External Program Evaluation:

Strengthening and Developing Partnerships in East Tennessee for Community Engagement in Artificial Intelligence Education

NSF Program #2405213

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STEM · Program Evaluation · Assessment · Research

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Project Overview

The PARTNER-AI project (PARtnerships to identify Teacher NEeds and Resources: AI Education in TN) is designed to co-develop a community-informed vision for AI education in middle and high schools in East Tennessee, with a focus on rural and under-resourced communities. The initiative employs a Research-Practice Partnership (RPP) model, actively involving teachers, school leaders, and parents as co-constructors of this vision. Major activities include the formation and expansion of RPPs, parent engagement through community events, iterative development of AI mission/vision statements, and a mixed-methods evaluation that informs continuous improvement.

Evaluation Approach

Dr. Sondra LoRe will serve as the lead external evaluator with STEM Program Evaluation, Assessment, & Research (SPEAR) consultants. Dr. LoRe will employ a Principles-Focused Evaluation (PFE) approach (Patton, 2018), emphasizing how well the project adheres to and advances its guiding principles throughout its activities. The evaluation will integrate strategies for both formative and summative feedback using qualitative and quantitative methods. This mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2015) will be aligned to the project's principles and intended outcomes, supporting data-informed decision making by the leadership team for continuous improvement.
Qualitative data will be analyzed using open and axial coding for thematic analysis (Saldana, 2016). Quantitative data will be summarized through descriptive statistics and appropriate parametric or non-parametric analyses. A convergent case study approach (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) will synthesize these data sources to provide an integrated understanding of how project activities and principles are working together to achieve goals.

Key Project Progress (to date)

Formation of an RPP leadership team including 9 representatives (school leaders, teachers, parents, students).

Conducted virtual and in-person RPP meetings focused on AI values, ethics, and visioning.

Engagement of 19 participants in Phase 2 (teachers, students, parents) through surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Evaluation Metrics

The PARTNER-AI evaluation uses a **Principles-Focused Evaluation** framework (Patton, 2018) with a mixed-methods design. Metrics focus on how project activities reflect the guiding principles and advance project goals.

Interviews

Individual interviews provide in-depth insight into participants' experiences. Metrics focus on attitudes and knowledge about AI, perceived indicators of success, and critical reflections on AI's ethical and educational implications.

Focus Groups (May

Focus groups with teachers, leaders, parents, and students are analyzed thematically (Saldana, 2016). Metrics include emergent themes on AI expectations and concerns, the generation of actionable ideas, and the diversity of viewpoints shared.

Surveys

Surveys capture quantitative data on AI literacy, confidence, perceived barriers, and support needs. Metrics include baseline and follow-up comparisons, disaggregated by participant role and county, using descriptive and inferential analyses.

Participant Observation

Participant Observation was conducted during the initial RPP leadership team kickoff Zoom meeting. Metrics included participant engagement, inclusivity in dialogue, and early indicators of confidence, curiosity, or concerns about AI in education.

Evaluation Findings

The evaluation of the PARTNER-AI project to date indicates that the program has successfully initiated collaborative partnerships among educators, parents, and students to explore the role of artificial intelligence in K-12 education. The project has effectively engaged participants across multiple counties through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and participant observation. These data sources collectively reveal that participants see AI as a promising tool to support teaching and learning, while also expressing thoughtful concerns about ethical use, student safety, and the need for professional development and clear guidelines. The project is progressing toward co-constructing a community-informed vision for AI in education, with early evidence of meaningful dialogue, stakeholder engagement, and shared commitment to inclusive practices.

Areas of Strength

- The project successfully formed and facilitated an active Research Practice Partnership leadership team that includes representation from school leaders, teachers, parents, and students across three counties.

- The RPP meetings created inclusive, respectful spaces for participants to share perspectives and begin co-constructing an AI vision that reflects community needs.

- The evaluation employed a robust mixed-methods approach, collecting rich qualitative and quantitative data from surveys, interviews, focus groups, and participant observation.

- Participants demonstrated high levels of engagement in activities, offering thoughtful reflections on AI's potential benefits and challenges in K-12 settings.

- The program fostered meaningful dialogue on ethics, equity, and transparency regarding AI use in education.

- The project has laid a strong foundation for developing shared agreements, mission and vision statements, and a Theory of Change related to AI in schools.

- Early efforts supported professional growth by raising participant awareness about AI, surfacing community values, and identifying key priorities for future training and policy development.

- There is clear evidence of participant commitment to preparing students for AI's increasing role in society while preserving the essential role of human relationships in learning.

Areas to Strengthen

- The project would benefit from formalizing and implementing clear district-level policies and guidelines on appropriate AI use in schools.

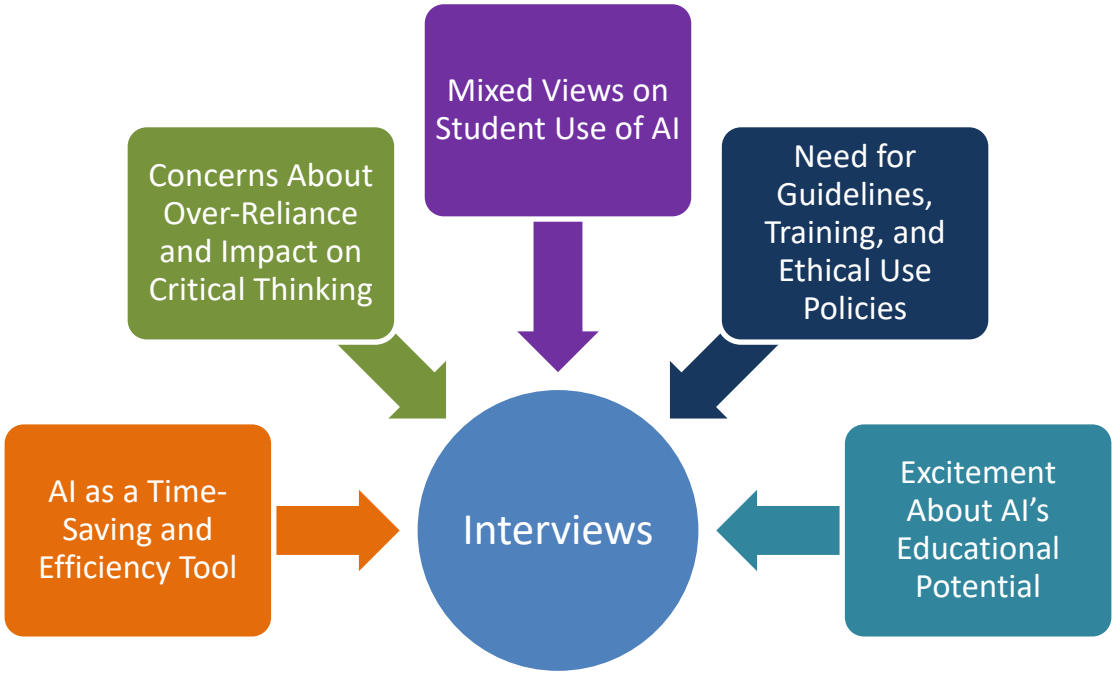
- Continued and expanded professional development opportunities are needed to build educator and parent confidence in integrating AI ethically and effectively.

- Further efforts are needed to ensure equitable access to AI tools and resources for all students, particularly in under-resourced settings.

Thematic Analysis of Interviews

Sixteen interviews were conducted with teachers, students, and parents during May and June 2025 as part of this study on perspectives regarding artificial intelligence in education. The transcripts were analyzed using open and axial coding following the qualitative data analysis approach described by *Saldana (2016)*. Codes were inductively generated, refined through iterative review, and organized into categories that were synthesized into overarching themes. This thematic analysis sought to represent both shared and contrasting views across participant groups, with attention to the nuanced ways AI is perceived as supporting or challenging educational practices. The themes described below are supported by salient quotes that illustrate these patterns in participants' own words.

Figure 1: Thematic Analysis of Interivews



AI as a Time-Saving and Efficiency Tool

Teachers consistently highlighted that AI reduces workload, supports lesson planning, generates differentiated materials, and assists with administrative tasks. Many praised AI's ability to help them be more productive and tailor resources to student needs.

"DFID [AI tool] lets me create leveled readings in seconds—it's been a game changer for my special ed class." (Teacher)

"ChatGPT saves so much time on lesson plans; I can't imagine going back to doing them manually." (Teacher)

"I love how it can help organize my IEPs and transition narratives. It saves me hours." (Teacher)

"I think teachers should use AI for creating materials—it's a helpful tool for the planning side." (Parent)

"If AI could help grade individual synthesis responses fairly, that would be a huge help." (Teacher)

Concerns About Over-Reliance and Impact on Critical Thinking

Participants across roles voiced concerns that AI could encourage dependency, reduce critical thinking, or short-circuit learning processes. There was apprehension that students might misuse AI as a shortcut rather than engaging deeply.

