



AI in Education:

What do the first AI-native graduates tell us?

The first AI-native class has graduated. Everyone is using AI.
Almost no one is fluent.

The class of 2026 did something no graduating class has done before

For the first time in human history, they completed an entire degree, orientation to commencement, with generative AI in their pocket.

ChatGPT launched in November 2022, weeks into their first semester. This spring, they walked across the stage as our first fully AI-native graduates.

Last year, we described educators as *Teaching Without a Map*. This year, we asked **300+ teachers and students in approximately 50 countries** a harder question: now that everyone has adopted AI, has anyone actually mastered it?

The answer is the defining tension of this report. Adoption is no longer the story; AI is here. AI fluency is another question.

To map the fluency gap, this report tackles four key questions:

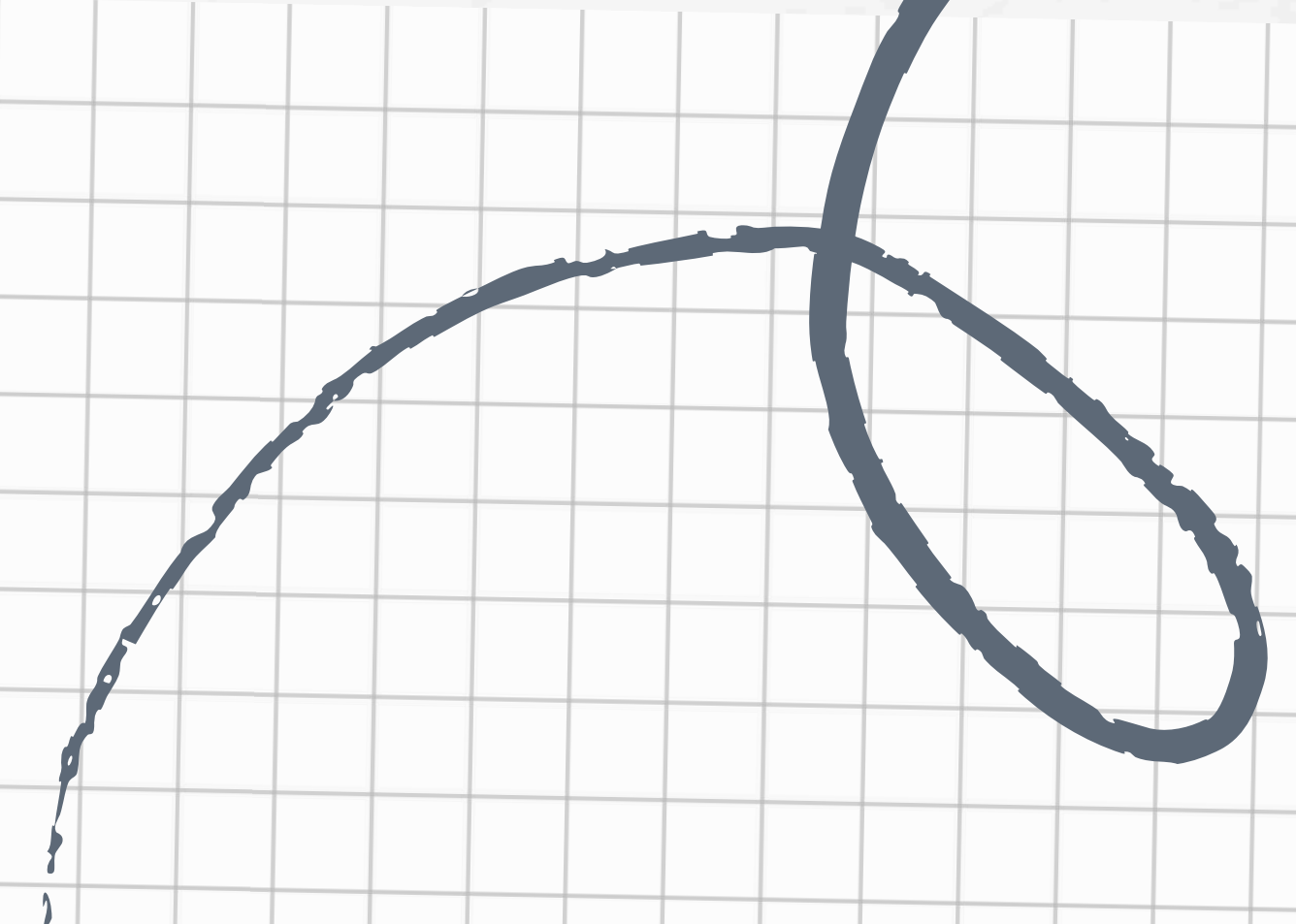
Fluency How far past basic AI usage have educators and students actually gotten?

Integrity What has AI done to assessment and trust in the classroom?

Governance Who is setting the rules, and can anyone find them?

Alignment Is education keeping pace with what the workforce now demands?

Methodology: DataCamp surveyed 151 educators (24 June to 15 July 2026; 45 countries; 68% faculty; 51% at research universities) and 156 students (8 to 15 July 2026; ~50 countries; 66% STEM). Workforce comparisons draw on DataCamp's 2026 State of Data & AI Literacy Report (517 US/UK enterprise leaders, fielded by YouGov). Platform findings are based on anonymized DataCamp learning data covering more than 4.5 million course starts and completions from roughly 294,000 academic learners across the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years, benchmarked against business and consumer learners. Where we reference last year's report, question wording may differ; year-over-year comparisons are directional.



93%

of educators use AI at least weekly in their academic work...

...90%

of students use AI for their coursework...

...yet only 3%

of educators believe their students are actually AI-fluent

First, what is AI fluency?

The term gets used loosely. Here's the definition we're working from, drawn from Stanford University and our own education experts.

AI fluency is the capacity to collaborate productively and responsibly with AI systems through understanding their capabilities, limitations, and implications.

This encompasses the practical skills to apply AI tools effectively, the critical thinking to evaluate their outputs, the ethical awareness to use them responsibly, and the adaptability to evolve alongside rapidly changing AI technologies.



The adoption debate is over.

