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September 20, 2023

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Ranking Member
Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Via email: HELPGOP_AIComments@help.senate.gov

Re: Public Comments on Exploring Congress' Framework for the Future of AI: The Oversight and Legislative Role of Congress Over the Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Health, Education, and Labor

Dear Senator Cassidy:

Thank you for your leadership in issuing a Request for Information (RFI) regarding the future of artificial intelligence (AI). We appreciate your and your staff's efforts to develop a white paper on AI and encourage a national policy discussion on the use of AI in the areas under the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee's jurisdiction. Specifically, we are grateful for your solicitation of public input and your recognition of AI's "potential benefits and risks to society." We are supportive of your efforts to take a proactive approach to how AI is being utilized, particularly in education and workforce development. We thank you in advance for your consideration of our views and stand ready to be a resource to you and your staff as you seek to "better understand the effects of AI and how potential legislation and regulation could impact the create and utilization of this technology."

About NAF

NAF is a national nonprofit organization that brings together education, business, and community leaders to ensure high school students are college, career, and future ready. For over 40 years, NAF has partnered with high schools in historically under-resourced communities to enhance school systems by implementing NAF academies – small, focused learning communities within traditional public high schools themed around growing industries, including engineering, finance, health sciences, information technology, and hospitality and tourism. With a rigorous program of study and a progressive continuum of work-based learning activities designed to build career awareness, exploration, and preparation, students gain the skills and knowledge needed to make informed choices and be successful in their future careers. NAF promotes open enrollment in our career academies, allowing students of all backgrounds and capabilities to participate and helping to address systemic, educational, and professional barriers faced by marginalized populations.

Work-based learning is the continuum of activities – both in classroom learning and the actual workplace setting – that leads students to gain real world experience. NAF knows that students benefit most when they participate in the full continuum of work-based learning experiences. This begins with career awareness activities such as worksite tours, progresses to career exploration activities such as job shadows, and culminates in career preparation activities such as mentored industry projects and paid internships. These opportunities, either virtually or in-person, enable students to identify career interests and aptitudes, understand education and training they need to have those aspirations, develop industry-specific skills, and build their professional network beyond their immediate communities as 80% of jobs are filled through personal connections.

Further, longitudinal data illustrates that engaging students in work-based learning programs is an effective way to increase the likelihood of high school graduation. Students in NAF academies are more likely to graduate on-time than their peers who are not involved with career academies -- especially those whose academic performance put them at risk of not graduating on time. Students who graduated from a career academy amassed 11% more total earnings each year over the eight years following high school than those who did not attend a career academy. Youth who drop out of high school can expect to earn \$10,000 less annually compared to high school graduates. Work-based learning has proven economic benefits for Black and Hispanic/Latinx students and young people from families with low income. Black and Hispanic/Latinx students attending NAF academies also are shown to have higher high school graduation rates.

AI in the Classroom

As your white paper notes, “Students must be taught to use AI to strengthen, rather than replace their critical thinking skills.” We wholeheartedly agree; AI should strengthen teachers and teaching and serve as a tool to challenge students’ thinking and learning, not replace them. From our own experience, we know that in the classroom, NAF’s educators and students are eager to learn how to embrace and benefit from the opportunities AI provides, while at the same time are appropriately and understandably cautious about integrating it into their classrooms.

Our educators understand the importance AI will play in many career pathways in the future and that students, early on, must begin learning about the potential benefits and challenges AI provides to the workforce. However, this is a rapidly developing technology and educators need guidance in how to understand it themselves while also helping their students develop their own abilities to integrate AI in ways that strengthen their core skills for the future.

What should the federal role be in supporting AI education?

We encourage you and your colleagues in Congress to ensure that adequate professional development opportunities and expert-backed resources (such as [KnoPro](#),¹ powered by NAF) are provided to teachers as they learn how to embrace this technology ethically into their classrooms and prepare students for future success.

¹ KnoPro is a no-cost, student- and educator-designed platform for high school students who want to develop in-demand skills. KnoPro connects students and teachers with authentic industry challenges and professional mentors that help students build skills and develop their career aspirations. Past and upcoming industry challenges have focused on AI topics. Unlike similar products that tend to focus on college students using text-heavy interfaces or charge schools or students for access, our platform was built specifically for (and with) high school students and teachers, with engaging videos, fun activities, essential resources, and opportunities to earn monetary and non-monetary rewards and recognition. KnoPro’s vision is to contribute to a world where all high school students, regardless of their resources, have access to work-based-learning opportunities that will help them confidently navigate a skills-driven labor market, and translate their interests and talents into postsecondary success and lifelong community impact.

The NAF network of students, educators, parents, and alumni know that AI literacy will be an essential skill needed for nearly every career pathway of the future and that being prepared for this eventual reality in the American workforce means embracing AI technology. However, embracing this extremely transformative tool will take guidance from policymakers at all levels to ensure adequate opportunities for engagement, training, and practice can be provided to educators and students regardless of their background and school resources.

Summary

Again, we thank you for your leadership and your staff's excellent work to develop a white paper that is catalyzing important policy discussions regarding the role of AI in our society and the role of the federal government vis-à-vis AI. We join you in hoping that AI can be utilized to strengthen our students' skills and thinking as they head into careers and workplaces that will be leveraging this technology in – and of – the future.

NAF appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on this topic, which is important for our students, educators, and nation. Please contact Jennifer Pautz, AVP of Policy & Advocacy (jpautz@naf.org), if NAF can provide further information on this or other matters that are of concern to you and the Committee.

Sincerely,

Colleen Devery

Colleen Devery

Chief Strategy Officer | NAF