"It could make people lazier, like they wouldn't even try to think for themselves anymore." (Teacher)

"Kids already know how to use AI to skip the work. They're not learning the math if AI does it for them." (Teacher)

"If people use AI to plagiarize, nobody learns anything." (Student)

"I'm afraid students will just accept whatever AI says without questioning it." (Teacher)

"It worries me that creativity will be stifled if AI does too much for kids." (Parent)

Mixed Views on Student Use of AI

Many participants saw AI as potentially beneficial for students when used ethically (e.g., for research, differentiation, accessibility), but they also expressed reservations about its use without appropriate guardrails, especially for younger learners.

"AI could help my students with disabilities find accessible ways to learn, but they need to know how to use it responsibly." (Teacher)

"High schoolers might be ready, but I don't think younger students can judge when it's appropriate to use AI." (Parent)

"AI could help with research or brainstorming, but using it to write the whole paper? That's not learning." (Student)

"I'm okay with AI if it's developmentally appropriate and done in small groups." (Teacher)

"I see potential for AI to help with SEL if it's tailored to the child." (Teacher)

Need for Guidelines, Training, and Ethical Use Policies

There was a clear call for professional development, clear district policies, and collaborative efforts to guide ethical AI use. Teachers expressed uncertainty due to a lack of formal guidance.

"Districts should provide training and guidelines—we can't just figure this out on our own." (Teacher)

"There should be clear rules so students know what's appropriate, kind of like plagiarism policies." (Teacher)

"Parents should be involved in shaping AI policies in schools." (Parent)

"I want the people setting AI policy to understand kids—not just the school board." (Teacher)

"Right now we're just making it up as we go. We need training that helps us use AI productively." (Teacher)

Excitement About AI's Educational Potential

Participants expressed optimism about AI's potential to personalize learning, support inclusion, promote creativity, and prepare students for the future. Many noted that AI, if used well, could enhance both teaching and learning.

"AI could be amazing for inclusion and helping kids be more independent." (Teacher)

"I'm excited to see what students could create using AI, like writing their own books." (Teacher)

"I think AI has huge potential for research and problem solving in science." (Parent)

"I use AI to make songs for my class about science topics—it keeps them engaged and learning." (Teacher)

"What excites me is how it can help with questioning skills and pushing students' thinking." (Teacher)

Thematic Analysis of Focus Groups

This section summarizes key themes that emerged from the analysis of focus group discussions with educators and parents about artificial intelligence (AI) in education. Participants shared their perspectives on the benefits, challenges, and potential impacts of AI, as well as their hopes and concerns for its use in schools. The themes presented here reflect the most consistent and meaningful insights drawn from these conversations, offering guidance for future planning and decision-making.

Figure 2: Thematic Analysis of Focus Groups

AI as a Tool for Efficiency and Support

Participants saw AI as a valuable tool to reduce workload and streamline tasks, such as creating individualized materials, lesson plans, and providing faster feedback. Many emphasized that AI could help free up time for more direct interaction with students but should complement—not replace—teacher expertise.

"I think AI can help us create individual data sheets or checklists that usually take me hours, but it can do it quickly so I can focus on my students."

"I've used AI to help draft lesson plans or generate ideas, but I still need to adapt it for my class."

"The feedback AI provides—especially instant feedback—has helped some students see their writing improve right away."

Concerns About Over-Reliance and Erosion of Critical Thinking

There was strong concern that overuse of AI could undermine students' ability to think critically and solve problems independently. Participants noted that some students already look to AI or Google for answers without first attempting tasks on their own.

"I'm afraid they'll stop thinking critically. They're already asking AI or Google before trying themselves."

"If we don't teach them to evaluate AI's answers, we're doing them a disservice. They'll just accept whatever it gives."

"They can't just rely on AI for everything—we're seeing students who can't even start their own papers without it."

The Need for Clear Policies, Boundaries, and Training

Teachers expressed a clear need for guidance on how AI should be used in schools, emphasizing that policies and professional development are lagging behind the technology's rapid adoption. Without such boundaries, they felt uncertain about when and how to use AI appropriately and ethically.

"We need an AI policy, just like we have for internet use. Right now, we're all figuring it out on our own."

"Our district has no guidance, and that's stressful. I don't want to use something and later be told it's not allowed."

"Training is key. I was hesitant until I saw what it could really do at a conference. Now I see how it can help."

Preserving Human Connection and Social Development

Across focus groups, participants highlighted the irreplaceable role of human relationships in education, particularly for social and emotional development. They stressed that AI cannot provide the empathy, modeling, or personal support that teachers and staff contribute daily.

"Our kids need more human interaction. They don't know how to talk to each other, or to adults. They freeze when you say good morning."

"Technology's great, but it can't teach kids to take turns or have a conversation. That's what they really need."

"AI can't replace the emotional support or relationships we provide. That's what sticks with students."

Equity, Access, and Community Concerns

Participants raised issues of access, noting that unequal availability of AI tools could widen existing educational gaps. They also called for stronger community dialogue and collaboration among educators to share effective practices and ensure AI is implemented thoughtfully.

"Access is the big issue—not every student can use these tools at home, so it can widen gaps."

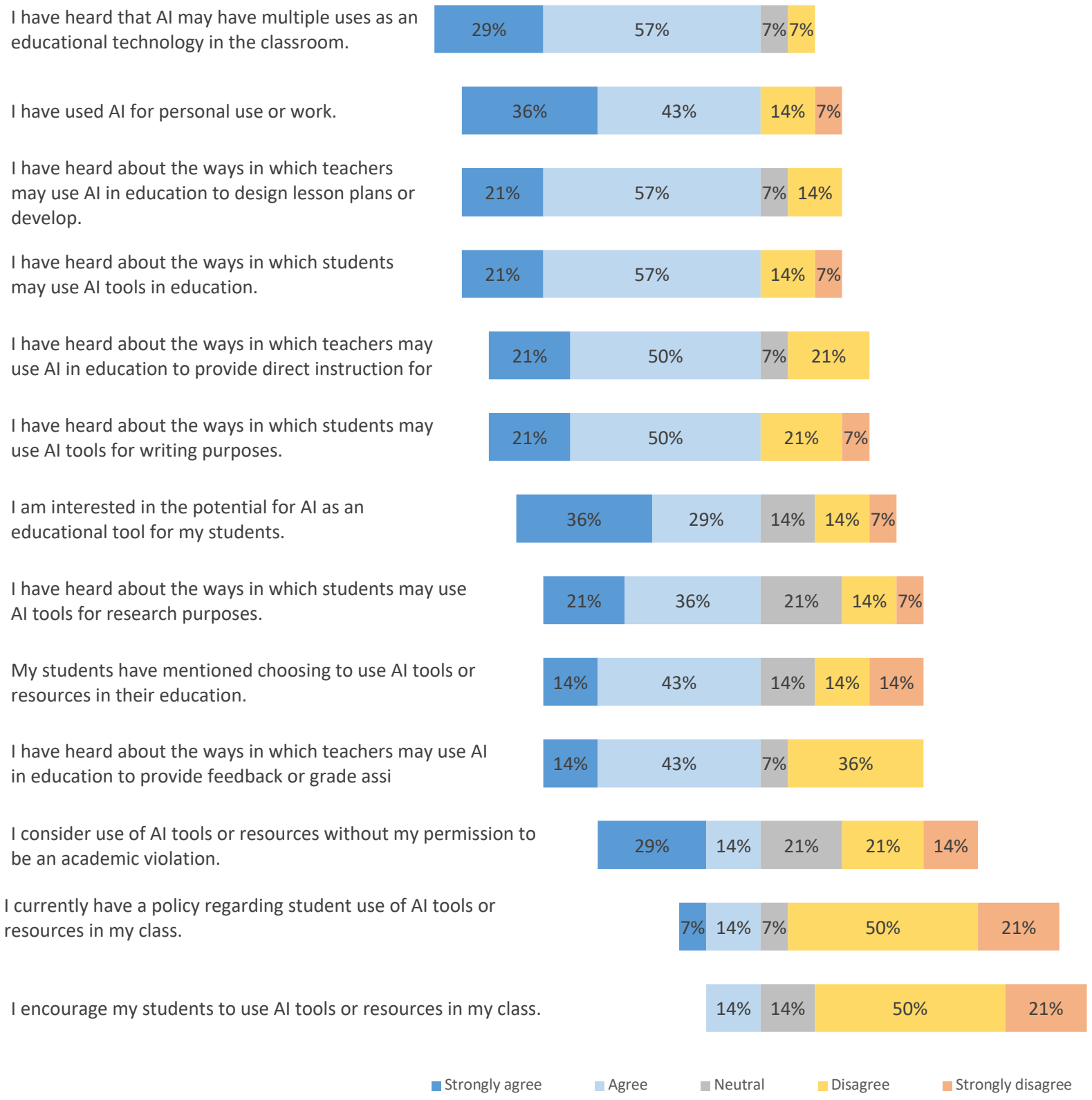
"I'd like to see a community of teachers sharing how they use AI, not just a one-off training. We need to support each other."

