RAND American Life Panel

RESEARCH REPORT

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Higher-Income Parents Use AI More and Encourage Their Children to Do the Same

Several times per school year, we survey nationally representative groups of about 1,000 parents and approximately 1,800 teens through, respectively, the RAND American Parents Panel (APP) and the RAND American Youth Panel (AYP), both of which are part of the RAND American Life Panel (ALP). In this report, we present what both parents and teens say about their artificial intelligence (AI) use, their perspectives concerning such use, and what parents have communicated to their children about AI use for school or homework. This report is intended primarily for parents, school principals, and school superintendents.

We draw on the results from four surveys for our analyses, which we describe in more detail in the "Methodology" section at the end of the report. The first two surveys were of parents in February 2025 and youth (ages 12 to 18) in May 2025. We surveyed both groups again in May 2026, posing some repeated questions to track trends over time.[1] Although some of the same parents and teens took the surveys at both time points, we did not design the surveys to track changes among individuals or within households but rather to take cross-sectional snapshots of AI use and attitudes among nationally representative samples of parents and teens.[2]

To our knowledge, this is the third report to examine AI use among parents and teens in the United States (in addition to Madden et al., 2024, and Hamilton, 2024). The two prior reports were published in 2024, when AI adoption rates were lower than they were in 2025 and 2026, and agentic AI was still new. Those report findings show that both parents and teens used AI; teens used it more

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KEY FINDINGS

- Although artificial intelligence (AI) use increased among parents in families of all income levels between 2025 and 2026, AI use increased most among parents in the *highest-income families* (those with incomes of $150,000 or more).
- Parents in the highest-income families and parents who are frequent AI users were the ones most likely to encourage their children to use AI for school or homework.
- Teens' perceptions of their parents' encouragement to use AI for school or homework were highly and positively correlated with teens' self-reported AI use for homework help.
- Consequently, an income-based gap has grown in the share of teens reporting AI use for homework help from 2025 to 2026, with a greater share of teens in higher-income families reporting AI use.

actively than parents (Madden et al., 2024); parents underestimated whether their teens were using AI (Madden et al., 2024); and teens used AI for similar self-reported uses as parents (Hamilton, 2024).

To preview our results, we found that higher-income parents were much more likely to use AI than their lower-income peers. We also found that those parents who are frequent AI users themselves—the same population of parents who tends to be in higher-income families—were more likely to encourage their teens to use AI and that such parental encouragement (and perceived parental encouragement) is positively correlated with teens' self-reported use of AI for school or homework. We refer to this as a *do as I do* relationship; in other words, teens might be modeling their adoption of AI after what they see their parents doing. We discuss these findings in more depth in the rest of the report.

It is possible that this relationship could have counterintuitive implications for the large and long-standing gap in achievement between low- and high-income students. On the one hand, if teens in higher-income families use AI more frequently for schoolwork and if the use of general-purpose AI tools harms learning—as the evidence to date suggests that it does—then disparate AI use could, in fact, narrow the income-based achievement gap by lowering the academic performance of high-income students. On the other hand, it is possible that the income-based gap in teens' AI use may widen achievement gaps if teens in higher-income families use AI in ways that do not outsource critical thinking or if they use AI to advance their college searches or career success.

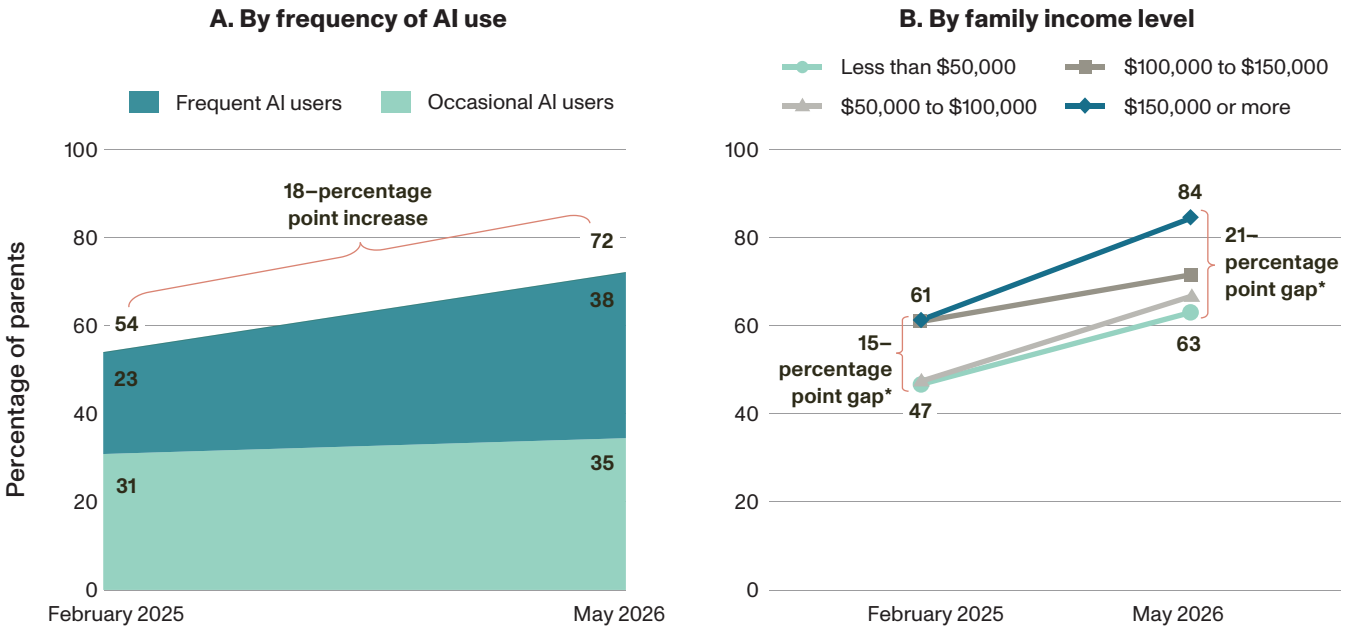
Parents' Own AI Use Has Markedly Increased, Especially Among Those in the Highest-Income Families

The share of parents who reported using AI for work or personal reasons rose from 54 percent in February 2025 to 72 percent in May 2026 (see panel A of Figure 1). The share of parents identifying themselves as *frequent AI users* (that is, using AI at least once per week) drove the overall increase.

