

Leading with Less: Reducing Cognitive Load Through AI integration

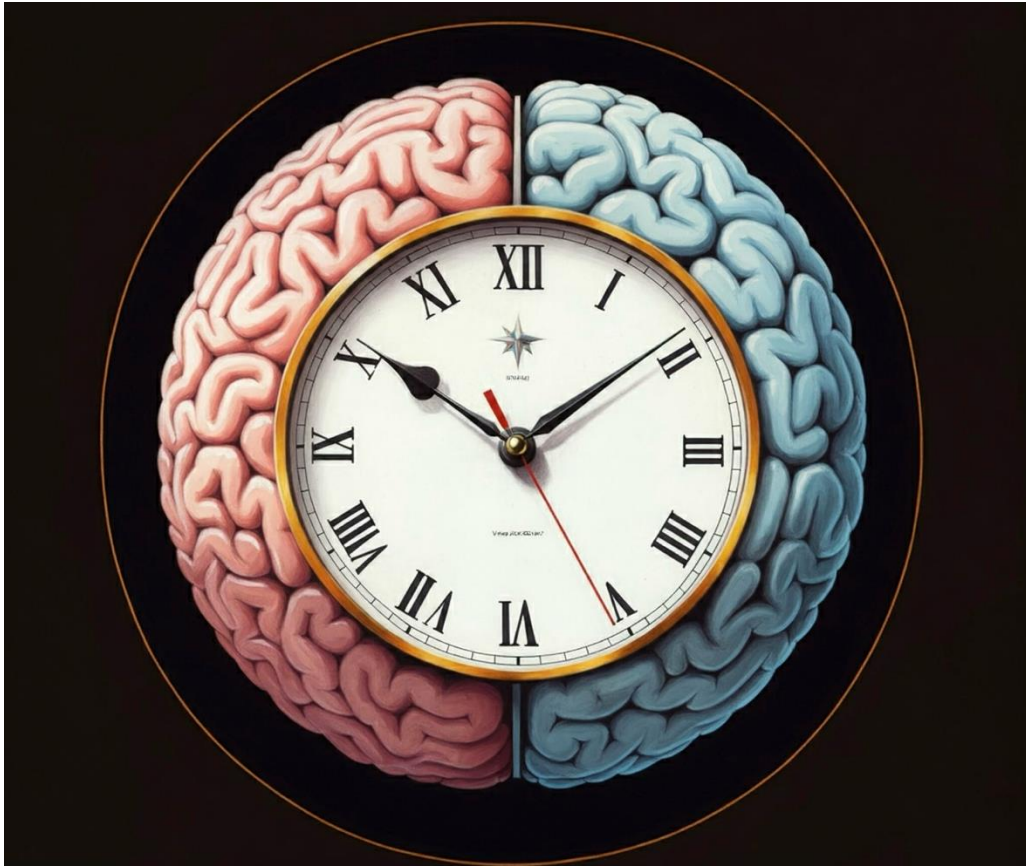
ACSA 2025 Leadership Summit
Derek Moore – November 6, 2025



PALO ALTO
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



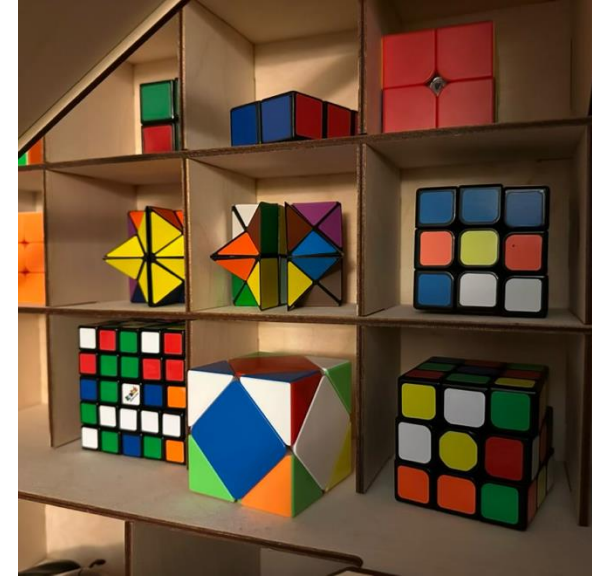
What is Cognitive Load?