Usage is high

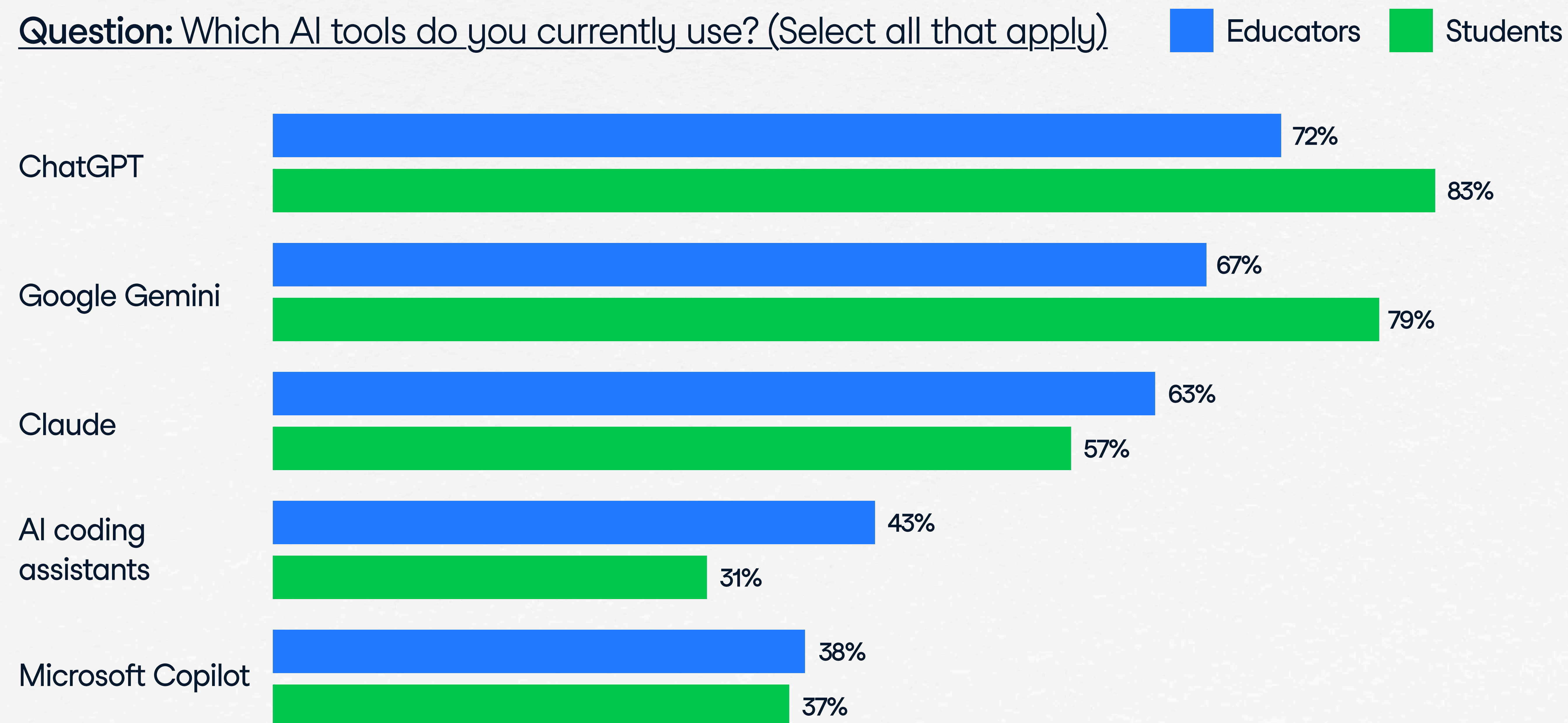
Two years ago, the question was whether AI belonged in the classroom. That question has answered itself. **71% of educators now use AI daily** in their academic work, and 93% use it at least weekly. Students AI use concentrates on coursework (90%), but lags behind daily use (55%).

What they use has changed, too. Last year, ChatGPT was a near-monopoly, used by over 90% of educators. This year, the classroom runs on a portfolio: ChatGPT (72%) leads, but Google Gemini (67%) and Claude (63%) are close behind.

Claude's adoption among educators has **more than doubled since last year**.

Mainstream adoption looks like an ecosystem each person assembles, not a single tool. The question is no longer whether educators and students use AI, it's whether anyone has taught them to use it well.

Question: Which AI tools do you currently use? (Select all that apply)



71%

of educators use AI daily; 93% at least weekly

90%

of students use AI for coursework; 55% daily

The fluency gap: Essential for careers, achieved by almost no one

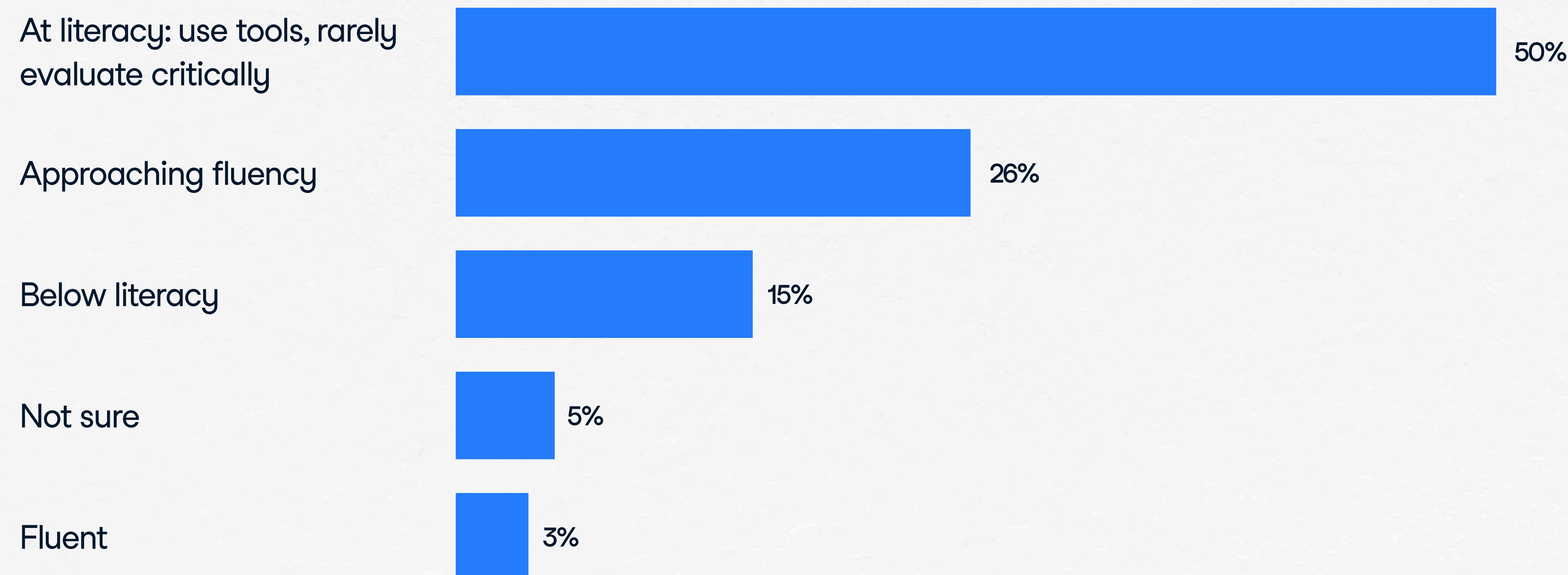
Ask educators whether AI fluency matters, and the consensus is overwhelming: **89% say it will be essential or very important to their students' careers within five years.**

Not a single respondent said it won't matter.

Then ask where their students actually stand, and the floor drops out. **Just 3% of educators believe their students have reached fluency:** the ability to apply AI critically, responsibly, and effectively. 50% place students at bare literacy: they use the tools but rarely evaluate what comes back. Another 15% put students below even that.

Students tell a rosier story about themselves: 27% claim fluency, and 75% say they can spot inaccurate or biased AI output. But 60% of them are self-taught. As our workforce research put it this year: “as AI becomes easier to use, the risk shifts from lack of access to lack of judgment.” **Confidence built without instruction is how you get confidence without correctness.**

Question: Where do you think your students currently sit on the literacy-to-fluency spectrum?



89%
of educators say AI fluency will be essential or
very important to students' careers...

