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Building Smarter Classrooms to Achieve Higher Student Learning: Empowering Utah Teachers with AI Support

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The purpose of the Center for the School of the Future is to promote empirically validated practices in public education systems and to encourage cooperative and research relationships between K-12 and higher education institutions.

Executive Summary

This brief begins with a clear and urgent premise: the core purpose of public education—and the work of every teacher—is student learning. Yet in today's classrooms, that mission is increasingly compromised. Teachers are spending too much time on administrative tasks and too little time on instruction. The consequence is not just teacher burnout; it is lost learning for students.

To reverse this, Utah must strategically invest in tools that restore instructional focus and elevate learning outcomes. Artificial intelligence (AI), when deployed thoughtfully, offers such a tool. With proper safeguards, training, and oversight, AI can serve as a trusted partner to educators by freeing up time, enhancing instructional quality, and ultimately improving student achievement at scale.

To fully realize AI's promise in education, we must move beyond fragmented, one-way applications. Instead, Utah can lead by fostering a multi-directional symbiotic relationship among AI, teachers, learners, and learning itself—a dynamic system in which each part strengthens the others. When AI assists teachers, they in turn apply their professional judgment to refine AI's use and deepen student engagement. Learners benefit not only from increased teacher attention but also from AI tools tailored to their unique needs—and their feedback can further refine both instructional methods and AI functionality. This learning ecosystem, working in continuous feedback loops, ensures that teaching practices, AI tools, and student experiences are constantly improving in response to one another—deepening understanding, accelerating mastery, and amplifying learning outcomes across the system.

Why It Matters

Gallup reports that teachers in the United States spend up to 29 hours per week on non-instructional responsibilities from IEP documentation and email correspondence to resource curation and compliance reporting. This overload reduces their ability to plan, differentiate, and respond to student needs.

AI tools—especially those designed for ease of use—offer a practical and research-informed way to redirect teacher capacity back to teaching. These tools can:

- Automate documentation and daily behavior logs.
- Generate standards-aligned lesson plans.
- Draft IEP narratives and transcribe meetings in real time.
- Recommend affordable and targeted learning resources.
- Provide correspondence with parents and colleagues.

Fetchy reports that early pilot programs in the U.S. show promising results. Teachers report saving an average of 2.5 hours each day by using AI, which is time they are reinvesting into student-focused activities. This shift is not about convenience; it is about restoring instructional opportunity and making significant, measurable gains in student learning.

Utah's Strategic Opportunity

Utah is uniquely positioned to lead in responsible AI integration. Districts such as Jordan have already demonstrated strong results. Additionally, the Center for the School

of the Future (CSF) at Utah State University stands ready to support statewide implementation, offering expertise in instructional systems, AI integration, and educator training, and overall deployment to substantially enhance student learning.

AI is not a replacement for professional judgment; it is a tool that allows teachers to focus their expertise where it matters most—on helping students succeed. Used strategically, AI enhances evidence-based instruction, expands personalization, and drives stronger academic outcomes. When teachers, students, and AI systems collaborate symbiotically, the result is a classroom environment more responsive, personalized, and impactful than ever before.

Key Questions and Potential First Steps

1. **How can Utah expand pilot programs to validate effectiveness across varied settings?**
   Competitive grants could support pilot sites and provide critical data on student achievement and instructional quality.

2. **What professional learning infrastructure is needed to ensure confident and ethical AI use?**
   Training should focus on practical integration, responsible use, and instructional application aligned with learning science.

3. **What policies are needed to safeguard student data and uphold responsible use?**
   Guidelines could reinforce Utah's privacy protections while enabling innovation through vetted, FERPA-compliant tools.

4. **How can the State ensure equitable access to AI tools and necessary infrastructure?**
   Targeted investments in hardware, connectivity, and platforms could ensure that all students benefit from better-supported teachers.

5. **What strategies will elevate educator voice and leadership in AI implementation?**
   Teachers should be co-creators in AI adoption by shaping practices, evaluating tools, and leading peer support networks.

