Reframing K–12 AI Policy

A TeachingAbout.AI Companion Report

Based on The Rochester Provocations

For Superintendents · Boards of Education · State Departments of Education
State and Federal Elected Officials

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The School Library System (SLS) of the Genesee Valley BOCES, established by Commissioner's Regulations in 1985, is a state funded program dedicated to improving the libraries of the region's 22 districts and non-public schools. Through cutting edge web development, professional support, and the facilitation of resource sharing tools, the SLS provides mission critical support for libraries and classrooms. Our programs have been recognized nationally as exemplars of the next generation of library services.

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Introduction

An Ecological Lens on AI in Educational Policy

> *"What happens if we place a drop of red dye into a beaker of clear water? Do we have clear water plus a spot of red dye? Obviously not. We have a new coloration to every molecule of water. That is what I mean by ecological change." — Neil Postman, 1998*

Introduction

In December 2025, the Genesee Valley BOCES TeachingAbout.AI project, funded through Google.org, convened a panel of school librarians, instructional leaders, university researchers, technology designers, and artificial intelligence experts in Rochester, New York. Over four days, the panel produced eight statements that became the Rochester Provocations. A companion volume, the Report for the K–12 Field (Harris, 2026), addresses the educators who will translate these provocations into classroom practice. This document addresses a different audience: the educational policymakers whose decisions create the conditions in which classroom practice can change.

Superintendents and district leaders decide whether teachers have time to redesign instruction. Boards of education decide whether to fund school librarian positions as AI implementation leaders. State departments of education decide whether teacher preparation requires a course in educational assessment. State and federal elected officials decide whether artificial intelligence is treated as an ordinary procurement question or as a regulatory matter on the order of social media safety. Each of these decisions sits upstream of the work the field is being asked to do, and each can either enable or obstruct the practical recommendations made in the field report.

The Policy Moment

AI policy in K–12 education is being made in 2026 with unusual speed. As of early 2026, thirty-five states and Puerto Rico had issued formal AI guidance, with Ohio mandating district AI policies by mid-2026 and Tennessee requiring local policies under 2024 legislation (Ballotpedia, 2025; Hao, 2026). UNESCO has published an AI Competency Framework for Teachers (UNESCO, 2024), and the OECD has released a draft AI Literacy Framework for Primary and Secondary Education developed with Code.org (OECD, 2025). The U.S. Department of Education issued non-regulatory AI guidance in October 2024 (U.S. Department of Education, 2024), and Executive Order 14277 of April 2025 established a federal priority for AI education for American youth.

The same period has seen volatility in federal policy direction. A proposed multi-year moratorium on state-level AI regulation appeared in early 2025 reconciliation negotiations, which would have prevented state legislatures from acting during precisely the window in which state action is most consequential for K–12. The convening reached consensus that such preemption would directly obstruct harm-reduction work in student populations.

The Ecological Frame

The convening adopted Neil Postman's (1998) *ecological* frame for technological change. A new technology is not added to a system; it transforms the system. "What happens if we place a drop of red dye into a beaker of clear water?" Postman (1998) asked. "Do we have clear water plus a spot of red dye? Obviously not." The arrival of generative AI has not resulted in our prior educational system plus a chatbot. It has changed every interaction between teacher and student, between student and assignment, between school and family, and those changes cannot be isolated, contained, or reversed.

This ecological frame is significant for policy because most current AI guidance treats artificial intelligence as a discrete technology to be governed through procurement additions and acceptable use restrictions. That posture is necessary but not sufficient. The Rochester Provocations point to deeper policy questions about assessment validity, educator preparation, the role of school librarians, the protection of human teaching capacity, and the public-health dimensions of consumer AI products marketed to minors. Those questions cannot be answered with an acceptable-use statement for AI.

School Librarians as Policy Asset

One audience deserves naming in this foreword to the policymaker's report. In the LibraryReady.AI PreK–12 AI Scope and Sequence (Harris, 2024), the certified school librarian was identified as the building-level professional already best positioned to lead AI literacy instruction, evaluate AI tools, and coordinate professional learning about AI. School librarians are best placed to approach AI within the intersection of computer science, media literacy, and information seeking practices. The American Association of School Librarians has formally identified the certified school librarian as the educator best positioned for this role (AASL, 2018, 2025). Rachel Atkins, a technology professional developer, noted during the convening that school librarians are on the forefront of almost every school initiative.

This report includes certified school librarians throughout, not as professional courtesy, but as a structural recommendation. The most cost-effective AI capacity investment a district, board, or state department can make in 2026 is preserving and expanding certified school librarian positions and naming the school librarian explicitly in AI policy, guidance, and funding allocations.

New York Policy Context

New York's school leaders are not waiting for federal policy to settle. Between November 2024 and July 2025, the New York State Education Department and the Board of Regents launched and adopted the first phases of NY Inspires, an integrated plan to transform what a New York high school diploma signifies and how learning is taught, measured, and credentialed. The plan organizes its work around four interlocking transformations: adoption of the New York State Portrait of a Graduate, redefining credits around proficiency rather than seat time, the sunsetting of a single set of diploma assessment requirements, and a move to one diploma (NYSED, 2025a).

