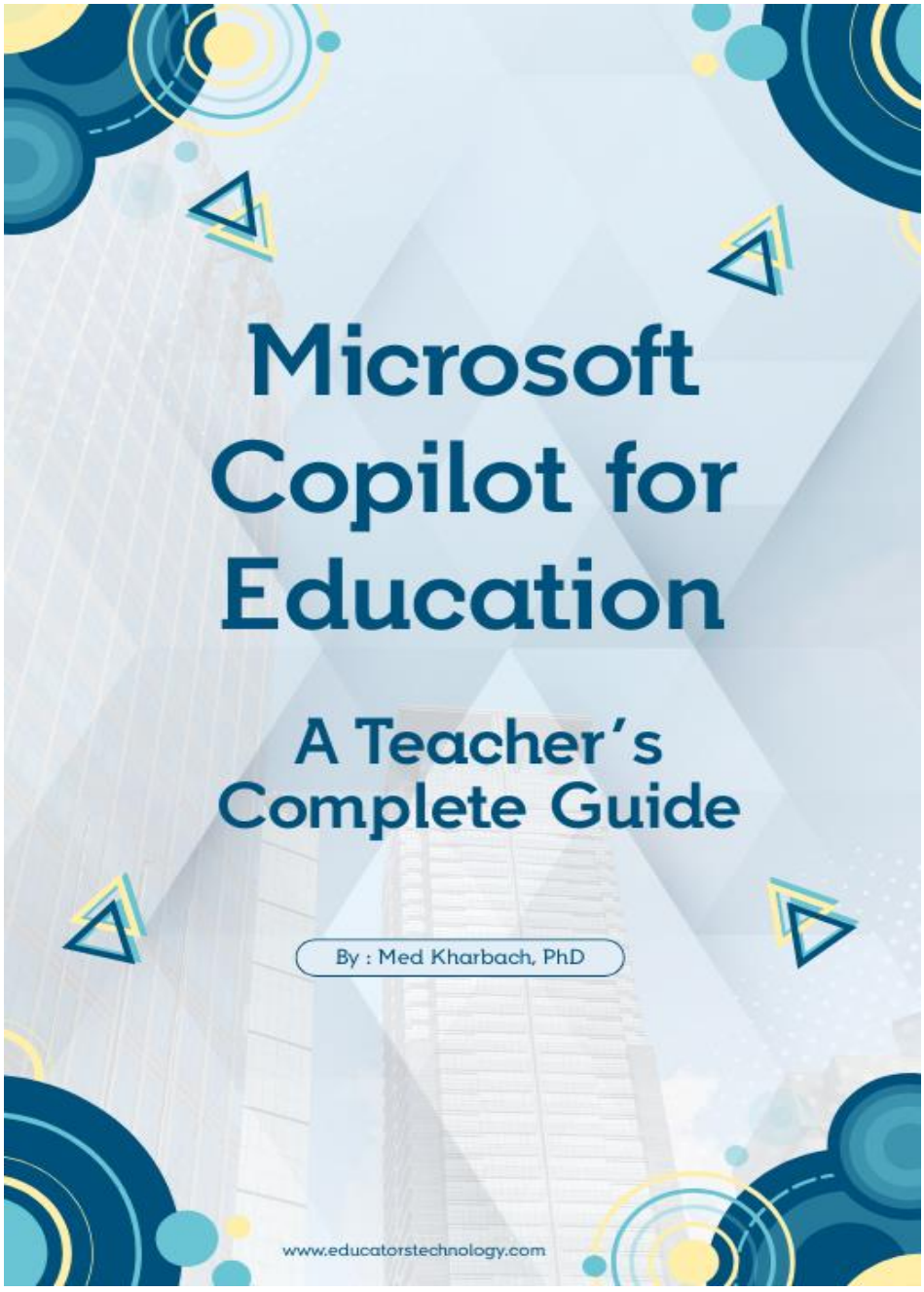
Microsoft
Copilot for
Education
A Teacher's
Complete Guide
By : Med Kharbach, PhD
www.educatorstechnology.com

