

AI Is Built Into Classroom Tools Faster Than Anyone Can Show It Helps Students Learn

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EdReports found almost no evidence that AI features in curricula improve outcomes. Microsoft's survey shows guidance and training far behind adoption, and Sal Khan says his own proactive tutor still has to prove itself. Meanwhile districts, teachers, and students are setting their own terms for using AI.

AI is being added to classroom tools faster than schools can check whether it works. EdReports reviewed 10 K–12 curriculum and edtech providers, including four of the country's top publishers. Only one offered third-party evidence that its embedded AI features improved educational outcomes [1]. Several other developments this week involve the same gap between using AI and proving its value.

The evidence gap is now a buying problem

EdReports' brief points to a practical issue: AI can be added to products without the vendor telling anyone. One elementary principal said his school found out that some tools it already used had AI built in that it “simply hadn't been told about” [1]. Digital Promise's CEO described the worst case: “quality assurance at adoption no longer guarantees quality at instruction” [1]. Existing review frameworks mostly check privacy and safety. They don't have a consistent way to judge whether AI strengthens learning or keeps a curriculum coherent [1].

For buyers: - Ask vendors whether AI updates are opt-in. One expert argued that every new AI feature is an instructional decision [1]. - Ask how the product is supposed to be implemented, not only whether it works. The Center for Outcomes Based Contracting warns that the study did not account for what students actually do with the materials. Without good implementation, the

field stays stuck in a 20-year cycle of “shiny new object[s]” that never build evidence [1].

A survey shows the guidance gap

Microsoft surveyed 3,345 people in the U.S., U.K., Australia, Brazil, Japan, and Saudi Arabia. 92% of students, 88% of educators, and 92% of education leaders had used AI for school at least once or twice. Daily use was 27%, 33%, and 53% respectively [2].

The groups see the situation very differently: - **Guidance:** four-fifths of leaders said their institution’s AI guidance is clear. Half of students and teachers said it is neutral or missing [2]. - **Training:** 77% of students and 53% of educators said they’ve had no AI training. Seven in ten leaders believe at least half their users have been trained [2]. - **Worries:** 42% of educators ranked more cheating among their top three concerns, and 41% of students ranked being accused of cheating among theirs. Leaders’ top concern was data privacy, at 23% [2].

Put together, the people who write AI policy and the people who have to follow it are worried about different things.

Khan: a more proactive tutor, still unproven

Sal Khan described a Khanmigo that steps in on its own instead of waiting for students to ask: - After a wrong answer, it offers credit if the student can explain their reasoning. - After a right answer, a strong explanation can replace the four more correct answers normally needed to show proficiency. - Teachers can assign a Socratic AI tutoring session to students struggling with a specific topic and then get a report on it [3].

Khan was careful about the evidence. He said the team thinks it sees “a signal” but doesn’t want to overstate it, given confounding variables. This coming year will test whether the proactive supports add anything beyond traditional Khan Academy [3].



Fireside Chat with Sal Khan - Preparing America for the AI Economy (5:39)

On safeguards, Khan said the AI model providers agreed not to use teacher or student data, and that grounding the tutor in Khan Academy’s human-written content pushed hallucinations close to zero. By his estimate, about one in 40–50 full tutoring sessions contains some error, and the AI sometimes corrects it [3]. He said explicitly that the tutor is not a replacement for a human tutor [3].

His evidence for pre-AI Khan Academy is about how it’s implemented. In a University of Toronto study in Indian government schools, students got 30 minutes a day of Khan Academy with a paraprofessional keeping them engaged. They saw an effect of almost half a standard deviation over seven months [3]. A Tennessee trial with students behind grade level found a 0.14 effect over a year [3]. He also warned that bans like New York City’s mostly cut off students whose only access to AI is at school, while affluent peers keep using it at home. He argued that proctoring assessments would address cheating more precisely [3].

Justin Reich added an equity point of his own. In MIT interviews with 120 teachers and students, AI was the most urgent issue in affluent schools. In low-income communities, teachers called it “the 19th issue on our list,” and some couldn’t attend AI training because no substitutes were available [4].

How districts are choosing tools

Denver Public Schools approved MagicSchool as its only student-facing AI tool. It got there after a year-long pilot, a formal RFP, and input from teachers, students, and families. This is according to MagicSchool’s own team, who also cited an independent Common Sense Privacy review [5].

Third Space Learning offers districts a fully funded AI math tutoring program backed by the Gates Foundation. It comes with a Stanford and Cornell study of whether AI tutoring can match high-dosage human tutoring. A sales advisor reported more than 30 pilot “yeses” from 30+ district meetings. He credited the funding and research backing, not the product, which he said made saying yes “the safe choice” [6]. That is interest in pilots, not learning results.

New tools, and how teachers are using them

- **Microsoft Teams for Education** can now create flashcards and fill-in-the-blank activities from a teacher’s attached notes, which teachers can edit or “enhance with AI” [7]. Students can also generate quizzes and flashcards from their own assignment materials [7]. This saves time, but practice built from one document only covers what that document contains.
- **Google Gemini** will replace Gems with Skills. For Workspace education customers that happens in June 2027, and Gems will be migrated automatically [8].
- **In Japan**, educators in a Google showcase describe Gemini’s Guided Learning as giving hints toward an answer instead of the answer itself. One reports a workload of about 60% of what it was before Gemini. A lecturer has students submit their full AI dialogue logs, saying that grading only the final output has to end [9].
- **In Seoul**, a teacher of adult professionals turns rough class notes into feedback documents and next week’s lessons using an AI agent. Feedback time per student dropped from about 30 minutes to 2–5 [10]. The teacher’s caveats: the output is only as good as the notes, everything needs review, and writing down “my rules for good feedback” took the most effort [10].

Student opinion is split

Teacher reports from forums don’t agree. One teacher describes half of students using AI daily and the other half despising it. A “good chunk” of students walked out of an administrator’s fully AI-generated presentation [11]. A computer science teacher’s survey of 28 students gave a more mixed result: 5 anti-AI, 4 worried, 3 pro-AI, 5 hopeful, and 11 who didn’t know or didn’t care. As that teacher put it, the loudest voices get over-represented [12]. A teacher piloting an AI literacy curriculum says skeptical students still accept lessons on how AI learns, bias, and checking AI Overviews [13]. These are anecdotes, not survey data.

Higher ed: AI is now part of the college search

EAB's 2026 survey of more than 5,000 high schoolers found 46% using AI in their college search, up from 26% in spring 2025. 18% had dropped a college from consideration because of what AI told them [14]. AI is being added to existing research habits, not replacing them: 84% of prospective adult learners still use search engines [14]. One analysis warns that AI may favor prominent institutions, rely on outdated information, or mix up similar programs. That could leave a regional university that is a better fit less visible [15].

Other developments

- **Alpha School:** Michael Horn and co-authors argue the \$65,000 school itself is not disruptive. They see its Timeback software as the more plausible path, potentially powering a wave of low-cost private schools [16].
- **Pearson is acquiring Workera,** whose AI tools measure employees' skills for businesses [17].

Watch this space

- **Whether districts start requiring opt-in AI updates and evidence** in contracts, following EdReports' findings.
- **Khan Academy's results** for its proactive tutor this school year.
- **The Stanford/Cornell results** on AI versus high-dosage human tutoring.
- **Whether schools close the training gap** for teachers and students that Microsoft's survey found.

Sources

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