As shown in panel B of Figure 1, parents in families with higher incomes were more likely to use AI, which we presume stems from higher rates of AI use at white-collar, higher-paying jobs (Pendell, 2025). When we first asked parents about their AI use in February 2025, we observed a 15–percentage point gap between parents in the highest- and lowest-income families. Although parents' AI use increased at all four family income levels, it increased most among parents in the *highest-income families* (parents who reported earning $150,000 or more). Fifteen months later, the 15–percentage point gap in AI use between the lowest- and highest-income families grew to a 21–percentage point gap. The widening of this gap was driven almost entirely by increases in the share of highest-income parents using AI frequently rather than just occasionally.

FIGURE 1

The Percentage of Parents Using AI for Work or Daily Life Is Increasing



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question asked of parents: "How often do you use AI (such as chatbots) to help with your work or daily life?" (n = 984 in 2025 and n = 1,000 in May 2026). The 2025 survey item did not specify "such as chatbots." We classify parents who chose "At least once per week" or "Daily" as frequent AI users and those who chose "Less than once a month" or "At least once per month" as occasional AI users. See additional notes about the methodology for both surveys in the "Methodology" section at the end of the report. We gray out the middle two income categories to keep focus on the gap between parents in the highest- versus the lowest-income groups. An asterisk (*) indicates that the gap is statistically significant. Values may not sum because of rounding.

Higher-Income Parents Were Especially Likely to Encourage Teens to Use AI for Schoolwork

In May 2026, we asked parents, "Which statement most closely fits what you tell your child about use of AI (like chatbots) for school or homework?" We offered four response options, ranging from discouraging AI use to encouraging AI use to not having talked at all to their children about AI use.

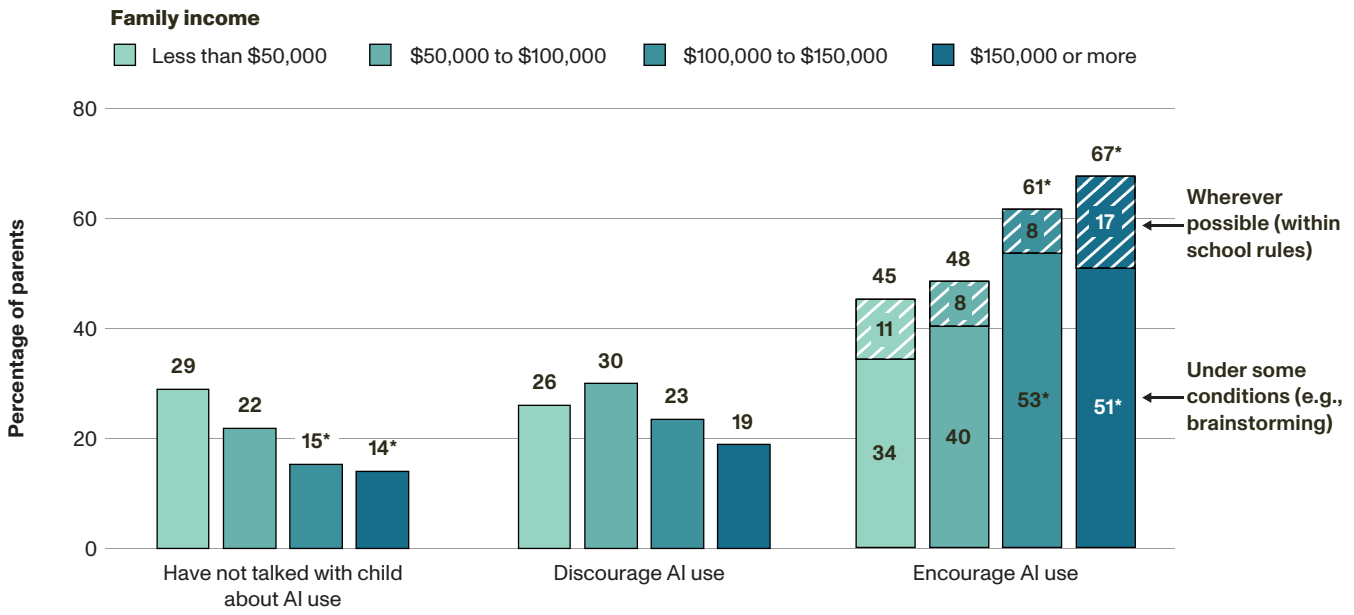
Overall, parents' recommendations to their teens varied: 56 percent reported encouraging their teens to use AI for schoolwork to some degree, 24 percent reported discouraging all AI use for schoolwork, and 20 percent reported not having talked with their children about AI use (results not shown).

Figure 2 displays a similar relationship by family income as that shown in Figure 1. Not only were higher-income parents substantially more likely to have talked with their children about using AI for school or homework, but they were also substantially more likely to have encouraged their children to use AI for schoolwork. About two-thirds of parents in our highest-income category ($150,000 or more) had encouraged their children to use AI, compared with just under half of the lowest-income parents in our sample.

Although most parents who encouraged their teens to use AI for schoolwork reported encouraging AI use with restraint (i.e., "I discourage my child from using AI to think for them, but I encourage my child to use AI for some things like as a brainstorming partner or for checking their work"), 17 percent of parents in the highest-income category reported encouraging their children to use AI wherever possible within school rules.

FIGURE 2

Parents in Higher-Income Families Were Significantly More Likely to Report Encouraging Their Children to Use AI for Schoolwork as of May 2026



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question asked of parents in May 2026: "Which statement most closely fits what you tell your child about use of AI (like chatbots) for school or homework?" (n = 1,000). Parents were asked to select one of four options (which we have shortened in the figure for readability): (1) I have not talked with my child about using AI for schoolwork or homework; (2) I discourage my child from using AI at all for schoolwork or homework; (3) I discourage my child from using AI to think for them, but I encourage my child to use AI for some things like as a brainstorming partner or for checking their work; and (4) I encourage my child to use AI wherever possible within the rules the school sets. An asterisk (*) indicates that the percentage of parents selecting a response option is statistically significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from the percentage of parents in the lowest-income category (less than $50,000) who responded similarly. Values may not sum because of rounding.