"AI is here. If we don't start talking about it and teaching it properly, we're setting our students up to fall behind in the real world."

Phase One Survey Analysis-Teachers

As part of the mixed-methods evaluation for the PARTNER-AI project, surveys were administered by the project leadership team to teachers participating in the Research Practice Partnership activities. This section presents findings from 15 teacher surveys collected across Roane, Scott, and Sevier Counties. The survey instrument included a combination of Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended prompts designed to inform the co-construction of the project's AI vision and Theory of Change. These data will contribute to both formative and summative evaluation efforts and provide important context for ongoing partnership discussions.

*Figure 3: Teacher level of agreement to statements about their **familiarity** with Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education*



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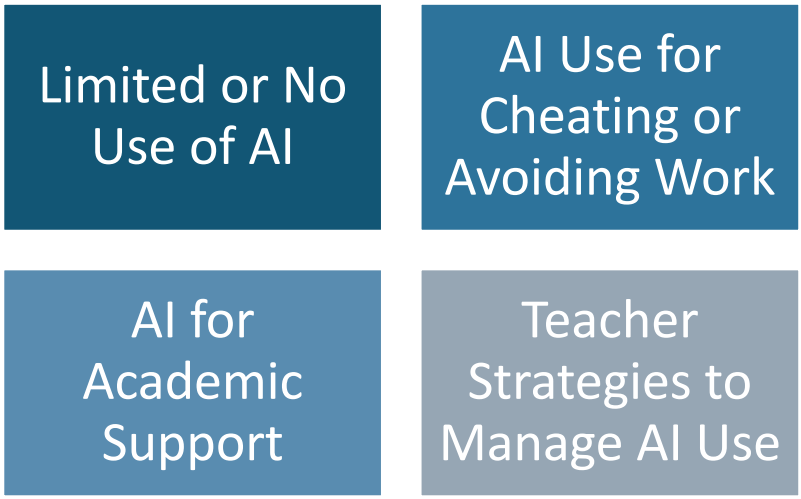
Students' current use of AI for academic purposes

Many teachers reported that their students either do not use AI at all or use it very minimally, often limited to basic tasks like searching for answers or using text-to-speech tools. Some noted that while AI use isn't common in their classes, they have observed students using it in other contexts. A recurring concern was the use of AI to cheat or avoid doing their own work, particularly for writing assignments, with students relying on AI to produce essays or complete tasks without genuine effort. In contrast, a few educators shared examples of students using AI productively, such as to spark ideas, analyze code, or solve math problems. Teachers also described strategies they use to manage AI use in their classrooms, such as requiring paper copies of assignments or guiding students through proper writing processes to discourage over-reliance on AI tools.

Figure 4: Teachers thematically describe ***students' current use of AI for academic purposes***



Limited or No Use of AI

Many teachers noted that students either do not use AI or use it minimally.

"None"

"None at all."

"Very little... probably just searching answers to questions."

"Not in my class but I have witnessed them use it for other classes."

"They currently do not have it available as a possibility for them. Some use text to speech and others are not high readers."

"They are still very young, but they are aware that they can get answers from AI."

AI Use for Cheating or Avoiding Work

Several quotes reflect concerns about students using AI to bypass learning or complete assignments dishonestly.

"A lot of them try to use it plagiarize or create their essays."

"My students use AI-based programs to write essays or complete work that is writing-intensive as a means of simply not doing the work."

"I have found some students have used AI to write papers for them."

"I have had students cheat on academic essays by having ChatGPT write their essay."

"I walk them through the proper process for proofreading papers and speeches. However due to their lack of the desire to actually learn and master the material they instead choose to have the AI do as much of the work as possible so they 'get it done.' However because of the students limited vocabulary and lexile levels it flagrantly stands out as not their material. To counter this I utilize paper copies in class as often as possible to limit their usage."

AI for Academic Support

Some students use AI as a tool to assist with their learning or problem-solving.

"In my classroom, students' current use of AI varies for academic purposes. Some use AI to get started and spark ideas, and others try to pass AI off as their own work."

"My students have used AI during computer science. It is built in to the platform that they use. It can help them analyze their codes and determine where errors are and how to fix them."

"I also know that students use things like PhotoMath to solve problems on homework."

"Writing papers, and solving math problems."

Teacher Strategies to Manage AI Use

Educators describe how they attempt to manage or guide AI use.

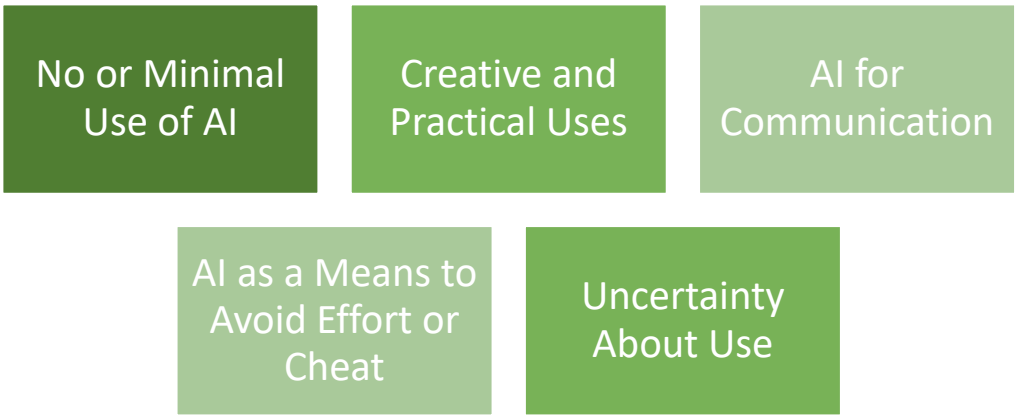
"I walk them through the proper process for proofreading papers and speeches."

"To counter this I utilize paper copies in class as often as possible to limit their usage."

Students' current use of AI for personal purposes

Teachers described a wide range of student use of AI for personal purposes, from no use at all—often attributed to young age—to increasing use in social communication and creative expression. Some educators noted that students engage with AI tools to create images, designs, songs, or poems, while others observed AI being used for practical tasks like writing resumes. There were also concerns about students using AI as a means to avoid effort or as a cheating mechanism. A few respondents mentioned uncertainty about how students use AI personally, though they acknowledged seeing students rely on technology, including AI, more frequently when communicating or solving problems.

*Figure 5: Teachers thematically describe students' **current use of AI for personal purposes***



No or Minimal Use of AI

Some teachers reported that students do not use AI or do so very rarely.

"None— mainly because of their age (5-6)"

"Rare"

"No use of AI."

"I haven't experienced them utilizing it outside of assignments. I've seen them dabble in making images but that's about the extent."

Creative and Practical Uses

Students were noted to use AI for creative outputs or practical tasks.

"They like to use Magic School AI to create songs and poems."

"Not sure about personal, but I have had a student use it for helping to write her resume and a cover letter."

"I do not know of specific instances of their use, but I know that they can create images and designs for texting and Snapchat."

AI for Communication

AI is increasingly present in how students communicate and interact with peers and family.

"I see students using AI more and more each day when texting or responding to their peers or parents."

"They use Tiktok."

AI as a Means to Avoid Effort or Cheat

There is concern about AI being misused to bypass effort.

"It's a cheating mechanism."

"Currently, there are not enough safeguards for students concerning use of AI. They are primarily using it to get out of doing work."

Uncertainty About Use

Several respondents indicated they were unsure how students use AI personally.

"Not sure... some photo alteration, but not sure of other uses."

"not sure"

"I believe it is used often."

