



The AI Readiness Report

September 2026

Autumn is officially upon us and back-to-school season is in full gear, as is aiEDU. In this edition, we are recapping the surprisingly busy summer months and providing a look ahead to the last quarter of the year. Four things to highlight: aiEDU announced a new class of Community Catalyst grantees, the fall Trailblazer Fellowship is kicking off soon, we published our [first mid-year impact report](#), and we have some exciting opportunities to engage in K–12 Messaging Research on AI Readiness.

Program Spotlights

Trailblazer Fellowship: 3 Years In

aiEDU is in our 3rd year of offering the Trailblazer Fellowship, a 12-week commitment with synchronous sessions, asynchronous activities, a teacher stipend, and a certificate of completion. To date, there have been 16 cohorts and 300+ teacher fellows across 40 states that completed the program. We have a lot to share from this work, which we encourage you to learn more about in our blog post, [“Three Years of Trailblazers: What 300 Teachers Taught Us About AI Readiness.”](#)

Applications for the five fall 2026 cohorts closed on August 24. We received 460 applications for 175 spots. Trailblazer Fellows have been notified and will begin their fellowship next week!

Community Catalyst: Meet the 2026 Grantees

Since 2024, aiEDU has provided \$1.45M in Community Catalyst subgrants to 28 organizations across 19 states. In July, we announced our third round of grantees for

aiEDU's 2026 Community Catalyst program, covering seven projects across six states and reaching more than 1,100 educators and 30,000 students. Beyond funding, every grantee will receive direct support from aiEDU — including train-the-trainer programming, strategic advising, and coaching — and will convene as a cohort throughout the grant year for peer connection and collaboration. While only seven grants were able to be awarded, we received 139 letters of intent across 45 states. [Learn more about this work and meet the grantees](#), including Capital Region ESD 113 in Washington, which was recognized by the Center for Public Sector AI for its Catalyst project.

Recently Released! NEW aiEDU Classroom Resources

Vibe Coding, Built for Every Learner (aiEDU + CAST)

Following the vibe coding workshops aiEDU co-hosted with CAST this spring, Christian Pinedo from aiEDU and the CAST team have published a joint write-up and a free companion resource for educators. The workshops paired aiEDU's build-first approach to AI with CAST's Universal Design for Learning framework, demonstrating that when teachers build their own classroom tools, accessibility can be designed in from the first prompt instead of retrofitted later. [Read the CAST + aiEDU write-up](#) or [download the workshop resource \(PDF\)](#).

Thought Leadership & Advocacy

New Research: What Earns Community Trust on AI

One of the most common things we hear from district leaders right now is that they aren't sure how their communities will react to AI — and that uncertainty is slowing good work down. There's plenty of polling on how people feel about AI, but almost nothing that tests what actually earns trust.

That's the gap aiEDU and SquadBuck set out to fill. Together we're running focus groups this fall with a national sample of K–12 parents and educators, followed by a national survey, which will result in messaging and engagement guidance that school systems can put to work right away.

We hosted a briefing for philanthropic partners in August, and we've made the materials available:

- [Project overview](#)
- [Philanthropy briefing deck \(August 19\)](#)

- [Recording of the August 19 briefing](#)

We're assembling a group of aligned funders to support the three phases of work over the next 5 months, and there's still room at the table! If supporting this effort is of interest — or if you have research to share and partners we should be talking to — we'd welcome the conversation. Reach out to Josh Westfall, Director of Development at aiEDU (josh.westfall@aiedu.org).

Teachers as Tool Evaluators

Our first professional learning community focused specifically on AI tool evaluation wrapped this spring with University Prep Schools, a Detroit charter network. Seven educators built their own evaluation criteria, tested tools in their classrooms, and made real start/stop decisions, adding environmental impact as a criterion of their own along the way. [Read what happened when teachers led the vetting.](#)

AI Readiness in the News

aiEDU Studios Podcast (6/25/26): Andy Rotherham, co-founder of Bellwether — [Why AI Makes Knowing Things Matter More](#)

aiEDU Studios Podcast (7/2/26): Carole Basile, Dean of ASU's Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation — [Why Banning AI in Class Is the Wrong Fight](#)

Substack (7/8/26): [A Practical Guide to the Looming\(?\) AI Bubble](#)

aiEDU Studios Podcast (7/9/26): Chong-Hao Fu, CEO of Leading Educators — [Why Schools Should Bet on Teachers, Not Tools](#)

aiEDU Blog (7/13/26): [Lead the Learning Before You Lead the Change](#)

BBC News (7/16/26): Alex featured on the segment [AI Bosses Call for Industry Slowdown](#)

PR Newswire (7/23/26): [aiEDU Announces 2026 Community Catalyst Grantees, Backing Educator Capacity Building Across Rural and Indigenous Communities](#)

aiEDU Blog (7/27/26): [Vetting AI Tools: What Happens When Teachers Lead?](#)

aiEDU Blog (8/10/26): [Three Years of Trailblazers: What 300 Teachers Taught Us About AI Readiness](#)

Looking Ahead

October 7

Capital AI Education Collective
Washington, DC

October 9–10

Alex attending FullScale Rural Summit
Indianapolis, IN

2026 Funders

Amazon Ballmer Group Booz Allen Hamilton Inc. Charter School Growth Fund Cognizant
Google.org The J.M. Smucker Co. Leidos Micron Foundation NetApp
Northrop Grumman Foundation Okta Patrick J. McGovern Foundation Pull Up Fund
Raikes Foundation Salesforce Foundation Stuart Foundation Walton Family Foundation
W.K. Kellogg Foundation

“The AI Readiness Report” is aiEDU’s monthly newsletter for the philanthropic community to provide insights on our work, what we’re hearing in the field, and the latest news on AI Readiness to share with your leadership and stakeholders as you see fit.

The AI Education Project (aiEDU) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, founded in 2019, that is devoted to ensuring all students are ready to live, work and thrive in a world where AI is everywhere.