



Building an AI-Ready Workforce:

A Look at College Student ChatGPT Adoption in the US

OpenAI

More than any other use case, more than any other kind of user, college-aged young adults in the US are embracing ChatGPT, and they're doing so to learn. Over one-third of 18- to 24-year-olds in the US use ChatGPT, and among these users, over one-quarter of their messages are about learning, tutoring, and school work, according to OpenAI user data.

A new analysis of OpenAI user data and student survey results reveal the degree to which college-aged students are using ChatGPT across the 50 US states, and where gaps in adoption exist. Our survey finds that three in four college-aged users want to use AI in their education and careers.

Beneath these nationwide rates of college-aged user adoption, however, lie challenges that America needs to address in order to foster a healthy economy and ensure future economic competitiveness. As employers increasingly prefer candidates with AI skills, state-by-state differences in student AI adoption creates potential gaps in future workforce productivity and economic development. With many employers prioritizing workers with AI knowledge, states with low rates of AI adoption risk falling behind.

One finding from our student survey that stood out to us: Many college and university students are teaching themselves and their friends about AI without waiting for their institutions to provide formal AI education or clear policies about the technology's use. The education ecosystem is in an important moment of exploration and learning, but the rapid adoption by students across the country who haven't received formalized instruction in how and when to use the technology creates disparities in AI access and knowledge.

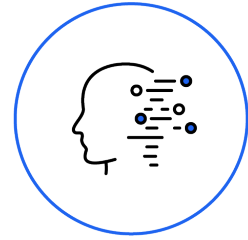
The enclosed snapshot of how young people are using ChatGPT provides insight into the state of AI use among America's college-aged students. We also include actionable proposals to help address adoption gaps. We hope these insights and proposals can inform research and policy conversation across the nation's education ecosystem about how to achieve outcomes that support our students, our workforce, and the economy. By improving literacy, expanding access, and implementing clear policies, policymakers and educators can better integrate AI into our educational infrastructure and ensure that our workforce is ready to both sustain and benefit from our future with AI.

Leah Belsky

Vice President, Education

OpenAI



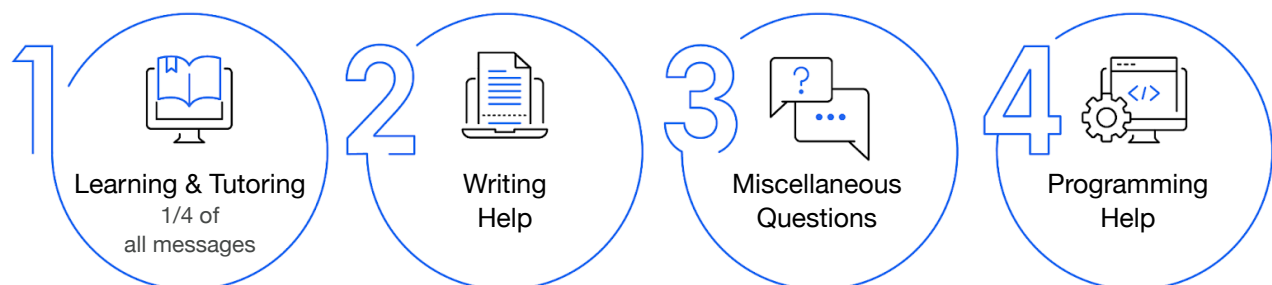


Students are using ChatGPT for their education

College-aged students aged 18-24 primarily use AI tools for starting papers and projects, summarizing texts, exploring topics, and brainstorming creative ideas, according to our recent survey.¹ For ChatGPT users who belong to this age group, just over a quarter of all messages are education- or learning-related (which means those messages are tagged as tutoring- or teaching-related by our internal classifiers), followed by writing assistance, one-off questions, computer programming support, and how-to advice². Our data details the messages sent through ChatGPT and the way students self-label their use of AI. We plan to partner with the research community to study the impact of ChatGPT use on learning and educational outcomes.

While academic research on AI's impact on learning is still in the early stages, a recent [study](#) by Harvard University found that students using ChatGPT tailored for a physics class doubled their engagement and improved problem-solving skills – with especially pronounced gains for those with less background knowledge.