- Cognitive load is how much a person needs to ***think*** in order to complete a task.
- Cognitive load is a fundamental human constraint.



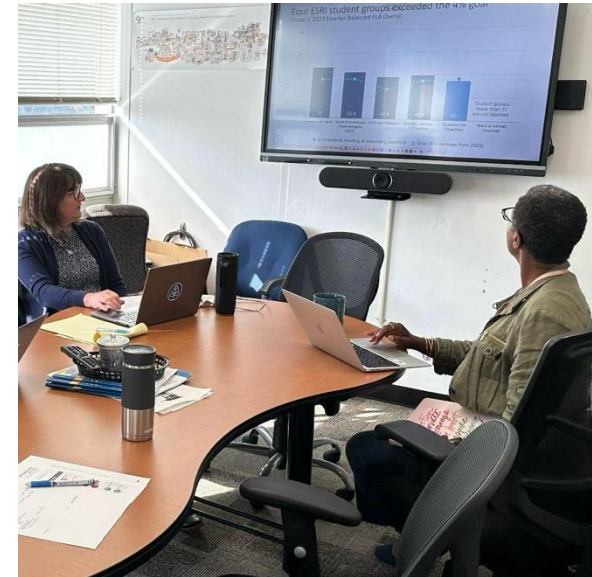
What would I do with more thinking time?



What would I do with more thinking time *at work*?



The Palo Alto
PROMISE



How do you spend your time at work?

Tasks that move you forward

- Setting Vision and Direction
- Focusing on People
- Building Culture
- Modeling Innovation
- Data driven improvement
- Being Present

Tasks that consume your time

- Email Overload
- Information Sorting
- Document Creation
- Routine Communication
- Data cleaning & formatting
- Policy Translation



Example: Information Sorting & Policy Translation



**Turning dense documents into
clear, human guidance**

District Strategic Plan



Example: Document Creation

First draft of employee evaluations

Inputs:

- Observation notes
- Performance artifacts
- Job description (& template)
- Areas for improvement

