Artificial Intelligence in Education

May 14, 2026 AI Summary

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A Technology Already in Students' Hands

As the LEVinar panel began, it quickly became clear that AI is not something students are waiting to encounter—it is already deeply embedded in their daily lives.

High school senior Liana Jennings admitted that she once viewed AI with skepticism, seeing it primarily as a shortcut—or even cheating. But her perspective shifted dramatically during the college application process. Faced with overwhelming decisions about costs, programs, and transfer credits, she turned to AI as a research assistant. What might have taken weeks became manageable, as AI helped her compare schools and synthesize information.

Her story reflected a broader truth echoed by student representative Sinan Farawila: students are already using AI extensively, often to process large volumes of information. In his school district in Richland, AI helped analyze thousands of student survey responses, turning raw data into something usable and meaningful.

Even in elementary classrooms, AI is finding its place in unexpected ways. Liana recounted a moment when a young student struggled to draw an imagined "unicorn dolphin." Frustration turned into creativity when AI generated a custom coloring page—transforming a breakdown into a breakthrough.

Yet alongside these examples was a caution: students frequently associate AI with cheating, highlighting a critical gap in how schools are teaching its responsible use.

Teachers at the Center of Change

While students are experimenting with AI, educators are often leading its structured adoption.

Student Katelyn Cockrum observed that teachers may actually be using AI more consistently than students, especially to create lesson plans, presentations, and

instructional materials. The technology is saving time—an invaluable resource in education—and allowing teachers to focus more on engagement and delivery.

Camille Jones, a digital education coach in the Quincy School District and 2017 Washington state Teacher of the Year, described how her district is moving beyond isolated experimentation toward a comprehensive K–12 AI literacy framework. The goal is not simply to introduce tools, but to build a shared understanding of how AI works, when to use it, and how to question its outputs.

This intentional approach reflects a broader shift. As researcher Bree Dusseault from the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) explained, districts that succeed with AI are those that adopt it strategically—aligning tools with clear goals and providing training for both teachers and students. In these environments, students don't just consume AI—they help shape how it's used, even participating in policy decisions.

From Efficiency to Transformation

Early uses of AI in education often focused on efficiency—automating tasks, saving time, and simplifying workflows. But the conversation revealed a deeper transformation underway.

Dr. Min Sun from the University of Washington College of Education shared a powerful example from a seventh-grade social studies classroom. Using Colleague AI, a teacher created a live simulation of flood response planning. Students acted as community leaders, analyzing real-time data and debating how to allocate a limited budget. Instead of spending weeks gathering data, they spent their time interpreting it, debating it, and making decisions.

This shift—from information gathering to higher-order thinking—illustrates the true potential of AI in education. It enables classrooms to prioritize critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving—the very skills students will need in an uncertain future.

Bright Spots Across the Country

Across the country, innovative models are emerging.

In Gwinnett County Georgia, an entire high school has been designed around AI readiness—not just technical skills, but ethics, creativity, and leadership. Students graduate not only understanding AI, but with a clear sense of how they want it to shape their lives and communities.

In Washington state, school districts like Elma and Quincy are using AI to personalize learning pathways, streamline curriculum design, and connect education more directly to careers.

These examples share a common thread: AI is most powerful when guided by a clear vision. Without purpose, it risks becoming just another tool; with purpose, it can reshape how learning happens.

Guardrails and Ethical Questions

With opportunity comes responsibility.

A major concern raised during the webinar was how to protect student data and creativity. Dr. Min Sun emphasized that responsible AI systems should not use student data for training models, highlighting the importance of transparent and ethical design.

At the system level, Bree Dusseault pointed out that safeguarding data is not the responsibility of individual teachers or students—it requires strong policies, contracts, and infrastructure at the district and state levels. Without these safeguards, students may be at risk even in systems that attempt to ban AI entirely.

The discussion also surfaced a deeper philosophical question: in a world where AI can generate content, how do we preserve and nurture uniquely human creativity?

The Skills That Matter Most

When the conversation turned to the future workforce, a clear consensus emerged.

Yes, students will need technical skills and AI literacy—the ability to understand how AI works and how to use it responsibly. But even more important are the human skills that AI cannot replace.

Creativity. Curiosity. Critical thinking. Compassion. Collaboration.

As Jolenta Coleman-Bush from Microsoft Philanthropies put it succinctly: AI is a tool—but human skills are the superpower.

Babak Mostaghimi from LearnerStudio added a simple but profound insight: no matter how technology evolves, one constant remains—we will still need to be good humans, capable of working together and navigating complex relationships.

Students Imagine the Future

In the final moments, students were asked to imagine what AI could become.

Their answers were revealing.

Liana envisioned AI that strengthens human connection—helping people communicate, listen, and learn from one another more effectively.

Sinan imagined expanded accessibility, where AI breaks down barriers for people with disabilities and enables seamless communication across languages.

Katelyn hoped for AI that provides unbiased, balanced perspectives—helping users see the full picture rather than reinforcing preconceived views.

These aspirations pointed to something deeper: students are not just users of AI—they are already thinking critically about what it should be.

A Shared Responsibility

As the webinar closed, one idea lingered: integrating AI into education is not just a technical challenge—it is a collective responsibility.

It requires educators who are trained and empowered, students who are informed and engaged, families who are included in the conversation, and systems that prioritize equity and safety.

Above all, it requires a commitment to ensuring that as technology advances, humanity does not fall behind.

AI may be transforming education—but the goal remains unchanged: to prepare students not just for jobs, but for lives of purpose, connection, and possibility.