



SCHOOLINKS.COM

How Community High School District
155 Achieved Engagement from
Students And 400+ Industry Partners
In 4 Months

Customer Story

Introduction

The desires of parents, students, counselors, led Justin DeBolt on an intense search for a “Heads and Shoulders Above” solution for CCR.

The Problem

The school district was experiencing tremendous variation in the student experience across district schools when it came to CCR. Access to opportunities for career exploration and hands-on learning greatly depended on which school a student attended.

The Process

The process for identifying a new platform had to engage a wide cross-section of stakeholders and take into account the user experience, needs, and hopes of students, families, and educators. If they were to switch platforms, it had to be heads and shoulders above the current way of doing things. Enter SchoolLinks.

The Results

Within 3 months of launch students logged into the platform more than 20,000 times. The district had more than 400+ contacts with local businesses, non-profits, and government agencies. It is apparent SchoolLinks is pivotal to help the school realize their mission of “Enter with promise, leave with purpose.” for the future.



Crystal Lake, IL



5.5k Students



4 Schools



>1yr. with SL

The Problem

A Disconnect Between Students and Real-World Career Experiences

Community High School District 155 sits 45 miles northwest of Chicago and includes 5,400 students across five high schools. Over the past several years, administrators and educators within the district made career readiness and preparation a priority for their students. They recognized the value in expanding the career exploration resources and career readiness culture for their students. They understood the need to expand access to opportunities to all students across the district and made it a goal to engage families and the community in these efforts. They were uncertain, however, about how to make these goals a reality for all students and families. Throughout District 155,

college and career counselors at schools were doing incredible work with their students. Despite these efforts, the aspiration to give all of their students access to meaningful, real-world career learning experiences coupled with guidance on goal-setting and reflection remained out of reach with the tools and resources they were using. Many educators and students felt that the platform the district used to connect students with opportunities was antiquated and frustrating to use. Many families reported being disconnected from the career exploration process. Administrators recognized that the district needed to elevate the overall district career readiness offerings as well as scale best practices across all district high schools.

The Key Concerns

01 Administrators reported that there was tremendous variation in the student experience across district schools.

03 Students were not able to directly connect with relevant local businesses or organizations.

02 Access to opportunities for career exploration and hands-on learning depended on availability at the school a student attended.

03 If a school did not have existing industry partnerships for students to utilize, they were forced to rely on personal connections to secure internships or jobs related to their career exploration.

The Process

Looking for A Solution that is “Heads and Shoulders Above” Others

As part of this important effort to move the district forward in their career readiness offerings and engagement, the district hired Justin DeBolt as Director of Career Experiences. Mr. DeBolt brought with him fresh energy, perspective, and a commitment to enrich the experiences and opportunities for all students in District 155. DeBolt realized that the district could benefit from collaboration with an expert external partner that could innovatively streamline communications and outreach, customize the tools and resources to best serve their specific context and students, and allow for personalized trouble-shooting. He also deeply understood that change at a district level is challenging and multi-layered and the value of any new system, resource, or tool had to be worthy of the effort. He explained, “If we were going to switch [to a new platform], it had to be heads and shoulders above” the current way of doing things.

The process for identifying a new platform or resource had to engage a wide cross-section of stakeholders and take into account the user experience, needs, and hopes of students, families, and educators. Over the course of seven months, the district surveyed families and schools. They heard from families that they were hungry for real-world internship and job experiences for their students. They heard from educators and counselors that connecting students to these kinds of experiences is critical and allows for unmatched learning opportunities; however, most schools did not have the human resource power to establish and maintain relationships with industry partners that would allow for these work experiences for students.

As part of the decision-making process, the district convened a career experience advisory group made up of counselors, teachers, vice principals, and technology specialists and had conversations with administrators from feeder districts. This broad

engagement with other educators ensured that practitioners—and their first-hand understanding of student needs and the implementation context—would drive decision-making. DeBolt also reached out to local community organizations and representatives from businesses as part of the process for developing the district’s career readiness strategic plan. He wanted to better understand their needs and challenges, especially in terms of workforce development. He had representatives from all of these groups participate in demonstrations and planning conversations. This approach ensured that the solutions to improve the career experiences of students would have greater buy-in from stakeholders and would meet the specific needs of the community.

