

## **Building a Shared Framework for AI Readiness**

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### **Abstract**

AI is transforming education, skills, jobs, and daily life. This article outlines an approach to AI education centered on a common framework for AI Readiness, equipping students with technical understanding, critical thinking skills, and career preparedness. By fostering AI literacy and adaptability, schools can better prepare students for a fast-changing world while ensuring that technology is used thoughtfully and ethically.

### **The Need for a Common Framework**

Every student is unique, every teacher has a distinct approach, and every school district faces different challenges. Yet, all must navigate the rapid transformation brought by AI. AI is already an integral part of the economy, education system, and daily life. This transformation is ongoing and will redefine the essential skills students need to succeed in a dynamic workforce.

With AI's increasing role across industries — and its challenges, including bias (Broussard, 2023), environmental concerns (Brookings Institute, 2024), and misinformation (World Economic Forum, 2024) — it is imperative to equip students with the knowledge and skills to engage with AI critically and responsibly and thrive in a future where AI is everywhere.

To ensure that students, teachers, and educational institutions can adapt to these changes, schools need a shared framework that defines AI readiness and provides a structured approach to developing durable, transferable skills that will be key to students' success in the future.

### **Defining AI Readiness**

As an AI- and education-focused nonprofit founded in 2019 — before consumer-facing AI tools and large language models became widespread — aiEDU has worked extensively to define AI literacy and AI readiness in an educational context. Our approach integrates multiple perspectives, research, and practical insights, including:

- Surveys and interviews with over 1,800 educators
- Stakeholder meetings with AI and education leaders
- Existing AI literacy frameworks from Digital Promise, UNESCO, and ILO Group— which specifically contributed to our definition of what it means to be “AI-literate” while we looked more deeply at the territory of what being “AI-ready” means.

- Connections to broader workforce and digital resilience frameworks such as ISTE standards, 21st Century Skills, and Durable Skills to understand how a definition of AI readiness can mesh with future skills.

From this research, we established three key definitions to guide AI readiness for students, teachers, and school systems:

- 1.) **AI Literacy:** The collection of skills and knowledge needed to confidently understand, ethically use, and critically evaluate AI in a world where it is ubiquitous.
- 2.) **AI Readiness:** The ability to apply AI literacy in both personal and professional contexts. A person is AI-ready when they can navigate AI's interdisciplinary impact, collaborate effectively, and apply creativity and self-advocacy in an AI-driven world. They are also able to adapt to technological changes and leverage their uniquely human skills to enhance their value in a shifting landscape.
- 3.) **AI Systems Readiness:** The capacity of an educational system, institution, or organization to effectively support AI literacy and readiness among educators and students. This includes setting guidelines for acceptable use, fostering a culture of curiosity and collaboration, and ensuring ongoing learning and community engagement.

These three concepts provide a foundation for defining what it means to be AI-ready at the individual and institutional levels.



### AI Student Readiness



A student is considered AI-ready not just when they understand how AI tools function but when they can critically evaluate their applications and limitations. This framework breaks down into three essential competencies:

- *Know Your Basics:* Students must first develop foundational AI literacy by understanding what AI is, how it works, and how to use it appropriately. This competency varies by grade level but consistently involves applying AI tools to complete age-appropriate tasks.
- *Be a Critical Thinker:* AI is not neutral, and students must recognize its biases, limitations, and potential for misuse. Being AI-ready means questioning AI outputs, identifying when bias might be present, and understanding how and why AI tools produce certain results.
- *Know the Human Advantage:* A core component of AI readiness is the ability to recognize which skills remain uniquely human. Students should learn to think innovatively, synthesize knowledge across disciplines, and apply interpersonal skills such as collaboration and self-advocacy in their academic and professional lives.

These three competencies do not need to be addressed in a particular order; rather, they provide multiple entry points for developing AI readiness.

### AI Teacher Readiness



While these echo the domains of the student competencies, they are not intended to be a one-to-one match. For example, in the teacher domain "Know and Model the Basics", competency 1c focuses on identifying, describing and applying district/school AI policies for use. This is an overarching competency that will allow teachers to be able to support students in building their knowledge of AI use, which is related to student competencies 1a - recognize AI systems and 2b - examine AI use and outputs.

Teachers play a critical role in fostering AI readiness among students. The educator framework follows a similar structure to the student framework, emphasizing leadership and instructional strategies to support AI literacy.

- **Know and Model the Basics:** Teachers must develop a foundational understanding of AI, including how it works and how it is used in educational settings. This includes identifying and applying school and district AI policies to ensure ethical and effective AI integration.
- **Foster and Model Critical Thinking:** Just as students need to think critically about AI, teachers must model this behavior by evaluating AI-generated content, recognizing biases, and guiding students in assessing AI tools' credibility and reliability. Educators must also stay informed about student-facing AI tools to determine which are most relevant and effective for instruction.
- **Know the Teacher Advantage:** Teaching remains a uniquely human profession. AI-ready educators facilitate problem-solving, encourage interdisciplinary thinking, and leverage collaboration and self-advocacy to help students navigate their academic and career goals.

### **AI Systems Readiness**

At the institutional level, AI readiness means ensuring that the system can deliver on the promise that all students have the opportunity to build AI literacy and the skills necessary to thrive in an AI-driven world.

- **Vision and Strategic Orientation:** AI-ready school districts develop a clear, community-informed perspective on AI's role in education and establish a long-term strategic plan for integrating AI literacy.
- **AI Readiness Knowledge:** Institutions must ensure that AI literacy is embedded into curriculum and professional development so that students and teachers are equipped to engage with AI critically and effectively.
- **Teaching and Learning:** School districts must create opportunities for educators to participate in professional learning about AI and AI readiness. Resources should be available for school leaders and teachers to implement AI literacy practices, including ongoing professional development, cross-grade collaboration, and instructional support.
- **Policies and Operations:** To sustain AI readiness, school districts should establish clear policies and guidelines for AI use, including AI ethics, academic integrity, and responsible AI adoption. Additionally, technical, legal, and fiscal audits should ensure that AI tools are implemented thoughtfully and equitably.

## **Meeting the Moment**

By establishing a clear framework with shared definitions, values, and expectations, schools can help students, teachers, and institutions adapt to AI in ways that emphasize lifelong skills and responsible engagement.

The next step is scaling: Our belief, embedded in our framework, is that every school district, if not every school, will be different but that a shared set of values will ensure that all students can work, live, and thrive in a world where AI is everywhere. As a result, an important next step is for school districts to look at this framework as a starting point for developing their own bespoke approach to AI readiness.

Technology with evolved but clear, articulated guidelines that can help each community with what it is seeing on the ground will help achieve scale: It will ensure that all students, teachers, and district leaders know what they are anchoring for while also giving them important latitude to set their own strategy. Each district or state should evaluate where they are in this framework and where they need to go, but it's urgent that they begin to approach the task. What we have seen in our work is that starting the process is the most important part—and that inaction, or waiting, is a choice in itself that can have harmful consequences.

Even as AI technology evolves, a structured AI readiness framework can serve as a crucial foundation that allows us to prepare for the disruptions and evolutions that AI will drive in our education systems, work, and lives.

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