



Contributed photo

Vienna, Illinois, High School Superintendent Joshua Stafford works closely with educators in Singapore in July. Stafford traveled there with the Department of State’s Fulbright Scholar Program to conduct educational research, which included learning about how that country’s districts are integrating AI into classrooms.

AI

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High School. Before this role, Shidal held the title of teacher for 19 years. She’s now helping guide her district’s AI choice. “I’ve had some meetings with some companies, some tech companies, that are specific to the education world, that will be able to help our teachers develop lessons and our students to be able to use the technology in the correct way.”

“The kids are already there. So, we need our adults to feel comfortable,” Ceglinski explained of their efforts to educate their educators on current and future technology. “When they do, then they can better utilize and help educate our kids about how to ethically use...these programs,” Ceglinski said.

In 2024, nonprofit Digital Promise found that schools in 93% of districts surveyed were using some kind of AI technology. Another report last year co-authored by the Center for Digital Thriving found half of teens surveyed use generative AI, but they’re most commonly using it to get information and brainstorm. That’s no surprise to Vienna, Illinois, High School Superintendent Joshua Stafford.

“The data sets that we’ve looked at say 87%,” Stafford said. “I would say it’s 100% of our students are utilizing AI in some form or fashion.”

Combined, these education leaders have about 70 years of experience in local school dis-

tricts. They’ve seen the rapid growth of technology in the classroom in just the past three decades: from small desktop computers in the 1990s to artificial intelligence in 2025.

“This is truly a whole new world for our teachers and our staff,” Ceglinski said.

MCPS hasn’t yet officially contracted with a company to bring AI tools to the district. That’s expected to happen next week, leading up to the first day of school on Aug. 11. How will that technology be used to benefit teachers and students? One example: tutoring.

“If I’m the student and I’m struggling and I’ve missed this question, on the platform it would allow you, the student, to talk to the AI computer and say no, I did not understand this. Yes, I did understand this,” Shidal said. “That way, if the teacher is still giving the lessons, if one student needs to have a little extra help, they’re able to get that in real time, in classroom. And then the teacher is able to have that software on the back end, and she can, or he can, see that their class is excelling in this area and that they need help in another.”

Shidal said that gives teachers a much clearer picture of how to build lessons day to day. “They are taking the standards and assessing what the students need to know. The technology is doing that for the teachers, and they are able to, in real time, plan better lessons and allow students to be able to learn at their own pace.”

“The real-time feedback is

going to be a game changer for kids,” Ceglinski said.

It’s a more customized approach to learning, with the individual student’s needs in mind. Teachers, meanwhile, can better utilize their time.

“As a teacher in the classroom for 19 years, I would spend many hours taking things home and designing and saying, OK, my students know this. They don’t know this. And if a computer can do that for me, and it’d be accurate, I’m going to use that for benefit and for me to be able to put more time into just helping students,” Shidal said.

In Vienna, discussions about AI and how it’s utilized are very public and ongoing. “Can we utilize the tool to let it do things that it can do, so that we can do only the things that we can do? Absolutely. If I can maximize the minutes of our professionals that are in classrooms every single day, that’s a win for kids.”

These educators agree: AI is a powerful tool, but only a tool. It may be new, but their goal remains the same.

“I think that the thing that we’re emphasizing in our setting is it’s a spoke in the wheel. It’s not the hub. Teaching and learning is the hub. It’s the main thing,” Stafford said.

“It can help us with the lesson, but it doesn’t determine whether or not the student learns,” Ceglinski explained. “That’s what we’re there for. So, it really causes us to rethink how we do things to leverage it. But student learning is what our goal is, and it doesn’t do that for you.”

LAWS

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Superintendent Josh Hunt said the systems serve the students, teachers and parents well. However, he said he wished the state had asked for more input from school leaders at the local level.

Examples Hunt cited as areas where perhaps lawmakers didn’t think the entire process through surround communication between students and coaches or other adults and teachers who lead extracurricular activities. Regardless, Hunt thinks everyone in the district will be pleased with how things develop over the school year.

“I think our parents are happy. I think our staff is happy that we’re moving towards...one communication system. It’s obviously easier to keep up with instead of you getting five, six different messages on your phone every day from different teachers and from different programs,” Hunt said.

Informing people of the recent changes in law can be a hurdle. Trigg County Schools Superintendent Rex Booth has been posting short videos of himself on the district’s public Facebook page explaining the changes.