Top Student Use Cases

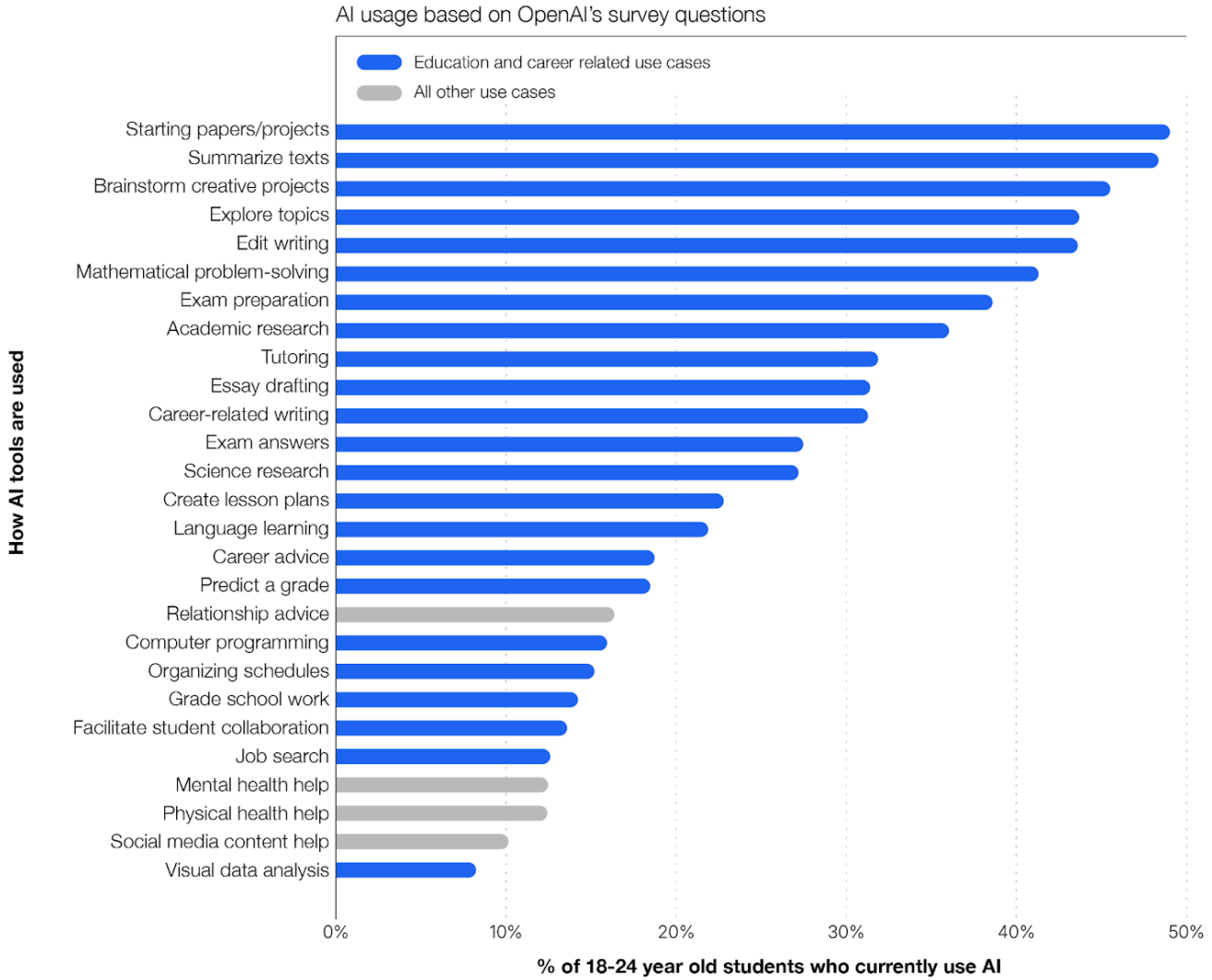


Source: OpenAI user data from January, 2025

¹ According to our survey of 1,200 students aged 18-24, AI tools are used for starting papers/projects (49%), summarizing long texts (48%), brainstorming creative projects (45%), exploring topics (44%), revising writing (44%).

² ChatGPT US-based 18-24 year old user data for Jan. 2025.

