



June 2026

Teens and the AI Future

**Perspectives,
Possibilities, and
Preparation**

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Key findings

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools have become part of daily life for many U.S. teens, but the systems responsible for guiding that use have not kept pace. More than four in five teens (83%) report using AI tools, and roughly two-thirds use them at least a few times a week. Despite this widespread use, only 36% say they are being taught enough about AI in school, and fewer than one in four feel highly prepared for an AI-shaped workforce. These gaps in guidance and perceived readiness are not evenly distributed, as teens receiving the least guidance are often the same teens who already face the greatest barriers to opportunity.

This report draws on Britebound's national survey of 3,000 U.S. teens in grades 7–12, fielded in October 2025. It examines teen AI engagement across five connected dimensions: use, school environment, readiness, perspectives, and equity. Across these areas, the findings reveal consistent and actionable disparities:

1. Teen AI use is widespread, but patterns of use vary sharply across student groups.

Most teens report using AI tools, but how often they use them and what they use them for varies substantially by school type, parental education, and race and ethnicity. Teens in private schools, teens with college-educated parents, and teens who identify as White or Asian report the most frequent and varied AI use. In contrast, teens in traditional public schools, teens without college-educated parents, and teens who identify as Black or Hispanic/Latino report less frequent use and a narrower range of use cases. These differences affect large segments of the U.S. teen population: roughly 80% of K-12 students attend traditional public schools, and Black and

Hispanic/Latino youth together represent about 40% of children in the U.S. As a result, these disparities are not a narrow equity concern; they are central to whether the country can prepare young people broadly for an AI-shaped future.

2. School environments are strongly linked to how teens use AI, but clear guidance remains inconsistent.

Only about one in five teens say most of their teachers encourage AI use for schoolwork, and private school teens are more than four times as likely as traditional public school teens to report this kind of encouragement. Teens in more encouraging environments are more likely to use AI in ways that extend beyond answer-seeking, both for schoolwork and in their personal lives. Restrictive environments, by contrast, do not eliminate AI use: more than two in five teens whose teachers strictly disallow AI still use it for schoolwork, most commonly for answer-seeking.

3. High AI readiness is uncommon and concentrated among teens with more support.

Fewer than one in four teens fall into a “High AI-Ready” group, defined by stronger perceived AI skills, confidence with AI, and preparation for an AI-shaped workforce. Teens who report teacher encouragement are more than six times as likely to fall into this group as those whose teachers ban AI use. Readiness also varies by school type, with a majority of private school teens (56%) reporting high readiness, compared with only 19% of public school teens. The same groups with the highest readiness are also more likely to expect AI use in their future jobs, while those with the lowest readiness are less likely



to expect future AI use. Together, these patterns point to a compounding workforce readiness gap.

4. Teen perspectives on AI are defined less by clear optimism or pessimism than by uncertainty and mixed expectations.

Nearly half of teens (45%) express uncertainty when asked how they expect AI will affect jobs and society. Among those with more defined views, ambivalence is more common than either optimism or pessimism, suggesting that many teens see AI as a source of both opportunity and risk. More structured AI engagement appears to deepen this complexity and enhance nuanced thinking rather than simply increase optimism. These patterns also vary across the same demographic lines seen in AI use and readiness, although the clearest divide is between uncertainty and ambivalence rather than support and opposition.

5. The central concern is that AI may compound existing inequities.

The same markers of socioeconomic advantage appear across AI use, teacher encouragement, readiness, and future expectations. These patterns mirror the second-level digital divide documented for prior educational technologies, in which access gaps narrowed while gaps in use quality persisted and proved harder to address.^{1,2} The stakes may be higher with AI. Emerging research suggests that AI is already changing employer expectations for entry-level workers, compressing the early-career learning curve and increasing the value of judgment and expertise that structured AI

engagement helps build.^{3–5} Without intentional intervention, teens who already face greater barriers to opportunity may be least prepared for an AI-embedded labor market.

6. This trajectory is not inevitable.

Organizations are already building infrastructure to close these gaps, including AI-ready graduate frameworks, free teacher training at national scale, and equity-focused credential programs.^a However, the history of educational technology shows that new resources often reach the communities best positioned to use them first. Ensuring that AI education reaches the students who need it most will require intentional targeting, sustained investment, and policy decisions guided by evidence of need rather than demand alone.

^a <https://iste-ascd.org/ai/>; <https://path.mit.edu/>



Introduction

In the two years since generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools entered mainstream use, adoption among teens has accelerated rapidly. While most U.S. teens now use AI tools regularly, the guidance and structures needed to support responsible and effective use are still largely underdeveloped. As a result, many young people are learning to navigate one of the most consequential technologies of their lifetime without a consistent framework for understanding when AI supports learning, when it may undermine it, and how to use it well.

This report examines how teens are using AI, how schools are shaping that use, and how young people understand the effects of AI on their learning, work, and futures. It is organized around four questions: What are U.S. teens doing with AI? What role does school play in shaping that use? How prepared do teens feel for an AI-embedded workforce? And how do they expect AI to shape their future? Across these questions, the report also examines a cross-cutting issue: how these patterns differ by who teens are and where they go to school.

About this study

From October to November 2025, Britebound fielded an original online survey of 3,000 U.S. 13–18-year-olds currently enrolled in secondary school (grades 7–12). Respondents were asked about their AI use and frequency, perceptions of teacher stances on AI at school, sense of AI readiness, and views on how AI may affect their future careers and society more broadly. Demographic quotas and weighting were applied to align the sample with national benchmarks. Full methodological details,

including the complete survey questionnaire, are available in the [Methodology](#).

Britebound survey results are situated within a fast-changing national evidence base. We compare our results with surveys from major research organizations fielded between late 2023 and early 2026. During this period, generative AI moved rapidly from novelty to widespread use across many areas of society. Teen use of AI also expanded quickly, from relatively few students using AI for schoolwork in 2023 to a majority doing so in 2025.

These findings should be read as evidence of patterns, not proof of cause and effect. All results in this report are associational. Cross-sectional survey data can show how two things are related, but not whether one causes the other. For instance, our findings show that teens who report more teacher encouragement also report less answer-seeking AI use. However, this does not necessarily mean that teacher encouragement reduces answer-seeking. When we describe patterns as “linked to” or “associated with” an outcome, we mean they are observed together, while recognizing that other factors may explain the relationship.

Comparisons across studies should be interpreted with care. The surveys cited in this report were conducted at different times, among different samples, and with different question wording. When we include findings from other surveys, we note relevant differences when they are important for interpretation. Specific numbers should therefore be compared across studies cautiously.



How this report is organized

This report begins by examining **how teens are using AI**, establishing the scope and character of their engagement, which is often centered on answer-seeking and information-searching. It then turns to **the school environment**, documenting how teacher encouragement, training, and policy shape the conditions under which teens encounter and use AI. The third section focuses on **AI readiness**, exploring how prepared teens feel and how perceived skills relate to career expectations. The fourth section examines **how teens expect AI to shape their future**, including how AI may affect jobs and society. The final section steps back to consider **how AI may compound existing inequities**, connecting the preceding findings to the history of educational technology divides and what those patterns may mean for teens preparing for a workforce increasingly shaped by AI.

Throughout the report, we draw on findings from other research to show where our data align with, diverge from, or extend the broader evidence base. Taken together, the demographic patterns documented across sections point to a clear warning: without fast and intentional action, some teens may enter an AI-shaped future with less guidance, preparation, and opportunity than others.



How teens are using AI

AI use is becoming a mainstream teen behavior, but adoption still varies across teens and contexts.

More than four in five teens (83%) in our survey report using AI tools.^b Among those who use AI, about two-thirds do so at least a few times per week, including 30% who report daily use.

Most teens use AI for both school and personal purposes (44%), while 23% use it only for school and 16% use it only for personal purposes.

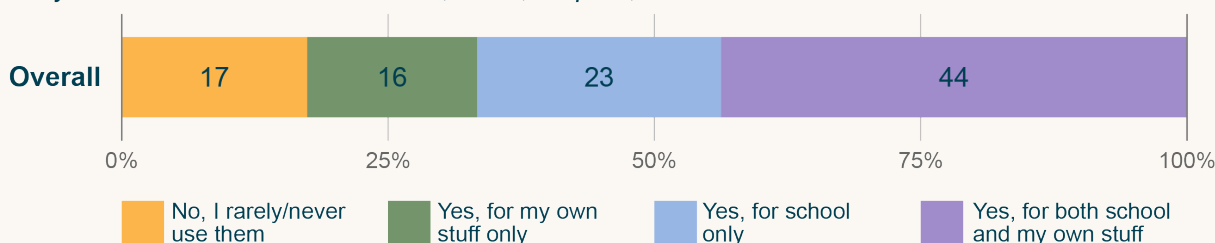
These findings reflect a substantial shift during only a short period of time. When Pew Research Center first asked teens about ChatGPT use for schoolwork in fall 2023, just 13% reported having tried it.⁶ By fall 2024, that figure had doubled to 26%.⁷ By fall 2025, Pew found that 64% of teens reported chatbot use, including about three in ten who used chatbots daily.⁸ Adoption estimates from surveys fielded

between 2023 and 2025 vary by sample, timing, and question framing, but the broader trend is clear: AI tools have rapidly become part of most U.S. teens' routines. See the [Appendix](#) for full citations and details on each study.

The 17% of teens who report rarely or never using AI warrant attention. Non-use may reflect active choice, access barriers (e.g., school-level restrictions or limited means), or a combination of these factors. As discussed later in this report, more negative views of AI, lower socioeconomic status (as measured by parental education and school type), and teacher discouragement are all associated with non-use and lower use intensity. These patterns suggest that whether teens use AI, and how often, may be shaped by both individual preferences and the conditions around them.

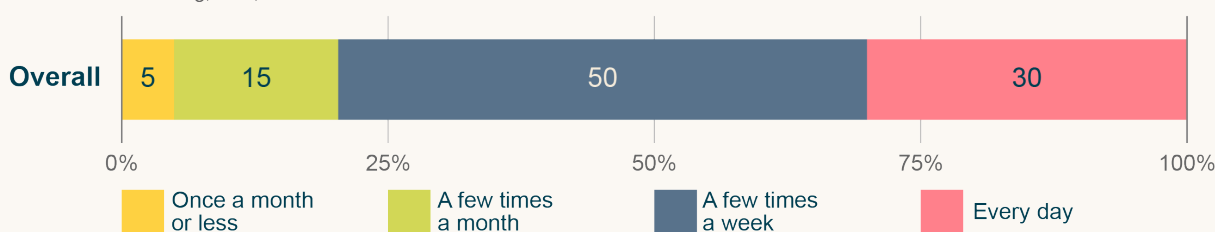
Teen-reported AI use by context and frequency of use

Do you use AI tools like ChatGPT, Bard, Copilot, etc.?



How often do you use AI tools?

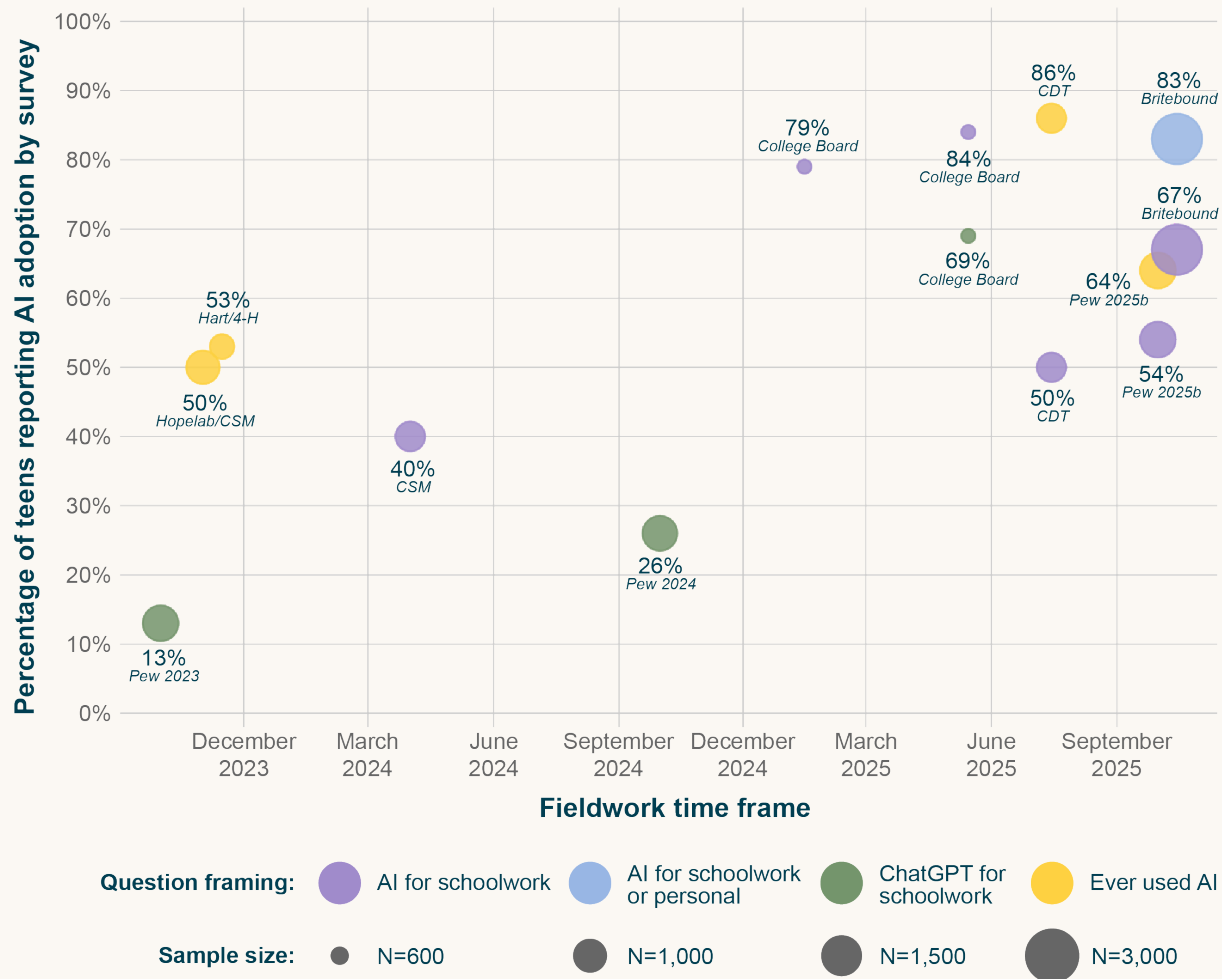
*Conditional on using, N=2,536



^b Figures use descriptive labels. Full question wording can be found in the questionnaire within the [Methodology](#).



