

DISTINCT *by* **DESIGN**

THE DIGITAL MAGAZINE OF **MAGNET SCHOOLS OF AMERICA** **QUARTER 1 / 2024**

BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION

Fulfilling Brown's Promise

SCHOOL FINANCE

*With a Fiscal Cliff Looming, States
Must Ensure Districts Maximize
Every Dollar for Students*

SCHOOL CULTURE

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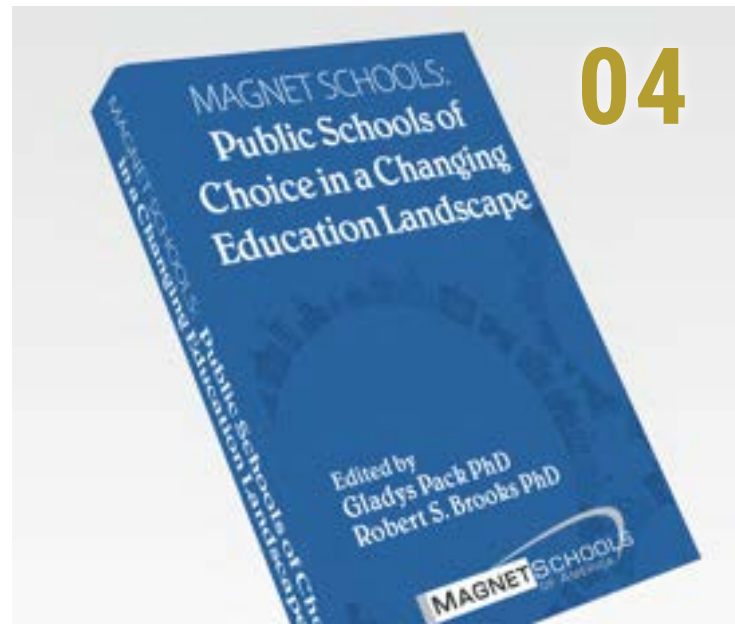
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WELCOME

BY RAMIN TAHERI AND THERESA PORTER

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Distinct by Design*, the digital magazine of Magnet Schools of America. *Distinct by Design* is a quarterly periodical intended to provide information and expert opinion on issues important to magnet schools, their students, educators, administrators, and supporters, and anyone working to advance the five pillars that serve as the foundation of magnet schools: diversity, innovative curriculum and professional development, academic excellence, leadership, and family and community partnerships.

"As its name suggests, *Distinct by Design* focuses primarily on a feature of American public education—the magnet school—that is unique and unlike most public schools but intentionally different."

As its name suggests, *Distinct by Design* focuses primarily on a feature of American public education—the magnet school—that is unique and unlike most public schools but intentionally different, purposefully designed to provide opportunities that set these schools apart. Of course, many of the issues that are most pressing in today's magnet schools are also of great importance to all public schools. Readers will find articles and information that cover a range of topics within K-12 education.

In this first issue, we look at some of the most topical issues in K-12 education this year, including the looming expiration of pandemic-era federal emergency education funding,



Ramin Taheri is CEO of Magnet Schools of America.

