



Education Insights 2024-2025:

Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow

About This Report

The report, *Education Insights 2024-2025: Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow*, by Discovery Education captures prevailing attitudes and beliefs from superintendents, teachers, parents, and students. Survey data was collected in August 2024 by The Harris Poll, an industry-leading research organization, on behalf of Discovery Education. It included 1,524 respondents across K-12 students, parents of K-12 students, and K-12 teachers and superintendents. Findings in this report provide meaningful insight into the true experiences of educators, students, and parents.

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Executive Summary

This report uncovers three key areas of opportunity to refine and focus efforts in education leadership to address the most pressing challenges facing educators today. The data reinforces that teachers remain deeply dedicated and passionate about helping students succeed in the classroom and beyond. This positive environment is reflected clearly among students. **The majority of students report an eagerness to learn and a strong sense of belonging at school.**

However, teachers are facing challenges that hinder student engagement and learning outcomes – reflected in national headlines of declining test scores and attendance rates. While teachers are receptive and eager to embrace changes that produce positive outcomes, this report reveals major barriers to doing so.

The majority of teachers report increasing variation in student skill levels and declining levels of classroom engagement. Parents observe high levels of curiosity at home, yet teachers report a noticeable lack of curiosity within the school setting. Further, while showing some signs of improvement, data from this report and other publications show that stakeholders in general feel dissatisfied with the direction of education and the readiness of today's students for tomorrow's workforce.¹

Three focus areas indicated by the data:

1 All stakeholders must **foster student engagement** to motivate curiosity, inspire exploration, and **activate effective learning**.

2 **Career exploration and 21st-century skill development** is increasingly critical because teachers, parents, and students feel concerned about students' preparedness for the future as the workforce evolves.

3 Providing more **targeted support for teachers and students** can increase confidence and improve outcomes.

Introduction

Discovery Education researchers worked with third-party experts from The Harris Poll to analyze survey data provided by over a thousand students, parents, teachers, and superintendents from districts of all sizes across the United States. Some response trends validated prevailing research and expectations from the current education landscape, while others led to surprising takeaways that offer new insight and guidance to build a brighter future for our students.

In this report, we will explore how educators are navigating the complex and dynamic landscape of education and focus areas where the data signals a need to pivot, shift, or advocate for support to enhance student learning. We will also learn from practitioners currently working to address and improve prevailing attitudes in education.



People making laws don't ask teachers very often: How can we help you? What do you need? What is the climate of education like these days? It's nice to be heard and feel like your opinion matters and your experiences count.

Wendy Davis
Middle School Teacher, CA

What did educators, parents, and students share?

Students, parents, teachers, and superintendents expressed a sense of positivity about the current state of education. Teachers enjoy working with students and believe that their efforts are making a difference for students every day. Further, as data from this report and previous studies indicate, schools have made concerted efforts to develop more inclusive learning environments. Parents and students feel like they are part of a community and their voices matter.

However, amidst this progress, **student engagement challenges and concerns about future readiness persist.** While tools and resources have evolved, effectively capturing student interest and equipping students with the skills needed for tomorrow's world require ongoing effort and creativity.

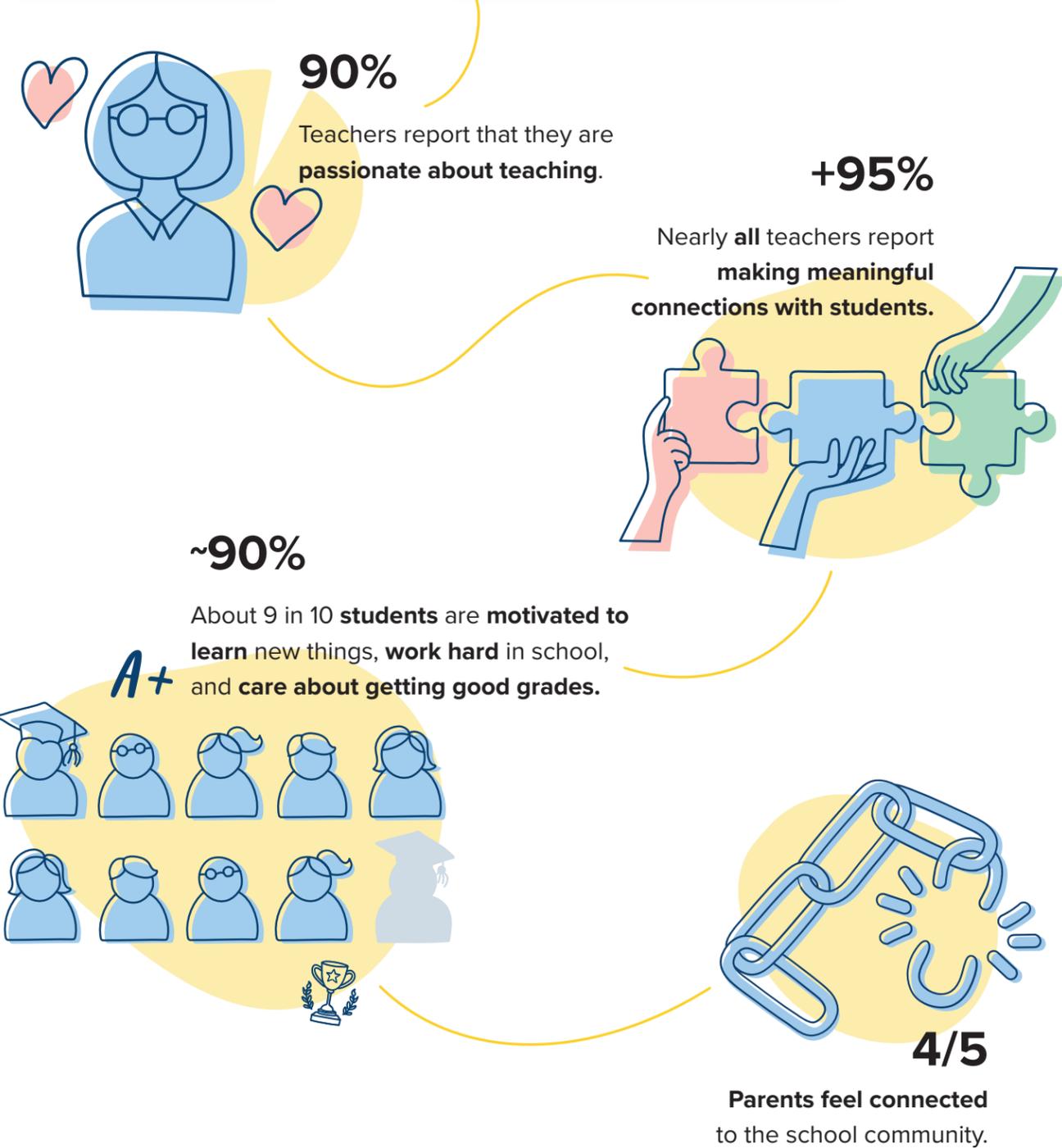


I've noticed student engagement tends to ebb and flow over the years. Right now, it's a challenge because students are bombarded with so much media and information, all at a fast pace. In the classroom, this doesn't always translate well. Students expect quick, 30-second bursts of information, and that's about what their attention span is. They expect the 'show' of it all, but that's not every teacher's style.

Jen Hall
Digital Learning Specialist, GA

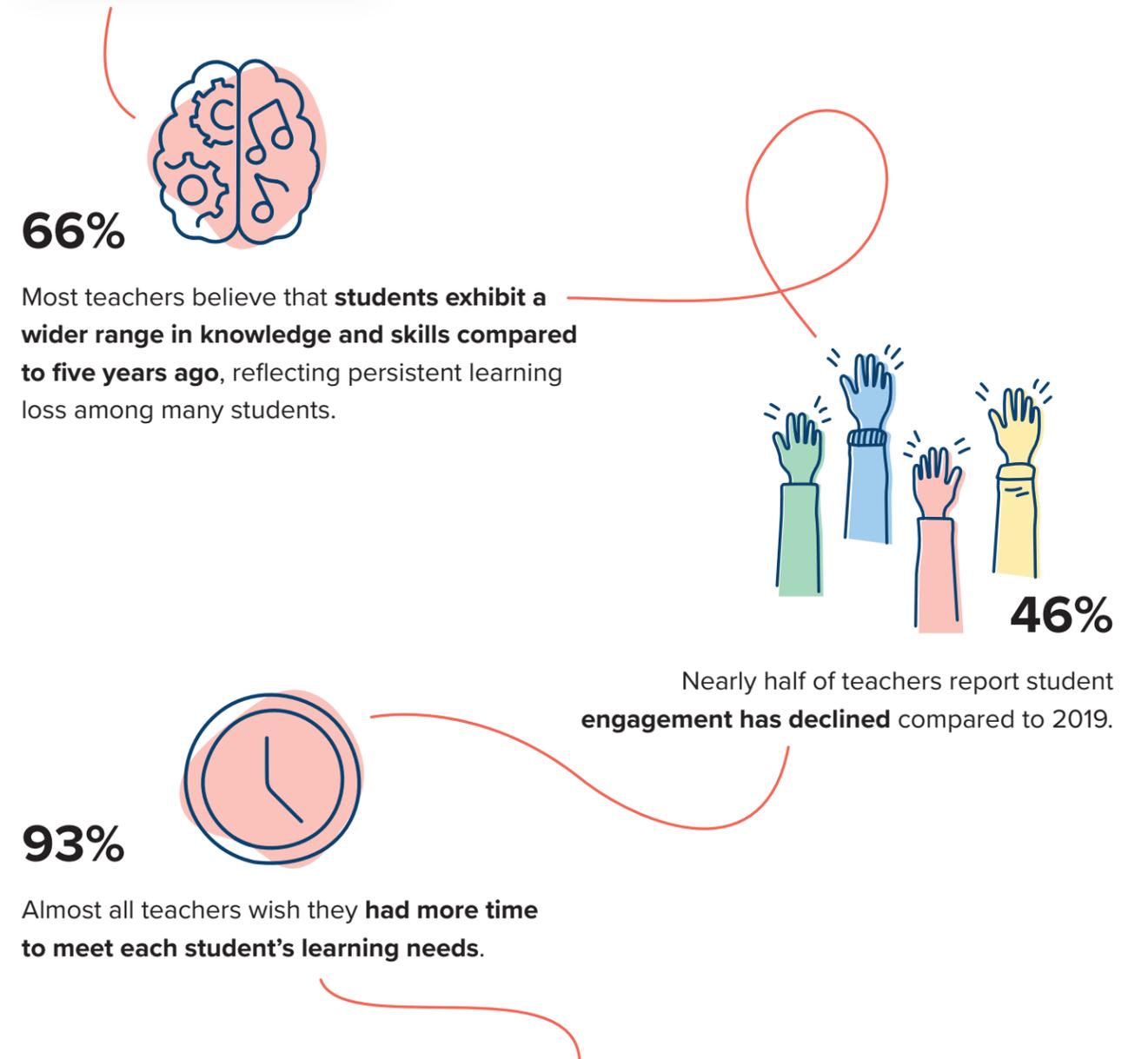
Key Findings

By many measures, learning communities are healthy and productive. Most district leaders, teachers, parents, and students express positivity about the current state of education.



And Yet...

While these positive sentiments are encouraging, educators face significant challenges.



93%
Almost all teachers wish they had more time to meet each student's learning needs.

Engagement • Personalization • Motivation
Are the top three challenges in the classroom identified by teachers.

Why?

What do dedicated teachers need to motivate, engage, and support student learning effectively?

Engage Students to Activate Learning

+90%

Stakeholders universally agree that **curiosity is central to student learning**.

82%

Students believe there are **not enough opportunities to be curious** in the classroom. Three-fourths of teachers agree.

49%

Less than half of **high school students** say they are **curious** at school.

Focus on Future Readiness

88%

District leaders, teachers, parents, and students rate **life skills** as very important.

57%

Yet **only about half of students** believe their school adequately teaches **life skills**.

67%

Over two-thirds of **students** feel that their education is **not evolving to meet workplace needs**. Three out of four adults agree.

Meet Teachers and Students Where They Are

3/4

Students say **learning at their own pace** would increase likelihood to **engage with lessons**, feel **empowered in school**, and feel **more prepared** for the future.

93%

Nearly all teachers believe **adaptive learning would help** students learn more effectively.

86%

Teachers report **collaborating with leadership would help** them deliver more meaningful learning experiences.

Engage Students to Activate Learning

By focusing on curiosity and delivering relevant, appropriately challenging content, educators can engage students, ignite their motivation, and inspire persistence.

Research shows that engagement is the most important predictor² of whether K-12 students feel excited and prepared for their future. Students who are engaged are more likely to find learning interesting, challenging, and feel empowered to explore and research new things. As students move through school, data shows there is consistent decline of several factors that contribute to engagement, including how challenged students feel, their motivation to learn new things, excitement about school, and levels of curiosity in the classroom.

Active learning, the ability to be curious, explore new things, ask questions, and research, is central to engagement. **Almost all teachers and students (94%) agree that curiosity is key to unlocking learning, but 80% of students say there are not enough opportunities to be curious.** Fortunately, teachers agree that there is a need to prioritize exploration and motivate curiosity to engage students and drive learning outcomes. They cite gaps in resources as well as limited time, among the critical areas to address this concern.



68%

Over two-thirds of teachers report that getting students excited about learning is a top challenge.

“ Superintendent perspective

The Nevada Department of Education is dedicated to enhancing student achievement and educator effectiveness statewide. To fulfill this mission, we equip our educators with the tools they need to inspire curiosity, engage students in learning, and prepare all learners for future success. As the education landscape continues to evolve, my department is committed to supporting Nevada's exceptional educators with the highest quality resources available.

Jhone M. Ebert

Superintendent of Public Instruction,
Nevada Department of Education, NV

Striking a Balance: Engaging Students with Appropriately Challenging Instruction

At the root of everything, students must be appropriately challenged in a supportive learning environment to feel engaged, motivated, and empowered to learn. Content that is too difficult can cause students to feel discouraged, and content that is too easy can cause students to feel bored. However, when students are faced with tasks that are challenging yet attainable, they are able to build resilience through productive struggle, participate in critical thinking and problem solving, adapt and develop a growth mindset, and confidently explore unanswered questions.³

Nearly 80% of teachers believe school is challenging for students, but parents and students have a different perception. Only about half of students find school challenging.

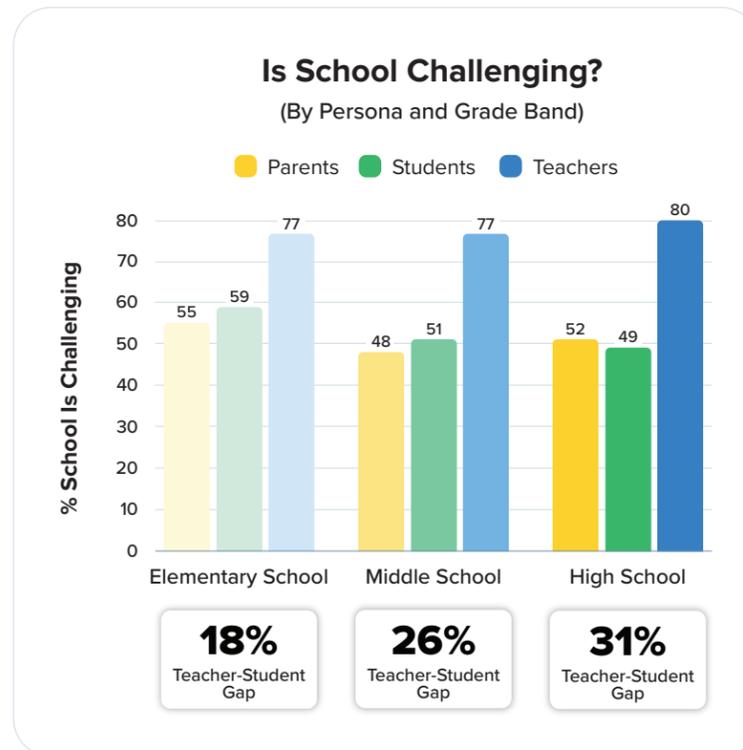


Figure 1: Comparison of students, parents, and teachers reporting school is challenging by grade level.

