



2026 | TEENS IN THE AI ERA

Schoolwork and Skills That Matter

COMMON SENSE MEDIA IS GRATEFUL FOR THE GENEROUS SUPPORT
AND UNDERWRITING THAT FUNDED THIS RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

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Overview

As artificial intelligence (AI) tools have moved from novelty to fixture in many American homes, questions about their role in learning have become urgent for parents and caregivers, teachers, and policymakers alike. This report focuses specifically on how teens use artificial intelligence for schoolwork, setting aside entertainment and free-time use. It builds on our prior research, [The Common Sense Media Census: AI Use by Tweens and Teens \(2026\)](#), which looks at how tweens and teens interact with AI in their daily lives. This report focuses on the specific role of AI in schoolwork and includes both in-class and take-home use. We provided background to participants that this includes use while in the classroom and outside of the classroom as long as it is for schoolwork.

In the survey, we defined an **AI tool** as a website or app that simulates human intelligence to solve problems, generate content, analyze data, and/or automate tasks.

This nationally representative survey about teens' experiences with AI for schoolwork was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago. Interviews for this survey were conducted from April 30 to May 14, 2026, with 1,017 teenagers age 13 to 17 representing the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

The research suggests that AI has become a routine part of how teens approach schoolwork, used nearly as often to get direct answers as it is to brainstorm or check work. The findings also point to some significant gaps: Many teens don't understand their school's AI rules, and many say literacy and safety have been largely absent as topics in classrooms.



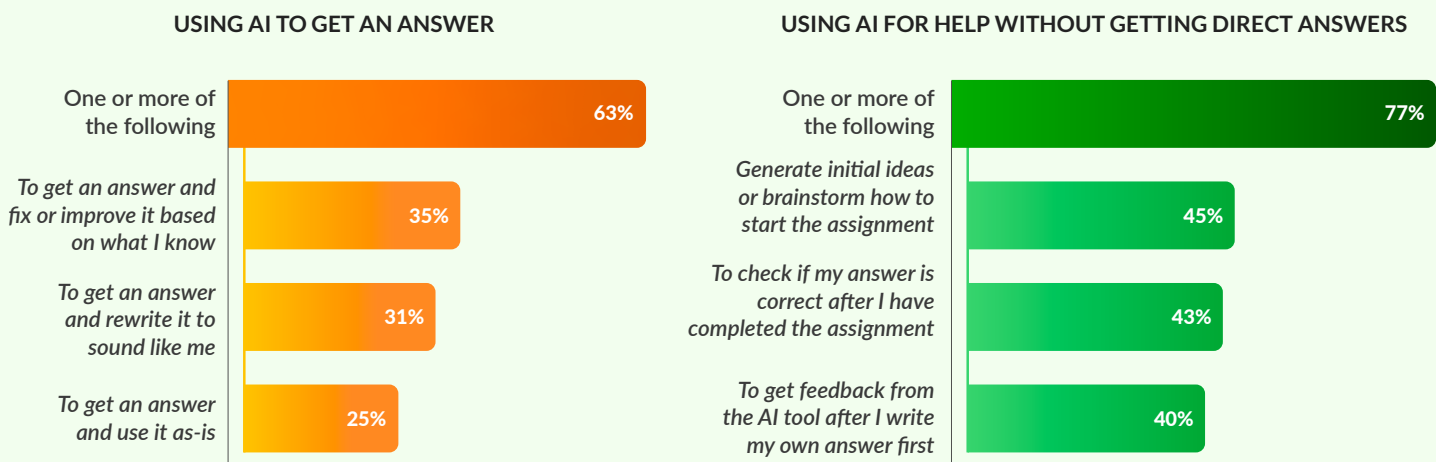
Key Findings

1. Among teens who use AI, 63% say they get an answer to their schoolwork from AI.

Overall, 7 in 10 teens (70%) say they are using AI tools for schoolwork. More than 6 in 10 (63%) teens who use AI say they get an answer to their schoolwork from it in one or more of the following ways: 35% get an answer and fix or improve it based on what they know, 31% get an answer and rewrite it to sound like them, and 25% get an answer from AI and use it as-is.

Teens are also turning to AI to start their schoolwork or to check their work once it is completed. More than three quarters (77%) of teens who use AI say they use it for help without getting direct answers in one of the following ways: 45% generate initial ideas or brainstorm how to start the assignment, 43% check if their answer is correct after they have completed the assignment, and 40% get feedback after they write their own answer first.

FIGURE 1:
How teens are using AI tools for schoolwork



Q: In what ways do you use an AI tool for schoolwork? (Please select all that apply.)
Base: Teens who use AI for schoolwork (n=665).



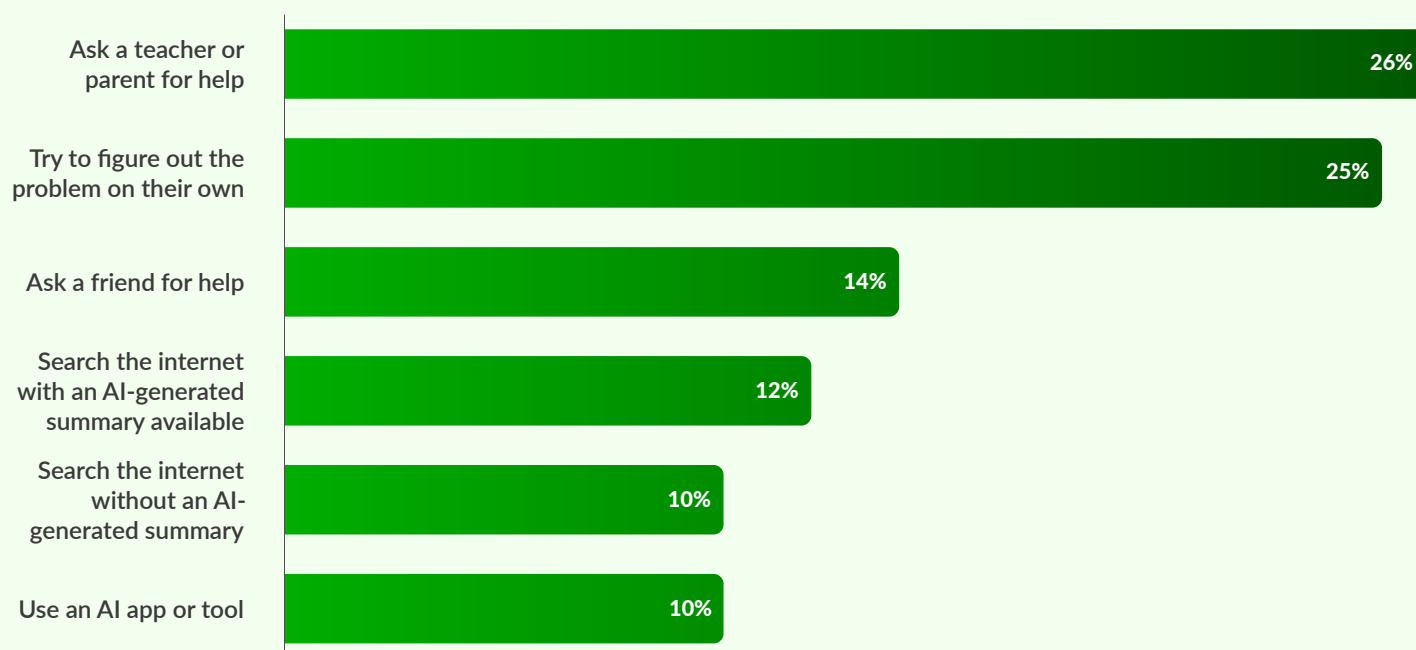
2.