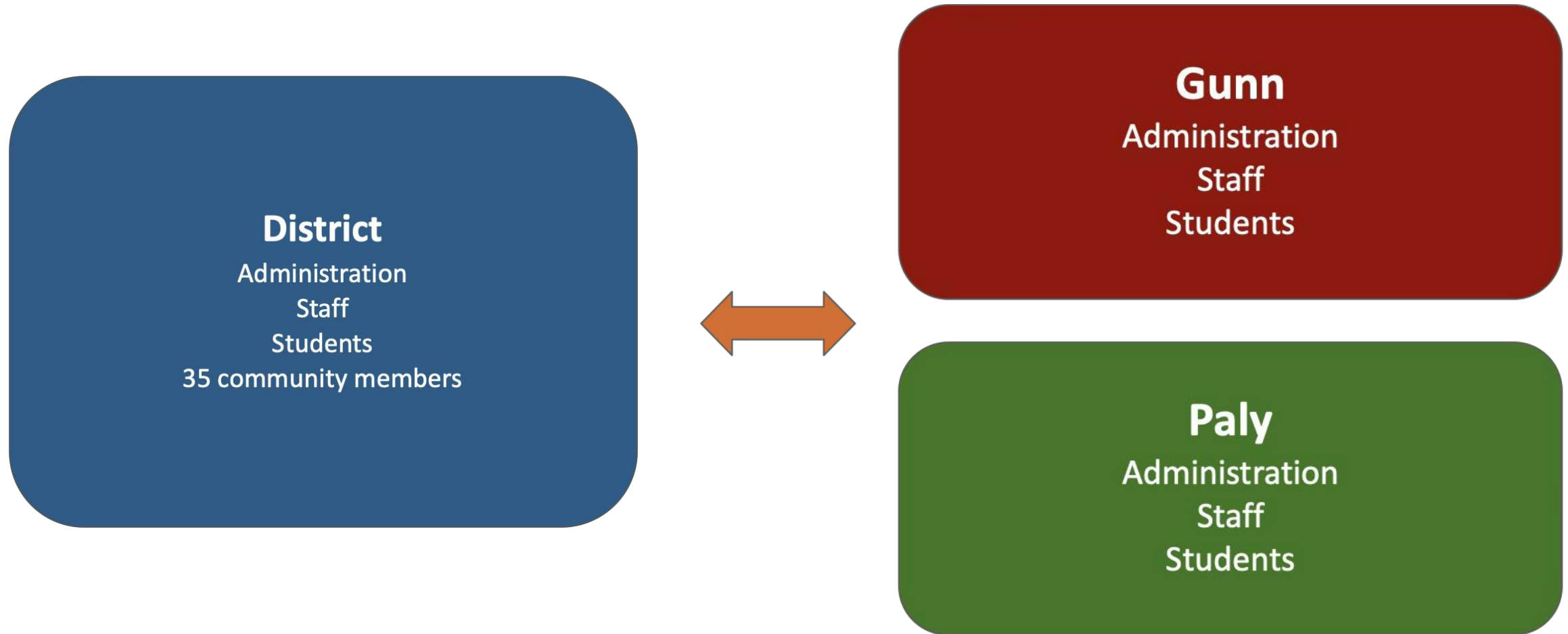


The Palo Alto USD journey

Reducing *organizational* cognitive load so staff and students can focus on learning, not logistics.



AI Committees: Fall 2023– Winter 2024



Generative AI Guidance: Principles

- **Academic Integrity** – Student work must reflect individual understanding and effort.
- **Innovation & Learning** – Use AI to enhance creativity and problem-solving ethically.
- **Teacher Empowerment** – Instructors decide how AI fits into their teaching.
- **Transparency & Accountability** – Disclose and discuss AI use between students and teachers.



Generative AI Guidance: Objectives

- **Core Skills First** – Build foundational knowledge alongside AI tools.
- **Enhance Learning** – Use AI to foster creativity, critical thinking, and engagement.
- **Open Communication** – Maintain clear dialogue on acceptable AI use.
- **Equity & Access** – Leverage AI to support all learners inclusively.
- **Privacy & Safety** – Uphold strong data protections under California law.
- **Continuous Improvement** – Regularly review and refine AI practices.



Generative AI Guidance: What we will NOT pursue

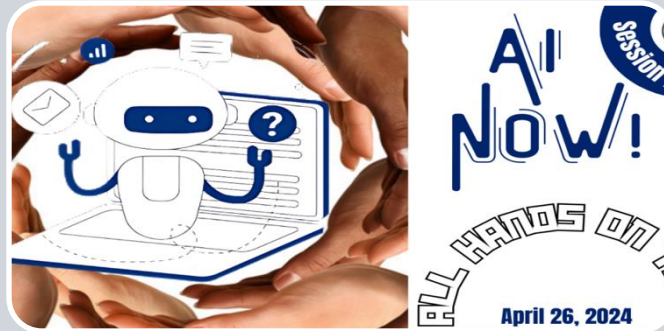
- **Full Assignment/Exam Completion** – No AI-generated work submissions.
- **Unauthorized Use** – Follow course, integrity, and appropriate human behavior guidelines.
- **One-Size-Fits-All Policies** – Respect diverse student needs and contexts.
- **AI Elimination** – Acknowledge risks without banning tools that aid learning.



