



AI at Work

How K–12 leaders can navigate artificial intelligence while protecting learning, professional judgment, teacher autonomy, and a healthy workplace.

A national evidence review examining AI adoption in K–12 schools — and the signals district leaders should be watching now.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

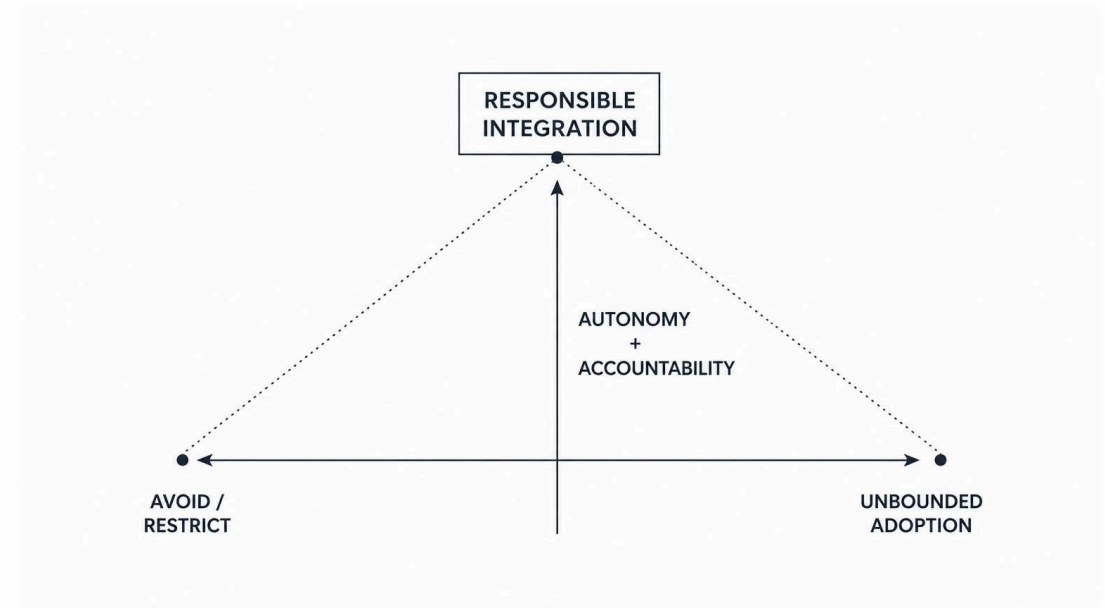
AI is changing the work.

The harder question is what it should not replace.

Students are using AI. Teachers are using AI. Schools are writing policies. Districts are expanding training. The leadership challenge is no longer simply adoption. It is determining where AI can support teaching and learning without replacing the human thinking, professional judgment, and responsibility schools exist to develop.

The Defining Leadership Question

The axis below captures the tension every district leader must navigate — between reflexive restriction and unbounded adoption, and between autonomy without accountability and accountability without autonomy. The goal is **Responsible Integration**: high autonomy paired with high accountability, guided by clear organizational values.

