CoSN
Leading Education Innovation

FROM CLASSROOMS TO CAREERS:

REIMAGINING LEARNING IN AN AI-INFUSED WORLD

A synthesis of perspectives from CoSN's EdTech Innovation Committee on technology, career readiness, and the future of learning.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As school districts confront rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), shifting workforce demands, and rising expectations for personalized learning, CoSN's EdTech Innovation Committee gathered to explore how K-12 education can best prepare students for future careers. They were able to share their insights verbally or online (including attribution if wanted).

This report synthesizes committee member insights across six major themes:

1. Preparing students for career futures that are uncertain and rapidly changing
2. Integrating technology across all subjects and career pathways
3. Shifting from content-focused teaching to problem-solving, critical thinking & effective tool use
4. Building cross-department collaboration structures
5. Balancing foundational knowledge with AI-augmented learning
6. Pushing the boundaries of what's possible

Committee members shared the importance of agency, metacognition, ethics, interdisciplinary collaboration, and helping students understand and navigate emerging technologies with confidence. Members also noted how technology is not a subject in and of itself; it's a part of every field of study and career path and stressed the need for coordinated structures that allow districts to integrate innovation cohesively and sustainably.

6 TECH & CAREER THEMES

1. PREPARING STUDENTS FOR CAREER FUTURES THAT ARE UNCERTAIN AND RAPIDLY CHANGING

The committee surfaced a shared reality: the future of work is no longer predictable, even in broad strokes. Artificial intelligence, automation, and rapidly transforming industries make it increasingly difficult — and often unrealistic — to prepare students for specific jobs. Instead, districts are being called to prepare students for change itself.

Across the discussion, members emphasized that while the tools are new, the core human skills needed to navigate uncertainty are not. Adaptability, creativity, structured thinking, and resilience continue to rise in importance. The role of schools, therefore, is shifting from training for known outcomes to building the capacity for lifelong learning, iteration, and reinvention.

Committee member Melissa McCalla (Pasadena Independent School District, Texas) shared frameworks like the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report and the OECD Learning Compass that can be helpful as "north stars," not for predicting exact careers, but for guiding districts toward skill development rooted in agency, reflection, and applied thinking. Preparing students for the future now means teaching them how to learn, adapt, and respond to what they have never seen before.

INSIGHTS FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

"Teach skills and processes so students can apply knowledge to new, unfamiliar situations," (Kathleen Stephany, School District of Holmen, Wisconsin).

"There is another question we need to raise: what are you trying to teach? What do you want the students to master? How is mastery in the real world changing? Are you making adjustments to what needs to happen right now?" (Rajesh Adusumilli, Arlington Public Schools, Virginia).

"The keys are adaptability, creativity and structured thinking. This is not new."

"Teach re-iteration, failing, grit, perseverance, and flexibility — and give lots of room to practice these things."

Leverage insights from the broader conversation around the future of work, while keeping in mind the inherent challenge of attempting to predict the future. For example:

"44% of core skills are expected to change by 2027, with analytical and creative thinking plus tech literacy rising fastest." — World Economic Forum

"Agency, co-agency, and the anticipation–action–reflection cycle are foundational for navigating uncertainty." — OECD Learning Compass

Summary: Collectively, the committee signaled a shift from "preparing students for a job" toward preparing students for a lifetime of learning, pivoting, adapting, and navigating continuous change.

2. INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY ACROSS ALL SUBJECTS AND CAREER PATHWAYS

EdTech Innovation Committee Co-Chair David Jarboe (D2 Harrison Schools, Colorado) explained that it's important that technology can no longer live in silos. "Don't silo tech into certain fields because if a child isn't in a science pathway, they aren't getting the same experience," said Jarboe. "As tech is evolving, what is the technology, how does it transcend across all core academics?"

When access to digital tools, computational thinking, and AI literacy is limited to select pathways (such as computer science or CTE), students in other disciplines are left behind. In a world where every career is touched by technology, every subject area must be part of the integration strategy.

Members also emphasized that true integration depends on confidence, both for students and for educators. When teachers feel unsupported or underprepared to use emerging tools, innovation stalls. Conversely, when departments collaborate early and often, technology becomes embedded naturally into instruction rather than layered on as an add-on.

INSIGHTS FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

"Use a problem-solution framework to help identify the cross-functional dependencies between the curriculum areas and student outcomes (whole child). Then, start small with a minimum viable product, leverage the skills that are already embedded within standards for curriculum in all areas as a starting place," (Melissa McCalla, Pasadena Independent School District, Texas).

"Technology becomes integrated when it's modeled in all areas of the instructional process.... When people collaborate from the beginning, then the integration becomes real and effective," (Jennifer Porter, Arizona Technology in Education Association, Arizona).

