



THE RETURN ON IMPACT (ROI) OF COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS INFRASTRUCTURE

Reported Outcomes Associated with Xello's Unified
CCR Platform for Student Readiness, Staff Capacity,
Family Outcomes, and District Performance

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<u>2</u>
Key Findings at a Glance	<u>4</u>
About the Research	<u>6</u>
SECTION 1	
The CCR Maturity Challenge	<u>7</u>
SECTION 2	
The Return on Impact Framework	<u>11</u>
SECTION 3	
Impact Domain One: Student Readiness	<u>13</u>
SECTION 4	
Impact Domain Two: Staff Capacity	<u>17</u>
SECTION 5	
Impact Domain Three: Family Economic Empowerment	<u>21</u>
SECTION 6	
Impact Domain Four: Districtwide Capability	<u>24</u>
SECTION 7	
Characteristics of High-Impact Districts	<u>29</u>
CONCLUSION	<u>31</u>
Appendix A: Research Notes and Limitations	<u>32</u>
Appendix B: Qualitative Participant Profile	<u>33</u>
Appendix C: Data Sources	<u>33</u>
About Hanover Research	<u>34</u>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the definition of student success expands beyond graduation, school districts are being asked to demonstrate stronger postsecondary outcomes while navigating staffing constraints, accountability requirements, evolving workforce expectations, and rising demands for data-driven decision-making.

Over the past decade, college and career readiness (CCR) has expanded from a counseling initiative into a strategic district priority. Students are increasingly expected to graduate with clear postsecondary plans, meaningful career exploration experiences, greater self-awareness, and the knowledge required to make informed decisions about education, training, and employment.

Yet despite substantial investments in readiness programming, many districts continue to face a common challenge: delivering readiness consistently across schools, grade levels, and student populations.

Career exploration, course planning, advising, financial aid awareness, and family engagement are often managed through disconnected processes, multiple systems, or isolated initiatives. Student information may exist across spreadsheets, paper forms, local databases, and individual educator records. As a result, districts frequently struggle to create continuity, measure progress, and scale successful practices.

This study examines a different approach. Rather than measure causal impact, it instead examines reported and observed outcomes among educators and district leaders using a unified CCR platform as part of their readiness strategy.

Drawing on a national survey of educators and district leaders (n=357), qualitative interviews with K–12 practitioners (n=12), and Xello platform engagement data from the 2025–26 school year, findings suggest that **districts reporting the strongest outcomes approach college and career readiness as a coordinated system rather than a collection of activities**. In these districts, readiness is supported by shared processes, common data, and a unified infrastructure that creates continuity across grade levels while providing visibility to educators, administrators, students, and families. As such, these districts experience the highest levels of ROI for their college and career readiness infrastructure. For the purposes of this study, ROI refers to **Return on Impact**.

Rather than focusing exclusively on financial return, Return on Impact examines the educational, operational, organizational, and family outcomes districts realize through investments in college and career readiness infrastructure. This framework recognizes that many of the most valuable outcomes in K–12 education are reflected in improved student preparedness, stronger organizational effectiveness, expanded opportunity, and increased capacity to support students at scale.

Across the survey and interview findings, four dimensions of Return on Impact emerged consistently among districts using Xello as their CCR platform:

Student Readiness

Survey respondents and interview participants reported stronger student ownership of planning, increased confidence in postsecondary decision-making, clearer goals, and more meaningful connections between interests and future opportunities.

Staff Capacity

Survey respondents reported reductions in administrative burden and more efficient advising workflows, while interview participants described greater capacity for direct student support.

Family Economic Empowerment

Survey respondents and interview participants reported greater access to information regarding affordability, scholarships, financial aid, and postsecondary planning. Platform engagement data provided additional evidence regarding scholarship awareness and utilization.

Districtwide Capability

District leaders interviewed for this study described stronger accountability, greater visibility into readiness activities, improved strategic planning, and more consistent implementation across schools and grade levels.

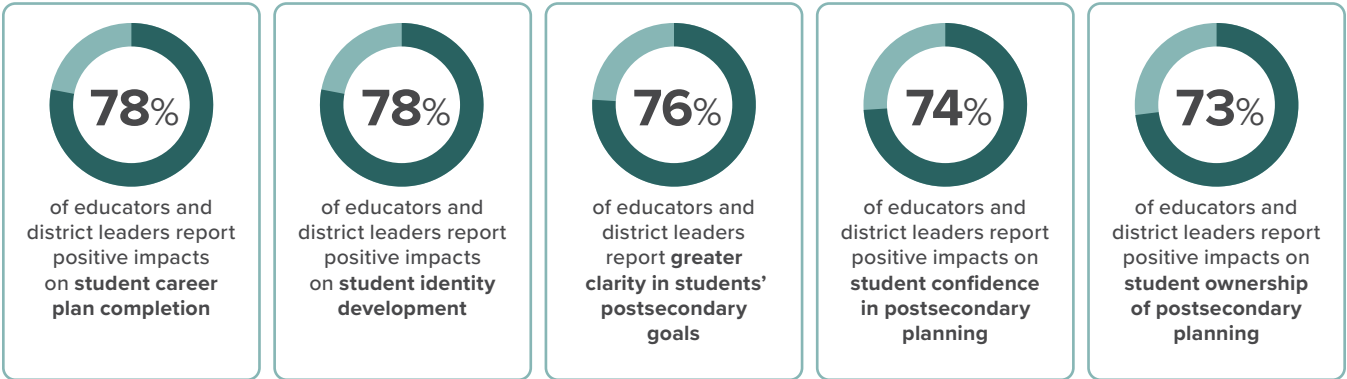
Taken together, these findings suggest that the greatest Return on Impact occurs when college and career readiness functions as infrastructure rather than as a collection of disconnected programs. And, notably, the districts represented in this study consistently identified their CCR platform as a foundational component of that infrastructure.

As expectations for postsecondary readiness continue to evolve, the question facing district leaders is no longer whether readiness matters. The question is how districts can build systems capable of delivering readiness outcomes consistently, equitably, and at scale.

Key Findings at a Glance

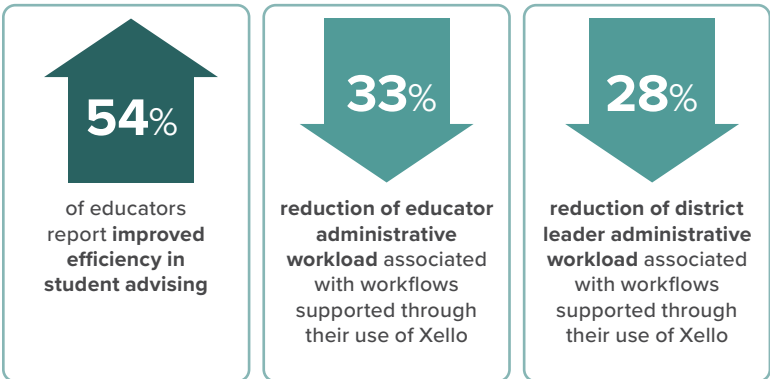
The research examined reported Return on Impact among Xello users across four dimensions: Student Readiness, Staff Capacity, Family Economic Empowerment, and Districtwide Capability.

