

# Seamless Implementation and Unmatched Support in CT

## Above and Beyond Anything I Ever Would Have Expected



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Pomperaug Regional School District 15 in Connecticut serves the communities of Middlebury and Southbury and is home to just over 3,000 students from preK through 12th grade. The district's guiding philosophy is rooted in a vision to "engage students in meaningful learning today while preparing them to thrive in the world they will inherit tomorrow." Pomperaug has a long history of prioritizing school counseling as a cornerstone of that mission. Every school and grade level is supported by a strong counseling team dedicated to guiding students' academic, social-emotional, and career development. This commitment ensures that students receive personalized support and consistent guidance throughout their K-12 experience.

Stacey Zwick, the Director of School Counseling, leads this districtwide effort. Under her leadership, the counseling department has deepened its focus on helping students discover and pursue individualized pathways while ensuring that every student has access to the tools, relationships, and supports needed to succeed in school and beyond. As part of this philosophy, the district continually looks for ways to strengthen these efforts. This mindset led the counseling team to take a closer look at the tools they were using to guide students' college and career journeys.

## Reevaluating Tools to Better Support Students

In years past, Pomperaug, like many school districts across New England, used Naviance to support their college and career readiness (CCR) work. Zwick noted that at that point "there wasn't another game in town." Over time, however, the counseling team began to question whether the platform still met the evolving needs of their students and staff. The district had already begun moving away from Naviance for certain key functions including college recommendations—shifting teachers to use the Common App directly.

The counseling team started exploring more comprehensive options for student engagement and postsecondary planning. They sought a solution that was user-friendly, built for the entire K-12 experience, and supported the full scope of college and career pathway exploration and planning. Zwick first learned about SchoolLinks from another Connecticut district that was seeking a similar shift, and, upon further exploration, the platform quickly rose to the top of Pomperaug's list. As the counseling team evaluated various systems, none offered the same level of depth, functionality, and ease of use as SchoolLinks.

## Reevaluating Tools to Better Support Students cont'd

Zwick shared that SchoolLinks stood out for its intuitive design and accessibility. She was immediately impressed with the ease of login while maintaining strong security measures. She referred to the login process on the previous platform as “a nightmare” noting that it felt like they were “logging into NASA!” With SchoolLinks, by contrast, users could simply sign in with Google, eliminating the daily frustration of forgotten passwords and complicated steps. That same simplicity extended to families as well. Parents could easily connect to their child’s account, view progress, and stay informed about upcoming opportunities—all without extra setup or technical hurdles.

Another decisive factor was SchoolLinks’ seamless integration with the district’s student information system, PowerSchool. Zwick noted that the systems talk to each other on a nightly basis ensuring that grades, schedules, and academic progress are all in one place and up-to-date. After a careful review process, the decision to adopt SchoolLinks was an easy one. With its intuitive design, seamless integrations, and robust features, the platform aligned perfectly with Pomperaug’s vision for a comprehensive, student-centered counseling experience.

## A Smooth Transition: Implementing the College Application Manager

As part of its initial launch, the district rolled out the SchoolLinks College Application Manager at Pomperaug High School which serves around 1,000 students across grades 9-12. Recognizing that incremental change is at times preferable, the district took a thoughtful, phased approach—they provided an overlap year in which they kept Naviance active while introducing SchoolLinks for the school year. This allowed time to move data, test processes, and ensure that students and staff were well versed on what needed to be done in SchoolLinks to ensure a smooth transition.

As it turned out, that caution quickly became unnecessary. Zwick recalled that the plan for a gradual transition was a moot point because as staff was having conversations during the first weeks of school to come to a final decision about which platform to use, “the kids made the decision for us!” She explained that, “before we had even rolled it out, they [the students] were on SchoolLinks—they were doing it.” She emphasized how intuitive and user-friendly it is that the students were able to navigate the platform and begin using it independently without any guidance or prompting. She added, “They jumped in and have loved it ever since.”

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When the district moved to using the Common App for recommendation letters, teachers appreciated the simplicity of that process; they were apprehensive about whether SchoolLinks would be as easy to use. Zwick shared that the implementation was smooth and the teachers found the process as easy as the Common App. For staff outside of the counseling office who had not been involved in selecting the platform, that first experience was incredibly encouraging. “For their first interaction [with SchoolLinks] to be so easy was such a good selling point,” Zwick explained. It also opened the door for the counseling team to suggest they check out other tools and resources within SchoolLinks.

# Dramatic Increase in Engagement with College Rep Visits

As Pomperaug has further embedded SchoolLinks into its college and career readiness programming, the district has found tremendous value in SchoolLinks' Event Scheduler feature, which the district uses primarily to manage college representative visits. Counselors can easily select available times within the scheduler, while students can learn about upcoming visits and sign up directly through the system. The result has been a dramatic increase in participation. As Zwick noted, last year, "engagement with college rep visits went through the roof." The surge in student interest was so significant that the team even had to consider moving events into larger rooms to accommodate the growing attendance, ensuring each session maintained the right level of interaction and impact.

