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A LEADER'S GUIDE TO *AI INTEGRATION*

EXPLORING AI
IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

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ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

District and school leaders are feeling the pressure to "do something" as AI (artificial intelligence) enabled tools continue to flood the education technology market. Yet evidence of what actually works is still limited.The core challenge for system leaders is how to explore AI in ways that spark innovation while maintaining safety, security and alignment with district goals.[1] Without a clear and coherent strategy, efforts risk wasted resources, weak implementation and loss of trust.[2]

Too often, exploration begins with the *what*—selecting or adopting tools without a clear purpose. To shift this pattern, Education First developed the **AIxCoherence Framework,** which guides leaders to first ask *should* **we** and *could* **we,** and only then **how**. By framing the right problems and weighing real possibilities before implementation, districts can pursue AI with focus and coherence. The ultimate goal is to build a coherent, evidence-based AI integration strategy that supports educators and advances student outcomes.

Frame the Problem by defining the challenges AI is meant to address.

Explore AI Solutions by evaluating tools against your instructional goals and safety standards.

Learn Forward by piloting and learning in structured ways before scaling.

Frame the Problem — Act with Purpose / Stay Focused

Explore AI Solutions — Address Bias / Cultivate Trust

Learn Forward — Be Nimble / Embrace Curiosity

Who Should Use this Toolkit?

This toolkit was developed for district and school system leaders who are exploring how artificial intelligence can support teaching and learning. Superintendents, academic chiefs, CIOs/CTOs, curriculum directors, principals and instructional coaches will find practical guidance here. It may also be useful for school board members, funders and community partners who want to understand how districts can pursue AI with coherence, safety, and alignment to instructional priorities.

In This Toolkit

Drawing on lessons and tools developed during the AIxCoherence Academy's inaugural cohort, this toolkit includes:
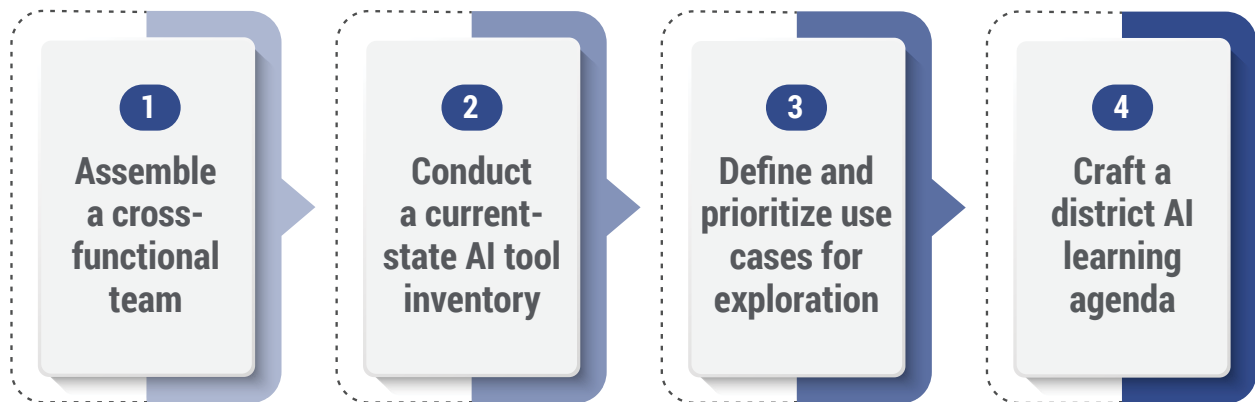
- **Tools** to frame the right problems, design learning agendas and launch structured pilots.

- **Protocols** to conduct AI inventories, define use cases and vet solutions.

- **Real-world examples** from districts demonstrating the shift from scattered exploration to a coherent strategy.

FRAME THE PROBELM

Before investing in new AI tools, district leaders must **define the challenges that AI is uniquely positioned to address.** Without this clarity, efforts risk fragmenting, duplicating work and undermining trust.

This section provides tools to help you:

1 Assemble a cross-functional team

2 Conduct a current-state AI tool inventory

3 Define and prioritize use cases for exploration

4 Craft a district AI learning agenda

Together these steps anchor AI exploration in system needs and goals, and they provide the foundation for coherent exploration and decision-making available in this toolkit.