The Board of Regents formally adopted the New York State Portrait of a Graduate in July 2025 (NYSED, 2025b). The Portrait names six attributes that every New York graduate should demonstrate, all grounded in Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education: Academically Prepared, Creative Innovator, Critical Thinker, Effective Communicator, Global Citizen, and Reflective and Future Focused.

Running alongside Portrait adoption is the Performance-Based Learning and Assessment Networks (PLAN) Pilot, the operational vehicle by which NYSED is testing how a multiple-measures, performance-based system works in classrooms. Twenty-three pilot schools across New York are participating; a permanent PLAN Pilot Regulation was adopted by the Board of Regents in September 2025, granting participating schools regulatory flexibility from specified Part 100 requirements where not preempted by federal law (NYSED, 2025c). The PLAN program's stated goals include building assessment literacy among educators, families, and communities and grounding statewide practice in the principles of equity, transparency, validity, and reliability.

Each chapter that follows includes a brief New York Policy Context note that connects the chapter's argument to NY Inspires, the Portrait of a Graduate, and the PLAN Pilot. Though these New York elements are not specifically about AI integration, they do provide a context into which AI was suddenly thrust. The notes are offered for New York readers without altering the report's broader national framing; the shifts under way in New York are mirrored in a growing number of other states.

01

Provocation 1

There Is No AI Problem

> *"Education itself is a wicked problem; assuming there is an AI-in-education problem risks us thinking there is an AI solution."*

Expert Review

The convening embraced this provocation as an opening, not a conclusion. When framed as solving "AI in education," the work we undertake becomes a shopping list of solutions leading to little change within the educational system. The panel cited student cell-phone bans as a feel-good policy action that left addictive design issues untouched. Across 22 studies, Campbell et al. (2024) found "little to no conclusive evidence" that blanket bans without additional intervention improved outcomes. Thomas Corbin (Deakin University) reframed AI as a wicked problem (Rittel & Webber, 1973) that can only be reformulated, not easily solved. Corbin, Bearman, et al. (2025) argue this framing "lifts the impossible burden on teachers and institutions to immediately get things right once and for all," while Postman's (1998) ecology reminds us that every part of a system takes on new coloration once a new technology arrives.

> *"I don't want us to in any way suggest that AI is a solution, because if there's a product a school can buy, they cognitively offload everything to the product."*
> **— Christopher Harris, Project Lead, TeachingAbout.AI**
>
> *"AI is the catalyst, so we're going to have things that feel disconnected from AI — because AI is shining a light on it."*
> **— Patrick Whipple, Genesee Valley BOCES**

Policy Implications

AI is not a discrete problem with a discrete solution, yet most guidance still prescribes a procurement — a policy template, a detection subscription, a tutoring platform — for questions that are not procurement questions. The deeper misalignment is structural: AI work is usually assigned to the chief technology officer while its effects surface in instruction, typically under the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction (Education Commission of the States, 2025). Effective AI policy is therefore an instructional initiative, not a standalone technology one, and landscape analyses confirm that policy on teaching and learning in an AI-mediated context lags far behind policy on procurement (Ballotpedia, 2025).

New York Policy Context

NY Inspires (NYSED, 2025a) is itself an argument against treating AI as discrete: it bundles diploma policy, credits, assessment, and the Portrait of a Graduate into one transformation rather than four reforms. The

question for a New York district is not "what is our AI policy" but "how does AI change the work already named under NY Inspires." Answering this second question will be especially important during the shift to performance-based learning and assessment.

Recommendations by Role

ACTION FOR: SUPERINTENDENTS AND DISTRICT LEADERS

- Reassign primary authority for district AI work from the chief technology officer to the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction and name a certified school librarian as a co-lead of the district AI working group with documented release time.
- Require that every AI procurement request include a one-page instructional problem statement reviewed by the curriculum office.
- Reframe district planning language from "AI policy" to "teaching and learning in an AI-mediated context," and ask of any AI purchase whether the district would still want it without the AI.
- Charge the school librarian and curriculum director with auditing existing initiatives for AI's ecological effects rather than launching a parallel AI workstream.

ACTION FOR: BOARDS OF EDUCATION

- Consider the need to adopt a stand-alone "AI policy" where an updated Acceptable Use Policy and an Academic Integrity Policy already address the same questions. Consider instead a statement of beliefs about AI usage.
- Add an annual board agenda item for an instructional report on AI from the curriculum office, including the certified school librarian.

ACTION FOR: STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

- Publish a model district policy framework that explicitly subordinates AI procurement decisions to instructional design decisions and positions AI as an instructional issue, not a technology issue.

Provocation 2

02 We Can Be Agents of Validity or Victims of Cheating

"We cannot control cheating and focusing on it will lead to an adversarial relationship with students; where we have agency is in how we engage students with more meaningful tasks that lead to an accurate understanding of student learning."

