Google for Education GSV Ventures

# Google GSV Fellowship

Digital Lookbook of Insights & Resources from 2023-24 Cohort

# Table of Contents

# Introduction

## The Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship: Empowering Leaders to Transform Education

In a rapidly evolving educational landscape, the need for innovative leadership and technological integration has never been more critical. Recognizing this imperative, Google for Education and GSV Ventures — a global platform for education and workforce skills innovation — have partnered to establish the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship. This groundbreaking program is designed to empower K-12 superintendents and top-level instructional leaders to harness technology as a lever for innovation and impact, ultimately transforming the educational experiences of millions of students.

> "At this moment in time, there is the appetite and resources to leverage technology to reimagine instruction. We are uniquely positioned to overlay instructions and technology to increase access to information and experiences for our historically underserved students."
>
> — Dr. Simone Wright, Chief of Academics, Denver Public Schools

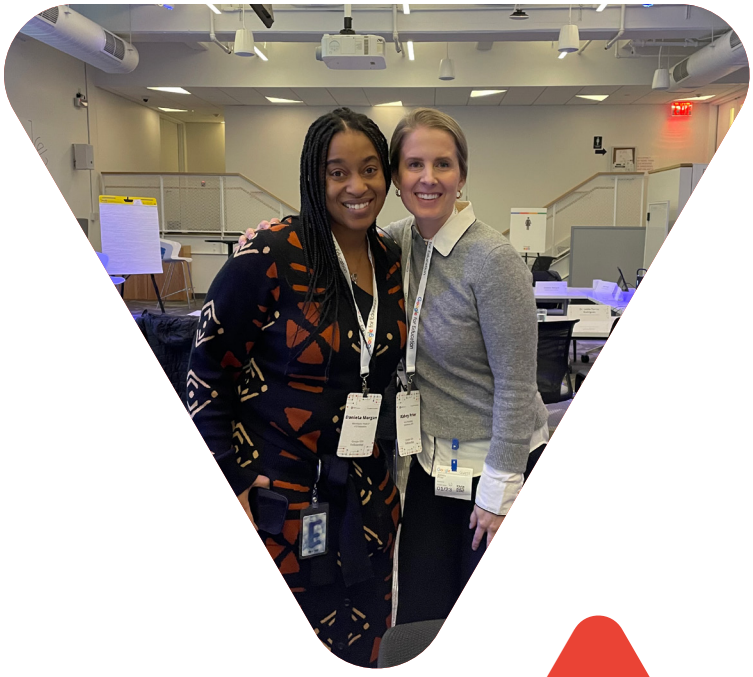
## Purpose and Vision

Google and GSV understand that educational leaders are **uniquely positioned** to ignite change in their schools and districts.

> "The Google GSV Fellowship is really that chance to explore that idea that you've had in your mind…we all get into this work because we're passionate about supporting our students and our teachers and the day to day doesn't always make it possible to really dive in."
>
> — Dr. Cameron Fadjo, Former Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services, Pleasantville Union Free School District

> "What a gift to be able to slow down and be given the opportunity to think."
>
> — Dr. Rahesha Amon, Former Senior Executive Director of School Support and Operations, New York City Public Schools

The Fellowship cultivates a community of change agents passionate about transforming education at the intersection of instruction and technology. By fostering collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and innovation, the program empowers educational leaders to drive meaningful change. It amplifies the impact of these leaders by facilitating the implementation of innovative solutions that improve student outcomes and close the achievement gap. Ultimately, this initiative strives to shape the future of education by catalyzing systemic change, influencing the edtech landscape, and promoting equitable access to quality education.



> "We have the opportunity to shape the future of education by integrating technology in ways that are student-centered, equity-focused, and aimed at preparing students for the demands of the 21st-century. Therefore, it is imperative that we continue to innovate and push the boundaries of what is possible at the intersection of instructional impact and technology."
>
> — Dr. Michael Karner, Regional Superintendent of Lake County Regional Office of Education, Illinois Virtual Schools & Academy

> "It's important that student learning drives instruction and technology and not the other way around."
>
> — Gudiel R. Crosthwaite, Ph.D., Superintendent of Lynwood Unified School District

# Program Structure and Activities

The year-long Fellowship is a transformative journey, providing participants with access to cutting-edge technology, resources, case studies, and professional development opportunities. Fellows immerse themselves in rich experiences, collaborating with peers, receiving personalized mentorship, and connecting at in-person and virtual events. Through groundbreaking research and leading-edge best practices, fellows gain valuable insights into the world of educational technology. These opportunities drive personal and professional growth, empowering fellows to create and implement a unique Transformational Opportunity that impacts their students and community.

> "To have the chance to connect with expert coaches, other people who are innovating in their districts and in their field, and, having the time and space to apply that to a specific problem has been one way [the Google GSV Fellowship] has given me the chance to think about innovation in my role."
>
> — Jade Grieve, Former Chief of Student Pathways, New York City Public Schools

Collaboration is at the heart of the Fellowship. Through workshops, conferences, and virtual gatherings, fellows have the opportunity to learn from each other, share best practices, and co-create solutions to shared challenges. This collaborative approach not only accelerates the pace of innovation but also creates a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose among fellows.

> "We're in a think tank with brilliant minds who are creating opportunities for students, opportunities for each other, opportunities for organizations to blossom and it is really all about the shared knowledge within a room that we can get better at what we do as leaders."
>
> — Dr. Zandra Jo Galván, Former Superintendent of Greenfield Union School District

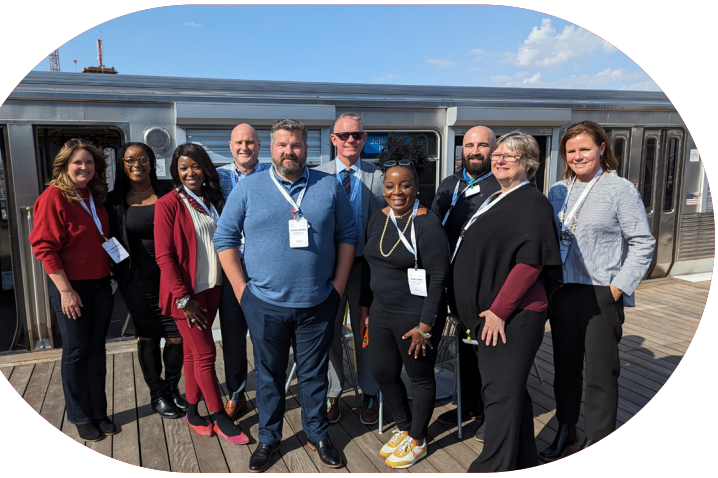
# Impact

The impact of the Fellowship extends far beyond the individual leaders who participate. By empowering superintendents and instructional leaders to implement innovative practices and technologies, the program has the potential to transform entire school districts, reaching millions of students and creating a **ripple effect of positive change** throughout the educational ecosystem.

> “From transforming districts to launching companies, the power of the Google GSV Fellowship has already been seen and experienced at the systems level in its first year alone - and we know the ripple effect of that impact will only gain momentum as the network grows with our incredible 2024-2025 cohort.”
>
> — Tiffany Taylor, Partner and Co-President of ASU+GSV Summit

The inaugural cohort alone serves 2.2 million students, with the impact of these pioneering leaders felt throughout the education landscape. The cohort’s transformational projects addressed critical challenges in their districts, such as improving student achievement, improving instruction with technology, building teacher capacity with AI, empowering students with better feedback and smarter assessment systems, closing the achievement gap, increasing access to quality education, and more. Fellows also shared their learnings by presenting their work at the ASU+GSV Summit and other conferences and workshops, as well as publishing articles and blog posts about their experiences. The Fellowship fostered a strong sense of community and collaboration among educational leaders, creating a powerful network of changemakers.

> “There isn’t just one thing, but as I think about the whole of [the Google GSV Fellowship], the highlight was the way everyone and every activity reinforced and reminded me that we can dream a bit and tackle some of education’s biggest challenges in creative and innovative ways.”
>
> — Naomi Norman, Superintendent, Washtenaw Intermediate School District



Fellows reported significant personal and professional growth and implemented innovative solutions that are making a real difference in students' lives. The Fellowship provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of educational leadership, which will inform the design and implementation of future Fellowship programs.

> "To me, innovation is about growth and letting go of the fear of failure. Recognizing and naming challenges then finding creative ways to tackle them, knowing you will most likely not get it right the first time, is the key mindset for innovative thinkers."
>
> — Mary P. Beck, Acting Chief Teaching and Learning, Chicago Public Schools

# Looking Ahead

The Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship is poised to continue its mission of empowering leaders and transforming education. The Fellowship will expand its reach to include additional diverse voices and perspectives, and it will continue to evolve to meet the changing needs of the education landscape. The future of education is bright, and the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship is committed to playing a leading role in shaping that future.

THEME 01

## Building Teacher Capacity With Artificial Intelligence

AI presents an opportunity to augment the teaching profession, including by saving teachers time with grading and planning support, thereby freeing teachers up to spend more time focusing on student learning and less time with their unsustainable workload, as well as providing improved professional development.

THEME 02

## Improving Instruction With Technology

Teachers can leverage the power of AI to improve teaching and learning, through advanced personalization and targeted interventions.

THEME 03

## Empowering Leaders With Guidance on Artificial Intelligence

Empowering school and system leaders to leverage AI effectively and ethically, through actionable guidance and direction such as toolkits, frameworks, and pathways.

THEME 04

## Empowering Students With Better Feedback and Smarter Assessment Systems

AI can enhance assessment and feedback, both to support students in better understanding their skills and knowledge as well as to support teachers in understanding student performance and instructional needs, all the while taking more work off of teachers' plates and providing students and families with greater access to their data.

THEME 05

## Prioritizing Equity and Inclusion

As a tool for good, AI can increase access for traditionally marginalized communities - both for students to access learning and families to access system decision-making; including diverse voices in the creation and regulation of AI is critical to making that possible.

THEME 06

## Preparing for the Future

As advancements in AI have rapidly accelerated, so too is the need to adapt for an uncertain future, to prepare students for the future of work and teachers for the classrooms of the future.

# Theme 01:

## Building Teacher Capacity With Artificial Intelligence

AI presents an opportunity to augment the teaching profession, including by saving teachers time with grading and planning support, thereby freeing teachers up to spend more time focusing on student learning and less time with their unsustainable workload, as well as providing improved professional development.

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Dr. Linda Chen

## Empowering Leaders, Transforming Education: Enacting a Vision for Human-Centered AI

> “I want central office staff to be comfortable with the use of generative AI so that teachers will be comfortable with it… I want them to understand the promise of what generative AI could do – and get really good at using it.”

**Dr. Linda Chen**
Senior Deputy Superintendent of Academics,
Boston Public Schools

# Key Takeaways

1. **Emphasize Human-Centered Use of Technology:** Leaders should focus on using technology, including AI, to support and enhance human decision-making – rather than replace it. By streamlining tedious and data-intensive tasks, technology can reduce teachers' cognitive load, allowing them to concentrate on higher-order and higher-impact instructional activities. The ultimate goal is to create tools that empower teachers to make better decisions and improve instructional quality, rather than viewing technology as a substitute for human judgment.

2. **Engage and Empower Internal Stakeholders:** Successful implementation of technology initiatives requires the active engagement and buy-in from key stakeholders. Leaders should create opportunities for these individuals to explore and experiment with new technologies in a collaborative environment. This approach fosters ownership and deeper understanding of the technology's value, facilitating a smoother integration into existing practices and driving meaningful change from within.

3. **Create Space for Exploration, Innovation, and Iteration:** Leaders must allocate dedicated time for team learning and experimentation with new technologies. An iterative approach, through which leaders and educators are given space to test, refine, and adjust their thinking and strategies, can lead to more effective and impactful outcomes, particularly when utilizing AI in purposeful ways that are relevant to their current work.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Boston Public Schools |
| **Location** | Boston, MA |
| **Number of Schools** | 119 |
| **Number of Students** | 49,000+ |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 23% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 69.8% |
| **Students Learning English** | 33.7% |

# The Challenge

As the Senior Deputy Superintendent of Academics for Boston Public Schools, Dr. Linda Chen's interest in exploring how technology could transform teaching and learning led her to apply to the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship. Seeing an opportunity to step outside her role and connect with other passionate leaders across the country, she recognized that, "There are the day-to-day things that get in the way, and we're not really always at a place of ideating and thinking about something future-oriented –because we're so much in the present." Joining the Fellowship, Dr. Chen sought to answer two critical questions:

1. How could technology enhance teacher efficiency and reduce teacher cognitive load?

2. How could it support equitable and inclusive practices in schools?

Grappling with myriad challenges that urban school systems often face, Boston Public Schools staff worked tirelessly to analyze data that would inform sound instructional decisions. Oftentimes, Dr. Chen noticed that her instructional team relied on manual processes that required additional time and energy – time that could have been used in more impactful ways. Dr. Chen's challenge was to explore innovative technology solutions to more efficiently support their efforts to drive equitable outcomes across the district.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Smart data systems that support equitable student supports**
What are the efficiencies we can use with data to automatically flag student needs, guide decision-making, identify solutions, and analyze impact of student supports?

**Personalized pathways and supports for teachers**
How can we use technology to better support teachers, to fill their gaps, develop them, and provide efficiencies and support?

Dr. Chen likened her Transformational Opportunity to that of a dissertation process, as her vision evolved over the course of the Fellowship. Initially, she focused on creating effective learning pathways for teachers, given their proximity to students. She aimed to improve instructional practices while also increasing operational efficiency. This included offering professional development courses in their learning management system (LMS) to build competencies around using technology innovatively.

As she progressed through the Fellowship, however, Dr. Chen realized that the process was vague, top-down, and required significant buy-in from stakeholders. To drive meaningful change, a shift in focus was necessary. Dr. Chen pivoted and decided **to target district and central office instructional leaders, rather than teachers specifically, with the goal of "helping them understand the promise of what generative AI could do – and get really good at using it."**

Dr. Chen's project included providing leaders with opportunities to engage deeply with AI and other technological tools. This involved structured sessions in which leaders could experiment and "dabble" with AI in a supportive, peer-driven environment. "I felt like, for my own learning journey, I was less afraid of an unknown if I just dabbled with it, if I just tried it, and then I tried it to see how it actually made me more efficient and effective," Dr. Chen reflected. Her emphasis shifted to fostering creativity, risk-taking, and a deeper understanding of how technology could enhance their roles and districtwide strategies.

This new approach would offer an opportunity for the district to stand at the forefront of innovation. As Dr. Chen commented, "I want them to be comfortable with the use of generative AI so that teachers will be comfortable with it – as well as learn alongside our most innovative teachers." Dr. Chen and her team identified essential learning competencies for teacher practice, and will begin to guide teacher use of the technology based on their own experimentation.

# Successes & Learnings

## AI's Role as Human Assistant

Dr. Chen was clear from the start that the goal of AI should never be to "replace human decision making, but create opportunities […] and then, of course, you need to use human decision-making, because the educators know the students best." Rather than replace higher-order thinking, Dr. Chen thought broadly about how to utilize AI to streamline tedious, lengthy processes involving large datasets. Tools streamlined decision-making processes and reduced the cognitive load on educators, allowing them to focus more on instructional quality that reflected the unique strengths, needs, and interests of their students.

## Engaging Stakeholders to Explore New Technologies for Themselves

Finding and collaborating with the right internal stakeholders was key to making progress and achieving buy-in. Dr. Chen noted that, "For me, this is about creating an entry point [...] and giving people the risk of just trying to be creative." This time and space to explore AI and other technologies is crucial for leaders to find the value in these tools themselves, rather than through top-down mandates. By fostering a collaborative environment and allowing for creative exploration, Dr. Chen aimed to empower these leaders to drive technological transformation from within, carrying it over to their work with school-based educators.

## Reflections on Leadership

The Fellowship underscored the importance of leadership holding dedicated time for learning and exploration – not just leadership development. Dr. Chen knew that many leaders ask themselves, "How do I create time to invest in my own learning?" With this concern in mind, making space for experimentation and risk-taking was vital – and allowed Dr. Chen to identify barriers, pivot, and keep moving the district's transformative work forward.

# What's Next

Dr. Chen's Transformational Opportunity laid the foundation to extend this initial AI training and collaboration. Moving forward, she hopes to partner with organizations like LearnKit.ai – a tool created by other participants in the Fellowship – Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez (Superintendent, Hartford Public Schools), Natasha Trivers (CEO, Democracy Prep Public Schools), Dr. Cameron Fadjo (Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services, Pleasantville Union Free School District), and Dr. Tommy Welch (Regional School Superintendent (K-12), Boston Public Schools) – to continue to enhance leaders' fluency and ability to support teachers in effectively integrating AI into practice.


Regarding practical applications and use cases, Dr. Chen will help the district in developing algorithms to match students with appropriate teachers and resources. Finally, these experiences will inform the development of district policy around AI, in collaboration with the school board and educators across the district. As Dr. Chen shared, "We want to promulgate a policy with our board, but what we don't want to do is do that before we've had a chance to experience its value – and for a critical mass of educators to understand the use of it."

# Taking It Forward

## Reflect

When looking to both explore and operationalize a vision for schools and systems, leaders can consider the following questions:

- What does a future vision for success look like for students, staff, and the district as a whole? How would things be different, and how would we know?
- What is the current status of our schools or system, and how does it align with or differ from this vision?
- Who can provide valuable perspectives to ensure the vision is effective, inclusive, and equitable? Which stakeholders may have been historically overlooked or deprioritized?
- What concrete outcomes, guidance, or learnings are needed for students, staff, and/or families to effectively meet this vision?

Dr. Chen's approach underscores the value of creating space for authentic exploration and experimentation. By allowing educators and leaders to dabble in new technologies, districts can foster a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. The journey also demonstrates the importance of aligning technology initiatives with broader educational goals and engaging stakeholders throughout the process.

## Explore

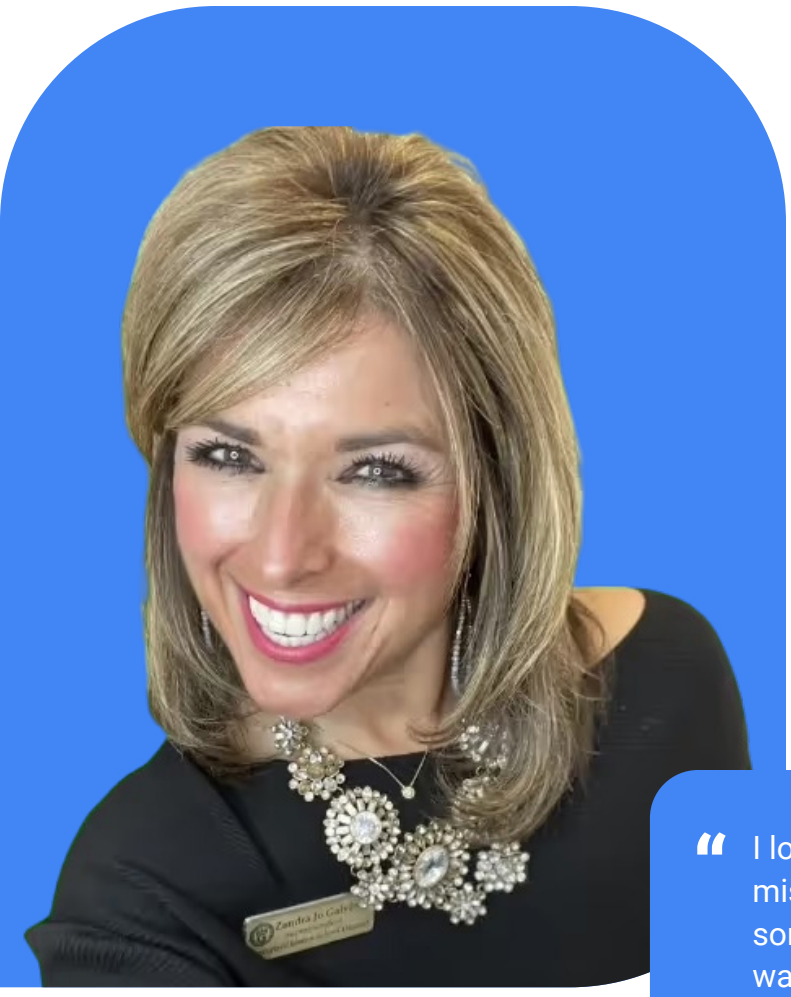
Scan the AI Resource Share that Dr. Chen and her peers in the Google GSV Fellowship leveraged throughout their journey. Developed by TLA, this hub of resources is organized by theme and includes descriptions of all resources to help leaders discover the most relevant resources to support their work.

Dive into TLA's Real-Time Redesign toolkit to learn how to conduct a step-by-step, inclusive design process to solve problems in your school or system. The guide prioritizes inclusivity by starting with bringing together a diverse design team, guides participants to conduct empathy interviews, and ultimately to pilot a potential solution.

Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Dr. Zandra Jo Galván



## Transforming Teaching and Learning in Rural California With AI

> “I loved bringing our people together with a common mission around AI. I loved [...] teaching them something that they had no idea about and then watching their eyes light up.”

**Dr. Zandra Jo Galván**
Former Superintendent, Greenfield Union School District

# Key Takeaways

1. **Inclusive Collaboration Drives Innovation:** By bringing together diverse stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents, and community leaders, districts can create a shared vision for innovation – including AI integration – that addresses local needs and concerns.

2. **Start with Clear Goals:** Framing technology initiatives, such as AI, around concrete objectives —e.g., giving educators more time and preparing students, especially those who face significant barriers to success for their future careers— helps to focus efforts and garner a collective commitment from stakeholders.

3. **Embrace a Growth Mindset:** Leaders should approach new technologies with curiosity and openness, recognizing that the learning process is ongoing and that "failure" is an opportunity for growth and refinement.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Greenfield Union School District |
| **Location** | Greenfield, CA |
| **Number of Schools** | 5 |
| **Number of Students** | 3,700 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 15% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 90% |
| **Students Learning English** | 70% |

# The Challenge

For Dr. Zandra Jo Galván, Former Superintendent of Greenfield Union School District in California, the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship offered an opportunity to bring cutting-edge technology and innovation to the rural, predominantly Latino community her district serves. With 90% of students in the district qualifying for free or reduced lunch and a lagging graduation rate, Galván is hyper focused on **the urgent need to break the cycle of poverty** by equipping learners with skills and opportunities that could make them competitive in a rapidly evolving job market.

"If we don't do everything possible to bring opportunities to our brilliant scholars, no one else will," Galván passionately explained.

Galván joined the Fellowship with a vision to leverage artificial intelligence (AI) to both enhance teaching and learning experiences and expose students to new technologies that would better prepare them for their lives post-graduation. As Galván started out on her journey, she faced a myriad of discoveries, including the need to build large-scale awareness and dispel widespread misconceptions among staff and community about what AI is.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Professional learning and support for adults to leverage and explore the possibilities of AI**

How can we provide teachers the space to experiment with AI, allowing them to learn its capabilities and applications for students, teachers, principals, coaches, cabinet-level employees, and other school district staff members? The goal is to create an AI implementation plan for the district that leads to evidence of deep, authentic application of AI in instruction and improves efficiency for educators.

To turn her aspirations into reality, Galván narrowed her focus on the technological capabilities of her staff. Recognizing the need to empower teachers and staff with AI, Galván's Transformational Opportunity centered on the question: "How can we provide teachers the space to experiment with AI to learn its capabilities and applications for students, teachers, principals, coaches, cabinet-level employees, and other school district staff members?"

With this question in mind, Galván developed her goal to create an AI implementation plan for the district that would lead to **evidence of deep, authentic application of the technology in instruction and improved efficiency for educators**. She emphasized the potential of offloading rote, time-consuming tasks to AI, allowing staff to not only be more productive and efficient as professionals, but also have more time for their personal well-being.

"How do we give our leaders the gift of time? How do we make things much more efficient [...] and productive [with] saved time by utilizing AI?" Galván asked. "Wouldn't it be great if you didn't have to spend your weekend doing schoolwork, and [instead] you could be with your family?"

Ultimately, Galván underscored the importance of AI integration on student learning and skill-building. It is critical to ensure that her students, many of whom already face significant barriers, are not left behind in a rapidly advancing technological landscape. Galván formed **a diverse AI task force comprising community leaders, teachers, classified staff, parents, and administrators to explore AI's potential in education.** The formation of this collaborative team also helped to ensure the district's approach to AI use was grounded meaningfully in the needs of the school, community, and those it serves.

This task force **designed and implemented a five-part professional learning series to build AI awareness and showcase its potential applications in context,** bridging theoretical knowledge with application so that their community could explore how they could use AI to their benefit. This learning series progressed from introducing AI basics to exploring educational applications and developing implementation plans. This learning series was structured to be slow and gradual, allowing participants to come in with limited understanding of AI and build up their knowledge over the course of the series in a way that didn't feel overwhelming. Each session was carefully crafted to address specific aspects of AI integration:

1. Introduction to AI and team-building
2. Exploration of general AI tools
3. Focus on educational AI applications
4. Practical applications and experimentation
5. Next steps and planning for district-wide implementation and scale

Throughout the process, Galván highlighted the importance

of hands-on experience and experimentation for her school community. Educators were encouraged to explore various AI tools, looking into both general applications (such as administrative tools to improve workflows) and education-specific use cases (such as personalizing learning content for students). This approach allowed them to see firsthand how these technologies could transform their work and student learning experiences.

# Successes & Learnings

Galván's work on her Transformational Opportunity yielded several key successes and important learnings:

## Building a Collaborative Culture of Innovation

One of Galván's most significant achievements in the Fellowship was the development of a collaborative, diverse task force, representing the district's unique identities and context, to spearhead AI integration efforts. This inclusive approach not only brought together a variety of perspectives, but also helped address misconceptions and build trust around AI use in education. Galván noted, "I loved bringing our people together with a common mission around AI. I loved [...] teaching them something that they had no idea about and then watching their eyes light up."

By the end of the learning series, Galván reported that the task force was able to build a solid foundation for AI in the district. She received positive feedback from staff about the opportunities they were given to experiment with new tools and how these tools could help free up their time and improve their work-life balance. Overall, Galván noted, the task force was able to develop a collective commitment among educators, even those who initially saw AI as a threat but adjusted their perceptions to viewing AI as an ally and a helpful tool.

## Leveraging Networks, Resources, and Vulnerability

Galván found immense value in the connections she made through the Fellowship. She leveraged resources shared by other Fellows, such as curated lists of AI tools for education, and sought out advice from her personal and professional networks. This comprehensive approach to learning and problem-solving proved crucial for a leader navigating the complex landscape of AI in education. Galván also underscored the importance of being vulnerable with her colleagues, embracing the unknown, and being willing to 'fail forward' and experiment in her own understanding and implementation of this work.

## Aligning Technology With District Goals

By framing AI integration around concrete objectives – giving educators more time and better preparing students for future careers – Galván was able to create a clear vision that resonated with stakeholders. This alignment helped generate enthusiasm and commitment from participants, who could see the direct benefits of AI adoption in their daily work and in student outcomes. Galván was also able to deepen their work around presenting technology to students by bringing a group of 100 students to Google's headquarters in Silicon Valley, further allowing them to get a 'sneak peek' into what work in technology looks like and inspiring ideas for their post-graduation plans.

# What's Next

Looking ahead, Galván is focused on expanding and deepening AI integration across the district. She plans to reconvene the task force and scale up their efforts, aiming to ensure that every adult in the organization has a basic understanding of AI and its potential applications in education. "I want every single adult in my organization to know a basic level of what AI can do," she stated.

Galván also recognizes the importance of involving students

more directly in the AI initiative and deepening the way in which equity and representation sit at the heart of this work. She plans to collaborate with a Superintendent's Student Advisory Council, made up of district wide student representatives, to gather feedback and involve them in championing AI tools across the district. Additionally, Galván is working with the district's school board to develop policies and guardrails for AI use, ensuring safe and ethical implementation across the system.

As she moves forward, Galván emphasized the need for a measured, thoughtful approach to this transformative, system-wide work. "In the fall, we want to bring about all the adults in the organization to understand what [AI] can do, [and then] in the spring, [involve] kids – and just really go at a slow pace to make sure that we do it right," she explained. This careful strategy reflects her commitment to responsible innovation that truly serves the needs of the district's students and educators.

# Taking It Forward

Education leaders seeking to integrate AI into their districts can learn from Galván's experience.

## Reflect

Consider the following questions as you approach technology integration in your context:

- Who should be included in a diverse, representative task force to guide AI integration efforts in your system? Who is often excluded? How can you align their work with your system's broader mission and values?
- What challenges with staff wellbeing might AI and other technologies be able to support?
- How can you provide hands-on learning opportunities for staff to explore and experiment with AI tools?
- What steps can you take to ensure AI integration efforts specifically benefit students from communities positioned furthest from opportunity?

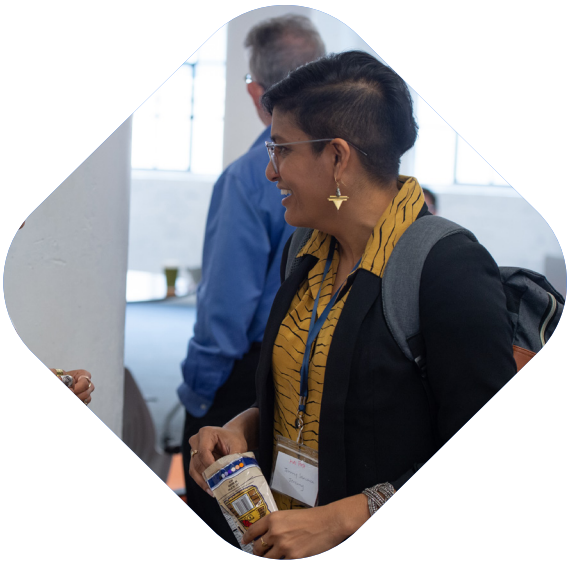
# Explore

Understand the critical levers driving adult wellbeing through research conducted by The Learning Accelerator (TLA) and the Greenfield Union School District. Explore how your educators and system leaders may be impacted by day-to-day demands – and begin to consider ways to use AI to mitigate these challenges.

Learn about fostering a growth mindset among system stakeholders to facilitate an impactful culture of change that can elevate both teaching and learning across your schools.

When engaging in collaborative work among educators or other representatives from your school community, be sure to build a shared commitment to change, ensuring that all participants and stakeholders develop the buy-in needed to support your initiatives.

