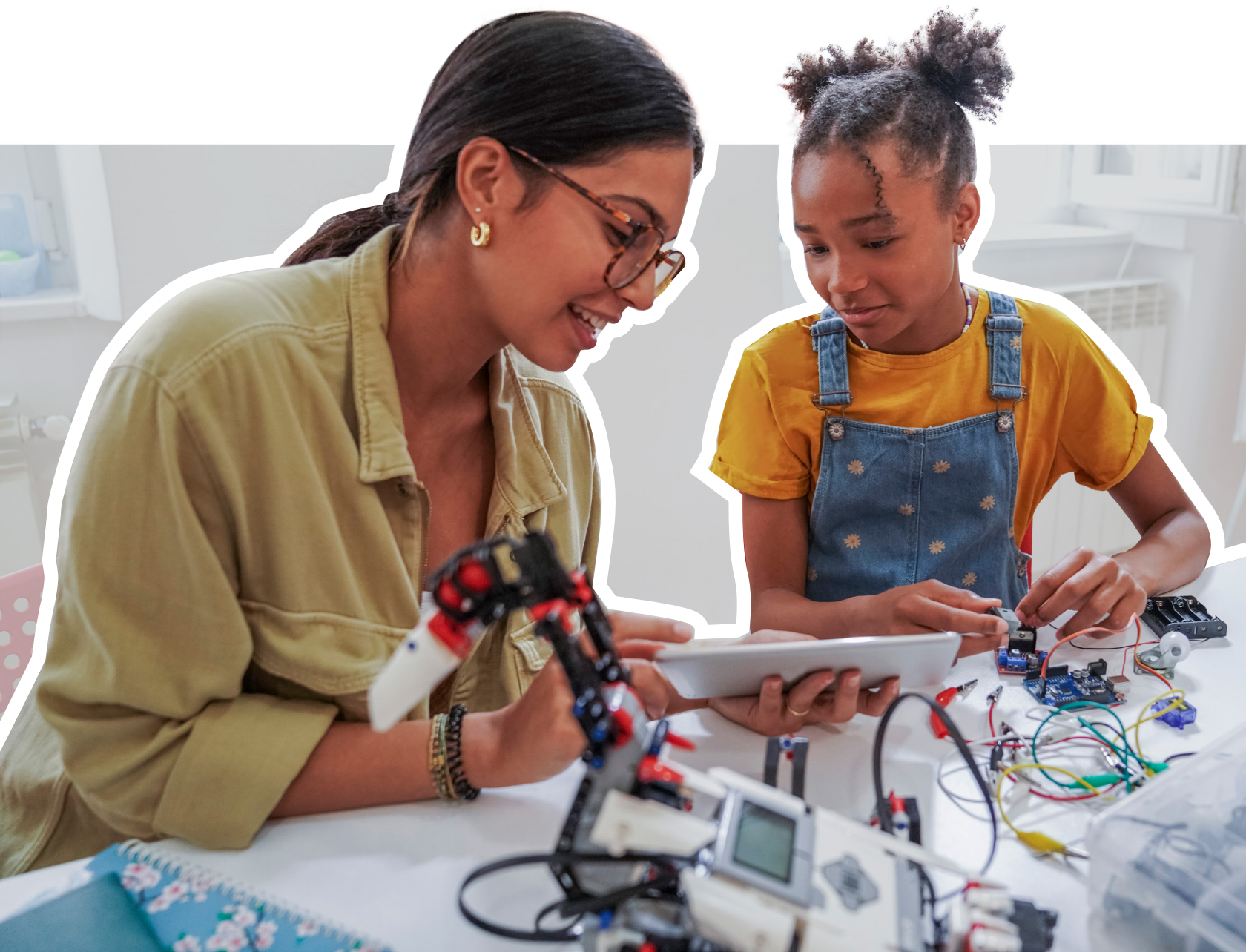


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# The Power of Career-Connected Learning in New Hampshire





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## Introduction

With nearly 10 million jobs<sup>1</sup> available in the United States and approximately one in six 18- to 24-year-olds neither enrolled in school nor working,<sup>2</sup> the gap between K-12 systems and workforce preparation is stark. In the state of New Hampshire, labor force participation remains below pre-pandemic levels at 64.6%, while employment still lags the pre-pandemic high by 13,200 workers.<sup>3</sup> Compounding this gap, recent data show that only about half of students say their school is good at teaching them about potential careers.<sup>4</sup>

In response, some states, including New Hampshire, have turned to career-connected learning (CCL). **CCL is an educational strategy designed to prepare K-12 students with the skills they need to build bright futures, while also connecting employers to capable students.** CCL empowers students to access educational and career opportunities through skills-based learning, training pathways and work experiences. CCL learning opportunities occur in a variety of ways in schools, including in core content classes and electives, as well as job fairs, job shadows, internships and apprenticeships. Integrating CCL into core and elective classes ensures each student has access to CCL opportunities by eliminating some of the barriers, such as schedule and transportation.<sup>5</sup>

Helping schools develop meaningful CCL opportunities is important to the mission of the New Hampshire Learning Initiative (NHLI), which aims to provide all students with accessible learning pathways to success in college, career and life.<sup>6</sup>

In the spring of 2023, Gallup partnered with NHLI to survey more than 9,600 students in fifth through 12th grades from 28 schools and 13 districts throughout the state of New Hampshire. This study was designed using validated items from the national Gallup Student Poll. The goal of this study was to better understand the current state of CCL and to measure the interactions between CCL participation, engagement and hope among middle school and high school<sup>7</sup> students.

