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# Voices of New Hampshire Students

## Career-Connected Learning's Role in Building Bright Futures





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## Introduction

In 2022, the U.S. Department of Education launched a new initiative to support career-connected learning by expanding student access to high-quality training programs in today's in-demand fields. Career-connected learning (CCL) broadens the pool of people who can access good jobs and careers by providing all students with skills-based learning, training pathways and work experience.

New Hampshire and several other states have embraced CCL as an educational strategy to better prepare students for the workforce and life beyond high school. As a national leader in educational innovation, New Hampshire Learning Initiative (NHLI) has championed CCL as it aims to provide all students with opportunities to succeed in college, their career and life.

NHLI recognizes that students flourish when given agency over their own learning and understands the importance of listening to student voices. In 2023, NHLI and Gallup surveyed the opinions of New Hampshire middle school and high school students and measured their opinions on career-connected learning, engagement and hope. The 2024 *Voices of New Hampshire Students: Career-Connected Learning's Role in Building Bright Futures* report expands on insights released in 2023 by providing an update on the state of CCL among New Hampshire students, further amplifying student voices.

This survey of more than 8,500 fifth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students from 25 schools and 13 districts throughout the state of New Hampshire<sup>1</sup> shows that career-connected learning has an impact, and students want more of it.



<sup>1</sup> NHLI invited schools and districts they had existing partnerships with to participate in the study, and schools were given the opportunity to opt in.

# Key Findings

## 1 **Students Say Career-Connected Learning Has an Impact.**

Key objectives of CCL include helping students explore different careers, raise their awareness of various postsecondary opportunities and gain career experience.

About half of students who participated in the study indicate that CCL has improved their career awareness. More than four in 10 middle school (42%) and high school (47%) students report that they learned about a job or career they had not heard of before while at school this past year. Additionally, one in three students (34%) say CCL experiences have informed their plans after high school.

## 2 **Community Connection Makes a Difference.**

CCL opportunities can include content taught in core classes and electives, career fairs, job shadows, internships and volunteering.

Students who participated in activities that allowed them to engage with the community outside of school walls are more likely to agree that CCL opportunities, in general, have informed what they plan to do after high school. For example, 57% of students who participated in an internship/externship, 54% of those who participated in a registered apprenticeship, 51% who had a volunteer position related to a job or career, and 51% who participated in job shadowing say their CCL activities have informed their plans after high school.

## 3 **Mentors Matter for Engagement and Hope.**

In the context of this study, engagement refers to students' level of "involvement in and enthusiasm for school." Gallup uses a nine-item index to classify students as engaged, not engaged or actively disengaged. Students who report having a mentor who supports their development are more likely to be engaged than their peers (36% vs. 16%).

Gallup defines hope as "the ideas and energy students have for the future" and uses a seven-item index to classify students as hopeful, stuck or discouraged. Students with mentors are more likely to be hopeful about their futures than their peers (39% vs. 24%).

## 4 **Students Want More Career-Connected Learning.**

A vast majority of students (90%) have participated in at least one CCL activity, and 59% report wanting to participate in more.

