

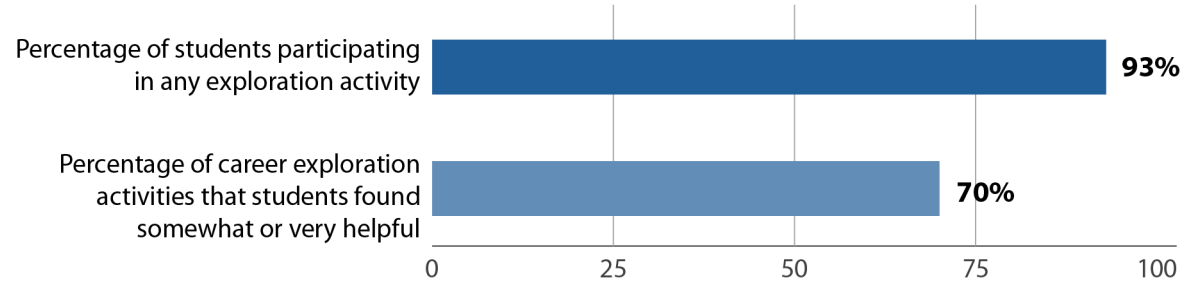
Delaware Career Development Study: Cross-District Survey Brief

How do students explore and develop career interests in middle and high school? To answer this question, RTI International and the University of Delaware, in consultation with the Delaware Department of Education and Rodel of Delaware, are conducting a 4-year study of career development opportunities in school districts in the Wilmington, Delaware area. This work is part of the national Career and Technical Education (CTE) Research Network, which is supporting concurrent research projects on career readiness in six U.S. cities with funding from the U.S. Department of Education. The study's first year was dedicated to an exploratory study of the opportunities available to middle and high school students in three Wilmington school districts: Colonial, Red Clay Consolidated, and New Castle County Vocational Technical. For more information about the study, visit https://decdstudy.rti.org/.

This brief summarizes the results of a survey of 12th-grade students in the three districts conducted by the research team in spring 2025. The survey asked students about their participation in career development activities, career advising, their postsecondary plans, and their satisfaction with career development opportunities in their high school. The survey received 1,552 responses, representing a 68% response rate. The results shared in this brief are aggregated across the districts.

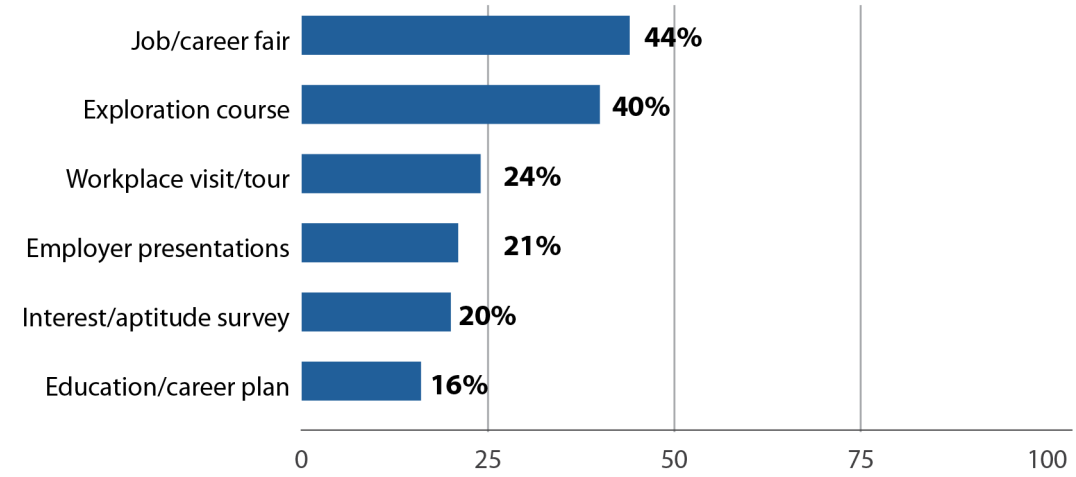
Career Exploration Activities

Almost all 12th-grade students (93%) reported participating in one or more career exploration activities during high school. They rated most activities that they participated in as somewhat or very helpful (70%).

