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# NATIONAL ACADEMY FOR AI INSTRUCTION

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## THE AI ACADEMY BRIEF MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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June 2026 · Issue #4

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

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# Devices down, eyes up, hands-on.

As artificial intelligence becomes more integrated into education, it is tempting to focus on what technology can do. But the more powerful technology becomes, the more important it is to focus on what students need.

Students need opportunities to discuss ideas, solve problems, collaborate with peers, create, question, and engage with the world around them. They need experiences that build knowledge, develop judgment, and strengthen relationships. These are not secondary to learning; they are learning.

Technology can support this work, but it cannot replace it. The purpose of education is not simply to deliver information. It is to help students become thoughtful, capable, engaged human beings.

That is why, in the age of AI, active learning, human connection, and meaningful engagement matter more than ever.

## Where We Stand

At the Academy, we believe the future of education must be both technologically informed and deeply human.

Devices down, eyes up, hands-on is a commitment to creating learning environments where students actively participate rather than passively consume, where discussion and collaboration are valued alongside information access, and where relationships remain at the center of teaching and learning.

This commitment extends beyond any single classroom strategy. It means creating opportunities for project-based learning, civic engagement, the arts, physical activity, outdoor and experiential learning, face-to-face interaction, authentic problem-solving, and healthy boundaries around technology. It means helping students learn to think critically, communicate effectively, and work with others – skills that become even more important as AI takes on routine tasks.

The Academy remains focused on educator use of AI because teachers need the training and support to navigate this changing landscape. But our goal has always been larger than technology itself. We believe the use of AI should strengthen the active engagement, human relationships, and meaningful learning experiences that are essential to education.

As schools continue to evolve, our responsibility is clear: ensure technology serves learning, while keeping students connected to the people, experiences, and opportunities that help them grow.

# Age-Based AI Restrictions in Schools

Based on remarks from Randi Weingarten • National Press Club • May 2026

**PreK –  
Grade 2**  
Ages ~4–8



## No Screens or Electronic Assessments

All devices and digital tools are off-limits for this age group.  
Exception: accessibility accommodations only.

**K – Grade  
5**  
Ages ~5–11



## No Student-Facing AI Tools

AI tools should not be placed directly in front of elementary students.  
Focus: reading, writing, math, and hands-on foundational learning.

**Grades 6–  
12**  
Ages ~11–18



## AI Allowed — With Adult Supervision

Older students may use AI tools only under educator or adult oversight.  
Goal: build AI literacy and critical evaluation skills.

**Anyone  
Under 16**  
All grade  
levels



## Ban on AI "Companion" Chatbots

AI tools that simulate friendships or personal relationships are banned for all children and teens under age 16.

**How AI  
Should  
Be Used**



## How AI Should Be Used

- Help educators with planning, preparation, and other professional tasks.
- Be used under teacher direction and supervision.
- Teach students how to evaluate, verify, and responsibly use AI-generated information.

**What  
Students  
Still Need  
to Do**



## What Students Still Need to Do

- Learn foundational knowledge in reading, writing, math, and civics.
- Think critically and solve problems.
- Work collaboratively with others.
- Complete projects, discussions, debates, and hands-on learning activities.

**Requirements  
for Schools**



## Requirements for Schools

- Strong privacy and data-security protection.
- Clear safety standards for AI providers.
- Teacher training so educators understand AI and can make informed decisions about its use.
- Independent research on AI's impact on learning and student well-being.

**What  
Schools  
Should  
Prioritize**



## What Schools Should Prioritize

Schools should emphasize project-based learning, real-world problem solving, career-connected learning, discussion, collaboration, and meaningful human relationships.

**ONE-SENTENCE SUMMARY:** AI should be a carefully supervised tool that helps educators and students, while schools continue to focus on human relationships, critical thinking, and active learning.

