

2024 Naviance Student Survey Report

Student Perspectives on College, Career,
and Life Readiness



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Introduction

The State of Postsecondary Planning

Counselors, educators, administrators, and other education stakeholders stand poised at a critical opportunity to rethink how to prepare students for a future that is increasingly unclear and complex.

This annual [PowerSchool Naviance CCLR](#) Survey gives insight into students' perceptions of their futures. This perspective is not just informative—it's essential for shaping the policies, programs, and practices that truly support student success.

Whether you're an educator striving to connect classroom learning to real-world applications, an administrator focused on improving long-term student success, a parent beginning to think about postsecondary paths for your student, or a policymaker working to create equitable and effective education systems that provide sufficient workforce pipeline, the information contained in this report is a crucial resource.

Together, we can ensure that every student is equipped not only to meet the demands of tomorrow but to thrive in a world where adaptability, resilience, and a commitment to lifelong learning leads to meaningful and transformative careers.

Today's Postsecondary Landscape

Seismic shifts in the modern job market, financial implications from the student debt crisis, and a national labor shortage are redefining what it means to prepare K-12 students for college, career, and life. Today's students are graduating into a broader array of opportunities and challenges than their predecessors. This landscape offers an exciting opportunity to chart their own postgraduate paths. It also invites K-12 schools and districts to review their college, career, and life readiness (CCLR) programming to ensure they are successfully transitioning students into life after high school.

The Modern Job Market

Continuous technological innovation is creating new jobs while also making some current positions redundant. In its current developmental state, AI (artificial intelligence) is often used in "roles that involve routine, structured tasks easily automated by intelligent systems" such as data entry and administrative positions, customer service representatives, manufacturing and assembly line workers, cashiers, and more.

Modern technology is designed to enhance, not replace, human work. While it is reducing the need for workers in certain roles, it is also creating opportunities that didn't exist even just a decade ago.² Content creators/influencers, telemedicine providers, AI prompt engineers, virtual reality designers, drone pilots, and social media specialists are just a few of the roles that wouldn't exist without technological advancements.

In fact, today's middle schoolers and elementary students will likely work jobs that haven't even been created yet.



Student Debt Math Doesn't Add Up

In addition to watching technology's impact on the labor market, today's students have seen their older counterparts drowning in student loan debt as a result of pursuing an undergraduate degree. According to the Education Data Initiative, the [average federal student loan debt balance is \\$37,853](#).³ The outstanding federal student loan balance is \$1.620 trillion and accounts for 91.2% of all student debt. [It is the second-highest consumer debt category after mortgages.](#)

Despite their education investment, [52% of former students are underemployed](#)⁴ (working in a job that doesn't require a bachelor's degree) a year after graduation, according to a study from the Burning Glass Institute and the Strada Institute for the Future of Work. [A decade after graduation, 45% are still underemployed.](#)

Generations of students have been taught that an undergraduate degree is the ticket to a secure, well-paying job. As the current job market disproves that idea, today's high schoolers are increasingly curious about alternatives to four more years of school. Interestingly, an increasing number of employers are, too. In an effort to create a more diverse workforce, [45% of companies plan to eliminate the degree requirement](#)⁵ for workers in entry- and mid-level roles, making social mobility more accessible.

Low Unemployment Meets Significant Labor Shortages

With [8.1 million job openings and 6.8 million unemployed workers](#),⁶ how can there be a labor shortage?

During the Great Resignation—also called the Big Quit and the Great Reshuffle—from March 2021 to June 2023, workers left their jobs in search of better compensation, improved work-life balance, and flexible work-from-home schedules. [The labor shortage that resulted continues to impact industries globally.](#)⁷

Findings from Manpower Group indicate that [75% of today's employers report difficulty filling roles](#).⁸ The most impacted industries include:

- Health care and life sciences (77% talent shortage)
- Consumer goods and services (76% talent shortage)
- Information technology (76% talent shortage)
- Transport, logistics, and automotive (76% talent shortage)
- Industrials and materials (75% talent shortage)
- Communication services (73% talent shortage)

Manpower Group also identified the top five "soft" skillsets and top five technical skillsets employers are having the most difficulty finding.⁹ These are:

Top 5 Skillsets Employers are Having the Most Difficulty Finding

	Soft Skills	Technical Skills
1	Collaboration & Teamwork	IT & Data
2	Accountability & Reliability	Engineering
3	Reasoning & Problem-Solving	Sales & Marketing
4	Active Learning & Curiosity	Operations & Logistics
5	Resilience & Adaptability	Manufacturing & Production

Jack Kelly writes for [Forbes](#),¹⁰ "The retirement of experienced Baby Boomers will create a talent gap and brain drain in the U.S. labor market, as their in-depth, 30-plus years of industry knowledge will go out the door with them." Without the tools or data to see where these talent gaps are occurring, schools and districts lack the information they need to guide their students toward industries and careers that are eager for rising talent.

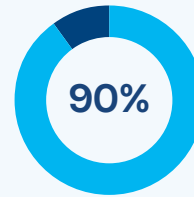
Survey

Methodology and Respondents

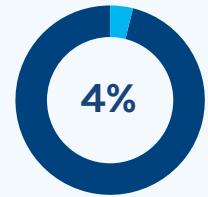
From April to June 2024, PowerSchool Naviance CCLR administered a voluntary online survey to all middle and high school students in the U.S. using the platform. The Naviance CCLR Student Survey enables an analysis of students' postsecondary interests and plans, the factors that are most influential in their decision-making about their futures, and a variety of other helpful metrics.

7,125 students responded to the survey, which took about ten minutes to complete. Most respondents are seniors enrolled in public school (73%) and demographically are evenly distributed across the West (38%), South (27%), and Northeast (27%), with a lower percentage of respondents from the Midwest (8%). Slightly more females than males responded to the survey (52% and 44%, respectively). About half of respondents have a parent with a college or advanced degree.

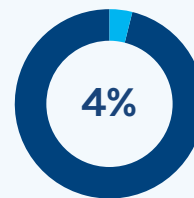
School Type



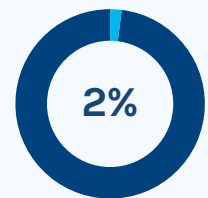
Public School



Private School



Charter School

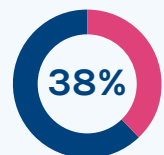


Other School

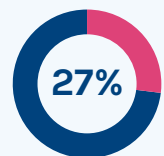
US – Region



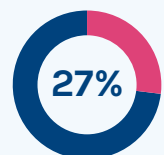
West



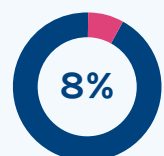
South



Northeast



Midwest



Key Findings: What Students Said

The perspectives and experiences of the students themselves give valuable insight into the factors that influence student decisions, the challenges they face, and the support they need as they navigate their plans for the future.