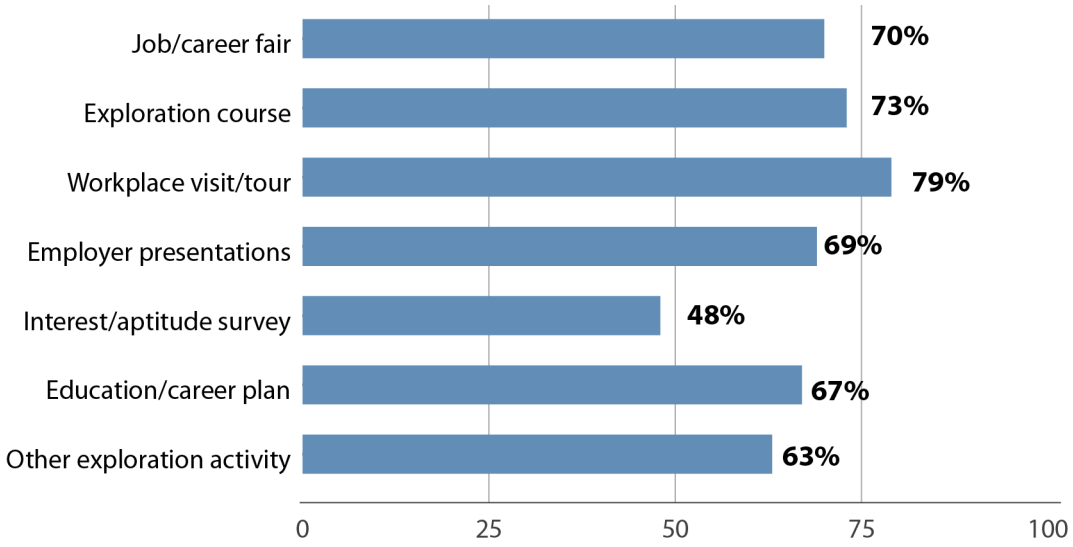


On average, students participated in two career exploration activities. Among all students, 44% participated in one career exploration activity and 50% in two or more activities.

The most common career exploration activities that students participated in during high school were job/career fairs (44%), followed by career exploration courses (40%).

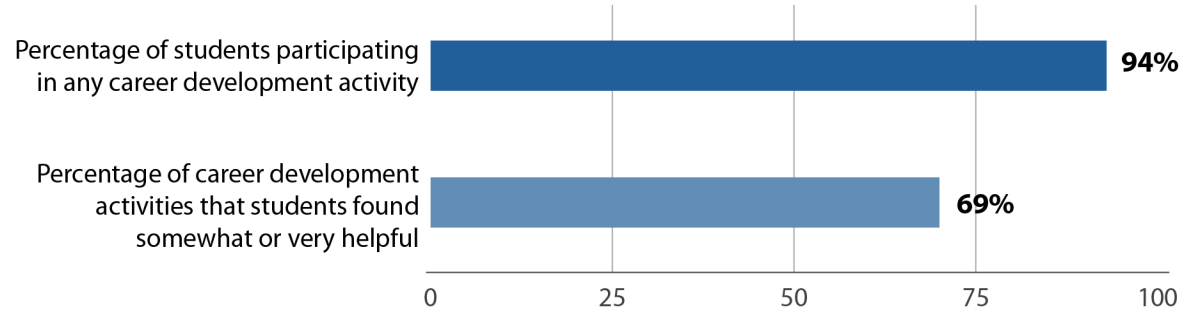


Among the activities, students most frequently rated workplace visits/tours (79%) and exploration courses (73%) as somewhat or very helpful.