AI tool use for 18-24 year old students

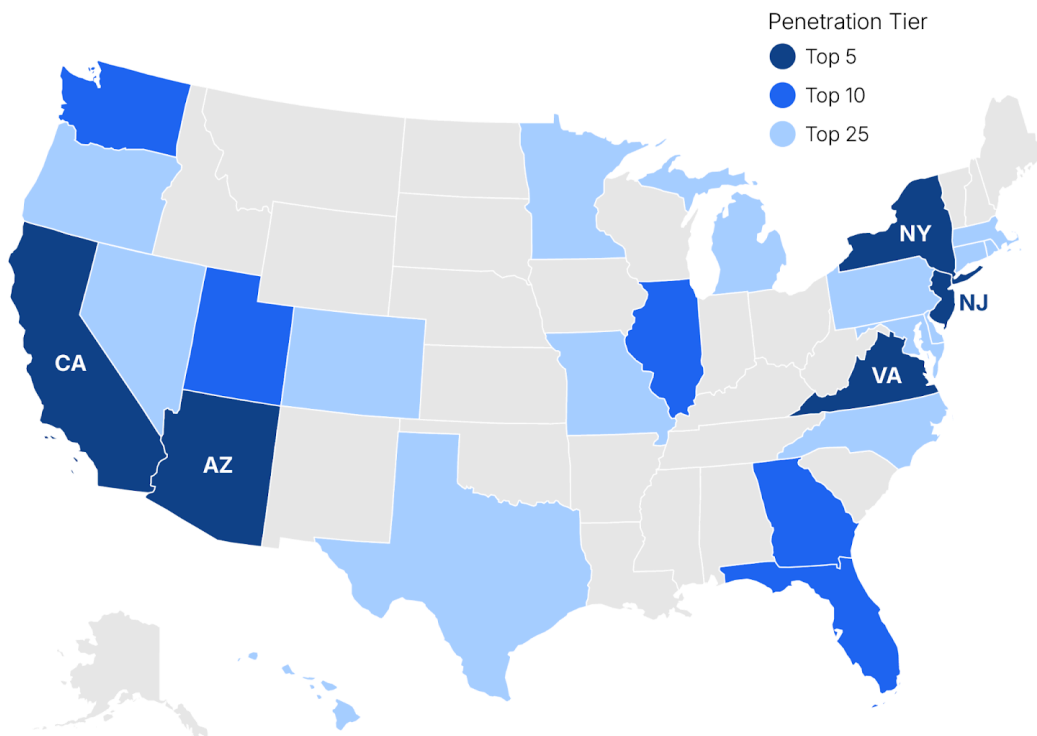




Student adoption varies by state

While student adoption of ChatGPT is strong, it varies significantly by state, according to OpenAI user data³. California, Virginia, New Jersey, and New York have the nation's highest adoption rates by 18-24 year olds, followed by Arizona, Washington and Utah. On the other hand, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and West Virginia have relatively low adoption rates by the same age group.

ChatGPT adoption by college-aged students varies by state



Source: OpenAI user data for 18-24 year olds in January, 2025

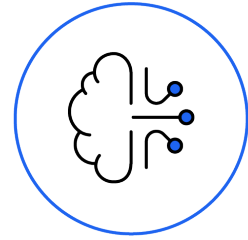
³ State-by-state percentage of young adults ages 18-24 who were logged in and used ChatGPT in Jan. 2025.

Moving forward, institutional support for AI integration is likely to play a positive role. States like Utah and New York have taken proactive steps to incorporate AI into higher education and offer potential roadmaps for other states to follow.

For example, Utah is focusing on AI education to better prepare its students to enter the job market. Salt Lake Community College is working to build an AI experience into different industry pipelines for students to become more familiar with AI before entering the workforce. The University of Utah launched a [\\$100 million AI research initiative](#) in October 2023 to tackle societal issues — such as with the environment, healthcare, and education — using AI. Additionally, Utah Valley University rolled out a [graduate certificate in AI](#), and recently [announced](#) an applied AI apprenticeship program in partnership with Utah-based companies.

In New York, the State University of New York (SUNY) system recently [announced](#) that starting in fall 2026, it would adjust one of its general education requirements that all undergraduate students are required to take, to include AI education. This is on top of SUNY's [AI initiatives](#) including its new Department of AI and Society, and an AI chatbot program that can be customized for coursework. SUNY is also dedicating 45 paid summer research internships on the use of AI for the public good through the Chancellor's Summer Research Excellence Fund, a school-sponsored initiative to provide students with paid summer research internships across various campuses.





Employers want AI-ready workers

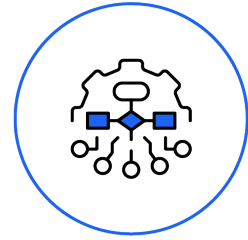
Whether or not academia is prepared for AI adoption, employers are increasingly prioritizing AI proficiency. Over 70% of business leaders say they would hire a less experienced candidate with AI skills over a more experienced one without, according to a recent [survey](#).

Students using AI tools not only learn school-related content but also develop AI literacy – the ability to build and use AI tools to accomplish tasks, refine thinking, and enhance productivity – a critical fluency in today’s job market. This is attractive for employers, with 72% already integrating AI into at least one area of their operations, up from adoption rates hovering around 50% over the last six years, a recent McKinsey [survey](#) shows. AI adoption is most prominent in areas such as marketing and sales, as well as product and services development, according to the survey. For example, workers rely on AI to provide real-time assistance and script suggestions during a human-to-human conversation.