1 Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023, July 6). *Job openings and labor turnover — June* [Press release]. U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved July 13, 2023, from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/jolts.pdf>

2 National Center for Education Statistics. (2022, May). *Young adults neither enrolled in school nor working*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/coi>

3 *Vital signs 2023: Economic & social indicators for New Hampshire 2017-2021*. (2023). New Hampshire Employment Security. <https://www.nhes.nh.gov/elmi/products/documents/vs23-all-chap-full-pub.pdf>

4 Willcoxon, N., & Marken, S. (2023, June 14). *K-12 schools struggle to prepare, excite Gen Z about learning*. Gallup. com. <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/507053/k12-schools-struggle-prepare-excite-gen-learning.aspx>

5 *What is career connected learning?* (n.d.). Career Connect Washington. Retrieved June 27, 2023, from <https://careerconnectwa.org/what-is-career-connected-learning/>

6 *About us — NHLI*. (n.d.) New Hampshire Learning Initiative. Retrieved July 13, 2023, from <https://nhlearninginitiative.org/about-us/>

7 In this report, the term “middle school students” refers to those in fifth through eighth grades, while “high school students” refers to ninth through 12th graders.

In the context of this study, **engagement** indicates the degree to which students are involved in and enthusiastic about school, while **hope** refers to the ideas and energy students have for the future.<sup>8</sup> Past research has shown that hope and engagement are positively related to student academic achievement and school attendance, which are both linked to students' likelihood to graduate.<sup>9</sup>

Findings from the Gallup-NHLI student poll demonstrate strong relationships between students' career-connected learning participation and their hope and engagement. These encouraging results indicate that CCL opportunities may help move the needle in improving student outcomes.

In the survey, students also share their confidence in overcoming obstacles, their opinions about their future, their relationships and interactions with teachers and classmates, and their thoughts about what they're learning. At the center of it all is a relationship between students' engagement and hope, and their opportunities for career-connected learning.

This study gives insight into what students think about the career-connected learning they receive, and how it might impact their engagement in school and outlook on the future. These results provide educators and leaders with the data they need to best foster student success — an important step in closing the gap between the skills students have and the jobs employers need to fill.



8 Gallup's classification of "engaged" and "hopeful" are based on a proprietary index that classifies people into three categories based on their responses to an engagement/hope for the future scale.

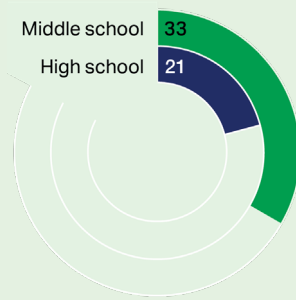
9 Balfanz, R., Herzog, L., & Mac Iver, D. J. (2007). Preventing student disengagement and keeping students on the graduation path in urban middle-grades schools: Early identification and effective interventions. *Educational Psychologist*, 42(4), 223-235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520701621079>

## Key Findings From New Hampshire Students

- 1 **Students in fifth and sixth grades (37%) are the most likely to be engaged out of all students in grades 5-12.** Students who are engaged have a high level of involvement in and enthusiasm for school. Engaged students are excited about what they are learning and contribute positively to the learning environment. Student engagement declines through the first two years of high school, at which point 18% of students in ninth and 10th grades are engaged. The proportion of engaged students increases for those in 11th and 12th grades (24%) but does not reach the higher proportions observed in fifth and sixth grades (37%) or seventh and eighth grades (28%).
- 2 **Mentors matter for engagement.** Those who agree<sup>10</sup> they have a mentor who supports their development are more likely to be engaged than their peers who do not have such a mentor (37% vs. 16%).
  - Everybody benefits from a mentor, and there is an opportunity for mentorship to be particularly impactful beginning at a young age: Of middle school students who earn excellent or good grades, 50% of those who have a mentor are engaged, compared to only 26% of those who do not have a mentor. This gap is similarly wide when comparing middle school students who earn average or poor grades (33% vs. 14%).
  - With just 43% of high schoolers and 39% of middle schoolers saying they have a mentor, opportunities exist to connect more students with an adult who can make a difference.
- 3 **Mentors matter for hope.** Those who agree they have a mentor who supports their development are more likely to be hopeful about the future than their peers who do not have such a mentor (40% vs. 25%).
- 4 **The vast majority of students (88%) report participating in at least one career-connected learning opportunity.** The most common type of CCL opportunity is doing an activity to learn about a job or career in class (57% of students say they do this). Of the CCL opportunities Gallup measured, learning about a job or career in class is the activity most highly correlated with engagement ( $r=.24$ ).
- 5 **Career-connected learning opportunities that match students' interests are more likely to inform their plans.** Students who agree that the career activities at their school include the types of jobs and careers they are interested in are three times more likely to agree that the CCL opportunities at their school have informed what they plan to do after high school, compared to those who do not agree.