Reported teen AI adoption rates by survey timing and question framing



AI use varies substantially by gender, race and ethnicity, school type, and parental education.

Male teens report higher use than female teens, who in turn report higher use than non-binary teens. Patterns in AI use across male and female teens are consistent across surveys, with male teens consistently reporting the highest use and frequency.^{8–10} Female teens are nearly twice as likely as male teens to rarely or never use AI (21% vs. 12%) and, among users, are much less likely to report daily use (22% vs. 38%). Non-binary teens are a notable outlier: a majority report rarely or never using AI (53%), more than three times the overall rate (17%). These are

among the first quantitative findings on non-binary teens in this area. However, because the number of non-binary respondents in our sample is relatively small (n=84), representing only about 3% of the cohort, these figures should be interpreted as suggestive rather than precise.

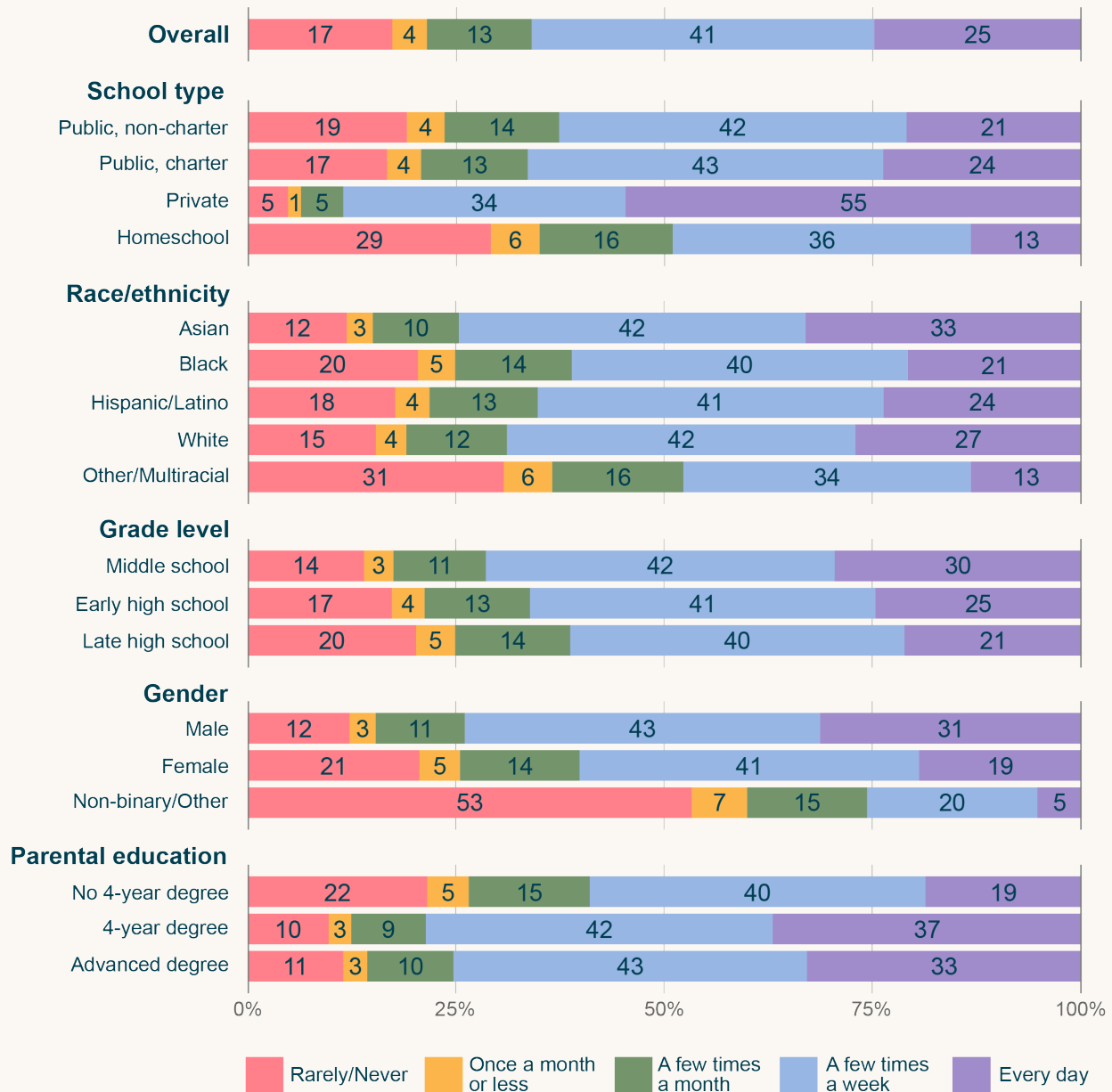
Patterns by race and ethnicity vary across surveys. In our data, Asian teens report the highest levels of frequent AI use, with 75% using AI at least a few times per week, followed by White teens (69%), Hispanic/Latino teens (65%), and Black teens (61%). Other surveys show a different pattern. In Pew data, reported use of ChatGPT for schoolwork was relatively similar across racial and ethnic groups in fall 2023,



with 11% of White teens, 13% of Black teens, and 11% of Hispanic/Latino teens reporting use. By fall 2024, however, Black and Hispanic/Latino teens were more likely than White teens to report using ChatGPT for schoolwork (31% each vs. 22%).⁷ Similarly, in the Hopelab and Common Sense Media survey from late 2023, Black young people were more likely than White young people to report using AI for schoolwork

(62% vs. 40%), image (51% vs. 24%) and music (42% vs 7%) production, and coding (31% vs. 8%).⁹ The fall 2025 Pew report found that Black and Hispanic/Latino teens continued to stand out as more likely than White teens to use chatbots for schoolwork, say chatbots had been helpful for schoolwork, and report completing most of their schoolwork with chatbot help.⁸ Asian teens were not analyzed separately due to small sample size.

Teen-reported frequency of AI use, overall and by demographic group



Several factors may help explain these differences. Our broader question framing, which asked about “AI tools like ChatGPT, Bard, Copilot,” may capture a different mix of tools and behaviors than surveys focused specifically on ChatGPT or other chatbots. Sample differences in age range, school enrollment status, and weighting approaches may also shape observed patterns. Timing is another likely factor: as AI adoption broadens, demographic differences may shift quickly, especially when surveys are fielded months or years apart. Taken together, the relationship between race, ethnicity, and AI use does not exist along a single, stable demographic gradient. Rather, it appears to vary depending on what kind of AI use is being measured, who is surveyed, and when the data are collected.

School type shows some of the sharpest differences in AI use, with teens attending private school representing a major outlier.

Only 5% of private school teens report rarely or never using AI, while a majority (55%) report using it daily. By contrast, teens in traditional public schools (~80% of teens in the U.S.) are nearly four times as likely to report rare or no AI use (19%) and less than half as likely to report daily use (21%). Homeschooled teens report the lowest levels of AI use, with 29% saying they rarely or never use these tools and only 13% reporting daily use.

Parental education level is also strongly associated with frequency of teen AI use. Teens whose parents do not hold a four-year degree are twice as likely to report rare or no AI use (22%) as teens whose parents have at least a four-year degree (10–11%), and nearly half as likely to report daily use (19% vs. 33–37%). These findings align with socioeconomic gradients documented in other surveys, including evidence that teens from higher-income households are more likely to be aware of, or report using, chatbots.

These demographic patterns recur throughout this report, not only in AI use but also in school encouragement, sense of AI readiness, and attitudes toward AI.

Information-seeking and content creation are the most common personal AI uses, but advice-seeking is also prevalent in early high school.

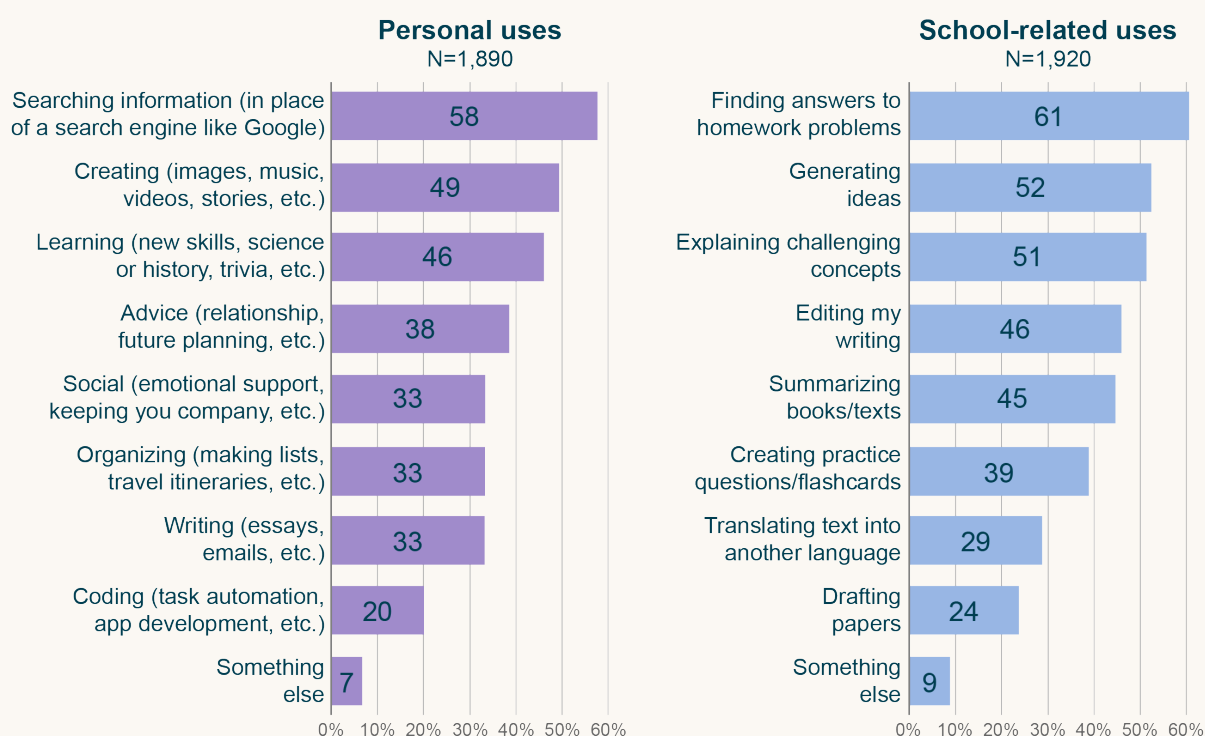
Among teens who use AI in their personal lives, the most common uses are informational and creative. A majority use AI to search for information in place of browsers or search engines like Google (58%). Large shares also use it to create content, such as images, music, or video (49%), and to learn new things (46%). Smaller but still meaningful shares use AI for advice (38%), social or emotional support (33%), organizing (33%), or writing (33%). Coding is the least common personal use, reported by 20% of teen AI users.

Other surveys point to a similar expansion of AI beyond schoolwork. In the fall 2023 Hopelab and Common Sense Media survey, teens reported using AI for creative purposes and information-seeking alongside schoolwork.⁹ The Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT) found in mid-2025 that two-thirds of high school students have had back-and-forth conversations with AI.¹¹ In survey data collected by the Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI) from July to August 2025, about four in ten teen AI users reported having talked about their feelings with a chatbot, consistent with the advice-seeking and social or emotional support uses in our data.¹²

Personal AI use varies by age group. Early high school (9th–10th grade) students report notably higher rates of personal AI use than those in middle school (7th–8th grade) and late high school (11th–12th grade) across nearly



Teen-reported AI uses across school-related and personal contexts



every category. They are more likely to use AI for creating (54% vs. 45% and 47%), learning (53% vs. 42% and 42%), advice (45% vs. 29% and 39%), and organizing (40% vs. 27% and 31%). The difference is especially pronounced for advice-seeking, with middle school students reporting AI use for advice at roughly half the rate of those in early high school.