Parents Who Reported Frequently Using AI Were the Most Likely to Encourage Their Teens to Use AI Wherever Possible Within School Rules

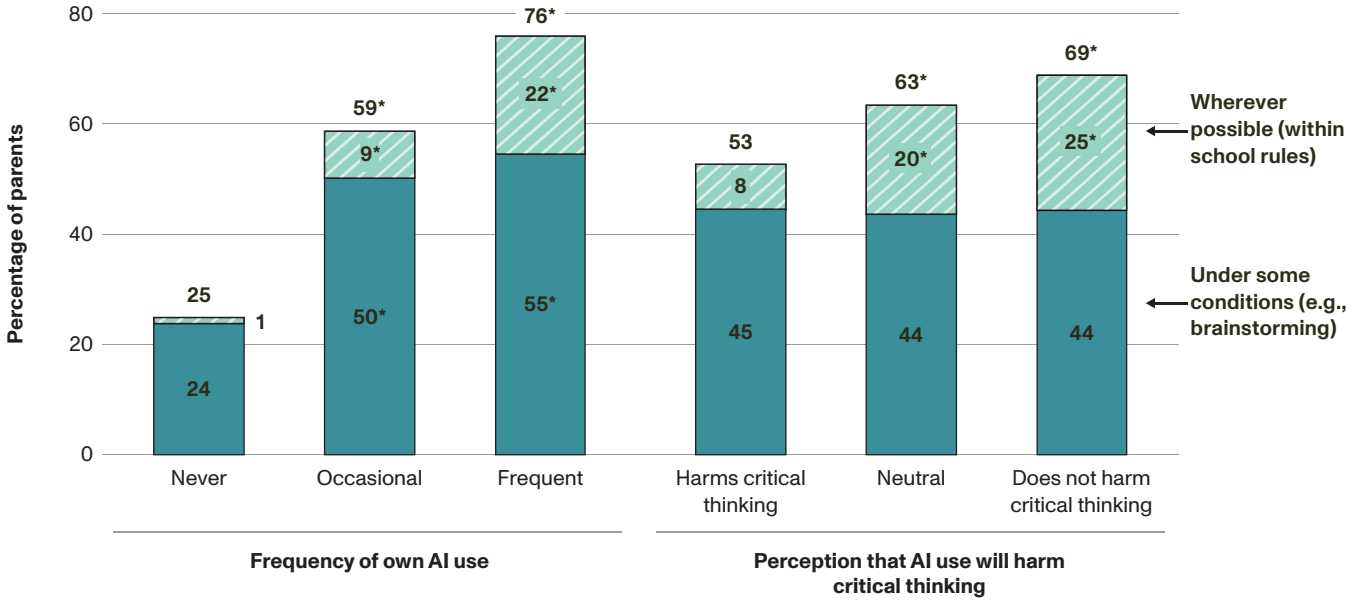
We also examined whether the frequency of parents' AI use and whether their agreement with the statement "The more students use AI (such as chatbots) for their schoolwork, the more it will harm their critical thinking skills" correlated with their likelihood of encouraging their teens to use AI for school or homework. As expected, both factors correlated with parental encouragement of AI use, as shown in Figure 3, and both especially correlated with whether parents encouraged their child to use AI wherever possible within school rules.

For example, about one-fifth of parents (22 percent) who indicated that they use AI frequently also encouraged their teens to use AI wherever possible for school or homework, within school rules. In comparison, virtually no parents who reported that they never use AI encouraged their teens to use AI wherever possible, as shown in the leftmost bar of Figure 3.

Sixty-nine percent of parents who did not agree that AI use harms students' critical thinking encouraged their teens to use AI for school, including 25 percent who encouraged AI use wherever possible within school rules. Perhaps surprisingly, about half of parents (53 percent) who *agreed* that AI use harms students'

FIGURE 3

Parents' Encouragement of Their Teens to Use AI Is Related to Parents' Own AI Use and Parents' Perception of Whether AI Will Harm Teens' Critical Thinking Skills



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey questions asked of parents in May 2026: "Which statement most closely fits what you tell your child about use of AI (like chatbots) for school or homework?" "How often do you use AI (such as chatbots) to help with your work or daily life?" and "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The more students use AI (such as chatbots) for their schoolwork, the more it will harm their critical thinking skills" (n = 1,000). An asterisk (*) indicates that the percentage of parents who said that they encourage their child's AI use, whether under specific conditions or wherever possible within school rules, is statistically significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from the percentage of parents in the reference category who said similarly. For these results, reference categories are parents who never use AI and parents who agree or strongly agree that using AI more for schoolwork will harm critical thinking skills. Values may not sum because of rounding.

critical thinking also encouraged their teens to use AI for school or homework, including 8 percent who encouraged them to use AI wherever possible.

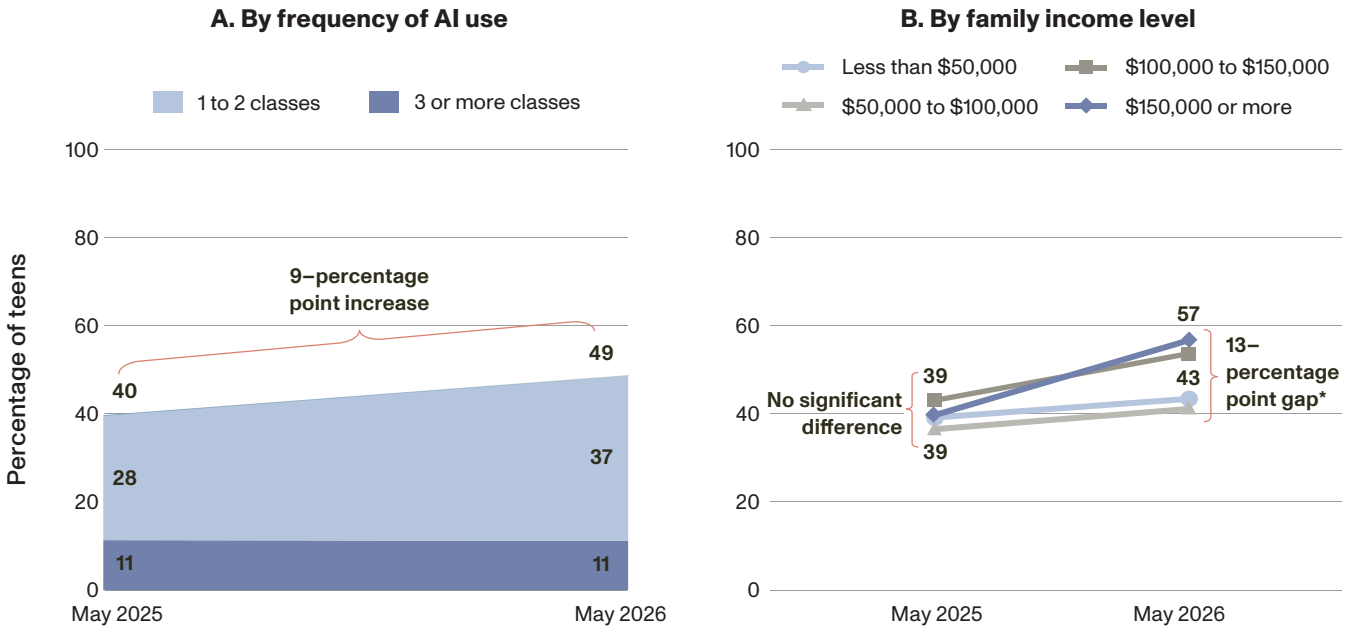
In results not shown, we also investigated these two factors alongside parents' family income levels and whether they perceived teens' use of AI for school or homework as cheating. When we examined all four factors together (family income, frequency of parents' own AI use, parents' perceptions that AI use may harm teens' critical thinking, and parents' perceptions of whether such AI use constitutes cheating), we found that only two—parents' perspectives of whether AI use is cheating and the frequency of parents' own AI use—predicted parents' encouragement of their teens to use AI for school or homework, giving credence to our do as I do hypothesis.

