

Where do the candidates stand on AI in the classroom?

Sioux Falls School Board — June 2026 election

CHALLENGERS — HAVE A CURRICULUM PLAN FOR AI

Has a Plan	Collaborative	Collaborative
<p>Stuart Willett Challenger</p> <p>Submitted a formal K–6 AI curriculum proposal. Starts in first grade with students directing AI to author picture books — children create the content, AI helps produce it. Goal: students who wield AI as a tool, not consumers controlled by it.</p>	<p>Jean Childs Challenger</p> <p>Acknowledged AI’s risks — especially unsupervised homework use — and called for training students in proper use. Emphasized handwritten in-class work and supported the challengers’ collaborative approach to developing solutions.</p>	<p>Michael Stangeland Challenger</p> <p>Acknowledged the rapidly changing landscape makes specific plans difficult, but committed to working with those who have deeper knowledge — explicitly naming Willett and Childs as the team he intends to work with.</p>

INCUMBENTS — NO COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM FOR STUDENTS

No Curriculum	No Curriculum	No Curriculum
<p>Gail Swenson Incumbent</p> <p>Pointed to the district’s AI guidance document and Southeast Tech’s collegiate-level AI grant as evidence of careful planning — but offered no K–12 student curriculum for how children should learn to use AI.</p>	<p>Marc Murran Incumbent</p> <p>Described AI working groups meeting monthly and teacher professional learning underway. Said the district is taking a “thoughtful, intentional approach” — but focused entirely on teacher training, not a student-facing curriculum.</p>	<p>Dawn Marie Johnson Incumbent</p> <p>Listed tools already in place to prevent AI misuse — blocked ChatGPT, screen monitoring, copy-paste flags, Magic School AI. Focused entirely on preventing cheating, with no vision for teaching students how to use AI productively.</p>

The difference could not be sharper. ChatGPT launched in November 2022. The incumbents have had years to act — and their answer is monitoring software and blocked websites. The challengers are the only ones at this forum with a forward-looking plan: a structured K–6 curriculum that trains students to direct AI rather than be directed by it. The children entering kindergarten today will graduate into a workforce where AI is everywhere. Sioux Falls needs a board that is preparing them for that world — not just trying to keep them from cheating on homework.

What each candidate said at the forum

Has a Plan **Stuart Willett — Challenger**

Willett was the only candidate to present a formal student-facing AI curriculum. He has submitted a proposal — available on his website at Willett4SFSD.com — outlining a K–6 curriculum path. The core idea: students should be directing AI, not consuming it. He argued that children entering kindergarten today will spend their entire careers in an AI-driven workforce, and that the district’s current approach — focused only on preventing cheating — is not preparation. He started his proposal in first grade deliberately: students tell their own story, draw their pictures, and use AI to help turn it into a book they can be proud of and read to their family. He also raised the dangers students need to understand — TikTok algorithms and other AI-driven systems — and argued these must be taught before students begin using the tools, not after.

Collaborative **Jean Childs — Challenger**

Childs acknowledged both the promise and the risks of AI. She called it “kind of scary, but here to stay” and raised the cheating concern directly: when students complete work at home, neither teachers nor parents can always monitor whether AI did it for them. Her practical proposals included requiring handwritten work to be completed in class and training students in the proper use of AI — framing it, like Willett, as an executive secretary rather than a ghostwriter. In her closing statement, Childs made clear that the three challengers are already functioning as a team: “We make an awesome team, the three of us. We’ve worked together well so far on ideas and thoughts and that’s just the beginning and we will continue to learn, study, be committed and act.”

Collaborative **Michael Stangeland — Challenger**

Stangeland was candid that the pace of AI change makes detailed advance planning difficult — the world a kindergartner enters will be completely different by the time they graduate. Rather than pretend otherwise, he focused on ensuring basic life skills are not overlooked in the rush to prepare for technology, and committed to working with those who have deeper knowledge. In his closing statement he was direct about that partnership: “I can absolutely admit that I do not have all the answers and I want to reach out and work with those who know what I don’t.” He explicitly asked voters to support himself, Stuart Willett, and Jean Childs together — signaling that on AI, he intends to follow Willett’s lead while contributing his own accountability and community engagement priorities.

No Curriculum **Gail Swenson — Incumbent**

Swenson directed the audience to the district's AI guidance document on its website, calling it a "wonderful document" that shows "how thoughtful and careful the district has been." She also noted that Southeast Technical College — which the board also governs — has won a grant to implement AI at the collegiate level. Her answer reflected pride in the planning process, but offered no vision for what a Sioux Falls student should know about AI by the time they graduate, or how the district intends to teach them to use it.

No Curriculum **Marc Murran — Incumbent**

Murran described a district that is moving carefully: AI working groups meet monthly, teachers are studying it in professional learning groups, and guidance and accountability structures are being built out. He compared the moment to when computers first arrived in schools and noted the district is taking "a thoughtful, insightful, and intentional approach." Notably, he said teacher training has reached high school and middle school — and elementary teachers are next year's priority. What was absent from his answer was any description of what students themselves will be taught about AI and how to use it responsibly and productively.

No Curriculum **Dawn Marie Johnson — Incumbent**

Johnson gave the most detailed answer among the incumbents — but every element of it was defensive rather than forward-looking. ChatGPT is blocked on district Chromebooks. Landschool provides real-time teacher monitoring of student screens. Google tools automatically flag large copy-paste blocks. Magic School AI provides feedback without doing the work for students. Many teachers require paper rough drafts before computer access. She argued that experienced teachers can recognize AI-written work and handle it when it arises. What her answer described is a district focused entirely on preventing students from misusing AI — with no articulated plan for teaching them to use it well.