

From Frustration to Success: How SchoolLinks Has Transformed CCMR in Central Texas



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The Liberty Hill Independent School District sits 40 minutes northwest of Austin, Texas. It is a rapidly growing community that serves just under 9,000 PK-12 students. The district has made it a priority to ensure that all students are prepared for academic success, career readiness, and personal development through a comprehensive counseling program.

At Liberty Hill High School—one of two high schools in the district—lead counselor Patti Coulter and her team are at the forefront of this work. Guided by the district’s vision, the counseling team is dedicated to promoting student success by equipping students with the tools to become effective leaders in society. This includes fostering a growth mindset, teaching problem-solving skills, and providing individualized guidance so that every student can reach their ultimate potential.

Liberty Hill is often described as “a small town with a big heart.” Coulter explained that “As our district grows, one of the things we are most proud of is holding onto that small-town feeling—where everyone knows one another and new families quickly feel welcomed.” That same approach shapes the work of the counseling team. Counselors strive to know every student—not just by name, but by their individual strengths, challenges, and aspirations—and to provide the personalized guidance needed to help them succeed. SchoolLinks has become an essential partner in making that level of individualized support possible at scale.

Frustrations with Xello

When Coulter came to the district five years ago, they were utilizing Xello as their college, career, and military readiness (CCMR) platform. While students found some value for career exploration, it had many limitations and inconsistencies that prevented it from serving as a true, district-wide CCMR support tool. Xello’s course planning feature was especially problematic. Coulter explained that one of the major issues was its inability to seamlessly account for transfer credits from students who came from other districts. Even when transcripts accurately reflected completed courses, the system often failed to recognize them. This was particularly challenging in a high-growth district like Liberty Hill, which welcomes many new students each year.

Frustrations with Xello - cont'd

The result was misleading academic progression reports. Students might appear to be missing multiple years of English or math even when they were fully on track. For students, this meant they could not rely on the system to accurately show graduation readiness. For parents, it created unnecessary confusion and stress. Coulter noted, "They'd say, 'We came here on track. Why are we suddenly not on track anymore?'" And for counselors, the inaccuracies made it far more difficult to evaluate where students stood and to identify those who required targeted support.

Xello also lacked a meaningful CCMR component. This left Liberty Hill without a reliable way to capture and report the broader readiness indicators that were central to the district's goals. Instead, the counseling team resorted to tracking CCMR progress manually on a shared Google Sheet. This process was both time-consuming and highly vulnerable to human error. These challenges made clear that Liberty Hill needed a more robust, comprehensive solution.

SchoolLinks Offered "Everything We Needed in One Place"

Coulter first learned about SchoolLinks by chance at a convening of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) national conference. While waiting for a session to begin, attendees began comparing the different platforms they used. One participant mentioned SchoolLinks and shared "how developed it was and how it offered all of the things a counselor would need," she recalled. Coulter returned to Liberty Hill and asked if the district could explore the platform further. Doing their due diligence, the district also looked at Naviance and Cadonex. Once the team began their review, the choice quickly became clear: "SchoolLinks just met everything that we needed," Coulter said.

What stood out most about SchoolLinks was how user-friendly it is. While Naviance offered many of the same capabilities, SchoolLinks felt far more intuitive and student-friendly.

"We could see our kids not being afraid to use it," Coulter explained. For other platforms, students only logged in when they were told to because the systems were so cumbersome. With SchoolLinks, Liberty Hill students began using different components on their own, exploring college and career tools without constant prompting from adults.

Counselors especially value the range of integrated features: career surveys, a profile page where students can build resumes, a robust college application module, easy search tools, and comprehensive career planning resources. "SchoolLinks encompassed everything that we needed in one place," Coulter emphasized. Even more, the platform provided valuable real-time insights.

"When I open it every morning, I can see all the kids who have been on SchoolLinks and what they've been doing—favoriting colleges, taking assessments, looking at different careers. It's different every day, and it shows us that we have a lot of usage."

- Patti Coulter

For busy counselors, this was game-changing as students are empowered to engage deeply with their future goals, allowing counselors to spend more time on personalized support.

Facilitating One-on-One, Truly Personalized Four-Year Planning

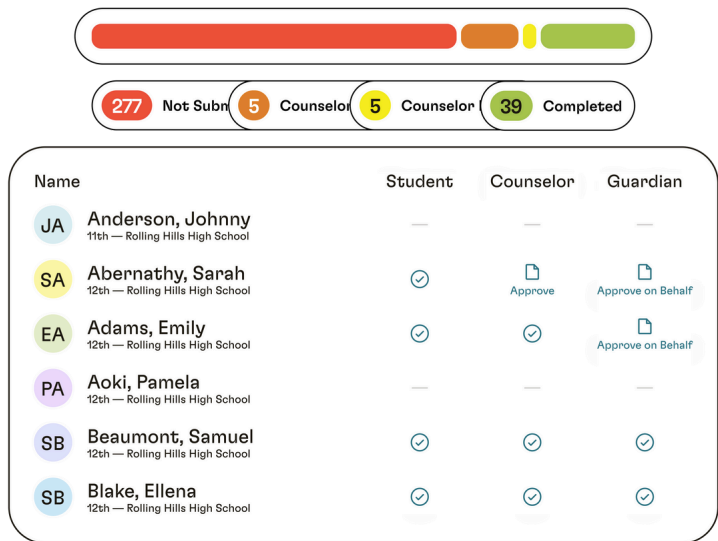
Since the implementation of SchoolLinks, Liberty Hill counselors have been able to regularly meet individually with every student (nearly 2,000 in total) ranging from incoming ninth graders to graduating seniors. These one-on-one meetings ensure that students receive consistent, personalized guidance as they move through high school. With SchoolLinks, counselors have access to a holistic picture of each student’s academic progress, personal interests, and postsecondary goals, allowing them to provide support for any pathway and meet students exactly where they are along their CCMR journey.