Skill-building AI uses exhibit some of the clearest differences by school type and parental education. Private school teens report the highest coding rates (27% vs. 18% for public non-charter schools). Teens with parents who hold advanced degrees report higher rates of using AI for both learning (52% vs. 41% among teens whose parents do not hold a four-year degree) and coding (28% vs. 17%). Full breakdowns are available in the [Appendix](#).

School-related AI use often centers on finding answers to homework problems, but many teens go further.

Among teens who use AI for school, the most common use is seeking answers to homework problems, reported by 61%. Across the broader survey landscape, teens commonly report using AI for homework or assignment help, although differences in question format and wording make direct comparisons difficult. In our data, AI use for homework support is the most standalone school-related AI behavior (see [Appendix](#)). Teens who report this use are less likely to report other school use types and report fewer uses overall, averaging 3.17 uses compared with 3.55 among all school-related AI users. Related findings from FOSI suggest that narrow use is common more broadly: among



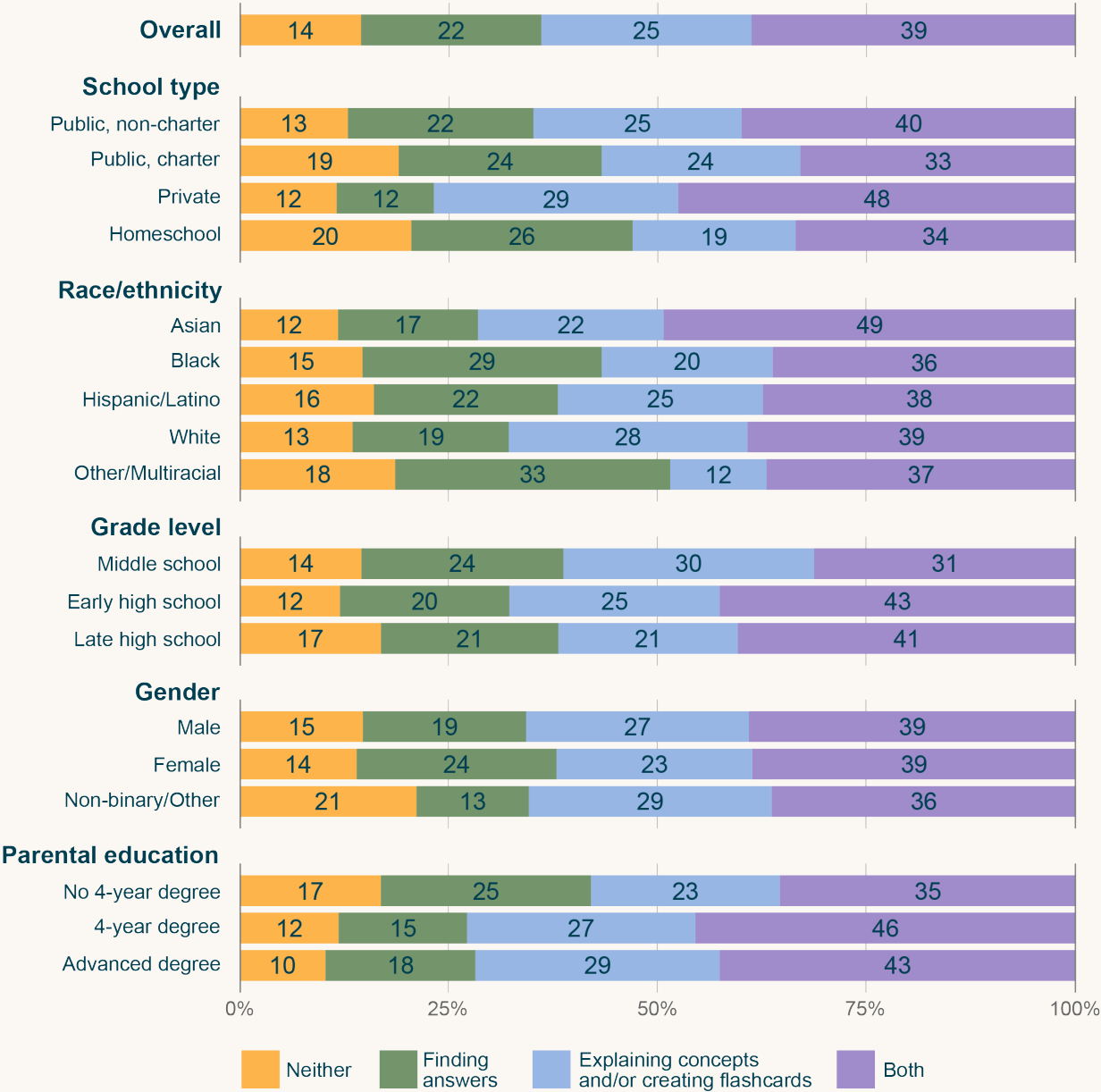
teen AI users in that survey, 64% reported using AI tools for only one or two purposes overall.¹²

Many teens use AI for learning support, not just answer-seeking. Substantial shares report using AI to generate ideas (52%), explain challenging concepts (51%), edit writing (46%), summarize texts (45%), and create flashcards or practice questions (39%). These uses tend

to cluster together, meaning teens who report one of these uses often report several others as well (see [Appendix](#)). Importantly, these broader learning-oriented uses do not necessarily replace answer-seeking. Teens who report any of these uses also report seeking homework answers at rates of 62% or higher. In other words, for many teens, the key distinction is not between

Teen-reported AI use for homework answers and learning support, overall and by demographic group

*Conditional on using AI for schoolwork, N=1,920



using AI as a learning shortcut or as a learning support, but between using AI as a shortcut alone and using it as both a shortcut and a support.

Across generations, concerns center on whether overreliance on AI could weaken core learning skills.

In the CDT survey, similar shares of teachers (71%), parents (72%), and students (64%) expressed concerns that AI weakens important academic skills such as writing, reading comprehension, and critical thinking.¹¹ Among teens who viewed the societal impact of AI as negative, the most common reason was overreliance and loss of critical thinking, cited by about one-third.⁸ In the FOSI survey, loss of critical thinking was also the single most cited concern among teen AI users.¹² In the Common Sense Media survey, two-thirds of teens agreed that students might not learn critical skills because AI does the work for them.¹⁰ These concerns are not limited to teens. Adults under 30 are among the heaviest AI users, yet many (61%) in this age group worry that AI could weaken creative thinking skills.¹³

Teens recognize a difference between AI use that supports learning and AI use that substitutes for it, but the boundary is often blurred.

In the 2024-2025 Project Tomorrow Speak Up survey, 70% of students in grades 6–12 said using AI to do homework or write a report constitutes cheating. Far fewer said the same about using AI to study for a test (13%), summarize class notes (14%), or learn about new ideas (10%).¹⁴ Similarly, in the November 2023 Hart Research and National 4-H Council survey, a majority of teens (62%) agreed that AI could make it easier to cheat on school assignments, but a similar share also saw benefits for learning career-relevant skills (62%).¹⁵ In FOSI focus groups, teens emphasized that the line between cheating and acceptable use often feels blurred.¹² Together, these findings suggest

that many teens recognize that some AI uses may displace or weaken learning. The challenge is that the boundary between shortcut- and support-based use can be difficult to distinguish.

Patterns of school-related AI use differ by school type, parental education, and race.

To examine this variation, we grouped school-related AI users based on whether they reported seeking homework answers, using AI to explain challenging concepts, and/or using AI to create flashcards or practice questions. This produced four groups: teens who reported none of these uses, teens who reported answer-seeking only, teens who reported one or both learning-oriented uses but not answer-seeking, and teens who reported both answer-seeking and at least one learning-oriented use.

These use patterns vary clearly across demographic groups. Teens in traditional public schools are nearly twice as likely as private school teens to report answer-seeking only (22% vs. 12%) and are less likely to report both answer-seeking and learning-oriented uses (40% vs. 48%). Teens whose parents do not hold a four-year degree are also more likely to fall into the answers-seeking-only group (25% vs. 15–18% among teens with college-educated parents). Black teens report the highest rate of answer-seeking-only use, at 29%, compared with 17–19% among Asian and White teens.

This raises an important question: **why do some teens go beyond answer-seeking while others do not?** The next section examines the school environments teens describe, including the encouragement, training, and policies that shape how they encounter and use AI. Our findings suggest that schools may play an outsized role. Teens who report more teacher encouragement also report less answer-seeking and advice-seeking, along with more frequent use of AI for other school and personal purposes.



AI in the school environment

Most teens are navigating AI at school without clear or consistent adult guidance.

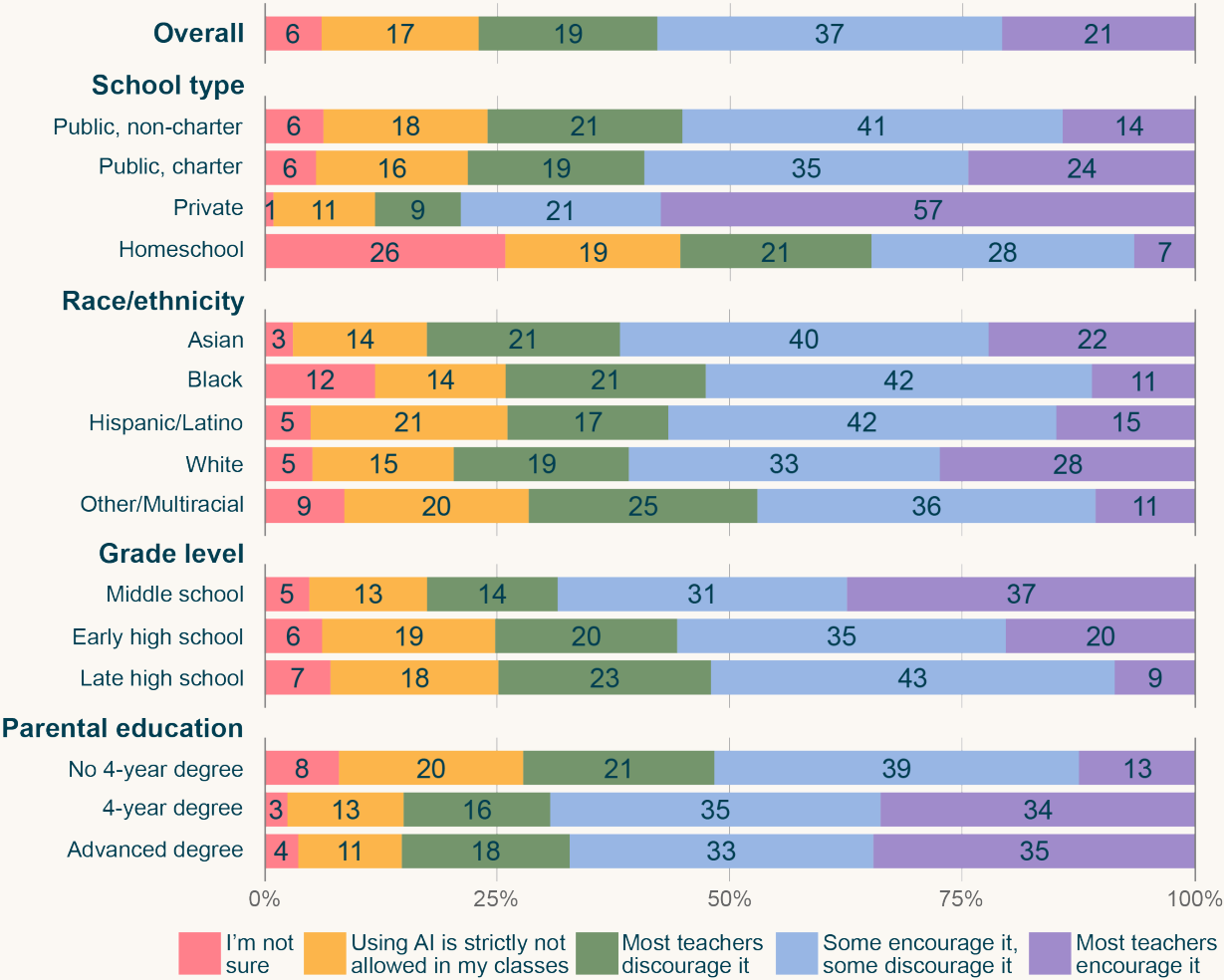
Teens report mixed or unclear teacher expectations regarding AI use for schoolwork.

Only one in five teens (21%) say most of their teachers encourage AI use for schoolwork.^c A larger share (37%) describe a mixed environment, where some teachers encourage AI use and others discourage it. The remainder report discouragement (19%), strict prohibition (17%),

or uncertainty about where their teachers stand (6%). Taken together, these responses suggest that many U.S. teens encounter inconsistent expectations around AI use, leaving them to make their own decisions about whether, when, and how to use AI for schoolwork.