"Our district is thinking intentionally about how to prepare students for a world where technology is rapidly changing, which means supporting families just as much as students. We introduce career exploration and themed pathways as early as elementary school, but we also create opportunities for parents to understand these programs, ask questions, and feel confident about the choices available to their child. ... These early exposures help our families see that students aren't choosing a career but rather discovering interests, building strengths, and exploring possibilities in a supportive environment."

We need to be discussing "what is the skill that we are expecting students to master and talking about how its application in the real world is changing and asking ourselves how we can make changes to our subject teaching and skills associated with it."

"Information, facts and data are not needed to be memorized; it is available on demand and so, the details of how to apply, how to use and how to navigate and self-learn skills are more to be focused on."

"Computers should be seen as tools to think with. We still have to think even though AI makes it a lot easier."

"Many of our current workers are lacking in, or at least not confident with, technology skills."

Summary: The committee agreed that integrating technology everywhere is a prerequisite for preparing students for contemporary careers and a foundation for helping teachers evolve instructional practices.

3. SHIFTING FROM CONTENT-FOCUSED TEACHING TO PROBLEM-SOLVING, CRITICAL THINKING & EFFECTIVE TOOL USE

The EdTech Innovation Committee identified a fundamental turning point in teaching and learning: the move from content coverage toward problem-solving, synthesis, inquiry, and real-world application. This shift is not about abandoning academic rigor — it is about redefining it for a world where information is abundant and the ability to think critically is paramount.

Rather than asking, "What content should students memorize?", members agreed that districts need to ask, "What should students be able to do with what they know?" Project-based learning, inquiry cycles, and executive skill development were named as essential strategies for supporting this transformation.

INSIGHTS FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

"It's not about shifting from content-focus to executive skills; it's about changing how the content is taught and accessed. The executive skills teach/support the content in the same way the technology does. Implying that they are separate focuses or one can't, or shouldn't, be taught by the others is part of the issue — we're creating the division and break between content and changing how we learn," (Jennifer Porter, Arizona Technology in Education Association, Arizona).

"Skills have gone untaught for many years; now we can get back to those. It's less a question of if this or that is more important, but it's how we approach them, rethink carefully why we are doing this in the first place," (Ruben Puentedura, Hippasus, Massachusetts).

"What do we want students to be able to do when they leave us? Take tests or be an effective team member? Memorize facts, or synthesize ideas? Portrait of a Graduate needs to be not only adopted but the springboard to changing how students show what they know, learner agency, and an overhaul of teaching practice."

Summary: This theme underscores a deeper mindset shift: moving from teaching content to designing learning experiences.

4. BUILDING CROSS-DEPARTMENT COLLABORATION STRUCTURES

EdTech Innovation Committee members were clear: Long-term success in technology and career readiness cannot depend on isolated champions or single departments. It requires intentional, system-wide collaboration across IT, curriculum, instruction, CTE, library services, and leadership.

"History shows us that when we lack an authentic culture of innovation that permeates the entire system, the impact that technology can bring tends to stall," said EdTech Innovation Committee Co-Chair Ryan Cox (District 279 Osseo Area Schools, Minnesota). "In the 1980s, computers in school were going to transform learning. It eventually has, but lacking a shared system-wide belief, this change took decades. The same can be said for the internet in the 1990s, mobile technology in

the 2000s, and cloud resources in the 2010s. We have an opportunity to learn from our past in order to see how working in collaboration can impact both learning and teaching."

While collaboration is often assumed to be part of school culture, the committee acknowledged that true cross-functional work must be designed, protected, and supported through formal structures and shared accountability. When collaboration happens too late — or not at all — technology initiatives become fragmented, unsustainable, and misaligned with instructional goals.

The committee highlighted multiple emerging structures that are helping districts break down silos: digital resource evaluation teams, campus technology liaisons, district-wide innovation and well-being groups, and formalized curriculum–technology coordination protocols. These structures shift the work from "technology initiatives" to learning initiatives.

INSIGHTS FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

"First and foremost, there must be regular communication between all of these areas. Everyone needs to be a part of the discussion. We also have to get everyone to understand that technology is not a subject in and of itself; technology and its use is a part of every field of study and career path. All students must be fluent in the technology that best integrates with their chosen field of interest," (Mark Leslie, Richland County School District One, South Carolina).

"We need to reframe and think of it more as 'learning initiatives' not 'technology initiatives'. The cross-collaboration element is critical because no one department should be owning and driving an initiative that is reimagining how technology is integrated into the learning process. All departments, teams, etc need to be involved throughout the initiative in order to have the work be truly integrated and addressing the root goals," (Jennifer Porter, Arizona Technology in Education Association, Arizona).

"It is paramount for IT to be working with Instructional Services and other district leaders in order to be united on teaching and learning with technology. Professional Development and other support for staff also need to be addressed," (Kathleen Stephany, School District of Holmen, Wisconsin).

