

Every Staff Member, Every Role: One Shared Understanding Prepares Our Students for Their Future

In District 211, we've always believed that part of preparing students for their future is making sure we grow right along with them. Today, we're excited to share that District 211 has been recognized as a flagship district in OpenAI's national launch of ChatGPT for Teachers, a secure, education-focused version of ChatGPT designed specifically for teachers and school staff.

This recognition reflects something we care deeply about: giving our students every advantage we can as the world around them changes. AI is already shaping colleges, workplaces, and industries, and our students deserve to learn *how* to use it with purpose and confidence through strong guidance.

District 211 is not only preparing students for the future; we are helping to shape the future of AI in education. Over the past two years, our district has become a model that other schools and organizations look to when exploring responsible, large-scale AI integration. Our work has been shared locally across Illinois, nationally through partnerships and conference presentations, and internationally through collaborations, publications, and professional networks.

This school year marks our second year of systematic AI integration, and in that time more than 1,000 staff members have participated in hands-on learning to help them use ChatGPT efficiently, appropriately, and responsibly. We have provided more than 100 hours of districtwide professional development, offered multiple full-day AI summits, and created in-district graduate-level courses. These efforts ensure our approach is not only comprehensive but also sustainable and scalable. When every adult in a school understands the same tools and uses the same language around them, students benefit from consistent messages, aligned expectations, and deeper learning.

One of the most powerful parts of ChatGPT for Teachers is that every staff member receives a professional-level license. Why does this matter? Because students don't just interact with teachers; they interact with *all of us*. When a student brings up AI in the lunchroom, in an activities meeting, in the library, or during a support group, every adult can have an informed, cohesive, and meaningful conversation about responsible use. It also helps our staff work more efficiently behind the scenes in instruction, communication, and planning.

District 211's decision to use ChatGPT as our AI platform helps us keep data siloed and protected. It also allows us to build a comprehensive, cohesive plan for professional learning and student learning, including creating staff and student AI Continuums to create a path for growth, and AI Skill Matrixes to highlight concrete ways to move forward on the

Continuums. By keeping everything in one safe ecosystem, we ensure that privacy, safety, and ethical expectations are clear and consistent.

ChatGPT for Teachers supports our mission to create dynamic learning environments by helping us to foster curiosity, independence, and problem-solving in our students. Our staff can use ChatGPT tools to personalize instruction for individual student needs, supporting multilingual learners and students with diverse learning profiles. It offers our students even more equitable access to learning tools and resources.

Most importantly, it gives students future-ready skills they can take with them wherever they go: college, career, the trades, the military, or any pathway they choose.

AI isn't a trend but is instead a foundational skill set students will need in nearly every field. Whether they pursue engineering, business, health care, trades, arts, education, or entrepreneurship, they will encounter AI tools that help them research, analyze information, create, problem solve, and communicate. AI will be a part of their world. Our job is to make sure they know how to use it efficiently, effectively, ethically, and equitably.

Teaching students *how* to use AI responsibly now helps them:

- Strengthen critical thinking by improving their questioning skills
- Improve writing, revising, and brainstorming
- Learn to validate information and recognize bias
- Break down complex concepts into understandable steps
- Build independence by using AI as a thought partner, not a shortcut
- Develop digital citizenship and ethical decision making

These skills directly support academic success today *and* long-term success in college and the workplace. In short: We're not preparing students for the world we grew up in; we're preparing them for the world they will lead.