



Connecticut AI Pilot Program Evaluation Final Report

OCTOBER 2026

**Center for Connecticut
Education Research Collaboration**

Partner Institutions





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About CCERC

The Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration (CCERC) is a research partnership between the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and institutions of higher education across Connecticut. CSDE sets the agenda, identifies projects, and allocates funding for CCERC. The University of Connecticut manages funding and provides an administrative team. A Steering Committee composed of researchers from various Connecticut institutions guides the administrative team in developing and approving research projects and reports. Researchers from Connecticut universities and colleges constitute the research teams. The mission of CCERC is to address pressing issues in the state's public schools through high quality evaluation and research that leverages the expertise of researchers from different institutions possessing varied methodological expertise and content knowledge.

CCERC was formed initially using federal relief funds to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning and well-being and recovery efforts in the state's schools. The partnership was subsequently institutionalized to respond to ongoing evaluation and research needs of the CSDE, provide research opportunities for Connecticut researchers, and foster collaboration across the state's institutions of higher education.





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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	6
Full Report	8
References	25

Executive Summary

The Connecticut Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Education pilot program created an opportunity for students and teachers in six districts across Connecticut to experiment with AI tools in teaching and learning both with students in the classroom and in preparation outside the classroom. Districts applied for funds to purchase AI tools and professional development resources approved by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to implement in discrete grade and/or instructional content groups during the 2024-2025 school year. The pilot program was undertaken in response to a call from the Connecticut State Legislature to investigate AI tools for grades 7-12. Participating school districts were tasked with implementing an approved AI tool of their choosing to enhance classroom instruction through project-based learning experiences, personalized learning pathways, real-time student progress monitoring, and potential AI-enhanced grading assistance. The pilot included six school districts, five public school districts: East Hartford, Lebanon, Rocky Hill, Seymour, and Westport and one public charter school, Odyssey Community School, that implemented the program in different grades and subject areas across Grades 5-12.

This report presents findings from the evaluation of this state-funded pilot program integrating AI into teaching and learning. This study was tasked with evaluating the efficacy of the AI pilot in helping students and teachers to learn new skills and tools. This evaluation was funded through the Connecticut Center for Education Research Collaboration (CCERC) at the request of CSDE. The research team used surveys and focus groups to understand how schools implemented AI pilot programs and identify areas of success and areas for improvement.

The AI pilot evaluation addressed the following research questions:

- How have students learned to revise AI prompts, critically read, and evaluate AI-model responses for accuracy?
- How did teachers understand and use AI during the pilot?
- How have teachers developed the skills to teach AI-use standards to students through the AI tools?
- What are student and teacher perceptions of students' research-skill development in the use of AI tools?

The AI pilot evaluation used a mixed methods approach combining descriptive quantitative and qualitative data from a survey administered to students (n=735 respondents) and teachers (n=58 respondents) in all six of the participating districts, as well as qualitative focus group data with students from three districts (n=32 participants) and teachers from four districts (n=24 participants).

Findings

The pilot program was generally successful in helping students and teachers develop skills using AI tools. Teachers found AI tools most useful outside the classroom for material preparation and differentiation. In the classroom, students and teachers

found teacher-created resources that were specific to the content and assignments for each class the most useful, such as teacher designed chatbots to help students compare their writing to rubrics. Both students and teachers expressed concerns about ethics, appropriate usage, and technology skills. Overall, both groups felt the pilot was successful in providing a space to learn a new tool and begin developing work processes and classroom structures that incorporate AI in ethical and useful ways.

Both teachers and students had concerns about accuracy, reliability, and ethics related to AI use, and all wanted more guidance and support on thinking about using AI in meaningful and ethical ways. Students and teachers were especially wary of using AI for math-related tasks and found that AI tools made frequent mistakes. While some students were excited about the possibility of expanded AI use in schools, the majority were ambivalent.

Professional development and peer collaboration for teachers was vital to the success of the pilot, and teachers expressed the need for more support and time going forward to further develop skills, knowledge, and resources for using AI in their instruction and work outside the classroom. Students, too, expressed the need for more time, guidance, and guidelines to practice using AI in their work.



Recommendations

Through the evaluation of this pilot program to integrate AI into teaching and learning, we identify the following recommendations:

- Districts should continue to invest in professional development and peer collaboration for teachers. This was a key element of the success of the pilot and is vital to any attempts to support teachers in using AI either with students or on their own.
- Districts and CSDE should continue to encourage AI literacy skills alongside new technology skills for students and staff. AI literacy is important, as is continuing to develop other technology skills for teachers of all experience levels. Continued training allows everyone access to multiple tools for their work and continued experience learning new skills.
- When using AI tools, districts should encourage content specific use. Students and teachers found AI tools most effective and helpful when using them as a support that leverages teacher expertise. Specifically, both teachers and students found using chatbots with teacher rubrics and teacher designed study tools effective uses of AI tools in teaching and learning.
- Districts should provide clear and actionable guidance and policies on appropriate AI use. When teachers and students felt the parameters for use were clear and consistent, they were more likely to engage with new AI tools. CSDE should continue to provide examples of strong, thoughtful, ethical policy for districts to adopt.
- CSDE and districts should emphasize and define ethical engagement with AI. All participants expressed ethical qualms about AI use, and those must be acknowledged and addressed in order to build thoughtful citizens of a world in which AI is increasingly present.
- Districts should develop consistent and actionable AI-use policies. CSDE can continue to provide model policies as well as guidance and best practices that can be used at the district level. It is important for teachers and students as they learn to navigate the complex and changing landscape of AI use to have consistent and reliable expectations and policies to guide them.

Full Report

Introduction

The Connecticut Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Education pilot program created an opportunity for students and teachers in six districts across Connecticut to experiment with AI tools in teaching and learning both with students in the classroom and in preparation outside the classroom. Districts applied for funds to purchase AI tools and professional development resources approved by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to implement in discrete grade and/or instructional content groups during the 2024-2025 school year. The pilot program was undertaken in response to a call from the Connecticut State Legislature to investigate AI tools for grades 7-12. Participating school districts were tasked with implementing an approved AI tool of their choosing to enhance classroom instruction through project-based learning experiences, personalized learning pathways, real-time student progress monitoring, and potential AI-enhanced grading assistance. The pilot included six school districts, five public school districts: East Hartford, Lebanon, Rocky Hill, Seymour, and Westport and one public charter school, Odyssey Community School, that implemented the program in different grades and subject areas across Grades 5-12.

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The pilot program was generally successful in helping students and teachers develop skills using AI tools. Teachers found AI tools most useful outside the classroom for material preparation and differentiation. In the classroom, students and teachers especially valued teacher-created resources that were specific

to the content and assignments for each class, such as teacher designed chatbots to help students compare their writing to rubrics. Both students and teachers expressed concerns about ethics, appropriate usage, and technology skills. Overall, both groups felt the pilot was successful in providing a space to learn a new tool and begin developing work processes and classroom structures that incorporate AI in ethical and useful ways.

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Below, we explain the background of using AI in schools followed by a description of methods. We then present the findings from the survey and focus groups and conclude by answering the research questions and offering recommendations.

Literature Review

Wide Usage, Limited Guidance

The literature points to a widescale increase in AI use in classrooms by both teachers and students (Doss et al., 2025; Laird et al., 2025a, 2025b; Gouseti et al., 2024) though to varying degrees of adoption. This is contrasted by more limited formal guidance for teachers and students on ethical and appropriate usage of AI (Doss et al., 2025; Laird et al., 2025a, 2025b; Gouseti et al., 2024) and limited publicly facing AI policy from districts (Eutsler et al. 2025; Gouseti et al., 2024).

Drawing from a series of nationally representative online surveys conducted between June and August 2024 for the Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT), Laird et al. (2025a) found that 36% of students and 46% of teachers reported using Generative AI (GenAI) for school purposes, including 21% of teachers using GenAI to grade student work. Additionally, 39% of special educators in their sample reported using GenAI for work on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in some capacity. Despite this, over two-thirds of their sample reported that they had not been given policy guidance on some aspects of student GenAI usage, with 32% saying their districts had no guiding policy or they were unsure of any such policy.

This publication was followed by a similar analysis conducted the following year (Laird et al., 2025b), which showed an increase in usage of GenAI with continued gaps in policy guidance. Laird and colleagues found that 50% of students and 69% of teachers surveyed reported using GenAI on some level in academic settings, an increase of 14 and 23 percentage points

respectively from the previous year. Similarly, 57% of special educators in their sample reported using GenAI for work with IEPs, an increase of 18 percentage points from the previous samples. Notably, only 29% of teachers and 16% of students reported receiving guidance on effective and appropriate usage of AI from their schools. In addition, only 22% of students reported having received guidance regarding when their school allowed AI use versus when it was forbidden.

