



Signaling Change

AI and School Communication



**Chat: What's your
favorite way you
use AI?**





I spent 10 years as a Senior Chief Communications Officer in Florida and South Carolina.

I now serve as the Apptegy Strategic Communications Advisor for K-12 districts.

Hi, I'm Greg!



Disney's latest customer service addition! Memory Maker Photopass Magic Shots!



The School Marketing Magazine

Transform your schools with marketing. SchoolCEO offers original research, superintendent interviews and marketing resources to get you started.



So let's talk AI!

1

How did we
get here?

2

What does our
new research say
about AI in school
administration?

3

How can leaders
lead well in the
age of AI?

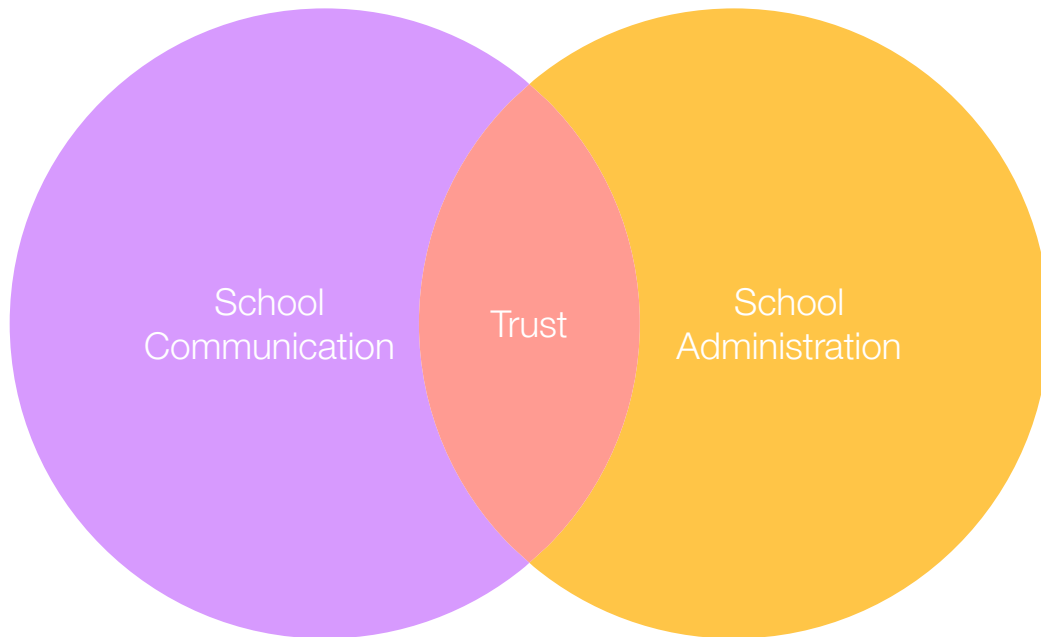


Part I: How Did We Get Here

Question for the crowd:

**In the past five years,
what new or increased
stressors have impacted
your roles?**

**Jot down or talk to a
neighbor.**



You wear a lot of “hats.”

Decision Maker

You are responsible for making multiple decisions throughout the day—many of them on the fly.

Decision Communicator

It’s your job to communicate—and gain buy-in—for decisions that are made. Sometimes, this is with an external audience, but other times it is internal as well.

Operations Pro

You get the role of facilitating moving parts—even when it’s the weekends or holidays. This means late nights, busy holidays, and the sense of “always being on”

Paperwork Magnate

With work comes paperwork! And unfortunately, a lot of this falls in your lap. And while paperwork is necessary, it isn’t incredibly motivating or fulfilling.



And unfortunately, leading and communicating in schools has only gotten harder.

Increased school choice

means families and teachers have more options than ever—meaning that your district competes for every student and staff member in a way that would have been unthinkable 15 years ago.

Budget cuts mean that every tool and position is under scrutiny, and that you may have fewer hands than ever to do the same amount—or more work.

Higher levels of politicization mean that no decision goes unexamined and that trust is no longer a given, but something fought hard for and easily lost.

AI is here to stay.

But how will it factor
into the equation?



We are entering a convergence zone.

On one hand, increased competition, school funding, and politicization. **As a result of all of these, we have burnout.**

On the other hand, AI is rapidly reshaping our roles.





Mixed
qualitative
and
quantitative
study

Hours of
in-depth
influencer
interviews

**130 survey
responses
nationwide**

What we wanted to know:

1

How are school leaders
and communicators
currently using AI?

2

Which tools and use
cases are most useful in
the office—not in the
classroom?

