Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
GENERATIVE AI GUIDANCE

CMS MISSION AND VISION

Mission

The mission of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) is to create an innovative, inclusive, student-centered environment that supports the development of independent learners.

Vision

The vision of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is to lead the community in educational excellence, inspiring intellectual curiosity, creativity, and achievement so that all students reach their full potential.

Core Beliefs

- Public education is essential to democracy and necessary for economic opportunity, mobility and the broader public good.
- We are responsible for building and maintaining a high performing school district.
- Each student is uniquely capable and deserves an engaging, relevant, and challenging educational experience.
- Our principals and teachers make a critical difference in student achievement and building a positive school community.
- The school system, families and communities are necessary partners in ensuring the academic, social, emotional and behavioral success of our students.

Commitments

- Providing an effective Superintendent to lead the District.
- Ensuring that all students achieve their full potential.
- Ensuring that each student has an effective teacher.
- Ensuring that an effective principal leads every school.
- Giving all students access to a well-rounded, rigorous curriculum that is evidence-based and data-informed.
- Preparing all students to be successful in institutions of higher learning or the workforce.
- Creating safe and orderly working and learning environments.
- Securing and allocating the necessary resources to pursue our vision and mission.
- Operating effectively and efficiently with fiscal accountability.
- Embracing our community's diversity and using it to enhance the educational environment.
- Providing and encouraging engagement opportunities for all students' families.
- Partnering with community members to maximize student learning.

Strategy

CMS leads the way, charting a pathway of endless possibilities, for students and employees, through a connected ecosystem of families, community and organizations, both public and private.

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VERSION HISTORY

Generative AI Guidance will be updated as needed to stay aligned with evolving technology, changing laws and policies, and input from students, families, and staff. All revisions will be documented in this section to maintain transparency and track the development of guidance over time.

Date	Version	Changes and Updates
08/19/2025	01	Original publication

OVERVIEW

Purpose

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) embraces innovation to drive educational excellence. As Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies rapidly evolve, CMS is committed to adopting AI in ways that enhance teaching, learning, operations, and stakeholder engagement, while preserving the central role of educators and human decision-making.

This guidance sets clear expectations and standards for AI use across CMS. It is rooted in extensive community engagement, aligned to the district's AI Vision and Guiding Principles, and informed by national and state best practices. It establishes how students, employees, and partners will engage with AI safely, responsibly, ethically, and effectively.

The guidance applies to all AI technologies that are:

- Accessed or used by students and employees on CMS premises
- Used for school and district-related activities
- Accessed through CMS-provided devices or networks

The guidance includes:

- Clear definitions of acceptable and unacceptable AI use
- Structures for professional development
- Guidelines for risk management data privacy
- A framework for ongoing evaluation and improvement

Scope

Through the CMS Generative AI Guidance and future updates, CMS seeks to provide clear expectations, approved use cases, and best practices for responsible Artificial Intelligence (AI) use across all CMS schools and departments. It is designed to help students, staff, and vendors align AI use with district policies on data privacy, digital citizenship, and academic integrity.

This guidance applies to academic, instructional, administrative, and operational uses of AI. All AI use must align with the CMS AI Vision and Guiding Principles, Board policies, and applicable federal, state, and local privacy laws.

CMS prioritizes human oversight, equity, transparency, and responsible innovation so that AI supports and enhances the human-centered foundation of education.

Current Recommendations

In January 2024, North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction released recommendations and considerations on the use of GenAI in NC public schools. The state guidance has been regularly updated with new resources and clarifications to the guidance as AI technologies evolve.

NCDPI Generative AI Implementation Recommendations and Considerations for PK-13 Public Schools

Board Policy

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is in the process of developing an official Board policy on Artificial Intelligence. Once finalized, this section will include a summary and link to the approved policy. Until then, all AI use should follow the guidance outlined in this document.

AI VISION STATEMENT AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

AI Vision Statement

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools embraces artificial intelligence (AI) as a catalyst for learning for all. AI will strengthen, rather than replace, the role of all employees in delivering excellence across each of our four pillars: academics, people, operations, and engagement. Leveraging the perspectives and partnership of our families and community, CMS will lead in the safe and effective adoption of AI – preparing every student and adult for success.