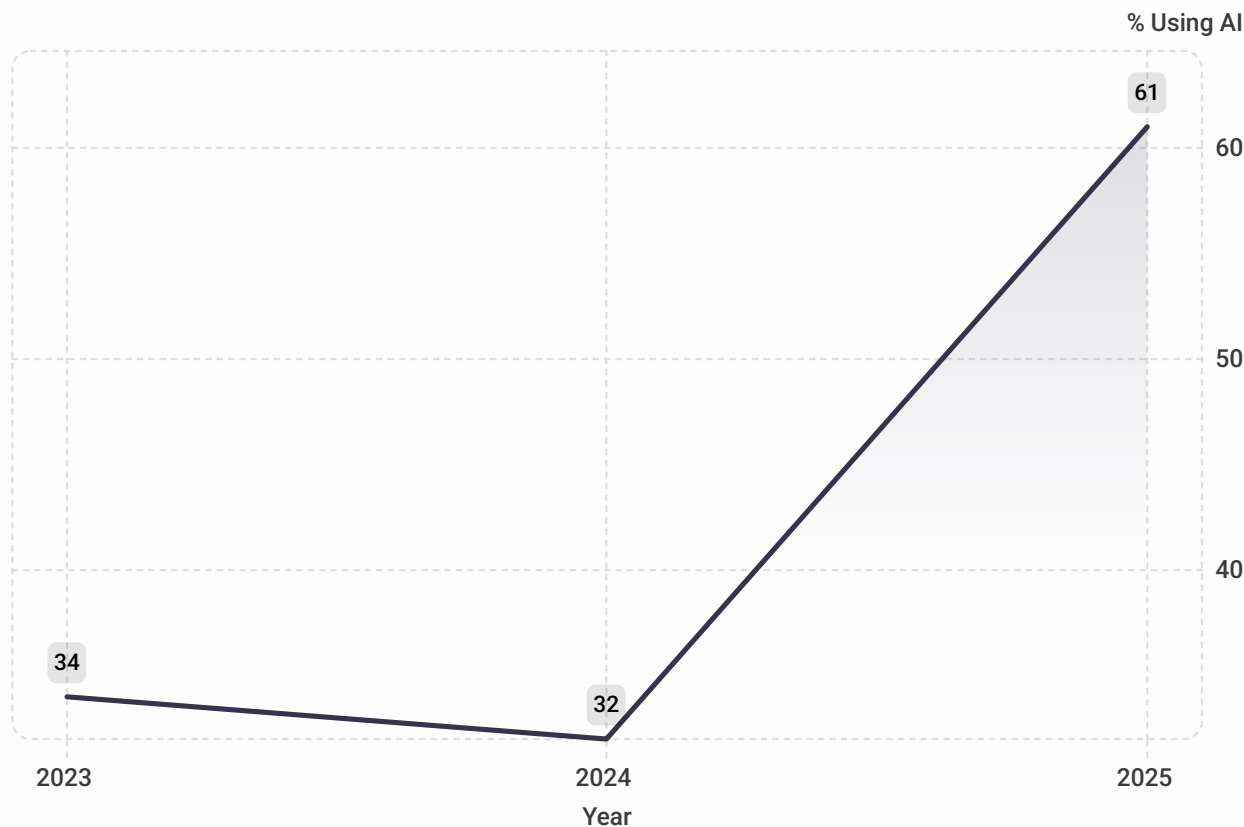


Warren Research conceptual synthesis. Not a validated diagnostic instrument.

AI Adoption Is No Longer Marginal

AI use among educators has moved from experimentation toward routine professional practice.

Teacher AI Use Over Time



6 in 10

Teachers Using AI for Work

A substantial majority of teachers now report using AI tools in their professional work — yet formal guidance has not kept pace.

- 32% used AI at least weekly.

SOURCE: Education Week Research Center; Walton Family Foundation–Gallup.

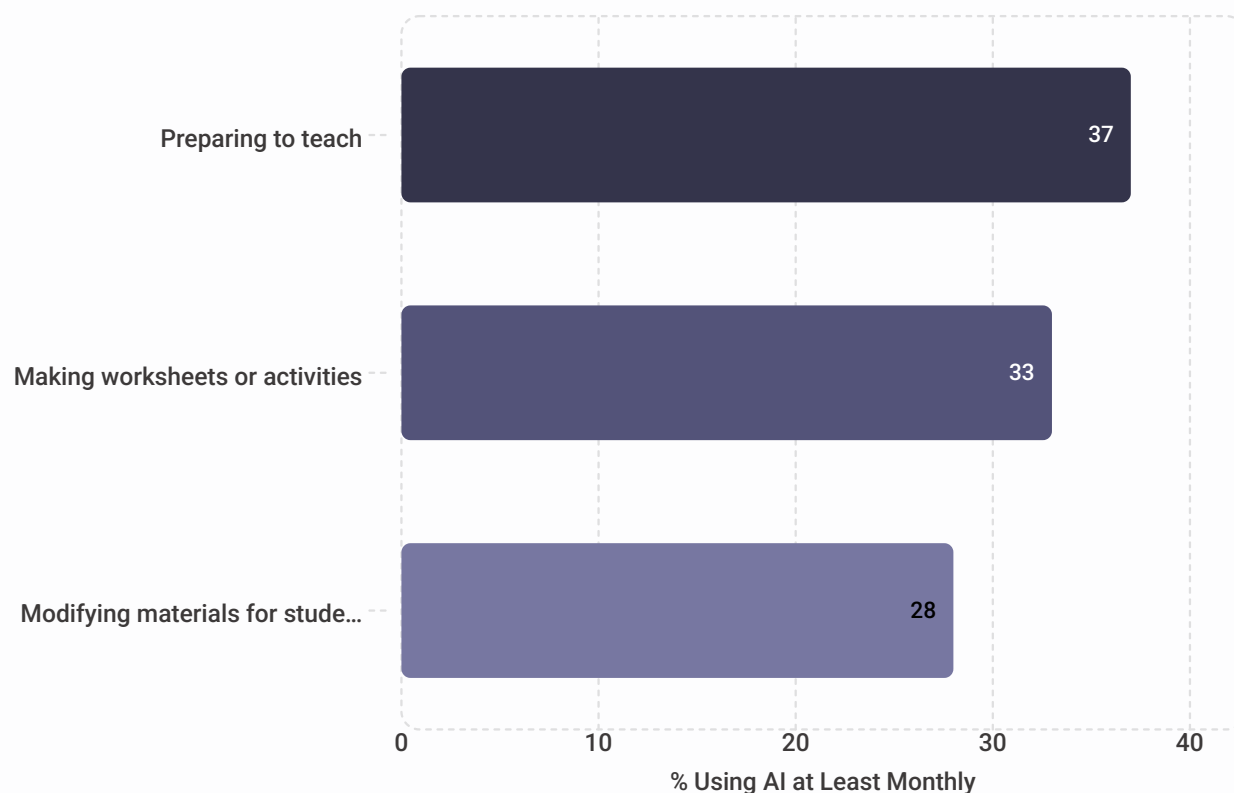
  **LEADER RESPONSE:** Treat AI as an existing workforce behavior rather than a future initiative. Begin by understanding where and how employees are already using it.