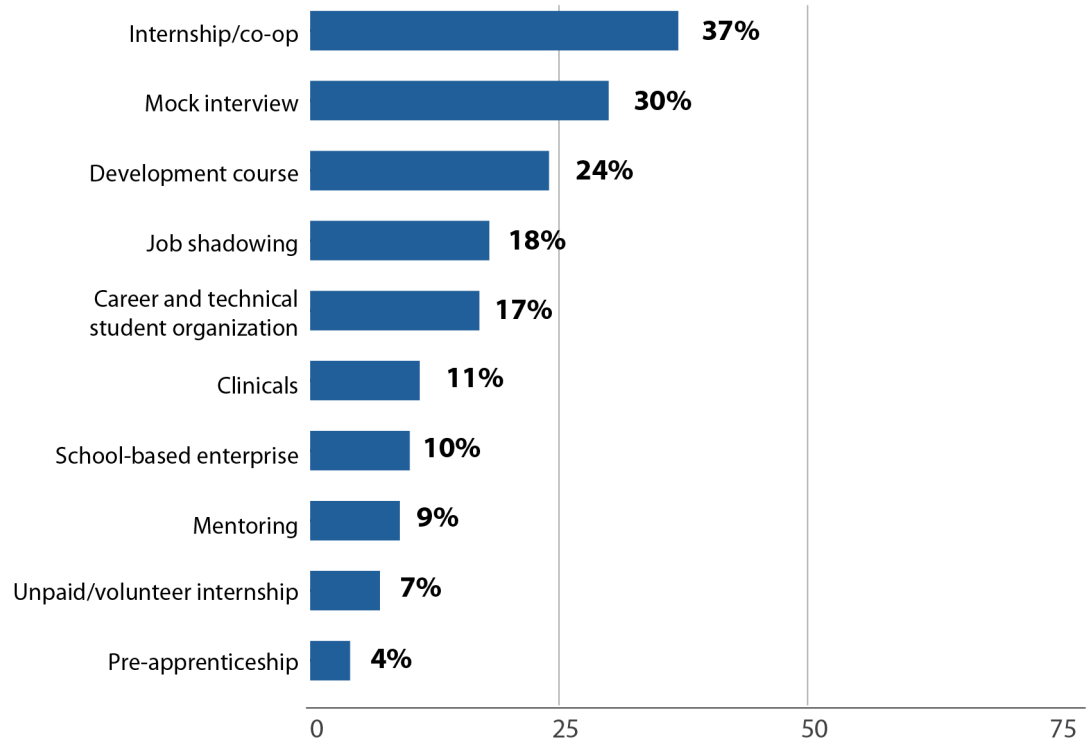
Career Development Activities

Almost all 12th-grade students (94%) reported that they had participated in one or more career development activities during high school. They rated over two-thirds (69%) of the career development activities that they participated in as somewhat or very helpful.

