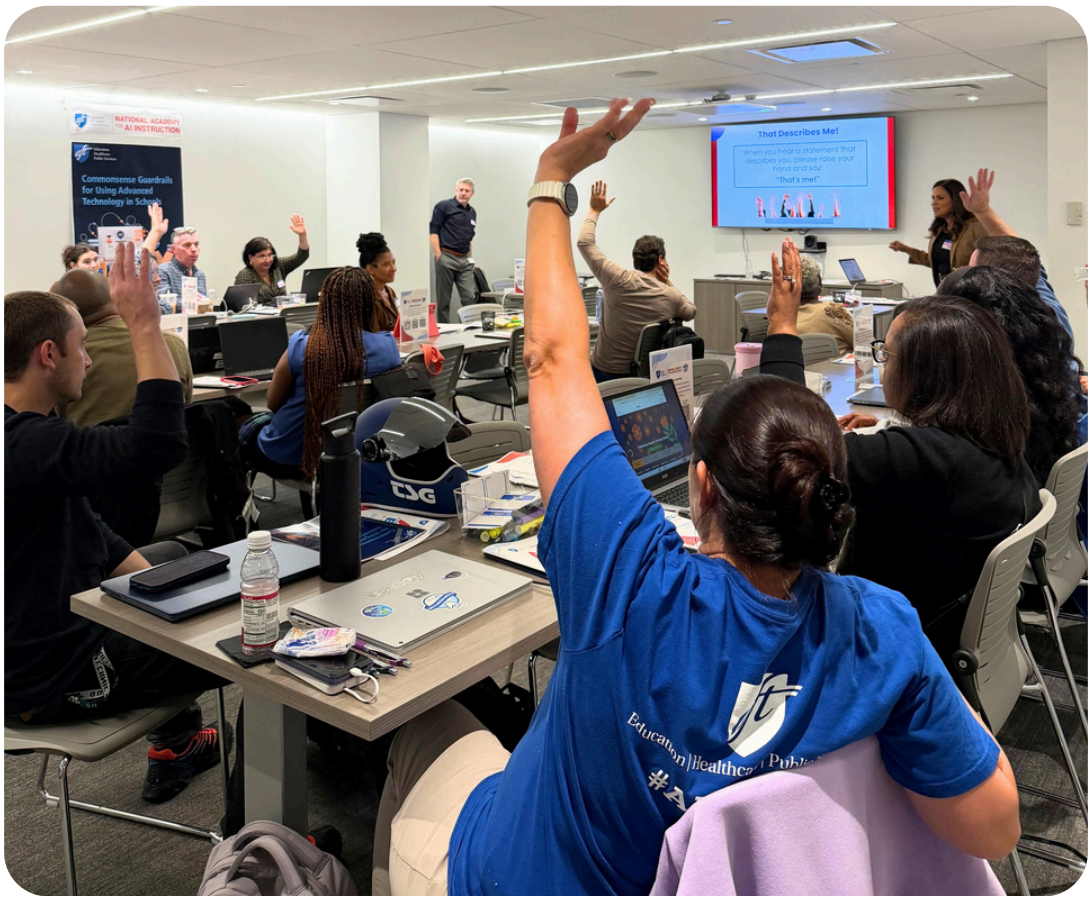
Education
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NATIONAL ACADEMY FOR AI INSTRUCTION

The AI Academy Brief

September 2026 · Issue #5



Insights, educator voices, and practical ideas from the National Academy for AI Instruction.

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Opening Message

As artificial intelligence continues to advance, the public conversation around it is changing quickly. New capabilities are emerging, experts are raising serious questions about where the technology is headed, and educators understandably want to know what those developments mean for schools.

Those questions make our work more important, not less. Educators need the knowledge to understand how AI works, the ability to evaluate the tools entering their classrooms, and a meaningful voice in decisions about how those tools are used. Students and families need clear protections and transparency about the technology they encounter in school.

It is also important to distinguish between the frontier AI systems driving many of today's headlines and the educational AI at the center of our work. The Academy is focused on helping educators understand and use AI designed for specific educational purposes, not experimental frontier models. That distinction does not eliminate the need for caution or strong safeguards, but it helps us focus on the risks and responsibilities that schools can, and must, address.

Our responsibility is to make sure educators are prepared to ask the right questions, establish appropriate boundaries, and help shape how AI is used in education. Giving teachers knowledge and voice is one of the strongest safeguards we can build as this technology continues to evolve.