Expert Review

The convening made that the point: "cheating" names a student behavior beyond the teacher's control, while "validity" names something the teacher as assessment designer can act on. The moment educators frame AI as cheating, Corbin observed, they make themselves adversaries of their students. Corbin, Dawson, and Liu (2025) distinguish discursive responses — changing the rules around a task — from structural ones that change the task so validity no longer depends on compliance; their "Talk Is Cheap" shows that the more precisely we specify acceptable AI use, the wider the gap between what we can specify and what we can verify. Fawns et al. (2025) caution that authenticity alone is not enough; validity returns only when a task structurally requires the cognition it claims to measure.

> *"If we frame it as a cheating problem, then it's a student problem. It's no longer our problem."*
> **— Thomas Corbin, Centre for Research in Assessment and Digital Learning, Deakin University**

> *"Photomath [an app released in 2014 that does math based on a photo of a problem] made us examine what counts as valid evidence of student understanding."*
> **— Angela Messenger, University of Rochester**

Policy Implications

A cheating frame invites disciplinary policy; a validity frame invites assessment policy — different instruments, timelines, and oversight. Where integrity policy rests on AI detection it stands on precarious ground: detectors show false-positive bias against English-language learners, students with disabilities, and non-standard dialects (Rae et al., 2025; Corbin, Dawson, et al., 2025), and using that output for discipline implicates Title VI and Section 504. Two peer-reviewed structural alternatives fit existing windows: Voice-First Written Assessment (Webb-Davies et al., 2026) links secure in-class evidence to later at-home work, and Black Box Assessment (Winstone et al., 2026) provides a framework that assesses process and revision over the polished product.

New York Policy Context

The PLAN program names "equity, transparency, validity, and reliability" as its guiding principles and lists assessment literacy among its goals (NYSED, 2025c) — exactly the vocabulary the validity reframe requires. New York educators can ground the shift from cheating control to valid design in language the state has already adopted. Black Box Assessment (Winstone et al., 2026) also closely aligns to the New Tech Network (2023) model for checkpoints within project-based learning units.

Recommendations by Role

ACTION FOR: SUPERINTENDENTS AND DISTRICT LEADERS

- Issue a written superintendent directive naming validity (not cheating) as the district's organizing concern for AI-mediated assessment.
- Discontinue AI-detection subscriptions at next contract renewal; direct that no detection output be admissible as sole evidence in academic integrity proceedings.
- Reallocate detection savings to two days of stipended assessment-redesign professional learning per teacher.
- Pilot structural assessment — Voice-First Written Assessment (Webb-Davies et al., 2026) and Black Box Assessment (Winstone et al., 2026) — in two to three units per grade band.
- Empower certified school librarians as in-house consultants on assessment redesign.

ACTION FOR: BOARDS OF EDUCATION

- Update the academic integrity policy to require a restorative-first protocol for suspected AI misuse, with discipline reserved for repeat or willful violations.
- Require an annual disaggregated report on AI-related discipline outcomes by English-learner status, disability status, and race/ethnicity.
- Teach and communicate "validity" — the inference about what a student knows, not the test sheet — as shared vocabulary for the board and community.

ACTION FOR: STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

- Issue technical assistance on assessment validity in an AI-mediated context building on the model of Black Box Assessment (Winstone et al., 2026) and providing specific examples.
- Provide regulatory cover for districts that pilot structural assessment models within state assessment windows.

03

Provocation 3

Our Assessments Were Broken Before AI

"We need to rethink how we understand and implement assessment including an emphasis on developing and implementing valid assessments in pre-service teacher programs."

Expert Review

The convening's most uncomfortable revelation was about preparation: with one exception, none of the regional schools of education required a course in educational measurement, a gap Guskey et al. (2024) document as national. Most teachers have studied state tests, grading software, and content, but not how to design a task whose results they can trust. Tom Guskey distinguished scoring (placing work on a rubric) from grading (the professional judgment behind a report-card mark): AI can score fluently, but only a teacher can grade. Winstone et al. (2026) offer Black Box Assessment — assess process, value revision, make agency visible, reward trajectory — and Webb-Davies et al. (2026) a complementary Voice-First model; both rest on measurement theory, and Wiliam's (2017) "decision-driven data collection" supplies the discipline: decide the decision before collecting the data.

> *"Every one of [over 20 NY districts I worked with on grade reform] I asked, 'Do you have a purpose statement for grading?' Every one said, 'No.' And I say, 'I know your problem.'"*
> **— Tom Guskey, University of Kentucky**

> *"Using AI to make your assessments or grade papers faster — that's just improvement. We're doing the same thing with a new tool. What you don't have there is pedagogical innovation."*
> **— Enrique Cachafeiro, Appalachian State University**

Policy Implications

Generative AI did not create the assessment-preparation gap; it made it consequential. Validity is a technical property of the inferences drawn from evidence, and it cannot be defended by educators who never met the concept in their training. Where it is undefended, AI's near-free polished output becomes indistinguishable from authentic work, and grade books stop functioning as honest communication to families and admissions offices (Brookhart, 2017; Guskey et al., 2024). The policy lever is teacher certification; systems that report achievement, work habits, and growth separately offer adoptable templates. These changes to how grades are reported have been a consistent recommendation from educational researchers for decades (Guskey et al., 2024).