Teachers report limited training, uneven policies, and uncertainty about how to guide student AI use. The mixed signals that teens receive from teachers are consistent with what teachers themselves report. In the Gallup &

Teen-reported teacher expectations regarding AI use for schoolwork



^c Figures use descriptive labels. Full question wording can be found in the questionnaire within the [Methodology](#).

Walton Family Foundation 2025 survey, 68% of K–12 public school teachers said they had not participated in any school- or district-provided AI training.¹⁶ Teachers were more likely to have taught themselves how to use AI than to have received formal training (52% vs. 31%), and only 19% said their school had a policy on AI use.¹⁶ Other surveys point to the same gap between the growing presence of AI in classrooms and the systems available to help educators respond. In the Speak Up survey, 53% of K–12 teachers reported not having discussed AI with students at all.¹⁴ Among math and science teachers surveyed in spring 2025, only 5% said their district had formal AI guidelines, and the majority (66%) reported receiving no AI training, even though many expressed interest in training on basic AI tools and capabilities (75%) and guidance on student AI use (65%).¹⁷

Parents report receiving limited information, leaving many unsure how AI fits into their teen’s school experience. The same lack of clarity surrounding AI use at school appears to extend home. In the 2024 Common Sense Media survey, 83% of parents said their teen’s school had not communicated with them about AI at all.¹⁰ Parents without college degrees were even less likely than parents with college degrees to have received any school communication about AI (89% vs. 77%).¹⁰ The fall 2025 Pew survey points to a similar gap at home: four in ten parents (42%) had never talked to their teen about chatbots, and substantially more teens reported using AI (64%) than parents reported their teen using AI (51%).⁸

Taken together, these findings describe a school and home environment in which teens are adopting AI faster than many adults are receiving the information, training, or guidance needed to support them. This creates a guidance gap in which teens are making decisions about AI use while the adults around them, teachers

and parents alike, are still trying to understand how the technology fits into learning.

Variation in teacher encouragement reflects familiar inequities to school resources and socioeconomic status.

The lack of consistent adult guidance is only part of the story. Among teens who do receive a clearer signal from teachers, encouragement is not evenly distributed. It varies sharply by school type, parental education, and race and ethnicity, patterns that often track broader differences in school resources, socioeconomic status, and access to educational support.

Reports of teacher encouragement are highest among teens in private schools, teens with college-educated parents, and White and Asian teens. Among private school teens, a majority (57%) report that most of their teachers encourage AI use for schoolwork. Among teens in traditional public schools, that figure is more than four times lower (13%). Teens whose parents have at least a four-year college degree are nearly three times as likely to report mostly encouraging teachers (34–35%) as teens whose parents do not (12%). Patterns by race and ethnicity follow a similar gradient, with White (28%) and Asian (22%) teens more likely to report teacher encouragement than Hispanic/Latino (15%) and Black (11%) teens.

Groups reporting lower AI use also tend to report less teacher encouragement. These data cannot show whether encouragement drives use, whether use prompts encouragement, or whether both reflect broader differences in school resources, teacher support, and institutional readiness. Still, the consistency of this alignment across the demographic dimensions examined here is notable. It suggests that AI guidance may already be shaped by the same inequities that influence access to other educational



opportunities, with important implications for these readiness gaps discussed in detail later.

AI bans do not eliminate student use but are linked to continued use that emphasizes answer-seeking.

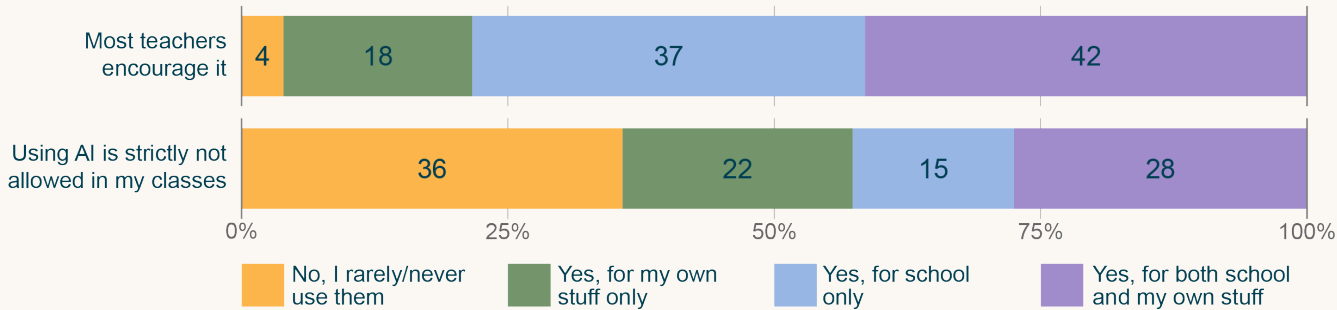
Although restrictive AI policies are associated with lower use, a substantial share of students continue to use AI without adult support. More than two in five teens (43%) whose teachers strictly disallow AI still report using it for schoolwork. Although this is well below the rate for teens in encouraging environments (79%), it still represents a meaningful share of students using AI without clear guidance, structure, or adult support.

Among school-related AI users, teacher encouragement is associated with less answer-seeking and more varied use. Teens

whose teachers mostly encourage AI report a different pattern of school-related use than teens whose teachers disallow it. Use of AI to find homework answers is 12 percentage points lower in encouraging environments, while every other school-related use measured is higher. The largest differences include creating flashcards or practice questions (25 points higher in encouraging environments) and drafting papers (19 points higher). This pattern suggests that teacher encouragement is associated not only with whether teens use AI, but with how they use it. Teens in encouraging environments appear more likely to report a broader mix of uses that can support studying, writing, practice, and productivity. By contrast, teens in restrictive environments who continue to use AI despite those restrictions appear more likely to concentrate that use around answer-seeking.

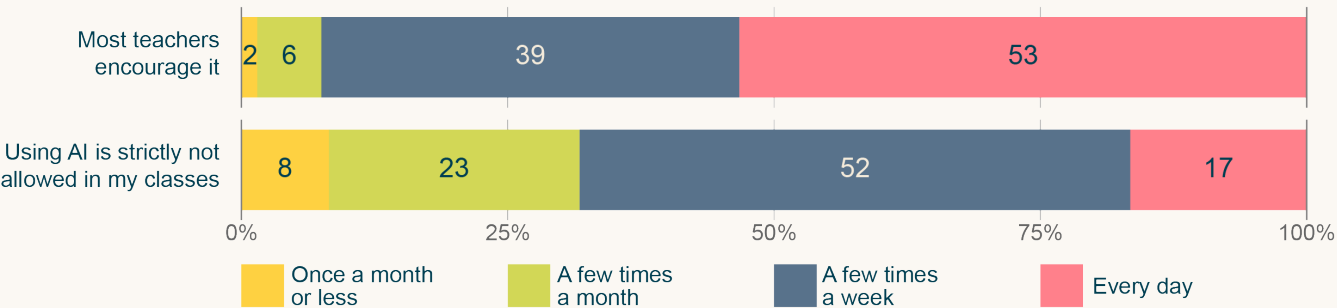
Teen-reported AI use context and frequency by perceived teacher encouragement

Do you use AI tools like ChatGPT, Bard, Copilot, etc.?



How often do you use AI tools?

*Conditional on using, N=2,536



Teacher encouragement is also associated with more learning-oriented personal AI uses.

The same pattern extends beyond schoolwork. Teens whose teachers mostly encourage AI for schoolwork report different patterns of personal AI use than teens whose teachers disallow it. Use of AI for coding is 22 percentage points higher among teens in encouraging environments, while reported use for learning, writing, and organizing are also higher, by 12, 11, and 10 points, respectively. By contrast, advice-seeking is 7 percentage points lower.

These patterns suggest that bans may reduce AI use overall, but structured guidance may be more important for shaping the nature of continued use. Teens who receive clearer signals from teachers may be more likely to understand AI as a tool for practicing, organizing, creating, and learning, rather than simply as a way to get answers. Teens who use AI despite prohibition, however, are doing so outside the structures where adults can model constructive use, set

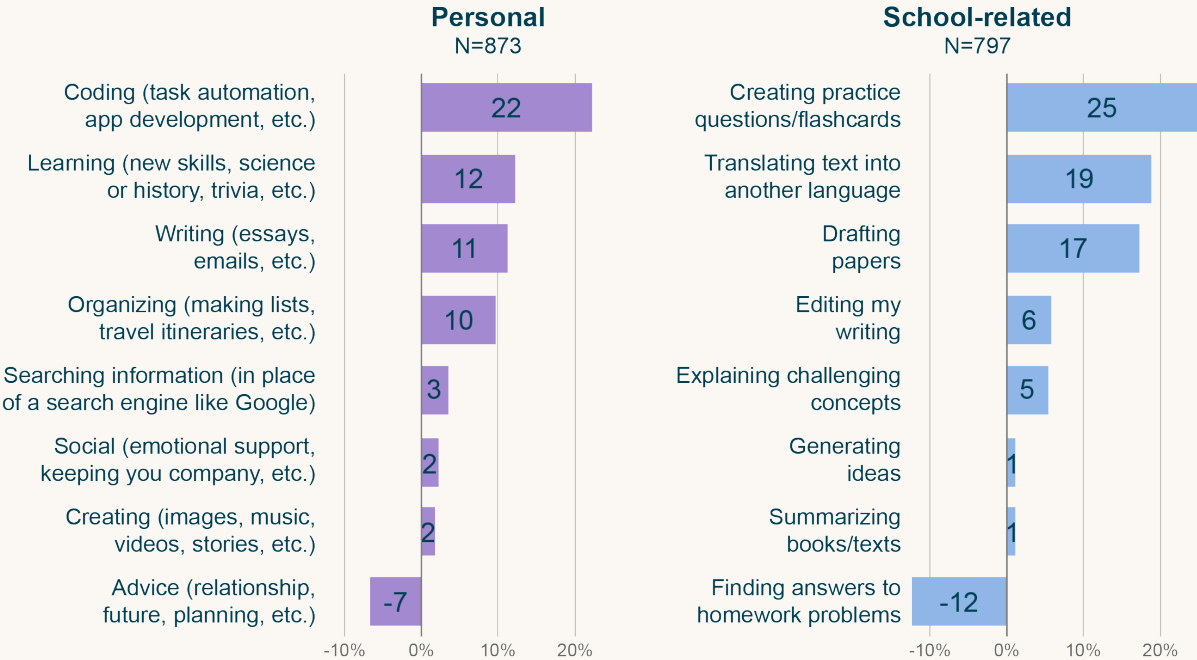
expectations, or help them distinguish support from substitution. This does not suggest that bans are categorically inappropriate. Rather, it suggests that banning AI does not appear to eliminate the forms of use schools are often most concerned about and may leave students with fewer opportunities to develop more constructive habits.

Teens who receive the most encouragement tend to want more, while those receiving less are more divided.

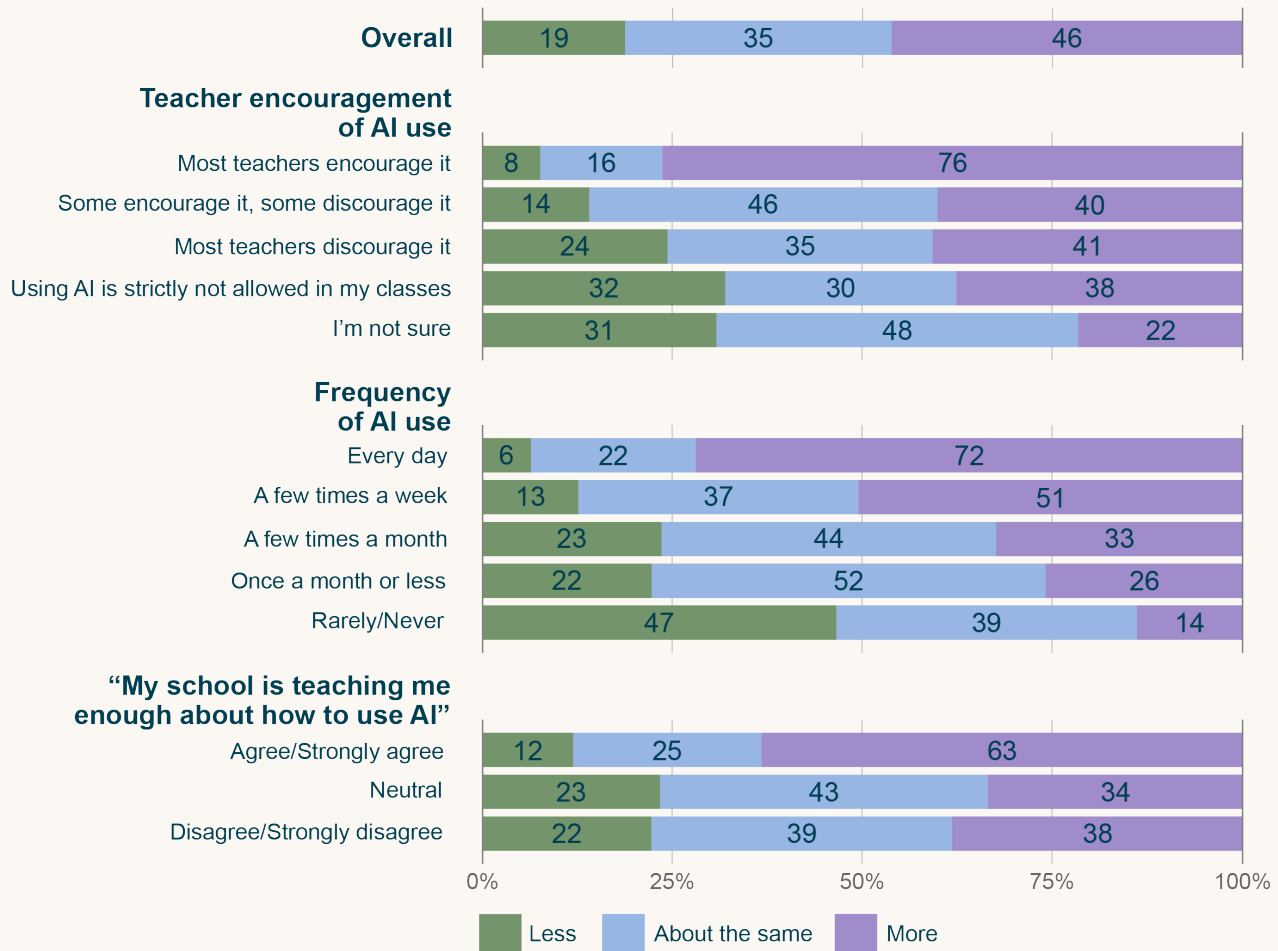
We might expect teens in restrictive school environments to be the most eager for change. Instead, the desire for more AI engagement appears to be concentrated among teens who are already receiving the clearest support.

