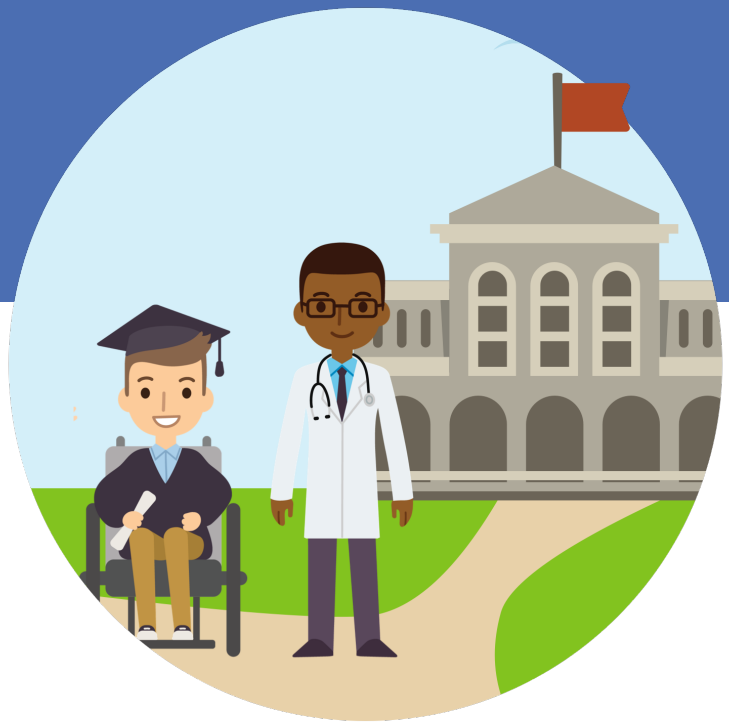




The State of College and Career Readiness in K-12

2021 Report





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Executive Summary

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When you think about college and career readiness (CCR) for K–12 students, it’s difficult to imagine a second grader applying for school across the country or landing their dream job for a dream company. After all, those are meant to happen years and years into the future—not today.

But what if the planning started today?

Becoming college and career ready doesn’t happen overnight. It takes years of constant practice and guidance from educators and families to put students on the right path to future success. That’s why Xello invested the last 25+ years creating an award-winning CCR program that helps K–12 students build self-knowledge and skills, explore future options, and create realistic plans.

At the end of the day, equipping students with the skills they need to be successful adults starts in the classroom. So where does college and career readiness stand in today’s schools?

We surveyed just over 100 educators and leaders in counseling, CTE, and administration to hear their perspectives on the K–12 CCR landscape across the U.S. and, in an unprecedented year, learn how COVID-19 impacted the focus on future readiness initiatives at school.

Key Findings

- ✓ Readiness requires a balance between academics and social-emotional competencies
- ✓ CCR increased and evolved during the pandemic
- ✓ Impact on student motivation and engagement was less significant than originally feared
- ✓ Families share educator worry about student readiness





Methodology

Methodology

Did the COVID-19 pandemic alter educators' focus on future readiness or was it a blessing in disguise? How would educators evaluate their approach to CCR today? Xello set out to answer these questions and deliver a report that emphasizes the state of CCR throughout America.

All research activities were delivered online through Qualtrics, an advanced, web-based survey solution. Xello sought out a mix of educators across counseling and CTE departments, as well as administration in order to ensure the research findings were representative of the groups most actively involved in college and career readiness initiatives. The survey was organized into 4 sections of focus: Demographics, college and career readiness, redefining student success, and student motivation and engagement. It consisted of 19 questions—15 multiple choice, three slider questions, and one open-ended question. The survey was conducted in June 2021 and 103 participants completed the survey.