...only 3%
believe their students are AI-fluent today

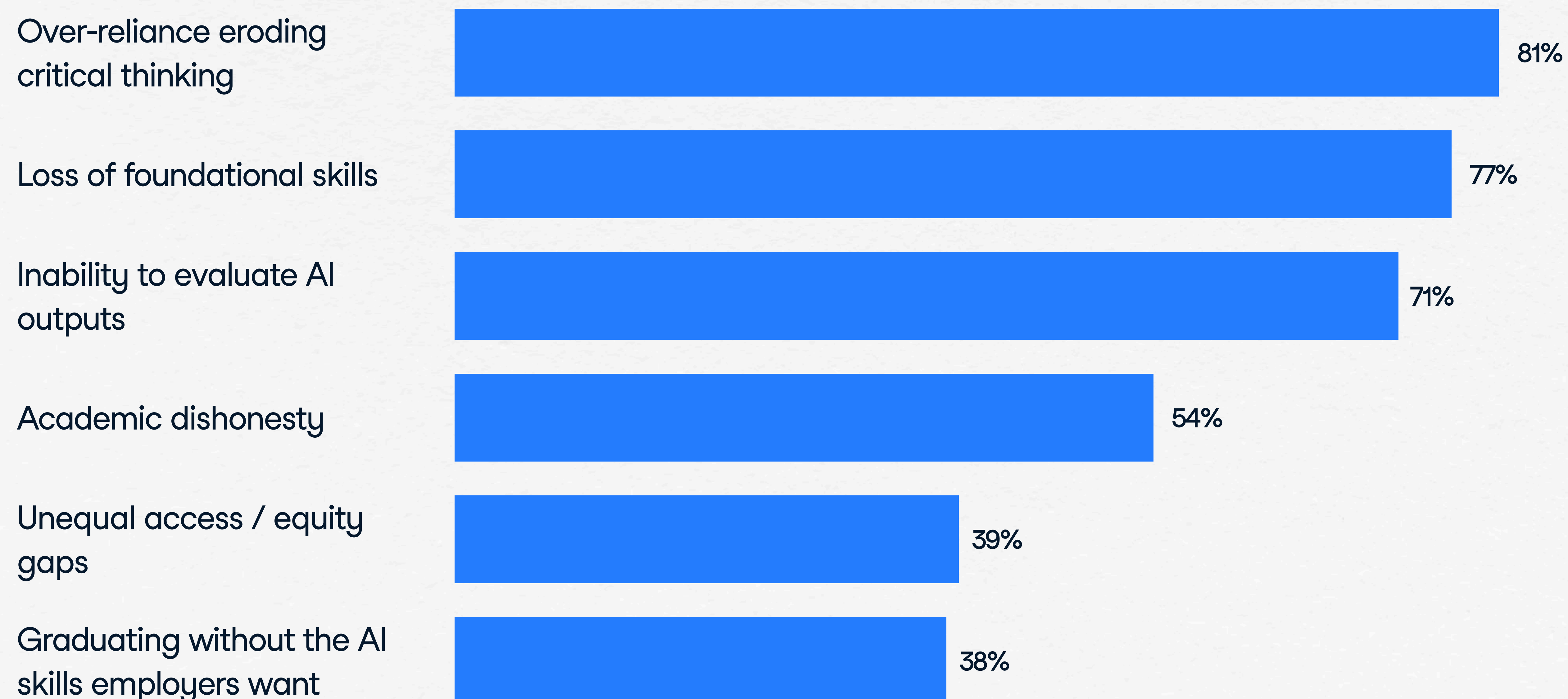
Educators' biggest fear isn't cheating, it's students not learning

For two years, the AI conversation in education has been dominated by plagiarism. Educators have moved on to something deeper.

When we asked what worries them most about students and AI, academic dishonesty came fourth. At the top: **over-reliance and the erosion of critical thinking (81%)**, the loss of foundational skills like writing, reasoning, and problem-solving (77%), and students' inability to evaluate AI outputs for accuracy or bias (71%).

Students share the anxiety: 48% worry AI might do the work for them instead of helping them learn. A further **65% worry AI could widen gaps between students who have access and skills and those who don't**.

Question: Which of these worries you most about students and AI? (Select all that apply)



"Inexperienced and novice learners lose most of the formative 'struggle' of learning when they use AI tools."

(Faculty, Social Sciences, US)

"New skills start to click instantly... but they tend to fade away very quickly. With such an easy and effortless entry, reaching expertise becomes very difficult."

(Undergraduate, STEM, Pakistan)