"Devices down, eyes up, hands-on." — Randi Weingarten



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# Rob's Reflections

## A Principled Stance on AI in K12 Schools

AFT President, Randi Weingarten's May 27 speech argued that artificial intelligence can be a useful tool in K12 education, but only if governments and schools put strong limits and safeguards in place. Her message was not that AI should be banned entirely. Instead, she warned that schools must be careful not to let technology replace the human relationships, critical thinking, and hands-on learning that are at the heart of a good education.

One of Weingarten's biggest concerns was the growing dependence on technology among young people. She argued that many students are already spending too much time on screens and that schools should not add even more technology without considering the consequences. She said students are "drowning in tech" and called for limits on student-facing AI, particularly for younger children.

As part of her proposal, Weingarten called for an immediate end to student-facing AI in elementary schools. She believes younger students need to develop foundational academic skills, social abilities, persistence, and healthy relationships before relying on AI tools. She argued that children learn best through direct interaction with teachers and classmates rather than through conversations with algorithms.

She also called for a complete ban on "social companion" chatbots for anyone under the age of 16. These AI systems are designed to simulate human friendships or relationships. Weingarten warned that such tools could interfere with young people's social and emotional development and create risks related to safety, privacy, and mental well-being.

She also proposed the creation of strong accountability standards for companies that provide AI services to schools. She argued that technology firms should meet strict safety, privacy, and transparency requirements before their products are used by students and educators. Companies that refuse to follow these standards, should not be allowed to operate in schools.

Throughout the speech, Weingarten emphasized that AI should support teachers rather than replace them. She warned against "cognitive offloading," where students rely on AI to do thinking for them instead of building their own knowledge and problem-solving skills. In her view, the purpose of education is not simply to access information but to analyze it, apply it, and work collaboratively with others.

Ultimately, Weingarten's vision is one of balance. She recognizes that AI is here to stay, but she believes schools need clear guardrails to ensure technology enhances learning rather than undermines it. Her call for limits reflects a belief that human connection, active learning, and strong academic foundations must remain at the center of education in the AI era.

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# Academy Strategy

This month, we're highlighting a framework developed by the National Academy for AI Instruction to help educators verify, authenticate, and investigate AI-generated outputs called the C.I.V.I.C. routine.

C – Check the Claim

I – Investigate the Source

V – Verify Accuracy

I – Identify Missing Perspective

C – Consider Consequences

# Voices from the Academy

As a middle school speech-language pathologist, my focus is always on communication, language processing, and student reasoning—so when it comes to AI, my main goal is making sure students are still thinking, explaining, and using their own language.

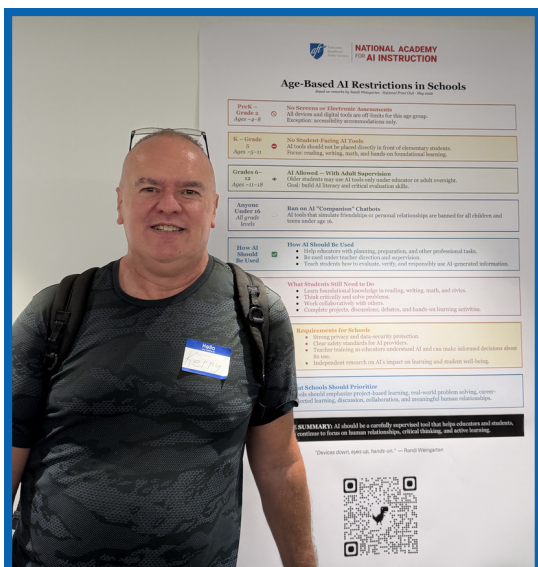
One big strategy I use is making student thinking visible. I don't just accept answers—I ask students to explain how they got there, often verbally. In speech, that might look like having a student justify an inference, retell information in their own words, or explain why they chose a particular vocabulary word. AI can generate an answer, but it can't replace a student being able to express and defend their thinking in real time.