AI Guiding Principles

Academic Excellence

CMS is committed to ensuring all students and educators are AI literate. For students, AI literacy includes understanding how AI works as a learning tool, using AI responsibly, and evaluating its outputs critically. For educators, AI literacy includes enhancing instruction and personalized learning, fostering critical thinking, and promoting academic integrity.

People Excellence

AI will transform how we learn, collaborate, and innovate, offering just-in-time support and unlocking new ways for educators to grow, connect, and lead. CMS will build the capacity of employees, teams, and the organization to use AI responsibly, effectively, and efficiently to maximize the success and creativity of all of our people.

Operational Excellence

CMS will leverage AI to optimize district operations, streamline processes, ensure accuracy, and improve efficiency. We will continue to adhere to cybersecurity standards and federal, state, and district policies for protecting stakeholder data.

Engagement Excellence

CMS will use AI to increase and improve engagement with all stakeholders, delivering on our commitment to the CROWN Experience. AI will personalize communication, anticipate needs, and strengthen relationships, ensuring everyone we serve feels seen, heard, and valued.

WHAT IS GENERATIVE AI?

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) refers to a type of artificial intelligence that can create new content, such as text, images, audio, video, or code by learning from a large amount of existing information. It uses what it has learned to produce original responses or materials that resemble the data it was trained on.

At its core, AI mimics human cognitive functions such as problem-solving, pattern recognition, and decision-making. Within this broader field, machine learning enables systems to improve their performance by identifying trends in data without being manually programmed for every scenario. GenAI extends these capabilities by generating entirely new material, not just analyzing or classifying existing information. GenAI tools can enhance classroom creativity, streamline administrative work, and support deeper student engagement when used responsibly.

Prompts

A prompt is the instruction or input provided by the user to a generative AI system. Typically written in everyday language, prompts tell the AI what the user wants it to do. Adding clear, specific details to a prompt helps improve the accuracy and relevance of the AI's response.

Predictions

A prediction or output is the AI's response to a prompt. It is generated based on patterns the AI has learned from large amounts of data it was trained on. The output is designed to match what the AI "predicts" the user is asking for.

DATA PRIVACY & SECURITY

Overview

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is committed to safeguarding the privacy and security of student and staff data in alignment with federal, state, and local laws, as well as CMS Board policies. This includes compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a federal law that governs access to and disclosure of student education records. As we expand the use of digital tools and generative AI across instructional and operational settings, protecting Personally Identifiable Information (PII) becomes even more critical.

Data privacy is a legal requirement and a foundation of public trust. All CMS employees must understand what qualifies as direct and indirect PII, how it should be handled, and what practices are prohibited under our data privacy policies. Improper use or disclosure of this information can lead to disciplinary action.

Personally Identifiable Information (PII)

Personally identifiable information (PII) is any information that permits the identity of an individual to be directly or indirectly inferred, including any information that is linked or linkable to that individual. PII includes direct identifiers like a person's name or ID number and indirect identifiers like date of birth. PII also includes any

pieces of information that could be combined to identify an individual. For example, even if a file does not include student names or ID numbers, there may still be a way to identify an individual student through a combination of other data fields like school, grade, sex, and race/ethnicity.

Examples of Direct Identifiers (Linked PII)

- **Name**: First, middle, and/or last name
- **Phone Number:** Contact numbers, including mobile and home
- **Email Address:** Personal or school/work email addresses
- **Home Address:** Physical address where the student or staff member resides
- **ID Number:** Unique identification number for the student or staff member
- **Social Security Number (SSN)**
- **Parent/Guardian Information:** Names and contact details of parents or guardians
- **Driver's License Number:** The unique number assigned by the state's DMV
- **Financial Information:** Bank account numbers or credit card information
- **Biometric Data:** Such as fingerprints or facial scans

Examples of Indirect Identifiers (Inferred PII)

- **Date of Birth:** Birthdate
- **Other School-Related Information:** Grades, test scores, courses, attendance, discipline records, etc.
- **Health Information:** Medical records or health insurance details
- **Citizenship or Immigration Status:** Information regarding an individual's legal status in a country
- **Ethnic and Religious Information:** Data that reveals an individual's ethnic background or religious beliefs

Student Data Privacy & FERPA

FERPA gives parents and eligible students (age 18 or attending a postsecondary institution) the right to inspect and review their student's education records. Parents also have the right to request an amendment to their student's education records if they believe there to be inaccurate or misleading information or a violation of privacy.

