



Learning Never Stops

How AI Makes Learning Continuous

Back-to-School Report | Summer 2026

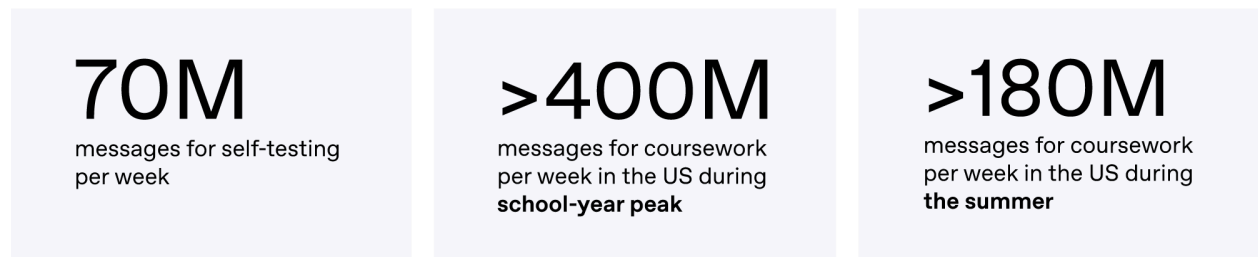
OpenAI

1. Introduction

For centuries, learning and teaching have largely been constrained by time and attention. Students having to wait until class. Teachers dividing their efforts among dozens of students as well as administrative demands. Outside of class, parents and tutors not always there right when questions or the need for help arise.

AI has changed all that. Explanations, feedback, and practice are instantly accessible outside of class. Learning has become continuous. For K-12 students, that support should come in teacher-guided experiences that extend the classroom. A student stuck on a hard algebra problem after school can ask for an explanation that very minute, while the problem is fresh in their mind. A teacher can adapt the day's readings to multiple skill levels before the first bell. A parent can receive a teacher's update in language they understand without waiting for the next scheduled meeting, and give better support at home.

How ChatGPT helps make learning continuous

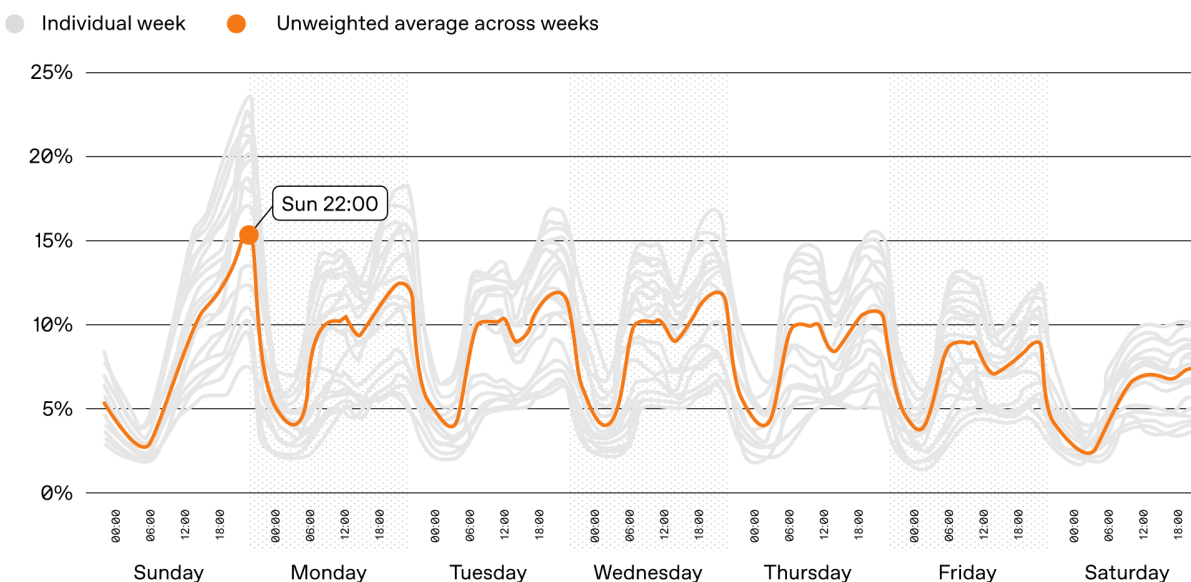


A privacy-preserving OpenAI analysis of ChatGPT users identified as many as 70 million conversations for self-testing purposes per week across all age groups, surfacing patterns such as repeated attempts at answers, answer-checking, misconception checks, and requests for more practice.