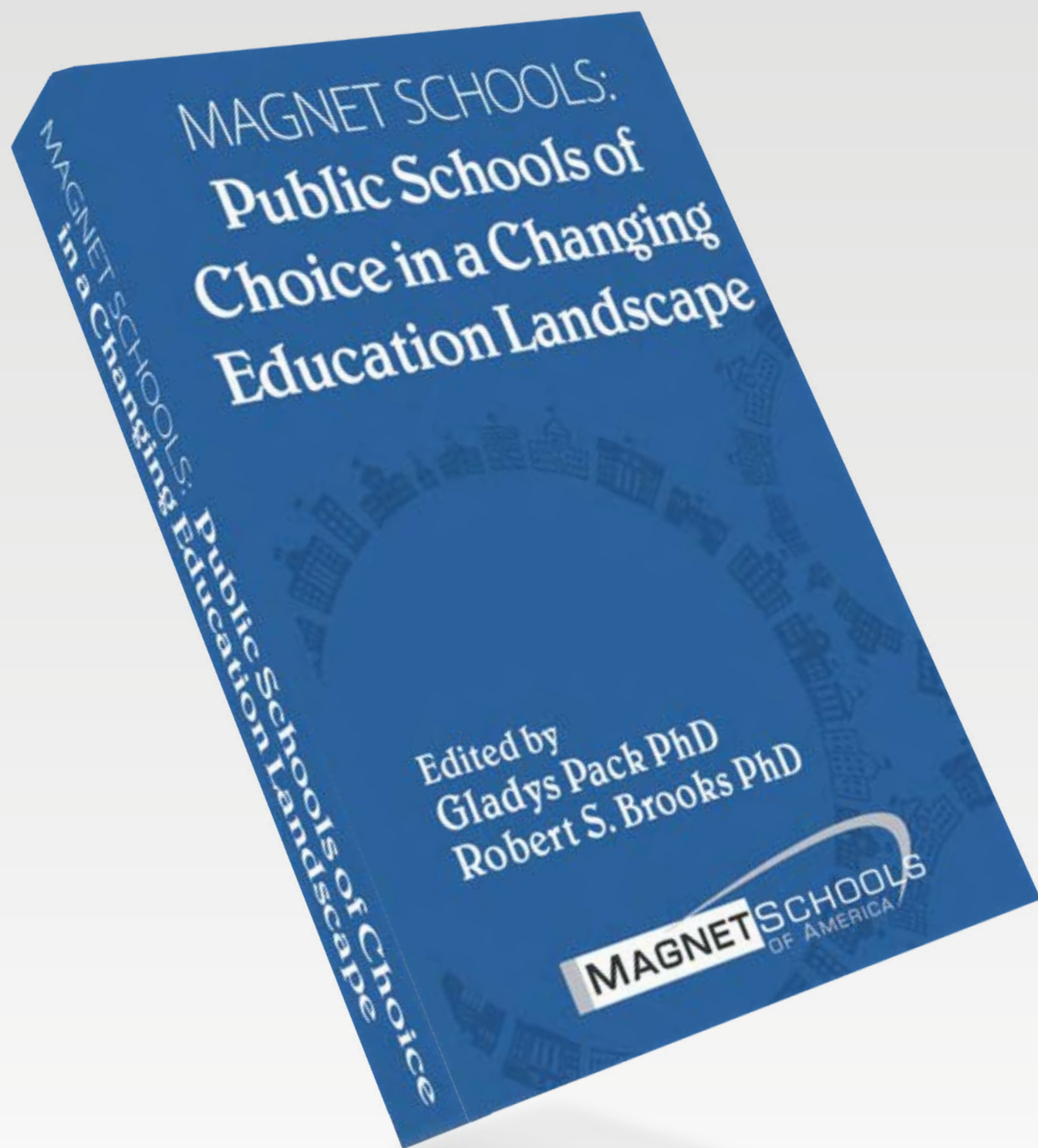


Theresa Porter is President of Magnet Schools of America and Executive Director of Innovation for the East Baton Rouge Parish School System.

student mental health and the importance of school culture and climate, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and what it means for education, and the state of school diversity efforts in a year that we mark the 70th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Looking forward, we expect to publish *Distinct by Design* on a quarterly basis.

In these pages, Magnet Schools of America hopes to bring readers the best and most informative content possible. Enjoy!



Learn more and obtain a copy of *Magnet Schools: Public Schools of Choice in a Changing Education Landscape* [here](#).

IN A CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT, MAGNET SCHOOLS OFFER COMPELLING SOLUTIONS

BY ROBERT BROOKS, PH.D., AND GLADYS PACK, PH.D.

As this first issue of *Distinct by Design* makes clear, American public schools are facing a range of challenges, from dwindling federal funding to dizzying and disruptive technological advancements to entrenched segregation. In our book, *Magnet Schools: Public Schools of Choice in a Changing Education Landscape*, we explore the unique facets of magnet schools that position them so well as potential solutions.