What Is AI Actually Doing Inside the Job?

The organizational question is not simply whether a teacher uses AI. It is **which part of the work is being delegated** — and what professional responsibility remains.

Teacher AI Use by Task

Task



AI AS ASSISTANCE vs. AI AS SUBSTITUTION

Individual uses are not automatically one or the other. The same tool can support professional judgment in one context and replace it in another.

"Evaluate AI use by task rather than treating adoption as a single behavior."

SOURCE: Walton Family Foundation–Gallup, *Teaching for Tomorrow, 2025–2026*.

📄 **✓ LEADER RESPONSE:** Evaluate AI use by task rather than treating adoption as a single behavior. Teachers may use the same technology in ways that have very different implications for workload, quality, and professional judgment.

The Student AI Question Is No Longer About Access Alone

70%

of teens report using AI for schoolwork.

SOURCE: Common Sense Media, Youth AI Safety Institute, 2026.

How Students Are Using AI — Two Overlapping Patterns

63%

Direct Answer

Used AI to get a direct answer to schoolwork.

77%

Indirect Support

Used AI for schoolwork without getting the answer directly (brainstorming, checking work).

Students may report BOTH types of use — these are not mutually exclusive groups.

38%

Fewer Own Ideas

Say AI availability leads them to generate fewer of their own ideas.

39%

Missing Out on Learning

Say they feel they are missing out on learning when using AI to complete assignments.

The same student can use AI to support thinking in one situation and outsource thinking in another. Blanket categories such as "AI user" or "AI non-user" are increasingly unhelpful.



✓ LEADER RESPONSE: Focus expectations on the learning students must demonstrate, not merely whether AI touched the assignment. The important distinction is whether AI supported the learning process or replaced the thinking the task was designed to develop.

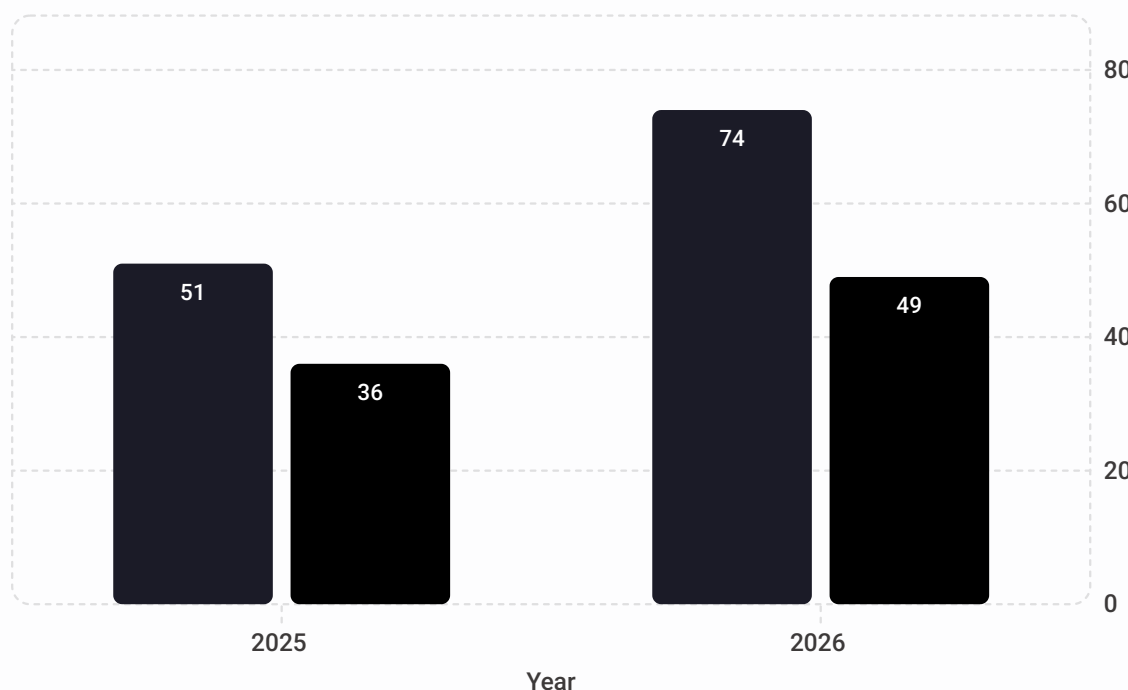
Schools Are Establishing Rules. Understanding Is Still Catching Up.