1. Assemble a Cross-Functional Team

To make your AI exploration strategy coherent and implementable, it's critical not to silo AI decision-making within one department.[3] A coherent strategy begins with bringing together teams that include the relevant voices necessary to shape your AI learning agenda, guide pilots and successfully implement them.

Teams in the AIxCoherence Academy that made the most headway included voices from teaching and learning, technology, school leadership and teachers. This allowed for the various expertise of each group to shape the district's learning agenda.

> **"People support what they create."**
>
> — Dr. Carlos Lopez, Assistant Superintendent, Ypsilanti Community Schools and 2024–25 AIxCoherence Academy participant

Make these roles explicit from the start:

- **Teaching & Learning** sets the instructional quality bar for any pilot (curriculum alignment, rigor, High Quality Instructional Materials [HQIM] fit).

- **Technology** ensures compatibility with system requirements, as well as privacy and security, and can help identify data infrastructure needs.

- **School-based voices** (principals, instructional coaches and teachers) ground decisions in classroom realities and student experience. Prioritizing educator and student perspectives ensures AI exploration strengthens the human connections that drive learning.[4]

It's essential to keep in mind that a cross-functional team doesn't just mean "more people in the room." It means:

- **Shared ownership:** The team has a collective charge to guide exploration, pilots and implementation.

- **Protected collaboration time:** District leadership commits regular time for this group to meet and drive the work forward.

- **Decision-making authority:** This group is empowered to make recommendations on what to scale, pause or sunset.

Act with Purpose

AI has the potential to not only to support an organization's strategy but also expand its impact in ways we may not yet have fully imagined. Purposeful action begins with a clear understanding of the potential problems we could address with AI, ensuring that AI efforts are aligned with long-term aspirations and evolving organizational values. AI always should help an organization propel its strategy and deepen its impact.

2. Conduct a Current-State AI Tool Inventory

AI is already present in your district—whether through new features in existing platforms, curriculum programs or teachers and students informally using outside tools. Start with an **AI Tool Inventory Analysis** to get a baseline understanding of what's currently in use. This initial audit will uncover redundancies, surface promising practices and prepare you to evaluate your larger tech ecosystem. Anchoring your review in key questions—like which tools are essential, which can be consolidated and which are obsolete—keeps the focus on coherence and sustainability instead of accumulation.

🖉 TOOL AI Tool Inventory Analysis

Purpose: To get a comprehensive picture of what AI-enabled tools are already being used in your district.

Schedule a 60-minute meeting with your cross-functional team, using the pre-work and agenda below, to complete the AI Tool Inventory Analysis.

Pre-Work: Each team member completes the AI Inventory Table for tools they use or know about.

💡 **TIP** Before your inventory activity, conduct a brief teacher survey to capture real usage and sentiment beyond central pilots (what's helping, what's not, where guidance is unclear).

Agenda (60 minutes):

- **Step 1** (10 min): Individually review the inventory table that team members completed as pre-work. Mark areas that surprise you or raise concerns.

- **Step 2** (15 min): As a group, identify overlaps, redundancies or gaps. Discuss alignment to district goals.

- **Step 3** (20 min): Sort tools into categories:

  - Working well, worth studying further
  - Redundant or unclear value
  - Concerning, potentially sunset

- **Step 4** (15 min): Capture infrastructure challenges and assign follow-up owners.

Output: Annotated inventory and 2–3 immediate focus areas for further study.

⬇ **Download the AI Tool Inventory**

SAMPLE AI TOOL INVENTORY

Initiative / Tool	Owner	Purpose / Alignment	Users / Beneficiaries	Observed Impact to Date	Wins	Challenges	Infrastructure Dependencies (data systems, device capacity, interoperability)
X tool	Teaching and Learning - ELA team	Lesson planning support aligned to HQIM	Middle school ELA teachers	Teachers report reduced prep time	Saves ~30 mins planning/week	Alignment to standards is inconsistent	Requires rostering + SSO; heavy load on Chromebooks
Y tool	Teacher-led pilot	General efficiency tasks (drafting comms)	High school teachers (self-selected)	Inconsistent usage; no district guidance	Quick time-saver for admin tasks	Confusion about when/if allowed	Data security unclear; no district contract

3. Define and Prioritize Use Cases for Exploration

The inventory exercise provides a snapshot of current activity. The next step is to engage in a structured prioritization protocol that helps your team identify and define priority use cases for system-level exploration.