Among teens whose teachers mostly encourage AI use, 76% say they want more encouragement, while only 8% want less. Among teens whose teachers ban AI, only 38% want more encouragement, and a nearly

Differences in teen-reported AI uses by perceived teacher encouragement versus strict prohibition



Teen preferences for whether schools should encourage AI use less, more, or about the same, overall and by school-related AI experiences



equal share, 32%, want less. A similar pattern appears by frequency of use: among daily AI users, only 6% want less AI at school, compared with nearly half of teens (47%) who rarely or never use AI, an eightfold difference.

These patterns suggest that students who have already had positive, structured experiences with AI may be better positioned to recognize its value and ask for more. By contrast, students who have encountered AI primarily through prohibition, confusion, or limited exposure may be understandably more ambivalent about expanding its role in school. From an equity standpoint, this distinction matters

because expressed demand may reflect prior opportunity more than actual need.

Education research has long shown that families with a higher socioeconomic status are often better positioned to advocate within school systems, while families with fewer resources may be more likely to defer to institutional decisions.¹⁸ In the context of AI, that pattern could mean that policymakers and school leaders hear the strongest demand from communities that already have more access, more guidance, and more confidence using the technology most. If school AI policy is driven primarily by student or family demand,



it may reinforce existing gaps rather than close them. Equity-oriented AI policy may therefore need to be proactive rather than demand-driven, guided by evidence of need rather than only by the loudest expressions of desire.

Differences in school AI guidance reflect systemic infrastructure gaps in training, policy, and resources.

Teacher training has not kept pace with the speed of student AI adoption, and access to high-quality training remains uneven. In spring 2025, Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation found that more than two-thirds of public school teachers had not received any school- or district-provided training on AI.¹⁶ RAND survey data from 2024 show that although district training rates had roughly doubled since the prior year, a substantial gap persisted between low-poverty and high-poverty districts: 67% of low-poverty districts had provided training, compared with only 39% of high-poverty districts.¹⁹ Even when training is available, it may not be sustained or effective. EdWeek found that 50% of teachers reported receiving some form of AI training in 2025, an 8-percentage-point increase from the year prior, but only 5% reported receiving ongoing training.²⁰ Among teachers who rated the training they received, 41% described it as “poor” or “mediocre” in 2024.²¹

School and district AI policies are becoming more common, but formal guidance remains thin and inequitably distributed. In a December 2024–January 2025 survey of educators, Carnegie Learning found that the share of schools and districts with AI policies doubled from 20% to 40% between 2024 and 2025, yet the majority still lacked any formal policy or guidance. Title I and rural schools were less likely to have policies than non–Title I, suburban, and urban schools.²² RAND reported a similar pattern in 2024, when

only 18% of principals said their school provided policy or guidance on the use of AI, including just 13% of principals from high-poverty schools.²³ National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data from December 2024 similarly showed that only 31% of public schools reported having a written AI policy, with lower rates among schools in high-poverty neighborhoods (24%) than in low-poverty ones (33%).²⁴ In interviews with 14 district leaders, RAND researchers found that 11 described a do-it-yourself approach to developing AI training, reflecting what the researchers characterized as “a scarcity of external experts.”¹⁹

State-level guidance is expanding, but implementation support remains uneven across schools and districts. By end of 2025, roughly 31 to 34 state departments of education had released some form of AI guidance for K–12 schools, depending on how guidance is defined. While this represents meaningful progress from the roughly 20 states that had issued guidance by December 2024,²⁵ the pace of adoption has been uneven, and most guidance remains nonbinding, with wide variation in specificity and practical utility.²⁶ During the 2026 legislative session, FutureEd is tracking 49 bills across 23 states addressing AI in classroom instruction, suggesting growing legislative momentum.²⁷ AI literacy is also expected to be assessed for the first time on the 2029 PISA, which may further accelerate state and district action.²⁸

In summary, school AI guidance remains absent, early-stage, or inconsistent for many teens, while the clearest support is often concentrated among students already positioned to benefit from new educational technologies. Without carefully targeted policy, students in less-resourced environments may have fewer opportunities to learn how to use AI critically, constructively, and confidently. The next section examines how these uneven environments may shape how prepared teens feel for an AI-embedded future.



Teen readiness for an AI-shaped future

Most teens report familiarity with AI, but fewer feel prepared to use it effectively in school or future work.

While the previous sections documented how teens are using AI and the school environments shaping that use, this section turns to a different question: how prepared do teens feel to use AI in their futures?

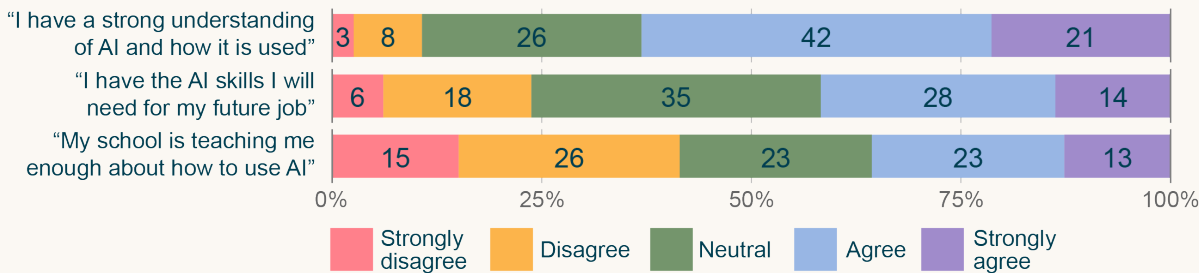
Though many teens feel familiar with AI, far fewer feel equipped to use it in future work or supported by school-based instruction. Survey findings point to a clear readiness gap: while 63% of teens agree that they have a strong understanding of AI and how it is used, only 42% agree that they have the AI skills they will need for their future job, and even fewer (36%) agree that their school is teaching them enough about AI.^d

Although direct comparisons are limited, national polling suggests a similar gap between familiarity with AI and confidence using it. To the best of our knowledge, no other survey has yet directly asked teens about their sense of AI

readiness. However, Pew data from February 2026 show a similar gap between awareness, use, and confidence: while 95% of teens have heard of AI chatbots and 64% use them, only 26% say they are extremely or very confident in their ability to use them, with another 31% saying they are somewhat confident.⁸

Teen uncertainty about AI readiness may reflect the lack of clear standards for which AI-related skills students need. When asked how much they agree with the statement “I have the AI skills I will need for my future job,” more than one-third of teens (35%) selected a neutral response. For many teens, it may not be clear what job-relevant AI skills look like, how those skills differ across future pathways, or how students are expected to build them. As described in the previous section, “AI readiness” remains largely undefined in many school contexts. Few states or districts have adopted concrete AI literacy standards, and most teens have received little structured guidance about what AI skills are or why they might matter.^{14,19}

Teen-reported AI understanding, confidence in future job skills, and school AI instruction



^d Figures use descriptive labels. Full question wording can be found in the questionnaire within the [Methodology](#).

In spring 2024, only 10% of U.S. public school principals reported that students receive school-issued guidance on AI use.²³ The high share of neutral responses may therefore reflect not indifference, but limited ability to assess a skill set that many schools have not yet clearly defined.

Few teens report consistent confidence across multiple AI readiness measures.

To better understand how teens perceive their readiness for an AI-shaped future, we grouped respondents into four AI-readiness profiles based on their response patterns across three survey items: whether they report a strong understanding of AI, whether they believe they have the AI skills they will need for their future job, and whether they believe their school is teaching them enough about AI. Additional details are provided in the [Methodology](#).

The four profiles capture distinct levels of confidence and uncertainty. **Unsure** teens (18%) showed no clear readiness pattern, with many selecting neutral or mixed responses across the three items. **Low AI-Ready** teens (19%) consistently reported lower confidence in their AI understanding, future job skills, and school-based preparation. **Mid AI-Ready** teens (39%)

reported some confidence but did not express strong readiness across the full set of measures. **High AI-Ready** teens (24%) reported the most consistent confidence across all three dimensions.

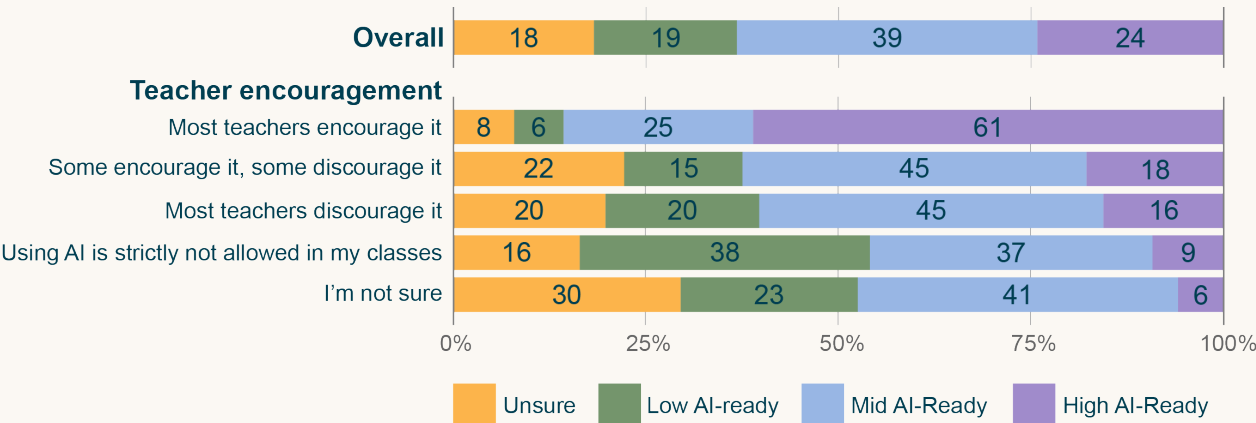
Together, these profiles show that high perceived AI readiness is uncommon. The largest share of teens falls in the middle, suggesting partial confidence rather than broad preparedness. Nearly one in five cannot clearly assess their own readiness at all, while only about one in four expresses consistent confidence in their AI understanding, future job skills, and school-based preparation. This reinforces the broader finding that teen familiarity with AI is widespread, but deeper readiness remains much less secure.

Teacher encouragement is associated with higher perceived AI readiness.

Teens in encouraging school environments are far more likely to report high AI readiness.

Among teens who say their teachers mostly encourage AI use, 61% fall in the High AI-Ready group, more than six times the share of teens whose teachers strictly disallow AI (9%). Teens in mostly encouraging environments are also far less likely to fall into the Low AI-Ready group (6% vs. 38%) and about half as

Teen AI readiness profiles, overall and by perceived teacher encouragement of AI use



likely to be Unsure (8% vs. 16%). This pattern is consistent across all levels of encouragement, with higher levels of perceived readiness closely tracking increases in teacher encouragement.

This association should not be interpreted as causal, but the size and consistency of the gradient are notable. Schools where teachers encourage AI use likely differ from more restrictive schools in many ways, including resources, staffing, technology access, instructional priorities, and student demographics. These differences mean that higher readiness cannot be attributed to teacher encouragement alone. Still, the gradient is consistent with the broader pattern that structured exposure to AI may help teens see AI as relevant to future learning and work. It also aligns with findings from the Common Sense Media survey, in which teens who had participated in class discussions about AI were substantially more likely than those who had not to say that AI skills are necessary for future careers (70% vs. 50%).¹⁰

Frequent AI use without structured guidance does not appear to produce the same sense of readiness. As documented in earlier sections, some teens use AI frequently even when their school environments are restrictive. However, access or use alone does not seem to correspond with the same level of perceived preparedness as guided engagement. For schools and policy makers, this means that expanding access to AI tools is not enough. Students also need opportunities to practice, question, evaluate, and apply AI in structured learning environments where adults can model constructive use and set clear expectations. Without the scaffolding, AI use may increase without building the skills or confidence teens need for an AI-shaped future.

