



# Santa Ana Unified School District

---

Jerry Almendarez  
Superintendent of Schools

August 28, 2024

The Honorable Maria D. Hernandez  
Presiding Judge  
Orange County Superior Court  
700 Civic Center Drive West  
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Re: Santa Ana Unified School District's Response to the 2023-24 Orange County Grand Jury Report on *Use of Artificial Intelligence in Public Schools (K-12)*

To the Honorable Maria D. Hernandez:

The Santa Ana Unified School District ("District") commends the Grand Jury for its time and attention devoted to studying this very important issue and publishing the Grand Jury Report dated June 12, 2024 entitled: *Use of Artificial Intelligence in Public Schools (K-12)* ("Report").

The District has thoroughly reviewed and considered the Findings and Recommendations in the Report. In accordance with California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury has requested that the District respond to Findings and Recommendations made in the Report. The District responds to the Grand Jury's Findings and Recommendations with the following:

## Finding 1

**Orange County's K-12 public schools have implemented policies and/or guidelines around the use of different AI platforms in varying and inconsistent ways. Some prohibit AI's use; others allow it; and some don't have policies or guidelines governing AI at all.**

**The District partially disagrees with the finding.**

The District cannot comment on other districts' policies and/or guidelines around the use of AI platforms. As it pertains to Santa Ana Unified School District, we have taken a proactive and comprehensive approach to implementing policies and guidelines for AI use in education.

SAUSD has developed and adopted an AI Compass, which serves as a living document guiding our district's approach to AI integration. This AI Compass was developed with input from the Superintendent's AI Advisory Council in collaboration with AI Safe, demonstrating our commitment to thoughtful and informed policy-making.

Furthermore, on April 23, 2024, the SAUSD Board of Education adopted both the AI Compass and a resolution positioning SAUSD as an AI Forward District. This action solidifies our

---

1601 East Chestnut Avenue, Santa Ana, CA 92701-6322 (714) 558-5501 Fax: (714) 558-5610

### BOARD OF EDUCATION

Carolyn Torres, President • Alfonso Alvarez, Ed.D., Vice President  
Hector Bustos, Clerk • Katelyn Brazer Aceves, Member • Rigo Rodriguez, Ph.D., Member

district's commitment to embracing AI technologies in education while ensuring their responsible and ethical use.

Our approach is neither prohibitive nor permissive without guidance. Instead, we have established clear guidelines for both staff and student use of AI. We encourage exploration and innovation while maintaining a focus on responsible and ethical use, data privacy, and student safety.

SAUSD has also established an Innovation Catalyst Collective (ICC) Policy Crew to continually work on AI-related policies and vet appropriate tools for classroom use. This ensures that our approach remains current and responsive to the rapidly evolving AI landscape.

### **Finding 2**

**Superintendents provide varying levels of support in implementing AI policies and/or guidelines in their respective school districts.**

#### **The District partially disagrees with the finding.**

The District partially disagrees in that it cannot comment on the superintendent's level of support in implementing AI policies and/or guidelines in other districts. As it pertains to Santa Ana Unified School District, Superintendent Jerry Almendarez has demonstrated strong and proactive support for implementing AI policies and guidelines.

Superintendent Almendarez has taken several key actions to ensure comprehensive AI integration in our district:

1. **AI Compass Development:** Superintendent Almendarez spearheaded the development of SAUSD's AI Compass, a comprehensive guide that outlines the district's approach to integrating AI in education. This document serves as a foundational roadmap for responsible AI use across the district.
2. **Board Resolution:** Under Superintendent Almendarez's leadership, the SAUSD Board of Education passed a resolution on April 23, 2024, adopting the AI Compass and positioning SAUSD as an AI Forward District. This formal endorsement at the highest level of district governance underscores the importance placed on addressing AI in education.
3. **Superintendent's AI Advisory Council:** Superintendent Almendarez established an AI Advisory Council to provide ongoing expertise and guidance on AI-related issues. This task force brings together diverse perspectives to inform district decision-making on AI implementation.
4. **Innovation Catalyst Collective (ICC):** Superintendent Almendarez supports the ICC, which focuses on fostering innovation in education, including the responsible use of AI.



This involvement demonstrates his commitment to staying at the forefront of educational technology trends.

5. **Professional Development:** Superintendent Almendarez has prioritized AI literacy among staff by supporting the development of comprehensive training programs and encouraging exploration of AI tools.

