



Ready for the Future?

Alberta Grade 12 Students'
Perceptions of Essential Conditions
for Career Success



CASS

College of
Alberta School
Superintendents



Continuing
Education
Program

Student Perspectives on Career Readiness

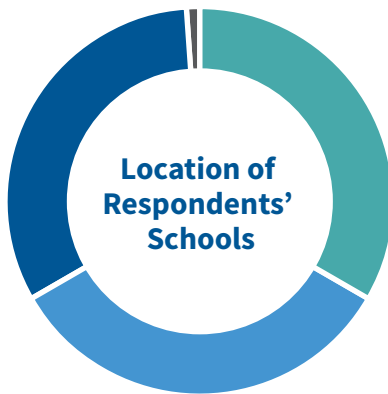
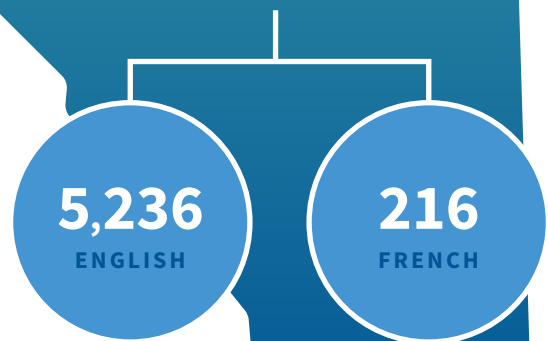
INSIGHTS FROM



5,452

GRADE 12 STUDENTS FROM ACROSS ALBERTA

This study was designed to examine student perspectives and provide evidence-informed insights to guide future system education planning.



33% Large City

33% Small City

32% Rural Area

1% Remote Community



STUDENT VOICE

“We’re young and these are big decisions.”



Across Alberta, students are making increasingly complex decisions about their future pathways in a rapidly changing labour market.

Ensuring that students are well supported in exploring, engaging with, and experiencing a broad range of career options has become a priority for many school authorities.

Career education plays a central role in helping students develop awareness of available pathways, align their interests and strengths with future opportunities, and build confidence in their post-secondary and workforce decisions.

Despite ongoing investments in career education programming, there remains a need for deeper insight into how students experience these supports and what conditions they perceive as most influential in shaping successful career decision-making. Student voice is essential for understanding not only when and how career thinking begins, but also which school-based experiences meaningfully contribute to confidence, clarity, and readiness for transition beyond high school.

Student voice is important for informing system education improvement.

Insights from students' lived experiences of career education reveal not only when career thinking begins, but also which experiences most strongly shape confidence, clarity, and readiness for the future.

Career education plays a critical role in helping students:



✓

**UNDERSTAND
AVAILABLE PATHWAYS**



✓

**CONNECT INTERESTS
& STRENGTHS**



✓

**BUILD CONFIDENCE IN
THEIR DECISIONS**



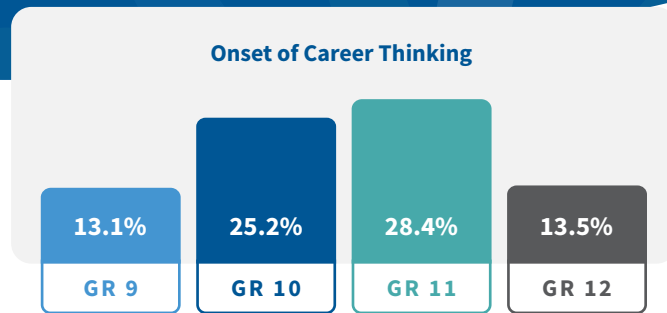
**STUDENT
VOICE**

“It’s stressful being expected to know your whole future.”