Teachers believe school is challenging for all students.

Teachers consistently report that students are challenged across all grade bands; 77% of teachers believe school is challenging for both elementary and middle school students, and 80% say school is challenging for high school students. In contrast, both students and parents report lower levels of challenge; only about 50% believe school is challenging across all grade bands. These perception gaps grow as students advance through school.

Students report being less challenged in higher grades, while teachers believe students are more challenged.

The largest gap is in high school (31%) followed by middle school (26%).

This discrepancy aligns with the belief that teachers often perceive a higher level of difficulty in school compared to students and parents because they are more aware of curriculum demands⁴ and expectations, which may not be immediately apparent to students and parents. While teachers focus on larger global objectives, parents and students may be more likely to focus on immediate outcomes and personal experiences.

Students desire challenging content.

While all stakeholders have valid, nuanced reasons for why they report school is challenging, students' perceptions signal a need to address the gap. If only about half of students feel challenged, the other half risk becoming bored and disengaged in class. Data from this survey found that students enjoy learning when they feel challenged in school. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of students report that they find challenging subjects to be rewarding, and 68% of students say when they don't understand material, they persist and keep trying.

Student perspectives

I think learning is most fun when it's not the same thing over and over. I like learning about new things I didn't know about before. It makes me wonder about why something is that way or how to do something. I also think it's fun when you are just learning something new and it's hard and then you get good at it and look back at how far you have come. I'm really fast at division and times tables, but I wasn't when I started, and now I am.

Jackie E.

Grade 3, Claremont, CA

My favorite subject is math. I like how complicated equations challenge me, but I don't really feel that challenged in math at school. We are learning about area and perimeter in class, and I learned about it in fourth grade and now I am in sixth grade. It's my favorite, but it's the most boring because it's way too easy. I saw that we are finally going to be learning about variables in school at the end of the year, so I plan on being bored all year long. It's extremely fun outside of school though. It's fun to think about the problems. I think what can I do with these numbers to create a new number. It's crazy how many things I can make with numbers.

Max T.

Grade 6, San Jose, CA

Prioritizing curiosity and exploration will fuel student engagement.

Researchers believe that curiosity is closely linked to interest, complexity, and levels of perceived challenge. Studies show that students who encounter appropriately challenging material will be more inclined to be curious about content, explore new ideas, and engage with learning.⁵ This relationship may explain why students, especially in higher grades, rate their levels of curiosity and challenge in school similarly.

88 Educator perspective

In my classroom, we're a community. We're lifting each other up and trying to achieve the same goals and success. I encourage students to adopt a growth mindset. When they are struggling, I help them understand that they're just not there yet, but they will get there. The students buy into that growth mindset because they know that is the mentality of our classroom.

Jeremy States
Math Teacher, VA

Lack of student motivation, engagement, and interest can manifest in surprising areas.



15%

of parents say lack of interest or motivation is a primary reason for student absences, second only to health-related issues.

It's more challenging to nurture student curiosity in school than at home.

In total, only about two-thirds of students say they feel curious at school. And, when we explore data by grade band, there is a noticeable decline as students move from elementary (76%) to high school (49%). The downward trend is consistent in and out of school, across all perspectives, and it aligns with research that suggests students exhibit less curiosity as they age.⁶

As students progress through grade levels their curiosity declines. This trend is most apparent in school compared to out of school.

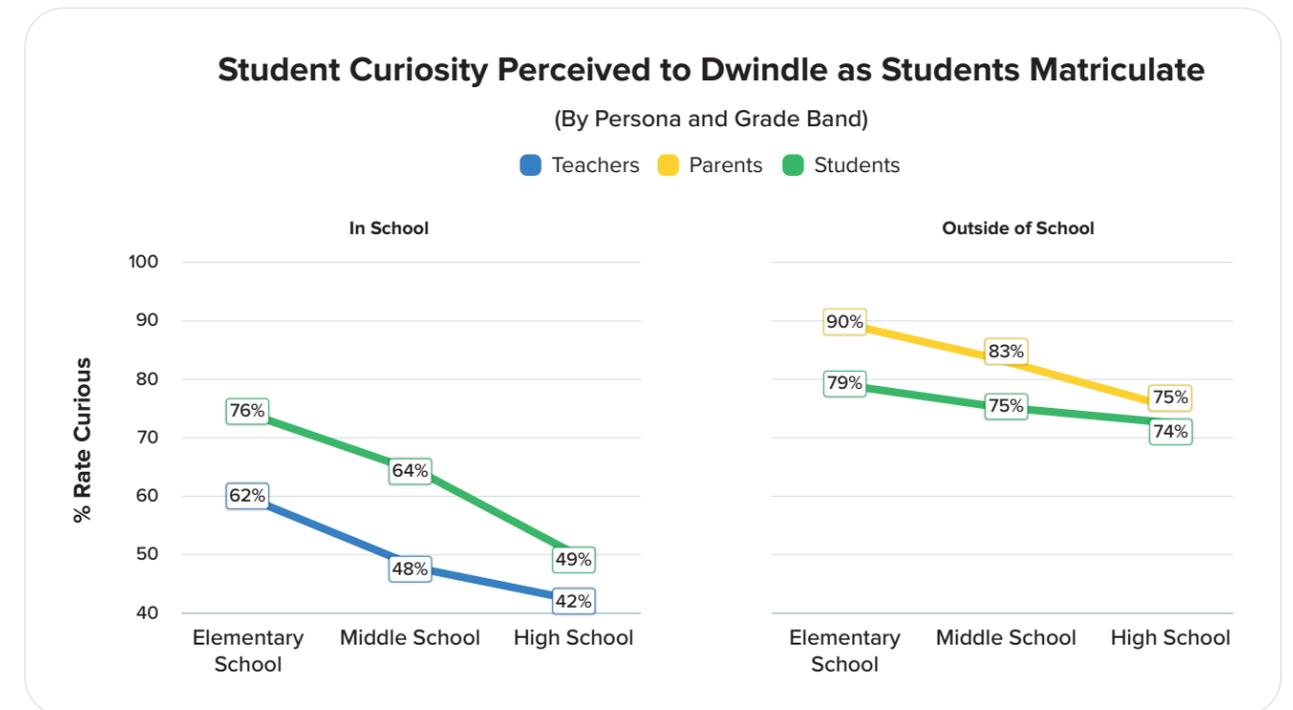


Figure 2: Comparison of student curiosity by persona, environment, and grade band.

Teachers' perception of student curiosity in school decreases by more than 20% as students get older, and they consistently rate student curiosity lower than students themselves and parents (outside of school). This discrepancy suggests that students' curiosity may not always be apparent to teachers, possibly due to how students express curiosity or that classrooms may not always allow students to display their curiosity openly.

Outside of school, students tend to be more curious, and they mostly stay curious despite getting older.

Both students and parents rate curiosity outside of school consistently higher than curiosity in school. In elementary school, 79% of students rate themselves as curious outside of school compared to 76% in school. Though this difference is minor in early grades, the gap widens as students get older. By high school, 74% of students rate themselves curious outside of school, but only 49% of high school students say they're curious in school.

Parents' perceptions of student curiosity also decline as their children grow older. Almost all parents believe their elementary school students are curious outside of school, but by high school, parents report 75% of students are curious at home. This decline may reflect decreased parental involvement in high school students' day-to-day routines, as older students begin to explore areas of interest more independently than younger students.

Despite an overall decline, the drop in curiosity outside of school is less pronounced than in-school curiosity. This suggests that school environments may not fully support or nurture students' natural curiosity as they advance through school. Since students maintain higher curiosity levels outside school, educators might consider exploring ways to integrate more real-world and interest-driven instruction into the curriculum to bridge this gap.

Student perspective

I like to learn most about computer science, and I learn it mostly at home. I can choose what I want to learn about, and I go deep into a rabbit hole, but at school I need to stay more on task. The things I like learning about at home I'll probably use more after graduation than the things I learn at school.

Joseph T.
Grade 9, San Jose, CA



Curiosity clearly matters, but students need more opportunities to explore.

Stakeholders overwhelmingly agree that curiosity is central to learning. Approximately 90% of superintendents, teachers, and parents agree that curiosity is critical to learning in the classroom, and 94% of students believe that they are more engaged in school when they are curious about material. Yet, they also express concern that students need more opportunities to explore, ask questions, and research independently at school.

I don't think there are enough opportunities at school for students to be curious.

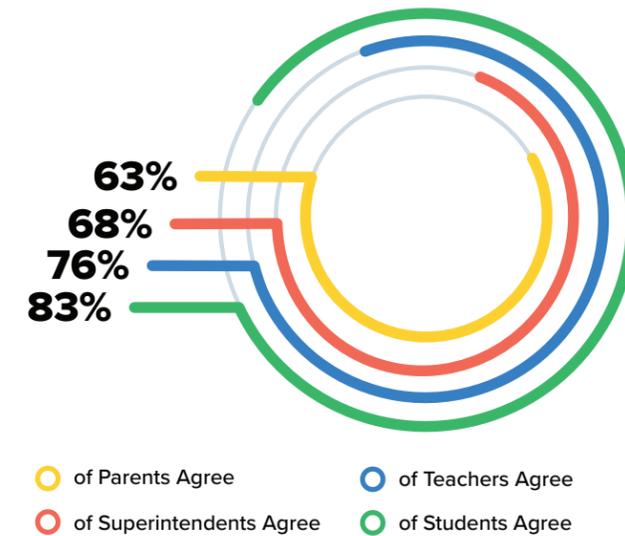


Figure 3: Stakeholder agreement regarding opportunities to be curious in school.

Educator perspective

Allowing kids to interact with something without being told how to, even though it might be messy, is the best way to get them curious. At the heart of it, they want to learn and they are motivated. We just need to get them to ask questions and start those conversations.

McKenna Akane
K-8 STEM Educator, MT

Teachers in higher grades struggle more to motivate students to participate in active learning.

When asked about their top three classroom challenges, teachers consistently cited two major difficulties across all grade levels: addressing each student’s individual skill level and maintaining student engagement and enthusiasm for learning. These challenges persist and often intensify as students progress through school.

🗣️ Educator perspective

To enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes, teachers must make content relevant to students’ lives. When students can see themselves in the material and understand its purpose, their level of engagement and investment in learning significantly increases.

Rita A. Mortenson
Educational Technology Coach, WI

As other data within this report indicates, challenges across curiosity and exploration increase as students progress through school. While only about 50% of elementary school teachers say it’s difficult to get students to ask questions and empower exploration, about three-quarters of upper grade teachers report empowering exploration as a challenge. Similarly, getting students excited about learning is challenging for 60% of elementary school teachers, but three out of four upper grade teachers report it is a top challenge.

💡 Quick Tip

To combat disengagement at the high school level, many educators have found success by providing instruction with real-world applications, collaborative opportunities, and autonomy-driven projects that allow students to explore topics they are passionate about. Empowering students to own their learning journey could help reverse the trends of declining curiosity and engagement.

Teachers Rate Top Challenges in the Classroom

(By Grade Band)

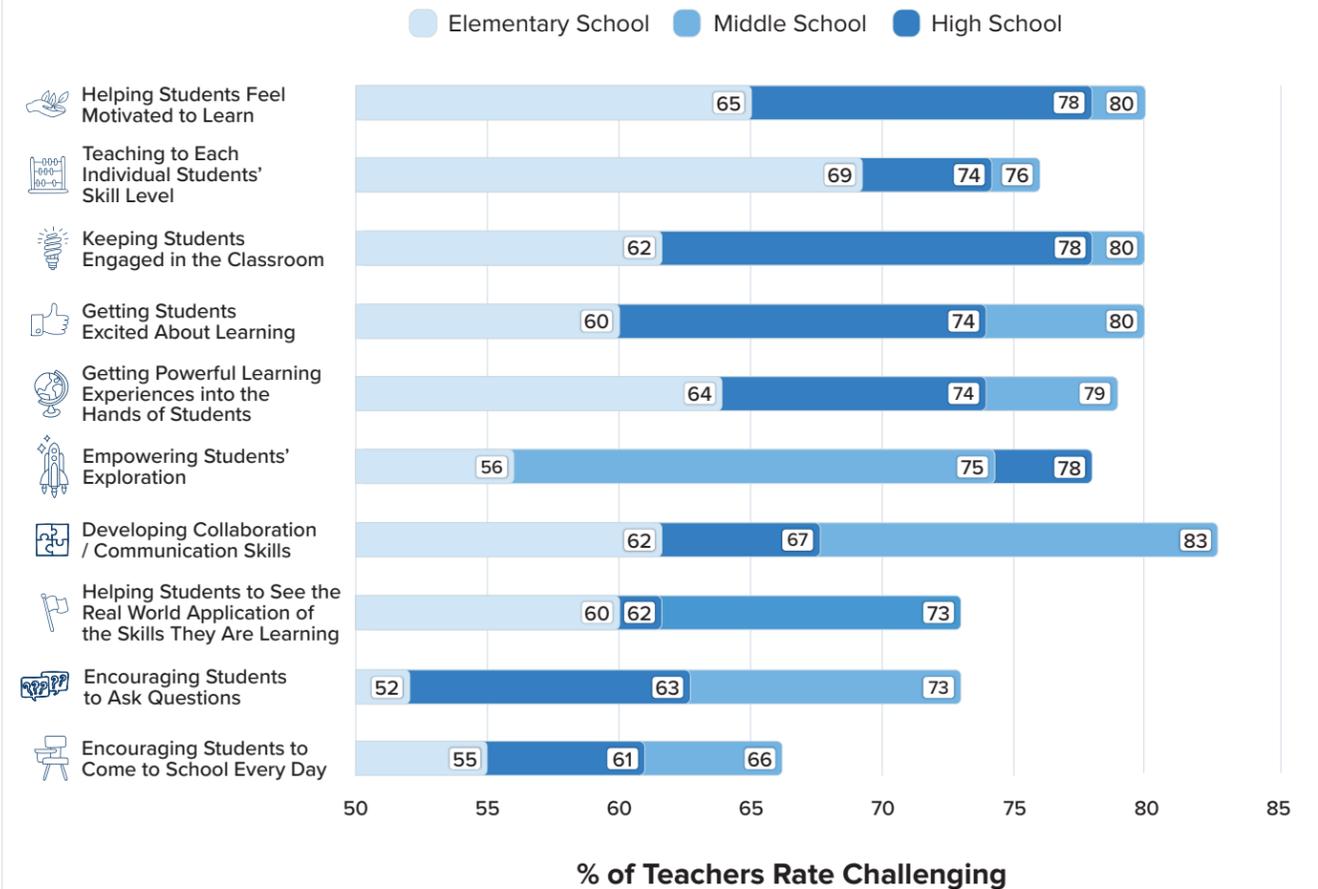


Figure 4: Percent of teachers who rate specific areas in the classroom as challenging by grade band.

Middle school students' self-perceptions may impact teacher challenge areas.

This data also shows that middle school teachers seem to find all areas more challenging than other grade bands, particularly for developing communication and collaboration skills (83%). This may align with research on the developmental stage of middle schoolers, who are navigating complex social interactions⁷ and require structured opportunities to develop collaboration and communication skills.

Difficulty engaging these students may also relate to student perceptions of themselves. Seventy-three percent of middle school teachers say encouraging students to ask questions is difficult, and survey data found that over half of middle school students refrain from participating in class because they fear negative judgment from their peers, and almost one-third of students believe participating in class is embarrassing.