Like Higher-Income Parents, Teens in Higher-Income Families Were More Likely to Report Using AI

Like the increase in AI use among parents, teens' reported use of AI for homework grew over roughly the same period, from spring 2025 to spring 2026 (see panel A of Figure 4). In May 2025, 40 percent of teens reported using AI for homework. By May 2026, that share had grown 9 percentage points to 49 percent. Unlike the trend of AI use among parents, where we saw the greatest growth among frequent users, the overall growth of teens' AI use was driven by increases in the share of teens using AI for schoolwork more limitedly, for one to two classes.

FIGURE 4

The Percentage of Teens Using AI Help for Homework Is Increasing



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question asked of teens: "Do you use AI help (like chatbots) for your homework? We won't share your answer with anyone" (n = 1,890 in May 2025 and n = 1,810 in May 2026). See additional notes about the methodology for both surveys in the "Methodology" section at the end of the report. We gray out the middle two income categories to keep focus on the gap between teens in the highest- versus lowest-income groups. An asterisk (*) indicates that the gap is statistically significant. Values may not sum because of rounding.

We have reported elsewhere that older students are more likely to use AI for homework help (Schwartz and Diliberti, 2026). To that finding, we add two new ones. First, family income is positively correlated with teens' use of AI for homework help as of spring 2026. Second, an income-based gap in teens' AI use has emerged, as it has for parents' AI use. By spring 2026, 57 percent of teens in the highest-income families reported using AI for their homework, compared with 43 percent of teens in the lowest-income families, a 13–percentage point gap. AI use for homework among teens in the highest-income families grew by 17 percentage points over the period we examined.

> "Teens' AI habits appear to track with the frequency of their parents' AI use.

Teens Were More Likely to Use AI for Homework Help If Their Parents Were Frequent AI Users

Figures 1–4 draw on our full, nationally representative samples of roughly 1,000 parents and 1,800 teens who answered our survey questions in spring 2025 and spring 2026. Going forward, we restrict our analysis to the subset of teens that we can link to parents in the same household. Using the parent and teen samples from spring 2026, we matched 533 teens to 427 parents. When we fielded our parent and teen surveys in 2026, we had not intentionally sampled only teens of the participating parents, so the parent-child pairings that we examine here were not designed to produce nationally representative estimates at the household level. Therefore, we did not weight these results, and readers should not infer that these results generalize to all U.S. families. Nevertheless, the parent-child pairings offer

a rare opportunity to examine associations between parents' perceptions about AI use and their teens' self-reported behavior. These are the first dyadic results about AI use that we are aware of.

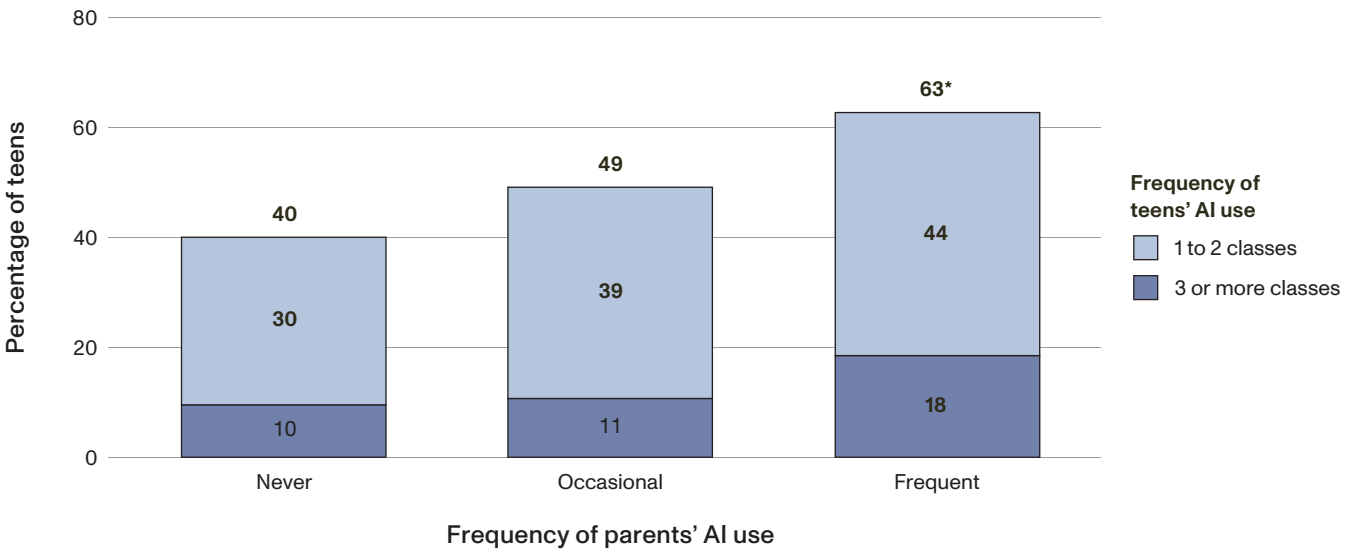
As shown in Figure 5, we found a positive correlation between the frequency of parents' AI use and the frequency of teens' AI use (as measured by the number of classes for which they indicated that they use AI). Roughly two-thirds (63 percent) of teens whose parents classified themselves as frequent AI users were using AI help for homework for at least some classes, compared with 40 percent of teens whose parents reported never using AI. This finding further supports our do as I do theory, showing that teens' AI habits appear to track with the frequency of their parents' AI use.

