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We all agree that registering students' course selections through Career Cruising is infinitely quicker. It's so easy to use and there is so much good programming behind it compared with the old data management system.

- Karen Sweeney, Counselor, Robertsdale High School

SUMMARY

Baldwin County Board of Education in Alabama has recently piloted Career Cruising's interactive course planning tool called ccPathfinder. In its first year of implementation, outcomes include:

- high school course registration 60% more efficient
- counselors reporting more time for meaningful student engagement
- students logging onto career guidance tools up to six times more often
- parent engagement increasing
- state mandated reporting generated with ease

RECOGNIZING OPPORTUNITY IN THE PLAN 2020 CHALLENGE

In 2012, Alabama State Board of Education introduced Plan 2020 to jumpstart career and college readiness and increase high school graduation overall. Plan 2020 mandates electronic portfolios, interest inventories and 4-year high school course plans for every student. Counselors are encouraged to work in collaborative partnerships with students, educators, and parents—as well as promote self direction and self-development in students. As a public school system, counselors in Baldwin County Board are also required to provide extensive reports on high school graduation outcomes for the state wide department of education. Julia Bryant, CTE Coordinator and the District Lead for ccPathfinder in Baldwin County, felt the above was a pretty tall order for counselors who were already swamped with a tedious high school course registration process. She was already using Career Cruising's interest

inventory to meet Career Tech course requirements, but noticed that students had no tool to connect their interest results with course registration. She recognized an opportunity to create a one-stop shop for all the students' career exploration and course planning requirements with ccPathfinder.

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I didn't find anyone else who had inventory and course selection,” says Bryant. “Career Cruising put all the dots together for students and it was all online...It takes a huge load off the counselors.”

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CCPATHFINDER SOLUTION: MEASURABLE RESULTS IN JUST ONE YEAR

Students More Engaged in 4-Year Course Planning

ccPathfinder enables paperless, 4-year course planning and career exploration on a secure online platform. Students are assigned one Career Cruising account that follows them through middle school and high school, safely storing all their research and planning efforts. Baldwin County schools are already showing as many as six times more logins to Career Cruising since upgrading to ccPathfinder.

In middle school, students begin their career exploration using our world-class Matchmaker interest inventory. They continue by investigating high school course options based on their interests or career pathways. ccPathfinder provides complete high school course descriptions online and provides feedback based on prior course selections. ccPathfinder also automatically tracks student course selections to make sure they fit diploma options and certification programs.

Problems are flagged instantly and successful pathways to graduation are highlighted.

"Students answer their own questions by clicking and exploring," says Julia Bryant. "One young lady was trying to pick a science class and when she clicked on the science pathway, she was able to read what they offered and make a selection. I thought that was an "aha" moment."

COURSE REGISTRATION 60% MORE EFFICIENT

Students are able to modify their course selections at any time without requiring a counselor to manually enter course codes for them. Students enter their course selections into ccPathfinder, and when your school is ready, all of the information is exported to your student information system, saving data entry time and eliminating mistakes.

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We used to start course registration at the end of January and we'd still be tying up loose ends in the first week of April," recalls Karen Sweeney, counselor at Robertsdale High. "This year we had students registered in three weeks... Now I'll have time for things like scholarship newsletters and more direct contact with the kids.”

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ON THE RISE

Baldwin County is already anecdotally reporting an increase in parents logging onto Career Cruising alongside students at home. Karen Sweeney at Robertsdale High attributes this to ccPathfinder's comprehensive and customizable environment.

"One stop shopping for Career Cruising was critical for parent involvement," says Sweeney. "I had created a website for my class with a lot of links to resources and now I can put all those links into Career Cruising."

Career Cruising makes it easy to upload everything from internet links, to letters of recommendation, to permission slips. Contacting individuals or sending mass emails to parents and students takes just a few simple clicks. And with the Parent Portal, parents are able to easily monitor multiple students' portfolios, give feedback, and join discussions with teachers and advisors.