AI NOW! – District Office (Spring 2024)



Session 1:
Foundational
knowledge &
practical skills



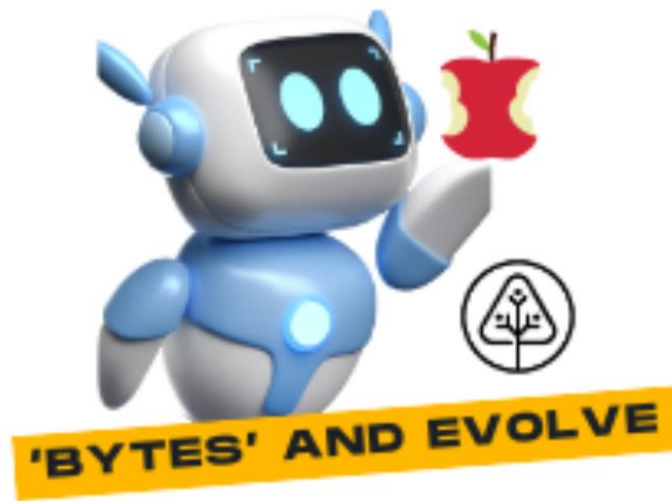
Session 2:
Hands-on
session
exploring AI
tools



Session 3:
Back to the
future journey,
explore creative
AI tools



AI NOW! – ‘Bytes’ and Evolve (Scaling-up 24-25)



- Three-part learning series, generated from the District version, to share out across all school sites
- Designed to evolve an understanding of AI, foster collaborative learning
- AI Lead Teachers
- Adults first!