Doss et al. (2025) uncovered similar trends in an analysis of eight nationally representative samples conducted by the RAND Corporation. They found that 54% of students reported using AI for school work in school year 2024-25, an increase from 37% the previous year. They also found that teachers reported an increase in AI usage from 25% in 2023-24 to 53% in 2024-25, including 69% of high school teachers. This was contrasted by only 34% of teachers reporting any policies around academic integrity and AI in their districts. Moreover, only 6% of respondents reported clear, comprehensive policies while 22% reported limited policies, and an additional 6% reported policies that were unclear or confusing.

In a systemic content analysis of 191 districts across 20 states, Eutsler et al. (2025) found that only 14.13% (n= 27) of districts had published publicly available policy on AI usage, with an additional 16.23% (n= 31) of districts currently developing policy. The authors noted additionally that some states, such as North Carolina and West Virginia, had developed statewide guidance for AI policy, but this was not a consistent trend in other states.

Equity Concerns

AI rollout in schools has run headlong into entrenched systems of inequity, including privacy concerns (Eutsler et al., 2025; Kim, 2025; Mintz et al., 2023) particularly in regard to issues such as immigration and healthcare (Eutsler et al., 2025) in which student data may be especially sensitive. Beyond this, AI rollout is impacted by resource allocation (Eutsler et al., 2025; Kim, 2025; Woodruff et al., 2023), and historical marginalization (Baker & Hawk, 2021; Dieterle et al., 2024; Laird et al., 2024, 2025b; Laird et al., 2025b; Gouseti et al., 2024). As AI tools become more prevalent, the risk of student data being compromised or used improperly may also increase (Kim, 2025; Mintz et al., 2023). While some districts have taken steps to address these concerns through policymaking (Eutsler et al., 2025), the possibility of misuse continues to exist.

Furthermore, Eutsler et al. (2025) found that rural school districts in their sample were less likely to have AI policies in place in comparison to their suburban counterparts, though not significantly so. Similarly, Woodruff et al. (2023) found that over 30% of teachers in their study (n= 4528) reported that their students had inconsistent or no internet access at home. This possibly indicates that some districts with historic resource disparities may be at a disadvantage when crafting AI policies. In this context, the AI pilot program aimed to address many of these gaps by funding AI tools and professional development in a diversity of districts and by supporting the ethical and careful use of AI by teachers and students.

Pilot Program Background

The pilot program was designed in response to Public Act (P.A.) 24-151 Section 143 (a), which stated that CSDE shall, during the 2024-25 school year, “administer an artificial intelligence education tool pilot program. Under such pilot program, the Commissioner of Education shall award a grant to assist such boards in implementing an existing artificial intelligence tool, selected by the Commissioner, that will be used by educators and students for classroom instruction and student learning.”

The project was undertaken in multiple phases. Phase one began with creating a K-12 digital literacy curriculum that was designed to address digital citizenship, digital literacy, AI literacy, and other emerging technologies. Phase two involved the creation of the pilot program itself. At this point, districts had the opportunity to apply to participate in the pilot by describing the AI initiatives already in place, their bandwidth for supporting new learning, and their plans for using the AI pilot resources. Six districts, including five public school districts and one public charter school, were selected to receive funds and enact their plans. A set of criteria for evaluation of the pilot was developed, namely:

- Impact of professional development offered through the pilot;
- Experience with the AI tool selected by the district, including ease of implementation, scalability, successes, and challenges;
- Use of AI in student feedback;
- Use of AI in assessment of student engagement;
- Use of AI in lesson planning;
- Use of AI in resource creation;
- Collaboration with colleagues around AI;
- Teacher perception of development of student skills in using AI tools generally, for research, for writing and analytical skills, and for subject-specific content.

Concurrently, CSDE released a Request for Information (RFI) to receive proposals for AI Education Tools to support the integration of AI in a safe, ethical and guided environment that has the potential to enhance 1) instructional planning; 2) personal and adaptive learning; 3) student-led learning; 4) data analytics and decision making; and 5) development of digital and AI literacy. A total of five programs were approved for use in the pilot program:

- SNORKL
- MagicSchoolAI
- SchoolAI
- CK12 Foundation
- Cloud Navigator

Phase three included implementation of the pilot program and evaluation of the program. Once the selected districts were paired with an approved AI tool vendor, they were given external professional development (PD) on the use of the tool. This PD

varied between districts. All had some PD provided by the AI vendors on the tool itself and some districts partnered with EdAdvance for additional support on classroom integration and AI policy development. Others used internal resources for PD on AI use for students and teachers. Pilot districts then used the tool over the course of the 2024-2025 school year. Participating districts were given funds to enact their pilot programs and were asked to offer professional development to educators and develop policies for AI use. The research team contacted districts in the spring of 2025 to conduct a survey of all participating districts and focus groups with students and teachers in a subset of districts to understand the experiences of participants and the success and challenges with using AI in teaching and learning practices.

Methods

This evaluation employed a mixed-methods research approach using two primary data collection techniques: a survey and focus groups. The evaluation sought to answer the following research questions:

- How have students learned to revise AI prompts, critically read, and evaluate AI model responses for accuracy?
- How did teachers understand and use AI during the pilot?
- How have teachers developed the skills to teach AI-use standards to students through the AI tools?
- What are student and teacher perceptions of students' research-skill development in the use of AI tools?

To address the research questions, data were gathered from teachers and students in all of the pilot districts. A convergent parallel design was used, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, analyzed independently, and then compared and integrated to understand how the findings complemented each other (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Study approval was obtained from CSDE, CCERC, and the University of Connecticut's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before data collection began.

Data Sources

The research team used two surveys, one for students (n=735 respondents) and one for teachers (n=58 respondents), to understand how respondents in all six of the pilot districts used AI in their work. To further understand the experiences of students and teachers in the pilot, the research team conducted focus groups with students in three districts (n=32 participants) and teachers from four districts (n=24 participants).

The survey questions and focus group protocols were developed following a review of the relevant literature. The teacher survey included questions related to teaching experience, participation in AI-related professional development and training sessions, frequency of AI tool use in the classroom, and experiences with the outputs generated by these tools. Teachers were also asked about their use of AI-generated analytics and statistics to understand student engagement and inform instructional decision-making. Furthermore, the survey explored the extent to which teachers used AI for lesson planning, instructional design, and resource creation.

The survey also examined the challenges teachers encountered

when implementing AI in the classroom and the types of support they may need to facilitate effective use of AI in their work. Questions addressed collaboration with colleagues to discuss and resolve AI-related issues, teachers' willingness to adopt AI technologies in the future, and their perceptions regarding the feasibility of implementing AI tools on a broader scale. Additionally, teachers were asked about students' use of AI in the classroom, students' proficiency in using AI tools, and any observed effects of AI use on students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The student survey was designed to assess the frequency and purposes of AI use, levels of AI literacy, and the perceived impact of AI on learning outcomes. It also explored students' perceptions of AI-enhanced feedback and their willingness to continue using AI tools in the future. Additionally, the survey examined students' overall experiences with AI and their views on its role in supporting teaching and learning processes.

Most of the survey questions asked students and teachers to respond on a five-point Likert-type scale to measure attitudes, perceptions, or levels of agreement, while other questions asked respondents to select multiple responses from lists of activities. A small number of open-ended questions were also included to allow respondents space to provide additional insights. This approach allowed for uniformity in data collection while capturing a comprehensive range of perspectives and experiences. The instruments were reviewed by the research team and by CSDE prior to their administration. Several revisions were made to improve the instruments, after which the surveys were built and managed in Qualtrics.

Data Collection

Project participation invitations were emailed to the superintendents in the six pilot school districts (Seymour, Lebanon, Odyssey Community School, Westport, Rocky Hill, and East Hartford) with anonymous survey links for students and teachers near the end of spring semester in 2025. Administrators in each district distributed the survey to students and teachers participating in the AI pilot. At the beginning of the fall semester in 2025, a follow-up project participation invitation was sent to those schools that were unable to distribute the survey at the end of spring semester. Overall, we received 735 responses to the student survey and 58 responses to the teacher survey across the six pilot districts for the survey.

The teacher survey respondents (n=58) represented all pilot districts, including East Hartford Public Schools (n=6, estimated response rate of 75%), Lebanon Public Schools (n=24, estimated response rate of 100%), Odyssey Community School (n=6, estimated response rate of 60%), Rocky Hill Public Schools (n=4, estimated response rate of 100%), Seymour Public Schools (n=2, estimated response rate of 20%), and Westport Public Schools (n=12, estimated response rate of 100%). Response rates were calculated using estimates of how many students and teachers participated in the pilot based on pilot applications and confirmations with districts where possible, estimates of how many respondents received the survey, and counts of how many in each group responded to the survey. Thus, while response rates varied between districts, the overall estimated response rate for the teacher survey was relatively high at 75.8%.

The majority of teachers who took the survey taught grades 5-8, which reflects that the majority of students participating in the AI pilot were in middle school. The teacher survey respondents had significant teaching experience with 68.5% of the sample having more than 11 years of experience, the majority of which was teachers with more than 20 years of experience (37% of respondents). Teacher respondents represented a range of subject areas including language arts/English/reading (n = 11), followed by social studies (n = 7), math (n=7), science (n = 6), technology and library (n=6), special education (n=4), and the rest reflecting other specialties including Spanish, PE, culinary, and others. The sample reflects a diverse mix of disciplines which is indicative of the breadth of the AI pilot.

