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AI IN K-12 INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS: What We're Seeing

A market baseline and emerging questions for curriculum quality

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Contents

Foreword

Since joining EdReports at the start of the summer, I've had the chance to listen closely to our team, educators, partners, and leaders from across the field. I continue to be impressed by the expertise, care, and commitment behind this work. I have also heard a clear and consistent belief—that better curriculum information leads to stronger decisions and, ultimately, better student outcomes.

That belief resonates deeply with me, and it's a big part of what drew me to EdReports. For more than a decade, the organization has helped make a complicated instructional materials market more transparent and easier to navigate. Through my conversations, one message has become increasingly evident: the need for trusted, actionable information is only growing.

AI is one of the most salient examples of that shift. As its use becomes more prevalent in instructional materials, AI is changing what those materials can do while making questions about quality, evidence, and the learning experience even more important. For EdReports, this moment brings both opportunity and responsibility—to understand it carefully and bring greater clarity to what it means for teaching and learning.

This brief is an early step in that effort. It establishes a baseline of what we can see in today's AI-enabled materials landscape and sharpens the questions that deserve deeper study. Just as importantly, we are committed to sharing what we learn along the way so the field can see both what is coming into focus and where important questions remain. Our goal is to build the understanding needed to provide clear, useful input as the market evolves.

I'm proud of the way our team has approached this exploration: asking hard questions, staying grounded in evidence, and remaining open to what we still need to learn. That combination of rigor, curiosity, and humility is exactly what this moment requires.

As this work continues, I'm energized by the opportunity to build on EdReports' strong foundation and make our insights even more valuable to educators and leaders—all in support of our shared vision of setting up every learner for success.

Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee
Chief Executive Officer, EdReports

Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence is moving into K-12 instructional materials faster than the field's ability to understand what those changes mean for curriculum quality. In a single school year, teachers' use of AI for instructional planning nearly doubled, rising from roughly a quarter of surveyed teachers in 2023-24 to more than half in 2024-25.[1] A separate national survey found that roughly six in 10 teachers used an AI tool during the 2024-25 school year.[2] As use rises, AI is being embedded across core and supplemental materials as well as powering a new generation of AI-native products, expanding what instructional tools can generate, recommend, adapt, and analyze for teachers and students.

These changes are already shaping classroom experiences, but the information available to understand them has not kept pace. Districts are being asked to make decisions about products without consistent, independent information about what their AI features actually do, how they interact with curriculum and instruction, or what evidence supports claims about their quality. What are the implications for the new definition of quality, and how might AI strengthen, reshape, or undermine the components that matter most for teaching and learning?

For EdReports, this moment echoes a challenge that has defined our work from the beginning: helping educators and decision-makers see more clearly into a complicated instructional materials market. Over the past decade, EdReports has helped make expectations for curriculum quality more visible and transparent. As the market moves faster, becomes more complex, and is increasingly shaped by AI, we are committed to providing trusted information while developing clearer signals about how materials work together, the strength of evidence behind claims, and what quality looks like in practice. This publication is a first step in that work.

Several findings stand out.

1. AI is not entering instructional materials as a single new product category; it is changing what existing and new products can do. AI features are being layered onto established core and supplemental programs, while AI-native products are emerging as standalone tutoring, writing, translation, and instructional-support tools. A single product may perform multiple functions, cross traditional categories, and engage both educators and students. As a result, labels such as "core" and "supplemental" increasingly tell only part of the story. Understanding an AI-enabled product may also require knowing what function the AI serves, where it sits within the instructional experience, and who interacts with it.

2. AI changes where and whether educators can intervene before it shapes students' learning experiences. Teacher-facing tools may generate lesson plans, adapt materials, score student work, or surface recommendations, often keeping an educator "in the loop" to review, redirect, or override AI-generated outputs before content reaches students. Student-facing tools may generate or adapt content in real time, provide tutoring, or adjust difficulty directly within a student's experience. Some products combine both channels, further complicating when and

how educators remain in the loop, where human oversight occurs, and how quality should be measured across the instructional experience.

3. Providers make confident claims about AI benefits, but the evidence and information needed to substantiate them remain limited. Across the companies examined, familiar themes – including teacher trust, human oversight, personalization, efficiency, and engagement – appear consistently in marketing. At the same time, the scan found limited information about how AI-generated or adapted resources fit within the standards, pacing, sequence, and instructional design of the broader curriculum. Evidence specific to the AI functionality itself is much less common. Providers frequently cite research supporting established products, but that evidence often predates the addition of AI and cannot automatically establish the instructional value of a newly added AI feature.