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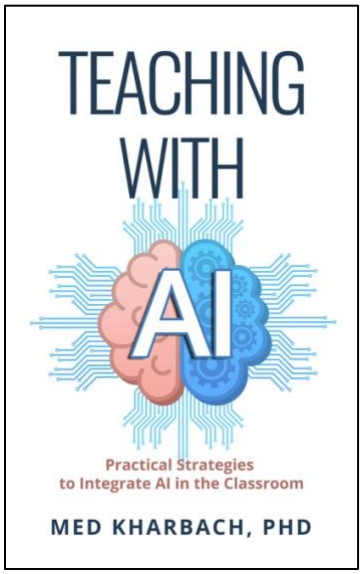
Teaching with AI

Practical Strategies to Integrate AI in The Classroom

In Teaching with AI, I speak directly to you as a teacher working through real classroom questions about AI. The book helps you build strong AI literacy so you understand how these systems work, where they help, and where caution is needed. I share concrete classroom strategies, examples drawn from practice, and ways to align AI use with sound pedagogy and professional judgment. My goal is to support you in using AI thoughtfully as part of your teaching, in ways that deepen learning and keep human expertise at the center.

Grab your copy here.



Introduction

Microsoft Copilot for Education is an AI assistant now embedded across the entire Microsoft 365 suite, and it's expanding fast. At BETT 2026, Microsoft announced 18 major updates spanning Copilot, Teams, Learning Accelerators, and Minecraft Education. For the millions of teachers and students already using Microsoft 365, that means AI is showing up inside the apps they open every morning, often without a new login or subscription required.

Image credit: Microsoft.com

I'll be upfront: I have mixed feelings about Copilot. I've tested the education features, explored the Teach module, and walked away unconvinced that it's the strongest AI option for teachers right now. But I also recognize that many educators are already using it or being told by their districts to start. So, I put this guide together. I did it because teachers encountering Copilot deserve a clear, practical walkthrough of what it actually does, what it costs, where it falls short, and how it

compares to Google's Gemini. If your school runs Microsoft 365, this guide tells you what you're working with.

What Is Microsoft Copilot for Education?

Copilot for Education is an AI layer that works across Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Teams, Outlook, OneNote, Forms, and Whiteboard. It handles lesson planning, content drafting, assessment creation, email communication, and student data analysis, all from within apps teachers already use daily.

The education version differs from the regular consumer Copilot in a few key ways. It operates under FERPA and COPPA compliance, which means student data gets specific legal protections. It includes education-only features like the Teach module and Learning Accelerators that you won't find in the business or personal editions. And it plugs into school IT systems through School Data Sync and Education Insights, giving administrators a window into how AI is being used across the institution.

For schools already running Microsoft 365, there's no new platform to adopt. Copilot shows up inside familiar tools, which lowers the adoption barrier compared to standalone AI platforms like ChatGPT or Claude. That said, convenience and quality are two different things. The integration is real, but it comes with trade-offs I'll get into later.

The Teach Feature: Copilot's Education Hub

The Teach feature launched in October 2025 and has been rolling out through early 2026. Microsoft is positioning it as the centerpiece of Copilot's education strategy: a

single interface inside the Microsoft 365 Copilot app that brings lesson planning, resource creation, differentiation, and assessment tools under one roof.

The workflow is straightforward. You type in a topic and grade level, and Teach generates a standards-aligned lesson plan. It supports standards from over 35 countries, so it works for educators outside the U.S. too. From there, you can adjust reading level, change the tone or difficulty, add real-world examples, and differentiate materials for diverse learners, all through prompts within the same interface.

