

Career-Connected Learning Positively Impacts Student Engagement and Hope, According to New Gallup-NHLI Study

Most New Hampshire students participate in career-connected learning, but more frequent and effective opportunities are needed.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — September 13, 2023 — As students and educators begin a new school year, Gallup and the New Hampshire Learning Initiative (NHLI), with support from the Barr Foundation and U.S. Department of Education, are releasing a study highlighting the impact of participation in career-connected learning (CCL) opportunities on student engagement and hope. CCL is an education strategy that provides students with career skills and connects employers with capable students, and it has been proven to positively affect student engagement and hope. Data from the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey of New Hampshire students found that 44% of high schoolers felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more consecutive weeks. The Gallup-NHLI student poll provides evidence that career-connected learning is a successful strategy for increasing student engagement and hopefulness among middle and high school students.

The study reveals that the majority of New Hampshire middle and high schoolers (88%) have participated in at least one CCL opportunity, yet only one in four students (25%) are engaged at school. The findings suggest a need for more frequent and higher quality CCL opportunities to bridge this gap. According to the report, providing students with any number of CCL opportunities can help boost engagement, but more opportunities have a greater impact. Overall, students who report participating in at least one CCL opportunity are more likely than those who did not participate to be engaged (27% vs. 15%) and hopeful (32% vs. 23%).

For students participating in a larger number of CCL activities — eight or more — engagement and hopefulness rise again. Nearly half (49%) of middle schoolers and 35% of high schoolers who participate in eight or more CCL opportunities are engaged compared to 31% of middle school students and 16% of high school students who participate in two CCL opportunities. This pattern holds true for hope: 39% of middle schoolers and 52% of high schoolers who participate in eight or more CCL opportunities are hopeful compared to 26% of middle school students and 28% of high school students who participate in two CCL opportunities.

“NHLI has been working in the CCL space for several years now and we recognize the importance of these experiences for students in the classroom and out of school,” said Carolyn Eastman, director of personalized learning at NHLI. “We are happy to be contributing to important research that supports what we and our Future Learning Pathways (FLP) schools’ teams have emphasized — growing hope in all students through CCL. This research will provide valuable insight and leverage the work that has already begun in school districts across New Hampshire.”

Access to CCL opportunities at school also influences students’ career aspirations. Over one in three (35%) high school students — and one in four (26%) middle school students — say that CCL opportunities at their school have informed what they plan to do after high school. Students who agree that the CCL activities at their school include the types of jobs and careers they are interested in are three times more likely to agree that these opportunities have informed what they plan to do after high school compared to those who do not agree.

Of the various types of CCL opportunities evaluated, mentorship was identified as one of the most significant factors on educational outcomes. Students with a mentor are more likely than those who do not have a mentor

to be engaged (37% vs. 16%) and hopeful (40% vs. 25%). Despite this, only four in 10 students (41%) report having a mentor. Yet mentorship is particularly crucial at a young age. Of the 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 study highlights the importance of not only providing students with career exposure but ensuring that those experiences are impactful and that the skills being discussed are relevant to students’ interests,” said Mark Reckmeyer, senior education market leader at Gallup. “Listening to student input and opinions when designing CCL or any curriculum is essential for ensuring that students are getting the most value out of these programs.”

Survey Methodology

Results for *The Power of Career-Connected Learning in New Hampshire* report 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%.

About New Hampshire Learning Initiative

In 2015, NHLI was founded to create and support meaningful, enduring innovation in education. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, NHLI works to break the mold of traditional student learning by preparing and supporting educators who are implementing competency-based learning systems. NHLI is composed of former and current educators dedicated to moving schools forward to a student-centered system of learning. NHLI believes every student deserves access to a high-quality education system that creates pathways for a bright future. For more information, visit nhlearninginitiative.org.

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.

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