

Leading Through Curiosity: Advancing Responsible AI Through Collective Action



PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

When generative artificial intelligence entered public conversation, school systems across Canada faced rapid uncertainty. Questions about safety, ethics, assessment, integrity, privacy, and readiness surfaced almost overnight, often under pressure to respond before shared understanding had been built.

The risk for districts was real and twofold. Move too slowly, and be perceived as unprepared or resistant to change. Move too quickly, and risk creating unintended harm, inequity, or erosion of community trust. Many systems treated AI as either a problem to be contained or a trend to be adopted, leaving educators and families caught somewhere between fear and hype.

Metro Vancouver school districts recognized a deeper and more specific challenge: how to engage with AI in a way that preserved professional judgment, protected students, and strengthened belonging, while avoiding fragmented, tool-driven decision making. And critically, how to do this without each district having to build understanding from scratch alone.

The question at the heart of this work was not “What should we do about AI?” It was “How do we approach AI in thoughtful ways as a community?”



Organization: **Metro Vancouver School Districts AI Collaborative**

Province: British Columbia

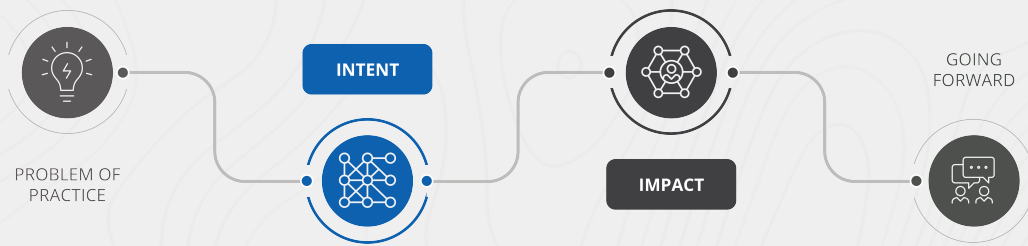
Date: **2026**

Districts: West Vancouver School District, Surrey School District and partner districts across Metro Vancouver in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Childcare.

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Integrating AI in Education: Transforming Learning — An AI Use Case Initiative for Canadian Education

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Intent

From the outset, this work was framed as a leadership and learning question rather than a technology initiative. The intent across participating districts was not to accelerate adoption or restrict access, but to engage with AI thoughtfully, responsibly, and collectively.

Core principles of safety, privacy, ethics, bias awareness, and critical thinking were positioned as non-negotiable foundations. At the same time, the network resisted fear-driven responses that might foreclose meaningful innovation. The posture was grounded in deliberate balance: genuinely excited about possibilities, honest about risks, and unwilling to let either side crowd out the other.

A Network Built on Coherence Without Conformity

Recognizing that neighbouring districts were grappling with identical questions, West Vancouver Schools helped convene a regional AI network now spanning about twelve Metro Vancouver school districts, together representing nearly three-quarters of British Columbia’s student population. The network includes Surrey, North Vancouver, Richmond, Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, Abbotsford, Delta, Coquitlam, Burnaby, Chilliwack, Langley and other partners.

The intent was coherence without conformity: shared learning, shared principles, and collaborative sense-making, while allowing AI practice to remain context-responsive and locally led. This “competitive in a cooperative way” posture reduced duplication, amplified effective practice, and elevated AI from isolated pilots to a shared regional endeavour.

A Deliberate, Year-Over-Year Focus

The network’s work has built year over year with intention:

Year 1	Understanding AI together. Superintendents showed up personally, not as delegates. The network focused on a small number of platforms rather than every emerging tool, because when you support everything, you support nothing.
Year 2	Developing shared AI guiding principles. Districts adapted each other’s work rather than copying it. Abbotsford’s foundational work with Indigenous communities on AI, for example, was later adapted by West Vancouver’s Indigenous Education Council for its own local context.
Year 3	Targeting two areas needing collective sense-making: AI on the business and operational side of school districts, and writing and assessment in an AI-rich world, particularly in English language arts at the secondary level.

“Don’t think replication, think diffusion. We don’t want AI sameness in every room. Every teacher is different, every classroom is different, and AI should amplify what’s already happening there.”