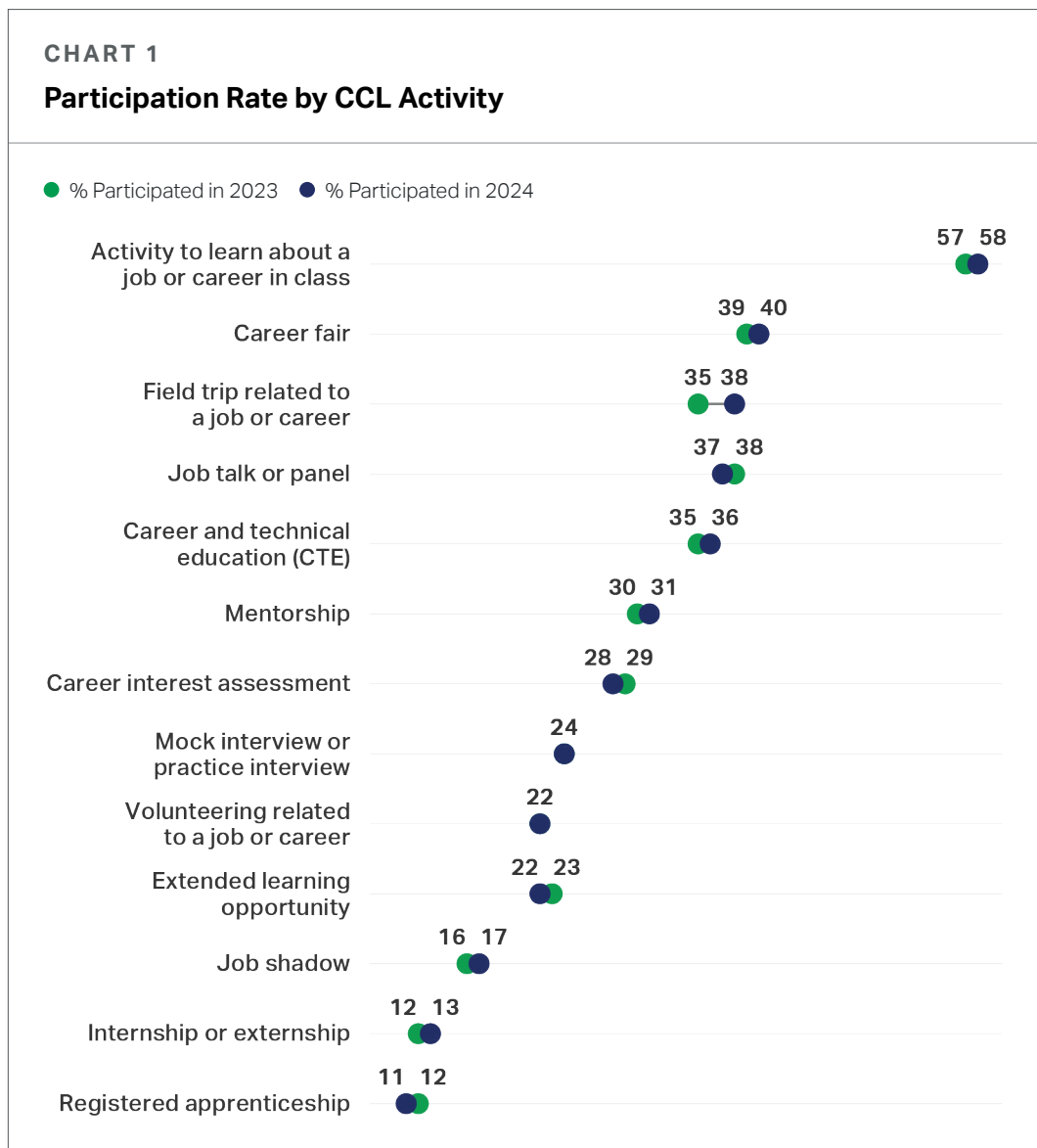
Students also seek greater variety in CCL offerings: Just under half of high school students (48%) and 25% of middle school students report that their school's CCL offerings include the types of jobs and careers they are interested in.

# The State of Career-Connected Learning in New Hampshire

## 2024 CCL Participation

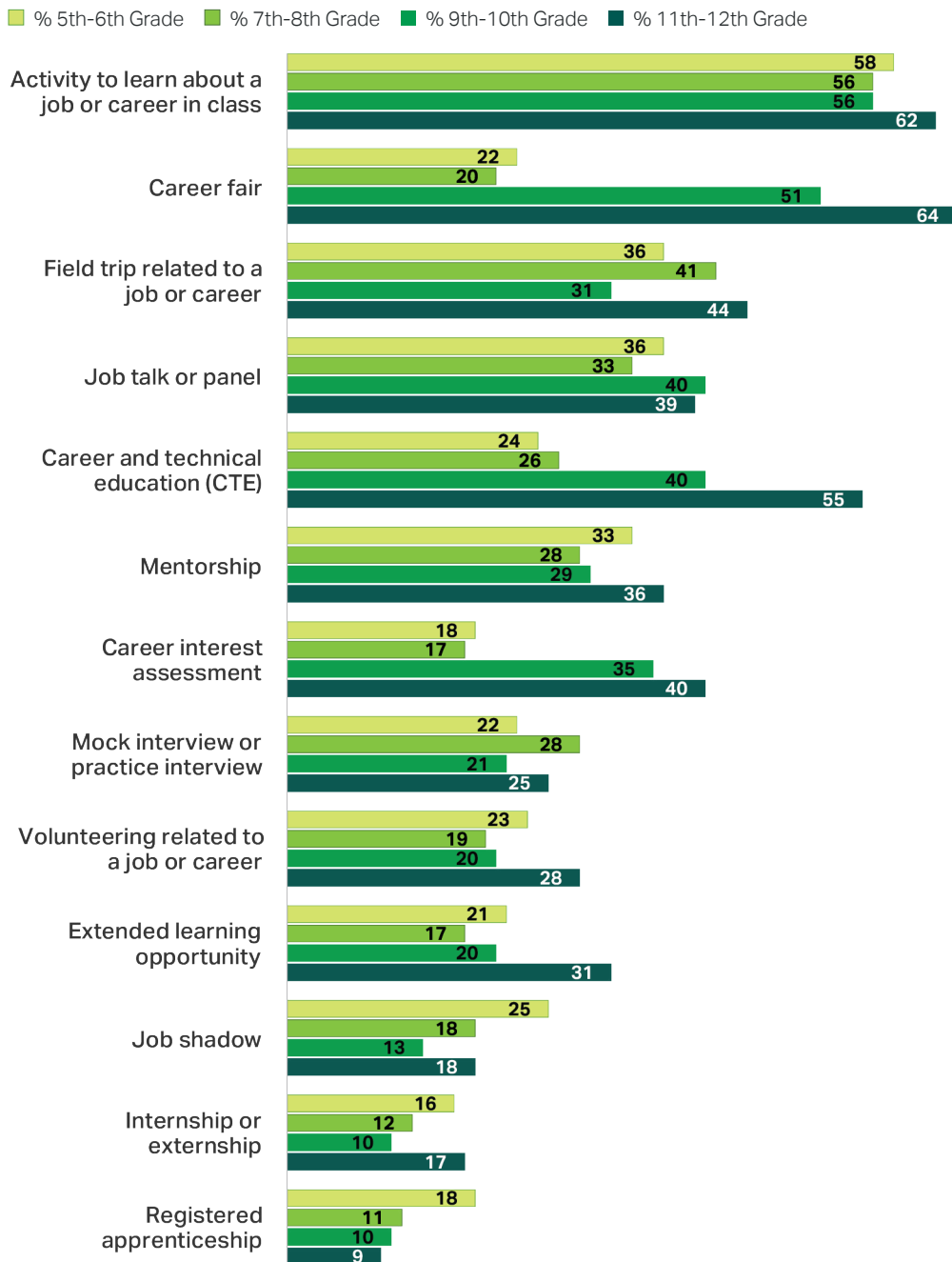
Similar to the results of the 2023 NHLI-Gallup study, 90% of students in 2024 report having participated in at least one career-connected learning activity through their school. More specifically, 54% of students have participated in 1-4 CCL activities, and 31% have participated in 5-9, while a small segment (5%) have participated in 10 or more.