*Figure 6: Teacher level of agreement to statements about their **perspective** regarding the use of AI in education*

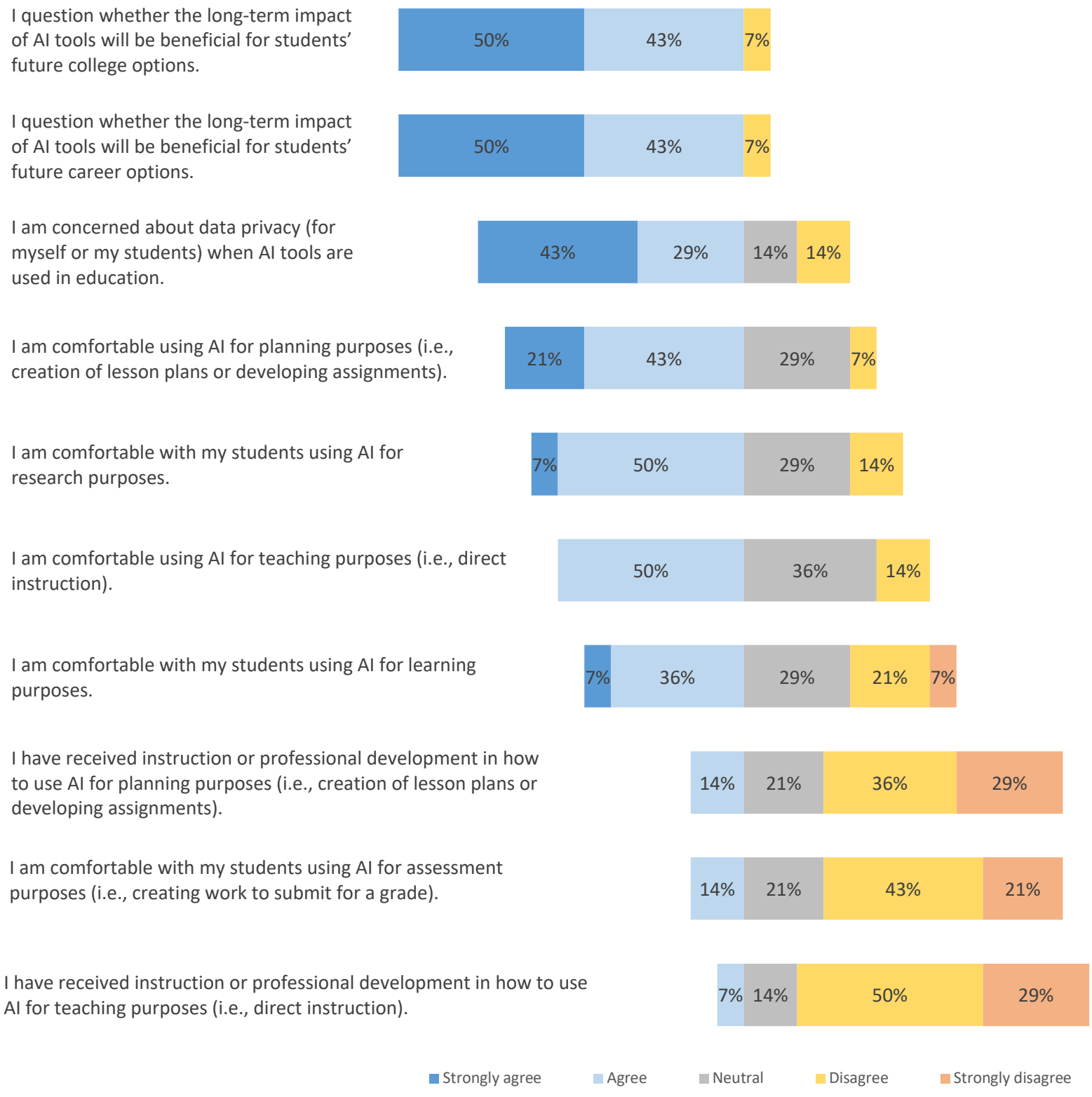


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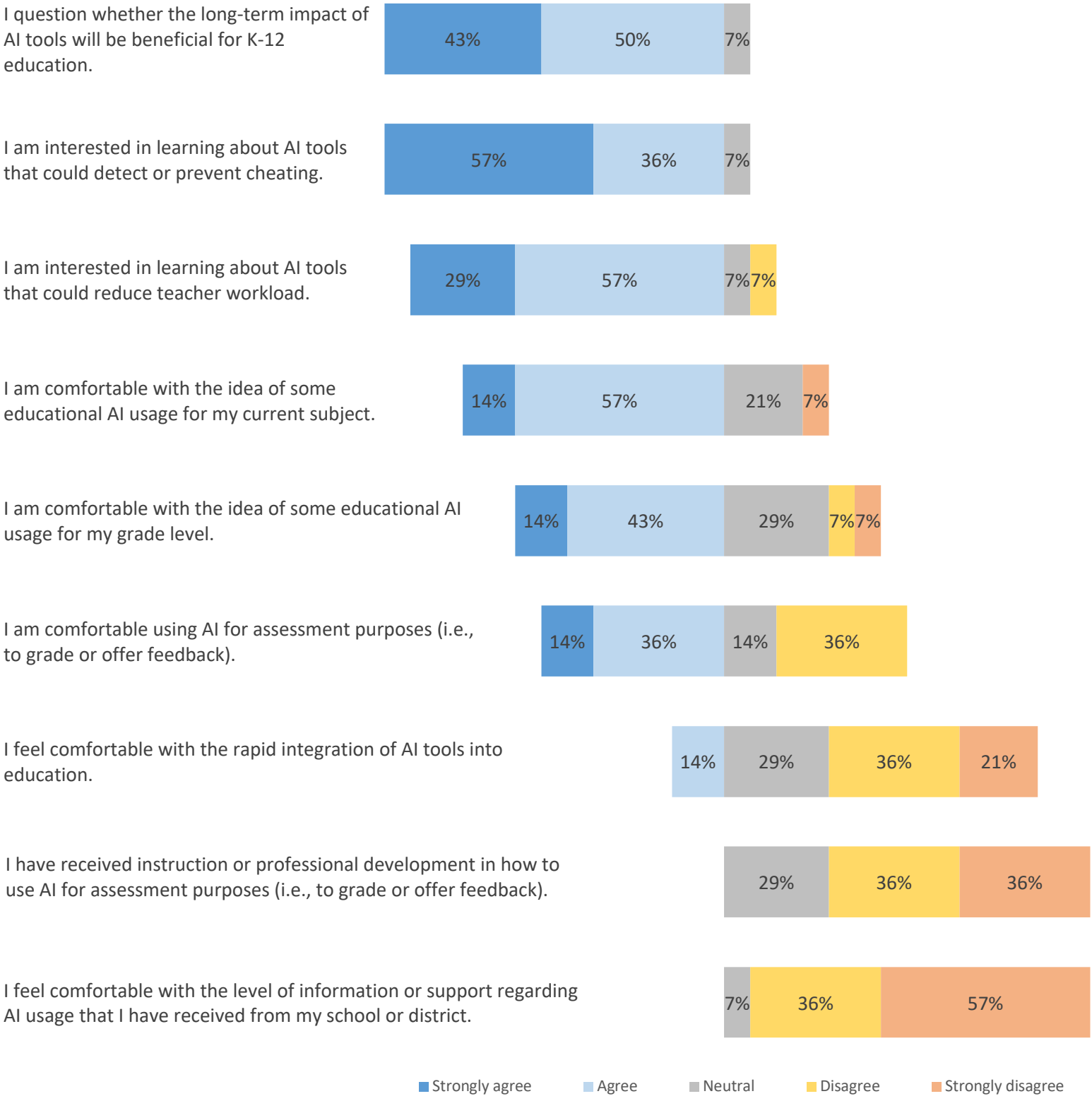
*Figure 7: Teacher level of agreement to statements about their **perspective** regarding the use of AI in education*



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Teachers expressed a mix of curiosity, optimism, and concern about AI in education. Many recognized potential benefits, particularly in supporting students with disabilities, streamlining lesson planning, and providing quick feedback that can aid learning. However, several teachers worried that overreliance on AI might reduce students' motivation, creativity, and critical thinking, and could undermine the essential human connection teachers bring to education. There was also a common theme of educators feeling unprepared or lacking training to use AI effectively and responsibly, and an emphasis on the importance of teaching students how to critically evaluate AI-generated content.

Figure 8: Teacher thoughts regarding the use of AI in education

Recognition of Benefits and Opportunities

Many teachers saw value in AI when used thoughtfully to support learning and teaching tasks.

"I see benefits for my students and myself from using AI. I do worry about the long-term effects… Students having instant feedback on their writing is beneficial… It also gives me a huge head start/saves time when it comes to grading essays/tests."

"I can see the benefit of using AI in education… I can also see how using AI could be beneficial (in a limited, supervised capacity) for our students with accommodations."

"As a teacher of students with learning disabilities, I am excited to explore how AI can support my students."

"Looking forward to thinking and learning more about AI in education and with students!"

Concerns About Overreliance and Loss of Motivation

Many teachers voiced fears that AI might make students overly dependent and reduce their intrinsic motivation and creativity.

"I worry that students are benching too dependent on AI and having the technology do the work for them."

"Main concern is that using AI will create a dependence on it and therefore reduce students' motivation to try on their own. May also diminish creativity?"

"I find myself questioning the consequences of its overuse by the current generation of learners. I'm noticing a decline in motivation... when students rely on AI... there's little retention or meaningful learning."

Desire for More Training / Uncertainty

Educators highlighted their need for better preparation and guidance in using AI effectively.

"It is so new, especially to an educator like me who is not tech savvy. I would want more training."

"I am not opposed to AI in my classroom, however, I have not had any training on it."

