



FAIR Summit Report 2025 Futures of AI in Rural Education

Wednesday, Sept. 24
The Dreamery
Pennsylvania State University

Highlights:

- Centered rural voices and cross-sector collaboration.
- Explored AI challenges and opportunities in rural education.
- Featured keynote by Rep. Paul Takac and expert speakers.
- Developed actionable recommendations for stakeholders.



Summit FAIR Organizing Committee with Rep. Takac and Guest Speakers Ko and Mroziak

Funding for the FAIR was provided by the Harry L. Batschelet Endowment in the College of Education.



Background:

Designed to move beyond abstract discussion, the FAIR Summit centered rural voices and fostered cross-sector collaboration to ensure that all communities, regardless of geography, can participate in and shape the digital-powered future of learning.

As artificial intelligence (AI) rapidly transforms education, rural communities face distinct challenges and opportunities in accessing its full potential. The FAIR Summit (Futures of AI in Rural Education) brought together educators, administrators, policymakers, researchers, and community leaders who explored the gaps between AI innovation and rural educational realities.

The summit began with an introduction by Rep. Paul Takac who discussed the issues facing rural Pennsylvania schools and communities. Three speakers (Chandra, Ko and Mroziak) delivered a series of interactive presentations that illuminated both emerging trends and persistent concerns about AI in education. In the afternoon, participants divided into interdisciplinary working groups to identify core challenges, share local and professional insights, and develop actionable recommendations for stakeholder and advocacy groups.



Keynote & Guest Speakers:

Representative Paul Takac

Paul Takac was elected to the House in 2022 to represent the 82nd Legislative District in the heart of Centre County. Rep. Takac brings to the legislature more than 30 years of business experience, including more than two decades in educational technology consulting and sales working with educators across Pennsylvania. Rep. Takac currently serves on the House Communications & Technology Committee and the Education Committee where he chairs the subcommittee on Special Education. He also sits on the Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee.

Rep. Takac highlighted the problems that rural districts and community face – more dispersed resources, low population density and issues of transportation. He noted that schools need to consider “How do we foster critical thinking and creativity; civics, digital literacy, or citizenship? What are the resources, the standards, the guidelines needed?” He emphasized that AI must be an enhancement, a new way of transferring human power and human capacity that amplifies not a replaces teachers.

“We need to prepare for a future of lifelong learning. The days where you kept the same job for decades has passed. How can we create the structures to help people thrive in that environment. The essential question is, how can AI reduce barriers to high-quality educational opportunities, particularly in rural areas?”



Representative Paul Takac



Andrew Ko

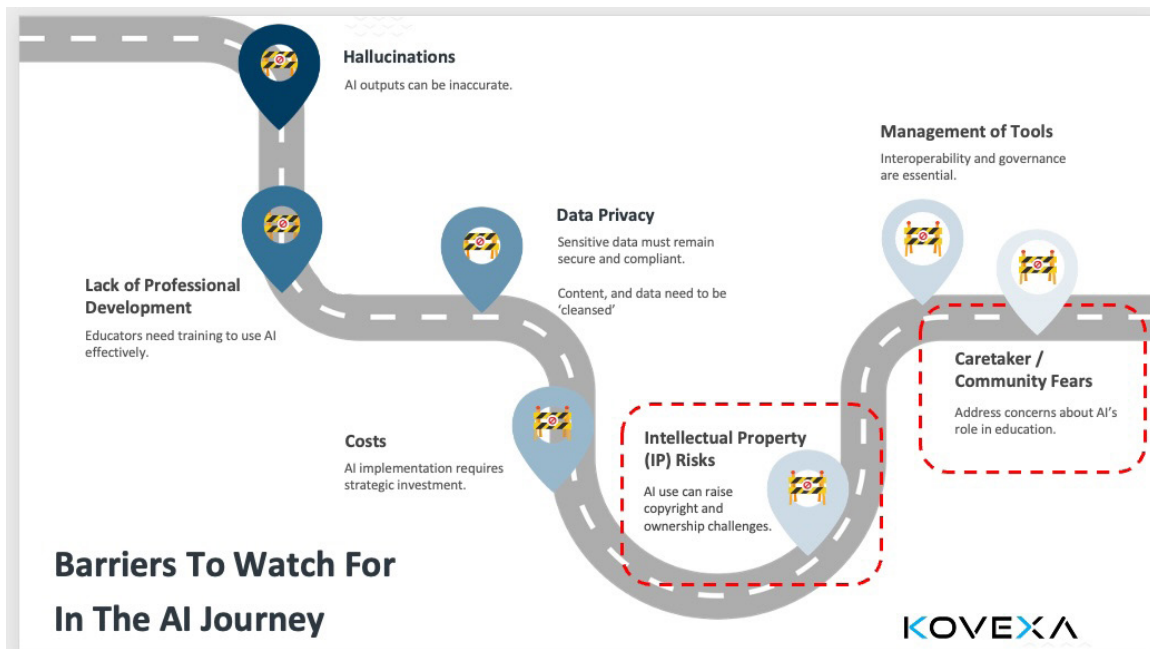
Rural schools stand at the intersection of rapid technological advancement and enduring structural challenges. Artificial intelligence is transforming industries from agriculture to large enterprises, yet many districts struggle to keep pace. Budget constraints, workforce shortages, aging infrastructure, and inconsistent policy guidance complicate adoption and limit the ability to fully leverage emerging technologies.