3

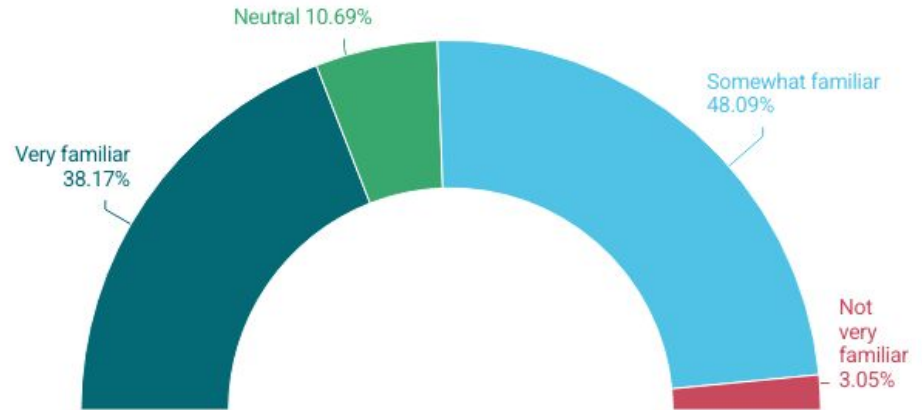
How is AI changing school
administration and
communication?



Finding #1:

AI is popular and gaining steam quickly.

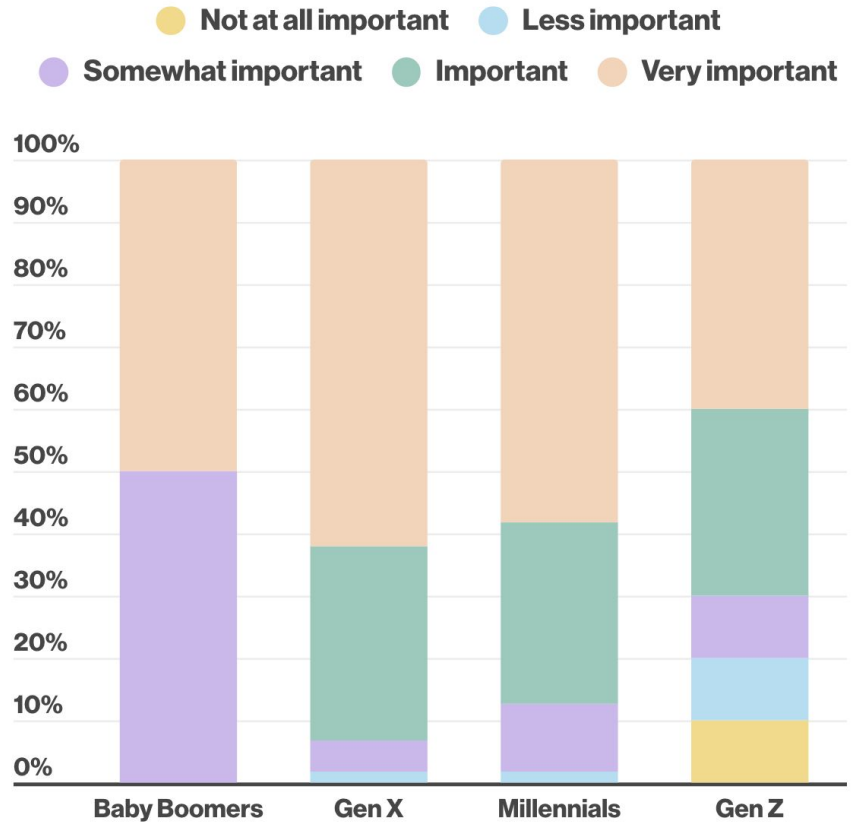
How familiar are you with AI-powered tools for professional tasks?



97% of respondents across various roles and district types reported having personally experimented with AI tools for their professional duties.

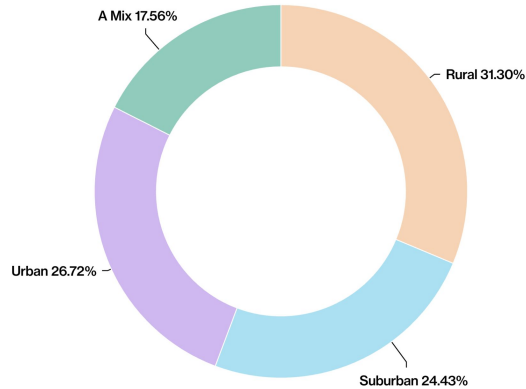


Participants of **all ages** believe AI is important to the future of school communication.

