



Generative Practice

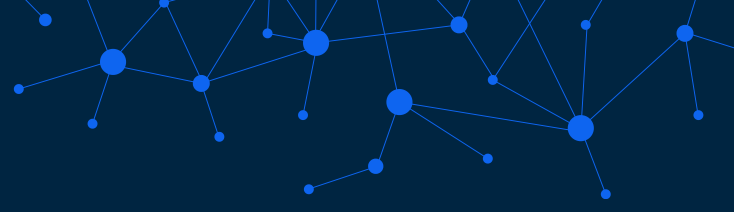
Practical Insights for Unlocking the Instructional
Potential of AI from the **School Teams AI Collaborative**

"With AI as a support, students felt more empowered to explore ideas, revise their work, and take risks in their learning. Students who were typically passive became more proactive, asking AI questions, exploring alternative approaches, or even challenging AI responses."

Jacqueline Oropeza, Lynwood High School

"AI isn't here to save education. Great educators are here to drive education, and AI is a tool to help them do that."

Zach Kennelly, DSST Public Schools



Every few generations, a watershed technological development emerges with significant impact on society and forces K-12 education leaders to grapple with the purpose, design, and practice of teaching and learning.

Much like the arrival of electricity, the personal computer, and the proliferation of the internet, this generation's moment arrived in 2023 with the rapid emergence of generative AI, led by large language models like OpenAI's ChatGPT, Anthropic's Claude, and Google's Bard (now Gemini).

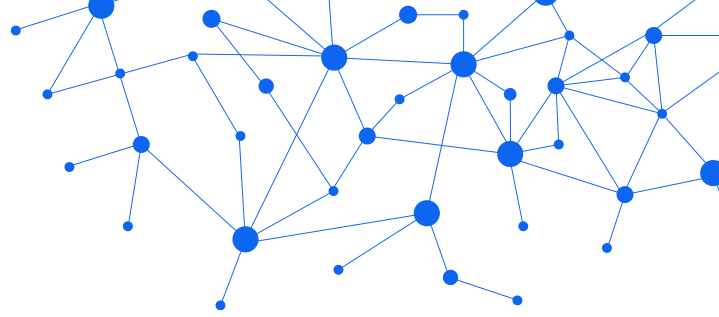
The rise of generative AI in education has brought a wave of uncertainty, urgency, and possibility. Early efforts and resources from the sector rightly focused on creating policies to safeguard student privacy and academic integrity. Much of the conversation centered on what AI might do to education, ranging from hopeful predictions about making teaching more sustainable by automating tasks and personalizing learning to warnings about the offloading of cognitive life and student data risks.

Speculation alone won't move education forward.

As policies take hold, systems urgently need something more grounded: practical instructional guidance that reflects the realities of the classroom. When outdated instructional models hold back student potential and growing teacher burnout stretches schools thin, incremental improvements are insufficient.

What's needed is deep instructional transformation, and that can't be delivered just from the top down. It must also be built from the classroom up. While generative AI is not a magic fix, it does represent a profound opportunity to rethink how schools work.

That's why **Leading Educators** and **FullScale** (formerly The Learning Accelerator) launched the **School Teams AI Collaborative**. We partnered with ~80 educators across 19 schools to get past the hype and understand how generative AI could catalyze better teaching and deeper learning. These educators implemented AI in practical, responsible ways aligned to their instructional goals. In doing so, they demonstrated what real change looks like when it starts with the people who know teaching best.



The Power of Partnership

In designing and implementing the School Teams AI Collaborative together, **Leading Educators** and **FullScale** sought to leverage complementary experience and expertise in design thinking, research, adult learning, educator practice development, and knowledge capture.

About **FullScale**

The mission of FullScale is to unite education leaders and organizations together to drive collective learning, action, and systems transformation. We break silos, bridge divides, lift up new evidence and unseen innovations, and accelerate change for lasting impact for every learner.



About **Leading Educators**

Leading Educators partners with school systems and states to solve their toughest instructional challenges, activating leaders and teachers with proven strategies to create classrooms where every student can thrive. We work at the intersection of teaching, talent, and technology to enable systems that ignite excellence by design.



The future of AI in education depends on treating educators not as mere implementers, but as co-designers.

When teachers are trusted and supported to lead innovation, they create more engaging, thoughtful, and effective learning environments. In the Collaborative, educators used AI to save precious time, differentiate instruction, spark student thinking, and reflect on their practice. These weren't flashy experiments—they were grounded efforts to improve teaching in the service of student success.

One of the most important lessons? It takes a *team* to change.

That's why we worked with full school teams, not just individual teachers, ensuring that innovation was collaborative. School-based teams allowed for shared understanding, collective learning, and stronger implementation. This is the shift the sector needs: away from abstract hype or individual heroics, and toward the practical, collective work of school teams trying to improve learning every day.

The Collaborative also showed how much is possible when **strong local leadership** takes the lead on innovation and how much more impact is possible when that work is supported by a broader **ecosystem**.

