Ohio Senate Education Committee

Public Hearing – S.B.

Jason Mayland – Merlyn Mind

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Good morning, Chair Brenner, Vice-Chair Blessing, and Ranking Member Ingram. Please allow me to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to testify today. The use of artificial intelligence in education is a worthy question for every citizen.

My name is Jason Mayland and I currently serve as Vice President for International Business Development at Merlyn Mind, Inc. My career in education and education technology has spanned more than 20 years and began as a solider in Bosnia-Herzegovina, teaching SAT and TOEFL prep to Bosnian students. I then spent the majority of my career in the community college sector as an institutional researcher, vice president, CIO, and CTO.

My work at Merlyn Mind has allowed me to discuss with both educators and policymakers throughout the world, the risks and rewards of associated with the deployment of artificial intelligence in schools. These discussions are often both fraught and thoughtful. They lie at the intersection of data privacy, personalized learning, student achievement, pedagogy, and academic integrity; however, these discussions rarely touch upon the most important aspect of the educational experience – the teacher.

Let me state unequivocally that technology cannot replace teachers. However, thoughtfully deployed technology can assist teachers in what is an increasing complex and inherently social activity, learning. Teachers are asked to individually curate each students' academic experience, within the context of a larger group. Whether 30 kindergartners or six classes of 30 eighth graders, the work of a teacher is an increasingly complex task made even more difficult by a seemingly endless array of technology solutions. While each of these solutions are often beneficial and necessary, they are often poorly integrated, creating technostress, increasing cognitive load, and ultimately wasting precious instructional time. Academic research tells us that a teacher loses 90 hours of each year or approximately 11 days, simply "fighting" with technology. This is doubly problematic since over 90% of a teacher's learning resources reside in their browser. These frustrations impact both teacher retention and student engagement.

This problem can be solved in part through voice-enablement. Voice-enablement allows both technophobes and technophiles the opportunity to get the most of their existing technology by simply speaking to it.

Currently over 10,000 teachers worldwide use Merlyn Mind's voice-enablement to safely and securely orchestrate their classrooms. Through the power of their voice, they drive presentations, share resources, control media, take notes, set timers, provide simultaneous translation, and hundreds of other functions to simplify their workflows and save time. Moreover, this affords them the ability to be with their students in the center of the room, maintaining attention and driving engagement.

The same technology has also provided the ability to model the responsible use of artificial intelligence through age-appropriate and customizable Socratic chat. Teachers, or students with teacher supervision, can ask questions and receive curated answers. This teaches prompt engineering which is really nothing more than crafting a good research question. The same technology can drive the emerging correlation between oracy and literacy. By asking questions verbally and seeing both the question and the answer on screen, students see the words, hear the response, and improve their literacy skills.

These tools can also be used by teachers outside the classroom to create lesson plans, find resources, and develop evaluation rubrics all of which can be aligned with either district or state standards.

Merlyn Mind is currently engaged in scaled, state-supported pilot projects in both Pennsylvania and South Carolina with additional projects pending. This is in addition to hundreds of schools in the United States and its territories, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Greece, Estonia, the UAE, and India who are working with this technology to save teachers time, drive engagement, and improve student achievement. We ask the state to explore ways it can invest in the quality of time students and teachers spend in the classroom. Merlyn Mind would love to discuss opportunities for the State of Ohio to advance these dynamic learning tools like other states are currently doing. I am happy to address any questions regarding these state projects, and look forward to working with you as we manage AI technology in the classroom.

Thank you for your time and attention today. I welcome your questions.