In total, 735 students responded to the survey across the 6 pilot districts. The focus of the pilot in each district, number of student responses, and response rate to the student survey are described in Table 1 below. East Hartford and Rocky Hill both had low response rates. This is likely due to the survey being offered at the end of the year during or after high school students’ exams and is not a reflection of the district or student engagement in the pilot. The survey did not require a response for each question, thus the total responses for each question may vary from the total number of survey responses as seen in the tables in the findings section.

TABLE 1: STUDENT RESPONSE RATES AND PILOT FOCUS

District	Participating Students	Number of Responses	Estimated Response Rate
East Hartford Public Schools	Grades 9-12, selected courses	16	10.7
Lebanon Public Schools	Grades 5-8	209	78.3
Odyssey Community School	Grade 7	63	78.5
Rocky Hill Public Schools	Grades 9-12 CTE Courses	20	3.4
Seymour Public Schools	Grade 7 ELA	125	73.1
Westport Public Schools	Grade 6	215	89.9
	Grades 11 and 12 Science	80	66.7

Focus group data were collected from four school districts in two waves. The four districts selected for additional data collection were chosen in collaboration with CSDE to increase the robustness of the findings and improve the diversity of responses. Districts in the sample were asked to identify student and teacher participants and schedule focus groups. Focus group participants were selected using a convenience sampling method. The research team contacted superintendents and district technology directors, who assisted in organizing the focus groups and identifying potential participants who were a part of the pilot project. Teachers and students were recruited based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. Researchers visited three districts to collect focus group data in person and conducted a virtual focus group with teachers in a fourth district. The first wave, conducted in May 2025, included Lebanon (10 teachers and 11 students) and East Hartford (two teachers). The second wave included Rocky Hill (five teachers and nine students) in September 2025, and Westport (seven teachers and 12 students) in October 2025.

Analysis

The survey data were analyzed using Stata, statistical analysis software, and Qualtrics, survey management and analysis software, and descriptive analyses were conducted to answer the research questions. Descriptive statistics were reported using frequency counts and percentages, means (M) and standard deviations (SD). Dedoose was used to analyze the focus group data using codes informed by the research questions and literature such as attitudes about AI, use of AI in classroom and outside of classroom settings, ethics, successes and challenges among others. After an initial coding round, themes were developed both inductively and deductively to generate the findings below. Data from both methods were analyzed separately and then together to develop a comprehensive set of findings and recommendations.

Limitations

These findings are from an evaluation of a pilot and thus, include participants who are interested in exploring the use of AI in teaching and learning. Survey findings may not reflect the sentiments of all teachers or all students in the sample districts, and findings are not representative of all schools in Connecticut, where interest and skill may vary. In addition, given the rapid spread of AI, student AI use may have increased during the time between data collection and the publication of this report. We also relied on focus group and survey data, which when compared across districts offered consistent themes. However, we did not complete observations to verify how AI was used in classrooms. That would be a helpful next step of inquiry for future research.

Findings

Across the survey and focus groups, students and teachers expressed interest in and excitement about using AI. Overall, both groups felt the pilot program was successful in providing a space to learn a new tool and begin developing work processes and classroom structures that incorporate AI in ethical and useful ways. Professional development and peer collaboration for teachers was vital to this success, and teachers expressed the need for more support and time to further develop skills, knowledge, and resources for using AI in their instruction and work outside the classroom. Students, too, expressed the need for more time, guidance, and guidelines to practice using AI in their work.

When analyzing student and teacher responses in tandem, it is clear that what teachers said they were teaching, students said they were learning, demonstrating strong alignment between teaching and learning in the lessons developed in the AI pilot. Both teachers and students also shared that the assumption that youth may be more adept at new digital tools did not hold true for AI use in these districts. Students expressed a desire for more support in how and when to use AI effectively and to follow rules and ethics surrounding AI use. Students viewed AI tools as useful for some tasks, but they also expressed that AI tools were not useful for other activities. They were happy to put AI aside for many tasks and preferred teacher support to AI support. In this way, AI was not replacing teachers, learning, or creativity in this sample of schools, but rather it supported these endeavors.

Finally, both teachers and students reported concerns about accuracy, reliability, and ethics in the context of AI use, and all requested more guidance and support on thinking about using AI in meaningful and ethical ways. This sentiment from both teachers and students demonstrates ethical engagement with AI and will be a helpful foundation as AI use continues to grow and change.

Below, we first present the findings from the survey. Next, we present the themes that emerged from the focus groups. Survey findings represent data from surveys completed by teachers and students in all six pilot districts. Focus group findings represent data collected in four pilot districts for teachers and three pilot districts for students.

Survey Findings

How do students use AI?

In the survey, we asked students about how they were using AI tools during the pilot, their confidence in their AI skills, when they were using AI tools, and how they felt about continuing to use AI in school in the future. There was some variation in how students responded across districts and between middle and high school students, indicating that how students use and feel about AI differs by context. Where the variation is notable, it is discussed below.

Students in the sample used AI across different phases of work and for different tasks. Students on average agreed with the statement *“AI helped improve the quality of my final product”* with a mean of 3.8 on a one to five Likert-type scale. When asked

about how they were using AI in the phases of their work and for what tasks, there was variation in how students were using AI tools. These tasks are listed in Table 2 below along with the percent of responses within the indicated group and response counts. Middle school students in the sample most often chose editing or improving their writing (75.8%) as activities for which they used AI during a classroom project, whereas high school students most often chose researching background information (61.4%). Both groups chose brainstorming ideas as the second most frequently selected with 70.1% of middle school respondents and 60.2% of high school respondents choosing this option. Thus, students were coached or independently chose to use AI tools as they developed their thinking and writing during school projects. Interestingly, designing visuals and presentations was the least frequently chosen option for both high school (13.3%) and middle school students (20.1%). This also indicates that, whether by choice, permission, or direction, students used AI for development, and less for final projects. As one student in an open-response question explained, an AI tool *“helps me understand the project better.”* Finally, some members of both groups indicated using AI for math or technical problems, but as both survey and focus group data reveal, were skeptical about trusting the results.



Stock Image

TABLE 2: TYPES OF ACTIVITIES FOR WHICH STUDENTS USED AI

Activity	High School Students		Middle School Students		Combined	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
Brainstorming ideas	60.2	50	70.1	423	69.0	473
Researching background information	61.4	51	48.9	295	50.4	346
Writing or summarizing content	27.7	23	44.6	269	42.6	292
Editing or improving writing	33.7	28	75.8	457	70.7	485
Designing visuals or presentations	13.3	11	20.1	121	19.2	132
Solving math or technical problems	47.0	39	29.5	178	31.6	217

Percent (%) and count (n) of student respondents by age group who used AI for each activity. Students were asked to check all activities that apply so counts will be higher than total responses.

In another question, the survey asked students to rank AI activities from most used to least used. Here, there were a few differences between districts. In Seymour and Westport, students reported using AI to improve their work more often than in the other four districts and slightly less for prompting initial ideas than in the other four districts. This may perhaps indicate the focus of the pilot in Seymour and Westport differed slightly than in other districts. In a different question, we asked students to respond with how much they agreed with statements on whether AI was relevant, useful, and accurate as well as how they would like to use AI in the future. Overall, across schools, students responded with means between 3 and 4, indicating neutral to slightly positive responses to using AI for schoolwork. This included agreement with the statement “*I felt confident in acting on the feedback provided by the AI tool,*” for which the mean response was between 3.5 and 3.9 on a five-point scale across all pilot districts. The strongest agreement across districts, ranging from 3.6 to 4.3, was in response to the statement “*AI feedback helped me improve my work.*” In an open-response question, one student explained that AI tools “*can help you revise things that other students can’t*”, indicating that perhaps students may be using AI for support rather than relying on their peers. Another student said, “*it’s like having a teacher in your pocket.*” In this way, student respondents were using AI tools for feedback and guidance when teachers were perhaps not available, or other students were not able to provide support. That said, students also responded with the least agreement with the statement “*I prefer receiving feedback from AI over other sources*” with agreement ranging from means of 2.6 to 3.2 across districts. Thus, while AI tools can be useful in supporting student learning when other sources are not available, students still preferred their teachers and peers for guidance overall. Overall, students had some confidence in using AI feedback, and did find it helpful, however they preferred feedback from teachers and peers, indicating that AI may have some role to play in supporting student learning, but has not replaced existing relationship-centered methods of collaboration and feedback.

In response to a question about using AI during different phases of research projects, there was variation in how middle and high school students responded. Specifically, 52.1% of Middle school students in the sample indicated that they were using AI during the planning and design process, whereas 45.8% of high school respondents said they were using AI in this way. Twice as many middle school students were using AI during the presentation and final product phases (21.6%) than high school students (9.6%), also indicating differences in how students chose or teachers guided students in using AI in their research process. Only 6.4% of both middle and high school respondents said they were not using AI at any stage in the process.