A **use case** translates a problem of practice into a testable application of AI from the user's perspective. Defining use cases ensures that your exploration is anchored in real instructional and operational needs.

A strong use case statement follows this structure:

As a _____**[TARGET USER]**_____, **I want** AI to _____**[GOAL]**_____
so that _____**[RATIONALE]**_____.

> **EXAMPLE**
> **As a teacher, I want** AI to access real-time, personalized insights into student performance **so tha**t I can adjust my instruction more effectively.

To create a strong use case, you need to articulate three things:

- **Who** is the target user? (teacher, student, family, administrator)

- **What** is the goal? (clear application of AI, such as differentiation, real-time feedback, efficiency tasks)

- **Why** is this goal important? (tie it directly to district academic strategy, e.g., improving math proficiency, reducing planning burden, increasing equity of access)

As system leaders, your role is to help define the **highest-leverage use cases** for your district. Prioritizing a small set of use cases helps you move forward with focus and confidence, rather than chasing tools or trends.

SAMPLE USE CASES FROM AIXCOHERENCE ACADEMY	
Lesson planning & preparation	■ Streamline lesson planning during curriculum adoption of HQIM, ensuring my lessons are curriculum-aligned and engaging for students.
Differentiation support	■ Generate accessible tasks that align with grade-level standards so that I can provide differentiated small-group instruction without lowering rigor. ■ Create interactive and differentiated lessons from our HQIM that foster authentic student engagement. ■ Integrate our district frameworks (culturally responsive teaching, universal design for learning) into our HQIM program, so that we can generate conditions for learning that support all of our students.
Enhance a math HQIM program with appropriate scaffolds and fluency practice	■ Align math fluency practice with conceptual lessons, ensuring that students build procedural fluency in a way that reinforces deep understanding and preps them for application tasks.
Real-time instructional support and data-driven teaching	■ Leverage real-time insight into student learning so I can adjust my instruction more effectively without adding to my workload. ■ Using real-time data insights, help us identify common student misconceptions related to our PLC learning goal or suggest targeted instructional strategies so we can effectively adjust lesson plans and interventions.
New teacher development with lesson preparation and use of HQIM	■ Leverage AI to help first-year teachers navigate and internalize high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) by surfacing relevant scaffolds, modeling instructional decisions, and offering just-in-time guidance—accelerating their development while ensuring students receive strong, differentiated instruction.

District Use Case Prioritization Protocol

Purpose: Translate problems of practice into 3–5 actionable AI use cases tied to district priorities.

Schedule a 90-minute meeting with your cross-functional team, using the pre-work and agenda below, to complete the Use Case Prioritization Protocol.

Pre-Work:

- The facilitator compiles the district's teaching and learning goals and shares them in advance.

- Each participant prepares 3–5 problems of practice aligned to those goals.

Agenda (90 minutes):

Step 1 (10 min): The facilitator reviews the district's goals and strategic priorities.

Step 2 (15 min): Individual brainstorm — each participant shares prepared problems of practice.

Step 3 (20 min): Group-sort into themes and cluster by pattern.

Step 4 (20 min): Vote on or select 3–5 focus areas.

Step 5 (25 min): Translate focus areas into use cases using the framing sentence:
As a [target user], **I want** AI to [goal] **so that** [rationale].

Stay Focused

Once we have framed the problem, we identify the key priorities that will drive meaningful change. Maintaining focus on the identified priorities ensures that we don't get sidetracked by AI's vast possibilities. Staying focused means consistently aligning our efforts with the core problem, avoiding scope creep and ensuring that all resources and decisions reinforce the solution to the central challenge.

4. Craft a Districtwide AI Learning Agenda

Your AI learning agenda is the north star for this work. It is the synthesis of the inventory and your prioritized use cases. Over the course of a school year, the agenda helps you generate evidence on the most promising use cases and decide what to scale, pause or sunset.