 This year, **four clear CCLR challenges** emerged:

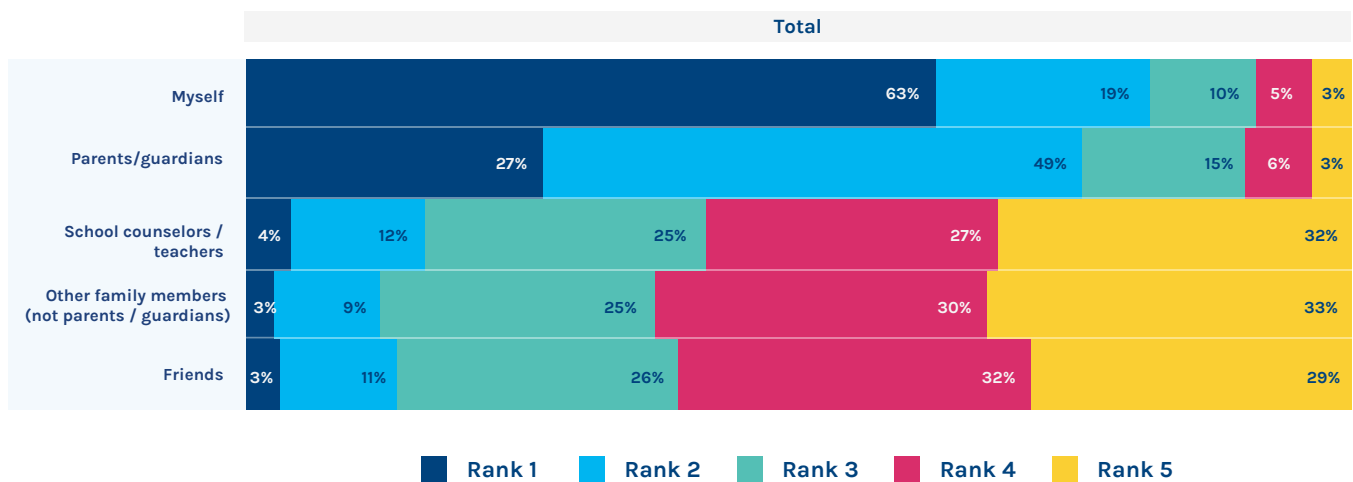
- 1 Improving family involvement** in their student's postsecondary planning and decision-making
- 2 Helping students make stronger connections** between the content they're learning in the classroom and its real-world applicability in careers and industries
- 3 Filling in information gaps** so all students have comprehensive understanding of their postgraduate opportunities: four-year college, two-year college, industry credential and/or certification, gap year, military enrollment, internship, direct to workforce
- 4 Nurturing strengths and interests** throughout students' education journey to avoid last-minute changes of plan and impulsive decisions

Reviewing these challenges and considering ways for schools and districts to proactively address these gaps in their CCLR programming will give a more complete understanding of what students want and need to feel fully college, career, and life ready."

Challenge #1: Improving Family Involvement

While students typically lead their postsecondary decision-making, parents and caregivers play the next most influential role. In a survey conducted by ACT, more students reported their mother as being very helpful in their postgraduate planning decisions than any other person or future planning factor.¹¹

Fig. 1
Influence on Decision



The majority of surveyed students say that after themselves, parents have the most influence on their postsecondary planning.



In too many schools, students do not have meaningful access to counselors, moving parents and caregivers into the most influential role for their student's college and career decision-making. Longstanding concerns about counselor overload may be alleviated by more intentionally inviting families into their student's college and career planning. [The American School Counselor Association \(ASCA\) recommends a ratio of 250:1 of students to counselors.](#)¹² In reality, the [national average ratio was 385:1 for the 2022-23 school year.](#)¹³ Studies support the reasoning behind smaller student/counselor ratios, including increased standardized test performance, attendance, GPA, and graduation rates, as well as decreased disciplinary infractions. In fact, one study¹⁴ found that one standard deviation change in the ratio can result in a 6% standard deviation in student outcomes, particularly in improving attendance, decreasing disciplinary infractions, and increasing graduation rates.

Increasing family engagement is not a concern only for counselors. The [2024 Education Focus Report](#)¹⁵ found that 25% of survey respondents at the school level and 21% at the district level said partnering with families/caregivers to boost student success was a top challenge they wanted to address.



Make Family Outreach Easier for Educators

Students whose parents and caregivers are engaged in their education have better attendance and behavior records, get better grades, demonstrate stronger social and emotional skills, and are more adaptable¹⁶ than students with disengaged families. Study findings suggest that this improved performance is due to a student's boosted belief in their "cognitive competence,"¹⁷ a perception that builds student confidence over time.

Essential to building engagement between schools and parents is a tool that allows for easy, instant, and personalized communication. 41% of educators surveyed in the Education Focus Report said that their busy schedules were the primary obstacle to more family communication.

Because students may not be receiving the individualized attention they need from overworked counselors, leveraging family engagement is the best way schools can support students' college and career planning. It's encouraging that 53% of educators surveyed in the Education Focus Report believe that partnerships between home and school have strengthened since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finding effective ways to address the challenges counselors and educators face in maintaining regular communication with families is essential for students to make informed decisions about their futures.

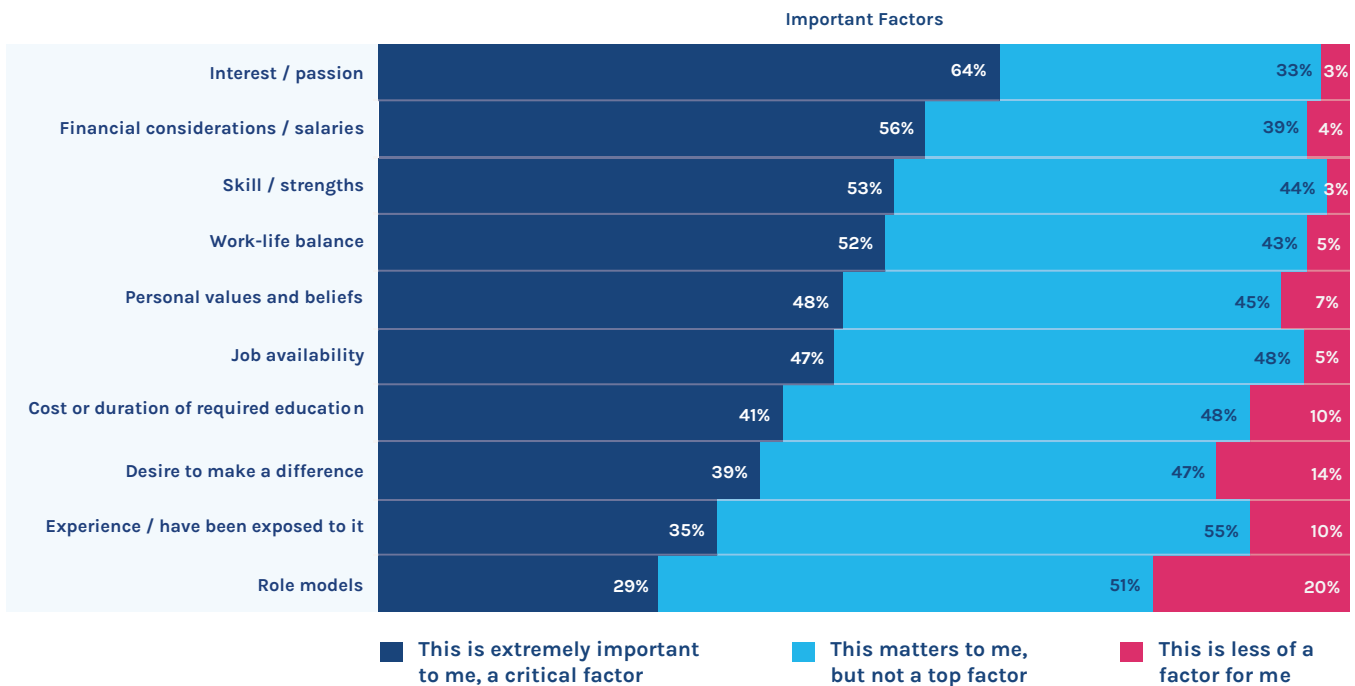


Challenge #2:

Students' Uncertainty about Their Futures Impacts Learning

Students' understanding of industries and career paths is critical to their postsecondary planning. The Naviance CCLR Student Survey reveals that the most important factor for students in choosing a career is personal interest, followed closely by financial considerations. However, a significant gap remains in how students connect their education to their future careers, especially among those not bound for a four-year college.