10 In this report, "agree" refers to those who answered either "agree" or "strongly agree," unless otherwise noted.

## 6 Participating in at least one career-connected learning opportunity could impact a student's engagement and hope.

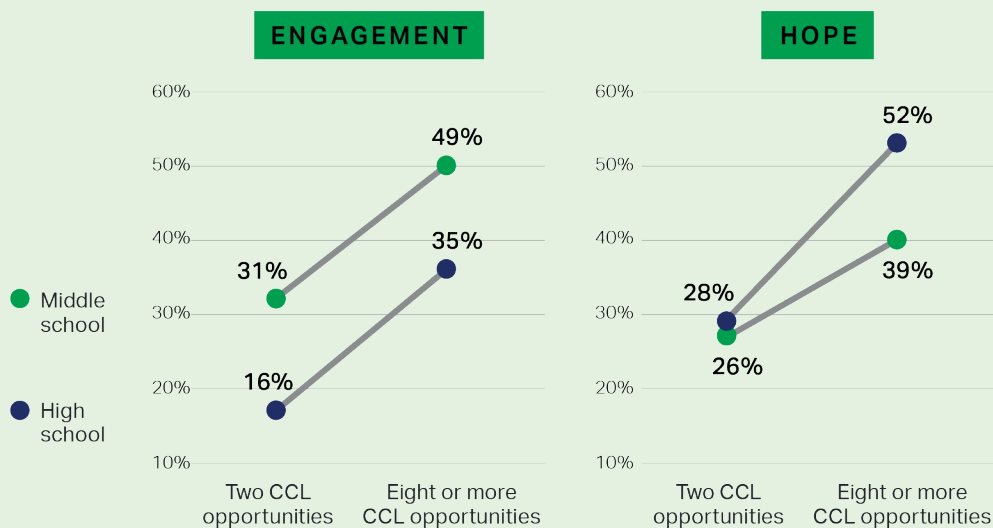


Twenty-one percent of high schoolers and 33% of middle schoolers who participated in at least one CCL opportunity are engaged, compared to 11% of high schoolers and 18% of middle schoolers who did not participate in any CCL opportunities.

Students who report participating in at least one CCL opportunity are also more likely to be hopeful than those who did not participate in a CCL opportunity (32% vs. 23%). This holds true when controlling for grade level and in most cases when controlling for academic achievement.

As students participate in more CCL opportunities, their hope increases and they are more likely to be engaged.

For example, 31% of middle school students and 16% of high school students who participated in two CCL opportunities are engaged, compared to 49% of middle schoolers and 35% of high schoolers who participated in eight or more CCL opportunities. This pattern holds true for hope: 26% of middle school students and 28% of high school students who participated in two CCL opportunities are hopeful, compared to 39% of middle schoolers and 52% of high schoolers who participated in eight or more CCL opportunities.



## Student Engagement in New Hampshire Schools

Why does engagement matter? In this study, students who are engaged are more likely to say they know they will graduate from high school (95% vs. 83%), will find a good job in the future (89% vs. 63%) and have a great future ahead of them (92% vs. 66%). This echoes previous research showing that student engagement is linked with important student outcomes, including achievement, grades and absenteeism.<sup>11</sup> The New Hampshire Learning Initiative is dedicated to supporting schools in improving student engagement, and a baseline measurement is a crucial step for tracking progress.

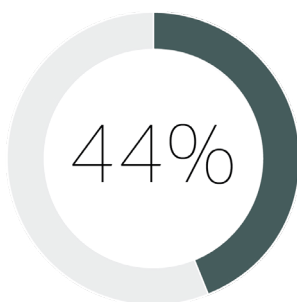
- **Just one in four students are engaged** at school (25%). The remainder of students are not engaged (36%) or actively disengaged (39%). Actively disengaged students are those who lack enthusiasm for and are less involved in school.
- **Engagement varies greatly by grade level** — students in lower grade levels are the most engaged. After fifth and sixth grades, where 37% of students are engaged, engagement drops to a low of 18% for new high schoolers in ninth and 10th grades. A small uptick exists as students get closer to graduation.
- **Engaged students are two times more likely to be hopeful** for the future compared to their peers, as measured by the Gallup engagement and hope indices.
- **The relationship between engagement and whether a student says “I know I will graduate from high school” is most pronounced among students who report receiving average or poor grades.** For example, among engaged middle schoolers with average or poor grades, 86% of students believe they will graduate from high school, compared to 67% of not engaged students.

Engagement is important to study in students with all types of experiences. Students who say they receive average or poor grades are much less likely to be engaged than those who say they receive good or excellent grades. It is unclear whether higher grades lead to higher engagement or if the reverse is true, but **a meaningful relationship exists**. Many of the findings in this study control for grades received, to better understand how engagement affects all types of students.

<sup>11</sup> Calderon, V., & Yu, D. (2016). *8 things you need to know about students*. Gallup.com. <https://www.gallup.com/education/231752/things-need-know-students.aspx>



## Students' Views on the State of Career-Connected Learning



The 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey,<sup>12</sup> which was administered to high school students throughout the state of New Hampshire, indicated that nearly half (44%) of students, including 58% of female students, felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more consecutive weeks.

This finding is consistent with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's research, which indicates that nearly three in five U.S. teen girls (57%) felt persistently sad or hopeless in 2021.<sup>13</sup> These discoveries highlight the need to help students gain confidence in their ability to navigate the workforce and build bright futures.

To address this concern, New Hampshire schools have invested in career-connected learning because of its potential to help students find relevance in the day-to-day curriculum and prepare them for success after graduation.

These data, coming from New Hampshire students themselves, provide insight into their CCL participation levels, perspectives on the value of the curriculum and the importance of mentorship, hope and engagement.

