

# Bringing A Districtwide CCR Vision to Life with SchoolLinks in Farmington, CT



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Farmington Public Schools is a suburban district in central Connecticut serving just over 4,100 students across the K-12 continuum. The district includes multiple elementary schools, one upper elementary school (grades 5-6), one middle school (grades 7-8), and Farmington High School (grades 9-12). The district's work is grounded in a mission to "enable all students to achieve academic and personal excellence, exhibit persistent effort, and live as resourceful, inquiring, and contributing global citizens." This Vision of the Global Citizen is embedded in every facet of district operations and shapes how Farmington defines success for its graduates.

At its core, this guiding principle reflects Farmington's commitment to developing civic-minded, self-directed, and compassionate students who graduate prepared for their next step and equipped to be thoughtful, engaged members of society. This vision comes to life through intentional alignment across learning experiences, skill development, and future planning, ensuring students are consistently encouraged to reflect on who they are, what they value, and how their interests and strengths connect to meaningful postsecondary pathways.

Kate Martorelli is the School Counseling Department Leader for Farmington Public Schools and plays a central role in advancing this work. Supporting students in grades 5-12 across three schools, Martorelli and her team approach counseling as a developmental, longitudinal process rather than a series of disconnected milestones. Beginning in grade 6, students engage in structured self-awareness, career exploration, and goal-setting activities that intentionally build year over year. In Farmington, the counseling team spends significant time helping students understand career and learning pathways—not just at the high school level, but as a coherent progression of experiences that collectively impact who students become by graduation and beyond. Because of this, finding a comprehensive college and career readiness platform like SchoolLinks that mapped so well onto its already strong counseling program has been instrumental in translating this postsecondary vision from ambition to reality.

# SchoolLinks: Making the Work of Counselors “More Robust and Efficient”

Together, the SchoolLinks platform and the district’s counseling framework function as connective tissue—helping students make sense of their academic experiences, explore postsecondary options through the lens of personal interests and goals, and plan futures that reflect both individual purpose and broader societal contribution. As Martorelli explained, this alignment is “directly responsible for having an impact on bringing a lot of those district goals and visions to life, because we are a district that wants kids to think about career planning and career exploration and career future goals as it relates to who they are as a person.”

Now in its second year of implementation, SchoolLinks supports work the counseling team had already begun. Prior to adoption, Martorelli and her colleagues were focused on articulating clear student success plans, finding more efficient ways to monitor progress toward graduation, and strengthening the counseling curriculum—particularly where it intersected with advisory programming, interdisciplinary learning, and the Vision of the Global Citizen. They were seeking a platform that could support career exploration, learning pathways, and career pathways within a single, intentional system. As Martorelli noted, “Platforms and programs matter. They make our work robust and efficient.”

With a strong team already in place, the goal was not simply to add another tool, but to identify a platform that would help counselors maximize their impact while remaining thoughtful, directed, and deeply connected to students. Efficiency was critical—not as an end goal in itself, but as a way to reclaim time for meaningful engagement. Martorelli explained that this need has become increasingly urgent as the role of the school counselor has expanded. While postsecondary planning remains a top priority, Martorelli emphasized that social-emotional learning and student mental health now represent a significant and growing portion of counselors’ responsibilities. “SchoolLinks, for us, just brought it all together,” she shared.

A key factor in Farmington’s decision to select SchoolLinks was the strength of its college application management capabilities. With 96 percent of students enrolling in two- or four-year institutions, the district places tremendous value on individualized postsecondary planning. A system that allowed for electronic document submission, seamless Common App integration, and a streamlined senior planning process was non-negotiable. SchoolLinks met those requirements while also enabling the counseling team to go deeper into district priorities around career planning, future readiness, and whole-child development. As Martorelli reflected, her team needed “a platform that kind of did it all—helped us still do postsecondary planning as efficiently as possible, but also got us deeper into district goals and initiatives.”

The district moved forward quickly during a window of strong administrative support and financial readiness, with leadership recognizing the long-term value of the shift for students. At the same time, the counseling team was mindful of community expectations—particularly around college planning for upperclassmen—and approached implementation thoughtfully to ensure continuity and trust. Martorelli expressed gratitude for district leadership that listened closely and recognized how SchoolLinks could strengthen both student outcomes and the counseling program as a whole.

## Seamless and Supportive Implementation

A key early success of SchoolLinks in Farmington was the integration of the college application management feature and the transition of rising seniors. With support from the SchoolLinks team, counselors onboarded juniors in the spring—getting them into the platform in May and June, ahead of senior year. This proactive approach made the start of the following school year feel seamless for both students and staff, reducing friction during one of the most high-stakes moments in the counseling calendar. With this transition, SchoolLinks demonstrated to the district that they are a flexible partner who understands the realities of the day-to-day work of counselors.

Martorelli noted that, in addition to the supportive partnerships that came with the implementation, SchoolLinks's overall approach to CCR informed conversations among counselors about led to positive shifts in practice. While some features differed from their previous system, veteran counselors quickly recognized the efficiencies gained. Over time, the team reframed changes such as placing more responsibility on students to request teacher recommendations as an opportunity to reinforce student agency. Counselors encouraged one another to remain open-minded, learning alongside students and embracing SchoolLinks as a tool that supports students in becoming the drivers of their own postsecondary journeys.