New York Policy Context

The PLAN program's goal of building assessment literacy (NYSED, 2025c) names the capacity this provocation requires; its SUNY Albany and Russell Sage evaluation partners are producing case studies and a 2027 policy report for preparation programs to draw on. Black Box and Voice-First tasks slot into the benchmark phase of project-based units (New Tech Network, 2023) without a separate framework. Additionally, NYSED is recommending that districts consider adopting standards-based grade reporting.

Recommendations by Role

ACTION FOR: SUPERINTENDENTS AND DISTRICT LEADERS

- Convene a board-endorsed working group, including the certified school librarian and assessment specialist, to draft a district purpose-of-grading statement modeled on Guskey et al. (2024).
- Audit district report cards for hodgepodge grading and adopt, where feasible, separate marks for academic achievement, work habits, and growth. Consider a shift to standards-based grading.
- Identify two to three units per grade band for modification to performance-based assessment using Black Box or Voice-First Written Assessment style pilots in 2026–2027.
- Teach a shared vocabulary of assessment — validity, reliability, formative/summative, scoring vs. grading, inference — in every professional-learning cycle.

ACTION FOR: STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

- In coordination with the teacher preparation oversight body, require all pre-service teacher candidates to complete at least one course in educational measurement before initial certification.
- Publish a state purpose-of-grading framework citing work such as Guskey et al. (2024) and Brookhart (2017), suitable for direct district adoption.
- Revise the state teacher evaluation rubric to reward assessment redesign and process-based evidence, not only summative score gains.

ACTION FOR: STATE AND FEDERAL ELECTED OFFICIALS

- Introduce legislation requiring an educational measurement course as a prerequisite for initial teacher certification, with companion funding for higher-education capacity to deliver it.
- Direct state appropriations toward stipended summer institutes in assessment redesign for in-service teachers.

04

Provocation 4

There Is No Such Thing as AI-Proof

"Be it assessments, careers, or anything else, the ubiquity of AI and pace of growth means AI-proof is a problematically alluring impossibility."

Expert Review

Participants kept returning to how seductive "AI-proofing" is. Just look at LinkedIn, one noted, where every other post promises the assignment AI cannot crack, and vendors are glad to sell a detector or a task design that "can ensure validity." Worse, it corrodes teaching from the inside, as teachers stop sharing rubrics so students can't feed them to a chatbot — leaving learners to aim at a blind target. The room's conclusion was blunt: there is no such thing as AI-proof, because AI can produce nearly every product and most of the processes schools have traditionally graded. The only real outcome of attempts to AI-proof assignments has been an ongoing academic integrity arms race (Eaton, 2023). Corbin, Dawson, et al. (2025) test acceptable use against three criteria — validity, alignment, and fairness — on all of which AI-proofing fails. Long and Magerko (2020) offer another solution: build the competencies for critical engagement rather than trying to remove AI.

> *"Companies keep telling me they've figured out how to make AI detection work. They haven't. They keep selling it as the thing that lets us get back to business as usual — but nothing like that works."*
> **— Thomas Corbin, CRADLE, Deakin University**

> *"The goal that we talk about at Mark Cuban is we're not looking for AI literacy. We want that, but we want AI agency. And so we want the students to be able to figure out for themselves if this is a good assignment that I should use AI on…that's the problem with those traffic models is that if you rely on those exclusively, then you are making the decision all of the time for the student."*
> **— Terri Eichholz, Instructional Designer, Mark Cuban Foundation AI Bootcamp**

Policy Implications

AI-proofing and detection are the most-purchased, least-effective category of district response: steady spending with no measurable gain in learning or integrity. The sharper concern is equity. Shutting AI off in the building advantages students with paid home access; relying on detectors disproportionately flags non-standard-dialect and second-language writers (Rae et al., 2025); defensive redesigns can quietly shift construct validity. Where these produce disparate impact across protected classes, they implicate Title VI and Section 504. The UNESCO (2024) and OECD (2025) frameworks extend the literacy-building alternative to the level of international policy.

New York Policy Context

NY Inspires sunsets the single high-stakes test as the primary measure of a graduate's learning (NYSED, 2025a), recasting the "AI-proof" question: not "can a student use AI to defeat a capstone" but "what combination of measures shows this student is Academically Prepared, a Critical Thinker, and an Effective Communicator" — a multiple-measures design question, not a detection purchase (NYSED, 2025c). Developing students who truly embody the aspects of the NY Portrait of a Graduate will create AI-proof students ready to withstand future turbulence in higher education and the job market.

Recommendations by Role

ACTION FOR: SUPERINTENDENTS AND DISTRICT LEADERS

- Adopt the validity-alignment-fairness test as the standard for any AI-related assessment decision; document the test in central-office procurement procedures.
- Adopt the LibraryReady.AI Scope and Sequence (Harris, 2024) as the district's AI literacy curricular spine, with a certified school librarian named as district and/or building lead.
- Retire "AI-proof" from district and vendor-evaluation language in favor of the validity–alignment–fairness test.
- Audit AI-related rules for equity impact: who benefits when AI is restricted, and whose dialect, language, or disability is treated as suspicious?