12 *Youth risk behavior survey*. (n.d.). New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved July 17, 2023, from <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/programs-services/population-health/health-statistics-informatics/youth-risk-behavior-survey>

13 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023, February 13). *U.S. teen girls experiencing increased sadness and violence* [Press release]. <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2023/p0213-yrbs.html>

## Older Students Are Active in Career-Connected Learning Opportunities; Younger Students Still Want More

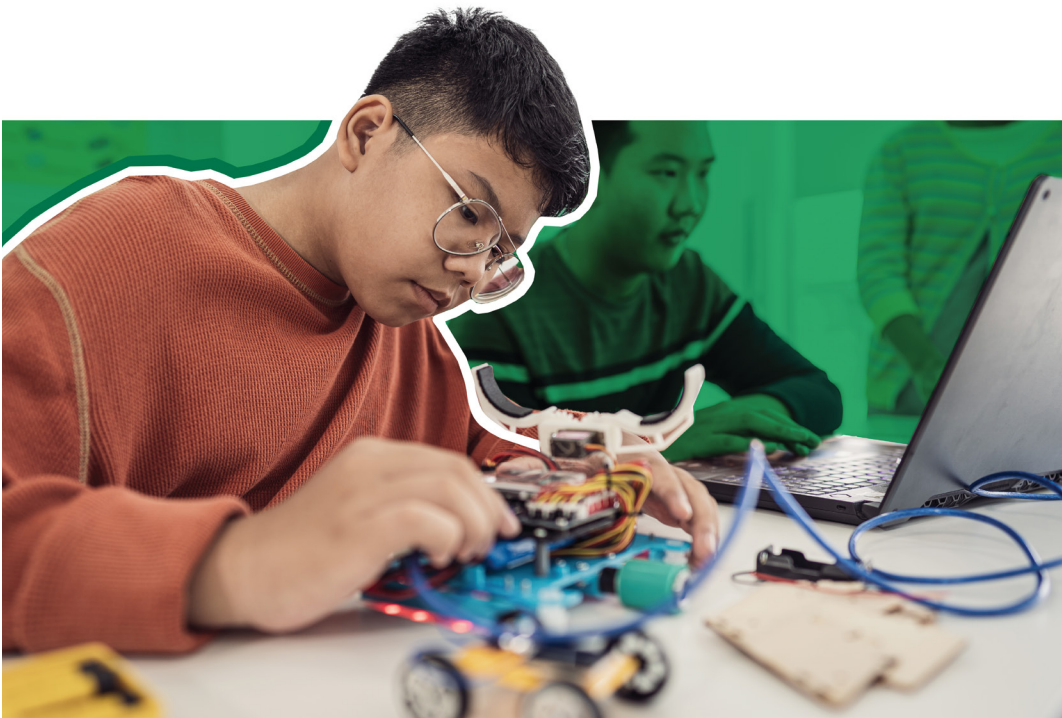
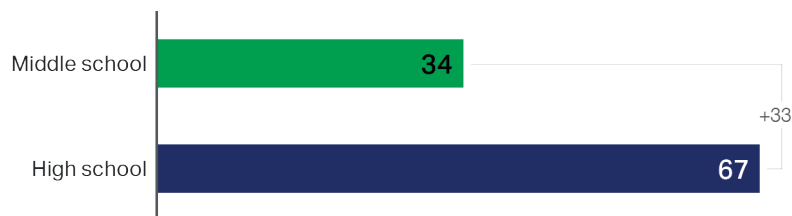
Overall, 53% of students agree their school offers many CCL opportunities. High school students are the most likely to receive CCL opportunities, as 67% agree their school offers many CCL opportunities, compared to 34% of middle school students who say the same.

Additionally, high school students (44%) are more likely than middle school students (25%) to agree that the career activities at their school include the types of jobs and careers they are interested in. This finding highlights an opportunity to expand available CCL opportunities for all students, but especially for middle schoolers, when CCL programs are designed to support students as they pursue career exploration.

CHART 1

### My school offers many Career-Connected Learning opportunities.

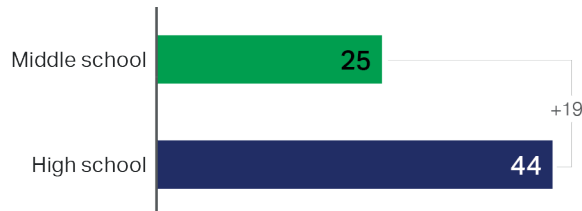
% Strongly agree/Agree



**CHART 2**

**The job or career activities at my school include the types of jobs and careers I'm interested in.**

% Strongly agree/Agree



Although they receive fewer CCL opportunities, **more than half of middle school students (53%) say they would like to participate in more CCL activities.** This was roughly true for all middle school students, regardless of whether they earn high (57%) or low grades (48%). More than half of high schoolers (61%) also wish they could participate in more CCL opportunities; those earning high grades (67%) are more likely to agree than those earning low grades (52%).

**CHART 3**

**I would like to participate in more Career-Connected Learning opportunities.**

% Strongly agree/Agree



## Nine in 10 Students Surveyed Participate in Career-Connected Learning

Many students indicate they would like to participate in more CCL opportunities, making it important for schools and leaders to understand the current state of participation. Students were asked whether they had participated in common types of CCL (e.g., learning about a job or career in class, participating in a career fair or attending a job talk or panel). The opportunities include in-school activities as well as activities that take place in the community.