"My course standards for next year have been recently released, and they will include a standard regarding AI. I feel uncomfortable teaching students to use these tools, as I do not... feel that they understand how to use them responsibly."

Importance of Critical Thinking

There was a shared belief that AI use must go hand-in-hand with teaching students critical evaluation skills.

"I think the most important thing is to teach critical thinking and reasoning. Students need to be able to evaluate the answers received from AI as being appropriate and correct."

"Students need to also understand how AI can be used to skew information and news that affect them."

Balancing Technology and Human Instruction

Some teachers emphasized the irreplaceable value of human teaching and relationships.

"I have never personally used AI but am pretty set in believing that teachers are the best to provide direct instruction."

"I feel that using AI even as a teacher DRASTICALLY reduces if not completely eliminates the need for the personalized touch that teaching brings to a group of students."

Figure 9: Teacher level of agreement to statements about the ***potential influence of AI in education***

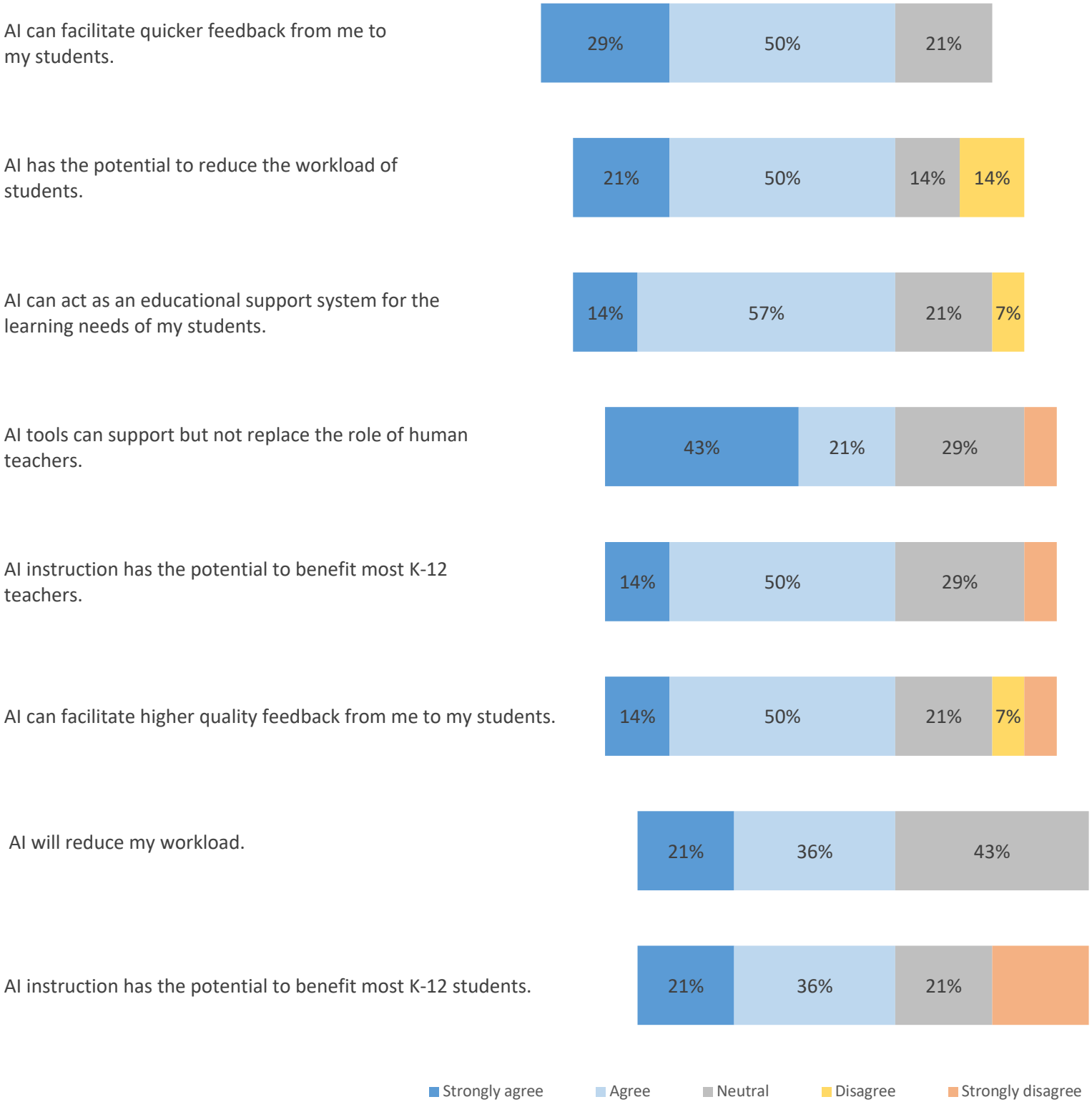


Figure 10: Teachers rank the usage and impact of AI tools in education

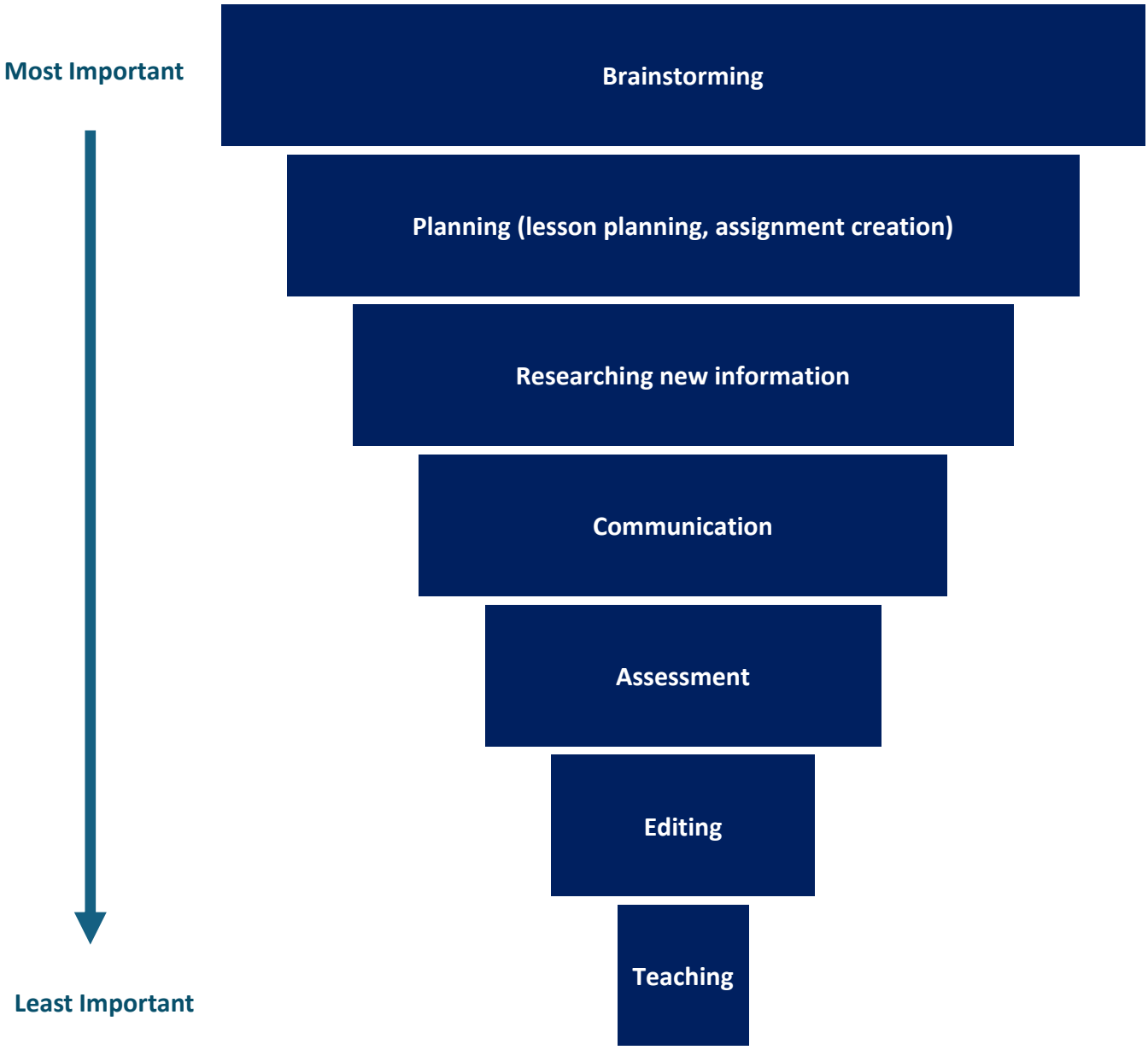


*Figure 11: Teacher **familiarity** with AI tools or products*

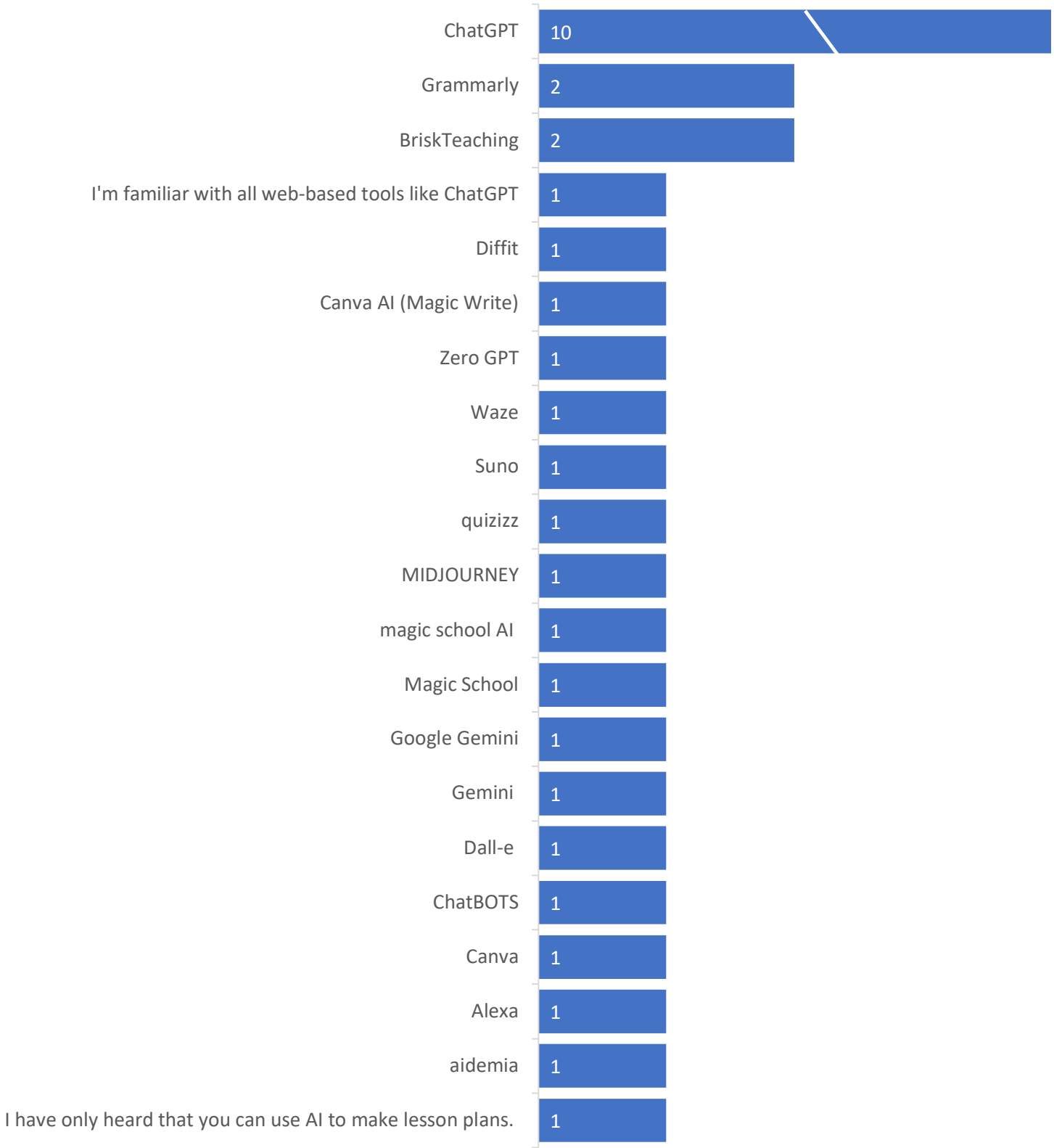


*Figure 12: Teacher **use** of AI tools or products*

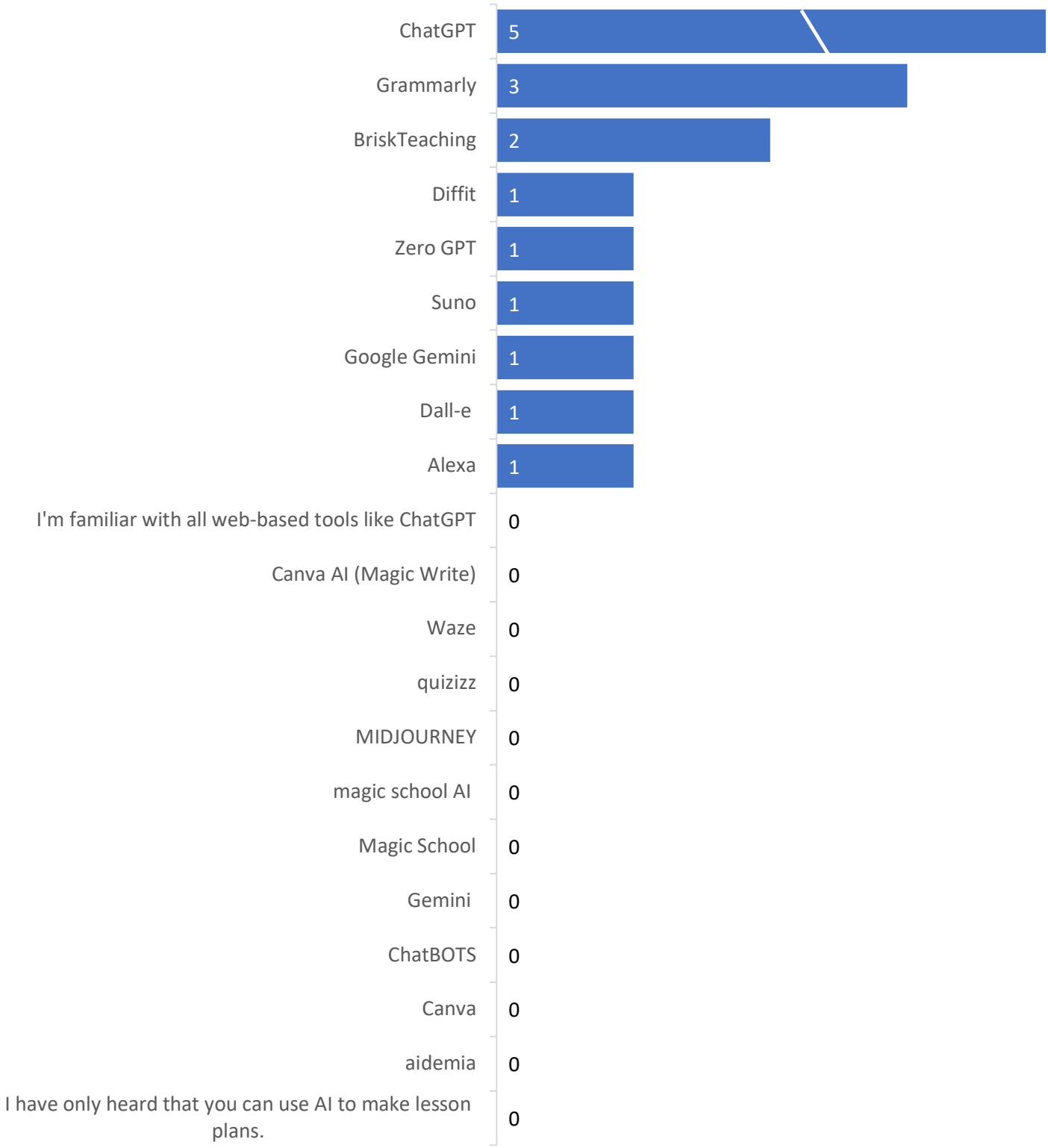