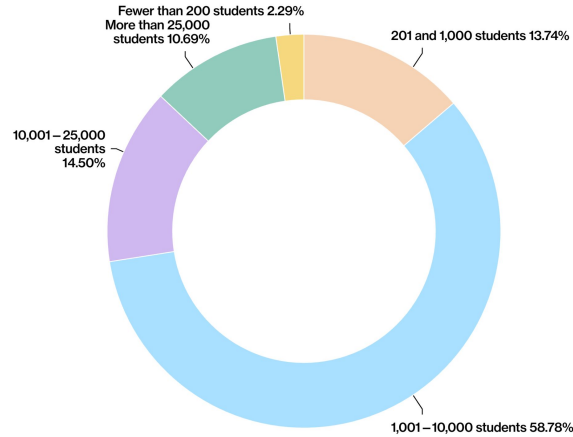


Who did we talk to?

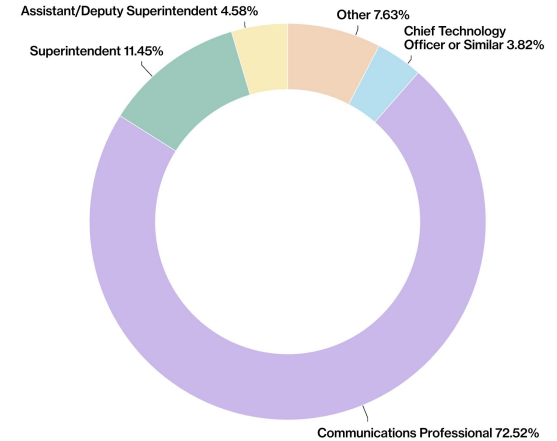
Type of District



District Enrollment



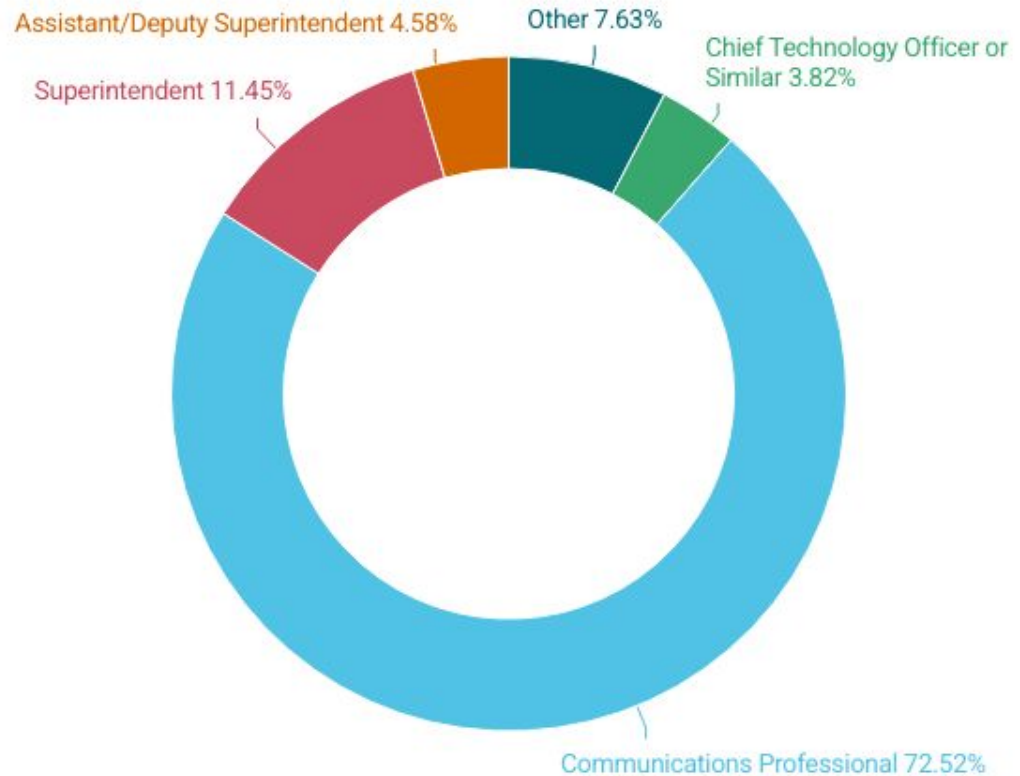
What is your current role?



Finding #2:

School communicators are leading the way when it comes to AI adoption.

What is your current role?



schoolceo

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SPRING
2024

HIGHLIGHTS:

Artificial intelligence expert Rebecca Bultsma, APR, on what generative AI means for school comms

How one finalist for AASA's Superintendent of the Year turned her district into an enterprise

+ Partners in Comms: How Superintendents and School Communicators Can Work Better Together



