



The Current State:

EdTech, TeenTech, and AI

**A Collaborative Report by
Washington Leadership Academy
& DC AI Collaborative**

Fall 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On September 30, 2026, **Washington Leadership Academy** and the **DC AI Collaborative** convened educators, school leaders, researchers, policymakers, and community partners to explore the current state of EdTech, TeenTech, and AI. The session began with an examination of emerging trends, research, and national dilemmas, followed by expert perspectives from Rhitu Chatterjee of NPR and Julie Kelleher of LikeAMother.ai. Participants then shifted from discussion to collaborative problem-solving through a series of whiteboarding activities.

During the whiteboarding sessions, participants rotated through three stations, each grounded in research findings, data, and guiding questions. At each station, groups explored a different dimension of responsible AI implementation, recording their perspectives, building on others' ideas, and identifying opportunities and challenges.

The three stations explored:

- **The AI-Enabled Classroom**: *What should an ideal, human-centered AI-enabled classroom look, feel, and sound like?*
- **Stakeholder Responsibility**: *What do schools need from policymakers, EdTech vendors, and school leaders before introducing new technologies to teachers and students?*
- **The Role of Parents**: *How should parental involvement and school-family partnerships evolve across elementary, middle, and high school?*

Across the nine whiteboarding rotations, six overarching themes emerged:

*Start with Purpose • Keep Humans in Control • Protect Productive Struggle
Build Capacity, Not Just Guardrails • Share Responsibility Across the Ecosystem
Lead With Transparency*

Across the discussions, participants emphasized that responsible AI implementation should prioritize human agency, meaningful learning, and intentional decision-making over technology adoption for its own sake. The challenge is translating these emerging principles into actionable practices while navigating rapidly evolving technology, unclear responsibilities, and varying levels of institutional capacity. The urgency lies in ensuring that schools, families, and policymakers develop the knowledge, structures, and partnerships necessary to shape AI's role in education rather than simply react to its growing presence.

This report captures the ideas and perspectives shared during the activity and identifies opportunities for continued collaboration across DC's education ecosystem.

METHODOLOGY

Activity Design

The DC AI Collaborative's whiteboarding activity was designed to move participants from learning about the current state of EdTech, TeenTech, and AI toward collectively exploring what responsible implementation could look like across DC's education ecosystem. Following presentations and discussions about emerging technologies, student experiences, and the responsibilities of schools and families, participants engaged in a collaborative whiteboarding exercise organized around three central areas: AI-enabled teaching and learning, stakeholder responsibility, and family engagement.

Structure and Process

Participants rotated through three stations, each featuring a guiding question and supporting research or data intended to ground the conversation in current evidence. Each station was divided into three discussion lenses, allowing participants to explore different dimensions of the same central question. As groups rotated, they contributed their perspectives to shared whiteboards, creating a collective record of ideas, questions, and potential approaches.

Station	Discussion Lens 1	Discussion Lens 2	Discussion Lens 3
AI-Enabled Classroom	Look	Feel	Sound
Stakeholder Responsibility	Policymakers	EdTech Vendors	School Leaders
Role of Parents	Elementary	Middle School	High School

Documentation and Analysis

The three completed whiteboards were photographed and preserved as the primary records of the activity. The analysis identifies recurring ideas, areas of alignment, and questions raised across the stations. These findings reflect participants' contributions and provide a starting point for continued discussion rather than a set of conclusions agreed upon by everyone.

STATION 1: THE AI-ENABLED CLASSROOM

Guiding Question:

What does an ideal AI-enabled classroom look, feel, and sound like?

Research Context:

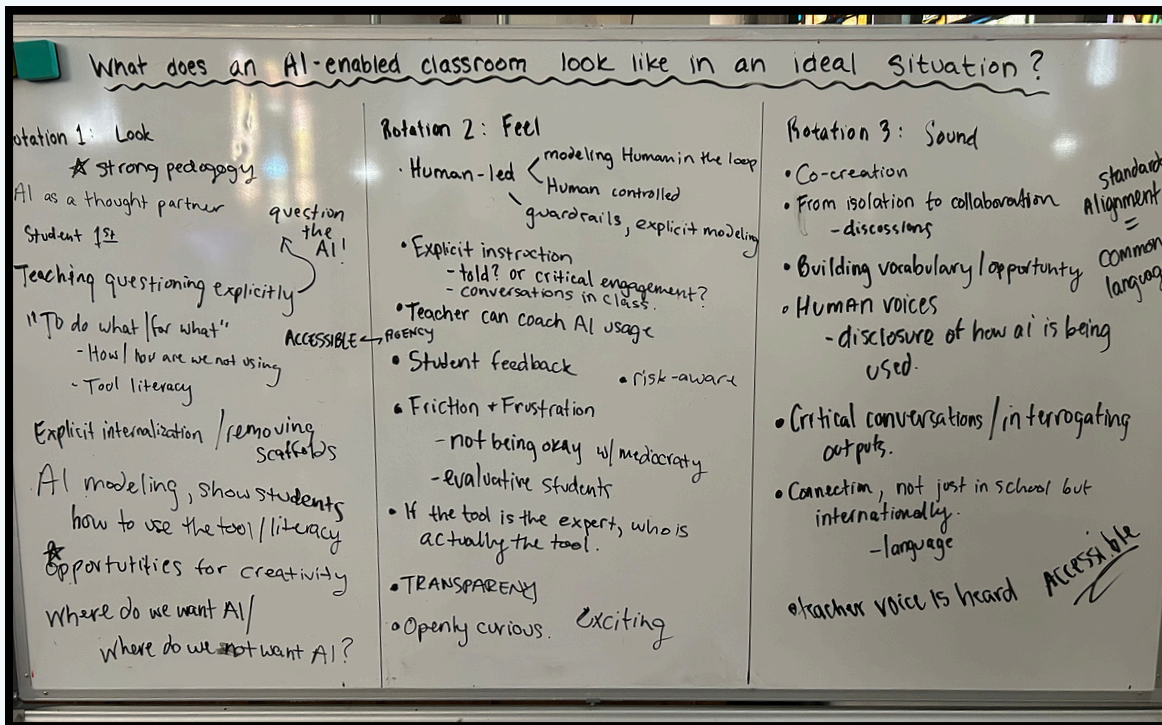
Participants were presented with research examining the difference between improved performance while using AI and the development of independent knowledge and skills. [A 2025 study by Bastani and colleagues](#) found that students performed better on supported tasks when using AI tools. However, students using an unguarded AI chatbot performed worse than peers without AI access when the tool was removed. These negative learning effects were largely mitigated when the AI tutor incorporated instructional safeguards.

This research introduced a central question: How can AI support learning without replacing the cognitive work necessary for students to develop independent understanding?

Discussion Rotations:

- **Look:** *What instructional practices and student behaviors would be visible?*
- **Feel:** *What should the learning experience feel like?*
- **Sound:** *What conversations and interactions should characterize the classroom?*

Completed Whiteboard:



STATION 1:

THE AI-ENABLED CLASSROOM

The AI-Enabled Classroom station asked participants to envision what an ideal learning environment might look, feel, and sound like when artificial intelligence is thoughtfully integrated into teaching and learning. Across the three rotations, participants repeatedly highlighted that strong pedagogy, human relationships, and student thinking must remain central, regardless of the technologies available.

LOOK: Intentional and Student-Centered

Participants envisioned classrooms where AI serves as a thought partner rather than replacing instruction or independent thinking. They emphasized strong pedagogy, student-first design, teacher modeling, and explicit instruction in how to question and evaluate AI-generated responses. Importantly, participants called for clear expectations around where AI should and should not be used, alongside opportunities for creativity and the intentional removal of scaffolds as students develop independence.

FEEL: Human-Led and Productively Challenging

Participants described an environment that feels human-controlled, transparent, curious, and responsive to student feedback. Teachers remain actively involved in coaching AI use, establishing guardrails, and maintaining meaningful learning expectations. One particularly important idea was the value of "friction + frustration" in the learning process. Participants recognized that while AI can make tasks easier, removing difficulty does not necessarily lead to deeper understanding. The goal is to preserve productive struggle while using technology to reduce unnecessary barriers.

SOUND: Collaborative and Reflective

Participants imagined classrooms filled with discussion, collaboration, and critical questioning rather than isolated interactions between students and AI tools. They emphasized co-creation, shared vocabulary, transparency about AI use, and opportunities for students to challenge AI-generated content. Teacher and student voices remain central, with AI supporting communication, accessibility, and connections beyond the classroom.

