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AI in Education in the Media: Moral Panic and Pushback (2022-2025)

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Executive Summary

The brief examines the global moral panic following ChatGPT's release in late 2022 and the subsequent pushback from AI-positive voices. Initially, fears of widespread cheating led to bans in school systems worldwide, with dramatic headlines about "the death of the college essay" and education in "emergency mode." Media used crisis language and metaphors like "arms race" to frame AI as an existential threat to learning.

By mid-2023, the panic began shifting toward adaptation as early bans proved ineffective and educators began seeing potential benefits. Notable events included NYC schools reversing their ban and the International Baccalaureate allowing cited AI content in student work.

Prominent AI-positive voices emerged, including Sal Khan (Khan Academy), professors Ethan Mollick and Siva Vaidhyanathan, and high-profile publications in *The New York Times* and *LA Times*. These advocates used historical analogies (comparing AI to calculators), emphasized future-readiness skills, and framed AI as a catalyst for needed pedagogical reform rather than a threat.

By 2024-2025, the discourse had matured from initial hysteria to a more nuanced conversation about responsible integration. Though academic integrity concerns linger, the focus has shifted toward teaching AI literacy and redesigning assessments rather than futilely attempting to ban increasingly ubiquitous technology.

Moral Panic Over AI in Education Scope of the Panic: Global Reach and Intensity

Widespread Early Alarm: The launch of ChatGPT in late 2022 triggered a swift, worldwide wave of concern across education. Within days, the chatbot was "[widely denounced as a free essay-writing, test-taking tool](#)" that could make cheating trivially easy. By early 2023, major school systems in the U.S. (New York City, Los Angeles, Seattle), Europe (France's Sciences Po, some UK universities), and Asia (e.g. RV University in India) had [banned the AI tool on school networks amid fears of a cheating epidemic](#). The panic spanned K-12 and higher education: **teachers and professors** sounded alarms about academic integrity, **administrators** [convened emergency meetings on honor codes](#), and **policymakers** called for guidance. In Australia, for instance, state education departments barred ChatGPT in public schools as 2023 began. News headlines in early 2023 reflected a near-universal anxiety that schools would be "swamped by a wave of cheating."

Regional Voices and Duration: English-speaking countries were especially vocal. In the U.S., the panic was intense from late 2022 through spring 2023, with one professor even expressing “abject terror” after catching a student using AI. The UK saw headteachers write to national newspapers about “[very real and present hazards and dangers](#)” of AI, launching a taskforce to protect students. Australia and France initially took hardline stances (bans), though Australia’s federal education minister [signaled by late 2023 that outright bans would soften in 2024](#). The **intensity** peaked in early 2023, when fear of an imminent cheating crisis was highest. Over time, the discourse has *moderated* somewhat – by mid-2023, some districts (like New York City) reversed bans, admitting the initial response was a “knee-jerk fear.” However, concern has not vanished; it evolved. As of late 2024, media still report on an “AI cheating crisis” in universities, but the tone has shifted from pure panic toward adaptation and ethical guidance. The moral panic’s **duration** has thus stretched over two academic years, with a high initial spike and a sustained, though less frantic, conversation through 2023 and 2024.

Who Is Most Vocal: Educators have been at the forefront. Teachers worry about **students** using AI to bypass learning, while students themselves are divided – some quietly exploit AI, others [fear being falsely accused by detection tools](#). **School and university administrators** have voiced concerns about maintaining academic standards. **Parents and the public** followed the issue through mainstream media, especially when high-profile incidents occurred (like a Texas professor mistakenly failing an entire class over AI suspicions). **Policymakers and experts** joined in by mid-2023: for example, UNESCO released global guidance on generative AI in education, [urging a balanced approach to innovation vs. integrity](#). Overall, the panic has been broad-based, initially loudest among educators and media commentators, and gradually pulling in voices of **tech ethicists** and **education policy experts** as everyone grappled with how big the threat really was.

1. Rhetorical Construction: Strategies and Language in Media

Fear Appeals and Doomsday Declarations: Early media coverage often used dramatic, alarmist rhetoric to frame AI as an serious threat to learning. Commentators warned that ChatGPT could spell “*the end of high-school English*” or “*the end of writing assignments altogether*.” These fear appeals painted a dire slippery-slope scenario: if AI could do students’ work, genuine learning and critical thinking might collapse. One December 2022 Atlantic headline flatly stated, “*The College Essay Is Dead*,” arguing that no one was prepared for how AI would transform academia. Such **slippery slope arguments** suggested that a single new technology could unravel the entire educational system’s integrity. Phrases like “*cheating epidemic*” and “*tsunami of cheating*” appeared, evoking a sudden, uncontrollable flood (e.g., experts warning schools would be swamped by cheating). This apocalyptic framing stoked urgency, implying immediate action was needed to save education from AI’s onslaught.