**The vast majority of students (88%) report participating in at least one of these CCL opportunities, and 75% of students report participating in multiple CCL opportunities.**

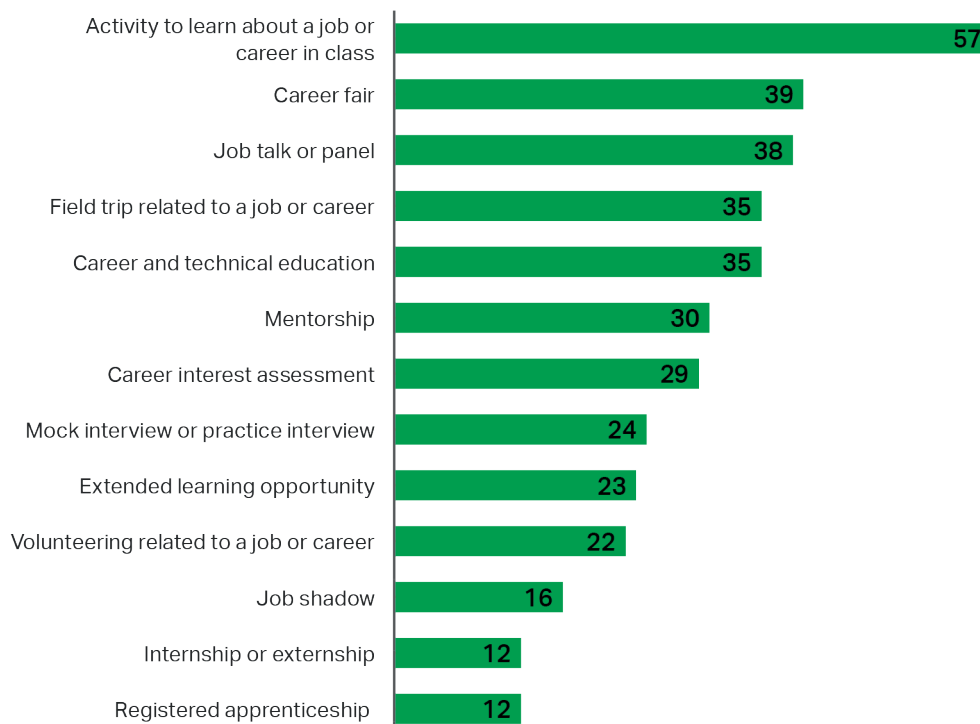
While not all CCL opportunities may be relevant to every student, New Hampshire schools are aiming for 100% of students to receive some type of CCL activity in the classroom.

Notably, the most frequent type of CCL activity is to learn about a job or career in class. Of the CCL opportunities Gallup measured, this specific CCL is also the most highly correlated with engagement ( $r=.24$ ).

**CHART 4**

### Student Participation in Various Types of CCL Activities

% Who have participated in each activity



## Students' Views on the Impact of Career-Connected Learning Opportunities

About one in three high school students (35%) — and one in four middle school students (26%) — say CCL opportunities at their school have informed what they plan to do after high school. As they near graduation, the impact of CCL on students' plans increases: 33% of students in ninth and 10th grades say CCL has informed what they plan to do, while a higher rate of 11th and 12th graders say the same (39%).

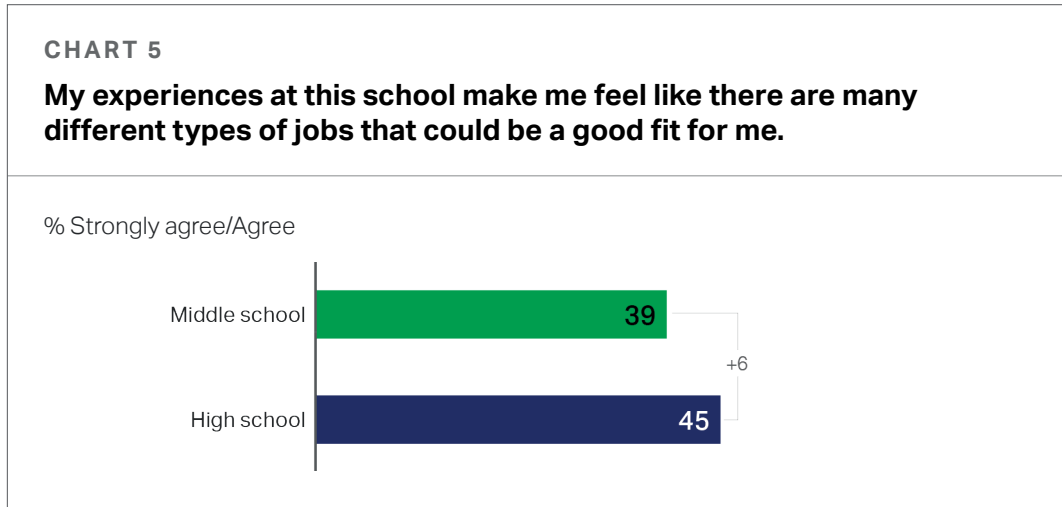
Additionally, the perceived effectiveness of CCL opportunities to inform students' future plans depends on how relevant students consider the CCL offerings to be.

Students who agree that the career activities at their school include the types of jobs and careers they're interested in are more than **three times more likely** to agree that the CCL opportunities at their school have informed what they plan to do after high school than those who do not agree.