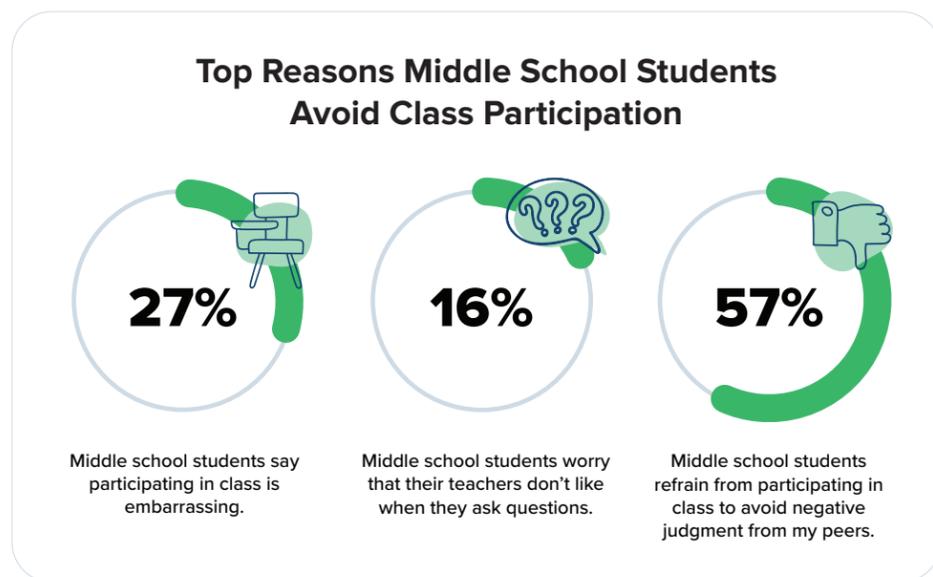


Figure 5: Middle school sentiments about participating in class.

“ Educator perspective

A lot of kids are afraid to be curious at school because they don't want to be wrong or admit that they don't know something. It's the same way for some teachers. If they aren't an expert in an area, they are nervous to bring it into the classroom. As teachers, we have to model failing forward for students. We have to be willing to acknowledge we don't know everything and that there is a lot of value in figuring things out together, learning together, and making mistakes along the way.

Jen Hall
Digital Learning Specialist, GA

Students, parents, and educators aim to balance connectivity, motivation, and focus.

A recent study from the Pew Research Center⁸ found that nearly three-quarters (72%) of high school teachers believe that cell phones are a major problem in their classrooms. The study found that only roughly 6% of elementary school teachers face the same challenge. As a result of increased cell phone usage, especially among older students, about 80% of schools have implemented policies to ban cell phones.⁹

Data from our survey shows that the majority of all stakeholders, especially adults, find cell phones disruptive to learning. Superintendents' views on the disruptive nature of cell phones (84%) closely align with the perspectives of parents (85%), suggesting a shared concern about how cell phones impact students' well-being. However, teachers have an even more pervasive perception that cell phones are disruptive (88%), likely because they experience firsthand the challenges these devices present in maintaining classroom engagement and attention. This reinforces the idea that the closer one is to the day-to-day educational environment, the more significant the perceived impact of cell phone distractions becomes.

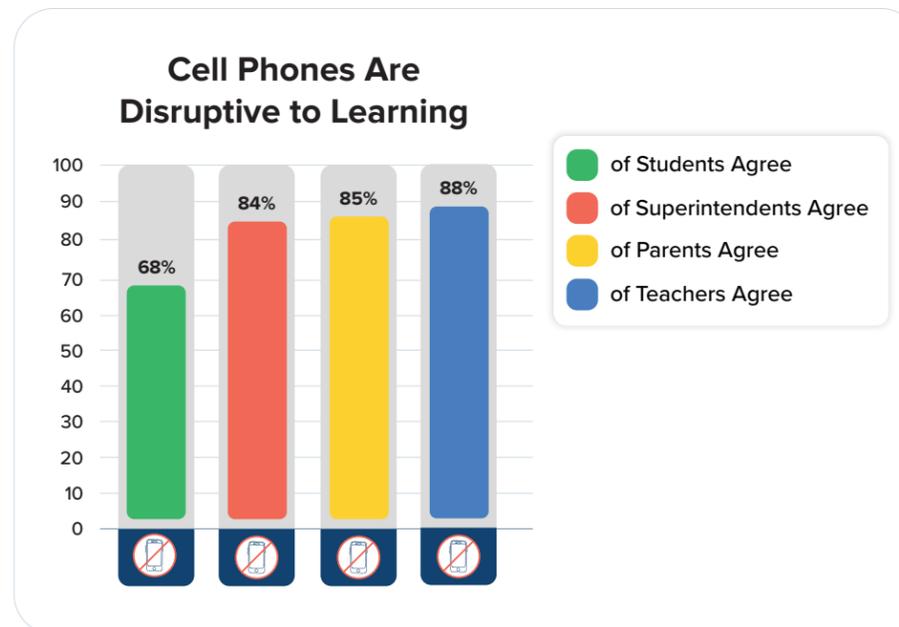


Figure 6: Percent of stakeholders who believe that cell phones are a disruption to learning.

Findings also suggest that student grade level plays a role in this perception. About 6% more middle school teachers believe that cell phones are distracting than both high school teachers and elementary school teachers. This may relate to fewer phones among younger students and middle school students may still be developing self-regulation habits compared to high school students.

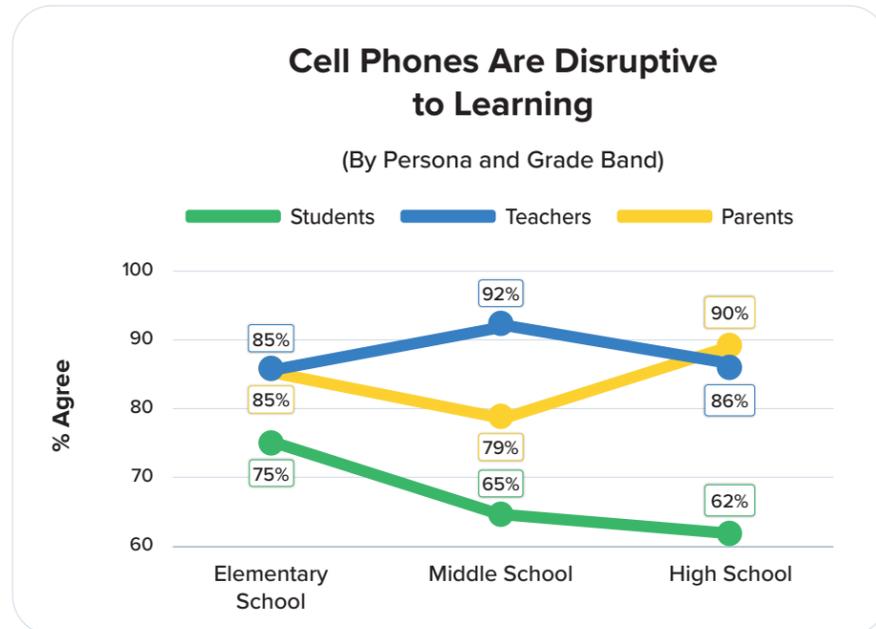


Figure 7: Comparison of stakeholders who say cell phones are a disruption to learning by grade.

Overall, students see cell phones as less distracting than both educators and parents, and this perception decreases as they get older. **There's a significant 28-point gap between high school students and their parents. A little over 60% of high school students believe cell phones are a distraction, while 90% of high school parents consider them disruptive.** Parents may view cell phones as the most problematic for high school students because they observe more frequent use at home despite a heavier homework load.

Studies have shown that smartphone usage among teens and preteens varies significantly, which may explain some variation in perceptions. Research from Common Sense Media found that participants picked up their phones a median of 51 times per day, ranging from only twice to 498 times. Despite high school students in our survey reporting that cell phones are less of a distraction, research suggests high school students look at their phones more than middle school students. This is likely due to preteens having more restrictions and fewer people in their network with whom they interact.¹⁰

Student perspective

Cell phones are mostly distracting—hearing the dinging is distracting. When a kid is on their phone, sometimes the teacher will have to stop and correct them, then the teacher gets off track and it creates problems for everyone. But I also find it to be a helpful tool. In one of my classes, they wanted me to use AI to show how it can be a resource, and I used my phone for that.

Sophia C.
Grade 12, Concord, NC

Curiosity may be correlated with cell phone perceptions.

Attitudes about cell phones vary among students. **Those who find cell phones distracting are nearly 1.5 times more likely to report feeling curious in the school environment compared to those who don't find phones distracting.** This data indicates that there may be a connection between a student's level of curiosity and their perception of cell phones as a distraction.

Specifically, students who believe cell phones are a distraction (71%) are significantly more likely to report feeling curious compared to those who don't see cell phones as a distraction (48%). This suggests that awareness of distractions might be linked to a more engaged or academically inquisitive mindset.

Students who recognize the disruptive potential of cell phones may be more mindful or self-aware in their learning environment because they are focused on engaging with their surroundings and the learning process rather than valuing the engagement opportunities provided by their devices. This data may also suggest that when students are curious, they are less likely to want to use their cell phones, and by increasing engagement, educators can decrease students' interest in using cell phones during class.

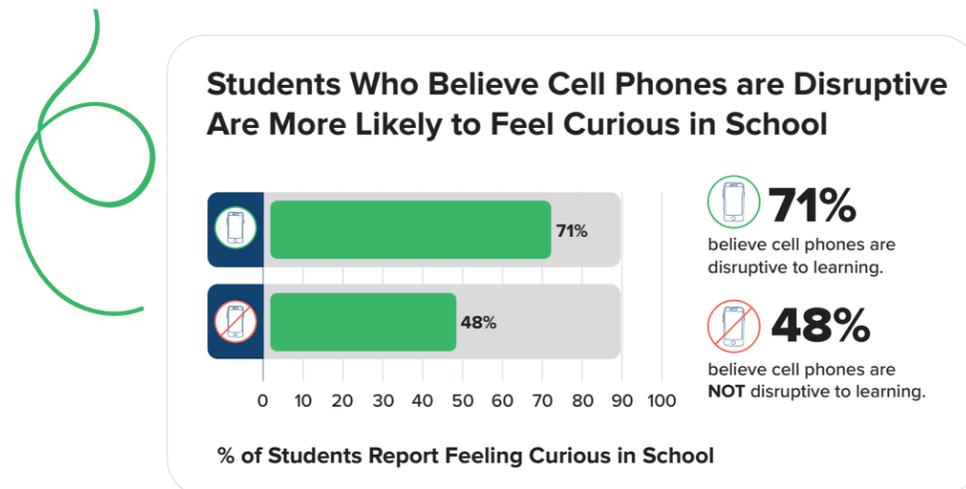


Figure 8: Perceptions of cell phone usage among students who report feeling curious at school.

Student perspective

With phones, it's a mix of distraction and tool, because you need a calculator, a weather app, you need GPS, you need it for to call and text people to communicate. But it can also rot your brain.

Amelia T.
Grade 4, San Jose, CA



Focus on Future Readiness

Future readiness requires an emphasis on both interpersonal skills development and career preparation.

Building students' curiosity, motivation, and engagement enhances immediate learning experiences and serves as a foundation for long-term success. When students see how their current studies connect to potential career paths, they are more likely to be motivated and invested in their education. This integration of curiosity-driven learning and practical exploration of future opportunities guides students toward both academic and career success.

As educators work to engage and motivate students, **survey findings suggest they must sharpen their focus in two key areas to better prepare students for the future—career readiness and developing interpersonal skills.**

Career Readiness

Connecting students with opportunities to explore future careers and envision what is possible helps them link their education to real-world outcomes. By fostering awareness and nurturing curiosity about future careers, educators can ensure that students graduate equipped to thrive and contribute to their communities. Research has shown that work-based learning helps students gain an understanding of the work environment, increases motivation in school, supports work readiness, and enhances job-related skills and knowledge. Data also indicates that engaging, work-based programs can improve school attendance and reduce dropout rates.¹¹

Interpersonal Skill Development

Simultaneous to exploring careers, students need to build and hone transferable human-centered skills that help them learn how to interact, communicate, and work with others. Skills including collaboration, adaptability, communication, problem solving, life skills (i.e., time management, financial literacy), and emotional intelligence are crucial in virtually every profession. These skills are increasingly reflected in Portrait of a Graduate frameworks because they contribute to long-term success in the workplace and beyond.

Labor statistics from 2023 show that the most sought-after traits in new hires include strong communication, flexibility, and critical thinking skills.¹² The data in this report aligns with this trend, highlighting that both educators and students place high value on these interpersonal skills and recognize their importance.

67%

Students worry that **education is not evolving to meet future workplace needs.**

#1

Parents, teachers, and superintendents rate **life skills as the most important skill** to prepare students for the future.

Students, parents, and teachers feel less prepared for careers than superintendents think they are.

We asked students, parents, teachers, and superintendents how confident they are that students will be prepared to successfully identify the best career path, secure top jobs, navigate a changing work landscape, and succeed at work as adults upon graduation.

Stakeholders report being confident about students' career readiness, but some stakeholder perceptions are significantly more optimistic than others.

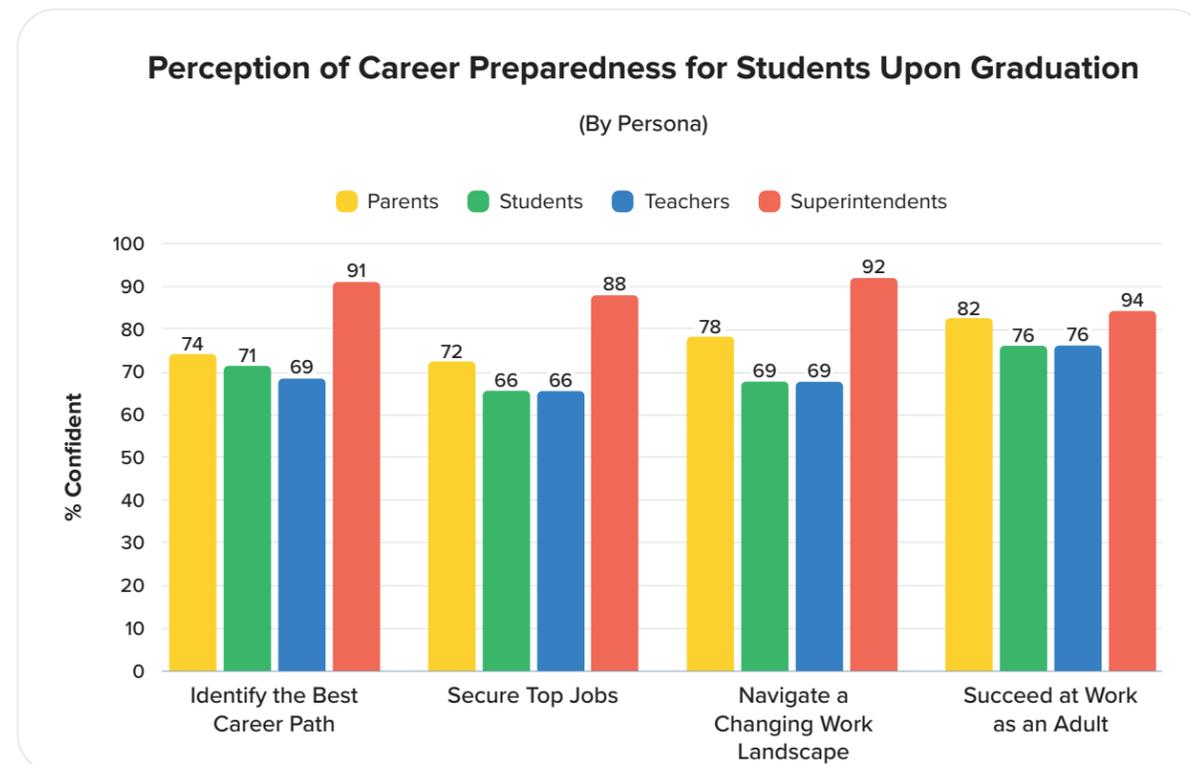


Figure 9: Comparison of stakeholders who believe students will be prepared to navigate specific career challenges areas upon graduation.

