

From AI detection to observable thinking: assessment redesign, ‘time back’ schools, and safer student-facing AI

AI in EdTech Weekly

2026-02-09

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By AI in EdTech Weekly • February 9, 2026

This week’s biggest shift is how institutions are responding to AI’s impact on assessment: moving from detection to designs that make thinking observable (live defenses, in-class work, interactive evaluation). We also cover ‘time back’ learning models (Alpha School, Khanmigo), curriculum accessibility tools, student-safety and data infrastructure, and new guardrails for student-facing AI.

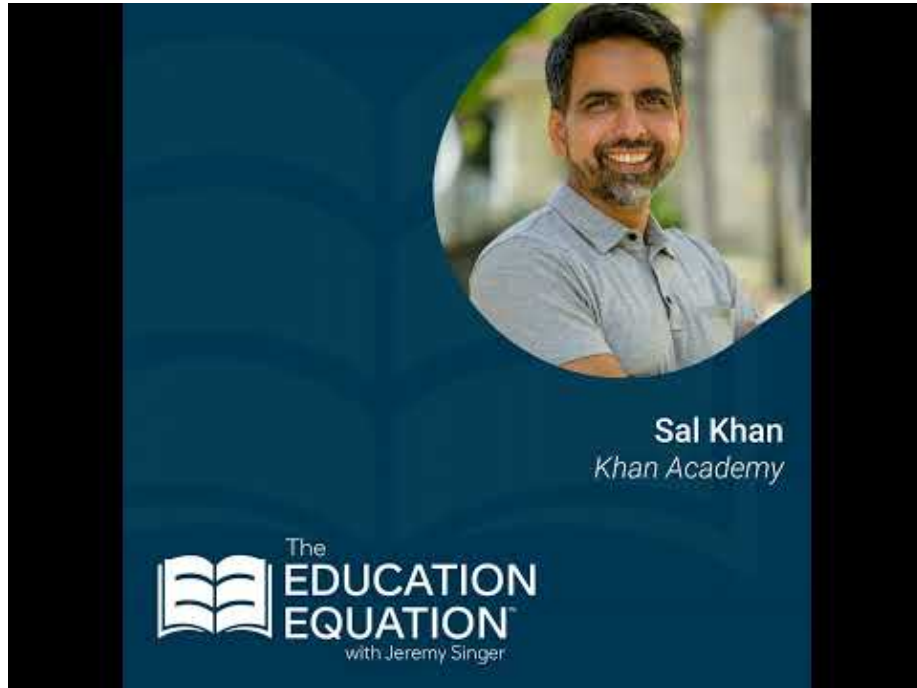
The lead — Assessment is shifting from “did you make this?” to “show me how you think”

Across K–12, higher ed, admissions, hiring, and even corporate compliance, multiple sources converge on the same problem: **AI has severed the link between producing an artifact and demonstrating understanding**, making “cheating” easier and harder to detect [1]. Evidence cited this week includes:

- **84% of high school students** using generative AI for schoolwork [1]
- A UK university study where **94% of AI-written submissions went undetected** and scored **half a grade boundary higher** than real students [1]
- Teachers reporting rampant AI-assisted submissions (including many “0” grades), with some moving assessments back to **pen-and-paper/in-class work** [2, 3]

In response, the most practical pattern isn’t better detection—it’s **more observable thinking**: live defenses, in-class work, and interactive assessment

designs that require students (or candidates) to explain and justify their work in real time [1].



Sal Khan | Khan Academy (45:34)

Theme 1 — “Observable cognition” is becoming the new baseline

Detection is a dead end (and creates its own harms)

One argument is explicit: you *won't* be able to reliably detect AI use in homework, so schools should stop building policies around it [1]. Related evidence includes AI-written submissions passing undetected at high rates [1] and educators describing how quickly students learn to route around enforcement (or how enforcement is constrained by grading policies) [4, 5].