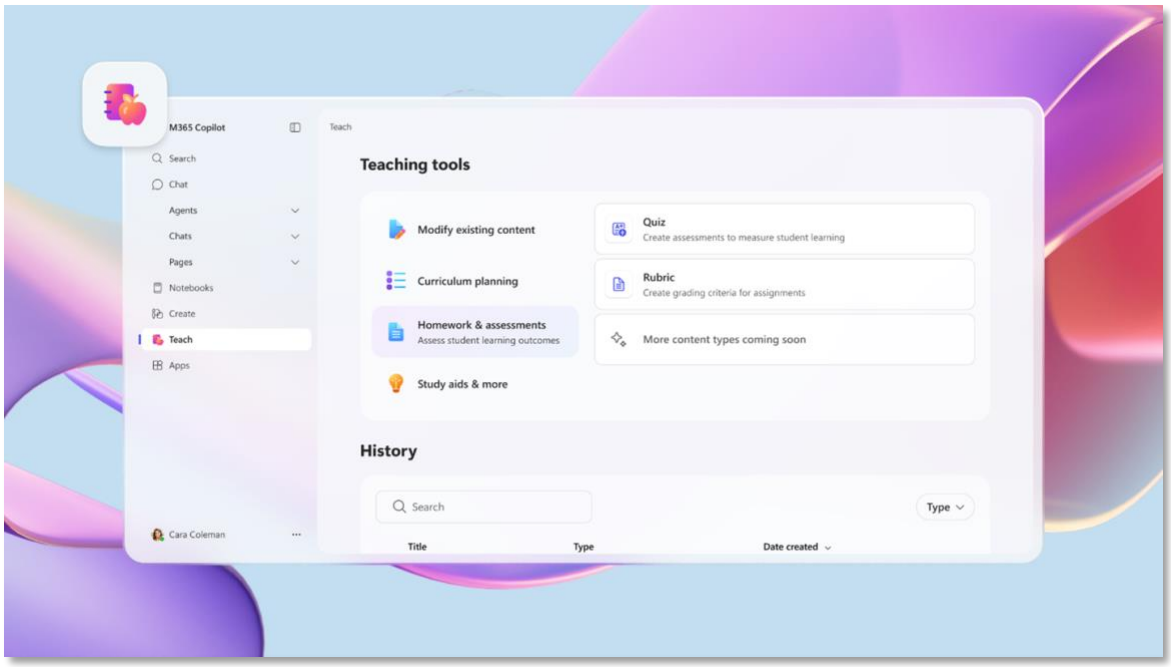


Image credit: Microsoft.com

Assessment creation follows the same logic. Teach drafts quizzes and rubrics based on your learning objectives, and you customize them before sending them out. The early deployment numbers are encouraging. Brisbane Catholic Education found that educators saved over 9 hours per week on admin and planning. At the University of South Carolina, 84% of users reported saving one to five hours weekly. Worth noting: both are Microsoft-highlighted success stories, so your mileage may vary.

Now, here's where I'd pump the brakes a bit. Early educator feedback on Teach has been uneven. Several teachers have pointed out that the generated lesson plans lean heavily toward descriptive, expository formats. They position students as passive receivers of information, which is the opposite of what experienced educators aim for. If you value inquiry-driven, student-centered instruction, you'll likely need to do significant reworking after Copilot hands you a draft. The tool is fast, yes. But fast and pedagogically strong aren't always the same thing.

A Spring 2026 update will embed Copilot directly inside learning management systems, which means teachers should be able to create content within their LMS courses without jumping between platforms. That's a genuine workflow improvement worth watching.

