

## **Illinois AI Benchmarking Survey Results**

The rapid developments in artificial intelligence (AI) technology present both opportunities and challenges for school leaders. Innovations in AI are occurring at an unprecedented pace, leading to the continuous emergence of new tools and applications that can enhance educational outcomes. However, this exponential growth also means school leaders must constantly adapt to new technologies and integrate them into existing systems. At present, there is minimal support available to help them navigate the implementation of AI in educational settings. This can be overwhelming, as it requires an ongoing investment in training and infrastructure, as well as staying abreast of the latest research and best practices. Additionally, the fast-paced nature of AI development can lead to a lack of standardized guidelines and regulations, making it difficult for school leaders to ensure that these technologies are implemented safely, ethically, and effectively.

This report presents the findings from a statewide survey conducted in August 2024 with assistance from the Illinois Principal's Association (IPA) and the Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA). The survey aims to benchmark the status of AI awareness and usage in schools across Illinois. A total of 219 responses were collected, providing insights into the demographics, AI awareness, and application of AI tools in educational settings.

### **Acknowledgements and Disclaimers**

The survey instrument was designed by Professor Rose Luckin of the University College of London's Institute of Education to facilitate a national benchmarking study on the trends in AI utilization across the United Kingdom. Slight adaptations were made in the naming conventions of the questions. Additional questions were incorporated to determine the classification of each school (urban, suburban, or rural) and to assess the poverty level associated with each institution.

### **Methodology**

The IPA and IASA encouraged their members to participate in the survey during the month of August. Data was collected via Google Forms. Respondents were required to answer 52 questions from the following areas.

1. Demographics
2. AI Awareness
3. Use of AI
4. AI Policy and Leadership
5. AI Safety
6. Ethics

## **Results**

### **Demographics: Questions 1-9**

Of the 219 respondents, 58.9% identified as superintendents or employed at the district office, 34.7% principals, and 6.4% technologists. A total of 73.1% respondents indicated they were employed at a Title 1 school. Among the schools surveyed 54.8% were from rural communities, 40.2% from suburban, and 5% from urban sectors. According to the survey, public schools constituted 96.8% of the respondents.

### **AI Awareness: Questions 10-17**

A slight majority (56.1%) of the school leaders surveyed shared that they understand (strongly agree/agree) the general concepts of AI. However, only 24.2% agreed or strongly agreed that they possess a good understanding of how AI can be used in education. The survey showed that only 9.1% agree or strongly agree that AI is being used to reduce teacher workload. For example, 85% of the surveys returned strongly disagreed, disagreed or somewhat agreed that teachers and administrators are using AI to create resources. In addition, 62.6% of the respondents shared they do not believe AI is used to personalize student learning. According to the survey, 97.6% of school leaders lack confidence in how to use AI with students. Regarding safety, only 33.3% believe they understand the potential threats that AI poses to students while only 8.2% strongly agree or agree that they understand how to develop safeguards against those threats.

### **Use of AI: Questions 18-32**

According to the survey, only 24.7% of school leaders believe their teachers are confident in how to use AI in the classroom setting. However, 79.5% shared concerns in their confidence of how to teach students to use AI appropriately. Only 6.8% of the respondents believe they have a clear approach in place for identifying and piloting tools that use AI. The majority of students are not using AI to support their learning at school according to 80.8% of those surveyed. School leaders (65.8%) also shared they do not believe students are using AI at home to support their learning. Only 3.7% of those surveyed are confident that students are using AI tools appropriately and not to cheat. Only 9.1% have confidence that students are not using AI to generate explicit content or to create misinformation, hate speech, or cyberbullying. Likewise, only 5% of those surveyed feel confident that students are not misplacing their trust in AI by sharing personal information or through unsupervised interactions, overreliance, bypassing restrictions, or by creating harmful content.

Only 11.4% of school leaders believe they are supporting students to use AI tools effectively, appropriately, and safely. According to school leaders, 0% believe AI is being used to generate student feedback or mark student work.

### **AI Policy and Leadership: Questions 33-39**

The survey showed that only 27.9% believe there is a strong appetite for AI amongst their leadership team. School leaders shared that 9.1% have a clear approach in place for identifying and piloting AI tools. The survey revealed that 65.3% of the respondents do not believe there is a leadership team or group at their school who is dedicated to coordinating the use of AI. Likewise, only 24.7% have a professional development plan in place to address expertise and consistency in the understanding and use of AI. School leaders responded as follows when asked if their school has an AI policy or strategy.

- 17.8% are not considering AI at this moment.
- 58.4% are considering AI, but do not have an AI policy or strategy.
- 16.9% are considering AI and have a policy or strategy.
- 6.8% are using AI and have a policy or strategy.