*Figure 13: Teacher use of AI for **work***

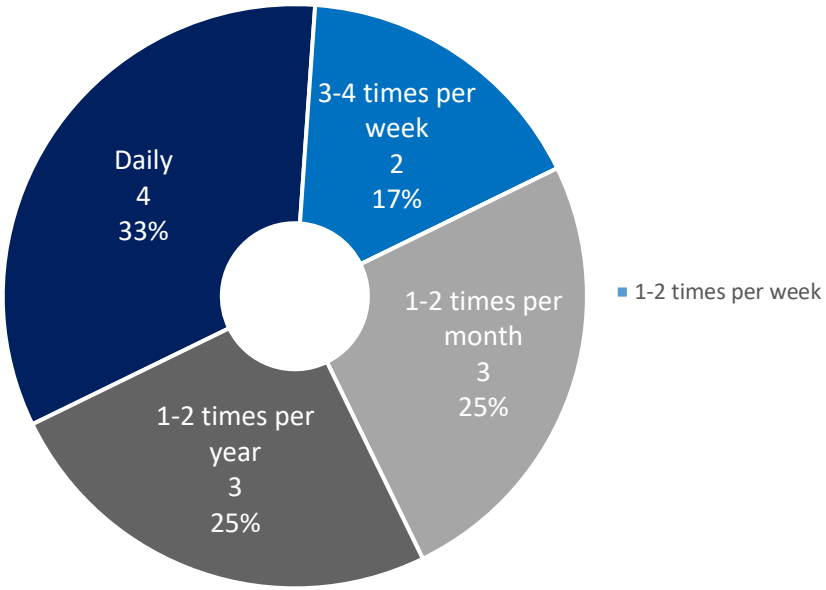


*Figure 14: Teacher use of AI for **personal***

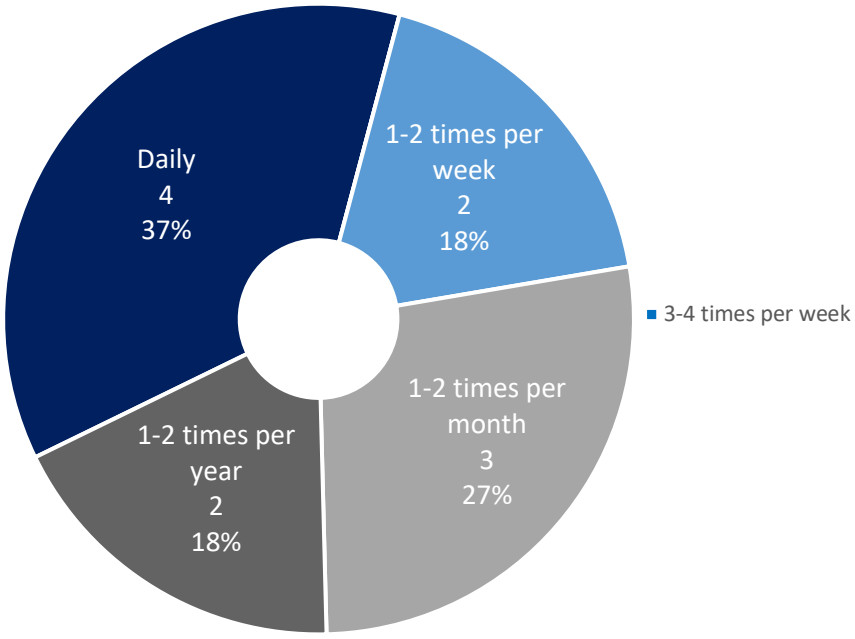
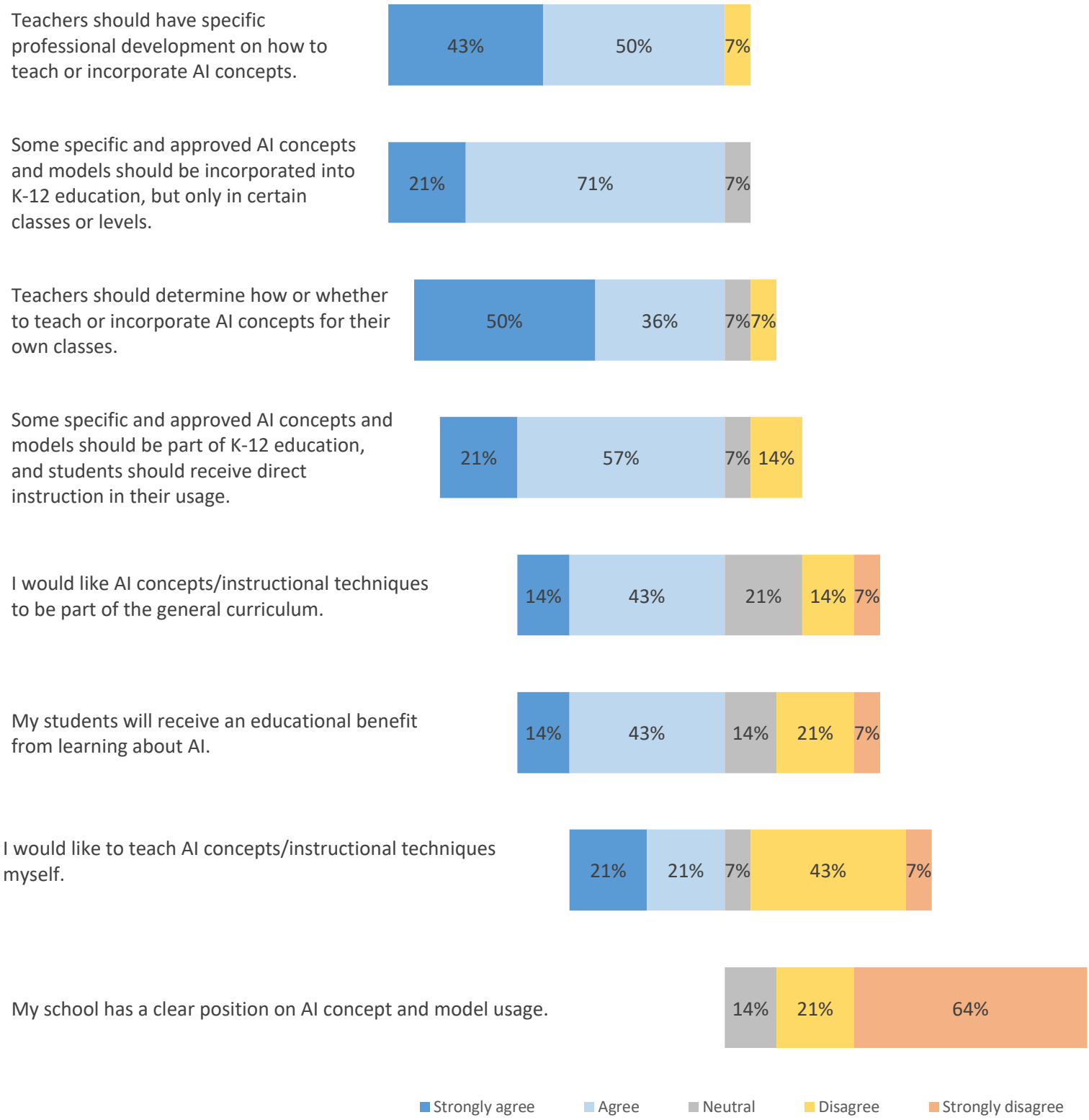


Figure 15: Teacher perceptions of their ***students learning about AI concepts in school***



Teachers expressed a mix of concerns and cautious optimism about AI's potential impact on students' education and employment prospects. Many feared that AI might contribute to declining work ethic, creativity, motivation, and critical thinking, as students increasingly seek shortcuts or become overly dependent on technology. Some worried that AI could exacerbate existing issues like reduced reading and communication skills, while others recognized its potential to enhance learning if properly integrated. A few highlighted the importance of professional development and thoughtful incorporation of AI to help students prepare for the future, noting that AI might simplify repetitive tasks or benefit students in certain employment contexts.

Figure 16: Teachers thoughts on the potential influence of AI in students' future education or employment prospects

Concerns About Dependency and Declining Skills

Many teachers worried that AI use could erode work ethic, motivation, creativity, and critical thinking.

"I'm concerned students will become lazy and let AI do the work rather than them, impacting their work ethic."

"I worry about reducing the amount of time students spend reading and thinking and communicating with others."

"I am worried it will create a dependence on AI and therefore create a deficit in learning and creativity/motivation."

"I think at this juncture… incorporating programs that only further eliminate the need for critical thinking, problem solving, and verbal communication patterns/exchanges is exacerbating an existing issue."

"I am concerned that students will utilize AI resources to get out of completing work that they should learn how to do on their own."

Mixed Feelings and Cautious Optimism

Some teachers recognized both risks and potential benefits.

"I have mixed emotions on this. However, I believe we should use it to help our students in a way that allows them to be prepared for the future."

"I go back and forth on the influence of AI. As a teacher, it benefits me. I do worry that students will rely on AI and not learn how to do certain things without AI."

"AI has potential to enhance their education and employment by simplifying redundancy. However based on interactions with my own peers I don't trust many teachers to properly incorporate the concept."

Need for Guidance and Training

Some felt that successful AI integration requires professional development and clear guidance.

"No. If it is going to happen the district should do a professional development and lay out clear instructions."

Concerns About Inequity

There was awareness that students who use AI might gain advantages over those who don't.

"I worry that students who do not use AI will be at a disadvantage to those who do in writing their college applications."