4. The field has made considerably more progress evaluating AI risk than evaluating AI instructional quality. Existing frameworks and certifications most often focus on privacy, safety, bias, transparency, inclusion, and interoperability. Some promising efforts are beginning to examine effectiveness and learning quality, but this scan did not identify a standardized, comparative approach for determining whether AI features strengthen learning, preserve curriculum coherence, or improve instructional quality.

These findings point to a central conclusion: AI is already changing instructional materials and classroom experiences, but the information and evidence infrastructure needed to understand those changes has not kept pace. More transparent information, stronger evidence, and a clearer connection between AI functionality and established expectations for high-quality teaching and learning will be necessary if districts are to make informed decisions in an increasingly complex market.

This baseline does not define what "high-quality AI curriculum" is. Neither does it conclude that AI improves or harms student learning, nor does it assume that existing curriculum-quality frameworks can simply be transferred unchanged to dynamic AI-enabled materials. Those are precisely the questions that require further investigation. Before determining what EdReports should ultimately signal about AI-enabled instructional materials, we need to understand more clearly what AI changes about curriculum quality and what it does not.

This work is the beginning of a broader learning agenda rather than a one-time market scan. EdReports' next phase of investigation will focus on four connected areas:

- **Which dimensions of quality matter most** for AI-enabled instructional materials, and where do established quality indicators still apply?
- **How does AI affect** curriculum coherence, teacher agency, student experience, differentiation, pacing, and human oversight?
- **What counts as credible evidence** of the instructional value of AI features, how should provider claims be substantiated, and how should quality be evaluated when AI can change or adapt instructional materials as they are used?
- **What information or independent guidance would most improve** decision-making, and where might EdReports be uniquely positioned to contribute?

AI will continue to evolve faster than the systems designed to understand and evaluate it. But the fundamental goal does not change: Students should experience high-quality, coherent content, and educators and decision-makers should have credible information to help make that possible. This baseline establishes what we can see today and provides a foundation for deeper study of what quality means in this new instructional materials landscape.

Introduction

Across the country, school districts are adopting instructional materials and products powered by artificial intelligence faster than the field can quantify the offerings or align around how to evaluate their instructional value. In a single school year, teachers' use of AI for instructional planning nearly doubled, rising from roughly a quarter of surveyed teachers in the 2023-24 school year to more than half in 2024-25.[3]

Many major K-12 edtech curriculum providers now market some form of AI-enabled or AI-driven product; yet, teacher training, student guidance, and district and state policies have not kept pace with this growth. Amidst the optimism of potential benefits and concerns around safety and data risks, there is a growing need to determine how and if these new technologies improve instructional quality. This echoes what district and school leaders themselves report: a lack of reliable, independent information to help them understand how these tools work and whether they improve learning outcomes.[4]

As the leading independent evaluator of PK-12 instructional materials, EdReports' reviews support the informed selection and implementation of high-quality materials nationwide. With AI quickly becoming the expected rather than the exception, continuing that work requires considering how AI is impacting the instructional materials market and student learning.

Recent research from Stanford's SCALE Initiative suggests that the most useful way to evaluate AI in education is to examine whether AI-enabled products expand students' access to meaningful and research-based learning experiences, such as personalized instruction, complex-problem solving, and meaningful collaboration, that are proven to help them develop competencies for thriving.[5] Applying such a framework, however, requires first understanding how AI-enabled products operate: what problems they are designed to solve, how they are architecturally and operationally embedded, how they function and what they do, and how they are marketed for use.

To begin creating that baseline understanding, this brief provides an initial look at the market of AI-enabled and AI-driven K-12 instructional products, and where there are gaps. This brief is neither exhaustive nor evaluative. It is not an evaluation of the quality or efficacy of these products, and is not intended to capture and define every product or market element. Rather, it offers a snapshot of the landscape today—a baseline the field can build from and measure against as AI-enabled instructional materials continue to evolve. It also identifies areas for further research and action to help build the infrastructure needed to support educational quality and coherence in an AI-enabled world.

Methodology and Limitations

This brief shares qualitative, publicly available information on product and marketing materials, drawing from a scan of AI-enabled and AI-driven K-12 instructional materials and publisher product claims. It identifies observable patterns of AI integration in curriculum products, of provider product materials, and of emerging evidence and evaluation frameworks for AI-enabled products.

EdReports selected 10 K-12 curriculum and edtech providers, representing a cross-section of company size, type, market reach, and product type: four large companies that are among the top 10 publishers of the most purchased instructional materials in the country[6], three mid-sized curriculum providers, and three digital-first edtech companies. For each, EdReports catalogued their marketed AI-enabled product(s), the key features, and the claims made about their use, trust, safety, and effectiveness, relying exclusively on information each company has made public.