A strong learning agenda does three things:

- Prioritizes 2–3 high-leverage use cases for initial exploration (not an exhaustive list)

- Identifies the evidence you need to gather (student impact, educator workload shifts, fidelity to HQIM, infrastructure readiness)

- Structures cycles of learning (innovation zones, design sprints, action research sprints) with clear success criteria

> **TIP** In order to *avoid* taking a "solutions-first" approach, we recommend defining your Learning Agenda *before* deciding which tools to use. This ensures you are anchoring exploration in district priorities, not vendor promises. In the next phase, you will need to vet potential tools—and in many cases, more than one tool may need to be tested against the same use case.

⬇ **Download the AI Exploration Learning Agenda Template**

SAMPLE LEARNING AGENDA

Learning Agenda Question	Problem of Practice	Priority Use Case for Exploration	What We Want to Learn by the End of the Year
How can AI-enabled tools strengthen coherence between Tier 1 curriculum and intervention supports within an MTSS framework?	Educators often struggle to align day-to-day intervention lessons with the scope and sequence of Tier 1 high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). This disconnect can lead to fragmented student experiences, duplicated efforts and missed opportunities to accelerate learning.	As a teacher, I want an AI tool aligned to my core curriculum to support me in generating lesson scaffolds and practice tasks for interventions, so that students can receive targeted support while building towards grade-level expectations.	Do these tools improve alignment to increase student access to grade-level content while addressing unfinished learning?
How can AI help teachers plan and adapt our HQIM more efficiently and effectively?	Teachers spend a significant amount of time and struggle to adapt HQIM for diverse learners effectively.	As a teacher, I want AI to generate lesson preparation support, scaffolding suggestions and alignment with grade-level standards, so that I can adapt HQIM more efficiently without compromising rigor.	Whether AI reduces planning load without diluting rigor or instructional quality.
How can AI surface and organize student learning data in ways that directly inform instruction?	Teachers struggle to interpret assessment and classroom data quickly enough to adjust instruction.	As a teacher, I want AI to surface and organize patterns in student learning data so that I can quickly identify trends and adjust my instruction in real time.	Evidence of whether AI improves the timeliness and usefulness of instructional decisions; recommendations for scaling.
How can AI reduce teacher workload on routine tasks so that more time is devoted to instruction?	Teachers are experimenting with general-use AI tools without clear guardrails, leading to inconsistency and risk.	As a teacher, I want AI to take on efficiency tasks (such as summarizing long texts or drafting parent communications) so that I can devote more time to instruction, within clear district guardrails.	Clear guardrails for efficiency use cases; guidance for districtwide general AI tool use.

EXPLORE SOLUTIONS

Once your Learning Agenda is set, the next step is to evaluate which tools are worth piloting. This is where districts often make missteps—jumping to solutions before ensuring the right guardrails are in place. To avoid that, use the Explore Solutions phase to ask: *Which tools are ready for piloting our use cases, and which are not?*

TOOL ## Due Diligence Checklist

Purpose: To help your district evaluate AI tools.

This phase should be led collaboratively by your Teaching & Learning and Technology departments. Instructional leaders can assess alignment with curriculum, standards and pedagogy, while technology leaders ensure security, interoperability and infrastructure readiness. Working together provides a balanced, district-wide perspective that neither department can achieve alone.

Use the due diligence checklist before launching any pilot and apply it consistently across vendors and products. Each step includes guiding questions to assess alignment, feasibility and risk.[5] In some cases, you may evaluate multiple tools against the same use case to determine which (if any) are ready for piloting.

Evaluation should also examine whether a tool supports trust, autonomy and connection in schools, since relationships between teachers and students remain the foundation of learning.[6] In addition, the ISTE EdTech Index is a great supplemental tool to use during your evaluation process.

Step 1: Define Your Use Case and Assess Fit of Tool Evaluator:
☐ What instructional or operational challenge are you trying to solve? ☐ *Use Case Statement: As a _____I want to _____ so that* *_____.*
☐ Are there existing tools in use in the district that already serve this purpose?
☐ Would AI provide meaningful advantages over non-AI solutions?
☐ How does this tool address the challenge you are trying to solve? ☐ Does it have a clear logic model or hypothesis for impact that aligns with your use case (e.g. "if teachers use X tool for 10 minutes a day, they will reclaim 60 minutes of planning time per week.)
☐ Does the use of this AI tool advance outcomes in line with our district's values?
☐ Does this tool comply with state and district AI policies?