STUDENT READINESS



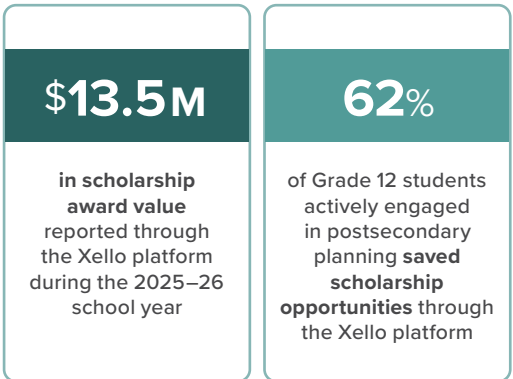
Source: National Educator Survey of Xello Users

STAFF CAPACITY



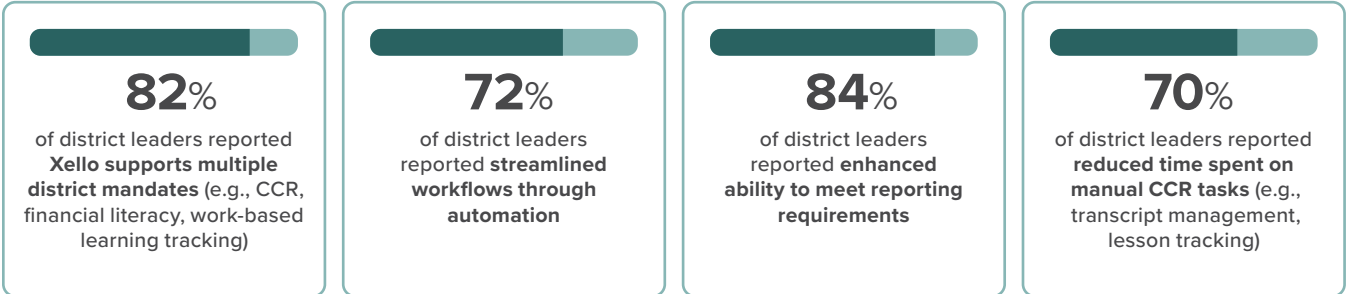
Source: National Educator Survey of Xello Users

FAMILY ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



Source: Platform Engagement Data (2025–26 School Year)

DISTRICTWIDE CAPABILITY



Source: National Educator Survey of Xello Users

THE IMPACT OF CCR PLATFORM TECHNOLOGY CHOICE



Source: National Educator Survey of Xello Users

Note: Survey percentages in this report reflect responses from educators and district leaders who use Xello. Findings should be interpreted as reported outcomes among Xello users, not as causal estimates or as estimates for all K-12 districts.

What This Means for Districts

Readiness outcomes improve when planning becomes a system, not an event. Educators reported stronger student ownership, confidence, and clarity when career and postsecondary planning was embedded throughout students' educational journeys rather than concentrated at key transition points.

Strong CCR infrastructure allows educators to redirect time toward student support. By reducing administrative work and improving access to information, districts create greater capacity for advising, relationship-building, and individualized student guidance.

Families engage more effectively when information is accessible. Centralized access to career, college, affordability, and scholarship information helps families participate earlier and more confidently in postsecondary planning decisions.

Accountability becomes easier when readiness data is connected. District leaders reported stronger reporting, planning, accountability, and visibility when readiness activities, student plans, and outcomes could be viewed through a single system.

Technology enables scale, but platform choice influences success. The effectiveness of college and career readiness infrastructure depends not only on adoption, but also on the experience it creates for educators and leaders. Platforms that are easier to implement, use, and integrate into daily practice are more likely to support sustained districtwide impact.

The greatest return comes from building readiness infrastructure. Programs deliver opportunities. Infrastructure enables districts to scale those opportunities, measure participation, and sustain impact over time.

About the Research

This study was commissioned by Xello and conducted by Hanover Research. It combines three sources of evidence to examine how districts using Xello experience and measure reported Return on Impact from college and career readiness infrastructure:

1. National Educator Survey, Winter 2026

357 K–12 district leaders and educators from across the United States, who all use Xello, participated in a national survey examining reported student outcomes, operational efficiency, family impact, and organizational value associated with college and career readiness initiatives.

2. Qualitative Interviews, Spring 2026

Hanover Research conducted 12 in-depth interviews with district leaders and educators representing elementary, middle, and high school environments using Xello across multiple states.

Participants represented counseling, student services, college and career readiness leadership, career and technical education, special education, and district administration.

3. Xello Platform Engagement Data, 2025–26 School Year

Xello platform engagement data from August 2025 through June 2026 provided additional context regarding scholarship engagement, student participation, and platform utilization patterns.

Together, these data sources provide both broad and in-depth perspectives regarding how districts experience Return on Impact from college and career readiness infrastructure.

SECTION 1

THE CCR MATURITY CHALLENGE

Why Some Districts Realize Greater Impact Than Others

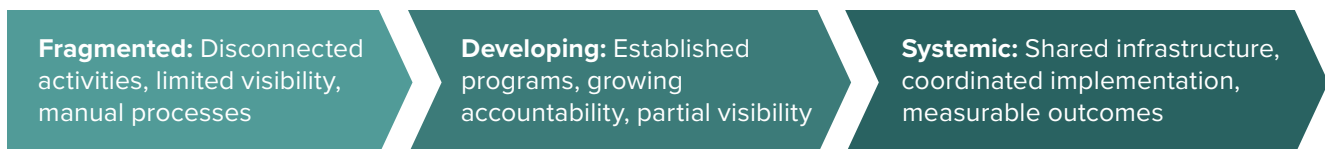
College and career readiness has become a strategic priority for U.S. school districts. Students are expected to graduate with clear plans, informed aspirations, and an understanding of postsecondary pathways. Yet the systems supporting those outcomes vary significantly across districts.

Survey responses and qualitative interviews collected for this study revealed a consistent pattern: Districts differed not only in the readiness activities offered, but in how those activities were organized, supported, measured, and sustained.

The findings suggest that districts operate within one of three stages of CCR maturity. The CCR maturity framework below is primarily derived from themes identified in qualitative interviews and reinforced by survey findings on implementation consistency, accountability, and visibility.

Three Stages of CCR Maturity

THE CCR MODEL OVER TIME



Stage 1: Fragmented

Readiness activities exist but operate independently. Career exploration, advising, course planning, and family engagement rely on disconnected processes, making continuity difficult and accountability limited.

In fragmented environments, readiness efforts often depend on individual educators rather than district systems. Students may have vastly different experiences based on the school they attend, the counselor they work with, or the opportunities available in their building.

Information is frequently stored in multiple locations, making it difficult to establish continuity from year to year or measure progress across the district.

Fragmented CCR Characteristics:

- Manual tracking processes
- Limited visibility into student progress
- Inconsistent implementation
- Readiness concentrated within counseling departments
- Student planning begins late
- Difficulty measuring outcomes

Stage 2: Developing

Districts have invested in readiness programming but continue to face challenges related to consistency, scale, and visibility.