The analysis focused on the varying degrees, types, and purposes of the AI features to identify what those features are designed to add or provide that simple algorithmic or rules-based technologies lack. Further, the scan compiled findings from a literature review and a scan of trade press coverage, company product announcements, and publicly available reviews of legacy products. This information provides additional context for the environment in which edtech companies are producing and marketing AI-enabled or AI-driven solutions. To supplement this information, EdReports also reviewed EdTechInsiders' Market Map[7] of AI-enabled instructional materials to explore a wider suite of products and add more data to the building catalog and categorizations.

No product evaluations were conducted as a part of this research. EdReports collaborated with an independent consulting firm for support in conducting the scans, synthesis, and compilation of this report. The research, synthesis, and writing of this report were done without the use of artificial intelligence.

Glossary of Key Terms

Artificial intelligence (AI): A broad term for technologies that are able to perform tasks that previously required human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, and problem-solving. In this report, the term refers to all types of AI that might be used in K-12 instructional products, including predictive, generative, and agentic AI.

- **Predictive AI** analyzes existing data to forecast future outcomes or make recommendations.
- **Generative AI** is a broad category to describe technologies that create new content, such as text, images, audio, video, or computer code, in response to plain-language prompts. This category includes large language models (LLMs).
- **Agentic AI** can reason through goals, make decisions, and carry out sequences of actions, often using other software tools or AI models to complete tasks with limited or no human interaction.

AI-enabled: A term to describe products, programs, or platforms that predate AI and could function without it, but which have had AI components added on, often as a layer or feature.

AI-driven or AI-powered: Synonymous terms to describe products built from the ground up around AI capabilities, such that AI is not a feature of the product but rather the mechanism through which the product's core function is delivered.

Core materials: Instructional products designed to deliver core curriculum.

Instructional product: Any tool designed for use by students and/or their teachers to facilitate learning. While this term may generally refer to products that are in print, digital, or a combination of both, this report's usage refers to those with at least one digital component.

Legacy product: Core or supplemental K-12 instructional products initially developed before AI, which are often produced by established K-12 publishers with long track records in the market. These products are most likely to be AI-enabled, not AI-driven.

Supplemental materials: Instructional materials or tools designed to provide students with extra practice or support, used by schools.

Understanding the Market

MARKET TRENDS

AI features, tools, and enablements take many forms in K-12 instructional products, and serve different purposes. Where AI sits within a product, what it is meant to do, and who is meant to use it all shape what quality may mean. Two products marketed as "AI-enabled curriculum" might function in almost entirely different ways, and the AI tools within them may serve entirely different purposes, creating challenges for evaluating them using the same metrics.

A background function of a program that adapts problem difficulty in real time is a different kind of tool than an assistant that explains concepts in multiple ways for a struggling student, even if both claim a similar label. Understanding these differences in function and purpose is the first step toward understanding the market.

AI is not entering instructional materials as a single new product category. It is showing up across the instructional experience, changing what products can do for teachers and students.

Across the products in this scan, four patterns emerge in how AI is beginning to change the market of K-12 instructional materials. While not representative of the entire field, these patterns offer a starting point to the questions this brief sets out to explore.

1 AI is more often augmenting existing instructional experiences than replacing them, but the nature of that augmentation differs depending on the product type.

AI-enabled products typically have AI features that work in conjunction with the legacy product, helping deliver curricular content in a more personalized way by adjusting problem difficulty or generating differentiated versions of an existing worksheet. It may also assess mastery in a more tailored way, collecting student performance data and surfacing insights for teachers. These products are often embedded in core curriculum products bought by districts and used in classrooms.

In AI-native products, by contrast, the AI tool itself is often the product and usually the platform through which content is delivered. Examples might include a writing tutor that supports a student with an assignment or an AI-powered math game that adapts difficulty based on a student's level of understanding. These products are typically curriculum-agnostic, applicable for skill-building across curricula, and may be selected or purchased for individual use by students or families themselves.

2 AI is entering the classroom through two primary channels, teacher workflow and student learning, and each may raise unique questions about quality and user experience.

Teacher-facing tools primarily create lesson plans and worksheets, compile data, and assist with scoring and feedback. While they may adapt what a teacher produces or how they produce it, ultimately the teacher should remain the final check on what reaches students. Student-facing tools create content or assist students in creating content, act as tutors, adjust problem difficulty in real time, or predict and assess student activity, removing that intermediary human checkpoint and putting the AI's output directly in front of the student.

