

**Driving Success in Mead, WA
With High Rates of Student
Engagement with SchoolLinks**

Customer Story

Key Takeaways

The Problem:

The district lacked a comprehensive and engaging college and career readiness platform leading to inefficient processes and limited capacity to support students' college and career exploration and planning.

The Process:

After a search for a new CCR platform that included student feedback, the district deployed SchoolLinks because it provided the most interactive, engaging, intuitive, and useful features and experiences for students and counselors.

The Results:

Usage spiked for both students and counselors while data was synchronized within a single platform offering real insights about post secondary success.



15 Schools



10K Students



1 yr with SchoolLinks



Mead, WA

The Problem

Lack of Comprehensive Solution Limited CCR Support for Students

The Mead School District, situated just north of Spokane, Washington, serves about 10,000 students. The school district has two large comprehensive high schools and has seen steady growth in its student population, with an annual increase of 200 students for the past five years. The district has long made a concerted effort to prioritize long-term relationships between high school students and counselors by having grade-level counselors remain with the same cohort for their entire high school career. These grade-level counselors, for many years, were the primary conduit for students to engage in academic planning, including the college and career exploration, preparation, and applications, for the students they served. Knowing their students in order to better serve their current needs and make developmentally appropriate decisions

for the future is their district culture.

In 2017, Josh Cowart, a grade-level high school counselor, recognized the benefits that additional dedicated, focused, and specialized resources to college and career counseling could have for secondary students in the district. Cowart worked with district administrators to outline what the presence of a college and career counselor position at each of the two high schools could do for students, families, and fellow educators. After the district identified available funding for the positions and recognizing the incredible potential for positively impacting post-secondary student trajectories, Cowart was excited to take on the college and career counseling role at his current high school.

The Key Concerns

- 1** Mead School District was using a CCR platform selected by the state that did not meet the needs of students.
- 2** Students were forced to use multiple applications which wasted valuable student time on duplicate data entry.
- 3** The system was insufficient to provide guidance to students and the interface was not engaging enough to keep their attention.
- 4** Limited functionality and under-utilization of the current system was hindering student progression rather than propelling it.

The Process

Student Feedback Was the Differentiator in the Selection Process

The Mead School District initiated a formal search for a sufficient and engaging college and career readiness platform for their students, counselors, and district. The school district looked at a variety of products on the market from Xello, Naviance, Schoolinks, and even considered vendors they had worked with in the past who had updated and improved upon their offerings.

Using their learned experience with previous CCR platform deployments, the district prioritized ensuring that the platform was a comprehensive, one-stop shop for students and counselors and, above all else, sought a platform that students would find valuable and engaging. Cowart explained that “the tool is only as effective as it gets used.” In order to truly gauge the student user experience, the district included student feedback and voice as a core component of the decision-making process. The district invited several students at each high school to do a trial run of the platforms being considered,

with zero prior instruction about how to use the platform. As Cowart explained, they wanted to get to the heart of “what is the end user experience like?”

The feedback from students was resoundingly clear: SchoolLinks provided the most interactive, engaging, intuitive, and useful features and experience. Cowart shared one anecdote about a student who was participating in selection demos who found that the SchoolLinks college selection feature allowed her to quickly hone in on schools that met her unique selection criteria unlike any other platform she had tried. She found the utility so helpful that she asked to extend the timeframe for access because she wanted to go from field testing for the district to using it for planning her personal journey. This enthusiasm from students about the platform was the difference maker for the Mead School District, and they chose SchoolLinks to be their comprehensive CCR platform.

The Result

Intuitive and Engaging User Experience Yielded Immediate Usage

Upon implementation, students immediately showed improved engagement with a variety of features on Schoolinks, and shared with peers, educators, and counselors the value they saw in the platform.

Unlike the previous platforms the district had used, Schoolinks was available through a student's single sign-on, which, according to Cowart, was a "game changer." Because students could access the application with such ease, and Schoolinks had easy implementation of this important interoperability function, many typical initial barriers to use were removed.

Students found that there were elements of Schoolinks that were particularly useful for where they were on the college and career exploration path. Cowart shared that freshmen and sophomore students really enjoyed the tools to explore their career interests and potential postsecondary paths. Schoolinks takes particular care to make these activities and features relevant to students, which builds connection and engagement from the very beginning.

And, counselors were thrilled to see students seeking out Schoolinks on their own and finding relevant value in what it offered them. Across the grade levels, counselors observed high usage rates from students, even on weekends and after school hours.

Cowart explained that this signaled, beyond just about any other metric, that students found Schoolinks beneficial to them: "If students are spending their own time on your platform, that's pretty powerful testimony that it's not just effective, it's useful."

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John Cowart
Future Ready Counselor

- 01 Schoolinks was easy to use for students and adults and could automate and organize many of the time-consuming tasks they were required to do as part of the college exploration and application process.
- 02 For counselors who were using Google sheets to track conversations with students along with their progress on college applications, Schoolinks offered the ability for them to track all of their students from a single dashboard.
- 03 For School staff who had spent hours manually printing and sending transcripts for students, Schoolinks offered a transcript tool, instantly providing relief of this cumbersome and time-consuming process.
- 04 This multi-layered functionality coupled with the intuitive ease-of-use meant that Schoolinks quickly became a core part of the college and career culture.
- 05 Counselors were thrilled to see students seeking out Schoolinks on their own and finding relevant value in what it offered them.

Looking Forward

Expanding Usage to Nurture a Rich Career Readiness Culture

The Mead School District has taken a phased approach to implementation to ensure a thoughtful and strategic process. Up until this point, they have focused on deploying SchoolLinks to all high school students, counselors, and school staff. Going forward, the district is excited to expand access and outreach to parents and caregivers to encourage even more robust support around college and career planning.

Seeing the success they have had with students and staff, Cowart is eager to see how offering families access to SchoolLinks will catalyze conversations,

deeper planning, and additional opportunities for their students.

Upon reflection, Cowart identified the inclusion of student feedback and voice in the selection process as a critical factor in the tremendous success of the SchoolLinks implementation. He explained that, “student input was absolutely essential for us to feel like we were making the right decision.” And that decision has proven successful in transforming how students and counselors engage in the college and career planning process throughout their district.

Summary

Mead School District had faced disappointment over and over again when it came to other CCR platforms. However they never stopped believing there was more they could do for their students. This dedication mixed with a willingness to accept student feedback and empower the end users of technology led them to make what they felt was the right decision. In turn, choosing Schoolinks has proven successful in transforming how their students and counselors engage in the college and career planning process throughout their district.

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.