LEVERAGING AI IN EDUCATION

YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE RACE, EQUITY, & POLICY SERIES: AI IN EDUCATION FORUM

PREPARED BY

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The **Boston Debate League**, in partnership with **826 Boston** and **WriteBoston**, led its Race, Equity, & Policy (REP) Series: AI in Education Forum at Roxbury Community College on Thursday April 10, 2025. The REP Series engages young people and the broader community in meaningful discussions on timely and relevant issues, fostering critical discourse and healthy debate across the City of Boston.

The focus of this forum centered on how best to leverage Artificial Intelligence (AI) for education and learning. As AI becomes an increasingly accessible and powerful tool with ever-growing potential, its widespread use raises concerns: ***How can educators continue to advance students' skills in writing and critical thinking instead of banning its use, acknowledging that understanding AI is a valuable skill for students and educators both now and in the future?***

Approximately 70 young people and educators came together to reflect on questions developed by a cohort of youth from Boston Debate, 826 Boston, and WriteBoston, and to consider how they currently use AI, the dangers and opportunities associated with AI, and recommendations for how educators and schools can intentionally leverage and embrace the power of AI for learning. Youth from the Boston Student Advisory Council and Teen Empowerment also attended. Participants engaged in small group discussions, then shared takeaways and insights in a larger community conversation on how classrooms could fully embrace AI for learning.

Youth Responses on the Positives and Negatives of AI Use

Responses from participants made it clear that young people are using AI and are keenly aware of how it can be useful to their everyday lives, but also how it can be a detriment, particularly when it comes to education. Students expressed their concerns about the negative impacts of AI, sharing concerns that AI has the potential to **stifle creativity; foster a dependency on its use by individuals; reduce collaboration and human interactions; and harm the environment.**

Despite the potential downsides of increased AI use, young people were also eager to share how they leverage AI in positive ways to assist them in their academic and personal lives – **making flashcards, summarizing complex texts, editing resumes, and creating study guides.**

Youth Recommendations on Leveraging AI to Enhance the Educational Experience

Participants offered thoughtful insights on how students and educators can use AI more intentionally to bolster the classroom and learning experience. In response to a final prompt about maintaining critical thinking skills amid widespread use of AI, participants were vocal about how they would like to see AI used to enhance the educational experience. Their recommendations ranged from classroom integration to environmental concerns to ensuring younger students are educated on how to use AI responsibly.

Below is a summary of youth participants' recommendations for leveraging AI, alongside traditional methods, to enhance education.
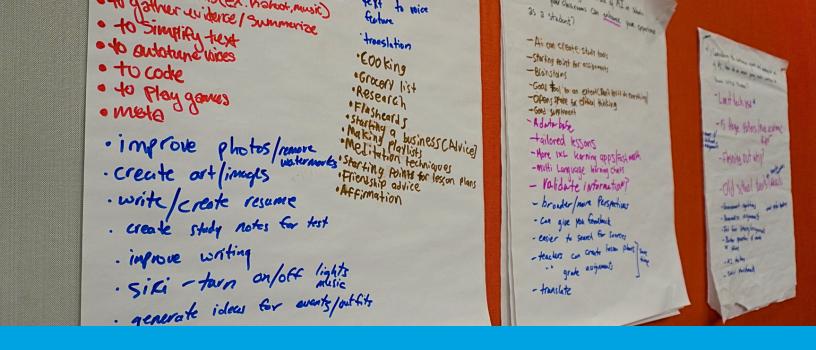
To sustain student's creativity, critical thinking, and authenticity, youth participants recommended:

1. Foster Critical Thinking and Academic Integrity
Ensure that AI enhances learning without replacing students' ability to think independently, creatively, and ethically.

Key Actions:
- Design assignments that require students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information.
- Encourage the use of AI for brainstorming and organizing ideas, while requiring students to develop their own arguments and final submissions.
- Promote reflection on AI-generated content, guiding students to critique and build upon it with personal insight.
- Educate students on academic honesty, emphasizing the importance of original work and the consequences of plagiarism.