Emerging Finding

Together, the three rotations suggest that an ideal AI-enabled classroom is intentional, human-led, and collaborative. The emphasis was not on maximizing AI use, but on making thoughtful decisions about when technology strengthens learning and when it may interfere with the development of essential skills.

Questions for Continued Discussion

- How can schools distinguish between productive struggle and unnecessary barriers to learning?
- What should students be expected to do independently, even when AI support is available?
- How can teachers make AI use transparent while encouraging exploration and creativity?

Ultimately, participants pointed toward a classroom where AI supports the learning process without becoming a substitute for it.

STATION 2:

STAKEHOLDER RESPONSIBILITY

Guiding Question:

What do we need from our stakeholders before introducing new technology to our teachers and/or students? Specifically, what responsibilities should fall to policymakers, EdTech vendors, and school leaders?

Research Context:

Participants were presented with findings from [Common Sense Media's 2026 Census of AI Use by Tweens and Teens](#), which found that 86% of children ages 9–17 use or interact with AI, including 24% who do so daily. These findings highlighted the growing presence of AI in young people's lives and the need for schools to consider the broader systems that influence how technology is developed, regulated, adopted, and experienced.

The discussion asked participants to consider what schools should reasonably expect from the organizations and institutions surrounding them before introducing new technologies.

Discussion Rotations:

- **Policymakers:** What laws, guidance, and accountability structures should be in place?
- **EdTech Vendors:** What should tech companies provide before schools adopt their products?
- **School Leaders:** What processes and supports should leaders establish before adoption?

Completed Whiteboard:

What do we need from our stakeholders before we roll anything out to our teachers and/or students?

Rotation 1: Policymakers	Rotation 2: EdTech Vendors	Rotation 3: School Leaders
• Review what is currently covered • Identify Gaps in existing law ↳ student privacy • Hold Town Hall style Sessions in-person/virtual • More state responsibility vs. federal (right now) • Broad Accountability Structure - Who's accountable for what? • DC specific - who? - OSSE? - DPSB? - City Gov? • Equity in access	• Slow down - we don't need AI added to every tool • Focus on tools that improve learner outcomes/ educator efficacy • Ask: What problem are you trying to solve? - What problem are schools trying to solve? • Engage more/ listen to schools/stakeholders • More meaningful pilot/beta programs • Beware Vendor Consolidation • Adhering to the Policies/Guidelines established by Policymakers	• Flexibility → Some Decentralization • Transparency → Rationale ↳ Rubrics ↳ Safe/Ethical Use Central to decision making • Relevant Usage Data re: Mental Health • Input from all key stakeholders ↳ Open forums → students, teachers, parents, community • Openness → address mistakes, pivot w/ new data • Strategic Goal Alignment (How does usage align w/ intent) • Rollout of RoadMap

STATION 2:

STAKEHOLDER RESPONSIBILITY

The Stakeholder Responsibility station asked participants to consider what schools need from policymakers, EdTech vendors, and school leaders before introducing new technologies to teachers and students. Across the three rotations, participants emphasized that responsible AI implementation requires clear expectations, meaningful collaboration, and shared accountability throughout the education ecosystem.

POLICYMAKERS: Establish Clarity and Accountability

Participants called for policymakers to review existing laws and regulations before developing new requirements, identify gaps in student privacy protections, and clarify which agencies and institutions are responsible for oversight. They also emphasized equitable access and meaningful community engagement, including opportunities for families and educators to participate in policymaking. Within DC's education landscape, participants specifically raised questions about how responsibilities should be divided across agencies and school sectors.

EDTECH VENDORS: Focus on Real Problems

The vendor discussion challenged the assumption that every educational technology product needs AI capabilities. Participants urged companies to slow down, listen to schools, and focus on improving student learning and educator effectiveness. Meaningful pilot programs, stakeholder feedback, adherence to established safeguards, and concerns about vendor consolidation were also raised. Rather than beginning with the technology, vendors should begin by understanding the problems educators and students are trying to solve.