Developing districts have often made significant progress. Career exploration opportunities exist, postsecondary planning activities are taking place, and district leaders recognize the importance of readiness. However, implementation remains uneven.

In some cases, programs may differ from building to building. In many, reporting requires manual effort and while student data may be available, it is not always accessible to the educators who need it most. As a result, districts can struggle to scale successful practices across all schools and student populations.

Developing CCR Characteristics:

- Established readiness initiatives
- Growing accountability expectations
- Partial visibility into student progress
- Variation across schools
- Limited longitudinal data
- Labor-intensive reporting

Stage 3: Systemic

Readiness functions as an organizational capability supported by common processes, shared data, and coordinated implementation.

Systemic districts approach readiness differently.

Career exploration, course planning, advising, family engagement, and accountability operate within a common framework. Student information follows learners across grade levels and educators share visibility into planning activities. Likewise, district leaders can monitor implementation and outcomes across schools. Crucially, responsibility for readiness extends beyond counseling departments and becomes part of the district's broader educational strategy.

Systemic CCR Characteristics:

- Shared student records
- Consistent implementation across grade levels
- Real-time visibility into student progress
- Data-informed decision-making
- Shared accountability
- Measurable readiness outcomes

Districts reporting the strongest outcomes in this study consistently exhibited characteristics associated with this stage of maturity.

From Activities to Infrastructure

One of the clearest findings from this research is that readiness outcomes strengthen when districts move beyond isolated activities and establish supporting CCR infrastructure. Interview participants frequently described a shift from managing individual programs to managing a coordinated readiness system.

Before the implementation of Xello, educators reported challenges such as:

- Tracking participation manually
- Repeating planning activities across grade levels
- Limited access to readiness data
- Inconsistent implementation
- Difficulty engaging families
- Limited district-wide visibility

After implementation, participants described a different operating environment: Student records followed learners across grade levels, counselors entered advising conversations with greater context, and teachers gained visibility into student planning. As well, administrators could monitor participation and progress across schools.

Several participants emphasized that the value of readiness infrastructure extends beyond efficiency. It creates continuity, ensuring that students no longer restart the planning process each year and educators no longer operate in isolation. At the same time, district leaders gain a clearer understanding of where implementation is succeeding and where additional support may be needed.

In short, programs create opportunities while infrastructure creates consistency.

The districts reporting the strongest Return on Impact were not necessarily offering more readiness activities than their peers. Instead, they had **established systems capable of connecting those activities into a coherent student experience.**

Source: Qualitative Interviews

Before CCR Infrastructure		After CCR Infrastructure
Manual tracking	→	Real-time visibility
Reactive advising	→	Data-informed advising
Disconnected activities	→	Coordinated planning
Multiple systems	→	Shared student records
Local reporting	→	District-wide accountability
Inconsistent implementation	→	System-wide continuity

Source: Qualitative Interviews

The Shift from Program Management to System Management

A recurring theme throughout the interviews was that the most effective district leaders move beyond viewing readiness as a collection of activities and instead approach it as an integrated system designed to improve graduate outcomes.

This distinction matters. While programs are often dependent on individual champions, systems are designed to survive staff transitions, leadership changes, and shifting priorities.

Districts operating at higher levels of maturity reported greater consistency in student experiences, stronger accountability structures, and more reliable access to readiness data.

Rather than asking whether readiness activities occurred, district leaders who adopted CCR systems were increasingly able to ask whether those activities were producing meaningful outcomes.

This transition, from program management to system management, represents one of the most important themes in the research and serves as the foundation for the findings presented throughout the remainder of this report.

SECTION 2

THE RETURN ON IMPACT FRAMEWORK

Measuring Value Beyond Traditional ROI

In K–12 education, some of the most important outcomes are difficult to capture through traditional financial measures alone. Improved student preparedness, increased staff capacity, stronger family engagement, expanded access to opportunity, and more effective organizational decision-making all create meaningful value for districts, yet many of these outcomes do not lend themselves to conventional return-on-investment calculations.

For that reason, this study defines ROI as **Return on Impact**.

Across the survey, interviews, and platform engagement data, four dimensions of impact emerged consistently:

Student Readiness

The degree to which students develop clearer goals, stronger self-awareness, greater confidence, and actionable postsecondary plans. Readiness outcomes focus on how students engage with planning, explore opportunities, and prepare for life after graduation.

Staff Capacity

The extent to which educators reduce administrative burden and increase the time available for direct student support. Capacity outcomes focus on operational efficiency, workflow improvement, reporting, advising, and the ability to scale support without increasing staffing levels.

Family Economic Empowerment

The ability of students and families to make more informed educational and financial decisions regarding postsecondary pathways. Family outcomes focus on affordability awareness, scholarship engagement, financial planning, and access to information that supports decision-making.

Districtwide Capability

The organizational outcomes associated with increased visibility, accountability, consistency, and strategic planning. Transformation outcomes focus on how districts coordinate readiness efforts, measure progress, and create sustainable systems that support long-term success.

Taken together, these four dimensions provide a framework for understanding how districts create value through coordinated college and career readiness systems. Importantly, these dimensions are inherently interconnected, with no single dimension operating independently.

For example, student outcomes improve when educators have more capacity. Similarly, family engagement strengthens when planning information becomes more accessible.

And likewise, district leaders make better decisions when implementation and outcomes are visible across schools and grade levels.

Thus, the findings suggest that Return on Impact is cumulative and that the greatest value emerges when districts create conditions that reinforce success across all four dimensions simultaneously.

THE RETURN ON IMPACT FRAMEWORK



Understanding Domain-Specific Findings

The remainder of this report examines each impact domain individually. While each section highlights a different dimension of Return on Impact, the findings should not be interpreted in isolation.

Interview participants consistently described these outcomes as interconnected:

- Students became more engaged because educators had greater visibility into their goals.
- Educators became more effective because administrative tasks required less time.
- Families became more involved because planning information became easier to access and understand.
- District leaders became more strategic because readiness data became more visible and actionable.

Together, these outcomes illustrate how college and career readiness infrastructure functions not simply as a planning tool, but as a system for supporting students, educators, families, and districts simultaneously.

SECTION 3

IMPACT DOMAIN ONE: STUDENT READINESS

Students Benefit When Planning Begins Earlier and Continues Longer

Across the surveys and interviews conducted for this study, student readiness emerged as the most consistently reported area of impact.

Largely due to systemic shifts in evaluating student readiness and CCR program performance, survey respondents and interview participants described a shift away from episodic planning conversations and toward a more continuous process of exploration, reflection, and goal-setting that begins well before high school graduation.

Nearly eight in ten educators surveyed who use Xello reported positive impacts on career plan completion (78%), while more than three-quarters report that students who use Xello demonstrate greater clarity regarding their strengths, interests, values, and future goals.

Participants also consistently emphasized that readiness develops over time. Many reported that students who begin exploring careers and educational pathways in elementary and middle school using Xello often arrive in high school with a stronger understanding of themselves and a clearer sense of direction.

It's no surprise then that districts reporting the strongest outcomes described readiness as an ongoing developmental process, rather than a process of simply asking students to make major postsecondary decisions during their final years of school.