Dominant Metaphors – “Arms Race” and “Cat-and-Mouse”: As the panic evolved, media began describing the situation as an escalating **arms race** between cheaters and detectors. Educators rushed to fortify defenses (using AI-detection software, oral exams, in-class writing) while students found new ways to evade detection. One Chronicle of Higher Ed forum piece bluntly titled “Nobody Wins in an Academic-Integrity Arms Race” captured the futility of this escalation. The **war/arms race metaphor** cast the issue in combative terms – an ever-escalating battle with no clear victor. Similarly, a **cat-and-mouse** dynamic was implied in reports of students hiding their “secret weapon” from teachers. This language reinforced an adversarial frame: AI as a weapon or illicit tool, and educators as enforcers chasing cheaters. Another metaphor compared AI’s arrival to past disruptive inventions. [Reuters noted](#) some educators likened generative AI to the advent of **handheld calculators in the 1970s** – initially feared but eventually integrated. This analogy served to contextualize the panic historically, hinting that today’s cheating fears might also fade as the tool becomes routine.

Historical and Pop Culture Analogies: To make sense of AI, writers drew parallels with earlier cheats or helpers in learning. Common analogies included **SparkNotes and CliffsNotes** (tools that worried teachers in earlier eras) and even **No-Fear Shakespeare** guides. By noting that “*teenagers have always found ways around doing the hard work of actual learning*,”

some articles put ChatGPT in a continuum of study shortcuts, suggesting the panic might be overblown in light of history. Others invoked science fiction tropes or tech “genies out of the bottle,” implying that once AI is loose in education, containment is impossible. Overall, analogies helped media either amplify the threat (comparing AI to a revolutionary force like the printing press) or normalize it (comparing AI to calculators or study guides).

Language of Crisis and Loss: Early discourse was laden with terms of crisis: “*cheating crisis*,” “*moral panic*,” “*emergency mode*.” [EdSurge noted](#) colleges in “emergency mode” to “shield academic integrity,” and faculty described being in “**terror**” or “**panic**” over how to catch AI misuse. Meanwhile, public figures worried aloud about a generation “losing” essential skills. A New York City schools spokesperson [argued](#) ChatGPT “does not build critical-thinking and problem-solving skills,” reinforcing the notion that if AI shortcuts proliferate, students won’t learn how to think. The **loss-of-skill trope**—the idea that writing or original thought could wither—was a powerful undercurrent. Headlines like “*The end of writing?*” or quotes like a teacher being “astounded” by AI’s writing prowess conveyed a mix of awe and dread, as if human skills were suddenly inadequate. This rhetorical strategy tapped into a broader societal fear of humans being overtaken by machines, resonating beyond just education.

Shift to Nuance and Hope: Over time, a counternarrative emerged using more tempered language. Some writers cautioned against **panic** and urged perspective. Tech commentators pointed out that “*cheating is nothing new*” and that educators have always adapted to new tools. The MIT Technology Review argued “*ChatGPT is going to change education, not destroy it*,” a reframing that swaps fear for inevitability and opportunity. By mid-2023, articles featured terms like “**opportunity**,” “**adaptation**,” and “**rethinking**” alongside the warnings. For example, an EdWeek analysis of data in April 2024 noted AI cheating wasn’t as rampant as feared: “*It wasn’t this, ‘the sky is falling.’*” Such language directly contrasts with the dire “sky is falling” tone earlier, signaling a rhetorical move to reassure. Even the New York City school chancellor, in reversing the ban, reframed AI as a “game-changing technology” to explore rather than a crisis to avert. This tonal shift in rhetoric—from panic to pragmatism—became more pronounced after key turning points.