Some products combine both channels, such as those that feed the same underlying data into a teacher's view and a student's experience, or that prepare teachers to teach the content it has generated for students. These products further complicate the question of where human discretion is expected to happen, what level of agency educators have in making instructional choices, and how quality should be measured across the instructional experience.

3 AI functions are blurring traditional product categories.

A single AI-enabled product may perform generative and predictive functions, deliver both core and supplemental content, and engage directly with both teachers and students, often without materials specifying which function is doing what. What providers describe most consistently is the outcome a feature claims to deliver, such as personalizing instruction, saving teachers time, or surfacing actionable insights. This is consistent with a broader pattern found throughout this brief in which companies are more specific about what a feature is designed to achieve than they are about how it achieves it. Further, new AI-native products are creating a need to examine how instructional purpose and product behavior are defined based on how students engage with them.

4 Instructional value of AI features is rarely addressed, and depends on how the features fit within the broader curriculum and instructional experience.

Whether AI-generated content, an adapted explanation, or a differentiated worksheet is high quality in isolation is a narrower question than whether it fits into, or disrupts, the sequence and coherence of the lesson and curriculum in which it is layered. For example, an AI feature that generates a reading passage or practice problem on demand may be well-constructed on its own terms while sitting outside the standards, pacing, or instructional design of the program around it. Clarity and details about AI design for instructional alignment and coherent integration are far less available and frequently addressed, but may prove central to discussions of AI's instructional value versus convenience.

Understanding how AI enablements in instructional materials cluster by type, purpose, use, and user will be one of the challenges facing the field as it works to triangulate these elements into a multidimensional framework for evaluating AI enhancements. While it is difficult to confirm every detail of AI technology powering any given tool, certain patterns can be detected based on what the AI is capable of, what the tool promises, and what its outputs claim to be. Some of the technologies now marketed as AI, such as machine learning, have been driving edtech for decades. Table 1 shows examples of the roles various types of AI may play across different products. The following section begins to examine some of the key characteristics of these tools.

Table 1. Examples of AI functionality across differentiating factors.

Instructional Purpose	End User	Possible AI Type	Example of Functionality
Core curriculum	Teacher	Generative	Chatbot-like tool that drafts lesson plans, slide decks, or differentiated worksheets aligned to that unit's standards
Core curriculum	Student	Predictive or Machine Learning	Adaptive practice engine that predicts which skill a student is weak on and adjusts problem difficulty in real time
Core curriculum	Teacher	Predictive or Machine Learning	Background tool that collects student performance and usage data and surfaces at-risk flags or mastery heatmaps for the teacher
Supplemental	Student	Generative	On-demand practice problem or reading-passage generator
Supplemental	Teacher	Generative	Product feature that generates differentiated versions of its own worksheets
Other	Student	Generative	Chatbot-like tutoring agent that acts as a tutor for writing and problem-solving, or assists with idea generation for homework or assignments
Other	Teacher	Agentic	AI engine that manages multi-step educator workflows across other instructional tools

PRODUCT TYPE AND POSITIONING

Understanding how companies position AI within their product offerings, and the types of AI capabilities those products employ, provides useful context for comparing how AI is being utilized across the instructional materials market.

There are three distinct starting points:

- AI features added to legacy products;
- AI-native products designed to be used in conjunction with one or more legacy products; and
- AI-native products designed to be used as a standalone.

AI enablement is not concentrated in one type of instructional product, either. Core curriculum and supplemental products are enabled with AI, as well as an additional emerging category of individual student support tools that are built entirely around AI. For the purpose of this brief, these categories are defined as:

- **Core:** Instructional products designed to deliver core curriculum, used by schools.
- **Supplemental:** Instructional materials or tools designed to provide students with extra practice or support, used by schools.
- **Other:** Products designed to deliver individual support, tutoring, or guidance to students, including products that can be purchased or used individually by students outside of school as well as within. For AI-driven products, these most often include those that provide 1:1 subject tutoring, translation services, and writing support.

In most cases in which a company has added a new AI feature to an existing legacy product, that feature lives within a core or supplemental product. AI-native products in this scan, by contrast, split between two different paths into the market. Some are new tutoring or writing-support tools and others are new standalone tools built by major legacy publishers that can now work alongside one or more of their existing core products. This suggests that AI-native development is not a single, unified trend but perhaps two distinct strategies: established publishers extending their footprint with a new tool, and newer entrants building individual-use products from the ground up.

Traditional labels like 'core' and 'supplemental' do not always capture the instructional role AI-enabled products are beginning to play.