Education records can only be disclosed with prior written consent from the parent or in the case of specific FERPA exceptions. These exceptions include access for "school officials" with a legitimate educational interest, for a new school to receive records when the student transfers, and for designated "directory information" to be shared if the parent has not opted out of such disclosure. Additional information is available in A Parent Guide to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) from the United States Department of Education.

Violation of FERPA may result in disciplinary action and can lead to loss of federal funding for the district.
To support compliance:

- All staff must follow CMS data privacy policies and complete annual training.
- Any suspected breach of student or staff data must be reported immediately to the district's cybersecurity team.

Open-Source vs. Closed-Source AI Systems

As we integrate AI tools into our workflows, it is essential to understand the distinction between open-source and closed-source GenAI systems. This understanding helps ensure appropriate data handling, aligns with our data privacy policies, and supports safe and responsible use.

Definitions

Open-Source Generative AI Systems (Not Secure)

These are AI tools that operate on publicly accessible platforms or models, often provided by third-party vendors. Example: ChatGPT (free/public version), Claude (free/public version), and other web-based tools where data entered may be used to train future models. *Data entered is typically stored and may be used by the provider unless explicitly stated otherwise.*

Closed-Source Generative AI Systems (Secure)

These systems operate within a controlled, private environment. Example: Microsoft Copilot with Microsoft 365. *Data is not used to train models and remains protected within the organization's secure environment.*

Data Usage Guidelines

AI Users shall not input any confidential or sensitive information, including student data, into AI Systems unless the system has been specifically approved for that purpose and the necessary data privacy and security measures are in place. Examples include: typing it into a prompt, uploading a file, or copying and pasting content that includes identifiable details.

Key Considerations

- Never put personally identifiable or confidential data into AI systems.
- Ensure staff are aware of whether the AI tool they are using is open or closed.

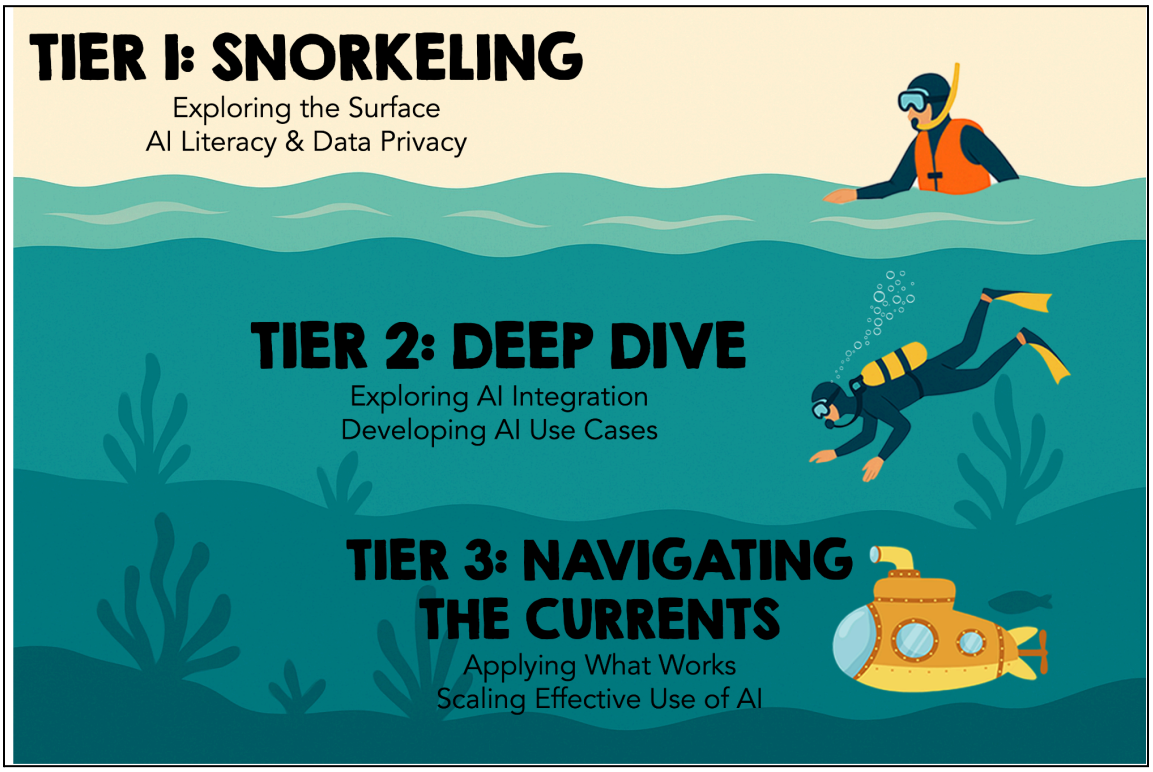
Guidance for Secure Use of Open AI Systems