In discussing funding obstacles, for example, *Magnet Schools* notes that demand for magnet schools outpaces supply, a fact that contrasts with reports of declining public-school enrollment in many parts of the country. Likewise, our book provides numerous vignettes outlining the use of cutting-edge technology in magnet schools, suggesting that these schools will be among the leaders in successfully integrating and exploiting advancements in artificial intelligence. And, of course, *Magnet Schools* discusses the history and continuing commitment to the essential cause of desegregation, an evolving but ever-present battle that takes on special significance this year as we mark the 70th anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Today's magnet schools provide both equitable and excellent schools for children from a range of different backgrounds, using theme-based programs that develop multiple talents, integrate the core subjects, celebrate diversity, set high academic standards, and offer parents choices. As we face the many challenges and opportunities ahead, we know that magnet schools will continue to rise to the occasion.



Robert Brooks, Ph.D., is an editor of *Magnet Schools: Public Schools of Choice in a Changing Education Landscape* and is a past president and past executive director of Magnet Schools of America.



Gladys Pack, Ph.D., is an editor of *Magnet Schools: Public Schools of Choice in a Changing Education Landscape* and a founding member of Magnet Schools of America.

FULFILLING BROWN'S PROMISE

BY SABA BIREDA



This year, as we mark the 70th anniversary of the *Brown* decision, schools are at least as racially segregated as they were in the late 1960s and students of color continue to be systematically excluded from schools with greater resources. Schools and districts with high numbers of students of color and students living in poverty are underfunded, over-reliant on novice teachers, and less likely to provide rigorous coursework.

Yet we know that diverse schools work. Integration is one of the most successful education reforms of the last century, and is a core component of an efficient, adequate, and equitable system of public education. America's first attempt at large-scale school desegregation resulted in significant improvements in academic and life outcomes for Black students and Hispanic students by meaningfully improving access to resources. Yet, in most regions of the country, states and districts have abandoned efforts to integrate schools.

"Integration 1.0" had many challenges—challenges that we can learn from—but integration is necessary to achieve equity in the educational resources offered to historically underserved students. Even the most progressive school-funding policies frequently cannot overcome the school district boundaries that segregate and isolate students by race and socioeconomic class. Without addressing these borders, leaders will struggle to achieve resource equity, because (1) it is expensive to sufficiently fund schools mired by intense poverty; (2) segregation requires substantial redistribution; and (3) segregation ensures funding equity is not resource equity, as the deeply segregated districts and schools serving students of color and students from low-income families are the same schools that experience the most teacher churn, offer the fewest advanced courses, and rely most heavily on exclusionary discipline.

We should never stop advocating for more money in schools and districts that serve high concentrations of students living in poverty and students of color. But it's time to stop assuming that the borders and boundaries that create that concentration of poverty and racial isolation in the first place are set in stone. We also must harness the energy and expertise from the often siloed

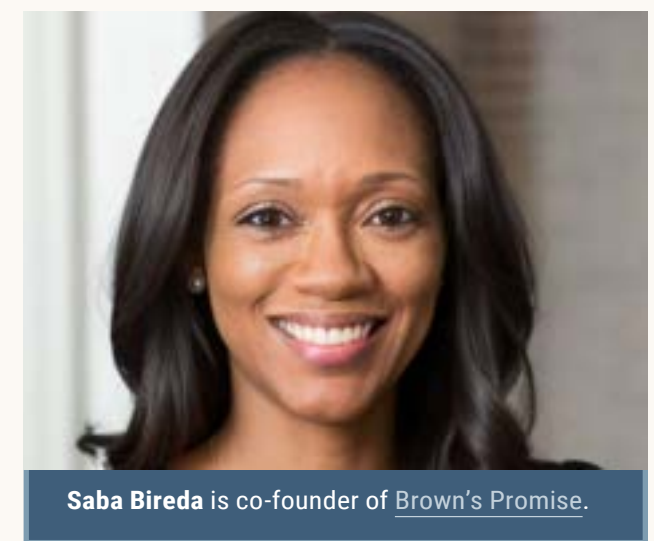
fields of school finance and school desegregation into an integrated approach to education equity advocacy and litigation.

