

VSB Voices

Digital Devices, Digital Tools and AI – Engagement Summary Report

May 2026



With deep gratitude and respect, we are honoured to be learning and unlearning on the ancestral and unceded lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) & səlilwətał (Tseil-Waututh Nation).

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About VSB Voices

VSB Voices is a listening post that provides an opportunity for members of the Vancouver School Board (VSB) community to share feedback and guidance to help inform the District's strategic planning and initiatives. Earlier this school year, parents, guardians and caregivers of students currently enrolled in VSB, and adult learners attending VSB schools/programs were invited to join. For the 2025/2026 school year, more than 200 participants signed up to share their perspectives through VSB Voices.

Digital devices, digital tools and AI

On April 16, 2026, the District held two in-person focus groups for members of VSB Voices to learn more about their perspectives on digital devices, digital tools and artificial intelligence (AI) in schools. As Copilot 13+ will be made available for secondary students this spring, we wanted to hear from students' families about what they know or are hearing about digital tools and AI in schools, what their questions and concerns are and what information would be useful to them.

The goal was to listen and learn from participants to better understand parent/caregiver perspectives and identify what information they believe is most helpful about digital tools and AI. Participants were asked their thoughts around three main areas: personal digital device restrictions in schools, AI and digital literacy, and communication with families. Both of the in-person focus sessions were held on Thursday, April 2026. The first session was held from 12:00 – 1:00 p.m. The second session was held from 6:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Nine participants attended the noon session, and eight participants joined the evening session for a total of 17 participants across both sessions. Eight participants were parents/caregivers of secondary students, seven participants were parents/caregivers of elementary students and two participants had children in both elementary and secondary schools.

Across both sessions, participants expressed a desire for careful and measured use of digital tools and AI in schools, paired with a strong emphasis on digital literacy for students. Participants also placed a high value on human-centred teaching that supported foundational literacy and critical thinking skills.

What we heard

Personal digital device restrictions

The following themes emerged based on participants' reflections about personal digital devices in schools, assessing what worked, what did not work and what can be improved.

Support for restrictions

Participants were generally supportive of the District's personal digital device restrictions, noting that the procedures align well with families' expectations. Some noted inconsistencies in the ways that the restrictions are applied due to different teachers' level of enforcement. This has led to some parents and caregivers being unclear about how the restrictions work in practice. One suggestion made was for educators to set and maintain clear expectations with students.

Participants with children in elementary schools expressed satisfaction with the restrictions. They reported a particular appreciation for a shared and consistent culture in schools with no mobile phone use in schools.

Balanced and appropriate use

Concerns were raised about how much time students spend on screens. Participants noted the importance of balance, particularly for younger students who are forming foundational habits. Participants broadly agreed that device use should be intentional, limited and age appropriate. Participants expressed a desire to see digital devices (if used) support learning and not interrupt students' attention, focus and the overall classroom climate.

Participants noted equity concerns for students who may need digital tools to learn, but whose need of devices may not be understood by peers.

AI and digital literacy

The following themes emerged when participants were asked about their current perspectives about AI and digital tools in relation to student learning.

Clarity about how AI will be used

Participants vocalized the need for transparency about how digital tools are and will be used, and the safety measures in place. Some further believed that there should be clear examples of how educators will be teaching the critical thinking skills required for students to use AI tools effectively. They also requested clarity around how students using AI will be assessed.

Responsible and critical use

Most participants acknowledged AI as being part of modern life and believed that students should possess the digital literacy skills necessary to thrive in a technology driven world. Participants expressed a desire to see literacy and critical thinking skills supported and not offloaded with the use of digital tools. Some noted concerns around students' ability to identify misinformation with AI. Participants wanted assurance that learning, not productivity, remains the goal for students.

Participants highlighted concerns that AI may reduce productive struggle for students, which was seen as essential to learning. Many underscored that overreliance on AI can change students' ability to think, write and problem solve.

Safety considerations

Feedback highlighted some participants' concerns about student data and privacy, as well as the expectation of clear guardrails and oversight before adoption of generative AI tools in schools. While some participants felt comfort and ease working with AI tools, others had concerns that implementation may be outpacing research and understanding about the potential risk these tools may pose for students.

Communication with families

The following themes emerged when participants were asked about when and how they would like to be informed, and what information is most helpful when it comes to their children's use of digital tools.

Channel and frequency preferences

While some participants did value information from the District, they expressed a wish for more clarity regarding the sender and intent of the message. Participants indicated a preference for communication directly from their child's teacher, either via email or in-person. They also valued opportunities for direct conversations with teachers about students' use of AI. Some indicated they were interested in participating in more frequent engagements about this topic in the future.

There was variance in preference in how frequent participants wanted communication, with some wanting as much as possible and others desiring a measured amount. Some participants found information on social media channels and the school websites useful, while others preferred messages sent directly to their inboxes.

Content preferences

Participants indicated they would like greater clarity about the District's overall vision regarding AI as well as clear rationale for why AI and digital tools are utilized. They also wanted to see transparency around any trade-offs, limitations and risks for chosen tools. Participants requested real examples of how students and teachers are or will be using AI to support learning, in practice.

Participants noted that online resources about digital literacy and the District's AI guidelines available in plain language would be helpful for parents and caregivers to reference.

Conclusion

Participants across both engagement sessions expressed thoughtful perspectives regarding the use of personal digital devices, digital tools and AI in schools. While there was openness to new technologies and recognition of the potential benefits of digital tools, participants consistently emphasized the importance of clear guardrails, age-appropriate use and a strong focus on student learning and well-being. Clear, transparent and proactive communication emerged as a critical condition for trust, with families looking to understand what tools are being used in classrooms, as well as why, how and with what safeguards. Feedback from participants points to a strong expectation that decisions about digital tools and AI be communicated clearly, with families meaningfully included along the way.

Post engagement feedback by participants was positive, with all participants agreeing that they felt supported to share their perspectives. Most agreed that the purpose of the focus group was clear and relevant to their interests as parents and caregivers.

Feedback received about digital devices, digital tools and AI engagement sessions will help inform the rollout of Microsoft Copilot 13+ in secondary schools this spring, as well as communications with families moving forward.

Thank you to all members of VSB Voices who offered their time and perspectives. Visit govsb.ca/engagement to learn more about additional engagement initiatives.