TABLE 3: STUDENT USE OF AI FOR PROJECT PHASES

Phase of Research Project	High School Students		Middle School Students		Combined	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
Planning and design	45.8	38	52.1	314	51.3	352
Research	60.2	50	65.8	397	65.2	447
Doing the project	28.9	24	33.8	204	33.2	228
Presentation or final product	9.6	8	21.6	130	20.1	138
I didn’t use AI at any stage	9.6	8	6.0	36	6.4	44

Percent (%) and count (n) of student respondents by age group who used AI for each research phase. Students were asked to check all phases that apply so counts will be higher than total responses.

Student AI Use: Development of AI Skills

Students were also asked about confidence in writing AI prompts and assessing the accuracy of AI responses. Table 4 below shows the mean responses to these prompts organized by middle and high school students. Students were still working to learn how to write effective AI prompts with means indicating just above neutral confidence, and students were slightly more confident in their skills to

write and refine prompts at the high school level than the middle school level. Interestingly, students were most confident in using other sources to check the information provided by AI, indicating that as students learned new skills, they were leveraging existing skills to support new learning. This is an important reminder that as AI tools become ubiquitous, continuing to develop research and comprehension skills outside of AI use is vital. In the open-response questions, many students wrote about the difficulty in trusting AI to provide the right answer. Students wrote that they were not sure how to know if AI responses were reliable and were concerned about the work needed to correct errors in AI responses. One student explained, “*sometimes it can mess you up.*” The experience of concern and frustration over AI accuracy and reliability was echoed in the teacher surveys and across the focus groups, indicating that schools need to address these concerns directly and teach students to assess the accuracy and reliability of information.

TABLE 4: STUDENT CONFIDENCE IN AI SKILLS

AI Skill	High School Students		Middle School Students		Combined	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
I know how to write clear and effective prompts for AI tools.	3.5	1.0	3.4	1.0	3.4	1.0
I can revise or refine my AI prompts to get better responses.	3.8	1.0	3.5	1.0	3.6	1.0
I can tell when an AI response is incorrect or misleading.	3.4	1.1	3.4	1.2	3.4	1.1
I can use other sources (like books, websites, or teachers) to check the accuracy of an AI response	4.1	1.0	3.8	1.1	3.8	1.1
I feel confident in deciding when to trust or question an AI-generated answer.	3.8	1.0	3.5	1.1	3.6	1.1
Observations	83		601		684	

Mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of responses by age group on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the most confident and 1 being the least.

Student AI Use: Frequency and Interest

We asked students about when and where they were using AI tools, the results of which are in Table 5 below. Across both middle and high school respondents, the majority of students in each group most often used AI in class with teacher guidance (56% of middle school respondents, 54.1% of high school respondents). However, when using AI independently, there was variation by grade level. Middle school respondents most often used AI independently while in school (25.2 %) whereas high school students were more often using AI independently at home (20%). It is useful to know that students were mostly using AI tools under teacher guidance but were also using AI tools on their own at all age levels, thus emphasizing the importance of including all teachers and families in developing AI skills and maintaining boundaries.

TABLE 5: PRIMARY CONTEXT OF STUDENT AI USE

Context	High School Students		Middle School Students		Combined	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
At home for school assignments	20.0	17	8.3	50	9.7	67
I did not use AI tools.	4.7	4	3.2	19	3.3	23
In group projects	1.2	1	5.0	30	4.5	31
In-class with teacher guidance	54.1	46	56.1	338	55.8	384
Independently during school hours	15.3	13	25.2	152	24.0	165
Other	4.7	4	2.3	14	2.6	18
Total	100.0	85	100.0	603	100.0	688

Percent (%) and count (n) of student respondents by age group who selected their primary context for AI use.

In another question, we asked students about how often they were using AI, and 37% of high school respondents reported using AI daily to a few times a week, whereas 29% of middle school respondents reported using AI with the same frequency, indicating that high school students may be using AI more frequently during the course of a project than middle school students. Importantly to note, 60% of middle school respondents used AI no more than a few times in the course of a project and 51% of high school respondents used it no more than a few times in the course of a project, also indicating a lower uptake in AI usage in general than perhaps other results indicate. Thus, even in the context of the pilot when students were using AI in targeted and teacher-directed ways, they may not be incorporating it into their work flow, reminding us that despite the conversations around the ubiquity of AI use, students were often

choosing to forgo AI tools despite having access.

There were some differences across districts in frequency of use as well, with 13.2% of student respondents in Lebanon saying they used AI tools “*Not at all*,” where this percentage was under 7% in the other pilot districts. When asked about how often they successfully complete a project using an AI tool, students in Lebanon also indicated that they less often successfully complete projects using AI than in other districts.

Looking forward, we asked students about whether they want to and plan to use AI in their work going forward. Results are listed in Table 6 below. Across the sample, students responded with means slightly above neutral that they will carry forward the strategies learned about crafting AI prompts and evaluating responses. Across all districts, students responded most frequently that that they were ambivalent about using AI in the future (38.4%). However, this was not true in Seymour, where students most frequently responded that they wanted to use AI in most classes and for most assignments (41.2%). Enthusiasm for using AI in the future was tempered in Lebanon, where 16.1% of students responded that they would never like to use AI again, which was more than in other districts that ranged from 0-9.8% of student respondents.

TABLE 6: STUDENT USE OF AI IN THE FUTURE BY DISTRICT

Response	East Hartford Public Schools		Lebanon Public School District		Odyssey Community School		Rocky Hill Public Schools		Seymour Public Schools		Westport Public Schools		Total Across Districts	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
I would never like to use AI again.	0.0	0	16.5	31	9.8	6	0.0	0	.8	1	5.8	15	8.1	53
I would like to use AI less than we use it now.	0.0	0	19.8	38	19.7	12	0.0	0	10.1	12	13.1	34	14.7	96
I don't care whether we use AI or not.	50.0	4	36.5	70	37.7	23	42.8	6	33.6	40	41.5	108	38.4	251
I would like to use AI in most of my classes and for most assignments.	37.5	3	23.4	45	21.3	13	35.7	5	41.2	49	33.1	86	30.7	201
I would like to use AI in all of my classes for all assignments.	12.5	1	4.2	8	11.5	7	21.4	3	14.3	17	6.5	17	8.1	53
<i>Total in District</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>192</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>119</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>260</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>654</i>

Percent (%) and count (n) of student respondents by district and level of interest in using AI in the future.

Across these student survey results, it seems that students were using AI in different ways across their work process, mostly in school with teacher guidance. However, the majority of students were not using AI tools frequently and were mostly ambivalent about using AI moving forward. Students preferred working with teachers for feedback over receiving AI feedback but found AI useful in some elements of planning and writing. This indicates that the pilot allowed students to build skills using AI in their work, but students were given the flexibility to use AI when it is helpful and useful, and not as a replacement for human interaction and relationship-based feedback.

Teacher Use of AI

Given the smaller number of respondents in the teacher sample, we do not present differences between district and grade level in the findings below. However, teacher responses were mostly consistent across districts, mirror student responses, and match the focus group data, indicating that the survey findings are a reliable depiction of how teachers in the pilot were learning about, understanding, and using AI.

When asked about how they are using AI in their work, 85% of teacher respondents were using AI tools in their lesson planning and 90% had used or were planning to use resources generated by AI. Teachers were also using AI to tweak materials they were already using, with 54% of respondents finding AI very helpful in enhancing existing curriculum. Teachers were most comfortable using AI tools



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in their own work to prepare materials and create feedback tools for students. In an open-response question, teachers described AI as a time saving tool for the generation of instructional tools, specifically differentiating reading and other materials as well as rubric creation. As one teacher explained, *“I have found it incredibly helpful for planning/grading/feedback purposes. I am still working on how to effectively incorporate student use in a meaningful and ethical way.”* This echoes statements during the focus groups in which teachers expressed not seeing how AI might further educational goals when used with students but found AI very useful in their own work.

When asked specifically about using AI to differentiate resources or personalize learning, 84% of respondents said they did so sometimes or often, yet only 65% of respondents said those resources were good or excellent, indicating that teachers perceived that some AI-generated resources were low quality. In another open-response question, teachers were concerned about the validity of AI-generated materials explaining that the time to check AI responses can eliminate any time savings from using it in the first place. An example one respondent gave was using AI to create answer keys to assessments and needing to correct many errors made by AI in generating those keys.

Teachers were also asked about using AI to support giving students feedback, and 75% said AI tools were somewhat to extremely helpful in providing timely feedback. However, they did not describe using AI to generate feedback on assignments; rather in open-response sections, respondents described using AI to create chatbots based on teacher-created rubrics that students could employ to improve their work throughout the writing process. They also described inputting assignments and asking AI to generate rubrics that they could then use to grade work. In addition, teachers in the sample rarely used AI to analyze student data or measure student engagement. Most teacher respondents (83%) said they were sometimes to never using data on student engagement generated with AI to adjust their teaching. Overall, during the pilot, AI acted as a tool in a human-centered process, rather than replacing a teacher in the way they might generate feedback and analyze data. The survey reveals that teachers used AI in their work to create materials and adapt those materials for different learners and scenarios.