**Research:
A Seat at the
Table**

New Findings on School Communicators Presented by SchoolCEO and NSPRA

**The Case for
Comms
Directors**

Why Your District Needs a Full-Time School Communicator



Research at
schoolceo.com

Closed
February
2024

Conducted in
Partnership
with NSPRA

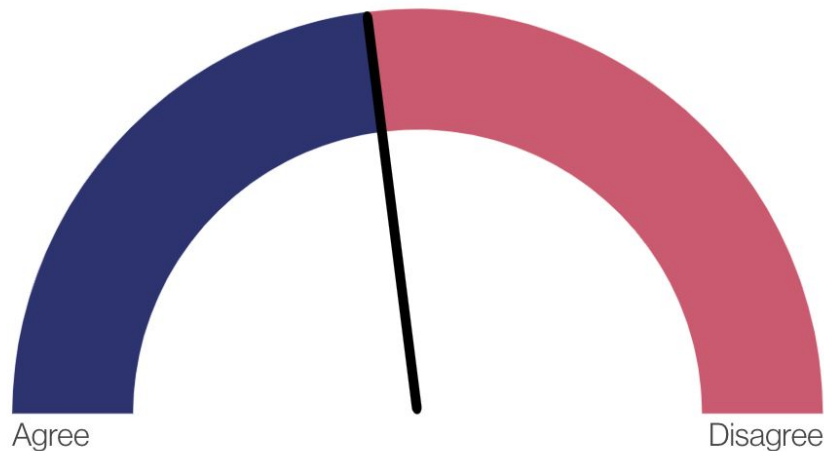
600
communications
directors
across the U.S.



Many communicators are dissatisfied with how they spend their time.

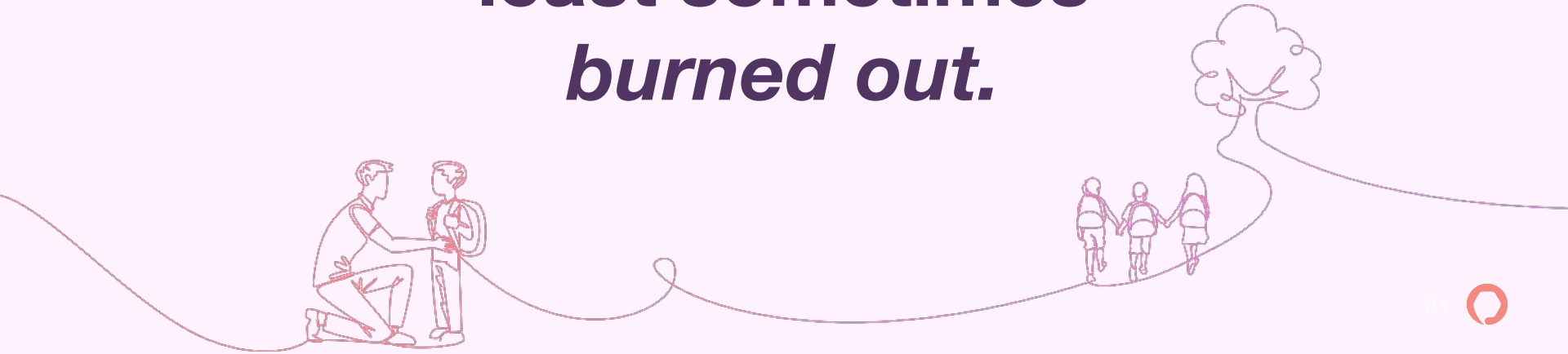
Agree or disagree:

You spend the majority of your time focusing on what you consider to be the most important elements of your role.



Which of the following tasks takes up the most of your time in a typical day?	Which of the following tasks do you believe are most important to being effective in your role?
External communications	Building long-term strategy
Social media management	External communications
Internal communications	Crisis communications
Website management	Internal communications
Crisis communications	Social media management
Building long-term strategy	Website management

**More than 75% of school
communicators said they were at
least sometimes
*burned out.***



Finding #3: General AI tools reign supreme.

Tool	% of Respondents Familiar
ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, or similar	95%
AI integrated into existing tools (such as Gmail or Canva)	71%
Image generation and manipulation tools (Midjourney or similar)	37%
AI meeting notetakers (Otter.AI, Zoom.AI, or similar)	36%
Other	5%
I have not used any AI tools	3%