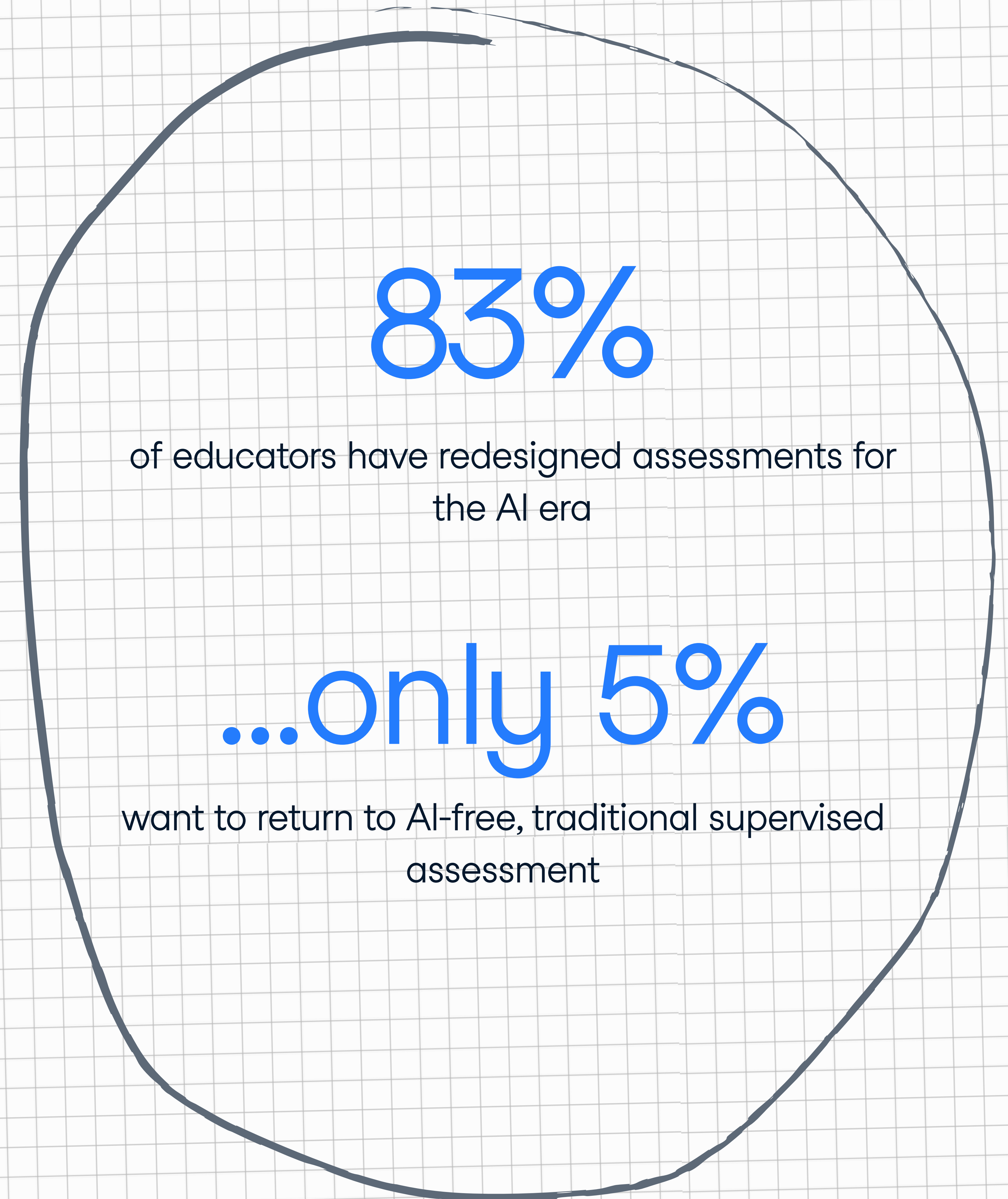
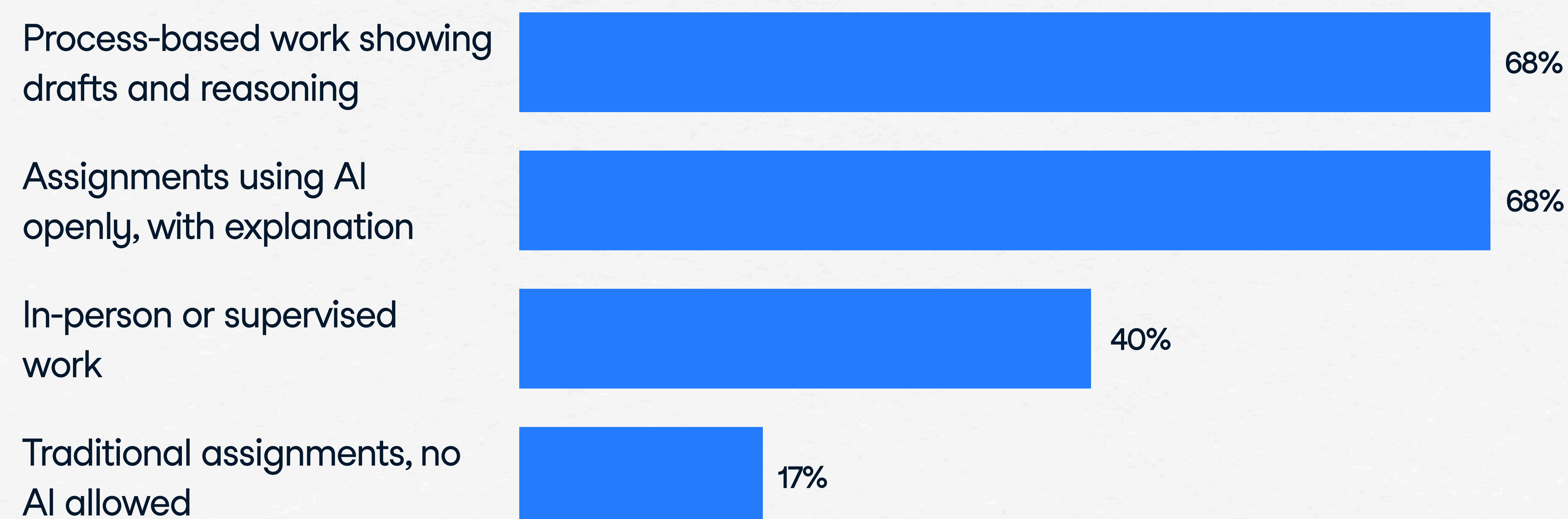
The assessment revolution already happened, from the bottom up

While institutions debated policy, educators rebuilt assessment themselves. **83% have redesigned their assessments in response to generative AI**. Only 5% want to restrict AI and return to traditional supervised assessment. The most popular paths forward are making AI use visible, intentional, and assessable (30%) and assessing process and judgment rather than outputs (20%).

Students want the same thing. Asked which assignments are most valuable for learning, 68% chose process-based work showing drafts and reasoning, and an identical 68% chose assignments where AI can be used openly and explained. Just 17% picked traditional no-AI assignments.

Integrity remains unsettled. 81% of educators say maintaining it is a challenge, and a third say they haven't found an approach that works. What's emerging on both sides is a desire for transparency rather than prohibition.

Question: Which approaches to assignments do you find most valuable for your learning?
(Students, select up to 2)



"It would be better to be told to use AI ethically... but it should not do all the work for us."

(Undergraduate, Social Sciences, Kenya)

The policy vacuum. Rules nobody can find

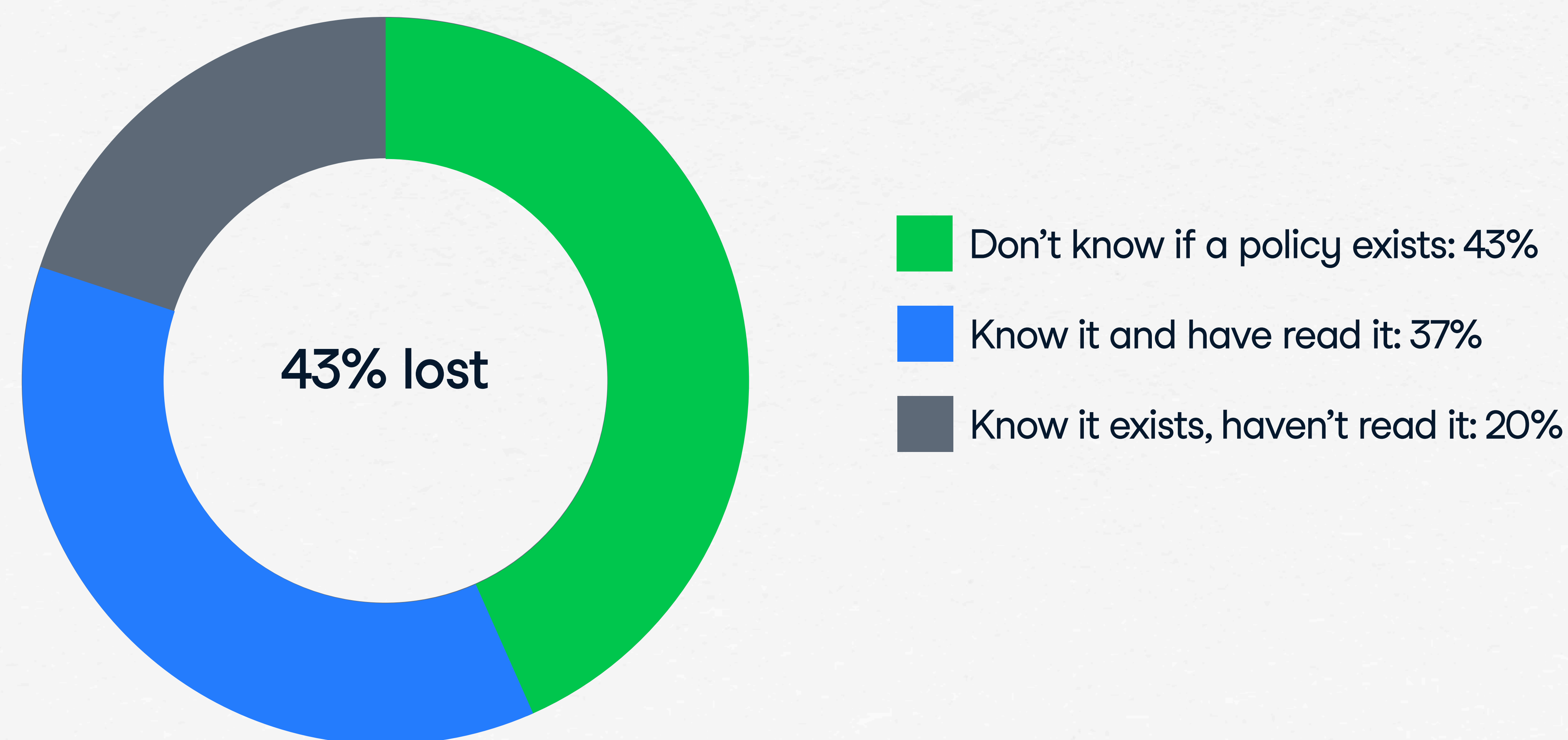
The classroom transformed. The rulebook didn't.