- Use general prompts: Ask AI for suggestions or templates based on general scenarios rather than individual cases.
- Ask for review: When in doubt, consult the CMS Cybersecurity Team before entering data into any AI tool.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

CMS is committed to building AI awareness and capacity through a phased, role-based professional development model. The CMS AI Training Plan equips staff with foundational knowledge, ethical practices, and practical skills to integrate AI into teaching, learning and operations responsibly. To support this learning, the district has adopted a tiered framework that mirrors the experience of exploring the ocean. The three tiers, Snorkeling, Deep Dive, and Navigating the Currents, represent increasing the levels of AI literacy and fluency.

Staff begin by building a solid foundation and gradually expand their knowledge and confidence with AI tools and practices, engaging at a level that aligns with their role and readiness.



Staff Training Tiers

Tier 1: Snorkeling - Learn the Basics

All staff will complete a self-paced online course focused on foundational AI concepts. Topics include what AI is, how it works, and key considerations such as privacy, safety, and bias. This tier supports academic excellence by establishing a shared understanding of responsible AI use across the district.

Tier 2: Deep Dive - Using AI in Practice

AI Champion Schools and Central Office AI Champions will explore AI tools more in depth. Participants will pilot AI use cases that enhance instruction, improve workflows, and support data-informed decision making. This tier supports people and operational excellence through innovation and collaboration.

Tier 3: Navigating the Currents - Leading and Growing

Experienced staff will lead peers by sharing what works and adapting AI strategies districtwide. They will help guide continuous improvement and community engagement, strengthening our commitment to engagement excellence, and ensuring all voices are valued.

Digital Citizenship & AI Literacy

Purpose

CMS is committed to equipping students and staff with the foundational knowledge and skills needed to navigate the digital world responsibly. As artificial intelligence becomes more integrated into learning, AI literacy and digital citizenship are essential for academic readiness, ethical technology use, and long-term success.

Importance

- Digital citizenship is a key component of student safety and digital wellness
- AI literacy encourages critical thinking, informed decision-making, and protection of personal and intellectual property
- Curriculum aligns with North Carolina Digital Learning Standards and ISTE standards to promote ethical, informed use of technology and AI

Implementation

CMS provides K-12 Digital Citizenship & AI Literacy lessons designed to support developmentally appropriate instruction across all grade levels. All students complete grade-level lessons each year. School-based Digital Citizenship & AI Literacy Champions help guide school implementation. The CMS Digital Citizenship & AI Literacy Toolkit includes detailed facilitation guides and resources to support lesson delivery and integration.

Curriculum Overview

K-5 Approach

Lessons for grades K-5 are delivered through a teacher-facing Canvas course that includes ready-to-use slide decks and activities for flexible classroom instruction. A Canvas course for grades 3-5 introduces students to digital tools and platform navigation. These lessons focus on foundational digital citizenship concepts such as internet safety, privacy, digital footprints, respectful online behavior, and an age-appropriate introduction to artificial intelligence. Students also learn responsible device care and internet use.

6-12 Approach

Grades 6-12 lessons are delivered via a student-facing Canvas course available for asynchronous or teacher-led use. The course includes multimedia content and scenario-based activities addressing advanced digital citizenship topics like cyberbullying, digital law, and intellectual property. AI literacy components cover generative AI, ethics, and data privacy. Students develop critical thinking skills for evaluating digital and AI content to become responsible and informed digital citizens.

Family & Community Resources

To support and complement the K-12 Digital Citizenship & AI Literacy lessons, CMS provides families with clear and accessible resources focused on digital citizenship and AI literacy. Parents and guardians have opportunities to participate in webinars addressing online safety, privacy, and responsible use of AI tools. Families can access the CMS Digital Citizenship & AI Literacy Lessons through the CMS website, as a Canvas Observer, and explore a dedicated Parent Course for additional support.