ACTION FOR: BOARDS OF EDUCATION

- Reject vendor proposals whose primary feature is AI proofing or AI detection.
- Require an equity impact statement, with reference to peer-reviewed bias evidence (Rae et al., 2025; Corbin, Dawson, et al., 2025), for any AI-related policy revision presented for board approval.

ACTION FOR: STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

- Issue a position statement against the use of AI-detection tools as sole evidence in academic integrity adjudication.
- Align state AI literacy guidance with the UNESCO (2024) and OECD (2025) frameworks.

Provocation 5

05 Most Things a Human Teacher Can Do, AI Can Mimic

"If we cannot identify and prioritize what human teachers bring to the classroom, we risk replacement. We must research the impact of human ingenuity, creativity, and relationships."

Expert Review

This was the most viscerally resisted provocation during discussions with educators in the region. We must, however, be honest about capabilities and attempts to implement AI tools as lower-cost replacements for human teachers. AI can indeed imitate explanation, feedback, planning, even encouragement — but not the real relationship between teacher and student. What humans do that AI cannot lives in relationship: human-to-human, human-to-object, human-to-environment. Corbin, Tai, and Flenady (2026) examine recognition in feedback, noting the field lacks a robust theory of why relationships matter even where, as in feedback, they clearly do. Bearman and Molloy (2017) name "intellectual streaking" — teachers exposing their own thinking and mistakes, which AI's hidden versioning cannot model — and Bearman and Ajjawi (2023) add that teaching is performative, affective, and irreducibly relational. Hammond's (2014) "warm demander" is a practice AI imitates in words but not in standing.

> *"Anyone can tie shoes. So do you need a teacher, or do you just hire someone to tie their shoes and wipe their noses? We need to focus on relationships and what really matters."*
> **— Julie Hengenius, Genesee Valley BOCES**
>
> *"Every AI, however smart it looks, is always pattern matching — so fundamentally it acts against creativity. It is just software doing math. There is no relationship to anything."*
> **— Qian Yang, Cornell University**

Policy Implications

This is the most fiscally consequential provocation for boards and elected officials. AI's capacity to mimic instruction is well documented; its capacity to replace the relational core of teaching is contested and not yet a budget protection. Under fiscal pressure boards will meet proposals to swap AI tutoring or grading for staff. The safeguards that once protected staffing — class-size ratios, FAPE under IDEA, accreditation, certification — predate these patterns and must be reread. The research vacuum is itself a policy concern, even as UNESCO (2024) names protection of teachers' rights and human agency as core principles.

New York Policy Context

The Portrait of a Graduate, grounded in Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education, centers attributes — Reflective and Future Focused, Global Citizen, Effective Communicator — that depend on relationship and ethical judgment (NYSED, 2025b). These describe outcomes a chatbot cannot produce, giving districts a Portrait-aligned answer when the substitution question arises.

Recommendations by Role

ACTION FOR: SUPERINTENDENTS AND DISTRICT LEADERS

- Adopt a district staffing policy that prohibits AI substitution for certificated-teacher functions in direct instruction, intervention, and IEP-required services.
- Build advisory, morning meeting, and small-group inquiry into the master schedule as protected (non-substitutable) time.
- Have each grade-level team document, in writing, what they do that AI cannot mimic and how they would prove it to a board.
- Use AI feedback as preparation for human feedback, not a substitute.

ACTION FOR: BOARDS OF EDUCATION

- Require, before approving any proposed reduction in certificated staff offset by AI tooling, a written analysis of what relational capacity is being lost and how it will be replaced.
- Add a stewardship-of-human-capacity category to the annual superintendent evaluation, including certified school librarian FTE, counselor caseload, and advisory minutes per student.
- Resist hyper-personalization rhetoric: individualized AI tutoring isolates students, and learning together is not a deficiency to optimize away.

ACTION FOR: STATE AND FEDERAL ELECTED OFFICIALS

- Direct state research funding, and where possible Institute of Education Sciences priorities, toward empirical study of the irreducibly human components of teaching.
- Resist legislation that authorizes AI tutoring or AI grading as a substitute for a certificated teacher's instructional role.
- Codify in state regulation that AI is a supplement to, not a substitute for, certificated services under IDEA.

Provocation 6

06 Teachers Must Have Permission to Compromise, Diverge, and Iterate

"Schools must develop a supportive and collaborative culture where teachers are empowered and expected to seek better solutions to the wicked problem we face."

Expert Review

The experts at the convening worded this statement carefully. Teachers need permission to compromise, diverge, and iterate. Teachers also need time, guardrails, and a culture that treats failed iterations as learning, not liabilities. Permission is not freedom from accountability, yet a focus on iterative improvements will be necessary. Corbin, Bearman, et al. (2025) call the wicked-problem framing a license for a "continual search for better content-sensitive designs," and Bearman and Molloy's (2017) intellectual streaking depends on the same condition: educators must show their thinking, including failures, without professional cost. At the same time, wide divergence between classrooms can cause confusion for learners and teachers alike. Corbin, Dawson, et al. (2025) chronicled that confusion in a paper that tried to determine where the line of acceptable AI use was across different situations. In cases where teachers are intentionally diverging, those modifications need to be clearly communicated with students and teaching colleagues.

