AI Best Practices in K–12 Education:
A Future-Proof Framework for Districts

Students and educators are increasingly using generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT, Dall-E, and Google Gemini. When guided by research and used correctly, AI has the potential to enhance and elevate K–12 teaching and learning. However, without guardrails, it can disrupt classroom learning, threaten academic integrity, and increase data privacy concerns.

In 2024, many school districts lack policies, training, or expertise to address AI's proper usage. Follow these best practices to establish a research-based and future-proof framework for the use of AI technology in your district.

WHO'S USING AI?

65%
of K–12 educators use AI technology

9%
of district leadership teams use AI technology systematically

61%
of K–12 students use AI technology

7
states have issued AI guidance for schools as of April 2024

THE IMPLICATIONS OF AI IN SCHOOLS

Like any new technology integration, there are both potential advantages and challenges to AI. Understanding both sides can help school and district leaders thoughtfully approach guidance for teachers and students as the technology evolves.

BENEFITS

THE STRATEGIC USE OF AI TOOLS HAS THE POTENTIAL TO:

Speed up lesson planning or grading

Facilitate inquiry-based learning and critical thinking

Enhance instruction and engage students in new types of projects

Personalize learning and support accessibility

Facilitate assessments

Prepare students for future careers that involve AI technology

PITFALLS

IF NOT MANAGED PROPERLY, AI'S POWER AND RAPID PACE OF CHANGE COULD:

Hinder student creativity and critical thinking

Create data privacy concerns

Facilitate cheating on assignments
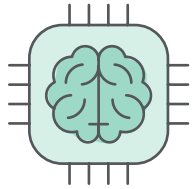
Encourage an overreliance on technology

Increase misinformation, inaccuracy, or bias due to limitations in the algorithms

DISTRICT LEADER CONSIDERATIONS

As AI quickly takes root in society, it will take time, resources, and a collective mind shift to properly integrate it into schools. While some districts have attempted to ban AI in schools, it's clear this technology is already reshaping education.

A more promising approach is to establish guidelines that can be adapted over time. However, if many administrators lack personal experience with AI, how can they develop effective guidance for its use?

START WITH THESE FIVE STEPS TO ENCOURAGE RESPONSIBLE AND APPROPRIATE AI USE IN YOUR DISTRICT'S SCHOOLS:

1. **Explore AI on your own**: Successful technology integration relies on visible support from leaders at all levels. Familiarize yourself with AI tools and model appropriate technology use. Try using AI to write the first draft of your next newsletter or summarize key points from meeting minutes.
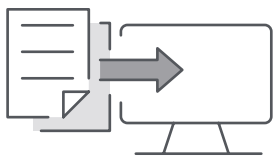
2. **Learn how others use it**: Survey district community members to learn how they are currently using AI technology and determine what support, improvement, or training needs exist.

3. **Form a team**: Gather district community members together to develop a shared vision for AI technology integration that includes goals and a plan for annual evaluation.

4. **Build iterative guidelines**: Establish an acceptable use policy or guiding statement that frames how AI technology should and should not be integrated into teaching and learning in the district. Keep it simple enough to be able to add future policies without having to undo limiting language or complicated procedures.
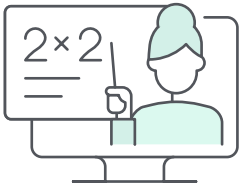
5. **Provide training:** Plan ongoing, embedded professional learning to train teachers and staff on new technology tools, technology integration best practices, and student engagement methods.

PRO TIP: Because machine-generated content is subject to errors and limitations, it's important to emphasize that all information gathered through AI must be cross-checked and edited for accuracy and clarity. When educators understand how to critically evaluate AI-generated content, they are more effective in teaching that skill to students.
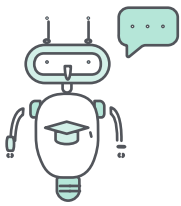
TEACHER CONSIDERATIONS

Help teachers and instructional staff access and encourage appropriate use of AI technology in their work.

IN THE CLASSROOM

To prepare students for future AI-focused learning or careers, teachers can begin to integrate AI literacy skills across the curriculum, with consideration to the grade level and content of their classes. Some examples include:

- In primary grades, teachers may integrate introductory AI instruction across content areas (such as interactive games, personalized learning) rather than develop AI-specific courses.
- For secondary grades, teachers may expand students' interaction with AI tools through learning extension activities, test prep, or peer collaboration *(e.g., students may use AI to create an outline or teachers may use it to generate an essay for students to critique).*

INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING

Teachers can use time-saving AI tools to support routine instructional support tasks such as lesson planning or personalized learning plans for students. Some examples include:

- Writing prompts, discussion questions, reading passages, and example problems
- Preparing lesson or unit outlines, summary information, rubrics, or grading feedback
- Gathering information on a given topic or new ideas for exploring a subject

STUDENT CONSIDERATIONS

Educators have a responsibility to teach students how to use AI properly and ethically as a tool for learning and help them understand what can go wrong.

ENCOURAGE CONVERSATION

- Engage students in conversations about their expectations of AI and discuss how it is a tool for enhancing learning, rather than a replacement for it.
- Show students how AI tools get their information from unfiltered internet sources. Demonstrate how difficult it is to get an AI tool to cite its sources and how easily AI can spread misinformation or bias.

ADAPT ASSIGNMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS

- Explain how and when students may use AI in their assignments, with clear guidelines for how to verify AI information and examples of what constitutes cheating or plagiarism.
- Reframe assignment goals to preserve students' own thinking, including inquiry-based assignments or project-based learning.

Stay informed about how districts are thinking about AI and other emerging trends in our report, **2024 Trends in K-12 Education.**

Sources: Center for Reinventing Public Education, EdWeek, EdWeek, Digital Promise, eSpark Learning, Forbes, Hanover Research, Hanover Research, Hanover Research, Hanover Research, Hanover Research, International Society for Technology in Education, Quizlet