

AI in Education

As the artificial intelligence industry continues to advance — with more users creating startups, technology and digital content — AI tools become part of many students’ daily life. This raises a concern: how should young people, specifically students, learn to use AI tools responsibly?

“[Teachers] don’t encourage us to use AI on any of our work, homework, tests, obviously,” said sophomore Kylie Shim. “When used correctly, AI is significantly more helpful than doing it by yourself. It helps you summarize better. It could be beneficial for your studying by teaching you quicker methods, and overall, it helps you search for the information you need way quicker.”

Advanced Placement Biology teacher Katherine Ward agreed that AI should not replace student thinking, but instead, be used for brainstorming, inspiration and active learning.

“Once a question is chosen, the work on developing the data, designing the experiment, running the experiment, gathering your sources ... that should be done by you,” Ward said. “[AI is] going to manipulate what we do. [But] if you’re sitting down and you’re using it as a study guide, you [can] ask the AI, ‘Help me understand chemiosmosis, transcription; help me understand symbolism, and how it might be used in a novel.’ It’s going to give you some information, and you read that information, and then it’s going to ask you a question, and you’re going to answer the question.”

Many take issue with how AI use is taught in schools, which they believe influences how students use it.

“[The way] a lot of students use AI is not intelligent,” said senior Louis Riviere. “They can’t just use it to outsource their thinking and write their essays for them, [which is] academic dishonesty. Instead of saying ‘don’t use AI,’ we should tell students to be smarter about the way that they use it. We should incentivize using AI as sort of a personal assistant as a way to help students think, rather than a way for the AI to think for the students.”

However, with AI websites blocked on school-issued Chromebooks, some believe teaching AI literacy may be difficult.

“If we want our students to use AI appropriately or not use it, we need to be able to train them how to use it,” said Courtney Caldwell, Ethnic Studies and Advanced Placement Via Individual Determination teacher. “[But] we can’t without being able to show [how to use AI in school].”

Copy: Allinah Zhan, Ashley Tsui, Helen McCloskey, Mi Nguyen

Layout: Allinah Zhan
Graphics: Allinah Zhan

SMUHSD Phone Ban

Before the 2026-27 school year, San Mateo Union High School District students used phones to upload assignments, check grades and access cell data when opening online resources. However, with new restrictions in place, classes have shifted away from cell phone use in education.

“I had a policy that worked,” Caldwell said. “I collected phones. They stayed in the phone chart all periods. Students were not allowed to take them to the bathroom. In my class, I don’t really notice any additional benefits, but it [the policy] is shifting the way break time works. Students have no option but to talk to each other or sit in silence.”

The movement to ban phones first took off with France prohibiting phone use for middle school students in 2018. Since then, 106 countries have banned phones during instructional time, and 30 states have bell-to-bell phone bans. In compliance with the PFSA, which called for California school districts to have a phone policy by July 1, the Oakland, San Jose and San Francisco school districts all developed bell-to-bell phone bans similar to the SMUHSD policy.

Some students have noticed new difficulties in classes due to switching from being able to use phones to exclusively Chromebooks.

“Previously, sometimes we would have to take pictures of our assignments and turn them in and that would be done using a scanning app on our phone, and that was very easy to do,” Riviere said. “It was also a lot harder to forget to do it because you would just do it the moment you’re done... just take a picture and submit it.”

TECHNOLOGY
IN
EDUCATION

District Provided Technology

Following Governor Gavin Newsom’s Phone-Free School Act, Aragon adopted a bell-to-bell phone policy and a Chromebook-only protocol.

School-issued Chromebooks are now the only permitted devices during school hours, sparking conversations about technology integration into the modern-day classroom.

For instance, many frequently accessed websites were blocked by the district on Chromebooks, including LinkedIn, Spotify and various informational YouTube videos. Though Chromebooks are meant to promote educational equity, the heavy restrictions on website access can impede educational experiences.

“I understand the push to have some equity in technology, but I find that the Chromebooks are incredibly limited,” Ward said. “Even the PDF of my textbook won’t open on the Chromebook. It opens on my personal and my district-issued computer, but on [students’] Chromebooks it won’t open. What’s the point?”

Moreover, some argue enforcing a schoolwide Chromebook-only policy puts unnecessary restrictions on students with personal computers, raising questions about the impacts of pursuing equity on the broader student population.

“I agree that the school supplying students with a Chromebook during their time at [Aragon] is good because not everyone has access to a personal laptop outside of school,” Riviere said. “But I would say that if the student has a substitute for the Chromebook that they prefer to use, in most cases it will be faster [and] just better in basically every single way.”

Moreover, personal devices provide easy access to personal emails, communication and extracurriculars like drawing, and websites like AP Classroom and Common App require students to sign in with their outside accounts. Assignments are completed online through Canvas, and websites like Khan Academy and NoodleTools provide easy access to resources. Despite its prevalence today, some believe consistent reliance on computers may inhibit instruction, opting for paper-based learning instead.

“[During the] pandemic and post-pandemic, we were forced to go very technology-driven,” Caldwell said. “That was a disservice to students. The more we’re on our computers, the more disengaged we become in class, and that’s why I prefer to go paper versus digital. But [spending] time during the pandemic [becoming] more educated in different technologies was a benefit. I can do digital lessons and have these really cool tools that benefit or supplement what we’re doing on paper.”

Students have noticed the benefits of paper-based learning as well, recognizing the role that physical writing still plays in modern education.

“I believe writing something out significantly helps you study more efficiently than typing, since writing [improves your] memory,” Shim said. “It depends on the assignment and the type of work you’re trying to do, because things that you need to remember, long-term memory, you need to write down. For quicker information, you could use technology.”

Along with what some see as limitations and difficulties, technology has brought what many view as positive advancements to education.

Future?

The rapidly evolving landscape of classroom technology has forced schools into a balancing act between caution and innovation. For educators, keeping pace with constant technological shifts is both an overwhelming challenge and an essential part of the job.

“What is the future?” Ward said. “I don’t know. I need to think carefully about how AI impacts what we do here. As far as new technologies, there’s so much coming out so quickly that I don’t know how it’s going to be applied in my classroom yet. One of the things I really appreciate about being a teacher is that I constantly have to be learning new things [and] adapting.”

The rapid rollout of new tools has created immediate hurdles for schools regarding academic integrity and artificial intelligence.

“Students using AI to help them cheat in their school work has scared the school system and the educational system,” Riviere said. “[In] a panic, [they have been] like: ‘No AI, we’re just going to ban it outright.’ I’m not saying that was the wrong decision. [However], AI will only become more prominent in our lives. We need to implement it slowly into our school system so that students are not left out to dry when they leave the educational system.”

Beyond AI tools, the foundational shift toward a tech-driven classroom relies heavily on digital devices.

“I hope that big technology brands like Apple can provide schools with bigger discounts on devices, for example, laptops, iPads, keyboards,” said junior Catie Wu. “Specifically high schools [could get] better discounts, [making it] more affordable, so kids can learn better.”

Even as debates continue over hardware accessibility and the benefits versus consequences of a technology-filled classroom, daily learning remains permanently altered by the advance of digital tools.

“There’s a lot of teachers that have maintained a lot of their digital tools and are using them in classes ever since the pandemic,” Caldwell said. “You can see every year there’s new teachers with SMART boards, and digital lessons are still very much alive and well. We’re constantly evolving and trying to streamline how we use Canvas and utilize that as a classroom tool as well... Do I think some teachers shifted back toward more paper driven? Yes, but I wouldn’t say that it’s a whole staff shift [back] to that.”