

Marshall Memo 1116

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
December 8, 2025

In This Issue:

1. [What can we do for “languishing” teens?](#)
2. [Advice for young people who are using generative AI](#)
3. [Using GenAI to plan for primary-grade intervention lessons](#)
4. [Complete sentences: a starting point for proficient writing](#)
5. [The case for students memorizing key facts – and how they can do it](#)
6. [What we capture – and lose – with all the photos and videos we take](#)
7. [Think, ink, pair, share](#)
8. [Supporting middle- and high-school students who read below level](#)

Quotes of the Week

“Our job is not to solve every problem in the world, but to do our part with grace, integrity, and courage.”

Cornel West, quoted in *Salvos*

“Learning to write is really hard, even harder than reading. It takes up a lot of cognitive real estate in our students’ minds.”

Michele Myers (see item #4)

“Our brains love shortcuts; it’s in our nature. But your brain needs friction to learn. It needs to have a challenge.”

Nataliya Kosmyna (MIT Media Lab) quoted in [“Are We Living in a Golden Age of Stupidity?”](#) by Sophie McBain in *The Guardian*, in *The Week*, November 21, 2025

“If you see me on my phone, there’s a 0% chance I’m doing something productive. If you see me on my laptop, there’s a 50% chance.”

A high-school student, quoted in *ibid.*

“Yeah, I wish somebody had caught me at the beginning of the year and told me not to waste my year not learning.”

A student who used ChatGPT to do all his homework, quoted in [“Schools Don’t Need Efficiency – They Need Focus”](#) by Tara Laskowski (interviewing Justin Reich), in *Educational Leadership*, December 2025/January 2026 (Vol. 83, #4, pp. 8-12)

“When we resist the urge to fix, we create space for people to access their own wisdom. That’s the most powerful kind of support we can offer.”

Elena Aguilar in [“Step Out of the ‘Fix-It’ Reflex”](#) in *Educational Leadership*, December 2025/January 2026 (Vol. 83, #4, pp. 56-57)

1. What Can We Do for “Languishing” Teens?

In this *Education Gadfly* article, Robert Pondiscio interviews Mike Goldstein, whose Center for Teen Flourishing focuses on what is shaping kids’ character and purpose between 3 p.m. and 3 a.m. In those unstructured hours, says Goldstein, too many teens are drifting into passivity, isolation, and screens. Here are some excerpts from the interview:

- “Many teens describe themselves as not doing much out of school besides scrolling on their phones,” says Goldstein. “Some try to change their behavior but struggle.” The “sitting around” phenomenon is occurring across the economic spectrum, even in the wealthiest families. A teacher in a Boston suburb described a typical student:

- Heavy screen time after school, over the weekend, and during the summer;
- Little time outdoors, reading books, walking, exercising, working, or volunteering;
- Apathy and low-grade anxiety/depression;
- Going through the motions, little direction or ambition;
- No clear out-of-school passions;
- Haven’t found “their people.”

“Once upon a time,” says Goldstein, “boredom nudged teens to do things. The smartphone and the trillion dollar companies who sell them defeat boredom. That leads to an idleness that I think is bad for young people.”

- “Flourishing teens,” on the other hand, “build busy calendars: sports, restaurant jobs, Starbucks hangouts with friends, church youth groups, scouting, playing guitar. Each domain (fitness, music, work, sleep, socialization) has its own vein of research showing benefits. Some flourishing teens do this the easy way: they join activities that the school offers. Other flourishing teens busy themselves with cool things that aren’t part of the school menu. What we don’t know is precisely how to increase languishing teen participation in all of these things.”

- Trying to suppress out-of-school screen time isn’t working, says Goldstein, citing unsuccessful efforts in China and Great Britain. “Teens find workarounds.” A better approach than suppression is substitution – creating attractive alternatives to mindless screen scrolling.