Teachers, parents, and students report similar levels of confidence about career readiness.

Parents, students, and teachers share similar views on students' career readiness, with parents showing slightly more confidence across all categories (an average of about 6 percentage points higher), with the largest difference in navigating a changing work landscape (9 percentage points). Results show the most significant difference within navigating a changing work landscape, where parents are 9 percentage points more confident than both students and teachers. These findings suggest a shared understanding of students' preparedness from those closest to them, indicating a generally positive outlook for the future while acknowledging room for growth in developing skills needed for a shifting job market.

Superintendent perspective

Approximately 90% of America's children in grades K-12 are currently enrolled in public schools, making the future of our nation largely dependent on the quality of our public school system. At St. Vrain Valley Schools, we are reimagining education for the 21st century. By emphasizing and inspiring curiosity, creativity, innovation, problem solving, and critical thinking, with a focus on future readiness, we are equipping our students with a strong competitive advantage, preparing them for success in our highly complex and accelerated global environment.

Don Haddad, Ed.D.

Superintendent,
St. Vrain Valley School District, CO

The moderate confidence levels, especially regarding securing top jobs, underscore a need for more career-oriented learning experiences in schools. Incorporating internships, mentorships, and project-based learning that connect academic knowledge to real-world skills could be crucial in addressing this gap and better preparing students for the evolving workforce.

Educator perspective

We need to prepare students for the real world. That's the goal of education, and we forget that. They need skills for basic everyday life. Whether you like it or not, everyday life happens regardless of if you go right to college or right into the workforce.

Wendy Davis
Middle School Teacher, CA

Teachers and students align very closely across all categories.

As the graph demonstrates, students and teachers report exact levels of confidence about career readiness across three of the four categories, with only a slight difference (2 percentage points) in identifying the best career path. As teachers interact directly with students daily, they may have a unique understanding of the gaps in skill development, compared to superintendents who may take a macro-level view.

Further, data from this survey indicates that both teachers and students recognize similar limitations in future-readiness skill development. Over 80% of respondents from both groups highlight a need for more comprehensive career readiness programs and resources that fully integrate into daily classroom activities.

Superintendents were much more likely than teachers to say that students will be prepared for future careers.

While teachers, parents, and students report similar levels of confidence, there is a notable discrepancy between educator stakeholders (teachers and superintendents). **Across all categories, approximately seven of every ten teachers feel confident that students are prepared, compared to nine out of ten superintendents (91%) who express confidence about students' career readiness.**

The higher confidence levels among superintendents may indicate a potential disconnect between the administrator-level understanding of programs and the day-to-day realities of how students are demonstrating essential skills. These results underscore the importance of bridging the gap between educational initiatives, classroom practices, and real-world skill requirements to ensure students are prepared to succeed in a dynamic job market.

74%
of superintendents believe that student preparedness for job opportunities has improved compared to five years ago, while only 41% of teachers agree.

Students are concerned about their career readiness. Two in three students say school is not preparing them for the workforce.

Data from the previous section shows that overall students are confident about their ability to navigate future work landscapes, but about two-thirds of students report that they are not prepared. The graphic below suggests that even students who feel confident and excited about the future still may desire better access to resources and support for career readiness. Students may believe they have a bright future, but they worry about how to achieve their goals. These findings reaffirm recent research that found that while students feel optimistic about their future, they do not necessarily feel adequately prepared for it.¹³

When we asked students about what they needed for career preparation, approximately 80% expressed a desire for more resources. An even higher percentage—around 85%—wanted more exposure to different career paths. These findings may contribute to survey results showing that about two-thirds of students feel that their education is not evolving to meet future workplace needs.

67%
of students believe that education is not evolving to meet future workplace needs.

Data suggests students are not receiving enough information or experiences to prepare for and understand the wide range of career options available to them.

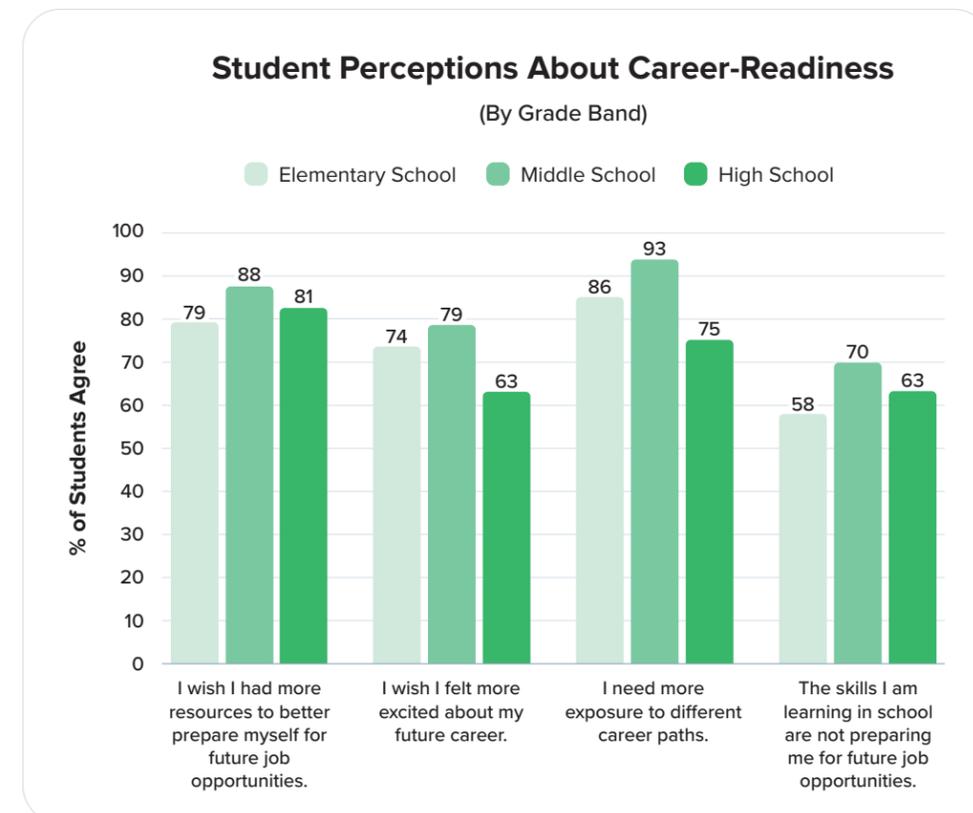


Figure 10: Percent of students who agree about specific career readiness focus areas, by grade band.

While the need for resources, skill development, and support increased as students got older (reaching highest levels in middle school across all areas), the levels of students who express a lack of excitement about their future careers declined (16-percentage point decrease compared to middle school). This indicates a significant surge in excitement for the future across high school students.

Middle school students signal the highest need for more career readiness.

Middle school students report the most need for more resources, skill development, and exposure to different career paths. They are also the least excited about their future careers; **only 21% of middle school students feel excited about their future career.**

This peak indicates that middle school is a critical stage where students start to recognize the importance of career readiness but feel they lack the necessary tools. In middle school nearly all students (88%) agree they need more resources and exposure to different career paths (93%).

Middle school is a period of immense transition for most students. During this time students are at a higher risk for disengaging due to challenges in forming their identity, experiencing puberty, and navigating new school environments. Research has shown that middle school is a time when students can benefit the most from career exploration.¹⁴ Career exploration programs can offer middle school students experiences that meet their social-emotional stages and allow them to learn about themselves during a formative period in their lives.



Fast Fact

Students who participate in career readiness programs in middle school are more likely to develop a clear understanding of their interests and how they align with potential careers.¹⁵ Early exposure to career paths and resources helps them to dream about their future. Understanding these aspirations and the education and skills needed to pursue their goals can reduce the likelihood of students becoming disengaged with learning as they progress into high school and beyond.

66 Educator perspective

Students can improve their learning and engagement by approaching every class with a growth mindset and being open to trying new things. They might discover a passion for a subject they never expected to enjoy. Even if they think they know what they want to do after high school, exploring different courses can provide valuable skills and perspectives that help in unexpected ways.

Rita A. Mortenson

Educational Technology Coach, WI

Students want more career exploration, yet teachers report students' lack of interest as a barrier to future readiness.

Although students clearly express a strong desire for more career readiness programs, teachers still perceive a lack of student interest as the biggest barrier to future readiness, suggesting a disconnect between student aspirations and the current opportunities available to them.

We asked teachers to choose the top challenges they face when trying to prepare students for the future. Teachers across all grade levels identify a lack of student interest as the most common challenge in workforce preparation. However, most students report a desire for more exposure to different career paths and greater access to resources to prepare for careers. This suggests a disconnect between what teachers and students find meaningful, relevant, and engaging.

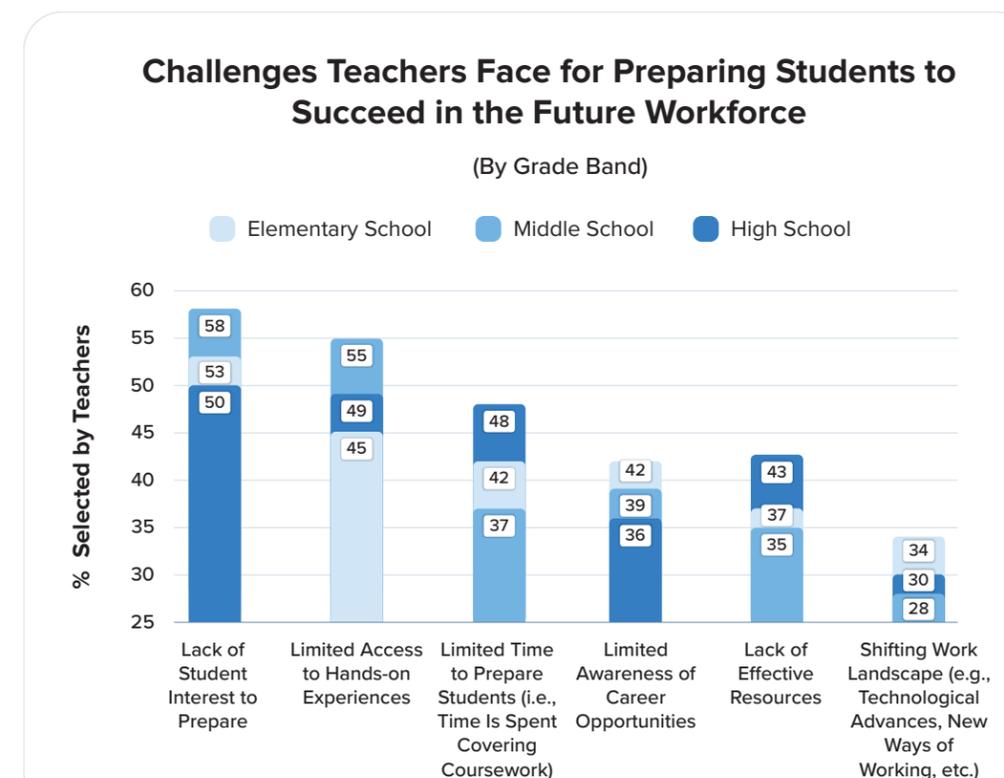


Figure 11: Teachers select the top three challenges for preparing students to succeed in the future workforce.

Limited career-readiness resources and experiences impact student engagement.

Although teachers report that a lack of student interest is the most common challenge for preparing students, most students have signaled they would like more career-readiness instruction and find value in resources that offer real-world relevance. About three-quarters of students report that resources for career exploration are important for both their long-term success and day-to-day learning, and about 80% of students report that content that connects to real-world experiences like career is important for their day-to-day learning.

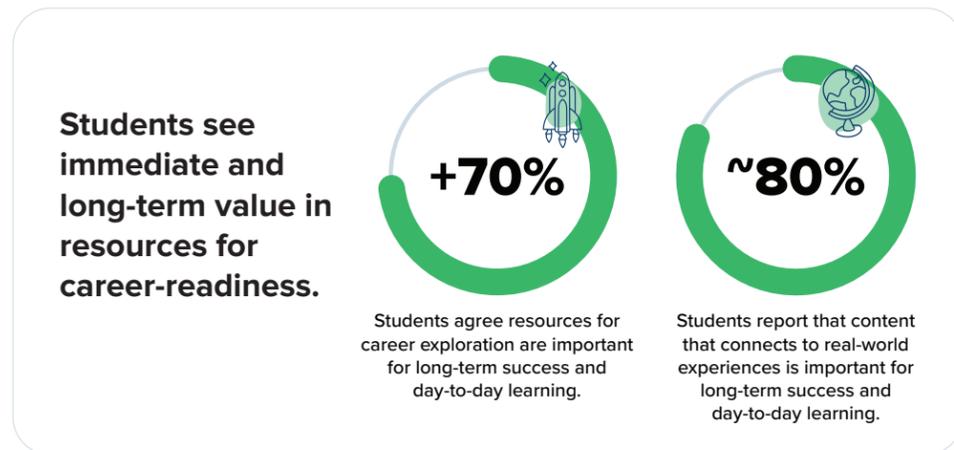


Figure 12: Percent of students who agree that career-readiness resources and content are important to long-term and day-to-day success.

Data from earlier in this report (Figure 9) also suggests that students agree with teachers about resource and experience limitations. About half of teachers believe that there are not enough opportunities for practical, real-world learning, especially in older grades. These results align with student data; **over 80% of all students desire better resources to prepare for the future, and more exposure to different career paths.**

Teachers need greater flexibility to prioritize career readiness.

According to teachers, lack of time to focus on career readiness is the third largest challenge. Over 40% find they spend more time covering other coursework and standards to integrate career readiness programs into an already packed curriculum. This is especially true for elementary school teachers because they must prioritize developing critical foundational skills first.

Career-readiness programs may seem most relevant as students approach graduation, but researchers suggest it's more effective to start preparing students in earlier grades. Recent studies show that introducing opportunities for career exploration early allows students time to engage in activities that support their post-secondary goals and offers flexibility to adjust their paths while the stakes are still low. Studies show that middle school students who engage in self-discovery and career exploration through structured career programs are more likely to report having opportunities to learn about their personal skills and interests.¹⁶ Such programs provide real opportunities and ample time for students to learn and develop both the practical and interpersonal skills that are in high demand in the workplace.

Student perspective

My school could make me more excited if I could learn more about things I love. I have a dream to fly around the world, and I would like to have an aviation class. It would teach you how planes work, different types of planes, and how to fly a plane.

Max T.
Grade 6, San Jose, CA

Increasing access to non-traditional resources, such as partnerships with external organizations, can help address existing engagement and readiness gaps.

BB Educator perspective

Technology provides us with the opportunity to go anywhere in the world virtually, and it allows us to bring anyone from around the world into our classroom virtually. I've invited pediatricians to my classroom via Zoom, meteorologists via Zoom, and then students could reach out to speakers via email or a phone call and build lifelong connections.

Jessie Erickson

National Education Consultant, ND

Both teachers and students have emphasized the need to enhance access, quality, and integration of future-ready experiences and resources. Students feel that real-world relevant content not only engages them, but also boosts their confidence in future success. Research¹⁷ on career-connected learning programs supports this, showing that such programs increase students' hope for the future, expose them to new careers, and improve overall school engagement. Additionally, greater participation in career learning is linked to even higher levels of student engagement.

Educators feel strongly that corporations are in a unique position to help prepare students for future job opportunities.

The majority of both superintendents and teachers across all grade bands agree that corporations can help bridge gaps between the classroom and students' careers.

Findings align with research that shows partnerships between corporations and educational institutions are essential for equipping students with the skills needed for the workforce.¹⁸ High school teachers are most likely to believe that corporations can help students prepare for the future (91%). This may reflect their unique role in supporting students near the end of their K-12 trajectory.