AI USE

Responsible Use of GenAI

CMS is committed to promoting the ethical and responsible use of generative AI across all schools and departments. To support this goal, CMS aligns with North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) recommendations on responsible AI use.

We encourage all staff and students to follow the EVERY framework from AI for Education, developed in partnership with NCDPI's Vera Cubero. The EVERY acronym serves as a reminder to carefully review the outputs from generative AI and to practice ethical AI use every time:

- E - Evaluate the initial output to see if it meets the intended purpose and your needs.
- V - Verify facts, figures, quotes, and data using reliable sources to ensure there are no hallucinations or bias.
- E - Edit your prompt and ask follow up questions to have the AI improve its output.
- R - Revise the results to reflect your unique needs, style, and/or tone. AI output is a great starting point, but shouldn't be a final product.
- Y - You are responsible for everything you create with AI. Always be transparent about how you've used these tools.

Ethical Use and Academic Integrity

Understanding the Risks of AI Detectors

AI detection tools are not reliable enough as the sole method for determining whether a student has misused AI. These tools frequently produce:

- False positives, where the tool flags something as AI generated when AI was not used. False positives can be more common for multilingual learners or students who are developing English language proficiency.
- False negatives, where the tool fails to flag something that was generated by AI. False negatives can occur when students are skilled at working with AI tools and fooling the detectors.

If there is concern that a student relied too heavily on AI, the response should center on guidance and learning, not punishment. Use it as an opportunity to reinforce how to appropriately collaborate with AI.

Academic Integrity and GenAI Citation

Maintaining academic integrity is essential to fostering responsible use of generative AI in our district. As AI tools become more accessible, it is important that students and staff use these technologies ethically and transparently.

Modeling Responsible Use

Staff and students are expected to model academic integrity and transparency when using generative AI tools. Educators should lead by example, demonstrating honesty about AI use and teaching students how to acknowledge the role of AI in their work. Generative AI does not create content independently, human input, prompts, and decisions guide its outputs. As such, it is considered best practice to disclose when AI has assisted in the creation of a product, even if formal citation is not required.

Guidelines for Disclosing AI Use

When traditional citation (MLA, APA, etc.) is not required, students and staff should still include a clear statement explaining how AI was used. This promotes transparency, supports digital citizenship, and helps distinguish between original thought and AI-generated content. Disclosure can take the form of an “AI Credits” section at the end of a project, a note beneath an image, or an in-text explanation.

Examples of Disclosures

- “Created by (*student name*) with editing support from (*tool name*).
- “I used (*tool name*) to brainstorm and outline my project ideas.”
- “Image created using (*tool name*). Prompt: ‘*Draw a futuristic cityscape at sunset with flying vehicles*.’”