In the US alone, prompts related to classwork and homework peak during the school year at more than 460 million messages per week, with activity climbing on Sunday evenings before the school week begins. Even during the summer months, when many classrooms are closed, the analysis found more than 180 million coursework-related messages per week.



Homework-Related Share of US Messages by Day and Hour



Percentage of US messages related to homework and schoolwork in a given hour local time. Jan 5 - Jul 19, 2026.

These patterns show what continuous learning can look like in practice. They demonstrate how students, relying on their teachers' AI guidance, move toward mastery: they attempt a problem, receive feedback, identify gaps in their understanding, and practice until they can explain an idea and apply it. In 1984, educational psychologist [Benjamin Bloom's "2 Sigma Problem"](#) described the exceptional gains that are possible with one-to-one tutoring and mastery learning, while a later review of 89 randomized studies by researchers at Northwestern University and University of Toronto found consistent gains from tutoring in reading and math. The longstanding constraint to gaining mastery has been the *availability* of individual attention *when* a student needs it.

The consequences of that scarcity are especially clear for students with fewer resources. In the most recent published [Programme for International Student Assessment \(PISA\)](#), conducted in 2022, 47% of socioeconomically disadvantaged students across OECD countries scored below basic proficiency in mathematics, compared with just 14% of advantaged students. Some families can afford a private tutor, while others need their children to work, care for younger siblings, or complete an assignment without anyone available to explain it.

In democratic societies, it was a great achievement to make access to school more widely available. But the work remains unfinished: to help more students master what they encounter in school in order to realize their full potential. AI is already expanding access to the support that helps students learn continuously, especially when teachers are able to support and guide student use. It can give a needed explanation after class, help teachers adapt lesson plans to acute and evolving student needs, and return time lost to recurring paperwork. AI is expanding access to the attention students require to gain mastery.



2. From Access to Mastery: How Students Are Learning Differently



Featured Teacher



Meet Casey Cuny

Casey Cuny is California's 2024 Teacher of the Year and an English teacher at Valencia High School. His "Elaboration Conversation" invites students to begin with a subject they care about, examine a claim and evidence with ChatGPT, and develop an argument themselves. His relationship-centered approach keeps students responsible for drafting, reasoning, and final writing while using AI to make practice and feedback more immediately available.

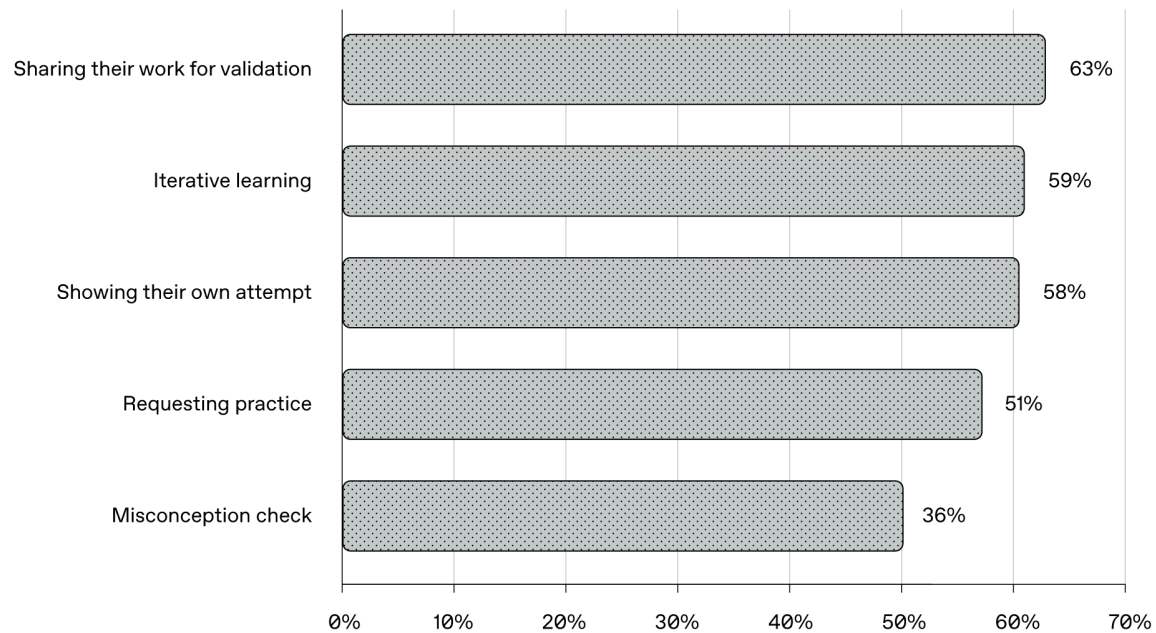
In his classroom, Casey Cuny is using ChatGPT to build writing exercises around students' interests: one might defend an NFL team, while another develops an argument about a Radiohead album. ChatGPT supplies a claim and evidence, and the student practices the reasoning Cuny has taught: an analogy, a rhetorical question, or an if-then argument. He calls the exercise the Elaboration Conversation and calls his broader approach "rigor through relationships."