Corporations Are Uniquely Equipped to Help Students Prepare for Future Job Opportunities

(By Educators and Teacher Grade Band)

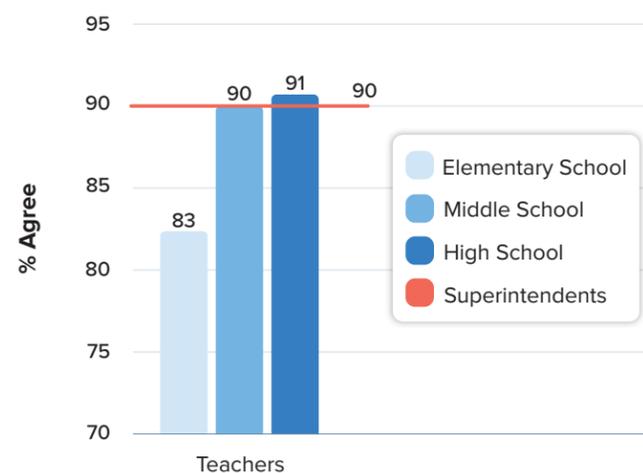


Figure 13: Percent of educators who agree that corporations can help students prepare for the future.

SUPERINTENDENT perspective

The key to engaging students in learning is connecting what is being taught to potential careers beyond graduation. In Ector County ISD, we are helping students explore potential careers in every grade. It makes the learning relevant, and helps students stay focused on what's going on in the classroom.

Scott R. Muri, Ed.D.

Superintendent Emeritus,
Ector County ISD, TX

Students and their parents agree that corporations can help students discover career paths and opportunities.

As students advance toward graduation, both they and their parents believe professionals can help connect classrooms to students' future in the workplace.

The data in Figure 14 demonstrates that both students and parents, particularly at the high school level, strongly believe integrating professionals in the classroom helps bridge the gap between curriculum and real-world application. High school students and their parents show the highest levels of agreement, at 95% and 97%, indicating a strong perceived need for career-connected learning from professionals.

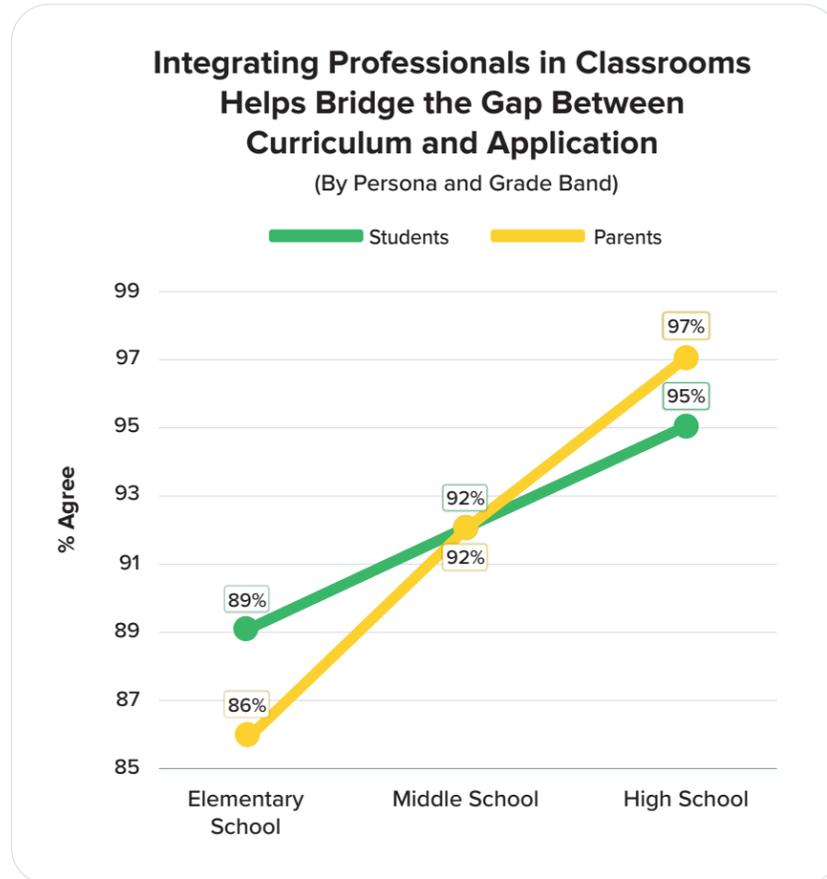


Figure 14: Percent of students and parents who believe integrating professionals into the classroom is valuable to learning.

Business perspective

Students are eager for real-world learning experiences and access to the latest technology and resources. By providing these opportunities with our partners, we not only meet their expectations but also prepare them for the jobs of tomorrow.

Alejandro Lozano

Senior Manager of Corporate Social Responsibility, Verizon

This data also aligns with survey results in which **over 90% of high school students and parents agree that exposure to different career paths is critical**. This may reflect students' and parents' awareness of the urgency for career preparation as their children approach graduation. Data from this graph also reinforces findings from Figure 10 in which middle school students expressed a specific desire for more potential career paths.

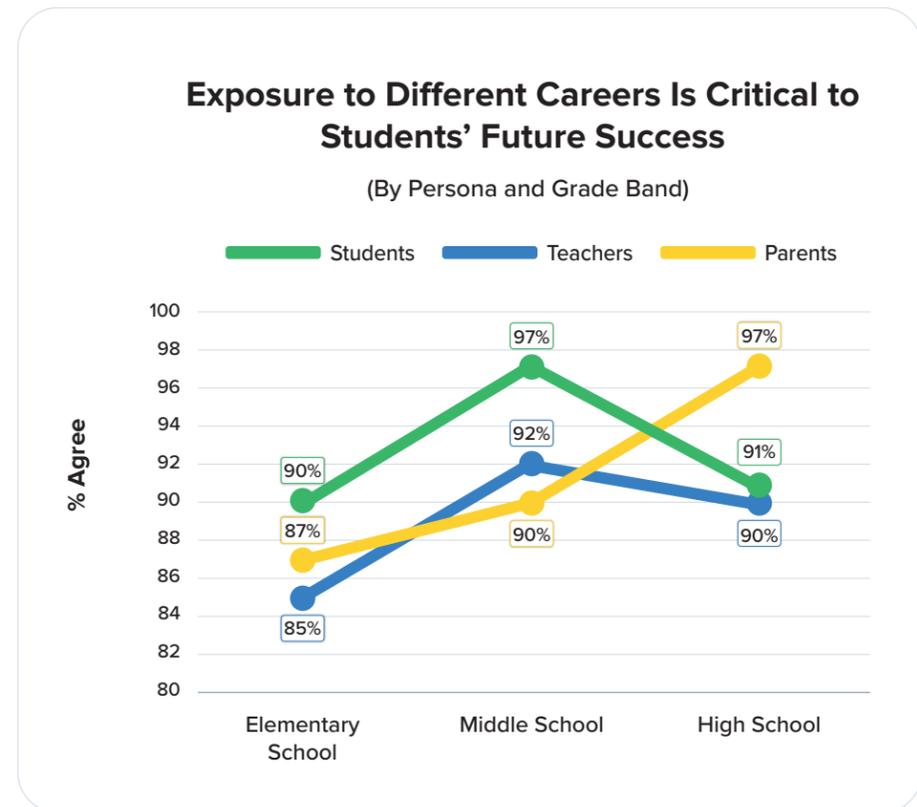


Figure 15: Percent of students, teachers, and parents who agree that exposure to different careers is critical.

Research emphasizes the importance of real-world exposure to make learning relevant and to help students understand the practical application of their studies, which explains students' desire for such experiences.

Community partners and corporations can offer students engaging resources and provide hands-on experiences about career-readiness.

Data from this survey found broad consensus among superintendents, parents, teachers, and students about the importance of external partnerships in bridging career-readiness gaps, with over 85% agreement across all statements. The most valued aspects include the motivating role of community mentorships and the integration of non-traditional resources from corporations and community groups.

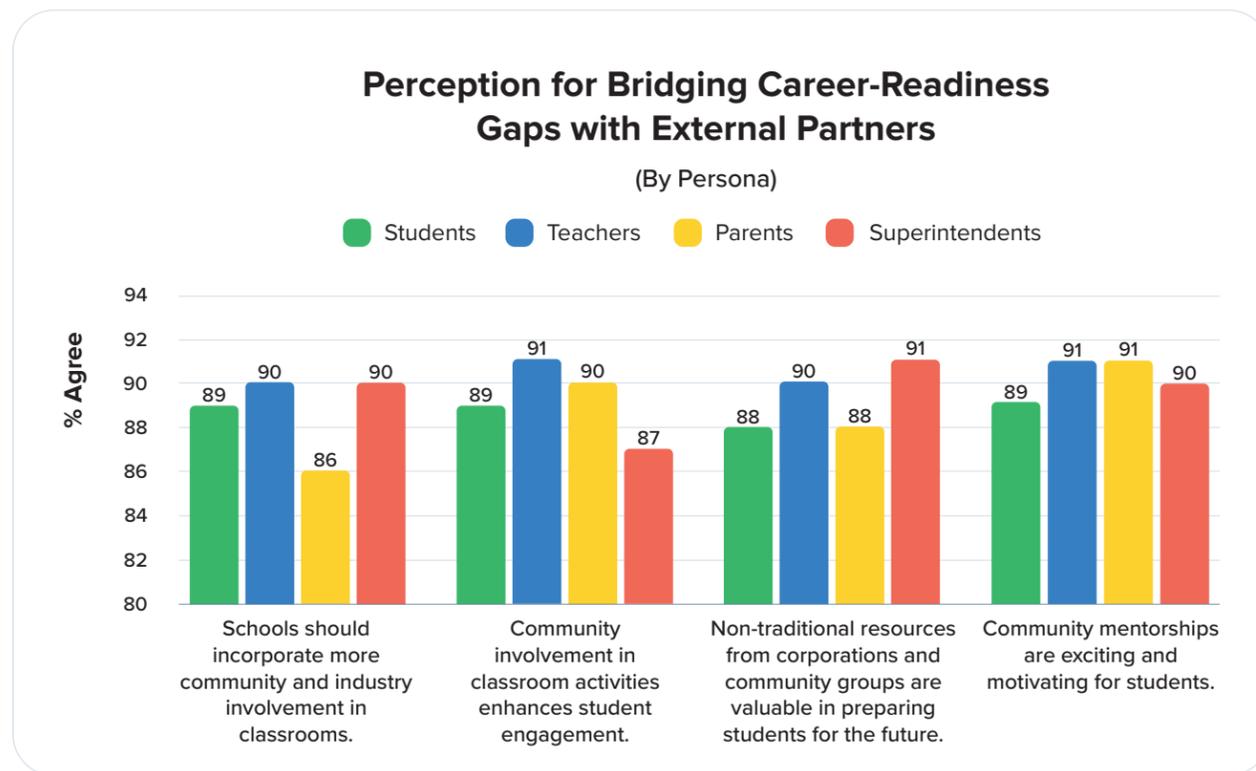


Figure 16: Percent of stakeholders who agree external partners can help bridge the gap between classrooms and career.

These results align with research that highlights the positive impact of real-world experiences on student engagement and future preparedness, indicating a shared belief in the need for greater community and industry involvement in education. Further, partnering with community organizations and corporations can give students opportunities for hands-on experiences. Labor statistics indicate that employers are increasingly looking for candidates who have participated in internships, apprenticeships, or specialized training in fields like healthcare, STEM, and manufacturing.¹⁹

Superintendent perspective

No school system can be truly great without fostering the belief that every student can belong, grow, and succeed. That takes more than educators and school system employees. It takes the creation of great learning environments both inside and outside of school buildings. That why we are pursuing a Community School Strategy, which provides students with wraparound services in collaboration with community partners and other stakeholders who can identify, address, and, ultimately, dismantle barriers to achievement.

Mark T. Bedell, Ed.D.
 Superintendent,
 Anne Arundel County Public Schools, MD

Sharpening interpersonal skills will equip students with the versatility needed for success in an ever-evolving job landscape.

We asked educators, parents, and students to rate the importance of specific skills to successfully navigate the future. **Stakeholders rate communication, critical thinking, life skills, and a growth mindset as the most valuable skills for future readiness.**

Research²⁰ supports the idea that interpersonal skills and life skills are fundamental for adapting to a rapidly changing job market and fostering problem-solving abilities. The emphasis on life skills and critical thinking also aligns with studies that show these competencies are crucial for lifelong learning and career adaptability. Students need such skills to feel prepared to navigate complex real-world challenges confidently.

Both educators and parents place a high value on the top four skills with over 85% agreement in each category. In fact, in three categories—critical thinking, life skills, and growth mindset—parents rate these skills an average of 4 percentage points higher than educators, indicating a strong belief in the necessity of these competencies for their child.



Life skills are essential abilities that help students navigate everyday life. These skills are crucial for personal development, future readiness, and overall well-being. Life skills include time management, financial literacy, adaptability, teamwork, emotional regulation, relationship-building, and perseverance.

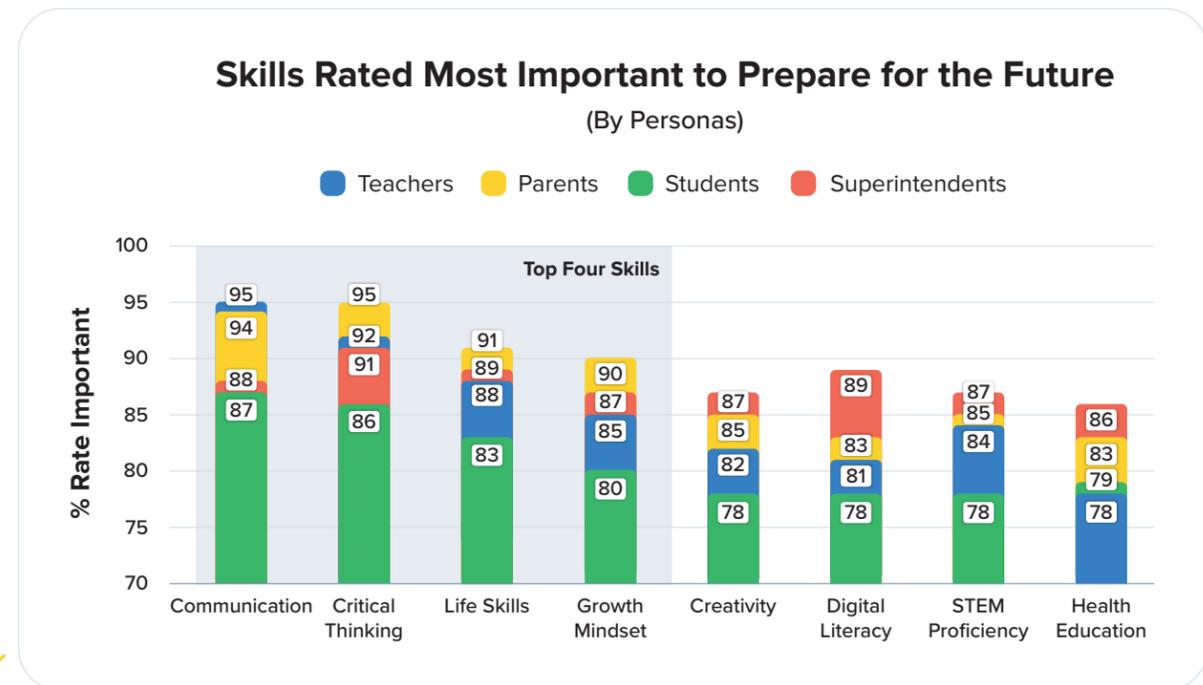


Figure 17: Percent of students, teachers, parents, and superintendents rate skills as most important for future success.

Communicating the value of these skills must start early.

Students also value interpersonal skills, but they rate the level of importance for the top skills lower than both parents and educators across all areas. These ratings may indicate that students lack exposure to real-world applications, making it challenging for them to recognize the high importance of skills like critical thinking, communication, growth mindset, and life skills.