The most common CCL activity is learning about a job or career in class (58% of students report doing this), followed by participating in a career fair (40%). Participation rates by activity remained largely the same between 2023 and 2024.



CCL activity participation rates vary by grade. For example, ninth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students are more likely to have participated in a career fair, taken a career interest assessment and participated in career and technical education (CTE) than those in grades five through eight. Across all grade levels, learning about a job or career in class has the highest participation rates, while registered apprenticeships and internships/externships are among the activities with the lowest participation rates.

**CHART 2**  
**Participation Rate by CCL Activity and Grade**

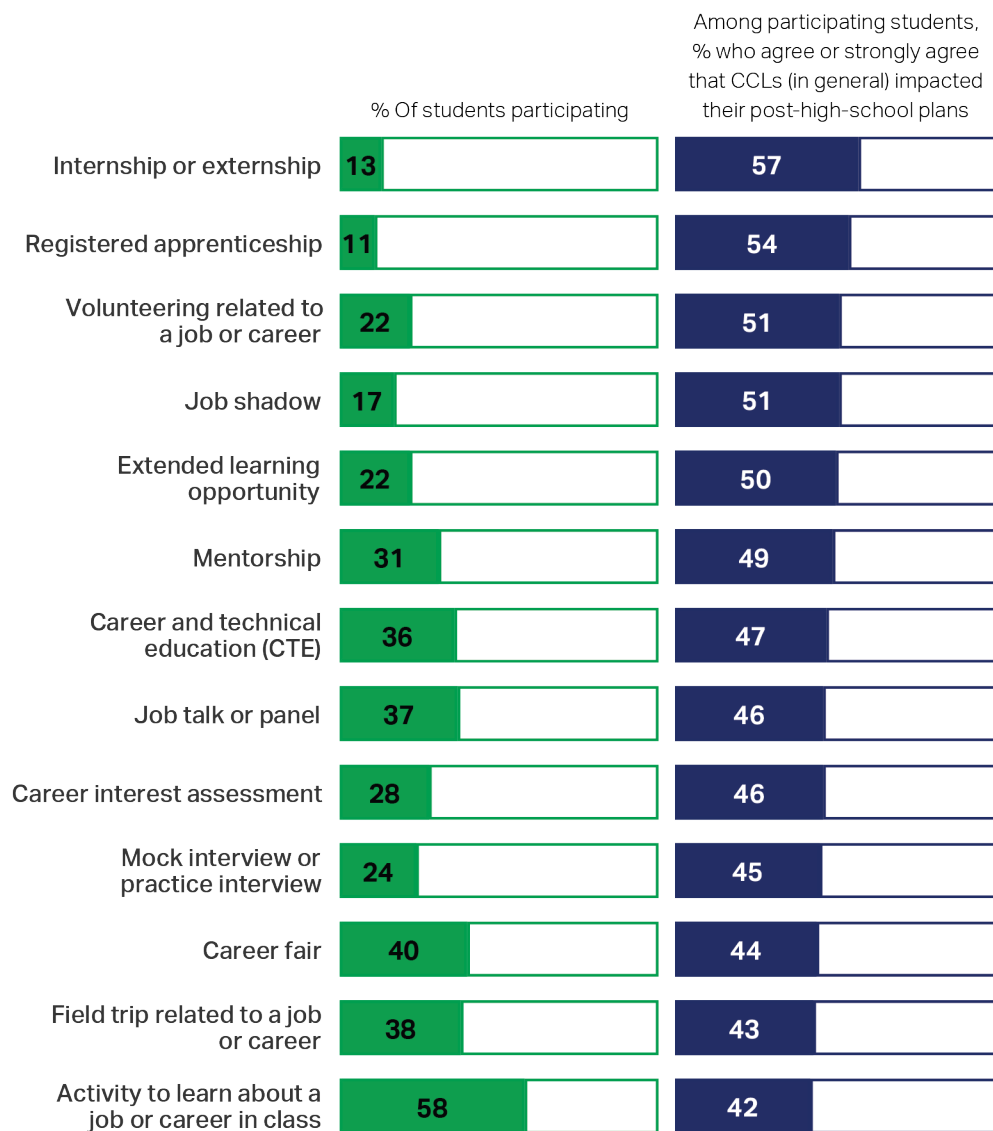


**High-impact CCL opportunities have the lowest participation rates.**

Five CCL opportunities stand out as being most highly correlated with a student's likelihood to say CCL impacted their post-high-school plans: having an internship or externship, a registered apprenticeship, volunteering related to a job or career, job shadowing and extended learning opportunities. However, these five activities also have the lowest overall participation rates. Education stakeholders in New Hampshire may wish to further study these types of CCL opportunities to determine which aspects make them successful and why they garner low participation. As these high-impact opportunities are outside the classroom, the finding also highlights the need to further explore avenues that support students in connecting and engaging with their communities.

**CHART 3**

**Impact of Participating in a CCL Activity on Post-High-School Plans**





## Students' Opinions of Their School's CCL Quality

### Nearly six in 10 students want to participate in more CCL activities.

Fifty-nine percent of students indicate they would like to participate in more career-connected learning opportunities at their school, including 52% of middle schoolers and 64% of high schoolers.

CCL opportunities appear to be more common in high schools than in middle schools, as high schoolers are more likely to agree that their school offers "many" CCL opportunities, even after controlling for grades earned in school. Nearly three in four high school students (73%) agree that their school offers many CCL opportunities, compared to only 34% of middle school students. This finding highlights an opportunity to listen to middle school students to better understand their needs around CCL.

### The job content of a CCL activity matters.

The types of jobs or careers included in CCL offerings could be crucial to making the program valuable to students and engaging those who have not participated in a CCL activity. Although many students are already participating in CCL and say they want more, only 38% (48% of high school students and 25% of middle school students) say their school's CCL includes the types of jobs and careers they are interested in. Among those who have not participated in a CCL opportunity, only 12% say their school's CCL opportunities include the types of jobs and careers they're interested in. Even so, nearly half (48%) of students who have not participated in a CCL opportunity indicate that they would like to participate in more CCL opportunities, demonstrating that even uninvolved students are looking to further engage with CCL.



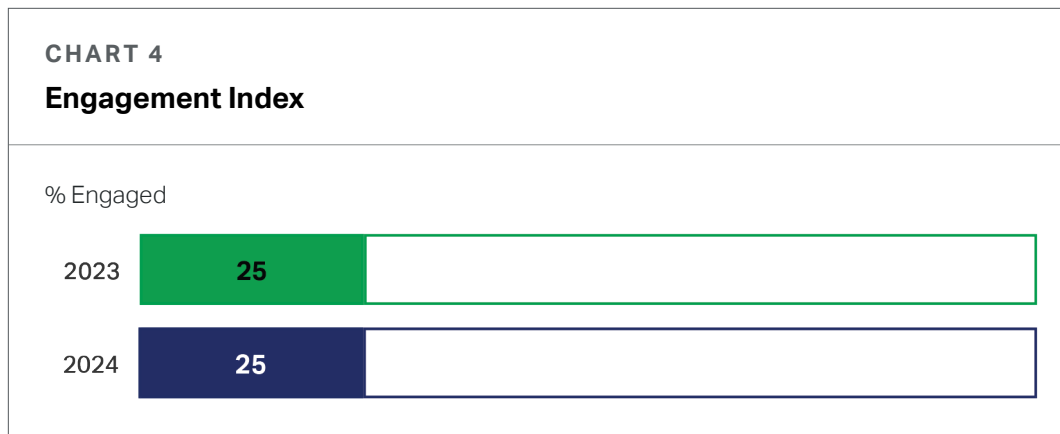
## Engagement and Hope: Outcomes of CCL

What students say about CCL opportunities aligns with additional outcome measures, including the Engagement and Hope Indexes measured in this study. The Engagement Index measures the degree to which students are involved in and enthusiastic about school; the Hope Index quantifies the ideas and energy students have for the future. Past research<sup>2</sup> has shown that hope and engagement are positively related to student academic achievement and progress, as well as overall success for districts and schools.

