

AI Is Already in Virginia's Classrooms.

The Rulebook Is Still Being Written.

*An early look at how Virginia's public school divisions are governing
artificial intelligence, and what it means for teachers, students,
and administrators.*

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Artificial intelligence has arrived at the doorstep of America's public schools, and educators, students, and administrators are navigating its presence in uneven and often uncertain ways. Some are experimenting with it cautiously; others are stepping back to assess the risks. What most schools are grappling with, regardless of where they land on adoption, is the absence of clear, community-grounded guidance: the policies, frameworks, and shared understandings that would help them make these decisions well. Virginia's recent passage of SB394 and HB1186 underscores the urgency of this work. The legislation reflects a statewide recognition that the rapid pace of AI development has outrun existing policy frameworks; researchers, policymakers, and practitioners need to work together to build the evidence base that will inform these decisions.

That is precisely the picture emerging from our early review of how Virginia's public school divisions are governing AI. What follows is a preliminary assessment based on the data we have been working through from across the state and the country. Our early finding echoes what has played out in medicine, hiring, and nearly every other field the technology has touched: AI is being put to work faster than the rules meant to govern it are being written. In most of the divisions we examined, AI reached classrooms before any formal policy arrived to guide it.

1 Where These Numbers Come From

We reviewed publicly available AI policies and guidance documents from 50 of Virginia's 131 school divisions: the 15 largest by enrollment, plus 35 chosen at random, based on what divisions had posted publicly as of June 2026. Because the analysis is still underway, treat everything below as an early reading rather than the final word.

2 Most Divisions Are Operating Without a Formal AI Policy

Among the 50 Virginia school divisions we examined, just over a third have explicitly published their AI policies. Figure 1 shows that nineteen divisions (38%) have one on the books, 29 (58%) have none we could identify, and two (4%) say a policy is under development. Put plainly: in most of these communities, AI is entering classrooms and front offices without a formal policy to guide it.

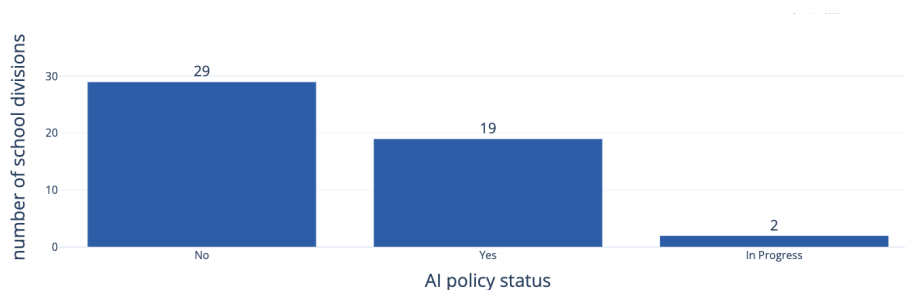


Figure 1. AI policy status across Virginia school divisions.

A policy, though, is only one piece of the puzzle. Many divisions instead publish AI guidelines, which are recommended practices rather than formal, board-adopted rules, and there the story looks somewhat different.

3 Guidelines Are Filling the Gap, Partly

More than half of the divisions we examined (27 of 50, or 54%) have published their AI guidelines, while 20 (40%) have not. One division mentions guidelines but shares few details, one restricts access to them, and one is still developing them. The pattern suggests divisions are more comfortable recommending good practice than mandating it: guidance is outpacing formal policy.

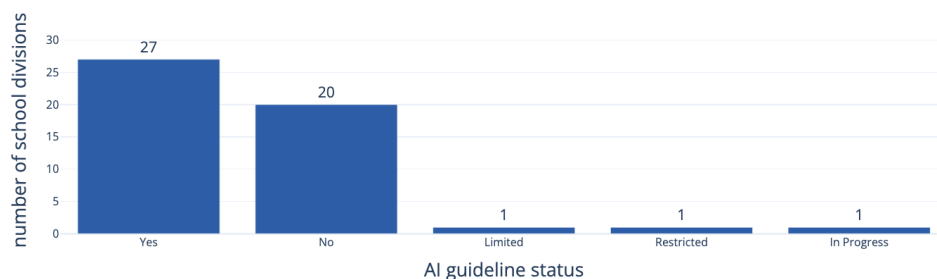


Figure 2. AI guideline status across Virginia school divisions.

4 Where a Student Lives Shapes the Rules They Learn Under

Formal AI policies are not spread evenly across the state. Divisions that have adopted them cluster in Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads, two regions known for their economic activity and workforce development, while Southwest Virginia, Southside, and the Shenandoah Valley show little to no formal policy presence.

