



La Scuola's Approach to Artificial Intelligence

Inspiring Brave Learners to Shape the Future

Executive Summary

La Scuola International School approaches artificial intelligence the way it approaches all complex realities children encounter in the world: with honesty, inquiry, and a commitment to preparing students rather than shielding them.

Research documents real risks to skill development, productive struggle, overreliance, child data privacy, and many others. These concerns are reflected in decisions like New York City's 2026 moratorium on generative AI in K–8 schools. We take them seriously. At the same time, avoidance is not the right answer. Our students live in the Bay Area, one of the most AI-saturated environments in the world. They encounter AI in the cars on their streets, in their homes, in the media they consume, and in the tools their parents use at work and at home. A child who has been taught to think critically about AI is better prepared when they encounter it than one who has not. This is consistent with our Reggio Emilia roots: we do not build walls between children and the world. We prepare them to navigate it with curiosity, judgment, and resilience.

The line we have drawn: our goal is learning about AI — not using AI to learn skills or develop capabilities. AI enters our curriculum as an object of inquiry and critical examination, not as a productivity tool or a shortcut for student work. It shows up in three ways: through the questions students themselves bring from the world around them; as a natural case within existing units of inquiry, from the nature of intelligence in Grade 3 to the ethics of public discourse in Grade 8; and in limited, carefully supervised middle school contexts, as a tool to be examined and critiqued rather than relied upon. Our commitments are specific: AI will not be used to assess students — if AI can complete an assessment, we have not built a good assessment. Student data will not enter unapproved tools. AI will not replace human social-emotional support, teacher relationships, or professional judgment. La Scuola's AI Advisory Council and Tool Assessment group will assess tools and contexts of use in our community, identify risks and develop mitigation strategies, and make recommendations. For teachers and staff, we see genuine opportunities — AI as a linguistic aid for our multilingual community, as an organizational tool that frees time for deeper human presence with



students, and as a subject of professional inquiry as we learn alongside the field. These are real, and they are distinct from student use. We are transparent about what we do not yet know, and we expect this position to evolve as evidence grows and tools develop. When it does, we will tell our community — and explain why.

It is not inevitable that all students will directly interact with AI. But it is inevitable that they live in a world where AI is being used, debated, and discussed. The question we are answering is not 'should children use AI' — it is 'how do we equip them with the critical mindset to scrutinize, navigate, and not be harmed by a reality they cannot avoid?'

Who We Are and What We Stand For

La Scuola is a school grounded in human experience, human connection, and the belief that children learn best through relationships, inquiry, hands-on engagement with the world and lived experience. Inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy and the IB framework, we hold a high image of the child — **capable, resilient, and deserving of an education that prepares them for the full complexity of the world they inhabit now and will inhabit in the future.**

This is our foundation. It does not change in the presence of AI. There are things that great teachers, mentors, and communities do for children that AI will never replicate — and should never be asked to. Every decision we make about AI is measured against this foundation first.

The World We Live In

In Reggio pedagogy, the "inside-outside" dynamic refers directly to a fluid reciprocity—the intentional ability to bring the knowledge, nature, and interests of the children from the outside world into the classroom, while simultaneously allowing internal classroom discoveries to flow back outside into the community. Adapted from the educational philosophy of Loris Malaguzzi

In the Bay Area, we live in a world where AI is not a future technology — it is the present. Our students encounter it every day: in the self-driving cars on San Francisco streets, in home devices, in the apps they use, in the recommendations they receive, exposure to billboards, images, publicity, and in the tools their parents use at work. Even if families choose not to introduce AI at home, there is a high likelihood that children will encounter it. It is clear through the data we have collected that our community reflects this reality in full. We have families who are actively working with their children on

AI and building models together. We have families who want nothing to do with AI and are deeply concerned. And we have every perspective in between.

We respect all of these positions. They all come from the same place: love for their children and a desire to get this right. La Scuola educators have a responsibility to bring the outside in, to create opportunity for students to inquire, to prepare students for multiple and changing environments, to use tools responsibly as they shape the future.