Step 2: Basic Functionality Tested Evaluator:
☐ How easily accessible is the tool in our tech ecosystem?
☐ Does the interface follow Universal Design for Learning Principles?
☐ Does it provide web browser access with easily accessible login credentials?

⤓ Download the Due Diligence Checklist Here

Address Bias

Generative AI technologies, while new, are trained using historical data patterns that can reinforce discrimination and exclusion. It is critical to evaluate and scrutinize any AI-produced or AI-assisted outputs for potential bias. By actively interrogating these results and deciding when to use or reject them, we can take steps to reduce the risk of reinforcing inequities.

DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT
UNITED CHARTER HIGH SCHOOLS

United Charter High Schools faced a common challenge when exploring new educational technology: Vendors constantly approached them with shiny new AI tools to enhance instruction. To winnow the wheat from the chaff, the team used the **AIxCoherence Due Diligence Checklist,** a tool designed to guide school districts through the process of vetting potential AI tools. The United team utilized this checklist during live vendor demos, transforming the standard product presentation into a targeted inquiry.

During one vendor's presentation, the United Charter team, armed with the questions from the due diligence checklist, moved past the product's intriguing premise and began to ask critical questions about its underlying claims, interoperability and pilot opportunities. They inquired about the data on the tool's efficacy, data privacy protocols and how its design would support instructional goals. The vendor's responses, initially enthusiastic, became vague.

The team's pointed questions revealed that the vendor could not provide data-driven answers to support their claims, nor were they willing to offer pilot licenses so the district could test if the tool worked in their classrooms. The checklist provided **a structured way to move beyond the flash and into the substance of the product.**

As the United Charter team debriefed, they reflected that while they had initially been excited about the tool's potential, the use of the checklist revealed that it was not a fit for their classrooms. The lack of data and satisfactory answers from the vendor meant the tool didn't meet their standards for responsible technology adoption. This proactive approach prevented them from investing in a product that would not have met the needs of their students or teachers.

Ultimately, the process led United Charter High Schools to another AI tool. This time, when they applied the same due diligence, the new vendor confidently and transparently answered the questions on the checklist. The new tool better aligned with the school's needs and had positive feedback in teacher testing, showcasing the importance of a well-defined vetting process.

Cultivate Trust

Cultivating trust requires centering people at every step of the process, from defining problems AI is meant to solve to piloting AI solutions. AI not only should augment our work but actively incorporate the insights and needs of the communities we serve. This ensures that AI solutions are contextually relevant, foster collaboration and build the trust necessary for change management and therefore systemic impact.

LEARN FORWARD

Once you've vetted and selected the tools that are ready for exploration, the next step is to **operationalize an agile approach to innovation—turning your system into a living laboratory.** The goal is to test use cases in real contexts, generate evidence quickly and adapt based on what you learn.

There is no single model districts must follow. Districts in the AIxCoherence Academy used a range of approaches—sometimes one, sometimes a combination—depending on their size, priorities and capacity. The common thread is creating structured, time-bound learning opportunities that build evidence before scaling.

Districts have drawn on several agile learning approaches, including:

- Creating Innovation Zones
- Running district-led design sprints for AI tool creation
- Engaging educators in action research sprints

To illustrate how these approaches can be sequenced, the sample Year 1 calendar below shows how districts can balance exploration and capacity-building without overwhelming staff. The key is to establish a **manageable cadence** that supports learning while leaving room to adapt. Districts do not need to pursue every approach at once—some may start small with running a short action research sprint whereas others may adopt an innovation zone strategy.

Suggested Year 1 Calendar

FALL (LAUNCH PHASE)	WINTER (BUILD PHASE)	SPRING (SYNTHESIZE PHASE)
Begin with one or more approaches that fit your context—for example, select AI Fellows, designate one or two Innovation Zone schools or kick off an initial Action Research Sprint focused on planning and efficiency.	Expand into additional use cases (such as data analysis) and run a second round of sprints or deepen work in Innovation Zones. Share early findings across participating teams.	Conclude with a final round of sprints or cross-zone learning, then synthesize evidence from whichever approach(es) you've used. Draft systemwide recommendations on what to scale, pause or sunset.