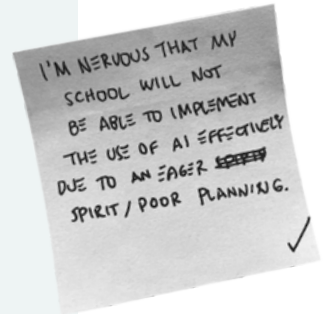
While teachers are doing incredible work locally, their ability to transform teaching and learning can only go so far. By building on the promising efforts already underway in schools, the education sector has an opportunity to strengthen the **conditions** needed (e.g., infrastructure, clear guidance, and aligned supports) that help strong practices spread faster and have a deeper impact. Moving from promising local innovation to widespread transformation will require such conditions that actively enable and amplify the work of school teams.

This report captures what we learned from these educators and includes insights to help schools move beyond speculation toward real, *lasting* transformation. We also recognize that the field must build supportive conditions through policy, infrastructure, and systems leadership for promising practices to spread.

At this moment, AI holds both promise and risk. It could help reimagine how learning happens, or it could reinforce the status quo. **The question is no longer *if* or *when* AI will reach classrooms. It's *how*, and who will shape that how.**

To fully understand the moment we're in and what the field must do to move forward, we need to examine the work of these early adopters more closely.

- We share what we observed from participating school teams: how teachers currently use AI in classrooms, what conditions made that use possible, and what challenges persist even at the leading edge.
- We then zoom out to connect these insights to the broader sector-wide dynamics, surfacing the gaps that must be bridged between classroom practice and system-level strategy.
- Finally, we offer recommendations for schools, systems, and field leaders to take coordinated action, grounded in the lived experiences of the educators already leading this work.



Teachers from around the country shared their hopes and worries about AI on sticky notes during the October 2024 kick-off event. (Ann Schimke / Chalkbeat)

The Why & How Behind the Collaborative

Educators are increasingly encountering generative AI in their work. We launched the School Teams AI Collaborative to:

- center educators' experiences,
 - better understand how early AI use unfolds,
 - surface promising AI-enabled practices from real classrooms.
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- **Teachers** benefit from having trusted colleagues with whom to plan and reflect, making the implementation of AI more sustainable and scalable.
 - **Administrators** create the structures, protect meeting time, formalize coaching cycles, and allocate resources that let innovation take root. Administrators turn short-term wins into lasting shifts in practice by aligning the team's learning with broader instructional priorities and continuously removing barriers.

Teachers and school leaders often take charge of testing new tools. Their insights, grounded in student needs and everyday instruction, are essential for shaping thoughtful, scalable approaches. That's why Leading Educators and FullScale built the Collaborative around **school-based teams** of teachers and administrators who could explore AI in real time and supported them with shared frameworks, coaching, and a national learning community. When educators explore new practices together, they can share ideas, challenge assumptions, and surface barriers that might otherwise go unaddressed.

Participating schools came from diverse geographies and represented a variety of instructional contexts (see Appendix A for participant schools). While all teams brought different starting points, they shared key **readiness conditions**: strong instructional foundations, responsible tech norms, and collaborative cultures for peer learning. We focused on secondary schools to meet age restrictions for using generative AI tools.

Collaborative members participated in **two cycles of implementation** and **three coaching windows** with ongoing learning capture, collaboration, and support through a mix of in-person convening, virtual collaborative sessions, and a virtual collaborative forum.

Throughout the year, teams used shared protocols and coaching supports to test classroom practices, reflect on outcomes, and refine approaches.

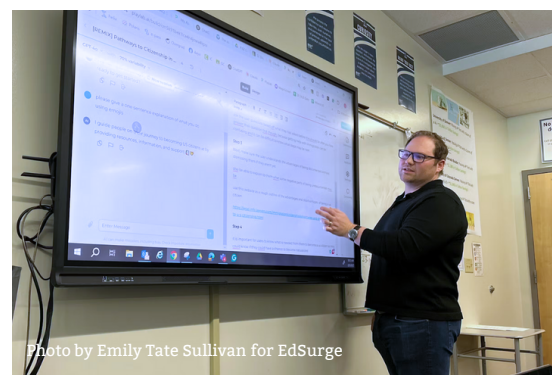
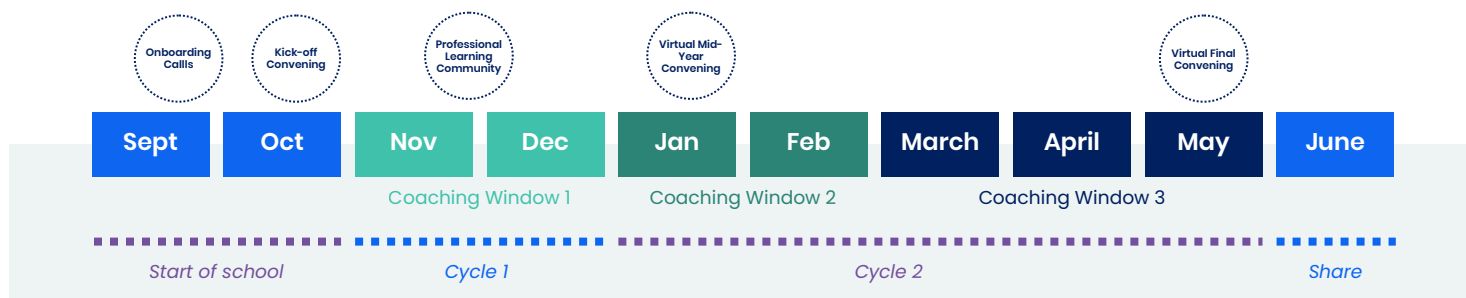


