



SUMMER AI CATCH-UP GUIDE

THE EDUCATOR'S 2026 AI CATCH-UP GUIDE

**30 updates, trends, and terms
for the 2026-27 school year**

What changed while you were on summer break and why it matters
for K-12 educators.

THE 10-MINUTE VERSION

No tech jargon. Just the updates worth knowing.



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Retired educator | Teacher, coach, and principal

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START HERE

AI changed a lot this summer. You do not need to learn everything.

The goal is not to use every tool.

The goal is to know what is possible so you can decide what is worth your time, what supports learning, and what fits your school policy.

THE BIG SHIFT

CHAT



CONTEXT



WORKFLOW



SCHEDULE



TOOLS



CREATE



BUILD

Inside this guide

01 Beyond the Chat Box

02 Create With AI

03 New AI Vocabulary

04 What Is Changing for Students

05 Practical Uses for Educators

06 Before You Use It at School

Two educator access updates

CHATGPT FOR TEACHERS

Free for verified U.S. K-12 educators through June 2028. Includes a secure teacher workspace and admin controls.

CLAUDE FOR TEACHERS

Free for verified U.S. K-12 educators. Sign up by June 30, 2027 for a full year. A school and district option launched August 28, 2026.

Availability and terms can change. Check the current provider page and your district policy.

BEYOND THE CHAT BOX

AI now keeps context, uses tools, and works on a schedule.

1 VOICE-FIRST PROMPTING

WHAT IT IS

You can talk through a task instead of typing a polished prompt.

WHY IT MATTERS

Speaking is often faster when your idea is still forming.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Describe tomorrow's lesson aloud, then ask AI to organize your notes into a plan.

REMEMBER THIS

Talk first. Refine second.

2 FILES AND IMAGES AS INPUT

WHAT IT IS

AI can work from documents, screenshots, photos, charts, and other files.

WHY IT MATTERS

You spend less time retyping the context the tool needs.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Attach a pacing guide and ask AI to identify where a standard is introduced, practiced, and assessed.

REMEMBER THIS

Explain it. Attach it. Refine it.

3 ONGOING CONTEXT

WHAT IT IS

A conversation can hold the history of one task as you continue refining it.

WHY IT MATTERS

You do not have to restart the explanation every time.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Keep one unit-planning chat and return to it for lessons, checks, and family materials.

REMEMBER THIS

One job. One chat. Keep refining.

BEYOND THE CHAT BOX

AI now keeps context, uses tools, and works on a schedule.

4 ONE WORKSPACE PER COURSE

WHAT IT IS

Dedicated workspaces keep related chats, files, and instructions together.

WHY IT MATTERS

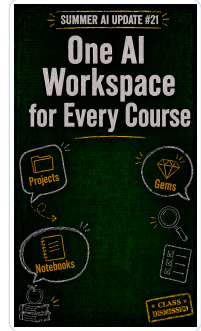
Each prep can retain its own standards, resources, and routines.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Create a 7th Grade Biology workspace with the pacing guide, rubrics, labs, and lesson format.

REMEMBER THIS

One prep = one AI workspace.



5 PERSONALIZED INSTRUCTIONS

WHAT IT IS

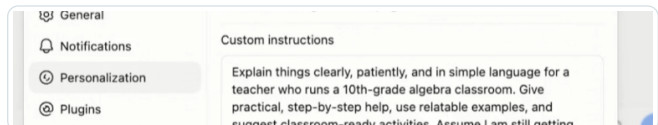
You can tell AI your role, course, preferred tone, and response format.

WHY IT MATTERS

Useful defaults reduce repeated directions.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Ask for clear steps, classroom examples, and language that fits a 10th-grade algebra teacher.



REMEMBER THIS

Set your defaults once.

6 CONNECTED TOOLS

WHAT IT IS

AI can connect to approved services such as Drive, Microsoft 365, email, or calendars.

WHY IT MATTERS

The source material may already be where you work.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Find a pacing guide in Drive, summarize the next unit, and flag missing resources.