“It’s been really received well. A lot of folks have talked about how they’re appreciative that we’re not just sending out big, long text messages through our messaging system or making long Facebook posts. We’re trying to keep them as quick and short and concise as possible but also making sure that we get that information out,” Booth said.

Trigg County Schools will use ParentSuite and Google Suite which includes Gmail and Google Classroom.

CELLPHONE BAN

House Bill 208 requires local school boards to adopt a policy prohibiting students from using phones during the school day.

Many school districts in western Kentucky already have some kind of cellphone policy in place in the school-based decision making, or SBDM, handbook.

Districts like McCracken County Schools will have students keep their phones in their lockers, bookbags or pants pockets whereas other districts will require students keep their phones specifically in lockers or protective pouches, which are located in the classroom.

Hunt wants to see how things unfold before

tweaking the district’s policy regarding cellphones.

“As a board we’ve talked about it and our plan is to just kind of see, hear some feedback and just remind our students that we have procedures in place and these aren’t to be out in class except for instructional time that is indicated by your teacher,” Hunt said.

Hunt believes limiting students’ cellphone use in the classroom is ultimately a good thing.

“I think one thing with this many years removed from the creation of the cellphone — it’s now part of our everyday lives. I think that there’s no doubt that they create a huge distraction,” Hunt said.

“I’m sure we’ll have a student or two that would think they can’t live without a cellphone, but we’ll work through that with them,” Shively said.

Booth said the ban allows students to have more of a presence in the classroom and focus more on learning.

“The attention spans of students are seemingly decreasing every year. I think a lot of that is because we are in a society that tends to scroll and if we don’t like what we see, you know, we’ll swipe up. And that’s the TikTok age, the Facebook, the Twitter,” Booth said.

He added, “If you don’t like what you’re hearing or you’re not automatically engaged then obviously, subconsciously, you’re just ready to move on to the next thing. I feel like that has a lot to do with why these cellphones are kind of being taken away during instructional time — trying to improve attention spans of our youth.”

Not every parent or guardian was fully onboard with the changes — specifically, the cellphone ban.

“I know how attached they are to [cellphones], and I know sometimes, as a parent, it’s a safety blanket. But student safety is one of our top priorities every day,” Hunt said.

School leaders encourage parents to reflect on their own time in school when students didn’t have cellphones.

“Yet, when a message needed to be relayed, it got to them in a timely fashion. It’s just going back to the way things used to be when a simple phone call to the office will suffice. And if it’s an emergency and a parent or, you know, a guardian needs to speak with a student immediately, we’ll obviously go get that student and we’ll allow that contact to continue to happen,” Booth said.

PARENTS

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achievement, school engagement and motivation compared to youngsters with parents who were not involved. That payoff compels millions of parents to get involved in their children’s schooling, and the following are a handful of ways to do just that.

• **Start the year off right.** Parental involvement in children’s schooling can begin before a new school year gets

under way. Orientation events designed to acclimate students to new schools can help calm youngsters’ nerves when they’re beginning kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, or high school. Transferring to a new school due to a family relocation or another variable can be difficult for students, and parents can make that transition a little easier by attending orientation events before the first day of classes. Back-to-school nights held a week or two into the school year also present a great chance

for parents to start the year off right.

• **Actively communicate with children’s teachers.** Parents can contact teachers at the start of a new school year to identify the best way to communicate. Some schools utilize apps to facilitate communication with parents. Some teachers may prefer communicating via email, phone calls or even text messages. Parents should not hesitate or be afraid to reach out to teachers about their children’s needs.

• **Do your part at home, too.** Parental involvement in children’s education can extend to the home as well. Parents can emphasize the importance of education in conversations with their children and offer to help with homework when children seem to need some assistance. Parents also can ask about assignments and tests, enthusiastically engage in projects designed to involve students’ families, and provide a stable, distraction-free home environment where kids can focus on their

schoolwork.

• **Volunteer with parental organizations.** Parent teacher associations/organizations are always in need of members to help to organize special events and volunteer at school functions. Parents can join groups such as a PTA or PTO to get more involved in campus life. If joining such groups is not possible, parents can let it be known that they would like to volunteer for events throughout the school year.

• **Ask children about their day.** One of the simplest ways parents can be more involved in

children’s schooling is to ask them about their day when they arrive home. Ask children what they did in class, and which parts of their day they found most, or even least, enjoyable. When parents express an interest in what kids are doing at school, that may compel kids to be more interested in their coursework.

Children are the ultimate beneficiaries when parents get involved in their youngsters’ education, and there’s no shortage of ways for moms and dads to engage at school.