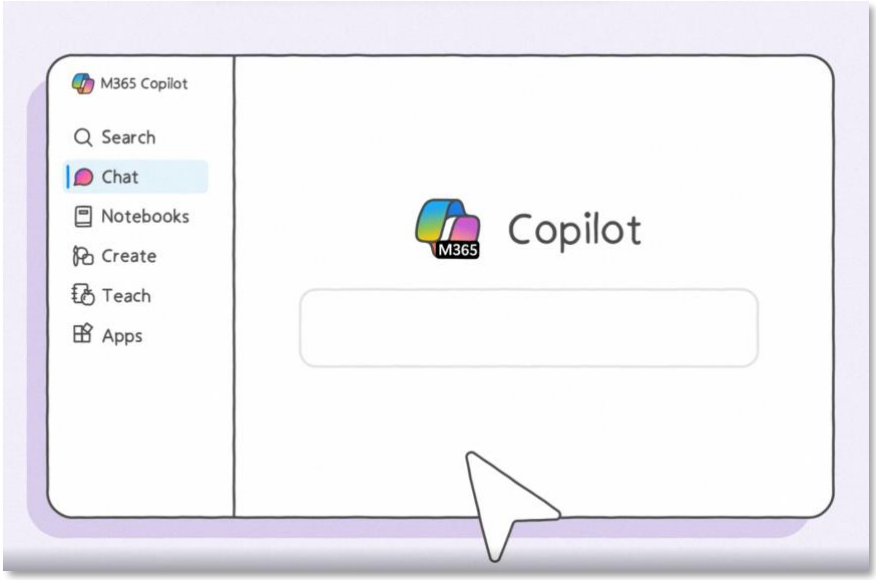


Image credit: Microsoft.com

Copilot Across Microsoft 365: Tool by Tool

Copilot works differently depending on which app you're in. Some integrations are genuinely useful for teachers; others feel more like they were designed for corporate users and repurposed for education. Here's a quick-reference table, followed by a closer look at the highlights.

App	What It Does for Teachers	Standout Feature	Watch Out For
Word	Drafts lesson materials, handouts, worksheets, class documents	Agent mode creates full documents from a single prompt, pulling from your OneDrive files	Output tends to be generic; you'll spend time customizing
PowerPoint	Generates slide decks from prompts, outlines, or existing docs	View-only mode lets students ask questions about slides they can read but can't edit	Slide design quality is hit-or-miss
Excel	Analyzes student data, builds grade books, generates performance reports	Agent mode creates visualizations from assessment data and identifies trends	Requires clean, structured data to work well
Teams	Meeting summaries, transcription, student support alerts	AI-powered student support cards flag students who may need attention	Useful only if your school runs classes through Teams
Outlook	Drafts and manages email, especially parent correspondence	Mobile voice feature summarizes unread emails hands-free	Drafts can sound overly formal or generic
OneNote	Organizes notes, summarizes student submissions, retrieves info	Cross-notebook search and summarization	Limited compared to Copilot in other apps
Forms	Quiz and assessment creation from learning objectives	Generates questions from existing content or objectives	Still needs teacher review for accuracy and alignment
Whiteboard	Collaborative visual activities, AI brainstorming	Supports real-time class brainstorming sessions	More of a nice-to-have than essential

Agent mode in Word, which started rolling out in early 2026, is probably the most teacher-relevant upgrade. You give it a single prompt, and it builds a complete document by pulling relevant content from files you've already saved in OneDrive. If you've built up a library of past lesson plans and worksheets, this feature can actually save real time.

The **PowerPoint view-only mode** is a small but clever addition. Students who can only view a presentation can still ask Copilot to summarize specific slides or clarify content. For teachers who share decks as study resources, that's a practical use case.

Teams integration is where things get interesting if your school already uses it for class management. The AI-powered student support cards pull data from Education Insights and flag students whose activity patterns have changed, with specific talking points for follow-up conversations. That's a feature with real classroom value, though it depends entirely on how much your school actually uses Teams.

Excel's agent mode (available on the web since late 2025, desktop since January 2026) can handle tasks like building visualizations from assessment data and formatting reports for parent conferences. Useful for data-oriented teachers, but it struggles with messy or inconsistently formatted spreadsheets.

Learning Accelerators: AI for Student Skills

Beyond Copilot itself, Microsoft offers a set of Learning Accelerators that use AI to target specific student skills. These tools connect to Education Insights, so teachers get a unified view of progress across the board.

Reading Coach is probably the most polished of the bunch. Students pick a character, setting, and reading level, and the AI generates interactive stories where they choose what happens next. As they read aloud, the tool gives real-time feedback

on fluency. They earn achievements and unlock new story elements, which turns reading practice into something kids actually want to do. For elementary teachers especially, this one has genuine classroom value.