"It feels like there's space right now for collaboration across IT and curriculum/instruction. There's a door open for taking that opportunity and finding people to be the champions across all areas of the work," (Melissa McCalla, Pasadena Independent School District, Texas).

Summary: These insights point to a shift from siloed departments to unified learning systems — especially important when integrating AI.

5. BALANCING FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE WITH AI-AUGMENTED LEARNING

As AI becomes more deeply embedded in learning environments, the committee grappled with a central tension: how to ensure students still master foundational knowledge while leveraging powerful new tools responsibly and creatively. The consensus was clear: AI does not replace foundational skills; it amplifies their importance.

Reading, writing, math, scientific reasoning, communication, and interpersonal skills remain essential building blocks for higher-order thinking. Without these foundations, students cannot critically evaluate AI-generated information, apply it ethically, or use it meaningfully in real-world contexts.

Members also elevated metacognition and self-regulation as essential infrastructure for AI-era learning. Students must understand how they learn, how they process information, and how to reflect on their own thinking to navigate increasingly complex digital environments.

INSIGHTS FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

"Students need to have fundamental reading and math skills. Students also need the ethical background and digital citizenship of using AI tools for learning," (Kathleen Stephany, School District of Holmen, Wisconsin).

"Students bring their own perceptions of AI to their learning space. We need a place for the perceptions and misconceptions to be addressed safely, and with thoughtful responses," (Theresa McSweeney, Boise School District, Idaho).

"Critical thinking skills are still important in the AI era; even more so. Students need to be able to evaluate AI-produced data, validate its veracity, and use it in a way that helps to convey their thoughts clearly," (Mark Leslie, Richland County School District One, South Carolina).

We need to help students build "interpersonal skills, especially skills related to building safe, meaningful relationships so that things like civil discourse can continue to be a reality in our world when it seems to be on the decline."

"Preparation requires cultivating the skills sought after most by employers, including analytical thinking (the most sought-after skill by employers in 2025), creative thinking, resilience, flexibility, agility, curiosity, and lifelong learning."

"This may be unpopular, but a focus on how to really read and write critically, mastering their language, can help them think critically about what they see in a world of AI. I don't think that memorization is necessarily an urgent need, but how to find information and use it, understand math and science concepts of the world around them and know how to work among them and with them, while also thinking outside the box. A tall order."

Summary: AI can accelerate learning, but only if students have the foundational skills to use it responsibly, critically, and creatively.

6. PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF WHAT'S POSSIBLE

The EdTech Innovation Committee expressed both optimism and urgency in exploring what AI now makes possible for teaching and learning. From expanded creative expression to real-time tutoring and advanced analytics, members see an opportunity to transform how students engage with ideas, content, and support systems.

Beyond efficiency, members discussed possibility: the chance for students to access new languages, new forms of expression, and new ways of revisiting disciplines they are passionate about. This moment calls not just for technical adoption, but for mindset shifts with a foundation in curiosity, ethical reasoning, and imagination.

Importantly, members also talked about how innovation must go hand-in-hand with inclusion. New tools open doors only if teachers feel prepared, students feel safe to explore, and families understand the purpose behind the transformation.

INSIGHTS FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

"Ask questions that encourage creativity. Be open to new ways of thinking. Impart a growth mindset," (Kathleen Stephany, School District of Holmen, Wisconsin).

"Create choice schools in elementary school so [students] can explore, not waiting until middle and high school. … We are trying, as a public school, to think about what we can do for early-age students. Many of them come in and are ready to explore. It's been wildly successful: stopped enrollment decline and families are loving it because it gives them choices," (Celia Gossett, Guilford County Schools, North Carolina).

"One of the biggest things that excites me about AI are the new possibilities for how we support students outside of the classroom. While AI tutors are not perfect, they are an exciting option for students to use when no one else is available to support them during non-school hours (and sometimes during school hours…)."

Summary: This theme signals that AI is not merely a set of tools: it is a catalyst for redesigning learning, expanding student possibility, and unlocking new forms of expression, analysis, and support.

CONCLUSION: WHAT THIS MEANS FOR 2026

EdTech Innovation Committee members agreed that preparing students for future careers requires more than adding new tools or changing individual courses. It requires:

- Systems-level collaboration across departments
- A shift toward metacognition, agency, and ethical reasoning
- Embedding technology across all subjects
- Supporting families and staff in navigating new pathways
- Ensuring foundational skills remain strong while leveraging AI
- Creating space for experimentation, creativity, and exploration

"You don't create the future by creating the past — you need to create the future," affirmed committee member John Heffernan (Professional Learning & Development Coordinator, Ireland).

These insights demonstrate both urgency and opportunity. Districts are not starting from scratch; the hope is that they are already closer than they think.

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