RULES ARE NOT THE SAME AS AI LITERACY. Organizations can establish boundaries faster than they build shared understanding.

School AI Rules and Computer Access

■ School Has AI Rules (%)

■ School-Computer Access (%)



27%

of teens said a teacher had discussed with them what AI is and how it works.

⚠ From a separate Common Sense Media survey — not statistically comparable to Gallup trend data. Do not combine with figures above.

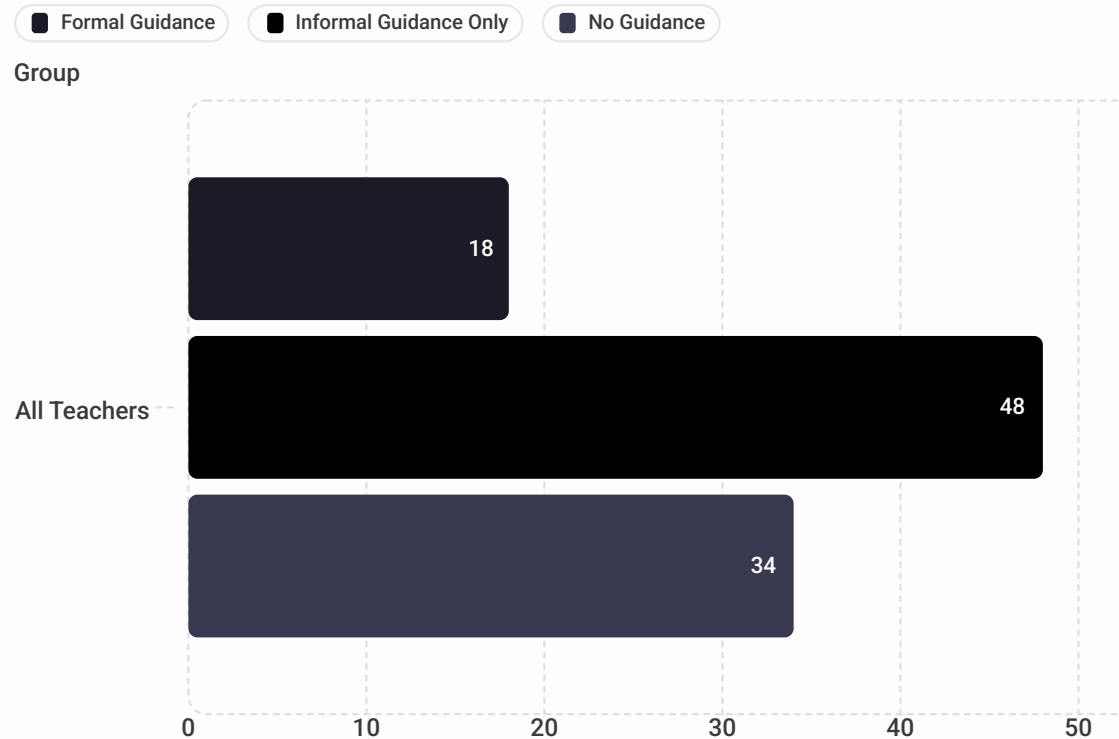
Rule-setting is outpacing AI literacy development. Schools can establish boundaries faster than they build shared understanding.