After Cuny used the exercise as a warm-up twice a week for two weeks, his students scored 23% above the school average on a district writing assessment. That comparison does not establish that AI caused the result. It does capture how students use the tool: they rehearse an argument, receive feedback, and make another attempt. Cuny describes his classroom rule as "humans draft; AI feedback, humans finish."

Those habits appear across a much larger sample. Among the self-testing conversations covered in the usage analysis, 59% involved iterative learning, 63% included answer-checking, 58% included the learner's own attempt, 51% requested practice, and 36% checked misconceptions. People ages 18-21 accounted for around 25% of users and 30% of messages in the broader homework analysis. The activity spans social studies, life and health sciences, mathematics, languages, and physical and earth sciences. This broader analysis does not yet establish how often these interactions reflect productive practice versus quick-answer seeking or cognitive offloading.



How Students Use ChatGPT to Practice



Observed behaviors in self-testing conversations; internal estimates. These estimates describe patterns of use, not learning outcomes. A single conversation can contain multiple behaviors.



Featured Student



Meet Brandon Pieczka

Brandon Pieczka is an Iowa State University software engineering student who uses AI to turn unfamiliar coursework into self-directed learning. He asks questions, tests explanations, checks original technical sources, and works through a concept until he can apply it independently. In an engineering internship, he used Codex to navigate an unfamiliar codebase and reports shipping an implementation, illustrating how a student's learning habits can

carry into professional work.

More recently, Brandon used Codex to learn an unfamiliar codebase and ship a project during an internship at Pinterest. He asked the coding agent to build a personalized guide to the technologies he needed, link its explanations to actual files, and challenge his assumptions as he worked through different approaches. By his second week, he had documented 20 experiments, even though interns were not expected to write code during their initial onboarding. His



experience shows how the same habits that support independent learning in school can help students contribute to professional work.

Iowa State University undergrad Brandon Pieczka uses the same loop to prepare for in-class exams: he supplies his notes, explains his thinking, and asks where it breaks down. Instead of waiting for the next available office hour, he can review prerequisite knowledge, test his own answers, and keep working until he's mastered the course material.

Evidence about AI and learning is still early and mixed. General-purpose chatbot use is not itself a learning intervention; outcomes depend on whether students are required to think, attempt, revise, and receive appropriate teacher guidance. Early studies suggest that the design of this support matters. In a randomized [Harvard study](#), a carefully designed AI physics tutor produced more than twice the median immediate learning gains of an active-learning classroom, with higher reported engagement and motivation. In a randomized study of nearly 1,000 high-school math students in Turkey, unrestricted AI improved practice performance but reduced later unaided test performance by 17%; a tutor configured with teacher-designed hints largely avoided that effect. Students learn more when the interaction requires them to attempt, explain, revise, and try again: whoever does the work does the learning.



3. How Teachers Are Reclaiming Time

Featured Teacher



Meet Ava Morton

Ava Morton is an eighth-grade educator in Clayton County, Georgia, who uses AI to make classroom materials more accessible to learners with different needs. She adapts texts, rephrases difficult passages, and prepares alternative routes into the same lesson while preserving its central ideas. She also uses AI to support communication with families, helping extend the connection between classroom instruction and learning at home.

Ava Morton uses ChatGPT to adapt the same grade-level text for students with ADHD, dyslexia, autism, and other learning differences. Instead of spending hours searching across websites and rewriting materials, she can create modern-language and simplified versions of a Shakespeare passage, break the Gettysburg Address into manageable sections, or rephrase a question in real time when a lesson is not landing. Morton estimates that ChatGPT saves her at least five hours of planning each week.