What replaces detection: defensible work

Several concrete “defense” patterns surfaced:

- **CalTech admissions:** applicants who submit research projects appear on video and are interviewed by an AI-powered voice; faculty and admissions staff review recordings to assess whether the student can “claim this research intellectually” [1].

- **Anchored samples** in admissions: Princeton and Amherst requiring graded high school writing samples as a baseline for authentic writing [1].
- **Classroom moves** that build friction and visibility:
 - Boston College professor Carlo Rotella brought back **in-class exams** (“Blue books are back”), arguing the “point of the class is the labor” and that the “real premium” is “friction” [1].
 - A high school Spanish teacher had students use AI to **text-level Spanish sources** (still reading in Spanish) and required a **link to their chat history** in the bibliography [6].

A related higher-ed complaint: **AI-generated student email** is described as “rampant” and “inauthentic,” prompting strategies like focusing on the *content* (“what do you mean by ‘reliable time?’”) rather than trying to prove origin [7].

Theme 2 — Personalized “time back” learning models are scaling (but governance choices matter)

Alpha School: 2-hour academics + human motivation layer

Alpha School is described as a network of private K–12 schools using AI to deliver **1:1 mastery-based tutoring** and compress core academics into **~2 hours/day**, with the rest of the day focused on projects and life skills supported by human guides [8, 9]. A recurring design choice: **no chatbots** (“chatbots...are cheat bots”) [8, 10].



How is AI shaping the future of education? (0:32)

Operational details shared this week include:

- A “Time Back” dashboard that ingests standardized assessments (NWEA/MAP) to build personalized lesson plans and route students into specific apps (e.g., Math Academy; Alpha Math/Read/Write) [10].
- A **vision model** monitoring engagement patterns (e.g., scrolling to the bottom, answering too fast) and nudging students (e.g., “slow down...read the explanation”) [10].
- A reported platform cost of roughly **\$10,000 per student per year** [11].

Alpha School’s model also got mainstream attention: a TODAY show segment highlighted a Miami campus pilot program described as “teaching kids with AI instead of teachers,” with reported admissions demand spiking after the segment [12, 13].

Khan Academy: “Socratic” tutoring with testing and error tracking

Khan Academy’s **Khanmigo** is positioned as an AI tutor/teaching assistant that nudges learners without giving answers (a “Socratic tutor”) [14]. The team describes building infrastructure around difficult evaluation edge cases and tracking error rates (reported **sub-5%**, in many cases **sub-1%**) [14]. They also cite efficacy research: **30–50% learning acceleration** with **~60 minutes/week** of personalized practice over a school year [14].

Self-directed learning at scale: “use AI to figure stuff out”

OpenAI shared a usage claim that **300M+ people** use ChatGPT weekly to learn how to do something [15], and that **more than half** of U.S. ChatGPT users say it helps them achieve things that previously felt impossible [15]. In parallel, Austen Allred argued there’s an “extreme delta” between people who plug their questions into AI and those who don’t [16].

Theme 3 — Curriculum and content are being redesigned for comprehension and inclusion

Math word problems, rewritten for comprehension without reducing rigor

M7E AI described an AI-powered curriculum intelligence platform that evaluates and revises math content to remove **unintentional linguistic and cultural barriers** while maintaining standards alignment and mathematical rigor [17]. The team framed the problem as a “comprehension crisis,” citing **61%** of **50M** K–12 students below grade level in math and noting **1 in 4** bilingual students [17].

The platform produces district-level summaries, deep evaluations, and revisions (including pedagogical/formatting recommendations and image/diagram feedback), and is offered free for district leaders/schools to use [17].

Localization and translation as distribution

- Google’s Learn X team described YouTube **auto-dubbing** as a way to expand global access to education content by letting learners watch videos in their own language [18].
 - Canva described “Magic Translate” as localization beyond language—ensuring template elements reflect local festivals and people students recognize [19].
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Theme 4 — District “plumbing” and student safety: more AI depends on more data (and transparency)

A key operational claim from an edtech infrastructure discussion: there is an “insatiable appetite” for more student data (beyond basic rostering) to make AI systems like tutoring and safety tools work [20]. Examples cited:

- **Attendance and family engagement:** TalkingPoints described using attendance data to message families when students miss school/periods and to help schools intervene before chronic absenteeism/truancy [20].