Just 39% of educators agree their institution has clear, well-communicated AI policies. 44% disagree. Only 25% report a consistent institution-wide approach to AI in assessment; the most common answer, at 44%, is that faculty decide case by case. And just **19% of institutions have an established, active AI governance** structure.

Students inherit the confusion. **43% don't know whether their institution even has an official AI policy.** 37% say expectations shift dramatically from course to course. The consequence is a quiet climate of fear: 44% of students worry about being wrongly accused of cheating, nearly the same share as worry about AI accuracy itself.

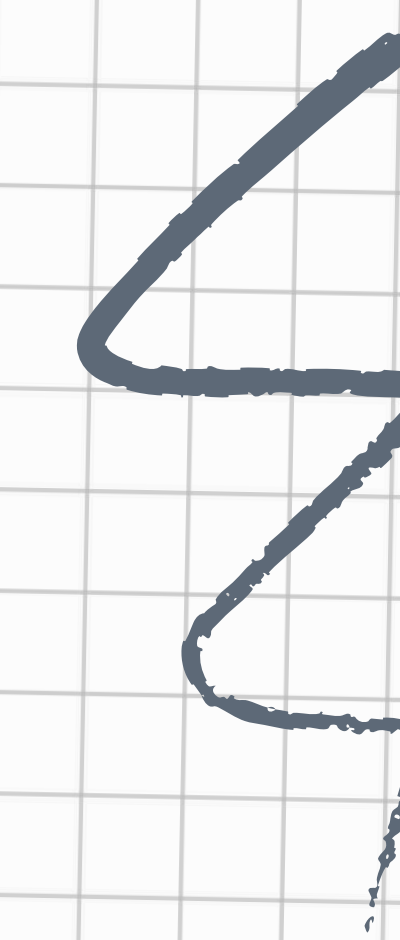
When every classroom is its own jurisdiction, students don't learn responsible AI use. They learn to guess what each instructor will tolerate.

Question: Do you know where to find your institution's official policy on AI use? (Students)



"For many faculty it's a huge productivity boost. For many others it's an existential threat."

(Faculty, Computing & Data Science, US)



19%

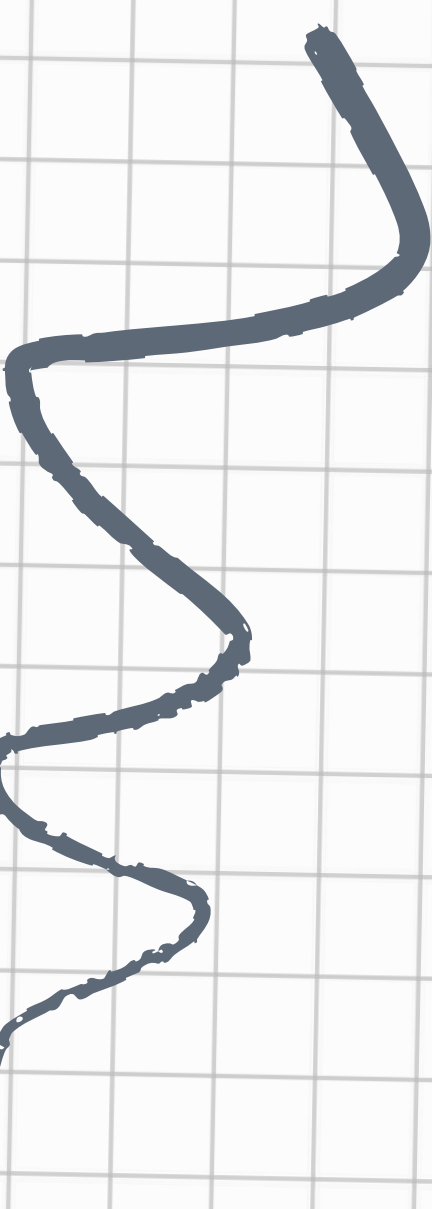
of institutions have an established AI governance structure

43%

of students don't know if their institution has an AI policy

44%

of students worry about being wrongly accused of cheating



Training works. Institutions still aren't providing it

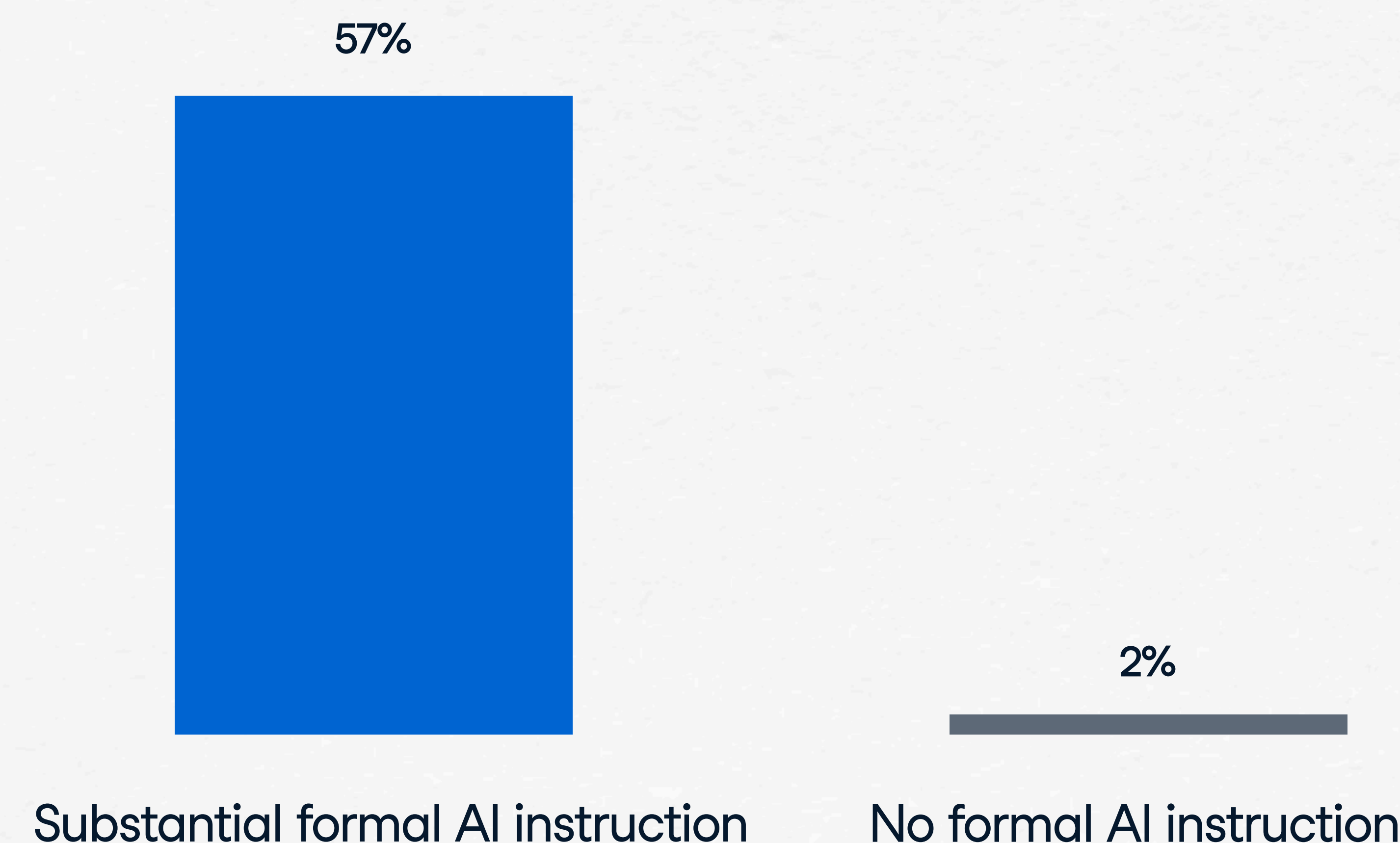
Last year, we showed that upskilled educators were dramatically more confident with AI. This year, the training gap persists, and we can now measure what it costs students.