When we explore the top four skills rated most important by student grade band, it's clear that students in early grades rate these skills as less important than older students. This may reflect that many classrooms in early grades often emphasize foundational learning of core subjects over practical experience, which can result in students not fully understanding how interpersonal and life skills translate into future success.

Data about students' confidence levels correlates with their perceptions about the value of these skills. Almost three-quarters of students say they feel confident learning math and reading and 68% feel confident learning writing and science, but this confidence declines by about 5 points for life skills. This data suggests that students may need more opportunities to practice these skills in authentic settings to understand the value and become confident in practicing these abilities.

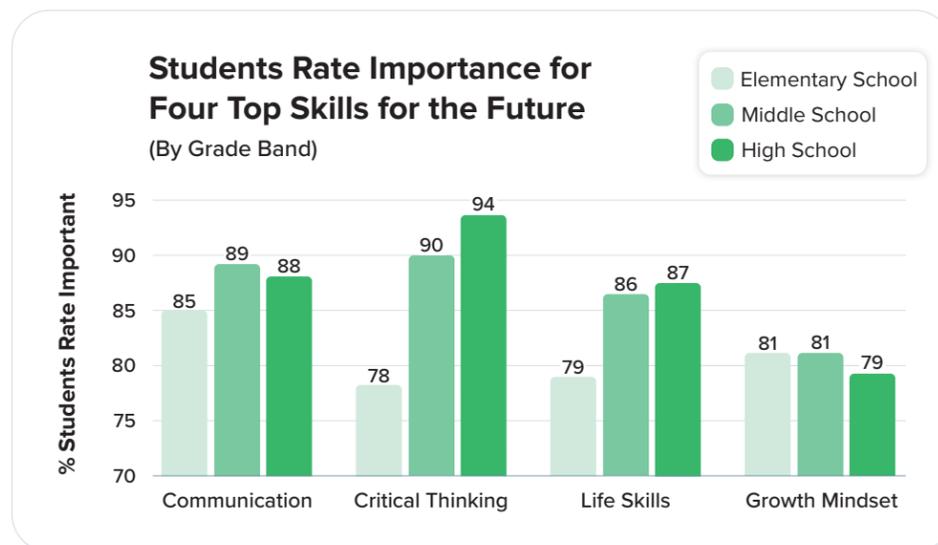


Figure 18: Students rate level of importance for skills to navigate the future by grade band.

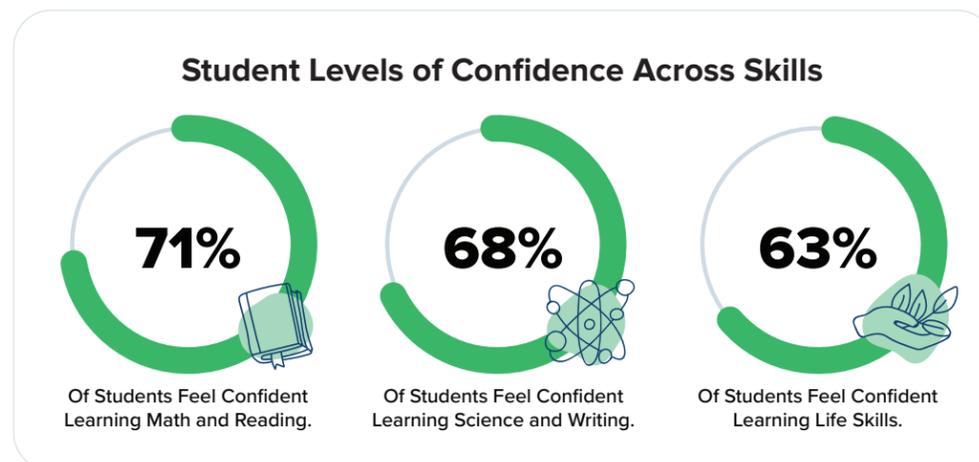


Figure 19: Students rate level of confidence learning core skills and life skills.

Student perspective

I would like to see our school help improve socializing. Everyone is so awkward and no one else will start a conversation. One thing that the school could do is they could have more time to go around getting to know people, not just at the start of the year, but all year round. I also think it's boring when you don't get to work with others. I like it when we can talk to each other about our ideas and why we got the answers we got. I hate working alone because good ideas come in groups and it's just easier to make a project good when I work with other people.

Amelia T.
Grade 4, San Jose, CA

Teachers and students report a quality gap in interpersonal and life skill curriculum.

In addition to exploring the importance of types of skills to students' future, we asked stakeholders to rate their school's performance in teaching those skills. Both students and teachers feel schools are not meeting their expectations within these areas. Only 60-71% of both teachers and students indicate that the curriculum and instruction for these skills is high quality. This indicates there is a 20% gap between the quality of instruction for these skills and their perceived value to successfully navigate the future.

Data in Figure 20 highlights notable gaps between the perceived importance and quality of skill development in school curriculums across both groups.

Research shows that investing in high-quality resources for these areas is crucial for student success. A 2023 study found that providing instruction for interpersonal and life skills can positively influence academic achievement, motivation, emotions, self-regulated learning strategies, and satisfaction in school.²¹

Both groups rate communication as the most important skill, and about 70% rate communication instruction as high quality. However, while this skill was rated important and high quality by most teachers and students, there's still a notable gap between value and quality. For teachers, there is a 25% difference in how important communication is and how well curriculum teaches it. Similarly, about 80% of both teachers and students rate life skills as important, but there is a 26-point gap between quality and value reported by students and teachers, suggesting a need for more practical, hands-on curriculum approaches across areas like time management, teamwork, and financial literacy.

Parent perspective

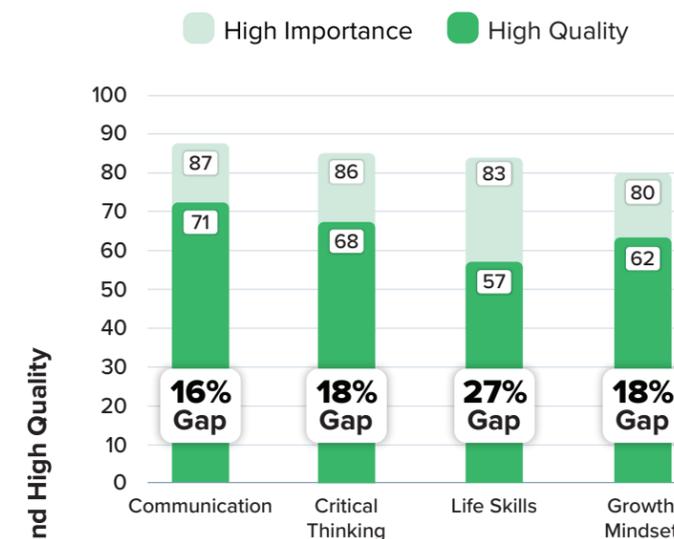
It would be great if students learned more about things like financial literacy in school and earlier. In elementary school, they can learn things like how savings accounts work and how much subscription services can cost. As they get older, I think it would help a lot of kids to understand how things like student loans and credit cards work. Those types of skills can really help young people start life out on the right foot. We'll help our kids build those skills, but other families may not have the time or knowledge. Schools can definitely help them out.

Chase E.

Parent, Claremont, CA

Skill Importance for Future vs. Curriculum Quality

(Reported by Students)



(Reported by Teachers)

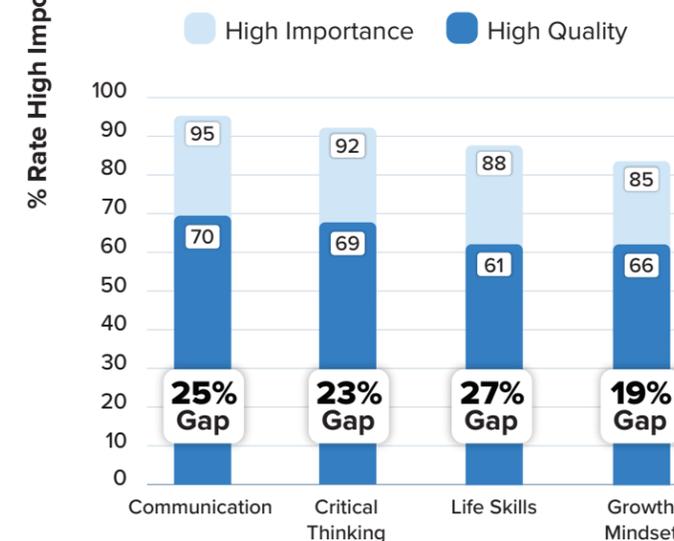


Figure 20: Teachers and students rate the importance of skill for future success and their quality of curriculum performance for each skill.

Meet Students and Teachers Where They Are

Providing more strategic, individualized support for teachers and students will increase teacher and student confidence and improve outcomes.

Both teachers and students need support to thrive in the classroom. **Studies show that teachers who feel supported are more likely to experience job satisfaction and remain in the profession longer, creating a more stable and effective learning environment for students.** When teachers are equipped with ongoing professional development, tools to help them reach each learner, and access to a collaborative support network, they feel more confident and capable of addressing the diverse needs of their students.

At a time when learning gaps and learner variation seem to be increasing, it is crucial for educators in age-based school systems to meet students where they are in their learning journey. **For decades, experience and learning science have both validated that a students' prior knowledge is one of the most important factors impacting their achievement.** That's why research consistently shows that personalized learning approaches—where instruction is tailored to students' unique strengths, needs, and interests—lead to better academic outcomes, increased engagement, and higher levels of motivation.

According to the American Institutes for Research,²² when educators account for and activate students' prior knowledge to create student-centered learning environments and experiences, students are more likely to achieve significant academic growth.

By working to provide the right tools and support, educators can foster more inclusive, personal environments in which everyone is empowered to succeed.



94%

Almost all teachers are looking for classroom tools that give them time back to focus on students.

“ Superintendent perspective

In Roanoke City Public Schools, our goal is for all students to graduate with a diploma and resume of rich skills and experiences. Having access to high-quality content within the context of highly effective instruction is paramount and ensures our educators have what they need to support our students in every class, every day.

Verletta White, Ed. D.

Superintendent,

Roanoke City Public Schools, VA

While teachers find purpose in their individual contributions, more experienced teachers feel less excited and more stressed.

We asked teachers if they agreed with specific sentiments about their role in the classroom and across the education landscape in general. **At every stage of their career, almost all teachers (over 95%) expressed positive feelings about what they are doing for students.**

Teachers feel passionate about teaching and believe they are making a difference in students' lives. As they continue in their careers, more teachers say that they make meaningful connections with students. Perhaps this small increase indicates that they have seen the impact of their work over the years through continued relationships with students. These perceptions are critical for student success. Studies show that teachers who are more satisfied with their jobs tend to provide higher-quality instruction, which leads to better student outcomes.²³



A classroom teacher's energy and excitement come from an emotional place, and students sense that passion and want to build on it. We need to be excited about what we're teaching and activate their interest. The closer teachers can get to individual student interest or student need, the better.

Jessie Erickson

National Education Consultant, ND

Teacher Outlook

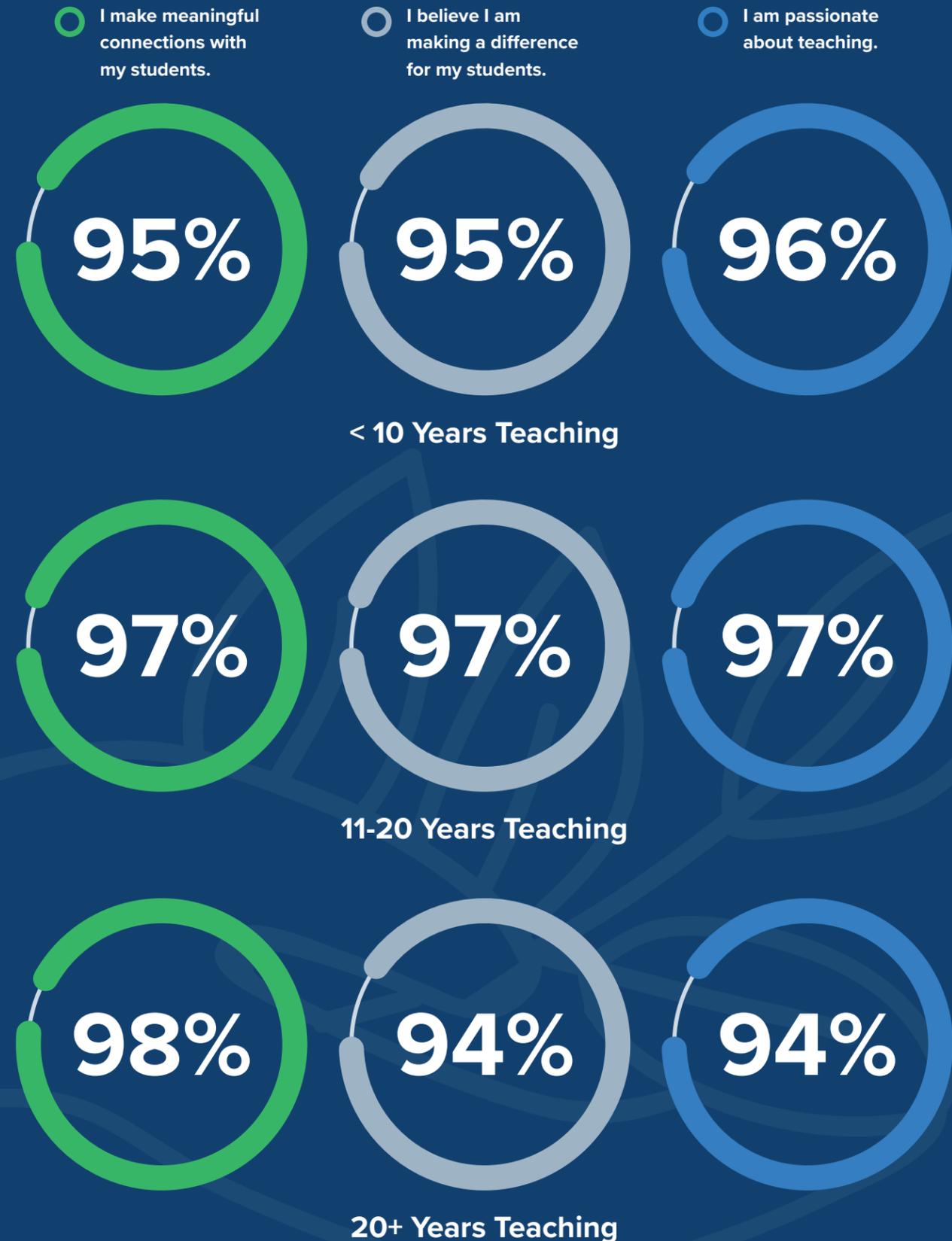


Figure 21: Percent of teachers who agree with sentiments.

However, while teachers at every phase of their career report feeling positive about their satisfaction and the meaning of their work, teachers further along in their career also report feeling less excited and more stressed.

