



## Introduction

Preparing students for a successful future has never been more challenging than it is today. School counselors face staggering student-to-counselor ratios of [415-to-1](#) on average, and their task list has only continued to grow as the COVID pandemic forced every school in the U.S. to do more with less time and resources than ever before.

The burden of such stressful conditions is exacerbated by the [more than 500,000 teachers](#) who left the profession since 2020. Despite these difficulties, new and returning teachers, counselors and administrators diligently continue their inspiring work to help students thrive in their postsecondary plans.

One of the most influential factors in achieving their goals is the effective selection, implementation, integration, and full-scale utilization of proven career guidance solutions. The achievement of such goals will require district leaders to address several key considerations.

## Cutting Through the Confusion in EdTech

Advancements in educational technology systems provide millions of students with incredible learning opportunities available at their fingertips while also allowing teachers and administrators to streamline their work in a much more efficient and effective way. The use of these digital tools has continued to increase since the start of the pandemic with [93% of U.S. teachers](#) reporting that they are doing at least partial online instruction with their students. Not surprisingly, most school personnel have become more confident and comfortable with their district's edtech resources over the last two years.

The problem with this is the now staggering number of digital education tools available, which makes it more difficult than ever for districts to choose the best college and career readiness software for their specific needs.

## Considering the Right Criterion

Too often, district leaders select their college and career readiness platform based on the wrong criteria, such as cost and attractiveness. While it is certainly possible to acquire an affordable and appealing online career guidance solution, an emphasis must be placed on factual evidence that demonstrates the system's efficacy.

### Prioritize Data-Driven Decisions

Purchasers cannot legitimately justify CCR platform procurement decisions without having quantitative research to support them. It must be demonstrated with definitive certainty that the system possesses the capacity to help students in identifying areas of occupational excitement and begin their development of transferable skills that will enable them to flourish in the modern workforce. This evidence should also be supported by ongoing validations of the system to confirm its continued effectiveness and relevancy over time.



“ In many cases, career planning systems rely on assessments that students complete to identify key attributes such as values, skills, and interests. This information provides students with the foundation for effective career and educational planning. Conscientious and ethical system developers provide psychometric evidence demonstrating the validity and reliability of all assessments used within their respective systems. ”



**Dr. Spencer Niles**

*Co-Director of the THRIVE Research and Intervention Center for the College of William & Mary*

Similarly, districts need to consider how they can more broadly measure and apply system data on students and their occupational interests. This critical information not only helps streamline efforts made by school counselors but can also be instrumental in overall program improvements as administrators seek to provide more engaging activities and even courses that are specifically aligned with what their students are looking to learn more about as they develop employable skill sets.

### Ensure an Unbiased, Equitable Approach

In addition to being valid and reliable, systems must also be engaging, efficient, and unbiased with respect to gender, culture, and race. Visuals included within the system must be diverse and language relevant to student users to facilitate a visceral connection to these educational resources and how they directly apply to the student's own personal life.