Mr. Ko explored what AI means for rural education today, drawing on both national data and local realities. He examined how these challenges intersect with the rapidly evolving AI landscape, presenting both obstacles and opportunities for rural communities.

The focus is on framing the moment: how innovation can align with community strengths, how educators can be supported in adapting, and how both students and teachers can acquire the future-ready skills and support they need to thrive in a world where technology is advancing at an unprecedented rate.



Andrew Ko, Chief Innovation Advisor at the American Association of Superintendents



Ranveer Chandra

Previously, Dr. Chandra was the Managing Director for Research for Industry, and the CTO of Agri-Food at Microsoft. He also served as the Chief Scientist of Microsoft Azure Global also led the Networking Research at Microsoft Research, Redmond. Dr. Chandra has published more than 100 papers and holds over 125 patents granted by the USPTO. He is a Fellow of the ACM and the IEEE, and has won several awards.

Dr. Chandra started at Microsoft in 2015. He also led the battery research project, and the white space networking project at Microsoft Research. He was invited to the USDA to present his research to the US Secretary of Agriculture, and this work was featured by Satya Nadella as one of 10 projects that inspired him in 2017.

Ranveer discussed how AI can greatly lessen the technological costs for small-holder farmers by extrapolating data. For example, instead of buying multiple soil sensors that are costly and can get in the way of farming, small-holder farmers can strategically place a small number of sensors on their land and use AI to provide more detailed analysis of the entire plot. He noted that AI has also been trained to pass standards for national agronomists and can provide basic information to farmers who don't have ready access to agronomist or consultants. While AI can't replace human expertise, Dr. Chandra emphasized its ability to assemble information from disparate sources and make it readily accessible to farmers around the world.



Ranveer Chandra, Ph.D. Vice President in M365 Copilot, and CTO Agri-Food at Microsoft.

Jordan Mroziak

AI Education Beyond the Pipeline” focused on teaching durable skills and a refocus to human flourishing domains as metrics for educational success. With this in mind, the reframing questions how students might benefit from an educational system that focuses on durable skills, like resiliency, critical thinking and problem solving, and ethical reasoning, while also safeguarding and honoring our humanity both individuals and a collective. The design of education must ask more than “What jobs will students get?” It should first ask: How can learning help every human flourish? Drawing on ideas from Harvard’s Human Flourishing Program—domains like meaning, virtue, community, health, and life satisfaction—we can explore how AI in education must be grounded in equity in design, access, and use.

All learners are entitled to rich pedagogy, meaningful digital access, and learning that awakens wonder and agency—not merely to be diminished into statistics of employability or infrastructure gaps. Educators, policymakers, and community members must envision policies and practices that honor learning as a space for flourishing—as a means to cultivate character and purpose, not merely to fill workforce pipelines. By integrating empirical insights from flourishing research with stories from rural and under-resourced contexts, we can reflect on what it means to foster learning that sustains both individual dignity and the common good.



