AI Strategies That Foster Student Agency

Washington Leadership Academy (WLA) is a public charter high school in Washington, D.C., that serves a population that is 99% Black and Brown, 33% SPED, and 100% Free/Reduced Lunch. Our AI strategy is built on a core belief: AI must expand student agency, voice, and opportunity. We focus on intentional, human-centered AI integration that prepares students for the future while addressing long-standing equity gaps in access to emerging technologies.

Two strategies we would like to share are:

- Building a citywide ecosystem for responsible AI use through the **DC AI Collaborative**
- Empowering students to create, reflect, and improve their work through innovative tools like Playlab and Class Companion

The DC AI Collaborative:
An Equity-Driven Approach to Systemwide AI Learning

WLA launched the **DC AI Collaborative** to bring students, schools, leaders, and policymakers together around a shared vision for responsible, equitable AI use. Because students in under-resourced communities are often introduced to new technologies too late, we see early AI literacy as an **equity mandate**, not an optional enrichment.

What the Collaborative Does

- Hosts *Pathways to Progress* convenings which are comprised of classroom learning walks and working sessions
- Students participated in our *Pathways to Progress* convening, sitting alongside their teachers to discuss real classroom AI use with policymakers and education leaders.
- Shares practical frameworks, tools, and implementation models
- Builds a cross-school community committed to student-centered AI practices
- Advocates for clear, coherent guidance from DC governing bodies

Early Impact

- 25 attendees at our first convening; 20+ RSVPs for our March 2026 event
  - Attendees include: *DC Public Charter School Board, OSSE, CitySchools Collaborative, EdTrust, Fordham Institute, FutureED, DC Charter School Alliance, Capital City PCS, DC International School, EL Haynes PCS*
- Strong policy and practitioner feedback on intentional, equity-driven implementation
- WLA's recognition as a model for responsible AI integration
- Building on their Pathways to Progress leadership, students met with Microsoft and other local charter schools to advise on student engagement and equitable AI use.

> *"We've been hearing concerns about too many tools being thrown at teachers without intentionality. What I saw at WLA was the opposite — purposeful, focused, thoughtful implementation."*
>
> -DC Based Think Tank

> *"Historically, low-income and Black and Brown students have been introduced to new tech too late, or not at all. WLA's work reverses that trend."*
>
> -Policy-based Participant

Playlab & Class Companion:
Strengthening Student Agency Through Creation and Feedback

In AP Psychology, students must master Free Response Questions (FRQs), yet a major challenge quickly emerged: **the College Board has released only two years of official FRQ samples since revamping their curriculum in 2024**, leaving students with *very little high-quality material to practice on*. Without frequent, accurate, content-aligned practice, students struggled to build confidence, deepen understanding, and improve their writing.

Our Solution: A Custom Playlab App + Class Companion Integration

To address this gap, Washington Leadership Academy built **custom *Playlab* applications** that automatically generate new, high-quality FRQs complete with:

- A content-aligned FRQ prompt
- Stimulus articles modeled after AP guidelines
- Rubrics aligned to the AP scoring framework
    - *Article Analysis Question (AAQ) Generator* **//** *Evidence-Based Question (EBQ) Generator*

This allowed teachers to produce unlimited, accurate practice materials tailored to the unit. We then input these FRQs into **Class Companion**, enabling students to:

- Write responses directly in the platform
- Receive personalized, rubric-aligned feedback in real time
- Analyze their strengths and growth areas
- Revise and resubmit immediately
- Generate class-wide data to inform teacher planning and reteaching

This pairing of Playlab (for creation) and Class Companion (for feedback & data) created a complete instructional cycle:

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Respond → Reflect → Revise → Reteach

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Impact:

- In just two months, students' FRQ scores tripled.
- Students became more confident, more independent, and more skilled in evaluating and improving their own work.
- Teachers gained actionable insights that strengthened instruction across units.

This strategy not only filled a practice gap, it transformed FRQ writing into a powerful vehicle for student agency, metacognition, and mastery.

Why These Strategies Matter for Student Agency

WLA's approach strengthens agency in four key ways:

1. **Equitable Access:** Early, meaningful AI exposure for traditionally underserved students ensures they can compete, lead, and create in an AI-shaped future.
2. **Critical AI Literacy:** Students learn how to choose tools wisely, prompt effectively, evaluate accuracy, and reflect on ethical implications.
3. **Creative Ownership:** Through Playlab projects and authentic assessments, students build AI-infused products that represent their ideas.
4. **Improved Mastery Through Feedback:** Class Companion empowers students to iterate quickly, build metacognition, and take charge of their own improvement.