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America's AI Report Card: 45 of 50 States Fail to Protect Student Thinking From AI

Only 5 states score 8.0 or higher out of 10 on preserving the cognitive effort students need to build working brains; 14 states have published no AI guidance at all

BLOOMFIELD HILLS, Mich., April 21, 2026 — American students are outsourcing their homework to AI. Forty-five of fifty states wrote the permission slip.

America's AI Report Card, a new state-by-state study released today, is the first research in the country to score state AI guidance on whether it protects the cognitive effort students need to build working brains. The results are grim. Of the 50 US states, only five protect student thinking in their AI education guidance: Vermont, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Utah, and West Virginia. Thirty-one states have published guidance that does not protect it. Fourteen states have published no guidance at all.

Every other state-level AI ranking in the country measures access, equity, compliance, and teacher training. None of them ask whether students are still doing the thinking.

“States raced to figure out where AI fits in school. Almost none of them protected the thinking. Student struggle is how brains grow. Only Vermont wrote that down,” said Kevin J. Roberts, M.A., academic coach, author of *The Effort Crisis*, and a contributor to ABC's 20/20 and BBC Radio.

The study scores each state across seven weighted criteria: Teach vs. Ban AI, Critical Thinking, Student Effort and Cognitive Development, AI Literacy, Teacher Training, Assessment Integrity, and Equity. Struggle is how brains grow. This is the only state-level AI ranking in America that measures whether states are protecting it.

Tennessee illustrates the national pattern. In 2024, Tennessee became one of the first states to require every local school board and public charter school to adopt an AI use policy. The law sets no floor for what that policy must protect. The mandate exists. The substance does not. Tennessee scored 4.95 overall and 4 out of 10 on Student Effort.

“Other countries are setting national standards for AI in schools. The United States is writing fifty different answers. Fourteen of our states have published none at all,” Roberts said. “A country that teaches its students to let machines do their thinking will not lead what comes next.”

Methodology: The study scored every US state plus Puerto Rico. Every state's primary AI guidance document was retrieved and reviewed by hand, directly from the issuing state Department of Education. Initial identification was cross-referenced with aiforeducation.io and FutureEd's 2026 State AI in Education Bills tracker. Every scoring quote and citation was pulled from the original source document by hand. No AI tool was

used to score state AI policy. The full rubric, every state's scoring evidence, and the complete dataset are published for public audit.

<https://aiedge.live/report-card>

About Kevin J. Roberts: Kevin J. Roberts, M.A., coaches students, parents, and schools on learning in the age of AI. He is the author of six books including *Schindler's Gift*, *Cyber Junkie*, and *The Effort Crisis*. His work has appeared on ABC's 20/20, BBC Radio, and NPR affiliate programming.

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