Oxford's Smooth Transition

A More Engaging & Comprehensive CCR System

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Introduction

FOxford Public Schools is a small K-12 district in New Haven County, Connecticut, serving a close-knit community with a strong commitment to student success. A guiding philosophy in the district is "Grow every day to excel tomorrow and succeed in the future." This vision underscores the high priority Oxford places on postsecondary readiness, with a clear goal of strengthening both college and career planning for every student. At Oxford High School, which serves approximately 440 students, and the district's middle school, which enrolls roughly 370 students, leaders have embraced the importance of preparing students with both the skills and the direction they need to thrive after graduation.

Alicia Mancinone, Director of School Counseling, has played a central role in leading Oxford's readiness work. After using the same college and career readiness (CCR) platform for nearly two decades, the district began seeking a more modern, engaging solution that would energize students and better reflect evolving expectations and requirements for success after graduation.

SchooLinks Launch: A Smooth Implementation

With strong district support and resoundingly positive feedback from other Connecticut school systems, Oxford adopted SchooLinks. They began by piloting the platform with juniors and fully launched the platform this school year across grades 6 through 12. This step marked a strategic and intentional commitment to increasing student engagement around college and career exploration and readiness and ensuring that students were using tools that would allow for the full breadth and depth of CCR exploration and planning across postsecondary pathways.

Rather than approaching implementation with a one-size-fits-all model, Mancinone reflected that the SchooLinks team took time to understand Oxford's unique context, priorities, and existing workflows. It was especially meaningful that the SchooLinks customer support representative met directly with staff to listen, assess their starting point, and help design a rollout plan tailored to their needs. The district also utilized the platform's recommended scope and sequence to determine where to begin. This guidance helped drive decisions and program design, serving as a blueprint for how Oxford introduced features, structured programming, and engaged students at each grade level. The SchooLinks customer support team remained closely involved throughout setup, ensuring the platform was configured to align with Oxford's priorities and readiness goals. As a result, Mancinone said the transition felt seamless, and support staff were able to quickly learn how to integrate the platform to support their work.

Early Engagement from Students

Oxford's intentional approach to implementation quickly translated into strong early engagement from students. In its first full year using SchooLinks across grades 6-12, the district has already onboarded approximately 97 percent of students, a level of participation that reflects both thoughtful planning and deep staff buy-in. This was in stark contrast to the district's previous system, where engagement had been a struggle due to it feeling outdated and uninspiring for students.

A major driver of this success has been Oxford's advisory model, which provides a built-in structure for consistent CCR programming. Rather than placing the full responsibility on counselors, Oxford has empowered advisory teachers to take the lead in facilitating SchooLinks activities. School counselors periodically push into advisory to support implementation, but teachers serve as the primary drivers of SchooLinks guidance and exploration. According to Mancinone, this shared ownership has been key to building momentum; the staff buy-in and support has, in turn, strengthened student engagement.

In Oxford, students have advisory every day, with three days designated as flexible periods where students can seek academic support, connect with teachers, or meet with clubs, and two days dedicated to structured activities and curriculum, including social-emotional learning lessons and SchooLinks engagement. This schedule gives teachers the flexibility to integrate SchooLinks in a natural, sustainable way, while ensuring CCR remains a regular and consistent part of students' CCR experiences.

At the high school, SchooLinks-related activities are incorporated into advisory at least twice each month, with a focus on career exploration, postsecondary planning, and assessments. When students complete assessments, counselors use the results to guide more meaningful one-on-one conversations about future pathways, goals, and next steps. To further support implementation in alignment with Oxford's advisory structure, the SchooLinks customer support team provided advisory rosters that gave teachers the ability to track student progress and task completion, allowing for real-time engagement, intervention, and support.

As part of its full 6-12 launch of SchooLinks, Oxford saw especially strong early momentum in middle school. With just one middle school counselor, the district uses a classroom-based model, with the

counselor pushing into classes to support CCR and SchooLinks activities. Some middle school students are now using the platform even more frequently than high school students. Mancinone shared that she is especially excited about what this means long term for CCR success; by the time these students reach high school and eventually graduate, they will have built years of experience using SchooLinks to explore interests, plan pathways, and prepare for postsecondary success.