Nearly two thirds of teens (65%) first try to solve problems themselves or ask someone for help when stuck on schoolwork, rather than using AI. One in 10 say they use an AI app or tool first.

Over a quarter of teens say they ask a teacher or parent for help (26%), and a similar share try to figure out the problem on their own (25%). More than 1 in 10 (14%) report asking a friend for help. Over 1 in 10 (12%) say the first thing they do is search the internet with an AI-generated summary available. One in 10 say they search the internet without an AI-generated summary first (10%), and 1 in 10 say they use an AI app or tool first (10%).

FIGURE 2:

Where teens turn first when they're stuck on schoolwork



Q: What is the first thing you usually do when you are stuck on your schoolwork? (Select one.)

Base: Teens age 13 to 17 (N=1,017).



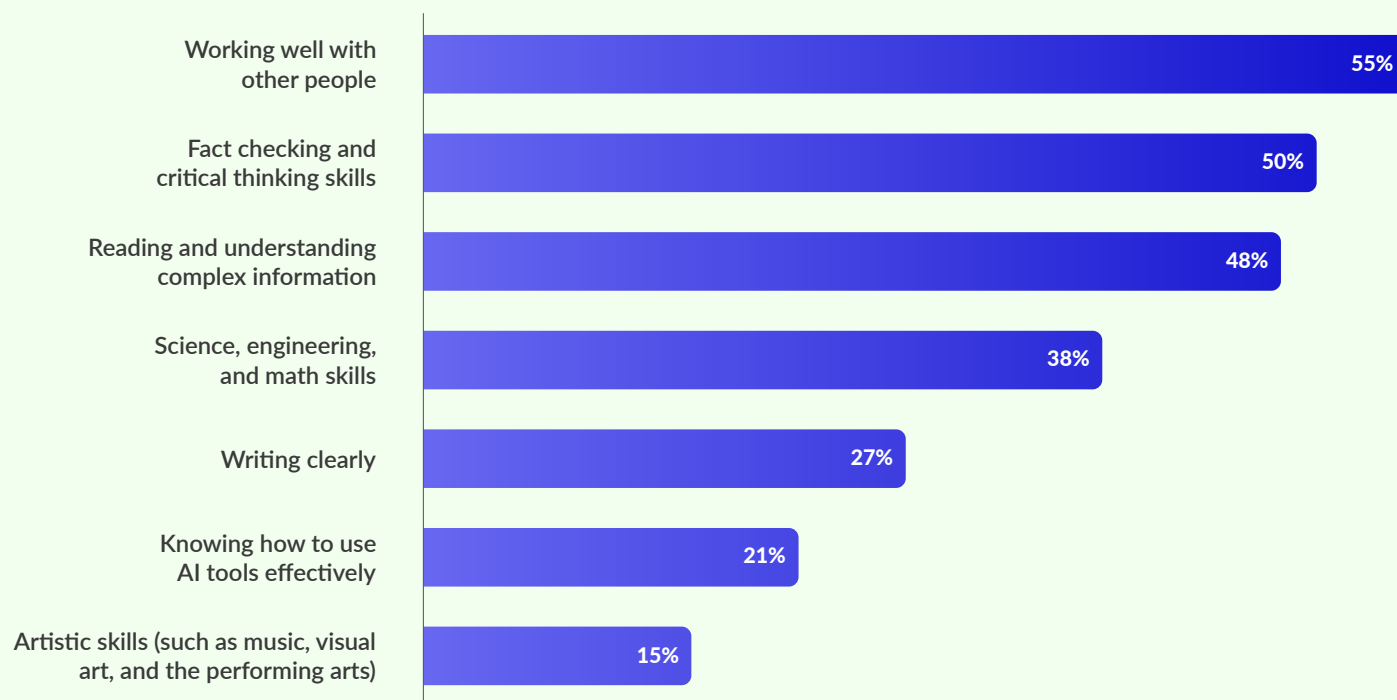
3.

The top three skills teens think will matter most for their future as an adult are social skills, fact checking/critical thinking skills, and understanding complex information.

We asked teens to select the top three skills that they think will matter most for their future as an adult. More than half of teens (55%) say that working well with other people will matter most for their future. Half of teens (50%) say fact checking and critical thinking skills, and just under half (48%) say reading and understanding complex information will matter most for their future. One in five teens (21%) believe that knowing how to use AI tools effectively will matter the most. Among teens who use AI for schoolwork, three skills were rated significantly higher compared to teens who do not: 1.) science, engineering, and math skills (41% vs. 32%), 2.) fact checking and critical thinking skills (31% vs. 19%), and 3.) knowing how to use AI tools effectively (18% vs. 3%).

FIGURE 3:

Skills that teens say will matter most for their future



Q. Which three skills do you think will matter most for your future as an adult? (Please select 3.)
Base: Teens age 13 to 17 (N=1,017).



