How Washington Students Use Artificial Intelligence in the Classroom

May 22, 2025 AI Summary

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In the spring of 2025, a quiet but powerful shift was taking place in classrooms across Washington state. It wasn't marked by new textbooks or standardized tests, but by the hum of curiosity and the click of keyboards as students and teachers explored the possibilities of artificial intelligence.

At the heart of this transformation was a virtual gathering hosted by the League of Education Voters. The webinar, moderated by Arik Korman, brought together a diverse panel of students and educators to discuss one central question: **How are students actually using AI in the classroom—and what should its future look like?**

🎙️ A Chorus of Student Voices

The conversation began with introductions, but quickly evolved into a vibrant exchange of ideas. Each student brought a unique lens shaped by their academic journey, personal learning style, and the policies of their schools.

Ananya Swaminathan, a high school junior, described AI as her "study partner." She used ChatGPT to brainstorm essay ideas, clarify economic theories, and even translate complex topics into metaphors from her favorite shows. "It's like having a tutor who speaks my language," she said. But she was quick to note its flaws—"Sometimes it's just wrong. You have to know when to question it."

Lilah Wakefield, a first-year member of the Legislative Youth Advisory Council (LYAC), used Microsoft Copilot and Photomath to study for math and edit essays. She loved how AI could generate quizzes from her study guides and explain wrong answers. "It's like having a practice test generator in your pocket," she said. But her school's strict policies meant she often had to use AI tools outside of class. "They see it as cheating. But for me, it's how I learn best."

Mayah Stewart, a senior, had a more cautious view. Her teachers used AI to create assignments, but didn't always verify the content. "We'd find errors in the material," she said. "It's helpful, but it's not perfect." She also worried about students using AI to skip

the learning process. “If you don’t understand the book, and you just ask AI to summarize it, you’re not really learning.”

Jordan Verkh-Haskell, a recent computer science graduate, had used AI extensively in his final year. For complex projects involving image processing, AI helped him find tools, write code, and understand new concepts. “It saved me weeks of research,” he said. But he also had to learn how to prompt it effectively. “It’s not just about asking questions—it’s about asking the right questions.”

Richie Martinez, a cybersecurity student at Columbia Basin College, appreciated the flexibility his school offered. Instructors could decide whether to allow AI, and students had to cite it when used. “It’s a collaborative tool,” he said. “It helps me organize my thoughts and debug code.”

Paree Raval, another LYAC member, offered a philosophical perspective. “School teaches us how to think, not just what to know,” she said. “AI should support that, not replace it.” She used AI to generate practice questions and summarize dense texts like *1984*, but emphasized the importance of effort and critical thinking.

🧪 The Research Behind the Tools

Dr. Min Sun, a professor at the University of Washington and co-founder of Colleague AI, shared findings from a recent pilot study involving 20 teachers and their students. Her team had developed a platform designed to act as a “third agent” in the classroom—alongside teachers and students.

The platform included:

- **AI-guided discussions** where students could engage with AI on specific topics.
- **AI tutors** that scaffolded learning without giving away answers.
- **Assessment tools** that offered feedback before final submission.
- **Growth insights** for teachers to track student engagement and interests.

Students appreciated the personalized guidance and immediate feedback. But they also noted that the AI’s tone felt robotic, its explanations sometimes too complex, and its interface lacking visual elements. “It’s helpful,” one student said, “but it’s not human.”

⚖️ The Tensions and Trade-offs

As the discussion deepened, students voiced concerns about AI’s limitations:

- **False positives in AI detection tools** led to accusations of cheating.

- **Over-reliance on AI** risked diminishing creativity and critical thinking.
- **Lack of transparency** in AI's sources made it hard to trust.

Yet, they also saw immense potential:

- **Subject-specific AI tutors** trained on university-level content.
- **Improved interfaces** that guide students in asking better questions.
- **Open dialogue in schools** to reduce stigma and promote responsible use.

🌱 A Vision for the Future

In a lightning round of closing thoughts, the students shared their hopes:

- **Ananya**: "AI isn't going away. But it's how we use it that matters."
- **Lilah**: "Let's make AI something we talk about, not hide from."
- **Mayah**: "It's a tool—not a shortcut. Let's use it to learn, not to cheat."
- **Jordan**: "Teachers give us context. AI can't replace that."
- **Richie**: "Let's make sure teachers stay involved. AI should support, not replace."
- **Paree**: "AI should encourage learning, not intimidate us."

Dr. Sun concluded with a glimpse into the future: more specialized AI tools, deeper integration into classrooms, and a focus on amplifying—not replacing—human connection.