SOURCE: Walton Family Foundation–Gallup; Common Sense Media, Youth AI Safety Institute, 2025–2026.

📌 **LEADER RESPONSE:** Measure whether students and employees understand the reasoning behind AI expectations, not simply whether a policy exists. Rules without understanding may govern behavior without building judgment.

Teachers Are Using AI Faster Than Organizations Are Guiding It

Teacher AI Guidance Status



SOURCE: Walton Family Foundation–Gallup, *Teaching for Tomorrow: Closing the Expectations Gap*, 2026. N = 2,069 U.S. public K–12 teachers.

82%

of teachers do not report receiving **formal guidance** on AI use.

Guidance Gaps by Task

69%

Report no guidance for AI use in one-on-one instruction or tutoring.

58%

Report no guidance for AI use in grading or student feedback.

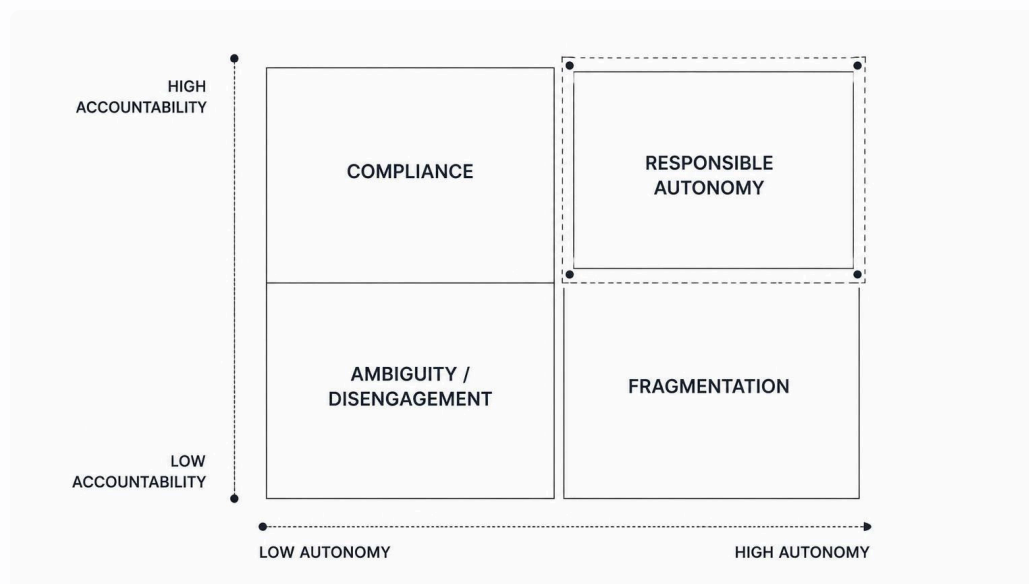
AUTONOMY WITHOUT CLARITY CAN BECOME GUESSWORK.

When organizational boundaries are unclear, teachers still make decisions — the result may be reasonable professional experimentation, or substantial variation across classrooms.

📌 **LEADER RESPONSE:** Define the non-negotiables and preserve discretion inside them. Teachers should understand where organizational boundaries exist without requiring leadership approval for every responsible use of AI.

Leaders Need Visibility. Teachers Need Professional Autonomy.

MONITOR THE SYSTEM, NOT EVERY CLICK.



Warren Research conceptual synthesis. Not a validated diagnostic instrument.

Monitoring Without Surveillance

Possible organizational monitoring mechanisms:

- Employee surveys
- Focus groups
- School-level implementation reviews
- AI-use patterns
- Professional learning feedback
- Student experience
- Workload measures
- Examples of classroom practice

Avoid presenting employee surveillance as an organizational-health strategy.

📄 **✓ LEADER RESPONSE:** Monitor patterns before policing individuals. Leaders need enough visibility to understand implementation while maintaining conditions in which teachers can experiment, ask questions, disclose mistakes, and exercise professional judgment.

AI Can Generate the Work. It Cannot Own the Outcome.

ASSISTANCE CAN BE DELEGATED. PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY CANNOT.

