

AI Learning Design Sharpens as Illinois Sets Rules and NYC Pauses Purchases

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This week's evidence and policy moves point to a more disciplined role for AI in education: guide student thinking, support targeted human action, and make learning processes visible. Illinois and NYC offer contrasting governance approaches as assessment and student wellbeing become central concerns.

The evidence is sharpening: AI should prompt, listen, and coach—not simply answer

This week's most consequential signal is practical: AI's learning value depends heavily on the job it is asked to do. In a Beijing randomized trial with 148 kindergarteners, a chatbot using structured dialogic questions matched a trained human reader on story comprehension and word learning; a chatbot that only narrated the story produced the lowest comprehension scores. [1]

The pattern reverses when AI does the cognitive work for students. In an English schools trial of 344 students aged 14–15, students who could ask an LLM questions about history texts performed worse three days later on retention, comprehension, and free recall than peers who took notes—even though 90% used the tool to request elaboration. [1] Penn research cited by Ethan Mollick similarly found that unrestricted AI use left students believing they had learned when they had not, while purpose-built AI tutors produced large learning gains. [2]

“You don't learn very well when people just give you answers.” [2]



The long way is the shortcut: friction, mentorship, and experimentation in AI / Ethan Mollick (23:34)

For reading, the clearest near-term fit may be **listening and guided practice**. Carnegie Mellon’s Reading Tutor outperformed sustained silent reading in a seven-month comparison across 178 students in grades 1–4. More recently, a Texas study of 107 students with dyslexia found that consistent use of BuddyBooks was associated with nearly double state-test growth; the study was correlational, not causal. [1]

Generative content remains less dependable. Expert reviewers judged many GPT-4o reading questions suitable for operational use, but only **42.6%** targeted the requested inference skill; models also could not reliably simplify passages to a fourth-grade level. [1] The practical distinction is increasingly clear: structured questioning and fluency support have stronger evidence than open-ended answer bots or unreviewed content generation. [1]

Two policy paths: Illinois sets a framework; New York City pauses purchasing

Illinois issued a non-mandatory, 400-page framework for responsible K–12 AI use. It places human interaction at the center, defines AI as a tool to inform rather than replace teaching, calls for civic engagement with communities, and asks districts to set deliberate, locally determined purposes. [3] The guidance includes grade-level examples for lesson planning and prompt engineering, alongside treatment of privacy, transparency, cultural bias, and hallucinations. [3] District policy templates, professional learning, and internet-safety instruction related to AI-generated cyberbullying are planned over the coming school year.

[3]

New York City has taken a more restrictive interim step. Chancellor Kamar Samuels asked principals to halt new educational-software purchases until the Education Department finalizes revised AI guidance later this summer. [4] The freeze follows criticism of the city’s initial guidance and calls for an AI moratorium from parents, educators, and more than half of City Council members. [4] Officials have also struggled to identify which AI-enabled products schools already use because many purchases happen at school level; a survey is now underway. [4]

The pause may complicate summer planning because schools use software for core functions as well as academic support. [4] Together, Illinois and NYC illustrate two immediate governance needs: define acceptable instructional uses, and know what technology is already in classrooms.

Assessment is shifting from AI detection to visible thinking

The response to AI-generated work is increasingly about designing assessments that require students to demonstrate their own reasoning. One proposed “Assessment Puzzle Framework” layers text, visuals, annotations, voice reflections, and personal connections; each layer makes a pasted AI response less sufficient as evidence of learning. [5]

That approach aligns with Mollick’s recommended division of labor: use AI tutors for work outside class, then protect in-person time for discussion, active learning, essays, and role-play assessments. [2] Instructors using Wikipedia assignments are making a related shift: rather than focusing solely on whether a tool was used, they check whether students’ claims and citations are verifiable. [6]

There is urgency behind the redesign. One veteran teacher reported seeing AI complete 40% of homework, while also reporting that students in an AP computer-science course where AI was deliberately integrated have all passed the AP exam over three years. Her stated priority is “learning detection” rather than AI detection. [7] That is an anecdotal account, but it reinforces the research distinction: the educational result depends on whether AI replaces practice or is incorporated into a structured learning process.

AI’s strongest institutional role may be making human attention more targeted

Equal Opportunity Schools combines student survey data—including belonging, trusted adults, and aspirations—with academic records and AI-driven predictive analytics to identify students overlooked for advanced coursework. A Mathematics study found partner schools identified more than **2.5 times** as many underrepresented students ready for AP, IB, or dual enrollment as traditional methods, with identified students performing as well as peers once placed. [8]

That is a useful model for “human-led, technology-augmented” practice: AI can surface patterns, while educators decide how to respond. [8] It also offers a contrast to systems that treat personalization as automation. Students may benefit from tailored information, but institutions still need to make them feel understood rather than managed by an algorithm. [9]

For teacher workflows, NotebookLM is being positioned as a bounded alternative to open-web prompting: it works from documents users upload and can turn source materials into audio overviews, explainer videos, slide decks, mind maps, flashcards, quizzes, and study guides. [10] Its constraint is also its value: outputs are limited to the materials supplied, so it is best suited to transforming and exploring a known set of sources rather than replacing source selection or educator review.

AI use is also becoming a student-wellbeing issue

Nearly two-thirds of teens report experimenting with AI, and some use chatbots for companionship, romantic relationships, or unvetted mental-health support—not only schoolwork. [11] Educators are being urged to ask students how and why they use chatbots, identify needs those interactions may be filling, and connect students with healthier human support where appropriate. [11]

This expands AI literacy beyond prompts and plagiarism. It includes explaining pattern recognition, helping students verify outputs with human judgment, and asking them to show both an AI output and the revision or reasoning they contributed afterward. [11]

What This Means

- **For classroom design:** Favor tools and prompts that require explanation, retrieval, revision, and repeated practice. Avoid treating fluent answers as evidence of understanding. [1]
- **For district leaders:** Pair AI guidance with procurement visibility, staff learning, and explicit expectations for privacy, safety, and instructional value. Illinois’ framework and NYC’s purchasing freeze show different routes to the same operational problem. [3, 4]
- **For assessment teams:** Build process into the assignment—oral explanation, annotated sources, draft history, personal connections, or in-class performance—rather than relying on a detector after submission. [5, 12]
- **For equity initiatives:** Use data systems to widen access to opportunity, but keep relationships and educator judgment central to the intervention. [8]
- **For families and student-support staff:** Treat chatbot relationships as a topic for candid conversation and AI literacy, not just a screen-time or academic-integrity issue. [11]

Watch This Space

- **NYC’s final AI rules:** The promised revised guidance—and how it handles younger students and existing software—will be an important test of whether districts can move from broad principles to workable controls. [4]
 - **Reading-fluency evidence:** AI listening tools have a long evidence lineage and promising implementation data, but the field still lacks a modern causal study to establish their current impact. [1]
 - **Rural implementation capacity:** A Texas Tech study found AI professional development remains scarce in rural schools. Action-oriented programs that start with teacher-identified classroom problems are emerging as one response. [13]
 - **Tutor modes in mainstream tools:** ChatGPT’s study mode is now activated by typing “@ study,” while Gemini also offers a study mode. The practical question is whether these modes consistently preserve learner effort as they reach more students. [14]
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Sources

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