Research Report

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More Students Use AI for Homework, and More Believe It Harms Critical Thinking

Selected Findings from the American Youth Panel

KEY FINDINGS

- The share of students in middle school grades and up who reported using AI for help with their homework increased from 48 percent in May 2025 to 62 percent in December 2025. Use among middle and high schoolers drove the overall increase.
- As of December 2025, 67 percent of students endorsed the statement "The more students use AI for their schoolwork, the more it will harm their critical thinking skills"—up more than 10 percentage points from ten months earlier.
- With the exception of using AI to get answers for homework, most students did not feel that their use of AI for other school-related purposes constituted cheating.
- Students in higher grade levels were more likely than students in lower grade levels to (1) say that their schools' rules for AI use depended on the specific teacher, (2) believe that their teachers were checking students' homework for AI use, and (3) worry about being accused of using AI to cheat.
- More female than male students believed that AI use harms their critical thinking skills and thought that their teachers were checking homework for AI use.

Starting in 2025, we have used the RAND American Youth Panel (AYP) to learn how and why youth are using artificial intelligence (AI) for school-related purposes (Doss et al., 2025). We intend for our survey questions to help school principals, school district superintendents, and state department of education leaders create or revise their guidance for students' allowed use of AI for schoolwork.

In December 2025, we administered our most comprehensive set of questions to date about students' AI use. As we explain in greater detail in the rest of this report, we asked students enrolled in middle school, high school, or postsecondary education the following:

- what category of AI tools they used (mostly chatbots)
- which specific AI tools they used (mostly ChatGPT)

- how they used the AI tools for school (getting better explanations of an assignment and brainstorming topped the list)
- whether they believe their AI use for these purposes is cheating (it can depend, but most answered no)
- whether students were in schools that had schoolwide rules for AI use (most did not)
- whether their teachers checked if students used AI for homework help (increasingly yes, the higher the grade level)
- whether they worried they would be accused of using AI to cheat (increasingly yes, the higher the grade level).

AYP members were eligible to participate in our December 2025 survey if they were between the ages of 12 and 29 and were currently enrolled in some type of schooling. In total, 1,214 enrolled youth responded to our questions. Among these youth, 15 percent (n = 184) were enrolled in middle school (grades 5 through 8), 61 percent (n = 738) were enrolled in high school (grades 9 through 12), and the remaining 24 percent (n = 292) were undergraduate students enrolled in a postsecondary institution. For simplicity, we refer to postsecondary-enrolled students as *college students* throughout this report. The youth in our sample represent diverse school environments, including traditional public schools, charter schools, private schools, homeschools, and postsecondary institutions.

We weighted this sample of youth to make it representative of all enrolled youth across the United States, at least with respect to their gender, race or ethnicity, grade level, and region of residence.

We had posed some of these same questions to independent samples of youth back in February 2025 and in May 2025. Where possible, we display time trends for reoccurring survey items. Note that, although we administered the same survey items at different points in time over the past year, the specific samples of youth to whom we posed these questions differed over time. In particular, we changed the way that we identified and sampled college students. Therefore, we caution readers when interpreting the time trend results for college students because some of the changes over time may be related to these methodological changes in our survey samples. For more details about the composition and comparability of the additional survey samples we analyze, please see the "Methodology" section at the end of this report.

In the sections that follow, we present findings from middle schoolers' through college students' reported use of AI for school.

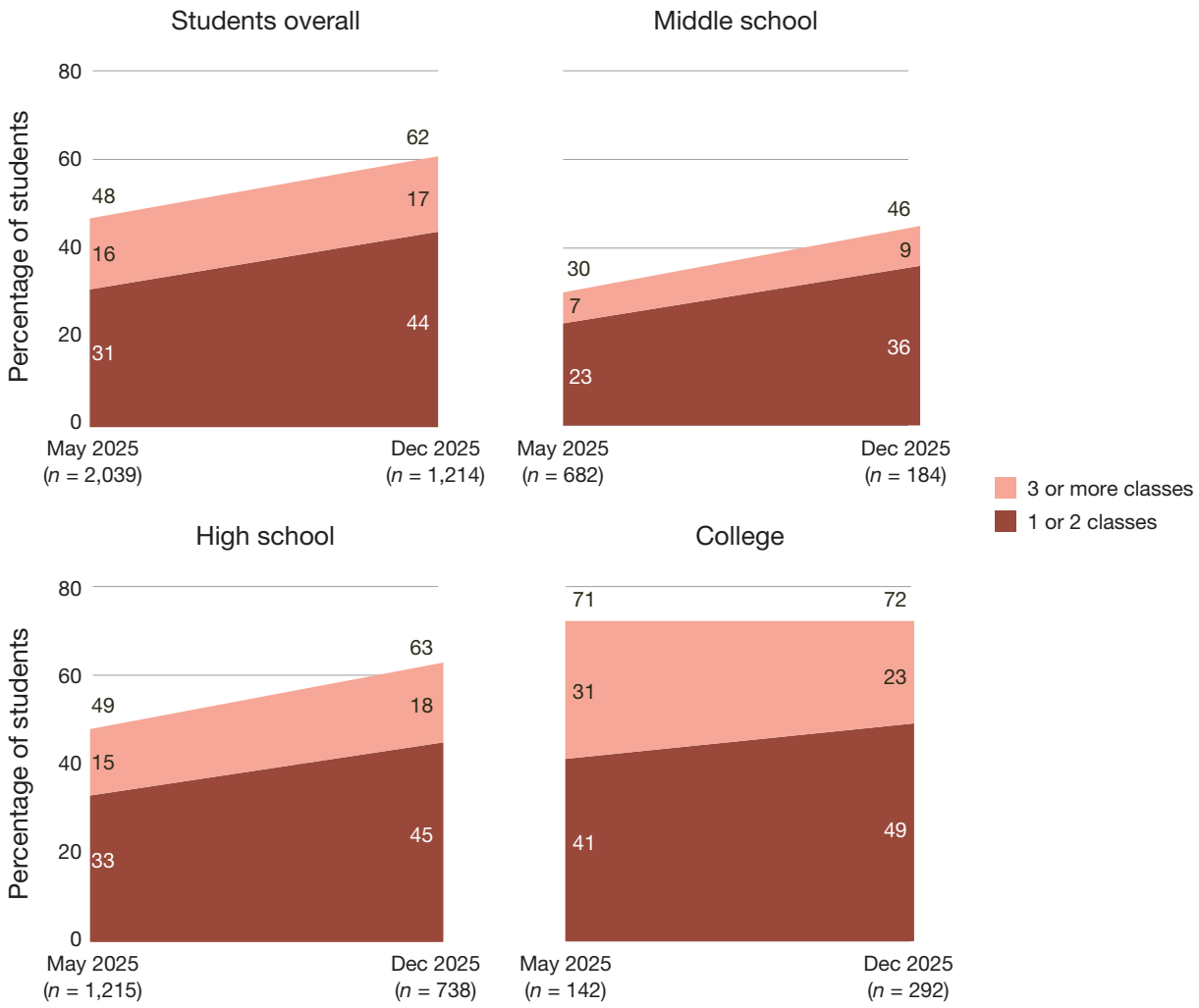
Substantially increasing shares of middle schoolers, high schoolers, and college students reported using AI for help with their homework over the course of 2025.

More Students Reported Using AI Help for Homework

Substantially increasing shares of middle schoolers, high schoolers, and college students reported using AI for help with their homework over the course of 2025 (see Figure 1). Between May and December 2025, middle and high schoolers' AI use drove the overall increase. By December 2025, nearly half of middle schoolers reported using AI for homework help in at least one of their classes. High school and college students were the most likely to report using AI for at least one of their classes. And one-quarter of college students were using AI for homework help in three or more of their classes.[1]

FIGURE 1

Students Increasingly Use AI Help for Homework



SOURCE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question administered to nationally representative samples of youth in May 2025 and December 2025: "Do you use AI help (like chatbots) for your homework? We won't share your answer with anyone" (n = 2,039 in May 2025; n = 1,214 in December 2025). The age eligibility criteria differed slightly between the May 2025 and December 2025 surveys; see the "Methodology" section at the end of this report for more details. Values may not sum because of rounding.

