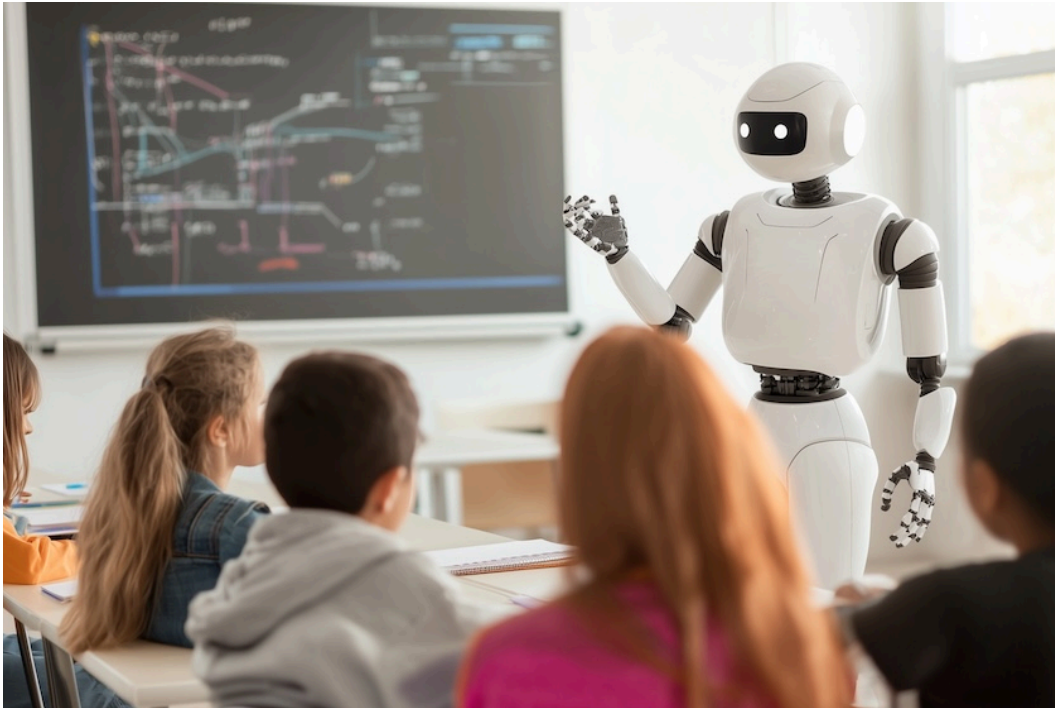


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Demystifying generative AI: How to lead with purpose

By Dr. Dana Godek and Michael Moore December 2, 2024



AI is everywhere—your inbox, board meetings, and staff conversations. Amid the buzz, it's easy to lose sight of a critical truth: generative artificial intelligence has transformative potential but requires grounded leadership to unlock its value.

As K12 leaders, you're navigating a tension-filled landscape: innovators vs. skeptics, tech-forward staff vs. cautious policymakers, and board members seeking clarity vs. the unknowns of rapid AI evolution.

This moment isn't entirely new. Think back to the debates over calculators in math classes or the emergence of personal computers. What's new is the pace—and the potential.

This article offers practical strategies to use AI where it's strongest—reducing workloads—while preparing your district to adopt it responsibly and equitably for improved student outcomes and streamlined operations.

Think of AI as a smart intern

Start by imagining AI as an intern—sharp, eager and tireless. This intern can write your emails, summarize documents, and even analyze complex datasets. But like any intern, AI needs clear instructions, regular supervision and a watchful eye to catch mistakes.



Simple prompts like “make this clearer” or “summarize the key points” can save hours. With a bit more sophistication, AI can:

- Analyze survey data and highlight trends.
- Draft and refine parent communications or policy memos.
- Create customized FAQs for staff or families.
- Predict student enrollment trends and optimize staffing plans.

Longtime educator Bill Daggett estimates AI can reduce task time by 80% but warns that leaders must carefully review the remaining 20%. Ethan Mollick’s research reinforces this: individual productivity increases by up to 46%, but system-wide benefits require thoughtful experimentation and scaling. His advice is clear: “*You have to do the R&D yourself.*”

Start small. Use AI to streamline your workload. As you do, you’ll model its usefulness, set expectations and quietly test how it can scale district-wide. This approach avoids controversy while ensuring your district learns how to maximize AI’s strengths.