AI CAN

DRAFT

Initial content and documents

GENERATE

Materials and resources

SUMMARIZE

Information and key points

SUGGEST

Approaches or options

ORGANIZE

And structure content

ADAPT

Materials to different formats

THE EDUCATOR MUST STILL

VERIFY

Accuracy and appropriateness

EVALUATE

Quality and instructional fit

DECIDE

What students receive

ADAPT TO THE STUDENT

In front of them

APPLY PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT

Throughout all decisions

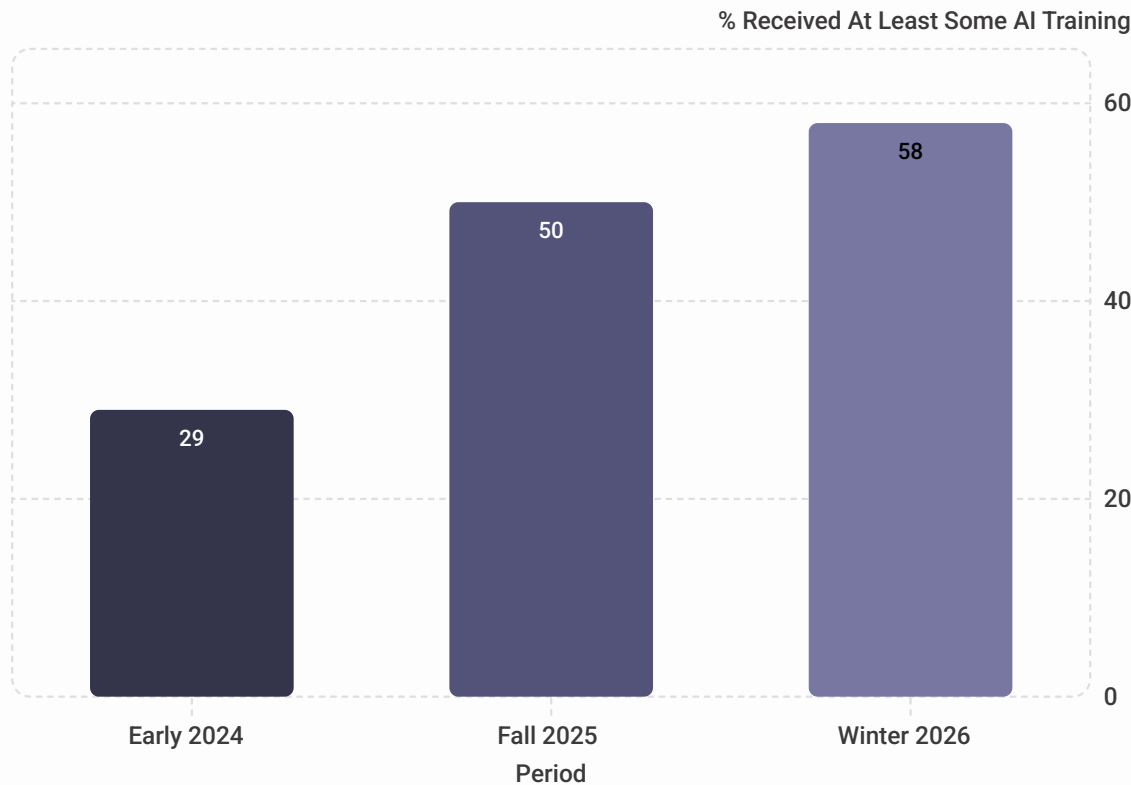
OWN THE OUTCOME

Entirely and without exception

📌 **✓ LEADER RESPONSE:** Hold teachers accountable for the quality, accuracy, appropriateness, and instructional purpose of their work regardless of which tools assisted in creating it. Accountability should attach to professional responsibility, not simply tool use.

AI Training Is Expanding. Readiness Is a Higher Bar.

Teachers Reporting At Least Some AI Training



42%

Still No Training

As of Winter 2026, 42% of teachers still reported receiving no AI training — revealing an uneven distribution of organizational support.

TRAINING ATTENDANCE ≠ AI JUDGMENT

AI judgment includes: when to use it · when not to · how to verify · what data to protect · what students must still do · what teachers must still own

SOURCE: Education Week Research Center surveys, 2024–2026.

📄 **✓ LEADER RESPONSE:** Measure whether professional learning improves employees' ability to make responsible decisions, not simply whether training occurred. The goal is professional judgment, not tool proficiency alone.

AI Can Save Time. Whether It Improves Work Depends on What Happens Next.