Fig. 2
Important Factors in Choosing a Career



64% of surveyed students said that the most important factor in choosing a career is having interest in it, followed by financial factors. About 1 in ten cite skills and work-life balance as extremely important.

Fig. 3

How Education Links to Future Plans

		Plans for After High School						
	Total	4-Year College	2-Year College	Trade School	Working	Gap Year	Military	Undecided
I trust that what I'm learning will prepare me for the future, but I don't always see the connection	57%	60%	57%	52%	48%	54%	51%	60%
I can see how what I'm learning relates to my future career	22%	24%	23%	18%	16%	14%	20%	18%
I do not think I will need most of what I'm learning in my future career	21%	16%	19%	29%	35%	32%	29%	28%

Students who indicated that they are planning to attend college are more likely to relate their education to their future careers, but many students choosing other paths fail to see the connection.

Students who don't see the connection between what they're learning in the classroom and its applicability in the workforce are more likely to become disengaged in their learning or drop out of school entirely. They are more susceptible to chronic absenteeism, a sudden decline in academic performance, and even anxiety and depression.¹⁸

Without a sense of what they're working toward, students are challenged to find purpose and meaning in curricular content that feels irrelevant or impractical. "When will I ever need to use this in the real world?" is a frequent student lament. Those students who need guidance the most are the ones who are increasingly unmotivated to engage in school.

Foster Student Engagement by Contextualizing Classroom Content in Real-World Applications

Student engagement correlates with stronger academic outcomes and more positive workplace outcomes. Research shows that engaged students are [2.5 times more likely to say that they get excellent grades](#) and do well in school and [4.5 times more likely to be hopeful about the future](#)¹⁹ than their disengaged peers. Additionally, early career exploration for students can significantly impact dropout prevention, [reducing the risk by 23%](#).²⁰



Use our ROI calculator to learn how building college, career, and future planning relevance into school curriculum can improve attendance and graduation rates, directly influencing state funding.

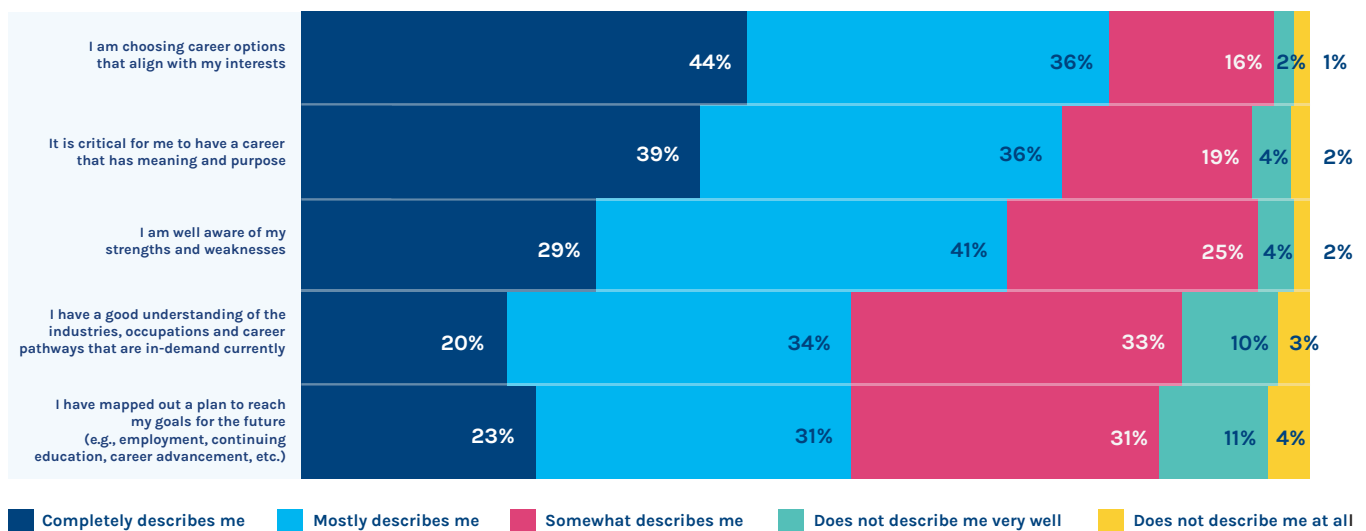
[Calculate the difference!](#)

The disconnect between K-12 education and the workforce results in students graduating from high school without the support or clearly defined paths to which they are accustomed. Today's students who graduate high school unprepared for the workforce need more support in identifying careers of interest, developing employability skills, and planning career paths. Research shows that only [26% of high school seniors](#)²¹ have foundational work readiness skills, and only [33% of students](#)²² believe they will graduate college with the skills and knowledge to be successful in a job.

Career-connected learning plays a crucial role in creating cohesive pathways from school to the workforce. U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona says, "An education system reimagined for the 21st century [engages youth of all ages in the power of career-connected learning and provides every student with the opportunity to gain real-life work experience](#),²³ earn college credits, and make progress towards an industry credential before they graduate high school."

Fig. 4

Students' Understandings of Their Interests and Future Careers



80% of students surveyed responded they are choosing a career that aligns with their interests.

Fostering students' career interests can be done with a variety of strategies and approaches, including:

- Encouraging self-reflection
- Inviting guest speakers
- Hosting career fairs or providing transportation to local networking events
- Facilitating internships or work-based learning opportunities
- Incorporating experiential learning in curriculum
- Creating networking opportunities
- Organizing field trips
- Providing career exploration resources

Additionally, schools can leverage advances in technology to make more explicit connections between classroom learning and real world relevance. By making learning more relevant and engaging, schools can better prepare students for their future careers and foster a lifelong love of learning.

What's most important is helping students realize that the work they're doing in school will have relevance and meaning after graduation. The more explicitly schools can make these connections, the more likely students are to stay engaged and invested in their learning.

Challenge #3:

Many Students Graduate Unaware of Possible Postgraduate Paths

Far too many students enter high school without any prior exposure to the full range of postsecondary opportunities available to them. Recent data shows that most teenagers in the United States—and worldwide—still have relatively constrained expectations about their future careers. Slightly more than **46% of American teenagers**²⁴ expect to work in one of the 10 most commonly cited jobs.

Students are expressing the need for more support in planning their futures. There are still too many students who get to the end of their secondary education without a plan and clear path forward toward their goals and ambitions.