REMEMBER THIS

Access depends on plan and permissions.

BEYOND THE CHAT BOX

AI now keeps context, uses tools, and works on a schedule.

7

SEARCH AND RESEARCH MODES

WHAT IT IS

AI tools can search current sources, compare pages, and provide links.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Find three science stories from the past week and include a source and discussion question.

WHY IT MATTERS

Current information should not depend on model memory alone.

REMEMBER THIS

Open the source before you trust the summary.

8

SCHEDULED TASKS

WHAT IT IS

Some AI tools can run work once, on a schedule, or when a condition changes.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Every Sunday at 4 PM, collect three current science stories for middle school.

WHY IT MATTERS

Recurring work no longer has to begin with you remembering to ask.

REMEMBER THIS

WHAT + WHEN + HOW OFTEN

9

EDUCATOR-SPECIFIC AI PLANS

WHAT IT IS

New teacher plans package AI features with school-focused privacy or curriculum support.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Compare ChatGPT for Teachers and Claude for Teachers with your district's approved tools.

WHY IT MATTERS

The account type can matter as much as the model.

REMEMBER THIS

Verify eligibility and school approval.

CREATE WITH AI

You can make, revise, interpret, and build in the same conversation.

10 CUSTOM VISUALS

WHAT IT IS

AI can generate a visual from a plain-language description.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Create a seventh-grade plant cell showing only five named structures.

WHY IT MATTERS

You can create the exact diagram, scene, or background your lesson needs.

REMEMBER THIS

Name the audience, content, and limits.

11 VISUAL REVISION

WHAT IT IS

Generated images can be edited through follow-up directions.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Remove extra labels, increase contrast, and leave the center open for a talking-head video.

WHY IT MATTERS

The first image is a draft, not the finish line.

REMEMBER THIS

Create. Revise. Customize.

12 PHOTOS BECOME RESOURCES

WHAT IT IS

AI can interpret a photo of notes, a board, a worksheet, or student-created work.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Photograph the board and turn the notes into a study guide or exit ticket.

WHY IT MATTERS

Information in the room can become a usable draft quickly.

REMEMBER THIS

Photograph it. Read it. Transform it.

CREATE WITH AI

You can make, revise, interpret, and build in the same conversation.

13 MULTI-FORMAT MATERIALS

WHAT IT IS

One source can become a teacher guide, handout, checklist, and family overview.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Use a reviewed unit plan to draft a coordinated classroom materials pack.

WHY IT MATTERS

Shared source material helps keep vocabulary and directions consistent.

REMEMBER THIS

One source of truth. Several useful formats.

14 VIBE CODING

WHAT IT IS

You describe what a small digital tool should do, and AI helps build the code.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Describe a vocabulary review game, test it, and request changes in plain language.

WHY IT MATTERS

Teachers can prototype an idea without starting as programmers.

REMEMBER THIS

Describe it. Build it. Refine it.

15 WEBSITES FROM A DESCRIPTION

WHAT IT IS

AI builders can turn a brief into a simple site or interactive resource.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Build a seventh-grade ecosystems unit site with lessons, vocabulary, and review links.

WHY IT MATTERS

A unit hub or family resource page can be drafted in one session.

REMEMBER THIS

Preview every link before sharing.

NEW AI VOCABULARY

Three terms explain how reusable AI work is changing.

16 AGENTS

WHAT IT IS

An AI agent works toward a goal using steps, tools, and feedback.

WHY IT MATTERS

The shift is from answering one question to completing part of a workflow.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Gather sources, compare them, organize findings, and draft a report for review.

REMEMBER THIS

An agent acts. A chatbot answers.

17 AUTOMATION

WHAT IT IS

Automation lets a defined task run with less repeated setup.

WHY IT MATTERS

Routine work is the best place to look for saved time.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Run the same weekly resource search using a saved task and the same output format.

REMEMBER THIS

Automate the routine, not the judgment.

18 SKILLS

WHAT IT IS

A skill packages instructions and resources for a repeatable workflow.