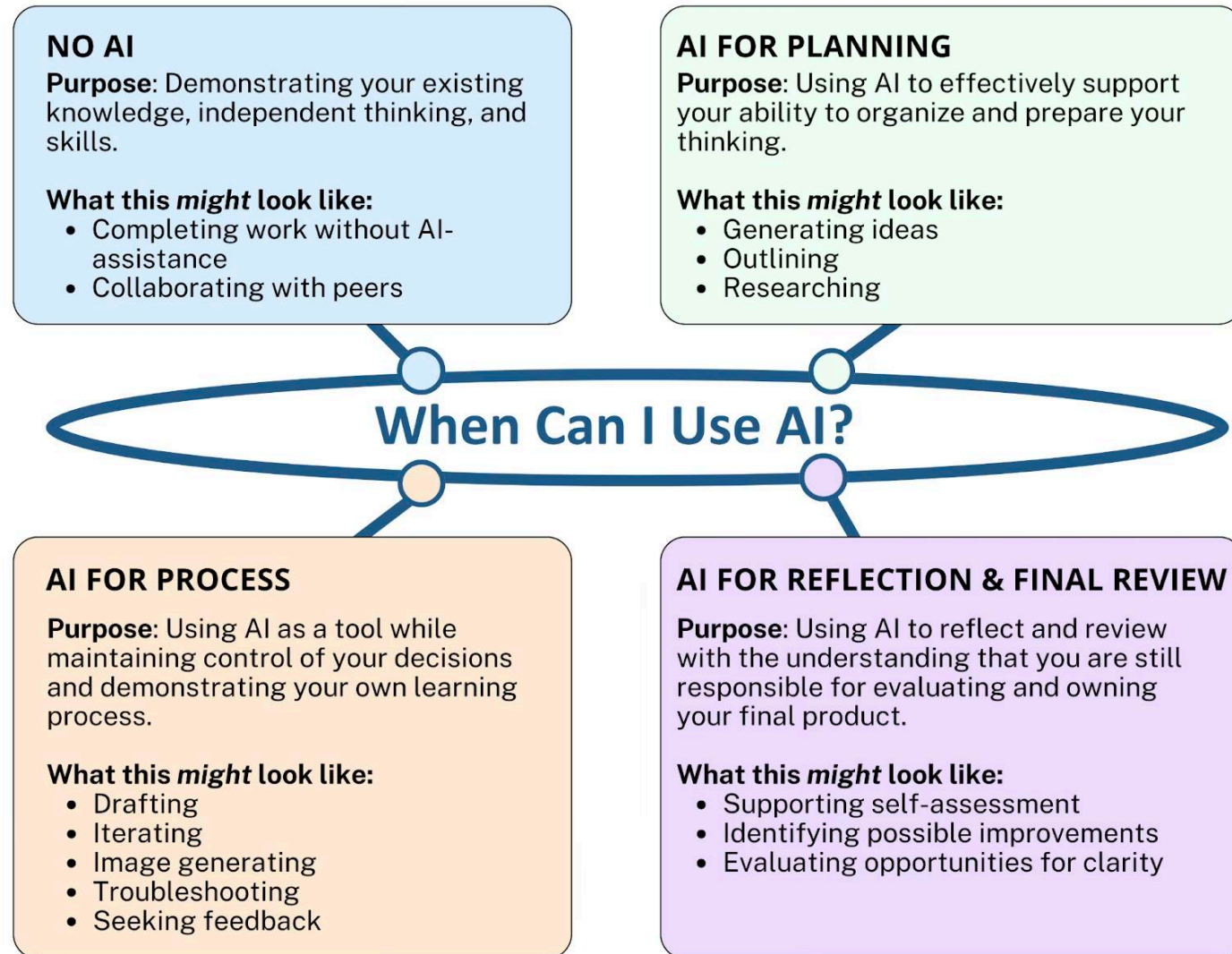


What does 2025-2026 look like?

- Understanding AI Fundamentals
- Evaluating Ethics & Safety of AI Tools
- Making Informed Pedagogical Decisions
- Evolving Professional Practices



Secondary Course Syllabus AI Guidelines 2025-2026



Building AI Literacy in Elementary



- Nurture the skills that are essential for a future with AI
- Teach students how to think and act in a world where AI exists, not how to use it



Foundational Skills in Elementary

Core Human Skills

- Strengthen literacy, empathy, collaboration, and communication
- Emphasize the learning process over the final product