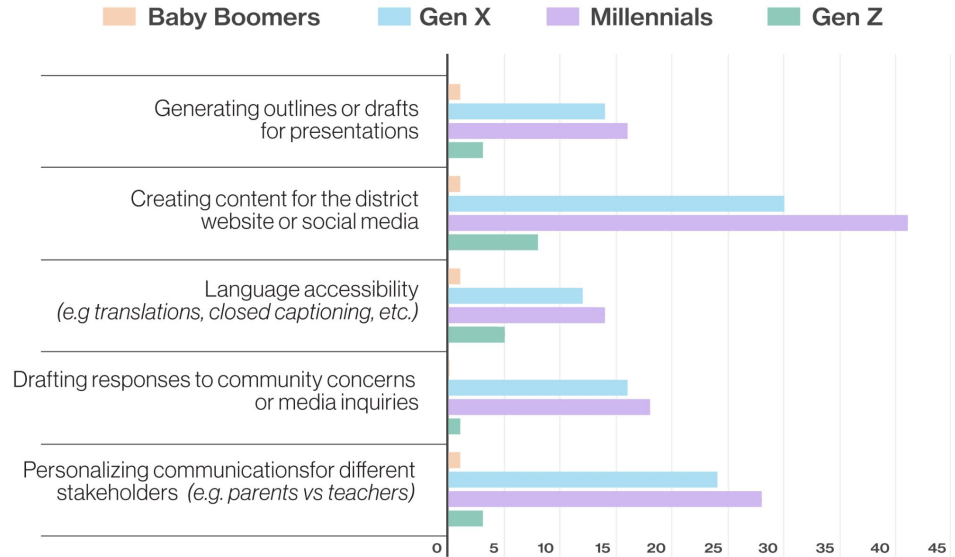


Beyond this, professionals were most likely to use AI features integrated into tools they're already familiar with, such as Gmail or Canva. This could suggest some professionals don't realize AI's potential as a standalone tool, simply viewing it as a new facet of another tool they know and love.



Finding #4:

Communication was the most frequently cited challenge that AI was used to address.



Use cases other than communications

Administrative Tasks

Respondents highlighted AI's potential for improving efficiency, automating routine tasks and streamlining clerical work.

Student Support/Instruction

Applications related to supporting student learning, instruction, tutoring, and creating lesson plans were frequently mentioned.

Data Analysis

This includes generating reports from data, gaining insights, identifying trends and performing general analytics.

Accessibility:

This refers to applications such as translation, language support and closed captioning.



But how does AI change the work of school administration?



AI creates potential for more personal connection.

It saves time.

Multiple leaders mentioned the usefulness of using AI for tedious or time consuming tasks, such as scoring RFP submissions or standardizing school handbooks.

It harnesses data.

Respondents were quick to tout its usefulness is analyzing data such as internal staff pulse polls and broad community surveys.

It fights burnout.

AI makes tedious, clerical tasks quicker and easier—allowing more time for face-to-face, meaningful tasks.



“AI has really streamlined my work—and honestly, it’s done wonders for my well-being. In a small district where we all wear a lot of hats and don’t have much extra help, the AI has been a total game-changer.”



But where do you start?

Or start over?



Building Agency, Reducing Burnout

1

Start with strategy,
not tactics.

2

Build policies that
provide answers.

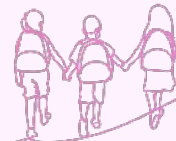
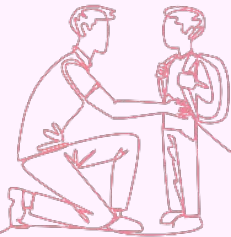
3

Make it fun and
make it helpful.



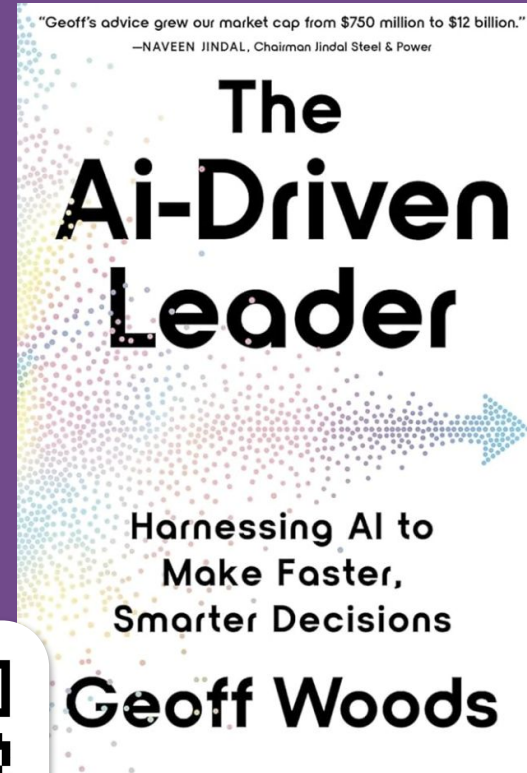
1

Your staff needs to know what they're trying to accomplish with AI—before they're asked to do it.



“When I interviewed over 200 executives for my book, 100% of them said AI was the future; 100% of them said they would adopt it. However, less than 5% had done anything with it at that point. When I peeled back the onion to find out why, it was because they didn't know where to start.”