Photo by Emily Tate Sullivan for EdSurge



Importantly, we approached this work as learning partners, not evaluators. We documented teams' processes and progress to build a grounded understanding of what early AI integration actually looks like in practice—and how educators can shape it responsibly from the ground up.

The patterns, tensions, and breakthroughs that follow reflect what we learned from these early innovators. Their stories offer a path forward for others ready to learn, try, and grow.

Practices Emerging from the Collaborative

The school teams in the Collaborative gave us a front-row seat to AI experimentation in real classrooms. What follows are the patterns, tensions, and breakthroughs we observed, and what they reveal about both the promise and complexity of early AI integration. We examined their practices through two grounding frameworks:

The **Value Add of Technology on Teaching (VATT)** framework, developed by Leading Educators, supports educators in evaluating how technology contributes to instructional practice. Rather than tracking usage or compliance, it helps practitioners understand whether tools enable them to **do more** by saving time or increasing capacity, **do better** by strengthening instructional quality, or **do new** by creating learning experiences that weren't previously possible. Rooted in classroom practice, VATT centers educator judgment, making it especially useful for navigating complex tools like generative AI.

While VATT helped teams understand the kind of impact AI was having on instructional practice, we paired it with FullScale's **Hop, Skip, Leapfrog (HSL)** to understand how far those changes pushed instructional models. HSL offers a shared language for describing how new practices evolve, in which a **hop** represents a small shift, a **skip** signals a more meaningful change from the status quo, and a **leap** reflects a transformative redesign of teaching and learning. This framework also highlights how innovation often unfolds incrementally—where a hop can lead to a skip, and a skip can lead to a leap—when systems support learning and iteration.

An Integrated Framework

While VATT helped teams assess the return on instructional investment, HSL helped them reflect on how far they were stretching their practice and what shifts might be needed to go further. The two frameworks are combined in the table below. Teams in the Collaborative used this combined framework to help guide the degree of change and type of impact they aimed to have and to determine what kind of AI-enabled instructional practice to test.

		<i>Type of Impact</i>		
		Do More	Do Better	Do New
<i>Degree of Change</i>	Hop	Making small tweaks in practice to improve efficiency, focusing on time-saving tasks.	Making small tweaks with the aim of incremental improvements to specific learning outcomes of data-driven decision-making.	Making small tweaks to explore how to create early incremental shifts in thinking or teaching that may lead to but are not yet transforming the system.
	Skip	Sustained and consistent changes in practices to improve efficiency.	Sustained and consistent changes in practice to improve outcomes on a substantial scale.	Adopt new, innovative teaching models driven by AI, shifting instructional paradigms and embedding AI deeply into the classroom experience.
	Leap	AI-enabled efficiency is fully integrated into fundamentally redesigned systems, automating significant portions of the learning or administrative processes.	AI is transforming learning outcomes at a systemic level, deeply embedded in instructional strategies and personalized learning for all students.	AI is driving a fundamental shift in schemas and mindsets, creating new learning paradigms and models that radically change the system.

A major goal of the Collaborative was to surface and document promising AI-enabled practices and share them with the sector.

Strategies from these educators have been captured and organized into a problem of practice series. Explore the strategies in these links:

- [How can school and district leaders build the prerequisite **conditions** for AI to be used powerfully, equitably, and responsibly?](#)
- [How can **teachers** begin to effectively and responsibly enhance teaching and learning through implementing generative AI tools?](#)
- [How can teachers support **students** in developing their ability to use generative AI effectively and responsibly in their learning?](#)

Learn how emerging AI-enabled practices from Collaborative schools align to the combined VATT and HSL framework.