We See the Opportunities

AI tools, used thoughtfully, offer real possibilities — particularly for our teachers and staff. As with all tools we use, they will be chosen and integrated with intention and care. We are genuinely encouraged by some of these:

- **Teacher presence and focus.** When AI helps with administrative tasks, time management, refining communications, and organizational work, teachers gain more time for what matters most: being with students, building relationships, and doing the deep collaborative work that no algorithm can replicate.
- **Multilingual communication.** La Scuola is a multilingual community. AI can be a meaningful clerical tool for non-native speakers among our staff and families — supporting translation and refining written expression.
- **Teacher collaboration.** AI can help teachers across disciplines find connections, share planning, and design richer integrated units — supporting the kind of collaborative professional practice our school is built on. More than multidisciplinary, it may be finding authentic applications for learning across disciplines, answering the question of what real-world applications integrating disciplines are and how we can scaffold them so they are accessible to our age groups.
- **Foster dialogue and exploration** AI is a tool for Reggio teachers as researchers -- we are committed to learning at every phase of life. Teachers engage with AI so we can know how to help students live in the current reality.
- **Use cases we haven't discovered yet.** We expect teachers and staff will find applications we haven't anticipated. Our governance process exists to evaluate these as they emerge, openly and carefully.

These opportunities are real — and they are primarily about **adults using AI in their professional practice**. They do not automatically extend to the classroom. With opportunity comes responsibility. We approach AI with open eyes. The opportunities above come with a set of risks that apply to any use of AI — including by teachers and staff.

We See the Risks

We are deeply aware of the various risks associated with general AI use including bias, toxic and harmful content generation, invisible data collection, hallucinations and misinformation, copyright violations, anthropomorphization, and many others. In addition, when it comes to our students, the concerns above are compounded by a set of risks that are specific to children and to learning. This is where we are most cautious.

We want to be direct: the research available today does not give us confidence that generative AI tools, as they currently exist, are ready for broad use in K–8 education. The risks are not hypothetical. They are documented.

Interfering with skill development

Research shows students who use AI for learning tasks perform worse when the tool is removed, and often overestimate their own mastery. For young learners still automating foundational skills like reading, writing, and mathematical reasoning, this risk is especially acute.

Removing productive friction

Struggle is not a problem to be solved — it is how learning happens. AI that makes things easier can remove the productive friction that builds real understanding, creating what researchers call ‘false mastery.’

Overreliance and dependency

Frequent AI use has been linked to measurable declines in critical thinking capabilities. Students who lack strong foundational knowledge — often those already experiencing disadvantage — are most vulnerable to this harm. AI risk is not equally distributed.

Why not ban AI for students' use at La Scuola?

Given these risks, why not simply ban AI entirely? In fact, some school districts have chosen to ban the use of student facing generative AI tools in elementary and middle school for a year. While we understand where this is coming from, we believe in a much more nuanced approach. At La Scuola we hold a high image of the child. We believe children are capable, resilient, and deserving of preparation for the ever-changing world around them. A child who has never been taught to think critically about AI is more vulnerable when they encounter it, not less.

Beyond the Wall: Malaguzzi also wrote about the metaphor of "the wall" (inspired by the original Reggio traveling exhibition When the Eye Jumps Over the Wall), asserting that traditional education builds boundaries between the child and the world. Breaking down these walls allows children to venture "beyond the known".

Given our Reggio Emilia roots, we see this as an opportunity for provocation. In Reggio practice, a 'provocation' is a material or experience intentionally introduced to provoke thinking, challenge assumptions, and spark inquiry. AI — with all its flaws, biases, and limitations visible — is exactly this kind of material. The child does not use it to produce work. The child examines it, questions it, and develops judgment about it.

Our intention is not to teach children to use AI. It is to teach children to understand it, question it, and recognize where it fails. Learning about AI — not learning with AI.

The Lines We Have Drawn

These are not provisional guidelines. They are commitments.

- The goal for students at every level is learning **about AI — not using AI to learn** skills or develop capabilities.
- The types of tools students may interact with as part of the curriculum are age appropriate and supervised / facilitated by an educator. Refer to the appendix for more details.
- AI is **not** used to assess student learning and performance. If AI can complete an assessment, we have not built a good assessment.