They also described an AI feature (“message mentor”) that suggests improvements to teacher-family communications [20].

- **Student safety:** Securely described using AI to scan student Google Docs for potential suicide notes and raise flags quickly, while emphasizing privacy/transparency and framing a benefit as “no human has to ever become aware of the student’s private thoughts” unless a flag is raised [20].
- **Admin reduction in special needs:** Trellis described transcribing child plan meetings and drafting a child’s plan/minutes (with time-bound, measurable actions), piloting across Scottish councils to reduce the 1.5–2 hour teacher write-up burden and improve teacher presence/eye contact in meetings [21].

A separate classroom-side warning: one educator described a “tech-powered system that never sleeps,” where AI is already embedded (text-to-speech, translation, writing supports) and constant measurement/feedback can erode pause and reflection, increasing pressure on students [22].

Theme 5 — AI literacy is being reframed: less “prompting,” more domain knowledge + visible practice

Two complementary takes stood out:

- **Evaluate output through domain knowledge:** Justin Reich argued that what’s hard is not using AI, but evaluating outputs—and that domain knowledge is a bigger differentiator than AI-specific tricks [6].
- **Treat AI chats as texts:** Mike Kentz proposed teaching AI use via comparative textual analysis of chat transcripts (students compare two AI interactions, identify differences, vote using a partially built rubric, then refine the rubric together) [23]. He reports “promising” results across middle school through college but highlights gaps (transcript design, facilitation quality, and adapting beyond humanities) [23].

Teacher reality check: **79% of teachers** reportedly have tried AI tools in class (up from 63% last year), while “less than half of schools” have provided training [24].

Student-facing AI: “instructional tool, not a companion”

MagicSchool AI released a white paper arguing student-facing AI should function as **instructional technology, not a companion**, to reduce risks like companionship and sycophancy [25, 26]. Their framing aligns with a broader principle that role clarity matters as AI enters classrooms [25].

Policy signals touched this too: Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro directed his administration to explore legal options requiring AI chatbot developers to im-

plement **age verification and parental consent** [27].

What This Means (practical takeaways)

- **For K–12 leaders:** If AI use is widespread and hard to detect [1], the most actionable lever is assessment design—more in-class work, live explanation, and structured reflection (rather than relying on detectors) [1].
 - **For higher ed:** Expect more hybrid “artifact + defense” models (e.g., video interviews, oral exams, anchored writing) to become normal ways to validate ownership [1].
 - **For edtech builders and investors:** The next wave of defensibility may be less about a chatbot UX and more about: (1) measurable learning loops (practice, feedback, progress), and (2) reliable integration into district workflows and data standards—plus clear transparency promises when products touch sensitive domains like safety [20].
 - **For L&D / employers:** The same authenticity problem shows up in hiring (AI-written résumés; rising cost/time to hire), reinforcing a shift toward early, live validation of skills [1].
 - **For learners:** Advantage goes to people who can ask good questions, verify outputs, and use AI as a scaffold rather than outsourcing thinking—skills echoed across classroom practice and workforce framing [6, 1].
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Watch This Space

- **Live/interactive assessment** spreading from admissions to everyday classroom practice (video defenses, oral exams, transcript-based evaluation) [1, 21, 23].
 - **AI “time back” models** that combine personalization with human motivation layers (and how they handle engagement, cheating, and trust) [9, 10, 8].
 - **Student-facing safety and role clarity**—instructional tool vs companion—and whether age-gating and consent become baseline requirements [25, 27].
 - **Curriculum accessibility tooling** (especially for multilingual and low-context learners) moving upstream into procurement and publisher workflows [17].
 - **Data governance under load** as more AI products demand extended data for tutoring, attendance, and safety use cases—and districts push for transparency [20].
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