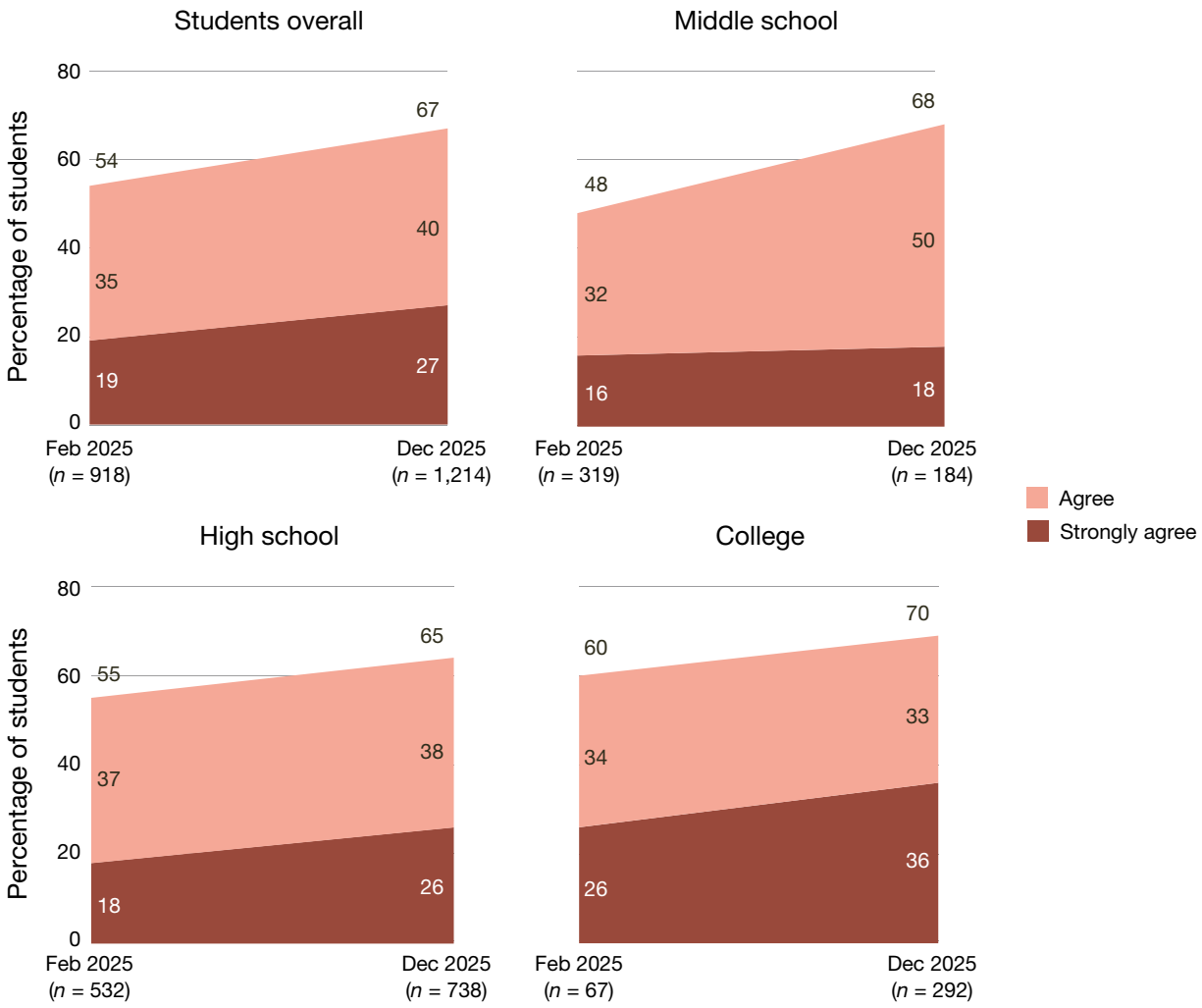
Increasing Shares of Students Agreed That Using AI for Schoolwork Harms Critical Thinking Skills

Students' responses to our surveys also show their increasing concern that using AI for schoolwork will harm critical thinking skills (see Figure 2). Back in February 2025, 54 percent of youth agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "The more students use AI (such as ChatGPT) for their schoolwork, the more it will harm their critical thinking skills" (see also Doss et al., 2025). Ten months later in December 2025, this percentage had grown to 67 percent. Though skepticism increased for students of all grade levels, the largest increase in concern (20 percentage points) was among middle school students.

As of December 2025, of the 38 percent of students who reported not using AI for homework, three-quarters (78 percent) said that they believe that using AI for schoolwork harms critical thinking skills. And 60 percent of students who reported that they did use AI for homework indicated the same. Greater percentages of students in higher grade

FIGURE 2

Students Increasingly Agreed That Using AI for Schoolwork Harms Critical Thinking Skills



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question administered to nationally representative samples of youth in February 2025 and December 2025: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The more students use AI (such as ChatGPT) for their schoolwork, the more it will harm their critical thinking skills" (n = 918 in February 2025; n = 1,214 in December 2025). The age eligibility criteria differed slightly between the February 2025 and December 2025 surveys; see the "Methodology" section at the end of this report for more details. Interpret the findings for college students with caution because the sample size was particularly small in February 2025.

levels agreed that AI harms critical thinking skills, although the grade-level differences were not statistically significant—i.e., 52 percent of middle schoolers who used AI for homework agreed that AI harmed critical thinking, compared with 60 percent of high schoolers and 64 percent of college students.

Among Seven Categories of AI Tools, Students Used Mostly Chatbots

We asked students which, if any, of seven categories of AI tools they used as of December 2025. The categories we listed included chatbots, college advisers, home-

work helpers, mental health aides, and writing helpers. Twenty-nine percent of youth said that they used none of the seven categories of AI tools, while the remaining 71 percent indicated that they used at least one of the seven categories of tools listed in the survey.

As shown in Figure 3, of the seven categories, students most commonly used chatbots, followed by writing helpers (such as Grammarly or Quill), followed by general homework helpers (such as Brainly, Chegg, or Course Hero). Two percent or fewer of students used AI tools expressly designed for career coaching, college advising, or mental health support.

Students in higher grade levels were more likely to use certain categories of AI tools than students in lower grade levels. Most notably, high school students and, especially, college students were much more likely than their middle school counterparts to report using AI chatbots and AI writing helpers, as shown in the bottom of Figure 3.

We further asked students to indicate which, if any, of 11 popular AI tools they used in class or for homework. We included a 12th "other" option and a mutually exclusive "I do not use any of these tools" option. Seven percent of youth selected the "other" option, and 28 percent of youth indicated that they did not use any of the listed AI tools in class or for homework.

As shown in Figure 4, ChatGPT was by far the most common AI tool that students were using, followed by two Google products. A majority of students (53 percent) reported using ChatGPT as of December 2025. This was a slight increase over the 45 percent of students who reported using ChatGPT when we asked this question in May 2025. We also observed large growth in students' use of Google Gemini; the share of students using this product roughly doubled between May and December 2025.

Among the other AI tools that students wrote in, Gauth AI, which is a homework helper, was by far the most commonly mentioned—by 28 students (results not shown).