Morton's experience reflects a much larger pattern. Teachers enter the profession to teach, yet much of their day is consumed by work that happens around teaching: building lesson plans, writing progress reports, preparing substitute materials, drafting individualized education plans, translating family communications, and documenting evaluations. AI can help compress that work, not to remove teachers from the classroom, but to give them more time to be fully present in it.

An OpenAI privacy-preserving analysis of data from January 1 to July 16 found more than 1.9 million messages related to tasks that help educators save time. Teachers sent 900,000 messages about report cards and progress reports, 800,000 about lesson planning, and more than 100,000 each about substitute plans and teacher-evaluation materials. The figures show educators using ChatGPT to move more quickly through recurring planning and administrative responsibilities.



~2M messages related to saving teachers
time in 2026 (overall number)

900K

messages about report
cards and progress reports

800K

messages about lesson
planing

>100K

messages about
substitute plans and
teacher-evaluation materials

Kara Crown, a special education teacher from a high school just outside Chicago, cut the time required to draft IEP goals and forms for review from more than an hour per student to less than 30 minutes. Teachers are adapting lessons to different reading levels, translating materials and family messages, generating practice activities, and turning pages of district guidance into focused, standards-aligned instruction.

The point is not simply to complete the same work faster. It is to redirect a teacher's finite attention toward the work only a teacher can do: noticing confusion, encouraging effort, building trust, and adjusting to the students in front of them. As Pam Wilson, an elementary music teacher from Fairfax, Virginia, told us, AI cannot help a kindergartner hold a mallet correctly. It can, however, clear away enough of the “noise” for the teacher to be there when that help is needed.



Additional Profile



Taiyo Inoue

Taiyo Inoue is a college mathematics instructor in California who uses Codex to automate recurring course administration in Canvas, including assignment dates, course calendars, announcements, and materials. He estimates that these workflows save him four to five hours a week. He invests the recovered time in a more active mathematics classroom, where students collaborate, explain their reasoning, and remain responsible for developing their own

understanding.



4. How Learning Expands Opportunity



Featured Teacher



Meet Doreen Mayrell

Doreen Mayrell teaches dual-credit college algebra at Collin College in Texas. She builds lesson-specific custom GPTs around her guided notes, worked examples, and learning goals, giving students a way to revisit a difficult concept or prepare before class. By adapting the same mathematical problem to different student interests, she makes individual support more accessible without changing what learners are expected to understand.

Doreen Mayrell teaches algebra to high-school students earning college credits. Some of those students can ask a parent for help or pay for a private tutor. But many leave class to work a shift or take care of younger siblings. Mayrell builds custom GPTs around her guided notes, worked examples, and learning goals, then releases each lesson about a week early so her students can learn whenever they have time. Students can move ahead when they understand the material or return to fractions and notation until they grasp it.

Mayrell also rewrites standard math problems around Taylor Swift tickets, fantasy-football scores, or makeup prices, instead of train schedules and watermelon tallies. The mathematics stays the same, but the material becomes relevant for her class. For students without dependable help at home, a patient explanation is now available when they need it.

The language spoken at home can also affect whether learning continues there. OpenAI's analysis identified roughly 1.5 million translation-related messages so far this year, including approximately 575,000 involving communication with parents and families. When teachers can share updates in a language a family understands, parents are better equipped to follow their child's progress and provide support beyond the school day.

The opportunity also extends beyond a single country. A World Bank randomized study in Nigeria found that six weeks of teacher-guided, GPT-4-powered tutoring improved students' performance on a combined assessment of English, AI knowledge, and digital skills. In Estonia, a nationwide ChatGPT Edu deployment is reaching more than 20,000 students and 4,600 teachers, with the



University of Tartu, Stanford, and OpenAI studying what happens in real classrooms. Estonia's implementation and research are underway; learning outcomes have not yet been established.



Additional Profile



Conor and Finn Grennan

Conor Grennan, CEO of AI Mindset and former chief AI architect at NYU's Stern School of Business, works with his son Finn to explore how ChatGPT can make learning more immersive and personal. While studying nineteenth-century German immigration to New York, Finn asked ChatGPT to role-play a fictional immigrant from Düsseldorf, turning a textbook topic into an interactive journey through Manhattan. Together, they have applied the same approach to

subjects such as cell biology and Hamlet, using story-rich scenarios to make difficult material more vivid and memorable.