At a Glance

- 103 participants completed the survey
- 40 school counselors, directors of counseling
- 40 CTE teachers and directors
- 23 superintendents and principals





SECTION 1

The State of CCR

The State of CCR

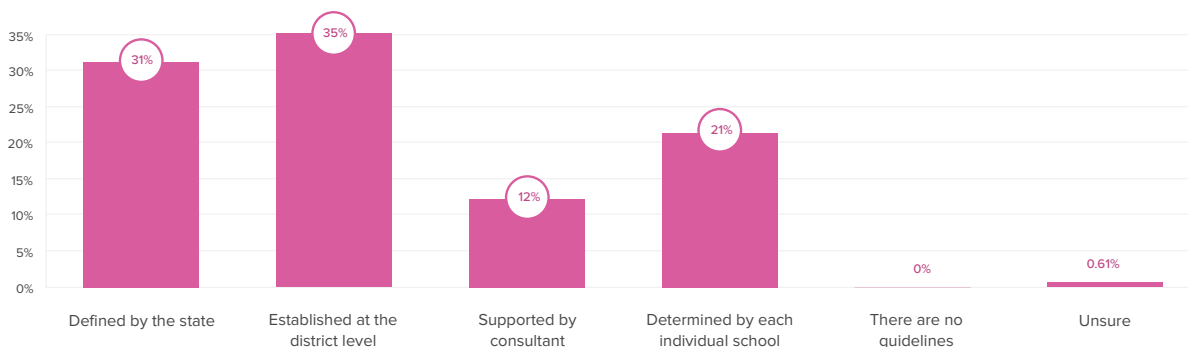
How are CCR standards and guidelines defined at your school or district? The college and career readiness experience isn't one-size fits all. Its requirements of students are defined differently from state to state—even from school to school.



Respondents rated the education system an **8/10** for its ability to prepare students for future success.

Based on our findings, **35%** of educators say CCR guidelines are established at the district level—with state-level following closely behind at **31%**. In all cases, CCR guidance is defined in some capacity. Zero educators responded there were “no guidelines.”

How are college and career readiness guidelines defined at your school district?

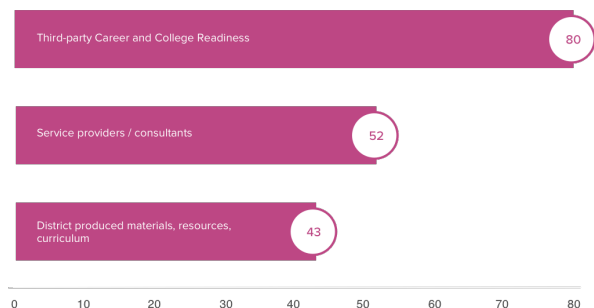


With guidelines in place for all educators, how are CCR programs rolled out in these schools and districts? Almost **80 out of the 103** of educators use CCR software to support their future readiness initiatives.



More than half of educators say CCR software best supports future readiness.

Which tools do you currently use to support your college and career readiness initiatives?



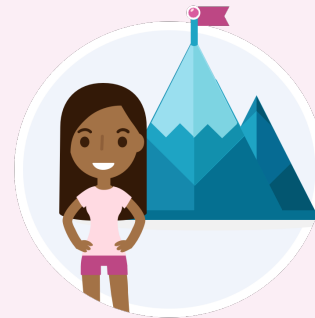
The State of CCR

How Future-Ready Are Students Anyways?

With most educators taking advantage of the tools and resources they need to get their students college and career ready, how do we know they're really set up for success? In order of importance, educators listed the following indicators of readiness:

Top indicators of future-readiness:

1. Social emotional learning (SEL) competencies
2. Standardized test scores
3. College or university enrollment
4. Workforce readiness
5. Graduation rate
6. Grades



It comes as little surprise that SEL competencies tops the list. Particularly with the COVID pandemic, educators across the nation made a concerted effort to focus on soft skill development and enriching the whole student.

40%

of educators believe college admissions exams, such as the ACT or SAT are the best way to evaluate students' preparedness for college.

Add to My Reading List: Helpful SEL Articles You'll Want to Bookmark

[25 Books to Introduce into Your Classrooms to Help Develop Students' Social-Emotional Learning Skills](#)

[An Educator's Guide to Developing Social-Emotional Learning Skills in Your K-12 Students](#)

[How Xello Helps Students Develop Social-Emotional Skills](#)