Using AI with Students

Teachers in the sample responded to questions about how they observed students using AI in the classroom. Most teacher respondents said that students used AI during the planning, design and research phases of projects as opposed to doing and presenting projects, which matches how student survey respondents said they used AI for schoolwork. Teachers also used open-response questions to explain that they used AI with students to help with idea generation, especially with students with special needs, and for writing feedback, specifically, grammar, sentence variation, spelling, and word choice. As mentioned earlier, some teachers described designing bots for this purpose using their rubrics.

When asked about how often students were using AI during class projects, 66% of teacher respondents said students used AI only a few times, further indicating that students used AI for task specific purposes and not as a feature of every step of their learning. Most teachers (64%) also said that students were most often using AI in class with teacher guidance, also matching student responses. With that use, 68% of teacher respondents agreed or strongly agreed that AI tools supported student learning in their content area.

The survey also asked teachers about the skills students developed after using AI during the pilot in their classrooms. These results are listed in table 7 below. After using AI in their classrooms, the majority of teachers agreed that students could better navigate AI tools in a meaningful way (78% agree or strongly agree) and better use AI to master standards-based material (52% agree or strongly agree). Teachers also agreed that students were better at using AI to help them write (66% agree or strongly agree). While the majority of teachers agreed that students could better use AI tools effectively for research (54% agree or strongly agree), they were not sure if students could critically evaluate sources for credibility or relevance (42% neither agree nor disagree for both). When asked about whether students could better critically evaluate sources for bias after the AI pilot, 40% of teacher respondents agreed or strongly agreed, but 38% were unsure and 22% disagreed or strongly disagreed.



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TABLE 7: TEACHER PERCEPTION OF USING AI TOOLS TO IMPROVE STUDENT SKILLS

Response	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Critically evaluate sources for credibility	4.0	2	14.0	7	42.0	21	34.0	17	6.0	3
Critically evaluate sources for relevance	4.0	2	12.0	6	42.0	21	38.0	19	4.0	2
Critically evaluate sources for bias	4.0	2	18.0	9	38.0	19	36.0	18	4.0	2

Percent (%) and count (n) of teacher respondents who selected level of agreement to each prompt.

Considering these results, it seems that teachers are teaching students how to use AI explicitly and that when using AI to support more discrete skills, teachers saw students improving after participating in the pilot. However, teachers were also more unsure or negative about whether students' skills in critically evaluating sources had improved, thus indicating important places for growth if districts continue to use AI tools with students.

Concerns

In other parts of the survey, we asked teachers about the concerns they had using AI for themselves and with students. Primarily, teacher respondents were concerned about the reliability or effectiveness of AI tools (57% of respondents) and about students using AI tools to take shortcuts or cheat (57% of respondents). This mirrors the focus group findings where teachers discussed being frustrated with the inaccuracy of AI-generated materials for themselves and for students, and being concerned about the ethics of introducing powerful tools to students that could be mis-used and ultimately work against learning goals. In the survey open-response questions, teachers specifically expressed concerns with the accuracy of AI responses to students' math questions or the accuracy of AI-generated math worksheets.

To use AI flexibly, teachers responded in open-response questions that they needed more time to experiment or "tinker" with tools and assess whether they are reliable and accurate. As one teacher described in an open-response question:

66 "The main issue I see is time. I need the time to play around with the tools myself to be able to effectively use them with my students, but there is so little time for planning as it is. I've had the best of intentions, but sometimes just falling back on old strategies is just more convenient in terms of time."

Other teachers also described needing more training in order to learn how to use different tools for themselves and with their students.

Overall, teachers said that AI tools seemed to work better for teachers on their own than using AI tools with students. This makes sense based on the experiences teachers described above as well as their ethical concerns, and desire for more time to understand and incorporate AI tools effectively. As school districts decide how they want to incorporate AI tools into teaching and learning, the concerns voiced by teachers in the pilot for the time and training needed to use these tools well is an important lesson to take forward.

Professional Development

A feature of the AI pilot was an explicit requirement for professional development (PD) on using AI tools in teaching and learning. We asked teachers about the frequency, quality, and usefulness of the PD they received. Teachers attended varying amounts of PD, with 38% attending 2-3 PD sessions, 40% attending 4-5, and 17% attending 6 or more. There was variation in these responses across and within districts. Overall, teachers found PD and collaborative time with peers useful and wanted more of both to help them develop their skills using AI tools in teaching and learning. Of the teachers who responded, 73% said the PD they were provided was good to excellent with 76% saying it was mostly to very relevant. An encouraging 96% of respondents said the PD they received prepared them somewhat to extremely well for incorporating AI into their teaching.

When asked about their confidence in using AI tools before PD, 88% of respondents said they felt somewhat, slightly, or not at all confident. However, after receiving PD, 62% of respondents said they felt very to extremely confident. These findings are a helpful reminder that offering teachers time and support in learning new things is critical when launching new initiatives, especially when those initiatives focus on new tools.

One specific form of PD teachers found useful was the collaboration and shared learning with peers. Across respondents, 94% said they felt somewhat to a great deal that collaboration with peers improved their use of AI tools in teaching. In addition, 61% of respondents said they were frequently or very frequently collaborating with colleagues. In an open-response question, a teacher explained, "having time to work with colleagues to develop lessons, activities and tools that included AI was essential to its use being successful and meaningful."

While 49% of respondents wanted more PD and training, 69% wanted more peer collaboration and sharing of best practices. This indicates that peer learning in this context was particularly valuable to teachers. The focus group findings echoed this sentiment as

well. Perhaps in a space where technology is changing rapidly, peer learning is a particularly useful tool in helping teachers to grow skills and confidence. In thinking about expanding the pilot, interestingly, 74% of teacher respondents felt moderately to extremely confident that they could support colleagues if AI was used more broadly. One participant in an open-response question praised the pilot, saying:

“I strongly believe the state should expand AI funding to other schools. This learning has been so impactful, and it is important that we get ahead of it as educators.”

Moving forward, the model of the pilot is a useful tool for school districts to consider as they build their policies and practices using AI tools. Building a team of confident teachers with experience supporting one another could be a helpful way to grow capacity for using AI tools on a larger scale.

As shown by the survey findings, students and teachers were using AI in some capacities more than others and were thinking about the ethics and meaningful use of AI in the classroom. While teachers found AI to be more useful in their preparation work, students found that AI support for writing and planning was helpful to get them moving when their teachers were not available. In all of these scenarios, humans remained at the center of the work process and were eager for more time and support to use AI tools most effectively.

Focus Group Findings

The findings below are derived from the analysis of data from focus groups with teachers in four pilot districts (East Hartford, Lebanon, Westport, and Rocky Hill) and focus groups with students in three pilot districts (Lebanon, Westport, and Rocky Hill). Quotations from teachers and students illustrate themes that are present across the sample, but to protect their identities, they are not identified by name, role, or district.

AI Use – Students

In focus groups, many students expressed that they saw some value in using AI in the classroom and were interested in learning more about how to use it in the future. They also expressed that they were not always sure of the ethical boundaries associated with when to use AI, or whether AI was always a useful tool. Some students felt AI was only useful in very specific contexts, like making something creative (a song or an image) or using a teacher-designed tool. Uncertainties often emerged due to tasks where AI struggled to produce useful or correct information. These experiences mirrored those of teachers in the sample, indicating alignment between teachers and students on the experience of using AI in the classroom in the AI pilot.

Students discussed how their experience in the AI pilot helped them to use AI more effectively. One student in a pilot district explained,

“I think when I started using AI, I think the way I formatted my questions weren’t as specific as I needed to be, so the answers that were being spit out to me weren’t as effective. But once I started to kind of learn how to prompt the question, the answers or what I needed AI to spit out to me really improved over time.” (Student)

In this example, the student had some experience with AI before,

but the direct instruction and scaffolding offered in the AI pilot improved their use of the tool. A teacher in a different district described experiencing a similar phenomenon with their students,

“One of the things that I realized was the kids...had already used AI. Had already used ChatGPT, had already used those things. But they had no lesson on how to actually write the prompt, and the skill set needed to get good results.” (Teacher)

Another student described the pilot as helping them to develop prompt refining and other AI skills that they identified needing to use in the future. “When you’re outside of school, people are using AI for work, they’re using [it] for research. So I think that is a skill that should be taught, because that’s what’s this new technology age is bringing.” (Student)

Another student explained that AI was available to students already, so it was important for schools to bring AI into the classroom in order to prevent its misuse. They explained, “In terms of, like, cheating,... that’s a big issue with AI, right? If schools want to regulate that, then embracing the AI is a good way to do that.” (Student)

Students also understood that AI tools were built from existing content and material, giving them a sense of the composition of AI outputs. For example, one student said, “I think when it comes to idea generation, AI is not something unique. Because it’s already something that’s been done, that’s been put into the system.” (Student)

Taken together, these examples illustrate that some of the explicit goals of the AI pilot were met, such as developing prompt engineering skills, understanding how AI tools are built, and preparing students for the future.