Teens' Use of AI Was Strongly Related to Whether They Perceived Their Parents as Encouraging Such Use and More Weakly Related to How Parents Classified Their Encouragement

As shown on the left side of Figure 6, teens' self-reported AI use was strongly correlated with whether teens perceived their parents as encouraging or discouraging such AI use. There was a 43–percentage

FIGURE 5

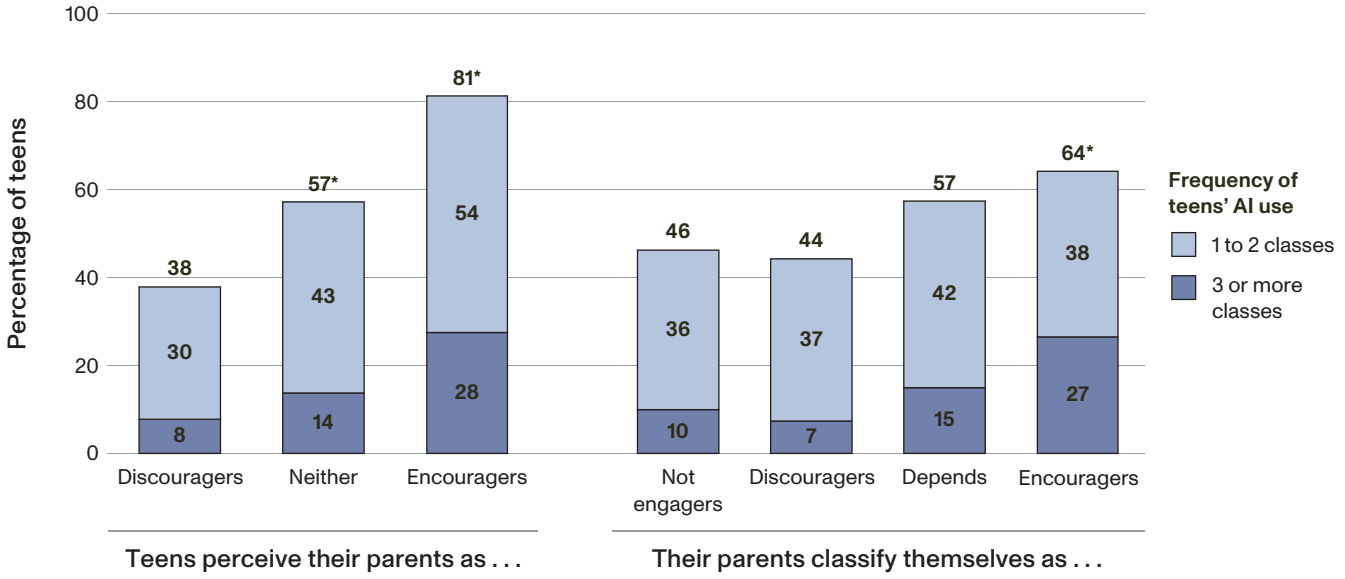
Teens Are More Likely to Report Using AI Help for Homework If Their Own Parents Are Frequent AI Users



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question asked of teens in spring 2026: "Do you use AI help (like chatbots) for your homework? We won't share your answer with anyone" (n = 533). These results are dyadic; that is, they represent responses of only those teens for whom we also had a survey response from their parents (n = 427). We classify parents who chose "At least once per week" or "Daily" as *frequent AI users* and those who chose "Less than once a month" or "At least once per month" as *occasional AI users*. Results should be interpreted with some caution as the dyadic sample was not designed to produce nationally representative estimates, is not weighted, and is relatively small. See additional notes about the methodology for both surveys in the "Methodology" section at the end of the report. An asterisk (*) indicates that the percentage of teens who said that they were using AI for at least some classes is statistically significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from the percentage of similarly responding teens of parents who never use AI. Values may not sum because of rounding.

FIGURE 6

Teens Are More Likely to Report Using AI Help for Homework If Their Parents Classify Themselves as Encouragers of AI Use or If Teens Perceive Them as Such



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question asked of teens in spring 2026: "Do you use AI help (like chatbots) for your homework? We won't share your answer with anyone" (n = 533). These results are dyadic; that is, they represent responses of only those teens for whom we also had a survey response from their parents (n = 427). Results should be interpreted with some caution as the dyadic sample was not designed to produce nationally representative estimates, is not weighted, and is relatively small. See additional notes about the methodology for both surveys in the "Methodology" section at the end of the report. An asterisk (*) indicates that the percentage of teens who said that they are using AI for at least some classes is statistically significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from the percentage of teens in the reference group who responded similarly. For these results, reference categories are teens whose parents have not talked with them about using AI and teens who perceive their parents as discouraging them from using AI help for homework. Values may not sum because of rounding.

point gap between the proportions of the 533 teens who reported using AI for their homework, depending on whether they perceived their parents as encouragers or discouragers of their AI use (81 percent versus 38 percent). Nevertheless, teens' self-reported AI use for homework was not entirely in lockstep with what they said their parents told them to do. More than one-third of teens (38 percent) reported using AI for homework as of spring 2026 even though they said that their parents had discouraged AI use for school.

The right side of Figure 6 shows the weaker, but still positive, correlation between how parents classified their stance on their teens' AI use and whether their teens' self-reported AI use aligned with that guidance. A noticeably large share of teens (64 percent) whose parents encouraged AI use wherever possible reported using AI for at least some classes.[3] But teens were about equally likely to use AI for homework when their parents said that they actively discouraged such use and when their parents simply did not engage them on this issue, suggesting that parental discouragement or lack of engagement (according to parents' responses, at least) may not noticeably suppress teens' AI use.

Interestingly, there is low correspondence between what parents said they tell their teens about AI use and what their own teens told us about their parents' attitudes toward teens' AI use (see Table 1). For example, among teens of parents who classified themselves as *encouragers* (that is, they encourage their children to use AI for schoolwork wherever possible), only 25 percent of those teens agreed that their parents encouraged them to use AI for school. Meanwhile, another 27 percent of these teens perceived their parents as actively discouraging them from using AI, and 47 percent perceived their parents as neither encouraging nor discouraging AI use.

