

Expanding CCR Resources and Strengthening Relationships in Ohio



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Grove City Christian School is a private, faith-based K-12 school located in Grove City, Ohio, a suburban community just south of Columbus. Serving approximately 1,000 students, the school's mission centers on partnering with families to prepare students for their next steps in life, learning, and leadership. That mission extends far beyond academics, reflecting a deep commitment to equipping students with both the knowledge and the practical life skills they will need to thrive beyond graduation.

For nearly two decades, Senior Director of School Counseling Nancy Gillespie has helped turn that mission into practice. As the school's first counseling program director, she built the program from the ground up, developing a comprehensive, student-centered approach to college and career readiness (CCR) that supports learners across every grade level in high school. Under her leadership, Grove City Christian has cultivated a culture of readiness that is reflected in the school's robust college and career programming. Each grade level participates in annual college visits, ensuring that by graduation, every student has toured multiple campuses and gained exposure to a wide range of postsecondary options. Representatives from two- and four-year colleges regularly visit campus, while the school's College and Career Readiness class provides dedicated time for students to explore interests, set goals, and prepare for the transition beyond high school.

In addition to its strong college-going culture—where 86% of graduates pursue higher education, with the majority attending four-year institutions—the school has seen a growing number of students choose two-year colleges. This evolution reflects a broader commitment to helping students identify their individual strengths and pursue the postsecondary route that best aligns with their goals.

From Disruption to Seamless Integration

When Ohio began rolling out new Graduation Plan requirements, Nancy Gillespie found herself managing an increasingly complex web of spreadsheets to track student data. The system quickly became unsustainable with too much information spread across many different places. Simultaneously, midway through the school year, Grove City Christian's existing CCR platform abruptly went out of business, forcing the school to find a new solution on short notice.

Integration - cont'd

Determined to avoid disruption for her students, Gillespie contacted SchoolLinks and explained the situation. Despite the tight timeline, the team moved swiftly to help Grove City Christian quickly get up and running. Gillespie described the experience as exceptional from the start: the SchoolLinks team not only understood the school's goals but also made the onboarding process fast, efficient, and reassuring. What began as a stressful transition turned into a remarkably smooth implementation that, in her words, "took what was not a good situation and made it great."

With SchoolLinks in place, Grove City Christian gained a comprehensive system that brought together all the different components of student readiness. The platform's integration with the Common App, transcript management, and Ohio Graduation Plan tools streamlined what had previously required multiple systems and manual tracking. Gillespie noted that she could now access each student's progress including community service hours, graduation seals, and remaining requirements all in one place, without having to toggle between spreadsheets or databases. The shift not only saved time but also gave counselors and administrators greater visibility into student readiness data, allowing them to focus more energy on guidance and less on logistics.

What began as an urgent need to replace a discontinued system evolved into a long-term solution that strengthened the school's readiness infrastructure. SchoolLinks did not just solve an immediate problem; it enhanced Grove City Christian's ability to support every student's path toward life, learning, and leadership beyond graduation.

Empowering Students to Explore and Plan for Their Futures

Since implementing SchoolLinks, Grove City Christian has noticed a steady increase in student engagement, particularly in career exploration and postsecondary planning. According to Nancy Gillespie, students quickly adapted to the new platform, with

participation reaching 100% among grades 7-12.

Gillespie noted how actively students now take initiative over their CCR planning with SchoolLinks. She loves seeing activity in the platform that happens outside of structured classroom time with students logging in on their own to explore careers, favorite colleges, or take interest assessments. "You can tell they're thinking about their futures when they start saving careers, liking schools, and leaving notes for themselves," she explained.

While seniors use SchoolLinks most frequently to send transcripts and manage college applications, underclassmen have also become highly engaged, especially as they explore career options and take assessments that help connect their strengths to potential paths. The assessments, Gillespie shared, have been particularly impactful for students who are still discovering their interests or feel uncertain about their future goals.

She recalled one student who initially said he wanted to pursue aviation because of the salary. Gillespie encouraged him to dig deeper and together, they discussed the education, training, and costs involved. She then asked him to complete a few SchoolLinks assessments. When he returned, their conversation shifted dramatically. He shared that his true passions were photography and business, and together they explored digital marketing as a possible career path. Gillespie remarked on the transformation, sharing that, "he took a simple assessment and turned it into something real and practical," with an outcome that aligns with who he is.

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Streamlining Planning and Tracking, While Catalyzing Student Conversations

Before SchoolLinks, Grove City Christian managed its graduation requirements through a paper-based system known as the Grove City Christian Graduation Planner. The document outlined every course, credit, test, and community service requirement, and students revisited it each year from eighth through twelfth grade. With SchoolLinks, that familiar system has been transformed into an interactive, digital experience. Gillespie was able to mirror the content of the old planner within the platform, giving students real-time access to everything they need to track their progress—from required courses and test scores to service hours and graduation seals.

The Course Planner feature has become a particularly valuable tool for students as they map out their academic paths. Students are able to use the planner to visualize the courses they need and ensure they are meeting graduation requirements. Gillespie noted that they have leveraged it effectively for long-term planning and tracking, and the school is already in discussions about using it for full scheduling in the future.