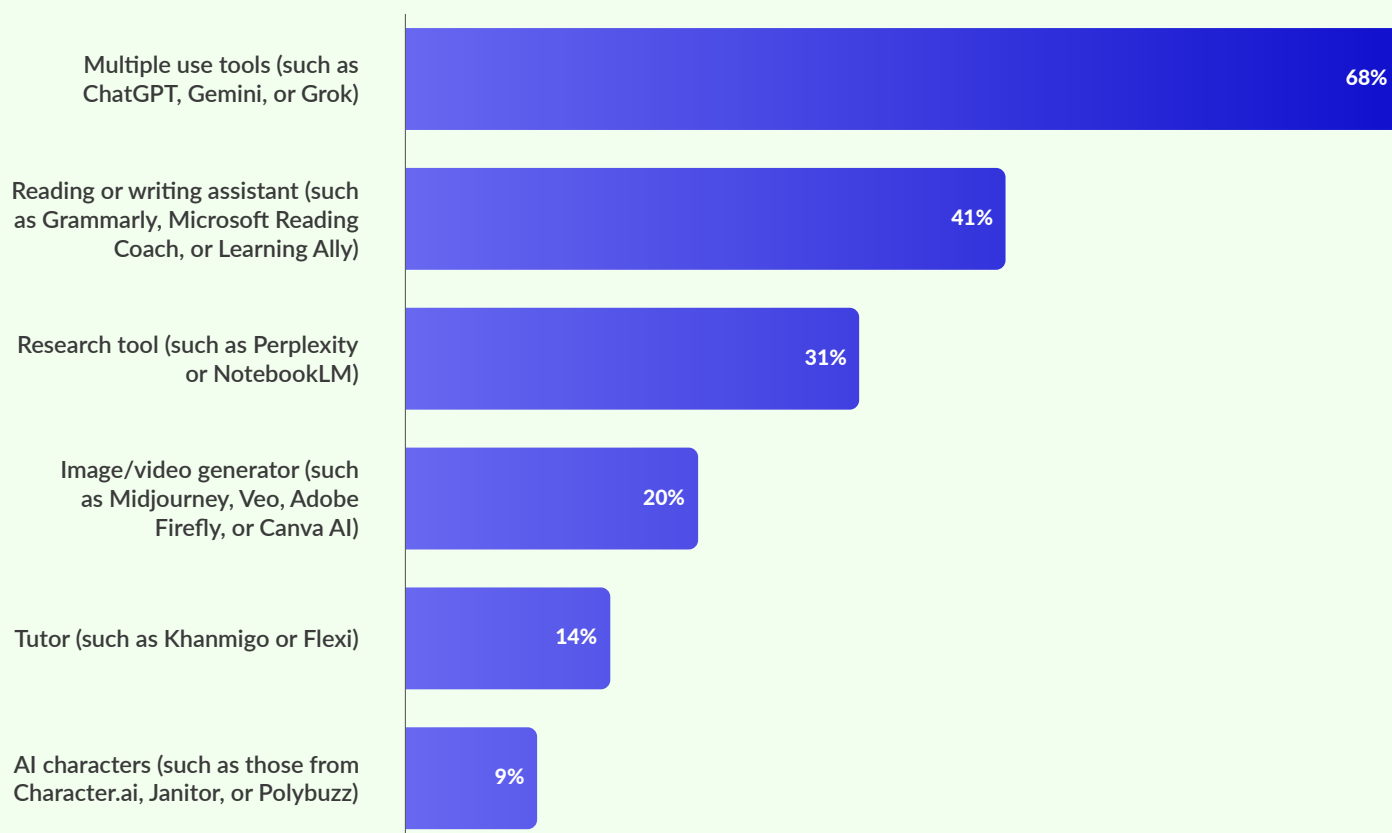
4.

More than two thirds of teens (68%) use multi-purpose tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, or Grok for schoolwork, more than any other type of AI tool.

Among those who use AI for schoolwork, nearly 7 in 10 (68%) use multi-purpose tools (such as ChatGPT, Gemini, or Grok), and 4 in 10 (41%) report using a reading or writing assistant (such as Grammarly, Microsoft Reading Coach, or Learning Ally). Nearly one third (31%) say they use a research tool (such as Perplexity or NotebookLM), and one in five (20%) report using image or video generators (such as Midjourney, Veo, Adobe Firefly, or Canva AI). Tutors (such as Khanmigo and Flexi) are used by 14%, and AI characters or companions (such as those provided by Character.ai, Janitor, or Polybuzz) are used by only 9%.

FIGURE 4:

Top AI tools used for schoolwork among AI users age 13 to 17



Q. When it comes to schoolwork (not entertainment), which of the following do you use AI for? (Please select all that apply.)

Base: Teens who use AI for schoolwork (n=665).



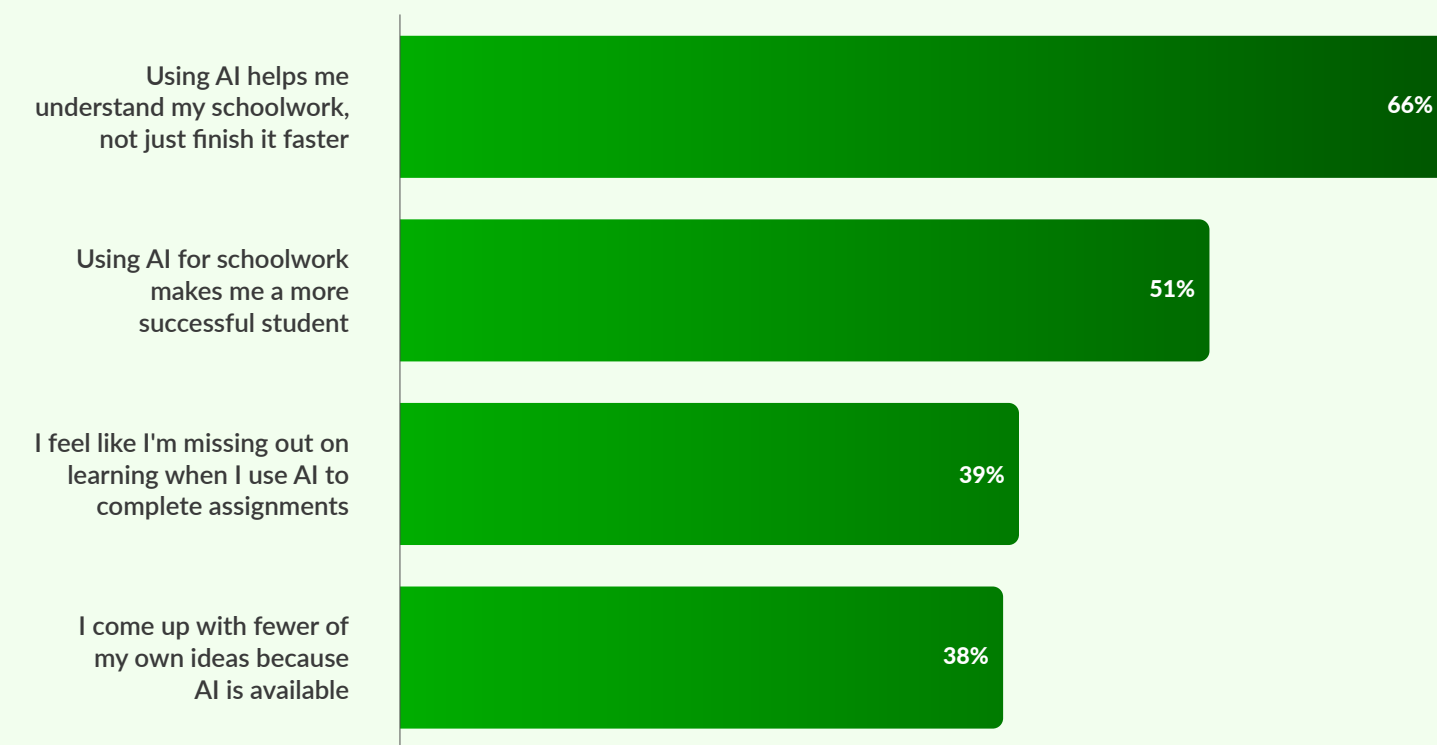
5.

