

# 180 Degree Turn: NYC District Goes From Banning ChatGPT to Exploring AI's Potential

By [Alyson Klein](#) — October 05, 2023

New York City Public Schools will launch an Artificial Intelligence Policy Lab to guide the nation's largest school district's approach to this rapidly evolving technology.

That development—announced Oct. 4—is quite a turnabout for a district that [less than a year ago banned ChatGPT](#), an AI-powered research and writing tool, spurring other districts to follow suit.

In May, New York [reversed its decision to block ChatGPT](#) on school networks. And now, the district wants to take the lead on crafting policy around the smart use of AI for teaching and learning and the management of schools.

“Technology is constantly evolving and New York City Public Schools aims to remain at the forefront of these changes,” Nicole Brownstein, a spokeswoman for the district, said in an email. “We are thrilled to announce that we will be implementing an AI Policy Lab in partnership with national experts and school districts across the country focusing on human-centered AI implementation, equity, safety, ethics, effectiveness, and transparency.”

The effort won't be confined to the Big Apple. New York's AI policy lab will serve as a hub for a national network of similar labs in school districts across the country. Roughly 15 school districts of various sizes and demographic mixes will likely be part of that network initially, said Erin Mote, the co-founder and executive director for InnovateEDU, a nonprofit partnering with New York on the lab.

New York's AI policy lab will consider questions about cybersecurity and privacy, as well as ways to use AI-powered tech responsibly for teaching and learning. It will examine how to communicate with parents about AI-powered tech, whether and how AI can be used in lesson planning and other teacher tasks, and the ethics of allowing students to use generative AI tools like ChatGPT for school assignments.

The lab will “think about: under what conditions could AI use be safe, accountable, fair, and efficacious?” Mote said. “We're going to have to tackle some sticky issues here around [reconciling] the technology and existing policy.”

New York will make any of the resources it produces—including sample letters to families explaining AI tools or materials to help districts clarify their AI policies for educators—available to any district that needs guidance.

Because New York is one of the most diverse districts in the country, the policy lab will help the K-12 field consider how AI could be used with a range of student populations, Mote added.

“I think New York gives us an opportunity to think about some really interesting challenges that education systems are thinking about all over the country right now,” she said.

## **‘Different moment’ from the rush to ban AI last school year**

Schools are hungry for specifics on AI policy, [but most states and districts have held off in providing them](#).

That’s likely to change soon, said Keith Krueger, the executive director of the Consortium for School Networking or CoSN, a membership organization for district technology officials.

AI has developed rapidly, but policy on how to handle it in schools has been slower to percolate, he said.

Krueger recently spoke to a group of superintendents and district tech officials in California. When he asked how many of them had policies and procedures already on the books on AI, few raised their hands. But when he shifted the question to “are you considering AI policies?” nearly every hand went up.

This is a “different moment from December, January,” when a new version of ChatGPT was released, shocking educators with its humanlike ability to craft anything from an essay on Shakespeare to a chocolate chip cookie recipe, and prompting a “rush to ban AI,” Krueger said.

Now, many district leaders understand that AI is “probably in almost every product that you already purchase, every new product that’s coming out,” Krueger said. “Having a way to think about what you’re allowing and not allowing and what questions you’re going to ask vendors is absolutely critical.”

CoSN is partnering with the **Council of the Great City Schools** to create an “AI readiness” checklist for districts, to help guide their thinking about AI policy. CoSN and CCGS’s work is separate from the AI lab in New York, though there will be collaboration between the two efforts.