I use a lot of peer interaction, partner work, and small group discussion. When students have to explain something to a classmate or respond to follow-up questions, it immediately shows whether they actually understand. It's much harder to rely on AI when you have to communicate your ideas clearly and respond on the spot.

Another strategy is live, in-the-moment tasks, like quick verbal responses or short written reflections during the session. I'll ask students to respond using what they know right now—whether it's summarizing a passage, making a prediction, or connecting to prior knowledge. That captures their authentic language skills and prevents them from outsourcing the thinking.

I also intentionally build in error analysis. Sometimes we look at a response—whether it's AI-generated or just incorrect—and I have students identify what's wrong and explain how to fix it. That shifts them from just answering questions to actually analyzing and using critical thinking.

Finally, I'm very explicit about teaching students how to question and evaluate AI, not just use it. I guide them to ask: Does this fully answer the question? Is anything missing? Does this sound like something I could actually explain myself? In my sessions, I always tell my students, "If you can't speak it, then you don't know it." That really reinforces that understanding isn't about having an answer—it's about being able to express it clearly and confidently.



Overall, in my setting, it really comes down to designing activities where students have to talk, explain, reflect, and interact—because in speech and language work, thinking isn't just internal. It has to be expressed, and that's what keeps the cognitive load on the student, where it belongs.

—Kerry Albright, Speech Pathologist  
PS 35 Stephen Decatur M.S.

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# Voices from the Academy

Middle school Visual Arts teacher Erin-Marie Elman attended this month's session, The Thinking Classroom: Navigating Critical Thinking and Cognitive Offloading in the Age of AI. Here's what she had to say about AI in the classroom:

## **What strategies are you using to ensure students are still doing the thinking when AI is involved?**

I really enjoy using AI with my MLL population when teaching descriptive language. For example, for their journey assignment I had them do their own version of the Where I'm From poem By George Ella Lyon. I had them fill the blanks with their choice of verbiage and using AI I had them generate an image. This created an image illustrating the poem. This took quite a bit of revision as just the language didn't specify how the objects and images were placed to illustrate the poetry which is a very important illustration component.

## **What are you taking back to your classroom from the session?**

Although AI can do so much for you, the teacher and student must remember to always question the source. We must always see the glitch, revise, reshape, and rethink how something is created to keep our ingenuity and integrity.

## **How are you addressing cognitive offloading in your classroom?**

There is a purpose for all tools in the box. I create a list of tools a student can use to accomplish a task. AI Tools chosen should be strategic and deliberate making your work impactful and value driven.

## **What you learned or what resonated most with you from the session?**

The value of the input is as important or even more important for the output. Knowledge and specificity drive Artificial Intelligence. What you give is generally what you are going to get. Be knowledgeable, check your sources, and choose integrity.

—Erin-Marie Elman, 6th-8th Visual Arts Teacher,  
I.S.96- District 21, Seth Low Intermediate School



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# Voices from the Academy

I attended the National Academy for AI Instruction professional learning opportunity titled “The Thinking Classroom: Navigating Critical Thinking and Cognitive Offloading in the Age of AI. During the session we talked about a variety of topics involving AI and the classroom, which culminated in a group project that tried to update a lesson while navigating through the challenges of AI availability. The biggest takeaway for me was not to think about banning AI or how to best detect it, but instead to create instruction that is “AI Proof” or creating “ethical” uses of AI.

The group chose to use a project from my Participation in Government class, called the Social Justice Research Paper. The project involves creating a research paper based upon a social justice issue. The students are tasked with creating an end product that is a 5-7 page paper answering their social justice research topic such as: Race – Can your first name affect your future or Diversity – Should English be the official language of the United States?; while also understanding the counterargument to whichever side they fall on.

In the past, plagiarism (whether intentional or unintentional) had been a problem and AI had only compounded the issue at hand. How do we get students to create an evidence based argument to be better college and career ready? As a group we took the framework of the project based, scaffolded assignment and modified it to create the end product we desired regardless of the obstacle.