Students Typically Used AI for Two of Eight Surveyed School-Related Purposes

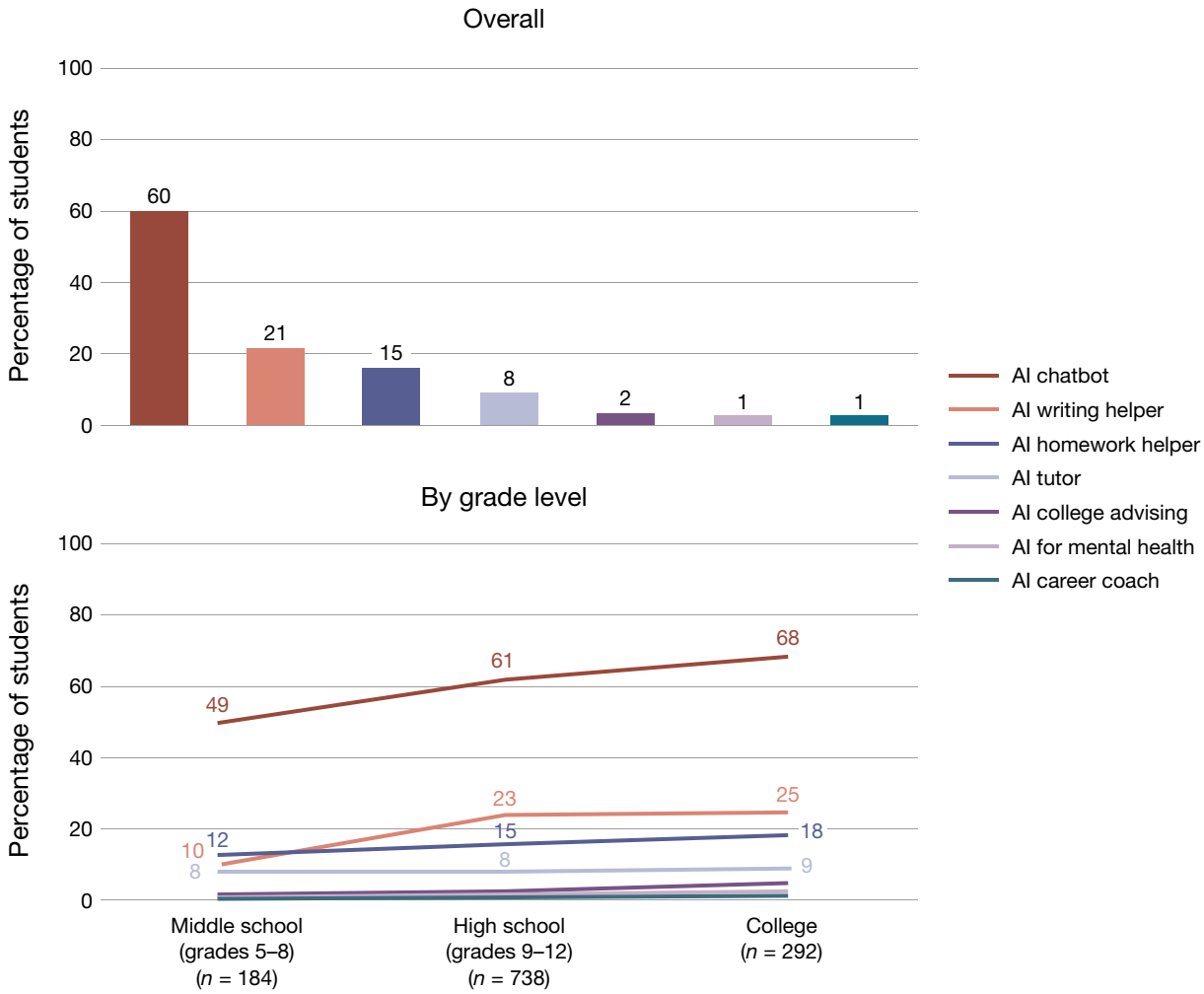
We then asked students to select from eight school-related purposes all of the ways they were using AI. (We also included an "other" option and a mutually exclusive "I don't use AI for school-related purposes" option.) Seventy-five percent of students used AI for at least one of the listed school-related purposes. In results not shown, students typically selected two of these purposes.

Among the eight school-related AI purposes listed in the survey, students almost equally selected the following four: (1) getting better explanations of assignments (38 percent), (2) brainstorming (35 percent), (3) looking up facts (33 percent), and (4) drafting or revising writing (33 percent) (see Figure 5). With the exception of looking up facts, students in higher grade levels were more likely to use AI for these purposes than students in lower grade levels. For example, the share of students using AI to get better explanations of assignments was nearly double at the college level than at the middle school level

Most notably, high school students and, especially, college students were much more likely than their middle school counterparts to report using AI chatbots and AI writing helpers.

FIGURE 3

Students' Use of Chatbots Increased by Grade Level



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question administered to a nationally representative sample of youth in December 2025: "What kinds of AI tools do you use, if any?" (*n* = 1,214). We provided the following examples of each category of AI tools: (1) AI chatbot (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude), (2) AI writing helper (e.g., Grammarly, Quill), (3) AI homework helper (e.g., Brainly, Chegg, Course Hero), (4) AI tutor (e.g., Khanmigo, CogniSpark, Mindgrasp), (5) AI college advising (e.g., GradGPT), (6) AI for mental health (e.g., Koko, Woebot Health), and (7) AI career coach (e.g., CodeSignal, Coach). Twenty-nine percent of youth selected none of the listed AI tools. Some data labels are not shown in the figure for readability.

(48 percent versus 26 percent, respectively). We suspect that this pattern likely reflects the increasing complexity and independently driven nature of school assignments as students move into higher grades.

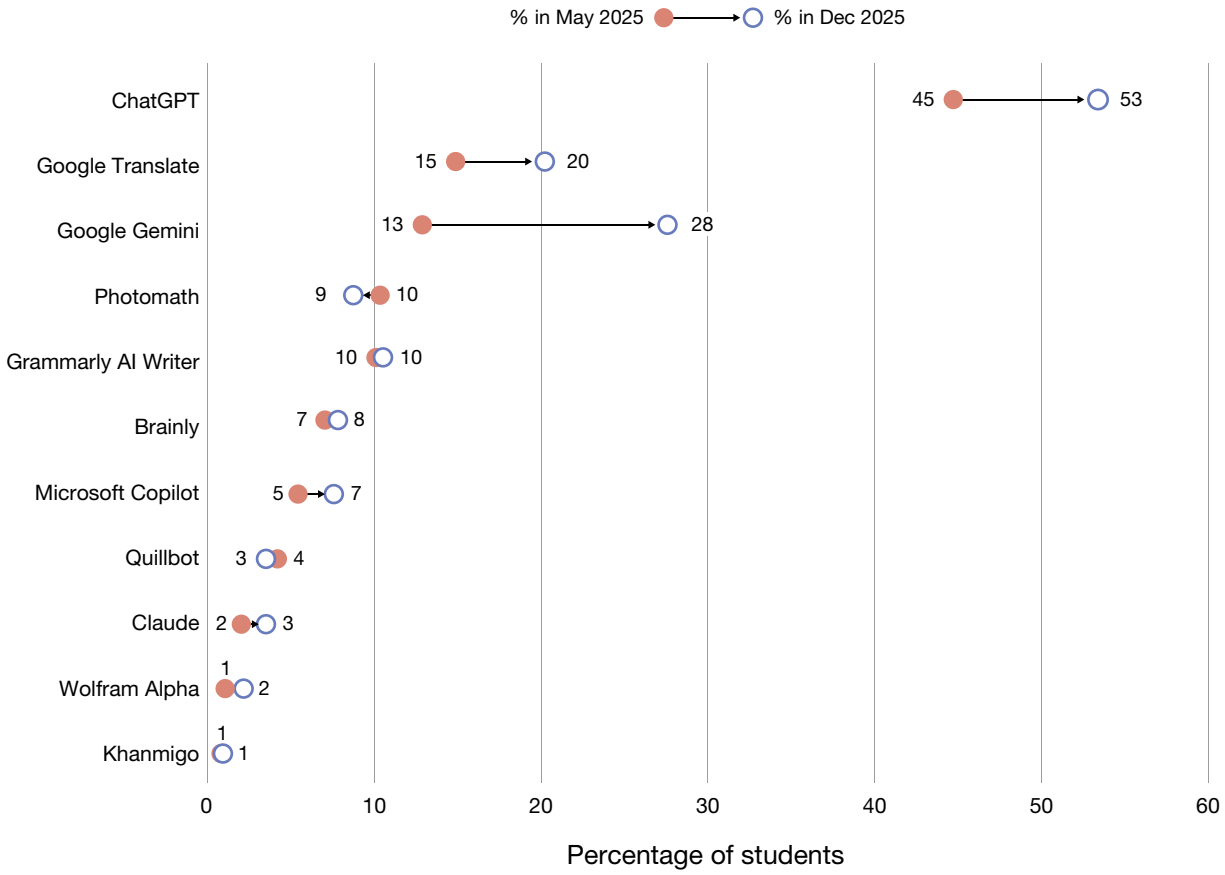
Among the 15 other school-related purposes that students wrote in, students most commonly said that they used AI to check their answers, to help understand what they did wrong on problems, and to walk them through particular problems.