Be sure to take time to assess and understand your system's student data to shine a light on strengths and critical gaps, then take steps to center equity in your edtech landscape and infrastructure, ensuring the tools and processes you're employing with educators and students benefit all students – especially those positioned furthest from opportunity.



Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Dr. Kelly Coffin

## Empowering Teachers: Cultivating a Culture of Innovation Through Experiential Professional Learning

> “We gave you the time, the space and the support. Three things that you rarely get. We hope – and encourage – that you will pass this on.”

**Dr. Kelly Coffin**
Interim Superintendent,
Former Assistant Superintendent of Innovation and Strategic Initiatives,
Farmington Public Schools

# Key Takeaways

1. **Embrace an Iterative, Teacher-Driven Approach to Innovation:** School and system leaders benefit from creating opportunities for teachers to lead the change process. By providing time, space, and support for educators to explore new technologies and pedagogies without immediate classroom pressure, leaders can foster a culture of innovation from the ground up. This approach often leads to increased buy-in and more creative solutions than top-down mandates.

2. **Design Authentic Learning Experiences for Adults:** When implementing new initiatives, leaders should consider putting teachers in their students' shoes. Experiential learning models not only build empathy but also increase teachers' confidence and willingness to incorporate new practices into their classrooms. This approach can be particularly effective when introducing new technology or other unfamiliar tools and methods.

3. **Leverage Small Successes to Drive Systemic Change:** Starting with a focused group of teachers can catalyze broader changes across a district or system. By celebrating early wins, fostering peer-to-peer learning, and continuously refining approaches based on feedback, leaders can create a ripple effect that transforms instructional practices, school structures, and student engagement system-wide. This strategy allows for organic growth and adaptation of new initiatives.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Farmington Public School District |
| **Location** | Farmington, MI |
| **Number of Schools** | 16 |
| **Number of Students** | 8,937 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 4.9% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 30% |
| **Students Learning English** | 16.3% |

# The Challenge

Like many of her peers in positions of leadership, Dr. Kelly Coffin, former Assistant Superintendent of Innovation and Strategic Initiatives and current Interim Superintendent at Farmington Public Schools, often finds herself caught up in the day-to-day whirlwind of system administration. This daily grind can stifle the strategic planning and visioning that are critical for long-term success in improving the student experience.

The Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship presented Dr. Coffin with an opportunity to step away from the immediate, urgent needs in front of her and look at the big picture. Her primary aim in the Fellowship became clear: to figure out how to move beyond the district's reactive and limited use of technology, toward a more sustainable and teacher-driven model of technology integration. She craved the opportunity to take a step back, connect with like-minded leaders, and initiate action steps toward true impact on student learning.

Farmington Public Schools had not adopted a one-to-one technology program until the COVID-19 pandemic compelled them to act. Many teachers felt uncomfortable with technology and did not see themselves as experts, often feeling overwhelmed by the myriad shifts related to technology brought on over the last several years. Dr. Coffin joined the Fellowship motivated by a desire to support her teachers, leverage technology to improve student achievement, and foster a more engaging learning environment. Understanding the rapid changes affecting the K-12 ecosystem, she wanted to ensure that technology was seen as a tool to enhance the core curriculum and create deeper learning experiences for students.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Facilitating teacher professional development on authentic learning, enhanced by technology**

The pandemic led to Farmington Public Schools becoming a one-to-one district. With the return to in-person learning, educators needed guidance on how to effectively integrate technology alongside the creation of authentic tasks so students could meaningfully engage in learning. Recently, the district established groups of "proof-of-concept" teachers at each of their campuses. Unlike early adopters, proof-of-concept teachers participate in a year-long program that includes professional development sessions led by fellow district employees on integrating technology.

Dr. Coffin's Transformational Opportunity (TO) was not about simply handing teachers tablets and expecting instant innovation – it was about **fostering a sustainable culture where technology played a key role in enhancing core learning**. To address resource limitations and a challenging culture marked by technology aversion, Dr. Coffin began the journey by building trust among district staff. As such, a traditional "pilot program" approach was replaced with the term "proof of concept," emphasizing discovery and learning over rigid implementation.

The first five months of this initiative centered on empathy interviews and focus groups with teachers. Dr. Coffin and her leadership team needed to understand teachers' pre-existing experiences, anxieties, and comfort levels with technology, and using a design-thinking approach ensured the program addressed real needs – not just technological possibilities or rote tasks that created minimal change in long-term practice.

In her proof-of-concept approach, Dr. Coffin engaged 100 teachers in exploratory learning around a topic that often felt unfamiliar to them – technology, and she soon found that teachers' discomfort with technology mirrored students' anxieties. To combat this challenge, the district introduced iPads to teachers in December 2023 – not as a pre-packaged solution, but as a strong catalyst for exploration. Prompting teachers to engage in creative, open-ended tasks – such as working with technology to make a quick video – encouraged collaboration and discovery. "They became their students, literally," Dr. Coffin explained. "We allowed them to struggle through that."

Although teachers were nervous about the initiative, they were given the time, space, and support to learn something new – a luxury that is often difficult to come by for teachers who face increasing demands in their day-to-day schedules. Teachers were not expected to be instant experts, but rather, they were encouraged to learn alongside one another. **This approach fostered a safe space for experimentation and risk-taking that allowed educators to be more vulnerable and expand their learning in an authentic way.**

Throughout the Fellowship year, these exploratory learning sessions gradually increased in complexity. Teachers refined their technology skills through exercises and collaborative activities, shared their journeys, and learned to craft compelling narratives about their experiences. This focus on storytelling ensured that their successes could be effectively communicated to the wider school community in a manner that highlighted the district's work toward a successful culture shift. The year culminated in a celebratory event, where teachers were empowered to showcase their proof-of-concept work. They presented lesson plans integrating technology, strategies for engaging students, and the impact on their classrooms. This celebration served as a powerful demonstration of their growth and achievements. Dr. Coffin told the teachers, "We gave you the time, the space and the support. Three things that you rarely get. We hope – and encourage – that you will pass this on."

# Successes & Learnings

Rather than emphasizing the newest technology fads and top-down mandates, Dr. Coffin's TO unearthed a far more powerful insight: the magic of transformative work lies in igniting a passion for innovation within teachers themselves.

## Increase Teacher Ownership

The proof-of-concept approach created a supportive environment where teachers felt empowered to take risks and explore new horizons. In place of hesitation and reluctance toward technology integration, a growth mindset blossomed among educators. Teachers embraced new methods, collaborated with colleagues, and reveled in sharing their successes. Leaders and teachers ensured the focus wasn't on the technology itself, but instead on how it could elevate learning, and they showcased the ways in which students "made meaning" of what they were learning and actively transferred their newfound knowledge.

## School Leadership Involvement Matters

By collaborating with school principals, Dr. Coffin was better positioned to understand the specific needs of the teachers and staff at each school site. This targeted approach allowed for more effective support and professional development, contextualized to the unique needs of the school community. While the program initially hit stumbling blocks due to a lack of sustained principal involvement, Dr. Coffin found that buy-in and support from the top was essential. Leaders need dedicated time to learn collaboratively, alongside teachers – not just cheer them on from the sidelines. Success was about creating an environment that removes barriers and fosters ideas – a significant step away from traditional top-down mandates.

# What's Next

The district's proof-of-concept professional development program will continue, welcoming a new cohort of 100 teachers in the 2024-25 school year. In the next iteration, however, training around technology will start earlier in teachers' careers at Farmington Public Schools, laying a stronger foundation for technology integration from the get-go. Recognizing the diverse needs of both new and experienced teachers, the program will be restructured to offer targeted support and personalized learning pathways.

Dr. Coffin sees great potential in how these efforts will impact students. "We are looking differently [at] students with IEPs and how they are included. We're looking differently at students with behavior issues – and do those look different when they're in an engaging learning environment versus a traditional 'read the book, take the test' kind of thing," Dr. Coffin shared.

Transformation won't be confined to classrooms, as the proof-of-concept program highlighted the power of collaboration. Dr. Coffin envisions exploring restructured school days that prioritize collaboration not just for students, but for teachers as well. She imagines developing professional learning communities (PLCs) in which teachers from different subject areas brainstorm, share best practices, and co-create innovative lessons. Over the next five years, the district plans to track data on engagement, student well-being, and growth, with the long-term vision of full transformation, in order to better understand where they're experiencing pockets of success and how to expand their positive influence for students across the system.

# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders looking to accelerate technology integration and improve student outcomes can draw inspiration from Dr. Coffin's journey.

## Reflect

To begin, consider these questions:

- What are the current barriers to technology integration in your schools?
- How can you build teacher capacity to effectively use technology?
- What resources and supports are needed to sustain long-term technology initiatives?

## Explore

To guide your work, explore these resources created and curated by The Learning Accelerator (TLA):

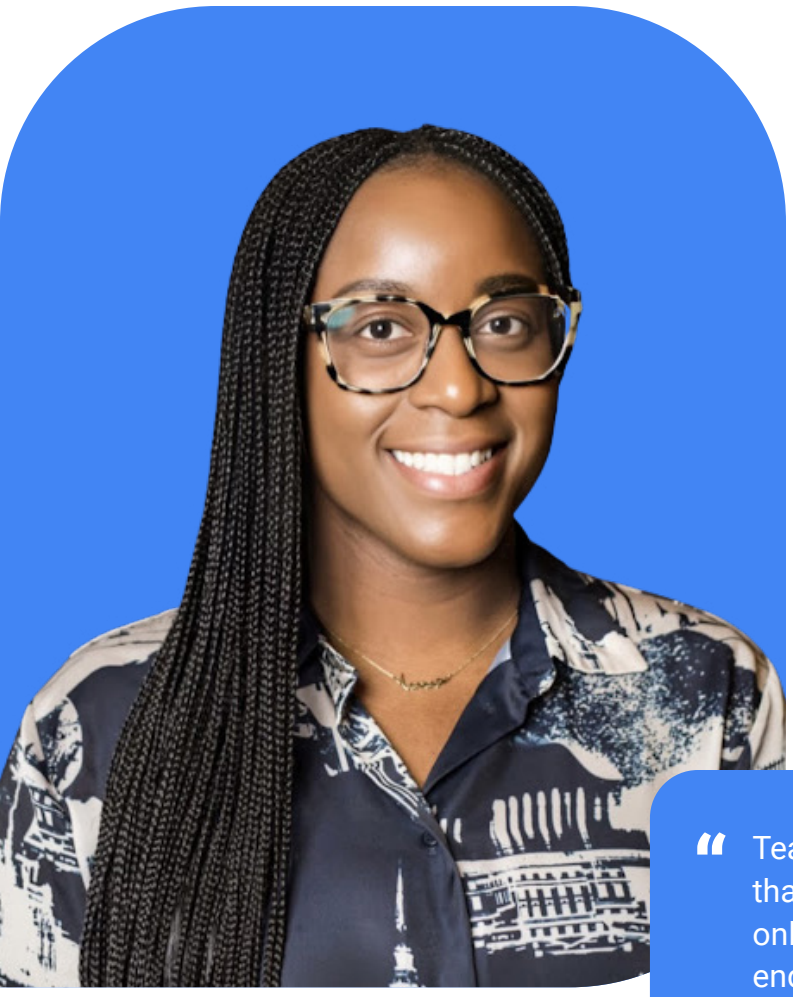
- Leverage teacher leadership: Identify and empower teacher leaders to drive change organically.
- Focus on student outcomes: Collect and analyze data to measure the impact of technology integration on student learning.
- Build a supportive culture: Celebrate successes, foster collaboration, and create a positive environment for innovation.

By taking a systematic approach and focusing on teacher empowerment, data-driven decision-making, and a supportive culture, you can replicate Dr. Coffin's success and transform teaching and learning in your system.

Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Djeneba (DJ) Cherif



## Building Teacher Capacity and Content Knowledge With AI

> “Teachers believe, from the anecdotes they shared, that this actually gives them greater capacity to do only the things that they can do. It also gives them endurance [and allows them to] not be exhausted every night – from trying to plan lessons and also thinking through small groups.”

**Djeneba (DJ) Cherif**
Chief Academic Officer,
University Prep Schools

# Key Takeaways

1. **Use AI as a Tool for Professional Development:** Leveraging generative AI can be an effective strategy for enhancing teachers' comprehension of complex concepts and addressing challenges. Using AI to help educators better understand effective teaching practices and what misconceptions students may have can strengthen educators' pedagogical skills.

2. **Build Teacher Capacity and Confidence by Providing Space to Explore AI:** Introducing AI to teachers in a low-stakes way can demystify the technology and shift their perception from viewing it as a replacement to seeing it as a complementary tool to their work. Effective implementation involves creating opportunities for hands-on learning and providing support to address initial concerns about AI's role in education.

3. **Align AI Use to Strategic Priorities:** Successful integration of AI into teaching practices requires clear communication and alignment with broader, system-wide goals. Engaging teachers as ambassadors and involving them in the development and implementation processes can enhance buy-in and effectiveness of these initiatives. Additionally, addressing any reservations from education leaders and ensuring they are informed about AI's benefits can help overcome resistance and foster a unified approach to AI adoption.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | University Prep Schools |
| **Location** | Detroit, MI |
| **Number of Schools** | 10 |
| **Number of Students** | 4,604 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 14% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 77% |

# The Challenge

DJ Cherif joined the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship to address a critical challenge faced by her school system, University Prep Schools (U Prep) – staffing. Like many school systems, U Prep experienced challenges hiring teachers due to a nationwide teacher shortage. Consequently, U Prep hired a significant number of teacher fellows and long-term substitutes – totalling 17% and 15%, respectively, of their teacher workforce in the 2023-24 school year. *(Note: At the beginning of the 2024-25 school year, the population of teacher fellows and long-term substitutes was reported to be significantly lower.)* While U Prep had already adopted a strong, research-based curriculum, Cherif knew it required skilled teachers to implement – especially around providing effective, timely feedback to students.

Developing teacher capacity became an urgent priority for Cherif, particularly given the challenge that a significant percentage of students at U Prep were not yet performing at grade level. By joining the Fellowship, Cherif saw an opportunity to leverage emerging technology like artificial intelligence (AI) to build the capacity of teachers, specifically by enabling them to provide more meaningful and rapid feedback to students to accelerate student learning.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Creating a sustainable, effective teaching practice**
A sustainable teaching profession will lead to more higher-quality teachers staying in the classroom. How can AI and technology resources build the capacity of teachers, provide better feedback for kids, and make teaching more sustainable?

To address the challenges of effectively preparing a novice teaching staff and the need for more effective student feedback, Cherif embarked on her journey in the Fellowship to leverage AI in her school system. However, she quickly realized that before implementing AI tools, there was a need to educate both teachers and leaders about the potential of generative AI.

"What I didn't realize is that a lot of our teachers and our leaders, when they hear AI, at best they think of ChatGPT, but [they don't] really understand what generative AI is, what it can do, the pros and cons," Cherif explained. This insight led her to pivot her approach, focusing first on **building a foundational understanding of AI among staff.**

Cherif's Transformational Opportunity (TO) began by establishing two working groups in collaboration with U Prep's Director of School Quality: one for teachers and another for leaders. The teacher group consisted of 10-12 teachers who met monthly for after-school sessions. The leadership group included eight members, comprising both central office staff and building leaders such as principals and assistant principals.

These working groups engaged in professional development sessions exploring various aspects of AI, including its pros and cons, biases, and the implications of its use. Cherif emphasized the importance of linking these concepts directly to pedagogy: "The agenda essentially was a key learning of artificial intelligence. So, let's examine [...] some of the pros and cons, let's examine some of the biases [...], and what content areas do you think it'll be most prevalent [in]."

One practical application they explored was using AI to identify and address mathematical misconceptions. For instance, staff used ChatGPT to anticipate common misunderstandings students may have with math concepts and draft prompts to address these misconceptions. "We focused on Algebra I, also Algebra II, and fifth-grade mathematics in regards to fractions, ratios, and adding and subtracting fractions," Cherif detailed.

The initiative also revealed an unexpected benefit for teachers. As Cherif noted, "There's a level of vulnerability about the misconceptions teachers had with the content." By using AI tools to explore different ways of explaining concepts, teachers were able to address their own misconceptions and sharpen their content knowledge.

As the project evolved, Cherif recognized the need to adapt her approach. "I thought we were just going to get a tool, get some student work, and we were just going to move forward – and they were just like, 'No, this seems like more work,'" she explained. Realizing the increased expectations around understanding and utilizing a new tool led her to focus more on building buy-in and helping teachers see AI as a resource to support their practice – rather than an additional burden.

# Successes & Learnings

Through the development and implementation of her TO, Cherif identified several key successes and learnings:

## Demystifying AI Among Teachers

The initiative helped demystify AI for teachers, assuaging their fears and demonstrating the technology as a valuable resource. Teachers realized that the effectiveness of generative AI largely depended on the quality of the prompts they provided, and this insight reinforced the need for teachers to internalize lessons and understand their students' needs deeply to make impactful use of the technology.

"Teachers believe, from the anecdotes they shared, that **this actually gives them greater capacity to do only the things that they can do**," Cherif noted. "It also gives them endurance [and allows them to] not be exhausted every night – from trying to plan lessons and also thinking through small groups."

The working group reported that AI tools helped them generate differentiated lesson plans and instructional materials, freeing them up to engage in more high-impact teaching activities like facilitating intentional small groups. One tool in particular, Khanmigo, resonated with teachers following a professional development session, according to Cherif. However, Cherif and her system also faced challenges. Some teachers were initially concerned about AI replacing their roles or diminishing students' cognitive engagement. As teachers learned more about these tools over time, Cherif observed a positive shift toward viewing AI as a complement to instruction that could work alongside both teachers and students.

## AI as a Tool to Strengthen Concept Knowledge and Instruction

An unexpected benefit of the initiative was its impact on teachers' own content knowledge. Cherif explained, "There's a level of vulnerability about the misconceptions teachers had in the content." By using AI tools to explore different ways of explaining concepts, teachers were able to address their own misconceptions and improve their understanding of the material they were teaching.

This was particularly evident in mathematics instruction. "For example – I'm just using math because we talked a lot about math – they were discussing how to add multi-digit numbers using a place-value chart, which is aligned to our curriculum," Cherif shared, "but our teachers expected to teach math concepts in a way that is very different from how they were taught. There is definitely a need for development on concepts such as place-value and fractions so they can actually address student misconceptions correctly." In expanding their understanding of what they were teaching, **generative AI served as a dynamic professional learning tool.**

# What's Next

Looking ahead, Cherif shared, "I am going to continue to think big and believe in the impossible, but also think about how to strategically motivate and influence teachers to want to learn about the new tools, such as AI, that could amplify learning for our children." Cherif and her team will offer monthly professional development sessions on AI over the course of the 2024-25 school year, including on how to leverage ChatGPT and Khanmigo in the classroom. They also plan to offer the sessions virtually – both synchronously as well as asynchronously – allowing for teacher access to the materials anytime, anywhere.

Cherif plans to relaunch the working group next school year with several key modifications. The new cohort will meet more frequently, the process will include an application to ensure high levels of commitment from all participants, and a stipend will also be offered for participation (initially paid for out of the academic department's budget, although Cherif plans to apply for grant funding to sustain the stipends in the future). "We are relaunching the working group in the summer so that we can create an implementation plan for how teachers are going to use it," Cherif explained. The goal is to create a comprehensive roadmap for integrating generative AI into U Prep's teaching practices. This working group will also bring together teachers, central office staff, and school administrators, promoting a culture of collaborative learning across the system.

Cherif is eager to measure the impact of AI on student learning, particularly in addressing misconceptions in Algebra I, a course with high failure rates in the state of Michigan and across the country. She hopes that this work will lead to improved mathematics performance and better-prepared students overall. Cherif plans to use internal funds to send their Director of School Quality – and potentially additional teachers – to a conference focused on AI in education.

Ultimately, Cherif sees this work as crucial for preparing students for their future. "Our students are young, they're energetic, and they have this entire world ahead of them," Cherif reflected. "We have to do a better job of being better students so that we can equip them and prepare them."

# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders seeking to leverage AI to develop the capacity of their teachers can learn from Cherif's insights.

## Reflect

Leaders should consider the following questions as they think about how to implement AI with their teachers:

- What is the pain point you are trying to solve, and what role, if any, can AI play in minimizing it?
- Who are early-adopter teachers you could recruit to help explore AI and share their learnings with their peers?
- How can AI be used to improve professional development for teachers?

## Explore

The Learning Accelerator (TLA)'s EdTech Systems Guide shares actionable resources on implementation of educational technology, such as building buy-in and communicating effectively with stakeholders.

Scan the AI Resource Share that Cherif and her peers in the Google GSV Fellowship leveraged in their journey. Developed by TLA, this hub is organized by theme and includes descriptions to help leaders discover the most relevant AI-related resources to use in supporting their work.

Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Patrick Gittisriboongul, Ed.D

## Leveling Up Teachers' AI Capacity

> "In six months, our students were already starting to embrace AI. They were using tools like ChatGPT to write speeches. If we don't catch up, we're already behind."

**Patrick Gittisriboongul, Ed.D**
Assistant Superintendent of Technology & Innovation,
Lynwood Unified School District

# Key Takeaways

1. **Embrace AI Proactively:** Rather than banning AI, educators should proactively integrate the technology into the learning environment. This approach allows students and teachers to leverage AI's potential to enhance education and prepare for future technological advancements.

2. **Build Capacity Through Task Forces:** Creating a dedicated AI task force with diverse stakeholders can effectively build capacity, explore ethical considerations, and develop practical policies for AI implementation in schools.

3. **Prioritize Equity in AI Integration:** When introducing AI in education, it is crucial to consider how it can be used to address diverse learning needs and close achievement gaps, ensuring that all students benefit from these technological advancements.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Lynwood Unified School District |
| **Location** | Lynwood, CA |
| **Number of Schools** | 20 |
| **Number of Students** | 11,386 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 16.4% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 96.6% |
| **Students Learning English** | 26.4% |

# The Challenge

At a commencement speech in 2023, Dr. Patrick Gittisriboongul, Assistant Superintendent of Technology & Innovation for Lynwood Unified School District, listened as a student speaker openly shared that they had written their speech with the help of an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot. To see firsthand how students had rapidly, openly, and even proudly learned and incorporated AI into their everyday lives was a formative moment – one that inspired him to think broadly about the possibility for AI to transform learning, engagement, and outcomes in students' educational experiences. This inspiration led Dr. Gittisriboongul to join the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship.

"In six months, our students were already starting to embrace AI. They were using tools like ChatGPT to write speeches," Dr. Gittisriboongul shared. "If we don't catch up, we're already behind."

Around this same time, many districts across the country chose to ban AI in schools. Rather than try to restrain its use for Lynwood students, Dr. Gittisriboongul perceived an opportunity to develop a vision where everyone — students, teachers, and families — not only embraces AI but effectively utilizes it to transform the learning experience and academic outcomes for students.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**'Leveling up' students and staff to leverage AI to increase student achievement and close equity gaps**

The Level Up Lynwood project aims to revolutionize education in the Lynwood Unified School District by expanding access to large language models (LLMs) and generative AI (GAI). Large language models and generative AI tools have the potential to transform learning and teaching by offering personalized, interactive, and inclusive educational experiences. By harnessing the power of these technologies, the project will empower teachers to create engaging instructional materials, provide tailored support to students, and address the diverse learning needs of the district's student population.

Dr. Gittisriboongul's Transformational Opportunity (TO) centered around a key question: How might we leverage AI to transform learning and teaching by offering personalized, interactive, and inclusive educational experiences? He wanted to consider how this could both increase student achievement and help to close concerning gaps.

To tackle this question, Dr. Gittisriboongul launched Level Up Lynwood, a project aimed at building AI literacy and capacity in teachers. The initial cohort of 25 teachers morphed into the district's AI Task Force, charged with exploring how AI could be safely and effectively implemented in Lynwood schools. Over the course of the year, the group engaged in four sessions to tackle critical topics, including:

- ***Building the Fundamentals:*** Dr. Gittisriboongul brought in representatives from companies outside of education (such as Salesforce) to share how AI is being used to solve problems and improve systems.
- ***Ethics and Oversight:*** The task force discussed best practices for ethical AI use, risks, and biases. Teachers put together classroom policies on AI, which were shared directly with the district's school board.
- ***Equitable Implementation:*** Dr. Gittisriboongul leveraged tools and resources from The Learning Accelerator (TLA) to help explore and shape how schools can equitably bring AI into schools in ways that reach and support all students.
- ***Leadership + AI Capacity and Literacy:*** The task force explored the competencies required for teachers, leaders, and students to successfully leverage AI in their context.

Over the course of the Fellowship, Dr. Gittisriboongul's TO largely stayed true to his initial vision and goals. Through the process, he was able to source and implement resources that led to a robust series of sessions for the AI Task Force to operationalize its use.

# Successes & Learnings

Through the development and implementation of her TO, Cherif identified several key successes and learnings:

## Meaningful Impact on Teachers

The task force pushed members to critically "think about how we instruct, how we engage, what we ask kids to do, and what we ask kids to perform," according to Dr. Gittisriboongul. As a result, a significant mindset shift occurred among task force teachers who were recognizing that AI is not a cheating device – but rather a tool that can be used in productive and effective ways. Teachers felt comfortable learning and exploring how AI could assist with tasks like grading and making rubrics. As a result, they were able to create and utilize classroom use policies for AI to guide ongoing implementation in their schools.

## System-Wide Progress

The AI Task Force successfully met, executed their meeting objectives, and prioritized dedicated time for innovation and learning. Beyond capacity-building for its members, the task force shared their classroom policies with the school board, ultimately influencing them to pass a resolution to codify an AI use policy for the district. This achievement directly resulted from the task force's work, laying the groundwork for future growth and scale.

Despite its success, the task force did encounter challenges. Throughout this process, Dr. Gittisriboongul identified and addressed several barriers to success, including discussions about the age-appropriateness of AI ("How would [our young] kids [...] be exposed to AI?"), the need for infrastructure to evaluate tool quality ("How can we [...] 'weed and garden' [...] so many different platforms coming out?"), and combating change fatigue ("How do we integrate this into their day?"). By addressing these issues head-on with task force members, they collectively sought answers and developed guidance.

## Reflections on Leadership

On a personal level, Dr. Gittisriboongul spotlighted the power of learning from others as a key lever in actualizing his initial vision. Upon reflection, he noted, "This Fellowship, getting to listen to and learn from other leaders across the country, inspired my action around AI." Beyond the Fellowship itself, Dr. Gittisriboongul's choice to distribute leadership to task force members became a model for change within the district. In many ways, the task force represented the change in participants that is needed for the entire district community, demonstrating that the process works and should be scaled to include more teachers.

# What's Next

Dr. Gittisriboongul's TO has laid a robust foundation for the future of AI integration in Lynwood Unified School District. Building on the success of the initial AI Task Force, the district is poised to significantly expand its efforts in the coming years.

One of Dr. Gittisriboongul's key priorities is the formation of a student cohort. As he explained, "Next, I'm going to form a student cohort – that's going to be the next evolution." This student group will play a crucial role in shaping AI use across all grade levels, helping to build a scope and sequence for their peers.

In parallel, Dr. Gittisriboongul plans to develop a comprehensive AI pathway for students. This new initiative will focus specifically on AI literacy and computational thinking. "[This can be] an AI pathway approach for students to develop and really enhance their learning," Dr. Gittisriboongul explained. This pathway will cover crucial topics such as prompt engineering, fine-tuning models, open-source models, and other domain knowledge within the generative AI space.

The district also aims to continue evolving its approach with teachers. Dr. Gittisriboongul envisions "doing another task force with teachers," focusing on leveraging AI to transform teaching and learning practices. This next evolution will build upon the foundation laid in the first year, aiming to make AI use as transparent and integrated as tools like Zoom have become.

Additionally, Dr. Gittisriboongul plans to form a community cohort, expanding engagement with AI beyond just students and teachers to include the broader Lynwood Unified community. This aligns with his vision of making AI literacy and use transparent and embedded in everyday practices across the entire district.

These initiatives represent significant steps towards Dr. Gittisriboongul's vision of leveraging AI to transform learning and teaching, offering personalized, interactive, and inclusive educational experiences that can increase student achievement and close equity gaps. As he shared, "I want to see transparency. I want to see everyone just like, 'Oh yeah, we did this in Google Gemini. We got this in ChatGPT.' That's exactly what I want it to be embedded in every day."

Dr. Gittisriboongul's TO demonstrates how school and system leaders can move from exploration to vision-setting to concrete action around a large-scale topic. It is possible to both operationalize a vision while simultaneously developing others' capacity to execute it.

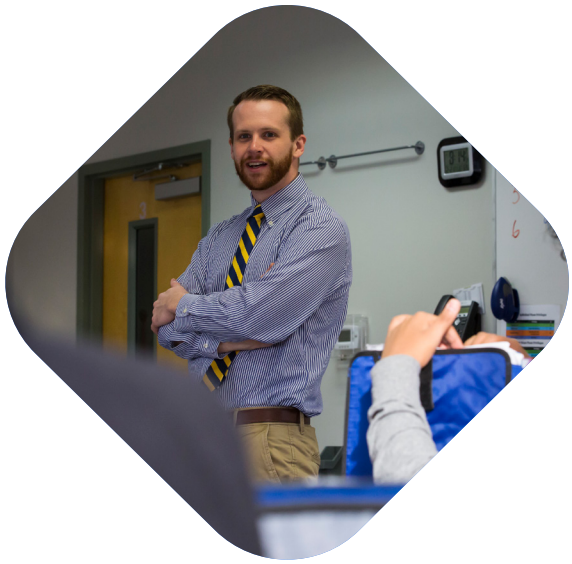
# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders looking to explore AI can apply learnings from Dr. Gittisriboongul's experience in their own contexts.

## Reflect

When looking to implement and deepen visions around AI and other major topics affecting their school systems, leaders can consider the following reflection questions:

- What would success look like for our students, staff, and families?
- Who has valuable perspectives to share on the topic, to ensure our vision is effective, inclusive, and equitable?
- What concrete outcomes/guidance/learning are needed for students/staff/families?



## Explore

A key driver of Dr. Gittisriboongul's success was actively listening to the stakeholders most affected by this topic. Dive into TLA's resources to learn how you can conduct and make sense of empathy interviews to inform your change management process.

Scan the AI Resource Share that Dr. Gittisriboongul and his peers in the Google GSV Fellowship leveraged in their journey. Developed by TLA, this hub is organized by theme and includes descriptions of all resources to help leaders discover the most relevant sources to use in supporting their work.