SECTION 2

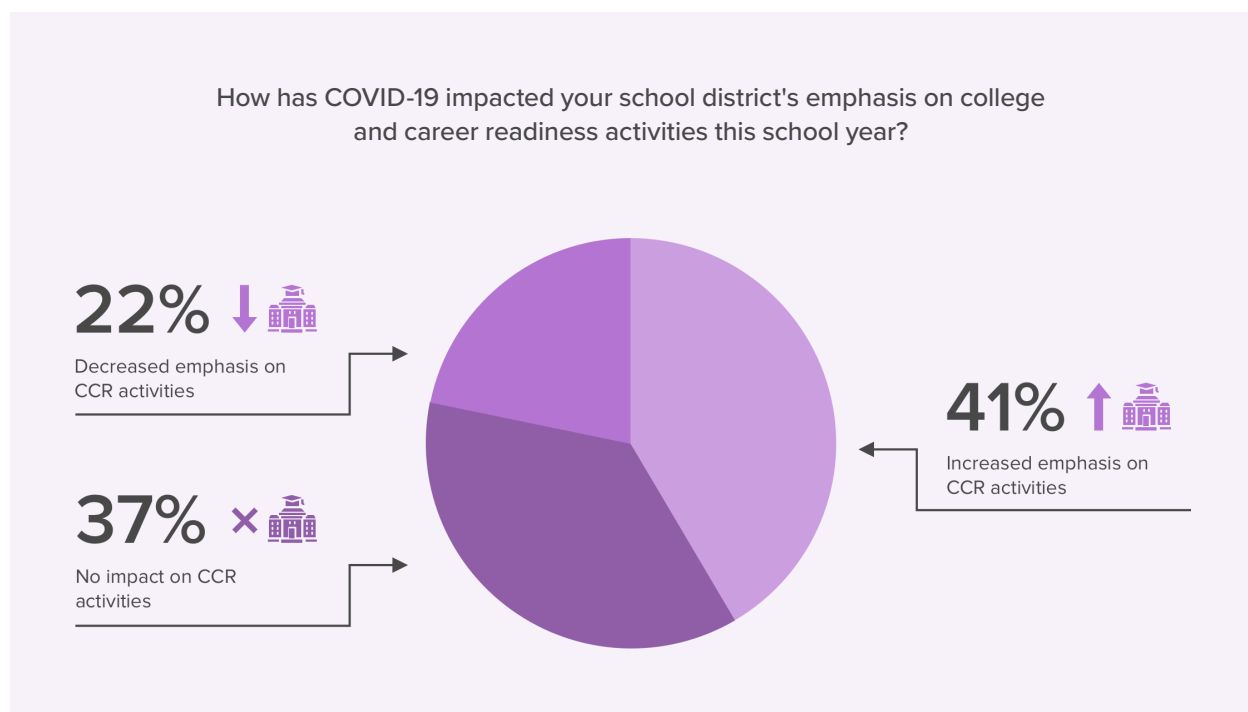
The COVID-19 Impact on CCR Activities

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The COVID pandemic put the world in a standstill in 2020/21. Educators worked tirelessly to provide students with an accessible and engaging learning experience in a remote setting. Students had to cope with schooling from home and the inability to socialize with peers on a daily basis - an out-of-the ordinary, but necessary move to protect educators and students.

How has it truly affected the focus on CCR?

Here's what we learned:



Overall, **41%** of educators experienced an **increased emphasis** on CCR activities in the 2020/21 school year due to COVID. About **37%** of educators saw **no change** and **22%** saw a **decreased focus**.

The COVID-19 Impact on CCR

With the emphasis on CCR activities varying across the board, here's what educators had to say about the impact of COVID on CCR:

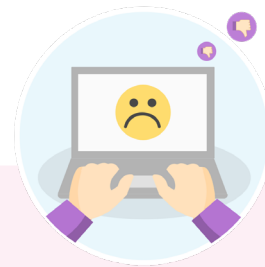


"We can be more aware of the importance of professional preparation in times of emergency"

"We have enhanced our outreach to graduating students. We don't want anyone left behind because of COVID."