Except for Getting Answers to Homework, Students Did Not Feel That Their AI Use Was Necessarily Cheating

We asked those students who indicated using AI for any of the eight school-related purposes listed in Figure 5 whether they considered their use for that particular purpose to be cheating. Our discussion focuses on the five most common school-related

FIGURE 4

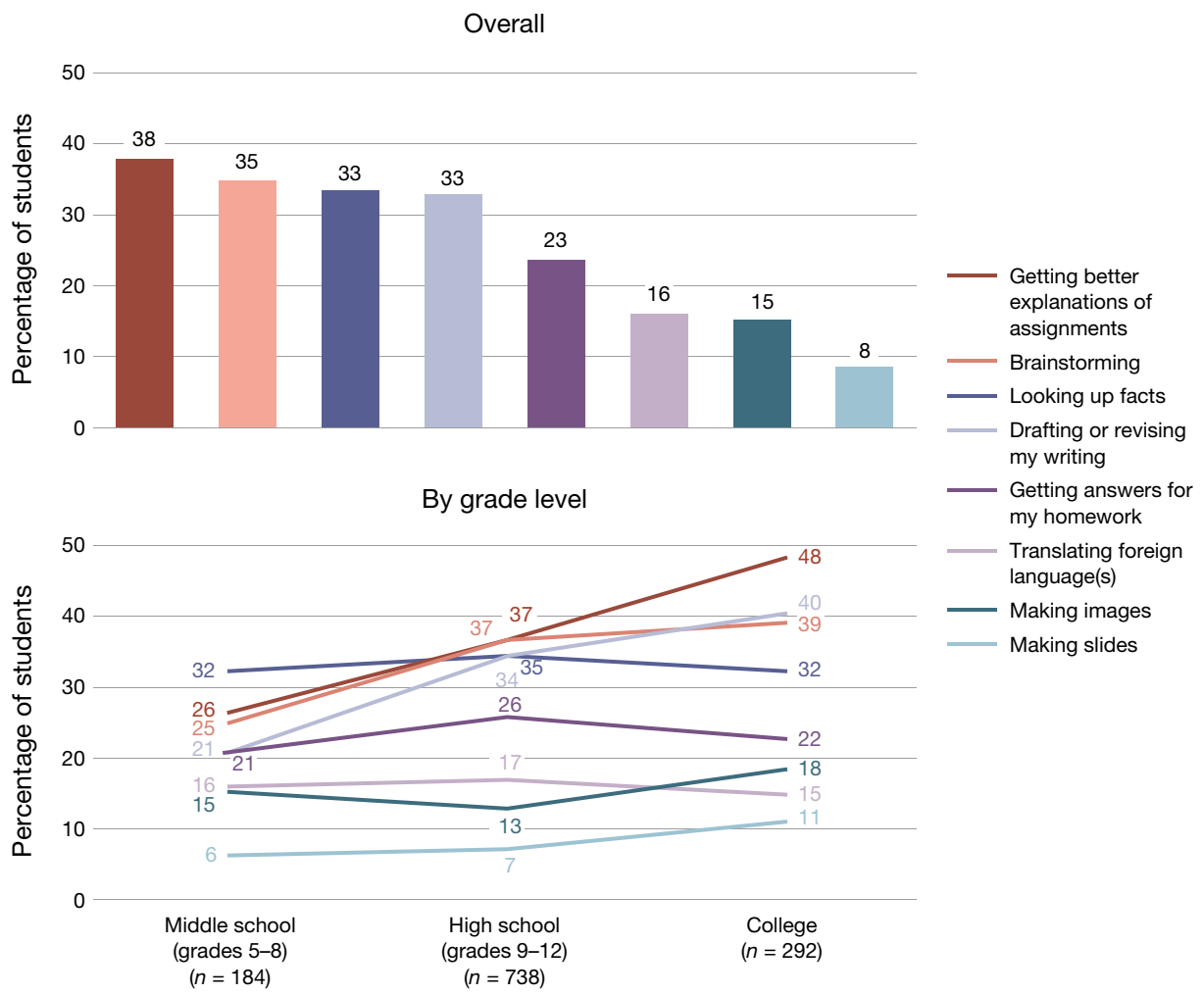
ChatGPT Continues to Be the Most Commonly Used AI Tool in Class and for Homework



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question administered to a nationally representative sample of youth in December 2025: "What AI tools, if any, do you use in class or for homework?" (*n* = 1,214). Twenty-eight percent of youth selected "I do not use any of these tools," and 7 percent reported using AI for "other" purposes. We present results from the same survey item administered to a separate nationally representative sample of youth in May 2025 (*n* = 2,032) for comparison over time.

FIGURE 5

Students Used AI for a Variety of School-Related Purposes



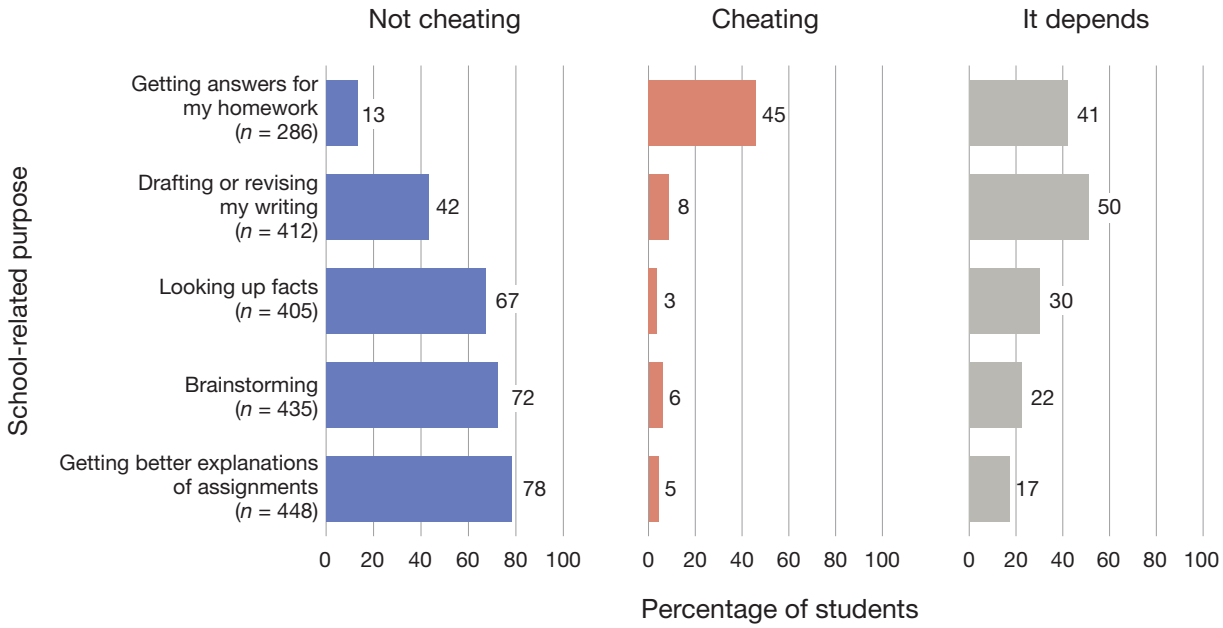
NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question administered to a nationally representative sample of youth in December 2025: "How do you use AI for school-related purposes, if at all?" (*n* = 1,214). Twenty-five percent of youth selected "I don't use AI for school-related purposes," and 4 percent reported using AI for "other" purposes.

purposes that students selected because these are the use cases for which we have a sufficient sample size to reliably analyze students' perceptions about cheating.