Brown's Promise, which I co-founded, seeks to catalyze a new wave of litigation, advocacy, and communications dedicated to supporting racially and socioeconomically diverse, well-resourced schools that are safe, affirming, and prepare each student for success. We will do this work in

partnership with state and community-based advocates, ensuring that our strategies always seek to center the experiences of the students, families, and communities that have been historically foreclosed from opportunity in this country.

The Supreme Court said in 1954 that "separate but equal" has no place in public education, yet seven decades later the reality is that many of America's students continue to have separate and unequal access to educational opportunities. If we want to prepare students of every race to thrive in an increasingly diverse, interconnected world, children from all backgrounds need to learn together in excellent, well-resourced, diverse schools led by diverse educators.

"We should never stop advocating for more money in schools and districts that serve high concentrations of students living in poverty and students of color."



Saba Bireda is co-founder of [Brown's Promise](#).



WITH A FISCAL CLIFF LOOMING, STATES MUST ENSURE DISTRICTS MAXIMIZE EVERY DOLLAR FOR STUDENTS

BY MARGUERITE ROZA, PH.D.

The last few years have seen states and districts flush with cash, thanks to historic sums of pandemic relief aid in the form of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, or ESSER.

But come September 2024, districts—which have collectively spent more than \$60 billion in ESSER funds for each of the two prior years—will suddenly have to make do without it. That leaves states and districts staring down a massive fiscal cliff. While amounts vary across districts, on average, that equates to a single-year reduction in spending of over \$1,000 per student.

It is no exaggeration to say that school finance is at an inflection point. And equity—in resources, staffing, and learning opportunities—hangs in the balance.

At the state level, we suggest leaders outline any proposed changes to revenue structures and find ways to ensure equity isn't lost in transition. State legislatures dole out the cash for schools. But it's the districts that decide how to spend it. Sometimes those decisions go well and schools beat the odds on student outcomes. Other times they don't, and outcomes lag those of similar peers.

But it doesn't have to be that way. States can pull levers to help districts maximize the value of every dollar for students. These levers don't require politically complicated changes to state funding formulas or limiting funding flexibility with class size caps, staffing prescriptions, or mandated programs.

Best of all, these five levers are low-cost and popular on both sides of the aisle:

1. PRIORITIZE STUDENT OUTCOMES.

Have leaders weigh student outcomes in budget decisions. Typically, the budget gets discussed at one meeting, and student outcomes at another. Never the twain shall meet. One challenge is that test scores don't surface until months after budgets are finalized. Two easy fixes: State laws can mandate that districts include prior-year test scores in budget packages, and specify that boards revisit the budget when test scores emerge.

2. ENSURE FISCAL LITERACY.

Require finance training so district leaders are equipped to spend money well. Most district leaders get little to no prep on how to deploy their mega sums. Given so much of it is state money, legislatures or state boards can ensure that training on strategic spending happens by bolstering requirements for administrator certification. School boards too should have to build skills in budget tradeoffs.

3. CONTAIN BENEFITS COSTS.

Districts often struggle to contain healthcare and retirement costs. Legislatures can rein in those obligations with statewide "pooled" health plans or caps on pricey retiree health care offerings. To control pension obligations, more states could exclude one-time pay increases and stipends from spiking employee pension payouts and cap the amount of salary that is pensionable.

4. MAKE SURE DISTRICTS PLAN (SEVERAL YEARS) AHEAD.

The medium-term financial outlook for many school districts is ugly. State leaders can ensure districts look ahead by requiring them to publish balanced, four-year budgets. Doing so would help leaders, stakeholders, and labor groups get on the same page earlier about the district's budget realities.

5. BE PROACTIVE AND HANDS-ON.

States must support and intervene in fiscally mismanaged districts. Sometimes leaders are resistant to making hard tradeoffs, or they commit to unsustainable labor agreements. Occasionally, there's fiscal malfeasance. In any case, students suffer when districts can't get their financial house in order. Some states have laws offering support, oversight, and ultimately intervention when needed to invalidate unaffordable commitments.