Fig. 5

Students' Understanding of Their Interests and Future Careers (by Grade)

	Completely / Mostly Describes Me	Grade Level				
		6 th – 8 th Grade	9 th Grade	10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade
I am choosing career options that align with my interests	80%	75%	83%	84%	87%	79%
It is critical for me to have a career that has meaning and purpose	75%	72%	75%	81%	1%	75%
I am well aware of my strengths and weaknesses	70%	62%	64%	64%	70%	72%
I have a good understanding of the industries, occupations and career pathways that are in-demand currently	54%	45%	44%	45%	48%	58%
I have mapped out a plan to reach my goals for the future (e.g., employment, continuing education, career advancement, etc.)	54%	46%	49%	47%	46%	57%

80% of surveyed students seek a career that aligns with their interests, and 75% want a career that fulfills a sense of meaning and purpose. Notably, this is more important to juniors than it is to seniors, with a negative change of 6% between grades. Only 46% of high school juniors have mapped out a plan to reach their future goals.

Only 57% of students in their final year of high school say they have mapped out a plan to reach their goals for the future, and only 54% believe they have a good understanding of the industries, occupations, and career pathways that are in demand.

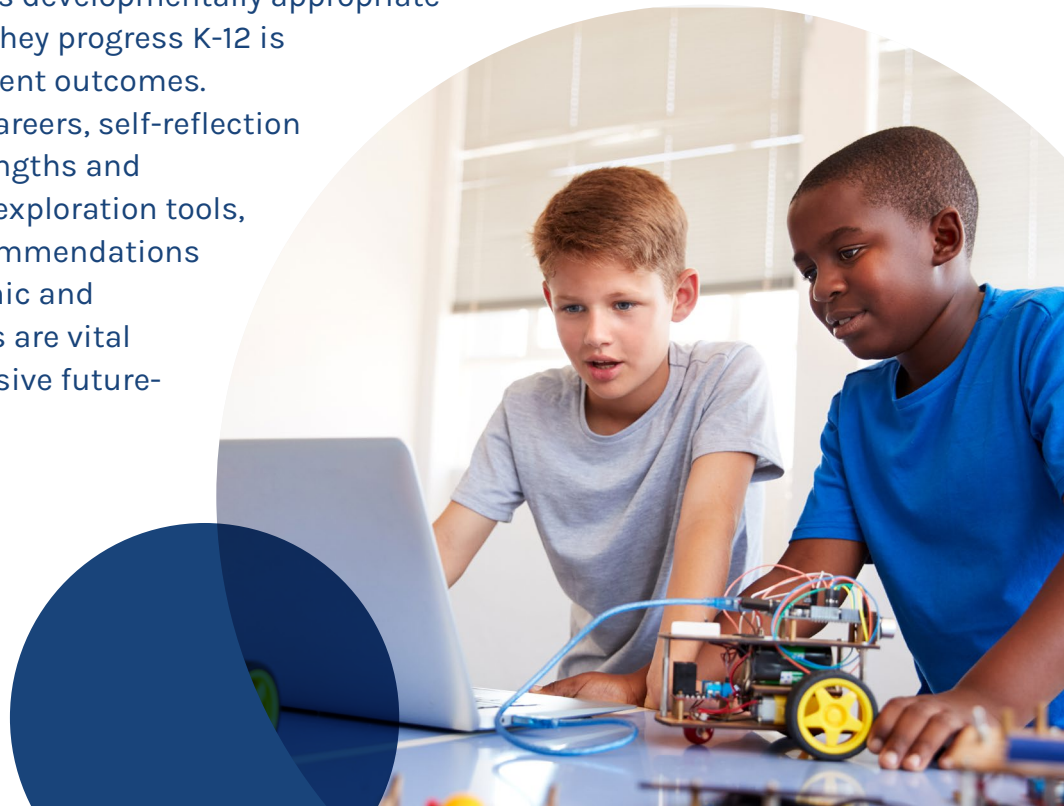
Improve Postgraduate Success and Equity with Comprehensive College and Career Programming

In many schools and districts, formal CCLR programming starts in middle or high school due to the belief that waiting until students are older to begin thinking about their futures is most developmentally aligned. However, there is increasing evidence of the benefits of introducing younger learners to career exploration.

A [growing body of research](#)²⁵ demonstrates the importance of providing career-connected learning experiences for younger learners to develop a positive self-concept of their occupational prospects. Students who have more time to think about and prepare for their futures are better equipped to adopt new skills and invest in their own lifelong learning.

Every school should have the tools and resources to introduce students to the opportunities available to them, including pursuing higher education or alternative certifications, enlisting in the military, working in an internship, and joining the workforce. Financial literacy and the ability to navigate funding options for these paths are also essential for students. Students can set goals only if they have a full understanding of what's achievable.

A robust CCLR program that is developmentally appropriate and grows with students as they progress K-12 is essential for optimizing student outcomes. Exposure to industries and careers, self-reflection assessments to identify strengths and interests, college and career exploration tools, and personalized future recommendations based on a student's academic and extracurricular achievements are vital components of a comprehensive future-oriented curriculum.

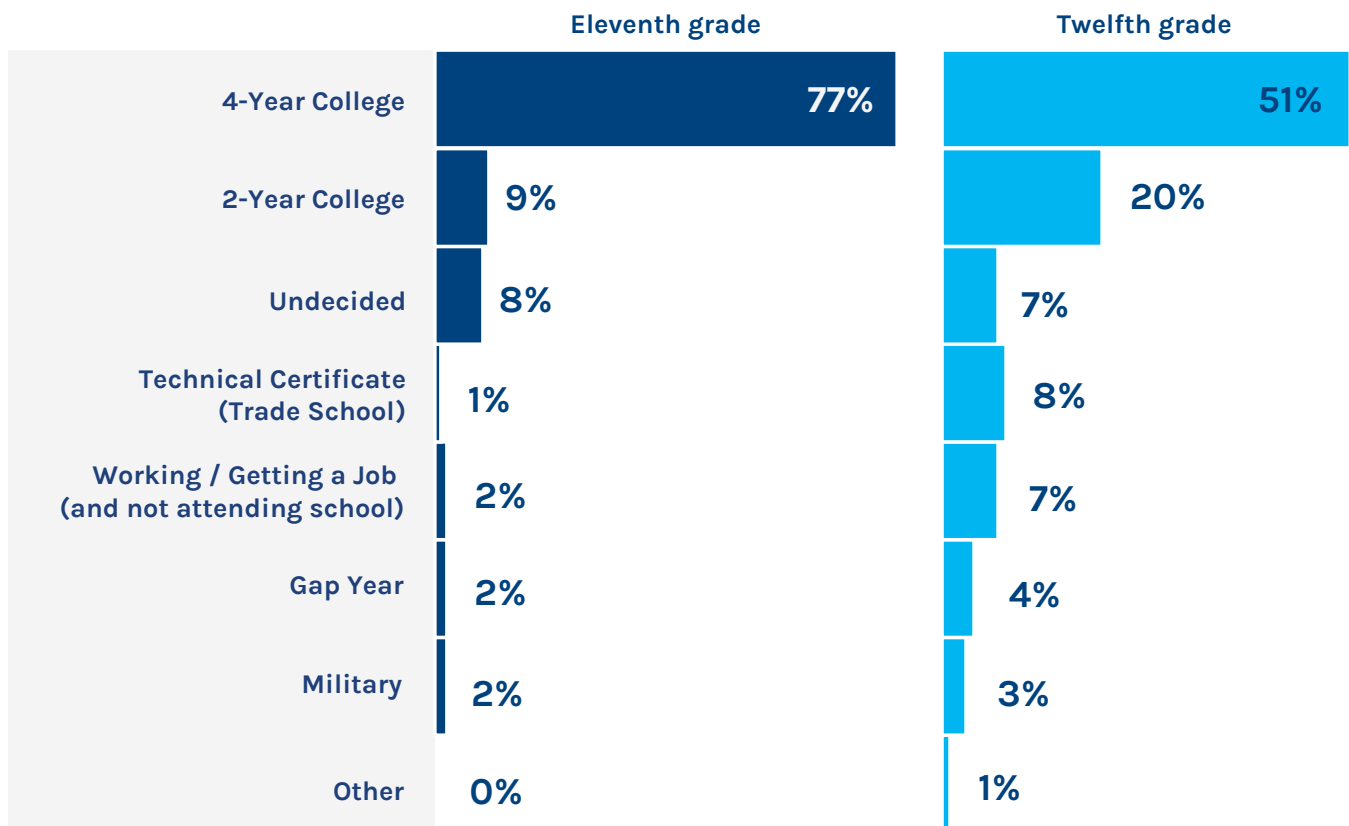


Challenge #4:

Students Most Likely to Change Plans between Junior and Senior Year

Until their final year of high school, most students plan to attend a four-year college. However, many of those students' postsecondary plans shift significantly during the senior year, with students electing to attend a two-year college or trade school, instead. About one out of 13 students remains undecided about their plans, despite graduation being imminent.

Fig. 6
Students Plans for After High School



Student interest in attending a two-year college nearly doubles from junior to senior year. At the same time, there is a steep decline in students planning to attend four-year colleges, indicating a need for students to have earlier access to information and knowledge about all pathway options.

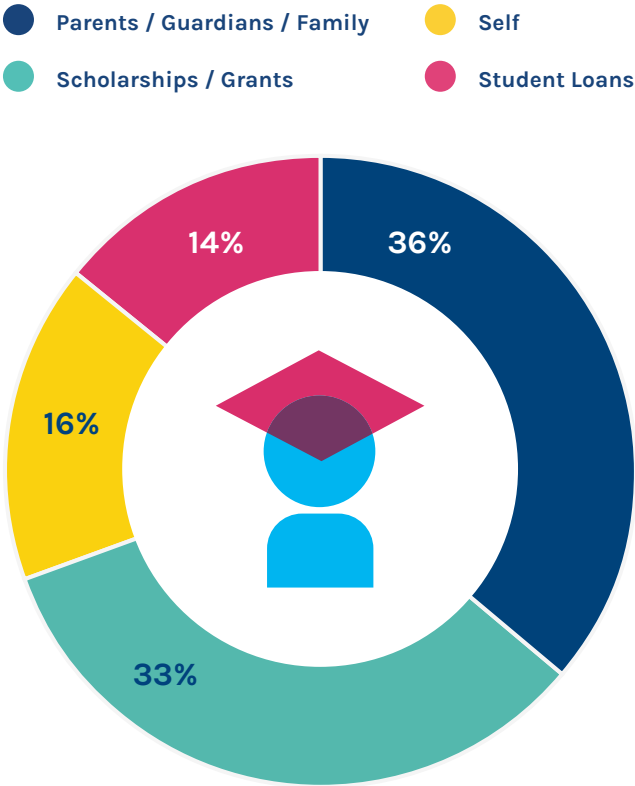
While the Naviance CCLR Student Survey did not ask students to explain the reasoning behind their changed choice, there are two most likely explanations:

- 1. After spending a summer learning about and visiting colleges, and familiarizing themselves with admissions criteria, students are better able to see their own candidate profile in context and adjust their plans accordingly.
- 2. Families have candid conversations with their students about the cost of continuing education, including loans and financial aid, helping students be more realistic about what's within their financial reach. Two-year colleges and trade schools are usually more affordable than four-year colleges.

In fact, parents are more likely to have frank conversations about finances after their student has held a part-time or summer job²⁶ and understands the connection between work, earnings, and debt. Even then, 63% of seniors say they "don't know" how they'll pay for college.

While the shifting decisions are expected as plans began to finalize, the data indicates that students would be better served by understanding the differences and similarities between four-year colleges and two-year colleges earlier in their postsecondary planning. Schools and districts can support this pathway choice by forming partnerships with local community colleges and trade schools and even directly connecting students to alumni who now attend those schools.

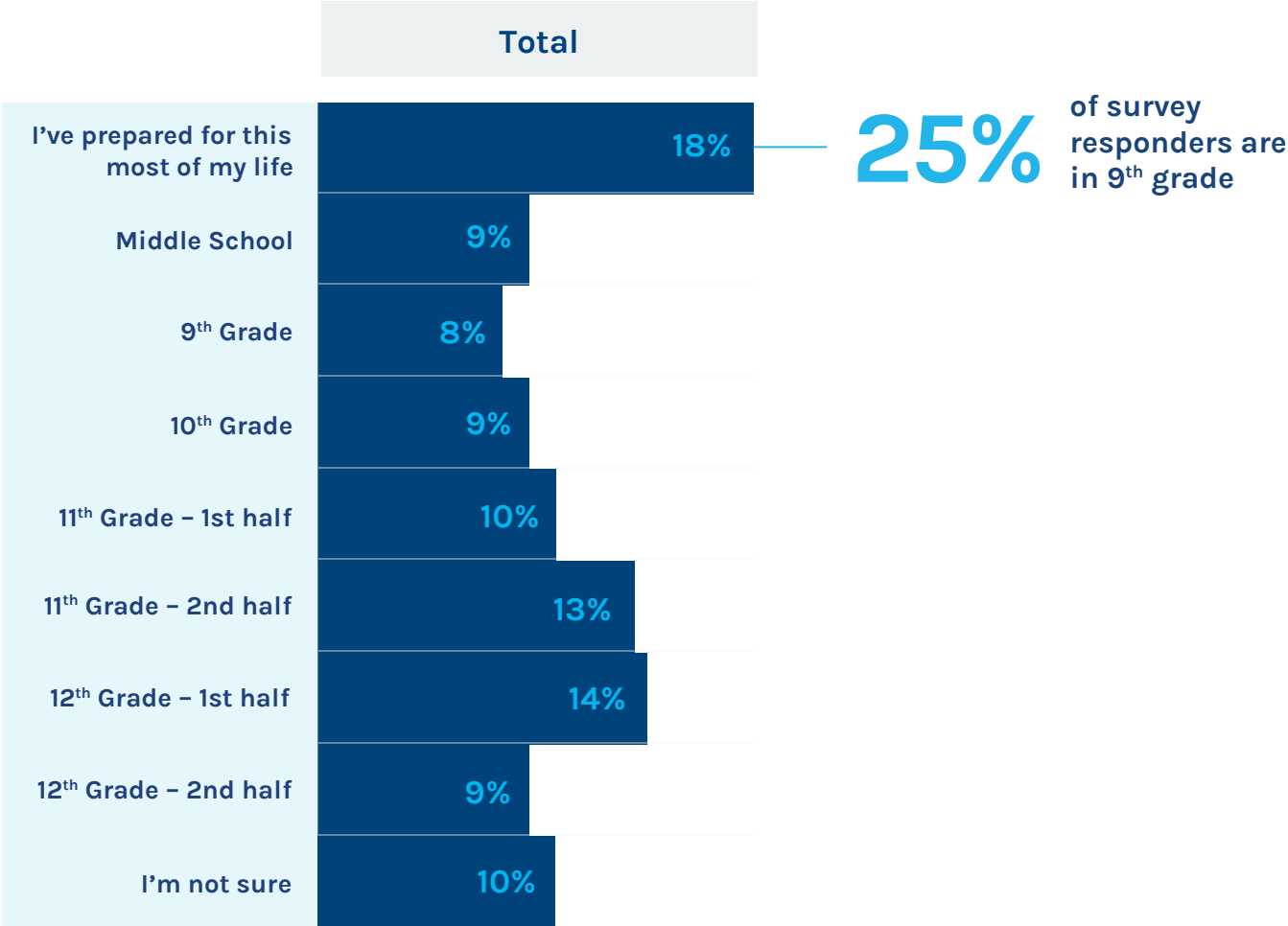
Fig. 7
Proportion of Tuition Expected to be Covered



Surveyed students indicate that they anticipate their family, as well as scholarships and grants, will pay for most of their college tuition.