Where We Stand

At the Academy, we believe schools should be able to benefit from useful technology without sacrificing student safety, privacy, or educator control. That starts with knowing what a tool does and holding technology providers accountable for how it operates. Student and educator data should not be used to train AI models, sold, or repurposed. Schools must retain control over how data is used, retained, and deleted. Families and educators deserve clear, accessible information about the technology being used, and consequential decisions must remain subject to human oversight.

These principles are at the heart of our National AI Safety & Privacy Standard for Schools. The standard moves beyond voluntary promises by establishing enforceable protections around privacy, safety, transparency, and control. Technology providers that want to operate in schools should be expected to meet that high bar. Our Academy partner Microsoft was the first company to sign on to the agreement.

But standards alone are not enough. Educators must have a meaningful role in decisions about how and when technology enters their classrooms. AI can support educators and students, but professional judgment and responsibility must remain with people.

We do not need to treat every AI tool as a frontier model to take its risks seriously. We need clear standards and boundaries that reflect how AI is used in education and the risks and responsibilities that come with it. That is how we make space for thoughtful uses of AI while keeping students, families, and educators protected.

Rob's Reflections

The AI in Our Schools Is Not "Frontier AI"

Headlines about artificial intelligence can be alarming. We hear about "frontier AI" becoming more powerful and experts debating risks that once belonged in science fiction. It is understandable that parents and teachers might connect those stories with AI in a classroom. But the AI used in schools is not the same thing as the frontier AI being discussed in the news. Frontier AI models are the most powerful, general-purpose AI systems available at a particular moment. The word "frontier" simply means the leading edge. And it is a moving line. It is experimental AI.

Educational AI has a much smaller and more controlled job. And it does not include frontier AI. It operates inside a controlled product designed for a particular educational purpose, with rules about what it can do and what information it can access.

Think of the difference between a jet engine and a school bus. A jet engine represents the cutting edge of speed and engineering, but that does not turn every vehicle with an engine into a jet. In the same way, a classroom program may use some of the technology developed through AI research without becoming an experimental frontier system.

That distinction matters because the risks are very different.

Discussions about frontier AI often focus on what could happen if extremely capable systems gained greater independence, helped people carry out dangerous activities or were deployed across society without proper safeguards. Schools usually face more immediate and familiar concerns. Is the answer accurate? Is student information protected? Does the program contain bias? Is it appropriate for the child's age? Does it support learning, or does it simply do the work for the student?

Those are all serious questions, but they are manageable questions. Of course, AI requires stronger review because it can generate new answers rather than merely display fixed content, but the basic responsibility remains the same. We must choose tools carefully, limit their access, protect student data, and keep a qualified educator in charge.

We should not let the dramatic stories about frontier AI prevent sensible uses of narrower educational tools. A calculator is not a mathematician, and an AI tutor is not a teacher. Used thoughtfully, AI can give students more opportunities to practice, help teachers spot areas of difficulty and reduce time spent on routine preparation.

The right question for a school is not simply, "Does this use AI?" It is, "What does this particular tool do, what information does it collect, what decisions can it influence, and who remains responsible?"

— Rob Weil, Chief Executive Officer of the National Academy for AI Instruction

Leaders Around the Table

Education leaders from 16 countries recently came together to share how AI is shaping education around the world. Despite differences in education systems, policies, and approaches to AI, many of the same challenges surfaced across the conversation—from protecting critical thinking and supporting educators to establishing clear guidelines and ensuring equitable access.

Keeping Human Thinking at the Center

Across countries, education leaders raised similar concerns about AI's impact on student thinking and learning. Cognitive offloading, overreliance on AI, assessment integrity, and maintaining critical thinking all surfaced in the conversation. While AI can support teaching and learning, leaders emphasized the importance of ensuring students continue to think critically, build foundational knowledge, and engage meaningfully in their learning.

Supporting Educators Through Change

Another shared challenge was ensuring educators have the support they need as AI becomes more prevalent in education. Leaders discussed gaps in training, limited time and capacity, and the difficulty of keeping pace with rapidly evolving technology. Across different education systems, the conversation reinforced the need to equip educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources to use AI thoughtfully and effectively.

Building Clear Guidelines

The need for clear and consistent guidelines was another common theme. While some education systems have established national frameworks, others are navigating a mix of local policies and evolving recommendations. Leaders highlighted the importance of creating guidelines that give educators clarity while allowing room for thoughtful, responsible use of AI in the classroom.

Leaders Around the Table

Making AI in Education Equitable

Equity emerged as another important concern across the conversation. Leaders discussed differences in access to AI tools, technology, training, and resources, as well as the risk that AI could widen existing gaps within education systems. The discussion underscored the importance of ensuring that advances in AI benefit all students and educators, regardless of where they learn or teach.