Chris Kennedy, Superintendent, West Vancouver Schools (SD 45)

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Impact

The impact of this approach has been both human and systemic. By limiting supported platforms, the network reduced noise and cognitive overload, allowing professional learning to focus on purpose and pedagogy rather than product comparison. Educators were given space to experiment thoughtfully, aligned with their expertise and classroom realities.

Stories of Inclusion and Belonging

In classrooms across the region, the most visible and consistent impact has been on inclusion:



<p>A child’s first week in Canada A Grade 1 and 2 newcomer student, in Canada less than one week, was immediately included in classroom learning through real-time AI translation. No pull-out. No waiting. Present from day one.</p>	<p>Registration in any language A school secretary registered a child in a language no one in the building spoke, completing the process in real time through AI translation rather than booking a translator days later. Fast, dignified, and welcoming.</p>
<p>Differentiated support in the moment Educational assistants adapted math problems up or down a grade level in real time, ensuring students with diverse learning needs and multi-language learners were included and experiencing success alongside their peers.</p>	<p>Personalized texts that spark engagement A teacher rewrote a reading passage as a basketball story at the same level using AI, matching one student’s interests. That student was engaged in a way generic texts had never achieved.</p>

Growing Student Engagement and Creation

At the secondary level, student interest in AI as a field of creation has grown dramatically. For example, in one district an AI and cybersecurity program that began with 30 students has seen applications grow fourfold. Students are not just consuming AI tools. They are building them.

<p>30 Year 1 student participants</p>	<p>60 Year 2 student participants</p>	<p>140+ Year 3 applicants for the program</p>
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Impact

Senior Leadership as a Critical Accelerator

A defining feature of this network’s success has been consistent, visible senior leadership presence. Superintendents across Metro Vancouver attended AI learning sessions personally rather than delegating. Where leaders spend their time sends a signal to the whole organization about what matters. By being in the room, superintendents made clear that AI was a shared leadership responsibility, not a technical task passed to another department.

Beyond instruction, administrative teams have used AI translation tools to communicate with families in real time, removing barriers that once caused delay or exclusion. Educators report emerging time efficiencies and new forms of personalization, particularly those now two or three years into thoughtful AI practice.



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Going Forward

GOING
FORWARD



The districts in this network do not claim to have AI figured out. That would contradict the very posture that has made this work effective. Instead, they continue to treat AI as an evolving journey that requires humility, adaptability, and honest ongoing reflection. The messiness is not a problem to be resolved. It is the work.

Going forward, the network is guided by five commitments:

Curiosity over certainty	Continue moving educators along a continuum from personal AI exploration, to professional application, to student-facing integration, without forcing a single timeline or approach.
Diffusion over replication	Strengthen regional sharing so that good ideas discovered in one district or one classroom travel quickly to others, adapted to local context rather than copied wholesale.
People over products	Revisit ethical frameworks and guiding principles regularly as tools and contexts evolve. Name the hard conversations, including what thoughtful writing and assessment look like in Grade 11 English in an AI-rich world, rather than deferring them.
Collective voice for provincial impact	Carry the network's work into provincial and national conversations. Ten to twelve districts representing nearly three-quarters of BC students speak with influence that no single district can match. The BC Ministry of Education has been a supportive listening partner, reinforcing this work without directing it.
Amplifying the people doing the work	When a payroll manager finds a better way, when an office secretary helps a family register in real time, when a teacher builds something that changes a student's day, those stories deserve to travel. Amplifying them is how culture shifts.

This Dell Technologies and C21 Canada use case illustrates how systems can navigate complexity without fear or hype, demonstrating that responsible AI leadership is ultimately about strengthening trust, equity, and human agency while moving forward together.

Resources:

- Fifteen Years One Question - What C21 Canada has been trying to tell us all along, Chris Kennedy, Superintendent, West Vancouver School District:
<https://files.constantcontact.com/d503fcbc401/55ccd87e-59c9-4124-a7c1-647fba6b657f.pdf>
- Culture of Yes: <https://cultureofyes.ca/>

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