SchoolLinks also allows for support specific to a student’s postsecondary goals and where they are on the trajectory to meeting those goals. For seniors, these conversations often center on the college application process, reviewing progress and ensuring deadlines are met. For students who are still exploring, counselors can walk them through career assessments, college searches, and related planning tools. Coulter celebrated that within SchoolLinks, every piece is linked to another. If students are looking at a career they are interested in pursuing, it then shows what schooling is needed, and what institutions offer that credential or major.

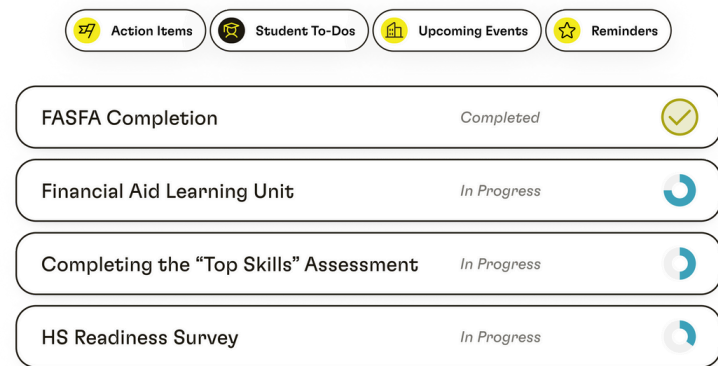
This shift has been transformative compared to the district’s previous experience with Xello. Where counselors once relied on brief, whole-group sessions, SchoolLinks now allows them to go deeper with students, helping them intentionally map out their four years of high school and make choices aligned with their long-term goals. The course planner has been especially impactful: students can visualize how their decisions fit into a complete pathway, rather than looking only at the year ahead. This prevents last-minute surprises in junior or senior year when students may want to add a class or take an off-period. By planning holistically, students are more likely to complete their chosen pathways and ensure their schedules reflect both graduation requirements and personal aspirations. “Because we’re having these one-on-one meetings, it helps us be more intentional,” Coulter said.

This personalized planning even begins before high school. Middle school students in Liberty Hill complete the Find Your Path Career Inventory in SchoolLinks, so by the time counselors meet with them to discuss ninth grade schedules, they already have a foundation in college and career exploration. Early engagement data confirms that even younger students are actively exploring their options, setting them up to enter high school with a clearer sense of direction.

2025-2026 Next Step Plan



Track student progress effortlessly!



Powerful Data to Track and Intervene

Increasing CCMR readiness has been a district improvement goal in Liberty Hill for years. SchoolLinks has made the frustrations and wasted time of the clunky, error-prone Google Sheet used to track critical metrics a thing of the past. Counselors now access robust, real-time reports that provide the data needed for goal setting and tracking.

“SchoolLinks allows us to look at each student easily and figure out where we can encourage them to meet that CCMR indicator,” Coulter explained. This may mean helping them define a pathway to an industry-based certification or encouraging a student to take a dual credit course.

This visibility into data and progress extends to parents, guardians, and the students themselves. Parents and guardians can log in to confirm that their student has planned all required courses for graduation and is on track to meet CCMR benchmarks with ease and with trust. “We can tell them their student is on track for graduation, but they can watch it happen,” Coulter said. As grades are posted, families see how progress impacts the overall plan in real time.

Students benefit from this transparency as well, particularly through the college applications tracker. Students can see when letters of recommendation are submitted, when schools have reviewed materials, and when each component of their application is complete. Coulter recalled meeting with a senior who felt overwhelmed by the Common App process until SchoolLinks displayed every task in one place. “When he could visualize everything on one screen, he had a clearer idea about the next steps.” With SchoolLinks, students can monitor their progress, stay organized, and move through the application process with clarity.

“Anyone Thinking About Going to SchoolLinks Should Just Do It!”

Coulter is unequivocal in her advice to other districts:

“Anyone who is thinking about going to SchoolLinks should just do it—go to SchoolLinks. It is going to change your counseling program. And it can change your whole campus.”

- Patti Coulter

For Liberty Hill, the greatest impact of SchoolLinks has been the ability to support students holistically—from middle school through graduation and beyond. With their robust set of tools, students who once said, “I have no idea what I want to do,” can now chart a clear and intentional path toward their postsecondary future. Coulter shared that the data-rich platform empowers students to see their own potential. By comparing admissions statistics, they discover that schools once thought out of reach are actually within grasp. For counselors, SchoolLinks has amplified and elevated their ability to guide students with both precision and support, providing a seamless pathway from exploration to decision-making.

And the impact does not stop at high school graduation. Alumni continue to have access to SchoolLinks with alumni accounts, which enables the user to request transcripts for a job, revisit their plans, or stay connected as they begin their college journeys. This past year, when Liberty Hill graduates started their first week of college, the district celebrated by sharing a post highlighting where students had enrolled. SchoolLinks is helping this “small town with a big heart” remain connected as students move into their next chapter.

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