2. Advance Equity and Access

Guarantee that all students, regardless of background, have equitable opportunities to benefit from AI technologies.

 Key Actions:
- Provide access to AI tools in shared spaces such as school libraries and computer labs.
- Offer training for both students and educators on effective and responsible   AI use.
- Develop inclusive policies that ensure fair access and prevent the deepening of existing educational disparities.

3. Encourage Human Connection and Collaboration

Balance the use of AI with meaningful human interaction to support social learning and prevent isolation.

 Key Actions:
- Design collaborative projects that require teamwork, dialogue, and face-to-face engagement.
- Encourage students to discuss AI-generated ideas with peers and educators to deepen understanding.
- Create classroom environments that integrate AI as a support tool while prioritizing interpersonal communication and community-building.

4. Promote Ethical and Sustainable AI Use

Guide the responsible integration of AI in education through thoughtful policy and environmental awareness.

Key Actions:
- Establish clear, evolving guidelines on the ethical use of AI in academic settings.
- Limit AI use to supportive roles such as tutoring and idea generation, avoiding overreliance for direct answers.
- Educate students about the environmental impact of AI technologies and promote the use of energy-efficient tools.
- Integrate sustainability and digital responsibility into the curriculum to foster long-term awareness.

*Artificial Intelligence (AI) was used to assist in the process of distilling participants' feedback into policy recommendations on how to leverage and integrate AI into education.

For what purposes have you used AI?

- **Practice for interviews**
- **Studying (making flashcards)**
- **Summarizing complex texts**
- **Research project/homework**
- Social media algorithms
- **Writing emails**

- **Make schedules**
- **Summarize video content by making flashcards and study guides**
- **Transcribe conversations**
- **Polish cover letters and resumes**
- Help with coding
- Autotune voices

- **Ask for relationship advice**
- Drafts of grocery list and cooking recipes
- **Make playlists**
- To cheat on tests
- Ask for meditation techniques (Therapy)
- **Advice on how to start a business**

*Responses shared by more than one participant appear in bold type.

YOUTH PARTICIPANT RESPONSES FROM THE RACE, EQUITY, & POLICY SERIES: AI IN EDUCATION FORUM

What are the possible downsides to using AI tools in school?

- Not thinking for yourself
- Plagiarism
- Inaccurate information
- Lack of creativity (work too generic)
- Recycled information
- Copyright theft

- Makes people lazy to do their own work
- Not everyone has same access to AI so it creates disparities
- People can get too dependent on AI
- People can get too isolated and talk more to robots than other humans

- People will collaborate less with each other
- Bad for the environment
- People's comprehension of topics can get worse if they're dependent
- "Losing your voice" due to lack of authenticity

YOUTH PARTICIPANT RESPONSES FROM THE RACE, EQUITY, & POLICY SERIES: AI IN EDUCATION FORUM

How do you imagine the use of AI in schools and in your classrooms can enhance your experience as a student?

- **Give feedback on your work so you can improve**
- Organize work
- Make schedules
- **Help teachers create lesson plans**
- **Broaden ways of thinking**

- **Damage people's research as sources might not be reliable**
- **Inspiration on how to do work (An outline)**
- **Summarize information**

- Translate documents to different languages
- **Use AI as a supplement to expand on work**
- **AI can create flashcards and study guides for student assignments**

YOUTH PARTICIPANT RESPONSES FROM THE RACE, EQUITY, & POLICY SERIES: AI IN EDUCATION FORUM

Considering the widespread use of AI, how do we ensure young people continue to become critical thinkers?

- **Limit tech use for youth so they don't become dependent on it**
- **More academic rigor (e.g. 15 page papers)**
- Use more old-school tools like pencil & paper rather than computers

- **Come up with creative questions on assignments that require more critical thinking**
- Make rules to only use AI as a tutor
- **Ask AI to not give straight answers**
- Restrictions on how often you can use it

- **Feed younger kids the idea that AI can only be used as a supplement and not something to replace doing your own work**
- **Make educators more equipped to use AI**