- Goldstein’s Center for Teen Flourishing is searching for the equivalent to pediatricians’ efforts to deal with some babies’ *failure to thrive* – a syndrome associated with poor weight gain, lethargy, and sleep trouble. “The fix is never ‘see GI’ or ‘see psych,’” he says. “You need a coordinated plan: pediatrics + nutrition + lactation + sleep hygiene + social work, all aimed at the daily schedule (feeds, naps, play) with one shared outcome metric: the growth chart.”

- Goldstein was active in K-12 schools (Match in Boston) and admires what the best charter schools are doing. The 3 p.m. to 3 a.m. sector needs similar passion, the kind of talent infusion charter schools had in their heyday, and fresh ideas.

- Traditional mentor programs are relaxed and unstructured – *Hey, do you want to go to a ball game?* – and this approach doesn’t seem to work with languishing teens. “Because of screens,” says Goldstein, “they’re not bored, so anyone trying to engage them has to be really good at motivating them to try new things in the real world and helping them persist with the two or three things they’re interested in.”

- Goldstein is wary of AI in schools as a solution to the languishing problem because it is likely to result in *more* screen time. Maybe AI efforts should have the equivalent of carbon offsets, where additional time on digital media is balanced by decreases elsewhere in teens’ lives.

- The metric for conquering the languishing phenomenon is the number of hours per week in the flourishing zone: fitness, after-school sports, a hobby, babysitting, in-person time with friends, amount of sleep, volunteering or working up to ten hours a week, pleasure reading, gardening, walking the dog. Goldstein says too many students are spending only about two hours a week flourishing. He challenges educators, parents, social workers, and others to push for 20 hours a week.

[“Helping Students Flourish, Not Just Achieve: An Interview with Mike Goldstein”](#) by Robert Pondiscio in *Education Gadfly*, December 4, 2025

[Back to page one](#)

2. Advice for Young People Who Are Using Generative AI

In this *Learning on Purpose* article, Eric Hudson suggests nine messages for students who are old enough to use new AI tools:

- Using GenAI doesn’t make you a good or bad person. Students are getting mixed signals on large language models. If they’re active users, they might hear that they’re innovative – or immoral. If they’re resisting AI use, they might be called principled – or out of touch. The key, says Hudson, is learning when and when not to use these tools. “Knowing the difference, and developing your own approach over time,” he says, “is essential.”

- There are good and bad ways to use AI with schoolwork. Students who ask GenAI to directly provide a solution or product become dependent, won’t build their own skills, knowledge, and critical thinking, and will perform less well when they don’t have the crutch. But students who use AI as a collaborative tool can deepen their learning and critical thinking skills. (This [self-assessment](#) by Amelia King can help tell the difference.)

- AI is not neutral. Unlike calculators, which will spit out the same answers no matter which brand you use, each chatbot is different. “They are designed to do more-complex, subjective work like analysis, interpretation, dialogue, and creation,” says Hudson. “The unpredictability of a chatbot is a feature, not a bug.” They vacuum up everything on the internet, which includes countless human choices, biases, and errors.

Chatbots are programmed to be quick and fluent, sound confident and authoritative, and be conversational and eager to please. To be a good user, you need to understand that these features are programmed. Read what AI produces with a critical eye and use prompts to push back and coach it. “I do not let the signals lull me into trusting everything I see,” says Hudson.

- AI is impersonal. GenAI can give objective feedback as you prepare for a presentation or a difficult conversation and think through a new idea. But using a chatbot for friendship, therapy, or romance (which many young people are doing) is problematic. “The bots are untiring ‘listeners,’” says Hudson, “they respond with sympathetic remarks and validating reassurances, and the conversations feel private (even though they are probably not private).”

A few AI tools have been approved for mental health applications, but they’re not widely available and mainstream tools like ChatGPT are fraught with problems. They “would rather comfort you than warn you,” says Hudson. “They would rather keep you talking to them than encourage you to talk to a person. Their default mode is to endorse your ideas, not to question them. Part of being impersonal means that chatbots are not capable of being personally invested in you.”

