

SCAN 4

What Teachers Think, Say and Feel About AI

Where teacher and student concerns meet, and where the teacher's are different - a K-12, evidence-based companion to SCAN 3

Prepared for the Youth AI Research Network

Where SCAN 3 listened to students, this report listens to teachers. It gathers what K-12 educators think, say and feel about AI, drawing on both peer-reviewed literature and the professional and trade press, and asks where their concerns align with students' and where they diverge. It is framed by **Learning Well** and **Being Well**, and read through *AI Unplugged* (Murgatroyd & Couture, 2026), which treats teachers as professionals whose judgment must be defended, not automated away.

June 2026

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1. Purpose and Framing

This is the fourth report in the Futures Leadership for Change series accompanying the Youth AI Research Network, and the deliberate companion to SCAN 3. Where that report listened to students, this one listens to teachers - what K-12 educators think, say and feel about AI in their classrooms and their profession. Its organizing question is the one the Network most needs answered: where do teachers' concerns align with students', where do they part company, and what follows for a network built on teacher and student agency together.

The report is deliberately evidence-led and draws on two bodies of work in equal measure: peer-reviewed academic literature, including recent systematic reviews and a randomized controlled trial, and the professional and trade press alongside large survey bodies such as RAND, the College Board, Gallup and the Center for Democracy & Technology. It reads the teacher voice through *AI Unplugged* (Murgatroyd & Couture, 2026), whose deskilling thesis - that AI can quietly reduce the teacher from designer to technician - names the deepest of the concerns that are distinctly the teacher's own.

The headline finding is easy to state and important to hold: teachers and students worry about many of the same things, but teachers worry about them far more intensely, and teachers carry a second set of worries that students do not share at all - worries about their profession, their judgment, and the human relationship at the centre of teaching.

2. How to Read This Scan

Three notes on the evidence. First, it is unusually strong for this kind of synthesis: the period since 2023 has produced both large, nationally representative teacher surveys and a growing body of systematic reviews, so the claims below rest on convergent academic and professional sources rather than impressions. Second, the comparison between teacher and student concern is itself a documented finding, most sharply in the College Board's parallel surveys of educators and students, so the gap this report describes is measured, not inferred. Third, as with SCAN 3, the fullest evidence is recent and North-American-heavy, though the academic reviews draw on international studies; later scans should widen the teacher voice toward the Network's own countries.

3. Teachers as Users, Not Only Gatekeepers

It is tempting to cast teachers as the brake on AI and students as the accelerator, but the evidence does not support such a tidy split. Teachers are substantial users in their own right. In nationally representative data, an estimated 85% of teachers used AI during the 2024-25 school year (Center for Democracy & Technology, as reported by Klein, 2025), and roughly three in five report using it for their own work, chiefly to develop materials, plan lessons, handle administrative tasks and communicate with families (NPR/Ipsos, as reported by Merod, 2025). The appeal is concrete: the academic literature consistently finds that automating planning, grading and routine administration reduces workload and returns time to teaching (Papadakis, 2026).

But teachers use AI warily, and their hesitation is itself evidence. In one survey of about a thousand K-12 teachers, a slight majority judged AI unreliable and a similar share lacked confidence in their ability to use it well (Imagine Learning, as reported by Merod, 2025). They are also working without a map: most teachers report having no guidance on how to use AI in their jobs, and far fewer schools have a formal policy on teacher AI use than on student use (NPR/Ipsos, as reported by Merod, 2025). The picture, then, is not refusal but uneasy, under-supported adoption - which colours every concern that follows.

4. Concerns Teachers Share With Students

On the core questions of learning, teachers and students are largely aligned, which matters because it means these worries are not generational panic but shared judgment. Three concerns recur across both groups.

The first is the erosion of critical thinking. About seventy percent of teachers worry that AI weakens students' critical thinking and research skills (Center for Democracy & Technology, as reported by Klein, 2025), and roughly two-thirds of students themselves now agree that the more they use AI for schoolwork, the more it will harm their thinking (RAND Corporation, 2026). This shared worry has empirical support: a randomized controlled trial in secondary mathematics found that students using an unguarded AI tutor performed worse on later unaided exams and overestimated their own mastery, a learning penalty driven by cognitive offloading (Bastani et al., 2025).

The second is over-reliance and dependency, and the third is academic integrity. Both groups name these, though, as the next section shows, teachers hold them far more strongly. What is striking is the convergence on the underlying diagnosis - that AI can produce correct outputs while bypassing the struggle through which learning happens. This is the agency paradox of AI Unplugged, and it is now voiced from both sides of the desk.

5. Concerns That Are Distinctly the Teacher's

Beyond the shared worries lies a set of concerns that belong to teachers alone, because they touch the profession itself rather than only the student. These are the concerns the Network most needs to hear, because they shape whether teachers will be willing partners in co-creation.

Deskilling, professional autonomy, and the fear of replacement

The deepest distinctly-teacher concern is what AI does to the teacher. A systematic review of forty-three studies found that negative teacher perceptions cluster around fear of replacement, anxiety, and a loss of professional autonomy rooted in uncertainty about the changing role of the teacher (Papadakis, 2026). AI Unplugged names the mechanism directly: when AI generates lesson plans, feedback and assessment, the teacher's role risks shifting from designer to implementer, from professional to technician (Murgatroyd & Couture, 2026). Students do not carry this worry; for teachers it is existential.