> *"We have to be allowed to make mistakes. We always talk about failure as the first attempt in learning for our students, but then we're not allowed to fail as teachers."*
> **— Bonnie Kirkland, Genesee Valley BOCES**
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> *"We have known about this for a long time. People kept saying, 'Well, Tom, we've come so far' — but a hundred years later, we hadn't."*
> **— Tom Guskey, University of Kentucky**

Policy Implications

The policy lever operates at three levels — state evaluation regulation, district observation rubrics, and collective bargaining — each adjustable to credit documented iteration without surrendering accountability for instructional quality. The convening's caution holds: permission without guardrails produces non-evidence-based adoption, so the right to try must be paired with a brief evidence check and an honest debrief. UNESCO's (2024) acquisition–deepening–creation progression offers an architecture for professional learning that is hard to operationalize without explicit institutional permission to iterate.

New York Policy Context

The PLAN Pilot Regulation (NYSED, 2025c), permanently adopted in September 2025, lets participating schools seek exemption from specified Part 100 requirements where not federally preempted — an explicit state-level permission slip for redesign. Districts outside the pilot can still cite NY Inspires as directional permission and shape rubrics and bargaining around the horizon NYSED has named.

Recommendations by Role

ACTION FOR: SUPERINTENDENTS AND DISTRICT LEADERS

- Issue an annual permission-to-redesign memo, signed by the superintendent, naming what is authorized, what evidence is requested, and what supports are funded.
- Revise teacher observation rubrics in partnership with the local bargaining unit to credit documented iteration on AI-era instructional questions.
- Fund Teaching Sprints (Breakspear & Jones, 2021) as the default format for AI-era professional learning.
- Pair permission with guardrails — a brief evidence check and an honest debrief — and use certified school librarians as cross-departmental connectors to broker redesigns worth scaling.

ACTION FOR: BOARDS OF EDUCATION

- Adopt a board statement endorsing professional iteration as part of the district's response to AI.
- When ratifying collective bargaining agreements, ensure that any new evaluation language reflects the wicked-problem framing rather than treating non-fidelity to a script as a deficiency.

ACTION FOR: STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

- Publish guidance that explicitly distinguishes between fidelity-required state assessments and locally adaptable curricular activities, to reduce the chilling effect of statewide rubrics.
- Endorse Teaching Sprints or comparable short-cycle improvement models as an approved framework for state-funded professional learning hours.
- Align state professional learning standards with the UNESCO (2024) acquisition-deepening-creation progression.

Provocation 7

07 The Real AI Crisis Is How We Take Advantage of the Opportunity

"There will not be a perfect solution, but we [students, teachers, institutions, society] have an opportunity to explore innovative changes to what we do."

Expert Review

The convening turned from diagnosis to opportunity: the crisis is not the technology but whether the field can use the moment. Almost every long-standing assumption — about homework, grading, lesson planning, the purpose of a diploma — is open at once. Corbin, Dawson, and Liu (2025) urge spending the moment on structural changes overdue for decades, since the "talk is cheap" discursive approach persists only while institutions tolerate it, and Bearman and Ajjawi (2023) describe AI as a pedagogy of "working with the black box." The pandemic is the caution: schools learned that the conditions of teaching are negotiable, but also that change without intention regresses once pressure lifts. AI will not go away, so the redesign must be built into the institution's steady state.

> *"We've got a huge amount of flexibility in assessment… I think we've got a chance here, finally — to rethink a lot of things we really should have rethought a long time ago, but were difficult to do."*
> **— Thomas Corbin, Deakin University**
>
> *"Because of the hype, we have an opportunity — to make productive use of this fear and guide some of the changes we've known for a very long time could be good. Let's use it as that extra little push."*
> **— Christopher Harris, Project Lead, TeachingAbout.AI**

Policy Implications

For policymakers this is a once-in-a-generation alignment opportunity. Portrait-of-a-Graduate frameworks now operate in roughly twenty states, performance-assessment pilots run in New York, New Hampshire, and beyond, and computer-science standards exist in forty-seven; federal and international frameworks share one thesis — the take-home summative artifact is no longer sufficient evidence of learning. Districts that meet these as separate workstreams produce duplicative governance; those that coordinate them under a single multi-year vision turn compliance burden into strategy. Postman's (1998) ecological frame is the reminder that this change cannot be undone and should be planned for, not waited out.

New York Policy Context

"Opportunity, not crisis" is the explicit posture of NY Inspires (NYSED, 2025a), which names — with dates attached — the move to a Portrait-aligned, multiple-measures, proficiency-based system. New York

districts can anchor AI redesign to that published timeline and use the momentum of both AI and NY Inspires to move reluctant stakeholders.

Recommendations by Role

ACTION FOR: SUPERINTENDENTS AND DISTRICT LEADERS

- Publish a three-year district vision aligning AI, Portrait of a Graduate, performance assessment, and computer-science work as a single workstream rather than three.
- Fund release time, not "extra time," for the alignment work.
- Make the three-year vision concrete about what will differ in student, teacher, and assessment work, and treat certified school librarians as the in-district R&D unit for the redesign.