Two thirds of teens (66%) agree that using AI helps them understand their schoolwork, not just finish it faster.

However, teens have mixed feelings about what it means to use AI for schoolwork, as almost 4 in 10 (38%) say that having AI available leads them to generate fewer of their own ideas. Half of teens (51%) say that using AI for schoolwork makes them a more successful student. Nearly 4 in 10 (39%) feel like they are missing out on learning when they use AI to complete assignments.

FIGURE 5:

Teen attitudes toward using AI for schoolwork



Q. Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Base: Teens who use AI for schoolwork (n=665).

Note: Percentages represent those who said they strongly agree or somewhat agree with the statements.



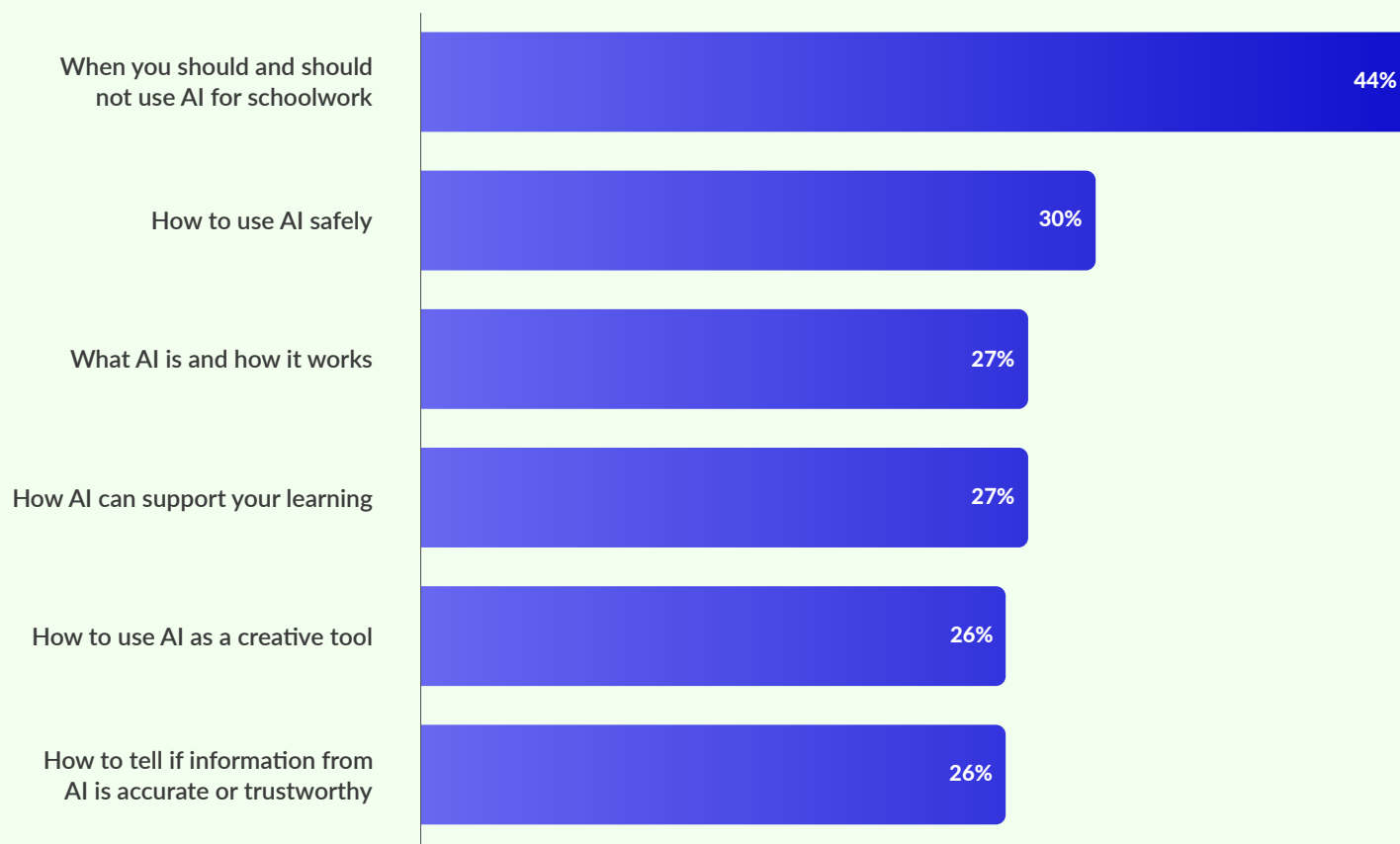
6.

Most teens (73%) are missing out on key AI literacy conversations with their teachers.

Of all the AI topics that teens discuss with teachers, the most common is rules about when they should and should not use AI for schoolwork, although only 44% say a teacher has ever discussed this. Three in 10 (30%) report ever discussing how to use AI safely (70% have not). Just over a quarter say they have discussed what AI is or how it works (27%) and how AI can support their learning (27%). Similarly, just over a quarter have ever discussed with a teacher how to use AI as a creative tool (26%) or how to tell if information from AI is accurate or trustworthy (26%).

FIGURE 6:

AI discussions with a teacher in class



Q. Which of the following has a teacher ever discussed in class? (Please select all that apply.)

Base: Teens age 13 to 17 (N=1,017).