Step 1 was to have them choose a topic and create an on demand/live journaled response in class. This takes away the ability and temptation to use outside resources and instead makes the writer defend their opinion while also revealing what possible counterarguments will be. If you believe that your first name can affect your future, you then need to imagine the argument of someone who disagrees with you and how you might respond. You now have created the basis for your claim, counterclaim, and rebuttal.

Step 2 would give the students the chance to ethically use AI. Allowing AI to research your topic but then insert the human element of deciding if it met the C.I.V.I.C. standards we discussed.

Step 3 is to create an outline based on your resources with the added task of showing your thinking by annotating, highlighting, etc where the evidence for your claim and counterclaim come from.

Step 4 is to create an error analysis for the counterclaim(s) presented. The students will treat these claims not as differences of opinion, but rather a flawed argument that needs to be corrected.

Step 5 is to create your paper with the addition of presenting your findings to the class and being able to teach and defend your topic. Being able to present your findings rather than blindly reading off of the page will show a deeper understanding of the material. This was a good example of how to revitalize assignments that students might have prompted AI to answer for them.

Other strategies I have implemented in the classroom in order to deal with AI is demonstrating to the students what “ethical AI use” looks like by creating AI enhanced study material based on my existing content, or showing the difference between AI being a helper and being the creator of an assignment. I also utilize the version history of documents, two different plagiarism and AI checking programs, while comparing in class writing vs their computer generated content for differences in tone, grammar, and structure. AI is not going away, nor is the temptation to use it; instead the question is “how do we harness it in a productive way, and teach others to utilize it in that manner?”

# Academy Highlights



The Thinking Classroom: Navigating Critical Thinking and Cognitive Offloading in the Age of AI  
New York, NY • June 11, 2026



The Thinking Classroom: Navigating Critical Thinking and Cognitive Offloading in the Age of AI  
Albany, NY • June 24, 2026

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# Summertime

Summer gives educators a chance to pause, reflect, and reset before the pace of a new school year begins again. It is also a good time to think about how we want to intentionally use AI next year. The goal should not be to use more AI just because it is available. The goal should be to use AI in ways to support stronger instruction and while keeping student learning at the center of your work.

Summer is a good time to choose one AI practice to improve before September. Not ten tools. Not every new feature. Just one useful habit. For example, a teacher might practice writing stronger prompts, creating better rubrics, or using AI to plan small-group supports based on common student misunderstandings and needs.

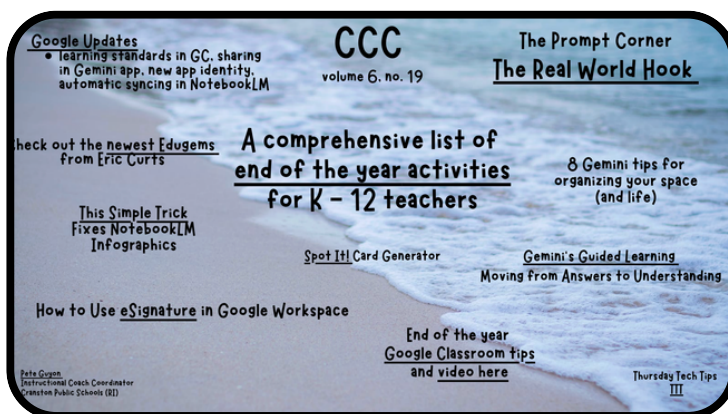
As we prepare for another school year, the most important question is not, “How can I use AI?” The better question is, “How can AI help me design learning that is clearer, more accessible, and more meaningful for my students?”

AI can be a powerful planning partner, but it should never replace your professional judgment. The best use of AI still starts with good instruction.

## Cranston Coaches Corner (CCC)

Ideas You Can Actually Use

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