“Many special needs students struggle to visualize their life after high school. Since everything is broken into manageable steps, they don’t have to do everything at once.” — *Special Education Transition Specialist, Large District (FL)*

Source: Qualitative Interviews

The findings suggest that students are **most successful when planning is introduced early, reinforced regularly, and connected to future opportunities in meaningful ways.**

Student Ownership of Postsecondary Planning

Another recurring theme throughout the interviews was student ownership. Educators working at schools that utilize Xello described students arriving at advising conversations with documented interests, saved career options, course plans, and developing postsecondary goals.

This student preparedness changes the nature of advising. Instead of directing planning conversations, educators increasingly facilitate and refine options students have already begun exploring. Several participants described moving from counselor-driven planning to student-driven planning.

“We went from zero to the expectation that everyone does a four-year plan. There’s been a significant measurable change.” — *High School Counselor, Rural District (KS)*

Source: Qualitative Interviews

Increasingly, students have become active participants in shaping their futures rather than passive recipients of information. Interview participants consistently described greater preparedness among students who use Xello when entering advising conversations, enabling educators to spend more time refining plans and less time establishing basic direction.

Several educators also noted that student engagement increases when planning activities feel personally relevant. Rather than completing requirements for compliance purposes, students are more likely to participate when they can connect activities directly to their own interests, aspirations, and goals.

Expanded Awareness of Postsecondary Pathways

Interview participants also emphasized the importance of helping students explore a broader range of opportunities. While students may be more aware of career options and high school course plans, they frequently enter planning conversations with limited awareness of related or evolving career pathways.

“Healthcare students know doctor and nurse. But when they can see related careers, that really expands their understanding of opportunities after high school.”
— *Advanced Learning Counselor, Large District (CO)*

Source: Qualitative Interviews

Exposure to career profiles, educational requirements, salary information, and day-in-the-life experiences often expands students’ understanding of potential futures. Participants reported particular value in the way that Xello presents college pathways, skilled trades, apprenticeships, military service, workforce entry, and career and technical education opportunities within the same planning environment.

Additionally, several educators noted that Xello increased engagement among students who previously struggled to see themselves reflected in traditional college-focused conversations. By exposing students to a wider range of possibilities, districts help ensure that planning conversations are based on exploration rather than assumptions.

These findings suggest that **readiness is strengthened when students can explore multiple pathways and connect those opportunities to their individual interests, strengths, and goals.**

Building Confidence Through Exploration

While planning outcomes are important, interview participants frequently emphasized another outcome that is often overlooked: confidence.

Students who understand their options, recognize their strengths, and can see a path forward often approach postsecondary decisions with greater certainty. Educators reported observing that students who use Xello demonstrate stronger self-advocacy, increased engagement in planning conversations, and greater willingness to explore opportunities outside their immediate experiences.

Several participants noted that students frequently discover interests and opportunities they had not previously considered:

“Students who were interested in video games looked up video game developer, saw a day in the life, and started to understand what that path might look like. In one lesson, you could see their confidence grow in a potential career.”
— *Elementary School Counselor, Mid-Sized District (MI)*

Source: Qualitative Interviews

For many districts, helping students build confidence is viewed as an essential component of readiness. A completed plan is valuable, but a student who understands why that plan matters may be even more valuable. Exploration experiences contribute not only to planning outcomes, but also to students’ confidence in navigating future decisions.

Readiness Before Graduation

Across both survey findings and interviews, educators consistently reported that adopting and integrating Xello enabled readiness gains before students left high school.

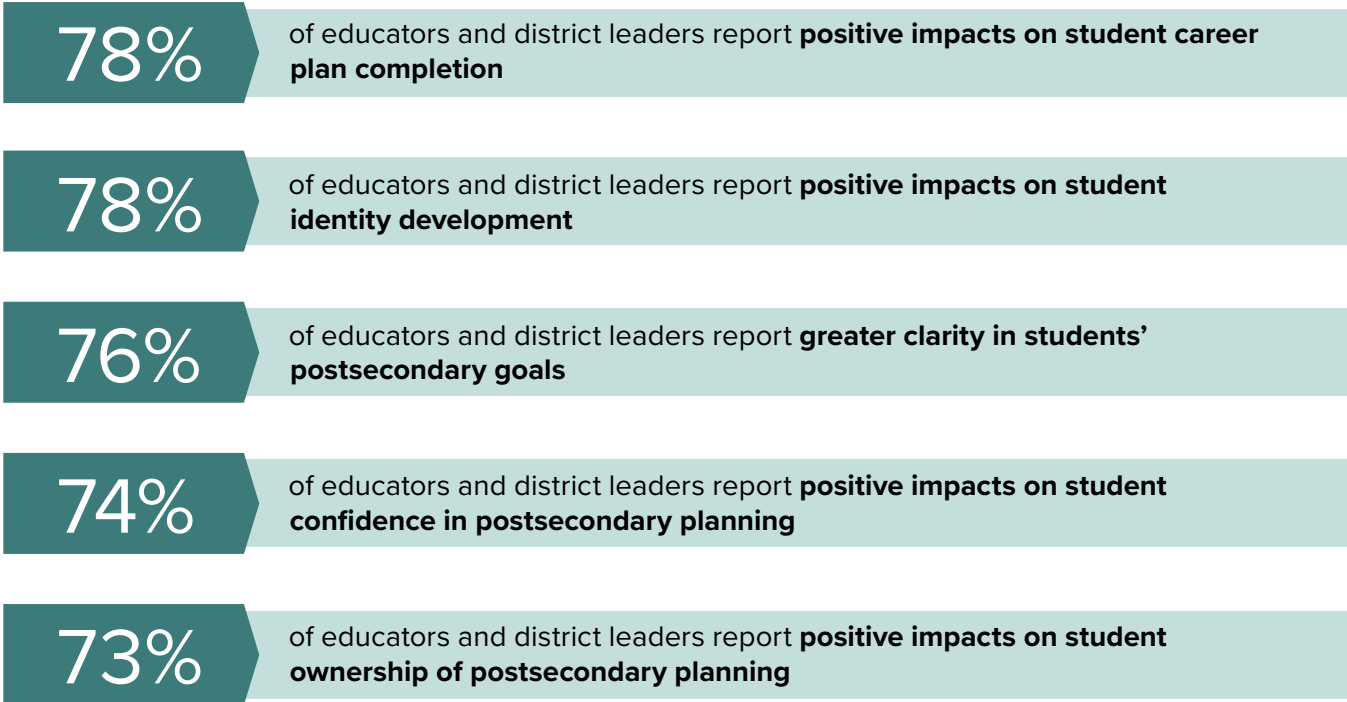
These outcomes include:

- Greater goal clarity
- Increased confidence regarding future plans
- Stronger understanding of personal interests and strengths
- More complete postsecondary plans
- Increased ownership of decision-making
- Greater awareness of available opportunities

This research does not attempt to measure long-term postsecondary outcomes after graduation. Instead, the findings indicate that educators consistently observe stronger indicators of readiness during students’ K–12 experiences when planning is supported through use of Xello.

This reinforces the finding that readiness should not be approached as a single event occurring near graduation. Rather, it is a developmental process that benefits from continuity, visibility, and sustained engagement over time.