Category	AI-Enabled Practice
Do More, Skip	<u>Helping Students Process and Apply AI-Generated Feedback:</u> At the Eliot School, teachers developed shared prompts they could use with generative AI to produce feedback for students on essays. Teachers also developed structured reflection and goal-setting protocols to make sure AI serves as a tool for deep learning and metacognitive growth. AI didn't replace teacher feedback, but it allowed teachers to give feedback more often and more efficiently (Do More). Teachers also engaged students more actively in processing and applying feedback (Skip).
Do Better, Hop	<u>Integrating AI into Project-Based Learning:</u> At Valley New School, teachers thoughtfully integrated AI use into their project-based learning to ensure the technology supports rather than replaces human-driven learning. One way they did this was by adding concrete ways to use AI throughout the project checklist students used. AI didn't overhaul Valley New's project-based learning, but rather sharpened it (Hop). By weaving AI-specific prompts and checkpoints into the existing project checklist, teachers ensured that AI use aligned with their learning philosophy and enhanced, rather than replaced, human-led inquiry (Do Better). For schools that don't have a project-based learning model, this strategy could be a skip or even a leap.
Do New, Leap	<u>Equipping Students to Drive Community Change with AI:</u> At DSST Public Schools, students built AI-powered chatbots to address community needs. By integrating real-world applications, industry partnerships, and multiple feedback cycles, the project empowered students to use AI as a tool for civic engagement and problem-solving. This strategy introduces a fundamentally new type of learning experience. Students are going beyond using AI to complete assignments or enhance existing skills. They are leveraging AI to design solutions that have real-world relevance and impact creating a new form of student agency and problem-solving that wasn't previously possible (Do New). This represents a significant shift in instructional practice, as students are engaging in a complex, multi-step learning process that integrates AI, real-world applications, iterative feedback, and collaboration with industry partners (Leap).
Do New, Skip	<u>Using Custom AI Chatbots to Support Multilingual Learners with Content Acquisition:</u> Lynwood High School used a custom AI chatbot called the English Language Support Assistant (ELSA) to provide real-time support for multilingual students. The chatbot analyzes class materials, defines vocabulary, generates comprehension questions, and summarizes key ideas, helping students engage independently with academic texts. By embedding the tool into daily instruction and iterating based on student feedback. While it builds on strong pedagogical practices, the chatbot introduces a novel way for multilingual learners to access content and practice language skills in real time (Do New). The strategy expands learning possibilities and student agency beyond traditional teacher-led support. By integrating AI to provide individualized, on-demand content support, the strategy meaningfully shifts how students engage with texts and practice academic language (Skip).

Lessons Learned: From Classroom Insights to Sector-Wide Leaps

The work of the School Teams AI Collaborative revealed two important truths.

First, even schools on the leading edge of AI integration are largely engaging in **early-stage, foundational uses of the technology**. These efforts are important, but they tend to make instruction more efficient or more engaging, rather than fundamentally transforming how learning happens. To reach the leap-level innovations that most benefit learners, **structures** and **processes** must be designed to support deeper instructional shifts.

Second, many schools and school systems aren't there yet—and that's okay. The reality is that most schools are still at the very beginning of their AI journeys. They are navigating uncertainty, resource constraints, policy ambiguity, and competing priorities. But that doesn't mean they're stuck. There are clear, concrete steps any school or school system can take right now to lay the groundwork for future success.

Leap-level innovation cannot happen in schools alone.

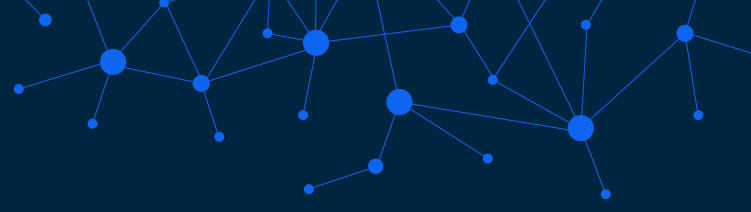
Fostering it requires sector-level conditions and coordinated action across a wide variety of stakeholders.

- **Policy gaps** are created by legacy models focused on compliance and risk management, rather than innovation and learning.
- **Implementation structures** are often fragmented or under-resourced, making it difficult to scale even successful practices.
- **Measurement processes** rely on outdated metrics that fail to capture deeper learning, creativity, or student agency—the very things AI might help unlock.
- **Structural patterns** continue to influence access to tools, support, and opportunity, leaving historically underserved communities with fewer chances to explore or benefit from new technologies.

Unfortunately, practitioner-led experimentation is rarely centered in policy discussions, research agendas, or product development cycles. Without feedback loops between classroom practice and field-level strategy, the sector risks building tools, policies, and research that are misaligned, inequitable, or irrelevant.

These constraints define what is possible and determine how far promising practices can travel. But they also point to where the opportunities lie.

The Collaborative showed what becomes possible when educators have protected space to explore, support to test ideas, and structures to share learning. These innovative educators weren't waiting for perfect conditions. They were building insight and proof points from the ground up.



A Call for Visionary, Coordinated Action

Bridging the gap between classroom innovation and sector strategy isn't a luxury; it's a necessity.

If we want AI to advance student-centered learning for all, we must rewire how the education sector learns. This means elevating practitioner insight as a form of evidence, creating two-way feedback loops between educators and decision-makers, and ensuring that policies, tools, research, and investments are built both for schools and with them.

The sections that follow outline concrete recommendations for two key groups of actors:

- **Schools and school systems** that are laying their AI foundations.
- **Sector leaders** (including policymakers, funders, researchers, and developers) who can align tools, policies, and supports to practitioner needs, enabling leap-level innovations to emerge, spread, and take hold.

Transformation will require both groups acting in concert—moving from fragmented experimentation to a coordinated, opportunity-rich, and future-ready approach to AI in education.