Treat AI as a change management challenge

Introducing AI isn’t just about tools; it’s about people. Success depends on how well you navigate the change management challenges AI presents. Here’s how to do it:

1. **Set a clear vision:** Articulate why AI matters for your district. Tie its use to tangible benefits, such as improving student outcomes and reducing staff burnout. Ensure your vision is explicit, widely understood and focused on both operational efficiencies and classroom impact.
2. **Engage stakeholders early and often:** AI adoption thrives on collaboration. Listen to concerns and ideas from teachers, IT staff, parents and students. Build trust by sharing your rationale and showcasing early wins. Under-promise and over-deliver.
3. **Build AI literacy across your team:** Offer hands-on training that addresses real needs. Focus first on those open to experimenting, but don’t neglect the pragmatic majority who ask, “What’s in it for me?” Equip leaders at all levels with the skills to use AI effectively.
4. **Center ethics and equity:** Audit AI tools for bias and demand transparency from vendors. Appoint an oversight group of diverse stakeholders to ensure equitable outcomes for all student subgroups. Prioritize tools that meet your district’s specific ethical and equity goals.
5. **Pilot and iterate:** Start small. Experiment with AI in controlled environments, like using predictive analytics to refine staffing plans or piloting tools for principal communication. Gather feedback, iterate and expand only when ready.
6. **Establish flexible policies:** Adopt guidelines that evolve with practice. Address critical issues like data privacy, educator autonomy and responsible use. Don’t let rigid policies stifle innovation.
7. **Measure what matters:** Track how AI affects staff workloads, student outcomes and stakeholder engagement. Use these insights to refine your approach and demonstrate value.

Crossing the AI chasm

Not everyone will embrace AI at the same pace. Borrowing from Geoffrey Moore’s *Crossing the Chasm*, here’s how to guide your district’s adoption:

- **Innovators:** Empower these early adopters to experiment with AI and share their results.



- **Early majority:** Focus on this group with practical examples of how AI improves their daily work.
- **Skeptics:** Acknowledge their concerns but show them concrete results that align with district goals and reduced workload.

Remember, success isn't about converting everyone—it's about building enough momentum to tip the scales.

Lead as a learner

Generative AI is transforming how we think about teaching, learning and leadership. As a leader, your role isn't to have all the answers but to guide your district in asking the right questions:

- How can AI reduce staff workload so teachers focus on students?
- How do we ensure equitable outcomes as AI tools roll out?
- How do we balance innovation with responsible governance?

Try a simple experiment. Using AI, ask your team to create a brief summary of the work their department(s) lead. As a group, interrogate and improve the summaries. Compare the initial prompt they used and what follow-up prompts they used.

Ask them, "What did AI get right/wrong? Would this tool save us time in simple summaries? How else might we experiment with it?"

The journey ahead will require team effort. Here's other ways to keep learning:

- Join AI-focused communities of practice through AASA, FETC, or other associations.
- Explore credentialing programs from platforms like Coursera or Google.
- Convene cross-functional teams to experiment, share successes, and tackle challenges together.

Use your DALI resources

There are several District Administrator Leadership Institute events coming up that can support your AI work.

- The Dec. 18-20 [Superintendents Summit](#) in Charlotte Harbor, Florida will focus on the future of technology including cybersecurity, AI, and technology leadership.
- The hugely popular [Future of Education Technology Conference](#) will be held in Orlando, Jan. 14-17, focused on technology use—including AI—in classrooms.
- The 12-week virtual [Technology Leadership Academy](#) offers a hands-on, expert-led opportunity to engage in problem-solving and planning.

Lead with purpose

AI is already reshaping our world, but its greatest potential lies in thoughtful, purpose-driven leadership. Use AI to streamline operations, engage stakeholders, and improve outcomes—but do so with care, curiosity, and collaboration.



The emails in your inbox may be full of hype but your leadership can cut through it to create meaningful change. Adopt AI not as a solution but as a tool that complements the creativity, dedication and expertise of the people who make your district thrive.

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