

Closing the AI Power Gap™

What K-12 Digital Learning Leaders Must Do Now

Dr. Alexis S. Smith

Fractional Chief Artificial Intelligence Officer
Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Ascend AI NOW, LLC

Doctorate in Digital Stewardship, AI Ethics and Governance | Certified Executive Coach | TAIMScore™
Certified Assessor | CoSN Thought Partner | CoSN K-12 CTO Academy Mentor





Georgia kindergartners now read aloud to an AI

Amira, the state's free universal K-3 reading screener, records students reading aloud. In Atlanta, families asked whether it leaves lasting "personal imprints." Because the state pays for it, opting out was not simple.

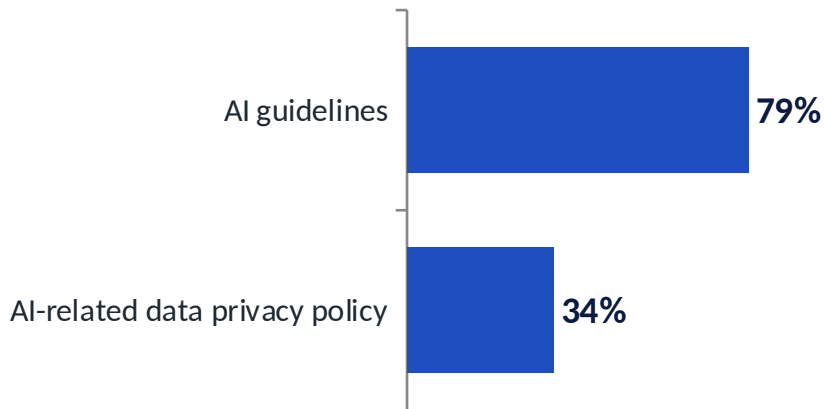
The question for every leader in this room:

Who approved the AI in your program, and what happens to the data it collects?

Guidance is spreading faster than governance



Districts with written AI rules (CoSN 2026)



Districts that trained teachers on AI, fall 2024 (RAND)



57% of district technology leaders are concerned about AI bias. The gap is widest where resources are thinnest: that is the AI Power Gap™.

Sources: CoSN, U.S. State of EdTech 2026 (607 districts, 44 states); RAND (Diliberti, Lake, & Weiner, 2025)

The AI Power Gap™



The critical distance between your program's AI ambition and its operational reality

AI AMBITION

- Adopt AI tools across the program
- Automate feedback and advising
- Personalize every student's path
- Keep pace with the technology

THE
GAP

OPERATIONAL REALITY

- Governance that protects students
- Bias-aware, ethical deployment
- Educators prepared and supported
- Sustainable, equitable integration

AI enters through 3 unguarded doors



Door 1

State-provided tools

Funded and selected above the district, like the K-3 reading screener, so local review is skipped.



Door 2

Features added to tools you already own

A licensed platform switches on AI mid-year. The amended COPPA Rule now requires separate parental consent before children's data is shared for AI training.



Door 3

Free accounts staff and students create

No contract, no data terms, no owner. Usage grows before leaders know it exists.

Sources: NIST AI RMF 1.0 (2023), GOVERN 1.6 (inventory AI systems); FTC amended COPPA Rule, Federal Register, Apr. 22, 2025; Davis Polk (2026)

The 5-part framework to close the gap

Your program lists 5 parts. Each maps to a stage of the Ascend AI NOW™ Framework for Responsible AI that you can score.



Assess Readiness

Diagnose

Inventory every AI tool and risk, through all 3 doors



Design Policy

Govern + Architect

Policy, decision rights, and data terms in every contract



Engage Stakeholders

Govern + Deploy

Educators, students, and families shape the rules



Deploy Responsibly

Deploy

Role-specific training and clear use guidelines



Sustain Ethically

Scale

Monitor, audit, and expand only what passes review

Crosswalked to NIST AI RMF 1.0, ISO/IEC 42001, EU AI Act, SOC 2. Human in the loop: U.S. Dept. of Education, OET (2023)

Every ethical risk has a part that mitigates it



Ethical risk	What it looks like	Mitigated by
Student data trains vendor models	Terms change after a tool is approved	Design Policy
Bias widens opportunity gaps	A tool flags some student groups more	Assess Readiness
Invisible tools	State-funded and free tools no one reviewed	Assess Readiness
Families surprised	No notice, no consent, no opt-out path	Engage Stakeholders
Inconsistent classroom rules	The same use is allowed in one class, punished in another	Deploy Responsibly
Drift after launch	Accuracy changes and no one is watching	Sustain Ethically

Risks synthesized from CoSN (2026), RAND (2025), NIST AI RMF 1.0 (2023), and public reporting on the Amira screener (2026)

YOUR 2-MINUTE READINESS CHECK

Raise your hand for every yes

1. We can list every AI tool in use, including state-funded and free ones.
2. One named executive is accountable for AI decisions.
3. Our contracts bar vendors from training AI on student data.
4. Families are told which AI tools we use and why.
5. We monitor approved tools after launch and log incidents.

Your lowest “no” is your constraint. It caps every other stage, so it is your first move.