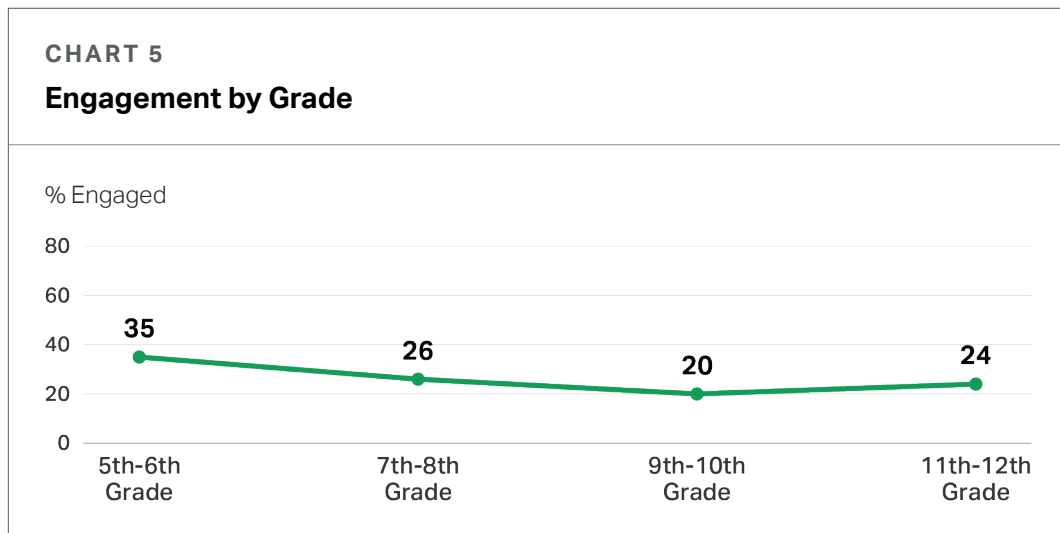
New Hampshire student engagement scores remained consistent between 2023 and 2024, with one in four students classified as “engaged.”



### ENGAGEMENT



Fifth and sixth grade students are two times more likely to be engaged than those in the first two years of high school. Engagement declines steadily from middle school through grades nine and 10, when a slight improvement in engagement is observed in the last two years of high school.

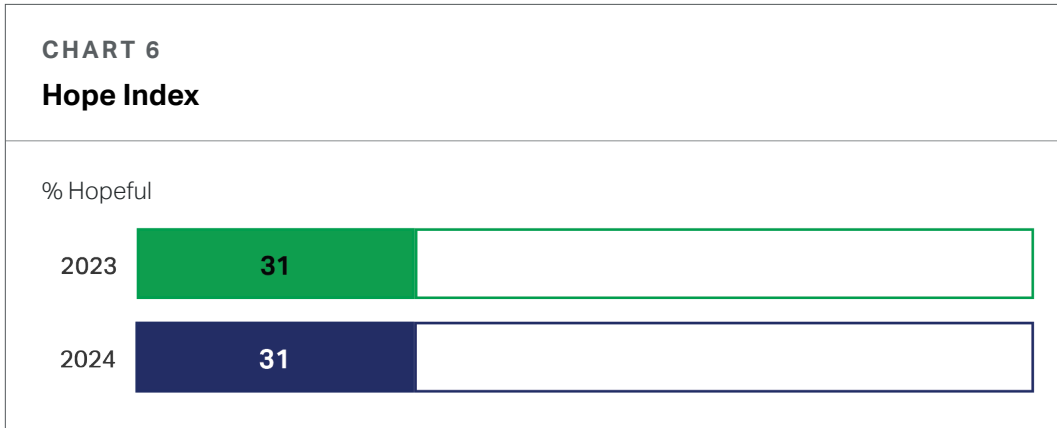


<sup>2</sup> Reckmeyer, M. (2019, October 30). *Focus on student engagement for better academic outcomes*. Gallup.com. <https://www.gallup.com/education/267521/focus-student-engagement-better-academic-outcomes.aspx>

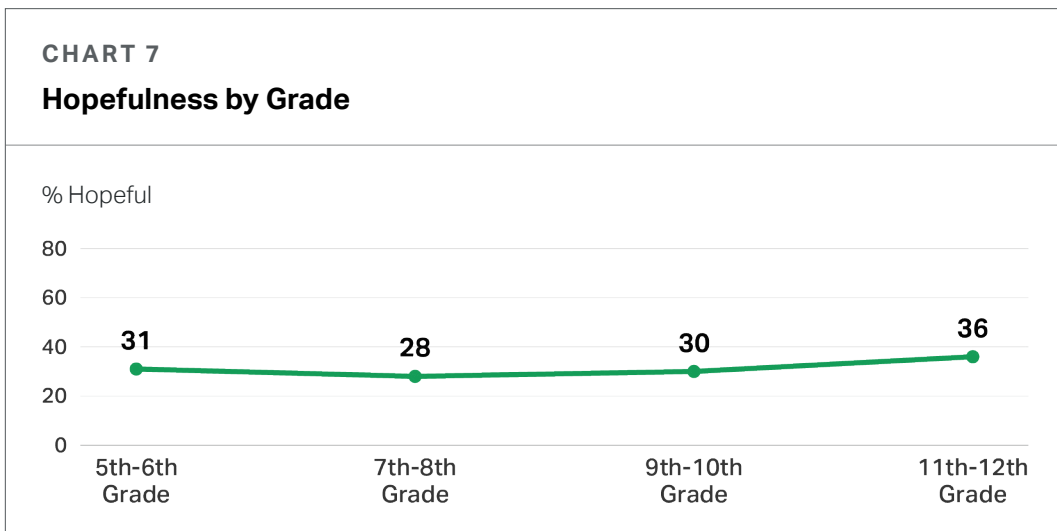


## HOPE

Hope Index scores have also remained consistent between 2023 and 2024, with nearly one in three students (31%) classified as “hopeful.”