Students discussed using AI to help them understand concepts more clearly or fully. For example, one student explained, “when I’m asking questions, it usually doesn’t like put it in a confusing way of text, it like just puts out the question clearly so I can understand it.” (Student)

Another student described a situation in which they were able to incorporate their own ideas along with AI generated ideas for computer science coding. They explained, using AI “helped, like, bridge the gap between what we know and then what the AI can give us.” (Student)

Teachers, too, described similar situations where students used AI to help them answer questions and make connections between ideas. One teacher explained,

“AI does a really good job, a really, really good job asking the kids, OK, tell me what you already know about this. And then the kids have to tell them, OK, I know this and this and this... Sometimes they have all this information, and they don’t know how to put it in context of the assessment. So, the tool is really, really effective at helping them connect the dots.” (Teacher)

In a different situation and district, a teacher described how AI was available to support students who were not comfortable reaching out to a teacher for help. They explained,

“It was also the student that wouldn’t have spoken out loud, or the student who would have been embarrassed to ask me the question. Like, I forgot what this word meant. Like, I think that it helped those students that weren’t getting much out of a class

discussion or weren't asking for help. I think that was probably what I saw as my biggest success." (Teacher)

In these examples, AI tools used in the pilot were helpful to students in connecting information they already had with new information and synthesizing it in a way that allowed them to move forward with the task at hand.

Students and teachers both discussed using AI tools to support studying material for a test. The AI tools offered interactive features and the ability to generate new and infinite questions about content allowing them helpful ways to study. A student explained,

“When I'm studying for a quiz, I don't want to just, like, be reading the same notes over and over again. I could ask the AI to ask me questions...So it helped me find gaps in my knowledge, and then target that, study that, and then reevaluate it, and that was helpful to me.” (Student)

Another student in a different district described a similar use,

“I'm a big fan of using AI to, like, get feedback or to prep for something. So I have a test I want to study for, and I've done all the practice that I was given by a teacher, just being able to put something in AI and have it spit out questions that kind of replicate what I would see on a quiz or a test, or if I have an essay or something that I'm feeling a little shaky on, but I have all my material written... [AI] will give me feedback, not, like, do the work for me, but saying your imagery in this scene is not great. Improve this by doing that, something like that, that gives me direct feedback that I feel like is a struggle in schools.” (Student)

Across districts, AI tools used in the AI pilot allowed students to expand on the materials, assignments, feedback, and support provided by teachers. Students were then able to refine their work and knowledge when teachers or pre-written materials were not available.

Students also discussed using AI tools to help them generate and organize ideas so they could get started on an assignment with greater ease. One student discussed using AI to support the organization and mechanics of their work,

“Magic School AI, the writing section of it, it's helped me better understand how to organize, like, conclusions, especially, if you're being specific. And it taught me a lot about grammar.” (Student)

Another student discussed more explicitly using AI for organizing timelines and steps to completing a project.

“I think AI is very good at planning. like, for example, I have a health project that I just started yesterday, and I put it into AI to give me, like, a whole plan for it, and it planned everything out perfectly. So I think it's very good for planning ahead, and I think that time management is something a lot of people struggle with, so I think AI is very helpful with saying, hey, here's your definitive guidelines for what you're doing for this topic.” (Student)

Another student saw AI as useful in this regard as well, but cautioned restraint in its use so students could continue to develop skills on their own, separate from using AI.

“I think that AI is, like, really helpful in generating ideas but I also do feel like that when you use it too much, it kind of takes away from the actual work and learning, but I think it's really good for getting a quick start of work.” (Student)

Here, this student drew attention to an important tradeoff that students and teachers mentioned in all districts. AI can certainly save time, but if not used thoughtfully and responsibly, may also offer to replace work that is important for students to develop on their own. This balance is one for adults to keep thinking about and incorporate as they develop clear AI use guidelines for their communities.

AI Use – Teachers

Teachers used AI in the pilot in their class time with students as described in the section above, but across the sample, teachers found AI most useful in their preparation, planning, and feedback for students outside the classroom. As one teacher explained, “as I've gotten the hang of it, there's certain things that I'm like, oh, I will never go back. Like, it's been really exciting or really life-changing just in terms of my routines.” (Teacher)

Most of the teachers in the focus group sample provided examples of how they used AI to create and differentiate materials for students, allowing them to recapture time for interpersonal interaction or tasks that required more creative and analytical attention.

Specifically, teachers used AI to build tools like chatbots of historical figures or study chatbots students could use independently to prepare for an exam. One teacher described using AI to write worksheets for students that assessed their knowledge after watching a YouTube video. The teacher uploaded the video transcript and the AI tool generated a worksheet. As one teacher described, “I'm spending less time creating those projects because the AI is assisting me, which then gives me more time to do other things, like talk to my students.” (Teacher)

Using AI to support straightforward tasks allowed teachers to free up time for tasks or interactions that required their expertise and interpersonal attention.

Teachers also used AI to differentiate existing materials to better support students as individuals with differing needs. For example, one teacher described how they were able to use AI to support multi-lingual students who found using languages other than English helpful when studying content. The teacher explained, “If you start asking it [AI] questions in other languages, it will respond back to you in that language. So, [the student] was able to study in Spanish, which was really, really, really helpful for her.” (Teacher)

Or, as another teacher described, AI was useful in offering different supports for different students as their needs varied, “Some of our students had really good use of it and it was able to help them, especially students who were not neurotypical. It really supports them for their research, their writing.” (Teacher)

Across the sample, teachers also described taking readings or worksheets and using AI to differentiate the materials based on reading level to allow all students access to content and learning.

Similarly, teachers used AI to design feedback tools for students to

use independently to organize their thinking and writing and get differentiated support. For example, one teacher created a chatbot for students to use when setting their weekly SMART goals. Here the teacher described the tool:

 *"The kids were able to enter in their SMART goals weekly into that chatbot and that chatbot gave them feedback based on the rubric that I had custom-built...it allowed them to get instantaneous feedback, and it also it was able to watch them throughout the weeks, because they used that same chatbot multiple weeks in a row." (Teacher)*

In this example, the teacher used AI to build an interactive tool that students could use on their own and receive basic feedback on alignment to the rubric and their progression over time, allowing students the opportunity to tinker with their plans before receiving teacher feedback. Other teachers described using similar tools for coaching students on their writing and alignment to the rubric. Teachers also offered students AI tools to help students plan for a project, and remarked on how Magic School did a good job of providing students with "ideas as to what they could do and without doing the project for them." (Teacher) When asked about these kinds of tools, students were most enthusiastic about the AI tools that teachers made to align to specific assignments or units. Students and teachers expressed concern about using AI in ethical ways, and these curated, purpose-built tools were ways to leverage AI to meaningfully further learning in trusted ways.

Support Structures

A prominent theme in the teacher focus groups was that the school-wide support structures, such as professional learning, peer support, instructional guidance, and technical support were instrumental to the success of the pilot. Teachers found AI tools most helpful when they were used consistently across the school and were not governed by different rules and expectations between classrooms. One teacher explained:

 *"We were, you know, one of the only classes piloting it, and we're not really allowed to use it in the other classrooms, so that was one thing that was a bit challenging also, was just making sure, like, this is locked here and open here, but you can use it for homework, but not here." (Teacher)*

Students reflected that these inconsistencies made them less likely to use AI tools. When policies, expectations, and practices were consistent, using AI tools was easier because students knew what to expect and how to apply the AI tools ethically. While the purpose of the pilot was to allow a small subset of teachers and students to use AI tools, this reflection is helpful in thinking about scaling pilot activities to larger or more consistent groups of students and teachers.

Consistency in professional development and collaboration were also vital support structures for teachers in the AI pilot. As in the survey results, teachers expressed the value of professional development in building their understanding of AI tools and their use for teachers and students alike. In the pilot, there were three forms of professional development that teachers found valuable: external groups brought in for workshops, internal coaching, and collaborative sessions with fellow AI pilot teachers.

Many AI pilot schools chose to bring in external professional

development providers, such as speakers from EdAdvance (a regional education service center in Connecticut) or from the AI tools themselves. One teacher explained the value of these sessions, "Magic School actually provided excellent professional development for the teachers on how to use it" (Teacher).