Next Profile →

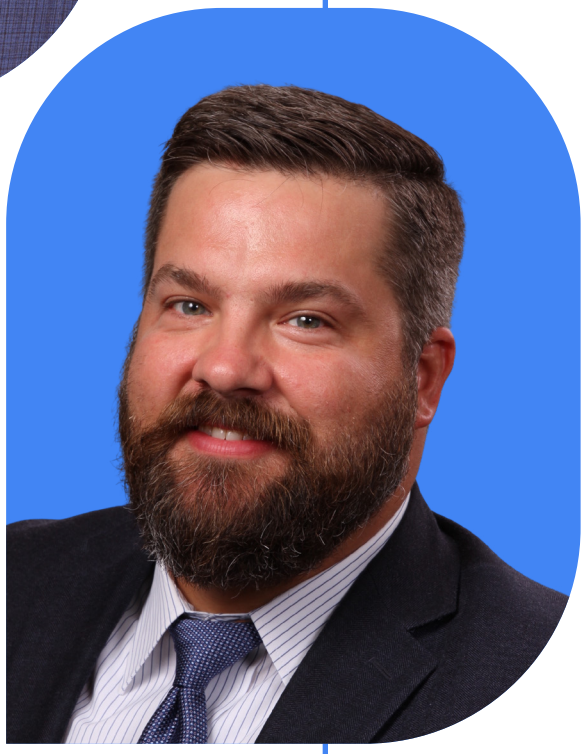
GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Dr. Stephen Bigelow & Patrick Malley

## Empowering Educators: A Grassroots Approach to AI Integration

> “Where we can help the most is breaking down cultural barriers by providing teachers time together to talk about these things,” Malley shared. “So that way, when a teacher decides to innovate, they know that we have their back, that there’s a cultural expectation of trying new things, and that we encourage them to go in that general direction.”

**Dr. Stephen Bigelow**
Former Superintendent,
Bay City Public Schools



**Patrick Malley**
Superintendent of Haslett Public Schools,
Former Chief Academic Officer, Bay City Public Schools

# Key Takeaways

1. **Foster Teacher-Led Exploration:** Empowering educators to explore AI through grassroots efforts – like working groups – builds comfort, understanding, and ownership. This bottom-up approach leads to more authentic adoption and helps address fears and misconceptions about AI in education.

2. **Address Ethical and Practical Concerns:** Take a strategic approach to addressing concerns about AI such as potential misuse by students and data privacy regulations. Proactively ensure that AI is responsibly adopted and aligned with educational values by including a variety of stakeholders in policy and planning processes.

3. **Embrace Nuance With Emerging Technology:** Move beyond binary, all-or-nothing thinking about emerging technology. Instead of debating whether to allow or ban AI entirely, focus on intentionally integrating it to support specific learning outcomes while addressing ethical concerns and establishing appropriate guardrails. This approach encourages stakeholders to explore AI's potential while being mindful of its limitations and ethical implications.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Bay City Public Schools |
| **Location** | Bay City, MI |
| **Number of Schools** | 12 |
| **Number of Students** | 6,366 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 14% |
| **Students Enrolled in Gifted & Talented Programs** | 5% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 37.4% |
| **Students Learning English** | 1.1% |

# The Challenge

Bay City Public Schools' former Superintendent, Dr. Stephen Bigelow, and then Chief Academic Officer, Patrick Malley, joined the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship with a shared goal: to explore how artificial intelligence (AI) could support teachers and enhance educational outcomes.

Facing unfinished learning resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic alongside increasing teacher workloads, the two leaders sought innovative solutions to reduce teacher burnout and improve instructional quality. Additionally, the two were eager to get out ahead of the artificial intelligence (AI) wave that was inundating schools. "It's difficult to get through the day without hearing something about [AI]," Dr. Bigelow noted. The Fellowship provided an opportunity for them to explore how AI might empower educators and students alike by making processes more efficient for teachers and empowering them to create transformative learning experiences.

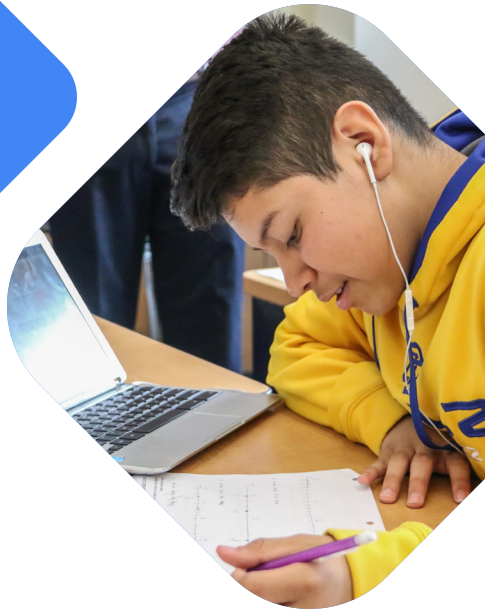
# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Identifying opportunities and creating a framework for AI to augment the teaching profession**
How can we reduce the burden on classroom teachers? Can increasing teachers' use of AI tools to strategically take managerial tasks off their plate, allowing them to focus on student learning and improving outcomes?

Dr. Bigelow and Malley's initial Transformational Opportunity (TO) was focused on leveraging AI to reduce the burden on classroom teachers. However, as the leaders engaged with the Fellowship and observed the rapidly changing landscape of AI in education, their focus evolved.

Rather than implementing a top-down approach, the leaders recognized the importance of teacher ownership in successfully integrating AI into the classroom. They began by forming a working group of teachers to explore AI's potential in education. "The real power is having more of a grassroots effort so they become comfortable," Dr. Bigelow reflected. "They understand that AI isn't always dangerous. It's not always something to be entirely feared, although there are some guardrails that you have to put in place."



The working group did identify critical concerns to navigate, such as the potential for AI tools to be misused by students or to compromise privacy. In response, the district implemented a ChatGPT Teams account, providing a secure environment for exploration and protecting sensitive information. “We needed a space where we knew data wouldn’t be shared inappropriately,” Dr. Bigelow emphasized.

The working group met four times during the school year. During these sessions, teachers were shown ways that generative AI could help with productivity, and they were encouraged to try them out in their day-to-day work. Teachers also completed learning logs of how they were using generative AI and shared their experiences using the technology to develop lesson plans, rubrics, and letters of recommendation in these sessions.

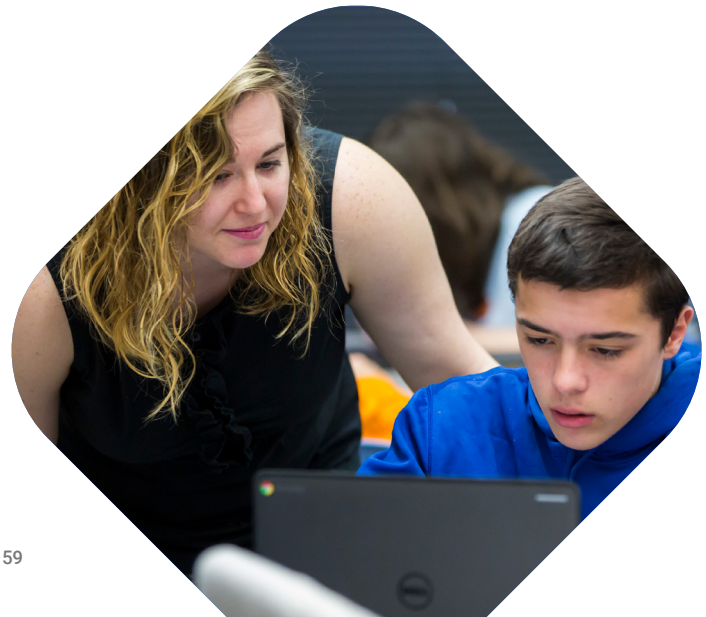
This approach aimed to create a ripple effect, with teachers sharing their experiences and learnings with colleagues, deepening a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Dr. Bigelow emphasized the capability of this level of collaboration and sharing: “It’s going to be through them sharing their use of AI with other colleagues, who then go and find something that I don’t even know exists.”

The district also partnered with Hanover Research to support their efforts with the working group. They conducted pre-and post-surveys to assess the working group’s knowledge and understanding of AI before and after their cohort experience. Teachers in the working group also participated in one-on-one interviews to share what the district needed in order to be ready for AI.

# Successes & Learnings

## Involving Teachers to Build Buy-In

By inviting teachers into the exploration and policy formation process, Dr. Bigelow and Malley fostered a sense of ownership and investment among staff. The teachers in the working group learned about low-stakes ways to use AI and discovered practical applications that could enhance their work. Dr. Bigelow explained, "It's more about how do we get our teachers comfortable using AI productively and ethically – and then that leads to how the students do the same. So in order for anything to happen in our district successfully, there has to be this teacher ownership piece." This hands-on experience was crucial in demystifying AI and building confidence among teachers. "I also think we've created a coalition of early adopters even though the folks that initially signed up – some of them were skeptical. There's still some healthy skepticism and concern, I think, amongst that group," Malley reflected. "But they're advocates for it now that they understand it better and know what they're talking about. It's better to be able to say, 'This isn't going away – this is our future and we have to find ways as educators to understand this technology to be able to better serve the needs of our kids.' Otherwise, our kids are just going to leave us behind and use it without us." Teachers influencing their peers helped develop buy-in more effectively than top-down mandates from district leadership.



## Employing Nuance When Using AI in Schools

Working with AI led Dr. Bigelow, Malley, and the teachers in the working group to evolve from either/or thinking to seeing the shades of gray regarding AI in schools. The leaders noted that the debate should not be on whether AI should be allowed writ large in schools or not. Rather, teachers in the working group saw the opportunity – and importance – of intentionally integrating AI in limited ways to support learning outcomes.

## Building Connections and Ongoing Dialogue

One of the most significant outcomes of Dr. Bigelow and Malley's experience exploring their TO was the connections they formed with staff members. "The biggest win is connecting with staff and teachers that I normally would not be working with on these sorts of things – from people who are frightened of technology in some way to those maybe a little bit more out on the edges and comfortable exploring things," Dr. Bigelow shares. This ongoing dialogue has created a channel for sharing new discoveries and insights about AI in education while also building relationships between teachers and district leadership.

# What's Next

While both Dr. Bigelow and Malley's roles are changing, they remain committed to preparing schools for an AI-driven future. The leaders emphasized the need to focus on students specifically, helping them develop and deepen their abilities to think creatively and synthesize new information – skills that will be crucial in a rapidly changing job market. "Our survey results show that our kids already know [AI is] there, and that it makes no sense for us to ignore it and pretend that it doesn't exist," Malley explained, "But we're not yet there socially or culturally [with AI integration]."

The leaders hope to create more space for more teachers to explore emerging technologies. "Where we can help the most is breaking down cultural barriers by providing teachers time together to talk about these things," Malley shared. "So that way, when a teacher decides to innovate, they know that we have their back, that there's a cultural expectation of trying new things, and that we encourage them to go in that general direction."

The leaders stressed the importance of involving key stakeholders moving forward — students, teachers, parents, and school board members — in ongoing discussions about AI's role in education as they seek to, in Dr. Bigelow's words, "make sure that, at the very end of the day, teaching and learning isn't going to be short-changed by AI – it's going to be enhanced through it."

Dr. Bigelow announced his retirement from Bay City Schools in August, while Malley recently became Superintendent of Haslett Public Schools.

# Taking It Forward

For other education leaders considering the integration of AI, the experiences of Dr. Bigelow and Malley offer valuable lessons. They highlight the importance of involving teachers in exploration and policy formation, demystifying AI to build literacy, and addressing ethical concerns upfront.

## Reflect

When looking to implement and deepen visions around AI and other major topics affecting their school systems, leaders can consider the following reflection questions:

- How are teachers involved in your decision-making processes about new technologies?
- What steps can you take to build AI literacy among staff in low-stakes environments?
- How can you address and alleviate concerns about privacy and ethical use of AI in your district?

By embracing a collaborative and thoughtful approach, leaders can effectively integrate AI into education, enhancing both teaching and learning while preparing students for a rapidly evolving future.

## Explore

Google for Education offers a free course on Generative AI for Educators that can be used to help teachers develop their AI literacy. Explore The Learning Accelerator (TLA)'s EdTech Systems Guide and dive into its sections on implementation for ideas on building buy-in and communicating effectively with stakeholders.

Scan the AI Resource Share that Dr. Bigelow, Malley, and their peers in the Google GSV Fellowship leveraged in their journey. Developed by TLA, this hub is organized by theme and includes descriptions of all resources to help leaders discover the most relevant sources to use in supporting their work.

Next Theme →

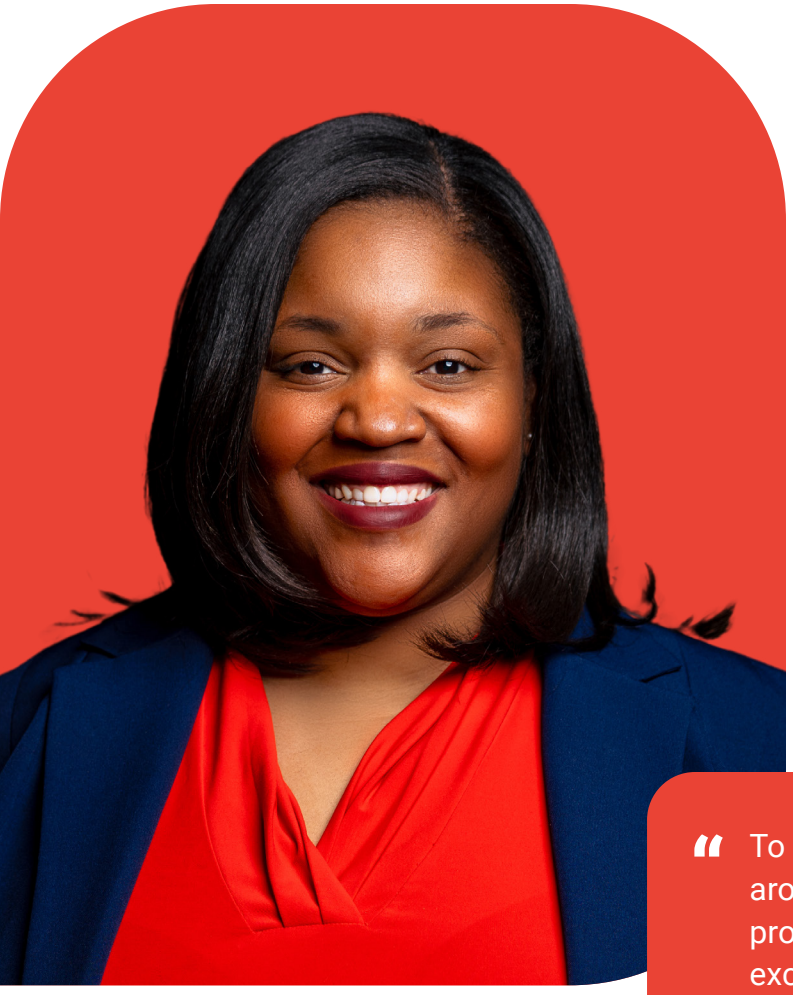
# Theme 02:

# Improving Instruction With Technology

Teachers can leverage the power of AI to improve teaching and learning, through advanced personalization and targeted interventions.

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Dr. Simone Wright



## Collaborative Leadership: Pioneering Safe and Effective Digital Learning

> “To see some of the feedback from the educators around how they feel about their craft and their profession and how it’s reinvested them – I’m so excited.”

**Dr. Simone Wright**
Chief Academic Officer,
Denver Public Schools

# Key Takeaways

1. **Foster Cross-Departmental Collaboration:** Bringing together diverse teams from academic, technology, operations, and legal backgrounds can lead to more comprehensive and robust solutions for technology integration. This collaborative approach ensures that multiple perspectives are considered, resulting in stronger and more cohesive improvements to student learning.

2. **Prioritize Data Privacy and Security:** Establish rigorous, efficient vetting processes for all digital tools, including mandatory data privacy agreements. Regularly review and update these processes to ensure they meet evolving security needs while still allowing for innovation in educational technology.

3. **Remain Flexible and Responsive:** Be prepared to adapt your approach to meet the most pressing needs of your district. Recognize that transformational opportunities are not static and may require pivoting to address urgent concerns while still working towards larger goals. This flexibility allows for more effective leadership in dynamic educational contexts.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Denver Public Schools |
| **Location** | Denver, CO |
| **Number of Schools** | 210 |
| **Number of Students** | 88,050 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 14% |
| **Students Enrolled in Gifted & Talented Programs** | 8% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced-Price Lunch** | 63% |
| **Students Learning English** | 36% |

# The Challenge

When Dr. Simone Wright stepped into her role as Chief Academic Officer for Denver Public Schools in July of 2023, she quickly recognized the district's need for guidance on how to effectively use technology in classrooms. As she set out to develop a comprehensive instructional framework that weaved in meaningful technology integration, Dr. Wright realized that the district faced more immediate challenges related to technology use and data privacy. "We had a data leak, and we had to rein it in," Dr. Wright explained. The district was grappling with an overwhelming number of third-party applications – over 1,200 when she took over – leading to potential security risks and a fragmented technological landscape.

Taking stock of both the district's urgent and longer-term needs, Dr. Wright was committed not only to addressing immediate concerns, but also to leveraging technology to enhance instruction and empower educators. Fortunately, a new initiative emerged to support Dr. Wright with her efforts: an opportunity to join the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship. Through the Fellowship, Dr. Wright saw an opportunity to create a cohesive approach that would safeguard student data while maximizing the benefits of educational technology.

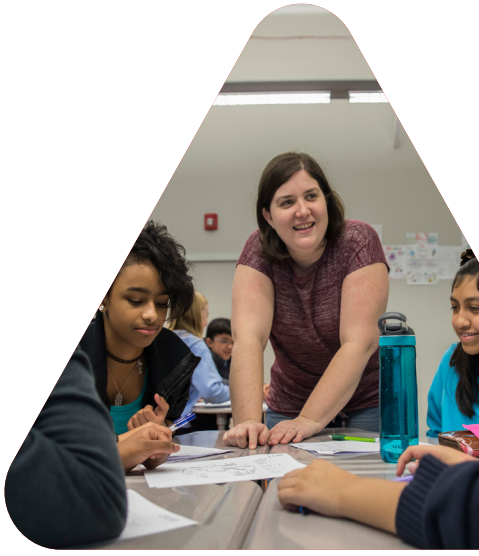
# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Establishing a comprehensive approach to technology integration**
In Denver Public Schools, an overwhelming number of third-party applications were being used, leading to potential data privacy risks and a fragmented technological landscape. Establishing clear guidelines and processes for technology use would safeguard student data while maximizing the benefits of educational technology. Creating a system to efficiently evaluate and integrate digital tools, ensuring they meet both instructional goals and security standards, while also empowering educators to effectively use technology in their classrooms, would ensure a streamlined approach to edtech to improve student outcomes.

Dr. Wright's initial Transformational Opportunity focused on developing an instructional framework that integrated technology to support meaningful student engagement. However, as she engaged with her peers in the Fellowship and responded to her district's most pressing needs, Dr. Wright pivoted to focusing on establishing district-wide guidelines and processes for technology use.

"I think the spirit of my Transformational Opportunity is still there, but a huge piece of what actually happened **was that my team needed a sustainable process to get clear on what we mean when we talk about tech integration**," Dr. Wright reflected. This shift led to the development of a comprehensive evaluation process for third-party applications to ensure tools met stringent criteria for both instruction and security.



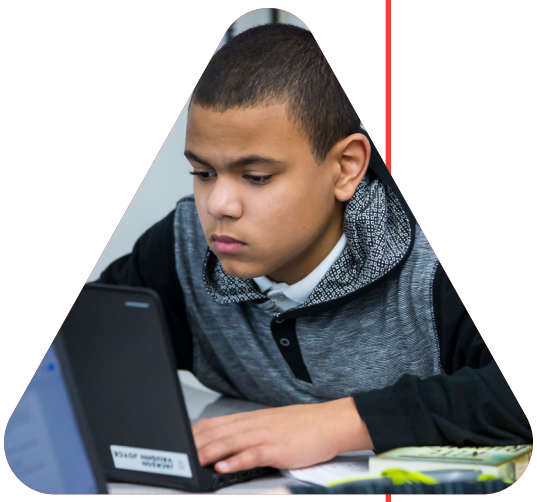
Dr. Wright and her team established an internal DPS working group of instructional technology experts, operational technology experts, legal experts, and content experts. The process, which prioritized the instructional experience of teachers and students, was led on the academic side by the district's STEAM team, including the Office of Educational Technology. The task force developed **a rigorous vetting process for all digital tools**, which included mandatory data privacy agreements, and began rolling it out. In the initial launch of the vetting process, 200 apps were approved, removing 1,000 potentially harmful apps from the district and saving significant resources. Prior to this process being put in place, the district spent over 22 million in software purchases in the 22-23 school year. With the initial rollout, the system has cut software costs by over 10%. A specific win has been this process allowing DPS to move from school based software purchases to district-led cohort purchases, even for software and applications that are being used in a limited number of schools. With vetted, high-quality, endorsed tech solutions, DPS has been able to present solutions to schools pertaining to instructional areas such as quiz software, classroom management tools, and productivity tools. Each negotiated contract through our process has given the schools a 30%-50% price reduction in teacher license cost and per pupil license costs. Furthermore, it led to thoughtful integration of emerging technologies, including the piloting of an AI tutor for English class. It also opened the door for targeted teacher professional development on effective technology integration.

"I think one huge piece of this that I would want to elevate [...] is the power of ensuring whoever you're working with, you have a data privacy agreement with," Dr. Wright emphasized. She was surprised to discover that even technology vendors her district had a long-standing relationship with and had deemed to be "good partners" sometimes lacked the baseline, non-negotiable privacy guardrails determined by the team.

The evaluation process evolved from an initial "clean-up" phase to a dynamic, multifaceted approach integrating stakeholders from various departments. Content experts were crucial in determining whether a tool genuinely supported the district's instructional goals, while experts from other departments were able to assess tools using their individual expertise around technological, legal, and operational concerns, allowing them to attend to product assessment more thoroughly. As Dr. Wright explained, "My aspiration is that [this process] generally **supports the acceleration of the use of high-quality instructional materials**." To further support this goal, Dr. Wright's team created a school-centered intake process including structured principal intake forms, rubrics for evaluation, and a data privacy agreement (DPA) workstream.
This new process also informed how we anticipated teacher capacity with regards to the use of instructional technology usage. A specific example of this is how DPS utilized the new process to frame their thinking around AI use and expansion across schools. The tool selection was important, but conceptual understanding of how to use AI and the needed background knowledge was just as important. Anticipating an oncoming submission of AI tools, the STEAM team developed professional development units and multi-leveled AI learnings (AI 101 and AI 201) for teachers and leaders to better understand AI's impact on education. Training focused on AI literacy for students and teachers, and on AI as an effective instructional tool. This knowledge provided principals and teachers with the guidance to help us select tools that had instructional impact, were tied to content areas, and would potentially lead to improved student outcomes, opposed to a splattering of independently identified tools across classrooms. These sessions equipped teachers with the skills to leverage AI and technology in instruction in a meaningful and safe way.

Dr. Wright's Transformational Opportunity also led to broader systemic changes in Denver Public Schools. The district's director of STEAM presented their work to the Board of Education, signaling that responsible growth and scaling of technology integration was a district priority. "I think our team has done a [...] really good job of not engaging just principals, but engaging [...] educators in

different roles across different public schools," Dr. Wright reflected, emphasizing the far-reaching impact this work has had across the district. "We were able to even have [teachers] get feedback from their students who also spoke to… a strengthened quality of instruction."



# Successes & Learnings

Throughout her Fellowship journey, Dr. Wright experienced several key successes and learned valuable lessons:

## The Power of Cross-Departmental Collaboration

By bringing together diverse teams – including academics, technology, operations, and legal – Dr. Wright fostered a more comprehensive approach to technology integration. This collaboration led to more robust solutions and a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by educational technology. It also demonstrated how stakeholders representing different needs and interests of a school community can work together to make strong, cohesive improvements to student learning.

## Educator Empowerment and Reinvestment

The initiative had a profound impact on teacher engagement and efficacy. By providing teachers with the right tools and support, the district not only improved instruction, but also reinvigorated educators' passion for their work. "**To see some of the feedback from the educators around how they feel about their craft and their profession and how it's reinvested them – I'm so excited**," Dr. Wright expressed.

## Flexibility in Leadership

Dr. Wright quickly realized the importance of adapting her approach to meet the most pressing needs of her district. "The idea of a Transformational Opportunity is not static," she reflected. "I think it has to be fluid if you are effectively leading for your context and also actively engaging in the Fellowship." This flexibility allowed her to address urgent

data privacy concerns while still working toward her larger goals of enhancing instruction through technology.

# What's Next

Looking ahead, Dr. Wright plans to build on the successes of her Transformational Opportunity in a number of ways. She aims to codify the learnings from the teacher-focused work to develop training for principals, ensuring school leaders are equipped to guide technology integration effectively. Additionally, her team will continue refining their approach to identifying and implementing digital platforms that align with their instructional goals. After culling a significant number of third-party apps, the technology landscape at Denver Public Schools is now more manageable for educators, administrators, and students alike, giving the district a simpler, more secure starting point for their technology selection and implementation.

"Eventually, we want to get to a place where we can say we've overlaid our core curriculum with AI tools like CourseMojo," Dr. Wright explained. "We want to be able to start to codify where we actually see achievement success." Using a data-driven approach will help the district make informed decisions about future technology investments, allowing them to maximize the value and the impact of the tools they choose to implement in accordance with their unique context and goals for their learners.

Dr. Wright advises school system leaders embarking on similar journeys to create space for learning and use inclusive design methods to involve their teams in the process. "I don't think that true change and effective leadership happens with one person," she emphasized. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and collaboration, leaders can drive meaningful change that benefits both educators and students.

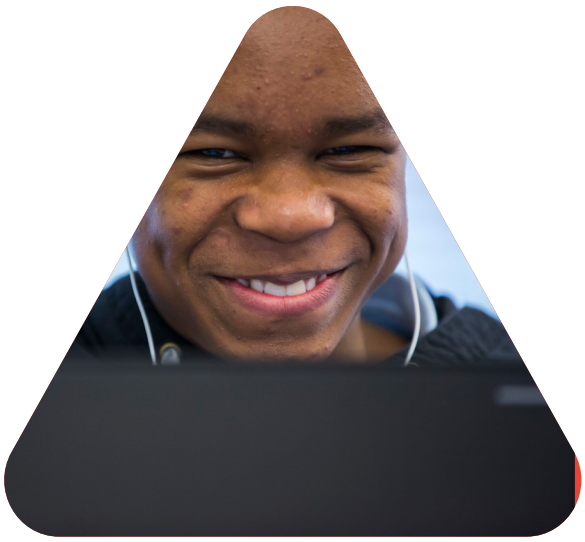
# Taking It Forward

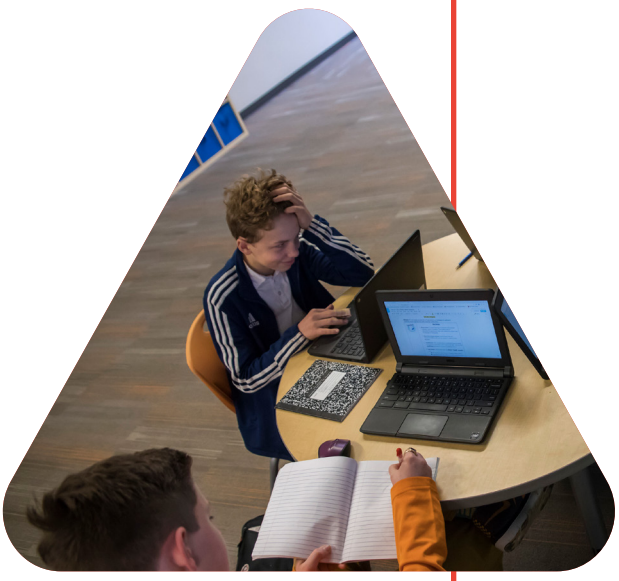
School and system leaders looking to enhance technology integration and empower educators in their districts can apply several key learnings from Dr. Wright's experience:

## Reflect

Consider the following questions as you approach technology integration in your context:

- What ongoing systems and processes exist to ensure technology integration is purposeful and safe?
- How might you innovate while ensuring robust data privacy and security?
- In what ways can you involve diverse stakeholders from your school community, including teachers, in the process of evaluating and implementing new technologies?
- How might you use professional development around technology to reinvigorate educators' passion for their work?





## Explore

Dive into the VATT (Vision, Access, Teaching, and Technology) framework from Leading Educators, which Dr. Wright found helpful in guiding her work. This framework can help you think through the various constituents involved in technology integration and keep the focus on advancing learning.

Investigate AI tools – including CourseMojo, which Dr. Wright piloted in English classrooms – by exploring TLA's AI Resource Share that Dr. Wright and her peers in the Fellowship leveraged. While being mindful of your district's specific needs and constraints, explore how such tools support and enhance instruction in your context.

Scan the AI Resource Share that Dr. Wright and her peers in the Google GSV Fellowship leveraged in their journey. Developed by TLA, the hub of resources is organized by theme and includes descriptions of all resources to help leaders discover the most relevant resources to use in supporting their work.

Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Frances Baez

## Empowering Teachers to Foster Meaningful Technology Integration

> “It’s not just about replicating day-to-day tasks with devices or reading a passage on a screen – it’s about incorporating technology in meaningful ways that deepen student learning. This is why teacher empowerment is crucial. They need the knowledge to maximize technology’s potential and ensure it enhances learning and does not replace essential classroom interactions.”

**Frances Baez**
Chief Academic Officer,
Los Angeles Unified School District

# Key Takeaways

1. **Prioritize Authentic Technology Integration:** Focus on using technology to enhance learning experiences rather than simply digitizing existing practices. Ensure that technology integration supports student collaboration, critical thinking, and engagement with real-world problems, moving beyond surface-level implementation to create truly transformative learning environments.

2. **Strategically Plan for Scaling New Initiatives:** Create sustainable, system-wide change by embedding technology integration into existing professional development structures and aligning with organization-wide goals. Implement strategies like train-the-trainer models and rotating facilitator programs to build capacity among educators, ensuring thoughtful technology use becomes an integral part of instructional practice throughout the district.