ACTION FOR: BOARDS OF EDUCATION

- Endorse the district's three-year vision in a formal resolution that commits the district to coordinated rather than fragmented response.
- Direct the superintendent to report annually on how local AI work aligns with state portrait-of-a-graduate, performance-assessment, and computer-science initiatives.

ACTION FOR: STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

- Publish a state-level synthesis document mapping AI literacy, performance assessment, Portrait of a Graduate, and computer-science initiatives onto a single coherent framework.
- Treat the LibraryReady.AI Scope and Sequence (Harris, 2024) and the UNESCO (2024) and OECD (2025) frameworks as the K–12 curricular spine districts can adopt without state-by-state reinvention.

ACTION FOR: STATE AND FEDERAL ELECTED OFFICIALS

- Appropriate dedicated state-level funding for teacher release time tied to AI-era assessment and curriculum redesign, with priority for districts that name certified school librarians as alignment leads.
- At the federal level, sustain the supplemental priority for AI use in schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2024) and resist preemption that would prevent state action.

08

Provocation 8

Avoidance of AI in Education Is Not an Option

> *"AI is unavoidable and a failure to address harm reduction feeds into the ongoing public health emergency created by the intentional design of algorithms to extract capital from humans."*

Expert Review

The bluntest provocation: schools cannot opt out. The argument is not that every student must use AI but that the institution must address it openly, because the alternative is to leave students alone with products engineered for engagement. The convening drew the social-media analogy: that medium became a mental-health concern when engagement metrics colonized the platforms adolescents use for everything. Chatbots without timestamps, unsolicited re-engagement messages, and simulated parasocial intimacy are extraction techniques as described by Doyuran (2024) in a review of explicit decisions made by software developers to nudge users towards increased engagement. Harm reduction was the chosen framing — neither "ban it" nor "embrace it" — accepting that students will meet these products and must be taught to face them with eyes open.

> *"I would elevate the topic of AI to the public health level. These should be policies and considerations being discussed at OB-GYN offices and at pediatricians' offices."*
>
> **— Daryl McLaughlin, Superintendent, Perry Central Schools**

> *"This technology is created by people, and it's the choices that people make that create the technology — and those choices have ethical implications."*
>
> **— David Petty, MIT App Inventor Foundation**

Policy Implications

For elected officials this is the most consequential provocation. Engagement-driven design in consumer AI mirrors social media, and the U.S. Surgeon General's advisory (Murthy, 2023) framed that as a public-health concern; AI chatbots sharing the architecture are not categorically different. State legislatures hold a lever districts lack: extending social-media-safety frameworks — age verification, default privacy, design transparency — to AI chatbot products. Restriction alone is insufficient (Goodyear et al., 2025).

New York Policy Context

The harm-reduction call maps onto the Portrait of a Graduate's Global Citizen attribute (NYSED, 2025b): AI literacy and harm reduction can be embedded in Portrait-aligned instruction alongside media-literacy, civics, and health rather than built as a separate program.

Recommendations by Role

ACTION FOR: SUPERINTENDENTS AND DISTRICT LEADERS

- Adopt a district AI harm-reduction policy explicitly naming engagement-driven design, parasocial chatbot use, deepfake abuse, and AI-generated CSAM as student welfare concerns.
- Establish a low-friction student AI opt-out pathway and communicate it through the family handbook and academic integrity policy.
- Resource the certified school librarian as the district lead for AI literacy and digital wellness instruction, with coordination to public library and pediatric partners.
- Integrate AI literacy and harm reduction into existing media-literacy, health, and civics instruction — beginning in the primary grades — using the LibraryReady.AI PreK–12 Scope and Sequence (Harris, 2024), aligned to UNESCO (2024) and OECD (2025).

ACTION FOR: BOARDS OF EDUCATION

- Include AI harm-reduction in the district's student wellness and code-of-conduct policies, citing the Surgeon General's advisory (Murthy, 2023).
- Require an annual harm-reduction report from the superintendent describing incident trends, mitigations, and family communication.
- Hold AI vendors to public-health standards; decline to renew products that behave unethically.

ACTION FOR: STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

- Jointly issue, with the state department of health, guidance for districts on AI-related student wellness risks paralleling existing social media advisories.
- Mandate that AI literacy instruction begin in primary grades, using the LibraryReady.AI Scope and Sequence (Harris, 2024) or an equivalent peer-reviewed framework as a recognized resource.

ACTION FOR: STATE AND FEDERAL ELECTED OFFICIALS

- Extend existing state-level social media safety statutes (age verification, default privacy, design transparency) to AI chatbot products marketed to minors.
- Direct the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights to investigate AI products whose design patterns mirror those identified in the Surgeon General's advisory (Murthy, 2023).
- Resist multi-year federal preemption of state AI regulation. The Rochester convening identified such preemption as a direct obstacle to harm reduction.
- Fund public libraries through state library aid as community-level AI literacy partners.