2. Evolving Trends and Turning Points in the Discourse

ChatGPT’s Launch and Initial Shock (Late 2022): ChatGPT’s release in November 2022 ignited the debate. Within weeks, viral social media posts and news stories showed the chatbot acing exams and writing passable essays. This “**Wow**” **moment** quickly gave way to alarm in education circles. December 2022 saw high-profile think pieces (The Atlantic, New York Times) declaring the death of the student essay. Educators reported students turning in AI-written work over winter finals. This period established the narrative that **AI = cheating tool**, setting the stage for a moral panic at the start of the new year.

School Bans and Policy Reactions (Jan–Feb 2023): The panic truly went mainstream in January 2023. The largest school systems (e.g., NYC Public Schools) enacted **preemptive bans** on ChatGPT, often grabbing national headlines. Their [stated reasons](#) – to prevent plagiarism and protect “student learning” – were widely reported and amplified fears. Each ban was a media event, reinforcing the sense of a global consensus that AI in class was dangerous. Policymakers were quoted framing these moves as cautionary pauses to understand the tool. However, these early bans also drew criticism and likely marked *Peak Panic*: by treating the technology as taboo, [some argued schools were avoiding the real challenge of adaptation](#).

Cheating Scandals and False Positives (Spring 2023): As the school year went on, several **flashpoint incidents** kept the issue in headlines. One notorious case was a Texas A&M-Commerce professor who *failed* an entire class after incorrectly believing ChatGPT “told him” it wrote their essays. The story (first reported in May 2023) went viral, illustrating pitfalls of overzealous policing. It highlighted the arms-race mentality and the risk of **false accusations**, fueling debate on how to verify AI use. Another theme was the rise of AI-detection software like Turnitin’s new tool (launched April 2023). Media

initially cast these as saviors, but soon reported on their flaws – false positives disproportionately flagging non-native English writers, etc.. These events slightly **shifted the framing**: from “students cheating unchecked” to “educators risk overreacting.” It became clear that a pure crackdown approach had collateral damage. This realization began tempering the panic by mid-year.

Integration and Policy Shifts (Mid/Late 2023): UNESCO’s first global guidance on GenAI in education (Sept 2023) further [reframed the conversation at a policy level](#), emphasizing teacher training and ethical use rather than fear. By late 2023, some mainstream outlets ran stories asking “*So, did the cheating apocalypse happen?*” The answer was often no: ABC News, for example, reported that the expected cheating “wave never broke” – school largely continued normally. Surveys and data (e.g., a Stanford study of high schools) found self-reported cheating rates in 2023 remained **flat** compared to pre-AI years. Such findings were widely cited to suggest the panic was overstated.

Ongoing Adjustments and Current Tone: As of 2024, the discourse has matured but remains active. Universities grapple with what an AI-pervasive world means for assessment. The **tone now is more balanced**: neither naive optimism nor moral doom-saying. Education outlets publish case studies of teachers using AI as a teaching tool, alongside cautionary tales of students who regret cheating with AI after being caught (e.g., a BBC story headlined “[I massively regret using AI to cheat at uni](#)”) – blending moral lessons with pragmatic adaptation. A late-2024 Guardian piece noted “more than half of students” use generative AI and described a tense campus atmosphere of suspicion. Yet even that investigative framing focused on systemic solutions and student perspectives, not just fear. We also see metaphorical shifts: less “end of the world” talk, more discussion of “**co-existing with AI**” and fostering academic integrity through new norms. In short, the moral panic has cooled into a nuanced debate. Key events like the **release of GPT-4** (March 2023), the explosion of AI tools following ChatGPT’s popularity, and new academic policies (honor code updates, “AI-use disclosed” policies on syllabi) all pushed the conversation from emergency toward adaptation.

Representative Media Highlights: To illustrate the evolving rhetoric, consider a few headlines and quotes over time:

- *Dec 2022:* “The College Essay Is Dead” – emphatic, fear-inducing.
- *Jan 2023:* “ChatGPT banned...amid cheating fears” – ubiquitous headline template from New York to Sydney.
- *Mar 2023:* “Can Turnitin Cure Higher Ed’s AI Fever?” – suggesting a malady and quick fix.
- *May 2023:* “NYC does about-face on ChatGPT...initial ban was ‘knee-jerk fear’” – admission of overreaction.
- *Nov 2023:* “ChatGPT was tipped to cause widespread cheating. Here’s what students say happened” – a retrospective, calmer analysis (finding the sky did not fall).
- *2024:* “AI cheating is overwhelming the education system – but teachers shouldn’t despair” – [a Guardian op-ed](#) acknowledging strain but urging hope, encapsulating the balanced tone.