Critical & Creative Thinking

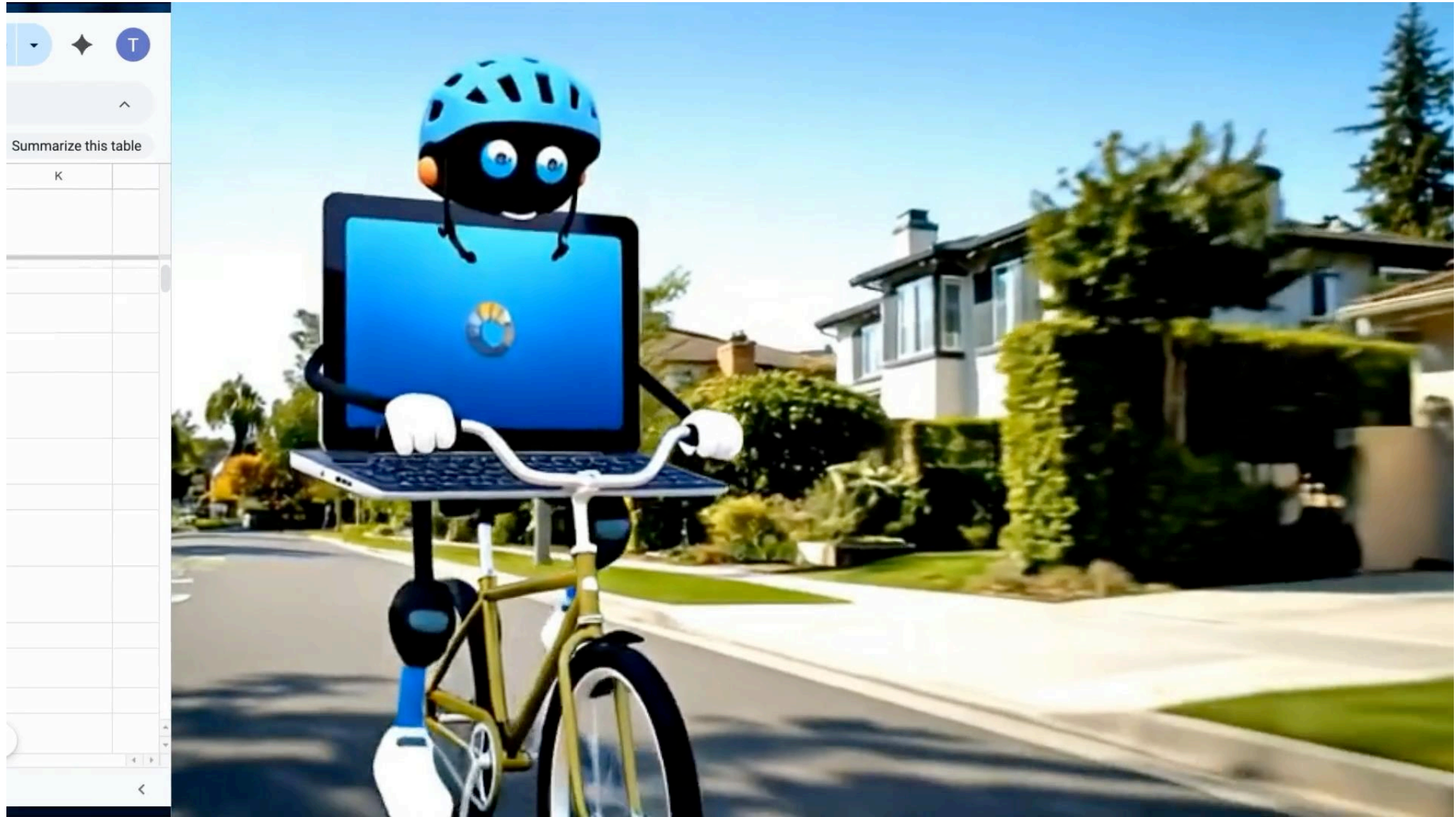
- Discern fact from fiction and solve problems thoughtfully
- Foster curiosity, adaptability, design thinking, and decision-making