Closing

A Coordinated Agenda for Action

The Rochester Provocations are deliberately uncomfortable because comfortable framings have already produced two decades of educational technology adoption that did not change what mattered. AI will not change what mattered either, unless the policymakers who set the conditions for the field use this moment to look honestly at what AI has made visible: the assessments that did not assess, the curricula that did not invite thought, the cultures that did not give teachers permission to do their work as professionals, the consumer products that have been quietly extractive for a decade.

The moves required are not new. They are the moves the most thoughtful educators and researchers have been arguing for since long before generative AI existed. The arrival of AI has only added urgency, and the alignment of state and federal initiatives in 2026 has added opportunity.

Three Cross-Cutting Recommendations

Across the eight provocations, three recommendations recur with sufficient force to warrant separate naming.

First, **name the certified school librarian explicitly**. The most cost-effective AI capacity investment available to a district or state in 2026 is the preservation and expansion of certified school librarian positions and their explicit naming in district AI policy, state AI guidance, and any AI-related funding allocation. The LibraryReady.AI PreK–12 AI Scope and Sequence (Harris, 2024) is a peer-recognized, grade-banded, librarian-friendly framework that aligns with the UNESCO (2024) and OECD (2025) international AI literacy frameworks and is available under an open license.

Second, **fund redesign, not procurement**. The single most consequential budget decision in 2026 is whether public dollars purchase AI products or purchase teacher time for assessment and curriculum redesign. Where state and federal appropriations are available, they should preferentially fund release time, professional learning, and assessment infrastructure rather than tool subscriptions.

Third, **treat consumer AI products marketed to minors as a public-health matter**. The architecture of engagement-driven design is well documented and has produced a sustained advisory from the U.S. Surgeon General regarding social media and youth mental health (Murthy, 2023). AI chatbots that share that architecture are not categorically different, and policymakers should not treat them as if they were.

Action Matrix by Audience

The following matrix consolidates the principal recommendations by audience, indexed to the chapter in which each is developed in greater detail.

Superintendents and District Leaders	
Ch 1	Place AI under the curriculum office; name school librarian as co-lead.
Ch 2	Discontinue AI-detection subscriptions; fund structural assessment redesign.
Ch 3	Draft a district purpose-of-grading statement; pilot Black Box / VFWA.
Ch 4	Adopt LibraryReady.AI as the AI literacy spine; conduct annual equity audit.
Ch 5	Prohibit AI substitution for certificated services; protect advisory time in master scheduling.
Ch 6	Issue annual written permission-to-redesign memo; adopt Teaching Sprints.
Ch 7	Publish three-year vision aligning AI, Portrait of a Graduate, and assessment work.
Ch 8	Adopt harm-reduction policy with named opt-out pathway.
Boards of Education	
Ch 1	Decline stand-alone “AI policy” where AUP and academic integrity policies suffice.
Ch 2	Revise academic integrity policy to require restorative-first protocol.
Ch 4	Require an equity impact statement on AI policy revisions.
Ch 5	Require relational-capacity analysis before any AI-substitution decision.
Ch 6	Adopt a board statement endorsing professional iteration.
Ch 7	Endorse the district’s three-year vision in a formal resolution.
Ch 8	Adopt a public-health frame in student wellness and code-of-conduct policies.
State Departments of Education	
Ch 1	Publish a model district policy framework subordinating procurement to instruction.
Ch 2	Issue technical assistance on validity; provide regulatory cover for structural pilots.
Ch 3	Require an educational measurement course in pre-service certification.
Ch 4	Recognize LibraryReady.AI and analogous frameworks for state credit.
Ch 6	Endorse Teaching Sprints and the UNESCO progression in state PD standards.
Ch 7	Publish a state-level synthesis of AI, Portrait of a Graduate, and CS initiatives.
Ch 8	Jointly issue AI wellness guidance with the state health agency.

State and Federal Elected Officials	
Ch 3	Mandate measurement coursework as teacher certification prerequisite.
Ch 5	Direct research funding toward irreducibly human components of teaching.
Ch 7	Appropriate dedicated funds for teacher release time in AI-era redesign.
Ch 8	Extend social media safety frameworks to AI chatbot products marketed to minors.
Ch 8	Resist multi-year federal preemption of state AI regulation.
Ch 8	Fund public libraries as a force multiplier for community AI literacy.

A Final Word

Teachers, school librarians, principals, and curriculum directors are the people who will make AI policy real in classrooms. They cannot do it without the people this report is written for. Policymakers do not need to lead the redesign. They need to set conditions in which the redesign can happen, name the people who are positioned to lead it, fund the time it requires, and refuse to mistake a vendor demonstration for a solution.

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The Rochester Provocations

Statements to anchor honest conversations about AI in education.

01 There Is No AI Problem

02 We Can Be Agents of Validity or Victims of Cheating

03 Our Assessments Were Broken Before AI

04 There Is No Such Thing as AI-Proof

05 Most Things a Human Teacher Can Do, AI Can Mimic

06 Teachers Must Have Permission to Compromise, Diverge, and Iterate

07 The Real AI Crisis Is How We Take Advantage of the Opportunity

08 Avoidance of AI in Education Is Not an Option

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