Figure 6 shows that, with the exception of using AI to get homework answers, students overwhelmingly did not feel that their use of AI could be considered cheating.[2] For example, 78 percent of students said that using AI to get better explanations of their assignments was not cheating, and 72 percent said the same about brainstorming with AI. However, a sizable minority of students indicated that their AI use *could* be considered cheating, especially for writing and for getting homework answers. The large share of students who selected "it depends" comports with some of the other uses that students wrote in,

FIGURE 6

Few Students Considered Their Use of AI to Be Cheating



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question administered to a nationally representative sample of youth in December 2025: "Do you consider these uses of AI to be cheating?" (*n* = 448). Respondents were asked if they considered the use of AI to be cheating only if they reported using AI for that specific purpose on a previous survey item.

such as using AI to edit or improve their writing rather than to generate whole drafts.

Most Students Indicated That Their School Did Not Have a Schoolwide Rule About AI Use for Homework

We asked students, "What is your school's rule about using AI help (like chatbots) for homework?" and offered five mutually exclusive responses: (1) "No rule that I know about"; (2) "We may use AI help for homework in any class"; (3) "We may not use AI help for homework in any class"; (4) "Some teachers allow it, and some teachers don't"; and (5) "I don't know."

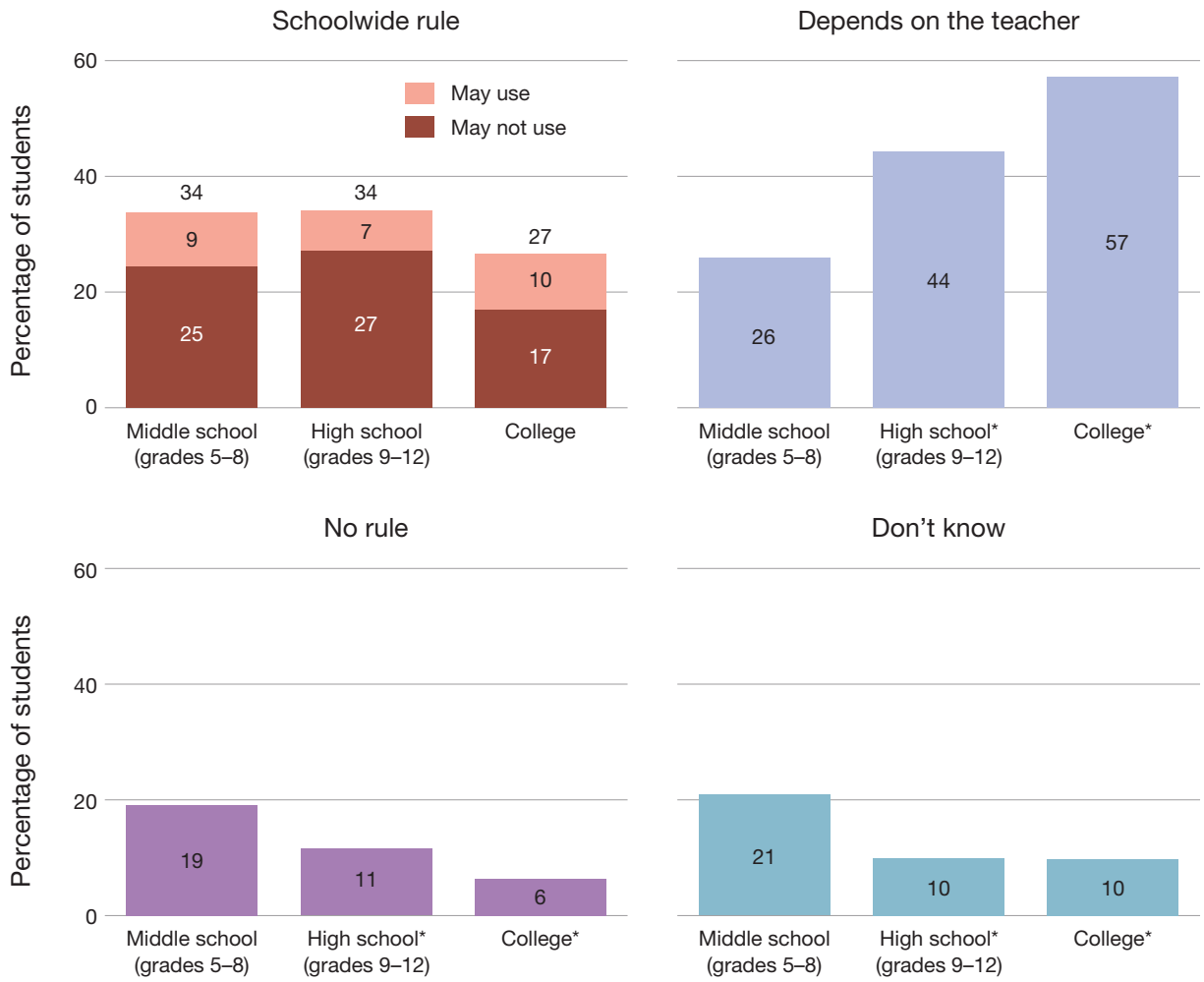
Students continued to report substantial ambiguity around school rules in December 2025, as they did when we first asked this question nearly a year ago in January 2025 (Doss et al., 2025). As shown in the red bars in the top left of Figure 7, about one-third of middle schoolers, high schoolers, and college students indicated that their school had a schoolwide rule. Students who reported a schoolwide rule for AI use were two to three times more likely to say that the rule prohibited AI help for homework than allowed it.

The blue bars in Figure 7 show that the higher the grade level, the more likely rules for AI use were to depend on a specific teacher. This finding was especially true at the postsecondary level, where a majority of college students (57 percent) said that some teachers allowed the use of AI help for homework and some did not.

The purple and teal bars in Figure 7 show that, compared with middle school students, high school and college students were more likely to indicate that their school had no rule for AI use or that they did not know whether such a rule existed.