Jordan Mroziak, Consultant, CodeJoy



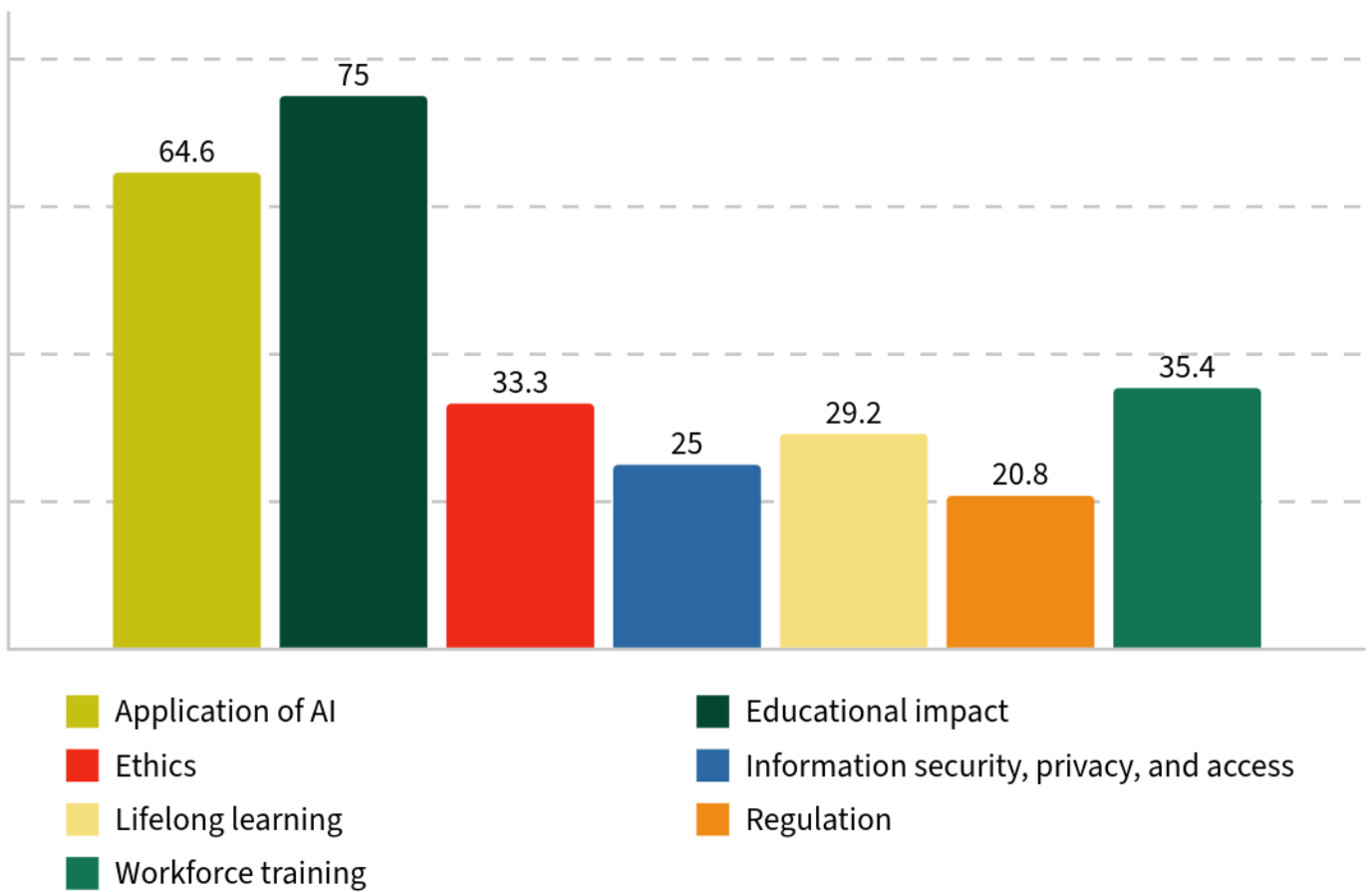
Discussion: Critical Areas for AI Policy

In a preliminary survey, participants were asked to rate various areas of policy and identify the most crucial areas for discussion. As this chart indicates, there are many policy sectors that critically affect rural schools and communities.



Participants were asked to rate what they saw as the AI topics that they believed were most critical to discuss, based on their professional experience.

Most Important Areas



Summary:

In our upcoming policy analysis brief, we will provide a detailed account of the issues that participants discussed, and the specific recommendations they created. Some of the main points considered were:

- In their discussions, the participants highlighted the need for better training for teachers. The Pennsylvania Department of Education has a new endorsement in artificial education for teachers. More competencies and a “toolkit” for teachers needs to be specified.
- Alternative data control and monitoring systems need to be developed, including ways to create regional centers that store and analyze data.
- The impact of rural data centers can provide needed jobs in rural locations, but often come with large footprints in terms of water use and power consumption. Regulation aimed at more even regional distribution of these centers would allow the benefits and impacts to be allocated around the state.