Executive Order 30, signed in January 2024, directed the state to issue guidelines for integrating AI throughout Virginia's schools, and echoes of that language, including principles like "Do not Harm," surface in many of the division documents we reviewed. But state guidance of this kind is directional rather than binding: whether it translates into formal local policy depends heavily on each division's capacity and resources to act on it. What this means in practice is that the policy landscape we are documenting is still actively forming.

Money does not tell the whole story, though. In our early look, divisions with adopted policies tend to sit in somewhat better-off communities, but the pattern is far from clean: policies and guidelines show up in some of the state's lower-income divisions as well, and some of its wealthiest divisions still have none. Community wealth alone does not explain who has a rulebook. Still, geography raises real concern. As AI governance matures across the state, divisions in less-resourced areas risk falling behind not only in technology, but in the formal protections and guidance that policies give students and staff.

5 Rural Divisions Are Furthest Behind

Community type sharpens that concern. Based on Census classification, rural divisions make up nearly half of our sample (23 of 50). Yet only 2 of those 23 (about 9%) have formally published an AI policy. Suburban divisions account for 32% of the sample (16 of 50), urban divisions 18% (9 of 50), and town divisions 4% (2 of 50).

6 A Policy on Paper Is Not the Same as a Teacher Who's Ready

For the 30 divisions that do have AI guidelines or policies, the next question is what it actually delivers, starting with whether anyone is trained to carry it out. Of the 19 divisions with an adopted AI policy, only 8 (42%) also provide AI training for educators; the other 11 have a policy but offer no training we could identify. Among the 29 divisions without a policy, just 3 (10%) provide any AI training at all. The early signal is that formal governance and educator preparation are not yet developing in tandem. A policy or guideline without training gives teachers rules on paper, but not the skills to follow them.

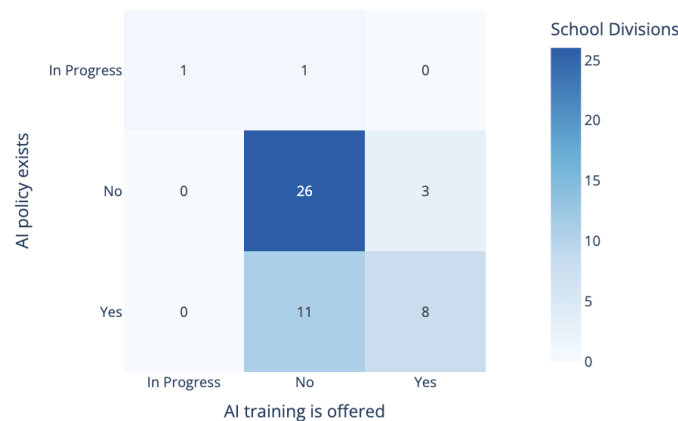


Figure 3. AI policy status and AI training availability.

7 Few Policies Separate Rules for Teachers from Rules for Students

There is one more gap hiding inside the documents themselves: few set expectations for a specific role. Of the 19 who published AI policies, 18 name their intended audience, but most address teachers and students together in a single set of provisions (13 divisions). Only a handful are written for a specific group: 3 for teachers, 2 for students. One names no audience at all. That matters because a combined policy tends toward the generic: guidance that must apply equally to a teacher planning lessons and a student writing an essay often retreats to broad principles rather than concrete expectations, and can answer neither reader's questions well.

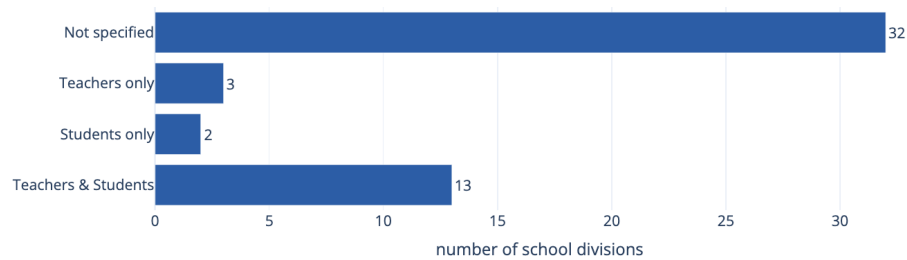


Figure 4. Who AI policies are written for.

8 What the Policies Actually Say



Figure 5. Enforcement strength and guidance detailedness of AI policies in 16 Virginia school divisions. Scores range from 0 (theme not addressed) to 4 (fully required with oversight / comprehensive guidance).

Reading the documents side by side reveals that some themes repeat across nearly every division with formal AI guidance, and the divisions' own words tell the story better than any summary. Figure 5 maps this landscape across eight policy themes, showing how strongly each of sixteen school divisions enforces each theme (enforcement strength) and how thoroughly it explains each theme (guidance detailedness).