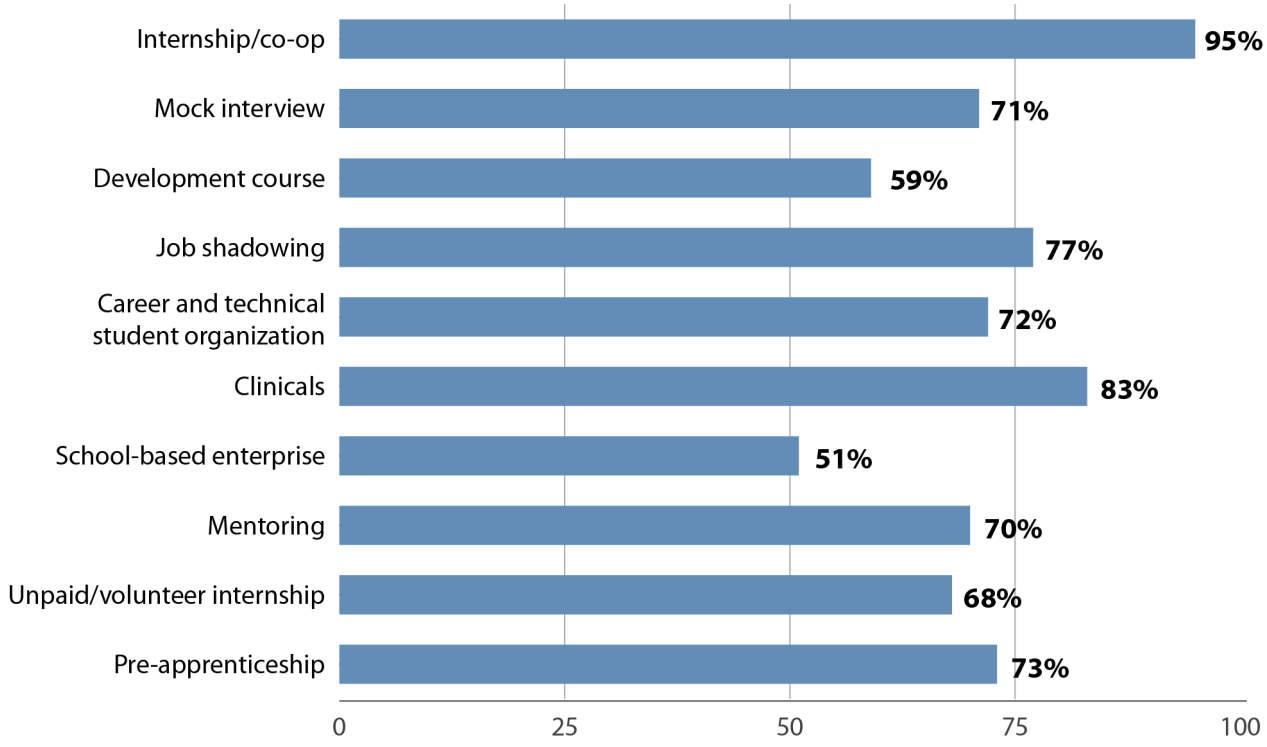


On average, students participated in two career development activities. Among all students, 55% participated in one career development activity and 40% in two or more activities.

Internships and co-ops (37%), followed by mock interviews (30%), were the most common career development activities that students reported participating in during high school.