Alongside shared challenges, the conversation also highlighted promising approaches taking shape around the world. From educator-developed tools and professional learning to collaborative guidelines and new approaches to AI literacy, leaders shared ways their education systems are working to navigate AI responsibly. These examples offered an opportunity to learn from one another and showed the value of continued collaboration as AI's role in education evolves.





— AFT President Randi Weingarten takes part in a discussion with education leaders from around the world.

Voices from the Academy

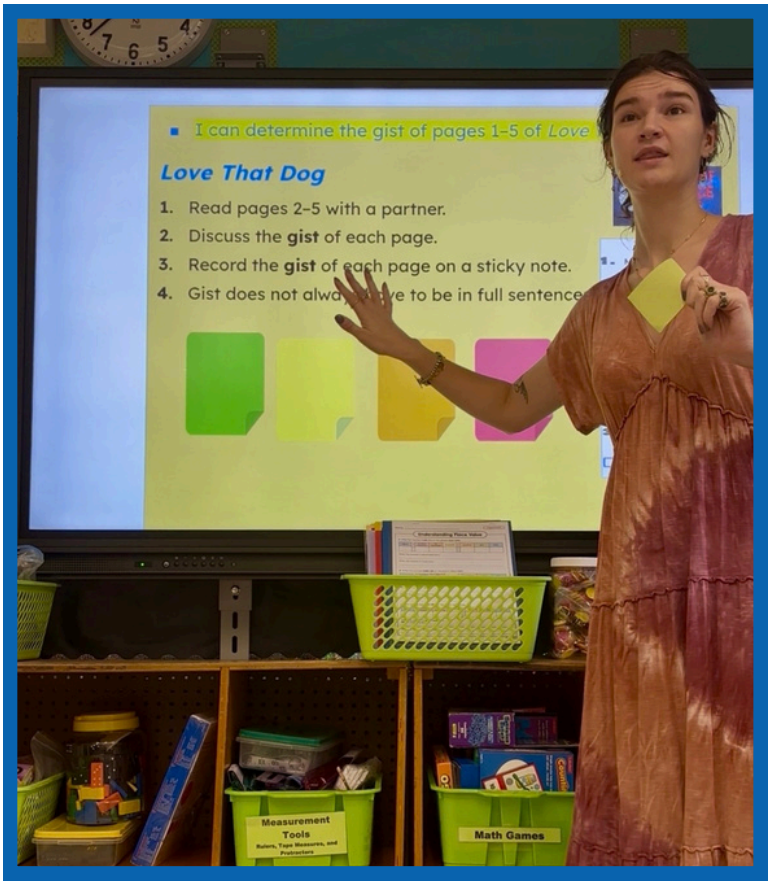
I am Eleanor Marcus, a special education teacher passionate about fostering critical thinking and a lifelong love of education for all, currently pursuing this at PS4 Duke Ellington Elementary School in a fourth grade ICT classroom. I was excited about the opportunity provided by the National Academy for AI Instruction to learn more about how to effectively and ethically incorporate technology and AI platforms into my classroom planning in order to support students in developing essential academic and life skills. I have honestly been hesitant about engaging too much with technology, both personally and in considering how doing this will affect my students. However, this opportunity excited me as I want to be more knowledgeable about how to use platforms in a way that would truly be beneficial. As we know, staying in the dark and avoiding things will not help anyone, as the reality is that technology and AI are here.

This means it is our responsibility as educators to understand technology and prepare our students to utilize it appropriately throughout their lifetimes. This session helped me understand what the actual risks are and how to incorporate technology in a way that does not take away from the essential human connection involved in education and also protect the privacy and well being of our students. Within this session I was able to grapple with in what ways technology allows us to provide a better and more targeted education to the needs of our diverse learners.

Voices from the Academy

It was also beneficial to be involved in this session along with colleagues that educate students in a variety of domains to hear how they use technology within their planning to take some of the hours off of the time we spend lesson planning, combing through data, creating slides etc. This allowed me to do some reflecting and remind myself that while the students are always going to be my priority, burnout is something we all need to consider as teachers, not only because it is important for ourselves but ultimately it will affect how we show up for our students.

We can utilize technology to protect that and provide even social and emotional support. I am so grateful that sessions like this are offered to us in order to achieve our ultimate goal as educators, to prepare our students to be successful and happy members of our ever evolving society.