The EdAdvance providers also worked in pilot districts in smaller groups to help develop AI policies and practices for the district. In another district, a current member of the technology team was working with the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) on developing AI-support materials, and thus provided much of the AI training for the district. Other districts discussed how helpful it would be to have more in-house experts to offer support more often as well as frequent, brief updates with tutorials on new AI tools available to teachers and students. In another district, teachers talked about the *Common Sense Media* curriculum as being helpful for thinking through and planning for AI use. They explained, "Common Sense Media, the curriculum is huge,...it was great that we were able to manipulate it a little bit. That was helpful." (Teacher)

Here, flexibility for teachers to take expert materials and adapt those materials to their courses and their students was valuable, further emphasizing the need for collaboration and scheduled planning time. Similarly, in another district, one teacher explained how administrators communicated flexibility in expectations of AI use, which allowed teachers to use it more appropriately. This teacher explained, "we felt like we had a lot of flexibility to say, this is not adding to our assignment here, this is not a good use of this." (Teacher)

In this district, there was significant planning time and professional development provided, which when paired with trust in teachers and flexibility of expectations, made for a successful pilot in which teachers and students could explore and learn.

In all of the focus groups, teachers discussed the importance of time and space to work together to troubleshoot, share successes, and develop policies in the shifting context of AI use. Teachers described a wide range of time they were provided for collaborative development around AI use. Some teachers indicated highly structured professional learning opportunities. Others expressed a current absence of formalized collaboration but a desire for more.

Professional Learning Communities, and similar teacher working groups are well-evidenced mechanisms for school improvement, and in this context, were extremely useful in helping teachers feel supported and confident using new AI tools. One teacher explained, "It really didn't matter if you were old, if you were young, everybody at some point had some type of snag with the AI. And, it was really nice having each other." (Teacher)

One teacher expressed that she learned even from being in the focus group because it was helpful to hear about others' experiences. Allocating resources to developing teams and offering time for them to collaborate is helpful when supporting teachers in developing new skills and ways of thinking.

Challenges

For teachers and students, the largest challenge in using AI was navigating the ethics and appropriate use of these powerful tools.

Students in the focus groups indicated a healthy skepticism of AI use, aligning with the findings from the survey. Teachers explained that they coached students about ethical use of AI and caution when trusting results. For example, one teacher reiterated what they told students:

“you can’t use the AI for the critical components. You can use AI for the secondary components that you need to complete to get to the critical component. So, I had that conversation with them to understand when to and when not to use AI.” (Teacher)

Students reflected these ideas about using AI to support their work, but not to complete it, indicating that students absorbed the key points teachers emphasized about responsible and informed AI use. One student explained,

“Some kids will use it for cheating, but if they use it for cheating, I mean, that’s kind of on them because they can’t use it on tests, like, where it matters, so they’re not learning anything. They’re not cheating effectively. So, I think it’s fair that teachers give AI as resources. Giving AI itself isn’t cheating, it’s just how we use it.” (Student)

In this way, students and teachers seemed to be hearing each other as they thought about when and how to use AI in school.

Navigating the accuracy of AI and the boundaries around ethical use were part of every student focus group, and something that students were grappling with and asked for more guidance on from adults. For example, one student asked for, “guidelines for, like, what you can actually use it for, so, like, you know going in that it’s not cheating or it is cheating.” (Student)

Furthermore, students said it was challenging to tell if the responses provided by AI were reliable and accurate. One student explained, “Most students don’t trust it.” (Student)

Again, it is reassuring that students heard the message that AI can be easily used in unethical ways, and took time to consider how to use AI responsibly.

Despite some of the successes described earlier, some teachers in the focus groups left the pilot seeing AI as superfluous. One teacher explained, “It didn’t solve a problem... I didn’t find anything where, like, AI solved a teaching problem I was having in terms of getting students to understand.” (Teacher)

Another teacher in the same district described their thought process,

“for me, it was deciding, is this a tool for me? Or is this a tool for students? And I had trouble making it a tool for students. I had no trouble making it a tool for me. I think the goals are different between you and the student.” (Teacher)

This teacher framed it as such based on the idea that AI as a content production machine interacts with student and teacher labor differently. In their words, their role as a teacher was to “produce great content” and “lessons that help the students learn”.

In their understanding, AI could help streamline content production or enhance it, creating a better end product for students to benefit from. On the other hand, the role that AI produced content has for students is to fundamentally disrupt the

relationship between student work output and mastery of content.

In this way, teachers asked the big questions about AI use that the larger culture is asking: what are the goals of AI use? Are we comfortable with what AI is replacing? What are the consequences of using AI? What level of support provided by AI is helpful and what is detrimental? Versions of these questions were present in all of the focus groups. In a different district, teachers also reflected on the larger consequences of using AI tools. One teacher described her trepidations around AI:

“I realized, like, the environmental impact. And that was very eye-opening for me.... oh, my God, these kids are just sitting here generating stupid pictures. Like, that’s the biggest thing. Like, that takes the most energy. It takes the most. And so, I think I used it more judiciously...I thought more about, like, is this actually going to enhance my learning? Or am I just playing around on this?” (Teacher)

Another teacher in the same district was grappling with the consequences of AI use for student learning,

“But are we comfortable with that they don’t have to work for anything? Like, they can even ask it to do the deep thinking for them. And it will. And so at what point are they not really learning anything other than how to type something in and get the answer? And does that matter if it’s going to be there for them in the future? But I feel like it does matter. On a pure level, I feel like it matters if they are just consumers of information.” (Teacher)

Or as a teacher from a different district illuminated, “a trend in education is that if a student can produce the product, they must have mastered the skills to produce the product. That relationship is broken now.” (Teacher)

Here, this teacher reflected on how AI might be changing how we think about learning generally outside of the AI pilot. In each focus group, sentiments like the ones above were peppered throughout the conversation, alternating with ways that AI tools streamlined teachers’ work or supported students’ learning. These complex understandings about AI were evolving for all participants, just as they are in most workplaces worldwide.

Students also grappled with how to think about and use AI. For example, one student described the process of using AI, “It’s a monotonous process, and at that point, you’re like, I may as well do it myself.” (Student)

Another student described both how they use AI to check their work, but also that they prefer connecting with their teachers directly:

“I think that the AI tools are all right, but I personally don’t really like them that much. I would rather like a professional or like an actual teacher like check my work. It’s helpful for like if you’re going to like check over your work or like ask it about something you wrote. But there were times in the past where I have had to correct it on like some math stuff and writing things.” (Student)

Students in every focus group echoed this experience that AI was not useful for solving math equations or getting support studying for a math test. The AI tools would often give incorrect responses

in these contexts, which was confusing for students. Math teachers confirmed this experience. A student explained,

“AIs in general, like, they struggle with mathematics, and, like they’ll give you an answer, but then when you go in and you do the work yourself, you’ll notice, like, they made a simple arithmetic mistake, and then that’s how you know, like, oh, their final answer is incorrect.” (Student)

This overwhelming experience of the shortcomings of using AI in math classrooms is a helpful reminder that while AI can be useful in some contexts, it may not be the right tool in others.

Finally, in the focus groups, teachers reported that it took some effort to get students interested in, engaged with, and viewing AI as a tool for their work. Reluctance to engage with AI is not necessarily what many adults expect of younger generations, but in the context of the reservations discussed above, this reluctance may be indicative of the importance of adults clearly articulating boundaries, appropriate use, and where AI is useful, and where it falls short. One teacher described the work they did in their classroom:

“[Students] had certain opinions towards AI, and they were honestly very reluctant, because they had viewed AI not necessarily as a tool, but as a cheating mechanism. So they didn’t want to use AI at all. And so I had to help basically, it was psychological conversation of how do we rebrand this to utilizing it as a tool versus a cheating mechanism.” (Teacher)

Or as another teacher explained, “the class feedback was pretty much...akin to, well, why didn’t you just teach it?” (Teacher).

As in the examples above, students in the pilot were concerned about using AI appropriately, and found that it was not always a useful tool for the task at hand. In some ways, students and teachers communicated clearly and learned from each other about the ethics and most appropriate uses for AI, and in other ways, teachers and students had room to learn more from each other about the ways they were evolving their thinking on AI use. Across the sample, both groups, too, advocated for more time to learn together about AI, providing a path forward.

Looking across themes, districts, students, and teachers, the AI pilot was a success in that it helped schools engage with AI tools, think deeply about them, increase AI literacy for all involved, create communities of learning, and find pockets of helpful planning and learning tools. Students most appreciated interactive tools that allowed them to engage with the rubrics and materials provided by their teachers. Teachers most appreciated the tools that allowed them to efficiently differentiate materials and offer interactive feedback to students as part of their writing and planning processes. In every focus group, ethical questions and requests for more time, support, and collaboration were present. As AI becomes increasingly accessible, schools need to tackle the big questions of AI use and leverage the lessons above to best support an ethical and productive path forward.

Discussion

Below are findings from the survey and focus group put in conversation with each other to answer the research questions about the effectiveness of the AI pilot directly.

How have students learned to revise AI prompts, critically read, and evaluate AI-model responses for accuracy?