Each milestone reflects a **shift in framing**: from panic and prohibition, toward reflection and integration. While moral concern over AI in education has been global and intense, the discourse is gradually moving from panicked headlines about an “end of learning” to a more measured conversation about how to uphold learning in the age of AI. The initial moral panic is softening, but its legacy is a heightened awareness and ongoing vigilance in media and schools alike.

Pushing Back Against AI Moral Panic in Education

1. Scope and Visibility of AI-Positive Voices

A diverse range of educators, researchers, and public figures around the world have advocated for an “**AI-positive**” **approach to education** since late 2022, directly countering the prevailing moral panic about cheating and academic doom. These voices include classroom teachers, professors, ed-tech leaders, journalists, and even educational institutions

themselves. For example, high school English teacher Cherie Shields published a January 2023 Education Week op-ed urging colleagues: "[Don't Ban ChatGPT. Use It as a Teaching Tool](#)," arguing that teachers must **embrace AI as another learning tool** much like they once taught Google search skills. Mollick's experiment was featured on NPR and in international media, positioning him as a prominent advocate for adapting pedagogy to AI rather than fearing it.

In a February 2023 Q&A with Education Week, Khan [explained](#) his opposition to banning ChatGPT, warning that blocking AI deprives students of mastering a technology that will be ubiquitous in their careers. He noted that the same week New York City schools banned ChatGPT, a tech firm posted a \$275,000 job opening for a "prompt engineer" – a role with no official degree, just expertise in using tools like ChatGPT. As Khan explained on a TED stage, "We're at the cusp of using AI for probably the biggest positive transformation that education has ever seen." His stance, echoed through TED talks, 60 Minutes segments, and a 2023 book on AI in education, gave the pro-AI pedagogy movement a globally recognized champion.

Even entire **institutions** have joined the pushback against AI panic. In early 2023 the International Baccalaureate (IB) – whose programs span 120+ countries – announced it would [allow students to quote from ChatGPT in essays](#) as long as they cite it, instead of forbidding the tool. The IB's head of assessment, Matt Glanville, [emphasized](#) that generative AI should be embraced as "an extraordinary opportunity" and that education must adapt by teaching students to verify and contextualize AI-generated content. He noted that essay writing will need to play a "much less prominent" role going forward, as educators shift to assessing skills like evaluating AI output. Likewise, some university leaders spoke out against blanket bans. For instance, Villanova University's Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning [stated](#) in 2023 that "there is no university-wide ban on ChatGPT" because faculty may find "many excellent uses for it in classes," provided its output is critically analyzed and properly cited. Such endorsements from respected institutions and officials have given the AI-positive pedagogy movement considerable visibility and legitimacy on the global stage.

Notably, **journalists and public intellectuals** have used mainstream media to amplify these ideas. *The New York Times* tech columnist **Kevin Roose** was one of the first to urge a measured approach, writing a January 2023 column titled "[Don't Ban ChatGPT in Schools. Teach With It](#)." In *The Guardian*, media studies professor **Siva Vaidhyanathan** [recounted](#) catching students using AI and concluded it's "*a teachable moment*" – an opportunity to discuss why students resort to AI and how educators can address underlying issues, rather than simply punish them. Similarly, author and writing expert **John Warner** used [his Inside Higher Ed column](#) to satirize the panic (joking about reverting to "*stone tablet and chisel*" homework) and to reframe ChatGPT as "*an opportunity, not a threat*" for improving how and what we assign students. Across opinion pages, blogs, and education conferences, these voices have reached wide audiences. They have appeared in outlets from *Los Angeles Times* and *Scientific American* to NPR, BBC, and CNN, ensuring that pro-AI education perspectives are heard globally alongside the more fear-driven narratives.

Overall, the **influence** of these AI-positive education advocates has grown from niche conversations to mainstream educational discourse. Through op-eds, keynote speeches, social media, and policy decisions, they have injected a counter-narrative into the global conversation on AI in schools. Many of these figures command significant followings (for example, Khan Academy's platform of millions of users, or Angela Duckworth – co-author of an AI-positive *LA Times* op-ed – with her prominence in education psychology). This has helped their message reach teachers in ordinary classrooms as well as ministers of education. By late 2023, the chorus of "*don't panic, let's innovate*" voices had attained a high level of visibility, influencing teacher trainings, ed-tech adoption strategies, and even government guidance on AI in curricula worldwide.