3. **Embrace Adaptive Leadership:** By pivoting quickly based on feedback and resource constraints, leaders can navigate complex challenges and drive meaningful change. There is a need for rapid cycles of improvement, recognizing that the pace of education demands agility and willingness to adjust course. Inclusive design practices involving a broad range of stakeholders are essential for creating solutions that truly resonate with the community.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Los Angeles Unified School District |
| **Location** | Los Angeles, CA |
| **Number of Schools** | 783 |
| **Number of Students** | 406,126 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 15.3% |
| **Students Enrolled in Gifted & Talented Programs** | 15.29% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced-Price Lunch** | 74.99% |
| **Students Learning English** | 16.98% |

# The Challenge

Frances Baez joined the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship with a clear vision: to bridge the gap between the evolving needs of modern classrooms and the traditional instructional methods that many teachers still employed. As Chief Academic Officer at Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), she observed a significant disparity in how technology was used in classrooms before, during, and after the pandemic.

"I saw that teachers used technology differently… before the pandemic – minimal use; during the pandemic – when instruction became technology-dependent;and when we returned to face-to-face learning – with an over-reliance on technology," Baez explained. "It's not just about replicating day-to-day tasks with devices or reading a passage on a screen – it's about incorporating technology in meaningful ways that deepen student learning. This is why teacher empowerment is crucial. They need the knowledge to maximize technology's potential and ensure it enhances learning and does not replace essential classroom interactions."

Initially drawn to the potential of generative AI in the classroom, Baez recognized the need for a more holistic approach to technology integration. Seeking balance between human interaction and the use of digital tools, Baez focused on empowering teachers to strategically leverage technology to improve instruction. By prioritizing student engagement and collaborative learning specifically, Baez aimed to create dynamic learning environments where technology complemented – rather than replaced – critical teaching practices.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Integrating technology to support student interaction and discourse**

Technology is too often integrated into classrooms in limited or unnecessary ways, failing to meaningfully use technology to its full potential. Empowering teachers to strategically leverage technology can improve instruction, especially when technology is used to encourage social learning among students.

Baez's Transformational Opportunity (TO) was framed around a fundamental question: How might we effectively equip teachers to integrate technology within classroom instruction in a way that prioritizes student interaction and discourse?

Baez began with multiple focus areas for using technology, starting with demystifying generative AI and creating a responsible use policy. Initial misconceptions about AI replacing teachers or enabling cheating needed to be addressed. She formed a task force involving technologists, teachers, students, parents, and administrators to develop a generative AI policy (Board Informative, 10/12/23) and emphasized digital citizenship lessons to ensure responsible use.

As her understanding deepened through her Fellowship experience – especially exposure to inspiring case studies – Baez's approach evolved. She realized the importance of equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills to use generative AI effectively and balancing digital tools with discussion and student collaboration. This led to the integration of generative AI tools like Canva into lesson-planning and providing summer professional development on generative AI content.

To pilot her ideas, Baez leveraged resources from an existing grant to launch an after-school program that brought technology into project-based learning activities around topics including robotics and climate issues. This pilot reflected her vision of instructional lessons that combined technology with student-driven projects, fostering collaboration and critical thinking among learners.

"The old way of technology doesn't always translate into the future of technological use," Baez observed. "We have to ensure teaching and tech doesn't skip over the innovation piece. We need to use tech to support the ways that maybe pen and paper didn't allow us to think. How can we capitalize on learning to make it a different experience than what was before?"

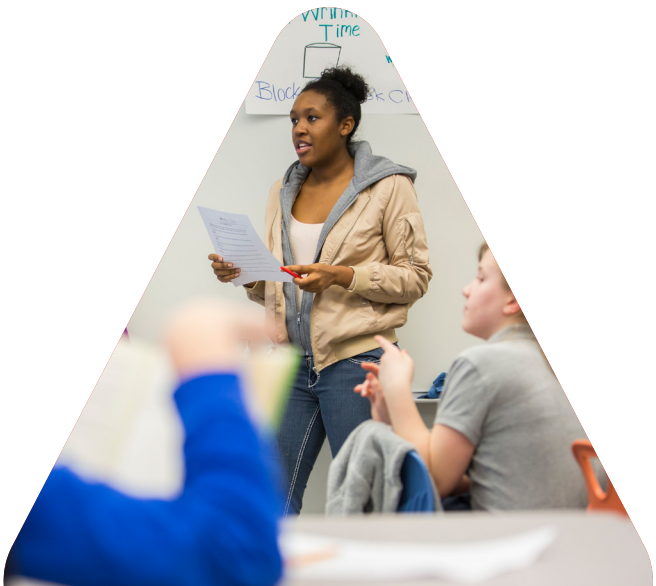
# Successes & Learnings

## Prioritize Meaningful Technology Use

Baez's experience in the Fellowship led her to think critically about ensuring that technology is utilized purposefully to impact student learning. Instead of sharing generic software tutorials, professional development sessions focused on strategic technology integration. Teachers delved into the "how" and "why" of technology use and explored ways to use tools like generative AI to create engaging lessons that catered to diverse learning needs. In the district's after-school program, teachers transformed from content deliverers into learning facilitators, guiding students through project-based learning activities that seamlessly folded technology into learning. These projects were designed to address specific learning objectives, allowing students to harness AI tools to tackle real-world problems, foster technical skills, hone critical thinking, problem-solve, and collaborate – essential competencies for the 21st-century learner.

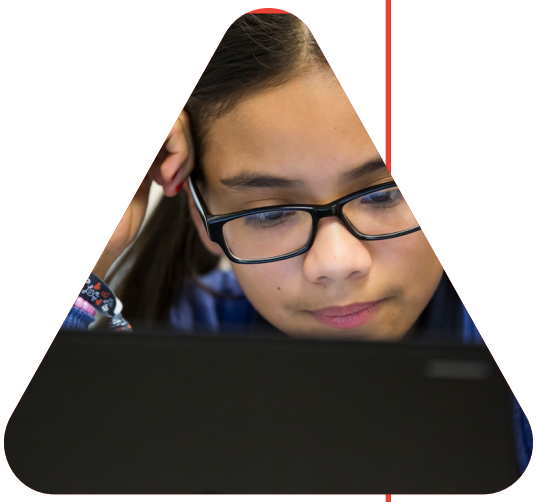
## Sustainability & Scalability of New Initiatives

Baez thought deeply about scaling and sustaining what worked to support teachers in creating learning environments that effectively utilized technology and enhanced students' overall learning experience. Rather than creating a separate initiative, Baez integrated her efforts into existing priorities and structures, weaving technology integration into the fabric of the school system. "Scaling access to resources has been a core mission for me. We provided makerspaces to all schools, but simply having these amazing labs isn't enough. We realized teachers needed the support to integrate them effectively. Now, ensuring strong professional development is crucial. It's like having a fantastic orchestra with no conductor – the potential is there, but the music won't play without the right guidance," Baez reflected.



Scaling up successful practices requires a skilled and empowered workforce. One strategy utilized in the district was to create a "train-the-trainer" model, where teachers who mastered technology integration could then mentor and support their colleagues. This approach empowered teachers to become leaders in their own schools and fostered a culture of continuous learning among staff.

Understanding that effective scaling required more than just internal efforts, Baez actively sought collaboration with external partners, such as technology companies and educational organizations. These partnerships could provide valuable resources, expertise, and support as the program expands beyond its pilot stage. Sustainability also necessitates a commitment to continuous improvement, as she believed data collection and reflection were crucial. Regularly measuring the program's impact and gathering feedback from stakeholders made areas for improvement easily identifiable.



# What's Next

Building on the success of her pilot, Baez envisions a future where technology integration becomes a cornerstone of learning for all LAUSD students.

Her immediate focus is on scaling the after-school program. Replicating the model in more schools will allow more students to benefit from project-based learning enhanced by technology. The ultimate goal is to bring these innovative technology-driven lessons into the regular school-day curriculum to reach every student district-wide, and foster a culture of innovation and critical thinking in every classroom.

To support scaling efforts, Baez plans to implement a rotating facilitator model. By training a core group of teachers, the program can be implemented in multiple schools at once, maximizing its reach and impact. Baez also foresees a future where students collaborate on projects across schools – and even across districts. Technology, particularly video conferencing tools, will play a pivotal role in facilitating these collaborations, developing a sense of community and shared learning – all in support of Baez's original goal to leverage technology to support student discourse.

# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders looking to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of technology integration can apply learnings from Baez's experience in their own contexts.

## Reflect

To begin, leaders should consider the following reflection questions:

- What is the purpose of technology integration in your schools? What learning goals is technology supporting?
- What are the current challenges and limitations your educators face when it comes to technology integration, such as lack of access, professional development, or confidence in using technology effectively?
- What resources, expertise, and bright spots currently exist in your system to support technology integration?

## Explore

To learn more about evaluating technology, dive into The Learning Accelerator (TLA)'s EdTech Systems Guide to strengthen edtech selection, implementation, and evaluation systems.

Understand your system's edtech infrastructure and landscape by auditing your "edtech stack." Leaders should account for all current tools and assess whether they meet baseline requirements for safety and ethics, as well as align with broader system and curricular goals. Keep accessibility top-of-mind during this process to ensure all students can benefit from the technology being implemented.

Scan the AI Resource Share that Baez and her peers in the Google GSV Fellowship leveraged in their journey. Developed by TLA, this hub is organized by theme and includes descriptions of all resources to help leaders discover the most relevant sources to use in supporting their work.

Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Sonja James

## Leveraging AI to Personalize Learning and Close Achievement Gaps

> “Looking at our test scores and looking at the students that really need support, there are quite a few students coming out of COVID with shortcomings – gaps [between] where our students should be and where they are. How can a classroom teacher utilize this technology to help create lessons as well as individualized activities for students?”

**Sonja James**
Executive Director of Educational Equity & Inclusion,
West Bloomfield School District

# Key Takeaways

1. **Leverage AI to Plan for Personalized Learning:** AI tools can help teachers more efficiently create personalized learning experiences for students by analyzing data and providing ideas for targeted interventions. This approach can especially help address the diverse challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. **Start Small and Iterate:** Begin to implement new technologies by piloting with a small, targeted group of students and educators – rather than school or district-wide adoption. This approach allows for quick learning, adaptation, and refinement of the idea before scaling up. James' experience with a small group of students and an educator provided valuable insights and proof of concept, paving the way for broader implementation and impact across the district.

3. **Build Strong Relationships and Secure Family Buy-In:** The success of interventions depends not only on the tools themselves but also on building trust with families and securing their buy-in. Clearly communicating with parents and guardians about how they are using AI, the steps taken to protect student data, and the overall goals of the intervention is crucial. This approach helps gain necessary support and ensures a collaborative effort towards improving student outcomes.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | West Bloomfield School District |
| **Location** | West Bloomfield, MI |
| **Number of Schools** | 10 |
| **Number of Students** | 4,628 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 12% |
| **Students Enrolled in Gifted & Talented Programs** | 3.5% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced-Price Lunch** | 34% |
| **Students Learning English** | 7% |

# The Challenge

For Sonja James, Executive Director of Educational Equity and Inclusion at the West Bloomfield School District in Michigan, the Google GSV Innovation Fellowship presented a unique opportunity. James learned about the Fellowship at the ASU+GSV Summit and was initially drawn to the networking opportunities and the chance to push herself out of her comfort zone, as she did not consider herself "tech-savvy." When James joined the Fellowship in the summer of 2023, she sought to explore how emergent technology like artificial intelligence (AI) could address pressing challenges in her district. One stood out in particular: the **significant learning gaps among students that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.**

"Looking at our test scores and looking at the students that really need support, there are quite a few students coming out of COVID with shortcomings – gaps [between] where our students should be and where they are," James explained. "How can a classroom teacher utilize this technology to help create lessons as well as individualized activities for students?" James observed that many students were returning to school far behind where they should be academically. Through her work in the Fellowship, James narrowed in on her Transformational Opportunity (TO), realizing that technology could support teachers to close those gaps by helping to efficiently plan personalized learning experiences to accelerate student learning.

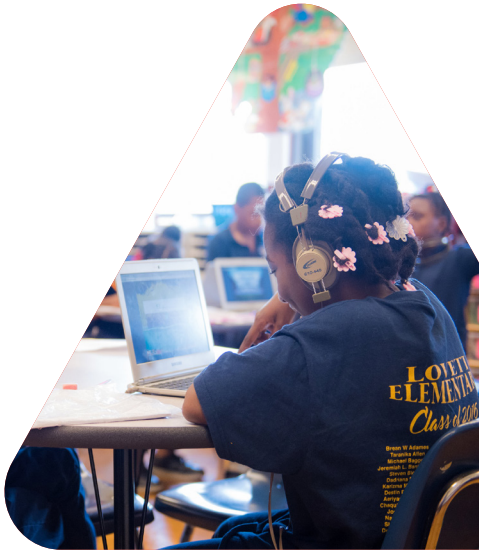
# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Leveraging AI to support intervention, small-group, and whole-group student learning**
Parents and teachers are identifying students who need additional support in greater numbers than we've ever seen before. How can teachers utilize AI to more efficiently plan to personalize learning for each student in order to accelerate their learning?

James then focused her project on an initial pilot for a subset of students. She partnered with a fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Moss, and focused on a group of boys who needed additional support, particularly in reading. James was particularly concerned about the gap in literacy levels among African American boys and aimed to develop targeted interventions to address these gaps.

James and Moss identified 10 students who could benefit from additional support. They began by analyzing the students' data to identify specific gaps in their learning. To support their work, they used MagicSchool, an AI platform built for schools, selected after a review of different tools due to the variety of benefits it provided. To maintain privacy and focus on the data's insights, they anonymized the data – decoupling it from any student identification information – and fed it into MagicSchool. **With the AI tool's help, James and Moss were able pinpoint specific areas in which the students needed support and also recommended targeted interventions and lessons based on them**. To supplement learning, the tool also provided lists of books based on individual student interests.



These technology-based suggestions served as a jumping-off point. "Let's look at the [suggestion], let's look at the student that we're talking about," James explained. "We did not just take it at face value. It gave us a good, easy guide to begin with and it came up with interventions and suggestions that we hadn't even thought about." James and Moss also used AI tools to help plan students' schedules for the week, ensuring that each session was purposeful and aligned with student needs. James and Moss met weekly to plan out sessions, and subsequently, Moss conducted targeted interventions with the small group twice a week.

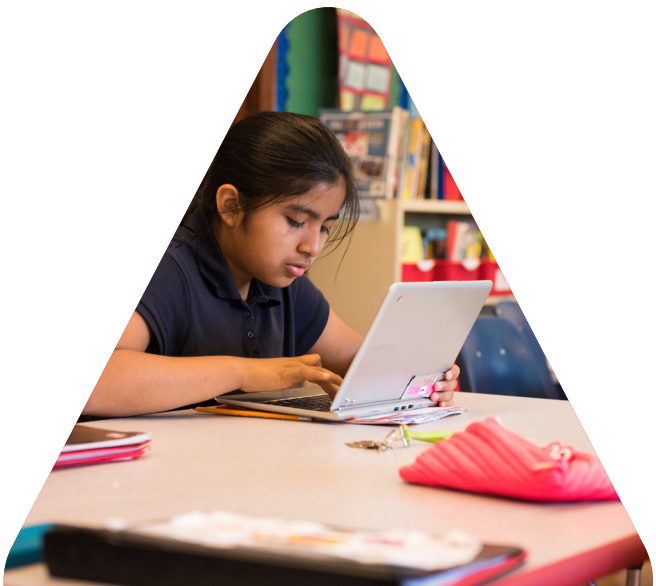
**Securing buy-in from families was crucial for the success of the pilot**. James and Moss sought permission for the students to participate in the small group, clearly demonstrating how the targeted interventions would benefit their children's literacy and overall academic performance. James and Moss also shared how they were keeping their students' information private. "It's all in how you frame it and the relationship the teacher has with the families and the trust that your families have with you – because a lot of people are not there yet with AI," James explained. "Knowing that this is going to be something to benefit their child and what are the benefits for their child is what we needed to communicate clearly." By being proactive and building on strong relationships, they were able to gain the trust and support of parents.

# Successes & Learnings

Through this collaborative and tech-driven approach, James and Moss effectively addressed the literacy challenges faced by the boys in their pilot group. The targeted interventions, supported by data and AI, provided a structured and engaging learning experience, **leading to measurable improvements in student engagement in literacy along with incremental gains.** This pilot program set a precedent for future initiatives, showcasing the potential of technology and collaboration in addressing educational challenges. James' experience in the Fellowship led to a number of successes and realizations.

## AI Made Creating Personalized Instruction for Students More Efficient

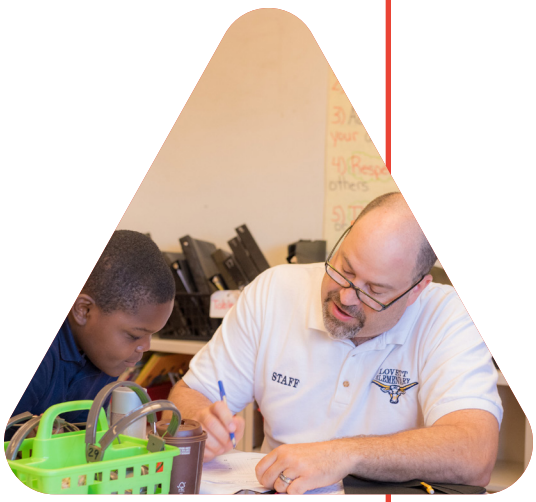
One significant accomplishment from James' TO was the **increased efficiency in creating personalized instruction plans and materials for students**. The use of AI tools supported Moss in developing both whole-class lesson plans as well as individualized plans for small groups based on student data, helping them plan for a class of 28 students while still offering personalized support to the smaller cohort of 10 students. This efficiency allowed for more quality instruction time and interactions between students and their teacher. "For a classroom teacher to be able to take an hour to plan for all of these kids is almost unheard of," James explained. "But when you have the template and the frame to help you with that, it makes life that much easier – especially if you don't have to plan on the fly. It's not an abundance of time. It actually helps cut down the time."



The time saved using AI freed up the teacher to prioritize the highest impact instructional tasks: one-on-one and small group interactions with students. While students do use edtech tools that create individualized pathways for students, James noted that she wanted to find interventions that did not add more screen time, and those that provided students with more direct instruction with the teacher.

## Personalized Interventions Led to an Increase in Students' Engagement and Confidence

The personalized interventions facilitated a noticeable increase in student engagement and confidence. Students were more willing to participate in class and take risks because the instruction was tailored to their interests and needs, according to observations. This personalized approach made students feel more connected to their learning and, ultimately, more confident in their abilities.

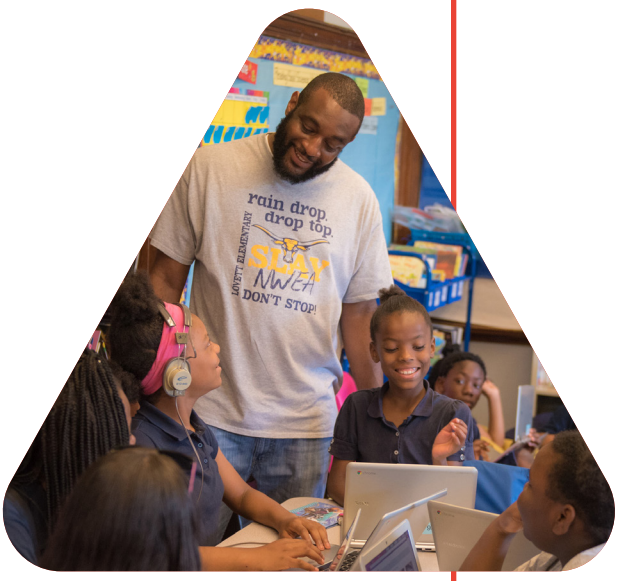


"I'm working in a small group. I'm reading something that's interesting to me. I'm also hitting some success. So, as I'm hitting that success, I feel more comfortable raising my hand," James explained as to why students were gaining confidence. Having more small-group and one-on-one interactions also strengthened student-teacher relationships, fostering a classroom culture where it was okay to make mistakes and learn from them.

## Using AI Developed Leaders' Comfort with Technology

On a personal level, participation in the Fellowship developed James' comfort with technology. Her experience underscored the **importance of educators embracing technology to stay ahead of the curve and effectively support their students' learning and development.** While she was initially hesitant and did not consider herself to be at the forefront of technology, she embraced the opportunity to learn and integrate AI into educational practices. She advises other education leaders, "Don't be afraid of it because, whether we like it or not, AI is here to stay. How do we utilize it to benefit learning and impact education? Because our students are going to learn how to use ChatGPT –so how do I, as a language arts teacher, for instance, help my students utilize AI to help with their writing and not use it as their writing?"

James' work using AI to personalize instruction also helped apply AI in other aspects of her work. Recognizing that academic challenges often coincide with behavioral challenges, James partnered with a social worker in the district to develop personalized behavior plans. Given their large caseloads, creating individualized plans can be challenging and often results in slightly modified versions of one-size-fits-all solutions. By utilizing AI tools such as MagicSchool, they generated innovative ideas for behavior plans, introducing strategies they had not considered before.




# What's Next

Looking ahead, James is planning to expand the literacy pilot by recruiting another teacher to work with the initial pilot teacher. James is curious about applying this technology to whole classes – not just small-groups of struggling students – to meet the needs of all students, including those who are already excelling and could rise to additional challenges.. James also aims to evaluate the impact of this work not only on academic outcomes but also on student behaviors, teacher efficiency, student engagement, and learner confidence.

Lastly, James recognizes the need to empower students. "How do we embrace [AI and other emerging technologies] in education?" James posited. "Whether we teach them how to use it or not, it's coming through that door, and kids are going to use it –so we have to look at how to help students utilize it the right way."

# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders looking to utilize AI to create more personalized instruction for their students can apply learnings from James' Fellowship experience in their context.

## Reflect

To begin, leaders tackling gnarly, systemwide challenges or exploring innovative new ideas should consider the following reflection questions:

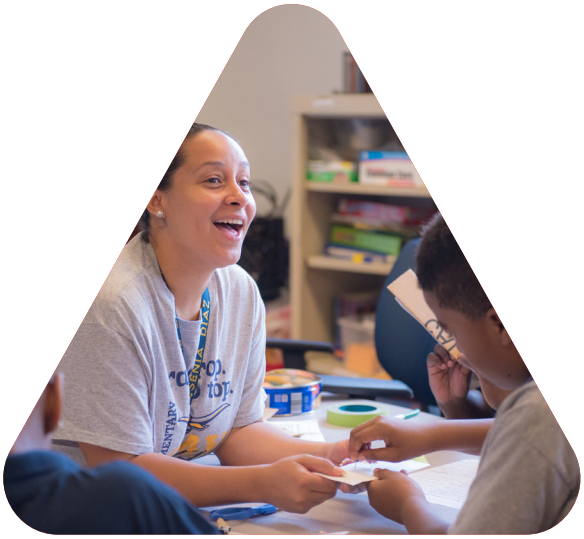
- Which student populations are the highest priority? Where could they benefit from additional support?
- Who are the trailblazer teachers in your schools who are not afraid to implement new technologies and instructional approaches?
- What are the diverse needs of the student population, and how might AI help to personalize learning experiences for students?
- What are technologies that your students will need to be able to use to thrive in their learning and futures?

# Explore

Explore TLA's Problem of Practice on Data-Driven Instruction for strategies around analyzing data and applying these learnings in instruction. Additionally, check out strategies that are targeted and relevant to students and use individual and small-group instruction for additional customization.

Dive into TLA's Real-Time Redesign toolkit to learn about how to pilot technology using a step-by-step, inclusive design process. This guide prioritizes inclusivity by starting with bringing together a diverse design team and guides participants to conduct empathy interviews, ultimately to pilot a potential solution.

Scan the AI Resource Share that James and her peers in the Google GSV Fellowship leveraged in their journey. Developed by TLA, this hub of resources is organized by theme and includes descriptions of all resources to help leaders discover the most relevant resources to use in supporting their work.



Next Theme →

# Theme 03:

# Empowering Leaders With Guidance on Artificial Intelligence

Empowering school and system leaders to leverage AI effectively and ethically, through actionable guidance and direction such as toolkits, frameworks, and pathways.

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Dr. Cameron Fadjo

## Building LearnKit.ai: A Systems-Level Approach to AI in Education

> "We have this unique thing that we collectively built. It resonates well with systems-level leadership because we live in that space. The product provides a solution to the problem of developing a strategy around generative AI implementation in K-12 schools in a very direct way."

**Dr. Cameron Fadjo**
Technical Architect - Microsoft, CDW;
Former Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services,
Pleasantville Union Free School District

# Key Takeaways

1. **Leverage Cross-District Collaboration:** When tackling complex challenges like AI integration, collaboration among systems-level leaders across districts can lead to more robust and widely applicable solutions. By sharing expertise and resources, education leaders can create tools and strategies that address common needs while allowing for local customization.

2. **Adopt a Systems-Level Approach:** Successful AI integration requires looking beyond individual classrooms to consider its impact on the entire educational ecosystem. By taking a holistic view that includes students, teachers, administrators, and families, leaders can develop more comprehensive and effective strategies for implementing AI in education.

3. **Prioritize Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement:** Involving diverse stakeholder groups in the AI integration process is crucial for success. An inclusive approach, combined with a commitment to continuous learning and adaptation, ensures that AI initiatives reflect the needs of the entire educational community and remain responsive to the rapidly evolving field of educational technology.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Pleasantville Union Free School District |
| **Location** | Pleasantville, NY |
| **Number of Schools** | 3 |
| **Number of Students** | 1,630 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 19% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 6.8% |
| **Students Learning English** | 2.6% |

# The Challenge

For Dr. Cameron Fadjo, former Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services at Pleasantville Union Free School District in New York, the Google GSV Innovation Fellowship presented an opportunity to address a critical challenge facing educators: the integration of artificial intelligence into the educational landscape. At this particular stage in his career, Dr. Fadjo saw the Fellowship as a chance to engage with other leaders and think beyond the day-to-day operations of his district.

"I'm sort of mid-career as an administrator or starting to enter that mid-career phase, and here's an opportunity for me to engage with others," Dr. Fadjo explained. "The Fellowship creates [...] an opportunity to engage in a particular area specifically around instruction."

Dr. Fadjo identified two key challenges: teachers' hesitation to use technology – especially emergent technology like AI – despite its increasing importance in education and society, and the need for a systems-level approach to implementing generative AI. He recognized that without proper exposure and understanding of this new technology, students would likely face limited opportunities in the future, creating an equity issue.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Teacher and leader development pathways powered by AI**

Build a scalable, web-based software platform for educational communities to guide the development of comprehensive planning and strategy resources that all stakeholder groups (students, teachers, building administrators, district administrators, and parents) can utilize to bring a locally developed integration strategy for generative artificial intelligence into the K-12 environment.

The project, called LearnKit.ai, is focused on bringing the integration of generative AI into education via the development of a tool that guides teachers and educational leaders at all/multiple levels through the creation of training and policy resources. This tool, developed by Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, Natasha Trivers, Dr. Cameron Fadjo, and Dr. Tommy Welch incorporates generative AI into the resource creation process. Each school district/K-12 organization creates their own 'LearnKit' that consists of materials to guide all identified stakeholder groups (guidance documents), a resource articulating the organization-specific approach to generative AI within their school community (position statement), and a suite of training materials on the basics of generative AI for all stakeholder groups (training kits). The interactive tool serves as a resource to support various stakeholders across the education ecosystem.

To address these challenges, Dr. Fadjo collaborated with other leaders in the Fellowship: Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez (Superintendent, Hartford Public Schools), Natasha Trivers (CEO, Democracy Prep Public Schools), and Dr. Tommy Welch (Regional School Superintendent [K-12], Boston Public Schools). The collaboration began with these leaders sharing their individual district challenges – and

subsequently recognizing significant overlap across their goals. Through a series of brainstorming sessions and iterative discussions, they refined their ideas, ultimately converging on a systems-level approach to AI integration. This collaborative process led them to **develop LearnKit.ai, an AI-based platform designed to help school districts create comprehensive, stakeholder-infused generative AI strategic plans reflecting the values of their school communities**.

"We focus on the classroom, which is critical – but the Fellowship gave us an opportunity to take a step back, open up the lens a little bit, and ask, 'Well, how did those classes get influenced? How does the community get influenced? How do our buildings and our system get influenced?'" Dr. Fadjo explained. "Asking these questions really took us to a more focused question – 'How do we do this systems-level work so that we can have something that reflects our needs?'"

LearnKit.ai guides district leadership through a structured process to develop AI strategies tailored to their specific needs and values. The platform helps leaders create position statements, guidance documents, and training materials for various stakeholder groups, including students, teachers, building leaders, district leaders, and families.

As the project evolved, Dr. Fadjo and his peers realized the importance of addressing the diverse needs of different stakeholder groups. They developed a process that includes forming advisory groups, conducting meetings, and creating customized resources to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach to AI integration.

# Successes & Learnings

Through the development and implementation of LearnKit.ai, Dr. Fadjo identified several key successes and learnings:

## The Power of Collaborative Innovation

By connecting and working with colleagues from different districts through his participation in the Fellowship, Dr. Fadjo and his team were able to create a tool that addresses common challenges for systems-level leaders while allowing for customization. “We have this unique thing that we collectively built,” Dr. Fadjo noted. “It resonates well with systems-level leadership because we live in that space. The product provides a solution to the problem of developing a strategy around generative AI implementation in K-12 schools in a very direct way, and there’s a nice defined scope to it, meaning that it does a couple of things. It doesn’t do everything, but it does what’s essential in supporting our educational communities in our respective capacities as district administrators.”

## The Importance of Stakeholder Engagement

Dr. Fadjo learned the critical nature of involving various stakeholder groups in the AI integration process. “We all recognize that the process of bringing generative AI into our organizations can’t happen in a vacuum, and it needs to have the buy-in of multiple stakeholders,” he explained. This approach ensures that the resulting strategies reflect the values and needs of the entire educational community and the unique entities within these communities who will need to use and interact with AI in different ways.

## The Need for Continuous Learning and Adaptation

Throughout the process, Dr. Fadjo recognized the importance of staying open to new information and adjusting strategies accordingly. “With so many different factors to consider and evaluate, I found that I was constantly learning,” he reflected. A growth mindset has allowed him to navigate the rapidly evolving landscape of AI in education and address unexpected challenges and opportunities as they relate to the development of the LearnKit.ai platform.