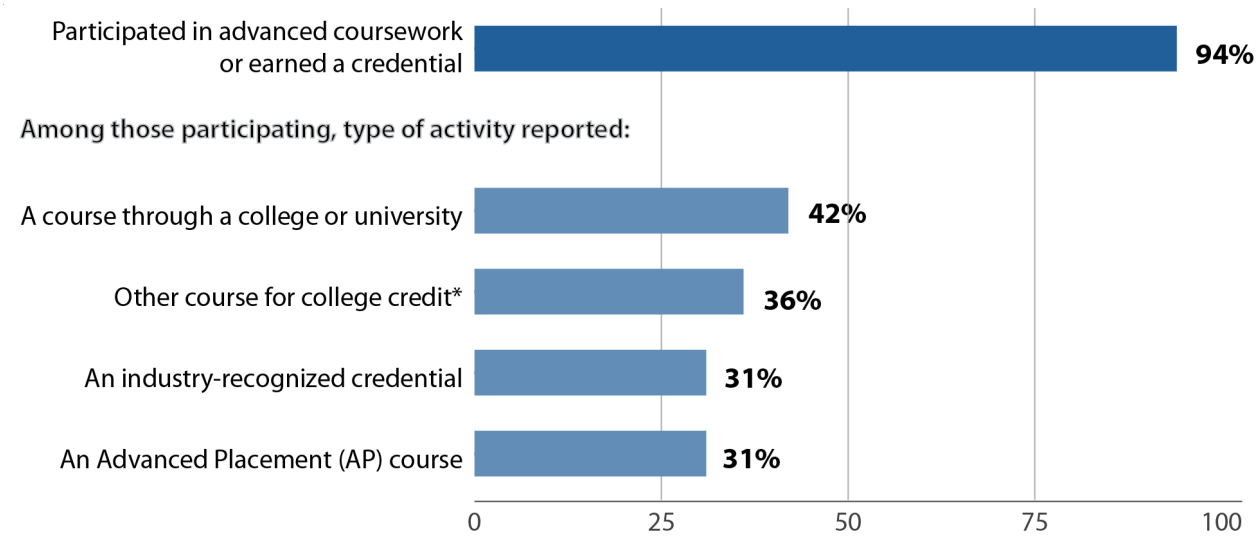


Among the activities, students most frequently rated internship/co-ops (95%) and clinicals (83%) as somewhat or very helpful.



Credentials and Credit Activities

Ninety-four percent (94%) of students reported earning an industry credential or participating in advanced coursework such as courses for college credit or Advanced Placement (AP).



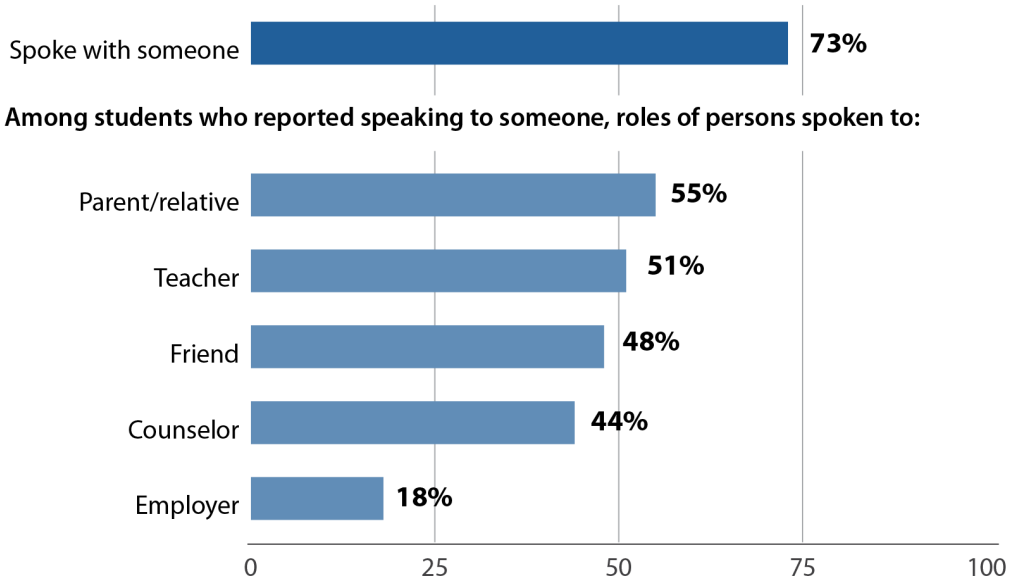
*Includes options such as International Baccalaureate and early college programs.

Among these options, the highest percentage of students had taken a course for college credit either through a college or university (42%).

Lower proportions of students (31%) participated in Advanced Placement courses or had earned an industry-recognized credential.

Career Interest Conversations

During high school, 73% of students reported speaking with someone about their career interests.

