



5 NFL teams bounced from top 10

SPORTS, 1B

THE ITHACA JOURNAL

ITHACAJOURNAL.COM | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2025

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Rapid technological shift adds wrinkle for already-strained educators



Turning to AI for help writing lesson plans and assessments not only saves time, but it also gives teachers a tool for brainstorming ideas, helping them feel less isolated in their work. PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

AI could worsen school inequalities

Katie Davis and Aayushi Dangol
University of Washington
THE CONVERSATION

Today's teachers find themselves thrust into a difficult position with generative AI. New tools are coming online at a blistering pace and being adopted just as quickly, whether they're personalized tutors and study buddies for students or lesson plan generators and assignment graders for teachers. Schools are traditionally slow to adapt to change, which makes such rapid-fire developments especially destabilizing. The uncertainties accompanying the artificial intelligence onslaught come amid existing challenges the teaching profession has faced for years. Teachers have been working with increasingly scarce resources – and even scarcer time – while facing mounting expectations not only for their students'



How teachers end up using, or not using, AI to support their teaching – and their students' learning – may determine whether AI's use in schools narrows or widens existing equity gaps.

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2025 HEAP application window opens

Emily Barnes
New York Connect Team
USA TODAY NETWORK

New Yorkers can finally apply for this year's Home Energy Assistance Program, or HEAP, benefits as the application window opened on Dec. 1 – a month later than in years past. If you heat your home with electricity, natural gas, oil, coal, propane, wood or wood pellets, kerosene or corn, HEAP can help you heat and cool your home by providing up to \$996 in benefits. Emergency HEAP can help you heat your home if you are in a heat-related emergency. The benefits are based on your income, available resources and the type of emergency. Applications for this program open Jan. 2, 2026.

Why was the HEAP application window opening delayed this year? Since the program is federally funded, the historic 43-day federal government shutdown that ended last month postponed the application period. "As temperatures have already begun to drop, it's disgraceful that the federal government took so long to provide federal funding for critical heating assistance for families across the state," Gov. Kathy Hochul said in a written statement. "Hardworking New Yorkers count on this assistance to help with their utility bills and keep their homes warm during the cold winter months..." According to Hochul, over 1.5 million New York households received regular HEAP benefits in 2024.

Who qualifies for HEAP?

Your eligibility and benefits depend on your income, household size, primary heating source and if there's a member of your household who is under age 6, over age 60 or permanently disabled. You may be eligible if:

- A member of your household is a U.S. citizen or qualified non-citizen
- Your household's gross monthly income is at or below the current income guides for your household size. For example, a family of four must make at or below \$6,390 to qualify.
- You receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits
- You receive Temporary Assistance (TA)

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Ithaca Trader Joe's scores well in safety grades

Thomas C. Zambito
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USA TODAY NETWORK

Trader Joe's grocery stores in New York tallied dozens of A grades during state food safety inspections over the past two years. The California-based chain earned 48 A grades after surprise visits to stores from Long Island to Buffalo by inspectors with the state Department of

Agriculture and Markets. But state inspectors view anything less than an A as a failing grade. And Trader Joe's had seven Bs at stores in Buffalo, Brooklyn, New York City and Long Island for violations that could be fixed on the same day. Among the B violations were shelves with old food debris and a live fly in a retail area. The chain also had two stores in the Finger Lakes and Hudson Valley that received C's – which are

considered a critical deficiency that requires a second, unannounced visit. In Ithaca, the store received two A grades during visits in 2023 and 2024. The store opened in 2021 and is located in the retail plaza at 744 S. Meadow St. **Which Trader Joe's stores earned C grades?** The most serious violations – C grades – came at stores in Scarsdale in

March 2025 and in Rochester the same month. At both stores, inspectors found mouse droppings on shelves. At the Scarsdale store, there were rodent gnaw marks on bags of chips and in Rochester rodent activity on a bag of flavored almonds. The Scarsdale store received an A during a follow-up visit on Aug. 28, 2025. It's unclear what grade the **See TRADER JOE'S**, Page 2A

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Volume 210 | No. 300
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