TABLE 1

Low Correspondence Between Teens' Perceptions of Their Parents' Attitudes Toward AI Use for School or Homework and What Parents Reported Telling Their Children About Such Use

Parents Classify Themselves as	Teens Perceive Their Parents as			
	Encouragers (%)	Discouragers (%)	Neither (%)	Both (%)
Not engagers	9	35	53	4
Discouragers	4	44	48	3
Depends	15	34	48	3
Encouragers	25	27	47	2

NOTE: This table depicts response data from the following survey question asked of parents in May 2026: "Which statement most closely fits what you tell your child about use of AI (like chatbots) for school or homework?" (*n* = 427). This table also depicts response data from the following survey questions asked of teens in May 2026: "Have any of the following people encouraged you to use AI (like chatbots) for school or homework?" and "Have any of the following people told you NOT to use AI (like chatbots) for your school or homework?" (*n* = 533). Parents were asked to select one of four options (which we have shortened in the table for readability): (1) I have not talked with my child about using AI for schoolwork or homework (not engagers); (2) I discourage my child from using AI at all for schoolwork or homework (discouragers); (3) I discourage my child from using AI to think for them, but I encourage my child to use AI for some things like as a brainstorming partner or for checking their work (depends); and (4) I encourage my child to use AI wherever possible within the rules the school sets (encouragers). The "depends" row represents parents who classified themselves as encouragers "under some conditions" (see Figure 2). Results should be interpreted with some caution as the dyadic sample was not designed to produce nationally representative estimates, is not weighted, and is relatively small. Values may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Parents' Encouragement Mattered for Teens' Use of AI for Homework—Perhaps Even More Than That of Teachers and Friends

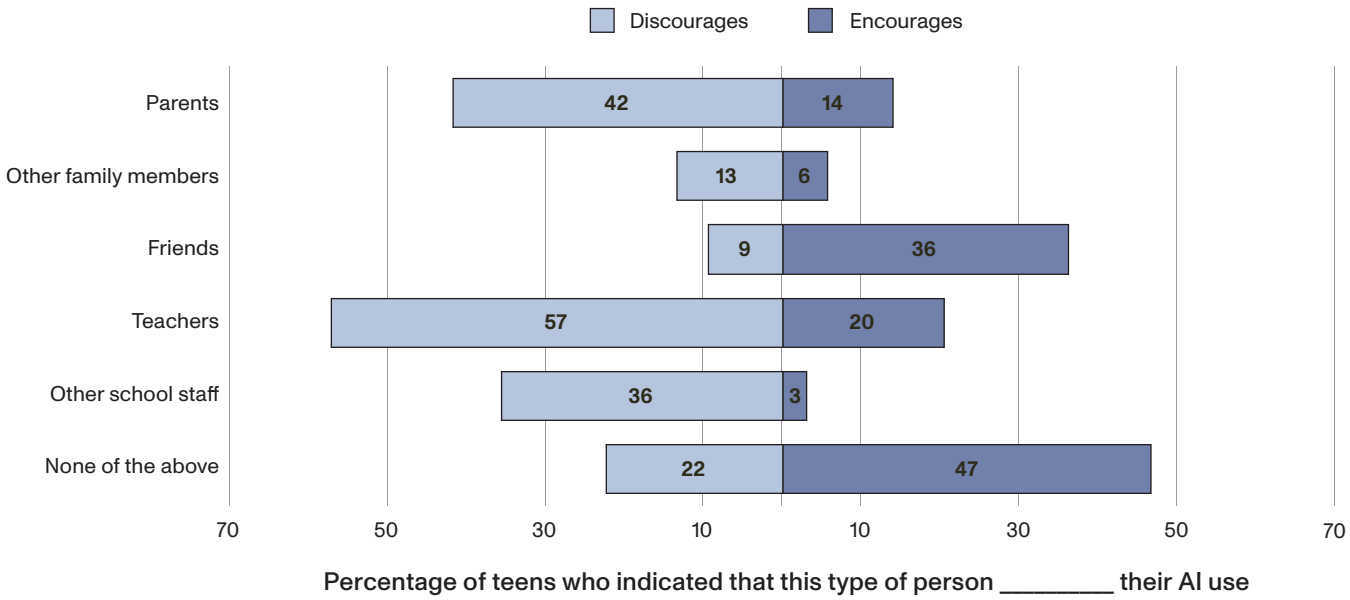
In two separate questions, we asked 1,800 teens in May 2026 whether their friends, parents, other family members, teachers, or other school staff (e.g., principals, guidance counselors) had encouraged or discouraged them from using AI for school or homework. Figure 7 shows that teens are hearing mixed messages. Seventy-eight percent of teens said that people in at least one of the five categories had discouraged them from using AI for school or homework, while 53 percent of teens said that people in at least one category had encouraged them. According to teens, teachers (57 percent) were the most common discouragers of AI use, and friends (36 percent) were the most common encouragers.

To understand which types of people, whether encouragers or discouragers, shape teens' AI use, we grouped teens into bins based on the type and number of people telling them whether to use AI for school or homework. Given our sample size, we did not categorize teens into all possible combinations of, for example, one encourager and zero, one, two, or three discouragers; instead, we focus first on the top three most commonly reported encouragers and then on the top three reported discouragers.

Figure 8 shows results for the types of people that teens reported as encouraging their AI use for school or homework. Relatively few teens (33 percent) reported using AI for homework if no one—parents, friends, and teachers—encouraged them to do so. If teens reported having at least one encourager, however, they were significantly more likely to use AI for school or homework. The specific type of encourager perhaps only marginally influences teens' AI use. However, when parents are among the types of encouragers, between 55 and 77 percent of teens reported using AI for homework. When a teacher or friend was the only

FIGURE 7

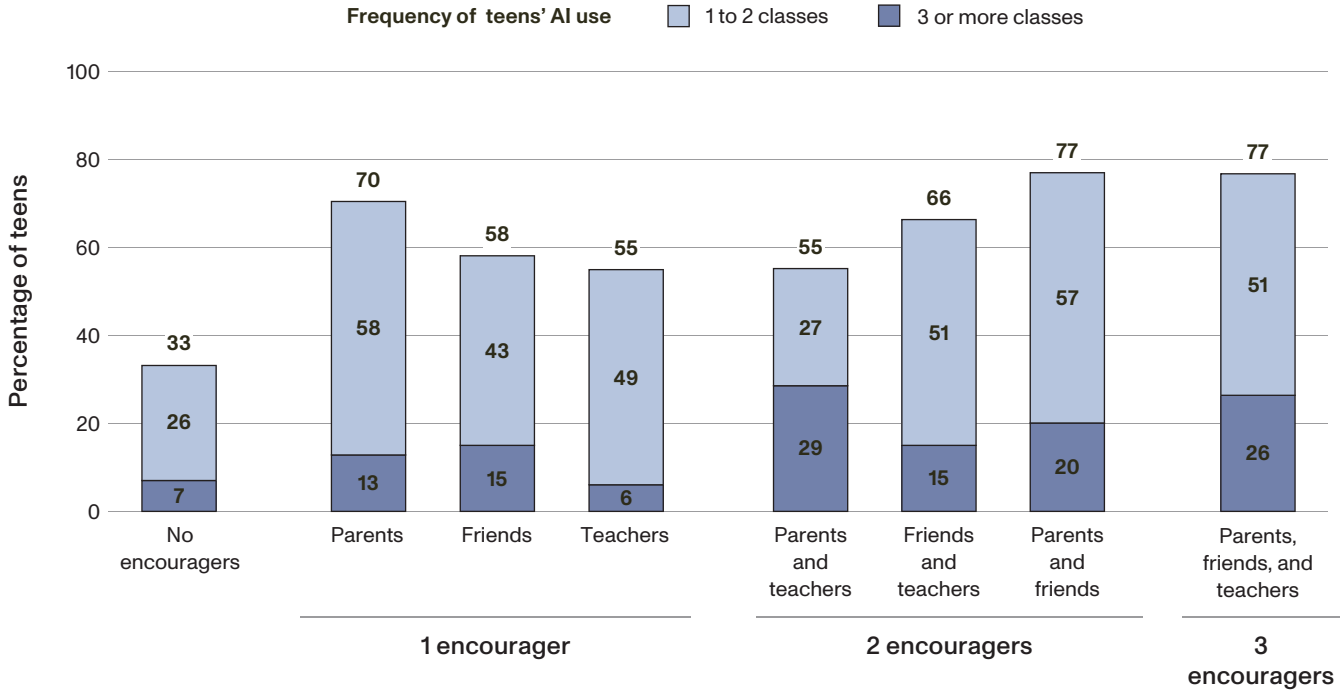
Teens Received Mixed Signals from Different Sources About Whether to Use AI for School or Homework