SCHOOL LEADERS: Create Conditions for Responsible Implementation

Participants emphasized that school leaders must balance clear expectations with flexibility for experimentation. They called for transparent decision-making, alignment with organizational goals, meaningful stakeholder input, and the use of relevant data to evaluate implementation. Participants also encouraged leaders to acknowledge mistakes, adapt when necessary, and establish thoughtful rollout plans rather than introducing technologies without adequate preparation.

Emerging Finding

The three rotations suggest a framework of complementary responsibilities: policymakers establish clear protections and accountability, vendors develop purposeful solutions, and school leaders create the conditions for responsible implementation. Each has a distinct role, but success depends on meaningful coordination across the education ecosystem.

Questions for Continued Discussion

- Who should be accountable for ensuring that AI tools are safe, effective, and appropriate for students?
- How can schools maintain flexibility while operating within shared expectations and safeguards?
- What evidence should vendors provide before schools introduce their products?

A central message from this station was that schools should not be expected to navigate the challenges of AI implementation alone. Responsible innovation requires the broader ecosystem to share both the work and the responsibility.

STATION 3:

THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Guiding Question:

How does the role of the parent evolve over time as it pertains to AI? For each grade band (elementary, middle, and high school), what is the school's role in informing families about the platforms students are using and its strategy for implementation?

Research Context:

Participants were presented with findings from the [Family Online Safety Institute's 2025 report, Generative AI in Uncertain Times: How Teens Are Navigating a New Digital Frontier](#). The research highlighted gaps in parent involvement and guidance surrounding generative AI. Among teens ages 15–18, 57% reported that their parents or caregivers did not have rules about generative AI use, while only 8% of teens identified parents or caregivers as most responsible for teaching them about the technology.

These findings raised questions about how families can meaningfully support young people as their independence, technological exposure, and decision-making responsibilities evolve.

Discussion Rotations:

- **Elementary School:** *What knowledge, habits, and conversations should families establish early?*
- **Middle School:** *How should parents navigate increasing independence, access, and appropriate use?*
- **High School:** *How should parental involvement evolve toward student judgment, accountability, and preparation for life beyond school?*

Completed Whiteboard:

How does the role of the parent evolve over time as it pertains to AI?

Rotation 1: Elementary	Rotation 2: Middle	Rotation 3: High
- Age-appropriate conversations (early & often) ↳ foundational knowledge (machine vs. human) ↳ conceptualization ↳ casual conversations - distinction between types of AI ↳ chatbot vs. gen. AI vs. others - Bias in models ↳ home / school / social structured (clubs) / social unstructured / solo - asking open questions and listening - modeling what kids should do / interact with AI	- give parents knowledge about occurrence in school - ask for resources from schools ↳ parent guide on how to talk to kids ↳ where do they go for trusted knowledge? - Start convos around tech generally → distinguish appropriate access by age - ask about data privacy agreements / PII implications - garner insight on pos./neg. AI impact - figure out what your student is entering in chatbots/gen AI	- Student's knowledge pre-developed w/o parents - alignment w/ individual ideas/thought (maintain voice) - convos on why/when to use AI and not - Using tool to get to bigger postsec. goals - Partner w/ schools to maintain accountability ↳ PTA involvement to promote group learning

STATION 3:

THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

This station explored how family involvement in AI education should evolve as students progress through elementary, middle, and high school. Participants considered how schools should communicate with families about the technologies students use and the expectations regarding implementation. Across the rotations, a developmental progression emerged, with the role of parents shifting as students gain greater independence.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: Teach and Model

Participants emphasized beginning conversations about AI early, using age-appropriate language to build foundational understanding. Families should help children distinguish between humans and machines, understand basic AI concepts, recognize potential bias, and develop healthy technology habits. Parents were encouraged to model responsible use, ask open-ended questions, and create opportunities for ongoing conversation rather than relying exclusively on restrictions.

MIDDLE SCHOOL: Guide and Monitor

As students gain independence, participants emphasized the need for parents to better understand how and where young people encounter AI. Schools were encouraged to provide trusted resources, explain which platforms students are using, and help families understand data privacy, personally identifiable information, and appropriate access. Participants also emphasized the importance of balanced conversations about the benefits and risks of AI, including what students may share with AI systems.

