

YOUNG AMERICANS ARE COMING OF AGE IN A WORLD THAT IS CHANGING BY THE DAY.

Technology and social media have long been central to young people's lives, but AI presents a new frontier.

AI technology is rapidly evolving and readily available, generating excitement and apprehension alike. According to a 2025 Pew Research survey, **two-thirds of teens aged 13-17 have used AI chatbots**; 28% use them every day. And among 18-35-year-olds surveyed by the Sine Institute of Policy & Politics at American University, Close Up, Future Caucus, and AU's Kogod School of Business in 2025, 21% felt "excited and positive" about AI, 31% felt "concerned and anxious," and 48% felt an equal mix of the two.

These are the young Americans who will feel the greatest impacts of AI as they finish school, enter the workforce, and take their place in society. Thus, it is a vital time for them to consider multiple perspectives on AI-related policy topics and to critically examine their own views.

Even more important, however, is for these young people to build, through the practice of deliberative dialogue, the **lifelong skills of critical thinking and communication**. It is these skills which will equip them to treat differing viewpoints with respect and curiosity, and enable them to work together toward consensus on how to move forward.



IT'S NOT THAT PEOPLE ARE 'WRONG' OR 'RIGHT'
but that they have grown up a different way, been
exposed to different information and perspectives,
and lived a different life.

—Student Participant

KEY FINDINGS: DELIBERATION

The experience of deliberation increased participants' sense of efficacy and mutual respect, their satisfaction with democracy, and their appreciation for civil discourse.

- **Students reported significantly greater confidence in their political voice**, with agreement that "I have opinions about political and social issues that are worth listening to" rising from an average of 7.05 to 8.18 on a 10-point scale, with 1 being "completely disagree" and 10 being "completely agree" (+1.13 points).
- When considering people with different views than them, **students became substantially more respectful of opposing viewpoints** (+0.59 points) and **significantly less likely to believe "it is hopeless to reach an agreement"** (-0.80).
- **Students' satisfaction with democracy increased** from 17.8% to 25.6%; the share of those who were undecided or uninformed dropped dramatically.
- In their written reflections on the value of deliberation, **the vast majority of post-program respondents expressed newfound appreciation for civil discourse.**

EVIDENCE OF DELIBERATIVE GROWTH

Throughout the program, students showed that they were not merely absorbing information but actively developing deliberative competencies.

- **Students demonstrated clear understanding of what makes deliberation distinctive from debate.** One noted: "I didn't see this discussion as an argument. ... We were both explaining and listening to each other's opinions, then collaborating our ideas."
- **Multiple students emphasized that being persuaded was not about losing but about learning.** One wrote: "It didn't necessarily change my mind on the matter, but it did open me up to a new perspective."
- **Rather than viewing policy options as binary choices, students described seeking common ground.** One said: "At the end, we both heard each other's opinions and created a policy that included both of our opinions and ideas."
- **Many students demonstrated awareness of their own limitations.** One reflected: "I naturally compare things to what I've lived through. Sometimes that helped me connect quickly with others, but it also meant I had blind spots. I realized I tend to assume certain issues affect everyone the same way they affect me, which isn't always true."



This conference has revitalized the part of me that thinks **THE WORLD CAN AND SHOULD GET BETTER**, and that political discourse is possible with people who oppose me.

—Student Participant



KEY FINDINGS: THE ISSUES

After reviewing vetted briefing materials, engaging with an expert panel, and deliberating 14 policy proposals about AI's presence in education and its economic impact, students demonstrated nuanced shifts in their policy positions.

- When discussing education, **students showed increased support for schools developing comprehensive AI policies** (moving from an average of 8.72 pre-deliberation to 9.17 post-deliberation) and AI training and classes (8.31 pre-deliberation, 8.73 post-deliberation). **They also moved away from extremes.** They rejected an outright ban on AI in schools (3.02 pre-deliberation, 2.29 post-deliberation) while also becoming more cautious of broad AI use by students (5.22 pre-deliberation, 4.08 post-deliberation).
- When discussing the economy, **students showed their largest shift (–1.59) when considering whether to implement UBI for AI-displaced workers**, with agreement falling from an average of 5.42 before deliberation to 3.83 after deliberation. Strong student consensus emerged around making deceptive AI content unlawful, with agreement increasing from 7.62 before deliberation to 8.48 after deliberation.

REPRESENTING YOUTH VOICES NATIONWIDE

The participants in this NextGen Roundtable deliberation were high school students from 39 schools in 19 states and the District of Columbia, representing different backgrounds, ideologies, races, and genders.