EDUCATOR-REPORTED READINESS OUTCOMES AMONG XELLO USERS



Source: National Educator Survey of Xello Users

Key Finding

Student readiness appears strongest when planning is continuous, personalized, and embedded across grade levels rather than concentrated during the final years before graduation.

SECTION 4

IMPACT DOMAIN TWO: STAFF CAPACITY

Capacity Creation Is One of the Most Immediate Forms of Return on Impact

District leaders often evaluate new initiatives based on their ability to improve outcomes without requiring additional staffing.

Across both the survey and interviews, educators consistently identified increased capacity as one of the most immediate and tangible benefits of adopting Xello as their college and career readiness infrastructure. Specifically, participants reported spending less time on administrative tasks and more time supporting students.

Educators estimate an average **reduction of 33% in administrative workload** associated with workflows supported through their use of Xello.

District leaders estimate an average **reduction of 28% in administrative workload** associated with workflows supported through their use of Xello.

Source: National Educator Survey of Xello Users

Xello-driven efficiency gains were reported across advising, course planning, lesson tracking, reporting, and compliance-related activities. While these efficiencies may not always translate directly into budget reductions, they create opportunities to redirect staff time toward higher-value activities that directly support student success.

For many districts, this distinction is important. The greatest benefit is not necessarily doing less work, it is being able to spend more time doing the work that matters most for students.

Reclaiming Time for Student Support

The value of these efficiencies extends beyond operational convenience.

Time recovered from administrative tasks can be redirected toward advising, intervention, relationship-building, and individualized support. In interviews, counselors who use Xello described entering meetings with greater context regarding student interests and goals. Likewise, administrators described improved access to participation and completion data, while teachers described reduced preparation requirements through access to ready-made CCR curriculum resources.

Collectively, these efficiencies enable districts to increase the amount of support available to students without increasing staffing levels. Several participants described this shift as one of the most meaningful operational outcomes associated with implementing Xello.

One district leader noted that staff were able to spend less time collecting information and more time using information:

“Instead of spending time tracking down information, we can spend our time having better conversations with students.” — *High School Counselor, Mid-Sized District (KS)*

Source: Qualitative Interviews

This distinction emerged repeatedly throughout the interviews.

Improving Advising Efficiency

Interview participants frequently connected these efficiency gains to improved access to student information.

Rather than beginning advising conversations without context, counselors who leverage Xello are able to review student interests, goals, assessments, saved careers, course plans, and prior activities before meetings occur. Entering advisement conversations fully informed about student progress leads to more productive conversations.

More than half of educators reported improved efficiency in student advising using Xello.

Source: National Educator Survey of Xello Users

Several participants described Xello as enabling them to focus discussions on decision-making and next steps rather than information gathering. The result is a more personalized advising experience and a more efficient use of educator time.

As high student-to-counselor ratios continue to be a challenge for districts across the country, advising efficiency represents a meaningful operational benefit.

Course Planning and Real-Time Visibility

Course planning emerged as one of the most frequently cited operational benefits of using a CCR system across the interviews.

Participants described replacing paper-based requests, manual entry processes, and disconnected tracking systems with Xello’s centralized workflow that provides real-time visibility into student selections. Teachers, counselors, and administrators gained access to information simultaneously, reducing delays and improving decision-making. Several participants described improved forecasting, more accurate scheduling decisions, and fewer end-of-cycle corrections.

These efficiencies extended beyond scheduling itself. District leaders also reported that Xello enables earlier visibility into student plans, helping to improve staffing decisions, course offerings, and reporting processes.

While course planning may initially appear administrative in nature, participants consistently linked these efficiencies to broader organizational effectiveness.

Reporting and Accountability

Whether supporting graduation requirements, accountability initiatives, state reporting, or local strategic planning efforts, educators increasingly rely on data to demonstrate progress. At the same time, reporting requirements continue to expand for many districts, and participants frequently described reporting as one of the most time-intensive responsibilities prior to implementation.

Prior to adopting Xello, respondents reported that information often existed across multiple systems and required significant manual effort to compile. With centralized access to student planning data through Xello, many participants reported improvements in both efficiency and accuracy.

Specifically, district leaders described being able to answer questions more quickly, identify participation gaps more effectively, and monitor implementation across schools with greater confidence. Several participants directly connected improved reporting capabilities to stronger accountability.

Visibility enables action. Without access to reliable information, even well-designed initiatives can be difficult to evaluate and improve.



Source: National Educator Survey of Xello Users

Beyond Efficiency: Building Organizational Capacity

The most meaningful operational outcomes identified in this study extend beyond time savings.

The findings suggest that districts are not simply working to become more efficient: They are striving to increase their capacity to deliver readiness programming consistently and at scale. By leveraging Xello's centralized CCR platform, capacity benefits can be realised across all levels of education:

1. Educators gain access to better information.
2. Students receive more personalized support.
3. District leaders gain greater visibility into implementation.

Together, these outcomes enable districts to support more students without proportionally increasing administrative workload.

This distinction reflects a central theme of the research: Infrastructure does not eliminate work. Instead, infrastructure helps ensure that effort is directed toward activities that create the greatest value for students.

Key Finding

The most immediate operational return is not budget reduction, but increased capacity to support students.

SECTION 5

IMPACT DOMAIN THREE: FAMILY ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Better Information Supports Better Decisions

The financial implications of postsecondary decision-making continue to grow. Students and families must increasingly evaluate educational options alongside affordability, career outcomes, credential requirements, and long-term financial considerations.

Across the survey and interviews, educators consistently reported that students make more informed decisions when career exploration is connected to financial information.

Approximately two-thirds of educators report that **CCR infrastructure helps students align career interests with affordable postsecondary pathways.**

Source: National Educator Survey of Xello Users

Participants in districts using Xello described students as better prepared for stronger conversations regarding educational costs, financial aid, scholarships, and future planning. Rather than considering educational options in isolation, students who use Xello are increasingly able to evaluate pathways within the context of both personal goals and financial realities.

The findings suggest that access to relevant information helps students and families make decisions with greater confidence and clarity.

Connecting Aspirations to Affordability

One of the recurring themes across interviews was the importance of helping students understand the relationship between aspirations and affordability. Students often begin career exploration with limited awareness of the educational requirements, costs, and earning potential associated with different pathways.

Participants described how access to career and postsecondary information through Xello helped students evaluate options more holistically.

Rather than simply asking, “What do I want to be?”, students who use Xello increasingly ask:

- What education or training is required?
- What will that pathway cost?
- What financial aid opportunities exist?
- What are the potential outcomes?