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey questions asked of teens in May 2026: "Have any of the following people encouraged you to use AI (like chatbots) for school or homework?" and "Have any of the following people told you NOT to use AI (like chatbots) for your school or homework?" (n = 1,807).

FIGURE 8

Positive Encouragement Was Highly Correlated with Teens' AI Use



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey questions asked of teens in May 2026: "Have any of the following people encouraged you to use AI (like chatbots) for school or homework?" (n = 1,807). Values may not sum because of rounding.

encourager, 55 to 58 percent of teens reported using AI help for homework in at least some classes.

In results not shown, we also conducted a parallel analysis examining the relationship between the number and type of discouragers and teens' AI use. Forty-seven percent of teens with no discouragers reported using AI for homework. In isolation, teens' perceptions of parental discouragement did not appear to shape teens' AI use: 51 percent of teens who said that their parents were discouragers reported using AI—a percentage not measurably different from those teens who had no discouragers. Far fewer teens (34 percent), who received discouraging signals from three sources (their parents, their teachers, and other school staff), reported using AI for homework.

Taken all together, teens' perceptions that their parents encouraged AI use for school or homework was highly and positively correlated with teens' self-reported AI use, even when teens received mixed signals from other people in their lives. In fact, teens' perceptions of their parents' attitudes toward AI use for school or homework correlated more strongly with teens' self-reported AI use than any other factor we examined—including sex, family income, and parents' perceptions of whether AI harms critical thinking—except for age.

Implications and Recommendations

This report updates findings from the two prior survey-based studies on parents' and teens' AI use and shows in more depth the relationships between them. We found that the share of parents using AI grew substantially in 2025 and into 2026 and that this growth was fastest among parents in families with household incomes of $150,000 or more. These highest-income, frequent AI-using parents were also the most likely to encourage their teens to use AI wherever allowed at school. Teens' perceptions about their parents' encouragement to use AI were, in turn, related to teens' use of AI for homework help. The net result is a widening of income-based gaps in both teens' and parents' AI use.

> “ Frequent AI-using parents in families with household incomes of $150,000 or more were also the most likely to encourage their teens to use AI wherever allowed at school.

If AI use for homework among teens in higher-income families should hold or grow at higher rates than that of teens in lower-income families, it is possible that teens in higher-income families may see larger achievement declines, resulting in a shrinking of the long-standing income-based achievement gap. This is because the evidence to date—which is from international and U.S. studies conducted with secondary school–aged students, university students, and young adults—indicates that unrestricted AI use during students' first attempt at a school task (such as drafting an essay or answering a math problem) harms student performance. This evidence base is still new but does include four randomized controlled trials and a large-scale quasi-experimental study (Bastani et al., 2025; Lehmann, Cornelius, and Sting, 2025; Stadler, Bannert, and Sailer, 2024; Kosmyna et al., 2025; Strömberg, Lei, and Wu, 2026). In each case, the harm appears specifically when AI substitutes for a student's own first attempt at the task rather than when students use AI to refine or support an attempt that they have already made.

There is less, but positive, evidence that AI can *advance* learning when it supplements rather than replaces students' initial work, such as by giving hints, asking questions, or challenging students' assumptions (Lehmann, Cornelius, and Sting, 2025; Pardos and Bhandari, 2024). Furthermore, teens in higher-income families might use AI in ways that advantage their college or career planning or access. So it is certainly not a given that heightened AI use among teens in higher-income families will necessarily narrow the income-based achievement gap. However, most evidence so far

“ Perhaps the most important takeaway of this report is that parents have as vital a role as schools, if not more so, in conveying messages about responsible AI use to their teens.

indicates that students primarily use general-purpose AI chatbots for their work rather than guard-railed AI (Schwartz and Diliberti, 2026) and that their AI use enables cognitive offloading (e.g., Bastani et al., 2025; Strömberg, Lei, and Wu, 2026).

Even though AI tools and guidance on their use are rapidly changing, this generation of teens cannot afford to wait for definitive answers before deciding whether and how much to use AI tools. There is now enough evidence to warrant drawing distinctions between helpful and harmful uses of AI for learning, regardless of family income. In the short run and at a minimum, states and districts should help schools convey specific talking points—both at school and in communications sent to students' homes—about why teens should not use unrestricted AI (such as commercial models) for their initial attempts at schoolwork and homework. While the evidence is not yet conclusive, schools should help parents, teens, and teachers understand the distinctions between AI doing the work for students (i.e., cognitive offloading) versus AI reacting to students' own attempts to do the work and helping students' critical thinking grow.

Perhaps the most important takeaway of this report is that parents have as vital a role as schools, if not more so, in conveying messages about responsible AI use to their teens. Teens' perceptions, whether right or wrong, of their parents' attitudes toward AI use for school and homework correlated more strongly with teens' self-reported AI use than any other factor we examined, with the sole exception of age. The other factors we examined included sex, family income, and parents' perceptions of whether AI harms critical thinking.

Specific talking points for parents are all the more important because communication between parents and their teens about AI use appears to break down. We found a wide gap between what parents reported telling their teens and what those teens reported hearing. Interestingly, teens were much more likely to say that their parents had discouraged AI use than parents were to say that they had discouraged it. Our results suggest that parents may be sending their teens mixed signals. Regardless of whose version of "the AI talk" is more accurate, parents likely need to be much more explicit for their messages to get through to their teens.