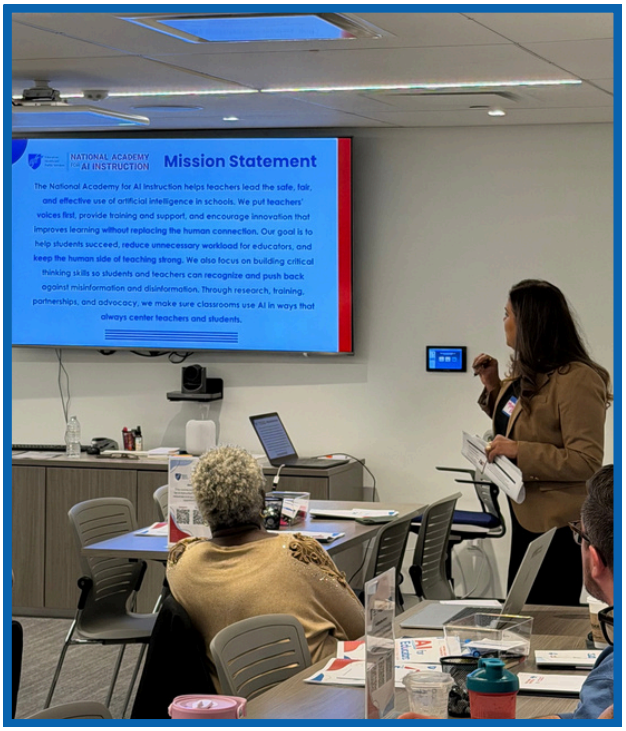


— Eleanor Marcus, Special Education Teacher
4th Grade ICT Classroom, P.S. 4 Duke Ellington Elementary School, Manhattan, NY

Academy Highlights









AI for Educators: A Foundational Guide
New York, NY • September 29, 2026

Upcoming Sessions

Explore upcoming virtual and in-person learning opportunities from the National Academy for AI Instruction.

The Academy offers both in-person and virtual sessions so educators can participate in the way that works best for them. We offer beginner and more advanced courses, so no matter your experience with AI, there is a training designed for you. Each session focuses on practical strategies you can apply right away.

aiinstruction.org

OCTOBER 6, 2026 · VIRTUAL
Access by Design: AI Tools for Accessible and Inclusive Instruction

OCTOBER 14, 2026 · IN PERSON
Empowering Every Learner: AI in Action for Diverse Classrooms

OCTOBER 16, 2026 · VIRTUAL
Critical Thinking in the Age of AI

OCTOBER 20, 2026 · VIRTUAL
AI for Educators: A Foundational Guide

OCTOBER 27, 2026 · VIRTUAL
Who's Doing the Thinking? AI, Cognitive Offloading, and What's at Stake?

OCTOBER 29, 2026 · IN PERSON
The Thinking Classroom: Navigating Critical Thinking and Cognitive Offloading in the Age of AI

Learn on Your Schedule

Can't make it to a live session? Explore the Academy's growing library of on-demand learning opportunities. Watch anytime, learn at your own pace, and **earn CTLE hours** while exploring topics ranging from AI foundations and critical thinking to cognitive offloading, accessibility, and more.

Featured On-Demand Sessions:

- AI for Educators: A Foundational Guide
- Who's Doing the Thinking? AI, Cognitive Offloading, and What's at Stake
- Empowering Every Learner: AI in Action for Special Education
- Critical Thinking in the Age of AI
- Empowering Voices: Unlocking Grade-Level Learning for English Learners with AI

Explore All On-Demand Sessions:



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Cranston Coaches Corner

AI must support student thinking. It must not replace it. Ask yourself one question before you bring AI into your classroom.

Who is doing the thinking: the student or the tool?

You want your students doing the hard work. AI provides fast feedback. It explains difficult concepts and organizes ideas. You get the most value when you force students to struggle with the material. Struggle builds memory and skill. For example, if a student uses AI to generate an outline for a history paper, they must still write the actual paragraphs themselves.

Ask these three questions when you design an assignment:

- *Before AI:* What must students attempt or create on their own first?
- *During AI:* Is the tool helping students revise and reflect, or is it producing the final answer?
- *After AI:* Can your students defend their ideas and complete a similar task without the tool?

A small shift in prompting changes the outcome. Teach your students to stop asking AI to write their responses. Show them how to prompt the tool for feedback instead. Have them use these exact phrases:

- "Ask me questions to improve my reasoning."
- "Give me feedback on my answer. Do not rewrite it."
- "Challenge my argument. Point out my weaknesses."
- "Find the flaw in my logic."

These prompts force the student to maintain ownership of their own work. They learn more when they do the actual fixing.

Technology changes fast. You need to stay current to teach effectively. The Cranston Coaches Corner newsletter shares updates on Google Workspace for Education, AI developments, classroom resources, instructional strategies, tech tips, and practical ideas teachers can use right away.

Click here to sign up for free.