Students in grades 11-12 are more likely to be hopeful than those in grades five through 10.



## Relationship Between Engagement, Hope and Career-Connected Learning

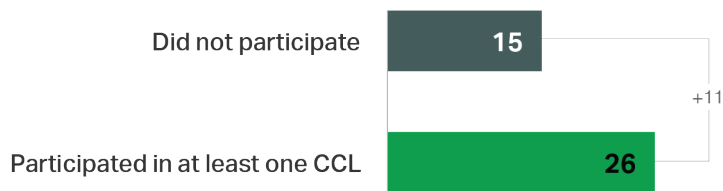
How is career-connected learning connected to **hope** and **engagement**?

Respondents who participate in at least one CCL opportunity are more likely to be engaged. This finding holds when controlling for grade level and grades received and is consistent with 2023 data, further validating the previous year's findings.

**CHART 8**

### Engagement by CCL Participation

% Engaged

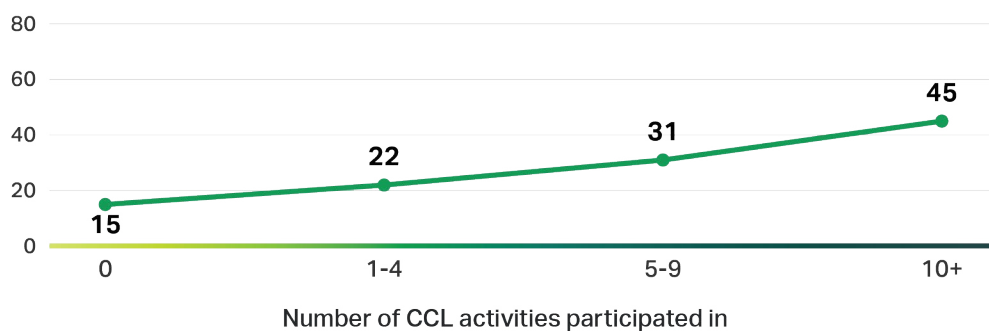


As expected, greater participation in CCL activities is associated with greater levels of engagement.

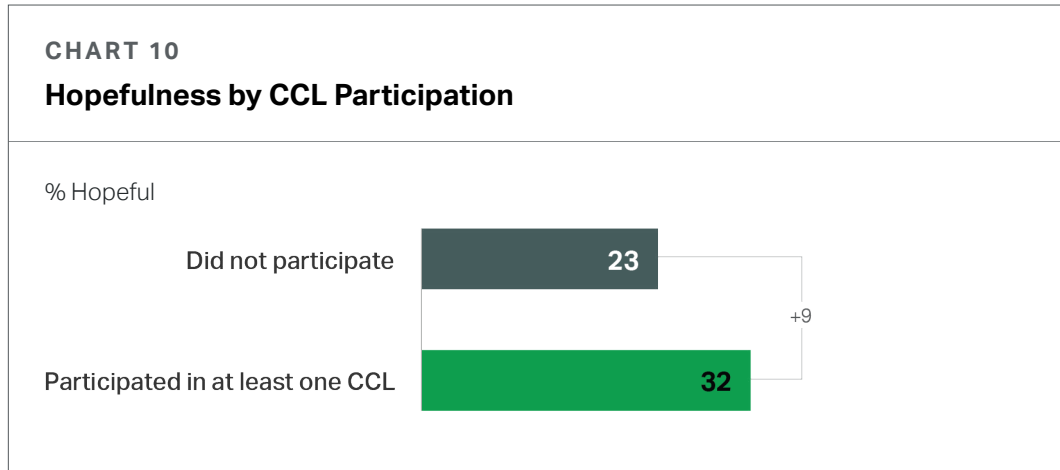
**CHART 9**

### Engagement by Number of CCL Activities Participated In

% Engaged



Respondents who participate in career-connected learning are more likely to be hopeful about their futures. This finding holds when controlling for grade level and grades received.



Beyond CCL participation, there is a link between students' opinions about CCL opportunities and hopefulness.

Close to half (44%) of all students say their experiences at school make them feel like many different types of jobs could be a good fit for them. Forty-one percent of students who agree with this statement are hopeful about their future, compared to only 23% of those who do not agree.

Additionally, 43% of students who have been highly impacted by CCL — i.e., agree that CCL opportunities have informed what they plan to do after high school — are hopeful about their future, compared to 24% of those who strongly disagree, disagree or neither agree nor disagree.

Forty percent of students who indicate that CCL opportunities include the activities they are interested in are hopeful, compared to 25% of those who disagree. This finding highlights the importance of listening to students and better understanding what they are looking for in CCL opportunities.

## Career-Connected Learning Has an Impact ... and Students Want More

### Students Say CCL Makes a Difference

A critical goal of CCL is to help students build career awareness, and about half of students indicate that this objective is being met. Forty-two percent of middle school students and 47% of high school students say they learned about a job or career they had not heard of before while at school this year. As students expand their awareness of various career paths, they perceive more possibilities available to them for their futures: 39% of middle schoolers and 48% of high schoolers agree that their experiences at school make them feel like many different types of jobs could be a good fit for them.