FIGURE 7

One-Third of Students Indicated That Their School Has a Schoolwide Rule About Using AI Help for Homework



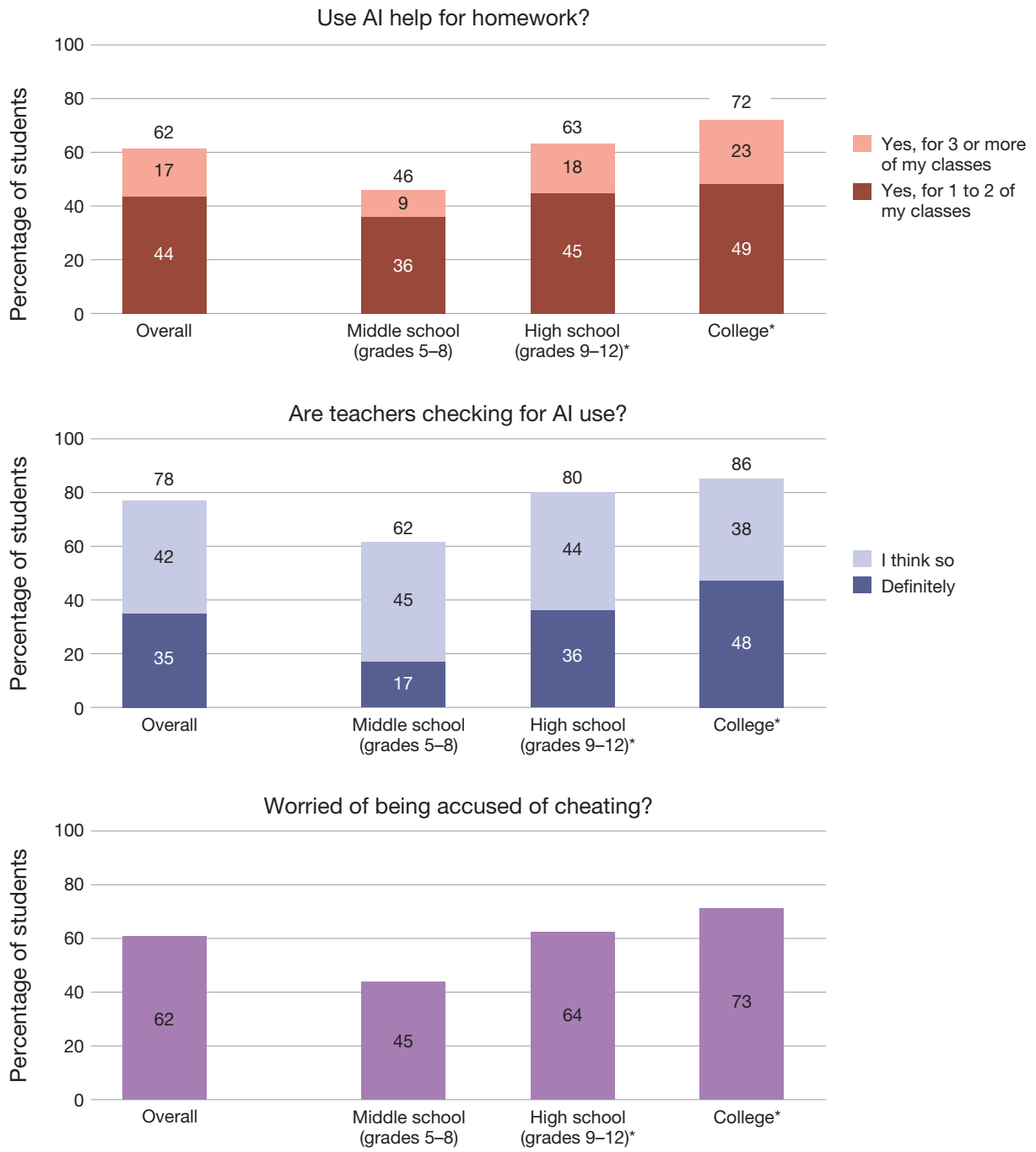
NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question administered to a nationally representative sample of youth in December 2025: "What is your school's rule about using AI help (like chatbots) for homework?" (n = 1,214 overall; n = 184 middle school students; n = 738 high school students; n = 292 college students). The values shown for schoolwide rule include students who said, "We may use AI help for homework in any class" or "We may not use AI help for homework in any class." An asterisk (*) indicates that the percentage of high school or college students who said that their school had a rule about using AI help for homework is statistically significantly different from the percentage of middle school students who said the same.

Older Students Were More Likely to Report That Teachers Check for AI Use, and These Students Were More Likely to Worry About Being Accused of Cheating

In addition to asking students whether they used AI help for their homework, we asked students the following two questions: "Do teachers in your school check whether students use AI to help with homework and projects?" and "Are you worried you might be accused of using AI to cheat, even if you didn't?" Figure 8 shows that students' answers to all three questions followed the same stair-step pattern: The older the students, the more likely they were to use AI, the more likely they were to believe that their teachers check for AI use, and the more likely they were to worry that they will be accused of using AI to cheat.

FIGURE 8

Older Students Were More Likely to Use AI Help for Homework, to Think That Teachers Check for AI Use, and to Worry About Being Accused of Cheating



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey questions administered to a nationally representative sample of youth in December 2025: "Do you use AI help (like chatbots) for your homework? We won't share your answer with anyone," "Do teachers in your school check whether students use AI to help with homework and projects?" and "Are you worried you might be accused of using AI to cheat, even if you didn't?" (n = 1,214). An asterisk (*) indicates that the percentage of high school or college students is statistically significantly different from the percentage of middle school students. Values may not sum because of rounding.

The older the students, the more likely they were to believe that their teachers definitely checked whether students used AI to help with homework and projects.

Furthermore, students expressed substantial ambiguity about whether their teachers checked their work for AI use. For example, only 17 percent of middle schoolers said that their teachers were definitely checking, compared with 45 percent who suspected that teachers might be but were not sure. The older the students, the more likely they were to believe that their teachers definitely checked whether students used AI to help with homework and projects.

Although Male and Female Students Were Equally Likely to Use AI, Female Students Expressed More Concerns About AI Use

Roughly equal shares of male and female students reported using AI (like chatbots) for help with their homework (see Figure 9). Female students were also statistically equally as likely as male students to be worried about being accused of cheating with AI.

Despite the fact that female students were just as likely as their male counterparts to use AI for homework help, female students seemed to have more concerns about this use. Specifically, female students were more likely than male students to

- agree that using AI for their schoolwork will harm their critical thinking skills (75 percent of female students versus 59 percent of male students)
- believe that their teachers are checking whether students use AI to help with homework and projects (82 percent of female students versus 74 percent of male students).

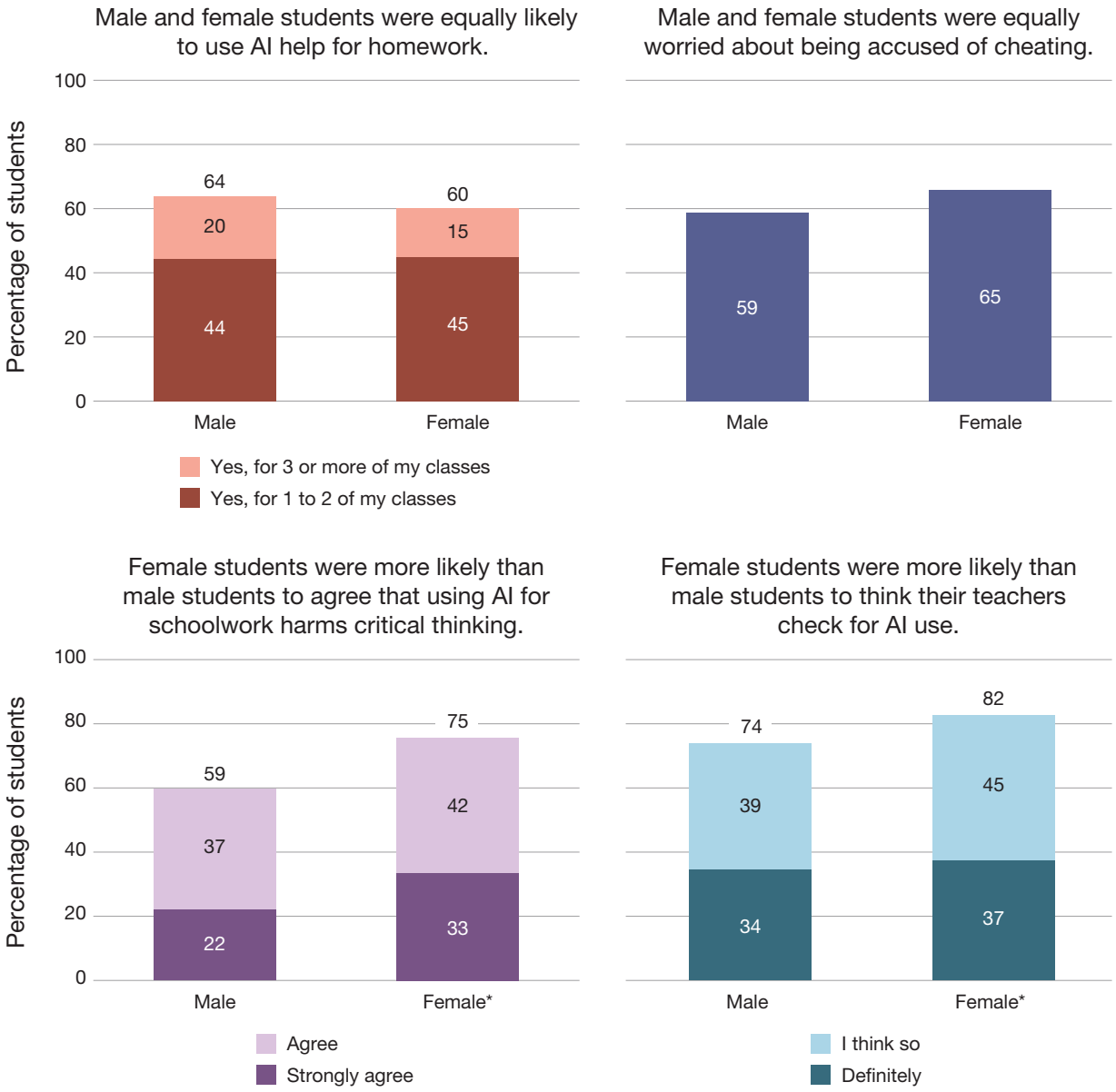
Students Who Attend Schools That Allow AI Use and Who Believe That AI Does Not Harm Critical Thinking Were More Likely to Use AI for Homework Help