- AI can help with things you care about. A lot of the discourse about AI in schools has been about cheating, so students may see it mostly as a tool for cutting corners. But there are positive uses, including:

- Fact-checking ideas you hear in class or see on the internet – “You’ll be surprised how quickly and effectively AI helps you get to the truth,” says Hudson.
- Upskilling – Chatbots can help to learn coding, languages, and a wide variety of skills.
- Making your work better – Hudson recommends the “human first/human last” approach, using AI to fine-tune and polish drafts for your final approval.
- Bringing an idea to life – AI can look at a new idea from different angles, make suggestions on a problem, create mockups of designs, and suggest resources.

- AI is an opportunity to make ethical decisions. This includes thinking through questions like *Can an AI be a true friend?* and considering issues of bias, intellectual property, and the environmental impact of AI data centers.

- The world of artificial intelligence is full of bad incentives. When students feel pressured to get good grades and gain admission to a prestigious college, they are tempted to cheat, cut corners, and succumb to the clever blandishments of profit-making companies. Because AI has such a stigma in schools, students go underground with the ways they’re using it, even positive ones. Students will make better choices if the conversation about AI is above board.

- Adults can use students’ help. Surveys show that more than 80 percent of students have used AI for schoolwork, but at least half of teachers aren’t using it at all. Hudson urges educators to talk to students about it, not to catch them cheating but to get their perspective and understand the positive uses. Students have a lot of questions – and a lot to offer a school’s policies and discourse about this brave new world.

- Nothing matters more than nurturing human agency. “In the near future,” says Hudson, “young people will become the stewards of this technology, making large and small decisions

about AI. The question that faces them: how do you want to be human in an AI world.?” We need to help kids steer away from the negative uses, explore the positive possibilities, and always keep humans in the loop.

[“Nine AI Messages for Students”](#) by Eric Hudson in *Learning on Purpose*, December 2, 2025

[Back to page one](#)

3. Using GenAI to Plan for Primary-Grade Intervention Lessons

In *The Reading Teacher*, Amy Walter and Dennis Davis (North Carolina State University) say that in the limited time primary-grade intervention tutors have to prepare for a day’s lessons, they often face an “unmanageable task” – aligning with the school’s intervention program while customizing to meet each child’s needs. “When teachers lack the time or resources to individualize instruction within intervention programs,” say Walter and Davis, “students may receive lessons that are mismatched to their skill levels or disengaging in content, conditions that can compromise reading progress and widen existing literacy gaps.”

The good news is that GenAI can be very helpful generating materials, customizing texts, and refining lessons – building teachers’ skills and confidence as they adapt instruction to meet individual students’ needs. Walter and Davis observed intervention tutors in a university-based school as they used AI to support their decision-making, reducing routine planning tasks and “allowing more space for focused and responsive instructional thinking.”

Here are some ways the tutors used GenAI:

- Generating phonics-pattern word lists – two sample prompts: “Write a list of ten words spelled with *aw* and *au*” and “Give me a list of multisyllabic words with open syllables.” As students progressed, teachers had AI generate increasingly sophisticated word lists.
- Using AI to scan a text and flag words that might pose difficulty for students in terms of phonics features and vocabulary load.
- Creating new texts when no published materials are available for a particular phonics focus or a student’s interests. A sample prompt: “Write a short story about soccer for third graders that uses these words: *rain*, *train*, *paint*, and *play*.”

As tutors used GenAI, they quickly discovered that writing good prompts was the key to getting helpful results – and following up when the output wasn’t quite right. “Prompting became more than a technical skill,” say Walter and Davis; “it emerged as a form of pedagogical reasoning.” Tutors learned how to clearly articulate goals, anticipate potential mismatches, and revise as they went along. One tutor prompted: “I want to do phoneme manipulation with the word *yawn*, taking out sounds and replacing them to create new words. Can you give me five examples?” Tutors also used AI to clarify goals when they weren’t sure what was required.