WHY IT MATTERS

AI can follow your preferred process more consistently.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Create a Sub Plan Skill that uses your schedule, routines, safety steps, and dismissal plan.

REMEMBER THIS

Skills save the process.

WHAT IS CHANGING FOR STUDENTS

The opportunity is real, and so is the need to protect student thinking.

19 AI AS A TUTOR

WHAT IT IS

Learning tools increasingly support a back-and-forth tutoring conversation.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Ask one question at a time and wait for the student's reasoning before continuing.

WHY IT MATTERS

A useful tutor responds to student thinking instead of only giving an answer.

REMEMBER THIS

Tutor, do not take over.

20 HINTS BEFORE ANSWERS

WHAT IT IS

AI can be instructed to use hints, questions, and challenge steps.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Give one hint, ask for evidence, and reveal the solution only after two attempts.

WHY IT MATTERS

The prompt can protect productive struggle.

REMEMBER THIS

Hint. Question. Challenge.

21 ACCESSIBILITY SUPPORT

WHAT IT IS

AI can help draft captions, alternative explanations, translations, and accessible formats.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Rewrite directions in plain language while preserving the learning target.

WHY IT MATTERS

A first draft can make planned supports faster to prepare.

REMEMBER THIS

Support access. Keep the rigor.

WHAT IS CHANGING FOR STUDENTS

The opportunity is real, and so is the need to protect student thinking.

22 AI LITERACY

WHAT IT IS

AI literacy includes understanding capabilities, limits, ethics, and responsible use.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Compare an AI answer with two sources and identify one unsupported claim.

WHY IT MATTERS

Students need to evaluate AI, not simply operate it.

REMEMBER THIS

Use it. Question it. Verify it.

23 COGNITIVE OFFLOADING

WHAT IT IS

Cognitive offloading happens when a tool carries part of the mental work.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Have students plan or predict first, then use AI to test and revise their thinking.

WHY IT MATTERS

Helpful support can become lost learning if AI does the thinking students need to practice.

REMEMBER THIS

Think first. Use AI second.

24 DEEPPAKES AND SYNTHETIC MEDIA

WHAT IT IS

AI can produce convincing images, cloned voices, and altered video.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Trace a viral clip to its earliest source and look for independent confirmation.

WHY IT MATTERS

Seeing or hearing something is no longer enough to prove it is authentic.

REMEMBER THIS

Pause. Trace. Confirm.

PRACTICAL USES FOR EDUCATORS

Use AI to improve communication and design, not replace professional judgment.

25 FAMILY COMMUNICATION

WHAT IT IS

AI can clarify, translate, and adjust the tone of a message.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Rewrite a policy-heavy paragraph in warm family language, then verify the translation.

WHY IT MATTERS

School language can be made easier to understand without changing the meaning.

REMEMBER THIS

AI supports the message. You own it.

26 RUBRIC AUDITS

WHAT IT IS

AI can review a rubric for vague language, gaps, and uneven performance levels.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Check whether each level is specific, distinct, aligned, and student-friendly.

WHY IT MATTERS

A clearer rubric helps students understand quality before they begin.

REMEMBER THIS

Ask AI to audit it, not grade it.

27 AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

WHAT IT IS

Assessment design is shifting toward process, application, explanation, and reflection.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Collect a proposal, checkpoints, source notes, final product, and short defense.

WHY IT MATTERS

A final product alone may not show who did the thinking.

REMEMBER THIS

Make the thinking visible.

BEFORE YOU USE IT AT SCHOOL

Policy, privacy, accuracy, and human review still come first.

28 AI DETECTORS ARE NOT PROOF

WHAT IT IS

AI writing scores are estimates and can misidentify both human and AI-written text.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Review drafts, source history, student explanation, and school policy before deciding.

WHY IT MATTERS

A score cannot establish misconduct by itself.

REMEMBER THIS

Use the score to start a conversation.