What School and School System Leaders Can Do Next

1. Align AI Strategy to Instructional Vision

Too often, conversations about AI in education start with tools. What's possible? What's allowed? What's new? But in the absence of a clear, shared instructional vision, these conversations risk becoming fragmented, reactive, or even harmful. Tools get adopted without a purpose. Educators are left to figure things out on their own. And efforts drift away from what matters most: powerful learning for every student.

The most important move a school or school system can make at this moment is to **ground AI implementation in a student-centered instructional vision**. That vision should clarify why AI is being explored, how it can support deeper learning, and what outcomes educators and students are working toward.

This vision doesn't have to be perfect or permanent, but it does need to be shared across roles, connected to school system-wide priorities, and focused on purpose, not novelty. This co-created vision should guide tool selection, professional learning, and policy development to ensure that AI adoption is intentional, coherent, and in service of the school system's instructional goals.

- **Co-creating a shared vision for AI** with input from instructional leaders, classroom educators, IT staff, and students. This ensures alignment across academic and operational priorities.
- **Anchoring AI exploration in existing frameworks**, such as a district's graduate profile, instructional commitments, or digital learning plan.
- **Clarifying what "good" looks like** in AI use by going beyond defining what is permitted by also naming what is encouraged and why.
- **Using the vision as a north star** when making decisions about tool adoption, professional learning, pilot design, and policy development.

AI can help teachers differentiate instruction, scaffold learning, provide formative feedback, and make classroom time more relational and responsive. But only if it's used with intention.

A clear instructional vision doesn't constrain innovation; it enables it. It gives educators a foundation for experimentation and ensures that every AI-related decision is in service of deeper, more equitable learning.

2. Build Cross-Functional Leadership Structures

AI integration in schools can't be owned by a single department. When IT teams adopt tools without instructional input or when academic leaders push for innovation without technical support, implementation quickly becomes disjointed. Educators are left with mixed messages, and promising practices stall before they gain traction.

Schools and districts need cross-functional leadership structures to move from pockets of experimentation to coordinated system-wide learning. These teams bring together diverse perspectives—curriculum and instruction, IT, legal, professional learning, and classroom educators—to make aligned, thoughtful decisions about AI.

This kind of collaboration ensures that **technical feasibility, instructional value, ethical considerations, and policy compliance are addressed in tandem**, rather than in isolation.

- **Standing cross-functional working groups** that meet regularly to coordinate decisions, troubleshoot implementation, and align on vision.
- **Including educators in decision-making**, not just as end users but as co-leaders and informants. Their insights are essential for ensuring guidance reflects classroom realities.
- **Clarifying roles and responsibilities**, so each department knows who is leading on what, from tool vetting and policy guidance to professional learning and family communication.
- **Using decision frameworks and protocols** that encourage teams to weigh both instructional and technical considerations when assessing new tools or practices.

Strong cross-functional teams **don't just manage AI—they shape its role in learning**. They model collaboration, build trust across departments, and create the infrastructure for ongoing, adaptive implementation. In a moment defined by uncertainty, these teams help schools act with coherence, clarity, and shared purpose.

3. Design and Learn from Pilots

Pilots are often treated as isolated trials, testing whether a tool “works” before scaling it. But in this moment, **piloting AI goes beyond product evaluation. It's about sector learning**.

Done well, pilots can serve as a **strategic learning engine** for schools. They help clarify goals, surface implementation barriers, and develop context-specific insights that guide broader integration. Rather than rushing to scale, schools should focus on designing **structured, purpose-driven pilots** that generate meaningful feedback and build internal capacity over time.

Pilots are not the end of the journey—they're the beginning of a longer arc of continuous improvement. When approached as learning tools rather than checklists, they create space for responsible, contextualized experimentation and set the foundation for sustainable innovation.

- **Identifying early adopter teams**—educators and students eager to explore AI in ways aligned to instructional priorities. Select diverse participants to ensure findings are inclusive and transferable.
- **Clarifying learning goals and success criteria up front**. Define what the pilot is trying to learn, what data will be collected, and how outcomes will be assessed.
- **Embedding regular feedback loops** into the pilot structure. This might include classroom observations, teacher and student reflections, peer share-outs, and ongoing coaching support.
- **Treating pilots as safe-to-fail environments**, where educators can experiment without fear of evaluation or compliance consequences.
- **Documenting insights and sharing them system-wide**. Use pilot findings to inform policy, professional learning, resource allocation, and scaling decisions.

4. Invest in Professional Learning and Teacher Capacity

No technology can transform learning without skilled, confident educators behind it. While early adopters may experiment independently, sustainable, system-wide innovation depends on intentional, job-embedded professional learning that helps all teachers understand how to use AI in service of instruction.

This learning must go beyond tool training. It should focus on pedagogical integration, ethical use, and alignment to instructional goals, supporting teachers in making AI a meaningful part of their practice and not simply a quick fix for time savings.

Importantly, teachers need safe, supported spaces to explore AI. The school systems that invest in adult learning—just like they do in curriculum or devices—are the ones most likely to see responsible, high-impact AI use take root.