- Personal student data is not entered into unapproved tools. Prohibited categories include: performance data, health and counseling records, immigration and family information, and biometric identifiers.
- AI will never replace human social-emotional support, professional judgment, or teacher-student relationships.
- Teachers may use AI to support their work, as a time management and organizational tool, a linguistic tool to support translation and refine written communications, for presentation development, refinement and file formatting, to customize rubrics, organize unit flow for clarity and actionability. AI does not create instructional content rather is a tool for professional development. Teacher training on appropriate AI use for professional practice is in development. AI does not replace professional judgment, care, or the teacher's relationship with students.

Any output generated through AI is always reviewed by humans before being delivered and never done in isolation. AI represents one voice in a conversation with many other voices.

School–Family Partnership Healthy and responsible use of AI and technology is a shared responsibility between school and home. Educators cannot establish and maintain healthy boundaries alone; we rely on the active partnership of parents and caregivers to reinforce age-appropriate expectations, responsible AI use, and positive technology habits at home. Consistency, communication, and shared expectations between school and families are essential as technology continues to evolve. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to support this policy with non-school issued devices at home.

What We are Still Figuring Out

We believe transparency about uncertainty is part of integrity. These are the questions we are actively working through:

- There is significant discussion about AI facilitating differentiation for students working well above or below grade level. We do not yet have evidence this works in practice. We are watching the research carefully before making any decisions.
- As specific tools evolve and new evidence emerges, our assessment of which tools may be appropriate — and for which contexts — will change. We will communicate those changes transparently.



- Our AI Advisory Council, AI Tool Assessment Group, and AI Policy will continue to evolve. We are committed to bringing diverse expertise — including parent voices — into that process. Teacher training on appropriate AI use for their own professional work is also in development.

This document is a living statement. We are drawing a clear line in the sand based on our best current understanding. We expect this to change as knowledge grows and tools develop. When it does, we will tell you — and explain why.

For questions or to share your perspective, please contact the AI Advisory Council through the school office.

Appendix

How AI Shows Up Across Grade Levels

Illustrative examples of how AI enters — and does not enter — the La Scuola learning experience at each stage. This is not an exhaustive curriculum map; it reflects our current thinking and will evolve.

Whole-school goal: Awareness

At every level, the goal is the same: **learning about AI, not learning with AI**. AI enters the curriculum as an object of inquiry and critical examination — never as a productivity tool or a shortcut for student work.

Early Childhood

PreK Ages 2–5

No generative AI.

At this age, children are engaged in one of the most fundamental cognitive tasks of early childhood: learning to distinguish what is real from what is imaginary, and what is living from what is not living. These are rich, developmentally appropriate inquiries. Robots offer a natural provocation within this inquiry. Is a robot alive? Does it think? Does it feel? Children's own questions about the machines they encounter in the world — in stores, in homes, on the street — open the door to exactly this kind of wondering. Teachers follow the child's curiosity. AI is not introduced by the teacher explicitly; the door is open for children's own questions to bring it in.

What questions emerge?

Students ask what makes a person human, whether a robot can be alive, and who is speaking when a device answers people. Familiar voice command tools in their homes, on their parents' phones, in newer cars prompt questions: Is there a person behind the voice? How does the device

understand us and know how to respond? What languages do they speak? The self-driving cars they see on the city streets prompt similar inquiries: who is driving? How do they know where to go? Students show surprise when public transportation vehicles are operated by drivers. Ideas about robots, analog tools, digital devices, and other technologies are conflated and overlap - in one class, a 3-D printer is identified by one child as an "AI machine."

How educators respond:

Educators invite students to share what they think they know ("I know how it works!") and examine their theories together. When a student suggests that a person is inside a machine, teachers use the idea to formulate generative questions and extend the conversation rather than supply an answer. The provocation invites deeper inquiries and theorizations from the children: what is alive? What makes a person a person? Do objects have feelings or families? Through documentation and progettazione, educators collaborate across campuses to see how the explorations intersect and deviate in each context.