### Finding 3

**There are many resources to guide educators in using AI. Several are available at the local level through the Orange County Department of Education, Orange County Board of Education, CEO Leadership Alliance Orange County, and Orange Unified School District Technology Department, to name a few. However, utilization and even awareness of the availability of such resources is highly variable across school districts.**

#### **The District partially disagrees with the finding.**

The District does not have firsthand information regarding the utilization and awareness of the availability of the AI resources across school districts. As it pertains to Santa Ana Unified District, we have proactively developed and utilized a range of resources to guide educators on the use of AI. These resources include:

1. **SAUSD's AI Compass:** This comprehensive guide serves as the cornerstone of our AI education strategy. It provides educators with a clear framework for understanding and implementing AI in their teaching practices. The AI Compass will be regularly updated to reflect the rapidly evolving AI landscape and has been highly effective in providing a consistent, district-wide approach to AI integration.
2. **Superintendent's AI Advisory Council:** This council, composed of educators, technology experts, and community stakeholders, provides ongoing guidance and recommendations for AI use in our schools. The council's diverse perspectives have been invaluable in addressing the complex ethical and practical considerations of AI in education.
3. **SAUSD's Innovation Catalyst Collective (ICC):** This group focuses on fostering innovation in education, including AI integration. The ICC has been instrumental in developing practical, classroom-ready AI applications and sharing best practices across the district.
4. **Professional Development Programs:** SAUSD offers regular workshops and training sessions on AI in education. These programs have significantly improved our educators' AI literacy and confidence in using AI tools responsibly.
5. **Partnership with Local Resources:** We actively collaborate with the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) and the CEO Leadership Alliance Orange County (CLAOC) to access additional AI resources and expertise. These partnerships have

expanded our educators' knowledge base and exposed them to diverse perspectives on AI in education.

6. **Online Resource Hub:** We maintain a curated online platform where educators can access up-to-date information on AI tools, ethical guidelines, and lesson plans incorporating AI. This resource has been particularly effective in providing just-in-time support.

### **Recommendation 1**

**By June 30, 2025, Orange County's K-12 schools should implement policies and guidelines regarding the appropriate use of AI. These may be provided at the district level or within individual schools through the adoption of an Acceptable Use Policy, Code of Ethics, or other written directives addressing the use of AI.**

**The recommendation has been implemented.**

The District has implemented this recommendation as follows:

1. **AI Compass:** SAUSD has developed and adopted an AI Compass, outlining policies, guidelines, and ethical considerations for AI integration in education.
2. **Board Resolution:** On April 23, 2024, the SAUSD Board of Education adopted the AI Compass and passed a resolution positioning SAUSD as an AI Forward District.
3. **AI Integration Guidelines:** We have established clear guidelines for staff and student use of AI, covering exploration, data privacy, ethical use, and balancing innovation with safety.
4. **Academic Integrity Policy:** We've addressed AI in our policies, stating that SAUSD does not support AI-writing detectors for disciplinary or grading processes.
5. **Approved Tools:** We've officially approved certain AI tools for district-wide and site-based use, with a clear vetting process.
6. **Innovation Catalyst Collective (ICC) Policy Crew:** This group continually works on AI-related policies and vets appropriate tools.
7. **Instructional Technology Site Leads Program:** We've established a network of site-based AI leaders for consistent policy implementation.
8. **Professional Development:** We've implemented training programs to ensure staff understand and can effectively implement our AI policies and guidelines.

These measures position SAUSD at the forefront of responsible AI integration in K-12 education, with a commitment to regular policy reviews and updates.



## Recommendation 2

**Superintendents should ensure that their schools have policies that cover, at a minimum: the scope, guiding principles, and training regarding the responsible use of AI tools by students and teachers; any prohibited uses of special considerations regarding AI tools; and related security, privacy, and safety considerations.**

**The recommendation has been implemented.**

The District has implemented this recommendation as follows:

1. **AI Compass:** SAUSD has developed and adopted an AI Compass that comprehensively covers the scope, guiding principles, and responsible use of AI tools by students and teachers. This living document serves as our district-wide policy framework.
2. **Innovation Catalyst Collective (ICC) Policy Crew:** Superintendent Almendarez has established this group to continually work on AI-related policies, ensuring they remain current and effective. The ICC Policy Crew is actively engaged in: a) Refining the scope of AI use in our schools b) Developing and updating guiding principles for AI integration c) Creating training materials for responsible AI use d) Identifying and addressing prohibited uses and special considerations e) Addressing security, privacy, and safety considerations
3. **Training Initiatives:** We have implemented and are expanding professional development programs to ensure all staff understand and can effectively implement our AI policies and guidelines. These include asynchronous courses, workshops, and hands-on exploration sessions.
4. **Instructional Technology Site Leads Program:** This network of site-based AI leaders ensures consistent implementation of AI policies across all schools in the district, facilitating communication between the district and individual sites.
5. **Approved Tools and Vetting Process:** We have established a clear process for vetting and adopting new AI technologies, with special attention to security, privacy, and safety considerations.
6. **Regular Policy Reviews:** The Superintendent ensures that AI policies are regularly reviewed and updated to address emerging challenges and opportunities.
7. **Board Oversight:** The SAUSD Board of Education has formally adopted our AI approach, providing high-level governance and accountability.

While these measures are in place, we recognize the rapidly evolving nature of AI in education. The ICC Policy Crew is continuously working to refine and expand our policies, with a focus on getting information to sites efficiently. The Superintendent is committed to ongoing oversight and adaptation of our AI policies to ensure they remain comprehensive and effective.