HIGH SCHOOL: Coach and Partner

At the high-school level, participants shifted toward supporting student judgment, accountability, and preparation for life beyond school. Families should help students consider when and why AI is appropriate, maintain their own voice and ideas, and use technology in service of broader academic and postsecondary goals. Participants also identified opportunities for schools and parent organizations to create shared learning experiences and reinforce expectations.

Emerging Finding

The discussions suggest that parental involvement should evolve from teaching and modeling to guiding and monitoring, and ultimately to coaching and partnership. As students gain independence, schools have a corresponding responsibility to support families through developmentally appropriate information, transparent communication about AI platforms, and shared expectations for responsible use. The need for school-family partnership does not diminish as students grow older; its purpose evolves alongside them.

Questions for Continued Discussion

- What information should schools consistently share with families about AI platforms and implementation?
- How can schools support parents who have limited familiarity with emerging technologies?
- How should expectations for student independence and parental oversight change across grade levels?

Families cannot be expected to guide students through technologies they have not been supported in understanding. Meaningful school-family partnerships require ongoing communication, accessible resources, and opportunities to learn together.

OVERARCHING THEMES

Although participants approached the whiteboarding activity from three different perspectives, several common themes emerged. These themes reflect a shared interest in ensuring that AI strengthens educational experiences while preserving the relationships, skills, and responsibilities essential to student success.

Theme 1: Start with Purpose, Not Technology

One of the clearest messages was that **AI adoption should begin with a defined purpose rather than the availability of a new tool.** Participants challenged the tendency to add AI capabilities without identifying a meaningful problem. EdTech vendors were encouraged to prioritize student outcomes and educator effectiveness, while school leaders emphasized aligning technology decisions with organizational goals. Classroom and family discussions similarly focused on when, why, and where AI should be used.

Together, these perspectives suggest that the most important question is not how schools can incorporate AI, but ***what problem they are trying to solve and whether AI is the right solution.***

Theme 2: Keep Humans at the Center

Across all three stations, participants emphasized **human judgment, relationships, and agency.** In classrooms, teachers should model and guide AI use while students retain ownership of their thinking. Families should help young people develop independent judgment, and school leaders should meaningfully involve educators, students, and communities in technology decisions.

The common thread is that AI should strengthen people's ability to think, collaborate, and make decisions, not replace those abilities. ***Human-centered implementation requires preserving meaningful human control and participation.***

Theme 3: Protect Productive Struggle and Independent Thinking

Participants raised important questions about the relationship between AI-supported performance and genuine learning. The classroom discussion highlighted the value of "**friction and frustration**" and the importance of gradually removing AI-supported scaffolds. Family discussions similarly emphasized preserving students' own ideas, voice, and independent judgment.

AI can remove unnecessary barriers, improve accessibility, and help students engage with challenging content. However, making a task easier does not always improve learning. **Educators must distinguish between supports that expand access to learning and shortcuts that replace the cognitive work necessary to develop understanding.**

OVERARCHING THEMES

(continued)

Theme 4: Build Capacity, Not Just Guardrails

Participants recognized the importance of safeguards but emphasized that **responsible AI use cannot be achieved through restrictions alone**. Classroom discussions highlighted explicit instruction, teacher modeling, and AI literacy. Families need trusted resources and guidance, while school leaders must create opportunities for professional learning and thoughtful experimentation.

Across these conversations, education itself emerged as an essential safeguard. ***Students, educators, and families need the knowledge and confidence to make informed decisions as technology continues to evolve.***

Theme 5: Share Responsibility Across the Ecosystem

The whiteboards challenged the assumption that schools should independently manage every aspect of AI implementation. Participants identified distinct responsibilities for policymakers, vendors, school leaders, teachers, and families. Policymakers should establish protections and accountability, vendors should develop purposeful and responsible products, and school leaders should create conditions for thoughtful implementation.

The discussions also highlighted how **students, families, educators, school leaders, and local governments are often downstream of decisions made by national policymakers and technology companies**. Participants emphasized the need for stronger collective advocacy and accountability, particularly in challenging the influence of for-profit technology vendors whose business interests may not always align with the needs of students and schools.

Shared responsibility only works when accountability is clearly defined. Schools need coordinated support from the broader ecosystem, as well as a stronger collective voice in shaping the policies and technologies that affect their communities.