What tools are used:

Collective discussion and documentation to make students' thinking visible – including drawing and clay. Observation is a fundamental tool for trying to hypothesize what a machine is and how it works (using light, magnifying glasses, or reflective surfaces to illuminate new perspectives, using anything from an analog voice recorder to 3D printer. Investigations focus on material objects, observations, and hypotheses about how things work.

Lower Elementary

K – 2nd Grade

AI is not intentionally part of the curriculum in these grades, but students' observations and wonderings about it are welcomed. In STEAM classes, students are introduced to robotics, to basic concepts of coding, and to digital art tools and stop-motion animation. It is often in these contexts that the topic of AI surfaces in their conversations.

What questions emerge?: When we see digital art or a photograph, who made it? Did a person use a tool or did a machine make it, or both? Children's questions about familiar tools can lead to a closer look at how a robot follows instructions and how those instructions are made.

How educators respond: Educators invite children to explain how they think a tool or image works, then give them ways to test their ideas. Hands-on robotics make instructions and movement visible. Toward the end of the year, children and educators explore the basics of block coding on a screen together. Together, they compare products made by these tools and relate them back to the choices people make.

What tools are used: Robots, hands-on coding materials, iPads, Digital Art apps (Sketchapp), Stop Motion app, and block coding software to support investigation. Digital art and photography provide examples to examine. AI and voice command tools children are exposed to outside of school often offer points of reference for children's theory about technology. Documentation helps the educator observe how those theories change over time.

Upper Elementary

3rd Grade

In grade 3, the unit "Diverse minds and bodies react differently to the world" opens an inquiry into what students mean by *intelligence*. Some students connect it to being good at math; others wonder whether they use different parts of their brains when they speak different languages or perform different tasks. Questions about neurodiversity create space to examine the many ways people learn and respond to the world.

What questions emerge?: What is intelligence? What makes someone intelligent? Is a one-year old child intelligent? What about an animal – or a tree? These questions drive students to reconsider whether intelligence means already knowing something, solving a problem, or being able to learn and adapt. Their tendency to give human qualities to animals and trees also raises a useful question: when we call something in nature "intelligent," what do we mean?

How educators respond: Teachers guide the conversation by introducing examples that challenge a definition students have proposed (for example, Is a baby intelligent? Is a whale intelligent?). When math arises as a sign of intelligence, educators guide the conversation to the broader category of problem solving and learning potential. The role of the adult is to create new contexts in which the students can test their theories. One context presented questions whether this concept applies to machines programmed to solve problems, adapt, generalize, and learn.

What tools are used: Research is conducted on various forms of intelligence through reference materials and documentaries. Discussion and new provocations help students actively and continuously compare their theories across different species in the natural world (people, animals, plants). The chromebook is introduced as a tool used under teacher supervision during STEAM class, which has a subject-specific unit on coding. Students build on the basics of block coding explored in second grade.

4th Grade

Students are assigned an individual Chromebook to use in class for research and to develop computer literacy. They may bring them home occasionally for specific projects or as assigned by their teacher.

Inside the STEAM coding unit, students inquire into how AI is built and trained. They label training data by hand, then watch that labeled data train a simulated machine learning model that must go on to classify images it has never seen. The work runs as a simulation of cleaning the ocean, so the model's successes and its mistakes both have a visible consequence.

What questions emerge? As students gain independent access to devices inside of school and monitored usage outside school, they begin to ask: How is information created? In STEAM, they also explore how programs might help address problems in the world. How does an AI model learn? How well does it solve the problem it was designed to address? What criteria can we use to test its effectiveness, and what can its mistakes tell us?

How do educators respond? Using tools designed for educational purposes ([Code.org](https://code.org)), teachers introduce activities to demystify AI showing how it learns and how it can be trained. Special attention is given to how AI depends on data sets to be trained. In the coding unit, students label training data by hand and observe how their choices affect a simulated machine learning model as it classifies images it has never seen. Students investigate how the machine responds to human commands and the data presented. Educators use accurate classifications and mistakes to help students assess how well the model serves its purpose.