Career-connected learning is designed to support students as they explore and experience all types of careers, and this finding highlights the importance of **listening to student voices when making decisions about the types of careers that are represented in CCL curriculum.**

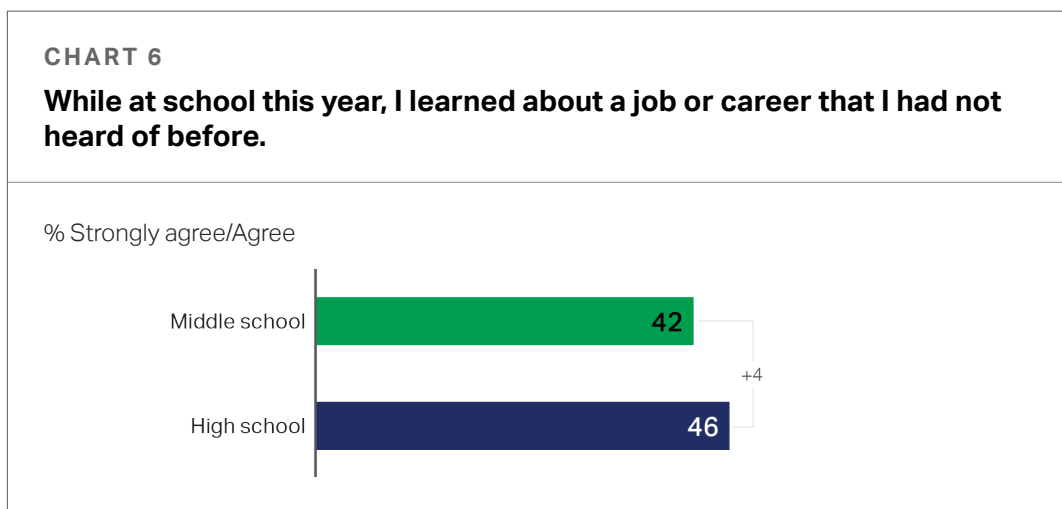


One goal of CCL is to help students discover multiple pathways to a bright future. Just 43% of students say the experiences at their school “make me feel like there are many different types of jobs that could be a good fit for me.” This is higher among high school students (45%) than middle school students (39%).



Exposing students to many different types of jobs and careers allows educators to support students in discovering various ways to achieve their goals.

Students who agree they learned about a job or career this year that they had not heard of before are more than 2.5 times more likely than their peers to agree with the statement: “My experiences at this school make me feel like there are many different types of jobs that could be a good fit for me.” High school students (46%) are more likely than middle school students (42%) to agree with the statement: “While at school this year, I learned about a job or career that I had not heard of before.”



## The Power of Mentorship

Studies show mentorship is a key driver of positive outcomes.<sup>14</sup> As something that can be supported within schools, increasing mentorship programs may also be a big opportunity to ensure equitable access to career-connected learning for all students.

Prior research has found that having a mentor is critical to student success. Students who have a mentor are more likely to set higher educational goals, attend college and participate in productive activities than those who do not have a mentor.<sup>14</sup>

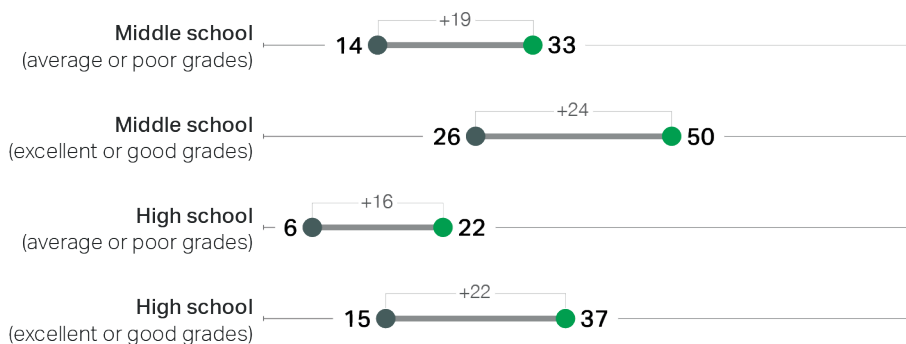
Only 41% of surveyed New Hampshire students agree that they have a mentor who supports their development (43% of high schoolers and 39% of middle schoolers). Yet those who do have a mentor are more likely to be engaged than their peers. The impact of a mentor exists regardless of grade level or academic performance, but the gap is particularly notable among middle schoolers earning excellent or good grades — there is a 24-percentage-point engagement difference between those who do have a mentor and those who do not.