The latter, 'other' category in particular represents a pathway that may occur outside traditional district adoption processes: tutoring and translational products are the ones least often procured, vetted, or reviewed through a standardized adoption process. Instead, they are often used by students alone, and serve as 1:1 tutoring, writing support, translation, and idea

generation. They are frequently free to use and when they are not, they are typically bought by families or parents, rather than by schools or districts. These products are often not aligned to state standards, specific curriculum, or sometimes even grade level, and are frequently marketed for general use by students within a large age range.

The exact type of AI model and how exactly it operates within the product remains the most opaque factor. Virtually no providers state explicitly the type of AI used in their product unless it is generative. For example, those with products that create lesson plans or practice problems sometimes denote generative AI. However, there are many other types of AI that are likely to be used in instructional products, such as predictive, agentic, deep learning, machine learning, and others. Different types of AI technologies may be used alone or together in service of the ultimate same goal, such as more personalized learning experiences or greater teacher capacity.

Technical architecture has implications for privacy and security as well as reliability, instructional value, and the evidence needed to evaluate quality. The AI's type and function may also dictate what information and data the AI collects, stores, and uses. As later sections of this report explain, these concerns are central in the current evaluative market.

USERS

Given the multitude of functionalities for students and teachers alike, the market of AI-enabled K-12 products can also be reasonably segmented by end user, or the person for whom the product is designed. Some products are built for **student use**, in which students engage, knowingly, with an AI assistant, chatbot, or other feature during use. Other products use AI to track, predict, and tailor students' experience to meet their needs, and the **AI capability operates in the background** of the program but directly with the student's work. Another type of AI is for teacher use specifically. Some teacher-facing AI-enabled products are designed solely for **teacher use** and others are designed for teachers to use with students, either in real time or separately.

Teacher-facing AI tools tend to cluster around a similar set of functions: generating or adapting lesson materials; producing practice work; scoring, grading, and assessment; and producing and analyzing insights about student progress that a teacher would otherwise have to compile manually. In products designed for use by both students and teachers, the two functions are typically presented as connected: the technology collects information on a student's progress in real time and adapts both the student's experience and the teacher's insights using that information, serving multiple instructional uses and users at once.

Narratives and Definitions Surrounding AI

How a company talks about its AI products, and what it does and does not substantiate publicly, is itself a source of information about the state of the market. Across the companies considered in this brief, a consistent set of findings emerged regarding how AI is messaged, evidenced, explained, and disclosed. Four findings stood out and together they point to a clear pattern: **companies are describing their AI features in confident, consistent language, while the evidence, technical detail, and disclosure needed to substantiate those descriptions often remain uneven or absent.**

Marketing is consistent, but vague.

Two messages appear across nearly every company in this scan, and both function more as positioning than as verifiable claims.

The first is a version of "human-in-the-loop." Every company includes some form of the message that AI supports teachers rather than replacing them. The consistency of this marketing suggests that companies understand this to be an expectation of their products and a concern felt by their clients and communities. Still, what this means in practice looks different across the board, and while some are explicit about the human-in-the-loop expectation and have built-in checks, it is unclear if all do.

The second common message is some version of "trusted by teachers." Variations of "trusted by," "loved by," or "used by" educators appear across nearly every company's site as a signal of quality or adoption. In almost every case, it is not possible to determine from public materials how that trust was measured or what exactly it points to. The claim is seemingly offered as a promise of utility, but the underlying evidence is opaque.

These two messages suggest a market that has converged on a shared vocabulary of reassurance faster than on a shared set of standards.

Evidence of quality and efficacy for AI features is thin, and trade associations are filling the gap.

Companies frequently share efficacy evidence for legacy products that have been evaluated, whether independent research on the overall program or evidence tiers for the core curriculum. **That evidence, however, rarely includes the AI feature itself and often predates the addition of the AI component(s).** Only one company in this scan cites evidence from a third-party evaluator for the student outcomes of their AI tool specifically. More often, it is difficult to parse whether the AI feature, specifically, increases access to, or even touches upon, the meaningful learning experiences identified in the SCALE research as critical to improving student success. In some cases, a legacy product's efficacy data appears directly on the marketing page for the AI-enabled product which, intentionally or not, may leave the impression that the credibility of the established product transfers to the new AI feature layered on top of it.

Evidence for an existing product does not necessarily demonstrate the instructional value of a newly added AI feature.