As a result of all of this input—from the needs assessments to surveys to advisory group feedback—District 155 was excited to bring the innovative and comprehensive college and career readiness platform, Schoolinks, to their students, educators, families, and local businesses. Schoolinks’ unique ability to seamlessly facilitate career goal-setting, encourage career exploration, and connect students and local industry partners to find opportunities for internships and other job-related roles was particularly appealing to the community. The ease at which stakeholders can navigate the platform and the intuitive and student-centered approach to its structure ensured broad engagement across the community. DeBolt understood that these features had the potential to catalyze the efforts towards the district’s long-term strategic goals for career readiness and collaboration with community partners.

The process for identifying a new platform or resource had to engage a wide crosssection of stakeholders and take into account the user experience, needs, and hopes of students, families, and educators. - J. DeBolt, Director of Career Experiences

The Result

Active Engagement from Students and Industry Partners

One of the priorities several stakeholder groups articulated during the decision-making process was to deploy a platform that was highly engaging for students to promote regular and ongoing usage over the course of their high school careers. The district took a phased implementation approach for its initial rollout of SchoolLinks, targeting freshman and sophomore usage during the first year. The district did however make the platform available to all students interested in using the features. As an initial step in deployment, District 155 placed the SchoolLinks application on all student devices.

From the onset of the implementation, the district saw immediate benefits in their goal to seamlessly connect with industry partners. SchoolLinks provided a hub to facilitate these partnerships between schools and industry partners across the entire geographic region. This tremendously increased access to community organizations and businesses and eliminated barriers for students who previously were dependent upon relationships with their specific school. And, industry partners benefited from the opportunity to easily connect with all students from a single point of entry,

rather than having to navigate multiple school communities and points of contact on their own.

Without any prompting or guidance, over 500 students logged in to SchoolLinks on their own and began exploring and utilizing the platform.

Once the district officially kicked off the rollout, students logged in more than 20,000 times to engage with the platform in the first 3 months.

Despite only being required for freshman and sophomore students, juniors and seniors have started to use SchoolLinks for college searches and goal-setting.

Within a matter of months, the district had more than 400 contacts from local community businesses, nonprofits and government agencies.

Looking Forward

Expanding Usage to Nurture a Rich Career Readiness Culture

In the coming months, DeBolt is excited to expand the formal deployment of SchoolLinks to all high school students in the district and see the incredible opportunities this will create. District 155 is utilizing SchoolLinks features that allow for students to receive personalized, hands-on career learning opportunities that align with the goals they have set within the platform. DeBolt shared the experience of a student who had articulated in his schoolinks career goal that he had an interest in welding and was promptly connected with a local welding company

who welcomed him for a tour of a working shop. That student connected with working professionals who could answer his questions, give him a first-hand view into a day in their life, and continue to be a resource for the student as he further explores this career. This will be possible for students across the district who are interested in a variety of career fields. And, when a relevant career opportunity becomes available, notifications will go to both the student and their family to encourage dialogue and broader exploration about what is possible.

Summary

As articulated in their mission statement, District 155 strives for all students to, “Enter with promise, leave with purpose.” SchoolLinks is a pivotal resource to help students truly realize this goal. With tools to encourage exploration and goal-setting, resources to connect students with industry partners for real-world learning opportunities, and a platform to help students structure a productive path towards these postsecondary aspirations, SchoolLinks is quickly becoming a vital component of this work to transform students’ potential into future success.

A Note From SchoolLinks

Supporting a wide range of district initiatives and complying with legislation changes doesn’t have to be daunting. See for yourself with a personalized demo of SchoolLinks’ modern platform and tell us how we can help you meet your district’s goals.