How Students Explore, Engage & Experience Career Thinking

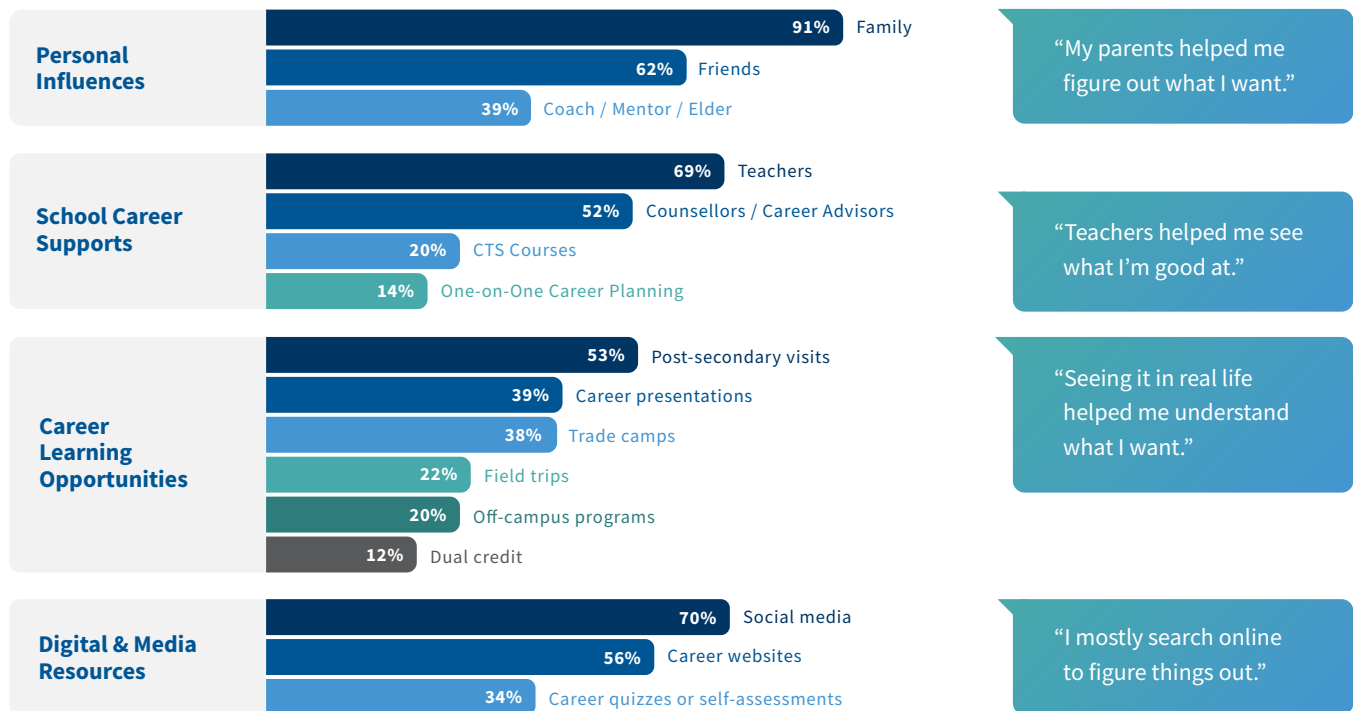
The study was developed by using the [CASS Trades, Apprenticeship, and Vocational Education \(TAVE\) Framework, \(2022\)](#). The framework conceptualizes career thinking across three dimensions: Exploring, Engaging, and Experiencing. These dimensions provided a coherent structure for examining students' career awareness, engagement with supports and programming, and the influence of experiential learning for career confidence.

Exploring Awareness of Possibilities



Findings suggest that **Grades 10 and 11** represent a common period for the onset of career thinking.

What shapes students' career thinking?