5. What We Are Learning From Our K-12 Academies



Featured Educator



Meet Christina Ordonez

Christina Ordonez is the technology department chair at Hoffman Estates High School in Illinois's Township High School District 211. She helped extend AI training beyond teachers to librarians, athletic trainers, hall monitors, bus drivers, and other school staff so students receive consistent guidance about responsible use. Her district's approach shows how practical AI literacy can spread across an entire school community.

Christina Ordonez wanted students in Illinois's Township High School District 211 to hear consistent guidance about AI from every adult they encountered at school. So her district didn't just put ChatGPT into the hands of its teachers. Instead, it also taught librarians, athletic trainers, hall monitors, bus drivers, and hundreds of other staff members how to use ChatGPT in their work.

Ordonez was a featured speaker at an AI Skills Jam for K-12 Educators outside Chicago. The gathering was one of a series launched this summer by OpenAI Academy and the Walton Family Foundation in Jonesboro, Georgia; Fairfax, Virginia; Orlando; San Bernardino, California; Phoenix; Salt Lake City; and Las Vegas. The Jams are designed to give teachers and school leaders greater AI expertise and the confidence to apply it in their work.

At each stop, educators worked side by side with OpenAI technical mentors to learn how to use AI to assist with lesson planning, assessment data, school policies, administrative tasks, and other day-to-day responsibilities. Participants also received a year of free access to ChatGPT Education and continued learning opportunities through OpenAI Academy.

Educators described a wide variety of creative ways they were using ChatGPT inside and outside the classroom.

A Fairfax elementary music teacher uploaded her curriculum, grading policies, district regulations, and teaching approach to ChatGPT, creating a planning tool she could use to build lessons



throughout the school year. A Jonesboro fourth-grade teacher used ChatGPT to condense pages of lesson plans into focused, 30- to 40-minute lessons centered on the day's required standards. Chicago educators described using ChatGPT to simulate science experiments, support student animation projects, and analyze more than 200 novels for gaps in representation. In San Bernardino, a principal used it to build a complex master schedule, a task she said would otherwise have taken hours, and probably days.

Initial survey data reinforced the practical value of the training: 93 percent of participants said they left with something they could use again, and 96 percent planned to apply what they learned within 30 days.

For OpenAI, listening to educators is as important as training them. The lesson plans, differentiated materials, schedules, and other workflows they developed at the Jams show us where teachers lose time, where students need more individualized support, and where educators encounter friction when using AI. Those observations can help our product and engineering teams improve tools for schools, while helping OpenAI Academy design future training, examples, and follow-on resources around the needs educators identify.



6. Conclusion

Education has always depended on human interaction: the teacher who notices that a student needs more attention or the parent who helps their children with difficult homework. ChatGPT cannot replace those interactions. But with appropriate guidance and safeguards it can make individualized assistance available to more people, at more times, than ever before. It can help students better understand a difficult concept they did not fully grasp in class, give educators new ways to reach different learners, and help families understand school communications in the language they know best.

OpenAI's internal analysis found students using ChatGPT to check their answers, get personalized assistance with complex subjects like math and science, and generate additional questions to practice. Teachers use it to rewrite a Shakespeare passage for different reading levels, communicate with families in other languages, adjust lessons for students with different needs, and reduce the time they spend on planning and paperwork. Schools are exploring how the same tools can support students with different reading levels, learning needs, schedules, and access to help outside the classroom.

The AI Skills Jams for K-12 Educators that OpenAI and the Walton Family Foundation have been holding across the country clearly demonstrate that access to a tool is only a beginning. Educators made the greatest progress when they started with a familiar challenge, had time to experiment, and learned alongside mentors and peers. Feedback from teachers and school leaders can show where products, examples, and training can become more useful. That cycle of using, sharing, listening, and refining helps turn new technology into effective educational practice.

OpenAI will continue learning from the people closest to students. Their experiences will shape the products we build, the examples and safeguards we provide, and the training we offer through OpenAI Academy and partnerships with schools and communities. We will help educators use AI thoughtfully and confidently while preserving the judgment, relationships, and high expectations at the heart of teaching.

The larger opportunity is to make learning less constrained by the school day or the availability of individual help. A student with a question on Sunday evening can receive guidance while the lesson is still fresh. As one teacher at an AI Skills Jam for K-12 Educators explained, ChatGPT allowed him to turn an idea that came to him on the drive to school into usable classroom materials before the first bell. A parent can understand an update from school and provide better support at home. These moments extend the reach of teaching and give more students the explanation, feedback, and encouragement they need to master new ideas, pursue their interests, and realize their potential.