What tools do students use? Students use devices to work with hand labeled data and a machine learning simulation. Framed as an ocean cleanup task, the simulation makes the consequences of the model's classifications

visible. Students can ask whether it identifies the right objects, which errors recur, and how those errors affect the cleanup.

5th Grade

Students are assigned an individual Chromebook to use in- and outside of class for academic purposes. Media literacy, research skills, AI bias, introduction to digital citizenship and self-management, and limitations of AI.

Students are assigned one-to-one devices to manage school work on and off campus. Devices are used primarily as research tools and students are given explicit instruction on how to identify and evaluate reliable sources, cite information properly, and format work submitted digitally. There is additional exploration of academic tools including presentation and word-processing software. Students are also introduced to learning management systems as organizational and management tools, alongside analog tools like planners.

PYP Exhibition (PYPx): The capstone student-driven inquiry project has seen students engage directly with AI topics — last year's cohort pitched and examined an AI tutor concept. This is teacher-supervised inquiry, grounded in critical evaluation. Students are asking: should this exist? Who does it serve? What could go wrong?

AI enters through the *How We Express Ourselves* unit on media and ethics, where it is named explicitly in one line of inquiry: *the impact of bias, misinformation, and artificial intelligence in media on ethical understanding and decision-making*. It sits beside three companion lines — how media and persuasive writing shape public opinion, how data presentation connects accurate information with ethical communication, and how open-mindedness shapes our interpretations. AI is therefore introduced as one of three forces acting on what students read and come to believe,

alongside bias and misinformation, rather than as a technology to be studied in isolation.

This work runs while students are researching for the Exhibition, so source evaluation is most practical and relevant. They are choosing what to trust for their own published work.

Students watch a video documenting what researchers found when they tested AI image generators. Given plain occupational prompts, the systems returned strikingly uniform results — surgeons as white men, nurses as women — although nothing in the prompts specified a gender or a race.

What questions emerge?

In response to the provocation, students and teacher discuss: Nobody told the AI model to make the surgeon a man. So where did that come from?

Is the machine biased, or is it showing us something about us?

If it learned from images that people made and captioned, whose choices are we actually looking at?

What happens to a child who only ever sees these images?

If this content gets published, and the next model learns from it, does the pattern get stronger?

How would I even know whether something I'm reading was written by a person?

The last one reaches furthest, because it turns the inquiry back on their own Exhibition research.

In this context, what is the value of a curated database with a pool of vetted, human-authored material?

And what challenges do the curators of those databases face now?

The last two turn the inquiry back on their own Exhibition research, and on the library databases they are using to do it.

What tools do students use?

A video provided by the teacher, presenting researchers' findings on bias in AI image generation; Chromebooks for processing text and building presentations, and for researching sources on their Exhibition topics; News articles and Common Sense Media learning modules on media literacy; Research databases through the San Francisco Public Library (sfpl.org), for locating credible sources for the Exhibition.

Middle School

6th Grade

What questions emerge? Students talk with peers about when and how to use AI and digital tools. As in PreK, they bring their own ideas to these conversations; by Grade 6, they speak with greater awareness and authority and have increased exposure to digital tools, platforms, and devices outside of school. However, misconceptions and gaps in understanding remain. They ask: Where does information come from? How can we verify what we read and see? What is plagiarism, and how can we be sure the work we submit is our own? In advisory, they also consider how to communicate well online and build healthy relationships, including in spaces where chatbots are present.

How do educators respond? Educators establish a foundation in information literacy, teaching students to examine sources and scrutinize claims, including AI-generated content. Students receive explicit instruction in how to read, evaluate, and cite digital sources. As they gain greater access to digital tools, educators help them navigate questions of academic integrity and encourage them to ask trusted adults about situations that feel unclear, including questions about safety and well-being.

What tools do students use? Students conduct research using established sources such as Encyclopaedia Britannica and Newsela, which offers articles at different reading levels. They also learn to navigate broader search results, recognize sponsored links, and use the OPVL framework to evaluate a source's origin, purpose, value, and limitations across disciplines.