29 PRIVACY AND APPROVED TOOLS

WHAT IT IS

School policy and account protections determine what information may be entered.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Use de-identified information unless your school has authorized the tool and the data use.

WHY IT MATTERS

A tool that is safe for personal use may not be approved for student records.

REMEMBER THIS

No names. No identifiers. Check policy.

30 HUMAN JUDGMENT STILL LEADS

WHAT IT IS

AI can be inaccurate, biased, incomplete, or confidently wrong.

TEACHER EXAMPLE

Check facts, alignment, tone, access, and possible bias before using an output.

WHY IT MATTERS

Educators remain responsible for the decision and its effect on students.

REMEMBER THIS

AI can assist. Educators decide.

WHAT SHOULD I TRY FIRST?

Choose one goal. Run one small experiment. Keep the version that helps.

1

SAVE PREP TIME

Start a course workspace

Add one pacing guide, one rubric, and your preferred lesson format.

2

MAKE DIRECTIONS CLEARER

Revise, do not replace

Ask AI to identify unclear steps and suggest plain-language revisions.

3

SUPPORT ACCESS

Create one alternate format

Turn reviewed directions into a checklist, caption draft, or family explanation.

4

PROTECT STUDENT THINKING

Use a tutor pattern

Tell AI to give hints and questions before answers.

5

REDUCE REPEATED WORK

Save a workflow

Build a skill or scheduled task for one routine you already repeat.

A STARTER PROMPT THAT WORKS ON ANY PLATFORM

"Before you create anything, ask me three questions about my goal, students, and constraints. Then give me a first draft I can review."

THE SCHOOL-READY CHECK

Before you paste, connect, generate, schedule, or share, pause here.



POLICY

Is this tool approved for the task and account you are using?



PRIVACY

Have names, IDs, grades, health details, and other identifiers been removed?



PURPOSE

Does AI support the learning goal instead of doing the learning?



ACCURACY

Did you verify facts, citations, calculations, and standards alignment?



BIAS

Could the output disadvantage or misrepresent a student or group?



HUMAN REVIEW

Who will review, revise, approve, and take responsibility for the result?

IF AN AI DETECTOR FLAGS A STUDENT

- ✓ Do not treat the score as proof.
- ✓ Review the student's drafts, notes, sources, and version history.
- ✓ Ask the student to explain the ideas and process.
- ✓ Follow the same school policy and due-process steps for every student.

THE FIVE-WORD RULE

PAUSE. CHECK. REVISE. DOCUMENT. DECIDE.

When local policy is stricter than this guide, follow local policy.

YOU'RE CAUGHT UP.

You do not need to master all 30 updates. Choose one or two ideas that could make your work easier without giving away the thinking that belongs to you or your students.

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LET'S CONNECT

SOURCES AND CURRENT PRODUCT NOTES

Checked August 30, 2026. Product access can vary by plan, region, device, and admin settings.

OpenAI: ChatGPT for Teachers

openai.com/index/chatgpt-for-teachers/

UNESCO: AI Competency Framework for Teachers

www.unesco.org/en/articles/ai-competency-framework-teachers

OpenAI Help: Projects in ChatGPT

help.openai.com/en/articles/10169521-using-projects-in-chatgpt

Turnitin: Using the AI Writing Report

guides.turnitin.com/hc/en-us/articles/22774058814093-Using-the-AI-...

OpenAI Help: Scheduled tasks

help.openai.com/en/articles/10291617-tasks-in-chatgpt

U.S. Department of Education: Student Privacy

studentprivacy.ed.gov/

ChatGPT Work: Skills and plugins

learn.chatgpt.com/docs/skills-and-plugins

U.S. Department of Education: AI and teaching

www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/documents/ai-report/ai-report.pdf

Anthropic: Claude for Teachers

www.anthropic.com/news/claude-for-teachers

ISTE: AI literacy and digital citizenship

iste.org/blog/simple-starters-for-ai-literacy-and-digital-citizenship-lear...

Google Classroom: Gemini Notebook and Gems

support.google.com/edu/classroom/answer/16534159



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