Theme 6: Transparency Builds Trust

Transparency emerged as an important condition for responsible AI implementation across all three stations. Participants called for clearer communication about technology decisions, the platforms students use, data privacy, and expectations for AI-assisted work. They also emphasized involving families and communities in decisions that affect students.

Trust grows when people understand what decisions are being made, why they are being made, and how they can participate in shaping them. Transparency is therefore essential to meaningful engagement and accountability.

FROM SHARED THEMES TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

The six themes emerging from the whiteboarding sessions point toward an emerging vision for responsible AI implementation: one that prioritizes **educational purpose, human agency, meaningful learning, and collective responsibility**. They also highlight unresolved tensions around educator autonomy, student safety, independent learning, and the influence of technology companies on decisions made by schools and communities.

While schools, families, educators, and local governments are often downstream of decisions made by national policymakers and technology companies, they must have a stronger voice in shaping those decisions. Participants emphasized the need for stronger collective advocacy, shared expectations, and greater accountability for for-profit technology vendors whose business interests may not always align with the needs of students and schools.

Opportunities for Continued Work

1. Develop Shared Principles for Responsible AI Implementation

Establish common expectations and guiding principles for responsible AI use that reflect the needs of DC students, educators, and families while allowing schools to adapt them to their own missions and communities.

2. Build Capacity Across the Education Ecosystem

Create opportunities for educators, school leaders, students, and families to develop AI literacy, share promising practices, and navigate emerging technologies with greater confidence.

3. Strengthen Collective Advocacy and Accountability

Unite schools, families, community organizations, and local government around shared priorities to advocate for stronger protections, greater transparency, and increased accountability for technology companies and policymakers.

4. Move from Principles to Practice

Develop practical tools, implementation frameworks, professional learning opportunities, and evaluation strategies that help schools translate shared principles into everyday decisions about teaching, learning, and technology adoption.

5. Continue Listening and Learning Together

Expand opportunities for students, families, educators, researchers, and other stakeholders to shape the conversation, challenge assumptions, and contribute to future priorities.

These opportunities represent potential directions for the Collaborative's next phase of work, rather than finalized commitments. Continued progress will depend on bringing diverse perspectives together, challenging assumptions, and translating shared priorities into meaningful action.

SPECIAL THANKS

We extend our gratitude to the educators, researchers, school leaders, policymakers, and community partners who contributed their time, expertise, and perspectives to this work. Their willingness to engage in thoughtful and sometimes challenging conversations makes this collaboration possible.

Thank you to **RhITU Chatterjee** of NPR for helping to ground our conversation about EdTech, TeenTech, and AI through the lens of teen mental health and technology.

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We are grateful to the leadership team at Washington Leadership Academy for valuing transparency, creating space for diverse perspectives, and recognizing that meaningful progress requires a willingness to engage in difficult conversations. We especially recognize:

- **Mark Deegan**, Chief Innovation Officer
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- **Adam Browning**, Director, Academic Innovation & AI Strategy
- **Chrissy Smith**, Principal
- **Eric Collazo**, Executive Director

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- **Donald Alexander**, World Languages
- **Michael Barnes**, Biology
- **Nicole Latimer**, Special Education
- **Akhita Madyun**, Physical Education
- **Denonté McKinney**, Computer Science
- **Tatiana Megarry**, Computer Science

Lastly, thank you to the attendees of the September 30, 2026 event, [DC AI Collaborative: The Current State of EdTech, TeenTech, and AI](https://www.dcaicollaborative.org). Meaningful progress requires diverse voices at the table. We are grateful for your time, perspectives, and commitment to shaping a more thoughtful, equitable future for DC education.

CLOSING THOUGHT

The conversations captured in this report reinforce an important reality: responsible AI implementation is not simply a technology challenge. **It is an educational, developmental, and collective responsibility.**

Across the whiteboarding sessions, participants emphasized the importance of protecting human relationships, strengthening learning, and ensuring that schools and families have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect them.

One question from the whiteboards captures the challenge ahead:

“Where do we want AI, and where don't we want AI?”

Answering that question requires collaboration, shared accountability, and a collective voice strong enough to influence the policies and technologies shaping students' lives.

The **DC AI Collaborative** will continue bringing diverse perspectives together to move beyond reacting to technological change and toward collectively shaping a more equitable, human-centered future for DC education.

