

LINKED LEARNING STUDENT SURVEY

College and career pathway students report takeaways from 2025–26 and its impact on their next steps.



As California moves forward with historic investments in career connected, college preparatory learning, it is more important than ever to stay focused on what truly makes a difference for students. That means paying close attention to what works, ensuring students have meaningful, high quality learning experiences, and listening carefully to young people themselves.

Each year, the Linked Learning Alliance surveys thousands of pathway students across the state to elevate their perspectives and learn from their experiences. This document presents findings from the most recent academic year, capturing student reflections from seven districts and diverse pathways.

While these findings are not intended to represent all California students, they point to common themes and our opportunities to strengthen education: learning that feels purposeful, relationships that support growth, opportunities to apply knowledge in the real world, and experiences that help turn interests into plans for the future.

ABOUT SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

4,301

students responded

90%

identify as a student of color

44%

will be a first-generation college student

School districts represented:

Antelope Valley UHSD, Fresno USD, Los Angeles USD, Oakland USD, Porterville USD, San Benito HSD, San Bernardino City USD

*This is not considered a scientific survey, and results should not be interpreted as applying to a larger audience of students beyond those who responded.

“I realized that the work I put in today is my future. That changed my mindset about school and my learning. I now want to do my best and give it my all.”

– First Year, Los Angeles Unified School District

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

Linked Learning pathways are valuable and motivating.

Students describe Linked Learning pathways as experiences that make school feel purposeful. Exposure to real world learning and opportunities to explore interests increases motivation and helps students see themselves—and their futures—differently.

94% of students rate their high school experience as **valuable**

81% say they have a chance to **try out new things** and discover their interests

78% say they feel **motivated to learn** in their pathway

78% feel **fortunate** for their college and career pathway experience



"This allowed me to explore a new skill [and] to realize that there are a lot of careers and opportunities out in the world ... helped open my eyes to what I could do."

– Junior, Antelope Valley Unified High School District

"I completed my project and decided to compete [in] that subject. I won both my regional and state competition ... I found out I was capable [and] saw who I was."

– Junior, Porterville Unified School District

Pathways are supportive and build connections.

Students report that their pathway experiences are shaped by relationships—with teachers, peers, and adults who recognize and value them. These connections contribute to learning environments where students feel supported, respected, and encouraged to participate fully.

85% experienced opportunities to **collaborate** with their peers

80% say their teachers work hard to **help them** when needed

79% feel they are in a **supportive and inviting** place to learn

75% feel **seen and respected** by the adults in their pathway

73% feel their **life experiences** and opinions are valued

"Working with a teacher that was genuinely patient and willing to slow down for me was meaningful ... I appreciate teachers that actually talk individually with students."

– Sophomore, Los Angeles Unified School District

"In my college English class, we had meaningful discussions on our reading and were able to share and grow together as a class."

– Senior, Porterville Unified School District

Pathways bring the real world into learning.

For many students, pathway learning bridges the gap between school and life beyond the classroom. Applying academic learning to real world contexts helps students better understand postsecondary options and imagine themselves in college and career settings.

79% say they receive **useful feedback** on their work

"In journalism, I got to report sports news and I felt like I really liked being a reporter and writing."

– First Year, Fresno Unified School District

77% had opportunities to **take college classes**

"I got to talk to different medical professionals and learn about their careers and what their day is like ... this opportunity helped me learn more about myself and what type of career I want to pursue."

– Senior, Antelope Valley Unified High School District

76% felt able to **apply what they're learning** in academic classes to real-world opportunities



"I started to get a hang on reading schematics and making 3D designs in solid works. I felt I was learning actual useful stuff."

– Senior, San Bernardino City Unified School District

71% say they had opportunities to **build relationships with business professionals**

85% experienced opportunities to **collaborate with their peers**

Pathways build important life and work skills.

Through coursework, projects, and hands-on experiences, students report developing capabilities that extend beyond academics. These include confidence, professionalism, collaboration, and communication—skills essential for success after high school.

76% feel better **prepared to work** as part of a team

"I learned the foundation of how to create a business and what it takes, the determination, connections, teamwork, and perseverance of it all."

– Senior, Fresno Unified School District

74% believe they have developed **professionalism** necessary for success

"When I participated in a science fair, I felt motivated to demonstrate myself as someone who knew what they were talking about, which led to hours of studying. I was able to display my learning and skills."

– Senior, Oakland Unified School District

72% say they've developed **public speaking, research, and writing** skills

"During an internship, I was able to become a role model [to other students] and share my knowledge."

– Junior, Porterville Unified School District

72% say high school has made them more **well-rounded and capable**





Pathways give shape to future aspirations.

As students reflect on their pathway experiences, many describe greater confidence about their futures and clearer postsecondary goals. Exposure to college level work, careers, and meaningful learning helps transform interests into plans.

78% plan to attend a **four- or two-year college** immediately after high school

71% feel **confident about their** future after high school

69% have a **good idea** of what they **want to study in college**

“I attended a field trip to UCLA and participated in a lab with my class, where I had the opportunity to apply my knowledge and experience while also gaining new insights into more advanced learning.”

– Senior, San Bernardino City Unified School District

“The adults in my pathway are very encouraging and inspiring... they give us the hardest assignments they had to do in college and then tell us we could do all of it even with our eyes closed.”

– Senior, Oakland Unified School District

“When I was learning about different things in my biology and chemistry classes, it helped me realize that I want to major in science.”

– Sophomore, Oakland Unified School District

69% have **set goals** for college and career

68% say high school has helped them better understand how they want to **contribute to their community**

PATHWAYS TO THE FUTURE

Both third-party research on student outcomes and Linked Learning students themselves tell us what young people want and need from their education. The opportunity before us is clear: to use this insight to strengthen practice and expand access to meaningful, evidence-based, high-quality pathway experiences. This is our call to help California's young people and our state move forward with purpose.



“Help us with a deep understanding of what we can do after high school to pursue a good life... as well as persuading us to choose the best options, and not the bare minimum.”

– First Year, San Bernardino City Unified School District



The Linked Learning Alliance is part of a vast community of educators, business leaders, and community partners committed to keeping young people linked to the futures they deserve. Contact the Alliance to find out more about how you can support students in your community: [LinkedLearning.org](https://www.linkedlearning.org).