ONLINE NAVIGATION A BREEZE

Karen Sweeney is currently a counselor at Robertsdale High School. She is approaching retirement and, over the course of her career, has pretty much "seen it all" in terms of course registration tools. Sweeney is quick to list reasons why ccPathfinder is her favorite.

Search Capacity

Some programs require complete and accurate names in order to complete a search, but ccPathfinder's smart search engine compensates for basic spelling errors.

Consistent Data Management System

Some programs identify courses inconsistently by either name or numerical code, but ccPathfinder's data organization is consistent and complete. Sweeney also enjoys customizing her data fields on ccPathfinder, which other programs do not always allow.

Speedy Navigation

Some programs are very slow because they still require a page refresh after each typed entry. Sweeney also describes entering a "circle of death" every time she tried to get from one page to another. In contrast, ccPathfinder's user-friendly look is supported by sophisticated programming that supports intuitive navigation and no tedious page-updates.

"[Career Cruising's] business model seems to be to try to build the best model you can for the end users," says Sweeney. "Technology is supposed to make all this information easier to use. Somehow that seems to have been lost in [other companies]."

SMART DATA MANAGEMENT STREAMLINES STATE REPORTING

Career Cruising's flexible data fields make it easy to meet state reporting requirements and anticipate students' needs.

When courses are registered through ccPathfinder, the program becomes a powerful database of enrollment, scheduling and graduate information that is already compatible with the statewide student information system, STI iNOW. In fact, our partnership with STI has allowed us to create a truly easy to use integration process. Career Cruising includes dozens of pre-formatted reports, but also allows custom data generation with ease.

"A lot of the state reporting criteria is data driven and it's really up to us to make sure it's submitted correctly and on time." says Frank Davis, Baldwin County Schools' Software Support Professional. "When fully implemented, Career Cruising takes a huge load off counselors."

IMPLEMENTATION INCLUDES OUTSTANDING CLIENT SUPPORT

In Baldwin County, implementing ccPathfinder was a challenge because during the process, Alabama began a course code conversion to keep all high school course codes consistent across the state. Julia Bryant led the ccPathfinder initiative for counselors even though it was outside of her official responsibilities as a career technology coordinator. She recalls feeling supported throughout the implementation process despite her hectic schedule at that time.

“It's a great comfort to know that the support is out there when you start this product," says Bryant. "Client support is knowledgeable, patient and kind. They take time to answer all of your questions, walking me through the tasks and helping me stay on track to get it to the counselors on time. **”**

Career Cruising makes sure that products are properly set up and operating with no problems. Frank Davis at Baldwin County School's Education Technology Services found the technical implementation easy.

“The integration part from a tech perspective is not hard to do," says Davis. "It wasn't a big hassle for me to get the data needed for the initial set up. If you had an apathetic support department, that would've stunk, but it's all been pretty good. **”**

FUTURE PLANS AND CONSTRUCTIVE REFLECTION

In its first year, ccPathfinder provided significant benefits at the three participating Baldwin County high schools and their associated middle schools. With the initial implementation process complete, ccPathfinder can simply plug into neighboring high schools and middle schools that are keen to experience Baldwin County's early success.

Julia Bryant took on ccPathfinder implementation all by herself because, in her words: "I did it for the kids." While she felt very supported by Career Cruising, she would have preferred more collaboration from her school district.

ccPathfinder requires a district-wide master list of course codes in order for the automated course registration tools to work. This was a significant undertaking for Bryant because: she is not part of the counseling department; a district master had never been put together for her county; many of the district-wide course codes were in the process of changing into state-wide course codes.

In hindsight, Bryant says implementation would have been much easier coming from the counseling department where staff are more familiar with the existing academic guide that lists codes and descriptions for every course approved to be taught in the county. However, now that the initial implementation is complete, the maintenance is minimal.