Tutors found that, over time, GenAI was “another collaborator at the table,” but they always checked what it generated and ultimately relied on their colleagues to make decisions

about what was best for students. “Plan with people, not just tools,” conclude Walter and Davis.

[“Not Magic but Manageable: Generative AI and Instructional Decision-Making in Structured Reading Intervention”](#) by Amy Walter and Dennis Davis in *The Reading Teacher*, January/February 2026 (Vol. 79, #4, pp. 1-34); Walter can be reached at awalter5@ncsu.edu.

[Back to page one](#)

4. Complete Sentences: A Starting Point for Proficient Writing

(Originally titled “The Year of the Sentence”)

“Learning to write is really hard, even harder than reading,” says Pennsylvania ELA supervisor Michele Myers in *Educational Leadership*. “It takes up a lot of cognitive real estate in our students’ minds.” Sizing up her 13-school district’s approach to writing, Myers found the workshop model, which had featured student choice and mini-lessons to address specific needs, wasn’t moving the needle.

When a middle-school teacher said, “No one writes in complete sentences anymore,” that clicked with Myers; sentences seemed like the right place to start. A quick assessment found that only 24 percent of sixth graders could accurately write complete sentences, which meant they weren’t able to express complete thoughts. Her team launched the Year of the Sentence, a district-wide initiative in which everyone was asked to make two commitments:

- Speak and write in complete sentences.
- Whenever possible, support comprehension activities with sentence-level activities.

This proved to be a manageable way of tackling the “too much” problem of improving writing. Some key elements in the district’s initiative, now in its second year:

- *Tracking data* – Three times a year, elementary teachers have students write a short passage on content they’re familiar with, assessed on a 3-point scale (Yes/Developing/No) on handwriting, spelling, correct spacing, capitalization, punctuation, complete sentences, sentence variety, and transitions. Teachers are asked not to “overthink” their scoring and use the data to plan instruction. By May of the first year, 93 percent of students could correctly write fragment-free sentences and 69 percent were writing run-on-free sentences. In the second year, grade 7-12 teachers are using a similar system.

- *Supervision and support* – The role of principals encouraging and supporting the Year of the Sentence was crucial. Myers and her team provided a set of classroom “look-fors” and conversation starters and sentence stems that supervisors could use to be good observers during observations and follow up effectively with teachers.

- *Working around the textbook* – As the initiative progressed, it became clear that some components of the district’s ELA textbook didn’t align with the new grade-by-grade skill sequence. Myers and her team found and created better instruction and assessment tasks for teachers to use.

- *Training and support* – Lead teachers and department leaders were trained on sentence-level activities and assessments and proved to be more credible and effective providing PD for their colleagues than outside experts.

- *Next steps* – Grade K-2 teachers have now launched into the Year of Handwriting, and grades 3-12 are tackling the Year of the Mighty Paragraph, leveraging their knowledge of sentences to get students writing coherent paragraphs across subject areas.

[“The Year of the Sentence”](#) by Michele Myers in *Educational Leadership*, December 2025/January 2026 (Vol. 83, #4, pp. 36-41)

[Back to page one](#)

5. The Case for Students Memorizing Key Facts – and How They Can Do It

In this online article, Dave Stuart Jr. says there is basic information – “sets of knowns” – that students need to remember even if they can *just Google it*. “How can we expect them to create complex thoughts,” he asks, “experience intellectual breakthroughs, or even gain basic comprehension of course concepts, if we’ve not gifted them with a chance to commit foundational knowledge to memory?” He urges teachers to identify essential knowledge in their subject area and guide students to memorize it over time. Some examples:

- For writing, rules for usage;
- For world history, dates of significant events and geographic locations;
- For U.S. history, questions from the U.S. citizenship test or key dates and locations;
- For a course on computer applications, keyboard shortcuts.

