

AI in K-12 Education According to the Research

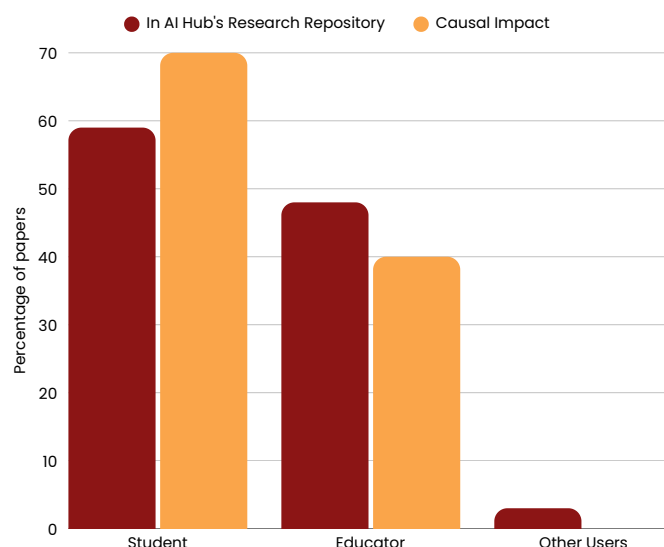
What we know and what we have yet to understand

REPORT SUMMARY

Insights from the "Evidence Base on AI in K-12": A 2026 review of research on how AI tools affect students and educators

What Research Exists

- **AI research growth has accelerated significantly**, with about a thousand studies emerging in just a few years.
- **Only a small share of studies use causal designs** capable of identifying the impact of AI, such as randomized controlled trials.
- **More evidence exists on students as AI users** as opposed to educators or other users of AI in education settings. (See graph)
- **Research gaps remain** around AI's long-term learning impacts, effects across diverse student populations, and implications for metacognition, wellness, and broader competencies.



What We Know So Far

- AI tools often **improve student task performance during use**, particularly during structured learning activities.
- Student mastery after taking away AI shows **mixed results**, highlighting the distinction between supported performance and durable learning.
- Educator-facing AI tools demonstrate **potential to support instructional capacity** by saving educators time and generating instructional feedback for educators, while maintaining or improving instructional quality.
- At a system level, early evidence suggests that:
 - **Learning outcomes depend** on how AI tools are designed and used
 - AI can be **an effective tool to support educators**.

★ Implications for School & Education Leaders

Clarify goals of student tools before adoption.

Identify whether the aim is feedback, practice, or deeper learning.

Monitor equity and access.

Track how AI tools affect different students and under what conditions to prioritize equitable implementation.

Approach implementation as iterative.

Regularly evaluate and adjust AI tool usage based on evidence of what is and isn't working.

Measure multiple learning outcomes.

Assess both AI-supported performance and independent understanding.

Differentiate between AI for students and AI for educators.

AI use by students must be developmentally appropriate towards clearly defined pedagogical goals.
AI use for educators show promise in improving practice, student outcomes, and saving time.