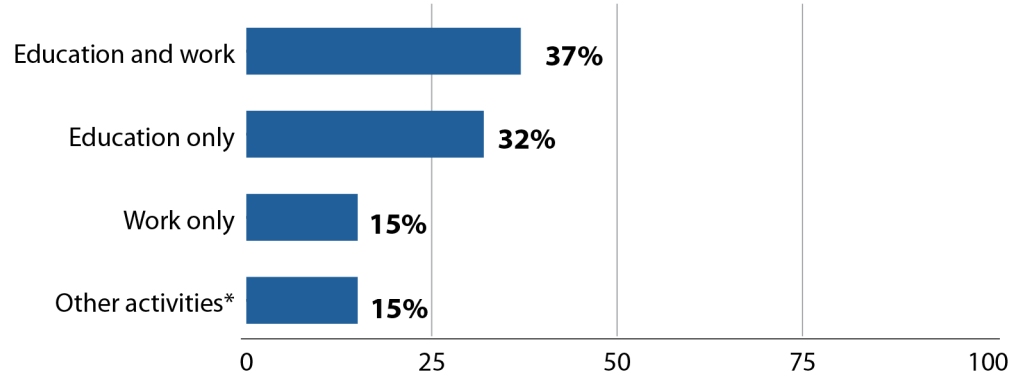


Most students spoke with a parent or relative (55%) or a teacher (51%). Among the students who talked to a teacher about their career interests, 76% of them found such conversations somewhat or very helpful.

Among the 44% of students who reported talking to a counselor, most (63%) reported meeting with a counselor at least twice per year. Eighty-four percent (84%) of those who talked to a counselor found such conversations somewhat or very helpful.

Postsecondary Plans

Combining education and work was the most common postsecondary plan (37%).



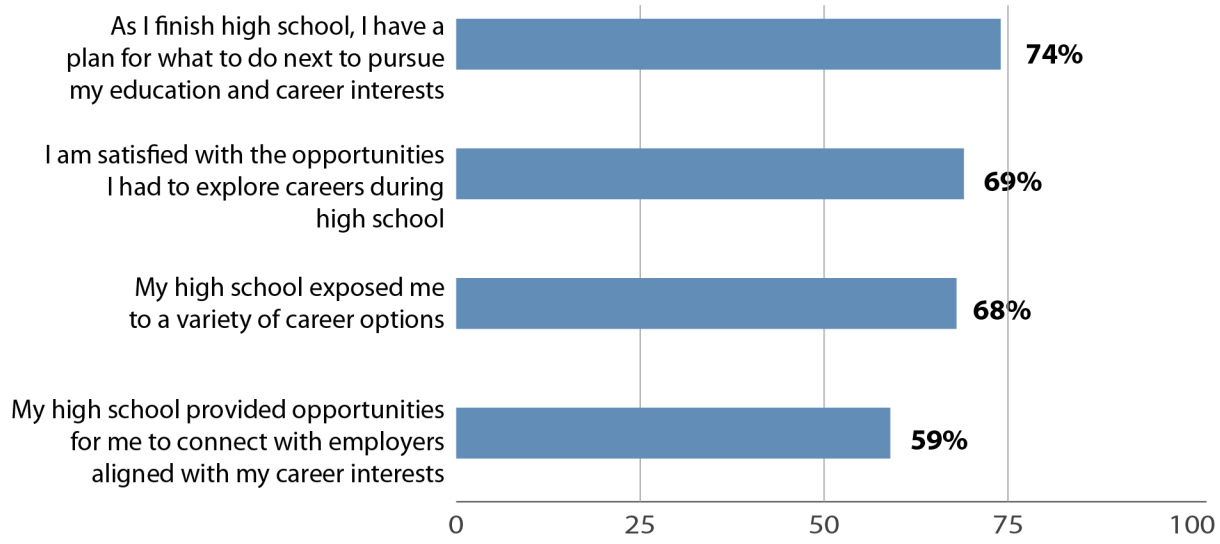
Note: "Other activities" includes starting a family, finishing their high school diploma, or no clear plans.

Regardless of other plans, a total of 69% of students planned to enroll in postsecondary education, and 52% planned on working.

Among all students, over half of the students (56%) reported postsecondary plans related to their career pathway, and 59% had long-term job aspirations related to their career pathway.

High School Experience Satisfaction

About three-quarters of 12th-graders (74%) agreed or strongly agreed that they have a plan for what to do next to pursue their educational and career interests.



Over two-thirds of students (69%) agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the opportunities they had to explore careers during high school, and a similar proportion of students (68%) agreed or strongly agreed that their high school exposed them to a variety of career options.

The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R305N240035 to RTI International. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.