Interestingly, 25% of ninth graders say, "I have prepared for this for most of my life" when asked, "When did you start preparing for your postsecondary life?" This data indicates that students are indeed thinking about, and even prioritizing, postsecondary planning at an early age, but they likely don't know where to go or how to get started on a tangible plan.

Fig. 8
When Postsecondary Planning Started



23% of students began postsecondary planning in their junior year, 24% in their senior year, and 18% responded they have been preparing their entire life.

Implement Postsecondary Pathway Exploration Earlier in Students' Education

Introducing career knowledge to younger learners is a key step in preparing students to become responsible citizens who contribute to the workforce by innovating and exploring. Schools and districts can have a great impact by introducing postsecondary outcomes to elementary students and building their CCLR programming in depth and breadth as students get older.

Alisha Hyslop, the senior director of public policy for the Association for Career and Technical Education, says, "Getting [elementary students] to grapple with concepts of careers at an early age helps them [learn what career paths may be possible](#)²⁷ and make decisions about educational and career possibilities as they get older. A student exposed to robots and engineering in elementary school may want to take robotics or Algebra 1 in middle school."

Engaging younger students with career-connected learning can set them up for future success while diminishing equity and access gaps. Hyslop says that early career exposure is "all about exploration and normalization. Students should see there are careers available to people who look like me, live where I live, and are in this community."

Introducing career literacy early in a student's education can maintain and even boost student engagement. When students are aware of diverse career paths, they are better equipped to make decisions about their futures. It's also a way of providing tools for young learners to achieve their goals—and in many cases, aim higher. [This knowledge helps them overcome self-limiting beliefs.](#)²⁸

Additionally, career development at the elementary level [solidifies the connection between academic achievement and future endeavors](#)²⁹ for students. Collaborating with teachers to incorporate career information in normal classroom activities and integrating technology in career development exploration increases the effectiveness of career interventions and their impact on academic achievement.

Recommendations

How Naviance CCLR Can Help

PowerSchool's Naviance CCLR platform is designed to support students in their postsecondary planning by providing a range of tools and resources to help them find their best-fit path.

Naviance CCLR and Family Engagement in Postsecondary Planning

To improve family engagement in their student's postsecondary planning, schools and districts can:

- Encourage parents and caregivers to view their student's **Student Readiness Report**, a personalized report that helps students stay on track and keeps families informed on student progress toward graduation and postsecondary goals. The Student Readiness Report contains vital information such as a student's progress toward meeting graduation requirements, course planning, self-assessment results, personalized multi-pathway planning, and more.
- Provide **multi-language** (70+ different languages) support in Naviance CCLR to provide accessibility to those families who are more comfortable communicating in languages that are not English and ensure that parents and caregivers can be included in their student's planning.



Naviance CCLR and Career-Connected Learning

To help students draw clearer connections between what they're learning in the classroom and how that content is relevant to their futures, schools and districts can encourage students to:

- Use **Career Key**, a self-assessment that helps students discover how their academic strengths align with career and industry pathways
- Explore **Career Profiles**, which provides access to information on a wide variety of careers, including typical required degrees or credentials, salary expectations, job demand, and employment outlook
- Access **Career Pathways and Clusters** to explore the sixteen national career clusters as defined by the U.S. Department of Education
- Watch **Roadtrip Nation** interviews, which includes videos of professionals from various fields explaining how they discovered their career path
- Leverage the **job search tools**, including a national job search database that lists opportunities for employment, apprenticeships, and internships
- Access **work-based learning** opportunities, such as job shadows and career fairs



Naviance CCLR and Postgraduate Knowledge

Students need to know all the possibilities available to them to make informed decisions about their futures. With Naviance CCLR, schools and districts can give students that knowledge with:

- Research-backed self-discovery assessments such as **Strengths Explorer** and **AchieveWorks**, which help students identify their strengths and interests and suggest careers and industries that align with those abilities
- Information on **military enlistment**, including detailed resources for each military branch
- **SuperMatch® College Search**, which allows students to filter colleges based on criteria such as location, major, size, and other personal preferences
- **College match and fit tools**, which help students identify colleges and universities that align with their academic and personal needs
- **Scattergrams**, which provides visual representations of a student's academic record in relation to accepted students at specific colleges, helping them assess their chances of admission
- **Scholarship Search**, giving students access to a database of over 3.5 million scholarships, including college, local, and regional options
- **Multiple pathway planning**, mapping for "undecided" students' different pathway options to help them envision their future
- **College visits**, giving students an opportunity to attend scheduled college fairs to meet with college/military representatives

Naviance CCLR and Early Career Exploration

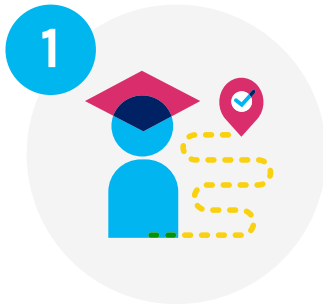
To ensure that students begin gaining career exposure at an early age, schools and districts can:

- Implement **Naviance for Elementary**, delivering age-appropriate content that introduces K-5 students to career exploration, helping them build confidence and excitement for their futures
 - Offer gamified career content with activities that engage younger students in thinking about their interests and potential career paths
 - Access a K-5 curriculum that is pre-built and standards-aligned with lessons covering academic, career, and personal and social themes

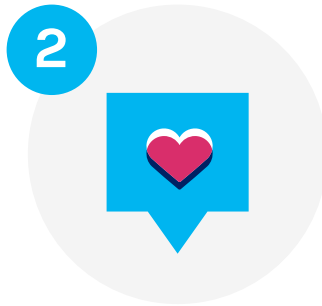
Naviance CCLR: Even More Support for Students and Counselors

Surveyed students noted their favorite Naviance CCLR features, with "exploring career options," "discovering my interests and strengths," and "researching college options" topping the list.