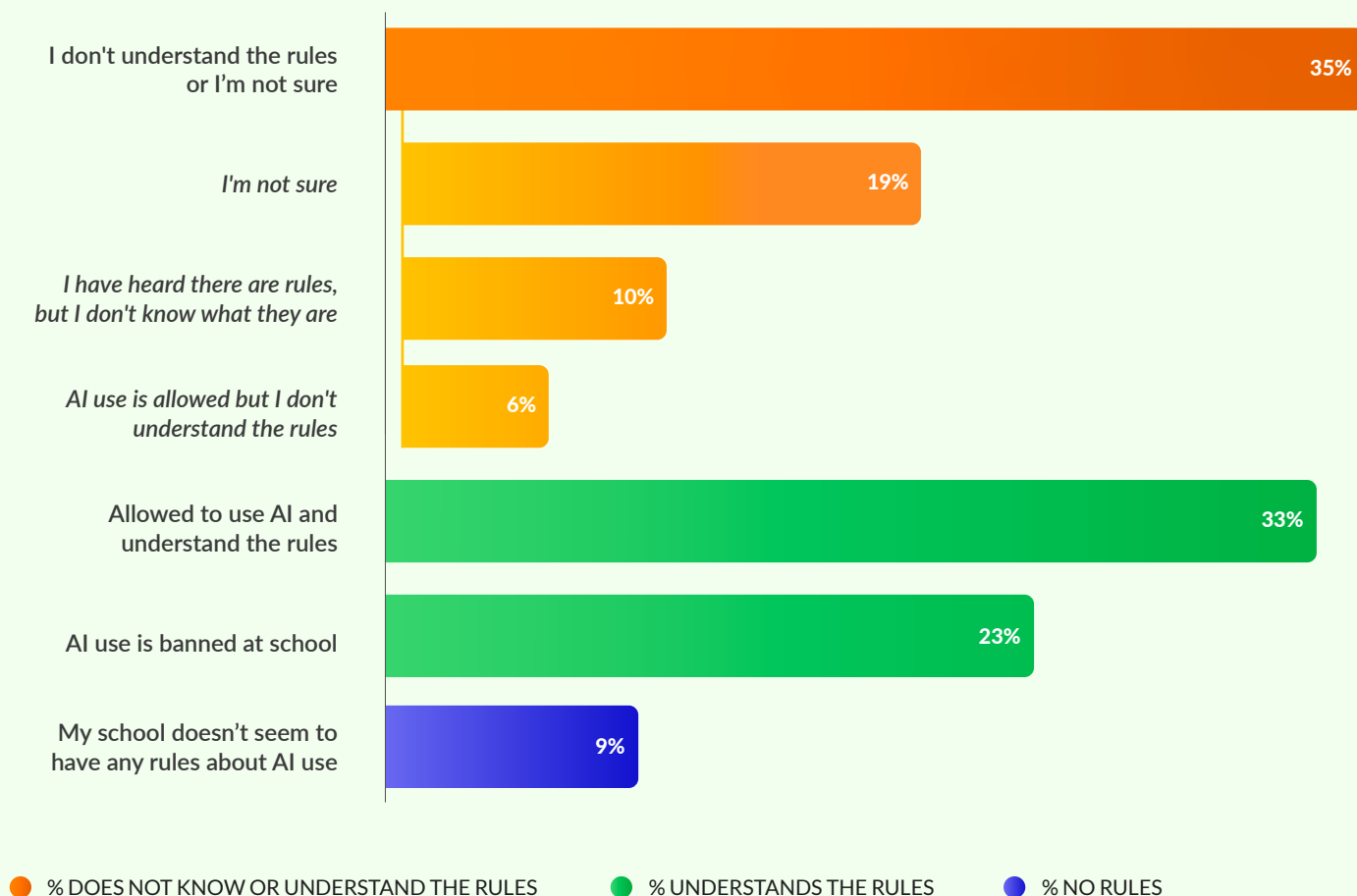
7.

More than one third of teens (35%) do not understand their school's rules around AI use.

More than one third of teens (35%) say one of the following: 1.) AI use is allowed but they don't understand the rules, 2.) they have heard there are rules, but they don't know what they are, or 3.) they're not sure. One in three teens (33%) say they are allowed to use AI and they understand the rules. Almost a quarter (23%) say AI use is banned at their school. Nearly 1 in 10 (9%) say their school doesn't seem to have any rules about AI use.

FIGURE 7:

School rules around AI use



Q. Which of the following best describes your school's rules about AI use? (Select one.)

Base: Teens age 13 to 17 (N=1,017).



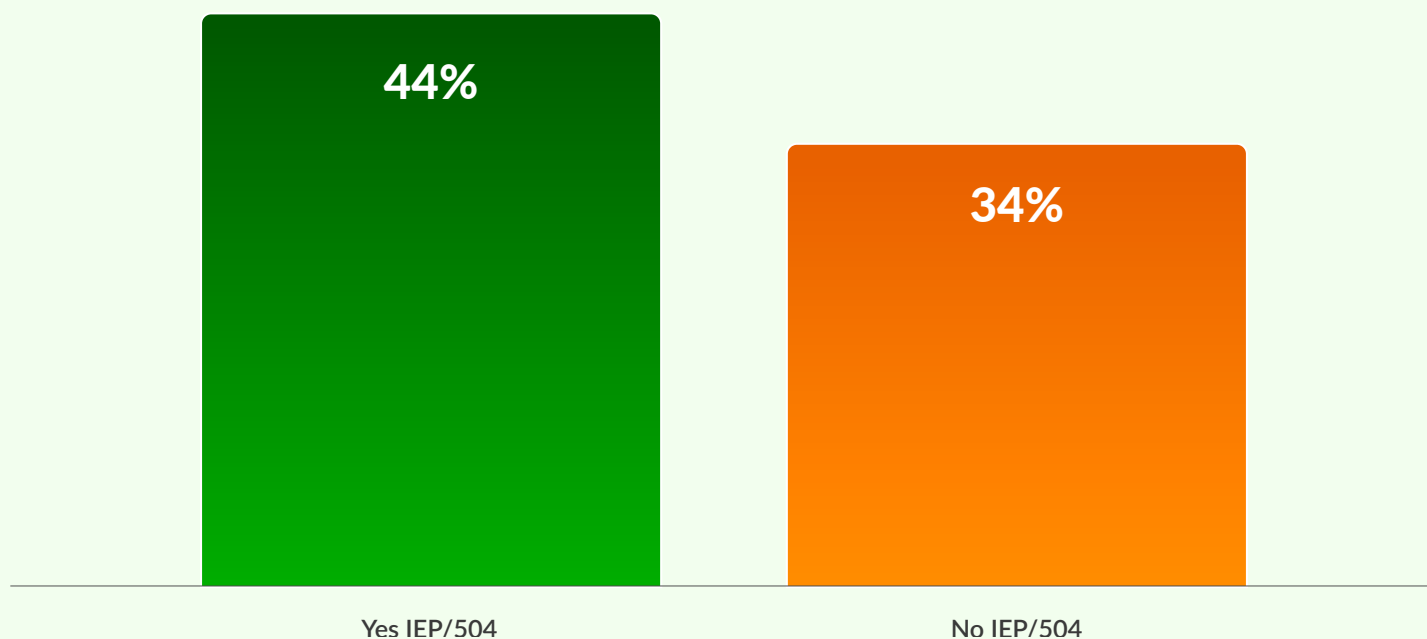
8.