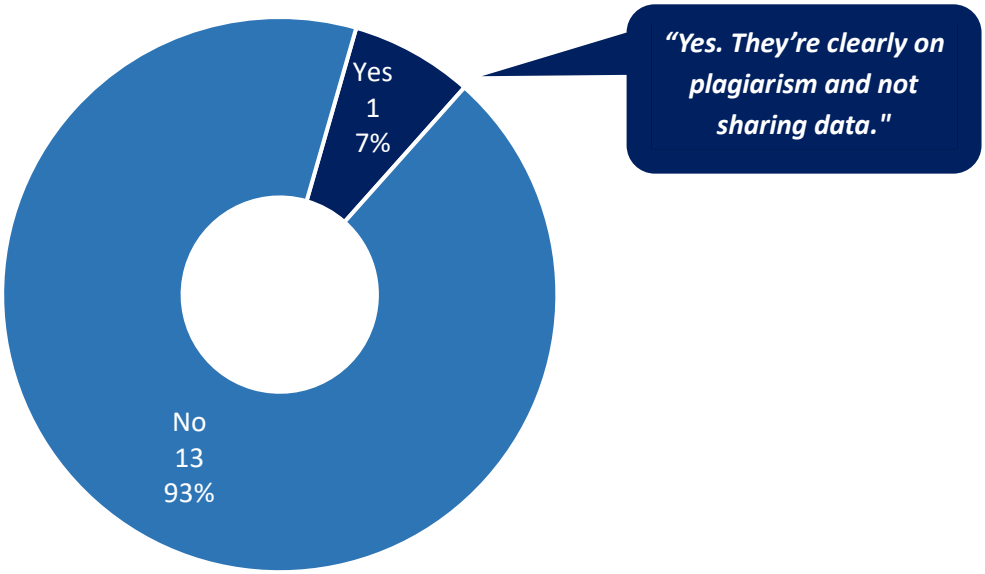
AI's Potential for Future Employment

Some acknowledged AI could support students in future jobs, depending on their path.

"Not for my students but I can see it being helpful in employment for general education students."

"AI has potential to enhance their education and employment by simplifying redundancy."

*Figure 17: Teachers note if they received **communication from their school or district** on the use of AI or AI policies*



Teachers emphasized the need for clear policies, practical professional development (PD), and beginner-friendly resources to help teachers effectively learn and teach AI concepts. Many stressed that PD should be directly connected to classroom instruction and include time for hands-on exploration. Several respondents called for district- or county-level guidance on expectations and acceptable tools, as well as policies on AI use and misuse. Challenges mentioned included teacher resistance to AI integration, overtraining on familiar tools, and the rapid pace of technology changes that can overwhelm educators. There was also recognition of AI's potential to reduce teacher workload and support data analysis for individualized learning, particularly in special education.

*Figure 18: Teachers note the **resources, support, or training** do you believe teachers need to effectively learn and teach AI concepts*

Need for Practical Training and Beginner Resources

Teachers want accessible, actionable guidance and time to explore AI tools.

"A beginners guide to AI, resources, strategies."

"AI for dummies!!!"

"Teachers should be shown and given time to explore possible benefits to using things like ChatGPT in creating lesson plans."

"Having a 'train the trainer' event so teacher leaders can learn about tools and then disseminate that to their buildings would be extremely beneficial."

"PD opportunities"

Importance of Clear Policies and District Guidance

Respondents highlighted the need for school systems to define policies and expectations.

"First off, schools need a specific and clear policy in place for AI usage; and then teachers need to be trained on how to detect it and teach it to students."

"If AI is going to be a part of the curriculum, it is imperative that school systems agree and implement a policy regarding it."

"Having districts discuss with their tech leaders a policy regarding the use and misuse of AI would also be beneficial."

"I do feel like training on county expectations would be beneficial for all teachers."

Frustration with Overtraining and Changing Tools

Some expressed concern about excessive or ineffective training and the rapid pace of tech changes.

"My district has a habit of over-training programs and concepts that most every teacher is fluent in… The amount of support we receive for programs that are part of a niche population is embarrassing."

"Teachers are frustrated with learning technology platforms then only using it minimally or not at all, then it changing next year. That's really tough."

AI's Potential to Support Teaching and Reduce Workload

There was recognition of AI's potential to assist with planning, data analysis, and intervention design.

"AI can help us, as special education teachers, to analyze multiple sources of data and create plans that target learning interventions for each student."

"Simplifying their workload to the point of our presence being redundant."

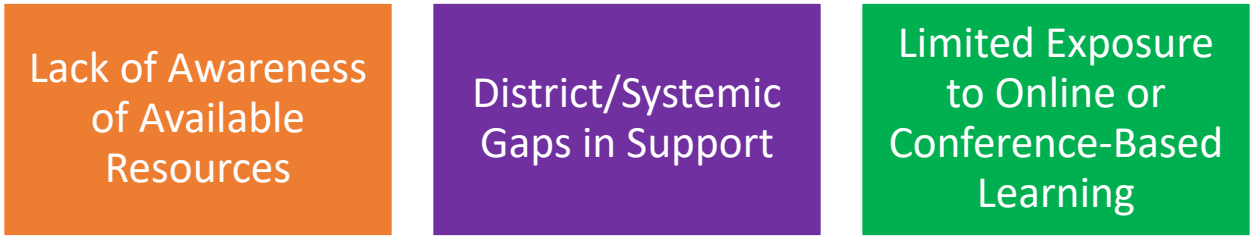
Anticipated Resistance and Challenges

Some anticipated opposition to AI integration, particularly in certain subject areas.

"The major challenge I anticipate is the opposition of some teachers, especially English classes, to the idea AI could positively influence students' learning."

Most respondents indicated they were unaware of any resources, support, or training available to help them understand how AI tools are used in education. Several simply responded with "No" or variations of it, while a few highlighted systemic challenges, such as their districts falling behind in providing up-to-date training. Some noted that while they had encountered online trainings or conference sessions, these opportunities were limited and lacked the depth or in-person engagement needed for meaningful learning.

Figure 19: Teacher awareness of resources, support, or training that might be available for them to understand how AI tools are used in education



Lack of Awareness of Available Resources

The overwhelming majority reported not knowing of any relevant resources or support.

"No"

"Really not."

"No I am not."

"Not at this moment."

District/Systemic Gaps in Support

Some respondents pointed to a lack of district-level responsiveness or up-to-date offerings.

"I'm aware of lots of resources, but my district stays behind the 8 ball in terms of staying up-to-date."

Limited Exposure to Online or Conference-Based Learning

A few mentioned isolated experiences with online resources or professional conferences.

"I only have seen online trainings and videos. At this time, I do not know of any in person professional development courses."

"The conference I attended was TETA, the Technology Educators of Tennessee Association, is where I first learned about usable and appropriate tools for me."

Participant Observation of the First Research Practice Partnership Phase One Meeting

Virtual kickoff meeting-February 2025

Participants: RPP leadership team (school leaders, teachers, parents, and students from Roane, Scott, and Sevier Counties)

A participant observation was conducted during the first meeting of the Research Practice Partnership (RPP) Phase One leadership team. The meeting was held via Zoom and served as a foundational opportunity for participants to engage with the PARTNER-AI project's goals, reflect on their values, and co-construct an initial vision for artificial intelligence (AI) in education.

The session began with introductions to the project and small-group activities, including a value-mapping exercise hosted on Padlet. This activity invited participants to reflect on questions such as "What does AI in education mean to you?", "What role does AI have now and in the future?", and "What values should guide AI use in schools?"

Key observations included:

Diverse understandings of AI in education. Participants largely saw AI as a tool to support learning and teaching. Comments included:

"It is a tool used to help students create and engage in learning through a variety of avenues."

"AI in education should be in partnership with the teacher and the students."

"Its role is mainly seen as reducing work or outsourcing it completely. I worry that people see AI's role as cheating, rather than a tool for learning."

"It's a tool to help students be able to learn in specific ways that may help them succeed better."

- Recognition of ethical concerns and needs for guidance. Participants emphasized transparency, accuracy, and equity, as well as the need for clear guidelines. For example:

"Transparency with both teachers and students in how they are using it. Understanding of the 'good, bad, and ugly' and dealing with those issues."

"AI should never replace any teachers. It should only be used for information gathering purposes and never for cheating."

"Clear guidelines on when it is acceptable to use AI and when it would be considered plagiarism."

- Commitments to student safety and learning. There was widespread agreement that K-12 students should learn about AI. Participants expressed views such as:

"It's super important for all students to learn about it."

"If we all learn to avoid and fear it, then we won't ever progress its uses."

"Students are already learning how to use AI on their own—it's everywhere on the internet. It would be helpful if they learned ways of using AI that didn't take away from their learning."

- Desire for professional development and support. Many participants indicated they would feel more confident integrating AI if they had access to training and guidance:

"I would be encouraged to incorporate it if we received some PD training and if I saw any specific benefits for students."

"Commitment to learning and appropriate usage of AI leading to something that teachers can trust."

The tone of the meeting was respectful, reflective, and open. Participants engaged thoughtfully with the material, expressed both hopes and concerns, and demonstrated a willingness to learn together. The Padlet contributions, chat transcripts, and breakout room summaries provide a valuable foundation for ongoing thematic analysis and the co-construction of the project's AI vision and Theory of Change.

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