ARKANSAS

The New School
Thaden School

CALIFORNIA

Bentley School
Crystal Springs Uplands School
Idyllwild Arts Academy
The Webb Schools
Wildwood School

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The Field School

FLORIDA

Academy of the Holy Names
Carrollwood Day School
St. Andrew's School

HAWAII

'Iolani School

ILLINOIS

Francis W. Parker School

LOUISIANA

Bishop Noland Episcopal Day School
Episcopal School of Baton Rouge

MARYLAND

Holton-Arms School
St. Andrew's Episcopal School

MASSACHUSETTS

Concord Academy

MICHIGAN

Greenhills School

MISSISSIPPI

Jackson State University

NORTH CAROLINA

Cary Academy
Charlotte Latin School
Greensboro Day School

NEW JERSEY

Princeton Day School
Saddle River Day School
The Pingry School

NEW YORK

Convent of the Sacred Heart
Poly Prep Country Day School
Little Red School House and Elisabeth Irwin High School
Rippowam Cisqua Day School

OHIO

Cincinnati Country Day School

RHODE ISLAND

Moses Brown School

SOUTH CAROLINA

Porter-Gaud School

TEXAS

Alcuin School
The John Cooper School
The Kinkaid School

VIRGINIA

Madeira School
St. Catherine's School

WASHINGTON

Lakeside School

EXPERT PANELISTS

We are grateful for the AI experts who took part in our plenary session to engage with students and answer their questions about policy issues.

Alice Siu (Moderator)

Associate Director
Stanford University
Deliberative Democracy Lab

Dorothy Lianlian Jiang

Assistant Professor
C.T. Bauer College of Business

Seth Fewell

AI Workforce Specialist
Microsoft

Lennart Koopman

Founder
Nzyme

Mike Yates

Senior Designer
Teach for America





Having had experience with debate, I now understand that deliberation is fundamentally different in that its aim is for **BOTH SIDES TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER** rather than attack each other.

—Student Participant

THE FUTURE OF DELIBERATION

The skills of deliberation are a key to understanding policy issues from multiple perspectives and to making informed decisions about how to resolve those issues. That's why Close Up and our partners are seeking to embed a culture of deliberative dialogue in schools nationwide.

- **Students who take part in NextGen Roundtable deliberations earn Close Up's Deliberative Dialogue Badge**, a shareable record of their skills in communication, active listening, problem-solving, and navigating differing perspectives. They also have the option of earning the Advanced Deliberative Dialogue Badge by leading a deliberation in their community.
- **Close Up is celebrating the Semiquincentennial of the United States through NextGen Roundtable: America 250**, a series of curriculum for high school classrooms, online seminars with historians, regional and national deliberative events for students, and professional development for educators that encourage a deeper understanding of our founding principles and how they relate to the policy issues of today.
- **Ahead of the midterms, Close Up is hosting NextGen Roundtable: Decision 2026 in Washington, D.C.** From July 8-11, we are convening a nationally representative sample of first-time voters to deliberate policy issues in a reasoned, mutually respectful way.
- **The NextGen Roundtable model is adaptable to schools and cities nationwide**, as a one-day or multi-day program for students to deliberate local and national issues.
- **Close Up has created comprehensive PD for educators** to amplify the use and effects of deliberation in schools, ensuring teachers and students have the skills, strategies, and resources to make deliberation an everyday practice.
- **Close Up has built a coalition of university partners** to continue building pathways that highlight the importance of civic education and support deliberation opportunities.

LEARN MORE





When we partner with Close Up, we're doing it to not only expose our students to different kinds of opportunities, but also to help them develop skills and traits and knowledge, particularly around deep thinking, civil discourse, and deliberation.

...THOSE ARE CRUCIAL SKILLS FOR OUR STUDENTS IN THE FUTURE.

—Debra Wilson, President, NAIS



National Association
of Independent Schools

Stanford | Deliberative
Democracy Lab
Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law

Close Up is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, civic education organization that informs, inspires, and empowers young people to become active citizens. For over 50 years, we have delivered experiential learning programs, professional development, curriculum design and consulting, and other civic education opportunities to more than one million students and educators nationwide. We connect what students learn in class to the real world around them, helping them to articulate their own views, listen to those of others, and engage with people of different backgrounds with tolerance and understanding. Learn more at CloseUp.org.

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) is a nonprofit membership association dedicated to unlocking the extraordinary potential in students, independent schools, and their communities. We provide services to more than 2,000 schools and associations of schools in the United States and internationally. While our member schools are self-determining in mission and program and governed by independent boards, NAIS supports school leaders at all levels, including heads of school, school administrators, trustees, and faculty, with the data, research, resources, and professional learning that allow them to perform their roles at the highest levels—and ultimately, help students flourish. To learn more, visit NAIS.org.

The Deliberative Democracy Lab at Stanford University is devoted to research about democracy and public opinion obtained through Deliberative Polling®. The method of Deliberative Polling has been used in over 50 countries around the world through over 150 projects, at varying levels of government and society. To learn more, visit deliberation.stanford.edu.

To learn more about opportunities to support and partner with Close Up, please contact us at support@closeup.org.