5.9

Hours Saved Per Week

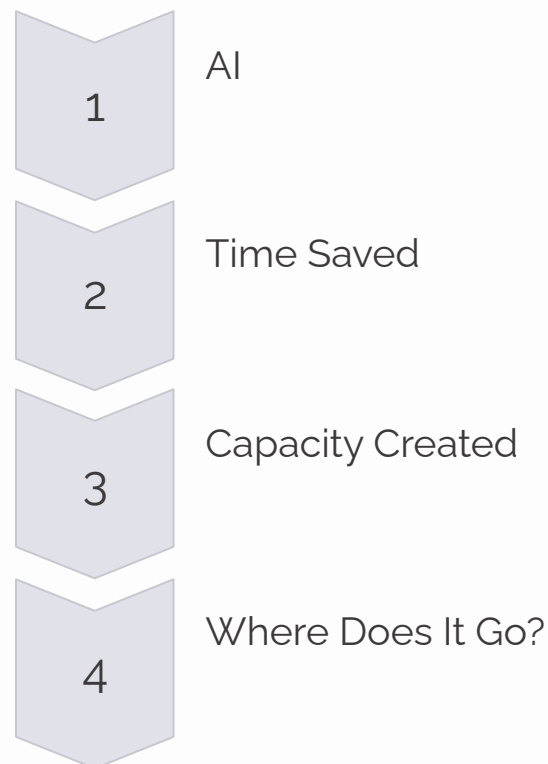
Estimated weekly time saved by teachers who use AI at least weekly. Equivalent to roughly **six weeks** across a school year.

Teacher-reported estimated time savings.

SOURCE: Walton Family Foundation–Gallup, Teaching for Tomorrow: Unlocking Six Weeks a Year With AI, 2025.

EFFICIENCY IS NOT THE SAME AS WORKPLACE HEALTH.

The question is not whether AI saves time. It is what happens to the time it saves.

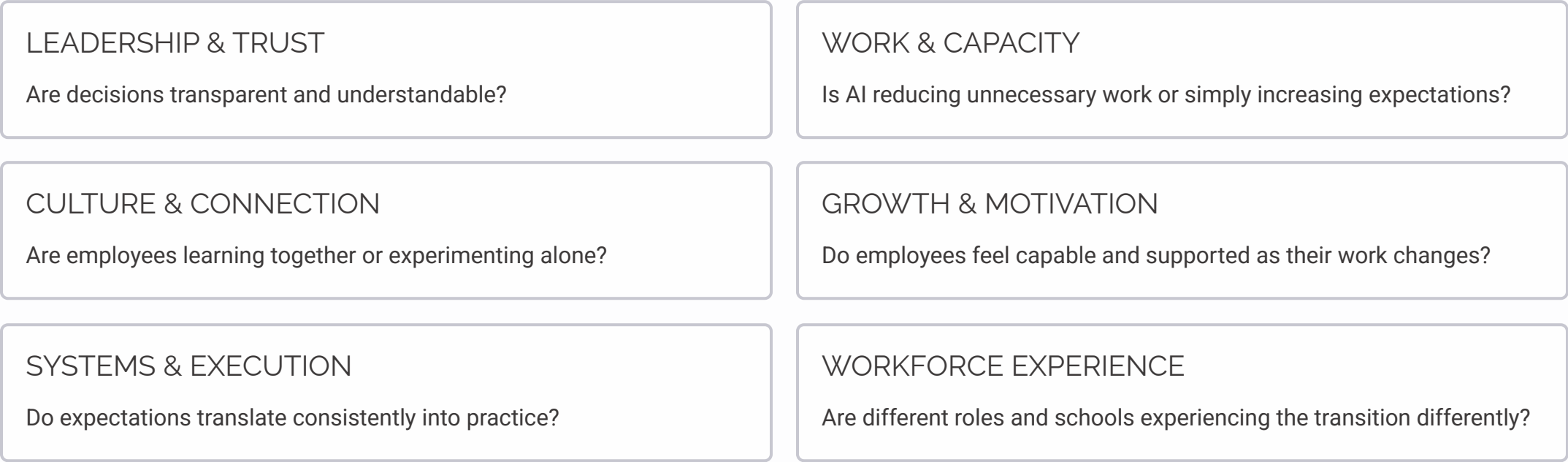


📄 **✓ LEADER RESPONSE:** Track what happens to recovered time. If AI-generated efficiency simply creates room for additional demands, the organization may gain productivity without improving employee capacity or workplace health.

Technology Changes Work. Leadership Shapes How That Change Is Experienced.



Six Domains of the AI-at-Work Framework



Warren Research conceptual synthesis. Not a validated diagnostic instrument.

☒ **LEADER RESPONSE:** Treat AI implementation as a workforce change initiative, not only a technology initiative. Monitor employee experience alongside adoption, training, policy compliance, and productivity.