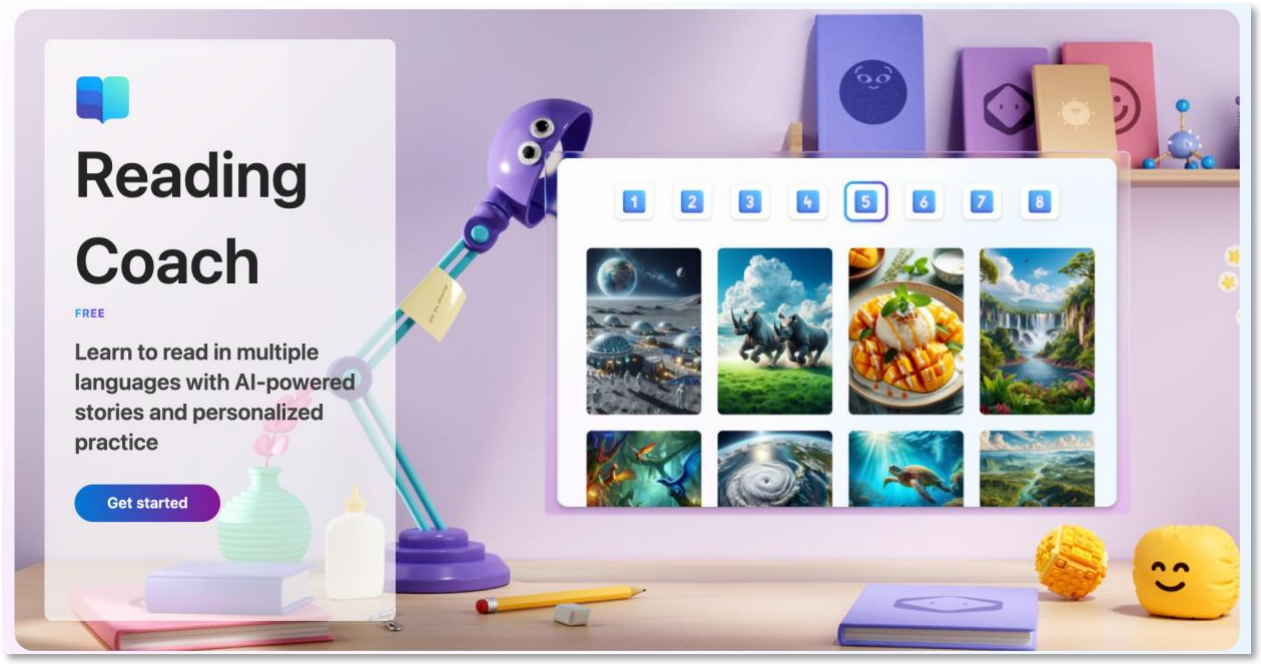


Image credit: Microsoft.com

Reading Progress tracks reading skills over time and identifies specific areas where individual students need focus. The AI personalizes the learning path, but teachers keep full control over instructional decisions. It's Reading Coach's data-driven companion.

Search Coach teaches students how to research effectively, with AI-guided search practice. In an era where AI itself makes evaluating information quality harder, teaching students to search well feels more urgent than ever. This one is underused, in my opinion.

Speaker Coach (also called Speaker Progress) gives real-time feedback on presentations: pace, pitch, filler words, body language. It works in both Teams and PowerPoint and offers personalized tips as students practice. Useful for older students preparing presentations or public speaking assignments.

Education Insights and Student Wellbeing

Education Insights pulls data from Learning Accelerators, Teams activity, and other tools into one dashboard. The AI-powered student support spotlight cards automatically flag students whose engagement patterns have shifted, and they provide specific talking points based on those changes. For teachers juggling 30+ students, that kind of automated heads-up can be genuinely helpful.

Source: Microsoft.com

Microsoft Reflect adds a social-emotional layer. Students share how they're feeling, and the tool tracks emotional wellbeing trends at the individual, class, grade, school,

and district levels. A new Microsoft Graph API for Reflect lets districts centralize SEL data for strategy development and targeted professional development. Whether your school prioritizes SEL data or treats it as secondary, the tool is there if you want it.

Image credit: Microsoft.com

For administrators, School Data Sync connects Student Information System data to provision Microsoft 365 accounts and generate richer reports. Azure Data Export allows exporting data to Azure or third-party stores for deeper analysis. Most classroom teachers won't touch these features directly, but they power the dashboards and insights you'll see on your end.

Building AI Skills: Minecraft Education and Microsoft Elevate

Minecraft Education and AI Literacy

For K–8 classrooms, Minecraft Education is Microsoft's vehicle for teaching AI concepts in ways that actually make sense to younger learners. The AI Foundations curriculum, aligned with UNESCO, OECD, and TeachAI frameworks, includes classroom-ready worlds like Fantastic Fairgrounds, CyberSafe AI: Dig Deeper, and Reed Smart: AI Detective. Students explore ethical dilemmas, data use, and AI decision-making through gameplay.

