Mission-Driven AI Approach

An AI approach turns out to be a useful pressure test on your mission.

1 IS · WAS · ALWAYS

12 MIN — 3 ALONE, THEN YOUR TABLE

Some things about school are current, some are past their prime, and some we will never stop doing. An ALWAYS finishes the sentence *"there will never be a time when we are not teaching ____"* — perspective taking, responsibility, problem solving, leadership, kindness to one another. It doesn't have to appear in your mission statement to be true, and often it doesn't. The power is in keeping the value separate from the path, because the path changes as the world does.

Is: driving a car · **Was:** driving a manual · **Always:** mobility — getting from A to B
Is: searching Google · **Was:** the card catalog · **Always:** finding high-quality reference material

IS	WAS	ALWAYS
what we do now	*what is replaced*	*what we'll never stop teaching*

AI touches everything, so it's the wrong place to start. Start with what you are developing in a person, then ask whether a practice serves it. The question for a teacher was never *did you use AI?* It is whether the practice reflects what the school values — was critical thinking deepened, and were the tools at hand wielded well, or deliberately set aside?

A PATH YOU STILL TEACH THAT HAS COME LOOSE FROM WHAT IT WAS FOR

Four things to say out loud

BULLETS ARE FINE.
FOUR ROWS, FOR THE YEAR AHEAD.

An approach, not a policy. A policy settles a question, is written to be enforced, and needs a stable world to be fair. An approach guides a judgment, is written to be used, and expects to be revisited. The steep part of the curve is a hard place to write anything permanent from, and yet we are still obligated to provide guidance. The stable parts — how we handle data, what we tell students about their own work — can be policy. The rest is judgment.

2 WRITE FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

11 MIN

Write for whichever group you'd have to address first — your faculty and staff, or your students. When you get home, run the same four again for the other domains, including how you talk about this with families.

	FOR THE YEAR AHEAD
What we value *what we're trying to protect*	
What we encourage *invited, never required*	
What we expect *of everyone, this year*	
What we won't do *and who'd be disappointed*	

The first two don't invite conflict. Do you cover each domain? And does the fourth trace back to an ALWAYS from the front page — is it something you believe, or something you'd prefer?

> Because we will always _____,
>
> we will not _____
>
> _____,
>
> even though it would _____
>
> _____.

If the third clause is easy to write, what does that say about the first two?

The Challenge Round

TRADE PACKETS WITH A NEIGHBOR
WRITE ON THEIRS. SIGN IT.

3 THREE TESTS

5 MIN

You're reading someone else's thinking, so be honest — it's more useful to them than being polite. Check the box if it holds up; if it doesn't, write the question you'd ask them.

☐ **The anonymity test.** Cover the school's name. Could this be any school? Does it tie closely enough to their mission that you'd know whose it was?

☐ **The change test.** When the tools change, does this still hold? Or does it rest on capabilities and failures of our current AI systems?

☐ **The behavior test.** Would this shift what anyone actually does at your school? If it only checks a box, what opportunity is being missed?

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WHAT YOU'D HAVE TO BE ABLE TO SAY OUT LOUD

Two people will ask you about this before Thanksgiving. What would you actually say to each?

TO A FACULTY MEMBER WHO THINKS YOU'RE MOVING TOO FAST

TO A PARENT WHO THINKS YOU'RE MOVING TOO SLOWLY

ONE ASK FOR THIS YEAR

One of ours, as an example: think what you like about AI, but not engaging the question isn't really an option here. "I gave it real work three times and it failed me" counts completely. What could you ask of everyone at your school this year?

> This year, everyone at our school will _____.
>
> An ask like that requires institutional support. We will provide _____.

Run this at your school

THE AGENDA WE ACTUALLY USED
EPS SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM · JANUARY – JULY 2025

One morning, no laptops. The entire senior leadership team engaged in the process. We began with an AI Stance and arrived at an AI Approach, because we stayed open to many perspectives and our target changed as we went. Today covered parts 4 and 6; the other four are below. The second is the one that gets skipped.

TIME	CONVERSATION	WHAT HAPPENS, AND WHY IT'S THERE
0:00–0:20	**Objectives, norms, framing**	Name the goal and the norms out loud. Ours opened with Socrates objecting to the invention of writing.
0:20–0:50	**Where our people are**	Your own faculty and staff survey, printed and in their hands. **Do this first, and do it before the meeting.** Groups read the data, then one insight per person. What do your people actually think, and how do you know?
0:50–1:40	**Scenarios in our future**	Small groups, one scenario each — three below, or write your own. Four questions each: what are the costs · what current practices lead us there · what current practices protect us · what would we change.
1:50–2:05	**The problem of change**	Change is punctuated, not steady: quiet stretches increase quality, then a steep one increases capability. We're on a steep one, which is a hard place to write anything permanent from — and we're still obligated to provide guidance.
2:05–2:15	**IS · WAS · ALWAYS**	Front page, and short.
2:15–3:30	**Commitments, then the approach**	What can we commit to this year? Then write the four — what we value, encourage, expect, and won't do — for adults and for students.

THREE SCENARIOS YOU'RE WELCOME TO BORROW

The A vs. B choice. Students choose between an A with little effort and no learning, or a B+ with real effort and real learning. If AI can produce everything we assign, what is the value claim of the education?

The AI loop. Teachers generate assignments with AI, students submit AI-generated work, teachers grade it with AI. Assume detection is impossible. What isn't busy work?

The AI memory. Students wear devices that record and recall their day. What happens to internal processing — and does the answer change if it's the accommodation a learning-support student needs?

TWO PROBLEMS, KEPT SEPARATE

What do we want to do? And how do we communicate it? We settled the first in discussion, then took up the second — the AI Approach document and the presentations that carried it to faculty, students, and families. The writing tested how clear we actually were. Make time for the second problem when you plan the first.

BEFORE YOU CONVENE

Survey your faculty and staff, and print the results. Decide what the day has to produce; ours was an approach for the coming year rather than a policy. Choose someone to hold the pen afterward. And give the document a person and a season rather than a deadline: who will notice when it stops describing what you actually do, and when would you expect to look at it again?

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