The human relationship at the centre of teaching

A second distinctly-teacher concern is relational. Scoping-review evidence finds teachers worried that AI diminishes human interaction and student-teacher bonding (Tao et al., 2026). Qualitative work on AI-generated feedback is even sharper: teachers and students alike insist that part of the point of feedback is that a person engaged with the work, and that AI tools must keep a human in the feedback loop rather than deskill the relationship out of it (Hennessy et al., 2025). Where students worry about AI and their own friendships, teachers worry about AI and the teaching relationship - a related but distinct concern.

Reliability, developmental fit, equity, and the policy vacuum

Teachers also raise concerns grounded in their professional responsibility for all learners. They question AI's reliability and its developmental appropriateness, particularly for younger children (Imagine Learning, as reported by Merod, 2025). They raise equity and access - whether under-resourced students will fall behind - and algorithmic bias, themes that dominate the academic literature on AI's ethical risks in schools (Tao et al., 2026; García-López & Trujillo-Liñán, 2025). And they name the stress of acting without clear guidance, a recurring driver of educator unease (Tao et al., 2026). None of these is primarily a student concern; all are core to the teacher's role.

6. The Concern Gap

The clearest way to see how teacher and student concerns diverge is to place them side by side. When the College Board surveyed educators and students on the same worries, the gap was stark: on every shared concern, educators worried far more than students.

Worry about AI in school	Students	Educators
AI could be used to cheat	42%	100%
AI could create dependence for basic tasks	52%	89%
AI makes deep critical thinking less likely	45%	87%

Figures are from College Board surveys of high-school students and educators, as reported by Klein (2025); the educator figures shown are for principals. The pattern is consistent across other data: a RAND survey found that even among adults, district leaders worried markedly less about critical-thinking harm than parents, teachers or students did, with only about a fifth of district leaders agreeing AI would harm thinking against roughly half of students (RAND Corporation, 2025). The concern, in other words, is not evenly distributed - it is highest among the teachers closest to children and lower at the system's administrative top.

The gap also runs the other way on a few issues, which matters just as much. Students carry worries that teachers largely do not: about half of students fear being falsely accused of AI cheating (RAND Corporation, 2025), a concern that barely registers in the

teacher data, where the emphasis is on detecting misuse rather than on the cost of wrongful accusation. And, as SCAN 3 documented, students worry about AI and their own futures and wellbeing in ways the teacher literature rarely captures. Read through the design-justice lens of AI Unplugged, this asymmetry is the point: if policy is set only by those who worry most about cheating, the student's distinct worries - false accusation, wellbeing, the future - risk going unheard.

7. What Teachers Are Asking For

Across the surveys and reviews, teachers ask for a coherent and modest set of things. They want clear guidance and policy, which most currently lack (NPR/Ipsos, as reported by Merod, 2025). They want training that is pedagogical and not merely technical, since the research is consistent that technical training alone does not produce confident, capable integration (Papadakis, 2026). They want time and workload relief rather than intensification. And, most fundamentally, they want AI designed to augment their professional judgment rather than displace it, keeping the human firmly in the loop (Hennessy et al., 2025). This is not a profession resisting change; it is a profession asking to remain a profession.

8. Implications for the Network's Work

Several propositions follow for the Network, which rests on teacher and student agency together.

- 1. Give teacher voice appropriate standing with student voice.** SCANS 3 and 4 are a pair; co-creation in the Network only works if both sets of concerns shape the inquiry, including the ones each group does not share.
- 2. Treat the concern gap as material, not noise.** Where teachers worry far more than students, that difference is worth surfacing and discussing openly between them, rather than resolving by fiat.
- 3. Protect the relationship.** The distinctly-teacher worry about bonding, and relational feedback is a design constraint: any co-created tool should keep a human in the loop and strengthen, not thin, the teaching relationship.
- 4. Address the policy and training vacuum head-on.** Teachers are adopting without guidance; the Network can model what good, locally-authored guidance and pedagogical training look like.
- 5. Defend professional judgment.** Following AI Unplugged, position teachers as designers and co-authors, not implementers of systems built elsewhere - the surest answer to the deskilling fear.

9. Gaps and the Next Scans

This scan establishes the teacher's voice and its relation to the student's voice; it does not exhaust either. Three gaps should shape what follows. The first is geographic: the

strongest teacher surveys are North American, and teacher voice from the Network's own countries - Norway, Ireland, Germany, Iceland, Australia and New Zealand - remains comparatively thin, though the academic reviews are international. The second is relational: the worry about student-teacher bonding is named but under-studied, and is a strong candidate for the Network's own research alongside the student-connection theme from SCAN 3. The third is longitudinal: little yet tracks how a teacher's stance evolves with experience and support, which a multi-year network can begin to document.

With SCANS 1 through 4 now covering the landscape of student creation, teacher-student co-creation, the student voice and the teacher voice, a fifth and synthesizing scan grounded in the Network's own evidence is the natural next step toward ICSEI 2027 - carrying the Learning Well and Being Well frames and the design-justice spine throughout.

References

References follow APA 7th edition style and combine peer-reviewed literature with professional and trade press. All sources are real and were verified for this report. Where a survey's findings reached this scan through a trade-press report, that reporting route is named.

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SCANs 3 and 4 are a pair: the student voice and the teacher voice, read together.