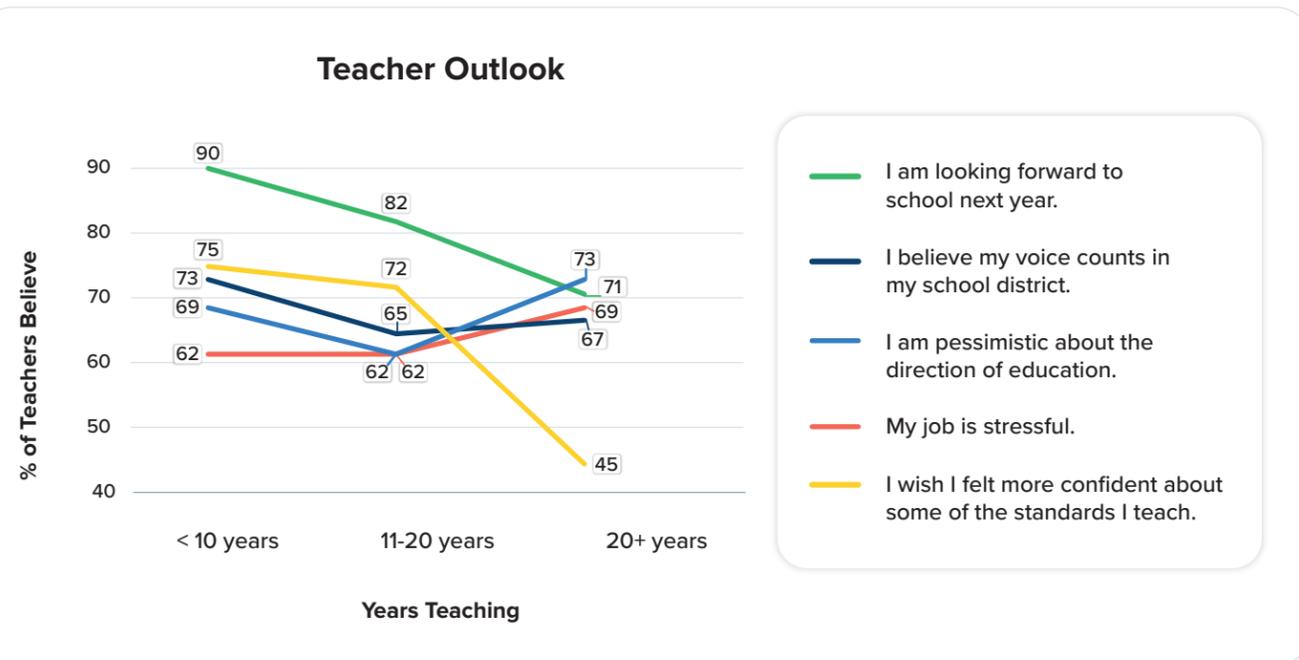


Figure 22: Percent of teachers who agree with sentiments.

Almost all new teachers (fewer than ten years in education) feel excited about school. This does not mean they find their job easy; nearly two-thirds of new teachers also rate their job as stressful. As teachers progress through their tenure, this excitement declines over time, yet they continue to feel stress despite more experience.

Research supports the idea that prolonged job stress affects enthusiasm, which may explain why 73% of teachers late in their careers feel pessimistic about the overall direction of education and are less excited about school than newer teachers.

It is also worth noting that teachers feel more positive about the areas that they have control over, such as developing student relationships and supporting instruction. While teachers with more experience feel stressed and dissatisfied with the direction of education, they still maintain their passion for teaching and continue to foster student connections despite challenges.

Educator perspective

Building relationships with students is central to getting them engaged. I've been teaching in this community for many years. I've taught students' parents, cousins, brothers, nephews, and all types of family. Students know I know them and their families, and I'm here to stay.

Jeremy States
Math Teacher, VA

Teachers early in their careers need more support with teaching standards.

Three-quarters of early-career teachers wish they felt confident teaching today's standards, but as teachers continue in their careers they grow nearly 1.7 times more confident. Less than half (45%) of seasoned teachers wish they were more confident in teaching today's standards.

According to education researchers, collective efficacy (when educators believe in their combined ability to influence student outcomes) may be the most important influence on teacher job satisfaction and teacher retention.²⁴ School leaders can focus on actively building a school culture where all teachers, in every stage of their career feel confident about their ability to help students succeed.

88 Educator perspective

A lot of educators have similar confidence issues that students have. Teachers can be hard on themselves and want to execute perfectly in front of their colleagues and students; they don't want to make mistakes or struggle in front of anyone. We have to remind ourselves to model what we want the students to adopt: confidence to grow. Students are very understanding and supportive when we try to learn new things together. They want to show off their expertise and help teachers learn new things.

McKenna Akane
K-8 STEM Educator, MT

Collaboration with leadership empowers teachers to create more meaningful learning experiences, with opportunities to strengthen student engagement support.

Collaborating with teachers and providing them with professional development opportunities and targeted support helps mitigate challenges and empowers teachers to deliver enhanced learning experiences.

Almost all teachers (86%) and superintendents (93%) agree that collaboration across multiple stakeholder levels helps provide students with meaningful learning experiences. This confirms research that suggests district-level collaboration is crucial for teachers as it enhances professional growth, ensures consistency, provides problem-solving support, and ultimately leads to improved student outcomes.²⁵

86%

of teachers believe that collaborating with leadership teams helps them deliver meaningful learning experiences.

93%

of superintendents believe that when teachers collaborate with leadership teams, it helps them deliver meaningful learning experiences.

While both superintendents and teachers recognize the importance of collaboration, there's a significant disconnect between their perceptions of support for student engagement. Although 86% of superintendents believe they offer sufficient support for teachers to engage students, just 25% of teachers feel they receive adequate engagement support from their district.

This data reflects a common trend among teachers and leadership teams. Research²⁶ suggests that discrepancies in perception among stakeholder levels are neither uncommon nor intentional. Education leaders may believe they offer adequate support based on existing district-wide initiatives and implementation, but programs don't always translate into actionable support for teachers' day-to-day experiences.

Perceptions of District Support to Engage Students

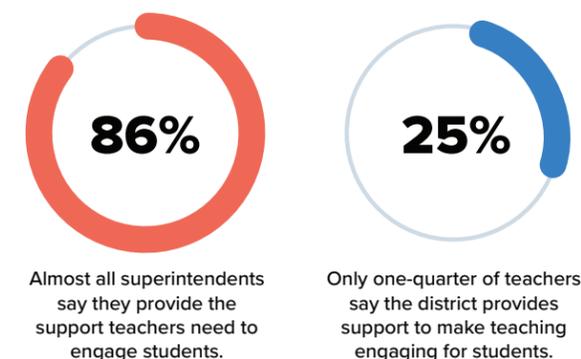


Figure 23: Gap in superintendent and teacher perceptions of support.

Professional development needs align with teachers' reported challenges.

Professional development opportunities can help teachers feel more supported in their work. We asked teachers to identify the professional development topics they were most interested in, and their top choices closely matched the most significant classroom challenges from this survey.

About half of teachers say PD that focuses on student engagement and meeting student needs would be most valuable. Data from this survey reaffirms that these areas are among the top priorities for teachers. About three-quarters of all teachers believe motivation, personalization, and engagement are the top three challenges in their classrooms.

Nearly half of teachers also desire PD on new trends and approaches in education. This aligns with findings that teachers are eager to find more high-quality resources and solutions to implement in their classrooms.

According to data from this survey, 63% of all teachers find their job stressful, and over one-third express interest in stress reduction support. These important perspectives highlight a clear need for emotional well-being assistance.

By capturing teachers' sentiments and concerns periodically, district leaders can provide more targeted opportunities for continuous learning and growth. Offering teachers more opportunities to voice their concerns can also help them feel more confident and supported.

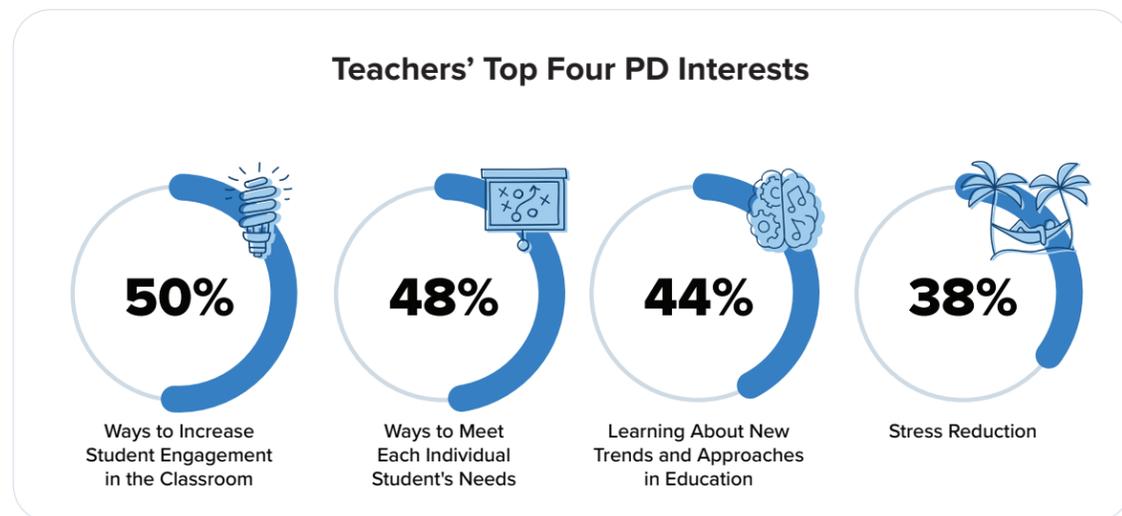


Figure 24: Teachers' top four PD interest areas.

Educator perspective

A lot of student success is determined by how educators connect with each other, how much we share resources, and how often we discuss our students' strengths and struggles. No teacher should feel alone in this work.

McKenna Akane
K-8 STEM Educator, MT

New technology, such as AI-powered tools, can accelerate the impact of adaptive learning. Yet, confidence varies among stakeholders.

Supporting teachers' needs evolves as new trends, policies, and tools emerge in education. With AI coming into focus as a transformative tool, it's essential for superintendents to respond proactively. Providing the necessary guidance and resources will ensure teachers are equipped to navigate these changes successfully.

Survey data shows that teachers are eager to learn about new tools that can help them support learning, indicating a generally positive outlook on technology in education. When asked specifically about AI, all stakeholders indicated a recognition of the importance of trustworthy sources, training, and administrative responsibility in ensuring successful implementation. **However, superintendents appear most eager to keep pace with the innovations brought by AI, with parents expressing concern over student use of AI for cheating.**

While superintendents maintain strong confidence in the power of AI, teachers and parents approach it with more caution. Superintendents have a 13% higher likelihood of trusting AI developed by education experts compared to parents and teachers. Less than three-quarters of teachers and parents consider AI-powered learning materials as more trustworthy when built by education experts.

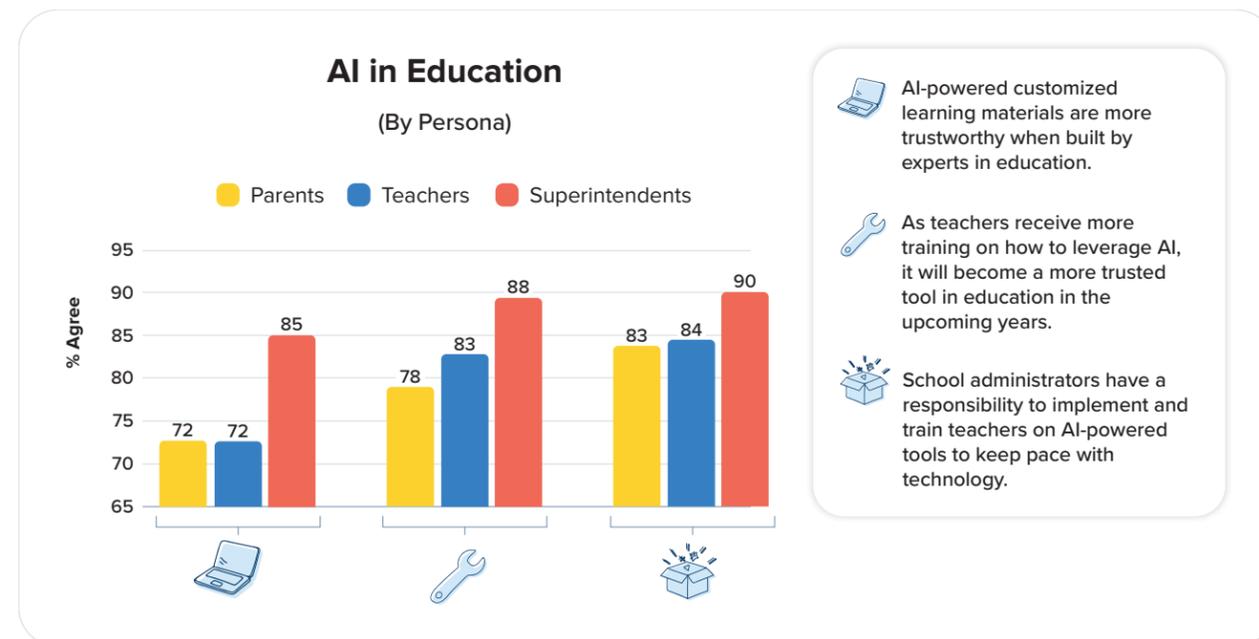


Figure 25: Parent, teacher, and superintendent sentiments about AI.

Parent perspective

As a parent, I worry a little that students use AI to cheat. The potential for using it as a learning resource is amazing though. It can be used to provide high-quality resources.

Meg S.

Parent, Avon Lake, OH

Superintendents also understand the importance of guiding teachers in AI use, with 88% saying that as teachers receive more training, AI will become a trusted tool in education. This demonstrates confidence in AI integration improving through effective training. A slightly lower but still substantial 83% of teachers and 78% of parents agree, which indicates all groups believe that training will build confidence and trust.

All groups express the strongest alignment on the necessity of leadership-sponsored AI training. **Over 80% of parents and teachers believe district leadership should provide strategic implementation and training on responsible AI use, and nine out of ten superintendents concur.** Nearly all superintendents (90%) affirm that school administrators have a responsibility to implement and train teachers on AI-powered tools. This suggests leaders feel a strong sense of accountability in integrating AI into education. The desire for more training and the level of caution aligns with current technology trends across education. Recent research has shown that the majority of educators feel concerned about the lack of district AI policies and clear direction for how to use AI for teaching and learning.²⁷

Parent perspective

I see the power of AI to help kids learn. It's especially useful for supporting kids at home when parents aren't sure how to help with their homework or need help explaining things. I just want my kids to know when it's appropriate to use it. I want them to understand how to use it ethically and responsibly.

Brooke T.

Parent, San Jose, CA

Teachers see greater variation in students' skills. Addressing these needs requires a thoughtful strategy and support from all stakeholders.

Survey data shows that two-thirds of teachers have noticed a broader range of students' prior knowledge and skill levels compared to 2019. Additionally, 81% of teachers find navigating these varied skill levels challenging. As a result, many teachers face the ongoing task of finding the right resources and support to effectively meet diverse student learning needs.

Student perspective

I feel like my teachers meet all the different skills in my class because of three things. First, I am mostly in class with students at a similar level, which helps with efficiency. Second, we have block scheduling, which gives teachers more time to check in with all the students in the classroom. Lastly, my classes are smaller, with 17-20 students, which keeps it manageable for my teachers.

Maisey M.
Grade 10, Crozet, VA

For teachers, adaptive learning content stands out as the top resource, with 45% identifying it as the most important tool for addressing students' needs. Additionally, 42% of teachers highlight the significance of one-on-one conversations with students, underscoring their belief in the value of individualized instruction and building strong teacher-student relationships.

In contrast, superintendents place a greater emphasis on fostering student independence. While teachers prioritize direct connections with students, 44% of superintendents consider student-led learning to be the most critical resource for personalizing instruction. They also highly value independent learning tools, with 38% rating them as important. These findings suggest that superintendents see student agency and ownership as central to effective personalized learning.

Educator perspective

The best thing you can do for students is meet them where they are. If you have multiple entry points, and you try different things, everyone will be successful at some point. And then, we have to celebrate their victories and encourage them the best we can.

Jeremy States
Math Teacher, VA

When we asked teachers and superintendents to identify the top three resources for tailoring instruction to individual student needs, both groups highlighted the importance of technology and human connections.

The data reveals that teachers and superintendents have somewhat differing perspectives on the most effective methods for tailoring instruction to meet students' individual needs. Teachers favor direct, interactive approaches, while superintendents prioritize student autonomy and technology integration.