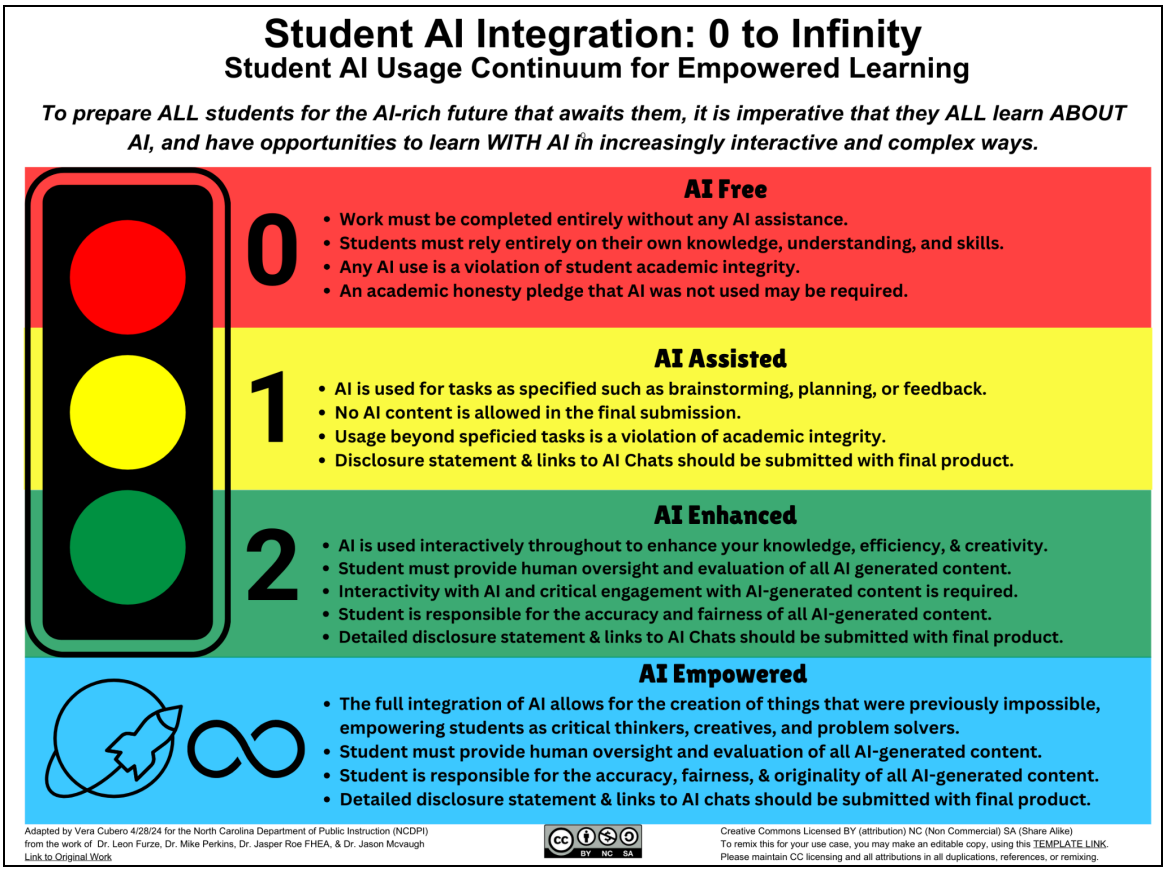
Staff Use

Staff must complete the AI Literacy & Data Privacy asynchronous training course prior to using CMS-approved GenAI tools. This course provides a foundation for responsible and informed use. The training includes the following:

- Core concepts of AI, machine learning, and generative tools
- How AI models are trained and influenced by data
- Practical examples of GenAI in education
- Ethical considerations such as bias, misinformation, and over-reliance
- Human oversight, fairness, transparency
- CMS Data Privacy Policies
- Personally Identifiable Information (PII)
- Expectations for safe AI use and a review of approved CMS tools and protections

Teacher Expectations for Student Use of Generative AI Use on Assignments

CMS has adopted the *Student AI Usage Continuum for Empowered Learning,* created by NCDPI, to establish clear and consistent expectations for how students use AI on assignments.
Refer to NC guidelines on "Student AI Integration: 0 to Infinity"



Setting Expectations

For each assignment, teachers will indicate the expected level of AI use aligned with the *CMS Student AI Use Framework*. Students are expected to follow these directions and use AI tools only within the permitted scope.

CMS Student AI Use Framework

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION	TEACHER EXPECTATIONS
AI-Free	Students complete the assignment without using AI tools. These tasks emphasize original thinking and personal insight.	Assignments may include prompts that are connected to students' personal experiences, require draft submissions, or involve in-class discussions. AI use is not permitted for any portion of the assignment.
AI-Assisted	Students may use AI for specific support tasks (e.g., text leveling, summarizing, vocabulary help, outlining, or study assistance), but the final product must be their own original work.	Teachers may allow students to use AI during brainstorming or planning. Students must not submit AI-generated content as final work. AI use should be documented or discussed as part of the learning process.
AI-Enhanced	Students can use AI as a learning partner throughout the assignment process as long as they maintain human oversight and transparency about its use.	Students should reflect on how AI contributed to their learning and must cite or explain AI assistance. The final product may include AI-informed content but should demonstrate critical thinking and originality.
AI-Empowered	Students engage with AI in innovative ways to develop creative or complex projects, such as simulations, multimedia, or data-driven investigations.	Assignments at this level encourage students to explore how AI can support discovery and problem-solving. Students must document their process and demonstrate responsible and ethical AI use.

Designing AI-Resistant Assignments

CMS supports the ethical and responsible use of generative AI while ensuring students develop critical thinking, creativity, and ownership of their learning. To maintain academic integrity and reduce opportunities for AI misuse, educators are encouraged to design assignments that promote authentic student engagement.

Strategies to Support Authentic Work

Focus on Process Over Product

Require students to submit work in stages, such as outlines, research notes, drafts, or brainstorming documentation. This approach helps capture how students develop their ideas instead of only receiving a final product that could be AI-generated.