Ten Key Themes:

The general discussion focused on safeguarding students, supporting educators, and ensuring ethical integration of AI. The participants elaborated on the following educational themes:

1. Cognitive Protection in Learning – Schools must ensure environments that foster critical thinking, problem solving, and independent learning while avoiding over-reliance on AI.
2. Data Ownership and Privacy – Student data should remain the property of the individual, with strong protocols to protect privacy and inform students/guardians of their rights.
3. AI-Free Activities – Every student should regularly engage in educational tasks without AI to support creativity, original thought, and human interaction.
4. Age-Appropriate AI and Data Ethics Lessons – Students should be taught about data ethics, human-AI interactions, and issues such as deepfakes in developmentally suitable ways.
5. Educator Support and Guidance – Teachers need clear AI usage guidelines, including use for assistive technologies, personalized learning, and lesson planning.
6. Boundaries of Acceptable AI Use – Explicit restrictions were proposed: no fully automating learning, no AI tools that threaten privacy, and no systems that replace authentic learning.
7. Balancing Human and AI Roles – Discussion focused on which tasks should be supported by AI and which must remain human-only to protect human flourishing.
8. Safe, Ethical, Developmentally Appropriate AI Integration – AI in schools must protect students, ensure equity, and foster growth.
9. Accountability Structures – Districts need policies to vet AI tools before use, emphasizing governance, accreditation, and compliance.
10. Need for Broader Expertise and Oversight – Schools require external expertise and consensus bodies to guide AI standards, not just reliance on local officials.

Organizing Committee



Andy Bater

Andy Bater is a fourth-generation farmer serving on the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau State Board and the Advisory Committee for Pennsylvania's Food Policy Council. For 16 years, he cultivated switchgrass on marginal farmland, supplying mulch to strawberry growers and contributing to bio-fuel research at Penn State. He now focuses on creating pollinator habitat and managing deer-fenced forest areas to support threatened bird species. Andy chairs Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's Wildlife and Fisheries Committee and has spoken nationally on wildlife-related farm damage. With over 25 years in digital radio and television engineering, as well as regulatory and standards work, he played key roles in disaster recovery following 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. His technology expertise earned him appointments to the FCC Precision Ag Task Force and the U.S. Commerce Department's Spectrum Management Advisory Committee. A past chair of the American Farm Bureau Federation Technology Issues Advisory Committee, he studies and presents on artificial intelligence policy and its evolving role in agriculture.



Arkar Kyaw

Arkar Kyaw is an educational leader and researcher with extensive hands-on experience in teacher education and higher education development in Myanmar. Since returning from a Fulbright scholarship in the United States, he has led numerous collaborative projects with universities across Myanmar, designing and implementing tailor-made solutions to leadership, teacher education, and institutional operational challenges. He is currently pursuing a dual-title Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Comparative & International Education at The Pennsylvania State University. His research focuses on community-based and culturally grounded leadership theories, as well as the experiences of teachers and scholars from the Global South. In addition to his research, Arkar actively advocates for equitable AI policies and the democratization of knowledge production and dissemination, striving to amplify the voices of educators and scholars working in marginalized and conflict-affected contexts.



Gerald K. LeTendre

Gerald K. LeTendre, Ph.D. is the Harry Lawrence Batschelet II Chair of Educational Administration for the College of Education at Penn State where he also served as Chair of the Education Policy Studies Department and edited *The American Journal of Education* from 2008-2016. His research focuses on how information and communication technology (ICT) is changing teacher work roles and professional development worldwide. He recently evaluated the impact of social robots on middle-grade learners using project-based learning, and his research group is investigating national, state and local policies around AI in education.



Tiffany Petricini

Tiffany Petricini, Ph.D. is an Associate Teaching Professor in Communication at Penn State Erie, the Behrend Campus. She is co-chair of Penn State's Joint Standing Committee on Responsible and Effective Use of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education. She also leads the Penn State Artificial Intelligence Community of Practice (AICoP) and the Humanities Institute's Phenomenology Collaborative Colloquia. Her publications have reflected interests in phenomenology, interpersonal communication, technology, philosophy, ethics, and media ecology, including her work "Friendship and Technology," available through Routledge. Tiffany has been an invited speaker on the international radio program "Spark" on CBC Radio One and the SUNY Plattsburgh at the Ethics Institute. She also serves as the social media expert for NBC affiliate WFMJ 21 News.



