**Executive Summary: Artificial Intelligence Update**

Orange County Schools is establishing a structured, human-centered framework to navigate the rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education. Rather than treating artificial intelligence as an isolated technological novelty, the district's AI implementation roadmap operates across the four core pillars of the strategic plan, Engage Orange, to prioritize long-term capacity building for students, staff, and families.

Key Takeaways

- District AI guidance is centered around AI literacy, digital citizenship, instructional support, and human-centered decision-making.
- To assist with AI guidance and support, the district has shifted from a school-based digital learning coach model to a district deployment model with instructional technology facilitators (ITFs).
- The district is establishing a revised AI committee representative of instructional stakeholders.

**Background**

Artificial Intelligence is evolving at an unprecedented pace; therefore, school districts must transition from static and reactive policies to dynamic, capacity-building models. Traditional administrative responses to educational technology typically rely on reactive, tool-specific evaluation cycles. However, as artificial intelligence evolves at an unprecedented velocity, attempting to evaluate, approve, or restrict individual applications on an ad hoc basis creates an unsustainable operational lag. The fundamental challenge facing public education is not keeping up with every individual tool, but preparing students and educators for continuous technological change while maintaining human judgment, privacy, and academic integrity.

This effort builds directly upon previous updates provided at the November 2025 Board of Education meeting on the rapid acceleration of AI. Building on the foundational training and grant funding received during the 2025–2026 school year, including the Digital Learning Initiative Instructional Innovation Grant, OCS is advancing its digital learning efforts in 2026–2027. This next phase focuses on integrating technology into instruction, strengthening staff and student skills, and expanding family engagement. These efforts will establish a foundation for sustainable innovation and continued growth in the 2027–2028 school year.

A human-centered approach to AI aims to empower educators and students to look beyond AI tools to understand what AI can do and what humans should continue to do. It helps explore why things that make us uniquely human, like judgment, creativity, and empathy, should be strengthened in an AI-rich environment. Finally, it requires us to consider how the decisions we make as educators shape the kind of learners, professionals, and citizens we are preparing ourselves and others to become.

**Key Information**

- **Artificial Intelligence Literacy**
  Understanding, experience, and judgement are fundamental to AI literacy. OCS defines AI literacy through three core behaviors:
  - Understand it: Comprehend how AI works, including its capabilities and inherent limitations.
  - Experience it: Engage in appropriate, purposeful usage within instructional settings.

- Question it: Verify outputs, protect data privacy, recognize algorithmic bias, and identify scenarios where AI should not be used.

This framework represents an integrated cognitive habit that balances functional comprehension with ethical discernment.

- **District Supported and Encouraged AI Tools**
  A foundational pillar of the district's strategy is the strict boundary between unvetted public software and vetted enterprise platforms. Publicly accessible, consumer-facing artificial intelligence services frequently collect user queries, prompts, uploaded documents, and personal metadata to train future commercial models. Within a public school system, exposing student inquiries or educator work products to commercial data harvesting may cause an unacceptable breach of privacy and a violation of federal and state statutes. The district has vetted and provided limited student access to tools meeting rigorous data security and compliance safeguards. Currently, two tools meet those requirements:
  - **MagicSchool** *(Available grades 6-12, with setup from classroom teacher required)*
    - Meets the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) standards
    - 1EdTech Trusted Apps Certified & AICPA SOC 2 Certified
    - No storage or training of 3rd-party AI models on user data
  - **Google Gemini** *(Available grades 9-12)*
    - Meets FERPA and COPPA standards
    - Youth-friendly onboarding and strict safety guardrails for minors
    - Enterprise-grade protection
    - No storage or training of 3rd-party AI models on user data
- **Instructional Technology Service Model Shift**
  Implementing systemic digital literacy across thirteen diverse school facilities requires an equitable, highly responsive operational delivery model. Historically, instructional technology personnel often operated within decentralized or school-specific assignments, leading to fragmented implementation and uneven access to professional coaching.

  From August 2026 to January 2027, OCS is executing a phased transition from the previous service delivery model (school-based digital learning coaches) to a coordinated district deployment support model. The first phase of the transition in August was to adjust their position titles to Instructional Technology Facilitators, aligning with the NC Department of Public Instruction position title. The district deployment model utilizes the six instructional technology facilitators (ITFs) to support all 13 schools and district staff based on targeted and identified needs to support professional learning and instructional initiatives. The ITFs will be leading the work of AI literacy across the district and supporting students and staff in three priority areas this school year:
  1. Digital Citizenship–Building safe, responsible, and informed technology habits.
  2. AI Literacy–Preparing students and staff to evaluate AI responsibly.
  3. Instructional Support–Helping educators use digital tools purposefully to strengthen teaching and learning.

- **District AI Committee**
  To ensure ongoing guidance and communication around AI, a new multi-stakeholder committee is in the process of being formed. This revised committee creation is in response to guidance from NCDPI regarding AI in an educational setting. This committee will hold its first meeting in December of 2026 and meet at least quarterly to review pertinent information, make recommendations, and provide regular updates to OCS leadership and staff. The committee will be composed of 13 school representatives (one for each school), instructional technology facilitators (ITFs), curriculum and instruction staff, and an OCS Board of Education member.

  The committee will focus on the following areas for oversight and recommendations:
  1. Data Privacy and Security–Protecting student data and safeguarding personal information.
  2. Vertical Alignment–Defining age-appropriate understanding of AI across grade levels.
  3. Tools and Responsible Use–Establishing guidelines for evaluating tools, addressing academic integrity, and guiding classroom implementation.
  4. Human-Centered Approach–Preserving human judgment and student critical thinking.
- **Ongoing Implementation Timeline**
  The district's artificial intelligence initiative is structured across an intentional three-year development trajectory spanning from the 2025–2026 school year through the 2027–2028 school year. This phased progression ensures foundational capacity is established before systemic classroom integration is supported.

| SY25-26<br>Foundation and Mobilization | SY26-27<br>Integration and Capacity Building | SY27-28<br>Innovation and Stability |
|---|---|---|
| The initial phase focused on scaffolding and building internal expertise with specialized professional development provided to Instructional Technology Facilitators through NCDPI.<br><br>The district secured a state Digital Learning Initiative (DLI) Instructional Innovation Grant to assist with the second phase of development, including partnership with The Friday Institute for Educational Innovation. | The current operational phase expands focus from internal capacity building to systemwide deployment. Core priorities include executing districtwide staff professional development, deploying structured student AI literacy lessons, conducting comprehensive family outreach, and activating stakeholder advisory groups. | The final planned phase focuses on AI literacy development and refinement, routine AI guideline reviews and refinement, and comprehensive support and coaching of ethical, safe, and innovative use of AI tools. |