Personalize Prompts

Create assignments that invite students to reflect on their own experiences, viewpoints, or local contexts. Personal responses are more difficult for AI tools to replicate and deepen student connection to the material.

Multi-State Assignments

Break assignments into smaller parts with deadlines. For example, proposal, draft, peer review, and final submission. This keeps students engaged throughout the assignment and reduces reliance on AI-generated final work.

Include Real-Time Components

Use presentations, debates, Socratic seminars, and classroom discussions to have students respond in real time. These formats allow teachers to observe students' understanding and communication skills firsthand.

Leverage Interactive Tools to Show Thinking

Incorporate digital whiteboards and visual collaboration platforms (such as Microsoft Whiteboard or Canva Whiteboard) to help students demonstrate their thought processes visually.

Test Assignments Against AI

Try answering your own assignment prompts using AI to identify vulnerabilities. Recognizing typical AI responses helps you adjust prompts to require deeper original thinking.

Supervise In-Person Writing When Possible

Conduct writing or assessments in supervised settings to collect authentic samples of student work and compare future submissions against them.

Monitoring Student Work in Progress

Instead of evaluating only the final product, use tools that allow you to observe how the student is creating their work. These tools offer insight into whether a student is developing ideas independently or copying from another source.

- Google Docs Version History - Shows every edit made to a document, including who made each change and when. Sudden jumps in word count or completed text may indicate copy-pasting or use of external tools. How to use: File → Version History → See Version History
- Process Feedback for Google Docs - This Chrome extension tracks writing behavior in Docs and provides visual reports of the writing flow, including when students typed, paused, or pasted.

Student Use

Students must complete their Digital Citizenship and AI Literacy lessons for their grade level. These lessons introduce key concepts and promote responsible digital citizenship.

APPROVED GENERATIVE AI TOOLS

Approved GenAI tools can be found in the Digital Resource Library. Each tool listed has gone through the district's Vendor Approval Process. Inclusion of a Generative AI tool in the Digital Resource Library indicates that it meets the district's standards for data privacy, security, and confidentiality in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. AI Users shall not input any confidential or sensitive information, including student data, into AI Systems unless the system has been specifically approved for that purpose and the necessary data privacy and security measures are in place.

GLOSSARY

This section defines key terms that will help CMS students, employees, families, and partners understand Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its responsible use within educational and operational contexts.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

A machine-based system that can, for a given set of human-defined objectives, make predictions, recommendations, or decisions influencing real or virtual environments. Artificial intelligence systems use machine and human-based inputs to:

- perceive real and virtual environments,
- abstract such perceptions into models through analysis in an automated manner, and
- use model inference to formulate options for information or action.

(U.S. Code, 15 U.S.C. § 9401(3))

Bias

AI models may reflect biases present in their training data, which can result in outputs that are inaccurate, unfair, or inappropriate. Staff should review AI-generated content for accuracy and equity.

Data Privacy

Protecting the personal information of students and staff by ensuring AI tools meet CMS data protection and security standards.

Ethical Use

The responsible and fair use of AI that respects student privacy, promotes equity, upholds academic integrity, and complies with CMS policies.

Hallucination

When AI generates content that sounds plausible but is factually incorrect or entirely made up.

Human-in-the-Loop (HITL)

A safeguard practice requiring human involvement to supervise, validate, and make final decisions in systems that incorporate AI-generated outputs.

Large Language Model (LLM)

A specific type of Generative AI model trained on massive collections of text data to understand, generate, and predict human language. LLMs power applications like ChatGPT, Claude, and Bard. Note: All LLMs are Generative AI models, but not all Generative AI systems are LLMs.

Machine Learning (ML)

A subset of AI where systems learn from data patterns and adjust outputs or predictions over time without being explicitly programmed for every task.

Training Data

The information used to teach an AI model how to generate predictions or responses. It includes text, images, and other media from a wide range of sources.

Transparency

The practice of clearly disclosing when AI is used, how AI-generated outputs are created, and maintaining openness about AI's limitations and decision processes.

RESOURCES

Board Policies and Regulations

Policy S-SINT Student Internet Use
Policy S-SINT/R-Student Internet Use and Network Access
Policy O-ELEC/R Use of CMS Network & Communication Technologies
Policy S-REC Student Records

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