On the educator side: **30% of institutions offer no formal AI training for faculty at all**, and only **10% have a mature, institution-wide upskilling program**. On the student side: **36% have received no formal AI instruction**, and just 29% have received substantial instruction. The majority, 60%, are building AI skills alone through online resources.

Now the payoff. Among students who received substantial formal AI instruction, **57% say their education is preparing them "very well" for the AI skills employers expect**. Among **students with no formal instruction: 2%**. Formal instruction is the single strongest differentiator in our entire dataset, bigger than field of study, degree level, or geography.

Asked whether they would participate if their institution offered more ways to build AI fluency, **86% of students said yes**. They're waiting to be taught.

Question: How well do you feel your education is preparing you with the AI skills employers will expect? (split by formal AI instruction received)



57%

of students with substantial formal AI instruction say their education prepares them "very well" for employer AI expectations...

...vs. 2%

of students who received no formal AI instruction

60%

of students are teaching themselves AI through online resources

86%

would join institutional AI fluency programs if offered

What the curriculum teaches vs. what businesses need today

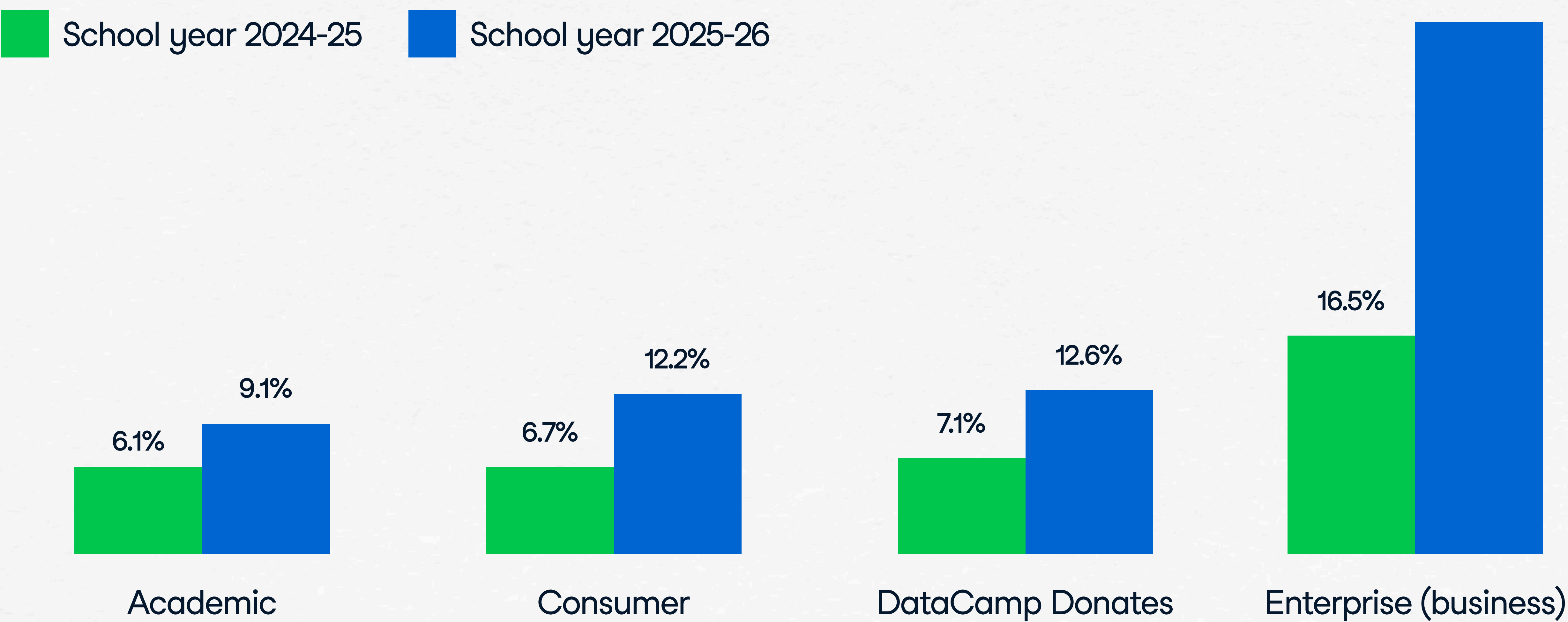
Surveys capture perception. Our platform captures behavior, and it confirms the gap.

Across DataCamp's academic community (roughly **294,000 active classroom learners** in the 2025-26 school year), AI-focused courses made up just **9.1% of all course starts**. The most popular academic courses remain the three classics: Introduction to Python, R, and SQL. The first AI course appears at #14.

Business learners tell a different story. Among enterprise users, AI content is **39.7% of all course starts, more than four times the academic share**, and the top five courses are all AI courses, led by Understanding Prompt Engineering and AI Ethics.

Academia is moving: academic AI course starts grew **59% year over year**, and over 50,000 classroom learners took at least one AI course. But the workforce has already pivoted. While universities teach the current curriculum, graduates' future employers are mid-transformation. Every year the gap compounds, another cohort graduates behind.

Question: AI courses as a share of all course starts on DataCamp, by learner segment (school year 2024-25 vs. 2025-26)



9.1%

of academic course starts on DataCamp are AI courses...

...vs. 39.7%

for business learners, more than 4x the academic share

The workforce isn't waiting

Our [State of Data & AI Literacy Report 2026](#), surveying 517 enterprise leaders, shows what those graduates walk into.

AI literacy is the fastest-rising skill in the workforce: 57% of leaders say it became more important in the last year, and 72% call it important for employees' day-to-day work. **69% of leaders will pay a higher salary for candidates with strong AI literacy skills** (74% for data literacy), with most premiums between 10% and 30%.

And what do leaders say is missing? Judgment, not coding. The gaps they describe are the ability to validate AI outputs, turn information into decisions, and communicate with data: precisely the fluency skills educators say students lack.