What Should Leaders Be Watching?

What should leaders be watching now?

CLARITY

WATCH FOR: Conflicting interpretations, repeated questions, school-by-school rules.

ASK: Where has professional autonomy become organizational ambiguity?

AUTONOMY & TRUST

WATCH FOR: Employees hiding AI use, fear of experimentation, excessive approval requirements.

ASK: Do employees have room to learn while understanding the boundaries?

ACCOUNTABILITY

WATCH FOR: AI-generated work accepted without review, unclear ownership, completion confused with learning.

ASK: What human responsibility must remain regardless of AI assistance?

WORK & CAPACITY

WATCH FOR: Time savings paired with rising workload, training becoming another demand, uneven benefits.

ASK: Is AI making work healthier or simply making more work possible?

SYSTEMS & EXECUTION

WATCH FOR: Different rules, unofficial workarounds, inconsistent training, major school-to-school variation.

ASK: Where is appropriate flexibility becoming organizational fragmentation?

❏ *This framework is a conceptual synthesis based on the evidence reviewed. It is not a diagnostic instrument.*

Questions Worth Asking Now

Before acting on AI, what do you actually know?

- 1 What are our teachers actually using AI for?
- 2 What are our students actually using AI for?
- 3 Where is AI supporting human work — and where might it be replacing it?
- 4 What must students demonstrate regardless of AI assistance?
- 5 What remains the teacher's professional responsibility regardless of AI use?
- 6 Can employees explain our AI boundaries without opening the policy?
- 7 Where have we intentionally preserved teacher autonomy?
- 8 How are we monitoring implementation without creating a surveillance culture?
- 9 Where is AI reducing workload, and what happens to the time it saves?
- 10 What evidence would tell us that AI is improving teaching, learning, or workplace health?

AI CAN CHANGE THE WORK.

LEADERSHIP SHAPES HOW THAT CHANGE IS EXPERIENCED.

AI presents K–12 leaders with two legitimate responsibilities. Schools must prepare students and educators for a world in which artificial intelligence is increasingly part of how work is performed. They must also protect the learning, professional judgment, relationships, and human responsibility that technology should support rather than replace.

Those goals do not require leaders to choose between innovation and accountability. Healthy organizations establish clear boundaries, preserve professional autonomy, listen to employees, measure what matters, and adjust as evidence develops.

AI can assist the work. Students must still learn. Teachers must still exercise professional judgment. And leaders must create the organizational conditions in which all three can coexist.

THE GOAL IS NOT MAXIMUM AI USE.

IT IS RESPONSIBLE AUTONOMY INSIDE A HEALTHY ORGANIZATION.

Research Notes & Sources

This issue synthesizes national research and survey evidence available through September 2026. Sources vary in methodology, sample population, timing, and unit of analysis. Findings should not be interpreted as describing every school or district.

RESEARCH NOTES

Warren Research synthesized publicly available national research and survey evidence available through September 2026. The underlying studies use different populations, samples, questions, methodologies, and data periods and should not be interpreted as one combined dataset. All findings are descriptive unless explicitly stated otherwise. Do not infer causation from descriptive survey evidence. AI technology and patterns of use are changing rapidly. Findings reflect the evidence available at time of publication. Warren Research frameworks are conceptual syntheses and have not been validated as diagnostic instruments.

PRIMARY SOURCES

1. **Education Week Research Center.** Teacher AI use surveys, 2023–2026.
2. **Walton Family Foundation–Gallup.** *Teaching for Tomorrow: Closing the Expectations Gap.* 2026. N = 2,069 U.S. public K–12 teachers.
3. **Walton Family Foundation–Gallup.** *Teaching for Tomorrow: Unlocking Six Weeks a Year With AI.* 2025.
4. **Common Sense Media / Youth AI Safety Institute.** Nationally representative survey of U.S. teens. 2026.
5. **Gallup.** Teacher AI use by task data, 2025–2026.

Education Week Research Center <i>Teacher AI Use Surveys</i> 2023–2026	Walton Family Foundation–Gallup <i>Teaching for Tomorrow: Closing the Expectations Gap</i> 2026 · N = 2,069 U.S. public K–12 teachers	Walton Family Foundation–Gallup <i>Teaching for Tomorrow: Unlocking Six Weeks a Year With AI</i> 2025	Common Sense Media / Youth AI Safety Institute <i>Nationally Representative Survey of U.S. Teens</i> 2026
Gallup <i>Teacher AI Use by Task Data</i> 2025–2026			