

Educational Corner—Another AI Controversy—Submitted by Mindy Koch

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly transitioned from a futuristic concept to an integral part of our daily lives, influencing various aspects of society, the economy and personal wellbeing. However, there is significant fear that AI threatens job security, encourages intrusive mass surveillance, spreads misinformation and reduces critical thinking.

AI infrastructure refers to the technology framework that enables AI systems to operate effectively. It includes hardware, software, cloud computing capabilities and data management systems. The rise of AI has sparked a revolutionary wave across various sectors, prompting significant investments in AI infrastructure projects. These initiatives aim to enhance computer capabilities, streamline data management, and improve accessibility to advanced AI technologies. The AI infrastructure projects strive to create a foundation that support the development and deployment of AI technologies. Its primary objectives include enhancing data accessibility and supporting innovation across industries. As technology advances, many companies are investing in projects to boost efficiency and innovation in various sectors. These developments raise several concerns with ethical risks creating models that create bias decisions, data privacy, and security threats.

Large scale AI infrastructure project proposals have created significant debate among policymakers, industry leaders, and the public. These project proposals are accompanied by a myriad of controversies that raise critical, ethical, economic, environmental and regulatory questions.

Several large scale AI infrastructures have been proposed in Michigan. Over 16,000 acres are being considered for development. The following projects are at various stages of exploration/development in Michigan. (Basic information on infrastructure proposals is provided through several news outlets.)

Saline Township, Washtenaw County, a \$7 plus billion data center with construction starting in early 2026.

Lyon Township, Oakland County, 1.8 million square foot facility, conditional approval received.

Van Buren Township, Wayne County, proposed data center, under local government review.

Ypsilanti Township, Washtenaw County, the University of Michigan and Los Alamos National Laboratory, proposed computing and AI research facility.

Gaines Township, Allegan County, proposed data centers near Grand Rapids, plans in process.

Frenchtown Township, Monroe County, proposed 200 acre project.

Dundee Township, Monroe County, 350 acres being explored.

Augusta Township, Washtenaw County, proposed data center, 810 acres.

Lansing, Ingham County, data center to provide heat to downtown buildings.



The impact of these large projects is characterized by significant economic investment and the creation of thousands of short-term jobs. There are concerns regarding stresses on local infrastructure, environmental impacts, overuse of farmland, noise, water use for cooling, massive energy demands and potential increases in electricity rates. Therefore, several local governments have paused projects to assess their potential impacts.

Michigan has enacted tax exemptions for data center equipment through 2050 to attract these projects. However, there is currently legislative consideration to pause new data center development until 2027 to assess potential impacts.

The Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) will have a leadership role in assessing the environmental impacts of the proposed AI infrastructure projects prior to construction through a variety of permit programs. For example, due to the need for a large land base for development, many permit programs related to protection of sensitive areas such as wetlands, inland lakes and streams, critical dunes, and designated environmental areas may need to be issued prior to construction. Additional permits related to water withdrawal, water discharge, stormwater management permits and possible air quality permits. The Public Service Commission, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Transportation are other state departments that will be involved in critical reviews of the infrastructure projects.

