

NINA MOINI: Well, this upcoming school year, districts across the country have a new tool they can use, a national AI policy. It was created by 98 teens representing all 50 states. Last month, they gathered in Boston for the MIT Day of AI, created a mock Senate, and drafted and passed their own legislation that helps schools navigate artificial intelligence. Representing Minnesota were students and staff from St. Cloud. Joining me now is incoming junior at St. Cloud Tech High School, Bihmanji Acho. Thanks for being here, Bihmanji.

BIHMANJI ACHO: Hi. Thank you so much for having me here.

NINA MOINI: And we're also thrilled to have Principal Molly Kensy, who also attended the conference. Thank you for being here, Principal Kensy.

MOLLY KENSY: Thanks for having me.

NINA MOINI: Bihmanji, I would love to start with you. This sounds like it was a really cool gathering of just a lot of people from all over the country. What made you want to be part of this?

BIHMANJI ACHO: Yeah, so for the MIT Day of AI, what really made me want to be a part of it is just seeing the effects of AI within my own school. Especially at St. Cloud Tech, 70% of our school is actually at or below the poverty line. And when you're looking at that, with the addition of AI in our learning space, when a lot of our students already don't have that basic foundation of critical thinking, AI just adds on to that and deteriorates from that.

So coming into this MIT Day of AI convention, it was just super important for me to be able to have a voice and to speak for the students within my own community, especially since I feel like our school is a special place, where a lot of our students don't really have that foundational basis of critical thinking built yet. So I think that my perspective on AI was different from a lot of people from other schools across the country.

NINA MOINI: How so?

BIHMANJI ACHO: Like I was saying before, especially with that basis of critical thinking, a lot of the times when I was talking with my peers, a lot of the schools that they were coming from, a lot of their students weren't at that 70% at or below the poverty line. A lot of their schools were either 30% to 50%. So I think us being at that 70% really adds to that socioeconomic factor of it. And it just changes the way that our school has to think about the use of AI within our school system.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, Bihmanji, tell me more about how you actually do use AI in your day-to-day in your life. A lot of times, the conversation gets very simplified to cheating or taking the easy shortcut. But how do you see it? Or do you use it in a way that you feel is healthy? Or do you try not to use it at all?

BIHMANJI ACHO: For me personally, I'm a big believer in trying not to use AI at all in my personal life.

NINA MOINI: OK.

BIHMANJI I just think that especially for me as a student in general, I feel if I start to use AI a little bit, I'm going to start to completely rely on it. But there are certain situations where I do dabble in the use of AI. If something's wrong with my car and I have no idea what to do, and I'm looking it up and I can't figure it out, I might go to ChatGPT and ask what's going on with it.

NINA MOINI: Sure. So, Principal Kensy, you have, as an administrator, kind of a difficult task here as all of this is unfolding and AI is becoming so common and having to perhaps draft your own policies. How are you approaching those conversations?

MOLLY KENSY: I feel pretty lucky to be here in District 742. We've done a lot of work early on in the process. And so early on, our system worked together with a variety of stakeholders, from educators to parents to students, and really had us at the table talking about, how do we create a guidance that supports this new age of technology?

And so we don't have it all figured out, that's for sure. And it's moving very quickly. But I think it helped us to have extra voices at the table. And really, it's allowing us to grow with the technology and to continue to keep asking questions and exploring what we need to do next to continue to support our PK to 12th grade learners.

NINA MOINI: Bihmanji, tell me a little bit about how it actually went when you were drafting the legislation. There were different committees. And were there amendments? Or how did it all work?

BIHMANJI Yeah, so there were different committees. So we actually had four different subcommittees. There were the students. There were the teachers. We had a parent subcommittee, and there were administrators. I was actually in the administrative subcommittee. And essentially, what we were able to do is we would go into the Senate chamber. And after we went into the Senate chamber for that initial couple of 10, 15 minutes, kind of getting an idea of what we were going to flesh out.