Only 21.5% of the school leaders surveyed agreed that they have a policy for addressing AI threats or dangers. School leaders responded as follows when asked if they have employed a digital citizenship program across all grade levels to ensure students are prepared with the tools they need to use AI tools responsibly.

- 20.5% do not have such a program and are not considering it at the moment.
- 37.9% do not have a program but are considering it at the moment.
- 41.6% do have a digital citizenship program.

### **AI Safety: Questions 40-46**

Only 6.9% of those surveyed feel confident in allowing their pupils to use AI products, while 16.9% felt they have limits and guardrails in place to protect their students. In terms of student data, 32.4% consider what data is being asked for when choosing an AI platform. Likewise, 47% understand how to keep a student's personal data safe.

Only 25.6% of those surveyed have considered how AI might impact equity at their school. Likewise, only 29.2% are aware of the ways in which AI might show bias. According to the survey, only 9.2% of school leaders believe that parents are aware of the AI products that their students interact with in the classroom setting.

### **Ethics**

Only 5.5% of the school leaders who were surveyed expressed confidence in how they will measure and assess the impact AI has on students. In addition, only 11.8% know the impact that they expect to achieve through the use of AI, while only 7.7% have clearly identified goals for the technology in their schools.

### **Participant Insights**

The following is a selection of comments from the respondents. They provide valuable insights into their perspectives and experiences. The comments were gathered through an open-ended question at the conclusion of the survey providing school leaders with the ability to express their thoughts in their own words. The feedback highlights key themes and sentiments that emerged during the study, offering a deeper understanding of the issues at hand.

- There is still much unknown. It is imperative that legislators step in to put limitations on how AI can be used to provide guardrails for schools (and humanity). We are emphasizing the mental health risks that come with these tools.
- I have serious concerns regarding the use of AI and know that we need to educate our students and employees about the challenges and opportunities. This is not an area that we have aggressively focused on and would need a great deal of PD in order to effectively do so.
- I see endless possibilities with it and want to embrace teaching our students to use it appropriately.
- One concern is schools falling behind by not teaching the benefits of AI.
- We have begun the learning journey with caution and consideration for the steps ahead. We have an AI policy draft and a plan for assessment of the tools we are embracing at the

district level. We are proceeding with our assessment of education oriented Ai tools with the same cautious process that has been in place for software uses, with student and staff data privacy foremost in mind.

- Our district technology and leadership teams are actively communicating the use of AI, as well as planning for new tools an AI integration with our current systems. We are very much split when it comes to its use in the classroom.
- Most teaching staffs, such as mine, have no knowledge of AI or even it uses at all. Meanwhile, our students use it every day. We are so far behind I'm not sure my staff can catch up especially because of the age of my staff.
- We realize the importance of AI moving forward, but we also see the pitfalls. We are first trying to embrace it for faculty use so we better understand how to use it for our classrooms and help our students use it in a positive way.
- Leadership understands the use of AI could be super beneficial. However, new technology and the misuse of AI leaves our staff lacking confidence in how to move forward.
- We hope that this technology will allow access to higher level opportunities for students who struggle in traditional settings and teaching methods.

## **Discussion**

According to the survey, most schools do not currently possess the necessary infrastructure and support to provide for the successful implementation of AI into the school setting. The results of this survey clearly demonstrate a need for support.

To begin with, school leaders require support in the formulation of policies and procedures to oversee ethical issues such as bias and misuse. This includes the development of professional learning activities aimed at cultivating a group of teachers proficient in utilizing AI as a productivity tool to enhance student learning and facilitate communication with parents. Additionally, there is a pressing need for training and oversight in the creation of protocols that ensure the safe integration of AI into the school environment. The fact that only 11.4% of the surveyed leaders believe they are effectively, appropriately, and safely supporting students in using AI tools is alarming. Furthermore, there is a significant lack of understanding regarding potential AI-related threats to student safety and the implementation of safeguards to address these issues.

The survey highlights the necessity for further research in this domain. When used effectively, AI has the potential to foster equitable learning environments in underserved communities, many of which are in large urban centers and rural areas. Unfortunately, only 5% of the school leaders who responded to the survey are from urban centers. It is crucial to conduct more research in these communities to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges leaders face in implementing AI in their schools.

The survey offers educational leaders and policymakers comprehensive insight into the myriad of challenges associated with the implementation of artificial intelligence in schools. The findings should be leveraged to foster a more profound inquiry into the requisite support systems and cultural frameworks that school leaders must establish to ensure the ethical and effective integration of AI technologies.

*Joseph Fatheree is a doctoral student at the University of Illinois in the Department of Educational Policy and Organizational Leadership. The focus of his research is developing a better understanding of the synthetic relationships that are formed between children and AI-powered tools. He has over 35 years of experience in public education. He was recognized as one of the Top 10 Teachers in the World in 2016 by the Varkey Foundation and name the Illinois State Teacher of the Year in 2017.*