Perceived AI readiness follows the same demographic gradients as AI use and school-based support.

Across the survey, the student groups that are least likely to report frequent AI use or teacher encouragement are also less likely to report a high sense of AI readiness. This pattern suggests that perceived readiness is not developing evenly across students but instead tracks many of the same demographic and school-context differences documented earlier in this report.

Gender, race, and ethnicity show substantial differences in perceived AI readiness. Male teens are more than twice as likely to fall into the High AI-Ready group (42%) compared with female teens (16%), and nearly four times as likely as non-binary teens (9%).^e Differences also appear by race and ethnicity: White (32%) and Asian (30%) teens are more than twice as likely to be grouped as High AI-Ready compared with Hispanic/Latino and Black teens (both 15%). Black teens are also the most likely to fall into the Low AI-Ready group (26%), nearly double the overall average.

School type and parental education show the sharpest readiness gaps. A majority of private school students (56%) are in the High AI-Ready group, compared with less than one-quarter of students in traditional public schools (19%). Teens whose parents hold advanced degrees are three times as likely to be grouped as High AI-Ready as teens whose parents do not hold a four-year degree (44% vs. 15%).

Together, these patterns suggest that AI readiness is shaped by access to supportive environments, not just individual interest or motivation. For full readiness profile breakdowns by demographic subgroup, see the [Appendix](#).

^e Given the relatively small number of non-binary teens represented in our sample, this finding should be taken with caution.



When perceived AI skills are linked to career expectations, the readiness gap becomes more concrete.

The readiness profiles show how teens assess their own preparation for an AI-shaped future, but readiness also depends on whether teens expect AI to be relevant to their working lives at all. To examine this relationship, we calculated two measures for each demographic subgroup: the share who agree that “I have the AI skills I will need for my future job” (perceived readiness) and the share who agree that “using AI will be part of my future job” (career expectations). Together, these measures help distinguish between teens who feel prepared for an AI-enabled workforce and those who may not yet see AI proficiency as necessary for their future.

Career expectations are important due to the predicted widespread impact of AI on most occupations, especially entry-level roles.

Emerging economic research suggests that occupations with greater exposure to generative AI are already experiencing changes in hiring patterns. In these fields, employment among workers in their early twenties has declined even as employment among more experienced workers has increased.⁴ Some experts have warned that AI may be “hollowing out the bottom rung of the career ladders,” and that the ability to work effectively with AI will have substantial implications for productivity and advancement.^{5,29,30} If teens do not expect to encounter AI in their careers, they may be less likely to develop the skills needed to enter a workforce where AI proficiency is increasingly tied to hiring, performance, and growth.

Perceived AI skills and expectations for future AI use tend to move together.^f Across

^f Across individual respondents, level of agreement to the statements “I have the AI skills I will need for my future job” and “Using AI will be part of my future job” have a high polychoric correlation of 0.589.

demographic subgroups, lower perceived AI skills generally align with lower expectations for future AI use, while higher perceived skills align with higher expectations. This pattern suggests that disparities in AI readiness may be inadvertently self-reinforcing. Teens who report lower perceived AI skills are also less likely to expect AI to be part of their future work, which may reduce their motivation to pursue AI-related learning opportunities. Conversely, teens who feel more prepared are also more likely to expect AI to matter in their careers, which may reinforce the perceived value of continued skill development. In this sense, the gap is not only about current preparation, but about whether teens see AI skill development as relevant to their future.

The highest levels of perceived readiness and career AI expectations are concentrated among groups with greater structural advantage.

Many of the groups with the strongest perceived AI skills and expectations for future AI use are the same groups that report higher AI use, more teacher encouragement, and stronger overall AI readiness throughout this report. Private school teens offer the clearest example of this pattern, scoring well above other subgroups on both dimensions. Teens with college-educated parents, White and Asian teens, and male teens also show relatively high perceived readiness and stronger expectations that AI will matter in their future work, consistent with the previously described disparities.

The lowest levels of perceived readiness and career AI expectations are concentrated among groups already facing broader educational inequities.

Teens in traditional public schools, teens whose parents do not have a four-year degree, Hispanic/Latino and Black teens, and non-male teens fall below the overall average on both measures. These teens are less likely to feel prepared and less likely to anticipate

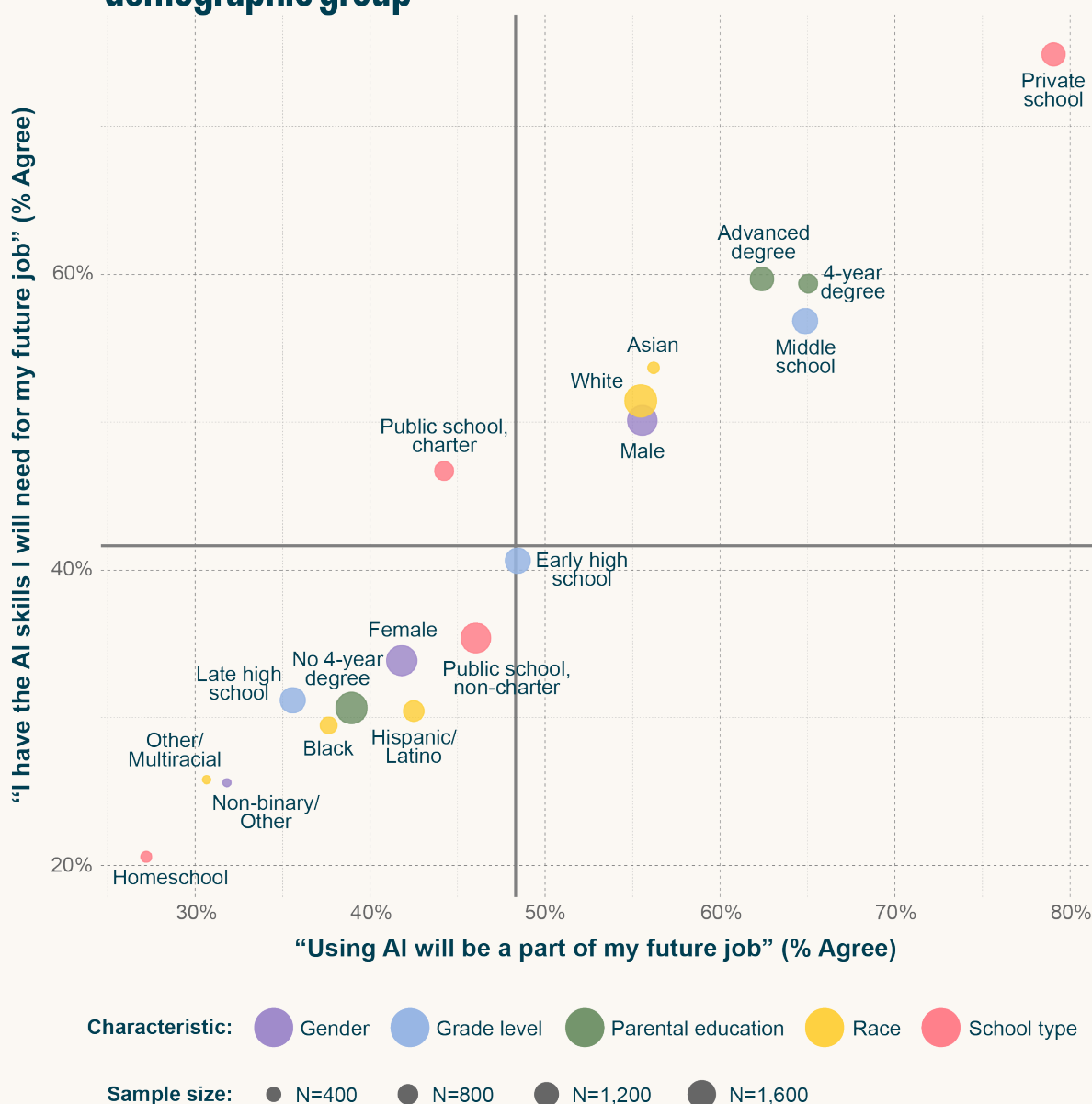


needing the preparation. This combination is particularly concerning because students who do not view AI as relevant to their futures may be less likely to seek out, use, or advocate for AI learning opportunities. Over time, lower perceived relevance could limit access to the experiences that help young people build confidence, develop skills, and prepare for an AI-affected labor market.

These differences in AI readiness and expectations point to a deeper risk: teens who

are already better positioned to access AI guidance and practice may also be more likely to see those skills as important for their futures, while teens with less access may be less likely to recognize or pursue AI-related preparation. Without intentional guidance, these patterns could allow existing educational disadvantages to compound, leaving some young people better prepared to navigate an AI-affected labor market and others less equipped to compete in it.

Teen-reported AI job expectations and perceived AI skills by demographic group



Teen expectations for how AI will shape work and society

Teens see both promise and risk, but uncertainty is the dominant response.

We asked teens how much they agreed with nine statements about the effects of AI on jobs, society, and their own futures. Their responses do not fit neatly into a simple optimism-versus-pessimism frame. Instead, teens appear to be weighing competing possibilities: AI may create opportunities, but it may also make the future more difficult, less predictable, or less fair.

Teens are divided on the broader societal effects of AI. About half of teens (51%) say they are concerned about AI, yet 41% agree that the benefits of AI outweigh the dangers, with 33% remaining neutral. Teens also recognize competing labor market effects. A large share agree that AI will create new kinds of jobs (66%), while a similar share expect many people to lose existing jobs (60%). Likewise, a majority think AI will make it harder to get a job (57%), even as many agree that jobs will become easier (51%) and that people will have more leisure time (51%). Across these responses, teens do not appear to see AI as purely beneficial or purely harmful. Rather, many recognize both possibilities at once. This pattern echoes findings from Hopelab and Common Sense Media in 2023 and Pew in 2025, in which the most common views of AI's impact on society were "both positive and negative" (41%) and "equally positive and negative" (34%), respectively, with nearly equal proportions landing on mostly negative and mostly positive.^{8,9}

Teens tend to be more neutral or positive when thinking about the impact of AI on their own futures. The most contested personal-future item was "I have to rethink my career

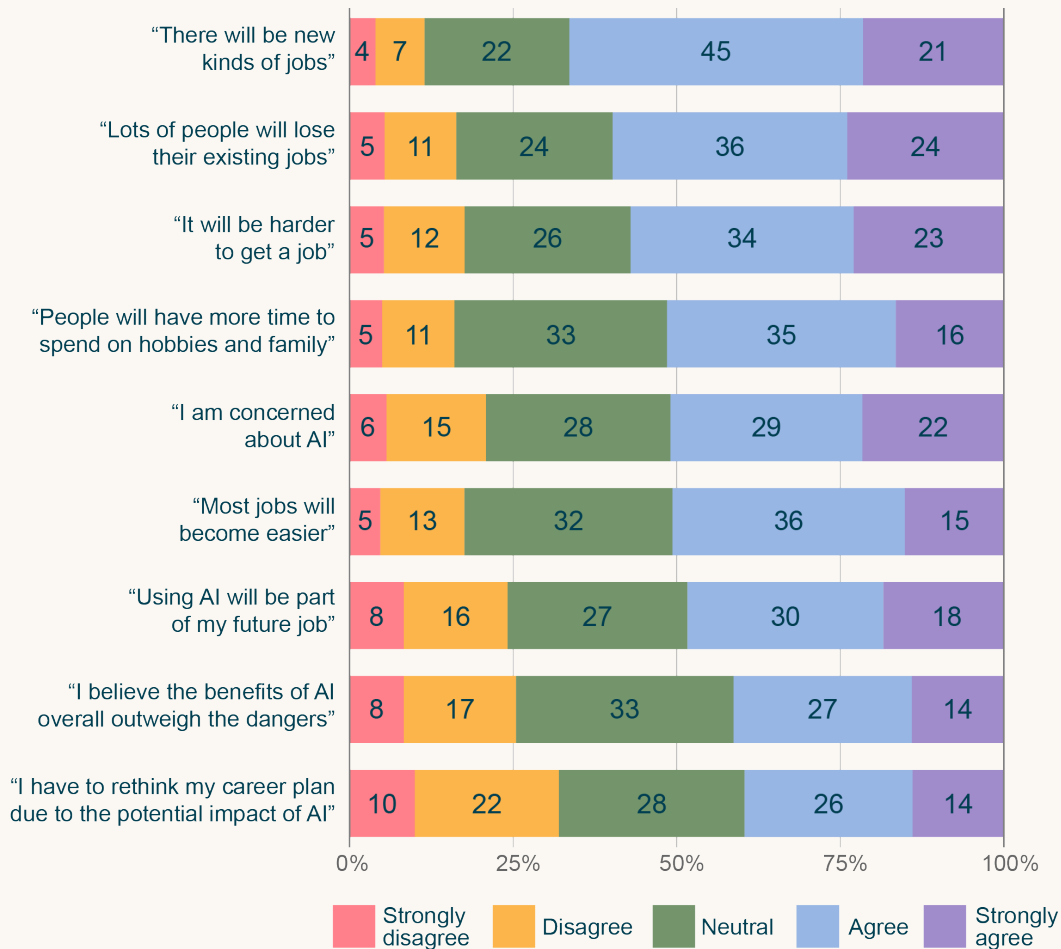
plan due to AI," with 32% of teens disagreeing, 28% feeling neutral, and 40% agreeing. This pattern is consistent with findings from the 2024 Common Sense Media survey, in which the majority of teens said that AI had not changed their job plans (61%), educational path (63%), or planned skills (58%), though about one in five were actively reconsidering each.¹⁰ Similarly, a 2026 Junior Achievement survey found that 73% of teens believed that AI would have a mostly positive effect or no effect on their ability to get a good job.³¹ The Pew 2025 survey also found that teens were more likely to see the effect of AI on their own lives as positive (36%) than negative (15%), with many teens landing somewhere in the middle.⁸

Neutral responses suggest that many teens are uncertain about how AI will shape the future.