- **Ongoing, differentiated professional development** that helps teachers explore how AI can support core instructional practices like feedback, scaffolding, differentiation, and formative assessment.
- **Modeling use cases that are relevant and instructionally grounded**, using real classroom scenarios to demonstrate how AI can extend, not replace, human judgment.
- **Leveraging early adopters as peer leaders**, creating opportunities for teachers already experimenting with AI to share insights, mentor colleagues, and co-facilitate learning.
- **Creating space for collaboration and reflection**—through PLCs, coaching cycles, or inquiry groups—so teachers can learn with and from one another.
- **Integrating AI learning into broader professional learning structures**, rather than treating it as an add-on or one-off workshop.

When teachers are equipped to use AI well, they're more likely to try, adapt, and reflect on their practice—and to do so in ways that support student agency, access, and deeper learning.

5. Generate Meaningful Evidence of Impact

AI has the potential to fundamentally reshape how students learn and how teachers teach—but without clear evidence of its impact, schools risk investing in hype rather than outcomes. Right now, most school systems lack the frameworks and tools to assess whether AI is **actually improving instruction**, not just saving time.

To move forward, schools must develop approaches to evidence-building that are **aligned with their instructional values**. Traditional metrics (e.g., standardized test scores or time-on-task) rarely capture the full picture of what AI might enable: personalization, creativity, agency, engagement, and human connection. We need new ways to ask: Is this working? For whom? And how do we know? *(Continued on next page)*

- **Defining success based on instructional priorities.** For example, if a district has a Profile of a Graduate or a commitment to deeper learning, those goals should guide what AI-enabled success looks like.
- **Tracking both qualitative and quantitative indicators,** such as teacher reflection data, student work samples, usage patterns, engagement surveys, and formative assessments.
- **Involving educators in designing measurement approaches,** so evidence collection reflects classroom realities and doesn't feel extractive or disconnected from practice.
- **Evaluating not just outcomes, but experiences.** For example: Are students engaging more deeply with content? Do teachers feel more able to meet individual needs? Has AI freed up time for human connection?
- **Sharing insights transparently** within and across schools to support learning and improvement. A culture must be created where transparency is viewed simply as compliance or accountability.

Measurement should not be a barrier to innovation. Done well, it becomes a lever—helping educators and leaders understand what's working, refine what isn't, and make smarter decisions about scale.

6. Develop Local Policy as a Lever for Instructional Transformation

In many schools and districts, AI policy has been developed reactively, focused on managing risks like data privacy, academic integrity, and appropriate use. These guardrails are essential. But if policy only serves to control or contain AI, we miss a much larger opportunity.

Policy can and should be a catalyst for instructional improvement.

By aligning policies to an instructional vision—and designing them to support experimentation, collaboration, and continuous learning—leaders can create the conditions for AI to enhance teaching and deepen learning, not just automate tasks.

- **Embedding AI guidance into broader instructional and technology policies,** rather than isolating it as a standalone issue. This ensures coherence and reinforces that AI is as much a teaching and learning issue as it is a technological one.
- **Encouraging thoughtful, transformative uses of AI.** Policy can help shift focus from compliance to creativity, highlighting ways AI can foster deeper thinking, collaboration, and feedback.
- **Allocating time, space, and resources** for teams to test, iterate, and refine new AI-enabled practices. This includes protected time for planning, coaching, and reflection.
- **Establishing equity-centered guardrails,** such as requiring human oversight, supporting accommodations and access, and reviewing tools for bias.
- **Creating feedback mechanisms** so policies can evolve based on what educators are learning in practice.

Well-crafted policies don't just manage risk; they **signal priorities, unlock innovation**, and help build trust across the system.

When policy is used as a lever for instructional transformation, it becomes part of the strategy for meaningful, responsible AI integration.

What the Broader Field Must Do Next

While schools and school systems play a critical role in advancing responsible AI integration, **they cannot do it alone**. The work of early adopter teams has revealed what's possible, but it has also surfaced clear limitations: infrastructure gaps, policy ambiguity, limited research alignment, and a lack of usable tools that meet real instructional needs.

To move from isolated experimentation to **opportunity-driven, sector-wide transformation**, the broader field—state and local education agencies, funders, researchers, and edtech product developers—must **create the enabling conditions** for schools to lead this work.

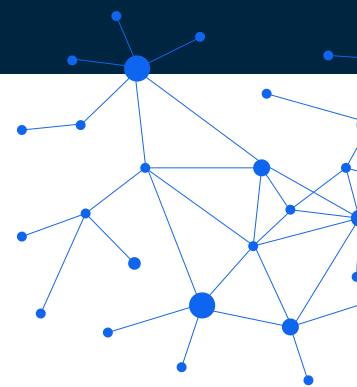
This means not just observing innovation, but actively supporting it.

The following recommendations focus on how the sector can respond to what we've learned from the leading edge, build critical bridges between practice and policy, and ensure that teachers and students are at the center of AI's future in education.