Named third-party validation specific to an AI feature is rare. Of the 10 companies in the scan, only two point to a named independent evaluator for their AI feature specifically, one citing a bias-and-transparency certification and the other a learning-quality rating. In the absence of an independent quality evaluation, several companies instead point to membership in industry alliances focused on responsible AI use in education, including TeachAI, EDSAFE AI, and SIIA.[8] These alliances typically publish shared principles or guidelines, but do not conduct product-specific evaluations, so **membership functions less as evidence of quality and more as a signal that a company is participating in the broader conversation about responsible AI use.**

Model transparency is inconsistent.

Public materials describe AI features more often by what they do (scaffold a lesson, score a response, translate a passage) than by what powers them, including whether or not the AI is proprietary or runs on an external, commercial model. When AI runs on an external model, the precise model(s) are not always disclosed. Landing page language compounds the challenge of identifying source technology. Most companies' product pages imply, through word choice or framing, that its AI is proprietary to that company. Digging into privacy policies or technical documentation sometimes reveals a different picture: a feature built on a licensed or widely available model rather than one trained from student data. Whether that distinction matters to a district may depend on purchasing considerations, instructional needs, and even the legal landscape.[9] Regardless, the information is often difficult to find.

This gap is not unique to the companies in this scan. A 2025 transparency framework from the Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT) identifies the underlying AI model as one of eight elements school districts need to know in order to fully understand a product.[10] CDT reasons that a product built on top of a pre-existing model inherits that model's strengths and weaknesses in ways that shape both its effectiveness and its risks. The same analysis notes that when companies do adapt a licensed model for K-12 use, that adaptation typically happens by either fine-tuning the model itself or by placing restrictions around it, such as limits on what data it collects. Few companies currently disclose which approach they take or how well it holds up in practice.

For districts, the effect is the same regardless of cause: **it is difficult to know what technology is actually inside an AI-enabled product.** This makes it difficult to compare products, anticipate their limitations, or possibly hold providers accountable for how a model behaves.

AI-specific data privacy disclosure is the exception, not the norm.

Most companies in the scan publish some form of general data privacy language as is required by federal and, often, state law.[11] But the level of specificity within those policies and inclusion of artificial intelligence varies widely. Three of the 10 companies provide concrete detail, naming specific regulations, data-sharing arrangements, and what data is collected from users, and six companies maintain general privacy statements, though only two mention AI specifically. Beyond company policy, two publish language online about their philosophical approach to AI and how it guides aspects such as privacy, usage, and interoperability.

Evaluation and Information Gaps

Few organizations currently evaluate the instructional quality of AI-enabled K-12 products, and fewer still evaluate AI features as their own component, as opposed to an add-on within a product that is evaluated as a whole. **Most existing evaluation activity in this space is focused on privacy, safety, bias, and interoperability.** A smaller set of efforts is beginning to take on the question of instructional value directly, and as the field has more time to organize around this new sector and as markets and policies mature, it is reasonable to assume more evaluative approaches will emerge.

CURRENT EVALUATIONS AND FRAMEWORKS

Common Sense Media built the most extensive instructional quality rating system identified for edtech, reviewing more than 2,800 products against a 14-point learning-potential rubric. However, in January 2026, a decade after they first began reviews, the organization paused this process to focus instead on AI Risk Assessments. These are evaluations aimed at identifying which AI products carry the greatest safety and security risks for children, rather than which offer the greatest instructional value.[12] This shift is consistent with the field's focus as a whole from the instructional potential of AI-enabled materials to a harm-mitigation orientation.

Digital Promise operates a "Responsibly Designed AI" certification that evaluates bias reduction, data transparency, and content labeling.[13] While it does not evaluate instructional effectiveness on its own, the organization co-leads a broader collaborative effort described below.

RAND has a long history of evaluating instructional materials, including products from several companies included in this scan, but its work is typically commissioned on a per-product basis rather than run as an ongoing, comparative evaluation program. There is no current indication that RAND has begun evaluating AI-enabled products specifically or assessing the quality and effectiveness of AI-assisted learning within instructional materials. RAND's AIRS project has studied how educators and students are using AI, but the organization has not independently evaluated the products they use.[14]

A related effort comes from Stanford's previously referenced SCALE Initiative. The Initiative is part of the Stanford Accelerator for Learning and conducts a broad range of research on K-12 teaching and learning.[15] While it does not evaluate individual products, SCALE has identified questions and considerations that may help decision-makers assess the instructional value of AI-enabled tools. This approach could inform the development of future instructional quality evaluation systems.

The field is not starting from scratch on instructional quality. The open question is how existing expectations apply when AI changes what materials can generate, recommend, or adapt.