In design, students begin with analog tools, including books, color references, typefaces, and calligraphy, before exploring graphic design through Google Workspace, Canva, and digital illustration tools.

Use of digital and technological tools is carefully considered by the teaching team and students only engage at school, on school-issued chromebooks, while monitored by GoGuardian. AI summary results are disabled on school issued devices and unknown websites are blocked. Six-tab limit on devices to encourage focus and organizations.

7th – 8th Grade

Grades 7 and 8

What questions emerge? Students ask how recommendation algorithms shape what they see online, who benefits from their attention, and how AI-generated images, video, and audio affect trust in what they read and see. They consider the risks of turning to chatbots for emotional support and what to do if they encounter a troubling interaction. These questions lead to questions of responsibility: Who is accountable when an AI tool causes harm? Can a machine reason morally? What kinds of conversation help people reach ethical judgments, and how do today's digital forums compare with the forum, agora, and theatre as spaces for public dialogue?

How do educators respond? Teachers address these questions through guided inquiry in advisory and academic classes, grounding discussion in situations students may already encounter outside school. Media literacy

work asks students to scrutinize synthetic content, advertising, propaganda, and the claims made in online spaces. Advisory creates a supported setting to discuss AI companions, mental health, and ownership of one's image. In the Grade 8 philosophy unit, students examine moral responsibility and critically assess responses produced by AI. Teachers remain present throughout these conversations, helping students test claims, consider consequences, and explain their reasoning.

What tools do students use? Students analyze digital media, social media features, AI-generated content, and sources about how these systems operate. Possible connections across the curriculum include investigating the environmental and human labor behind AI in science and I&S; examining data annotators and content moderators alongside Grade 7 study of industrialization; and connecting Grade 8 work on demographics, surveys, economics, and Bay Area history to changes in the workforce. In art and design, students can compare human-made and AI-generated work while asking whose creativity is used, who owns the result, and who stands to profit.

Students do not engage directly with AI or use AI to produce work for courses. All inquiry is facilitated and guided by teachers and on school-issued devices with requisite protections.

Risks That Apply to All AI Use

Bias and discrimination. AI systems reflect the biases in the data they are trained on. Outputs can reinforce stereotypes, disadvantage certain languages and cultures, and produce results that are subtly or overtly unfair. This requires constant vigilance.

Toxic and harmful content generation. AI tools can generate harmful, misleading, or inappropriate content — sometimes unpredictably. No tool is fully safe, and approval processes must account for this.

Invisible data collection and loss of control. Data entered into AI systems may be stored, used to train future models, or shared in ways that are not transparent. Every use of AI carries a data footprint that must be understood and managed.

Environmental impact. AI systems consume significant computational energy. Large-scale AI use has a measurable environmental cost that is rarely discussed but cannot be ignored.

Accuracy and misinformation. AI generates confident-sounding output that can be wrong. Uncritical use — by adults as much as students — risks spreading misinformation and eroding standards for accuracy and verification.

Copyright Risk: AI may create content that copies or closely resembles copyrighted work. Using or sharing that content could unintentionally violate someone else's intellectual property rights.

Anthropomorphizing AI: AI can create the false impression that it thinks, feels, or cares, leading children to mistake simulated connection for a genuine relationship. This can blur healthy boundaries and make children more vulnerable to manipulation or exploitation online.

Governance and Ongoing Process

La Scuola maintains a structured AI governance process that will continue to evolve:

- AI Advisory Council: meets regularly and brings diverse expertise — including parent representation — to evaluate use cases, assess the risk and recommend mitigation strategies.
- AI Tool Assessment Group: meets regularly to formally review tools and makes recommendations to the school
- AI Guidelines: a living document reviewed and updated as evidence and tools develop
- AI Internal Task Force: determines policy and direction



- Incident tracking: concerns are documented, investigated, and used to inform ongoing learning and mitigation

Areas under exploration — where we do not yet have answers: the potential for AI to support extreme differentiation for students working significantly above or below grade level is frequently cited but not yet evidenced. We are watching the research. We will not introduce any new use case until we have confidence in both the benefit and the safeguards.