"We reserved professionals to use their full capacity in college career activities"

"Made us more creative and more dependent on technology in our lives"



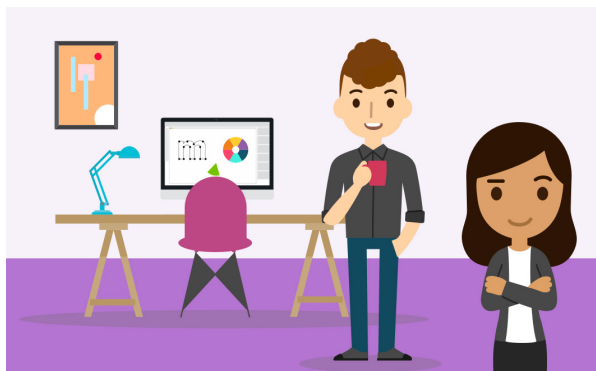
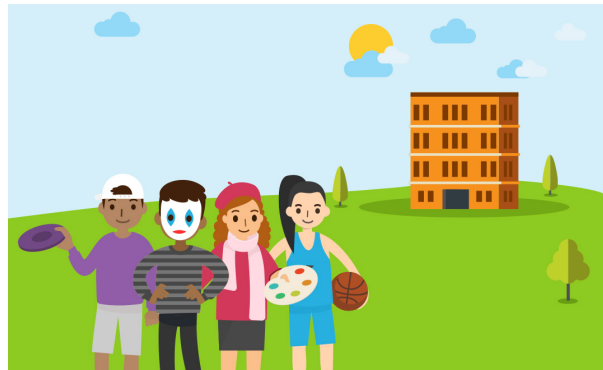
"Due to COVID-19, the [CCR] activities to be attended could not be carried out as scheduled"

"We had the potential to widen already existing disparities—some students have additional support through personal networks"

"We have a lot of work to do to catch all of our students up and ensure they are college and career ready."

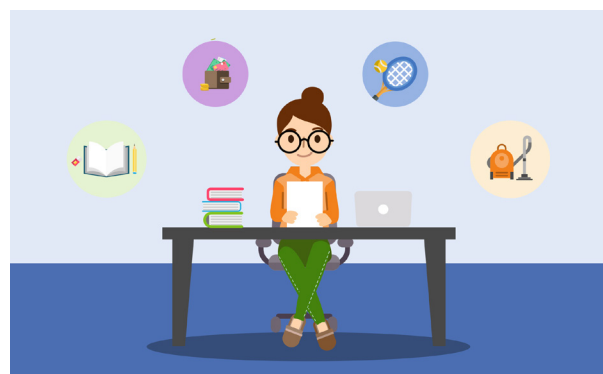
The COVID-19 Impact on CCR

Due to that heightened focus on CCR, top activities educators engaged in were **skill development, career research and exploration, and college placement testing.**



It comes as no surprise that in-person CCR activities came to a halt during COVID—and this extended beyond classroom learning. Typically common (and exciting) activities for students such as **career fairs, college tours, and even work-based learning experiences decreased** during the pandemic.

However, as distressing as the pandemic has been for educators and students across the country, it made way for innovation. **Student portfolio creation and the development of a self-paced curriculum** were among the top newly implemented CCR activities.