# What’s Next

Looking ahead, the LearnKit.ai team members (Cameron, Natasha, Leslie, and Tommy) plan to focus on building enthusiasm and increased buy-in for LearnKit.ai and AI integration within their respective districts. Although Dr. Fadjo recently left his role within the Pleasantville School District, he noted that he has laid the foundation for the respective department, building, and district leaders to continue their efforts to build upon the foundation established through the collaborative resource process. He expects that, with multiple leaders across various stakeholder groups in place, the work to bring about this cultural change will continue.

Additionally, the LearnKit.ai team sees potential for expanding the use of LearnKit.ai beyond their own districts. With 60 organizations already signed up to use the platform since its launch in April 2024, Dr. Fadjo envisions continued growth and refinement of the tool. “The initial response clearly showed us that there is a need to keep building LearnKit.ai,” Dr. Fadjo shared. “The development process has been remarkably rewarding, and the response is a strong indicator that we’re building something that has value.”

As AI continues to evolve and impact education, Dr. Fadjo remains committed to ensuring that districts are prepared to leverage these tools effectively and ethically. By developing a tool that helps to foster a culture of continuous learning and stakeholder engagement, the LearnKit.ai team aims to ultimately create a platform that plays a direct role in helping organizations create educational environments that empower both educators and students to thrive in an AI-augmented world.

# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders looking to integrate AI into their educational strategies can apply learnings from Dr. Fadjo's experience in their own contexts.

## Reflect

To begin, leaders tackling the challenge of AI integration should consider the following reflection questions:

- How can you engage diverse stakeholders in your AI integration process to ensure buy-in and address various perspectives?
- What specific needs does your district have regarding AI integration, and how might these differ across different stakeholder groups?
- How can you create a culture of continuous learning and adaptation within your organization to keep pace with rapidly evolving technologies?

# Explore

Dive into the LearnKit.ai Planning Guide to understand the step-by-step process of creating a comprehensive generative AI strategic planning toolkit for your organization. The guide covers important stages such as initiating the process, planning advisory group meetings, preparing resources, and launching the toolkit. Additionally, check out the LearnKit team's planning documents, including their project proposal, project charter, and presentation.

Consider joining the School Teams AI Collaborative, an initiative bringing together school teams to explore the responsible and effective use of AI in education. This collaboration can provide valuable insights and support as you develop your district's AI strategy.

Remember, as Dr. Fadjo emphasizes, **the key to successful AI integration lies not just in the technology itself, but in how it's implemented with consideration for all stakeholders.** By taking a thoughtful, inclusive approach, you can help ensure that AI enhances – rather than disrupts – the educational experience in your district.

Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Mary P. Beck

## Developing Foundational AI Guidance to Support Equitable Teaching Practices

> “With our AI work, we’ve had to really be collaborative because no one is an expert. Everybody’s coming in with a different lens and so that’s been really important.”

**Mary P. Beck**
Deputy Chief of Teaching and Learning,
Chicago Public Schools

# Key Takeaways

1. **Foster Cross-Departmental Collaboration:** AI impacts policies and procedures for departments across school districts. Bringing together diverse team members from academics, technology, operations, and legal can lead to more comprehensive and robust solutions for AI integration. This collaborative approach ensures multiple perspectives are considered, resulting in stronger, more cohesive improvements to student learning.

2. **Develop a Strategic Foundation:** School systems need to establish AI readiness to ensure the proper policies are in place to protect students and facilitate alignment across departments. While establishing foundational policies and procedures, school systems should consider how these policies and procedures will ultimately lead to equitable teaching and learning practices.

3. **Balance Innovation With Established Change Management Practices:** While embracing new technologies, sticking to best practices for implementing change remains crucial. Focus on stakeholder buy-in, clear communication, and creating a supportive environment for innovation. This approach helps leaders navigate the challenges of introducing new technologies in large, complex school systems.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Chicago Public Schools |
| **Location** | Chicago, IL |
| **Number of Schools** | 634 |
| **Number of Students** | 323,251 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 16.1% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 70.7% |
| **Students Learning English** | 24.7% |

# The Challenge

For Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) Deputy Chief of Teaching and Learning Mary Beck, the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship served as an opportunity to reimagine how one of the largest school districts in the country could integrate cutting-edge technology into teaching and learning. When student survey results revealed that students were eager for more meaningful feedback on their learning, Beck was compelled to support the district in making high-quality feedback a core part of the learning experience.

With the emergence of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in schools, Beck wondered how the new technology might support teachers in providing more – and better – feedback to their students. The potential for impact was significant, and the Fellowship created space for Beck to explore the realities of this new opportunity.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Creating AI guidance and policy, ultimately leading to grading consistency and equity**
In Chicago Public Schools, the rapid emergence of AI technologies created an urgent need for clear guidelines and policies to ensure responsible and effective integration. Establishing a comprehensive framework for AI use would safeguard student data while maximizing the benefits of educational technology, particularly in areas such as personalized learning and equitable assessment practices. This foundational work ultimately aims to empower educators to leverage AI tools responsibly to support more consistent and equitable grading practices and enhanced student feedback.

While Beck's initial Transformational Opportunity (TO) focused on AI-supported feedback, she quickly realized that foundational work was needed to develop the district's AI readiness. "I think I underestimated the place where we were as a district with our AI development and understanding," Beck reflected. "I also overestimated the rate at which we would use AI to create impact."
Beck pivoted to focus on understanding and establishing AI guidelines and practices that would serve as a foundation for future AI solutions in teaching and learning. "We need to back way up and figure out what our plan as a district is for AI integration," Beck said. '

CPS had been permissive of AI and had not blocked generative AI tools, allowing Beck to experiment with the technology. Her team formed a professional learning community, bringing together 30 teachers and administrators biweekly to review different AI guidelines and explore various AI tools.

To ensure alignment across the district, Beck built bridges with the legal department and the information technology services (ITS) department. "I've been partnering directly with [these departments and stakeholder groups] so that we have really robust guidance as a backbone for everything," Beck shared. Collaboratively, they drafted a comprehensive AI guide with input from teachers and administrators. This guide not only outlined the permissible uses of AI within the district but also aimed to facilitate a cultural shift toward responsibly embracing technology.

Parallel to this work, Beck and her team also began exploring how to leverage AI to enhance their curriculum. They started developing a closed large language model for their Skyline curriculum using Merlyn Mind. "It's eliminating all of the noise that comes with the entire web – where it's our closed LLM based solely on our Skyline materials," Beck explained.

# Successes & Learnings

## The Power of Cross-District Collaboration

One of the most significant successes Beck highlighted was the partnership between the academic team and other departments. Beck underscored the importance of collaborating with teams from across the district as they determined how AI should be implemented in their district to establish a more representative vision and implementation plan. "With our AI work, we've had to really be collaborative because no one is an expert. Everybody's coming in with a different lens and so that's been really important," Beck reflected.

In particular, the partnership between teaching and learning and ITS has flourished. Beck shared, "Now we're in a space where we have biweekly meetings, we talk often, we work together, and we're really pushing each other. Their perspectives on what they're rolling out with AI through HR portals and things like their chatbots – we're learning from what's happening through those pieces."

## Navigating Data Privacy and Security Challenges

Beck and her team had to grapple with complex issues around data privacy as CPS has robust policies that only allow for vendors that meet strict data collection restrictions. As Beck and her team dug into the use requirements for generative AI tools, they discovered age restrictions that would directly affect student utilization of the technology. They informed parents and guardians about the usage of AI at CPS and gave them the chance to opt their students out of using these tools. The district also decided to not recommend specific tools – but rather develop guidance that would be more evergreen as AI continues to evolve.

## Balancing Innovation With Best Practices in Change Management

Despite the novelty of AI, Beck found that established change management practices remained vital. "While there was all the flurry around AI, the best practices of rolling out any change or implementing change – which is really getting buy-in, explaining the why, etcetera – all those things still stand true," Beck commented.

She emphasized the importance of engaging stakeholders, building understanding, and creating a supportive environment for innovation. This approach helped navigate the challenges of implementing new technologies in a large, complex school system.

# What's Next

Beck is eager to build off of the foundational work from the Fellowship. Initially, Beck plans to focus on finalizing the district's AI guidelines and expanding the integration of AI into their Skyline Curriculum. This effort aims to enhance personalized learning and streamline lesson-planning by integrating student data from existing platforms.

Beck is particularly excited about the potential impact on grading practices and student feedback that will follow. "To me, grading practices are less about the grade itself and more about the feedback we're offering students," she explained. "Even if we don't get the whole piece perfect by this time next year, we will be making strides towards lessening the daily load for teachers so they can give that meaningful feedback to students."

Beck envisions a future CPS where AI tools support teachers in providing more frequent, targeted feedback, helping students understand their progress and the next steps in their learning. Beck is also looking forward to continuing to support AI champions within CPS and sharing the district's progress with broader stakeholders, including the school board and the community. The work is seen as a stepping stone toward more comprehensive, system-wide changes, including tackling inequitable grading practices and ensuring all students have access to high-quality educational experiences.


# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders looking to build foundational structures needed for AI can apply learnings from Beck's experience.

## Reflect

To begin, leaders exploring innovative new ideas should consider the following reflection questions:

- What are the departments in your school system that may need to be involved with AI decisions? How can you build bridges to collaborate with them on this work?
- Who are the trailblazer teachers and administrators in your school or school system, and how can you convene them together to explore collaboratively?
- What policies does your school or school system have in place to protect student privacy? Do these need to be updated to incorporate AI?
- Reflecting on new initiatives you have implemented, what actions led to successes? What actions led to setbacks?

## Explore

Explore The Learning Accelerator (TLA)'s EdTech Strategic Planning Guide for resources on how to select, implement, and evaluate edtech tools. This resource includes guidance on garnering buy-in and effectively communicating with stakeholders.

Scan the AI Resource Share that Beck and her peers in the Google GSV Fellowship leveraged in their journey. Developed by TLA, this hub is organized by theme and includes descriptions of all resources to help leaders discover the most relevant sources to use in supporting their work.

Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez

## Fostering Innovation: A District-Wide Journey to AI Integration

> “It morphed into this system-level need that I actually didn’t think we were even going to get into. But it was almost [...] organic, at least to my role as a superintendent and how I approach the work. Whenever we’re going to do system-level change, I have to think about all the stakeholders.”

**Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez**
Superintendent, Hartford Public Schools

# Key Takeaways

1. **Create Safe Spaces for Innovation:** Establishing environments where educators can explore and experiment with AI without fear is crucial for facilitating change. This approach encourages a culture of vulnerability and experimentation, which is essential for pushing boundaries and improving practices across the district.

2. **Embrace Continuous Learning and Humility:** Leaders should model a learner's mindset, acknowledging the complexity of AI and the importance of ongoing education. Doing so fosters empathy and understanding, both which are critical in leading transformative change in education.

3. **Develop Inclusive, Stakeholder-Driven Strategies:** Engaging diverse stakeholders in the AI integration process ensures that initiatives reflect the needs of the entire educational community. By involving various groups in exploration as well as decision-making, leaders can create more comprehensive and effective AI strategies.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Hartford Public Schools |
| **Location** | Hartford, CT |
| **Number of Schools** | 39 |
| **Number of Students** | 17,047 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 21% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 75% |
| **Students Learning English** | 26% |

# The Challenge

For Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, Superintendent of Hartford Public Schools in Connecticut, the Google GSV Innovation Fellowship presented an opportunity to address pressing challenges in her district by exploring innovative solutions. Initially, Dr. Torres-Rodriguez focused narrowly on a specific population of students, multilingual learners. "When I joined [the Fellowship], I knew I needed to begin to think if there were any opportunities here specifically to support a subgroup of multilingual learners, knowing that population continues to grow for [our district]," Dr. Torres-Rodriguez explained. She was particularly interested in discovering instructional technology tools or platforms that could enhance supports for these students.

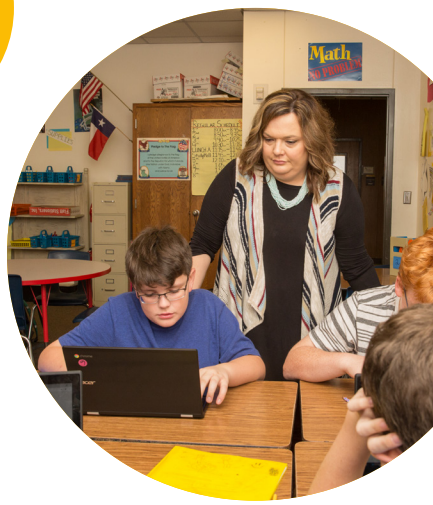
This drove Dr. Torres-Rodriguez's curiosity about the emerging field of artificial intelligence (AI). While the impetus for her exploration of AI was focused on supporting multilingual learners, she quickly saw an opportunity to leverage AI to impact her entire district – and beyond.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Teacher and leader development pathways powered by AI**
The project is focused on integrating AI into education via the development of a tool that guides teachers and educational leaders at all/multiple levels. The project entails a systematic systems approach, leveraging technology to help coordinate the work (steps). The LearnKit.ai tool, developed in collaboration with Natasha Trivers, Dr. Cameron Fadjo, and Dr. Tommy Welch, incorporates generative AI for just-in-time feedback, ethical AI implementation, and emphasizes AI's potential to enhance teaching and student learning. The interactive tool serves as a resource to support various stakeholders in the education

To address these challenges, Dr. Torres-Rodriguez collaborated with other leaders participating in the Fellowship: Dr. Cameron Fadjo (Former Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services, Pleasantville Union Free School District), Natasha Trivers (CEO, Democracy Prep Public Schools), and Dr. Tommy Welch (Regional School Superintendent [K-12], Boston Public Schools). The collaboration began with these leaders sharing their individual district challenges – and subsequently recognizing significant overlap across their goals. Through a series of brainstorming sessions and iterative discussions, they refined their ideas, ultimately converging on a systems-level approach to AI integration. This collaborative process led them to **develop LearnKit.ai, an AI-based platform designed to help school districts create comprehensive, stakeholder-infused generative AI strategic plans reflecting the values of their school communities.**



"It morphed into this system-level need that I actually didn't think we were even going to get into," Dr. Torres-Rodriguez reflected. "But it was almost [...] organic, at least to my role as a superintendent and how I approach the work. Whenever we're going to do system-level change, I have to think about all the stakeholders."

To begin implementing this Transformational Opportunity (TO), Dr. Torres-Rodriguez initiated an "AI Exploration Camp" in partnership with Google for Education in her district. This brought together 50 team members from across Hartford Public Schools including teachers, special education staff, multilingual staff, cabinet members, and operations executives. The camp allowed participants to explore AI tools and brainstorm potential applications in education in the context of their professional roles.

LearnKit.ai guides district leadership through a structured process to develop AI strategies tailored to their specific needs and values. The platform helps leaders create position statements, guidance documents, and training materials for various stakeholder groups, including students, teachers, building leaders, district leaders, and families.

As the project evolved, Dr. Torres-Rodriguez and her peers realized the importance of addressing the diverse and varied needs of different stakeholder groups. They developed a process that included forming advisory groups, conducting meetings, and creating customized resources to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach to AI integration.

# Successes & Learnings

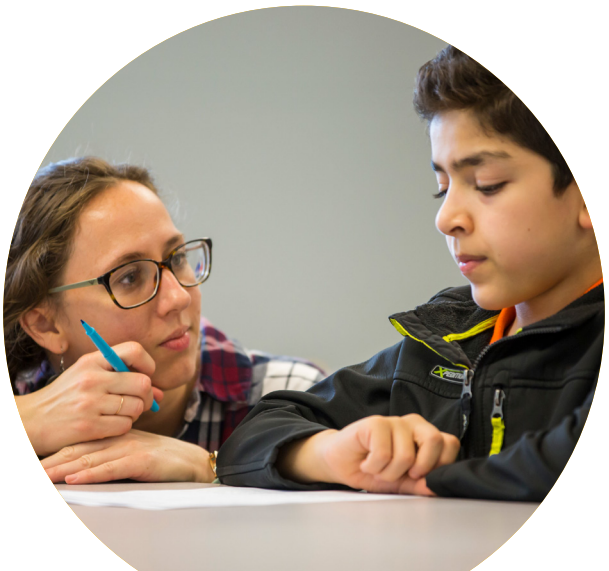
Through the development and implementation of LearnKit.ai and her district's AI initiatives, Dr. Torres-Rodriguez identified several key successes and learnings:

## The Importance of Creating Safe Spaces for Innovation

Dr. Torres-Rodriguez recognized the value of providing environments where educators could explore AI without fear, facilitating a culture of vulnerability and authentic experimentation among staff, helping them push the boundaries of what they were comfortable with in an effort to improve practice across the district. "There was a safety net that I believe I had, and it was just a reminder of, yes, these are some of the conditions that facilitate change," she reflected, underscoring the influence of culture on the capability of a system to truly transform.

## The Need for Continuous Learning and Humility

Throughout the process, Dr. Torres-Rodriguez embraced a learner's mindset, acknowledging the complexity of AI and the importance of continuous learning. "One of the things that I very humbly share is how much I, myself, don't know about generative AI and all the other tools and platforms that exist," she admitted, emphasizing the importance of empathy and understanding when leading change.



# What's Next

Looking ahead, Dr. Torres-Rodriguez plans to expand AI integration efforts within Hartford Public Schools. She is assembling a steering committee to guide the district's AI strategy and hopes to continue collaborating with the Google team to co-create future initiatives. She is also launching four AI professional learning communities (PLCs) across schools.

"We're trying to move it along knowing that [...] we really haven't built the strategy for it, but [we're] relying on the fact that we have these tools," Dr. Torres-Rodriguez explained. She envisions focusing on practical implications for instruction, process augmentation for efficiency, and the development of a comprehensive strategic plan as the next stages for leveraging AI across the district.

Additionally, Dr. Torres-Rodriguez sees potential for sharing her district's experiences and the LearnKit.ai resource with a broader audience. She plans to share the tool and her school district's journey with AI at the Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents Annual Summit in October 2024, furthering the dissemination of knowledge and resources developed through the Fellowship.

As AI continues to evolve and impact education, Dr. Torres-Rodriguez remains committed to ensuring her district is prepared to leverage these tools effectively and ethically. By fostering a culture of continuous learning, stakeholder engagement, and innovation, she aims to create an educational environment that empowers both educators and students to thrive in an AI-augmented world.

# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders looking to integrate AI into their educational strategies can apply learnings from Dr. Torres-Rodriguez's experience in their own contexts.

## Reflect

To begin, leaders should consider the following reflection questions:

- How can you create safe spaces for educators and other stakeholders to explore and experiment with emergent technologies without fear of failure?
- What strategies can you employ to ensure diverse stakeholder involvement in your AI integration process?
- How can you model a learner's mindset and humility as a leader when introducing new technologies like AI?

## Explore

Dive into the LearnKit.ai Planning Guide to understand the step-by-step process of creating a comprehensive generative AI strategic planning toolkit for your organization. The guide covers important stages such as initiating the process, planning advisory group meetings, preparing resources, and launching the toolkit. Additionally, check out the LearnKit.ai team's planning documents, including their project proposal, project charter, and presentation.

Consider joining the School Teams AI Collaborative, an initiative bringing together school teams to explore the responsible and effective use of AI in education. This collaboration can provide valuable insights and support as you develop your district's AI strategy.

Remember, as Dr. Torres-Rodriguez emphasizes, successful AI integration requires creating conditions that facilitate change, promoting agency and self-efficacy among staff, and maintaining a commitment to continuous learning. By taking a thoughtful, inclusive approach, you can help ensure that AI enhances the educational experience for all stakeholders in your district.

Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Natasha Trivers

## From Hesitation to Innovation: Developing LearnKit.ai to Transform Schools

> “I’m really excited to just use it as a tool to make the work more efficient for teachers and use it as a tool to unlock more learning for students.”

**Natasha Trivers**
CEO, Democracy Prep Public Schools

# Key Takeaways

1. **Embrace a Growth Mindset With Technology:** Educational leaders should approach new technologies like AI with curiosity and openness, even when they seem daunting. By adopting a learning stance and actively engaging with emerging tools, leaders can unlock transformative opportunities for both their students and educators, ensuring their schools remain at the forefront of education innovation.

2. **Leverage Collaborative Networks:** Engaging with peers across different districts can lead to more robust and widely applicable solutions. Collaboration with peers facing similar challenges can result in better solutions to help solve common challenges in the field.

3. **Prioritize Stakeholder Engagement:** Successful integration of AI in education requires buy-in from various stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, students, and even board members. Creating a framework that allows for customization based on unique local needs and values is crucial for widespread adoption and effective implementation of AI technologies in educational settings.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Democracy Prep Charter Schools |
| **Location** | New York, NY; Las Vegas, NV; San Antonio, TX |
| **Number of Schools** | 17 |
| **Number of Students** | 5,625 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 15% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 81% |
| **Students Learning English** | 10% |

# The Challenge

For Natasha Trivers, CEO of Democracy Prep Public Schools, the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship presented an opportunity to confront her fears around artificial intelligence (AI) and its potential impact on education. "I had my head completely in the sand about AI – and somewhat intentionally so," Trivers admitted. "I was like, 'This scares me – scares me on a societal level, at government level – everything."

Despite her concerns, Trivers recognized that avoiding AI could potentially disadvantage the students and educators she served. She explained, "I couldn't allow that fear to impede my students and all the wonderful things that could be unlocked for them with AI – or for our educators and all kinds of efficiencies [they could gain access to]."

As a leader of a charter school network serving predominantly students furthest from opportunity, Trivers saw an urgent need to ensure her students were not left behind in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. She noted, "Our students from historically underserved communities are on the forefront of what this looks like from a career standpoint. They should be at the front of the line in terms of potential careers, too, as opposed to the back of the line because our school system didn't get our act together in time."

The Fellowship offered Trivers a chance to develop a comprehensive, ethical approach to integrating AI into her school system, despite initial reservations. "I figured this was a really great opportunity to join the Fellowship, to learn more, and to force myself to do a Transformational Opportunity that is indeed going to be transformational for our district," Trivers reflected.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Teacher and leader development pathways powered by AI**
Build a scalable, web-based software platform for educational communities to guide the development of comprehensive planning and strategy resources that all stakeholder groups (i.e., students, teachers, building administrators, district administrators, parents) can utilize to bring a locally developed integration strategy for generative artificial intelligence into the K-12 environment.

The project, called LearnKit.ai, is focused on bringing the integration of generative AI into education via the development of a tool that guides teachers and educational leaders at all/multiple levels through the creation of training and policy resources. This tool, developed by Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, Natasha Trivers, Dr. Cameron Fadjo, and Dr. Tommy Welch, incorporates generative AI into the resource creation process. Each system creates their own 'LearnKit' that consists of materials to guide all identified stakeholder groups (guidance documents), a resource articulating the organization-specific approach to generative AI within their school community (position statement), and a suite of training materials on the basics of generative AI for all stakeholder groups (training kits). The interactive tool serves as a resource to support various stakeholders in the education ecosystem.

To address these challenges, Trivers collaborated with other leaders in the Fellowship: Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez (Superintendent, Hartford Public Schools), Dr. Cameron Fadjo (Former Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services, Pleasantville Union Free School District), and Dr. Tommy Welch (Regional School Superintendent (K-12), Boston Public Schools). The collaboration began with the

fellows sharing their individual district challenges and recognizing significant overlap in their goals. Through a series of brainstorming sessions and iterative discussions, they refined their ideas, ultimately converging on a systems-level approach to AI integration. This process led them to **develop LearnKit.ai, an AI-based platform designed to help school districts create comprehensive, stakeholder-infused generative AI strategic plans reflecting the values of their school communities**.

LearnKit.ai guides district leadership through a structured process to develop AI strategies tailored to their specific needs and values. The platform helps leaders create position statements, guidance documents, and training materials for various stakeholder groups, including students, teachers, building leaders, district leaders, and families.

As the project evolved, Trivers and her peers recognized the importance of addressing the diverse needs of different stakeholder groups. They developed a process that includes forming advisory groups, conducting meetings, and creating customized resources to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach to AI integration.

# Successes & Learnings

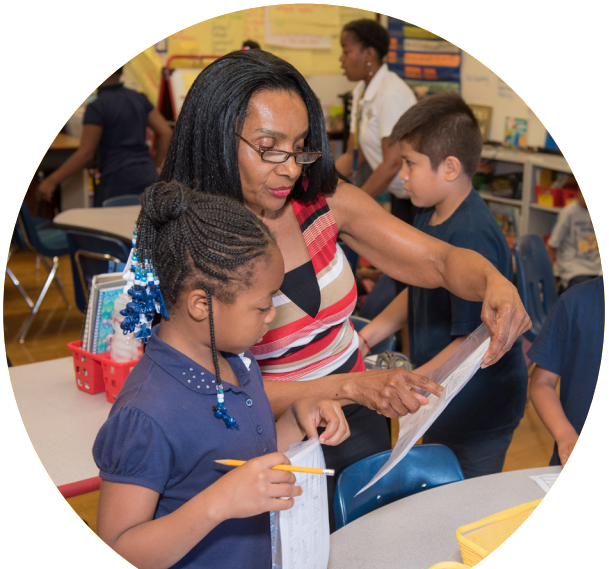
Through the development and implementation of LearnKit.ai and her district's AI initiatives, Dr. Torres-Rodriguez identified several key successes and learnings:

## Acknowledging the Power of Collaborative Innovation

By connecting and working with colleagues from different districts through her participation in the Fellowship, Trivers and her team were able to create a tool that addresses common challenges while allowing for customization. The Fellowship provided Trivers with a supportive environment to explore AI alongside other education leaders. She noted, "I think a really powerful element of the Google GSV Fellowship was just bringing superintendents and systems leaders together and giving them space to be creative. The words that come to mind when I think of the Fellowship are connection, innovation, and fun."

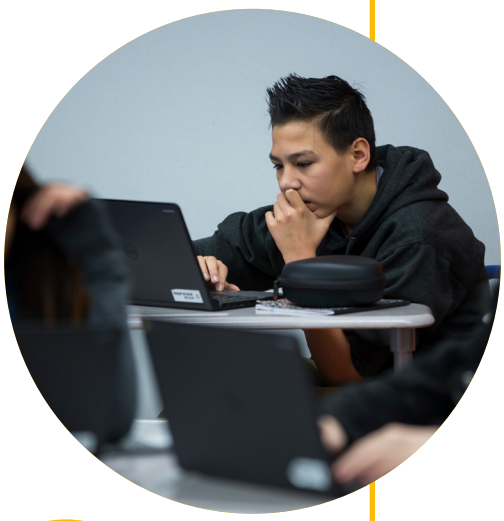
## Launching LearnKit.ai

A significant achievement for Trivers was the creation of LearnKit.ai, a platform designed to meet educators where they are in their AI journey. "I'm really excited to just use it as a tool to make the work more efficient for teachers and use it as a tool to unlock more learning for students," she shared.



## Reinforcing the Need for Stakeholder Buy-in

Trivers' belief in the importance of engaging stakeholders in decision-making was deepened through her experience with the AI integration process. She acknowledged, "I know, for sure, it's going to be transformational. I also know that we're going to have to [build] a ton of stakeholder buy-in, including board members whose expertise, insights, and critical questions will be crucial in developing a robust, responsible AI strategy that aligns with our core district priorities."



# What's Next

Looking ahead, the LearnKit.ai team members (Dr. Fadjo. Trivers, Dr. Torres-Rodriguez, and Dr. Welch) plan to focus on building enthusiasm and increased buy-in for LearnKit.ai and AI integration within their respective districts. Additionally, the LearnKit.ai team sees potential for expanding the use of the tool beyond their districts. With 60 organizations already signed up to use the platform since its launch in April 2024, the team envisions continued growth and refinement. "The initial response clearly showed us that there is a need to keep building LearnKit.ai," Dr. Fadjo explained. "The development process has been remarkably rewarding, and the response is a strong indicator that we're building something that clearly has value."

As AI continues to evolve and impact education, Trivers remains committed to ensuring that districts are prepared to leverage these tools effectively and ethically. By creating a tool that fosters a culture of continuous learning and stakeholder engagement, the LearnKit.ai team aims to ultimately create a platform that plays a direct role in helping organizations create educational environments that empower both educators and students to thrive in an AI-augmented world.

# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders looking to integrate AI into their educational strategies can apply learnings from Trivers' experience in their own contexts.

## Reflect

To begin, leaders tackling the challenge of AI integration should consider the following reflection questions:

- How can you engage diverse stakeholders in your AI integration process to ensure buy-in and address various perspectives?
- What specific needs does your district have regarding AI integration, and how might these differ across different stakeholder groups?
- How can you create a culture of continuous learning and adaptation within your organization to keep pace with rapidly evolving AI technologies?

## Explore

Dive into the LearnKit.ai Planning Guide to understand the step-by-step process of creating a comprehensive generative AI strategic planning toolkit for your organization. The guide covers important stages such as initiating the process, planning advisory group meetings, preparing resources, and launching the toolkit. Additionally, check out the LearnKit team's planning documents, including their project proposal, project charter, and presentation.

Consider joining the School Teams AI Collaborative, an initiative that brings together school teams to explore the responsible and effective use of AI in education. This collaboration can provide valuable insights and support as you develop your district's AI strategy.

Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Dr. Tommy Welch

## Fostering System-Wide AI Readiness With LearnKit.ai

> “One of the things that I’m especially proud of is the product that we put out, which is the LearnKit.ai website. It really focuses on the user’s experience no matter where they are, whatever entry point they have, if they’re a well-versed teacher who has been using it for two or three years, or if they’re a brand new teacher.”

**Dr. Tommy Welch**
Regional School Superintendent,
Boston Public Schools

# Key Takeaways

1. **Embrace Collaborative Innovation:** Engaging with peers across different districts can push a leader's thinking and guide them to more innovative solutions. In addition, collaboration with those facing similar challenges can result in more robust and widely applicable solutions to common obstacles in the field.

2. **Address Diverse Stakeholder Needs:** Successful technology integration requires a comprehensive approach that considers the needs of various groups, including students, teachers, building leaders, and district administrators. Creating customized resources and guidance documents for each stakeholder group ensures a more inclusive and effective implementation.

3. **Adopt a Systems-Level Approach:** Leaders should look beyond individual classrooms to consider technology's impact on the entire educational ecosystem. By taking a holistic view that includes the entire school community – students, teachers, administrators, and families – leaders can develop more comprehensive and effective strategies for implementing technology, including AI, in education.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Boston Public Schools |
| **Location** | Boston, MA |
| **Number of Schools** | 119 |
| **Number of Students** | 49,000+ |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 23% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 69.8% |
| **Students Learning English** | 33.7% |

# The Challenge

For Dr. Tommy Welch, Regional School Superintendent at Boston Public Schools, the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship presented an opportunity to address a critical challenge facing his district: how to effectively integrate artificial intelligence (AI) into classrooms and support teachers and staff with varying levels of experience with technology.