Beyond the improved participation and logistics, the Event Scheduler has brought incredible added value through the data it provides. The district can now see who attended different events, when they attended, and which colleges are drawing the most interest. Students are also asked to give more information about their interest (e.g., whether to learn about a specific major or career field), which has helped the college and career center tailor supports and bring in speakers that align with these preferences. In short, the feature has given the counseling team deeper insights into their students' CCR goals and strengthened their ability to connect students with meaningful postsecondary opportunities.

## Streamlining and Strengthening CCR Tracking and Planning

Pomperaug has also integrated SchoolLinks' Experience Tracker feature, making it a central hub for managing several key college and career readiness (CCR) processes across the district. All high school students are required to complete five hours of community service each year; those hours are now logged directly in SchoolLinks. Seniors also use the platform to manage their capstone projects, submitting all required paperwork digitally including advisor approval forms and progress documentation for each project component.

The system has quickly expanded beyond these districtwide uses and has been embraced by a variety of staff and students who see the value it can add to their work. Student organizations with their own service expectations, such as the National Honor Society, are now using SchoolLinks to track hours and manage member submissions. Advisors can easily create rosters that display only the documentation and forms specific to their program. This flexibility has inspired other club sponsors and staff to adopt the platform for their own initiatives. According to Zwick, setup and customization have been remarkably simple: "Staff can go in, create an experience, note what they want students to complete, and assign the appropriate roster."

Building on that success, Pomperaug has also implemented the Course Planner feature to give students, families, counselors, and staff a clear, real-time view of each student's progress toward graduation. The tool automatically pulls in course information from PowerSchool, allowing users to see what requirements have been met and what remains. Zwick raved about its easy-to-understand visualization that helps all stakeholders quickly see what is required and gauge progress. This has replaced the static paper lists and grids of the past, which often were challenging for students to actively put into practice.

The feature has been especially valuable in supporting transfer students. The team works carefully to identify and categorize their prior coursework so they can see exactly where they are in terms of meeting requirements. The Course Planner has also sparked meaningful planning conversations between students and counselors. By comparing students' intended plans with the courses they actually enroll in, staff can help students stay aligned with their goals.

## Building a K-12 Continuum of CCR

Pomperaug's approach to college and career readiness begins well before high school. Zwick emphasized that Pomperaug has long supported a comprehensive K12 counseling model grounded in three areas: academic, personal/social, and career. She shared that they have always focused on all three, but the team was excited to explore what career resources were available to help them go even deeper.

SchoolLinks provided exactly that. The platform offers age-appropriate, engaging tools for introducing goal-setting and career awareness as early as elementary school, creating a natural continuum that extends through middle and high school. Elementary students can now explore careers through interactive VR lessons in SchoolLinks—an experience Zwick noted was particularly engaging for that age group. As the counseling and teaching staff continue to build familiarity with the platform, they are exploring ways to integrate SchoolLinks into classroom routines including morning meetings, social-emotional learning check-ins, and other teacher-led activities.

Zwick also noted that SchoolLinks does a particularly good job of supporting students in building soft skills that will be relevant regardless of postsecondary pathway or career choice. She shared that schools often talk about the need to prepare students for “jobs that don’t yet exist.” Zwick applauded SchoolLinks’ ability to build critical skills that will transcend industries and roles in a tangible and meaningful way: “I love the focus on the life skills that are part of any job you’re going to get—the humanity piece of it, the soft skills you’re going to need to be successful anywhere.”

## Unmatched Customer Service and Support

For Zwick, one of the most defining aspects of SchoolLinks has been the unparalleled level of customer service and partnership. “Where SchoolLinks has always—literally from day one—stood above the rest is the customer service,” she said. “I don’t just mean a willingness to help. I mean the immediacy of having someone there to answer your questions.”

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That responsiveness has extended far beyond troubleshooting. Zwick described SchoolLinks as a true collaborator—one that listens, adapts, and continuously improves based on real feedback from the field. When her team suggested several refinements to the College Application Manager, such as identifying who students can choose as teacher recommenders, the SchoolLinks team was quick to respond. “They’re so receptive,” she said. The team is willing to take feedback and act on it quickly.

Zwick noted that the personalized support from their customer representative has been truly priceless and the impact of that relationship extends well beyond the SchoolLinks implementation. Zwick reflected that “Haley [their SchoolLinks representative] is possibly the best thing to happen to my department in the last 10 years.” She described the personal support her team receives—from professional development sessions to day-to-day guidance—as “above and beyond anything I ever would have expected from any platform.”

Reflecting on three decades in education, Zwick put it simply: “I’ve worked with a lot of platforms. I’ve watched a lot of technology come and go. I’ve watched pendulums swing. And I have never experienced the customer service I’ve experienced through SchoolLinks.”

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