



News Coverage

Mohawk Trail and Hawlemont Regional School Districts
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[Area schools drafting AI policies for classwork](#)

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As schools across the country grapple with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), new policies are being introduced to govern its use in classrooms, with a goal of balancing innovation with concerns over privacy, equity and academic integrity.

The sentence above was written with help from ChatGPT. Were you able to tell it was not written by a human? Now imagine the challenges educators face in welcoming new innovations to the classroom, while still preventing students from letting artificial intelligence complete their assignments for them.

To address these, the Mohawk Trail Regional School District School Committee adopted a policy earlier this month to address the use of AI in schools for inclusion in next year's student handbook. "We all know that AI is entering into our world and it's important we're informed about it," said Suzanne Crawford, chair of the district's Policy Subcommittee. "AI will have an important role in the future, and it's important students learn about it and are educated on using AI ethically."

Crawford said AI has been on her mind for a while, and the district began drafting a policy on its use in the schools following the Massachusetts Association of School Committees conference, held in Hyannis last November. A policy was drafted in collaboration with Mohawk Trail teachers and librarians in an attempt to recognize AI as a tool that can be used in classrooms, but needs to be regulated to ensure students are using it ethically and not passing off artificially generated work as their own.

"The Mohawk Trail Regional School District recognizes the growing importance of generative artificial intelligence (genAI) to the ever-changing landscape of digital technology," the policy states. "At the same time, it acknowledges that genAI represents a momentous shift in the way that a range of educational tasks can be accomplished, that there are serious outstanding questions about if and how genAI can be used ethically, and how it can be effectively incorporated into a rigorous curriculum."

The policy states the district will continue to seek guidance and materials on how to incorporate AI into schools, and provide students with opportunities to learn how to use it. The policy adds that any AI-created work presented as original work will be seen as "a breach of academic integrity and handled in accordance with relevant student handbook guidelines."

Crawford said the AI policy was purposely written to be vague as technology evolves so quickly. If the School Committee were to adopt a policy with more specifics on how the AI can and should be used, technology could change and the policy would no longer be applicable, Crawford said.

Leaving the policy as general as possible allows it to be amended as needed in the future, and for faculty to determine how AI can best be incorporated in the classroom.

“We tried to do it in a general way because it’s a fast-moving world and policy changes aren’t fast,” Crawford said. “I don’t know where it’ll land in the classroom.”

Other school districts across Franklin County and the North Quabbin region are also looking at how to incorporate and regulate AI in the classroom.

Heather Maynard, director of teaching and learning for the Gill-Montague Regional School District, said while she cannot speak to what will happen in the future at Gill-Montague schools — her position has been eliminated for next school year amid budget cuts — she believes the use of AI will grow in schools as the technology develops. Maynard also said teaching students how to use these tools responsibly will be essential.

“I think AI is a very important tool, but students, if left to their own devices, may use AI in ways not conducive to learning,” Maynard said. “AI should be used as a tool to improve their learning and not as a replacement of learning.”

She said while the technology is already good and constantly improving, students need to be aware that AI is not perfect and they must be responsible for their own work and learning. She recommends school districts talk about developing policies on AI plagiarism and look into technology to recognize AI-generated work to prevent students from attempting to pass it off as their own. When possible, she said teachers should hold written assessments in person.

Darius Modestow, superintendent of the Frontier Regional and Union 38 school districts, said faculty have been attending trainings on artificial intelligence for the past two years and are considering developing an AI policy for the student handbook. Currently, staff members tell students that AI is not permitted on assignments and work to develop assignments that require critical-thinking skills beyond AI capabilities.

“AI is a tool that is here to stay. While it can assist with routine writing tasks, it has limitations,” Modestow said. “Our goal is to ensure students understand both when and how to use AI effectively, as well as the potential challenges it presents.”

Elizabeth Zielinski, superintendent of the Ralph C. Mahar Regional and Union 73 school districts, said school officials are devising an AI addendum to the existing plagiarism policy.

“That is currently in dialogue and discussion. That’s where we’re at. We’re in the crafting stage,” she said, adding that the goal will be for teachers to guide students on how to appropriately use AI as a tool for learning. “You can’t change the tidal wave of technology that’s coming.”

Zielinski said the districts will also seek guidance from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees to help students “responsibly use the technologies that are ever-evolving.”

Maynard added that educators are accustomed to constantly adapting to new technologies, curriculums and instructional methods, and AI is just the latest thing schools need to adjust to. “Even though it’s new territory, it’s not really,” Maynard said, “because there’s constantly changes in education.”

With the exception of the first paragraph, the entirety of this article was written by staff writers. Reach Madison Schofield at 413-930-4579 or mschofield@recorder.com. Chris Larabee and Domenic Poli contributed reporting.

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