In Stuart’s 9th-grade AP world history classes, he has students learn 120 items. A sampling:

- 1776 – American Declaration of Independence, Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*
- 1791 – Olympe de Gouges’ Declaration of the Rights of Women
- 1804 – The Haitian Revolution
- 1815 – Congress of Vienna – Europe’s “balance of power” established
- 1839 – First Opium War in China, declining Qing dominance
- 1848 – Marx and Engels publish *The Communist Manifesto*
- 1861 – The end of serfdom in Russia
- 1863 – The US Emancipation Proclamation

Here’s a 15-minute exercise that Stuart does every year before he begins to present his list of facts to be remembered. Students get out their notebooks and write about 100 words in response to these questions:

- *Are you the kind of person who can memorize a list of dates?*
- *How do you know?*
- *What kinds of things in your life do you memorize, and how do you do that?*

He asks students to pair/share for five minutes and then has them get out a blank sheet of paper and leads them through these steps:

- He projects five dates with events and asks students to copy them down, mentioning that in a minute, they'll have to write them from memory.
- Students cover their lists and on another paper, try to retrieve them from memory (the projector is off).
- Using the first (copied) list, students correct their retrieval attempt, giving themselves a point for every date and a point for every event they remembered correctly.
- Students then cover the first two lists and try again to write the dates and events.
- They uncover the first two lists and make corrections to list #3, scoring their effort.
- Even if they got a perfect score on the third attempt, they retrieve the information once more.

Students then get out their notebooks, turn to their earlier jottings about memorization, and write a response to these prompts:

- *Are you the kind of person who can memorize dates?*
- *What do you do to memorize information like this?*
- *How long does it take?*
- *How hard is this?*

Students discuss what they learned from the exercise, and Stuart shares his rationale for what they'll be committing to memory that year: "This date memorization stuff," he says, "is one pillar of the year-long feast of knowledge we're seeking to enjoy together." It doesn't matter that they can quickly find information online, he continues. Knowledge is inextricable from all the other things they'll be doing – critical thinking, analysis, writing, discussion. And what's more, there's a lot of joy in this old-fashioned idea of building knowledge.

Embedded in this exercise and what follows during the rest of the school year are several key insights:

- Kids know that he can help them do things they didn't think they could do.
- Memorizing is an important skill – for school and for life.
- They'll only memorize information that's meaningful and important.
- With the right approach, remembering things is quick and straightforward.
- It does require effort on their part – the right kind of effort, one step at a time.
- Students see themselves as able to do the work he'll ask them to do.

["Teach Students to Memorize Sets of Knowns"](#) by Dave Stuart Jr., December 2, 2025; Stuart can be reached at dave@davestuartjr.com.

[Back to page one](#)

6. What We Capture – and Lose – with All the Photos and Videos We Take

In this article in *National Geographic*, Emma Magnus says it's great that we now have so many easy-to-access digital images – kids' birthday parties, vacation trips, family gatherings, weddings, selfies. With our smartphones always within reach, we're capturing more of our lives than any previous generation; one woman estimates she has about 150,000 pictures in the cloud.

This plethora of images may be affecting our “autobiographical memory,” says Magnus, which “is central to how we understand ourselves” – a mental reservoir to which we refer when we think about our lives. Photos and videos can help with reconstructing our life story, jogging our memory about details and emotions we might otherwise forget. Remembering is an interaction of what we actually recall and all the images we’ve off-loaded onto hard drives, smartphones, and social media.

All of this reduces the cognitive load of trying to remember everything, but it may also weaken our ability to recall details unless we look at those images. “As a result,” says Magnus, “when we turn to digital images to reconstruct an event, those files don’t just support our memory. They feed back into it, becoming part of it and subtly altering it... They’re shaping which moments we remember, how vividly, and how well we interpret our personal histories.” There are also photos we delete – snapshots of an ex, a bad night out – and those are deleted from our mental hard drive as well (except for those that refuse to leave).