We then examined whether the four factors asked about on the December 2025 survey—perception of the effect of AI use on critical thinking, school rules about AI help for homework, belief that teachers check for AI use, and worry about being accused of cheating—were associated with students' use of AI for homework help. Specifically, we combined these four factors into a multivariate regression to predict students' AI use, adding controls for grade level and gender (which are correlated with AI use, as shown in the previous figures). Although this analysis cannot tell us which of these inputs cause students to use AI help for homework, it does indicate which factors are positively correlated with students' use of AI for homework help, as shown in Figure 10. These factors are

- attending a school with a schoolwide rule that allows students to use AI for homework (as well as being in a setting where such rules depend on a specific teacher)
- perceiving that AI use does not harm students' critical thinking skills (or feeling neutral about the effects of AI use on critical thinking)
- being worried about being accused of using AI to cheat.[3]

FIGURE 9

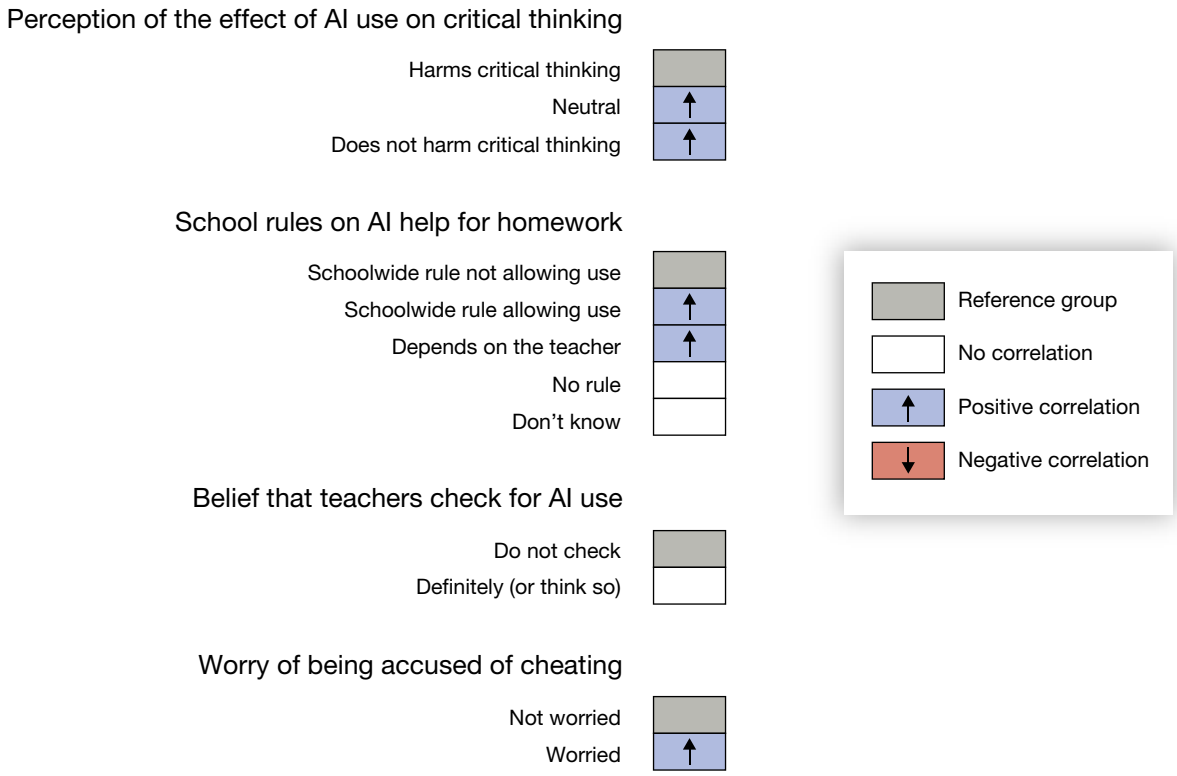
Female Students Were as Likely to Use AI as Male Students, but They Were More Concerned About Using It



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey questions administered to a nationally representative sample of youth in December 2025: "Do you use AI help (like chatbots) for your homework? We won't share your answer with anyone"; "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The more students use AI (such as ChatGPT) for their schoolwork, the more it will harm their critical thinking skills"; "Do teachers in your school check whether students use AI to help with homework and projects?"; and "Are you worried you might be accused of using AI to cheat, even if you didn't?" (n = 1,206). An asterisk (*) indicates that the percentage of female students is statistically significantly different from the percentage of male students. Values may not sum because of rounding.

FIGURE 10

Four Factors Correlate Positively with Students' Use of AI Help for Homework



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey questions administered to a nationally representative sample of youth in December 2025: "Do you use AI help (like chatbots) for your homework? We won't share your answer with anyone"; "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The more students use AI (such as ChatGPT) for their schoolwork, the more it will harm their critical thinking skills"; "What is your school's rule about using AI help (like chatbots) for homework?"; "Do teachers in your school check whether students use AI to help with homework and projects?"; and "Are you worried you might be accused of using AI to cheat, even if you didn't?" (n = 1,206). Results are from a multivariate linear regression model regressing students' use of AI help for homework on four indicators of students' perceptions about AI use and their school environments, with controls for their grade level and gender.

Implications and Recommendations

Students' responses to our surveys send a strong, clear signal of their increased use of AI for school-related purposes, including homework. Results from the December 2025 survey administered to AYP members suggest that the older the students, the more likely they were to use AI for

- help with homework at all
- help with homework in three or more of their classes
- a variety of school-related purposes, including drafting or revising writing, brainstorming, and getting better explanations of assignments.

In addition, the older the students, the more likely they were to use AI chatbots, such as ChatGPT, and writing helpers, such as Grammarly and Quill.

At the same time, students reported substantial ambiguity in how to navigate their increasing use of AI in the school environment. That is, the older the students, the more likely they were to

- say that AI rules at their school depend on the teacher
- say that they knew or suspected that their teachers were checking for AI use
- worry that they would be accused of using AI to cheat on their homework, even if they did not.