**CHART 7**

### Relationship Between Mentorship and Student Engagement

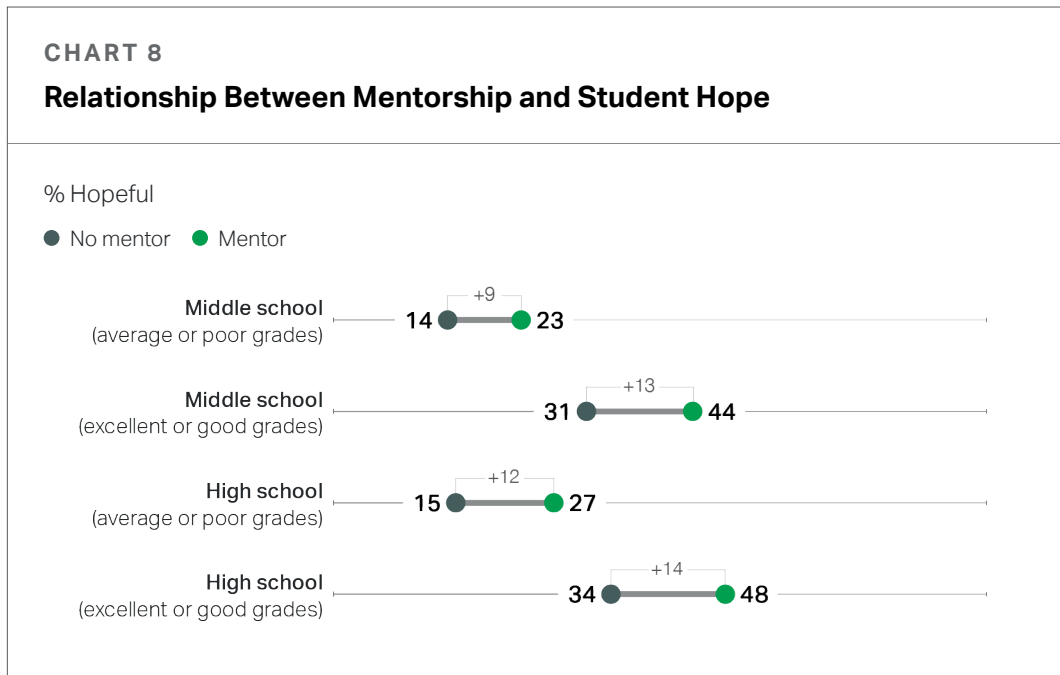
% Engaged

● No mentor ● Mentor



<sup>14</sup> Bruce, M., & Bridgeland, J. (2014). *The mentoring effect: Young people's perspectives on the outcomes and availability of mentoring*. Civic Enterprises with Hart Research Associates for MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership. [https://www.mentoring.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The\\_Mentoring\\_Effect\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://www.mentoring.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The_Mentoring_Effect_Full_Report.pdf)

In addition to its positive relationship with engagement, **mentorship is connected to a stronger sense of hope for the future.** New Hampshire middle and high school students who agree they have a mentor who supports their development are more likely to be hopeful than their peers who do not agree they have a mentor. This holds true when controlling for grade level and grades earned.



These findings highlight the powerful impact mentorship can have on students, their experiences at school and their confidence in their abilities to build a bright future.

In addition to asking students about whether they have a mentor who supports their development, this study asked students whether they have participated in mentorship *specifically in the context of career-connected learning* at their school. Fewer students say they have participated in mentorship as part of CCL at their school (30%) than those who agree they have a mentor who supports their development (41%).

Most New Hampshire students (59%) do not have a mentor who supports their development, while 70% have not participated in mentorship in the context of CCL. These results highlight an **opportunity for schools to prepare educators with the tools they need to be strong mentors and to create a structure that helps students have easier access to mentors at school.**



## Career-Connected Learning Is Related to Engagement

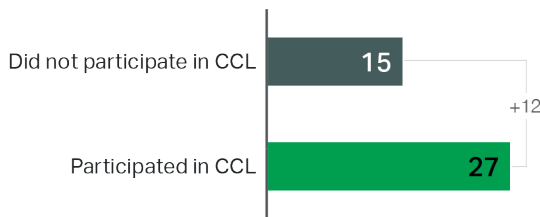
Students who report participating in at least **one CCL opportunity are more likely to be engaged** than those who did not participate (27% vs. 15%).

This pattern holds true when controlling for grade level. Thirty-three percent of middle schoolers who participated in at least one CCL opportunity are engaged, compared to 18% of those who did not participate in any CCL opportunities. Among high schoolers who participated in at least one CCL opportunity, 21% are engaged, compared to 11% of those who did not participate in any CCL opportunities.

**CHART 9**

### Overall Student Engagement and CCL Participation

% Engaged

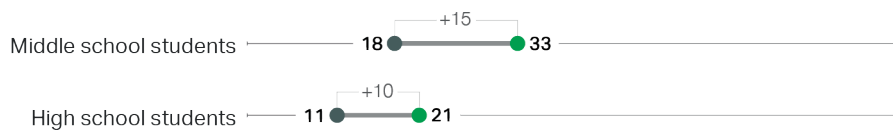


**CHART 10**

### Student Engagement and CCL Participation by Grade Level

% Engaged

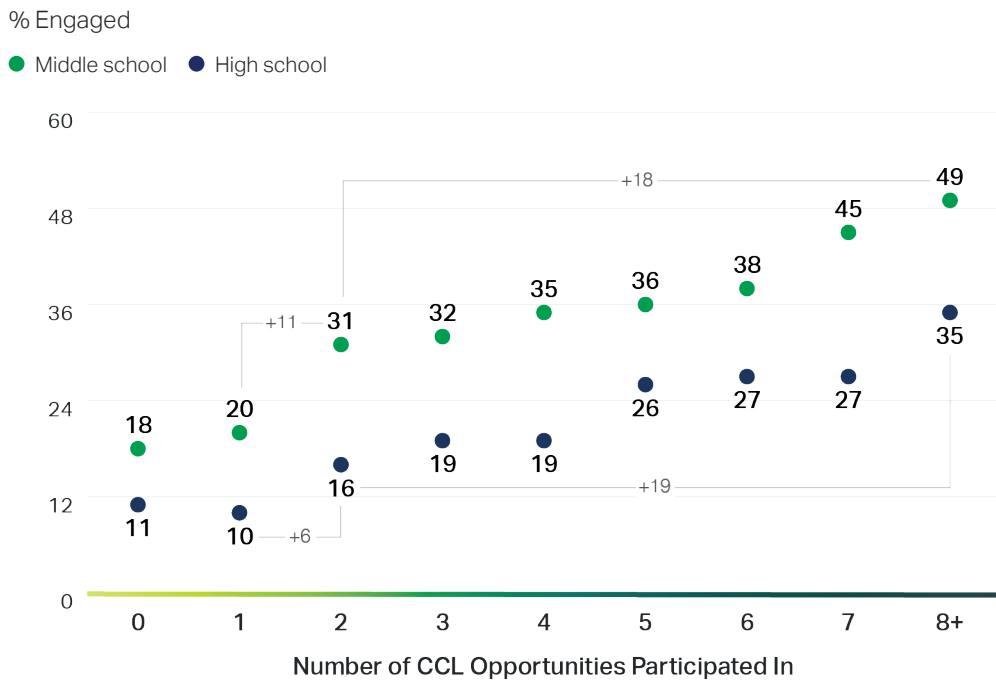
● Did not participate in CCL ● Participated in CCL



Additionally, engagement continues to rise with even more CCL participation.