Several educators described these conversations as particularly valuable for first-generation college-going students and families who may have less familiarity with postsecondary planning processes:

“When I first came here, students often defaulted to a local college without really understanding why. Now they’re making decisions based on their interests, goals, and what makes sense financially.” — *High School Counselor, Suburban District (KS)*

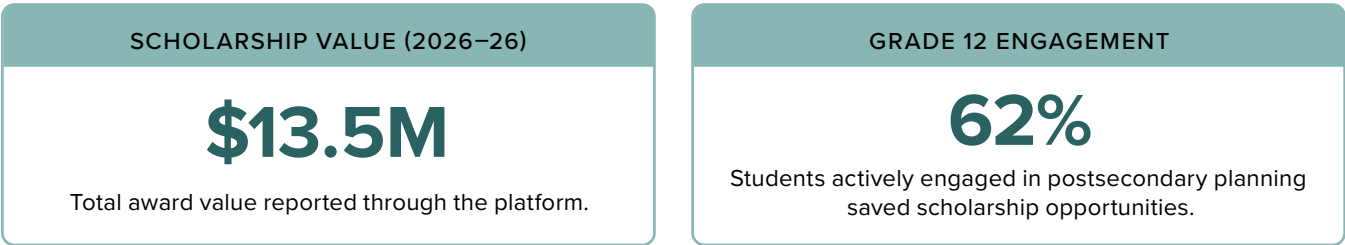
Source: Qualitative Interviews

By making information more accessible, Xello and districts help families engage in planning discussions earlier and with greater confidence.

Scholarship Awareness and Access

The most measurable evidence of family impact emerged through scholarship engagement.

Xello platform engagement data from the 2025–26 school year indicates substantial student interaction with scholarship opportunities:



Source: Platform Engagement Data (2025–26 School Year)

While scholarship outcomes vary considerably across individuals and communities, these findings suggest that centralized access to scholarship opportunities through Xello may increase awareness and engagement.

Several interview participants noted that scholarship discovery often depends on visibility as students cannot pursue opportunities they do not know exist. By providing centralized access to scholarship information, Xello helps reduce barriers to awareness and encourages students to explore opportunities that might otherwise remain undiscovered.

Family Engagement as a Force Multiplier

Every district represented in this study had access to family engagement tools through Xello, yet interview findings suggest that outcomes vary based on implementation practices.

Districts reporting the strongest family engagement often embedded planning tools into existing touchpoints such as student-led conferences, parent nights, course planning meetings, and advising conversations.

Participants consistently described family engagement as strongest when planning conversations were integrated into existing district practices rather than introduced as separate initiatives. Several interview participants noted that parents and guardians often become more engaged when they can access the same information students are using to explore careers, build plans, and evaluate opportunities.

“Once we switched the translation, the student was able to participate in the program in their home language, which happened to be Farsi. Our previous platform couldn’t do that.” — Elementary Counseling Supervisor, Large K–12 District (VA)

Source: Qualitative Interviews

This demonstrates that shared visibility creates shared ownership. When families understand student goals and planning activities, they are better positioned to support decision-making and reinforce readiness efforts outside of school.

The findings thus suggest that technology alone does not drive engagement. Rather, engagement appears strongest when districts intentionally incorporate families into the planning process.

Key Finding

Earlier planning and greater access to information help students and families make more informed educational and financial decisions.

SECTION 6

IMPACT DOMAIN FOUR: DISTRICTWIDE CAPABILITY

The Greatest Return on Impact Occurs at the System Level

Student outcomes matter. Operational efficiencies matter. Family engagement matters. Yet the most significant finding to emerge from this research may be the impact of CCR infrastructure at the organizational level.

Across interviews, district leaders consistently described a shift from managing readiness as a collection of programs to managing readiness as a system.

This distinction appeared repeatedly throughout the research. Before implementation, readiness activities often existed across multiple departments, grade levels, schools, and systems. This resulted in a host of inefficiencies and barriers, most notably:

1. Data was fragmented.
2. Accountability was difficult to establish.
3. Implementation varied from building to building.
4. Visibility into student progress was limited.

Following implementation of Xello, participants described increased consistency, stronger accountability, greater visibility, and more informed decision-making.

These outcomes represent a different category of value: Rather than improving a single process, districts described improvements in how readiness is coordinated, measured, and sustained across the organization.

Shared Accountability for Student Readiness

Historically, responsibility for readiness has often rested primarily with counselors. However, the findings suggest that districts reporting the strongest outcomes distribute ownership more broadly.

Nearly three-quarters of district leaders and educators report stronger accountability across grade levels.

Source: National Educator Survey of Xello Users

Interview participants who adopted Xello described readiness becoming a shared responsibility among counselors, teachers, administrators, and district leaders. Specifically, they noted that access to common information enables more stakeholders to participate in supporting student success. Several district leaders specifically described this shift as one of the most important outcomes associated with implementation.

When planning activities, student goals, and readiness indicators are visible across the organization, accountability becomes easier to establish and sustain. In parallel, readiness becomes something the district owns collectively rather than something individual educators manage independently.

Visibility Enables Better Decisions

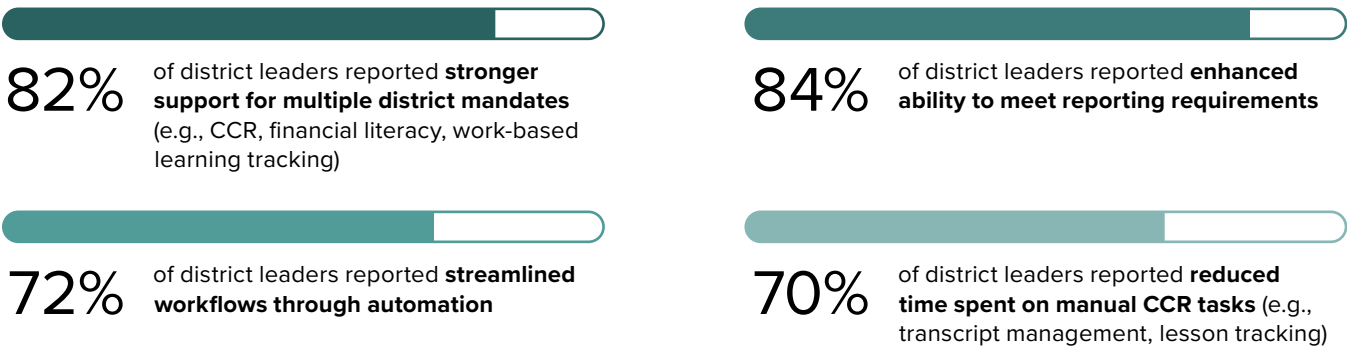
A recurring theme throughout the interviews was visibility. District leaders consistently described improved access to information through Xello as a catalyst for stronger decision-making.

Visibility allows districts to answer questions that were previously difficult to address:

- Which students have completed planning activities?
- Which schools are implementing programming consistently?
- Where are participation gaps emerging?
- Which student groups may require additional support?
- How are readiness initiatives progressing over time?

Several participants noted that the availability of data through the Xello platform changed conversations at both the school and district levels. Rather than relying primarily on anecdotal observations, leaders could use information to guide decisions and allocate resources more effectively.

The findings suggest that visibility in Xello is not simply a reporting benefit, it is also a strategic capability:



Source: National Educator Survey of Xello Users

Creating Continuity Across Grade Levels

One of the clearest differences between fragmented and systemic districts was continuity. Without continuity, readiness activities remain disconnected. With continuity, they become part of a developmental process that evolves over time.

In many districts, prior to implementing Xello, students historically repeated similar planning activities at different grade levels because information did not travel with them.