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### High-Impact CCL Opportunities Include Mentors, Quantity and Community Engagement.

One measure of a CCL opportunity's impact is its influence on a student's plans after high school. Thirty-four percent of students report that CCL opportunities have informed what they plan to do after high school, indicating that CCL opportunities have had a particularly meaningful impact on their futures. This number is even higher among high schoolers, with 38% agreeing that a CCL opportunity has informed their post-high-school plans.



### What do we know about students in the high-impact group?

The high-impact group comprises students who agree or strongly agree with the statement, "The CCL opportunities at my school have informed what I plan to do after high school."

**Mentors matter.** Fifty-eight percent of students in the high-impact group have a mentor, compared to 34% of their peers who are not in the high-impact group.

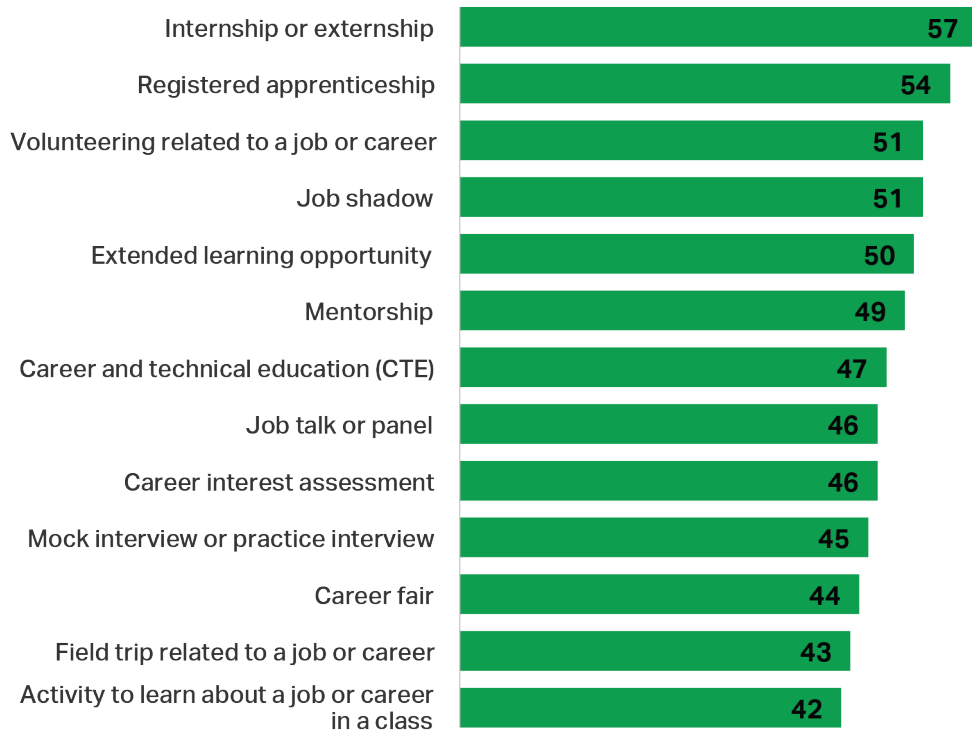
**CCL quantity is important.** Sixty percent of the high-impact group have participated in five or more CCL opportunities, compared to 26% of their peers.

**Community engagement is key.** Participating in *any* career-connected learning activity impacts students, though activities that allow students to engage with the community outside of school walls are more highly correlated with the high-impact group. Nearly six in 10 students (57%) who participated in an internship/externship agree or strongly agree that CCL activities have informed their plans after high school. Similarly, 54% of those who participated in a registered apprenticeship, 51% who volunteered related to a job or career, and 51% who participated in job shadowing say the same.

**CHART 11**

#### Impact of CCL Activities on Post-High-School Plans

% Of students who who strongly agree/agree participation in an activity informed their plans



## Community Connection Matters

Some activities are more highly correlated with students' hopes for the future, specifically activities that allow students to engage with community members outside school walls. For instance, 38% of students who volunteered related to a job or career, 39% of those who participated in an extended learning opportunity (ELO) and 40% who participated in an internship/externship were hopeful about their futures, compared to only 29% of those who did not participate in each activity.

### Mentors

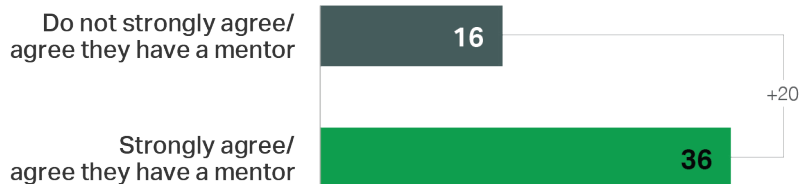
It is clear that community engagement impacts students' optimism about the future. At the same time, the logistical challenges of connecting students with community members can serve as a barrier to facilitating these types of activities for students. Outside of programs that may require substantial coordination, such as ELOs and internships/externships, mentorship is a powerful tool to help students meaningfully interact with the community.