The largest jumps in engagement occur between students who participate in only one activity compared to two, while another spike appears for students at the highest end of participation (eight or more CCL opportunities). For example, among high school students, 10% of those participating in one CCL lesson are engaged, compared to 16% of those in two CCL opportunities. Among middle schoolers, 20% of those participating in one CCL lesson are engaged, compared to 31% of those participating in two CCL activities. The percentage of engaged students largely levels off for those who participate in between three and seven CCL activities. As students begin to participate in a larger number of CCL activities, engagement jumps again, with 49% of middle schoolers and 35% of high schoolers who have participated in eight or more CCL opportunities being engaged.

**CHART 11**  
**Student Engagement by Quantity of CCL Participation**



Overall, students who report participating in at least one CCL opportunity are also more likely to be hopeful about their future than those who did not participate in a CCL opportunity (32% vs. 23%). This pattern holds true when controlling for grade level.

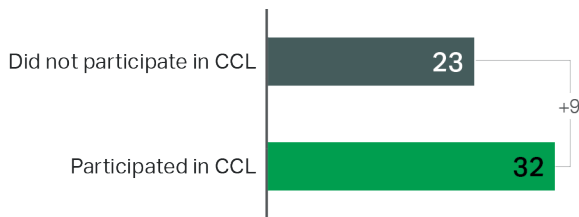
As is the case with engagement, when students participate in more CCL opportunities, they are more likely to be hopeful.

For example, 26% of middle school students and 28% of high school students who participate in two CCL opportunities are hopeful, compared to 39% of middle schoolers and 52% of high schoolers who have participated in eight or more CCL opportunities.

**CHART 12**

**Overall Student Hope and CCL Participation**

% Hopeful

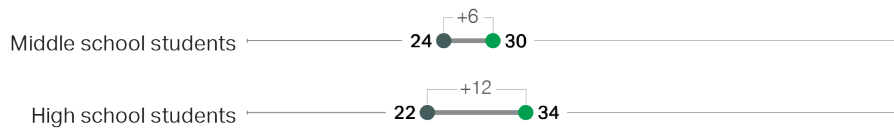


**CHART 13**

**Student Hope and CCL Participation by Grade Level**

% Hopeful

● Did not participate in CCL ● Participated in CCL



## Conclusion

While in the first year of a three-year study, the Gallup-NHLI student poll highlights the need for improved engagement and hope among middle school and high school students, it also suggests that by using career-connected learning as a framework, educators and leaders can create meaningful change.

Students who participate in CCL opportunities are more likely to be engaged and hopeful than those who do not, and more CCL activities matter — students' engagement and hope are likely to increase as they participate in more CCL opportunities. In-school CCL opportunities, such as learning about a job or career in class, can have a profound impact on student success, while being both equitable for all students and scalable for schools.

A key in-school CCL opportunity is mentorship. Although there is a strong relationship between mentorship, engagement and hope for the future, a minority of students report having a mentor who supports their development. Improved mentorship programming could have a substantial impact in schools' efforts to reach their most vulnerable students.

It is important to note that the impact of CCL is enhanced when students find the opportunities to be relevant to them and their goals. Students who agree that the job or career activities at their school include the types of jobs and careers they're interested in are three times more likely to agree that the CCL opportunities at their school have informed what they plan to do after high school compared to those who do not agree. This finding demonstrates the importance of listening to student voices when making decisions about the types of careers that are represented in CCL curriculum.

Overall, the New Hampshire schools included in this study have been able to successfully engage students in career-connected learning, with 91% of high schoolers and 86% of middle schoolers participating in at least one opportunity. This high level of participation creates a strong foundation for schools to build upon as they continue to support students in improving engagement, growing hope and discovering multiple pathways to bright futures.

## Methodology

Results for the Gallup-NHLI student poll are based on a web-based survey conducted from May 8 through June 13, 2023. The survey was available in English and Spanish and administered to students during the school day. Overall, 9,641 middle school and high school students responded from 13 districts and 28 schools throughout the state of New Hampshire. The results from this survey represent the first of a multiyear commitment to this study.

The study was designed in accordance with RSA 186:11, IX-d, New Hampshire's policy governing the administration of non-academic surveys or questionnaires, which includes all surveys, questionnaires or other documents designed to elicit information about a student's social behavior, family life, religion, politics, sexual orientation, sexual activity, drug use or any other information not related to a student's academics. Additionally, the research protocol and survey were reviewed by Gallup's Institutional Review Board.

The margin of error (MOE) for all 9,641 students surveyed is 1.0%. The MOE for the 4,346 middle school students surveyed is 1.5%, and the MOE for the 5,295 high school students surveyed is 1.3%. The MOE is a measure of precision: For each group, there is a 95% chance that the estimate is within +/- the adjusted MOE. For example, 91% of high schoolers indicated they have participated in at least one CCL opportunity. With a MOE of 1.3%, there is reasonable certainty (a 95% chance) that the true estimate is between 89.7% and 92.3%.



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