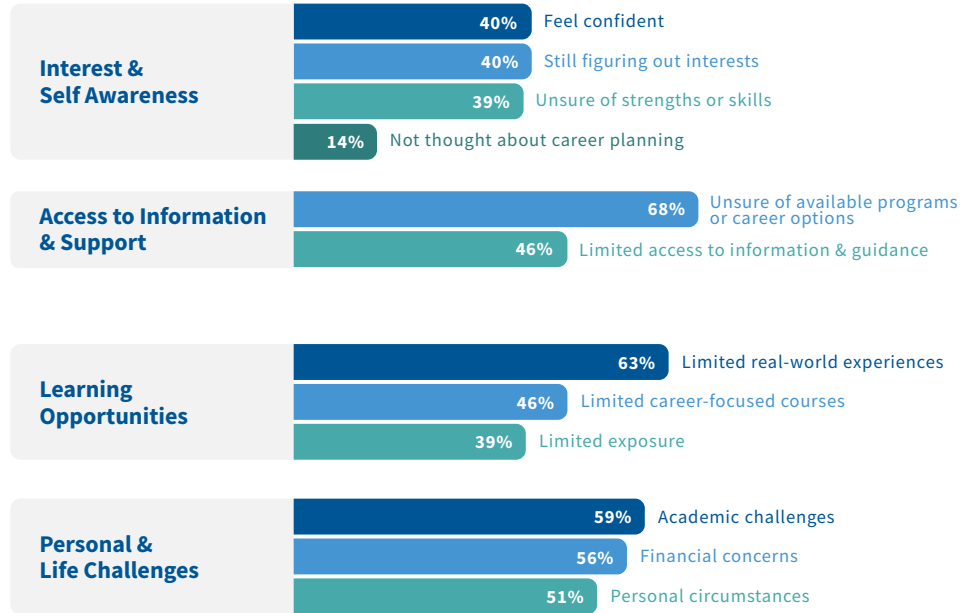


This study found that **relationships** play a central role in career thinking, with systems and structures acting as secondary supports.

Engaging

Connecting Interests to Pathways

Student-identified challenges affecting career development:



“I’m still figuring out what I even like.”

“I don’t know what options are out there.”

“I haven’t had a chance to try anything.”

“I’m trying to figure out my future while keeping up with school, thinking about money, and dealing with everything else in life—it’s a lot to handle at once.”

This study found that students’ engagement in career thinking is shaped by intersecting factors, including self-awareness, access to information, experiential learning, and broader personal and contextual conditions.



*Registered Apprentice Program (RAP), dual credit, job shadowing, work experience





“You don’t really know if you like a career until you actually do it.”



“I know there are lots of options—I just don’t feel like I fully understand them.”

Experiencing Career Thinking

Learning Through Real-World Opportunities

What helps students learn? Students say they need to:



SEE IT IN REAL LIFE



PARTICIPATE IN HANDS-ON LEARNING



TALK TO SOMEONE IN THE JOB

Students say they also need:



RELATIONAL SUPPORT

“Having one person who believes in you makes a huge difference.”



GUIDANCE

“I need someone I can talk to more than once.”



TIME TO EXPLORE

“We need more time to figure things out.”



CLARITY

“Just explain what we actually need to do step by step.”

Key Insights & Considerations for System Action



Student Voice Insights from the Study



1

Career Thinking Starts with Relationships

Students rely on family, teachers, counsellors and friends when thinking about their future.

2

More Information Does Not Mean More Clarity

Even though students use social media and career websites, many still feel unsure about their options and next steps.

3

Career Decisions Take Shape in High School

Career thinking becomes more intentional for many students in Grades 10–11. Students indicate a need for earlier access to clear information regarding course requirements, certifications, timelines, and next steps after graduation.

4

Students Need Clearer Guidance to Pathways

Many students struggle to understand available career pathways and how to connect their interests to real opportunities.

5

Real-World Experiences Make a Difference

Hands-on opportunities, like job shadowing or workplace experiences, help students feel more confident, but many indicated lack of access to them.

1

Career Development as a Continuum

Position career development as a K–12 progression rather than a Grade 12 outcome, with earlier, structured opportunities for exploration and reflection to support identity formation and reduce uncertainty.

2

Intentional Design of Relational Supports

Prioritize the role of relationships by strengthening educators' capacity to engage in career conversations, ensuring consistent, high-quality guidance across learning environments.

3

Establish Coherent Information Systems

Develop centralized and accessible, user-friendly pathway maps and resources to reduce confusion, improve navigation, and support equitable access to career information across schools.

4

System-Level Investment in Experiential Learning

Expand and coordinate access to hands-on, experiential, work-based learning.

5

Equitable Access

Design career development approaches that intentionally address disparities in access and opportunity, ensuring all students benefit from high expectations, structured supports, and community partnerships.



A KEY TAKEAWAY

The findings suggest an important opportunity for school authorities:

To support students' career thinking through relational, coherent, systems that provide access to meaningful career education experiences.



Ready for the Future?

Alberta Grade 12 Students'
Perceptions of Essential
Conditions for Career Success

Alberta Education is gratefully acknowledged for providing the conditional grant funding that made this study possible.

Sincere appreciation is extended to the thousands of students across Alberta who generously participated; their perspectives are invaluable and central to this work.

Appreciation is also given to school authorities for supporting the study and encouraging participation.

Gratitude is extended to school leaders, teachers, and staff who facilitated survey administration. This study would not have been possible without their collective commitment.

Special thanks are offered to the CASS Trades, Apprenticeship, and Vocational Education (TAVE) Committee for their guidance, thoughtful review, and meaningful contributions to the study's design.