He started off this process by looking in the mirror. "I was very inexperienced with how generative AI tools and resources would be or are being rolled out in our schools," Dr. Welch reflected. As a leader who began his career three decades ago, Dr. Welch recognized the gap between his own experience and the rapidly evolving technological landscape. "Being a teacher who taught in the '90s and never had access to these tools, being a principal in 2011 and never leading and managing a staff that had access to these tools, I felt a little uncomfortable actually supporting a team that big, where you see teachers and leaders that have varying levels of [comfort] introducing the AI resources in our classrooms."

Dr. Welch recognized the urgent need to prepare his district for the impending wave of AI in education. "As we were working on this when we started in the summer of 2023, there were only two states that had guiding policy on AI and education. As we went through the following winter, it crept up to seven. More and more states continue to take official stances on how we will use these tools in our classrooms," he noted, highlighting the swiftly changing landscape. This realization fueled his commitment to ensure his team wouldn't be left behind in this technological revolution.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Teacher and leader development pathways powered by AI**
Build a scalable, web-based software platform for educational communities to guide the development of comprehensive planning and strategy resources that all stakeholder groups (i.e., students, teachers, building administrators, district administrators, parents) can utilize to bring a locally developed integration strategy for generative artificial intelligence into the K-12 environment.

The project, called LearnKit.ai, is focused on bringing the integration of generative AI into education via the development of a tool that guides teachers and educational leaders at all/multiple levels through the creation of training and policy resources. This tool, developed by Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, Natasha Trivers, Dr. Cameron Fadjo, and Dr. Tommy Welch, incorporates generative AI into the resource creation process. Each system creates their own 'LearnKit' that consists of materials to guide all identified stakeholder groups (guidance documents), a resource articulating the organization-specific approach to generative AI within their school community (position statement), and a suite of training materials on the basics of generative AI for all stakeholder groups (training kits). The interactive tool serves as a resource to support various stakeholders in the education ecosystem.

To address these challenges, Dr. Welch collaborated with other leaders in the Fellowship: Natasha Trivers (CEO, Democracy Prep Public Schools), Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez (Superintendent, Hartford Public Schools), and Dr. Cameron Fadjo (Former Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services, Pleasantville Union Free School District). The collaboration began with the fellows sharing their individual district challenges and recognizing

significant overlap in their goals. Through a series of brainstorming sessions and iterative discussions, they refined their ideas, ultimately converging on a systems-level approach to AI integration. This process led them to **develop LearnKit.ai, an AI-based platform designed to help school districts create comprehensive, stakeholder-infused generative AI strategic plans reflecting the values of their school communities**.

LearnKit.ai guides district leadership through a structured process to develop AI strategies tailored to their specific needs and values. The platform helps leaders create position statements, guidance documents, and training materials for various stakeholder groups, including students, teachers, building leaders, district leaders, and families.

As the project evolved, Dr. Welch and his peers realized the importance of addressing the diverse needs of different stakeholder groups. They developed a process that includes forming advisory groups, conducting meetings, and creating customized resources to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach to AI integration.

# Successes & Learnings

Through the development and implementation of LearnKit.ai and her district's AI initiatives, Dr. Welch and his peers identified several key successes and learnings:

## Acknowledging the Power of Collaborative Innovation

Dr. Welch found immense value in working with a diverse group of educators. “Having the opportunity to work with a group of amazing educators across New York and New England pushed my thinking as I wrestled with the problem I was trying to solve in my own network of schools in Boston,” he shared. This collaborative approach allowed him to leverage the collective expertise of his peers, leading to more robust solutions.

## Launching LearnKit.ai

A significant achievement was the creation of LearnKit.ai, a platform designed to meet educators where they are in their AI journey. “One of the things that I’m especially proud of is the product that we put out, which is the LearnKit.ai website. It really focuses on the user’s experience no matter where they are, whatever entry point they have, if they’re a well-versed teacher who has been using it for two or three years, or if they’re a brand new teacher,” Dr. Welch explained. This adaptive approach ensures that the tool can serve a wide range of users across his district.

## Dedicated Time for Strategic Thinking

The Fellowship provided Dr. Welch with valuable time to step back from the day-to-day demands of his role. “I really appreciated the time away from the craziness of my role as a regional superintendent. As part of the Fellowship, we had time to be together every two or three months, away from our districts,” Dr. Welch reflected. This dedicated space allowed him to focus on long-term, transformative initiatives that might otherwise have been overshadowed by immediate concerns.

# What's Next

Looking ahead, the LearnKit.ai team members (Dr. Fadjo. Trivers, Dr. Torres-Rodriguez, and Dr. Welch) plan to focus on building enthusiasm and increased buy-in for LearnKit.ai and AI integration within their respective districts. Additionally, the LearnKit.ai team sees potential for expanding the use of the tool beyond their districts. With 60 organizations already signed up to use the platform since its launch in April 2024, the team envisions continued growth and refinement. "The initial response clearly showed us that there is a need to keep building LearnKit.ai," Dr. Fadjo explained. "The development process has been remarkably rewarding, and the response is a strong indicator that we're building something that clearly has value."

As AI continues to evolve and impact education, Dr. Welch remains committed to ensuring that districts are prepared to leverage these tools effectively and ethically. By creating a tool that fosters a culture of continuous learning and stakeholder engagement, the LearnKit.ai team aims to ultimately create a platform that plays a direct role in helping organizations create educational environments that empower both educators and students to thrive in an AI-augmented world.

# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders looking to integrate AI into their educational strategies can apply learnings from Dr. Welch's experience in their own contexts.

## Reflect

To begin, leaders tackling the challenge of AI integration should consider the following reflection questions:

- How can you engage diverse stakeholders in your AI integration process to ensure buy-in and address various perspectives?
- What specific needs does your district have regarding AI integration, and how might these differ across different stakeholder groups?
- How can you create a culture of continuous learning and adaptation within your organization to keep pace with rapidly evolving AI technologies?

## Explore

Dive into the LearnKit.ai Planning Guide to understand the step-by-step process of creating a comprehensive generative AI strategic planning toolkit for your organization. The guide covers important stages such as initiating the process, planning advisory group meetings, preparing resources, and launching the toolkit. Additionally, check out the LearnKit team's planning documents, including their project proposal, project charter, and presentation.

Consider joining the School Teams AI Collaborative, an initiative that brings together school teams to explore the responsible and effective use of AI in education. This collaboration can provide valuable insights and support as you develop your district's AI strategy.

Next Theme →

## Theme 04:

# Empowering Students With Better Feedback and Smarter Assessment Systems

AI can enhance assessment and feedback, both to support students in better understanding their skills and knowledge as well as to support teachers in understanding student performance and instructional needs, all the while taking more work off of teachers' plates and providing students and families with greater access to their data.

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Gudiel Crosthwaite, Ph.D.

## Empowering Students and Families With Transparency and Data Access

> “We’re starting to have those conversations about guardrails and where we can provide some flexibility for adults as well as for students. We’re exploring how we can harness some of the AI technology that’s out there to be able to provide data to families and students.”

**Gudiel Crosthwaite, Ph.D.**
Superintendent,
Lynwood Unified School District

# Key Takeaways

1. **Empower Students and Families With Data Access:** Providing students and families with access to academic data enables them to monitor progress, make informed decisions, and self-advocate, helping students avoid missed opportunities for post-secondary preparation due to issues like improper course placement or insufficient credits.

2. **Leverage Technology for Real-Time Data Tracking:** Developing a dynamic dashboard for real-time monitoring of student progress data, such as graduation rates and course completion, can be a valuable resource for educators and administrators. This technology helps professionals work hand-in-hand with students to make informed decisions that support student success.

3. **Build Collaborative Networks and Identify Gaps:** Connecting with like-minded leaders going through similar challenges, and using these touchpoints to identify gaps in educational technology for comprehensive academic advising, can be beneficial for school and system leaders. Continuously refining systems and exploring best practices can lead to significant, contextualized improvements and innovation in education.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Lynwood Unified School District |
| **Location** | Lynwood, CA |
| **Number of Schools** | 18 |
| **Number of Students** | 11,967 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 18% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 93.1% |
| **Students Learning English** | 26% |

# The Challenge

For Dr. Gudiel Crosthwaite, Superintendent of Lynwood Unified School District in California, the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship presented an opportunity to address a deep-seated challenge in education: **the lack of consistent, accurate academic advising for students.** This challenge was personal for Dr. Crosthwaite, who recalled his own high school experience of being placed in basic math courses despite his capabilities, requiring him to engage in significant self-advocacy to get on the right academic track for college.

"When I got to high school, I heard through one of my teachers what courses a student needs to be enrolled in to go to college," Dr. Crosthwaite recalled. "I went and [told] my counselor, 'I'm not in these courses.' She said, 'Well, that's where you tested in.' I don't remember ever taking a test."

Now, as Superintendent, Dr. Crosthwaite sees far too many students missing out on college opportunities themselves, similarly due to course placement that did not consider students' post-graduation aspirations. In joining the Fellowship, Dr. Crosthwaite sought to leverage cutting-edge technology to build **a system that truly empowers students to make informed decisions about their academic progress.**

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Empowering students and families by giving them access to their data**
Adults in school systems have access to a wealth of data, which they use for a variety of reasons, including monitoring outcomes and identifying supports for students. However, what's been missing from this equation is ensuring kids and families have access to this data, enabling them to work with adults as partners, monitor their own progress, and self-advocate.

To address this challenge, Dr. Crosthwaite's Transformational Opportunity centered on the question: "How might we develop a system that empowers students to access accurate information and advocate for their academic needs?"

Initially, Dr. Crosthwaite leveraged existing resources in his district to monitor graduation rates and course completion, allowing leaders to track this information by demographics and subgroups. With the help of a computer programmer, they worked to **transition from a paper-based system to a dynamic, accessible internal dashboard for real-time data tracking** that was made available to counselors and site administrators as well as district administrators.

The Fellowship provided a platform for Dr. Crosthwaite to expand his initiative through engagement with education leaders and industry experts. He conducted individual research around existing technology, which revealed to him that many districts lacked comprehensive systems for academic advising and course-tracking – the problem was not unique to Lynwood. This led him to explore potential partnerships with technology companies and developers to make more headway on centering students in data-tracking work rather than focusing primarily on existing solutions.

Dr. Crosthwaite sought a partner to collaborate on a technology solution but did not find success. "I tried to speak with some companies and [...] developers to see if this is something that they would be interested in partnering up and developing, but I haven't had success with that," he shared. He reported that many companies were skeptical about the demand and feasibility of such a system, citing concerns about cost and scalability, but for Dr. Crosthwaite, this further underscored the need for an innovative system to transform data-tracking and more thoughtfully integrate students into the process.

Dr. Crosthwaite pivoted, seeking out research and best practices to bring to his team in hopes of starting with a smaller pilot. Searching locally and nationally, he explored student data strategies used by neighboring schools and districts, as well as the practices employed by private schools, and contrasted them with what public school systems tend to do in order to identify areas for improvement and innovation. He also uncovered discrepancies between the way in which innovative technology is used in career industries, higher education, and in K-12, presenting some exciting opportunities to assess these systems and work toward cross-sector collaboration to drive innovation in education.

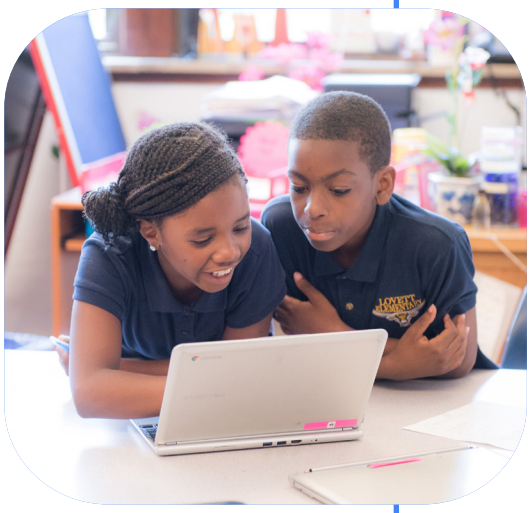
"How do we learn from other sectors so that we can start making shifts?" Dr. Crosthwaite asked. "We need more spaces to engage in conversations with [industry professionals, higher education, and K-12 systems] because, you know, industry is going in one direction, then you've got higher ed and then they're focused on their thing, and then we've got K-12. If there are things that are happening in industry or higher ed and I'm not pivoting, I'm sending in kids that are ready for 1980 but not for 2040, and I need to make sure that we're doing justice for all kids, particularly from lower income communities that may not have the capital or these experiences that kids may have in Silicon Valley. It's important to come together on a regular basis, to engage in these resources, and not work in silos or in isolation."

# Successes & Learnings

Through his journey in the Fellowship, Dr. Crosthwaite achieved key successes and gained valuable insights:

## Identifying Systemic Gaps

Through his research and conversations with industry professionals, Dr. Crosthwaite uncovered a significant gap in the educational technology landscape. The lack of comprehensive tools for academic advising and data access highlighted the need for innovation in this area and spurred his thinking around intentional, cross-sector collaboration in an effort to best prepare students for their futures. The Fellowship experience reinforced the critical role of student voice in shaping educational systems. Dr. Crosthwaite emphasized, "[We need to keep] the human aspect front and center and not secondary, so that if we develop a tool or technology that can – and will – impact people, it doesn't hurt them. It [should] enhance or add onto their lifestyle."



## Developing Internal Systems

Dr. Crosthwaite's team successfully created an internal dashboard to monitor graduation rates and course completion in real time. This tool has become a valuable resource for leaders at various levels across the district to better understand student progress and develop solutions around areas of need.

## Building a Collaborative Network

The Fellowship connected Dr. Crosthwaite with like-minded leaders across the country who shared a commitment to innovation and improving student outcomes. "Regardless of where we are geographically, there are some similar challenges, but there's also a similar commitment to continue trying and developing new approaches," he reflected. This network provided validation and inspiration for his work, and allowed him to converse with other leaders who pushed his thinking, presented him with valuable resources, and helped him refine his vision for innovation and data at Lynwood.

# What's Next

Looking ahead, Dr. Crosthwaite is committed to advancing his vision of empowering students and families with data access. The district will continue to build on the internal dashboard concept and seek opportunities to expand access.

In addition, Dr. Crosthwaite has convened an AI task force to explore the potential of artificial intelligence in education and how to implement it in a safe, effective way to benefit their school community. "We're starting to have those conversations about guardrails and where we can provide some flexibility for adults as well as for students. We're exploring how we can harness some of the AI technology that's out there to be able to provide data to families and students," he explained.

As Dr. Crosthwaite expands the work of this initial AI task force to include a broader range of voices and perspectives, he aims to build awareness about AI across the district and broader community, as well as among staff members, through presentations. He also intends to engage with local legislative officials to share the district's progress and highlight both the needs and opportunities that exist for K-12 in the education technology space. Additionally, the district is revisiting course requirements to integrate AI and computer coding from elementary through high school, ensuring students are prepared for the future of work.

# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders inspired by Dr. Crosthwaite's work can begin their own journey by reflecting on their own contexts and exploring targeted resources.

## Reflect

Consider the following questions as you approach technology integration in your context:

- How can you leverage technology to empower students and families with access to their academic data?
- What opportunities exist for cross-sector collaboration in your context?
- How are you balancing technological advancements with the need for human-centered, equitable approaches to education?
- What internal resources and skills does your school system have that could create a home-grown solution for your initiatives?

## Explore

Learn how to use student data for effective advocacy using the strategies and resources introduced in The Learning Accelerator (TLA)'s Data Advocacy Guide. This guide connects the purpose of advocacy and data collection to a framework, explores how to leverage and analyze data effectively to support advocacy efforts, and helps you understand what data is needed to advocate successfully.

Help set students up for success by involving their families in their educational journeys, and create a culture of communication, sharing, and transparency to bring family members into the fold on their students' experiences.

Look into your community to discover opportunities to partner with institutions, industries, and other experts to give students meaningful access into college and career discovery during their K-12 years.

Dr. Crosthwaite's advice to leaders, especially those serving students positioned furthest from opportunity, is to embrace the power of technology and collaboration: "Because of the technologies that we have today, it really does allow us to extend our reach and build a network – [a] collaborative network beyond our immediate area. Don't hesitate, go out there, get your name out there."

Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Michael McCormick

## Transforming Assessment With Teacher-Led Innovation and AI Integration

> “To me, this is the really deep work in education. I think having a tool that helps teachers and that they feel like they had a hand in designing, particularly the outputs – like what reports they wanted to see for their students – has been huge.”

**Michael McCormick**
Former Superintendent,
Val Verde Unified School District

# Key Takeaways

1. **Prioritize Inclusive Design:** Engaging teachers and stakeholders through direct conversations, focus groups, and user experience documentation fosters a sense of co-creation and ownership, leading to more successful implementation of new technologies.

2. **Empower Students With Data Access:** Recognize that setbacks are inevitable in technological innovation. Cultivate a culture of openness, active listening, and continuous improvement to address user pain points effectively.

3. **Build Collaborative Networks and Identify Gaps:** Providing students with access to their own assessment data can increase engagement and foster self-directed learning, particularly for students with strong executive function skills.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Val Verde Unified School District |
| **Location** | Perris and Moreno Valley, CA |
| **Number of Schools** | 23 |
| **Number of Students** | 19,216 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 12% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 93.1% |
| **Students Learning English** | 35.6% |

# The Challenge

For Michael McCormick, Former Superintendent of Val Verde Unified School District in California, the challenge he wanted to explore through the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship was immediately clear: existing assessment platforms were failing to provide actionable data that improved instruction at a reasonable price point.

"There's only a few companies that are in this space," McCormick explained. "For most of us districts, [we've] faced exponentially increasing licensing costs." Cumbersome, outdated design and a dearth of quality customer service meant teachers were spending excessive time navigating complex systems without gaining critical insights for targeted instructional improvements, all while rising costs strained the district's budget, diverting resources from other critical areas.

McCormick saw an opportunity to develop a cost-effective, intuitive system built with significant input from teachers and leaders in the district, capturing the voices of stakeholders closest to these systems to create an innovative, holistic solution that addressed the specific needs of the school community. His goal was to create a system that would empower educators and students with data to make informed decisions, easing the burden on teachers and ultimately enhancing student learning outcomes.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Building a smart assessment system to enable teachers to better support students**
Develop an assessment system that is student- and teacher-friendly, allowing for teacher- or district-designed common formative assessments, driven by technology to more efficiently diagnose needs and prescribe interventions. This system will provide teachers with useful reports, allowing for professional learning communities (PLCs) to analyze data together. Most importantly, begin thinking about how to assess 21st-century skills by grade level and subject area. Create a high-quality system that interacts with existing student information systems while keeping it very affordable.

McCormick's Transformational Opportunity centered on the question: "How might we develop a low-cost, user-friendly assessment system that empowers teachers and students?"

**With initial funding from Val Verde's Board of Education, McCormick's team partnered with local programmers to develop an assessment system that addressed the district's custom needs.** The Fellowship provided a platform for McCormick to explore innovative solutions and integrate advanced technologies into this work, particularly artificial intelligence and large language models.

McCormick emphasized the collaborative nature of the project, through which he tapped into the expertise of educators and those who support them, including instructional coaches and professional learning teams.

Instructional coaches – who work at all levels of the district, from preschool through the district's continuation high school for adult learners – facilitate professional learning for all grade levels. They used the new system developed in the district as the center of student data analysis. Once trained on the system, teachers used this data to develop targeted instructional responses for students, and they were given the opportunity to observe other educators and provide feedback on the way a lesson was taught. Subsequent data from that lesson was analyzed, underscoring the value of vulnerability and collaborative work in making their system a success.

The system incorporated both state assessments and district assessments, as well as teacher-created assessments, to provide a comprehensive view of student progress. **A key innovation was the integration of AI to assist teachers in creating reading passages at specific Lexile levels, significantly reducing manual preparation time and providing more targeted, personalized material for students to meet them at the appropriate level.** In addition, the system provided a way for students to access their own data, empowering them with insights about their learning progress.

"To me, this is the really deep work in education. I think having a tool that helps teachers and that they feel like they had a hand in designing, particularly the outputs – like what reports they wanted to see for their students – has been huge," McCormick reflected.

Throughout the development of this system, McCormick prioritized stakeholder input. The district's Curriculum Council, comprising 80 members representing all subject areas and grade levels, piloted the product and held both informal conversations and intentional focus groups with educators, who provided crucial feedback. This process allowed for continuous experimentation and improvement of the system, developing a product that simultaneously solved a problem of meeting the unique data needs of the district and garnered buy-in from its targeted users.

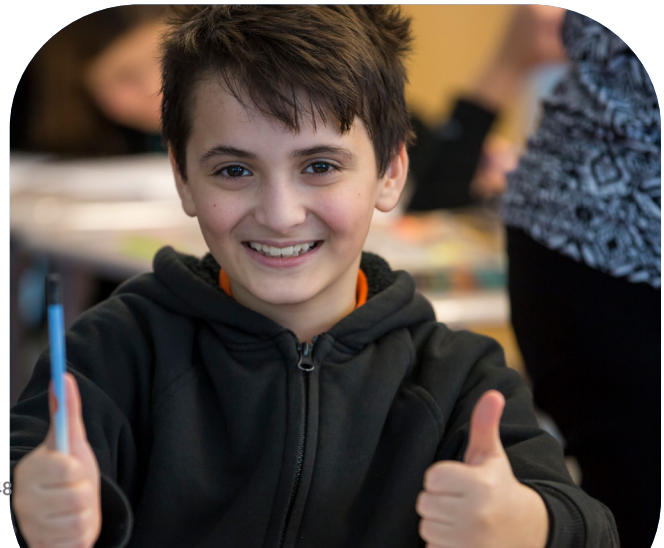
# Successes & Learnings

## The Power of Inclusive Design and Teacher Voice

McCormick's approach to development centered on inclusive design and amplifying teacher voices. Rather than relying on surveys, the team engaged in direct conversations, focus groups, and documentation of user experiences. This approach fostered a sense of co-creation among teachers. "[These strategies] got us a lot further to people really feeling like they were helping co-create this product," McCormick shared.

## Embracing Vulnerability in Pursuit of Continuous Improvement

The development process taught McCormick the importance of vulnerability and persistence in innovation. He learned that setbacks are inevitable – regardless of the amount of thought and excitement that may go into an initial draft or prototype – particularly when working with technology. "Vulnerability is the key to success," McCormick emphasized. "Really get vulnerable and be an excellent listener because ultimately, I think especially with something that's computer-based, where people are interfacing with the computer, you never know what that pain point is going to be."



## Empowering Students Through Data Access

An unexpected but significant learning came from expanding student access to their own data in the district. Inspired by feedback from other Fellows, McCormick's team extended the system to allow students to monitor their own progress. "The kids who want to monitor their own progress at that level, they're empowered to do so," McCormick explained. This move towards transparency and student empowerment has received positive feedback, particularly from students with clear goals in mind for their learning progression.

# What's Next

Looking ahead, McCormick sees great potential for the assessment system to benefit more students and educators. Now in its second year of implementation after an initial year of operating a basic product, the platform is currently being piloted in three districts, reaching approximately 50,000 users. As school districts face tightening budgets, particularly with the end of ESSER funding, McCormick believes this cost-effective solution could be widely adopted.

"I think districts are going to have to be having very serious conversations about what they consider part of their core instructional experience and what that portfolio of edtech looks like that supports that core instructional experience," McCormick predicts. He hopes the product will continue to expand, providing a robust, affordable assessment solution for districts across the country.

As McCormick transitions into retirement this summer, he has expressed interest in continuing to support the platform's growth, as well as mentoring future cohorts of Google GSV Education Innovation Fellows. His experience has ignited a passion for supporting transformative innovation and sharing the lessons he's learned along the way.

"I'm going to Barcelona – super excited about that, and then after I get back from that, you know, who knows what the future has in store for me," McCormick shared. "I'm a little bit scared – and a lot excited – because it's the first time in a long time where I've kind of felt like, 'Okay, I've had these experiences,' and, really, I think my passion is going to lie somewhere in the space of – can I pay it forward in such a way that I can help the next person along who's attempting whole-system transformation."

# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders looking to implement innovative assessment systems can apply learnings from McCormick's experience:

## Reflect

Consider the following questions as you approach transformation in your context:

- How can you create more opportunities for meaningful teacher and student input in your technology initiatives?
- What emerging technologies could enhance your system's current assessment practices?
- How can you foster a culture of continuous improvement, vulnerability, and innovation in your organization?

## Explore

Dive into strategies for inclusive design for transformative system-wide change, as well as teacher engagement in technology implementation. Consider how to balance innovation with fiscal responsibility, especially in light of changing funding landscapes, and ensure that investments align with school and system goals.

Investigate the potential of AI and large language models to enhance assessment, data analysis, and data-driven instruction in your context. How might these tools support more efficient and effective instructional practices?

Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Dr. Alena Zachery-Ross

## Equipping Students to Be Self-Directed Learners

> “As soon as we started using the app, it was able to open up access to families, parents, and students in our system because they could choose what language they wanted it to talk to them in… So it opened up access to people who we hadn’t talked to before – [such as] parents and students we considered harder to reach. They weren’t hard to reach. We just didn’t know that it was our deficit, not their deficit.”

**Dr. Alena Zachery-Ross**
Superintendent,
Ypsilanti Community Schools

# Key Takeaways

1. **Embrace an Inclusive Design Process:** Recognizing the importance of involving diverse stakeholders, including often-overlooked groups like school secretaries and students themselves, in the design and development of new initiatives opens new opportunities. This inclusive approach yields valuable insights, buy-in, and stronger solutions tailored to the community's needs.

2. **Lead With Humility and a Learner's Mindset:** School and system leaders benefit from stepping out of a self-sufficient leadership mindset and instead being open to seeking help and learning from others, ultimately leveraging resources and connections. This growth mindset enables leaders to embrace problem-solving experiences as learning opportunities without defensiveness, fostering personal and professional development

3. **Start Small:** Pivoting from an initial, holistic solution to a problem, school and system leaders can look for an opportunity to start small with a more narrowly defined, easy-to-implement concept. Starting with a smaller solution allows leaders and their teams to act and learn quickly, gaining powerful insights into the challenges and opportunities in their system.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Ypsilanti Community Schools |
| **Location** | Ypsilanti, MI |
| **Number of Schools** | 11 |
| **Number of Students** | 3,748 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 18% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 79% |
| **Students Learning English** | 13% |

# The Challenge

For Dr. Alena Zachery-Ross, Superintendent of Ypsilanti Community Schools in Michigan, the Google GSV Innovation Fellowship offered a chance to think differently about the district's overarching goal: **preparing all students with the skills, mindsets, and resources needed for future success after graduation**. This includes ensuring students graduate with real-world credentials to connect them to potential careers and, ultimately, postsecondary success.

"In our district, we really try to prepare our students for life," Dr. Zachery-Ross explained. Unlike more traditional districts, students in Ypsilanti earn industry credentials that align with real-world jobs. "Each one of our students – they don't graduate by last name. They graduate by credential. Everybody leaves with a pathway to their future."

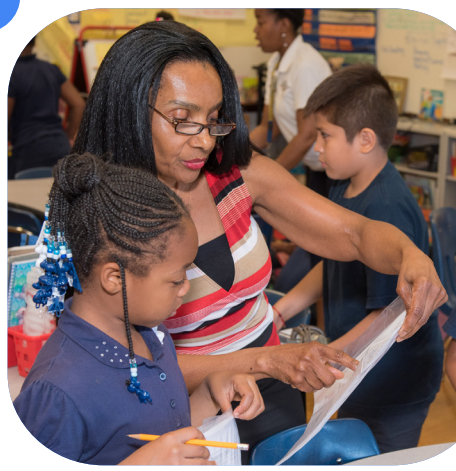
In a district where 100% of students receive free breakfast and lunch, and many rely on the schools for vital resources, Dr. Zachery-Ross recognizes the high levels of support that adults play in her students' lives. To prepare those students to be successful beyond school requires Ypsilanti to empower their students to be self-directed, to equip them to make healthy, positive decisions for themselves, and to confidently navigate life after graduation. "If we expect that of our students, then how are we allowing our system to support that self-directed student?" she asked.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Comprehensive AI-powered student information systems (SIS) to empower students with their data**
Build a system that connects the various systems within the district – such as behavior, instructions, SIS, tutorial services, and others – to support students and families in accessing district resources and communications. Ultimately ensuring students are empowered with their data and connecting the entire community with a common two-way communication tool.

To tackle this **multifaceted challenge of supporting students to be self-directed**, Dr. Zachery-Ross seized an opportunity to pursue an ambitious project over the 2023-24 school year as part of the Google GSV Innovation Fellowship: creating an AI-powered app to personalize the experience for students and connect them directly to the resources they need. By interweaving the districts' disparate systems – including their student information system (SIS), behavior, academics, tutoring, and other relevant systems – Dr. Zachery-Ross sought to leverage technology to support her students' self-direction.



Her initial concept involved utilizing an app with features like early warning systems to flag missed assignments or absences, personalized messaging, and a direct line to tutoring or counseling resources. The app would **empower students to track their own progress and next steps** – rather than putting the onus exclusively on teachers and staff, creating a system that allowed students to directly access information alongside adults. "Getting the adults out of the way can help our students to be self-directed," explained Dr. Zachery-Ross.

Through conversations with her leadership team, her Google GSV Innovation Fellowship Coach, and technology experts whom she was connected to through the Fellowship, Dr. Zachery-Ross's plan evolved. Rather than focusing on a costly, time-consuming solution of building an entire app from the ground up, she identified an opportunity to **start small** and test out certain features that would support her vision for greater equity and access across the district.

Dr. Zachery-Ross and her leadership team narrowed in on the idea of allowing families and students to better access vital information. Dr. Zachery-Ross began by piloting a basic chatbot that would allow students and families to gain access to details about resources in the district more easily. The Grizzly Chatbot tool **communicates vital information to families in their preferred languages and dialects** – of which Ypslanti has 25. Doing so allowed for two-way communication, as well, as the app connects students and families directly with the staff who are best positioned to field questions and receive feedback.

"As soon as we started using the app, it was able to open up access to families, parents, and students in our system because they could choose what language they wanted it to talk to them in… So it opened up access to people who we hadn't talked to before – [such as] parents and students we considered harder to reach. They weren't hard to reach. We just didn't know that it was our deficit, not their deficit."