Outside of specific product ratings, a number of groups have begun considering the metrics that might be used to conduct such reviews. A coalition of edtech standards and advocacy organizations, including 1EdTech, CAST, the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN), Digital Promise, InnovateEDU, ISTE + ASCD, and the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA), has developed a framework of quality indicators for edtech and AI products that explicitly includes evidence of effectiveness as one of its pillars, alongside safety, inclusion, usability, and interoperability.[16] The framework relies on member organizations to validate individual claims rather than producing a single independent rating, and it is still early in adoption, but it represents one of the first cross-sector attempts to put instructional value on equal footing with safety and privacy in a formal evaluation method.

A related but distinct effort comes from Learning Commons, an edtech infrastructure company that offers AI evaluations for developers rather than for districts.[17] Learning Commons evaluators are designed to be used during product development, scoring an AI model's outputs against research-backed rubrics based in learning science. This is a notably different approach from the market-facing evaluation gap described here. It is a tool for developers to test and refine what their AI produces, not a mechanism for districts to assess existing products or guide independent reviews. Still, it points to a growing recognition across the field that instructional value should shape how AI is both designed and measured.

Taking yet another approach, two groups have made efforts to solicit products and programs for evaluation. Accelerate announced a grant program in 2026 that pairs AI-powered learning tools with an external research partner to study usability, feasibility, and evidence of effectiveness, with the explicit goal of building an evidence base and establishing quality benchmarks.[18] The Evidence-Based AI in Learning (EVAL) Industry Collaborative, based at Boston University, has taken a functionally similar approach, inviting developers of AI-powered K-12 tools into independent, researcher-led evaluations that assess learning impact and instructional practice specifically, rather than privacy or safety alone.[19] Through this work, EVAL's goal is to establish both an evidence base for AI-enabled instructional tools and metrics for evaluation.

GAPS AND OBSTACLES

The field does not need to start from scratch in defining instructional quality. Well-established expectations around instructional coherence, alignment, design, assessment, teacher support, student experience, and efficacy evidence remain relevant to AI-enabled materials. What is less settled is how to describe and assess what AI adds or changes. Terms for AI capabilities, functions, and levels of autonomy are used inconsistently, while features that dynamically generate, recommend, or adapt content may complicate approaches designed to evaluate fixed materials.

The challenge, then, is to determine where existing expectations remain sufficient, where they need to be applied differently, and where AI introduces additional considerations or requires new approaches to evaluation. This extends to evidence: research on an underlying product may not demonstrate the instructional value of a newly added AI feature.

The challenge is to determine where existing expectations for quality remain sufficient, where they need to be applied differently, and where AI introduces something new.

For districts, these gaps make meaningful comparison difficult. Available information about AI-enabled tools often emphasizes privacy and safety more than instructional value, while evidence specific to AI functionality remains limited and difficult to compare across products. Greater clarity around AI functionality, evidence, and its relationship to established dimensions of instructional quality will be necessary for districts to make informed decisions.

MARKET MATURITY ASSESSMENT

Considering these findings, it is possible to sort the current state of the market into three rough categories: practices that are consistent and standard, practices that are starting to take shape but remain inconsistent, and practices that are largely absent from the field. This is not a ranking of individual companies, but a way to show where the market as a whole currently stands, and where the largest gaps sit relative to what a fuller understanding of these products would require.

MATURE.

Public disclosure and product positioning practices are fairly standard across the market. Most companies publish some form of data privacy policy, describe the products using AI, and are using a recognizable term, such as core or supplemental, and frame AI features around a similar set of messages about supporting teachers. Privacy policies and product positioning predate generative AI in this market, and companies have largely extended existing conventions to cover new AI features rather than building new ones. This is the layer of the market that is currently easiest for a district to find and compare across products.

EMERGING.

A layer of evidence-building around the quality of AI features specifically is beginning to take shape, though it is nascent, and remains inconsistent and unevenly applied. Many companies still point to legacy product efficacy data or membership in an industry alliance as a signal of participation in the field's broader conversation, but not a substitute for product-specific evidence. A number of newer initiatives, including Accelerate's grant program and Boston University's EVAL Collaborative, have begun pairing individual AI products with independent researchers to study effectiveness directly. None of this yet adds up to a track record most districts could use for side-by-side comparison, and what does exist is usually tied to a single product rather than the market as a whole.

MISSING.

Some of the basic tools a district would need seem to be missing from the field. **This scan did not identify an instructional quality review of AI features, comparable to how curriculum reviews evaluate core materials.** Model transparency remains particularly thin as many companies do not readily disclose what technology powers their AI feature at all. There is limited disclosure of whether an AI feature is included in a product's base price or sold separately. These gaps relate to one another: without a shared vocabulary, a shared evaluation framework is harder to build, and without consistent disclosure, that framework has less to evaluate against. These are critical pieces of information districts need in order to make informed, sustainable decisions.

