

# From “Rules and Tools” to Schools: What Illinois Educators Want from AI Guidance

By Teach Plus and the Illinois Digital Educators Alliance

“Education as a whole will need to shift more toward the learning journey rather than [teachers] solely evaluating the final product.” - *Illinois Teacher*

## Introduction

In the fall of 2024, Teach Plus and the Illinois Digital Educators Association published [Rules and Tools](#), finding that too many educators lacked sufficient training, guidance, or clear policies for using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in schools. Since then, AI has rapidly become an everyday reality in most Illinois classrooms. AI-powered tools are already shaping how students write, research, problem-solve, and create. Teachers are increasingly using AI to enhance lesson planning, provide faster feedback, and manage administrative tasks. In 2025, Teach Plus teacher leaders drew on the recommendations in their earlier report to develop and pass [Senate Bill 1920](#), directing the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to develop statewide guidance on the use of AI in schools by summer 2026. This presents an important opportunity for Illinois to proactively support educators and students.

To support the development of that guidance and get a current pulse on teachers’ experiences with AI, our coalition conducted a survey of Illinois educators from September to October 2025. More than 100 educators responded, including classroom teachers, administrators, and technology specialists, representing a wide range of educational settings. By centering educator voice at this critical moment, we aim to inform the development of AI guidance so that it is grounded in current classroom realities and responsive to educator concerns. This memo offers a preview of our full report due later this spring. [Click here](#) to be notified when it’s released.

## Findings

**Finding 1: Many educators are finding effective ways to use AI to enhance their work.** 58% of respondents described using AI to develop lesson plans or instructional content. Educators described using AI to design engaging lessons, differentiate instruction for diverse learners, and provide faster initial feedback. One set up chatbots to role-play historical figures, while another generated lesson ideas that resulted in a hunt for pirate treasure using geometry concepts. These responses suggest that teachers are not using AI simply to save time, but to rethink how they design instruction. Beyond the classroom, teachers are using AI to manage parent communication and to draft letters of recommendation. At the same time, teachers emphasized that AI should scaffold learning rather than replace critical thinking. As one educator noted, *“Nothing replaces the human brain—checking for accuracy and appropriateness.”*

**Finding 2: AI is changing schools faster than schools are developing guidance around using it well.** Educators across Illinois are encountering very different levels of support, training, and clarity on AI use. While more than half of the respondents reported that their districts offered internal AI workshops, nearly one in four said their districts still offer no AI training at all. One educator captured the consequences of this lack of preparation clearly: *“Students have access to AI, yet little structured guidance. Access without understanding how to use it is really not access at all.”* Educators need to know how to distinguish between scaffolded support and academic dishonesty, preventing *“a product that suggests learning without actual learning.”* They need help protecting critical thinking and shifting to assessments of the learning journey, rather than just final products. Teachers also need clear guardrails on inappropriate uses that replace human judgment or put students or their learning at risk.

## Recommendations

### **Recommendation 1: ISBE guidance should provide concrete examples of best practices and inappropriate use.**

Instead of vague principles, educators are asking for specific examples of what responsible, instructionally sound AI use looks like in practice in Illinois classrooms. Additionally, the guidance should provide examples of appropriate uses of AI to support teacher planning and student access. Just as importantly, state guidance must highlight and explicitly caution against instructional practices that weaken rigor, substitute for student thinking, or create new equity concerns. For guidance to be useful to teachers, it must include specific, concrete examples of both benefits and risks that they can apply to their own classroom.

**Recommendation 2: ISBE should leverage teacher leaders to support effective AI implementation.** Survey responses show that educators' confidence with AI varies widely across schools, often depending more on local leadership and training than on clear, consistent policy. These findings suggest that written guidance alone will not be enough to support responsible AI implementation. Leveraging trusted peers who've received in-depth training in AI leadership will help teachers overcome the uncertainty that comes with unfamiliar technology. By translating guidance into practice, expert teacher leaders will help ensure AI strengthens instruction and protects students in alignment with school and district goals. ISBE guidance should offer models schools can implement.

**Recommendation 3: ISBE guidance should establish a statewide framework for vetting AI tools.** Survey responses reveal significant uncertainty among educators about which AI tools are safe, comply with privacy laws, and are instructionally appropriate. While districts are doing their best to evaluate tools, and the state provides technical assistance through the Learning Technology Center, teachers still report inconsistent access, uneven safeguards, and confusion. A shared framework across the state is needed to support more consistent, informed, and transparent decision-making grounded in instructional value, student safety, privacy, and equity.

**Recommendation 4: ISBE guidance should position AI as a tool to support—not replace—human connection.** Survey responses suggest many educators are not only concerned about AI's impact on teaching and learning, but also on the relationships so critical to human development. Dialogue, collaboration, and care are foundational to strong school communities. While AI can improve efficiency, misuse risks diminishing connections between educators and students. State guidance should be clear that AI can support, but not replace, caring relationships, and explicitly address student misuses of AI that threaten healthy development and human connection.

## Conclusion

Illinois stands at a pivotal moment as AI rapidly reshapes teaching and learning. Educators are already adapting, but they need clear guardrails, specific best practices, and systemic structures that support responsible use. The recommendations in this memo offer a practical roadmap: provide specific examples, empower local champions, create transparent vetting processes, and protect human connection. By grounding policy in educator experience and classroom realities, Illinois can lead the nation in building an AI framework that strengthens instruction, safeguards students, and ensures every district can navigate this evolving landscape with clarity and confidence.

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