At the aggregate level, teens' responses suggest broad ambivalence, with many recognizing that AI may bring both meaningful opportunities and significant risks. However, aggregate patterns can obscure an important individual-level distinction. While some teens appear genuinely ambivalent, recognizing potential benefits and harms at the same time, others are more accurately described as uncertain, placing relatively little weight on either side. Across eight of the nine statements used to assess teens' expectations regarding the impact of AI, the most common response after agreement (combined "Strongly agree" and "Agree" responses) was neutrality rather than disagreement. This pattern suggests that many teens are not yet sure whether, how, or how strongly AI will affect jobs, society, or their own futures. Most teens appear closer to uncertainty, with neutral responses across



Teens views on the benefits, risks, and future impacts of AI



many items. Ambivalence, on the other hand, is less common overall but appears more often among the same subgroups reporting higher AI use and more teacher encouragement.

Nearly half of teens are uncertain about the effects of AI, while teens with more defined views often see both promise and risk.

When teens are grouped by their response patterns across the nine viewpoint items, four profiles emerge (see [Methodology](#)).⁹ The largest

⁹ Figures use descriptive labels. Full question wording can be found in the questionnaire within the [Methodology](#).

group, **Uncertain** (45%) teens, clusters around neutral responses on most items, suggesting no clear directional view of how AI will affect jobs, society, or their own futures. Two smaller groups express more directional expectations: **High-Risk** (19%) teens emphasize mostly negative effects, while **High-Upside** (16%) teens emphasize mostly positive effects. A fourth group, **Ambivalent** (19%) teens, reports strong expectations in both directions, indicating that they see AI as a source of meaningful opportunity and significant risk at the same time.

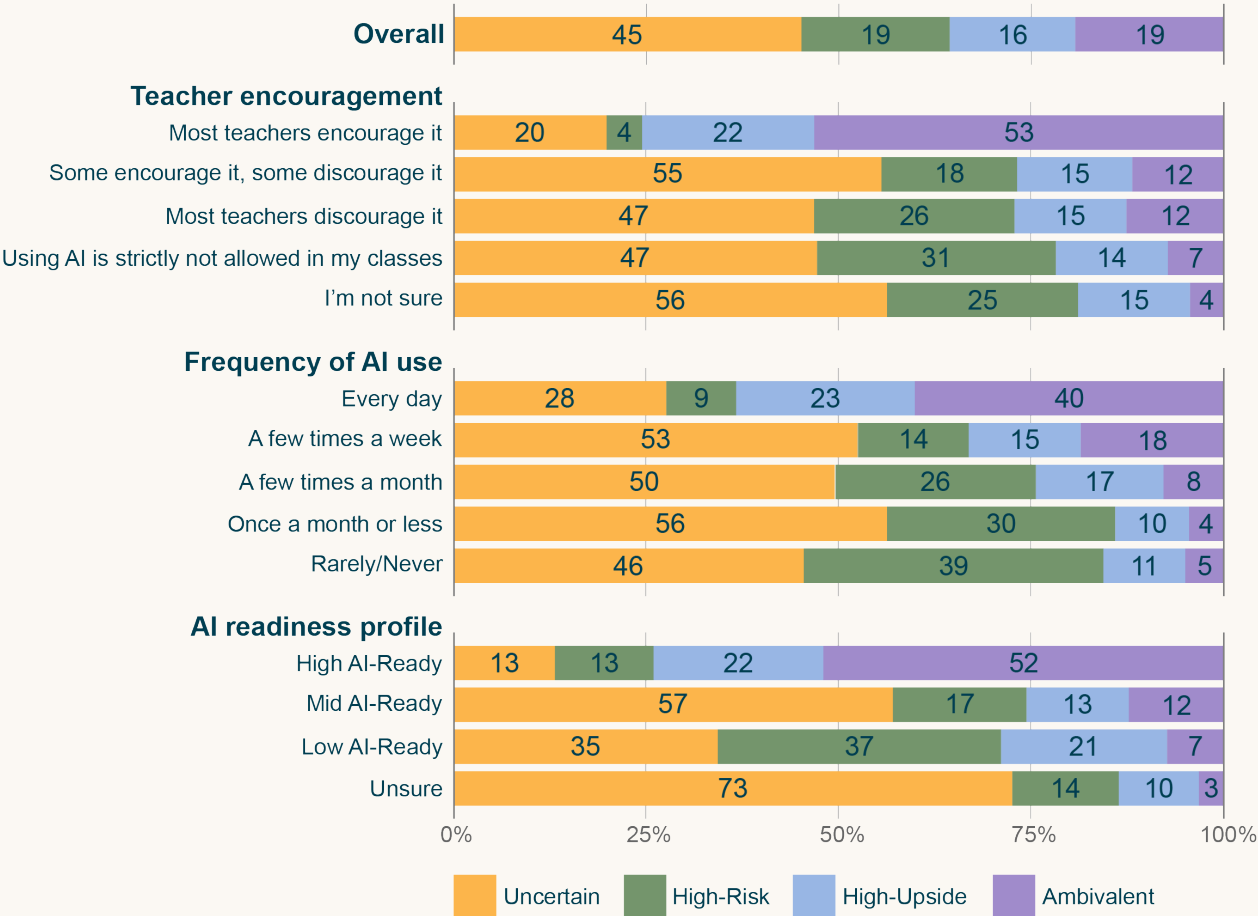
Uncertainty is the dominant teen perspective on the future impact of AI. Nearly half of teens fall into the Uncertain group, a pattern consistent



with the fall 2025 College Board survey, in which 50% of high school students landed in the middle when asked to weigh the benefits and risks of AI.³² Given how rapidly AI is evolving, and how mixed the signals from adults have been, widespread uncertainty among teens is not surprising. As discussed in the readiness section, it may also reflect the difficulty of forming clear views about a technology that remains inconsistently defined, taught, and governed in many school environments.

Ambivalence appears less common than uncertainty but may represent a more developed way of thinking about AI. Roughly one-in-five teens fall into the Ambivalent group, meaning they express both positive and negative expectations rather than leaning cleanly toward optimism or pessimism.^h These teens appear to recognize that AI may create real disruption while also opening new opportunities. Given the scale of AI-related change already underway across education, work, the economy, political systems, and public life,

Teen AI view profiles, overall and by teacher encouragement, use frequency, and readiness



^h The impact of generative artificial intelligence on socioeconomic inequalities and policy making,” PNAS Nexus. For contrasting views from the U.S. public and experts, see McClain et al. 2025. “How the U.S. Public and A.I. Experts View Artificial Intelligence,” Pew Research Center.

this simultaneous view may be one of the more calibrated responses available. Ambivalence is also strongly associated with more school encouragement of AI use, suggesting that teens who have more exposure to AI in guided settings may be more likely to see its tradeoffs clearly.

Teens in more encouraging school environments are less likely to be uncertain and more likely to hold nuanced views.

Teacher encouragement is associated with more defined, ambivalent views of AI, while restrictive environments are linked more closely to teen uncertainty. Among teens whose teachers mostly encourage AI use, just over half (53%) fall into the Ambivalent group, while only 20% are Uncertain. In contrast, among teens whose teachers ban AI, only 7% fall into the Ambivalent group, while nearly half (47%) are Uncertain and close to one-third (31%) fall into the High-Risk group. This pattern suggests that teens in encouraging school environments are not merely more optimistic about AI. Rather, they are more likely to hold potential benefits and risks in view at the same time. Teens in restrictive environments, by contrast, are more likely to remain uncertain, and those with more defined views are more likely to emphasize risk.

Daily AI use is associated with more defined views, especially ambivalence. Among teens who use AI daily, 40% fall into the Ambivalent group, while only 28% are Uncertain. By contrast, among those who rarely or never use AI, just 5% are Ambivalent, while 39% fall into the High-Risk group. Teens who use AI occasionally are somewhere in the middle, although Uncertain remains the dominant profile at every level of use below daily engagement. These data suggest that regular AI exposure may help

teens develop clearer views of its tradeoffs, while limited exposure is associated with either uncertainty or more risk-focused expectations.

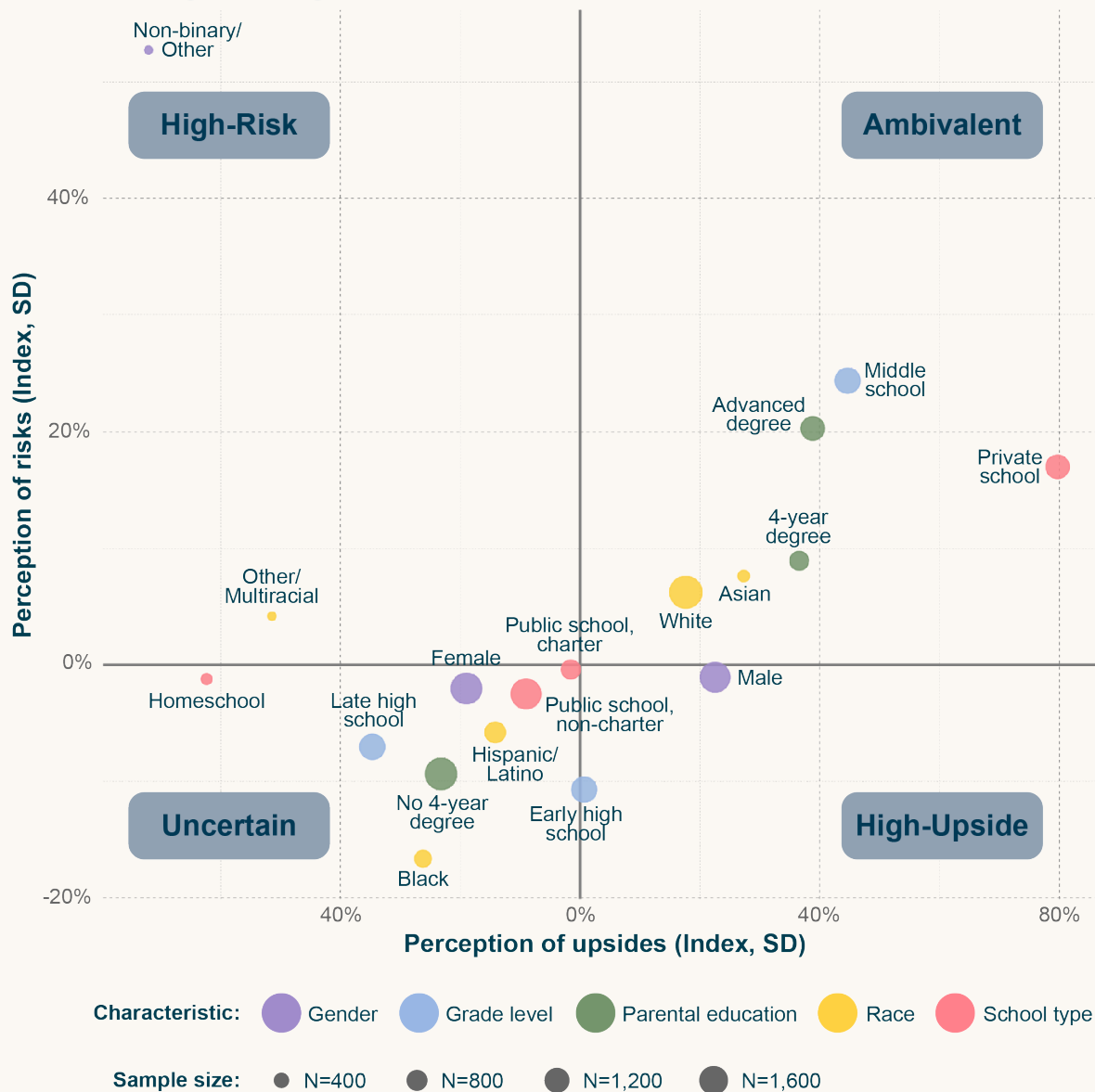
Higher AI readiness is associated with more nuanced views, but moderate readiness may leave teens in a state of uncertainty. Among teens in the High AI-Ready group, 52% are Ambivalent, while only 13% are part of the High-Risk group. Among Low AI-Ready teens, the pattern nearly reverses, with 7% Ambivalent and 37% High-Risk. The share of teens in the High-Upside group is similar across readiness levels, at around 20%, suggesting that higher readiness is associated with more nuanced views of AI rather than uniformly optimistic ones. However, this relationship is not linear. Most teens in the Mid AI-Ready group (57%) are Uncertain, a higher share than among Low AI-Ready teens (35%). This suggests that moderate familiarity with AI may increase awareness without necessarily helping teens form clearer expectations about its risks, benefits, or likely effects on their futures.