- *Geoff Woods to SchoolCEO*



**“As a profession, we
must think about how to
use AI strategically and
not just tactically.”**

-Dr. Gustavo Balderas
Beaverton School District



Three Conversations to Get You Started



1

The “Us” Conversation:
How Adults Set the AI
Norms

2

The “Them”
Conversation: When
Students Improvise

3

The “Oh No”
Conversation: When the
Evidence Falls Apart

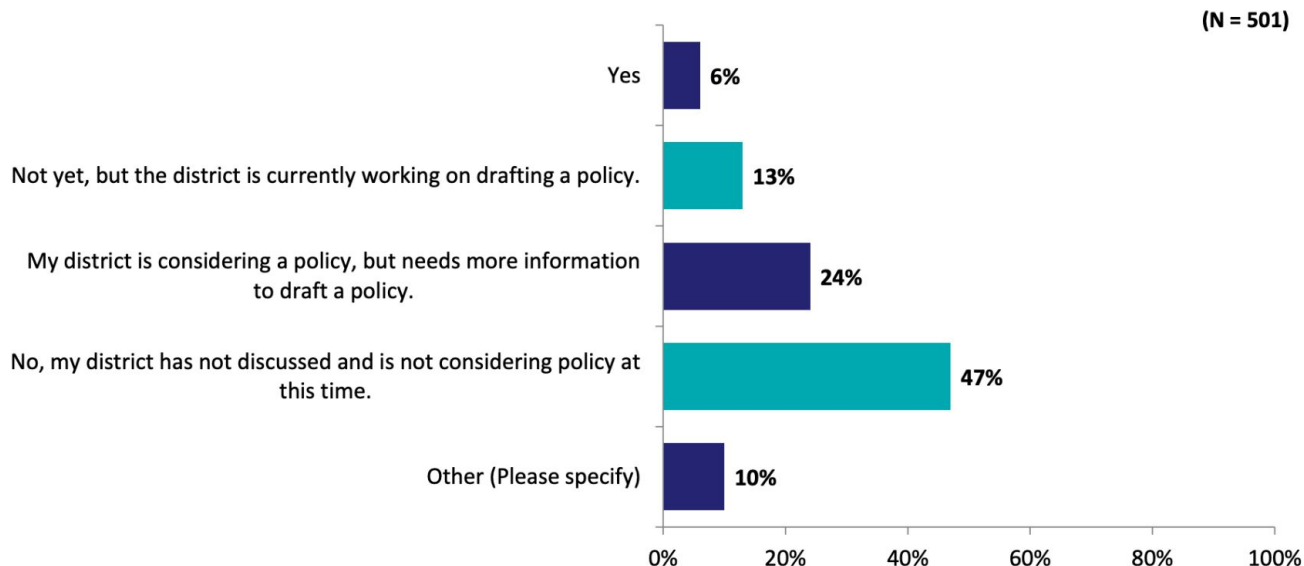
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Staff need clear policies and guidelines—and yet only a fraction of districts provide this.