2. Rhetorical Framing and Strategies

Despite varied backgrounds, these pro-AI education commentators share **common rhetorical strategies** in how they frame their arguments. One dominant approach is drawing **historical analogies** to demystify ChatGPT. They remind us that schools have survived and benefited from past technological upheavals. In an *LA Times* essay, Angela Duckworth and Lyle Ungar [write](#) that “one day soon, GPT...could be to essay writing what calculators are to calculus,” implying that just as math instructors incorporated calculators, writing instruction can adapt to AI assistance. Ethan Mollick [echoed](#) this in interviews, noting “we taught people how to do math in a world with calculators,” so now educators must teach students to write and think in a world with AI. By situating AI as simply the next step in a long line of educational tools, these voices **challenge fear-based narratives** and suggest that adaptation is part of education’s normal evolution.

Another prevalent strategy is an **appeal to future skills and innovation**. AI-positive advocates often argue that banning AI is not only futile but harmful because it deprives students of learning critical new literacies. Sal Khan’s emphasis on the prompt-engineer job opening is one such example, [underscoring](#) that *today’s learners will graduate into a workforce suffused with AI*. UCLA professor John Villaseñor [made a similar point](#) in *Scientific American*, asserting that the era when only humans could produce good writing “ended in late 2022” with ChatGPT’s rise – so “we need to adapt” by teaching students to use AI “ethically and productively.” He argues that students must learn how to prompt AI effectively and evaluate its outputs, treating AI use as an “emerging skill” akin to a new literacy. This framing positions AI tools as the modern equivalent of literacy or computer fluency, a necessary competency for the 21st century. The **metaphor of AI as a partner or assistant** rather than a cheat is common: Khan has [described](#) his AI tutor “Khanmigo” as a “thoughtful mentor” for students, and others speak of AI as a writing coach or teammate rather than an enemy. By emphasizing opportunity – e.g. calling AI a “super tutor” that can augment human teaching – these advocates flip the narrative from loss to potential gain.

Crucially, AI-positive voices directly **rebut the prevailing panic and “doom” rhetoric**. Many address the cheating fears head-on, but with a critical twist: they suggest the real problem lies in outdated assignments and pedagogies, not the AI itself. “If ChatGPT makes it easy to cheat on an assignment, teachers should throw out the assignment rather than ban the chatbot,” argues Prof. Helen Crompton, [framing](#) the technology as a catalyst for overdue pedagogical reform. Educator and ISTE CEO **Richard Culatta** used a vivid metaphor to make this point – he [quipped](#) that traditional assessments were already “dead” and “in zombie mode,” and “what ChatGPT did was call us out on that.” This kind of language reframes the AI as exposing flaws in the status quo (rote essays, memorization) and thus as a tool for improvement rather than a plague. Writer John Warner, in fact, [mocked](#) comparisons of ChatGPT to an uncontrollable virus, noting that granting so much power to a “nonliving piece of technology” is “counterproductive” and that much of the “freaking out” over cheating misses the deeper issue of why assignments fail to engage students. By [satirizing](#) panic (e.g. joking about wax tablets for writing or titling talks “Are sheds the answer?” to hyperbolic fears, proponents use humor to deflate what they see as moral overreaction.

These commentators also employ **constructive language and solution-oriented framing**. Rather than simply dismissing concerns, they often pivot to how educators can respond in positive ways. “Ignoring ChatGPT and its cousins won’t get us anywhere,” Vaidyanathan [writes](#); “in fact, these systems reveal issues we too often miss” in our teaching practices. Many urge colleagues to use the AI to *engage students in higher-order thinking*. For instance, one teacher [told](#) *Wired* she turned ChatGPT’s arrival into a classwide “teachable moment” – having students collectively analyze the chatbot’s responses for bias and errors. By labeling AI as a “new literacy” or a “critical thinking catalyst,” these voices shift the conversation from fear to pedagogy. They frequently stress transparency and responsibility: Villaseñor, for example, [tells his students](#) that if they use AI, they remain “solely and fully responsible” for the work’s accuracy and integrity. The message is that using AI is acceptable, *so long as students learn to use it thoughtfully and own their output*. This directly counters panic narratives by replacing them with an ethos of *guided, ethical use*.

