational impact to determine renewals or retirements.

XI.   Addressing Digital Wellness

     a. Because we view parents as partners, we could consider how we engage families as part of this broader initiative in conjunction with the AOE:

        i. **Transparency Portal**: Using the SDPC Resource Registry to show every approved app and its curricular purpose. Post it on school websites or the AOE website.

        ii. **Parental Controls:** Some software allows parental controls and monitoring of CBs outside school hours. That might be something we consider exploring on a statewide basis. In talking with other directors, some districts are already implementing this.

        iii. **Reporting:** Working towards standards and monitoring usage of technology for students using some of the products we have, so that we can ensure that students are not experiencing digital or screen fatigue in grade bands. This could be part of AOE's guidelines on screentime and students in K-12. Some of the data we could work towards in schools include teacher engagement tracking (student screen fatigue), post-implementation reviews of usage metrics showing how long students in specific grade bands use tools, efficiency audits to identify subpar software that is underutilized or ineffective, and the long-term impact of software on educational value (student growth).

        iv. **Digital Wellness Webinar Series:** It would be amazing if the state supported a district-based or regional series to help parents understand and manage technology use. This series would help parents mirror the boundaries we try to set in school, such as grade-appropriate screen time, age-based software requirements (some parents allow social media use for young children), and working with the school district as a partner in the

child's overall well-being, as part of our Portrait of a Graduate and Strategic Plan Implementation.

XII.   What I would like to leave you with:

I appreciate the updates to H.650, the AOE's role, school engagement, and study criteria. Schools want to be nimble, innovative, and safe. Let's leverage the robust systems we already have to improve student safety, such as the SDPC, without freezing innovation in Vermont classrooms. We could add to this conversation by working collaboratively with parents and the AOE on Student Health and Wellness to address concerns about digital fatigue and monitoring, and to develop guidelines for the Standardized Education Software Lifecycle for schools, harnessing schools' expertise and the state's guidance as partners in regulation.