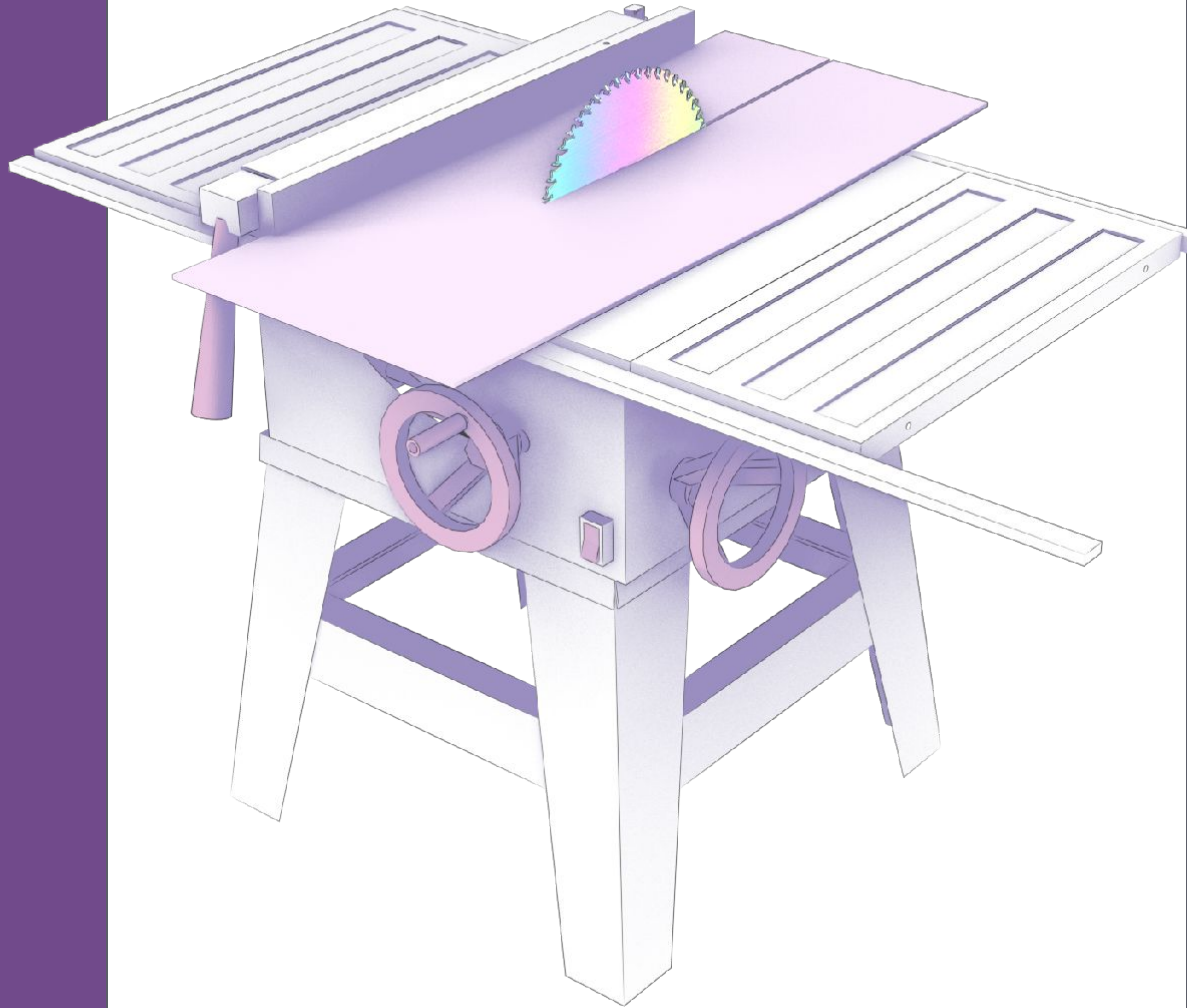


Clear policies build trust and transparency.

My district currently has a policy regarding the use of generative AI tools, either for students, staff or both.

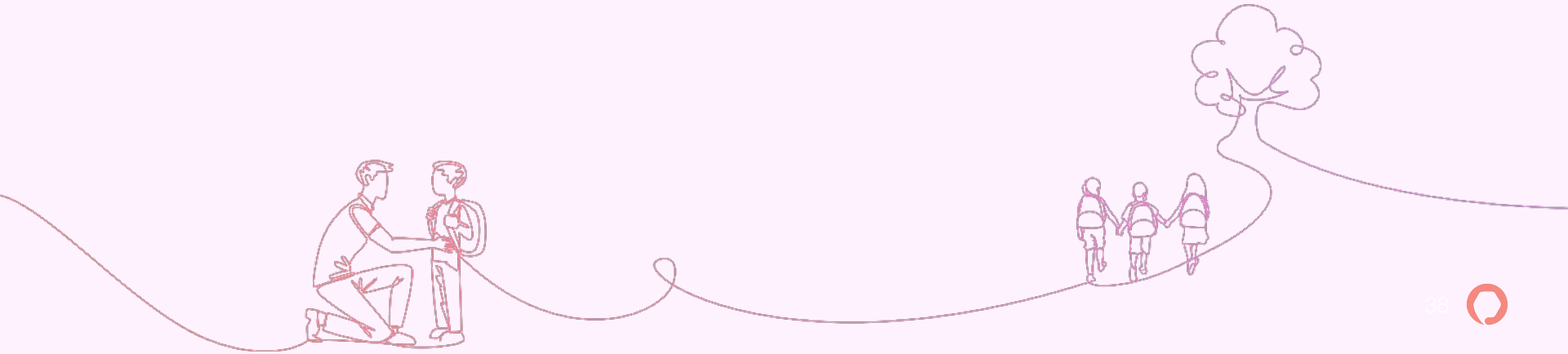


**Safety and
Transparency
are Key**



3

Make it fun. Make it helpful.



Teachers and staff may not be resistant to using AI—They may be just be intimidated.

Start with the personal.

Multiple admins recommended helping staff find personal AI use cases—such as planning a birthday party or generating a list of questions for a realtor to help them build interest in the tools.

Sandbox time is a must.

Sandbox time, or time when staff and teachers can play together with AI was cited multiple times as building “a-ha moments” for staff, beyond the initial AI-savvy cohort.