1. Put Educators at the Center of AI Design

Researchers, developers, and policymakers must make teachers and school leaders co-creators in the development of AI tools, policies, and strategies.

Why this matters: The Collaborative showed that the most effective AI use cases emerged from educator-led experimentation. Yet too often, these frontline insights are left out of key decisions. When educators aren't included from the start, tools miss the mark, policies don't match classroom needs, and innovation stalls.



- **Funders** can prioritize research–practice partnerships that require educator co–design and elevate classroom insights in grant criteria.
- **Researchers** can collaborate with teachers to develop studies around authentic instructional questions and co–create measurement tools that reflect what educators most value (e.g., creativity, engagement, equity).
- **Developers** can embed teacher design teams into product development cycles—not as testers but as designers—and run collaborative pilots that iterate in real–time with school–based teams.
- **State and local agencies** can convene cross–role working groups that elevate teacher voice in shaping policies and AI guidance from the start.

2. Build Coherence and Capacity Across the Sector

Achieving sustained, scalable impact requires aligning resources, guidance, and frameworks to move beyond fragmented initiatives.

Why this matters: In the Collaborative, educators demonstrated strong creativity and commitment, even as they navigated complex systems. Their innovations highlighted opportunities for greater alignment: clearer policies, connected supports, and shared priorities. When schools have a common foundation to build from, they can channel more of their time and energy into learning and teaching rather than navigating differing guidance. What educators need now is not just inspiration, but coordinated structures that amplify and accelerate the great work already happening in classrooms.

- **State education agencies** can develop unified guidance, shared frameworks, and open–access tools that reflect both instructional priorities and technical needs.
- **Professional learning providers** can align training to these frameworks, helping educators connect AI to core instructional practices.
- **Sector–building organizations** can curate and disseminate vetted, open–access resources to reduce duplication and boost equitable access.
- **Funders** can support the development of common infrastructure and incentivize cross–sector collaboration.

3. Use State and Local Policy To Drive Instructional Improvement

State and local leaders must design AI policies that do more than manage risk; they should actively support deeper learning and innovation.

Why this matters: In the Collaborative, most schools benefited from their districts prioritizing the development of policies and guidance that gave teachers and students the ability to explore the use of AI. *(Continued on next page)*

Clear parameters enabled educators to experiment confidently with AI in ways that aligned with their instructional vision. If policies focus primarily on restrictions without offering pathways to deeper usage, they can unintentionally slow innovation. The most impactful examples came from schools where policies framed AI as a tool for improving teaching and learning, which led to the creation of safe, thoughtful spaces for experimentation and discovery.

- **State education agencies** can embed AI guidance into broader instructional and technology frameworks, positioning it as a tool for deeper learning. By drafting policies that explicitly support equity-centered instructional uses of AI, establishing guardrails like human oversight and accessibility requirements, and creating structured feedback loops with educators, states can ensure that AI policies evolve with classroom realities and foster innovation safely.
- **Local education leaders** (e.g., LEAs, superintendents, school boards) can adopt policies that clarify not only what's allowed but what's encouraged, especially when it comes to creative, student-centered, and collaborative uses of AI. By embedding this guidance into existing instructional and tech strategies, allocating time and resources for experimentation, and creating local review structures, they can empower educators to pilot, iterate, and scale AI practices in ways that align with their instructional vision.

4. Commit to Open, Shared Learning Structures and Processes

Sustainable AI progress depends on investing in systems that encourage openness and collaboration rather than isolated experimentation. The future of AI in education must not be locked behind proprietary firewalls or restricted by uneven access to data and materials. Access to high-quality tools, data, and learning resources must be universal, not limited to those with the most funding or influence.

Why this matters: Teachers are developing valuable insights. The sector needs to find a way to make sure these lessons spread. When research is siloed, data is gated, or materials are proprietary, innovation becomes uneven and inequitable. Without intentional mechanisms for sharing what works and what doesn't, the field risks duplication, inequity in access to knowledge, and slow sector-wide progress. Collective learning is not a luxury; it's the engine of responsible transformation.

- **Funders and state agencies** can fund and support cross-district and cross-state networks that openly share practices, tools, and lessons from AI implementation, such as the Collaborative itself.
- **Developers and vendors** can release transparent documentation on AI tools, including data sources, model limitations, and known biases.
- **Sector leaders and researchers** can create public repositories of implementation guides and case studies that elevate practitioner insights and help schools learn from one another in real time.
- **All sector actors** can prioritize shared learning agendas over competitive advantage by funding initiatives that produce open-access implementation guides, use cases, and public-facing reflections from the field.

5. Accelerate Rapid, Context-Aware Research

To keep pace with AI's rapid evolution, the sector must embrace research approaches that are fast, flexible, and grounded in real classroom practice.