A number of studies also suggest AI tools like ChatGPT improve worker productivity. The Stanford and MIT researchers jointly [concluded](#) that AI-tools boost worker productivity by 15%⁴, with even larger productivity gains of over 30% for less experienced workers. For ChatGPT specifically, a [study](#) by researchers at the University of Chicago and University of Copenhagen found that our AI tool halved working hours for over one-third of the job tasks in its study. As a result of such productivity advantages that AI tools provide, students who are not exposed to this technology risk missing the opportunity to develop critical AI fluency and may fall behind.

⁴ As measured by the number of customer conversations resolved by a customer service agent per hour.





The 3Ds: Drive Access, Demystify AI, and Develop Policies

To build an AI-driven workforce, states should enable students to adopt AI tools responsibly with structured support.

— Demystify AI

AI literacy is essential for students' future success. Our survey shows that while three in four higher ed students want AI training, only one in four universities and colleges provide it.

Teaching AI effectively requires practical examples that show students how AI can support their learning rather than replace it. For example, a [study](#) conducted by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania showed that using the right prompt is critical in helping a student learn the material as opposed to simply being given the answer. For educators, developing clear frameworks on how AI can enhance the curriculum for students to learn is key.

Programs like [OpenAI Academy](#) — an AI education workshop co-hosted with institutions and local communities — help demystify AI for both students and teachers. These programs enable learners to gain hands-on experience with AI and promote responsible use, address academic integrity concerns, and build proficiency in real-world applications like job searches, exam preparation, and internships.

— Drive Access

Most higher-ed students learn how to use AI tools through word-of-mouth and are price-sensitive, according to our survey. Government and higher ed leaders can play a key role in driving student awareness to ChatGPT's free products, as well as subsidizing equitable access to the latest models.

Arizona State University (ASU) became the first higher ed institution to [collaborate with OpenAI](#) in January 2024, offering ChatGPT Enterprise to students and faculty. ASU also launched the [AI Innovation Challenge](#), encouraging faculty to new uses for the tool. Since then, the university has developed personalized [AI tutors](#) and [integrated AI into courses](#), such as in advanced English class, to support student writing.

More recently, the California State University system [partnered with OpenAI](#) in February 2025 to offer ChatGPT Edu — an AI platform tailored specifically for education — to roughly 500,000 students and faculty across its 23 campuses in the largest deployment of ChatGPT by any institution globally.

— Develop Policies

A nationwide AI education strategy—rooted in local communities and supported by American companies— will help equip students and the workforce with AI skills. Academic institutions, professors, and teachers must also lay out clear guidance around AI use - across classwork, homework, and assessments. Our survey shows that lack of pro-active policy on AI use reduces student adoption.

To maintain US leadership in AI, we must ensure a well-trained workforce across the AI supply chain, from technicians and engineers to researchers and developers. Governments should make AI training accessible and affordable through:

- **Federal Action:** Expand 529 savings plans to cover more AI supply chain-related training programs – including for construction, HVAC technicians, electricians, as well as AI researchers and developers – by amending Section 529 of the Internal Revenue Code or broadening the SECURE Act’s provisions.
- **State Legislation:** Establish AI literacy frameworks (similar to [ISTE Standards](#)) in core curriculum for students and professional development for teachers, while allowing states to tailor programs to local contexts.
- **Workforce Development:** Incentivize public-private partnerships to assess AI workforce needs, create training pipelines, and collaborate with labor unions, community colleges, and other institutions that provide training. For example, [Per Scholas](#) is a New York City-based nonprofit organization that offers tuition-free technology training — including for AI — nationwide, for individuals traditionally underrepresented in technology for high-growth areas in the industry.





Conclusion

Students are at the forefront of the AI revolution and eager to expand their skills, and employers are increasingly seeking an AI-ready workforce. However, too many students are left to discover and learn about AI independently, with limited institutional support, leading to uneven adoption across the US. OpenAI aims to collaborate with states, universities, colleges, and schools to advance research and better integrate AI into education, ensuring a strong foundation for both students and America's economic future.



Methodology Behind This Report

This report draws from two primary sources of data, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative insights:

1. **ChatGPT User Data** - We analyze ChatGPT usage data from January 2025, focusing on US users aged 18-24, broken down by state.
2. **OpenAI Survey** - We analyze a survey of US college and graduate students conducted by a third-party provider between December 13, 2024, and January 2, 2025 by only using answers provided by the 18- 24-year-olds totalling 1,229 survey respondents across a mix of STEM and non-STEM disciplines. The sample included both AI users and non-users but excluded “AI rejectors” – defined as non-users with little to no interest in adopting AI within the next 12 months.