Top 3 Areas Students Find Extremely Important Are:



**Exploring
Career Options**

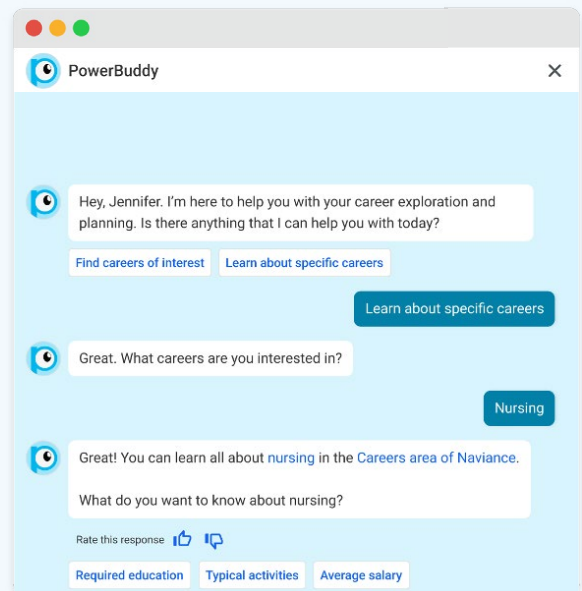


**Discovering
My Interests and
Strengths**



**Researching
College Options**

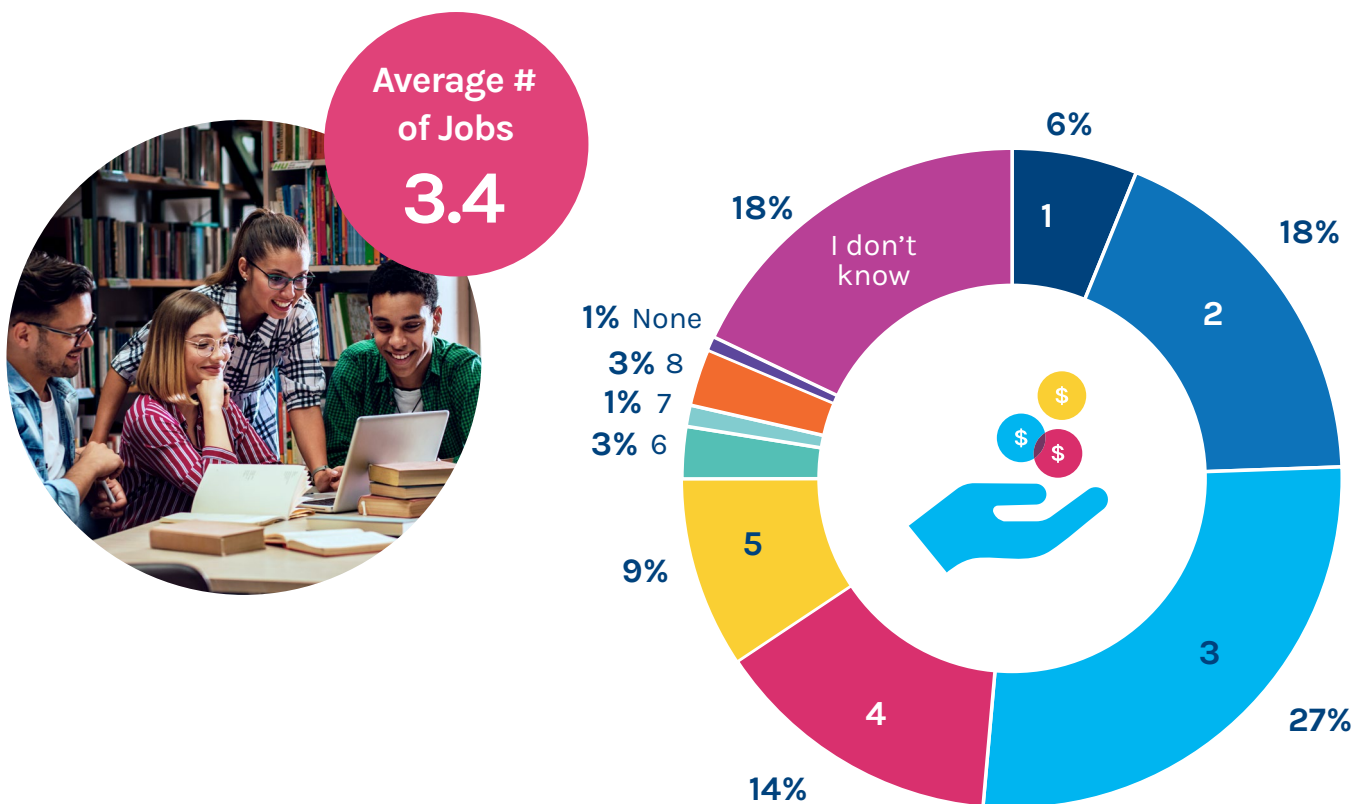
Students can also interact with **PowerBuddy for College and Career** in Naviance CCLR, an AI-driven chatbot that engages with students conversationally to make career exploration and postsecondary planning simple, personalized, and accessible. Students can chat with PowerBuddy to learn about best-fit colleges, components of the college application process, in-demand regional jobs, and more.



Conclusion

Students recognize that their future will be marked by one constant: change. As the survey shows, 20% of students "don't know" how many jobs they'll hold over the next ten years; most students anticipate they'll have worked in three or more.

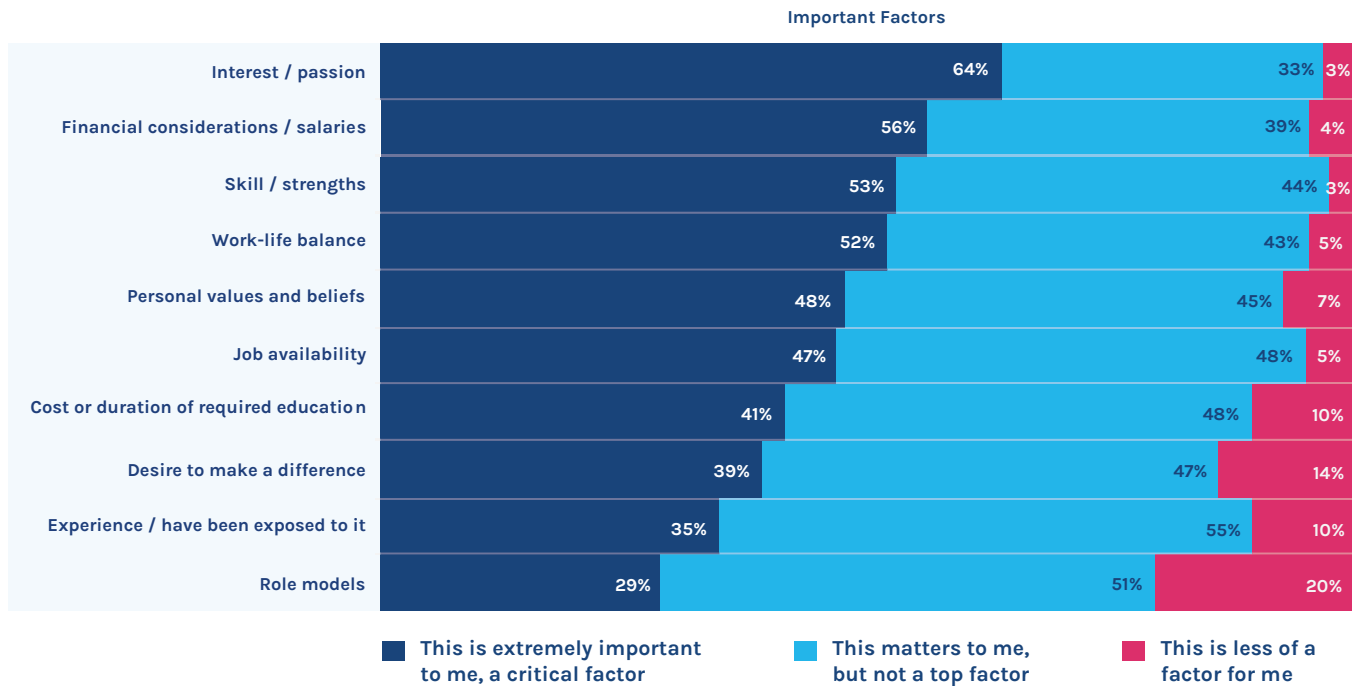
Fig. 10
Number of Jobs Expected in the Next 10 Years



27% of students anticipate having three jobs in the next 10 years. 18% simply don't know where their working life will take them.