Interview participants described how persistent student records changed that experience:

- Planning activities completed in earlier grades became accessible later.
- Interests, goals, assessments, and plans accumulated over time.
- Students no longer needed to start over each year.
- Educators gained access to richer context.
- Planning conversations became more informed and more personalized.

Several district leaders described continuity as foundational to creating a true K–12 readiness strategy.

“We have students as early as middle school saving colleges they plan to attend. Counselors and college career specialists now have that information on hand to improve the advising they are providing. The support we give in ninth grade is ultimately going to be extremely impactful.”

— Senior Student Services Administrator, Large District (FL)

Source: Qualitative Interviews

Supporting Strategic Planning

District leaders increasingly face growing expectations to demonstrate CCR program outcomes in both the short- and long-term. Whether responding to board priorities, state requirements, strategic plans, or accountability frameworks, districts must be able to explain how readiness efforts contribute to broader goals.

Participants frequently described CCR infrastructure as supporting strategic planning efforts by providing access to consistent information and measurable indicators. In fact, several interview participants noted that implementation became easier to sustain when readiness goals could be connected to broader district priorities.

The ability to leverage Xello to measure participation, monitor progress, and demonstrate outcomes strengthened confidence among stakeholders and supported long-term planning efforts.

“Xello is literally on our strategic plan. We have metrics attached to it. Our school board sees data from Xello as evidence of CCR progress.”

— Coordinator of College and Career Counseling, Large District (FL)

Source: Qualitative Interviews

For many districts, readiness infrastructure became an important component of broader organizational decision-making.

From Initiative to Infrastructure

Perhaps the clearest theme throughout the research is that high-performing districts stop treating readiness as an initiative. Instead, they treat it as necessary infrastructure responsible for driving positive postgraduation outcomes.

The contrast between initiatives and infrastructure outlines why this shift leads to greater return on impact:

1. Initiatives are often temporary while infrastructure becomes embedded.
2. Initiatives can depend on individual champions whereas infrastructure supports continuity through staffing changes and leadership transitions.
3. Initiatives often operate independently while infrastructure connects people, processes, and information.

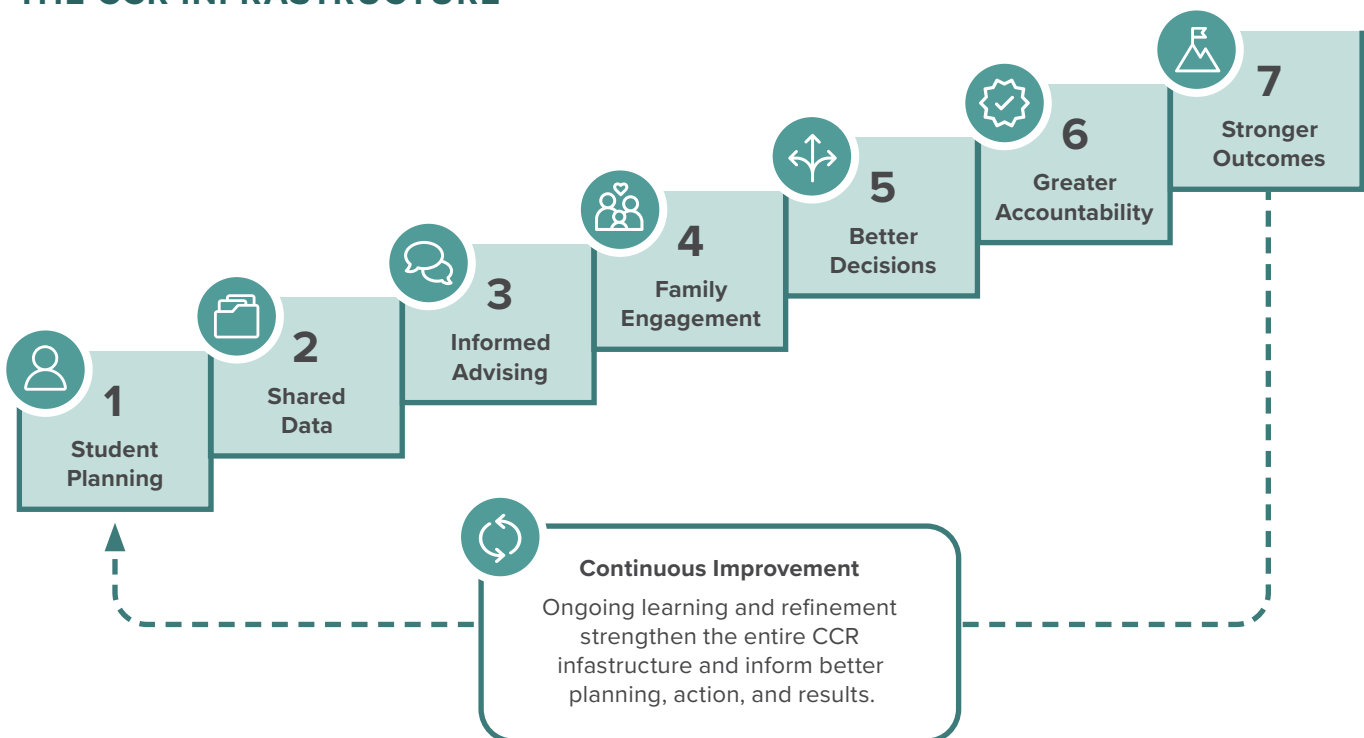
Districts reporting the strongest outcomes consistently described readiness as part of how the organization operates rather than simply another program requiring support.

“The answer is now just Xello. It’s all on Xello.”
 — College & Career Readiness Coordinator, Large District (FL)

Source: Qualitative Interviews

This shift, from initiative to infrastructure, represents the central finding of this study.

THE CCR INFRASTRUCTURE



The Impact of CCR Platform Technology Choice

Districtwide capability is influenced not only by the presence of readiness technology, but also by how effectively educators and leaders are able to use it in practice.

Many college and career readiness platforms offer seemingly similar foundational capabilities. However, implementation quality, usability, accessibility of information, and day-to-day user experience can influence whether or not a platform becomes embedded within district processes and supports long-term readiness goals.

To provide additional context, respondents with experience using another CCR platform were asked to compare their satisfaction with Xello:

82% of district leaders with experience using another CCR platform reported **greater satisfaction with Xello.**

74% of counselors with experience using another CCR platform reported **greater satisfaction with Xello.**

Source: National Educator Survey. Percentages represent respondents who indicated they've used another CCR platform.

While this study was not designed as a competitive evaluation, the findings suggest that experienced users perceive meaningful differences among platforms serving similar purposes. These perceptions may influence adoption, consistency of use, and the extent to which readiness initiatives become integrated across schools, grade levels, and stakeholder groups.

Key Finding

The greatest Return on Impact occurs when college and career readiness becomes institutional infrastructure rather than a collection of disconnected programs.

SECTION 7

CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH-IMPACT DISTRICTS

What Districts Reporting the Strongest Outcomes Do Differently

Although implementation approaches varied across districts, interview findings revealed several common characteristics among districts reporting the strongest outcomes.