# Successes & Learnings

## Value of Inclusive Design

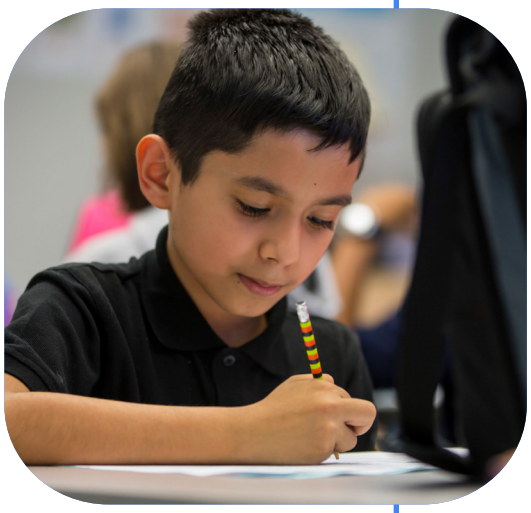
Through her experience in the Google GSV Fellowship, Dr. Zachery-Ross embraced an inclusive design process that yielded valuable successes and insights. Dr. Zachery-Ross tapped into the district's deeply collaborative, risk-positive culture. "People are open to sharing; if we pose the questions, people will give us the feedback," she noted.

From the start, Dr. Zachery-Ross sought input from her cabinet and other key stakeholders, including an often-overlooked group: school secretaries. As Dr. Zachery-Ross sought to increase access to resources and district information, she recognized the outsized influence that school secretaries play as critical, consistent touchpoints for families. Given that the secretaries field questions and direct families to resources, they would often take a step in determining what information and resources to point families and students to within the app.

When Dr. Zachery-Ross attended the ASU-GSV Summit as part of the Fellowship, she brought a cross-functional team of six, including school principals who also engage consistently with parents. This core group provided critical feedback, sparking ideas around gamification and positive encouragement elements for the app. Dr. Zachery-Ross recognized opportunities to "galvanize [collaboration] more on a larger scale" by elevating stakeholder voices, harnessing their "funds of knowledge and strengths" and increasing transparency.

## Access to Experts and Resources

Significant obstacles arose over the course of the year as Dr. Zachery-Ross's original ambitions came up against constraints. Fundamental questions like, "How much will this cost?" and, "What's the roadmap to make this a reality?" loomed large. As Dr. Zachery-Ross shared, "There wasn't […] a clear roadmap, exactly, for a person like me who's not a technologist to develop an app. I'm an educator."



Determining how to safely and responsibly implement AI tools like chatbots was also an ever-present consideration. Dr. Zachery-Ross was connected through the Fellowship to experts who could provide guidance, such as The Learning Accelerator's (TLA) Board Chair and Techademics founder and CEO, Al Motley. "He started getting me into that inquiry-based thinking, so I could shift my thinking," Dr. Zachery-Ross recalled. In connecting with other individuals through the Fellowship and receiving curated resources on AI from TLA, Dr. Zachery-Ross was able to not only identify the 'most viable product' to pilot her idea, but also to spread AI literacy more broadly throughout her district in hopes of empowering others to solve other challenges. Doing so has led Dr. Zachery-Ross to present her work at high-profile conferences such as ASU-GSV Summit and AERA.

## Reflections on Leadership

On a personal level, Dr. Zachery-Ross's experience in the Fellowship supported her continued development, including around leading with humility and curiosity. In facing the challenges of developing her project, she realized her self-sufficient approach as a veteran leader could be counterproductive. "For me, to even ask for help, I realized, was a big step," she shared. The experience showed Dr. Zachery-Ross how "sometimes we have so many resources around us – and we don't leverage them," and it challenged her mindset as an experienced leader. Above all, Dr. Zachery-Ross adopted a learner's mindset throughout her time in the Fellowship. As she shared, "It was just a learning opportunity. It allowed me to [not] have to put up a defense. I could just be learning, connecting, and exploring."


# What's Next

Looking ahead, Dr. Zachery-Ross is eager to synthesize and catalyze all the emergent learnings and insights from her Transformational Opportunity to empower self-directed learning across Ypsilanti Community Schools. Leveraging learnings from the initial pilot and leaning into the inclusive design process over the summer, Dr. Zachery-Ross shared, "We are now setting up those next-step meetings to really say, 'Okay, where do you guys want to go?'"

One of her core priorities is continuing to seek **input and buy-in from key stakeholders**, especially students themselves. "I see students being deeply involved. We need to be asking, 'What do they think?'" Having witnessed the value of an inclusive design process, she plans to double-down on capturing student voices to shape the future of the AI-enabled self-directed learning initiative, particularly through her student advisory council.

The next phases will involve narrowing the focus to specific, high-impact elements, based on the feedback gathered over the past year. Components such as gamification, principal voice messages, or an early warning triage system are likely front-runners for the next iteration.

While the end product and timeline may look different than originally conceived, a driving theme for Dr. Zachery-Ross is maintaining an **agile, curious approach while centering student needs**. "[We need to] go slow to go fast – just to make sure we get those voices and that we are clear about what we want this app to do." With strong community engagement and a student-centered vision, Ypsilanti Community Schools is well positioned to pioneer new forms of AI-enabled self-directed learning under Dr. Zachery-Ross.

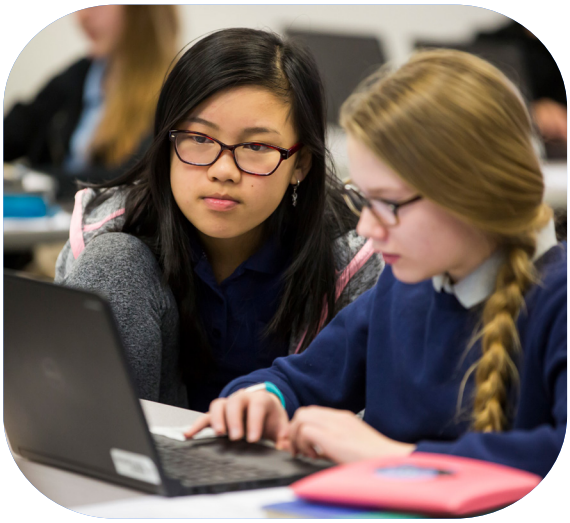
# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders looking to implement innovative assessment systems can apply learnings from McCormick's experience:

## Reflect

Consider the following questions as you approach transformation in your context:

- How can you create more opportunities for meaningful teacher and student input in your technology initiatives?
- What emerging technologies could enhance your system's current assessment practices?
- How can you foster a culture of continuous improvement, vulnerability, and innovation in your organization?



## Explore

Dive into strategies for inclusive design for transformative system-wide change, as well as teacher engagement in technology implementation. Consider how to balance innovation with fiscal responsibility, especially in light of changing funding landscapes, and ensure that investments align with school and system goals.

Investigate the potential of AI and large language models to enhance assessment, data analysis, and data-driven instruction in your context. How might these tools support more efficient and effective instructional practices?

Next Theme →

# Theme 05:

## Prioritizing Equity and Inclusion

As a tool for good, AI can increase access for traditionally marginalized communities - both for students to access learning and families to access system decision-making; including diverse voices in the creation and regulation of AI is critical to making that possible.

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Naomi Norman

## Laying the Groundwork: Growing a Cultural Foundation for Technological Change

> “It became more of a leadership journey. Not just [about] collecting or hearing voices – but how do you listen to the voices? And who is hearing them, and who is doing what with those voices?”

**Naomi Norman**
Superintendent,
Washtenaw Intermediate School District

# Key Takeaways

1. **Prioritize Cultural Change Before Technological Solutions:** When aiming to enhance inclusive decision-making, focus first on assessing and developing an organizational culture that values diverse perspectives. Ensure leadership practices and norms support authentic engagement before implementing new tools or platforms.

2. **Creatively Leverage Existing Resources:** While working toward ideal solutions, innovatively use available tools and processes to foster inclusive practices. Adapt current platforms or methods to support diverse stakeholder engagement and gather meaningful input.

3. **Embrace Adaptive Leadership in Change Processes:** Recognize that complex challenges often require shifts in approach. Be open to evolving initial plans based on new insights, focusing on the underlying issues – rather than just technical solutions. Continuous learning and flexibility are crucial for meaningful organizational change.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Washtenaw Intermediate School District |
| **Location** | Ann Arbor, MI |
| **Number of Schools** | 121 |
| **Number of Students** | 43,352 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 14.4% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 35% |
| **Students Learning English** | 8% |

# The Challenge

For Naomi Norman, Superintendent of Washtenaw Intermediate School District in Michigan, the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship offered an opportunity to explore how technology could support more inclusive decision-making processes across her district. Norman recognized that while her district had strong in-person facilitation practices, there was an opportunity to develop tools to effectively engage stakeholders in online or hybrid spaces.

"We are constantly asking ourselves how we have lifted [the voices] or engaged the people who are impacted by our decisions or by policies in the actual decision-making or policy-making process," Norman explains. "But that same creativity in that interaction between people isn't quite as available in the tools that we use online or in hybrid spaces."

Norman saw this challenge was fundamentally tied to issues of equity and inclusion and believed that to create a truly inclusive education system, leaders must authentically incorporate the voices of those closest to the students – especially those who have historically been positioned furthest from opportunity or excluded from decision-making processes.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Using technology for radical inclusion in system decision-making**

The district faces a critical opportunity to enhance its decision-making processes by centering the voices of those most impacted. While traditional engagement methods have proven effective, there is a clear need to expand participation through innovative digital platforms. By creating accessible channels for diverse stakeholders to contribute their perspectives, the district can foster a more inclusive and equitable decision-making environment.

For her Transformational Opportunity (TO), Norman initially envisioned developing a technological tool that could replicate the inclusive facilitation practices she valued within in-person settings. She aimed to create a platform that would allow for more effective engagement and deliberate voice-lifting in virtual environments, ensuring that all stakeholders – particularly those often overlooked – could meaningfully participate in decision-making.

However, as Norman engaged more deeply with the Fellowship – including collaborating with peers, conducting research, and working closely with her executive coach – her approach evolved. Norman realized that the challenge was not just about creating a new tool, but about fundamentally changing the leadership culture and practices within her district; ultimately, the problem was an adaptive one rather than a technical one.

"It became more of a leadership journey," Norman reflected. "Not just [about] collecting or hearing voices – but how do you listen to the voices? And who is hearing them, and who is doing what with those voices?"

This shift in perspective led Norman to focus on developing her leadership team's capacity to truly hear, value, and act upon diverse perspectives. She began to explore how to create an organizational culture that supports authentic voice and engagement, particularly for staff members of color who often face repercussions for speaking their minds. This involved piloting the use of existing digital tools such as Thought Exchange, which Norman used to gather input from various stakeholders including union leaders, district leaders, and families.

While still interested in technological solutions, Norman recognized that without the right cultural foundation, even the best tool would be ineffective. She pivoted to focus on building the right leadership practices and organizational norms that would lead to more inclusive tools and processes.

# Successes & Learnings

Throughout her Fellowship experience, Norman made significant strides in fostering a more inclusive leadership culture within her district. Her experience revealed several key themes:

## The Power of Inclusive Design

Norman's approach to developing the district's new mission statement and values demonstrated the effectiveness of inclusive design processes. By engaging diverse stakeholders – especially those from communities traditionally positioned furthest from inclusion and opportunity – through creative exercises, like one designed to capture participants' visions and dreams for the district – and "dream" activity, she was able to capture a wide range of perspectives and aspirations for the education system. This process not only resulted in a more representative set of organizational values – it also built buy-in and engagement across the wider community.

## Culture as the Foundation for Inclusion

While technology remained a focus, Norman's journey highlighted the critical importance of a solid organizational culture in fostering true inclusion. She learned that without the right cultural foundation, even the best technological tools would be ineffective. This realization led to a deeper focus on developing leadership practices that promoted humility, curiosity, and the ability to hear and act upon diverse perspectives.

## Creative Use of Existing Tools

In the absence of her ideal technological solution, Norman discovered innovative ways to leverage available tools to support inclusive practices. Her use of Thought Exchange to gather input from both union leaders and supervisors on workplace culture issues demonstrated how existing platforms can be adapted and used to foster dialogue and find common ground among diverse groups.

# What's Next

Looking ahead, Norman plans to continue her work on fostering an inclusive leadership culture within the district. A key focus will be a year-long process with her leadership team, using design thinking approaches to further develop an inclusive culture and identify concrete, measurable actions leaders can take to support this culture. This process will include implementing a new, "radical" culture survey to gather data on whether staff feel their voices are heard and where issues of exclusion persist. Norman aims to move beyond awareness to concrete actions and measurable outcomes, developing accountability measures with her team to ensure progression toward a more inclusive culture.

While prioritizing cultural change, Norman remains committed to eventually developing a technological tool that can support inclusive decision-making practices. She plans to remain open to opportunities and partnerships that could bring this vision to life, recognizing that as the district's culture evolves, the need for such a tool will become more apparent and its potential impact may become more significant. Additionally, she is considering creating a youth council to ensure direct youth voices in district-level decision-making, further expanding the reach of her inclusive approach.

# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders looking to foster more inclusive decision-making practices can apply learnings from Norman's experience in their own contexts:

## Reflect

To begin, leaders tackling gnarly challenges or exploring innovative new ideas should consider the following reflection questions:

- Who is typically included in your decision-making processes? Who is left out?
- How does your current leadership culture support or hinder authentic voice and engagement from all stakeholders?
- What existing tools or processes could you leverage to support more inclusive practices in your context?

## Explore

Dive into The Learning Accelerator (TLA)'s Real-Time Redesign toolkit to learn about how to conduct a step-by-step, inclusive design process to solve problems in your school or system. This resource prioritizes inclusivity by starting with bringing together a diverse design team, guides participants in conducting empathy interviews, and ultimately aims to pilot a potential solution.

Scan the AI Resource Share that Norman and her peers in the Google GSV Fellowship leveraged in their journey. Developed by TLA, this hub is organized by theme and includes descriptions of all resources to help leaders discover the most relevant sources to use in supporting their work.

Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Dr. Rahesha Amon

## Voices at the Table: Championing Equity in the AI Revolution

> “I had to have an ability to just kind of start a thought and allow it to go in the direction it needs to go, and even when I hit obstacles, I didn’t give up. I needed to be able to pivot but not stop.”

**Dr. Rahesha Amon**
CEO at City Teaching Alliance;
Former Senior Executive Director of School Support Operations,
New York City Public Schools

# Key Takeaways

1. **Critically Examine AI Tools and Partnerships:** Look beyond surface-level claims of equity and inclusion to evaluate the diverse representation and values embedded in AI technologies and edtech companies. Examine the board members, content creators, and decision-makers behind these tools to ensure true alignment with students' needs.

2. **Foster a Culture of Innovation and Ethical AI Use:** Create spaces for educators to explore AI tools responsibly, focusing on enrichment rather than deficit-based approaches. Empower teachers and students to leverage AI as a tool for learning while maintaining critical thinking skills.

3. **Lead Courageously in Pursuit of Systemic Change:** Be willing to challenge the status quo and have difficult conversations about equity and inclusion. Recognize that meaningful transformation often requires going against the majority and persisting through obstacles.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | New York City Public Schools |
| **Location** | New York, NY |
| **Number of Schools** | 1,870 |
| **Number of Students** | 1,047,895 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 21% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 73% |
| **Students Learning English** | 14% |

# The Challenge

*During the Fellowship, Dr. Rahesha Amon was the acting Senior Executive Director of School Support Operations at New York City Public Schools. She recently became the CEO of City Teaching Alliance.*

For Dr. Rahesha Amon, then Senior Executive Director of School Support Operations at New York City Public Schools, attending the ASU+GSV Summit in early 2023 was an eye-opening experience. Dr. Amon observed a stark contrast between the rapid advancements in AI technology and its lagging application in education, particularly in her own system. This disparity highlighted a pressing challenge that sparked her interest in joining the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship: how to ensure that AI technologies could be leveraged to benefit all students, especially those from marginalized communities, without perpetuating existing inequities.

"We're on the precipice of something that is going to transform and change and potentially help [us] all," Dr. Amon reflected. "But all are not a part of the conversation. More importantly, the algorithms behind the development of many of these tools [don't reflect diverse perspectives]."

As a leader in the nation's largest school system, Dr. Amon recognized the potential for AI to revolutionize education. However, she was acutely aware of the risks of developing and implementing emergent technology without careful consideration and a focus on equity and inclusion. In joining the Fellowship, Dr. Amon's focus was twofold: how to responsibly integrate AI into NYC schools while also influencing the broader edtech industry to create more equitable AI tools and applications.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Preventing AI from perpetuating and causing harm for marginalized students and communities**
Who gets to sit at the table as AI decisions are made? Is this moment going to harm or hurt? And who is going to be harmed? How could I potentially become one of the voices in the room that ensures that the model doesn't do harm, but instead does good - good for all? As cliche as it sounds, we need to do good for all.

Dr. Amon's Transformational Opportunity evolved into a mission to **ensure that AI technology promotes equitable learning for all students – rather than perpetuating harm – particularly for students and families positioned furthest from opportunity and affected by systemic barriers.** She approached this challenge through multiple avenues, recognizing that meaningful change would require action on both local and industry-wide levels.

Within New York Public Schools, Dr. Amon became a vocal advocate for responsible AI use in schools. When city schools initially banned AI tools like ChatGPT, she pushed back. Dr. Amon recognized that this approach could further disadvantage students who could benefit from exposure to these technologies, particularly after seeing the ways in which schools with significant resources leaned into teaching students how to use AI responsibly. She became part of a movement to lift the ban and instead focus on educating educators about safe, ethical AI use. This effort was driven by her research into the benefits of AI for students with disabilities, who often found these tools affirming and supportive of their learning.

Through her experience in the Fellowship, Dr. Amon saw an opportunity to influence the broader edtech landscape and joined an AI-focused startup as a senior advisor. In this role, she noticed that she was often the first person of color in the room, **challenging deficit-based language and pushing for more inclusive approaches to product development**. She used her position to ensure that the algorithms behind these tools were designed to serve and represent diverse student populations.

Dr. Amon also sought to impact policy discussions at the highest levels. She participated in a technology summit sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and the White House, where she was one of only two Black women in attendance. This experience reinforced the **importance of diverse representation in shaping AI policies and applications in education**, motivating her to continue pushing for change.

Throughout her journey, Dr. Amon conducted her own experiments and research to deepen her understanding of AI technologies. She immersed herself in learning about large language models and other AI tools, testing their capabilities and limitations. For Dr. Amon, one notable incident involved asking ChatGPT to generate a logo for "Black boy joy," which resulted in renderings that highlighted ongoing biases in AI systems. These hands-on experiences informed her advocacy and allowed her to speak authoritatively about both the potential and pitfalls of AI in education.

# Successes & Learnings

Dr. Amon's work yielded several important successes and learnings:

## Fostering a Culture of Responsible AI Use

One of Dr. Amon's proudest achievements was contributing to the movement that ultimately lifted the ban on AI tools in NYC schools. This shift allowed the district to move from a stance of fear to one of cautious exploration and learning. "I'm most proud that we are a part of the ballroom dance now, so to speak, and not just watching as spectators – we are definitely on the dance floor," Dr. Amon reflected. This change opened up conversations about how AI could be used to support both students and educators, particularly benefiting students who often remain "voiceless" in the development process of new innovations.

## Bringing a Critical Lens to Emerging Technology

Through her experiences with edtech companies and in high-level policy discussions, Dr. Amon developed a keen eye for evaluating AI tools and partnerships from an equity perspective. She began asking tough questions about the diversity of the people and the algorithms behind these technologies. This critical approach helped her advocate for solutions that truly served all students in an asset-based way, rather than perpetuating deficit-based models. Dr. Amon shared, "Who we partner with matters. Are they really the best solutions for our children, or are they causing unintended harm because they [...] are not diverse?"

## Embracing Discomfort and Persistence

In her time in the Fellowship, Dr. Amon learned to be comfortable with not always having a clear endpoint or tangible outcome, recognizing that her work often opened up more questions and conversations. This process of inquiry and critical evaluation, she realized, was a valuable endeavor in itself. "I had to have an ability to just kind of start a thought and allow it to go in the direction it needs to go, and even when I hit obstacles, I didn't give up. I needed to be able to pivot but not stop," Dr. Amon explained, highlighting the importance of persistence in tackling complex – and sometimes ambiguous – systemic issues.

# What's Next

While Dr. Amon has since transitioned from her role at New York PS, the impact of her work continues. Two of her colleagues from New York PS are participating in the 2024-25 cohort of the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship, ensuring that the focus on equity in AI implementation will persist within the district. Dr. Amon anticipates that the "do no harm" approach she emphasized will continue to influence decision-making around AI and edtech partnerships across the system.

In her new role as CEO of the City Teaching Alliance, a national education nonprofit focused on anti-racist, community-driven teacher preparation, Dr. Amon sees an opportunity to expand her influence. "Can you imagine 20-year-olds coming into our space as educators, thinking this way about solutions, about doing no harm," Dr. Amon asks, "entering the classrooms with this knowledge and understanding of how important it is to have divergent thinking?" Dr. Amon is undoubtedly committed to carrying her experience in the Fellowship forward as she builds a future of effective, equity-focused teacher preparation.

# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders looking to integrate AI technologies while prioritizing equity can apply key learnings from Dr. Amon's experience:

## Reflect

To begin with, leaders tackling gnarly challenges or exploring innovative new ideas should consider the following reflection questions:

- How has your district engaged in conversations around diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice? Are these values embedded in your culture and decision-making processes?
- Who are the stakeholders and decision-makers involved in your AI and edtech initiatives? Do they represent diverse perspectives and experiences?
- How can you foster a culture of innovation and ethical AI use that empowers educators and benefits all students?

## Explore

Dive into the resources Dr. Amon compiled to start conversations about AI and equity in education. These materials can help guide discussions and decision-making processes as you consider AI implementation in your context.

Consider conducting a “soil analysis” of your district, as Dr. Amon suggests. Examine the foundational values and practices that will either support or hinder equitable AI integration. Identify areas that need “pruning” or “fertilizing” to create a more just and inclusive environment for innovation. Use The Learning Accelerator (TLA)’s resources to reflect on equity in your pilots, processes, and solutions, and ensure the data you collect on students is done so in pursuit of equity.

Remember Dr. Amon’s advice: “You’ve got to be courageous about this. These conversations are hard... There is no glory and money in revolution, but it is such meaningful work when you are able to change hearts and minds.” By approaching AI integration with a critical eye towards equity and a willingness to engage in difficult conversations, educational leaders can help ensure that these powerful tools benefit all students.

Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Dr. Michael Karner

## Expanding and Strengthening Wraparound Supports for Virtual Learners

> “You always have different levels of supports when you’re in an in-person learning environment, and then we considered if those have been successful there, how could they be successful in a virtual space?”

**Dr. Michael Karner**
Regional Superintendent of Schools,
Lake County Regional Office of Education, Illinois Virtual Schools & Academy

# Key Takeaways

1. **Leverage Existing In-Person Supports to Create Virtual Equivalents:** When developing wraparound services for virtual learners, start by examining successful in-person supports and creatively adapt them to a virtual environment. This approach ensures comprehensive support while addressing the unique challenges of online education.

2. **Implement a Diverse Suite of Digital Tools to Meet Student Needs Holistically:** Utilize a range of digital platforms and applications to address various aspects of student support, including mental health services, crisis intervention, tutoring, social-emotional learning, and social interaction. This multi-faceted approach creates a well-rounded virtual learning experience.

3. **Challenge Perceptions Through Demonstrated Success:** Address skepticism about virtual learning by showcasing concrete data on student success, support utilization, and satisfaction rates. Use these metrics to advocate for the viability and effectiveness of virtual education, positioning it as a valuable option in preparing students for future academic and professional landscapes.

## About the School System

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **District / System** | Lake County Regional Office of Education, Illinois Virtual Schools & Academy | Illinois Virtual Schools & Academy |
| **Location** | Vernon Hills, Illinois | Statewide |
| **Number of Schools** | 222 | 221 Partner Schools |
| **Number of Students** | 120,910 | 3,087 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 14,893 | 490 |
| **Students Enrolled in Gifted & Talented Programs** | 5,546 | 260 |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 42,356 | 240 |
| **Students Learning English** | 17,412 | 56 |

# The Challenge

Dr. Michael Karner had just launched the Illinois Virtual Schools & Academy (IVSA) when he learned about the Google GSV Innovation Fellowship, which presented an exciting opportunity to strengthen and improve the virtual school by working with Google, GSV, and other innovative school system leaders from across the country. In particular, he was eager to focus on improving the way virtual schools provide wraparound supports for students – a key concern given the skepticism surrounding virtual learning's ability to match the comprehensive support systems of in-person schooling.

"Some people who might not agree with virtual learning – it's because of the supports that exist for them," Dr. Karner explained. "We wanted to ensure that a student who was taking one virtual course, multiple [courses], or was fully enrolled as a full-time student in virtual learning basically had some of the same experiences as an in-person student." Dr. Karner was committed to solving this challenge and providing the services and resources his students needed, including mental health services, academic tutoring, and social-emotional learning (SEL) programs.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Increasing access to wraparound services for virtual learners and increasing educational opportunities with virtual learning**

Enhance virtual learning in the state of Illinois through, ensuring that students and schools that utilize the IVSA are provided with all the necessary support and learning to be successful in a virtual learning environment and creating a full-time learning opportunity for students to utilize in lieu of their local school district.

To address the Transformational Opportunity (TO) of providing comprehensive support in a virtual environment, Dr. Karner and his team at IVSA embarked on an ambitious journey to create a suite of wraparound services for their students. Their goal was to ensure that virtual learners – no matter their level of enrollment in a virtual setting – would have access to the same quality of support as students in traditional brick-and-mortar schools.

Dr. Karner's approach was both innovative and pragmatic. "We looked at [...] some of the things that you do in person," he explained. "You always have different levels of supports when you're in an in-person learning environment, and then we considered if those have been successful there, how could they be successful in a virtual space?"

This philosophy led to the development and implementation of several key initiatives:

1. **Mental Health Services:** IVSA partnered with ReferralGPS, a care navigation service, allowing staff to submit referrals for students needing mental health support. The service would then research providers and offer students a range of appointment options. "Just from September 2023 alone, overall 14,000 people have used it, 320 treatment sessions have been covered for students with insurance and income challenges, and a network of 1,200 providers is included in the service," Dr. Karner noted, highlighting the program's impact.
2. **Crisis Support:** Recognizing their students were spread across the state, IVSA adopted the HelpMe app. This tool provides students with location-based resources for housing, food assistance, and other essential services determined from their zip code.
3. **Enhanced Virtual Tutoring:** The school transitioned from a primarily chat-based tutoring platform to Varsity Tutors, which offers both a chat functionality and synchronous video support. This change was made in response to student demand for more face-to-face interaction to better enhance their learning.
4. **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Check-Ins:** IVSA implemented Sown to Grow, a platform facilitating weekly emotional well-being check-ins for students. This tool not only helps identify concerns but also enables staff to conduct more targeted follow-ups.
5. **Virtual Clubs:** To foster a sense of community and social interaction, the school launched virtual clubs and spaces, including an e-gaming club, providing students with opportunities to connect outside of academic settings.

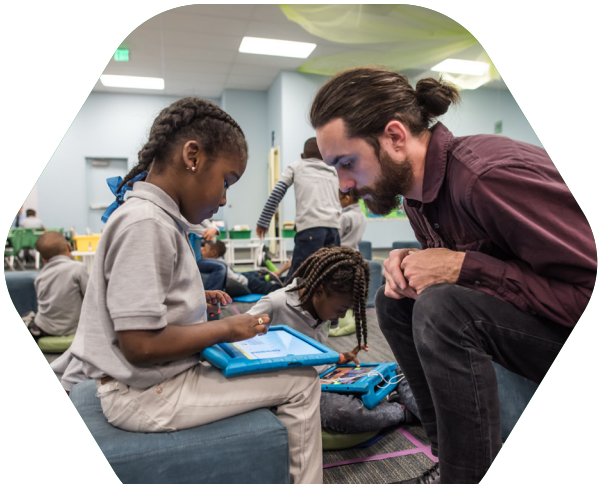
Through these initiatives, Dr. Karner and his team at IVSA have created a comprehensive support system that addresses the diverse and holistic needs of virtual learners. This approach not only enhances the academic experience but also contributes to students' overall well-being and sense of belonging within the school community.

# Successes & Learnings

## Strong Usage of Supports to Create Belonging and Academic Success

The impact of these initiatives has been significant. The school has seen strong data on the usage of these supports and celebrated a notable 90% pass rate among students. The 14,000 people who have accessed the Care Navigation Service highlights the demand and importance of these resources. Additionally, student and family survey results have shown high satisfaction rates, further validating the school's efforts.

Dr. Karner reflected on these successes, noting that while some students opt for virtual schooling as a preference, others join after facing challenges in traditional settings. The comprehensive support systems have helped create a sense of community and stability for these students – something that's crucial for their overall well-being and academic success.



## Changing Perspectives on Virtual Learning

A significant part of Dr. Karner's mission has been to challenge and change perceptions about virtual learning. "I think it's trying to get people to understand there are things that can be done virtually whether people think so or not. It's going to always vary on what's best for the student," Dr. Karner asserted. He emphasized that virtual education can be a viable option for students, offering a range of courses that may not be available in their local schools, such as advanced placement, foreign language, or specialized pathway classes. He advocates for a more flexible

approach to scheduling and instruction, suggesting that schools explore hybrid models that combine synchronous and asynchronous learning. Additionally, he recommends varying class schedules rather than adhering to the same daily length and time for each class.

Dr. Karner envisions a future where every high school student takes at least one virtual course, preparing them for a world where online learning and remote work have become increasingly prevalent. He believes that exposure to virtual learning environments can help students develop the skills necessary for success in higher education and the workforce.

Dr. Karner also works to show that his school is not going to replace teachers – by demonstrating that teachers are core to their model. He explains how educators are there to facilitate synchronous classes, respond to student inquiries, and provide meaningful feedback on student progress. Teachers at the school also form strong bonds with students through built-in check-in times, prompting educators to better understand their students, their progress, and their unique experiences as learners.

# What's Next

Looking ahead, Dr. Karner is focused on **refining the virtual learning experience**, particularly for students who take only one course in this setting. He aims to improve onboarding processes to ensure students are set up for success by learning how to navigate the school's platforms and what supports are available to them, and he is looking to strengthen partnerships with local districts. Given that many students enrolled in the supplemental program take the virtual classes at their local district – often after school or in a study hall period – he is keen on exploring ways to collaborate more effectively with districts and enhance the overall experience.