These short-term responses are important and needed but hardly sufficient. Schools and parents need multiple layers—not just a conversation with children—to help prevent students from offloading their learning onto AI. Schools need a policy layer that they can install on school-issued devices to prevent students from using general-purpose generative AI in web browsers or chatbots for their first attempt at work. Likewise, parents need a technological solution to provide guardrails for their children's use of AI on personal devices, such as tablets and phones. These kinds of guardrails are not simple to design, but developers and AI companies should pursue them, given the high stakes of AI harms on students' critical thinking. And AI guardrails, as opposed to outright blockage, are worthwhile because purpose-built AI holds real promise for student learning, as does students' guard-railed engagement with general-purpose AI tools.

Methodology

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

Data

The primary data sources for our analysis are a set of surveys administered to youth and parents who are members of the AYP and APP, respectively. First established in 2024, the AYP and APP are subsets of the larger ALP, a survey panel designed to produce nationally representative estimates of the U.S. population. For more details about how youth (and their parents) were recruited to participate in these panels, please see Schwartz et al. (2025).

Table 2 displays the sample specifications and other details about the survey administrations for these four data collections. Most importantly, the youth surveys were administered to members of both the AYP and Ipsos's Knowledge Panel, and the two youth surveys had slightly different sample specifications. The first youth survey (administered in May 2025) included about 2,300 youth ages 12 to 21, regardless of whether they were enrolled in school. The subsequent youth survey, administered in May 2026, had a much narrower sample that included only youth ages 12 to 18 enrolled in grades 5 through 12. To increase alignment between the two samples, we restricted our analysis of the May 2025 youth survey data to only the 1,893 youth ages 12 to 18 and enrolled in grades 5 through 12. The May 2026 survey sample also included oversamples of youth in four states (California, Florida, New York, and Texas). In short, some of the differences that we observed over time in youths' survey responses may reflect methodological differences between the two survey administrations rather than true change.

The youth and parents who received the May 2026 surveys were all members of the ALP. Because the ALP recruits participants at the household level, first recruiting adults (parents) and then asking adults whether their children (teens) would also like to participate, there is some incidental overlap in households that received our parent and youth surveys. We used this overlap to conduct a dyadic analysis comparing responses of parents and youth in the same household. These survey samples were not explicitly designed for such use, so the overlap between the adults and youth in terms of the households represented is imperfect. Therefore, we present these results as an illustrative analysis and acknowledge that they are not weighted to be nationally representative of the populations that we analyzed.

How We Analyzed the Data

We analyzed differences in parents' and youths' responses to our survey items by self-reported family income levels. (Parents who are members of the ALP report family income on behalf of their minor children.) As described above, our youth samples

TABLE 2

Survey Samples Used in This Analysis Differ Slightly

Sample Specification	Parents		Youth (Teens)	
	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3	Survey 4
Panels used	APP	APP	• AYP • Ipsos Knowledge Panel	• AYP • Ipsos Knowledge Panel
Administration dates	February 19, 2025–March 26, 2025	April 30, 2026–May 29, 2026	• AYP sample: May 8, 2025–June 5, 2025 • Ipsos sample: May 9, 2025–May 25, 2025	• AYP sample: May 5, 2026–June 8, 2026 • Ipsos sample: April 28, 2026–May 16, 2026
Eligibility	Parents of at least one child ages 12–17	Parents of at least one child ages 12–17	Youth ages 12–21 of any school enrollment status	Youth ages 12–18 enrolled in grades 5–12
Survey completes (*N*)	984	1,000	2,337 (1,286 from the AYP and 1,051 from Ipsos)	1,811 (1,044 from the AYP and 767 from Ipsos)
Oversamples?	No	No	No	Yes (CA, FL, NY, and TX)

combine responses from members of the AYP and Ipsos's Knowledge Panel. Both panels measure income slightly differently, so we relied on broadly aggregated bins where both panels best aligned. We also did not ask newly recruited parents in the ALP to report their family incomes at the time of their enrollment. Instead, we collected these data after the fact, meaning that limited family income data were available in spring 2025 for both parent and youth members of the ALP. To facilitate the analyses in this report, we used the available income data in panel records, even though they were collected at a later point than the survey administration. We hypothesized that a high family income could serve as a rough proxy for white-collar employment or the types of jobs that have been especially sensitive to AI automation while acknowledging that this is an imperfect proxy. We also note that the family income measure reflects household income not necessarily the income earned by the respondent parent alone.

We conducted significance testing to assess whether differences by self-reported family income level were statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. In this report, we describe only those differences by family income level that were statistically significant at the 5-percent level unless otherwise noted. Because this study is exploratory in nature, we did not apply multiple hypothesis test corrections. The results of our significance tests are also shown in the report's figures.

We did not conduct significance testing across survey administrations. This is because we lacked survey weights that properly account for the partial overlap in the survey samples over time. (These weights are impossible to produce because some survey samples include members of both the AYP and Ipsos's Knowledge Panel.) Despite the partial overlap in survey respondents, we did not analyze time trends longitudinally. Instead, we present cross-sectional comparisons because each survey sample was drawn independently.

Notes

[1] For simplicity, we refer to the middle- and high school–aged youth (ages 12 to 18) who took our surveys as *teens*. Only 10 percent of youth surveyed in May 2026 were 12 years old.

[2] Also, we did not design our survey samples to connect parents and teens within the same household. However, among the parents and teens who took our May 2026 survey, we could connect about 500 teens to the same households of about 400 parents, allowing us to compare and contrast within-family responses to our questions about AI use.

[3] The four categories shown on the right side of Figure 6 correspond with the four categories shown in Figure 2. The rightmost "encouragers" bar in Figure 6 represents the share of parents who encouraged AI use wherever possible (within school rules).

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About This Report

This report is part of a series of reports intended to provide brief, descriptive analyses of survey results of immediate interest to education policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. Over the past two years, we have administered surveys to members of the RAND American Parents Panel (APP) and the RAND American Youth Panel (AYP), both of which are part of the RAND American Life Panel, to better understand how much and under what conditions teens (youth ages 12 to 18) are using artificial intelligence (AI) for school or homework. The APP and AYP are designed and maintained by RAND Survey Panels, a data collection service at RAND dedicated to collecting and disseminating state-of-the-art, population-representative survey data to support research that addresses the most-pressing public policy challenges. For more information on RAND Survey Panels and the specific panels featured in this report, visit https://www.rand.org/surveypanels.

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