The College Application Manager quickly became a central component of this work. Early in the fall, counselors push into senior core classes to walk students through key tasks, including connecting SchoolLinks to the Common App. This structured, classroom-based instruction allows counselors to complete the necessary "housekeeping" upfront so that subsequent one-on-one meetings can focus on individualized planning rather than logistics. By streamlining processes without disrupting established counseling routines, SchoolLinks helped Farmington preserve what already worked while strengthening how counselors support students during the most critical planning moments.

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Professional learning has been a critical component of this expansion. August training focused on the College Application Manager, helping counselors build confidence and internal capacity before students fully engaged with the platform. While intuitive design made SchoolLinks easy to learn, the training ensured the counseling team felt prepared to utilize the system effectively. That confidence translated to strong community buy-in. Martorelli described that, in Farmington, SchoolLinks has been received very positively by students and families alike. The platform has been embraced holistically, creating space for counselors to introduce new approaches and reframe planning conversations in ways that resonated with students.

One of the most promising areas of growth has been the district's use of the Course Planner add-on. In direct alignment with Farmington's goals, the counseling team has been seeking ways for students to actively track their own progress toward graduation. Martorelli noted that research and experience support the idea that when students engage in this process themselves, they become more aware of who they are, what skills and strengths they bring, and how their choices connect to future possibilities. With a wide range of academic offerings, including core content, Honors, AP, College Preparatory coursework, electives, and the ASPIRE and Capstone programs aligned to mastery-based diplomas, Farmington wanted students to make intentional course selections tied to evolving interests across postsecondary pathways.

## Expanding Impact to Broader District Goals

As SchoolLinks has become embedded across Farmington Public Schools, its impact has extended well beyond college applications, supporting district-wide goals. Students begin engaging with SchoolLinks in sixth grade, with implementation spanning grades 6-12. Counselors loop with students through the upper elementary years and alternate responsibilities for delivering social-emotional learning programming, using SchoolLinks as part of that instructional process. This developmental approach reinforces continuity, ensuring students build familiarity with the platform while deepening reflection on strengths, interests, and goals over time.

Until recently, no digital system existed that truly engaged students in this work; the introduction of the Course Planner has changed that. Replacing a patchwork of manual “credit checker” spreadsheets and documents, the tool allows students to see what courses they are currently taking, what they have completed, and how those choices align with graduation requirements. With flexibility and customization built in, SchoolLinks partnered closely with the district to ensure the tool met Farmington’s needs. As the district begins integrating Course Planner into the ninth-grade curriculum, early signs point to strong student engagement, with students actively tracking progress and planning ahead. Features that help students articulate goals, future plans, and career cluster preferences have also provided administrators with a clearer picture into how course planning connects directly to broader district priorities.

Looking ahead, SchoolLinks’ data capabilities will further strengthen Farmington’s ability to refine and articulate pathways across departments. By grounding decisions in what students are actually interested in, the district is positioning itself to build programs and pathways that are both responsive and intentional, ensuring the Vision of the Global Citizen continues to be realized in concrete, student-centered ways.

## Sharing Success with Other Districts

Reflecting on Farmington’s experience, Martorelli emphasized that the success of SchoolLinks is rooted not only in the platform itself, but in how intentionally it is embedded into a vertically-aligned counseling curriculum. Dedicated time across grade levels has been essential to ensuring students build skills progressively without previous experiences feeling repetitive or disconnected. Central to that work has been asking deliberate questions about which assessment students should engage with in SchoolLinks, when they should revisit them, and how those insights should play into future planning conversations.

For Martorelli, effective implementation requires a shared expectation that counselors work collectively to deliver a developmentally appropriate curriculum that aligns with district goals and evolves with students across grade levels. By the time students reach

culminating experiences as upperclassmen, the question is not simply whether they are ready to apply to college or pursue a next step but whether the district has built their capacity to understand who they are as a person and what they might want to do after high school.

That perspective has also shaped how Farmington engages beyond its own district. Martorelli regularly connects with colleagues across Connecticut who are implementing or considering SchoolLinks, sharing onboarding insights and lessons learned. She noted that Connecticut is quickly emerging as a state at the forefront of SchoolLinks adoption, a trend she expects to continue as more districts recognize how well the platform aligns with the work of counselors and district postsecondary priorities. A consistent message she shares with peers is that SchoolLinks is not a one-size-fits-all solution; the team is willing to partner with districts to build programs that genuinely fit their needs.

## A Responsive, Strategic Partnership that Delivers Results

A defining feature of Farmington’s experience has been the incredibly high level of customer service and responsiveness throughout the partnership. Martorelli described a level of responsiveness that, in her two decades in the field, would have sounded unrealistic had she not actually experienced it. Whether reaching out with questions or exploring new ideas, she consistently receives timely, thoughtful, and responsive support—often within a matter of minutes or hours. That near on-demand customer service, she emphasized, has been a “game changer.”

Martorelli actively advocates for SchoolLinks within professional spaces, including state school counselor association conferences, emphasizing how the platform helps counselors maximize their role in ways that align directly with district goals. Looking ahead, Martorelli expressed excitement about continued growth, customization, and future conversations about what to build next. She was clear in her assessment: what SchoolLinks currently provides is “millions of miles ahead” of prior platforms. For Farmington, SchoolLinks is not simply a tool; it is a strategic partner in supporting student-centered planning, strengthening counseling practice, and bringing the Vision of the Global Citizen to life.