Sarah T. Zipf

Sarah Zipf, Ph.D. is a research project manager for Teaching and Learning with Technology at the Pennsylvania State University, where she researches the implications and impact technology has on teaching and learning. Her research interests include educational technology, distance and online education, educational equity, and outsourcing in higher education. She is an adjunct instructor for the Penn State World Campus.



Participants:

Andy Bater	Member, State Board of Directors	Pennsylvania Farm Bureau
Allison Kobzowicz	Public Policy Analyst	Joint State Government Commission
Amanda Smith	Director for K-12 Engagement, Outreach	College of Education
Andrew Ko	Executive Director	Kovexa / AASA Advisor
Arkar Kyaw	Doctoral Candidate	College of Education
Arryn Cumpston	Librarian	Crawford Central School District
Brendan Berthold	Instructional Designer	College of Arts and Architecture
Bryan DeWalt	Senior Policy Analyst	Joint State Government Commission
Cameryn Mitchell	Tech Talent Development Associate	Center on Rural Innovation
Carissa Pokorny-Golden	Bureau Director, School Leadership and Teacher Quality	Pennsylvania Department of Education
Carla Zembal-Saul	Kahn Professor of Science Education	College of Education
Crystal Ramsay	Senior Director	Teaching and Learning with Technology, Penn State
Dan Potutschnig	Superintendent	Philipsburg-Osceola Area School District
Daren Coudriet	Executive Director	Nittany AI Alliance
David A. Burkett	Superintendent	Everett Area School District
David Gindhart	Associate Vice President Administrative IT	Penn State University
Dustin Dalton	Director of Instruction & Data Analysis	Penns Valley Area School District
Edward Albert	Executive Director	PARSS
Frank Tallyen	IT Director/School Safety/Security Coordinator	Windber Area School District
Fredy Kelmun	Undergraduate	College of Education
Gerald LeTendre	Batschelet Professor of Educational Administration	College of Education
Gregory Thomas	Teacher	Windber Area School District
Gretta Kellogg	Engineering Program Manager	Institute for Computational & Data Sciences
Hillori Schenker	Doctoral Candidate	College of Education
Jae Wan Ahn	Science Technology Policy Fellow	Joint State Government Commission
James Collins	Undergraduate student	College of Education
Jeff Remington	Stem Outreach Liasion	Penn State Center for Science and the Schools
Jessica Fellin	Assistant Principal	Penns Valley Area School District
Jessica Shuster	Director of Education	Windber Area School District
Joan Adams	Technology Facilitator	West Perry School District
Joe Eckenroth	Principal, Pleasant Gap Elementary	Bellefonte Area School District
Jordan Mroziak	Consultant	CodeJoy
Katie Parr	Program Director	eAcademy
Laura R. Dimino, PhD	Executive Director	Center for Rural Pennsylvania
Maria Abunto	Executive Medical Director	AMBA Venture
Matt Johnson	Executive Director	Pennsylvania School Study Council
Matt Wise	District Director	Office of Senator Gene Yaw
Melissa Sadorf	Executive Director	National Rural Education Association
Michele Dubaich	Assistant superintendent	West Perry School District
Paul Heinemann	Director, Technology in Agriculture and Living Systems Initiative	College of Agricultural Sciences
Pauline John	Doctoral Candidate	College of Education
Peter Rea	Instructional Production Coordinator	Office of Digital Learning, Arts and Architecture, University Park
Phil Gruber	Agricultural Journalist	Lancaster Farming
Priya Sharma	Associate Professor	College of Education
Sara Fern Fitzsimmons	Technologies for Agriculture and Living Systems (TALiS) Coordinator	College of Agricultural Sciences
Sara Lauver	Associate Director	PA Early Learning Investment Commission
Sarah Zipf	Research Project Manager	Teaching and Learning with Technology, Penn State
Skip Pighetti	Assistant Superintendent	Bald Eagle Area School District
Tehniyet Azam	Graduate Assistant	Teaching and Learning with Technology, Penn State
Tiffany Petricini	Associate Teaching Professor	Communication Department, Penn State Erie
William Deal	Director of Teaching and Learning	Freedom Area School District