By year-end, districts should have:

- Evidence of impact for each priority use case and the tools tested
- A clear set of recommendations on which use cases to scale, pause, or sunset
- Teacher and leader insights on how AI integrates into instructional practice
- Documentation of infrastructure needs to support broader implementation

AI Exploration Zones

One way to Learn Forward is to select a small set of schools across grade levels to serve as incubators for AI exploration. Leverage these schools to pilot the district's priority use cases in a structured manner, document the results and share the findings with central leaders.

KANSAS

DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT
WICHITA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Wichita Public Schools designated Coleman Middle School, an environmentally focused magnet school, as part of its **Innovation Zone for AI exploration**. The district entered the AIxCoherence Academy with a clear goal: to use AI as a targeted solution for aligning curriculum with Coleman's environmental theme.

This problem-first approach quickly evolved into a **broader, human-centered strategy.** Through a partnership with Microsoft's Technology Adoption Program, the school piloted Microsoft 365 Copilot for a range of uses—from creating customized instructional materials to drafting Board of Education agendas. Students also engaged in sustainability projects that demonstrated how AI could connect directly to real-world learning. As AI Specialist Katelyn Schoenhofer reflected, the experience "just switched that mindset for us as a district," moving them from simply adopting AI to **thoughtfully integrating it for high-impact use cases.**

The pilot surfaced **key lessons.** The team realized it needed to refine the tool to reference Wichita's own high-quality instructional materials rather than generic web content. This pushed leaders to confront practical challenges and strengthen coherence between AI outputs and district curricula.

The work at Coleman has become a model for how an Innovation Zone can drive districtwide learning. Wichita is now planning to extend this approach, including developing a custom co-pilot to streamline the creation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for special education students. Coordinator of Digital Literacy Dyane Smokorowski described the pilot as "epic," underscoring its potential to move education beyond efficiency toward transformational classroom practice.

Embrace Curiosity

Rapid technological evolution requires a learning mindset and radical transparency. We stay at the forefront of AI developments to advance educational equity, continuously refining our knowledge and embracing innovations that align with organizational needs and values. As informed consumers, we assess risks, openly discuss AI tools and learn from others.

District-Led Design Sprints for Tool Creation

Some districts not only are piloting tools on the market but also choosing to design their own AI solutions. By running structured design sprints, they are attempting to create bespoke tools tied directly to their use cases.

These sprints enable educators and partners to collaborate on real use cases, test ideas quickly and generate prototypes that align with system needs. Unlike traditional pilots, design sprints center district priorities from the start, ensuring tools are built for coherence and long-term strategy.

COLORADO

DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT
DSST PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Denver School of Science and Technology (DSST) Public Schools used a **design sprint approach** to explore the "jagged frontier" of AI—areas of high promise and high uncertainty. Partnering with Playlab, DSST hosted a full-day hackathon where teachers, leaders and partners worked side by side to design prototype tools tied to priority use cases.

The sprint agenda included:

- **Grounding sessions** in DSST's STEM vision and its philosophy of responsible AI use

- **Problem mapping** to identify high-value use cases in teaching and learning

- **Build blocks** where teams developed prototypes and tested ideas in real time

- **Share-outs and critiques** to refine prototypes and clarify strategic guardrails

Pre-work for participants included critical readings such as "Centaurs and Cyborgs on the Jagged Frontier" (Ethan Mollick) and "Literacy in the Time of Artificial Intelligence" (Mary Kalantzis), along with a DSST survey on system leaders' mindsets about AI.

Through this process, DSST achieved two outcomes:

1. **Strategic clarity** – Participants sharpened the district's philosophy on AI, defining what is acceptable, encouraged, and off-limits across schools.

2. **Tangible outputs** – Teams created concrete products, including defined use cases and early prototypes, to guide future implementation.

The sprint not only empowered DSST educators to see themselves as designers of AI solutions, it also created a replicable model for district-led innovation. Leaders described it as a powerful way to "brighten the lines" around AI guidance while encouraging staff to test bold ideas within a structured, supportive process.