Teens with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan are more likely to customize AI tools for their learning needs than those without one.

In the full sample, 22% of teens report having an IEP or 504 plan, 52% say they do not, and 24% are unsure. Among teens who report having an IEP or 504 plan, 44% say they are setting up or adjusting AI tools based on their specific learning needs. More than a third (34%) of those without an IEP or 504 plan say they are also setting up or adjusting AI tools for schoolwork based on their specific learning needs.

FIGURE 8:

Setting up or adjusting AI tools based on specific learning needs



Q. Have you done or experienced either of the following?

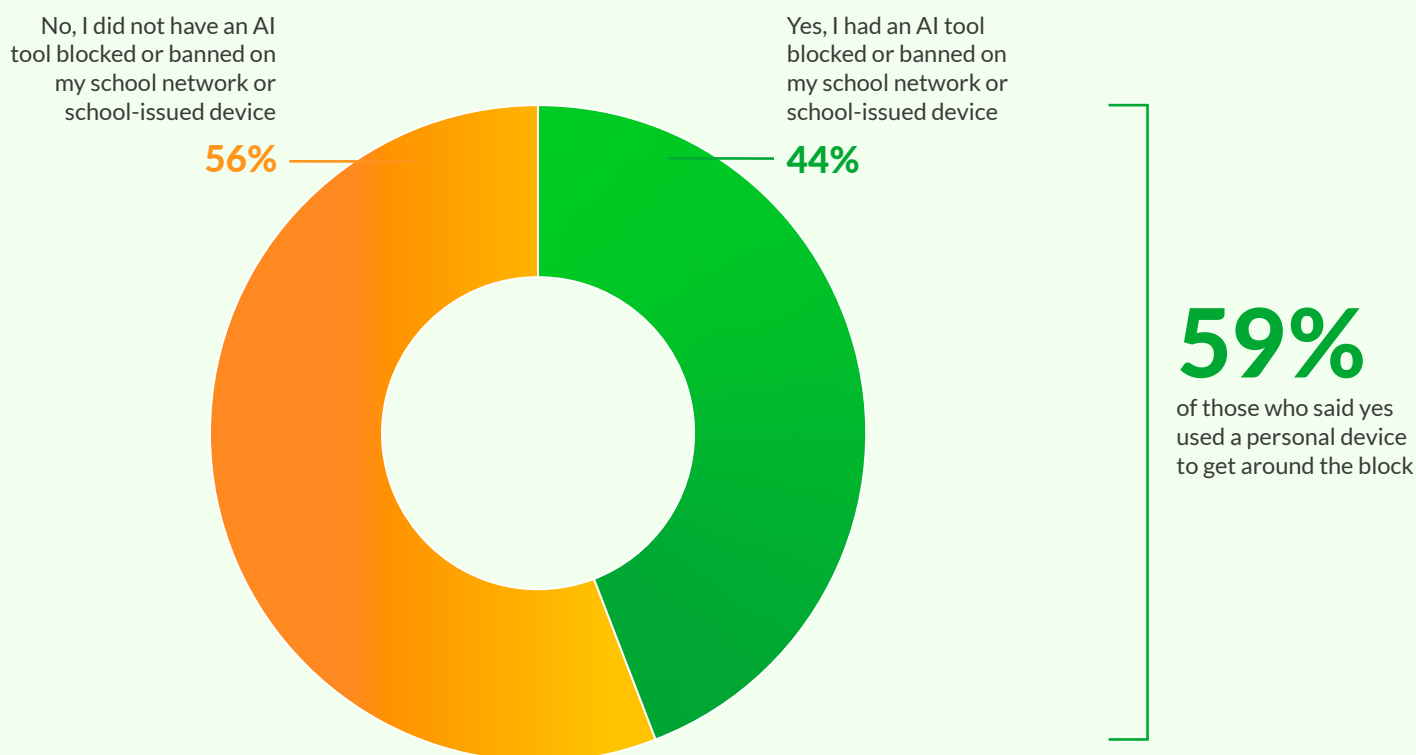
Set up or adjusted an AI tool for schoolwork based on your specific learning needs (such as customizing for notetaking, audio narration, transcription, or translation).

Base: Teens who reported they do or do not have an IEP or 504 plan (n=749).



9.

Nearly half (44%) of teens who use AI for schoolwork had an AI tool blocked or banned on a school network or school-issued device, and when that happened, more than half (59%) used a personal device to access it instead.

FIGURE 9:**Having an AI tool blocked or banned on a school network or school device**

Q. Have you done or experienced either of the following?

Had an AI tool blocked or banned on your school network or school-issued device.

Q. When this happened, did you use a personal device, like your phone or personal laptop, to access AI instead?

Base: Teens who use AI for schoolwork (n=665).



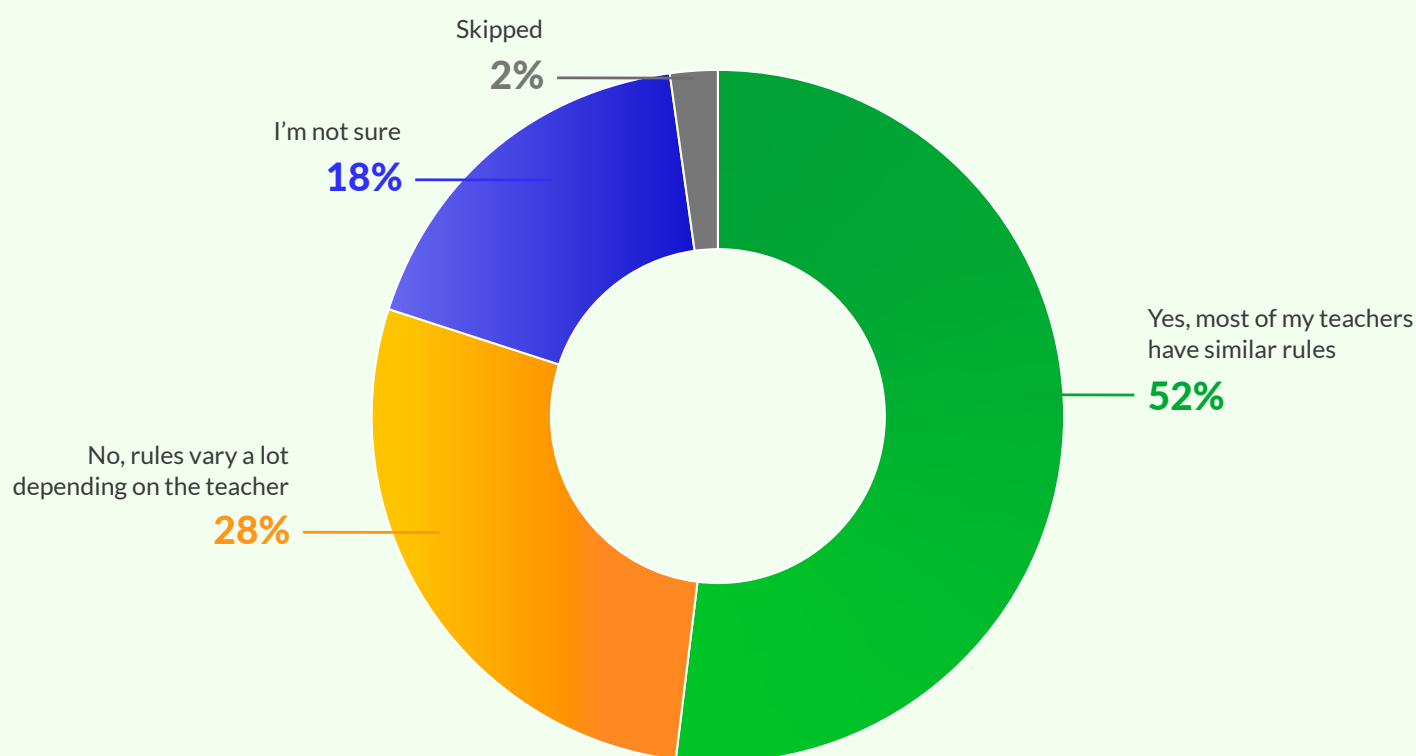
10.