Finally, a key rhetorical move is pointing out the **futility and risks of a punitive approach**. Advocates highlight that a cat-and-mouse game of banning and detecting AI-generated work is not only impractical, but educationally counterproductive. “*AI is here. And it cannot be banned,*” Duckworth and Ungar [flatly state](#), noting that students will find ways around filters just as they did with past technologies. Multiple experts have likened aggressive AI detection to an unwinnable arms race: every new detection tool is quickly outsmarted by advances in AI or simple workarounds. Moreover, [they warn](#) of collateral damage from over-policing. Scientific American’s op-ed cautioned that strict bans would lead to “*false positives and false negatives*” – with some innocent students wrongly accused of AI use and real cheaters going undetected – thus “*triggering enormous stress*” and injustices. Citing these drawbacks bolsters the argument that *teaching with AI is preferable to witch-hunting it*. In short, through analogies to past innovations, appeals to future-ready skills, reframing of cheating fears, and pragmatic reasoning about enforcement, AI-positive voices construct a narrative that directly challenges the fear and moral panic rhetoric. They replace it with one of **inevitability, opportunity, and pedagogical progress**, often [encapsulated](#) in memorable mottos like “*ChatGPT is an opportunity, not a threat.*”

3. Notable Publications and Milestones

Since late 2022, a number of **high-profile publications, statements, and events** have marked the emergence of AI-positive pedagogy in public discourse. One early milestone was the provocative Atlantic essay in December 2022 titled “[The College Essay Is Dead](#),” in which writer Stephen Marche alerted academia that AI like ChatGPT would upend traditional writing assignments – and by implication, that educators needed to rethink how they teach and assess writing. While Marche’s tone was dramatic, it helped catalyze discussion about adaptation over alarm. Weeks later, as schools began reacting to ChatGPT’s public release, opinion pages filled with direct responses urging a more balanced view.

Around the same time, **educators themselves voiced similar sentiments in essays and blogs that gained broad attention**. Cherie Shields’ EdWeek op-ed (Jan 5, 2023) and an LA Times guest essay (Jan 19, 2023) by Duckworth and Ungar both made headlines by explicitly opposing bans. The LA Times piece, strikingly titled “[Will chatbots...destroy education as we know it? We hope so.](#),” used an attention-grabbing reversal to argue that AI can *transform stale educational practices for the better*. “*Banning ChatGPT is like prohibiting students from using Wikipedia or spell-checkers,*” the authors wrote – impossible in practice and missing the point. Instead, they advocated treating GPT as a tool that “*complements, rather than substitutes for, student thinking.*” [This op-ed](#), coming from a renowned psychologist (Duckworth) and a computer scientist (Ungar), carried weight and was cited in subsequent debates about AI policy in schools.

Several **notable events in early 2023 showcased practitioners embracing AI in real time**, providing concrete examples that undercut the panic narrative. In February, the Associated Press ran a story ([syndicated by PBS NewsHour](#)) profiling Donnie Piercey, a fifth-grade teacher in Kentucky, who had *his students face off against ChatGPT in a writing game*. Instead of fearing cheating, Piercey turned the chatbot into a creative challenge: students had to identify which essay was written by the AI, fostering digital literacy and critical reading. “*This is the future... it’s coming, whether we want it or not,*” he told his class, after reminding them that calculators, Google, and Wikipedia all prompted similar concerns in his 17 years of teaching. The article, titled “*Some educators embrace ChatGPT as a new teaching tool,*” also highlighted a Florida tech trainer who called AI “*revolutionary*” and a “*real game changer*” for tasks like lesson planning. Around the same time, teachers like Heather Brantley were presenting enthusiastic sessions on AI at major conferences (e.g. the Future of Education Technology Conference), signaling to thousands of their peers that *ChatGPT could enhance lessons across subjects*. These stories, carried by mainstream media, served as **proof-of-concept cases** for AI-positive pedagogy in action.

Another watershed publication was an April 2023 feature in **MIT Technology Review** titled “[ChatGPT is going to change education, not destroy it.](#)” Far from a theoretical piece, it reported on a variety of educators who, after a few months with ChatGPT, were finding “*the outlook a lot less bleak*” than initial headlines suggested. The article quoted teachers noting that many students hadn’t even heard of ChatGPT until it was introduced in class, and that *88% of teachers who tried it*

found it had a positive impact on learning. It spotlighted voices like Prof. David Smith (UK) calling the panic “a storm in a teacup,” and instructional coach Emily Donahoe describing how she had students use ChatGPT to draft an argument, then critique and revise it, thereby making writing instruction more interactive. By compiling these experiences, the *Technology Review* piece functioned as a high-profile validation of AI-positive approaches, complete with soundbites like “ChatGPT could actually help make education better” and “teachers should throw out the assignment rather than ban the chatbot” if it makes cheating too easy. Such quotes were widely circulated as educators looked for guidance on responding to AI.