Dr. Karner is also exploring the expansion of grade levels in their virtual offerings, with plans to extend virtual schooling to K-5 students. This expansion is supported by the success of a summer program that served nearly 500 students, demonstrating both the potential and demand for virtual education at younger ages.

Additionally, the virtual school received a grant in partnership with the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana to implement an innovative pilot program. This program provides a stipend to a staff member (e.g., teacher, paraprofessional) who will work with students attending the virtual school to help strengthen learner experiences. This pilot aims to provide in-person and virtual support for hybrid students, addressing any potential issues or challenges these students may encounter. The goal is to include approximately 20 districts in the pilot, with a particular focus on districts with limited course catalogs.

# Taking It Forward

Virtual schools, as well as more traditional schools that offer virtual learning options, can learn from Dr. Karner's experience in implementing wraparound supports.

## Reflect

To start, consider the following reflection questions:

- What tools and resources does your district have that can be used with virtual students?
- What are services virtual students currently do not have access to or have a less-than-satisfactory experience with?
- How do your students, teachers, staff members, families, and other stakeholders view virtual learning? How can leaders show the range of different ways virtual learning can be implemented?

# Explore

The Learning Accelerator (TLA) worked and learned alongside several established virtual and hybrid learning models following the COVID-19 pandemic. Explore school profiles that document strategies from these innovative schools. Also, dig deeper with TLA's problem of practice series on strategies for virtual, remote, and hybrid learning, as well as case studies on key topics in virtual learning, such as belonging and effective student engagement.

Scan the AI Resource Share that Dr. Karner and his peers in the Google GSV Fellowship leveraged in their journey. Developed by TLA, this hub is organized by theme and includes descriptions of all resources to help leaders discover the most relevant sources to use in supporting their work.

Next Theme →

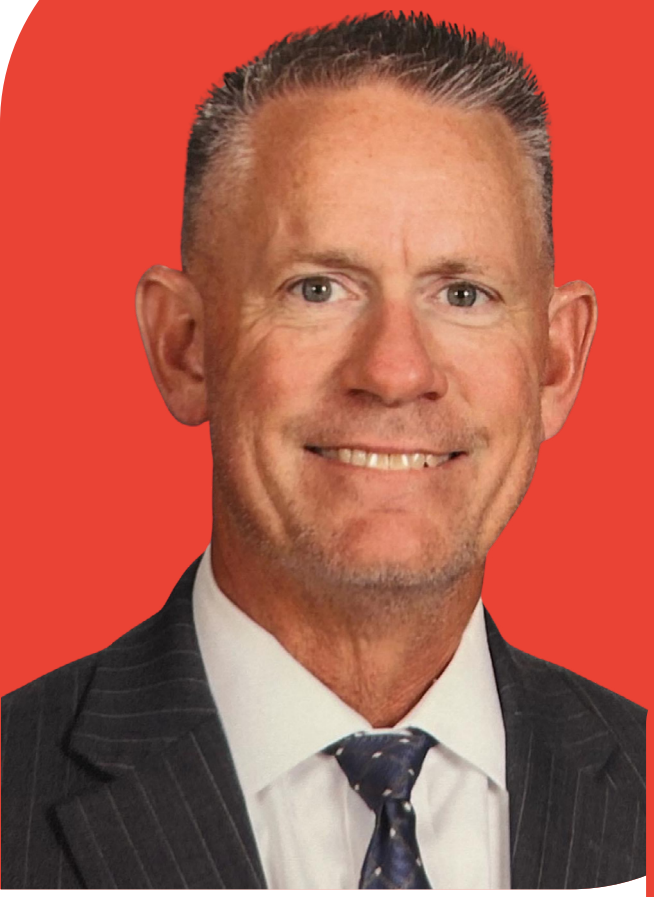
# Theme 06:

# Preparing for the Future

As advancements in AI have rapidly accelerated, so too is the need to adapt for an uncertain future, to prepare students for the future of work and teachers for the classrooms of the future.

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Dr. Kyle Barrentine



## Foundations for the Future: Early Career Discovery in Rural Indiana

> “As we put together our strategic plan here for Shenandoah School Corporation, one of our objectives was to create a K-8 career exploration framework where we could be intentional about our students getting to know themselves, what they like, what they do well, and then connect those to something that will allow them to make money and have a career after high school.”

**Dr. Kyle Barrentine**
Superintendent,
Shenandoah School Corporation

# Key Takeaways

1. **Integrate New Initiatives Into Existing Structures:** Avoid initiative fatigue by building upon current activities and aligning new programs with the district's overall strategic plan. This approach ensures buy-in from educators and staff while maximizing the impact of existing resources and experiences.

2. **Leverage Collaborative Networks:** Tap into the expertise of peers and colleagues, both within and outside your district, to gain insights, avoid pitfalls, and refine your approach. Collaboration can provide valuable perspectives and accelerate the development of innovative programs.

3. **Balance Ambition With Realistic Implementation:** When developing transformative programs, set ambitious goals but remain flexible in your timeline and approach. Be prepared to adjust your plans based on feedback and unforeseen challenges, prioritizing a successful and sustainable rollout over rapid implementation.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Shenandoah School Corporation |
| **Location** | Middletown, IN |
| **Number of Schools** | 3 |
| **Number of Students** | 1,332 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 17% |
| **Students Enrolled In Gifted & Talented Programs** | 9% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 45% |
| **Students Learning English** | 0.1% |

# The Challenge

For Dr. Kyle Barrentine, Superintendent of Shenandoah School Corporation in Indiana, the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship provided a unique opportunity to advance a pressing goal: reimagining career exploration for students from kindergarten through eighth grade. Indiana's statewide push toward career exploration and rethinking high school inspired Dr. Barrentine to strengthen his district's approach.

While only one career exploration built into students' K-8 experience in Shenandoah, Dr. Barrentine wondered about how to better prepare students for potential future career pathways. "Some kids, because of their opportunities in life, have more information… so it really feels like this is the right thing to do by kids – to try to help them understand themselves and those career opportunities that kind of revolve around what their interests and strengths are," Dr. Barrentine explained.

In alignment with their strategic plan, Shenandoah set an objective to create a K-8 career exploration framework that would allow students to intentionally explore their interests, strengths, and career options from an early age. Dr. Barrentine observed, "This isn't just about meeting state requirements – it's about providing our students with meaningful insights that guide their future educational and career choices."

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Developing a career exploration framework to guide post-secondary pathways**
Create a career exploration framework for K-8 students to get to know themselves, to get to know their strengths and their limitations, and also to understand the types of careers and opportunities that exist for students.

Dr. Barrentine's Transformational Opportunity (TO) was inspired by a visit to Cajon Valley Union School District during the ASU+GSV Summit in 2022. He observed their World of Work program and saw potential for a similar approach in his own district. As Dr. Barrentine explained, "Our students in eighth grade would generally take a 'Preparing for College and Careers' class, and that was really their only intentional experience with, 'Hey, what do I like? What am I good at? And then what careers are connected to that?'"

Recognizing the limitations of this single-course approach, Dr. Barrentine set out to create a more comprehensive framework. "As we put together our strategic plan here for Shenandoah School Corporation," Dr. Barrentine explained, "one of our objectives was to **create a K-8 career exploration framework** where we could be intentional about our students getting to know themselves, what they like, what they do well, and then connect those to something that will allow them to make money and have a career after high school."

The framework Dr. Barrentine and his steering committee are developing is ambitious in scope. The grid would break down by grade-level John Holland's six career personality types known as RIASEC:

- R: Realistic – "Doers"
- I: Investigative – "Thinkers"
- A: Artistic – "Creators"
- S: Social – "Helpers"
- E: Enterprising – "Persuaders"
- C: Conventional – "Organizers"

"We want to expose our students to six careers, one career each representing one letter of the RIASEC model," Dr. Barrentine detailed. This systematic approach aims to provide students with a wealth of career knowledge by the time they reach high school. "By the time our students get to the end of eighth grade, they should have been exposed to 54 different careers," he shared.

A key aspect of this framework involves **making existing activities more intentional**. For example, turning the long-running fourth-grade field trip to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway into a structured career exploration opportunity.

As the project evolved, Dr. Barrentine realized its true transformational potential. The framework not only involved career exposure but also required developing extensive community partnerships and creating a system to document students' experiences and reflections over time.

# Successes & Learnings

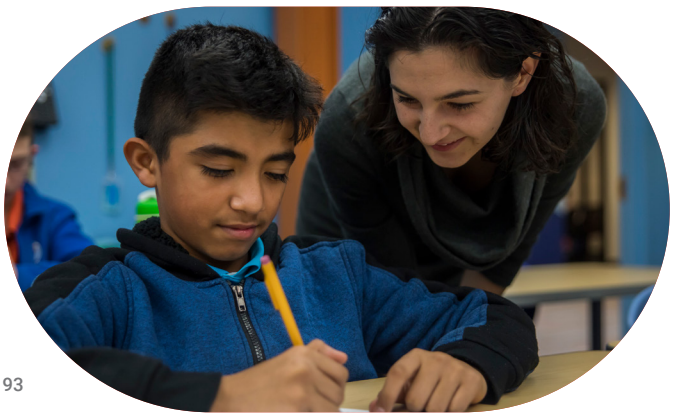
## Avoid Initiative Fatigue by Integrating Work Into Existing Structures

Dr. Barrentine recognized the importance of avoiding fatigue and frustration around new initiatives by building on existing activities and connecting new work to the district's strategic plan. "Number one, making sure that our career exploration framework fits with our strategic plan – which it does, and number two, if we can blend it in with things that we're already doing, and if it doesn't feel like something that's brand new is going to be a real big key for us," he explained. This approach helps ensure buy-in from educators and staff who might otherwise feel overwhelmed by new goals and initiatives.

The steering team began work on filling in the career pathways grid, and their goal is to complete it by the end of 2024. Taking stock of their current systems and processes, the team conducted an audit of where career exploration was already happening in the district and where there were natural opportunities to incorporate more or new career exploration. The career exploration initiative also dovetailed with their work to create a portrait of a graduate, which emphasized a holistic approach to student development.

## Leveraging Collaborative Networks

Dr. Barrentine found immense value in collaborating ith other superintendents and educational leaders. "My greatest resources have been my superintendent colleagues," he shared, referring especially to his peers in the Fellowship. By tapping into the expertise of those who have implemented similar programs, Dr. Barrentine gained insights and avoided potential pitfalls by learning from their work. This collaborative approach extends to his internal district team as well, with a small but dedicated group working together to develop the framework.



# What's Next

Dr. Barrentine plans to finalize the career pathways grid by the end of 2024. The steering team will then seek feedback from teachers and other stakeholders, aiming to implement the career exploration framework with students in the 2025-26 school year. Each of the careers introduced by the framework also requires a community partner that would allow students to learn about future job opportunities from local professionals. **The team will continue developing partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and experts** to have community partners identified by the end of 2024.

Additionally, they are **exploring ways to document student learning and reflections**, providing a comprehensive record that students can reference throughout their educational journey. "We need a way to house all of this information for our students because [they] aren't going to remember necessarily how they felt about a particular career exploration field trip they took in fourth grade when they become a sixth grader or seventh grader," Dr. Barrentine explained. "We want them to have a way to look back and say, 'Oh, yeah, in fourth grade, we went to the Indianapolis 500 and we explored all these different careers connected to the race."

Dr. Barrentine is excited about doing this work with his staff and community. He reflected on the work he did through the Fellowship and emphasized, "I learned that my district is in really good shape from the standpoint of the leadership and our teachers who are leading our kids every day that they're there. They're good people who want to do right by kids."

# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders looking to implement deeper career exploration into their schools can apply learnings from Dr. Barrentine's experience in their contexts.

## Reflect

For other educational leaders considering similar initiatives, consider the following questions:

- What career exploration opportunities already exist in your system?
- What makes your community unique, in terms of local industries and potential community partners? How might you partner with them to expose students to careers?
- Are transformational opportunities embedded into your school system's strategic plan? If not, how can you find opportunities to tie your work to the strategic plan?
- Which school systems locally, regionally, and elsewhere are doing strong work in the areas you are interested in pursuing, and how can you learn from them?

# Explore

Check out Google for Education's report on The Future of the Classroom which includes a focus on Life Skills and Workforce Preparation.

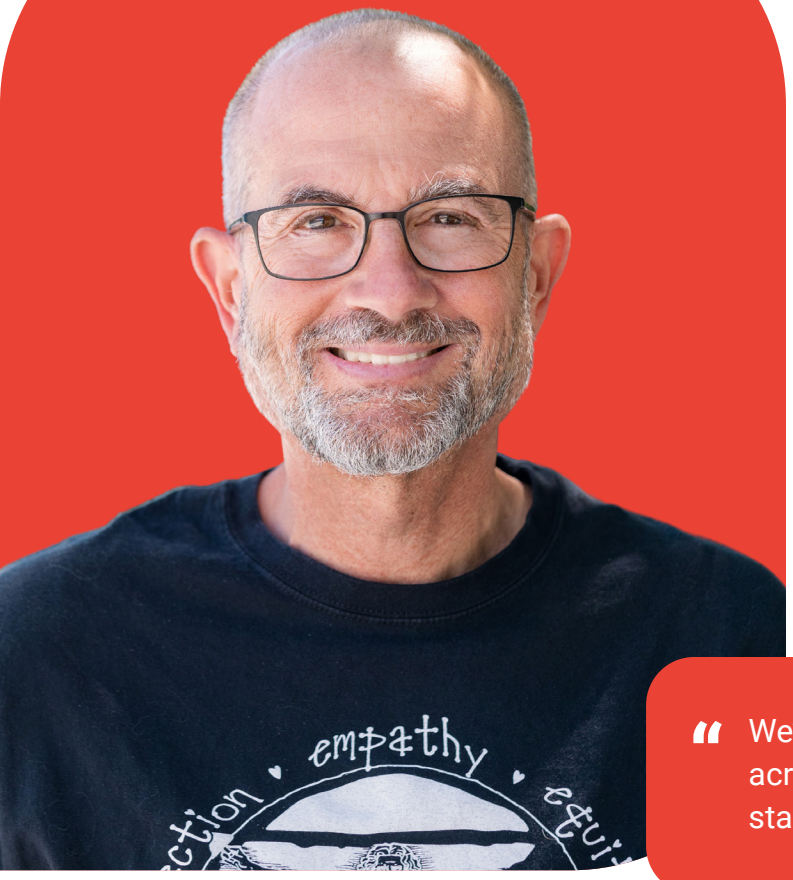
Dive into TLA's Real-Time Redesign toolkit to learn about how to conduct a step-by-step, inclusive design process to solve problems in your school or system. This resource prioritizes inclusivity by starting with bringing together a diverse design team and guides participants to conduct empathy interviews, ultimately to pilot a potential solution.

Scan the AI Resource Share that Dr. Barrentine and his peers in the Google GSV Fellowship leveraged in their journey. Developed by TLA, the hub of resources is organized by theme and includes descriptions of all resources to help leaders discover the most relevant resources to use in supporting their work.

Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Dr. Matthew Wunder




## Blending High School, College, and Career

> “We’ve built different schools, but we’ve never built across high school, college, and career, really starting with the employer.”

**Dr. Matthew Wunder**
CEO, Da Vinci Schools

# Key Takeaways

1. **Reimagine Traditional Pathways:** Educational leaders must rethink established systems to better serve all students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This may involve integrating high school, college, and career training in innovative ways.

2. **Leverage Networks and Expertise:** System leaders can combat isolation by tapping into professional networks, seeking out diverse perspectives, and collaborating with peers facing similar challenges.

3. **Balance Innovation With Structure:** As organizations grow, leaders must find ways to maintain an innovative spirit while developing robust systems and processes to support expansion and sustainability.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | Da Vinci Schools |
| **Location** | El Segundo, Hawthorne, and South Central Los Angeles, CA |
| **Number of Schools** | 6 |
| **Number of Students** | 2,775 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 12% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 44% |
| **Students Learning English** | 4% |

# The Challenge

For Dr. Matthew Wunder, CEO and Superintendent of Da Vinci Schools, the Google GSV Education Innovation Fellowship presented an opportunity to tackle a challenge he and his team had been grappling with for years: how to evolve from the "college for everyone" mindset to instead focusing on ensuring that students are positioned to lead stable, successful lives.

"It was once a much safer bet to say all kids should go to college," Dr. Wunder explained. "Well-intended, perhaps, but when you look at the national college completion rates, when you look at [the fact that] 9% of low-income kids finish a degree in six years, that student debt is on average $37,000 plus – it's a complete [disaster]."

Dr. Wunder recognized that the traditional push toward higher education was insufficient and potentially detrimental for many students, particularly those positioned furthest from opportunity. He saw a need to rethink the entire system, which seemed to primarily benefit adults and privileged students rather than serve all young people in a holistic and equitable way.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**How to rethink the traditional high school model to connect concretely to students' post-secondary futures**

By blending aspects of high school, college, and career training, students can not only graduate with a high school diploma, but also with a college degree and an employable skill set in a sector with upward mobility and middle-wage job opportunities. This approach creates a sustainable model that ensures no cost to students or families, transforming the high school experience.

Dr. Wunder's Transformational Opportunity built on work that began at Da Vinci 15 years ago: LifeLaunch. This ambitious project aimed to seamlessly integrate high school, college, and career training, providing students not only with a high school diploma, but also a college degree and an employable skill set in a sector with upward mobility and middle-wage job opportunities – and all at no cost to students or their families.

"LifeLaunch is essentially rigging several systems that don't work well together," Dr. Wunder explained. His goal was to create a program that supports all students, particularly those from backgrounds that pose significant systemic barriers to their success.

Through his experiences in the Fellowship, Dr. Wunder's vision for LifeLaunch evolved and was refined with deeper clarity. He articulated a crucial distinction between the career exposure that students may now receive, typically in specialized programs in high school, and true career education that can set them up for future success. "Even career technical education in high schools is not really career technical education – it's career exposure with some skills," he noted. "LifeLaunch will include career training as a distinction."

The Fellowship provided Dr. Wunder with a platform to explore new possibilities for LifeLaunch and develop clear and compelling messaging with a call to action. He leveraged the camaraderie and expertise of fellow system leaders, their networks, and his executive coach to get concrete about the project, refine his approach, and develop solutions to anticipated barriers.

# Successes & Learnings

Dr. Wunder's journey through the Fellowship yielded several key successes and learnings:

## Clarity and Momentum

The Fellowship pushed Dr. Wunder to articulate LifeLaunch with greater precision, bringing a complex, at-times muddled idea into sharper focus. This clarity accelerated the project's development and improved its potential for implementation. Additionally, the research he put into this project provided valuable insights about the educational ecosystem and the barriers that students face today, highlighting the importance of robust systems and processes in supporting this expanding, innovative work.

## Sustainable Funding Progress

A significant win for Dr. Wunder and LifeLaunch was securing sustainable funding. “We’re about 90% of the way there,” Dr. Wunder reported. His team strategically used philanthropy to reach sustainability, ensuring the program isn’t dependent on ongoing charitable support in the long term. “The financial model works at full enrollment,” he explained. “We’ve asked philanthropy to support us in the building years, but there’s not an umbilical cord back to funders.”

## Power of Networks

Dr. Wunder gained a deeper appreciation for the value of professional networks in combating the isolation often felt by system leaders. “I can call or text anyone in that [Fellowship] cohort... I’ve got this wild idea, can you help me out?” he shared. This newfound network provided crucial support, diverse perspectives, and collaborative problem-solving opportunities, and it helped him gain insights into the balance needed between innovation and structure in forward-facing K-12 initiatives.

# What’s Next

Looking ahead, Dr. Wunder and his team are preparing for a soft launch of LifeLaunch in August 2024, beginning with an Aviation Pathway. Leveraging Da Vinci’s proximity to Los Angeles International Airport, they will expand existing opportunities for students to earn pilot licenses and train for high-wage, high-growth jobs in the aviation industry. The program will also partner with Rivet Schools to offer teacher education pathways, providing students with opportunities to earn free associate, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees, as well as teaching credentials.

Central to LifeLaunch’s next phase is its advisory team, which Dr. Wunder plans to assemble during the summer. This team will provide expertise across various aspects of the program, from curriculum development to employer

partnerships. "We've built different schools," Dr. Wunder explains, "but we've never built across high school, college, and career, really starting with the employer." This employer-first approach aims to address talent shortages while providing students with clear pathways to meaningful careers.

True to Da Vinci's ethos, Dr. Wunder emphasizes the importance of documenting and sharing their work. "We're not a scale organization. We're a prototype," he explained. "Come steal it and do good – learn from our [successes and failures]." This commitment to open collaboration and learning reflects Dr. Wunder's belief in the power of innovation and shared knowledge to transform education for all students.

# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders inspired by Dr. Wunder's work with LifeLaunch can apply several key lessons to their own contexts:

## Reflect

To begin with, leaders should consider the following reflection questions:

- How can I leverage my professional networks to bring alternative viewpoints to innovative work in my system?
- How am I balancing the need for innovation with the development of robust systems and processes as my organization and/or initiatives grow?
- What are the elements of high school I can reimagine in my system to better equip students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed post-graduation?

## Explore

To further your thinking around integrated career education in K-12, explore The Learning Accelerator (TLA)'s resources on community-based career learning for students, project-based learning to support career exploration, and student internships that can provide students a firsthand look into potential jobs – and the skills they need to succeed in them.

To learn more about reimagining traditional educational pathways, explore the following resources:

Jobs for the Future's "The Big Blur" concept paper challenges policymakers, as well as education and industry leaders, to expand their thinking about the innovation needed to blend K-12, postsecondary education, and career training and preparation.

"Students First: Equity, Access, and Opportunity in Higher Education," a book by Paul LeBlanc, examines the issues affecting students approaching higher education and analyzes reforms to take on systemic inequities, affordability, and accessibility.

Next Profile →

GOOGLE GSV FELLOW CASE STORY

# Jade Grieve

## Accelerating Learning to Create Equitable Access to Technology Careers

> “We see young people not getting equitable access to strong jobs and careers, and we see part of the opportunity [is] in K-12, where a student’s experience can open doors early and give students access to those skills, those networks.”

**Jade Grieve**
Former Chief of Student Pathways, New York City Public Schools

# Key Takeaways

1. **Seek Out Access Gaps:** Leaders should actively work to understand gaps in access, especially with career pathways initiatives, to understand why students are successful and how to ensure programming is equitably accessible.

2. **Build Awareness Before Driving Change:** Leaders should create urgency in their communities around issues to tackle, and data visualization can help them communicate and underscore the importance of action. Successfully communicating your needs and vision can build buy-in for implementing new solutions.

3. **Dream Big, Start Small:** Start with a small group of engaged schools to test solutions, learn quickly, and refine approaches before scaling the work across a large district.

## About the School System

| | |
|---|---|
| **District / System** | New York City Public Schools |
| **Location** | New York, NY |
| **Number of Schools** | 1,870 |
| **Number of Students** | 1,047,895 |
| **Students With Disabilities** | 21% |
| **Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch** | 73% |
| **Students Learning English** | 14% |

# The Challenge

For Jade Grieve, Former Chief of Student Pathways at New York City Public Schools, the Google GSV Innovation Education Fellowship presented an opportunity to address a critical challenge in preparing students for future success: rapidly growing equitable access to high-demand technology early career pathways in K-12 – and the ways in which this initiative could also be a catalyst for improved math proficiency, given the relevance of those skills to the technology field.

The district had launched FutureReadyNYC, a signature career pathways initiative aimed at ensuring that every student graduates with a plan toward a rewarding career and long-term economic security. Grieve recognized that technology career pathways offered particularly significant college and career opportunities for students – but students' math proficiency levels often prevented them from exploring these pathways. "We see young people not getting equitable access to strong jobs and careers, and we see part of the opportunity [is] in K-12, where a student's experience can open doors early and give students access to those skills, those networks," Grieve explained. In joining the Fellowship, she sought to identify solutions to increase access to technology career pathways.

# The Transformational Opportunity

## Transformational Opportunity

**Tech-enabled math acceleration leading to tech career pathways**

Future Ready NYC is a career pathways initiative putting students on a path toward high-wage jobs in high-demand industries in New York City. The technology pathways require extensive math proficiency, creating a barrier to entry. How might technology in K-12 support personalized acceleration in math to give them access to technology pathways?

Grieve's initial concept for her Transformational Opportunity (TO) focused primarily on finding technology-enabled solutions for math acceleration. "Without some early opportunities for acceleration, there is a risk that we are unintentionally limiting equitable access to these experiences in the later grades," Grieve explained. Through conversations with her Fellowship coach and deeper reflection, she realized a crucial first step was missing, however – creating awareness and urgency around the issue.

"Step one is actually some form of data visualization that clarifies the need – and ideally incentivizes engagement on both the educator side and the student side. It should be knowable if these specific opportunities at your school may not be available to a student because of where you are in math and how you can engage in some acceleration opportunities," Grieve shared.

This realization led to a two-stage approach to tackling the issue. First, Grieve developed a concept for ways to present data that clearly shows the connection between current math proficiency and future career opportunities. This improved data visualization aims to create urgency and motivate engagement from both students and educators. Next, Grieve and her team began to evaluate and test technology solutions that could support learning acceleration to help students rapidly improve their math skills, ensuring they're prepared for advanced coursework and career experiences in relevant technology fields.

# Successes & Learnings

## Early Adoption and Piloting

Grieve found early success with rapidly engaging schools to pilot potential solutions. "We had 10 to 15 schools in the technology pathway program that said they wanted to be part of this pilot," Grieve reported. These schools are working with Khan Academy to implement mastery-based learning platforms for math acceleration. The district has also designated an instructional coach to support participating schools and facilitate a broader, integrated community of practice. This structure allows for ongoing learning and critical refinement of the approach.

## Challenges of Scale and Priority

While the pilot's uptake is encouraging, Grieve acknowledged the challenge of scale in a district serving over 500 high schools. "10 to 15 schools is a good number, I think, but how we rapidly scale is also very significant in context," she reflected.

Maintaining focus on this initiative amidst competing priorities is another obstacle. Grieve noted, "Is it the only priority in the office that I lead? No. Is it the only priority number for all of these individual schools or educators? Probably not. But that doesn't mean it's not critical for student success." This reality underscores the need for a structured approach to learning and expansion.

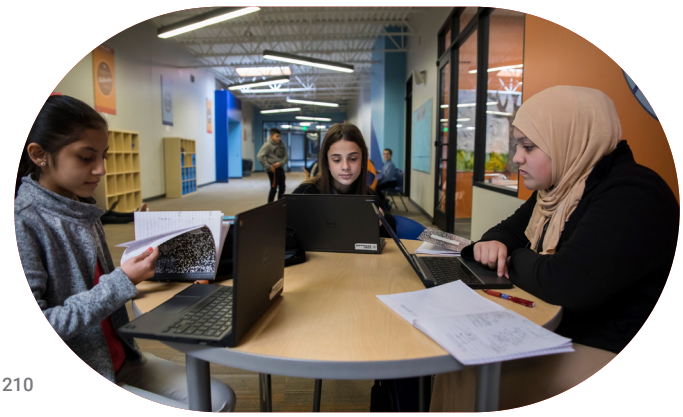
# What's Next

Looking ahead, Grieve is hopeful that the district will continue to expand on the pilots. This process will include capturing learnings from pilot schools and using these insights and more easily accessible data insights to begin planning for how to scale the initiative more broadly across the district. Additionally, Grieve expects that the district will continue to engage with industry partners and curriculum experts to ensure the pathways remain aligned with evolving workforce needs.

Grieve emphasized the urgency of this work: "We need to make sure that we're doing justice for all kids, particularly from lower-income communities that may not have the social capital, networks, or these advanced college and career experiences that will set them up for success in these high-opportunity fields."

# Taking It Forward

School and system leaders looking to improve equitable access to career pathways can apply several key lessons from Grieve's experience:



## Reflect

To begin, leaders working on career pathways initiatives should consider the following reflection questions:

- What career opportunities and pathways are our students able to access and not? Why?
- What is the state of our career pathways programming? Where is it most successful, and where is it falling short?
- How can data be presented to create urgency and motivate action around challenges we seek to tackle?
- In what areas could we pilot solutions to help take on pressing access needs in our system?

## Explore

Explore The Learning Accelerator (TLA)'s EdTech Strategic Planning Guide for resources on how to select, implement, and evaluate edtech tools. This resource includes guidance on how to garner buy-in and effectively communicate with stakeholders.

Dive into TLA's Real-Time Redesign toolkit to learn about how to conduct a step-by-step, inclusive design process to solve problems in your school or system. The guide prioritizes inclusivity by starting with bringing together a diverse design team, guides participants to conduct empathy interviews, and ultimately helps to pilot a potential solution.

Scan the AI Resource Share that Grieve and her peers in the Google GSV Fellowship leveraged in their journey. Developed by TLA, this hub is organized by theme and includes descriptions of all resources to help leaders discover the most relevant sources to use in supporting their work.

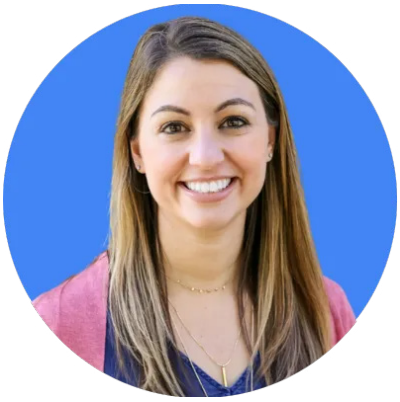
# Meet the Team

> “We are immensely proud to convene this remarkable group of fellows who have the power to change the conversation and bridge the gap between the use of technology and its instructional impact. This exciting partnership between GSV and Google for Education is a testament to our shared commitment to transforming education, empowering leaders to create meaningful change, and shape a future in which ALL people have equal access to the future.”
>
> — Tiffany Taylor, Partner and Co-President of ASU+GSV Summit

**Tiffany Taylor**
Partner, Co-President
ASU+GSV Summit

**Dr. Kristal Ayres**
Global Lead, Educator Leader Programs, Google for Education

**Jennie Magiera**
Global Head of Education Impact, Google for Education



**Julia Hieser**
SVP, Community & Program
ASU+GSV Summit

**Danielle Hercenberg**
Community & Events Planner, ASU+GSV Summit

**Abbey Prior**
VP, Educator Engagement
ASU+GSV Summit

Lookbook produced by **The Learning Accelerator**