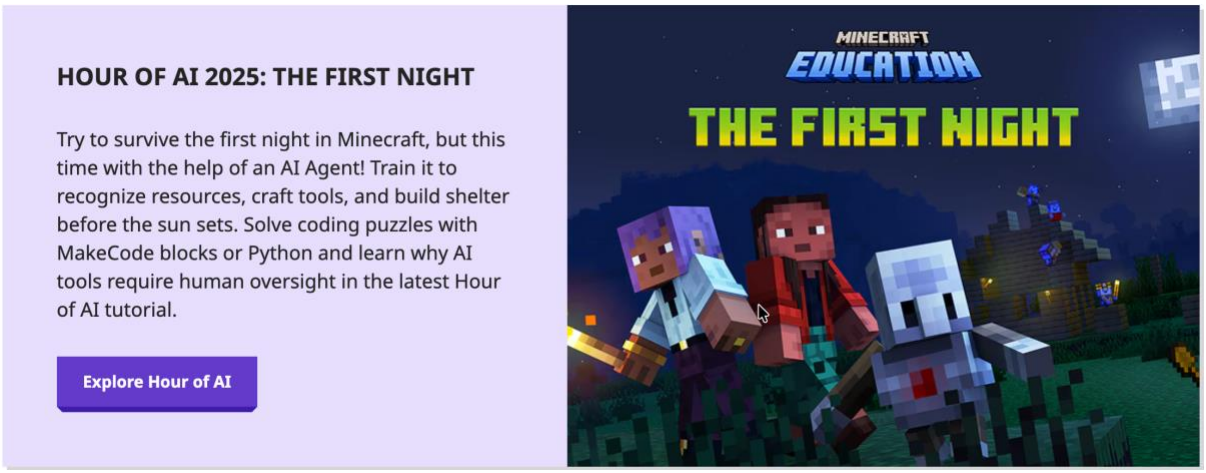


Image credit: education.minecraft.net

The Code Builder feature is where it gets more interesting. Students can teach AI agents using MakeCode (block-based coding), Python, or JavaScript to recognize patterns, classify resources, and coordinate tasks. That mirrors how real AI systems work, wrapped in a format kids already enjoy. I'll admit, this is one area where Microsoft's approach is genuinely creative.

New for 2026: teachers can use Copilot to create Minecraft Education lesson plans (preview launched February 2026) and unit plans (coming Spring 2026). An Hour of AI partnership with Code.org turns AI learning into interactive gameplay. For

elementary and middle school teachers trying to introduce AI concepts without a computer science background, these resources are a solid starting point.

Microsoft Elevate for Educators

Launched in January 2026, Elevate is Microsoft's professional development program combining community, training, and credentialing for educators learning to use AI. It includes year-round communities with expanded training, a progressive achievement system, and a mix of self-paced courses, live sessions, and AI-powered simulations. Everything is available globally in 13+ languages through the AI Skills Navigator.