Educators sense the mismatch: **53% agree there is a real gap between the AI skills their graduates have and what employers expect**; only 11% disagree. The workforce suffers the same issues as academia, only 35% of organizations have a mature AI upskilling program. Education doesn't need to copy industry, but it can bridge the gap.

"The biggest gap is understanding what AI can and cannot do."

(Enterprise leader, State of Data & AI Literacy Report 2026)

#1

AI literacy is the fastest-rising workplace skill (Data & AI Literacy Report)

69%

of leaders will pay a salary premium for AI-literate hires (Data & AI Literacy Report)

53%

of educators see a real gap between graduates' AI skills and employer expectations

What would actually close the gap

We asked educators what would most accelerate AI fluency at their institution. The answers converge on a clear playbook:

1. Upskill the faculty first

You cannot teach fluency you don't have. Comprehensive faculty training is the #1 accelerator (46%).

2. Rebuild the curriculum, not just the rules

Updated AI-integrated curricula (44%) and embedding AI fluency into program learning outcomes (44%) tied for second. Policy alone changes nothing students experience.

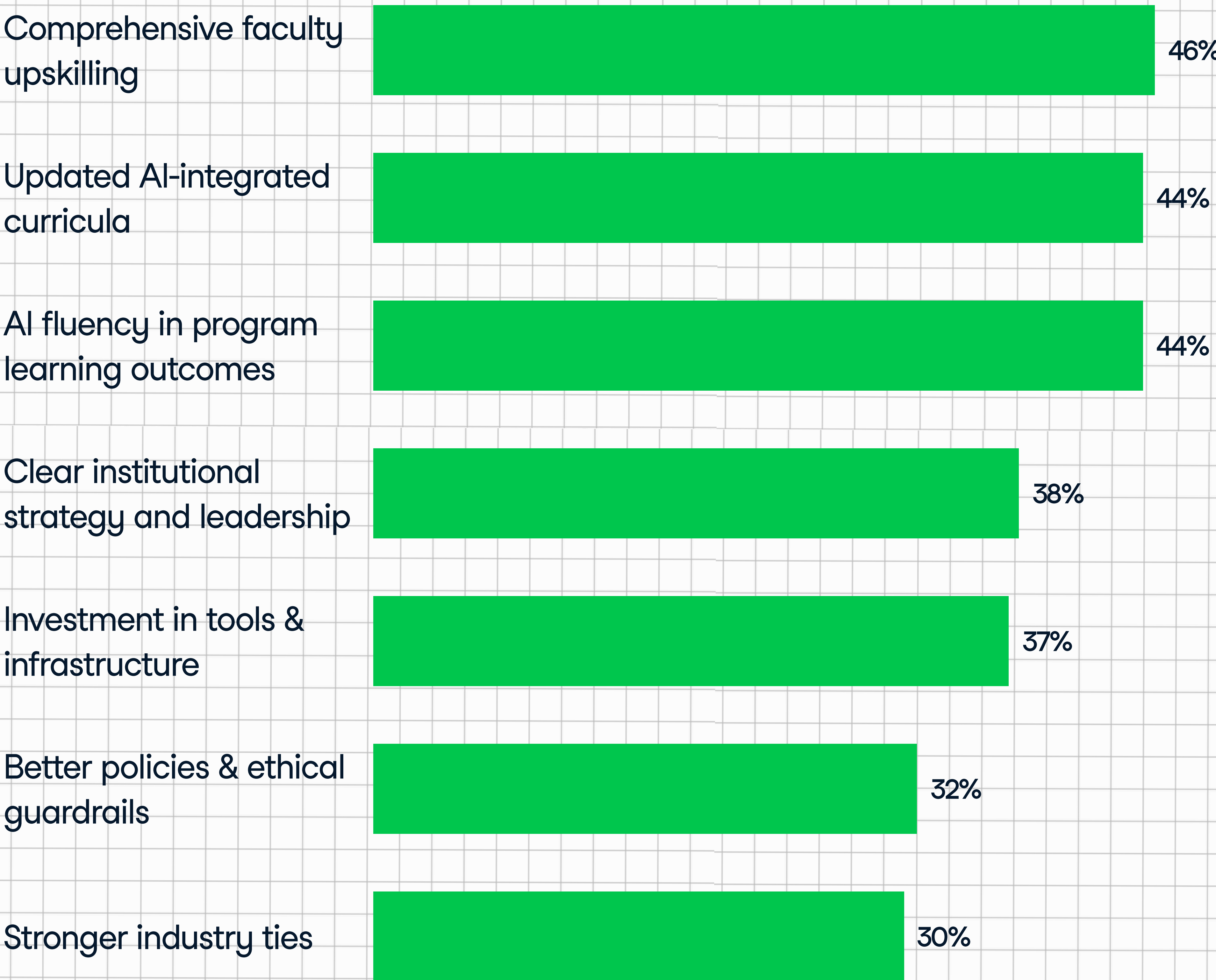
3. Lead from the top

38% call for clear institutional strategy. The barriers named most often are budget (45%), lack of discipline-relevant use cases (42%), and the pace of change outstripping the institution (40%).

Students' wish list matches: their most-wanted learning is **hands-on practice with AI tools in their own subject area (75%)** and **building the AI skills employers are looking for (69%)**. Application over theory, in their discipline, tied to careers.

Neither audience is asking for permission to use AI. Both are asking for structure.

Question: Which would most accelerate AI fluency at your institution?
(Select up to 2)



How the Mark Cuban Foundation prepares students for an AI-powered future with DataCamp

820+

students received free DataCamp training

1M+

XP earned

2K+

hours spent learning

Preparing students for an AI-driven future

The Mark Cuban Foundation works to ensure students are prepared for a future shaped by artificial intelligence, by providing high school students and educators with opportunities to learn in-demand AI skills.

The Foundation's flagship initiative is AI Bootcamps, hosted by corporate partners across the country. These programs introduce students to topics such as AI ethics, entrepreneurship, and how AI can be used across industries, from healthcare and sports analytics to ecology and creative fields. The goal is to help teens prepare for a workforce being reshaped by AI. The Foundation also offers a computer science track for the next generation of technologists.

Increasing access to AI education

The Mark Cuban Foundation partnered with DataCamp to extend access beyond the bootcamps, giving students and teachers more technical courses and a way to build a portfolio.

Through the DataCamp Classrooms program, eligible educators worldwide can register for free access to the DataCamp platform, allowing them to create virtual classrooms, assign AI and data learning, and track learner progress. Students build foundational data and AI skills, while teachers deepen their understanding of the technology and explore ways to bring those concepts into their classrooms.



"Students know that AI is the future, and teachers are excited about making sure their students are prepared for a digital future, and safe and thriving as citizens. But many schools still face constraints that make computer science, data, and AI education difficult to implement. DataCamp has a platform that has basic AI literacy and data skills, but the students who are high flyers also have opportunities to continue to learn and grow their skills. That is the magic sauce."