Over half of teens (52%) say most of their teachers have similar rules about how AI can be used for schoolwork, while more than a quarter (28%) say the rules vary a lot.

Just over half of teens (52%) say their teachers have similar rules to each other about whether AI can be used for schoolwork. More than a quarter of teens (28%) say the rules vary a lot depending on the teacher. One in five say they are not sure (18%) or did not respond (2%).

FIGURE 10:

Teacher rules about AI use for schoolwork



Q. Do your teachers generally have similar rules about how AI can be used for schoolwork? (Select one.)

Base: Teens age 13 to 17 (N=1,017).





Overview: The Cardiovascular System

The cardiovascular system consists of the heart, blood vessels, and blood. The heart is a muscular organ responsible for pumping blood through the circulatory system. It has four chambers: the right atrium and right ventricle, which form the right heart, and the left atrium and left ventricle, which form the left heart. The heart's structure ensures that blood flows in one direction, preventing backflow. The right ventricle pumps blood to the lungs, while the left ventricle pumps blood to the rest of the body. The blood vessels are divided into arteries, which carry blood away from the heart, and veins, which carry blood back to the heart. The capillaries are the smallest blood vessels, where the exchange of oxygen and nutrients occurs.

The cardiovascular system is divided into two main circulation systems and pathways. The pulmonary circulation carries deoxygenated blood from the right ventricle through the lungs to the left atrium, where it is oxygenated. The systemic circulation carries oxygenated blood from the left ventricle to the rest of the body. The blood returns to the right atrium, completing the cycle. The heart's electrical system regulates the heart's contractions. The sinoatrial node (SAN) initiates the electrical impulse, which travels through the atria, causing them to contract. The impulse then travels to the atrioventricular node (AVN), which delays the impulse before it travels to the ventricles, causing them to contract.

The heart's electrical system regulates the heart's contractions. The sinoatrial node (SAN) initiates the electrical impulse, which travels through the atria, causing them to contract. The impulse then travels to the atrioventricular node (AVN), which delays the impulse before it travels to the ventricles, causing them to contract. The heart's electrical system is composed of specialized cells that generate and conduct electrical impulses. The sinoatrial node is the primary pacemaker, setting the heart's rhythm. The atrioventricular node acts as a secondary pacemaker, and the bundle of His and Purkinje fibers conduct the impulses to the ventricles, causing them to contract.

Cardiac muscle, or myocardium, has unique properties: automaticity (ability to generate its own electrical impulses), excitability (responsiveness to stimuli), conductivity (ability to transmit impulses), and contractility (ability to contract forcefully). The coronary arteries supply oxygenated blood to the myocardium, and any obstruction can lead to myocardial ischemia or infarction (heart attack).

Physiology: The Respiratory System
The respiratory system facilitates gas exchange, allowing oxygen to be inhaled and carbon dioxide to be exhaled. It consists of the trachea (windpipe), bronchi, bronchioles, and alveoli. The trachea is the main airway, branching into the bronchi, which lead to the bronchioles, and finally to the alveoli, where gas exchange occurs. The diaphragm and intercostal muscles are involved in the mechanics of breathing. The diaphragm contracts and moves down, increasing the volume of the thoracic cavity and drawing air into the lungs. The intercostal muscles contract, pulling the rib cage out and up, further increasing the volume of the thoracic cavity.

Discussion

AI has become a common schoolwork assistant for the majority of American teens. These findings highlight both challenges and opportunities. Among the 70% of teens who say they are using AI for schoolwork, nearly two thirds say they use AI to get an answer to their schoolwork, a finding that is concerning for teens' learning and skill development.

Getting an answer from AI is not a single behavior. Rather, it occurs on a spectrum. At one end, 35% of teens get an answer and then fix or improve it based on what they already know. At the other end, 31% get an answer and rewrite it to sound like them, and 25% get an answer and use it as-is. While the first of these options seems more benign (a student checking the AI's work against their own understanding is doing more thinking than just copying and pasting), all are variations of answers that originate with AI and not the student. Even with the “best” version, the cognitive work of arriving at an answer is outsourced before students engage independently.

Other research indicates that this matters for learning. For example, an experiment with high school students found that multi-purpose generative AI can harm learning outcomes, while AI models specifically designed to tutor, rather than provide answers, led to both higher grades and more retention (Bastani et al., 2025). Faster completion often comes at the cost of the knowledge that students build (Rismanchian et al., 2026). It has also been suggested that compressing the distance from question to answer within an instant summary could undermine curiosity, a state in which the brain is especially receptive to learning (Le Cunff, 2026).

These outcomes are occurring alongside other AI design choices that may also be undermining learning. Common Sense Media's [recent testing](#) of Google's AI Mode within Google Search found that it completed 100% of the homework assignments it was given. In our [prior research](#) (O'Neil et al., 2026), we found that three-quarters of American teens and tweens have ever used or interacted with the AI summaries in search results. In this study, 12% of teens say that when they are stuck on schoolwork, the first thing that they usually do is search the internet with an AI-generated summary available. Additionally, among teens who use AI for schoolwork, 45% say that they use AI



for generating initial ideas or brainstorming. This practice may make starting homework less challenging by reducing friction in the moment, but could undermine two key skills: initiation of challenging tasks and flexible thinking that generates new ideas. These skills are important aspects of executive functioning, which is still developing in the teenage years and helps with planning, focusing, and following through with tasks. Among AI users in this survey, nearly 4 in 10 teens say that with AI available, it is harder to generate their own ideas. More research is needed to better understand the impacts of using AI as a tool early in the process of completing schoolwork and whether it may result in less ownership of ideas among students who use it in this way.