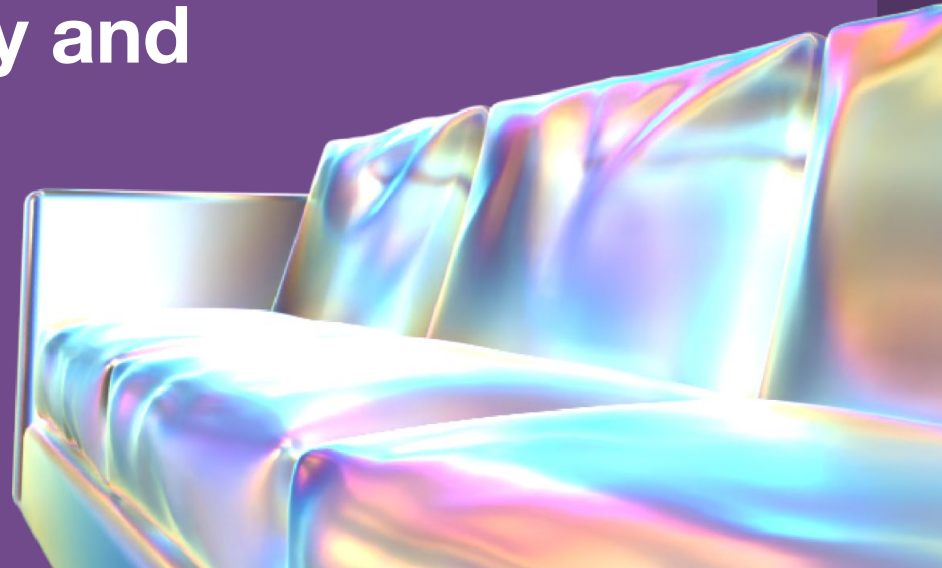
Celebrate wins *and* misses.

When someone has a tool that works, share it far and wide. When a tool fails to work as expected share that too, along with the mantra “This is likely the worst AI we’ll ever use”



“Curiosity can show you how to combine what humans do best with what machines can do faster. AI expands our capacity, but it is our judgment, empathy and creativity that give the work integrity.”

-Cristina Capretta, APR



Your next step:

What parts of their jobs do your staff dread the most?

How can AI help them dread them less?



When Parents Ask AI About Schools, Are They Getting the Right Answer?

I tested 20 school districts to see how AI search tools answer the two questions parents ask most: enrollment and the next school year's start date.



WHAT I TESTED

Real parent questions.
Real-time AI search.



WHAT I FOUND

Answers often come from third-party sites — not the district's own website.

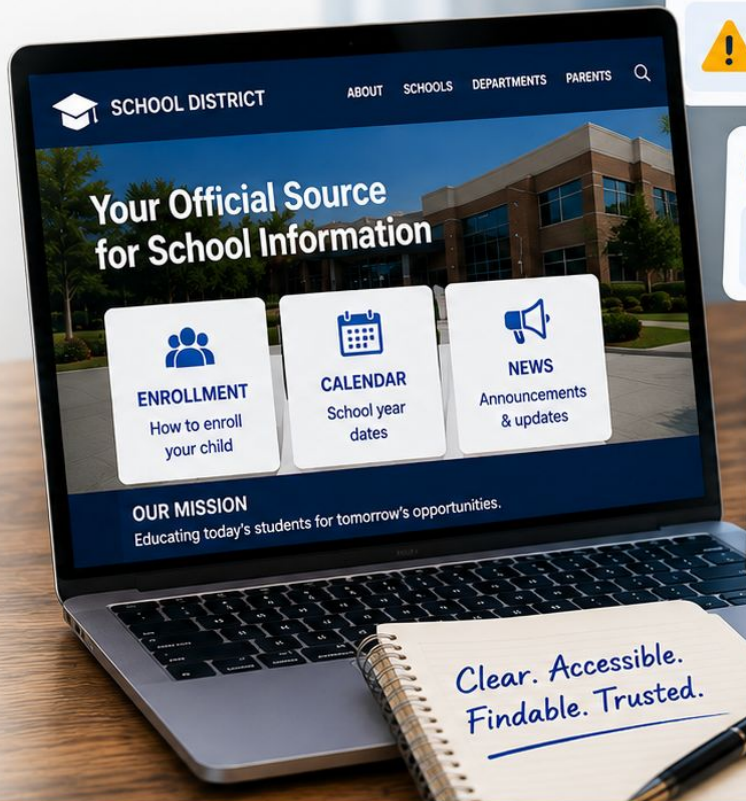


WHAT DISTRICTS SHOULD DO

Make official answers easy for people, search engines, AI, and assistive technology to read and understand.



Built for parents. Readable by people, search engines, AI, and assistive technology.



When does the 2026–2027 school year start?



Various sources say August 10, August 11, or August 24.



How do I enroll my child?



Here's how to enroll in your district...

Sources



CalendarSites.com

Aug 10



School Calendar (PDF)

Aug 24



Other District (Same Name)

Aug 11

Information may vary.



AI CAN ONLY SHARE WHAT IT CAN READ.

Make your official answers easy to find, easy to read, and easy for everyone to understand.



PEOPLE



SEARCH ENGINES



AI SYSTEMS



ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Register for SchoolCEO Conference!

When: September 28 - 29, 2026

Where: Dallas, TX



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All In: AI, Brand, and
Communications

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THANK YOU!