Let's not forget: K-12 funding is the biggest line item in most state budgets. Legislatures should do what they can to ensure that investment is spent well on behalf of their state's students. With the fiscal cliff coming, that matters more than ever.



Marguerite Roza, Ph.D. is Research Professor and Director of the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University. Learn more at [Edunomicslab.org](https://edunomicslab.org).



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MSA's scholarships are funded solely by donations from MSA members, past presidents, the Board of Directors, and the national office staff.

WHY SCHOOL CULTURE MATTERS

BY ASHLEY BERNER



As the title of this publication suggests, magnet schools are *distinct by design*. From the first magnet school that opened in 1968 (McCarver Elementary School in Tacoma, Washington) until today, magnet schools have specialized in having distinctive missions. Magnet schools operate with clear purpose and practices; teachers, students, and parents know what a magnet school is *about*.

That's a really good thing, because evidence from around the world suggests that studying within "distinctive educational communities in which pupils and teachers share a common ethos"

vastly increases the odds of students' acquiring academic and civic knowledge, skills, and sensibilities. [Anthony Bryk et al.](#) found this factor at work in American Catholic schools, for example, whose "communal culture" revolved around the belief that human beings have inherent value. Education researcher, civil rights activist, and policy maker Charles Glenn wrote [with respect to European school systems](#), which fund a panoply of diverse schools: "Schools with a distinctive identity . . . offer educational advantages deriving from their clarity of focus." And Scott Seider observed the benefits of strong normative culture in [three very distinctive urban schools](#) in Boston.



Understanding school climate and culture may be particularly topical amid the rise in mental-health issues among students and young people that began during the COVID-19 pandemic, as [“socio-cultural elements of school life are increasingly understood to be important for student health and wellbeing.”](#) In this sense, magnet schools have been ahead of the curve.

Like all institutions, though, even distinctive schools can lose their way. The leadership changes, demography shifts, teacher retention goes up and down, the financial picture changes, political polarization creates tension, a pandemic disrupts business as usual: There are lots of reasons why a school can experience mission drift. The question is, do you know where your culture is? And if it’s diffuse, what can you do about it?

Many school systems use climate or culture surveys to take the temperature of the environment; [Panorama](#), [Tripod](#), and the [Five Essentials](#) are among the better known. The Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, which I co-lead, has developed our own survey, [School Culture 360](#), which thousands of schools

across the country use on an annual basis. We help leaders pressure-test not only for students’ and teachers’ relationships, the presence of academic rigor, and parental engagement, but also for mission alignment and international indicators of civic formation. When it comes to school culture, the sum is greater than the parts. As [two scholars of school culture](#) put it,

The term “culture” provides ... an intuitively appealing way to help school leaders understand their school’s unwritten rules and traditions, customs, and expectations. The unofficial patterns seem to permeate everything.

The good news is that building a strong—and distinctive!—culture is a lever that every principal can pull to good effect, and magnet schools have a head start. “Mission alignment,” an “organic community,” and “belonging” are different ways to express what magnet schools exist to provide. Despite all the pressures that pertain to running a school in 2024, principals and teachers can lean into their distinctive culture with confidence. The students will thank you.



Ashley Berner, Ph.D, is Director and Associate Professor of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy.



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WHAT EDUCATORS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT GENERATIVE AI

BY RACHEL SCOTT, ED.D.

“Generative AI has significant implications for education, offering exciting possibilities for both teachers and students.”

By now, you have no doubt heard a lot about artificial intelligence (AI) and why it’s the best—or the worst—thing to happen to K-12 education in a long time. I can’t tell you what to believe, but I can help explain a little about how generative AI might be used in schools today.

First, what is “generative AI”? It refers to a subset of AI technologies that can create new content, such as text, images, or even music, based on patterns and data they have been trained on. Unlike other AI systems that rely on predefined rules or data sets, generative AI models can generate novel and realistic outputs that mimic human creativity.