### **Recommendation 3**

**K-12 students should be trained on the appropriate use of AI.**

**The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.**

The District has not yet fully implemented this recommendation but will implement this recommendation by June 30, 2025, with the following action plan:

- 1. AI Literacy Curriculum Development (August 2024 - December 2024):**
  - Develop a comprehensive K-12 AI literacy curriculum tailored to different age groups
  - Create cross-curricular integration guidelines for various subjects
- 2. Digital Citizenship Integration (January 2025 - March 2025):**
  - Incorporate age-appropriate lessons on responsible AI use into existing digital citizenship curricula
- 3. Pilot Program (April 2025 - May 2025):**
  - Launch pilot programs in select schools across grade levels
  - Gather feedback and make necessary adjustments
- 4. Teacher Training (June 2025 - August 2025):**
  - Conduct professional development sessions for teachers on implementing the AI literacy curriculum
- 5. Full Implementation (September 2025):**
  - Roll out the AI literacy program district-wide
  - Establish after-school AI clubs and district-wide AI project showcases
- 6. Ongoing Assessment and Improvement (Quarterly from September 2025):**
  - Conduct regular student feedback through surveys and focus groups
  - Update AI curriculum materials to reflect the latest developments
- 7. Parent and Community Engagement (Ongoing from September 2025):**
  - Develop and distribute an "AI at Home" guide
  - Organize information sessions for families in partnership with our Family & Community Engagement team

This comprehensive plan will ensure that our students receive thorough training on the appropriate use of AI, tailored to their age and integrated across their educational experience. We are committed to implementing this plan effectively and adapting it as needed to address the evolving AI landscape in education.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**K-12 teachers should be trained on the appropriate use of AI.**

**The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.**

The District has not yet fully implemented this recommendation but will implement this recommendation by June 30, 2025, with the following action plan:

1. **Comprehensive Training Program (August 2024 - December 2024):** We are developing a multi-faceted approach to train teachers on appropriate AI use, including:
  - Asynchronous online courses
  - Regular professional development workshops on practical AI applications
  - Digital citizenship and media literacy training with AI focus
  - Hands-on AI exploration opportunities
2. **Innovation Catalyst Collective (ICC) Policy Crew (Ongoing):** Select teachers participate in policy development and tool vetting, deepening their AI understanding.
3. **Instructional Technology Site Leads Program (Ongoing):** We've established a network of site-based AI leaders to provide on-site support and facilitate peer-to-peer learning.
4. **Continuous Learning (Ongoing):** We will continue to provide ongoing updates and learning opportunities to keep pace with AI advancements, including sessions on newly approved AI tools and best practices.
5. **Collaborative Learning Communities (January 2025 - June 2025):** We will foster teacher collaboration through professional learning communities focused on AI in education.
6. **AI-Enhanced Lesson Planning Workshops (Ongoing):** We will continue to offer specialized sessions for teachers to incorporate AI tools into their lesson plans effectively.

Our approach is dynamic and responsive, with regular feedback solicitation to refine and improve our training programs. We also maintain connections with other districts, educational organizations, and AI experts to ensure our training reflects the latest developments in AI for education.

This comprehensive strategy ensures our teachers are well-prepared to appropriately and effectively use AI in their classrooms, fostering an innovative, ethical, and student-centered learning environment.



### **Recommendation 5**

**Schools and educators should be encouraged to collaborate with the various available AI consortiums and think tanks, such as OCDE and CLAOC, to effectively implement AI and establish basic tenets for its use.**

**The recommendation has been implemented.**

The District has implemented this recommendation as follows:

**1. Existing Collaborations:**

- AI Safe Partnership: Collaborated in developing our AI Compass
- Innovation Catalyst Collective (ICC): Our internal think tank for AI implementation strategies
- Local University Partnerships: Engaging for latest AI research and developments
- Memberships in InnovateEDU, Digital Promise/League of Innovative Schools, Council of Greater City Schools, All4Ed/Future Ready Schools
- Collaborations with CORE Districts and California Collaborative

**2. Planned Collaborations:**

- CEO Leadership Alliance Orange County (CLAOC): Deepening engagement for workforce development
- Orange County Department of Education (OCDE): Continuing participation in AI initiatives
- National AI in Education Consortiums: Exploring memberships
- Tech Industry Partnerships: Planning collaborations with leading AI companies
- AI Ethics Think Tanks: Enhancing our AI ethics guidelines
- International AI in Education Networks: Seeking global perspectives
- AI Policy Advisory Groups: Staying informed on AI regulations in education

**3. Implementation Strategy:**

- Regular engagement with partners
- Knowledge sharing channels
- Pilot programs for new AI technologies
- Enhanced professional development leveraging external expertise
- Student involvement opportunities
- Continuous evaluation of collaboration impacts

These collaborations ensure our AI approach is innovative, ethical, and aligned with best practices, benefiting our students, teachers, and the broader educational community. We are committed to ongoing expansion and refinement of these partnerships to stay at the forefront of AI integration in education.



The Honorable Maria D. Hernandez  
Presiding Judge, Orange County Superior Court  
Page 9

Please accept the information provided herein as the District's responses to the Orange County Grand Jury's Factual Findings and Recommendation in the Report. Once again, we appreciate the time and attention that the Grand Jury devoted to this very important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry Almendarez", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Jerry Almendarez  
Superintendent