



AMERICAN
COMPASS

Making AI in Education Work for Kids

SETTING REAL STANDARDS FOR AI IN SCHOOLS

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

For-profit firms have **made billions** in recent years placing “education technology” in classrooms.

Yet education outcomes have plummeted.

Reading and math scores are at their lowest levels in decades, student mental health has declined, and soft skills have atrophied.

Despite this, AI firms are **pushing new, untested, and potentially harmful** EdTech tools on classrooms, risking student learning outcomes and well-being.

LEARNING FROM THE PAST

Nearly 50 million American children are enrolled in K-12 public schools. Few areas of federal policy will have more impact on the strength and flourishing of our nation than federal education policy. Yet over the past generation, we have largely allowed for-profit tech companies to set education policy, with screens becoming the conduit for a great deal of instruction and assessment. Far from improving outcomes, the educational results have been grim, with historically low scores and a genuine mental health crisis confronting American children. 80% of teachers, principals, and district leaders report that student behavior worsens when screen time increases.

We are at grave risk of repeating these mistakes on a larger scale with AI in the classroom. American policymakers must not confuse the legitimate goal of fostering AI literacy with the questionable goal of embedding AI in every aspect of classroom learning. The evidence suggests that student reliance on AI is accelerating the decline of basic cognitive and social skills. Current AI tools and systems are also prone to expose children to harmful and age-inappropriate content, and even to engage in criminal activity like the production of deepfake pornography. We must not allow unproven EdTech to flood our schools before its effectiveness and safety is clear.

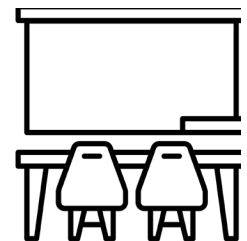
WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

The administration should establish a federal AI EdTech certification program, requiring any companies wishing to offer their AI products and services to school districts using federal funds to meet robust guidelines of **safety, transparency, and pedagogy.**

Congress should codify these requirements, enshrining them into law. The federal government is a major source of funding for public education: it must use its purchasing power to demand the **best returns for taxpayer money and the best outcomes for America's children.**

RESTORING STANDARDS

It is critical that our schools invest in AI education. But teaching students about AI does not mean using AI to teach in every case. Using AI in the classroom effectively requires careful forethought, creative pedagogy, and conscientious design. Our dynamic technology industry is capable of designing and deploying age-appropriate AI tools that can supplement the hard work of teachers and students, but it will not be incentivized to do so if outsized profits can be reaped by selling products that maximize engagement at the cost of learning outcomes.



The producers and sellers of AI educational tools need to be held to clear, high standards defined by policy. These standards should follow sound basic principles, including parental involvement, privacy protections, limits on screen time, teacher authority, and basic child safety.



FREQUENTLY RAISED OBJECTIONS

“We need to let the market drive innovation, not bureaucrats.”

Markets cater to customer preferences and habits; it is the task of educators to shape and mold students’ preferences and habits. Mass-marketed educational products will tend to respond to market demand by maximizing engagement through customization and gamification. That may generate profits, but it will not create successful learners. Nor is setting robust standards for outlays of federal dollars heavy-handed regulation—that’s just fiscal responsibility.

“We shouldn’t demonize businesses trying to improve education.”

Educational technology companies have a vital role to play in improving American education. But their financial incentives must be aligned with the right outcomes. The status quo, in which Big Tech rakes in billions selling tech to schools, even while 80% of “educational apps” send student data to advertisers and data analytic firms, and often without consent—is a broken model.

“We must embrace AI in schools so our kids—and our country—won’t be left behind.”

AI literacy means learning what AI is good for and what it is not. The rush to apply AI to every educational task risks weakening students’ creativity, critical thinking, and human relational skills—exactly what they will need to flourish in an AI-driven economy and as citizens of a free country.

FURTHER READING

Brad Littlejohn, “Teaching to the Tech”
American Compass, 2025.

A white paper offering recommendations on how to responsibly integrate AI technology into the classroom.

Brad Littlejohn, “Educating for an AI Future”
American Compass, 2025.

Comment on Department of Education’s Proposed Priority and Definitions “Secretary’s Supplemental Priority and Definitions on Advancing Artificial Intelligence in Education”

Oren Cass, “Bring Back the Computer Lab”
Commonplace, 2025.

An essay about how students need to learn about technology itself, not just use technology to learn.

Brad Littlejohn & Jared Hayden,
“The Dangers and Possibilities of AI in Schools”
Commonplace, 2025

A reaction to the Trump Administration’s executive order on Advancing Artificial Intelligence Education for American Youth.

Ashanty Rosario,
“I’m a High Schooler. AI Is Demolishing My Education.”
The Atlantic, 2025.

Reflections from a public high school senior in New York on AI’s inescapable influence on her education.

KEY FACTS

6

Number of minutes the average student lasts on an educational device before being distracted by another activity on the device.¹

84%

Percent of school districts that report providing a device to every elementary school student (2021).²

22%

Percent of eighth-graders reading at a “below basic” level in 2013.³

33%

Percent of eighth-graders reading at a “below basic” level in 2024.⁴

80%

Percent of teachers, principals, and district leaders who report student behavior worsens when screen time increases.⁵

61%

Percent of K-12 educators who report students are using AI for cheating.⁶

96%

Percent of “educational” apps that share children’s browsing data with third parties.⁷

ABOUT AMERICAN COMPASS

Our mission is to restore an economic consensus that emphasizes the importance of family, community, and industry to the nation’s liberty and prosperity. American Compass is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

For more information, visit
americancompass.org

¹Larry D. Rosen, Mark Carrier, and Nancy A. Cheever, “Facebook and Texting Made Me Do It: Media-Induced Task Switching While Studying,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 29, no. 3 (May 2013): 948-958.

²Kevin Bushweller, “What the Massive Shift to 1-to-1 Computing Means for Schools, in Charts,” *Education Week*, May 17, 2022.

³Sarah Schwartz, “Reading Scores Fall to New Low on NAEP, Fueled by Declines for Struggling Students,” *Education Week*, January 29, 2025.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Bushweller, “What the Massive Shift to 1-to-1 Computing Means for Schools.”
⁶Carnegie Learning, *The State of AI in Education 2025: Key Findings from a National Survey* (Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Learning, 2025).

⁷Internet Safety Labs, “ISL Research Reveals 96% of School Apps Send Student Data to Third Parties,” December 13, 2022.