⬇ **Download DSST's agenda for a design sprint**

Action Research Sprints

Another way to Learn Forward is to run short, structured cycles (6–8 weeks) where educators pilot AI tools tied to specific use cases. Each sprint launches a use case in classrooms, collects evidence on planning, instruction and workload, and then shares findings with peers and district leadership. Educators also serve as peer champions who can support broader adoption if use cases prove successful. Multiple sprints can be run in sequence to enable rapid iteration and scaling of what works.

DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT
BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Boston Public Schools (BPS), serving more than 50,000 students, launched an **AI Fellows program** to anchor its Action Research Sprints and replace ad hoc experimentation with a disciplined, educator-led way to test priority use cases and inform district guidance.

Each sprint followed a six-week cycle. Fellows began with onboarding—clarifying their problem of practice, setting pilot goals and learning how to capture evidence in weekly journals. Over the next three weeks, they piloted AI tools in classrooms and joined peer learning sessions to surface early findings and challenges. The cycle concluded with a synthesis phase, during which Fellows produced case study decks and short videos, and then recommended whether tools should be scaled, refined or set aside.

The design emphasized teacher agency and system coherence. Fellows tested tools aligned with district priorities such as support for multilingual learners, students with disabilities and integration with high-quality instructional materials. Their findings shaped updates to district AI guidance and professional learning.

Tony Beatrice, Deputy Chief of Teaching and Learning said, "The sprint structure moved us past trial and error and into a disciplined process where teachers are leading the learning."

⬇ **Download Boston Public Schools AI Fellows Program Approach**

Be Nimble

The newness of generative AI technologies means that both the tools themselves and our understanding of how to use them effectively are evolving in real-time. We know that some of the most effective applications will come from those closest to the work. This underscores the need for bottom-up insights to guide an AI strategy that provides users with the freedom to experiment, encourage learning from mistakes and adapt as new insights emerge.

CONCLUSION

From Scattered Exploration to Coherence

Artificial Intelligence will continue to evolve faster than any single district can predict or control. The question is not whether AI will shape teaching and learning, but **how districts will shape its role to support—not distract from—their instructional priorities.**

This toolkit offers a pathway:

- Define the work through a learning agenda so exploration is rooted in district goals, not vendor promises.

- Evaluate tools with rigor using a due diligence process that balances instructional quality and technical safeguards.

- Operationalize agile learning through innovation zones, fellows or sprints that generate real evidence in real classrooms.

Taken together, these steps allow districts to approach AI with the same coherence and intentionality they bring to curriculum, assessments and professional learning. **The goal is not to chase shiny solutions, but to build an evidence-based strategy** that reduces noise, supports educators and advances outcomes for students.

By the end of this process, your system will not only know which AI tools are worth scaling, but also how to make those decisions consistently, equitably and in alignment with your broader vision for teaching and learning. **Real change depends on people,** with AI serving as a tool to help teachers and students build stronger relationships, foster deeper engagement and achieve better outcomes.[7]

AIxCoherence Academy Inaugural Cohort

- Boston Public Schools (Boston, MA)
- DSST Public Schools (Denver, CO)
- Duval County Public Schools (Jacksonville, FL)
- Hamilton County Public Schools (Chattanooga, TN)
- Hawaii Department of Education (Honolulu, HI)
- Newburgh Enlarged City School District (Newburgh, NY)

- Quincy School District (Quincy, WA)
- Salem-Keizer Public Schools (Salem, OR)
- United Charter High Schools (New York, NY)
- Wichita Public Schools (Wichita, KS)
- Ypsilanti Community Schools (Ypsilanti, MI)

ENDNOTES

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ABOUT EDUCATION FIRST

Education First is a national, mission-driven strategy and policy organization with unique and deep expertise in education improvement. Our mission is to deliver exceptional ideas, experience-based solutions and results so all students—particularly Black, Indigenous and other students of color and students living in low-income communities—are prepared for success in college, career and life. We envision a world in which every student is prepared to succeed—a world in which income and race no longer determine the quality of education. Our mission is lived through our solutions and strategies by working with funders, states, policymakers, nonprofits, local education agencies and more.