Perhaps most importantly, increasing shares of students of all grade levels agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the more students use AI for schoolwork, the more it harms students' critical thinking.

Perhaps most importantly, increasing shares of students of all grade levels agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the more students use AI for schoolwork, the more it harms students' critical thinking. As of December 2025, 60 percent of the students who used AI help for homework believed that AI use harms students' critical thinking.

The large proportion of students who use AI for homework help and who worry about its impacts should be a call to action for educators. We recommend that schools have direct conversations with students about their perceptions of AI use and how it might assist or hamper the development of their critical thinking skills. As these data show, most students already use AI for homework; educators should elicit students' suggestions for ways to most and least productively use AI for that purpose.

To develop school policies and guidance about AI use, school educators and district leaders should identify use cases in which AI use primarily leads to *cognitive offloading* (i.e., using AI to do the mental work for students) or to *cognitive augmentation* (i.e., using AI to spur students to do deeper or more-robust work). For example, cognitive augmentation might occur when students use AI tools to help coach them to *revise* rather than initially draft their writing. AI could pose Socratic questions to students, give feedback to students on their reasoning, and provide students with opposing viewpoints.

In practice, using AI for cognitive augmentation rather than cognitive offloading might require schools to adopt the *flipped* classroom model, in which students are first exposed to new content at home (whether AI-assisted or not) and then do independent or group practice with that new content during teacher-led class time that is AI-free. In this way, students cannot simply use AI to think for them, and schools can retain cognitive friction for students in their learning process. The research evidence from flipped classrooms for student learning is at least modestly positive (Ma, Fan, and Ning, 2025).

Regardless of which instructional model schools use, school principals and district leaders need to explicitly tell students when and for which purposes they may use AI and when they cannot. With most students already using AI for homework, many do so without any school guidance. According to students, the lack of clarity around appropriate AI use is greatest in middle schools, followed by high schools, and then postsecondary institutions. Clarity and schoolwide consistency in what is allowed (especially for homework) could at least help alleviate students' worry that using AI will harm their critical thinking skills. And for schools trying to limit students' use of AI for homework, a schoolwide policy explicitly forbidding it could at least dampen students' use of AI for this purpose, even if it cannot stop it completely.

Methodology

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the collected AYP survey data and how we analyzed these data to present the findings in this report.

Data

The primary data source for our analysis, the AYP, is a nationally representative survey administered to youth in December 2025. First established in 2024, the AYP is a subset of the larger RAND American Life Panel (ALP), a survey panel designed to produce nationally representative estimates of the U.S. population. For more details about how youth were recruited to participate in the AYP, please see Schwartz et al. (2025).

The December 2025 survey was administered to members of the AYP and ALP who were between the ages of 12 and 29 and were enrolled in some type of schooling as of the 2025–2026 school year. The survey was in the field between December 4, 2025, and January 5, 2026. In total, 2,420 youth were invited to complete the survey. We received completed surveys from 1,214 youth. A small portion of invited youth screened out of the survey because they were no longer enrolled in school. We weighted this sample of youth to make it representative of all enrolled youth across the country, at least with respect to their gender, race or ethnicity, grade level, and region of residence.

To assist with the interpretation of the December 2025 survey results, we present results for select survey items that were included on two other recent surveys of youth. These other surveys, administered in February 2025 and May 2025, respectively, were also fielded, at least in part, using the AYP. As shown in Table 1, the samples for these additional surveys were similar, although they are not one-for-one directly comparable to the December 2025 survey sample. There are several important differences to keep in mind. First, the December 2025 survey was administered only to youth who we knew were enrolled in school, while earlier surveys also included youth in the eligible age range who were not enrolled in school. Second, the earlier surveys were restricted to 12- to 21-year-olds, while the December 2025 survey expanded the age eligibility up to 29 years. This change to the age range likely influenced the number of college students (i.e., postsecondary-enrolled youth) who were eligible to participate. Third, to achieve sufficient sample sizes, the February and May surveys supplemented AYP data collection by administering the same survey to youth who were members of the Ipsos Knowledge Panel. And finally, the May 2025 survey—which had a sample size near double the other two surveys—included oversamples of youth who resided in four states of interest (California, Florida, Texas, and New York).

To make these additional survey samples as comparable to the December 2025 survey sample as possible, we restricted our analyses of the February and May surveys to exclude graduate students and youth not enrolled in school.

Analysis

We analyzed differences in youths' responses to our survey items by grade level: middle school (grades 5–8), high school (grades 9–12), and postsecondary (first, second, third, or fourth year of college or trade school). Importantly, the categorization of students' grade levels is based on their

TABLE 1

Survey Samples Used in This Analysis Differ Slightly

Specification	February 2025	May 2025	December 2025
Survey eligibility			
Age	12–21	12–21	12–29
Enrollment status	• Middle school (grades 5–8) • High school (grades 9–12) • Postsecondary (undergraduate students) • Postsecondary (graduate students) • Not enrolled in school	• Middle school (grades 5–8) • High school (grades 9–12) • Postsecondary (undergraduate students) • Postsecondary (graduate students) • Not enrolled in school	• Middle school (grades 5–8) • High school (grades 9–12) • Postsecondary (undergraduate students)
Panels used	AYP + Ipsos Knowledge Panel	AYP + Ipsos Knowledge Panel	AYP only
Completed surveys (*N*)	1,058	2,332	1,214
Oversamples	No oversamples	Oversamples in CA, FL, NY, and TX	No oversamples

self-reported grade levels, not the grade span of the school that they attend. This means that there are likely some discrepancies in how we have categorized students and their actual school environments. For example, some students in grade 9 (which we have placed into the "high school" category) may, in fact, be enrolled in a middle school.

We conducted significance testing to assess whether differences by student grade level were statistically different at the $p < 0.05$ level. Earlier in the report, we described only those differences by student grade level that were statistically significant at the 5-percent level unless otherwise noted. Furthermore, because of the exploratory nature of this study, we did not apply multiple hypothesis test corrections.

Importantly, we did not conduct significance testing across survey administrations. This is because we lack a set of survey weights that properly account for the partial overlap in the survey samples over time. (These weights are impossible to produce because earlier survey samples included both AYP members and members of the Ipsos Knowledge Panel.) However, there is a high degree of overlap among at least the AYP portion of the samples. For example, of the 1,214 youth who participated in the December 2025 survey, 848 youth (70 percent) took the May 2025 survey, and 372 youth (31 percent) took the February 2025 survey. In total, 355 youth (29 percent) took all three surveys discussed in this report. Despite the partial oversample in survey respondents, we did not analyze time trends longitudinally; instead, we present cross-sectional comparisons because each survey sample was drawn independently.

Notes

[1] We suspect that the declining trend in the share of college students who used AI for three or more of their classes between May and December 2025 could be related to a change in how we sampled these two surveys. More specifically, the May survey included postsecondary-enrolled youth up to age 21. The December survey included postsecondary-enrolled youth up to age 29.

[2] Of course, students might not be using AI for specific school-related purposes *because* they feel that those specific use cases are cheating. Because we asked students only about their perception of cheating if they reported using AI for a specific purpose, our estimates may underestimate the total share of students who perceive that using AI for school-related purposes is cheating.

[3] We observed a positive correlation even after we interacted the variable for students' concern about being accused of cheating with the variable for the school policy environment.

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About This Report

This report is part of a series of short reports intended to provide brief, descriptive analyses of survey results of immediate interest to education policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. In December 2025, we administered a survey to members of the RAND American Youth Panel (AYP) to better understand exactly how students are using AI in schools. The AYP is one of the panels designed and maintained by RAND Survey Panels, a data collection service at RAND dedicated to collecting and disseminating state-of-the-art, population-representative survey data to support research that addresses the most-pressing public policy challenges. For more information on RAND Survey Panels and the specific panels featured in this report, visit www.rand.org/surveypanels.

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