This measured policy was covered in outlets like *The Guardian* with the headline “ChatGPT allowed in International Baccalaureate essays,” and it included Glanville’s forward-looking remark that essay writing will need to play a “much less prominent” role going forward, as educators shift to assessing skills like evaluating AI output. The IB’s stance was a **turning point** that inspired other school systems to consider similar moves. By mid-2023, some large districts that initially banned ChatGPT quietly reversed course. Notably, in May 2023 New York City lifted its school ban, with the [chancellor admitting](#) the district would “lean into” AI for teaching after all – a stark reversal that was influenced by months of advocacy and positive pilot examples (a development highlighted in NBC News and education press).

Meanwhile, **public statements from respected organizations** lent further credence to AI-positive pedagogy. UNESCO’s first global guidance on generative AI in education (released in August 2023) cautioned against moral panic and instead urged training teachers in AI literacy and ethics, reflecting many points long made by the pro-AI voices. And the U.S. Department of Education’s May 2023 report on AI in education also emphasized opportunities for personalized learning, even as it noted challenges. Each of these reports included quotes about preparing students for an AI-rich future rather than trying to freeze classrooms in the past. Even student voices joined the fray: *MIT Technology Review* published an essay by a high school senior titled “[Banning ChatGPT will do more harm than good](#),” in which the student argued that educators should help students use AI to “learn how to learn,” instead of focusing on prohibition. Such high-profile op-eds and statements, often shared widely on social media, have showcased a consistent theme of “**educate with AI.**”

In summary, from late 2022 through 2024, the discourse promoting AI-positive pedagogy has been punctuated by **influential essays, media features, and policy shifts**. Headlines like “[Don’t ban chatbots... use them to change how we teach](#)” and “AI’s teachable moment” captured the essence of this movement. The combination of compelling commentary (with quotable lines about “teachable moments” and “new literacies”) and concrete decisions (like the IB policy and Khan Academy’s AI tutor rollout) created a growing library of references that educators and leaders could point to when advocating for a constructive approach to AI in the classroom. These publications and events not only made the case for AI-positive education in theory, but also began to normalize it in practice.

4. Evolution of Discourse

The **tone and prominence** of AI-positive voices in education have evolved significantly from late 2022 to early 2025. In the initial weeks after ChatGPT’s public debut (late 2022), the conversation was polarized: dramatic warnings of an academic crisis dominated headlines, but a few forward-thinking commentators began planting the seeds of a more optimistic view. During December 2022, articles like [Marche’s Atlantic piece](#) grabbed attention with dire pronouncements (e.g. the “death” of the college essay), yet even those early pieces concluded with a call to *adapt teaching methods to AI* rather than futilely resist. This set the stage for a wave of response in early 2023. As *moral panic* peaked – with multiple school districts (New York, Los Angeles, Seattle, Queensland in Australia, etc.) blocking ChatGPT by January 2023 – the *pushback also gained momentum*. Throughout January and February 2023, AI-positive educators and experts moved with remarkable speed to publish guidance and reframe the issue. Many of these voices initially operated at the grassroots or institutional level (individual teachers writing blogs, university teaching centers issuing memos encouraging experimentation), but they rapidly gained broader prominence.

One observable trend was the **growing legitimacy** of using AI in education as time progressed. In January 2023, an educator advocating open use of ChatGPT (like Ethan Mollick or Donnie Piercey) was seen as a novelty – their stories were newsworthy *because* they bucked the prevailing norm. However, by the **2023–24 academic year**, such positions had moved closer to the mainstream. Over 2023, many school administrators shifted from blanket bans to nuanced policies. As one analyst summarized, *school districts “soon began reversing the bans they had recently implemented”* once they recognized bans were unenforceable and that AI could be an asset. A RAND survey in mid-2023 **confirmed** this trend: it found that a majority of school leaders were *“now focusing on increasing teachers’ knowledge and use of AI rather than creating student-use policies”* to forbid it. In other words, the narrative had begun to turn from *“How do we stop students from using it?”* to *“How can we train everyone to use it well?”* The Walton Family Foundation’s national survey in early 2023 likewise showed that by February, over half of K–12 teachers had tried ChatGPT and **nearly 9 in 10 of those teachers reported a positive impact** on learning. This data, frequently cited by AI-positive commentators, helped their cause and became more widely known as 2023 went on. Thus, as empirical experience and survey evidence accumulated, skeptical educators and administrators grew more receptive to the pro-AI arguments that early adopters had been making.