The transition to digital tracking has also transformed how Grove City Christian manages its community service requirements. Previously, students carried paper forms to volunteer sites for signatures, a process that often led to missing or incomplete paperwork. Now, through SchoolLinks' Experience Tracker, students can easily log hours and upload verification directly into the platform. Counselors can run reports, see each student's progress, and identify those who may be falling behind. The feature has improved both accountability and connection.

For Gillespie who values strong relationships with students, these new tools have been game-changing. SchoolLinks not only streamlined the administrative

side of readiness tracking but also made it easier for Gillespie to engage in more meaningful, informed conversations with her students, keeping the focus where she believes it belongs: on knowing each student and helping plan for a future that aligns with their aspirations and strengths.

Measuring Value Beyond Cost

In a crowded ed-tech landscape filled with competing products and constant advertisements, Nancy Gillespie approaches new tools with both discernment and caution. The variety in quality and reliability can be overwhelming. But from her first interaction with SchoolLinks, she noticed a difference—not only in functionality, but in partnership. She reflected that the “customer service, right from the get-go, when I was in a desperate situation,” went above and beyond. “I needed a turn-around in a couple of weeks, and they were able to do that.” SchoolLinks did not just meet the school's immediate implementation needs; it also listened carefully to what counselors across Ohio were experiencing as the state Graduation Plans evolved. By gathering feedback from multiple districts and building those insights directly into the platform, SchoolLinks ensured that the transition for schools like Grove City Christian was smooth.

The platform's value has proven to extend far beyond its features. “It's saving counselors time, it's saving teachers time when they're writing those letters of recommendation, and everything is just seamless,” Gillespie said. Tasks that once required multiple systems are now housed within a single interface. Gillespie also loves how the platform aligns with the specific workforce needs in Ohio as students explore careers, showing local employment demand to inform student planning.

For Gillespie, the most meaningful return on investment comes from the relationships and conversations SchoolLinks makes possible. “It's great conversation building,” she reflected. “I don't think there's a price to put on that—that's what we want to do: have a platform that helps me cultivate

conversations, that helps me engage with students, hear their stories, listen to what they're saying... and come up with a solution." She views SchoolLinks as more than a product; it's a long-term investment in the school's mission and students' futures.

SchoolLinks has also strengthened Grove City Christian's approach to digital citizenship by simplifying how students engage with technology. As the school works to reduce unnecessary phone use and foster more intentional digital habits, SchoolLinks provides a single, organized platform where students can complete all of their readiness activities. By consolidating tools for college applications, transcripts, and planning while integrating seamlessly with systems like the Common App, the platform reduces the clutter of multiple logins and apps. This streamlined approach helps students stay focused as they navigate the many steps of college and career preparation.

By bringing together the many dimensions of college and career readiness into one intuitive system, SchoolLinks has given Grove City Christian a tool that saves time, simplifies processes, and most importantly, creates space for more meaningful engagement between counselors and students.

A Partnership Defined by Compassion and Care

For Nancy Gillespie, one of the moments that most clearly demonstrated SchoolLinks' commitment to its schools had nothing to do with technology. A meeting had been scheduled with the SchoolLinks team for an afternoon just after Spring Break; but that day, a Grove City Christian student passed away suddenly. The meeting was cancelled as Gillespie and her colleagues shifted their focus to supporting students through their grief and honoring the loss of a member of their community. A few days later, SchoolLinks sent a beautiful planter and a heartfelt note to the school. For Gillespie, that gesture left a lasting impression. "To go above and beyond—that spoke really loudly to me," she said. The planter now

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sits in her home office and serves as a reminder of the company's care and understanding.

That experience reflected what Gillespie has come to appreciate most about SchoolLinks: the consistency, empathy, and professionalism of its team. Every interaction has been characterized by preparation, attentiveness, and follow-through. Meetings start on time, questions are addressed thoroughly, and when additional information is needed, the team provides timely updates and solutions. This level of responsiveness and engagement, she noted, stands out compared to other vendors she has worked with: "All of those are things you want to expect, but you don't always get. With SchoolLinks, I can say that 100% of the time, I've left satisfied with the answers."

That reliability is paired with an uncommon level of understanding. Gillespie has found that SchoolLinks approaches its work with genuine empathy for educators and the realities of school life. Many members of the SchoolLinks team have worked in schools themselves, which gives them valuable insight into the pressures, time constraints, and emotional demands that counselors, teachers, and administrators navigate every day. The SchoolLinks team demonstrates an understanding of why schools need certain tools and how those tools fit into the broader goal of supporting students. That shared perspective that is rooted in firsthand experience creates a sense of partnership and trust.

“Worth Every Penny”

For Nancy Gillespie, moving from spreadsheets to a single digital platform has been transformative for managing data and for empowering students to take ownership of their learning. Having everything in one place with SchoolLinks has streamlined planning, improved accuracy of data, and given students visibility into their own progress. Gillespie believes this access helps students take genuine responsibility for their educational paths. After implementing the platform, Gillespie has continued to share her experience with administrators and neighboring

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schools. From her perspective, both the platform and the people behind it have consistently exceeded expectations. When asked about sharing advice with other districts considering SchoolLinks, she put it simply: “The product is worth every penny.”

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