Segmentation and maturity intersect most clearly in the 'other' category. None of the companies scanned for this report that produce tutoring and writing support products clearly disclosed their underlying AI model on their own site (two were identified through an outside search). They are also among the least likely to name membership to one of the three alliances identified in this scan. The pattern raises a question worth testing: whether products used outside traditional district procurement pathways also provide less public technical disclosure. **Products purchased and used directly by students and teachers, outside a district's standard procurement process, are also the ones a district has the least built-in opportunity to vet, which makes the maturity of their public disclosure matter more.**

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF CURRICULUM QUALITY

The knowledge gaps are not abstract: they translate to real challenges and calls to action for the field. Product development and adoption is running well ahead of evaluation. A national Gallup survey found that roughly six in 10 teachers reported using an AI tool during the 2024-25 school year, and that teachers who used AI weekly reported saving an average of nearly six hours per week.[20] Most due diligence currently falls to individual districts, at a moment when few have the knowledge, resources, or capacity to take it on alone. Without a shared framework and vocabulary for asking these questions, districts are left to negotiate them one contract at a time, and the terms of those contracts are evolving rapidly as the field's collective knowledge changes.

After a decade of helping build field-wide alignment around what defines high-quality instructional materials, EdReports sees AI as a potentially significant shift: its growing role in curriculum must be considered in direct relationship to established expectations for curriculum quality. This brief raises to the surface many questions to further that conversation:

- How is instructional coherence being ensured (or is it) if AI features are adapting or generating instructional content, particularly in student-facing, real-time scenarios?
- How are lesson planning and classroom pacing impacted by individual student content generation or adaptation features?
- How should teacher agency and expertise come into play when AI is recommending instructional decisions, and what are the appropriate guiding principles for implementation versus overriding?
- What additional teacher guidance, training, or professional learning is needed to utilize new AI features in legacy products and ensure sufficient human oversight at the correct junctures? How will that training impact implementation time, resources, and processes?
- What quality, use, or policy guidelines would be useful around in-school use of the 'other' AI category of tutoring, writing support, and translation tools?
- How might the addition of AI-enabled functionality affect the quality of an underlying instructional program, and what evidence is needed to determine whether those changes preserve or alter that quality?

Given the prolific presence and use of AI, there is abundant opportunity for it to support classrooms, curriculum, and instructional coherence. However, this will not be done by default, and excellence will not be achieved in the absence of expectations.

Research Agenda: Where EdReports Is Going Next

This brief establishes a starting point: a shared baseline of how AI has begun to change PK-12 instructional materials, and where there is still a great deal of learning and building yet to be done. Among the central unanswered questions are how AI products change instructional quality and learning experiences, and what evidence is appropriate for assessing its benefits, limitations, and impact.

Before determining what EdReports should signal about AI-enabled instructional materials, we need to understand what AI changes about curriculum quality and what it does not.

Building from this baseline, EdReports has identified several areas for deeper study as we determine where we can make a unique contribution. Because this is a rapidly evolving field, the direction of that work may shift as our understanding of AI-enabled products, and the field's understanding more broadly, continues to develop.

1. **Quality:** What dimensions matter most for understanding the quality of AI-enabled instructional materials, and where do established instructional material quality indicators remain applicable?
2. **Instructional experience**: How do AI features affect curriculum coherence, teacher agency, and student learning experience?
3. **Evidence**: What constitutes credible evidence for dynamic AI functionality and the claims providers make about it?
4. **Field need**: What information or independent guidance would most improve decision-making, and where is EdReports uniquely positioned to contribute?

AI will continue to evolve faster than the systems designed to understand and evaluate it. EdReports' next phase of work will build from this baseline to deepen our understanding of what AI products change about instructional materials, what quality requires in this new context, and where independent information can best support educators and decision-makers. The goal is to ensure that as the market evolves, expectations for quality evolve with it and remain grounded in what matters most for teaching and learning.

For more information on this publication, visit: www.edreports.org.

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ABOUT EDREPORTS

With the firm belief that what is taught matters and that all students deserve standards-aligned, research-based materials tailored to diverse needs, including multilingual learners, EdReports publishes free, online, evidence-rich reviews of instructional materials. Since its launch in 2015, EdReports has trained over 1,000 educators to conduct rigorous reviews of instructional materials and has released more than 1,200 free reviews of math, ELA, science, and pre-K curricula. The organization's work has been instrumental in helping educators across the country make informed decisions about the materials they use in their classrooms.

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