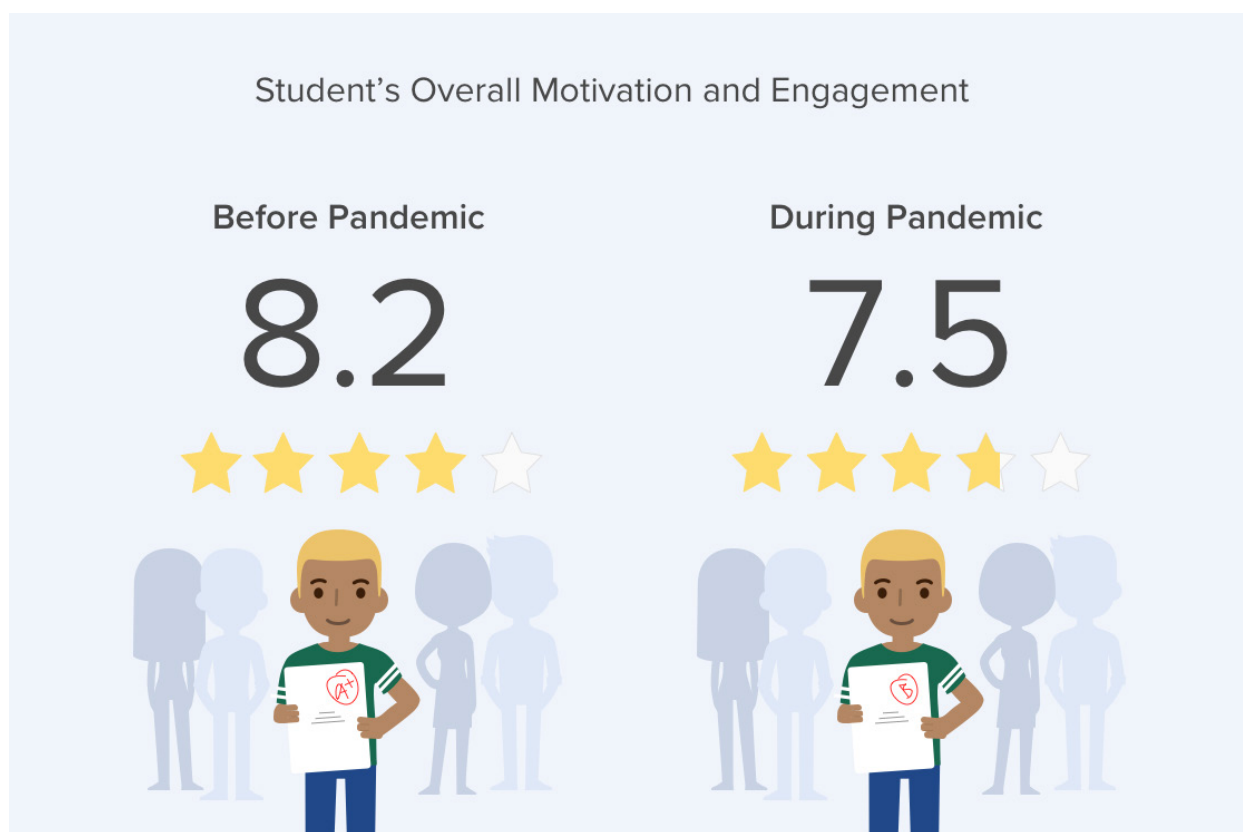


The COVID-19 Impact on CCR

Here's what we learned:

With the pandemic throwing a wrench in what's normally routine planning and teaching for educators, we were bound to see a negative shift in student engagement, right? Yes, but it wasn't as significant as we imagined.

How would you rate your students' overall motivation and engagement on a scale from 1-Not motivated to 10-Highly motivated?





SECTION 3

A Key Ally: Getting Families Involved

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Remember: Developing future-ready students takes a village. Educators don't have to carry the responsibility alone. Getting families involved is critical to developing confident, prepared, self-aware students and, at the end of the day, parents want what's best for their children.

80%

of parents are very concerned about their children's preparedness for life after high school

44%

of parents feel confident with their ability to help their children to get future ready

96%

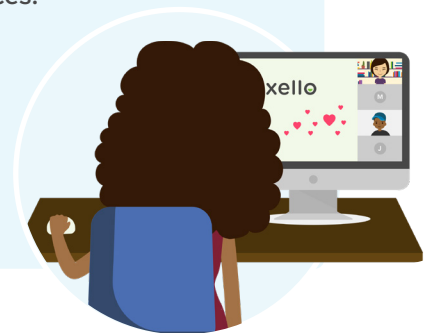
of parents believe a future readiness program will benefit their children

*Figures are based on a recent study by Xello that surveyed 400 U.S. parents of K-12 students

Ready to build lasting relationships with parents? Check out these resources:

[How to Build Relationships with Parents to Create a Seamless Future Readiness Experience for Students](#)

[Why Parental Involvement in Children's Education Leads to Student Success](#)





Closing Thoughts

Closing Thoughts

College and career readiness remains an important focus for educators in order to create successful futures beyond high school. By investing time and resources into CCR activities, students have the freedom to create a path that is unique to them.

COVID may have knocked educators off course, but it didn't break them. The pandemic made room for innovation. Educators tapped into their creativity to deliver an emphasized focus on CCR. And despite the pandemic chaos, educators still perceived students to be very much engaged and motivated in their work.

Shaping future-ready students is what every educator strives for, but it's also a huge undertaking. Together with parents and families, educators can form the support team that every student needs in order to create enriched and meaningful futures.

Learn More About Xello

Xello is an engaging online program that helps K–12 students build knowledge, skills, and plans for future success. Through self-knowledge, exploration, and planning, students better understand who they are, their academic and career options, and the steps they'll need to take to achieve their goals.

[Visit Xello.world](https://www.xello.world)