6. **What roadmap will guide scaling successful innovations statewide?**
   The State could develop implementation toolkits, secure statewide licenses, and build professional networks to accelerate impact.

7. **How can Utah keep pace with global and national AI-driven education reforms that aim to accelerate student learning?**
   Other countries have already embedded AI into national K–12 curriculum, and a recent executive order by President Trump signals similar momentum in the United States. Utah should be cautious not to fall behind. Beyond administrative efficiency, AI offers the potential to act as a one-to-one instructional partner by delivering adaptive, personalized feedback to students. In doing so, it can overcome one of education's long-standing dilemmas: teaching often obstructs learning by trying to serve all students in standardized ways. AI allows instruction to be specialized thereby accelerating mastery, sparking curiosity, and helping students surge ahead in their learning trajectories.

Conclusion: Begin With the End in Mind

The end goal of public education is—and must remain—greater student learning. Supporting teachers through intelligent use of AI is not an end in itself; it is a strategy for restoring instructional time, elevating teaching quality, and accelerating student growth.

With thoughtful leadership, Utah can pioneer an education system where AI, educators, learners, and learning itself form a dynamic, interdependent ecosystem—each improving the others. The mission of the Center for the School of the Future is to support learning by enriching the use of AI through rigorous research, implementation support, and scalable solutions.

This is Utah's opportunity to act decisively. Not merely to reduce teacher burden, but to ignite measurable, system-wide gains in student learning—the defining outcome of a world-class public education system.

Beginning in August and continuing through December 2025, we will release three additional manuscripts:

AI Policy Brief 2
Personalized and Powerful: How AI Can Transform Student Learning in Utah Classrooms

AI Policy Brief 3
Guardrails for the Future: Navigating AI's Risks in K–12 Education with Confidence and Care

AI Policy Brief 4
New Wine, New Wine Bottles: Rethinking and Redesigning Utah's Education Systems for the AI Era

References

- Gallup and Education Week data highlighting high teacher burnout rates and 29 hours/week spent on administrative tasks, underscoring the workload problem.
- NPR report on special education teachers describes paperwork burdens as "*like having two full-time jobs*," emphasizing the need to streamline IEP processes.
- Sutherland Institute article noting Utah teachers using an AI assistant saved "*several hours of work each day*," demonstrating AI's potential to reduce workload.
- Fetchy (an AI teacher's assistant platform) claims that, on average, educators save 2.5 hours per day using their tool, indicating significant time savings.
- Jordan School District (Utah) pilot results – *100%* of participating teachers wanted to continue using the AI tool, citing major time savings and reduced paperwork, which led to district plans for expansion.
- Education Week teacher survey example (Utah) – a teacher uses AI to draft parent emails in moments, a task that used to take 15+ minutes, illustrating efficiency in communication.

- Western Australia's government pilot ($4.7M) to use AI for lesson planning and admin tasks so teachers spend "*less time doing admin*," an international case of policy-level implementation to reduce workload.
- Learning Policy Institute research estimating $20k–$30k cost to districts for each teacher lost to turnover, used here to argue ROI of retaining teachers by easing their workload.
- Education technology commentary on AI in special education – notes that automating data analysis, writing and note-taking for IEPs "significantly reduces the stress and workload" of special educators, validating AI for IEP management.
- Excerpts from a 2025 *model policy* proposing a state grant program for AI in schools, including requirements for vendor privacy compliance, informing our recommendation for a Utah pilot program with proper safeguards.
- KUTV/KJZZ news on Utah's planned AI training program for teachers – shows state-level commitment to AI education and shifting teacher attitudes (from 40% pessimistic to 90% familiar with AI in one year), supporting our training recommendation.
- Utah State Board of Education's *AI Framework 2024* (draft) defining responsible AI use in schools, which we build upon for data privacy and balanced approach in our policy guidelines.

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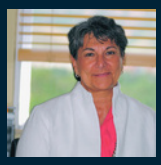

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