The most consistent message: *"AI should support educators, not replace them."* For example, Augusta County Public Schools says AI should "augment, not replace" human judgment and relationships. Gloucester County Public Schools specifies that AI "may not replace licensed educators' professional judgment or classroom instruction." Culpeper County Public Schools calls AI "an instructional assistant," a helper, not a substitute.

Preparing teachers is a close second. Gloucester County offers "ongoing professional devel-

opment” through its Instructional Technology Resource Team, Campbell County emphasizes “innovative professional learning with technology,” and Rockbridge County commits to building “AI literacy” through educator training and ongoing support.

Academic integrity runs through nearly every document, but rarely as an outright ban. Most divisions draw a line between responsible use and dishonesty. Suffolk Public Schools teaches students to use “AI as a Coach” and “AI as a Collaborator.” Gloucester County states that students “may not submit AI-generated content as original work,” and Rockbridge County pushes students to critically evaluate anything AI produces before relying on it.

Privacy concerns accompany almost every discussion of AI. Accomack County requires AI use to comply with applicable “privacy laws.” Gloucester County bars AI systems from processing or transmitting “personally identifiable information (PII),” and Rockbridge County requires district-approved tools that meet federal privacy requirements. Broader principles, such as “transparency,” “accountability,” “fairness,” and guarding against bias, recur as well, alongside commitments like Frederick County’s to “equitable access” and “responsible innovation” and Hanover County’s reminder that students should “verify the accuracy and credibility” of AI-generated information.

Beneath the shared language, though, divisions are in very different places. Gloucester County has an ethical framework grounded in “transparency, accountability, fairness, and educational value,” while Falls Church City is shaping its policy through “community input” and “advisory committees.” Approved tools vary widely: one county names MagicSchool as its “only approved Generative AI tool” for student-facing activities; another recommends Gemini, NotebookLM, and a district ChatGPT Workspace for educators; and many divisions name no tools at all. Even the audience differs: one county supports educators through a dedicated “Teacher AI Hub,” while another focuses on students in the classroom. And while equity is often acknowledged, the emphasis ranges from divisions explicitly committed to “bridging the digital divide” to those that barely mention it.

9 What School and District Leaders Should Watch

- **Acceptable-use policies alone are not enough.** Governing AI well takes a district-wide framework that covers how educators, students, and administrators actually use it.
- **One-time training doesn’t stick.** Teachers and administrators need continuous support to keep pace with tools and expectations that change by the month. George Mason University’s Ambassadors of Teaching in the Age of AI (ATAA) program is one such example.
- **Without clear classroom guidance** on appropriate use, citation, and academic integrity, educators and students are left to interpret the rules on their own.
- **Student and staff privacy is at risk** when AI tools arrive before approved-tool lists and data-governance procedures do.

- **Human oversight must stay central**, especially when AI informs decisions that directly affect students.
- **A policy that never gets reviewed** quietly goes stale as technology, law, and classroom practice move on.

10 What Districts Can Do Right Now

- Adopt a comprehensive, district-wide AI policy that squarely addresses responsible use, academic integrity, student privacy, and teacher responsibilities.
- Invest in professional development that builds educators' AI literacy and their confidence using AI in teaching and learning.
- Give classrooms practical guidance: concrete examples of appropriate use, clear citation expectations, and strategies for preserving original student work.
- Put a regular review cycle on the calendar so AI governance keeps up with evolving technology, legal requirements, and best practice.

11 What We Don't Know Yet

This is an early look, and it comes with some caveats.

- We have examined 50 of Virginia's 131 school divisions so far, roughly four in ten (38%). The rest are still being analyzed, so these findings are preliminary rather than representative of the whole state.
- Because the sample includes the 15 largest divisions by design, it over-represents suburban and urban communities. Statewide, rural divisions make up a larger share than in our sample, so the policy gap we describe here is, if anything, understated.
- We relied on publicly available documents. Some divisions keep AI guidance behind password-protected staff portals or district email logins, so relevant internal materials may be missing from our picture.
- A policy on paper is not proof of practice. We reviewed written documents, not what actually happens in classrooms.
- Sorting policies into categories involves judgment calls. We applied consistent criteria across all divisions, but some subjectivity is unavoidable.

12 Where This Goes Next

The next step is to complete the picture: extending the review to all 131 Virginia school divisions and looking beyond Virginia to districts around the country with instructive approaches to AI governance, including places with visible AI use and very different levels of resources.

We also plan to connect the policy review with the national news dataset we have been building (roughly 27,700 news articles screened, with 723 retained as evidence of concrete AI use or formal adoption decisions), asking whether districts with different policy approaches show different patterns of AI use and adoption. And a national survey of teachers will capture something neither news coverage nor policy documents can: what implementing AI actually looks like from inside a school. Together, those pieces will turn this preliminary snapshot into a fuller account of how AI is entering public education, and how school systems are responding.