Overall, the survey and focus group findings reveal that the AI pilot helped students to improve AI skills such as developing and refining prompts, and to a lesser extent critically evaluating AI generated sources. Students developed skills they did not have before the pilot and formed a better understanding of their gaps in knowledge. For example, students left the pilot knowing that not all AI responses were accurate, and that they needed to check responses carefully before incorporating them into their work, but did not always have the confidence and skills to do so. Students wanted more guidelines and support in understanding how and when to check AI responses for accuracy and when it was ethical and appropriate to use AI in their work. Teachers were skeptical about whether students had formed these critical analysis skills but remarked on the progress students had made in the short duration of the pilot. With these analytical skills using AI still in progress, both students and teachers found the teacher-developed tools that were content specific most helpful when using AI in the classroom. Specifically, students most enjoyed using teacher-created AI tools such as study tools, historical character simulations, and feedback chatbots because they felt more personalized and directly connected to classroom learning and thus trusted these content-tailored tools. At the same time, many students demonstrated an awareness of the complexity of AI tools and recognized that they still had much to learn about how to use them effectively and responsibly.

Students who enjoyed using AI pointed to the possible value of learning to use it in preparation for the workforce, with the expectation that their future employers may require or encourage AI use. Students and teachers noted that AI was most effective when used by students for planning and organizing writing and research, as well as receiving formative feedback on their work. Students viewed AI as an entry point or starting tool rather than a continuous support system throughout the entire project lifecycle. Most students used AI tools during the early stages of their work, including brainstorming ideas, editing and improving their thinking, conducting research, and assisting with the planning and design phases of projects. Students also used AI tools to receive feedback that could help strengthen their assignments and overall understanding of the material.

Students who developed a more negative view of AI held those views for varied reasons. Some students preferred teacher feedback to AI feedback or were frustrated to have to learn something via AI instead of via classroom instruction. Other students were frustrated by frequent errors or inaccuracies in AI responses. Some students reported that AI did not substantially enhance their understanding of topics, improve the quality of their final products, or strengthen their transferable research skills. Students demonstrated mixed feelings towards AI use as a whole, with many student survey respondents reporting ambivalence towards continued usage in school.

Students and teachers felt that AI was not as useful for math-related tasks and expressed concerns about the accuracy and reliability of AI tools and students reported moderate to low

confidence in their ability to identify errors in AI responses. In addition, students wanted clearer guidance about when the use of AI becomes cheating and when AI-generated responses can be trusted.

How did teachers understand and use AI during the pilot?

Teachers used AI tools in a variety of ways to support instruction and improve classroom practices. They incorporated AI into lesson planning, enhanced existing curriculum materials, and created classroom resources tailored to student needs. Teachers also used AI to differentiate and individualize curricular materials, allowing for more personalized learning experiences, and AI tools supported teachers in providing feedback to students more efficiently and effectively.

Teachers were concerned about the reliability and effectiveness of AI tools in the classroom, as well as the possibility of students using AI as a shortcut or for engaging in academic dishonesty. Teachers were also grappling with the consequences of AI in terms of ethics, environmental responsibility, and student learning. In addition, some educators experienced difficulties with student engagement and acceptance of AI-based learning tools, with some students expressing frustration over AI use or considering AI primarily as a vehicle for cheating. Teachers' understanding and use of AI was complex and evolving, and all teachers reported needing more time to collaborate, learn, and reflect to continue using AI in the classroom.

How have teachers developed the skills to teach AI-use standards to students through the AI tools?

Teachers felt that AI tools were most helpful when they were used consistently across the school, so students did not face different rules and expectations between classrooms. They also felt that the PD provided before the pilot was effective, relevant, and helped them feel confident about using AI tools in their teaching. PD took the form of peer learning, training offered by the purchased AI tools (i.e. PD from Magic School), and support from outside groups or experts already working in the district. Peer learning was particularly valuable for participants as it allowed them the opportunity to learn from the successes and challenges of teachers working with the same students in the same context and feel supported by a community in their learning.

What are student and teacher perceptions of students' research-skill development in the use of AI tools?

Overall, teachers and students generally perceived AI tools as beneficial for developing foundational research skills, though with inconsistent buy-in. Survey and focus group findings demonstrate that students felt that their AI skills were emergent but incomplete. When using tools, students reported the most confidence in their ability to revise or refine AI prompts to obtain better responses. Conversely, students reported struggling with evaluating the general credibility, accuracy, and completeness of AI responses. Generally, students reported weaker abilities in areas relying on exercising critical judgment. Some students indicated frustration with the process of checking AI accuracy. That said, students found AI tools helpful in planning research projects and using less conventional sources for evidence (like LinkedIn for a career project), as well as comparing their

emerging work with teacher-provided rubrics. Students also appreciated the support AI tools provided to keep them moving their project along when a teacher or peer was not immediately available to support them.

Overall, these findings match the growing body of evidence that AI can be useful in schools when used in discrete ways in a context that provides clear and consistent policies and guidelines along with teacher monitoring and support for student use. The AI pilot program provided schools an excellent opportunity to learn about and implement AI in teaching and learning. Engaging both teachers and students in the ethical quandaries, complexities, benefits, and consequences of AI use is vital moving forward to help prepare engaged critical thinkers, analysts, writers, and problem solvers in today and tomorrow's world.

Recommendations

The pilot program revealed developing skills in AI use for both students and teachers, as well as a wide variety of assessments on the use of AI in schools. A consistent theme was that even with possible enthusiasm for these tools going forward, there was a great need for further exploration and development of students' and teachers' skills in the use of AI tools and more time to analyze the appropriateness of AI tools for specific tasks. The AI pilot program succeeded in starting these conversations, and thus based on the findings above, we recommend the following.

Continue to Invest in Professional Development and Peer Collaboration for Teachers

Teachers universally expressed value in learning about AI use collaboratively with their peers and receiving PD on AI from both internal and external sources. Further professional learning opportunities focused on areas of need identified by teachers could expand on these gains and help advance ethical implementation. This is especially true regarding the appropriate use of AI, ethics of AI use, and how to address the technical limitations of AI (e.g. how to verify that AI-generated output is accurate and appropriately framed).

Foster AI Literacy Skills and New Technology Skills for Students and Staff

The evaluation of the pilot found that while student skills in AI tool use were emergent, they were less complete than might be expected considering the perceived proliferation of AI. Many students reported emergent skills in AI use, especially in identifying and validating the veracity of AI responses. Teachers and students also expressed frustration when AI-generated materials were inaccurate. Continuing to develop technology skills, including but not limited to interaction with AI tools could be essential, as students and teachers move forward into an increasingly technology-emersed world. Putting a full focus on AI skill development may leave other important skills underdeveloped, like using the internet as a research tool, computer programming, data management, and virtual communication, among others.

When Using AI, Leverage AI Tools in Context Specific Ways

Students and teachers found AI most effective and helpful when using AI as a supportive tool leveraging teacher expertise.

Specifically, both teachers and students found using chatbots with teacher rubrics and teacher designed study tools very effective uses of AI tools in teaching and learning. Teachers also described using AI tools to make rubrics for teacher generated assignments or to differentiate or translate materials. In these examples, humans stayed at the center of the endeavor and at the end product of use, while AI tools were used to support. When incorporating AI into teaching and learning, focused use of AI tools is recommended.

Provide Clear Guidance on Appropriate AI Use

It is critical that teachers and students know when AI tools are useful and when they may be a net negative. Some teachers expressed frustration with AI as a student-based tool even when they found it useful as a lesson-preparation tool. They should be wary of use cases in which AI made frequent and/or critical errors, such as math instruction or complex and critical thinking-based tasks. Teachers and students should be especially cautious of tasks where these frequent errors made by AI tools may create problems for students who struggle to identify the veracity of AI responses.

Emphasize Ethical Engagement With AI

Teachers and students both expressed significant worries about the ethics of AI usage. Some participants expressed an extremely negative view of AI, including a worry about environmental impact from AI usage, and fundamental breakdown in the implied social contract of learning, namely that student work produced or enhanced by AI no longer allows evaluation of student mastery. Even participants with a positive view of AI tools worried about the ethical implications of AI use. We encourage an emphasis on ethical engagement with AI through consistent and regular conversations and training with students and staff. Providing space and time to discuss, learn about, and develop best practices in response to these concerns is especially important as the field of AI continues to change.

Develop Consistent and Actionable AI Use Policies

Finally, it is critical that consistent and actionable policies on AI be developed at the state and district levels. CSDE can continue to provide model policies as well as guidance and best practices that can be used at the district level. It is important for teachers and students as they learn to navigate the complex and changing landscape of AI use to have consistent and reliable expectations and policies to guide them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, data from educators and students in six districts suggests that the AI pilot program provided an opportunity for teachers and students to explore using AI tools in teaching and learning. While the collective understanding of how schools should use AI, if at all, is still in process, the pilot program helped highlight how teachers and students can use AI as a support tool to further learning goals and how AI might be avoided when there is not time and support to critically evaluate output. The pilot program can serve as a springboard for further investigation into current use of AI tools in Connecticut schools, as well as the development of comprehensive guidelines for schools to follow that will help them ethically and effectively navigate a rapidly shifting landscape.

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