Students planning to attend a four-year college are planning on careers in STEM, health science, or business, recognizing that these industries are leading in technological advances and generally lead to well-paid work. While many students say that having an interest in their career is most important, more than half (56%) who took the survey also note that salary is one of the most important factors in choosing a job.

Fig. 11
Important Factors in Choosing a Career



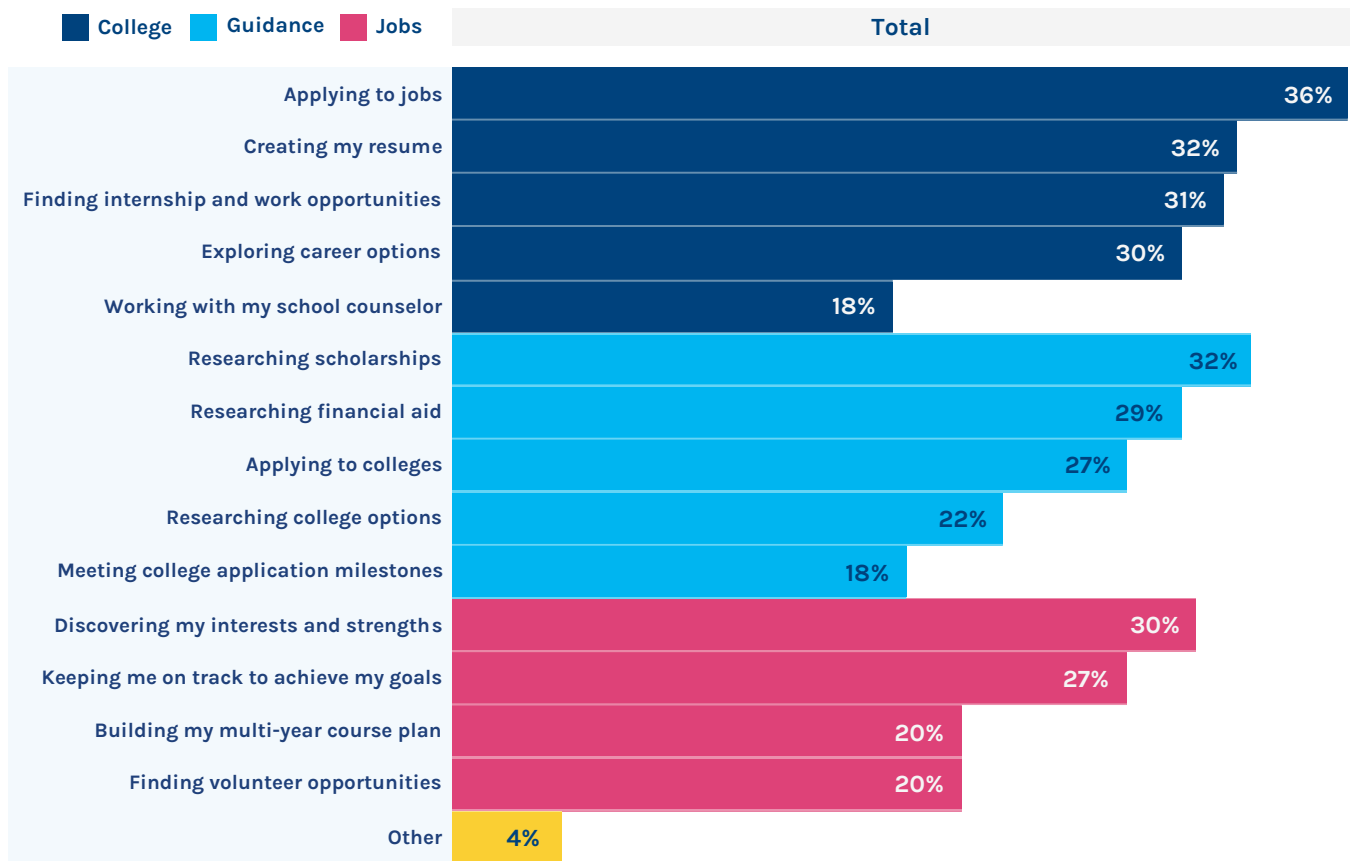
The most important factors that influence a student’s career choice include their own interest in it, earning potential, and its compatibility with their strengths. More than half also say work-life balance is a critical factor.

In fact, the top areas where students want more school support are all job-related: applying to jobs, creating a resume, and finding internship and work opportunities are areas where a school’s CCLR programming can be strengthened.



Fig. 12

Areas Where Students Wish Schools Provided More Support



Students want more job-related support from their schools. Applying to jobs, creating a resume, finding work opportunities, and exploring career options are top concerns.

For schools to serve students well, "college and career readiness" programming sets students on a path of economic opportunity and mobility. Student success as measured by employment rates and earnings averages reduces myopic CCLR curriculum by encouraging a long-term investment in student success.

The U.S. currently faces a labor shortage and a skills gap, which suggests that schools are not adequately preparing students for the modern workforce. While CCLR programming is traditionally concerned with the decisions students make directly after graduation, a more holistic approach that considers what student success means five, 10, and 20 years from now serves all education stakeholders better.

Many schools are already doing just that. At [Fort Smith Public Schools in Arkansas, high school juniors and seniors can participate in a dual-enrollment program](#)³⁰ that provides "hands-on learning and career readiness" in fields with regional workforce shortages. When the local chamber of commerce identified four areas of workforce need—manufacturing, health sciences, IT and skilled trades, and construction technology—the school district collaborated with colleges in the area to "build a pipeline to get students interested in those careers."

More frequent data sharing and institutional collaboration benefit everyone. Students understand the connection between what they're learning in school and how they'll use it upon graduation. Two- and four-year colleges receive state funding to support their work with high schools. The local economy generates a talent pool with the relevant skills, credentials, and experience to fill industry shortages. With teamwork, everyone comes out on top.

The recommendations suggested here are in the service of helping schools deliver postsecondary planning support that students not only need but want, including:

- Parents/caregivers and families who are involved in their student's postsecondary planning
- Clear connections between classroom content and postgraduate use
- Comprehensive knowledge of all available postgraduate paths
 - How to fund (scholarships, loans, family, etc.)
 - Necessary degrees/certifications
- Earlier introduction to career exploration

Students seek a professional path filled with meaning, purpose, and enthusiasm. Knowing that they can't predict how AI and other technological advances will change the workforce landscape, they're prepared to be adaptable and resilient.

Ultimately, postsecondary planning is helpful only if it provides the supportive framework students need to work toward and accomplish their goals. A student-centered approach to this work is crucial for helping them realize their ambitions. As students eagerly anticipate their futures, schools can be essential allies in their success. Their tomorrows depend on what schools do for them today.

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