Smooth Integration of College Application Manager

Oxford's rollout of SchooLinks has also strengthened how counselors support students through the college application process. Because the district previously used a platform to manage this process, the transition to the SchooLinks system felt familiar and relatively seamless. The tool was fully launched in the fall, and students adapted quickly, thanks to the platform's intuitive, user-friendly design. To ensure a smooth start, Oxford counselors participated in two professional learning days before the school year began and scheduled targeted College Application Manager training with the SchooLinks team. SchooLinks staff also conducted weekly check-ins and provided ongoing guidance and support during the initial rollout. As counselors began working in the system, processes such as uploading transcripts and completing application-related documentation quickly became routine.

Mancinone shared that students were already comfortable uploading documents, which made adoption easier, while teachers and counselors have come to appreciate the expanded tracking capabilities that their previous platform did not offer. One particularly valuable feature allows students to photograph and upload college decision letters, giving counselors real-time insight into outcomes and enabling more effective tracking of application results, which Mancinone noted is very powerful data to inform counseling conversations, track outcomes, and strengthen future planning. In

the future, Oxford plans to expand use of the platform earlier in the college planning journey. Counselors are especially eager to utilize SchooLinks with juniors to support college research and the development of balanced and personalized lists of safety, target, and reach schools, strengthening students' readiness and awareness as they prepare for the application process.

Fueling Significant Increases in CCR Event Participation

Since implementing SchooLinks , Oxford has also seen a significant increase in student participation in CCR activities with the utilization of the platform's event and scheduling features. Counselors now use SchooLinks to host and advertise a wide range of programming, including guest speakers from the armed services, career-focused talks, college representative visits, and CCR-related field trips. Creating events within the platform has been simple and efficient, allowing staff to quickly publish opportunities and track student sign-ups. Mancinone's team initially had some concerns about how college representatives would navigate the new system, but those worries were quickly alleviated with Oxford seeing strong participation from college reps using the system.

The impact on engagement has been immediate compared to previous years. Mancinone explained that an upcoming field trip to a local community college had to be canceled last year due to low student interest. This year, after creating and promoting the event through SchooLinks, the trip reached full capacity within just two days. Mancinone shared that students "are logging in and signing up," and that participation in visits and CCR events has increased "exponentially." For Mancinone, these results show that SchooLinks is a powerful tool to drive sustained engagement in postsecondary exploration among Oxford students.

Looking Ahead: Expanding Impact

Though still early in its implementation, Oxford is already looking ahead to how SchooLinks can further amplify its CCR success. Mancinone shared that the district's next priority is expanding family and guardian engagement. This spring, Oxford plans to invite parents and caregivers onto the platform to strengthen communication and reinforce students' planning beyond the school day. SchooLinks' customer support representative has also offered to lead a parent information session to help families better understand how to navigate the system and support their students' goals.

At the same time, the district is exploring ways to embed SchooLinks more deeply into academic experiences. In response to Connecticut's new personal finance course requirement, Oxford plans to integrate the platform's resume-building tools to help students connect financial literacy with career preparation. Oxford is also preparing to expand use of the Experience Tracker, particularly to support a capstone requirement that encourages students to complete a passion project, internship, or volunteer experience. By tracking these real-world learning opportunities in SchooLinks, the district hopes to strengthen documentation, reflection, and alignment with long-term career planning.

Mancinone is excited to see the staff increasingly recognize the incredible value of the platform and expand use of SchooLinks "throughout all different areas, not just counseling." What began as a CCR platform adoption is becoming a springboard for embedding CCR across Oxford's academic and student support systems from advisory to academic coursework to family engagement to real-world learning opportunities. With this approach, SchooLinks has become a catalyst for empowering students to explore their interests and strengths, set goals that align with who they are and what they want to be, and develop the skills necessary to successfully turn these plans into reality.