After that, what we did was we went into an individual room with each of our subcommittees, and we basically went into individual rooms with our own subcommittees. And we were able to speak about the bill and talk about different provisions that we want, if we wanted to add provisions, if we wanted to rewrite provisions, or if we just wanted to discuss certain things about the provisions within our bill. So in my own administrative subcommittee, I actually worked on the sixth provision. I wrote that in the administrative subcommittee.

NINA MOINI: OK. And what does it say?

BIHMANJI Essentially what it's saying, it's talking about administrators and their use of AI. It says that administrators are not allowed to use AI in the disciplinary process, except for the occasion where it is used to reveal academic dishonesty. And it's also speaking about how there has to be a second eye on it when it is used to prove academic dishonesty.

I thought that provision was important to add into the final bill, just because at my school specifically, we do have a lot of kids that are English learning. And Stanford actually did a study that found that when kids with English learning were caught by AI, 60% of their essays were more likely to be caught by AI if they were English learning students versus students that already know English. So I just thought it was important, especially for communities like that, for there to be, I guess, something stopping them from being falsely detected by AI.

NINA MOINI: OK. And so one of the things that I really like about this and what you're saying, Bihmanji, is that it brought a lot of different people to the table, it sounds like, and different people's roles from teachers to students, administrators, parents. Why do you feel like it was important to bring everybody together like that?

BIHMANJI
ACHO: Yeah, I thought it was super important to bring everyone together like that because when you're creating a policy that's to be used for the entire nation, you have to get everyone's different perspectives. America is such a diverse place that if we weren't able to get all these different perspectives, whether it be your school is less poor, you're more rich, no matter what, I think it's just super important to get those different perspectives to create an actual comprehensive policy that can be applied to most schools.

NINA MOINI: And, Principal Kensy, what do you think of the policy that was created as an administrator and how that could be utilized in your school? Because is it like a best practices? You don't have to adopt it?

MOLLY KENSY: Yeah, it's just a starting draft. I think what was really exciting for me to hear and witness was the general concern that these young people have for the future of AI and what that means for them. For them to break apart and really think about how this impacts their teachers, you saw their worry about the teachers are the experts in the room, and they're having to keep up with this new technology. And there's no time.

But these students also are tasked with it's not going away. So how do we do better and when we know better? And so it was really empowering to watch them use their voice to say, well, if nobody can figure it out, something's better than nothing. What does that look like? What could the strengths of this policy and guidance be, as well as what are the consequences and the challenges that arise?

And so Bihmanji's right, about 25% of our students are multilingual learners. And that causes a challenge as far as the AI detection and things like that. But it also comes as a resource and a tool that enhances and removes some barriers for our students as well. And so when we're making judgments and big decisions, we really need to look at the voices that aren't at the table that we're missing and slowing down to make sure that we're not creating more barriers while we're still learning what this tool has to offer us.

NINA MOINI: Bihmanji, what are you thinking as you come out of this and of these policies that have been drafted and you head into this school year? What are you hoping to take into the school year with you and perhaps share with other students?

BIHMANJI
ACHO: So going into the school year, I just want other students to realize that they definitely have a voice about AI policy and what happens with AI in their futures. And I just want students to be able to realize that we do have a voice. We do have an impact on what we say and what we do within our community, even if it feels like we don't.

I really did like when I was at the convention. A lot of the adults in the room were speaking about how they failed us on the whole social media thing, and we're only getting real legislator about that now. And I want students to realize that we do have a voice and we have power to help create legislator about AI policies now before it gets too late.

NINA MOINI: All right, thank you both so much, Principal Kensy and Bihmanji, for sharing your perspectives. This was a really fascinating conversation. I'm glad you guys are diving in on it.

BIHMANJI
ACHO: Thank you so much.

MOLLY KENSY: Thanks for letting us connect with you today.

NINA MOINI: Absolutely. Principal Molly Kensy of St. Cloud Tech High School. And Bihmanji Acho will be a junior there.