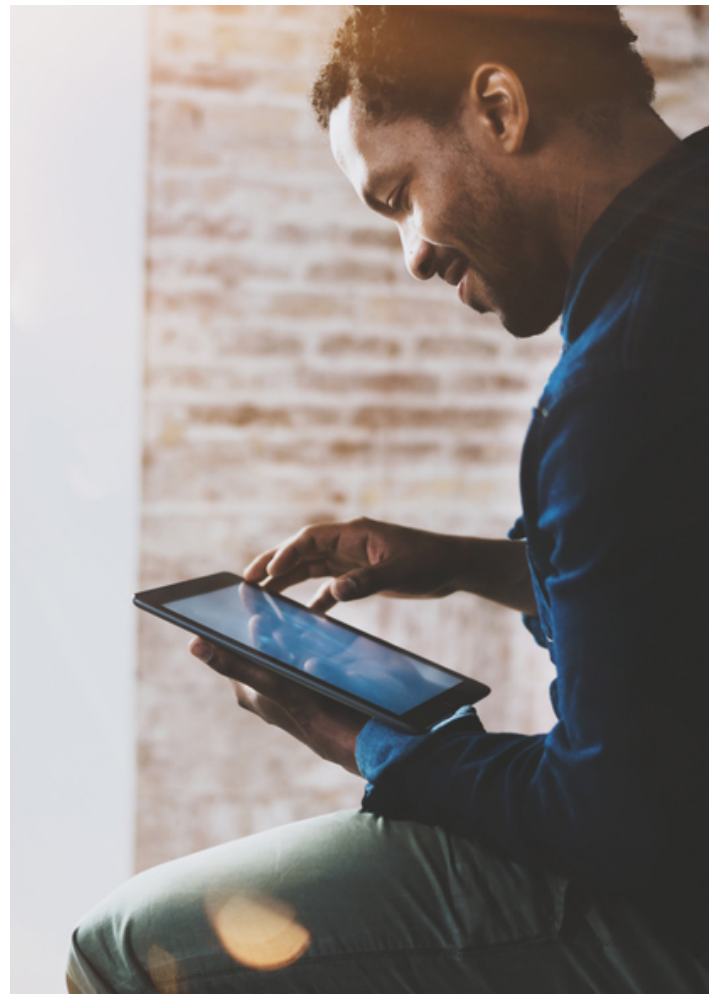
## Create Alignment Across All Stakeholders

A [2021 survey of approximately 1,500 educators](#) found that more than 60% of the teachers surveyed feel as though they are rarely if ever involved in procurement decisions. Nearly half of these individuals report they are frequently bringing in outside resources to supplement their school's existing edtech tools that are unable to fully meet their needs. This has left an expansive gap between school administrators who have the power to make edtech purchasing decisions and the counselors who are the ones using these technologies regularly.

### Include Important Counselor Insights

The procurement process needs to include input from a variety of stakeholders, particularly those most likely to use the software; the teachers and school counselors. These individuals will have the most precise sense as to whether a system is robust in its applicability and whether it can be readily integrated into their school's curriculum and counseling program.

Quite simply, if the frontline users of these systems do not view the system as useful, it is unlikely to be used. Conversely, when school counselors are excited about the potential of a system then it is much easier to get students excited about engaging with it. Helping students connect their school experience with a potential future that excites them, increases engagement and improves school performance.



“What we’ve noticed is that some of these students that are making poor grades are bored to death because there’s a lot of regurgitation that’s gone on as opposed to really exposing them to thinking and learning. I think that we’re all going to have to do a better job focusing on critical thinking aspects, problem-solving, allowing them to understand that learning’s not necessarily what I can spit out on a test, but what I can do to expand how I think and how I approach things and how I work with other people to come to a solution.”

**David Wofford**

*Superintendent of Chickasaw City Schools*

## Select the Right Partner

In addition to evaluating the solution, stakeholders must also evaluate potential software partners to ensure that the program selected will include appropriate onboarding and continuous support in order to reduce excessive strains or stressors on the educators involved. Districts must hold them accountable to a high standard in this process, as they should be able to expect considerable contributions from any vendor selected for this endeavor. While the software is certainly of primary importance, the quality of service cannot be understated as a crucial consideration in the implementation process.

### Expect Proactive Project Planning

The big picture view of implementation can be very overwhelming to educators as they struggle to take in the many stages and steps involved in this process, though there are several ways to break this complex project into smaller, more easily digestible tasks to keep the momentum moving forward and achieve an on-time system launch.

Working with the vendor to construct an outline of the onboarding plan will help to determine a clear path forward for key stakeholders and personnel within the district to eliminate confusion and concern. This outline should include a comprehensive timeline that details various stages of the solution’s implementation and when they are expected to be completed as well as routine status check-ins between both partners.

### Seek Regular Onboarding and Training

It is unrealistic to expect teachers and counselors to become masters of any new resource without first supplying them with the necessary information and instruction needed to gain an understanding of what the technology is capable of and how they are intended to utilize it with their students. This onboarding process must include multiple training sessions as well as ample opportunities for counselors to ask questions and get help with the platform if they need it.