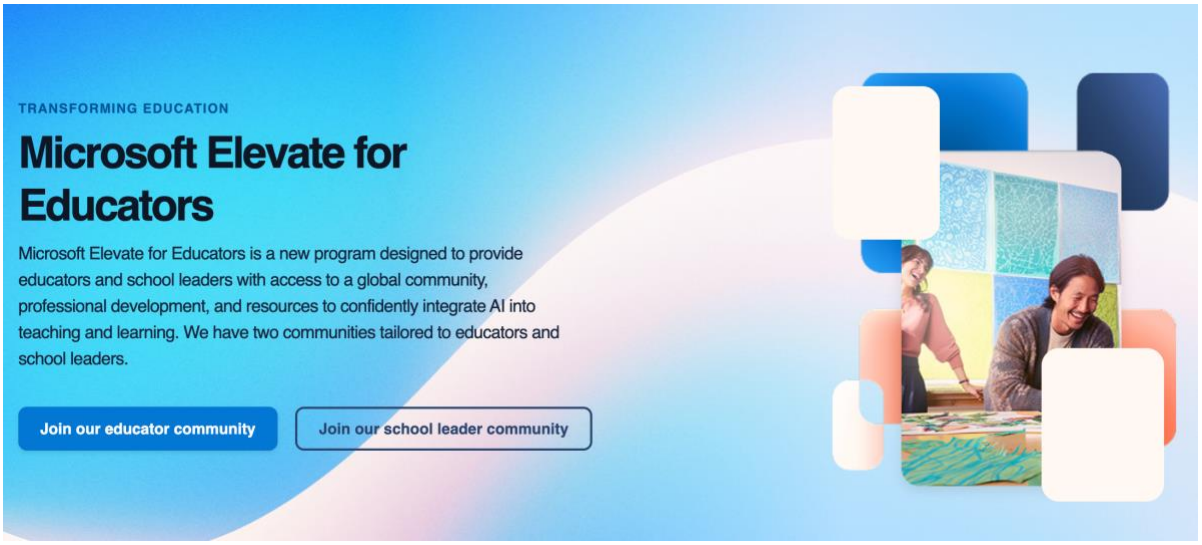


Image credit: https://elevateforeducators.microsoft.com/

Starting May 2026, a free Microsoft Elevate for Educators credential will be available, developed with ISTE and ASCD and aligned to the AI Literacy Framework. For teachers who want formal recognition of their AI skills, it's worth keeping on the radar.

Microsoft also co-funded the National Academy for AI Instruction alongside OpenAI and Anthropic, a $23 million initiative that launched in fall 2025 in New

York City. The academy trains teachers on using AI for lesson planning, assessment, and parent communication. It's a significant investment, though its reach is still limited to specific locations.

Pricing and Licensing

Microsoft 365 Education uses a tiered system. The good news: the free tier covers more than you'd expect. The bad news: full Copilot access across all apps gets expensive fast when you're buying for an entire district.

Tier	Cost	What's Included	Copilot Access
A1 (Free)	$0	Core M365 web apps, Teach module, Learning Accelerators	Copilot Chat (free)
A3 (Paid)	Per-user license	Everything in A1 + desktop apps, advanced security, management tools	Copilot Chat free; full Copilot as paid add-on
A5 (Premium)	Per-user license	Everything in A3 + enhanced analytics, reporting, security	Full Copilot included
Copilot Add-on	$18/user/month	Full in-app Copilot across Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, Teams	Full Copilot (for A3 schools)

A few things to note. The free A1 tier gives teachers access to Copilot Chat, the Teach module, and all Learning Accelerators. For many teachers, that's enough. You can plan lessons, generate quizzes, and use Reading Coach without paying anything extra.

The $18/user/month add-on (reduced from $21 in December 2025) is where you get full Copilot embedded inside Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and the rest. That's a meaningful budget line for districts. Brisbane Catholic Education reported that educators saved 9+ hours per week with full Copilot access, which suggests strong

return on investment for schools that commit. But those are numbers from one deployment, and every school's experience will vary.

Worth noting: Microsoft has announced price increases across Microsoft 365 starting July 2026. Schools considering adoption may want to lock in current rates before that kicks in.

Privacy and Data Safety: What Teachers Need to Know

You don't need to understand every legal detail here, but you should know the basics of how your students' data is handled.

Microsoft operates as a "school official" under FERPA, which means it follows federal student privacy rules. The company states it doesn't scan school emails or documents for advertising, and student data is used only to deliver the service.

For younger students, COPPA applies. Schools can authorize Copilot on behalf of parents, but the school is responsible for informing families about how data is collected. Updated COPPA rules taking full effect by April 22, 2026 are stricter: they require stronger consent verification and explicit parental permission before sharing data with third parties. If your school hasn't reviewed its data agreements with Microsoft recently, now is the time.

The practical takeaway for teachers: your prompts and the content Copilot generates are processed through Microsoft's systems. Be thoughtful about what student information you include in prompts. If you're asking Copilot to analyze student performance data, make sure your school has proper data processing agreements in place.

Limitations Teachers Should Know

I've hinted at some of these throughout the guide, but they deserve a dedicated section. No tool is perfect, and Copilot has real gaps that teachers should go in with eyes open about.

