

News

To boost AI education, Salesforce gives \$11M to San Francisco, Oakland schools



Marc Benioff, Salesforce co-founder, and San Francisco Mayor London Breed, reflect on the state of education in the Bay Area on Sept. 19, 2022. | Paul Kuroda for The Standard

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Salesforce is giving San Francisco and Oakland public schools \$11 million to prepare students for careers in artificial intelligence as the Bay Area looks to cash in on the [AI gold rush and the school districts contend with financial distress](#).

The gift, announced Monday morning ahead of a related AI workshop at a San Francisco high school, is part of a \$20 million national investment in education made by Salesforce, the city’s largest private employer. The San Francisco Unified School District and Oakland Unified School District will each receive \$5.5 million.

Salesforce also selected New York City, Chicago and Indianapolis public schools for grants. The remaining \$4.5 million not given directly to schools will go toward education and workforce development nonprofits, like CodePath and Marcy Lab, aimed at advancing students’ digital skills to provide them with better access to tech and AI careers.

“As AI continues to transform our schools, workplaces, and society, education has never been more critical,” San Francisco Mayor London Breed said in a press release. “I’m proud of our city’s long-standing commitment to the jobs of the future and thankful for Salesforce’s investment to ensure the next generation is set up for success.”

Salesforce is big on philanthropy for public education and workforce development, having donated over \$233 million in those areas over the past 11 years. San Francisco used the donations to expand its computer science curriculum.

“Their contributions to San Francisco schools have been instrumental in helping give our students access to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) courses and preparing them for the jobs of the future,” San Francisco Unified Superintendent Matt Wayne said in a statement.

Soon after ChatGPT was released last fall, school staff warned San Francisco educators to look out for AI-generated assignments, an issue [some teachers had already run into](#). But other educators saw the advantages of working AI into the classroom curriculum. And now, AI has emerged as a prominent new top player among the potential future employers of Bay Area students.

Salesforce’s gift comes at a time when finding money for new educational investments is tough for school districts grappling with the aftermath of the pandemic, which has contributed to a decline in student enrollment and attendance that affects funding and made it difficult to staff schools.

San Francisco’s school system is also responding to preexisting financial woes—including a [\\$37.6 million budget shortfall for the current school year](#)—by planning to restructure staffing levels across the district and [develop criteria for potential school closures](#).

Higher education, meanwhile, is racing to adapt to the new AI landscape. Local community colleges, like Oakland’s Laney College, have [begun offering courses and planning robust programming](#) related to AI.

“For businesses to really thrive and succeed, our schools need to be thriving and succeeding as well,” said Becky Ferguson, CEO of the Salesforce Foundation and senior vice president of philanthropy at Salesforce. “Our future workers are the young people today. It comes at a really important time as schools and educators and companies all are navigating this AI revolution.”

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