Many schools will conduct training events during teacher in-service days to capture the undivided attention of their educators as they are presented with new tools and teaching strategies intended for immediate use. The primary difficulty with in-service training is the unavoidable necessity to complete several sessions spanning a wide variety of resources and systems that are often unrelated, resulting in an onslaught of new information for counselors to digest and integrate into their lesson plans with very little time. Baring this in mind, career guidance platform implementation procedures must be incredibly clear, concise, and possess the ability to be introduced in a matter of 20-30 minutes during instances such as in-service days.

### Allow for Flexibility & Customization

Not every district, nor every school for that matter, is the same. Each possesses a variety of unique methods and mandates such as legislation on college and career readiness requirements that all students must meet to graduate.

Districts often face limited means to meet these requirements among the many others related to core coursework in the time they have available with students to discuss career guidance. There is extraordinary potential to embed postsecondary planning activities within standard subjects. After all, there is no doubt that many important career-related conversations are happening outside of guidance sessions. This means every teacher needs to be equipped with the right tools to engage students in those conversations to continue asking even more questions about potential pathways.

“We often see our partners utilizing their advisory sessions or core subjects to address college and career readiness standards within their districts. This approach is both an efficient use of class time as well as an impactful way to show how potential careers relate to the academic work that students are already doing every day. When they’re able to form this connection between the two, that is when they truly start to learn and develop skills for their future workplace.”

**Katie Harrington**

*Director of Training for Kuder, Inc.*

There is no need to start from square one when implementing a college and career readiness solution. Instead, any additional tools should integrate seamlessly into a district’s existing postsecondary preparation process as educators seek to strengthen weak spots and close gaps within their program. It is this form of implementation that weaves new digital resources into the colorful fabric of the district’s current curriculum that will lead to true success for everyone involved in career planning and development at the middle and high school levels.



“The ripple effects of failed college and career readiness system implementation are two-fold; counselors are likely to develop a misunderstanding of the platform as a simple test to tell students what they should do in life rather than a tool to guide effective conversations on assessed student interests and values, whereas students will begin to disengage from their studies as they become less hopeful for the future as they continue to struggle with connecting their coursework to potential career pathways.”

**Dr. Spencer Niles**

*Co-Director of the THRIVE Research and Intervention Center for the College of William & Mary*

## Key Strategies for Successful Implementation

For district leaders seeking the solution to routine problems and pitfalls within their college and career readiness programs, the answer most commonly lies in implementation. Thoughtful consideration must be given by administrators long before a purchase is made to thoroughly evaluate key criteria of a new career guidance solution as well as the system vendor’s ability to perform as a true partner who will provide comprehensive product launch procedures and continuous support for the entire district.

**Key considerations and strategies to administer during implementation should include:**

- Ensure research-based evidence of the college and career readiness system’s ability to guide students toward making confident decisions on their future career path.
- Look for the product’s demonstrated relevance to the diverse student population it is intended to serve.
- Demand readily available student data on system activities that can be used to influence ongoing CCR program decisions.
- Include opinions from counselors and teachers to gain their trust in the solution as a useful tool for themselves as well as their students.
- Secure a vendor who will act as a true partner to the district throughout system onboarding, training, and ongoing product support.
- Understand integration potential of the solution and its many career guidance resources to the school’s existing career planning curriculum.

**Strategic alignment throughout the implementation process will ensure positive outcomes in regard to the setup of the chosen software, its long-term utilization, and the program’s overall growth and success.**

## The Correlation to Effective Program Implementation

The most direct way to incite desired usage of any district’s college and career readiness solution among counselors and students is to ensure successful system implementation. This imperative process begins with school administrators who must plan carefully and intentionally relative to integrating career planning systems in their schools.

Even the greatest, most powerful career guidance software will fall flat if not implemented properly, with costly consequences. Poor CCR system implementation inevitably translates to poor system usage, which will leave both students and counselors feeling discouraged and disengaged in the career development process.