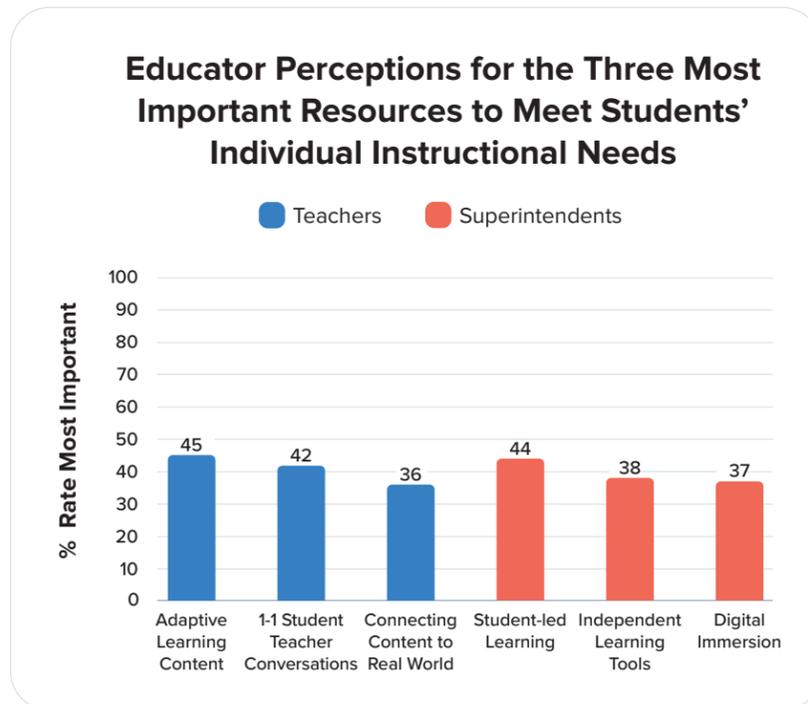


Figure 26: Educators rate the three most important resources to help meet students' individual needs.

Parents and educators recognize personalized instruction as a powerful tool to enhance student learning.

Although superintendents and teachers have different views on the most effective resources for meeting students' needs, both recognize the transformative power of technology-driven personalized instruction. Nearly nine out of ten stakeholders see digital tools as essential for personalized learning. This shared perspective highlights how educators appreciate the dual advantages of personalized instruction—digital tools that enhance teachers' capacity and adaptive content that caters to each student's unique learning levels and interests.

The data in Figure 27 shows parent and educator perspectives on the impact of personalized instruction across three key areas. The results indicate that all groups strongly believe in the positive impact of personalized learning but superintendents report the highest level of optimism, especially in building student confidence (94%) and preparing students for future success (89%).

Almost all parents (92%) believe that personalized instruction improves learning outcomes such as test scores, retention, and overall academic performance, and the majority (90%) of teachers and superintendents are equally convinced.



Fast Fact

Technology-driven personalized instruction uses responsive, adaptive technology to customize and tailor instruction to each student's skills, preferences, and interests. In addition to responding to students' needs in real-time, personalized instruction empowers students to take control and ownership of their learning.



87%

of all stakeholders agree that digital tools are essential for optimizing content for individual learning.

Student perspective

Sometimes it feels like teachers are moving too fast and too slow. When you know a subject well, you want to get ahead, but you wind up getting stuck when other kids don't understand the concept. Then there are other times when I'm confused and the teacher winds up just plowing ahead, and that's frustrating.

Sophia C.

Grade 12, Concord, NC

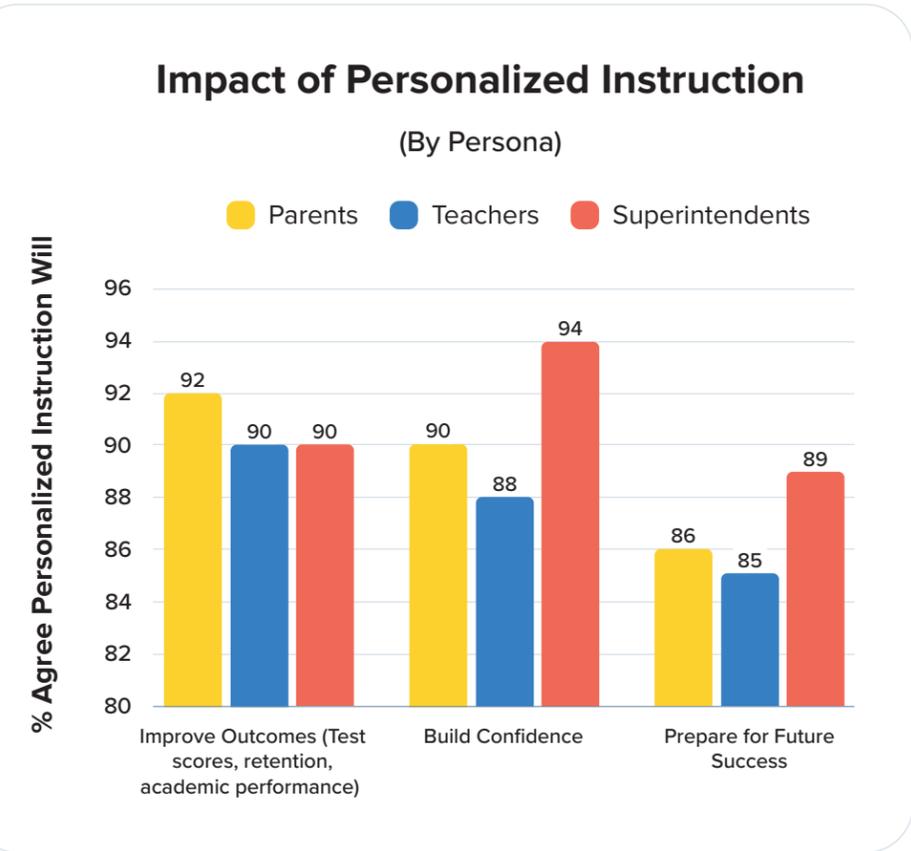


Figure 27: Educators and parents agree that personalized instruction can improve learning across specific dimensions.

Students also believe personalized instruction can greatly benefit learning outcomes.

The majority of students (81%) also recognize the importance of resources that adapt to their current skill level for both their daily learning and long-term success. In fact, adaptive resources were rated as the second most important tool for both day-to-day learning and achieving future goals, coming in just behind access to trustworthy information, which topped students' list at 82%.

When we explored reasons why students value personalized learning, we found that about three-quarters of students believe that personalized learning would have a positive impact on their engagement, empowerment, and future readiness. This excitement was especially prominent in middle school.

Data indicates that middle school students believe that personalized learning has the most significant impact, especially for feeling more prepared for the future (84%) and increased engagement (82%). Middle school students are about 12% more likely than high school students to believe that personalized learning can help engage with lessons. About three-quarters of elementary and middle school students believe that it will help them feel more empowered at school.

Research shows that during middle school, students reach a pivotal stage for learning engagement. As they start to develop more independence and self-awareness, they may find personalized learning especially helpful to both enable exploration and provide individual attention. Personalized learning taps into this critical developmental stage by offering content tailored to their interests and abilities.

Positive Impact for Students Using Personalized Learning

(By Grade Band)

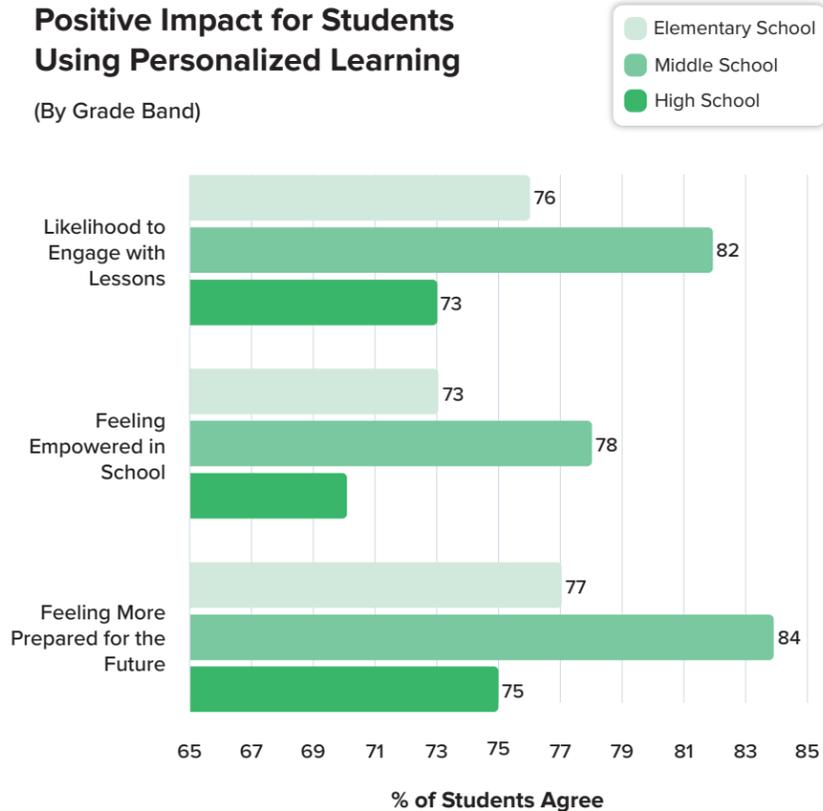


Figure 28: Students believe personalized learning can improve their learning experiences.

Student perspective

I think worksheets are boring. I try to finish them fast so I can login to play math and coding games. It's better than a worksheet because I don't have to wait until tomorrow to see if I got the answers right.

Avi E.
Grade 1, Claremont, CA

Although nearly all respondents agree adaptive resources are very important, most feel that access is limited.

We asked all stakeholders to rate the importance of adaptive resources for long-term success and daily learning. We also asked respondents to rate their access to such resources. Data indicates that all stakeholders agree that these resources are important, yet fewer feel satisfied with their ability to access them.

All stakeholders concur that there is great value in resources that can personalize learning to meet each student’s skill level. Over 80% of respondents agree that these resources are important for both daily learning and setting students up for long term success. About 5% more parents rate these tools as important compared to other stakeholders, suggesting they see personalized instruction as crucial for their child’s educational journey.

Though there is clear consensus that adaptable resources are important for student learning, about one-third of teachers, parents, and students do not feel that they have adequate access to these resources.

The greatest discrepancy exists among educators. The majority of superintendents (84%) rate access to adaptive resources highly, but only 64% of teachers agree. This significant perception gap suggests that while superintendents might have a more optimistic view of the resources being provided, teachers who experience the day-to-day realities of implementing resources are encountering practical challenges in accessing or utilizing them effectively.

These results may also align with research²⁸ that has found that the digital divide is still problematic for many students, and access to adaptive resources can vary based on factors including school funding, teacher training, and availability of connectivity.

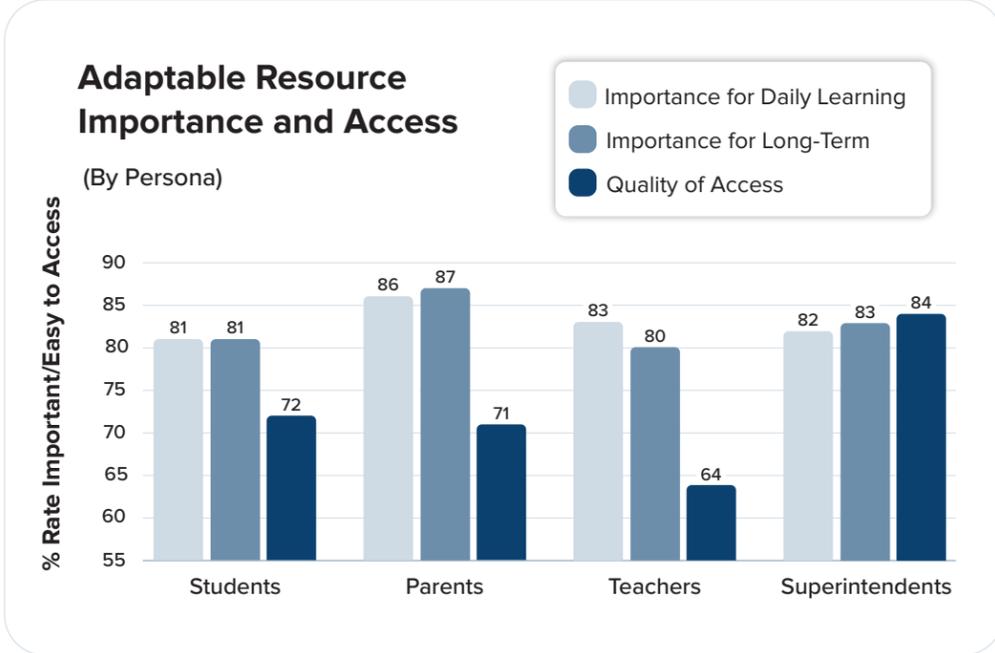
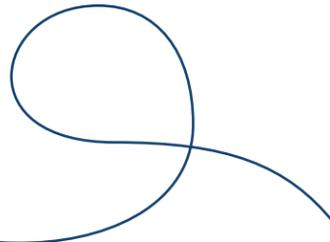


Figure 29: Stakeholders rate the level of long-term and daily importance for resources that adapt to each student’s skill level vs their ability to access such resources.

Conclusion

The report, *Education Insights 2024-2025: Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow*, underscores the dedication and passion that educators, parents, and students bring to education, even amidst the challenges and complexities of today's learning environments. Report data reveals that while there is a strong foundation of positivity and commitment, there are critical areas requiring attention to ensure that students remain engaged and prepared for future success.

Teachers, driven by their enthusiasm and connection with students, face increasing challenges, including a widening range of student skill levels and a decline in classroom engagement. This highlights the urgent need for enhanced and targeted support, particularly in fostering engagement and curiosity and equipping students with the skills necessary for an ever-evolving future.

Findings across career readiness indicate a significant opportunity for development. Both students and educators expressed concerns about whether students are adequately prepared to navigate future career paths, with middle school students showing the strongest desire for more exposure and resources to prepare for the future. This suggests a promising window of opportunity to introduce career exploration and skill development earlier than before.

Superintendents and teachers alike agree that integrating more training and resources, including leveraging external partnerships and new technologies will be central for building students' confidence and future readiness.

As superintendents, teachers, parents, and students work together to navigate changes and shifts across the landscape, there is a clear call to action: prioritize support for teachers, embrace innovative tools, and foster a culture of curiosity, engagement, and career exploration. By focusing on these areas, the education community can build on existing strengths and address the barriers that stand in the way of preparing students for a dynamic future. The path forward is one of collaboration, adaptability, and a shared commitment to ensuring that all students thrive.

Methodology

The survey was conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of Discovery Education in August 2024 and included 1,524 respondents across K-12 students, parents of K-12 students, and K-12 teachers and superintendents. More information about this survey and methodology is available upon request.

The Harris Poll

The Harris Poll is a global public opinion, analytics, and market research consultancy that strives to reveal society's authentic values to inspire leaders to create a better tomorrow. With a global research reach of more than 90 countries, Harris offers advisory services across sectors to world leaders, CEOs, and business decision-makers with state-of-the-art analytics, real-time software services, and practitioners in marketing, reputation, customer experience, trends, futures, and thought leadership/research-for-public release. In recent years, the Harris Poll has been a trusted research partner for: Sesame Workshop, Grammarly, CVS Health, PGA TOUR First Tee Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, and the Milken Institute. The Harris Poll translates shifting social sentiment into a competitive marketplace advantage.



Discovery Education is the worldwide edtech leader whose state-of-the-art digital platform supports learning wherever it takes place. Through its award-winning multimedia content, instructional supports, innovative classroom tools, and corporate partnerships Discovery Education helps educators deliver equitable learning experiences engaging all students and supporting higher academic achievement on a global scale. Discovery Education serves approximately 4.5 million educators and 45 million students worldwide, and its resources are accessed in over 100 countries and territories. Inspired by the global media company Warner Bros. Discovery, Inc. Discovery Education partners with districts, states, and trusted organizations to empower teachers with leading edtech solutions that support the success of all learners. Explore the future of education at www.discoveryeducation.com.

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