Students who agree they have a mentor who supports their development are more likely to be engaged than their peers who do not. This finding holds after controlling for grade level and grades received.

**CHART 12**

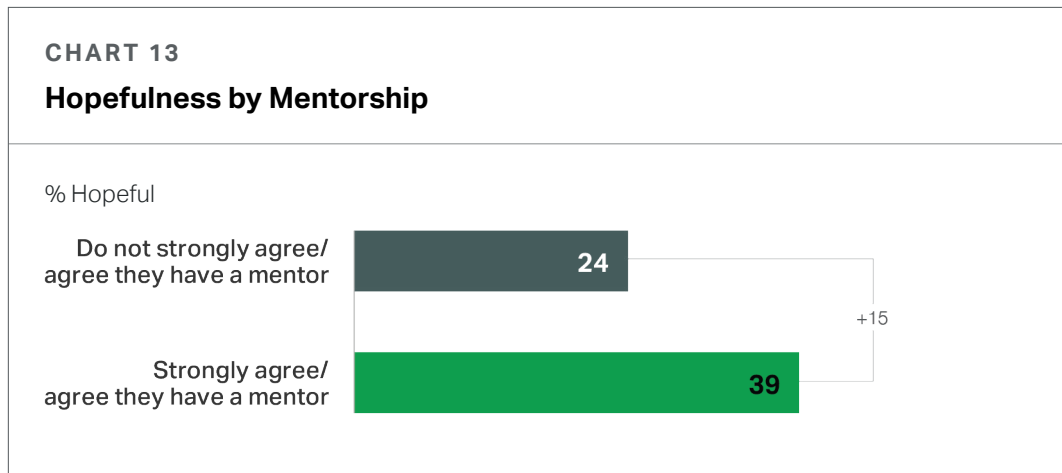
#### Engagement by Mentorship

% Engaged





Mentorship is also strongly correlated with hope. Those who agree they have a mentor who supports their development are more likely to be hopeful than their peers who do not agree. This holds after controlling for grade level and grades received.



### Who has a mentor?

- Thirty-nine percent of students in fifth through 10<sup>th</sup> grades agree they have a mentor who supports their development, compared to 52% of students in grades 11 and 12.
- Thirty-four percent of students who report earning “average” or “poor” grades have a mentor, compared to 47% of those who report earning “excellent” or “good” grades.
- Fifty-five percent of students who have participated in an internship or externship, ELO or volunteered related to a job or career report having a mentor who supports their development, compared to 39% of students who did not participate in these activities.



# Opportunities to Empower Students for Their Future

The impact that career-connected learning has on students is evident. Many New Hampshire schools and districts recognize this and are dedicated to advancing CCL programs, yet there is an opportunity to further improve the effectiveness and reach of CCL activities. What can schools, districts and community members do to empower students for their futures?

## 1 **Include a greater variety of CCL activities.**

Less than half of high school students (48%) and only a quarter of middle school students report that the career activities at their school include the types of jobs and careers they are interested in. Schools may want to work to better understand the types of careers students want to explore and expand CCL options.

## 2 **Create opportunities for community engagement.**

CCL activities that allow students to interact with the community and gain real-world experience — including internships or externships, volunteering related to a job or career, job shadowing and extended learning opportunities — are more highly correlated with impacting students' plans after high school. Fifty-seven percent of students who participated in an internship/externship say CCL activities informed their plans after high school, and slightly smaller majorities of those who participated in a registered apprenticeship (54%), volunteered related to a job or career (51%) or participated in job shadowing (51%) say the same. The portion of students who agree that CCL activities generally informed their plans after high school is significantly higher among those who participated in these activities than the 34% of students overall. Schools and communities can help empower students to feel more confident in their futures after high school by working together to create opportunities for students to interact with the community outside of school walls.

## 3 **Connect students to mentors.**

The study's findings show that mentors matter for student engagement and hope: Students with a mentor are 20 percentage points more likely to be engaged and 15 points more likely to be hopeful about their futures. Schools can make a meaningful difference in the lives of students by better understanding students' relationships with mentors. When schools take the time to understand where students find mentors and what makes an effective mentor, they improve their chances of making mentorship more accessible to all students.

The most pressing action needed to improve CCL programming and, consequently, student engagement and hope, is listening to students. This study captured the current state of career-connected learning in New Hampshire, but it is only a starting point. Schools and districts can leverage this data to gain a better understanding of student needs by making time to listen, such as by creating student focus groups to discuss the results of this study. Surveying or talking directly with students will allow schools to understand why students responded the way they did and learn what changes need to be prioritized.

## Methodology Statement

Results for the Gallup-NHLI student poll are based on a web-based survey conducted from May 1 through June 7, 2024. The survey was available in English and Spanish and administered to students during the school day. The sample comprises 8,634 middle school and high school student respondents from 13 districts and 25 schools throughout New Hampshire. NHLI invited schools and districts they had existing partnerships with to participate in the study, and schools were given the opportunity to opt in. The results from this survey represent the second year 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.



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