These characteristics do not guarantee success. However, they appeared consistently among districts that reported meaningful improvements across multiple dimensions of Return on Impact.

1. Leadership Commitment

Successful implementations begin with leadership.

Districts reporting the strongest outcomes consistently described active support from district and building leaders.

“The difference between the two schools I worked at was night and day in how teachers viewed, perceived, and cared about college and career readiness.”
— Career & Technical Education Coordinator, Regional District (WI)

Source: Qualitative Interviews

Leadership established expectations, communicated priorities, and reinforced the importance of readiness efforts over time.

2. Dedicated Implementation Time

Participants emphasized the importance of providing staff with time to learn systems, integrate practices, and support adoption. Implementation was most successful when districts treated readiness as an ongoing process rather than a one-time launch.

3. Building-Level Ownership

High-impact districts distributed responsibility across schools and departments. Building-level champions played a critical role in supporting implementation and sustaining momentum.

4. Ongoing Professional Learning

Training did not end after implementation. Districts reporting the strongest outcomes described continuous learning opportunities that helped educators expand their use of readiness tools and practices.

5. A Deliberate K–12 Scope and Sequence

Successful districts viewed readiness as a developmental journey. Activities were intentionally aligned across grade levels, creating continuity and reducing duplication.

CONCLUSION

College and career readiness has become a defining challenge for K–12 education.

District leaders are expected to prepare students for increasingly complex postsecondary pathways while simultaneously addressing accountability requirements, staffing constraints, and growing expectations from families and communities.

The findings of this study suggest that the strongest outcomes emerge when readiness is approached as a system rather than a collection of activities.

Across survey responses, interviews, and platform engagement data, districts reporting the greatest Return on Impact consistently described a common pattern of perceived and observed outcomes:

1. Educators reported stronger student readiness when planning became continuous and personalized.
2. Staff capacity increased when administrative burdens decreased.
3. Families became more engaged when information became more accessible.
4. District leaders made more informed decisions when implementation and outcomes became visible.

Together, these outcomes contributed to a broader organizational shift.

- Readiness became measurable.
- Accountability became shared.
- Planning became continuous.
- Support became more scalable.

The districts represented in this study consistently identified Xello as a foundational component of that transformation.

Across respondent groups, **89% of counselors and 88% of district leaders reported satisfaction with Xello as their CCR platform.**

Source: National Educator Survey of Xello Users

The findings suggest that the future of college and career readiness will not be defined solely by the programs districts offer. It will instead be defined by the systems districts build to support those programs over time.

For district leaders seeking stronger readiness outcomes, the evidence points toward a consistent conclusion: **The greatest Return on Impact occurs when college and career readiness functions as infrastructure for the entire district.**

“You can have all your programs and services. But if you don’t have a tool and you’re not putting all this information from students into a system of some sort, it isn’t going to work.” — *Student Services Administrator, Urban District (WI)*

Source: Qualitative Interviews

Appendix A: Research Notes and Limitations

This study examines reported and observed outcomes among educators and district leaders using a unified college and career readiness platform as part of their readiness strategy.

Findings are based on three sources of evidence:

- A national survey of 357 K–12 educators and district leaders conducted during Winter 2026
- Twelve qualitative interviews with educators and district leaders conducted during Spring 2026
- Platform engagement data collected during the 2025–26 school year

The study was designed to examine participant experiences, implementation practices, and perceived outcomes associated with college and career readiness infrastructure.

As with all survey and interview-based research, findings reflect participant perceptions and reported experiences.

The study does not attempt to establish causal relationships between platform usage and student outcomes.

Instead, findings should be interpreted as evidence of reported and observed impacts among participating educators and district leaders.

Results may vary across districts based on factors including implementation practices, leadership support, staffing models, local priorities, student populations, and organizational context.

Throughout the report, survey findings are presented alongside qualitative interview data and platform engagement metrics to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how districts experience Return on Impact.

Appendix B: Qualitative Participant Profile

To protect participant confidentiality while maintaining methodological transparency, participant titles and organizational identifiers have been generalized. The qualitative portion of this study included educators and district leaders representing elementary, middle, and high school environments across multiple states and organizational contexts.

PARTICIPANT TYPE	ORGANIZATION CONTEXT	STATE
High School Counselor	Mid-sized suburban district	Kansas
Elementary Counseling Supervisor	Large K–12 district	Virginia
Career and Technical Education Coordinator	Regional district serving middle and high school students	Wisconsin
Student Services Administrator	Large urban district	Wisconsin
Special Education Transition Specialist	Large district	Florida
Business and Career Education Teacher	Mid-sized district	Kansas
Advanced Learning Counselor	Large district	Colorado
Elementary School Counselor	Mid-sized district	Michigan
College and Career Readiness Coordinator	Large district	Florida
Senior Student Services Administrator	Large district	Florida
High School Counselor	Suburban district	Kansas
High School Counselor	Rural district	Kansas

Collectively, participants represented perspectives spanning counseling, student services, career and technical education, special education transition planning, college and career readiness leadership, advanced learning programs, and district administration.

Interview findings were used throughout this report to provide context, implementation insights, and examples of how districts experience and operationalize college and career readiness infrastructure.

Appendix C: Data Sources

This study draws upon three primary data sources.

1. National Educator Survey of Xello Users, Winter 2026

A national survey of 357 K–12 educators and district leaders examining student readiness, staff capacity, family outcomes, organizational effectiveness, and overall Return on Impact associated with college and career readiness infrastructure.

2. Qualitative Interviews, Spring 2026

Twelve in-depth interviews with educators and district leaders representing elementary, middle, high school, and district-level roles across multiple states.

3. Platform Engagement Data, 2025–26 School Year

Platform engagement data collected from Xello representing activity from August 2025 to June 2026, including scholarship engagement, student participation, and utilization metrics.

These sources were analyzed collectively to identify recurring themes, implementation patterns, and reported outcomes associated with college and career readiness infrastructure.



About Hanover Research

Hanover Research is an independent research and analytics firm that partners with educational institutions to support data-informed decision-making, strategic planning, program evaluation, and organizational improvement.

For more than two decades, Hanover has worked alongside K–12 school districts, state and regional education agencies, colleges, universities, and education-focused organizations to address complex challenges related to student success, educational effectiveness, and institutional performance. Hanover’s education practice combines quantitative analysis, qualitative research, benchmarking, and applied evaluation methodologies to help leaders make informed decisions and measure outcomes.

In K–12 education, Hanover supports districts and education agencies in areas including strategic planning, program evaluation, student supports, college and career readiness, curriculum and instruction, operational planning, and student success initiatives. Hanover’s work helps educational leaders understand what is working, identify opportunities for improvement, and build systems that support positive outcomes for all students.

In higher education, Hanover partners with colleges and universities to strengthen student success, improve institutional effectiveness, evaluate academic programs, support enrollment and retention strategies, and inform long-term planning. Through rigorous research and analysis, Hanover helps institutions navigate changing student needs, workforce demands, and higher education market dynamics.

Across both sectors, Hanover’s approach is grounded in the belief that strong decisions require strong evidence. By combining research expertise with practical implementation insights, Hanover helps educational leaders translate information into action and strategy into measurable results.