Charlotte Dungan
Chief Learning Officer, Mark Cuban Foundation

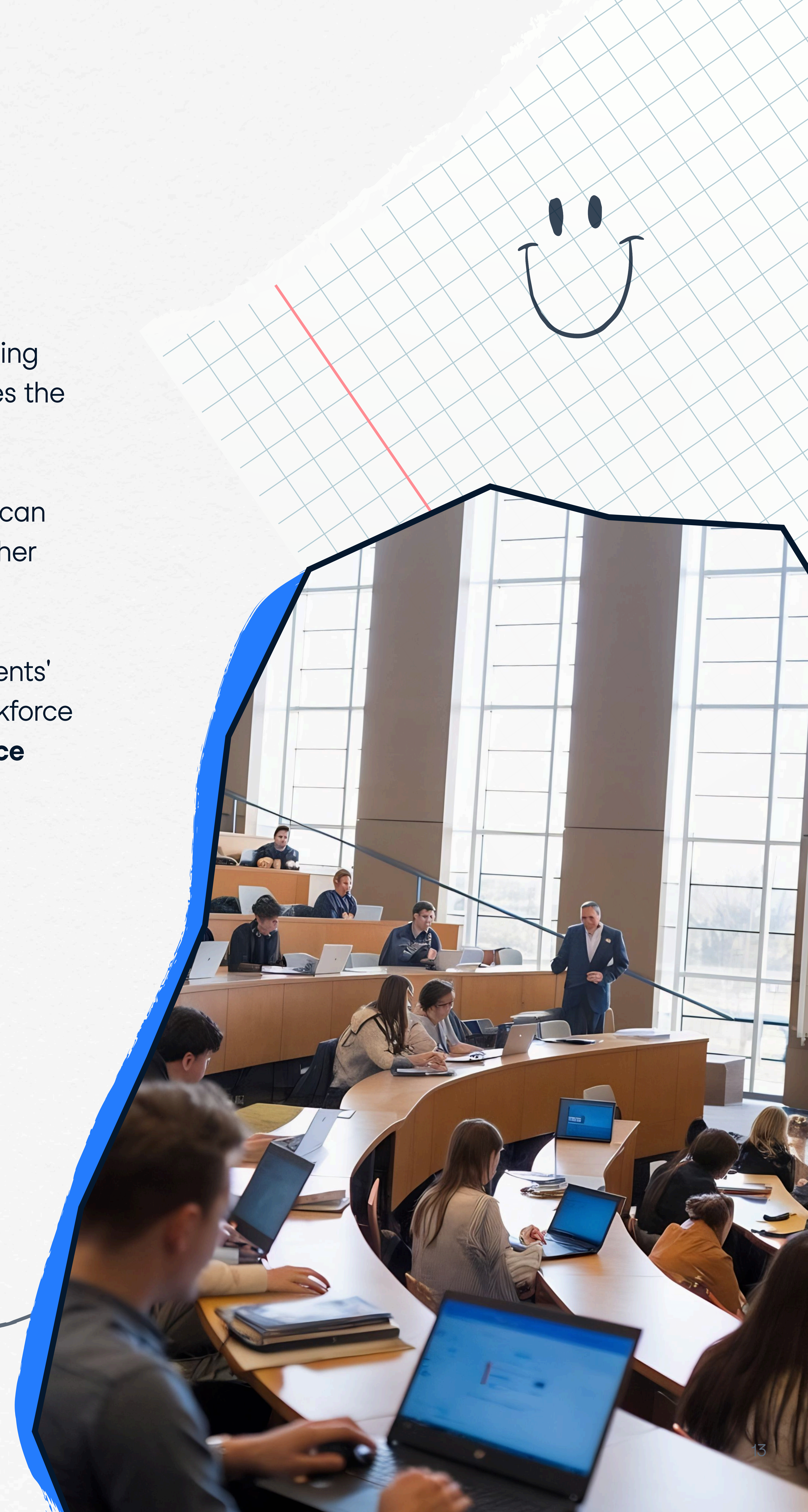
From literacy to fluency: the assignment for 2027

Last year, educators were teaching without a map. This year, they've drawn one themselves: redesigning assessments, assembling AI toolkits, adapting in real time. Students did the same, teaching themselves the most important skill of their careers in the gaps between classes.

What neither can do alone is turn improvisation into institution. That requires what only universities can provide: trained faculty, coherent policy, and curricula that treat AI fluency as a learning outcome rather than a liability, delivered with the same seriousness as writing or quantitative reasoning.

The data says the moment is right. Educators overwhelmingly believe AI fluency will define their students' careers. Students are volunteering for more training at a rate most programs never see: 86%. The workforce is paying premiums for exactly these skills. **Where formal instruction exists, it works: it's the difference between 2% and 57% of students feeling prepared.**

The first AI-native class has graduated. The second is already enrolled. The institutions that close the fluency gap now will define what AI-era education looks like for everyone else.



A free AI upskilling and teaching platform every educator can access



DataCamp Classrooms gives teachers and their students free access to DataCamp's full learning library, including the AI fluency courses students told us they want: hands-on courses in AI fundamentals, prompt engineering, AI ethics, and applied AI in every major discipline.

- ✓ Free for eligible educators and their students
- ✓ 1 million+ teachers and students across 180 countries
- ✓ Interactive, hands-on learning: the format 75% of students say they want most
- ✓ AI courses alongside Python, SQL, and the data skills employers still demand
- ✓ Classroom management, assignments, and progress reporting built in

[Create Your DataCamp Classroom](#)

Personalized interactions

What percentage of leaders do you think said they wouldn't hire someone without AI skills?

60%?

You're very close! The actual number is even higher.

66% of leaders say they wouldn't hire someone without AI skills. That's two out of every three leaders.

Write message...

Code exercises

INSTRUCTIONS

Create a one-shot prompt that provides an example showing how to extract the odd numbers from the set {1, 3, 7, 12, 19}, and seeks an answer for the set {3, 5, 11, 12, 16}.

```
1 client =
2 OpenAI(api_key="<OPENAI_API_TOKEN>")
3
4 # Create a one-shot prompt
5 prompt = ""
6
7 response = get_response(prompt)
8 print(response)
```

Run Code Submit Answer

Tableau interactive courses

Tableau_1_4_treemaps_chart

File Data Worksheet Dashboard Story Analysis

Combo chart

INSTRUCTIONS

1 2 3 4 5 6

Convert your current visualization to a treemap using Show Me.

Hint Next →

Multiple-choice knowledge checks

INSTRUCTIONS

What is an example of data bias in AI systems?

☒ A dataset that does not represent all groups in the target population

☐ Overfitting to training data

☐ High computational complexity of the model

☐ The use of outdated algorithms

Guided prompting

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Use the preset prompts to generate some responses from ChatGPT.
2. Review the content of each response, and reflect on the usefulness of each prompt.

How does fine-tuning improve the functionality of an LLM?

Describe the role of fine-tuning in improving a pre-trained language model

How does fine-tuning differ from the initial pre-training phase in LLMs?

Can you give an example of how fine-tuning helps in customizing an LLM for a specific task?

Real-world projects

INSTRUCTIONS

Determine if the proportion of adverse effects differs significantly between the Drug and Placebo groups, saving the p-value as a variable called `two_sample_p_value`.

```
1 # Import packages
2 import numpy as np
3 import pandas as pd
4 from statsmodels.stats.proportion import
5 proportions_ztest
6 import pingouin
7 import seaborn as sns
8 import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
9
10 # Load the dataset
11 drug_safety = pd.read_csv("drug_safety.csv")
```

Run All Submit Project

Bite-sized video

What is an algorithm?

Algorithm: a set of (computer) instructions to solve a problem or perform an action

Inputs

Process

Outputs

Drag & drop exercises

DRAG THE ITEMS INTO THE CORRECT BUCKET

Qualitative, usually discrete

Dimensions

Measures

Risk-free sandbox