Another evolution was in the **tone** used by AI-positive voices, which in turn influenced how others talked about the issue. For instance, much of the January 2023 discourse involved point-by-point rebuttals of cheating concerns and clarification of what ChatGPT could or couldn’t do. However, as months passed and the initial panic tempered, these voices were able to shift from a defensive posture to a more **constructive, forward-looking tone**. By late 2023, articles and conference panels were less about *“why we shouldn’t panic”* (that battle largely won in many quarters) and more about *“here’s how we are successfully using AI in our classroom.”* For example, teacher communities began sharing lesson plans involving ChatGPT, and academic journals published case studies of AI-assisted teaching. The conversation became richer: moving beyond whether AI should be allowed at all, to practical discussions of **ethical use, curriculum integration, and equity**. The AI-positive thought leaders often led these discussions, having established themselves as experts by virtue of their early advocacy.

Developments like the release of **OpenAI’s GPT-4 in 2023** and a proliferation of AI tools actually strengthened the pro-AI camp’s arguments. The continued improvement of AI made it clearer that these tools would only get more capable and prevalent. Meanwhile, attempts to contain AI usage showed cracks. By mid-2023, it was widely **reported** that AI text *detectors* (like GPTZero and Turnitin’s algorithm) were frequently unreliable – flagging human-written work as AI and vice versa. This sparked a backlash against over-reliance on detection software. Princeton computer scientist Arvind Narayanan (notable in the AI ethics sphere) publicly labeled AI essay detectors *“mostly snake oil,”* reinforcing the message that education should focus on adaptation, not surveillance. As this realization spread, the **credibility of the AI-positive pedagogical approach grew**. Those voices had consistently advocated for assessment reform (instead of trying to spot AI-generated text), and events proved their point, bringing more educators onto their side.

By **2024**, many early adopters of AI in the classroom had moved from the margins to the spotlight. Sal Khan, for instance, who was cautioning against bans in early 2023, by late 2023 was demonstrating Khan Academy’s AI tutor to audiences worldwide and advising ministries of education. Academic leaders like University of Hong Kong’s president and Australia’s Group of Eight universities issued statements in 2024 embracing a future with AI-assisted learning (often citing the need to teach AI literacy). Some countries even integrated AI topics into their K-12 curricula, treating it as a skill to be learned, not a menace to be avoided – a clear validation of the AI-positive pedagogy perspective on a policy level. The tone of media coverage also evolved: whereas early 2023 news pieces carried somewhat sensational titles about cheating (e.g. *“Everybody is cheating: Why this teacher has adopted an open ChatGPT policy”* on NPR, by 2024 the headlines were more likely to read *“Schools are teaching ChatGPT, so students aren’t left behind”* (as a CNN segment put it). The **“AI-positive” viewpoint had shifted from being a counter-narrative to becoming part of the consensus** in many education forums.

It's important to note that this evolution was not uniform everywhere – some pockets of resistance remained, and debates continued about the extent and manner of AI's use. However, the general trend from late 2022 to the present has been one of increasing acceptance of AI in education, guided in large part by the public voices and arguments outlined above. What began as a few brave educators and experts speaking against a tide of panic has grown into a broad movement exploring how AI can *enhance* teaching and learning. As one UK professor [observed](#), “*there’s still some fear... but we do our students a disservice if we get stuck on that fear.*” Over time, that sentiment – not getting stuck in fear – has gained prominence. Indeed, many of the same commentators who spent 2023 persuading colleagues not to panic are now (in 2025) leading workshops on innovative AI pedagogy, authoring guidebooks, and setting the research agenda for “AI-enhanced education.” Their journey from pushback to proactive leadership illustrates how the narrative around AI in education has matured. In summary, the past two-plus years have seen moral panic give way, at least in part, to a more nuanced conversation – thanks in large measure to these global voices who advocated early, often, and effectively for an **AI-positive approach to teaching and learning**.

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