At the same time, the data does not support a simple story in which teens are usually looking to make AI do their work for them. For example, more than three-quarters of teens (77%) also say they use AI for help with schoolwork without getting direct answers, including to check their work. While this double-checking may be in the interest of being a careful student, we should also consider the possibility that it is driven by the pressures that teens are under. In our 2024 report [Unpacking Grind Culture in American Teens](#) (Weinstein et al., 2024), the majority of high schoolers reported feeling pressure to have their life plan figured out or to achieve exceptional grades, and that parents and teachers are a main source of this pressure. In the context of academic competition and “grind culture,” using AI may feel less like cheating than what is needed to keep up. Additionally, the question of whether AI tools are both reliable and accurate in checking student work remains open.

As educators and policymakers weigh risks, we should be cautious about narratives that instinctively blame teens for using AI in schoolwork, and instead reflect on the larger culture and incentives that may underlie teens' drive to have AI double-check everything. We also heard from teens that nearly two thirds (65%) first try to solve problems themselves or ask someone for help when stuck on schoolwork, rather than turning to AI, though just over 1 in 10 say they use an AI app or tool first. One takeaway for teachers and parents is that they should intentionally communicate their availability to students, to reduce the perceived friction in asking for help.

Teens with learning needs (those who have an IEP or 504 plan) were more likely to say they customize AI tools to support their unique learning needs. This presents an area of potential for AI development, to deliver tailored support to youth with learning differences in reading, expressive writing, math,



or other types of communication challenges. This also carries a cautionary note for policy: Educational technology has often been at the forefront of identifying and delivering the accommodations that students need. Blanket bans and one-size-fits-all restrictions on AI, however well intentioned, risk cutting off tools that some students could benefit from. As schools set AI rules, they should be careful to not treat all students as if their needs are identical, and should reserve room for accommodations that can help students with different abilities. At the same time, a shift from broad, multi-purpose AI tools (which most teens in this survey reported using) to more purpose-built and rigorously tested tools will be essential.

When asked about what skills will matter the most in their adult future, teens told us that they think working well with others will matter the most. However, teen dependency on AI may be undermining this very skill, but adults both at school and at home can play a critical role in fostering collaboration and communication skills to help prepare them for the future. Multipurpose AI tools, particularly those that are anthropomorphized and infinitely available, do not teach kids to read social cues or handle conflict in a way that working with peers does.

Lastly, our findings suggest that this school year is a key time for teachers to talk about AI with students. Teens told us that they have most often discussed with a teacher the rules about when they should and should not use AI (44% said they have), but AI safety and literacy conversations are still lagging behind, with only 30% of teens saying they have talked about AI safety, and even fewer having discussed AI literacy topics (27%). Given that most AI tools were not built with children and their developmental needs in mind (Burns et al., 2026), it is important that we equip students with AI literacy skills and educators with the tools to support them.



Methodology

Data was collected using both probability and nonprobability sample sources, with the nonprobability sample integrated using a hybrid method designed to account for and reduce potential bias, producing more accurate population estimates. Interviews for this survey were conducted from April 30 to May 14, 2026, with teenagers age 13 to 17 representing the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

The probability sample source is the AmeriSpeak® Teen Omnibus, a quarterly multi-client survey using NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. teenage population. The survey was part of a larger study that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face to face). The National Sample Frame provides coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population. The U.S. Postal Service delivery-sequence file (DSF) and National Consumer Address File have been used in a subset of years as a supplemental sample during AmeriSpeak panel recruitment for low coverage states. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box-only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings.

Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak Teen, and 682 completed the online survey. Panel members were invited by email or by phone via standard text message. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive for completing the survey. The weighted household panel recruitment rate is 24.8% and the survey completion rate is 47.2%, for a weighted cumulative response rate of 11.7%.

Prodege provided 335 nonprobability interviews with teenagers age 13 to 17. The nonprobability sample was derived based on quotas related to age, race and ethnicity, gender, and education. Interviews were conducted in English and via the web only. For panel recruitment, Prodege uses invitations of all



types, including email invitations, phone alerts, banners, and messaging on panel community sites, to include people with a diversity of motivations to take part in research. Because nonprobability panels do not start with a frame where there is known probability of selection, standard measures of sampling error and response rates cannot be calculated.

Quality assurance checks were conducted to ensure data quality. In total, 15 interviews were removed for nonresponse to at least 50% of the questions asked of them, for completing the survey in less than one-third the median interview time for the full sample, or for straight-lining all grid questions asked of them. These interviews were excluded from the data file prior to weighting.

In order to incorporate the nonprobability sample, NORC used TrueNorth calibration, an innovative hybrid calibration approach developed at NORC in order to explicitly account for potential bias associated with the nonprobability sample. TrueNorth uses a tree-based non-parametric supervised learning algorithm to classify respondents based on their survey responses and apply a ratio adjustment to adjust the weights for the nonprobability sample to bring weighted distributions of the nonprobability sample in line with the population distribution for characteristics correlated with the survey variables. Such calibration adjustments help to reduce potential bias, yielding more accurate population estimates. A raking process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any noncoverage or under- and oversampling in both probability and nonprobability samples resulting from the study-specific sample design. Raking variables for both the probability and nonprobability samples included age, sex, Census region, race/ethnicity, and parents' highest education. Population control totals for the raking variables were obtained from the 2026 Current Population Survey. The weighted data reflects the U.S. population of people age 13 to 17.

The overall margin of error for the combined sample is +/- 4.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error, and there may be other unmeasured errors in this or any other survey.

Additional information on the TrueNorth approach can be found [here](#).



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About Common Sense Media and the Youth AI Safety Institute



The Common Sense Media Youth AI Safety Institute is a first-of-its-kind research and testing organization dedicated to ensuring the AI that children use is safe and developmentally appropriate. It sets safety standards, independently tests AI products, and disseminates the results.

Common Sense Media is the leading nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the research-backed information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in the age of apps, algorithms, and AI. We rate, educate, and advocate for policies to protect and prepare kids online. Our ratings, research, and resources reach more than 150 million users globally, over 1.4 million educators, and more than 100,000 schools worldwide every year. Learn more at commonsense.org/research.