Why this matters: The Collaborative showed that some of the most valuable AI insights came from educators testing ideas in real classrooms and adjusting quickly based on what they learned. Yet, traditional research timelines and methods often move too slowly to keep pace with AI's rapid evolution. By adopting faster, more adaptive research approaches rooted in classroom realities, the sector can surface timely evidence, respond to emerging needs, and help educators and leaders make better-informed decisions. This kind of context-aware research ensures that findings are relevant, actionable, and capable of guiding both immediate improvements and long-term innovation.

- **Funders and research institutions** can support short-cycle, design-based, and practitioner-led studies that explore emerging AI use in classrooms and generate timely insights.
- **Researchers and developers** can form partnerships with educators to co-investigate questions of practice and adapt rapidly based on feedback.
- **Sector leaders** can create channels to share early-stage findings, such as learning briefs, working papers, and public dashboards, so knowledge spreads quickly even before it is “final.”



Conclusion: A Call to Leap

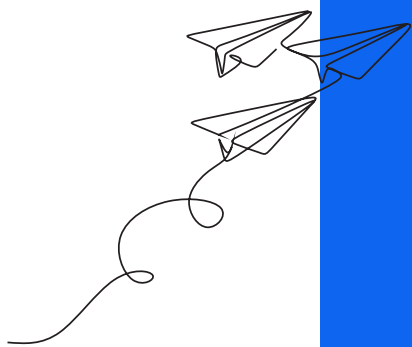
The rise of AI in education presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to go beyond adopting a new technology by fundamentally rethinking how we support student learning. And yet, our findings suggest that **even the most forward-thinking schools are still navigating the early stages of innovation**. Teachers are using AI to make existing practices more efficient or engaging, but rarely to reimagine what instruction could become.

This is not a failure. It's a *signal*.

If schools on the leading edge are still operating in hop and skip mode, then the sector itself is not yet built to support leaps.

We cannot expect transformation without creating the conditions that make it possible. That means:

- Aligning AI use to **clear, student-centered instructional visions**.
- Investing in **educator capacity** and **cross-functional leadership**.
- Building **coherent infrastructure and policies** that support all learners.
- **Generating evidence** that reflects the outcomes we truly care about.



More importantly, it means recognizing that **the answers won't come from the top down**. They are emerging—messily, creatively, and powerfully—from classrooms. From teachers trying something new. From students co-creating their learning. From school teams working together to navigate uncertainty with purpose and care.

The question is no longer whether AI will shape education. The question is **who will shape its use and to what end**.

We believe the future of AI in schools must be practitioner-led, equity-centered, and relentlessly focused on better outcomes for students. And we believe the field must act now, not just to respond to change, but to lead it.

Participants in the School Teams AI Collaborative

- **Appleton, WI:** Valley New School (Appleton Area School District)
- **Avondale, AZ:** Desert Edge High School (Agua Fria Union High School District)
- **Boston, MA:** Eliot Innovation School (Boston Public Schools)
- **Denver, CO:**
 - Aurora Science & Tech High School (DSST Public Schools)
 - Denver Online High School (Denver Public Schools)
 - DSST College View High School (DSST Public Schools), DSST Cedar High School (DSST Public Schools)
 - Northeast Early College (Denver Public Schools)
 - South High School (Denver Public Schools)
- **Lynwood, CA:**
 - Cesar Chavez Middle School (Lynwood Unified School District)
 - Marco Antonio Firebaugh High School (Lynwood Unified School District)
 - Hosler Middle School (Lynwood Unified School District)
 - Lynwood High School (Lynwood Unified School District)
- **New York City, NY:**
 - Launch Expeditionary Learning Charter School (New York City Public Schools)
 - United Charter High School (New York City Public Schools)
- **Ulster, NY:** Ulster BOCES
- **Washington, DC:**
 - Hart Middle School (DC Public Schools)
 - Washington Leadership Academy PCS
- **Wolfeboro, NH:** Kingswood Regional High School (Governor Wentworth Regional School District)

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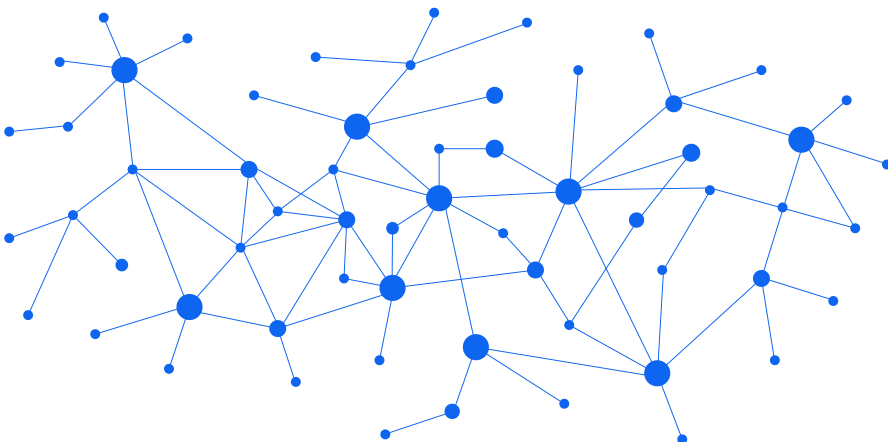


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