Digital Citizenship & Responsibility

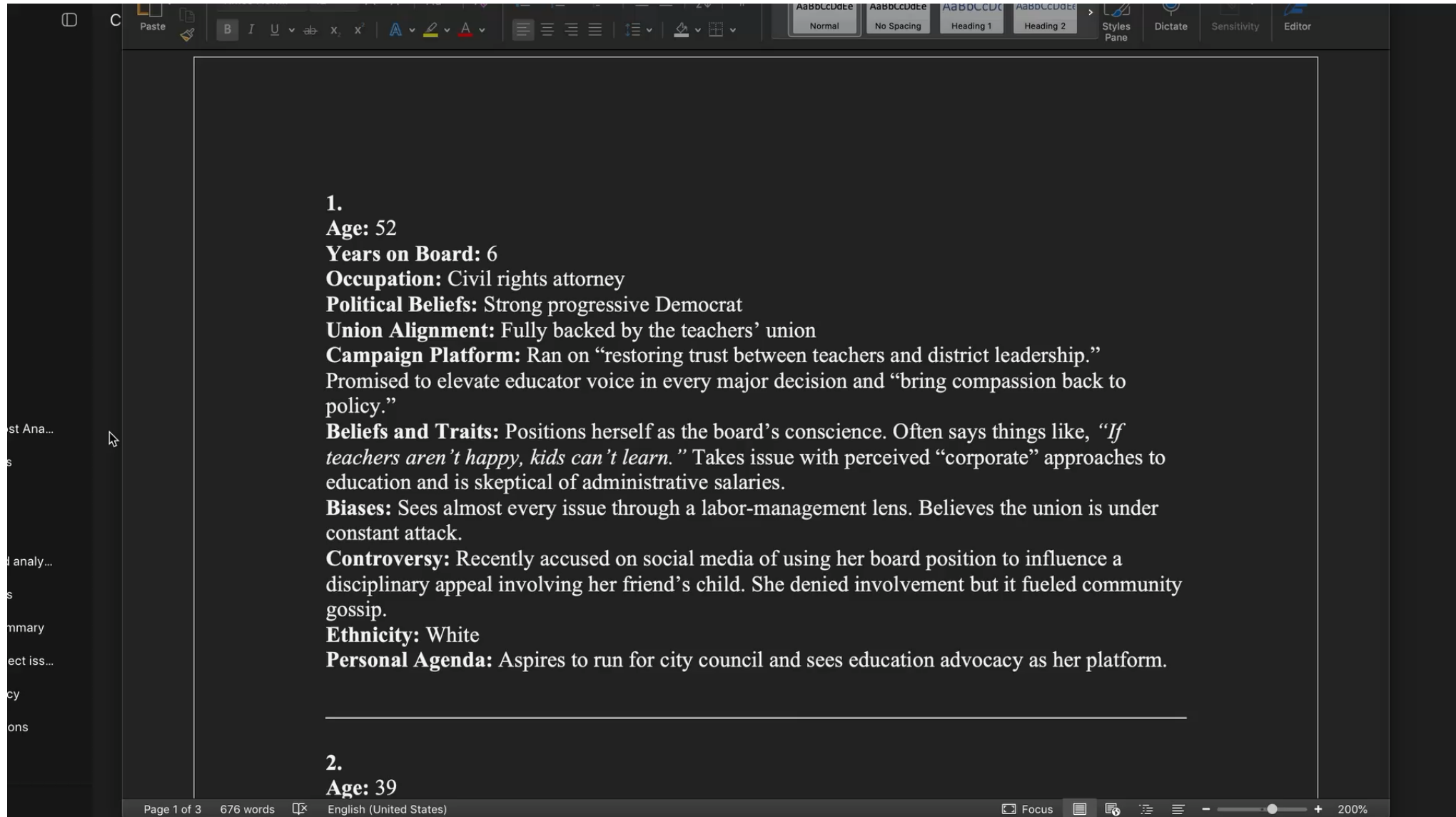
- Understand AI as a tool, not a replacement or friend
- Use AI safely, purposefully, and with integrity



Example: Policy Translation (Consistent language)



Example: Superintendent Thinking Partner



The screenshot shows a Microsoft Word document with a dark theme. The document content is as follows:

1.
Age: 52
Years on Board: 6
Occupation: Civil rights attorney
Political Beliefs: Strong progressive Democrat
Union Alignment: Fully backed by the teachers' union
Campaign Platform: Ran on "restoring trust between teachers and district leadership."
Promised to elevate educator voice in every major decision and "bring compassion back to policy."
Beliefs and Traits: Positions herself as the board's conscience. Often says things like, "*If teachers aren't happy, kids can't learn.*" Takes issue with perceived "corporate" approaches to education and is skeptical of administrative salaries.
Biases: Sees almost every issue through a labor-management lens. Believes the union is under constant attack.
Controversy: Recently accused on social media of using her board position to influence a disciplinary appeal involving her friend's child. She denied involvement but it fueled community gossip.
Ethnicity: White
Personal Agenda: Aspires to run for city council and sees education advocacy as her platform.

2.
Age: 39

The document interface includes a ribbon with tabs for Paste, Font, Paragraph, Layout, References, Mailings, and Review. The status bar at the bottom indicates 'Page 1 of 3', '676 words', and 'English (United States)'.



What *can* you spend your time at work doing?

- Setting Vision and Direction
- Focusing on People
- Building Culture
- Modeling Innovation
- Data driven improvement
- Being Present





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