Get your scored result

Free diagnostic, about 5 minutes. Scan now.

A Georgia case: policy now needs proof

Atlanta Public Schools draft AI policy

- AI never replaces certified educators
- No AI-issued grades, discipline, or graduation decisions
- No discipline based only on AI detection
- A public list of approved AI tools
- Parent sign-off for chatbots that collect data

What proves it works on day 1

- A written vetting process behind the approved list
- Consent records and a family notice
- An inventory that includes state-funded tools
- A due-process step in the regulation
- A named owner and an annual board report

Sources: Atlanta Civic Circle, Aug. 2026; Atlanta News First, Sept. 17, 2026 (decision expected November 2026); APS Artificial Intelligence web page

What you leave with today



Readiness Diagnostic

Score your program across all 5 parts and find your constraint.



Policy Design Template

10 policy sections with FERPA, COPPA, and state privacy law built in.



Stakeholder Engagement Guide

A 4-phase, 12-week plan from draft to board adoption.



Scan for the diagnostic

Get the templates: email assessments@ascendainow.com with the subject line DLAC IGNITE and your district name.

How I can help, and why I am here today

Why I am here: I am passionate about K-12. I help digital learning leaders advance responsibly and guide that path ethically through every new technology, especially AI.



1 Cabinet working session

I facilitate your leadership team through the readiness check, align on the constraint, and assign owners.



2 Systems and evidence assessment

I review your actual systems: single sign-on and app inventory, LMS and SIS integrations, contracts, and data flows, against 50 controls.



3 Roadmap and executive support

A board-ready report, a sequenced 90-day roadmap, and fractional executive support while you implement.



Bring this to your cabinet. Scan to book a discovery call with Dr. Alexis S. Smith.

Sources (1 of 2)



CoSN. (2026). U.S. State of EdTech 2026. Consortium for School Networking.
<https://www.cosn.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/U.S.-State-of-EdTech-2026.pdf>

Diliberti, M. K., Lake, R. J., & Weiner, S. R. (2025, April 8). More districts are training teachers on artificial intelligence: Findings from the American School District Panel (RR-A956-31). RAND Corporation.
https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA956-31.html

K-12 Dive. (2025, April 18). Teacher AI training remains uneven despite uptick.
<https://www.k12dive.com/news/teacher-ai-training-remains-uneven-despite-uptick/745668/>

National Institute of Standards and Technology. (2023). Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework (AI RMF 1.0) (NIST AI 100-1).
<https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.AI.100-1>

Federal Trade Commission. (2025, April 22). Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule. Federal Register.
<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/22/2025-05904/childrens-online-privacy-protection-rule>

Davis Polk & Wardwell. (2026). FTC prioritizes COPPA enforcement as new compliance obligations take effect.
<https://www.davispolk.com/insights/client-update/ftc-prioritizes-coppa-enforcement-new-compliance-obligations-take-effect>

Georgia Department of Education. (2025, January 21). Leveraging AI in the K-12 Setting.
<https://login.community.gadoe.org/documents/leveraging-ai-in-the-k-12-setting>

Sources (2 of 2)



Student Data Privacy, Accessibility, and Transparency Act, O.C.G.A. §§ 20-2-660 through 20-2-668.

<https://law.onecle.com/georgia/title-20/chapter-2/article-15/index.html>

Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 160-4-2-.40, Georgia Early Literacy Requirements (K-3 universal reading screener).

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/regulations/georgia/Ga-Comp-R-Regs-R-160-4-2-.40>

Hoodline. (2026, July 31). Atlanta parents sound alarm over AI dyslexia tests for kindergartners.

<https://hoodline.com/2026/07/atlanta-parents-sound-alarm-over-ai-dyslexia-tests-for-kindergartners/>

The Cool Down. (2026, July 31). Georgia's AI dyslexia screener draws fire as Atlanta parents question using it on kindergartners (citing 11Alive).

<https://www.thecooldown.com/green-tech/georgia-amira-dyslexia-screening-parents-concerns-georgia/>

Atlanta Civic Circle. (2026, August 16). School board discusses draft AI use policy.

<https://civicatlanta.org/blog/2026-08-16-school-board-discusses-draft-ai-use-policy>

Atlanta News First. (2026, September 17). Atlanta Public Schools moves toward adopting new AI policy.

<https://www.atlantaneWSfirst.com/2026/09/17/atlanta-public-schools-moves-toward-adopting-new-ai-policy/>

Atlanta Public Schools. (n.d.). Artificial Intelligence. Retrieved October 18, 2026.

<https://www.atlantapublicschools.us/about/departments/teaching-learning/instructional-technology/artificial-intelligence>

Ready to close the AI Power Gap™ in your program?

Book an Executive Discovery Call

calendly.com/ascendainow/executive_discovery_call

Dr. Alexis S. Smith

Fractional Chief Artificial Intelligence Officer
Founder & Chief Executive Officer
Ascend AI NOW, LLC
assessments@ascendainow.com
www.ascendainow.com
linkedin.com/in/alexisssmith



Scan to connect



Let us continue to close “The AI Power Gap™,” one LLM at a time.