Lesson plans skew passive. The Teach feature generates content quickly, but it tends toward descriptive, expository formats. Students receive information; they don't actively investigate, question, or create. If your teaching philosophy leans toward inquiry-based or project-based learning, you'll find yourself reworking most of what Copilot produces.

Customization has a ceiling. You can adjust reading level and difficulty after generation, but restructuring the pedagogical approach of a lesson plan is harder inside Teach than it would be working with a general-purpose AI chatbot where you can iterate through open conversation.

Accuracy is uneven. Copilot displays a "Check for mistakes" warning for good reason. Generated content, particularly in math and fact-based subjects, can contain errors. Always review everything before it reaches students.

Bias shows up in outputs. Early versions showed limitations with biased image generation and responses on sensitive topics like race and economic class. Microsoft keeps working on this, but teachers should critically evaluate AI outputs, especially when working with diverse student populations.

Security depends on setup. Misconfigured permissions could surface files or emails that certain users shouldn't see. If your school's IT team hasn't set up Copilot permissions carefully, broad prompts could pull sensitive student data into unexpected places.

Cost scales fast. The free A1 tier covers the basics, but full Copilot at $18/user/month adds up quickly at the district level. Schools need to think carefully

about which educators genuinely need the full experience versus those who'd do fine with Copilot Chat alone.

How Copilot Compares to Google Gemini

For schools choosing between ecosystems, the decision usually comes down to which platform you already use. But there are real differences worth knowing about.

Feature	Microsoft Copilot	Google Gemini
Core Integration	Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Teams, Outlook, OneNote, Forms, Whiteboard	Google Docs, Sheets, Slides, Gmail, Classroom, Meet
Free AI Access	Copilot Chat free with A1 tier; full Copilot requires paid add-on	Core AI features free with Education Fundamentals
Lesson Planning	Teach module with standards from 35+ countries	Gemini in Classroom (rolling out)
Student-Facing AI	View-only Copilot in PowerPoint; Learning Accelerators	Gemini side panel in Docs, Sheets, Slides
Reading/Literacy Tools	Reading Coach, Reading Progress, Search Coach	Read Along (limited integration)
Presentation Skills	Speaker Coach with real-time feedback	No direct equivalent
Data Analysis	Excel agent mode with visualizations	Sheets with Gemini assistance
LMS Integration	Coming Spring 2026 (direct LMS embedding)	Native Google Classroom integration
Context Window	Standard	Larger context window for research tasks
Student Wellbeing	Microsoft Reflect + Education Insights	No direct equivalent
AI Literacy Curriculum	Minecraft Education + Code.org partnership	CS First + AI-related modules
Privacy Framework	FERPA, COPPA compliant	FERPA, COPPA compliant
Cost for Full AI	$18/user/month add-on	Free with Education Fundamentals

The short version: Microsoft's advantage is breadth. The ecosystem is massive: Teams, OneNote, Education Insights, Minecraft Education, Learning Accelerators, Speaker Coach. If your school already lives inside Microsoft 365, there's a lot to work with.

Google's advantage is simplicity and cost. Gemini's core education features come free with Education Fundamentals, and Google Classroom integration is native and mature. For schools that run on Google Workspace, the AI experience feels more seamless and less like an add-on bolted to existing tools.

My honest read? If you're a Google school, there's little reason to switch ecosystems for Copilot. If you're a Microsoft school, the free A1 tier gives you enough to explore whether the AI features add real value to your workflow before committing budget to the full add-on. And if your district is still deciding between platforms, cost and existing infrastructure should drive that conversation more than any AI feature comparison.

About the Author

Med Kharbach, PhD, is an educator, researcher, and the editor of Educators Technology (educatorstechnology.com). A former K-12 teacher with over a decade of classroom experience, Med currently serves as part-time faculty at Mount Saint Vincent University. He is the author of Teaching with AI: Practical Strategies to Integrate AI in The Classroom, and co-author of The AI Turn in Academic Research with Dr. Jonathan Woodworth. His work focuses on the intersection of technology, pedagogy, and practical classroom applications. You can read more about Med and his research on his professional website www.medkharbach.com.