Generative AI has significant implications for education, offering exciting possibilities for both teachers and students. Of course, as with any new, transformative technology, generative AI brings with it a range of potential pitfalls that educators must navigate thoughtfully. Below, I discuss some of the potential benefits of generative AI and important considerations for educators interested in using this technology in their classrooms.

USES OF GENERATIVE AI IN EDUCATION:

1. Personalized Learning and Content Creation:

Generative AI enables educators to create customized learning materials that cater to individual student needs, preferences, and learning styles. This personalized approach can enhance student engagement and promote deeper learning. This technology fosters creativity and innovation in teaching practices, allowing educators to design more engaging and effective learning experiences for their students.

2. Automated Administrative Tasks:

Generative AI can be used to draft emails, design newsletters, and craft lesson plans. Leveraging AI to automate routine tasks can free teachers to focus more on instruction and individualized support.

3. Augmented Classroom Experiences:

Technologies such as virtual reality and augmented reality, driven by AI, offer immersive learning experiences that transcend traditional classroom boundaries, enabling students to explore complex concepts in a simulated environment and making learning more interactive and engaging.

4. Enhanced Accessibility:

Generative AI can be used to create accessible educational materials for students with diverse needs, including those with disabilities or language barriers. By generating alternative formats of content, such as audio descriptions or translated text, educators can ensure that all students have equal access to learning resources.

5. Real-Time Feedback:

Generative AI algorithms can provide immediate feedback to students on their learning progress, allowing them to track their performance and identify areas for improvement, promoting active learning and self-reflection among students.

Understanding AI and its Impact on Leaders, Educators, and Students in K-12 Education

July 8, 2024 – July 10, 2024

The Brown Palace Hotel and Spa
321 17th Street
Denver, CO 80202

Whether you're an educator seeking innovative teaching strategies, a researcher investigating the intersection of AI and education, or a policymaker shaping the future of learning, this conference offers a unique opportunity to connect with peers, exchange ideas, and contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding AI in education. Mark your calendars and join us for an inspiring and enlightening event!



Separate and Unequal: Brown at 70 and the Persistence of Segregated Schools

July 29, 2024 – July 31, 2024

The Waterfront Marriott Baltimore
700 Aliceanna Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

Join us for an intensive and engaging event about Brown's impact on the past, present, and future of education in America. By convening diverse voices and perspectives, this conference seeks to inspire dialogue, collaboration, and action toward the realization of Brown's promise of equal educational opportunity for all.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR USING GENERATIVE AI IN EDUCATION:

1. Ethical Questions:

Educators must consider the ethical implications of using generative AI in education, including issues related to data privacy, algorithmic bias, and student consent. It's essential to ensure that AI systems adhere to ethical guidelines and respect students' rights and autonomy.

2. Pedagogical Integration and Technical Skills:

Integrating generative AI into pedagogical practices requires careful consideration to ensure that it aligns with learning objectives and promotes critical thinking skills. Educators must evaluate how AI-generated content can enhance,

rather than replace, traditional teaching methods to create meaningful learning experiences for students. Educators may need additional training and support to effectively leverage these tools in their teaching practice.

3. Equity and Inclusion:

Educators must ensure that generative AI tools promote equity and inclusion by addressing disparities in access to technology and digital literacy skills. It's essential to consider the needs of all students, including those from diverse backgrounds or with special educational needs.

4. Privacy and Data Security:

AI in education often involves collecting vast amounts of student data. Safeguarding this data from breaches and ensuring privacy protection is paramount. Concerns about data security and potential misuse of sensitive information must be addressed diligently.



Generative AI holds significant promise for transforming education by enabling personalized learning experiences, fostering creativity, and enhancing accessibility. To effectively harness the potential of generative AI in education, however, educators must navigate a range of considerations, including ethical, pedagogical, technical, and equity-related concerns. By addressing these considerations thoughtfully, educators can leverage generative AI to create more engaging, inclusive, and effective learning environments for their students.



Rachel Scott, Ph.D. is an evaluation associate at the Center for Research Evaluation at the University of Mississippi.





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