There’s another wrinkle to our prodigious picture-taking: relying on a camera to capture an event can detract from appreciating the moment, in the same way that concentrating on filming a concert can reduce our enjoyment of the music. And what if we never look at the thousands of photos and videos we’ve taken? Most people don’t review and organize their digital material because it’s overwhelming, so there’s a double loss – being less present in the moment, and then not revisiting the images we’ve taken.

“Of course, outsourcing our memories to technology is nothing new,” says Magnus. “Human civilization is built on technology created to preserve and export what’s in our heads: Instagram, floppy disks, the printing press, even language itself. But tech is temporary. Hard drives will fail and social media companies will fall, and while that may not make them worth avoiding, today’s memory repositories have so much capacity – and are so integrated into our lives – that we stand to lose more when they inevitably fail.” Does that mean that if our phone is stolen or left behind in an Uber and there’s no backup, part of our brain is gone?

“Many of us have conditioned ourselves to instantaneously, almost unconsciously, rely on our phones to capture moments,” Magnus concludes. “Capture the highlights all you want, but remember that the moments that shape you may not be the ones on your camera roll.”

“Are We Reaching Photo Overload?” by Emma Magnus in *National Geographic*, December 2025 (Vol. 248, #6, pp. 96-99)

[Back to page one](#)

7. Think, Ink, Pair, Share

This *Edutopia* article and video suggest an extra step in the common Think/Pair/Share strategy. After a teacher poses a question to a class and invites all students to think about it, students *write* about it, then talk with another student, and finally take part in a whole-class discussion. “We know from cognitive science that whenever a student writes as they are thinking through an idea,” says Jim Heal (Learning Science Partners), “they are likely to process it more deeply. And therefore they will have more chance of encoding and remembering that information in the future.”

Writing before chatting with another student also improves the thoughtfulness and depth of small-group conversations, and amps up the full-class discussion that follows.

[“Bolstering Effortful Thinking with Think, Ink, Pair, Share”](#) in *Edutopia*, December 3, 2025

[Back to page one](#)

8. Supporting Middle- and High-School Students Who Read Below Level

In *Education Week*, Sarah Schwartz reports on key practices in secondary schools to support students who are struggling with foundational literacy skills. Key components:

- Build time into the schedule for reading intervention classes.
- Give classes a name that’s not stigmatizing, e.g., “Advanced Word Study” in Boston.
- Diagnose students’ needs – e.g., decoding polysyllabic words, vocabulary, stamina.
- Use age-appropriate reading materials.
- Get all teachers working on key literacy skills – e.g., “paragraph shrinking.”

[“Many Teens Lack Basic Reading Skills, These Teachers Are Trying to Change That”](#) by Sarah Schwartz in *Education Week*, December 4, 2025

[Back to page one](#)

© Copyright 2025 Marshall Memo LLC, all rights reserved; permission is granted to clip and share individual article summaries with colleagues for educational purposes, being sure to include the author/publication citation and mention that it’s a Marshall Memo summary.

If you have feedback or suggestions, please e-mail kim.marshall48@gmail.com

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and other educators very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 54 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 60 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers early Tuesday (there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTML version. Artificial intelligence is not used.

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are \$50 for a year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and how to pay by check, credit card, or purchase order.

Website:

If you go to <http://www.marshallmemo.com> you will find detailed information on:

- How to subscribe or renew
- A detailed rationale for the Marshall Memo
- Article selection criteria
- Publications (with a count of articles from each)
- Topics (with a count of articles from each)
- Headlines for all issues
- Reader opinions
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- A free sample issue

Subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in Word or PDF)
- All back issues (Word and PDF) and podcasts
- An easily searchable archive of all articles so far
- The "classic" articles from all 20 years

Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD SmartBrief
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Ed Magazine
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Exceptional Children
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Kappan (Phi Delta Kappan)
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Language Magazine
Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance)
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Principal
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Urban Education