Differences in AI perspectives follow the same demographic patterns seen in use, encouragement, and readiness.

Views about AI vary across demographic groups in ways that reveal differences in both optimism and concern. To examine these patterns, we compared each subgroup based on its average level of positive and negative views about AI, using the indices described in the [Methodology](#). Stronger positive and negative views together indicate greater ambivalence, while weaker views in both directions suggests greater uncertainty or less defined opinions. Higher concern paired with lower optimism indicates a more cautious view, while stronger optimism paired with lower perceived risk indicates a more positive view.



Teen perspectives on the benefits and risks of AI by demographic group



The main divide across demographic groups is not optimism versus pessimism, but ambivalence versus uncertainty.ⁱ Across most subgroups, positive and negative views move together: groups that score higher on the positive scale also tend to score higher on the

ⁱ Across individual respondents, the perceived upside and perceived risks indices have a Pearson correlation coefficient of only 0.21, suggesting this pattern may hold more at the aggregated subgroup level than at the individual level.

negative scale. In other words, the teens with more defined views are often not simply more optimistic or pessimistic but are more likely to see both promise and risk. Groups with more AI exposure, teacher encouragement, and readiness tend to cluster toward the upper right of the chart, while groups with less engagement cluster toward the lower left, where neither positive nor negative views are strongly expressed.



Private school teens are the clearest outlier, combining the strongest positive views with above-average recognition of risk. Compared with all other subgroups, private school teens show the strongest optimism about the potential benefits of AI while still recognizing its potential risks and disruptions. This pattern is consistent with what we might expect from teens who have had more structured engagement with AI, as greater exposure may make the benefits of the technology more visible while also sharpening awareness of what it could disrupt. Public school teens, including both charter and traditional public school students, express more moderate views on both dimensions, reflecting a more undecided pattern. Homeschool teens express the least defined views overall.

Higher parental education is associated with more defined views about both the benefits and risks of AI. Teens whose parents hold at least a four-year degree report stronger positive and negative views about AI. Teens whose parents do not hold a four-year degree are among the groups with the least formed views on either dimension. The pattern is consistent across the parental education gradient, suggesting that higher parental education is linked to both stronger risk and upside perceptions.

White and Asian teens tend toward ambivalence, while Black and Hispanic/Latino teens tend toward uncertainty. Asian and White teens report relatively defined views in both directions. Hispanic/Latino teens express weaker positive and negative views overall, aligning more closely with the broader uncertainty pattern. Black teens also report lower views on both dimensions and score the lowest of any group on the negative scale.

Gender patterns are more mixed, with non-binary teens standing out as more risk-focused.

Male and female teens both report views near the overall overage, though male teens lean slightly more positive about AI and female teens appear slightly more uncertain. Non-binary teens are a notable outlier, reporting the highest perceived risk and lowest perceived benefit. This pattern is consistent with findings from the Hopelab and Common Sense Media survey, which showed that LGBTQ+ young people were more likely than their peers to anticipate negative impacts from AI (28% vs. 17%) and less likely to view the future as mostly positive (9% vs. 18%).⁹ Given the small number of non-binary respondents in the present survey (n=84), these findings should be interpreted cautiously. However, their alignment with external findings among broader LGBTQ+ youth suggests that this pattern warrants further attention.

Middle school students are among the most ambivalent, while late high school students are among the most uncertain. Middle school students score relatively high on both perceived upsides and perceived risks, placing them among the groups with most defined views in both directions. Late high school students, by contrast, express weaker positive and negative views overall. This pattern may reflect a broader trend seen throughout this report, in which middle school students report higher rates of teacher encouragement and more varied AI use than older teens.

Full viewpoint profile breakdowns by demographic subgroup are available in the [Appendix](#).



AI and the risk of widening existing inequities

The patterns documented in this report point to a larger risk: AI may widen existing educational inequities if guidance, access, and preparation remain uneven. Teens are not encountering AI in isolation. Rather, their use of AI is shaped by the guidance they receive, the school environments they navigate, the adults who are prepared to support them, and the resources available in their communities. In this final section, we consider what these patterns mean for teens and what supports are needed to ensure that AI becomes a tool for broader opportunity rather than another mechanism through which inequity deepens.

The same markers of educational and socioeconomic opportunity appear at nearly every stage of the AI readiness pathway.

Differences in AI use, guidance, readiness, and expectations track with broader patterns of educational opportunity. Across the dimensions examined here, teens in private schools, teens whose parents hold college or advanced degrees, and, in our data, White and Asian teens more often report frequent AI use, more teacher encouragement, use patterns that extend beyond answer-seeking, stronger perceived readiness, and more defined views about the potential benefits and risk of AI. Teens in traditional public schools, teens whose parents do not hold four-year degrees, and, in our data, Black and Hispanic/Latino teens more often report the opposite pattern.

Although these data cannot establish causality, the repeated alignment of these disparities is difficult to dismiss. Socioeconomically advantaged teens are more likely to attend

better-resourced schools. Better-resourced schools may be more able to train teachers, develop clear policies, and provide structured opportunities for students to learn how to use AI productively. Teachers who receive more support may be better positioned to encourage thoughtful AI use, help students distinguish learning support from answer-seeking, and model constructive engagement. In turn, students who receive more structured guidance may be more likely to use AI in varied ways, feel prepared for an AI-shaped future, and develop clearer views about both its opportunities and risks. Whether these associations reflect a single pathway, multiple parallel effects of shared underlying conditions, or both, the practical concern is the same: **AI may deepen existing inequities if teens with fewer school, family, and community supports are left to navigate its risks and opportunities largely on their own.**

A familiar pattern with heightened stakes

Researchers who study educational technology have long distinguished between multiple levels of the digital divide. The first level concerns access, including who has devices, internet connections, and usable tools. The second level concerns use, including who uses technology in ways that build skills, knowledge, and opportunity, and who uses it more passively or narrowly. A growing body of work also identifies a third level, focused on who ultimately benefits from technology in ways that improve outcomes such as academic achievement, career readiness, and economic mobility.^{1,2}

Access has expanded, but access alone has not produced equal digital opportunity. Over the



past two decades, more students have gained access to devices and internet connections, substantially narrowing the first-level digital divide. The more difficult challenge has been ensuring that access translates into meaningful use and measurable benefit. Research continues to show that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to use technology for creative, productive, and skill-building purposes, while students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to use the same technology for passive consumption or narrow task completion.^{33,34} As Xin Wei of Digital Promise concluded based on a 2024 study of how students use digital tools, “access to digital tools alone doesn’t bridge the opportunity gap.”³³

The AI divide emerging in our data appears less about access than about guided, skill-building use. Most teens in this survey report access to AI tools, and use is widespread. In that sense, the first-level divide appears relatively small. The sharper divide is in the character of that use: whether teens use AI beyond answer-seeking, whether they receive guidance or encounter prohibition, and whether they develop transferable skills rather than simply obtain answers. These differences track along many of the same socioeconomic lines that have shaped earlier technology divides. Based on the findings from this survey, the second-level AI divide appears substantial, and the stakes may be higher than in previous waves of educational technology.

For young people entering the labor market, AI creates a dual challenge: fewer traditional entry-level positions in AI-exposed fields and higher expectations for the roles that remain. Emerging economic research suggests that AI is already changing what employers expect from entry-level workers. In occupations most exposed to generative AI, employment among early-career workers has declined even as

employment among more experienced workers in the same fields has grown.⁴ The concern is not only that there may be fewer entry-level roles, but that the nature of entry-level work may be changing. Tasks that once served as proving grounds for young workers, such as summarizing, drafting, and basic analysis, are increasingly being handled or augmented by AI. What remains may require stronger judgment, deeper contextual understanding, and greater ability to direct, assess, and refine AI outputs. Economists Autor and Thompson argue that generative AI increases the value of domain expertise and judgment, which are built through structured learning and guided practice rather than unstructured exposure to tools alone.³ Similarly, management researchers Call, Jiang, and Idso write that AI “may amplify existing disparities—particularly benefiting star employees who possess the domain expertise and strategic insight to extract disproportionate value from AI tools.”⁵

The teens who feel least prepared for AI may be entering a labor market that expects them to be ready. Teens who report lower AI readiness and lower expectations of needing AI in their future career are still likely to encounter employers who increasingly value some level of AI proficiency.³⁵ Meanwhile, the teens who already feel prepared and expect to use AI, disproportionately those in better-resourced school environments with structured AI engagement, may enter adulthood with a meaningful head start. The risk is not simply that some teens will use AI and others will not. The deeper concern is that AI may widen the gap between young people who arrive with the required guided practice, confidence, and transferable skills, and those who have been left to figure out the technology on their own.

American education has seen this cycle before: a promising new resource emerges, and the communities best positioned to benefit often receive the earliest and strongest support.



This pattern is familiar, but not inevitable.

Organizations across the education and workforce landscape are building infrastructure specifically designed to address the kinds of gaps this report identifies.

ISTE's [Profile of an AI-Ready Graduate](#) provides a human-centered roadmap for preparing students and entry-level job seekers for a workforce increasingly integrated with generative AI. The Profile identifies six roles that develop students' uniquely human capabilities: Learner, Researcher, Synthesizer, Problem-Solver, Connector and Storyteller. ISTE's [GenerationAI](#) has reached over 1M educators to-date, focusing on those serving in historically, marginalized communities.

[MIT RAISE](#) (Responsible AI for Social Empowerment and Education) is an MIT initiative, directed by Professor Cynthia Breazeal, that develops free, open AI-literacy curricula and teacher training for K-12 classrooms. Its Day of AI program has trained roughly 70,000 teachers and reached more than two million students across all 50 states and 175 countries, and tools like MIT App Inventor have been used by some 24 million learners to build with AI rather than only consume it. Through its PATH initiative (Pathways for AI Training and Hiring), RAISE extends the same model into community colleges, opening affordable, industry-aligned routes into AI-enabled careers for learners without a four-year degree. Because its resources are free and built for classroom use, RAISE is positioned to reach the under-resourced schools where this report finds AI guidance and teacher training are thinnest.

Efforts to prepare teens for an AI-shaped future must be centered on those with the least support today. Broad investments in AI education are important, but universal approaches alone may not be enough. Teacher training that reaches all educators equally may still disproportionately

benefit better-resourced schools first if those schools have more time, staffing, leadership capacity, and infrastructure to act on it. Career pathway programs may have the greatest impact when they reach students who currently report the lowest readiness, the least guidance, and the least expectation that AI will matter for their futures. The history of educational technology suggests that without deliberate attention to equity in implementation, new resources tend to flow toward the communities already best positioned to use them. Ensuring that AI education reaches the teens with the least supportive school environments will require intentional targeting, sustained investment, and accountability for who actually benefits.

A call for equitable AI preparation

AI did not create the inequities documented in this report, but it is adding a new and fast-moving layer to them. The disparities described here reflect long-standing differences in school resources, adult guidance, family educational background, and access to opportunity. They also affect students who make up a substantial share of the U.S. teen population, including those in traditional public schools (80%) and Black and Hispanic/Latino youth (40%). AI is now interacting with those differences in real time. With AI adoption among teens occurring more rapidly than the development of institutional capacity, the effects are likely to compound. Each year of uneven implementation risks sending another cohort of students into adulthood with different levels of AI preparation shaped by systems outside their control.

The central question is: will we respond quickly enough, intentionally enough, and equitably enough to ensure that AI broadens opportunity rather than narrows it?



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About Britebound

Britebound™, formerly American Student Assistance (ASA), is a national nonprofit whose mission is to inspire young people to explore their passions, experiment with careers, and navigate a path to a meaningful and rewarding future, through access to career readiness information, resources, and experiences for all. Britebound helps middle and high school students to know themselves—their strengths and their interests—and understand their education and career options so that they can make informed decisions. Britebound fulfills its mission by providing free, digital experiences including Futurescape®, Future Network, and GoZig, directly to millions of students, and through advocacy, impact investing, research, thought leadership, and philanthropic support for educators, intermediaries, and others. Britebound fosters a generation of confident, crisis-proof young people who are ready for whatever path comes next after high school. To learn more about Britebound, visit britebound.org.

About this research

As generative artificial intelligence (AI) becomes part of how people learn, work, create, and solve problems, career readiness is changing. For Britebound, this shift raises an urgent equity question: whether all young people will have the guidance, confidence, and opportunity to use AI in ways that support learning and expand future possibilities.

This report is intended to support more intentional decisions by educators, families, policymakers, and youth-serving organizations. It examines how U.S. teens are using AI, how schools are shaping that use, how prepared teens feel for an AI-embedded workforce, and how they expect AI to affect their futures. Across these questions, the report focuses on equity: whether guidance, confidence, and preparation differ by who teens are and where they learn.





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