

# Making CCMR Efforts More Effective and Efficient in Victoria, TX



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## Key Takeaways

- **SchoolLinks has significantly streamlined and strengthened CCMR efforts in Victoria ISD by allowing the district to consolidate multiple programs into a single, integrated platform and reducing administrative burdens on counselors and educators.**
- **The SchoolLinks course planning feature replaced an ineffective and cumbersome paper-based system with a process that has encouraged students to make more thoughtful choices, align course schedules with postsecondary goals, and has led to more accurate master schedules.**
- **Utilizing SchoolLinks has expanded family engagement by providing direct access to information, on-demand resources, and easier communication channels for CCMR efforts.**
- **The deployment of the platform resulted in cost savings by replacing multiple tools and led to strong educator buy-in due to its ease of use, time-saving benefits, and a "seamless" implementation process supported by excellent customer service.**

# Helping Students Find Their “AND”

Victoria Independent School District is situated on the southeastern coast of Texas. The district has a catchphrase that serves as a guiding principle for their college, career, and military readiness (CCMR) work: They aspire to help all of their 13,000 students “find their ‘AND.’” This philosophy reflects a commitment to ensuring that every student graduates not only with a diploma, but also with a clearly defined pathway—whether that be college, the military, or a career. In other words, the district wants to provide students with both the credentials and the direction they need to be successful beyond high school.

Brandi Henke has worked as the District Counseling Director for the past seven years and has been at the forefront of leading the district’s counselors in turning this vision into reality. As her district—like many across the country—faced mounting caseloads, increasing student needs, additional state and federal reporting requirements, and a rapidly evolving CCMR landscape, Henke recognized the need for a comprehensive platform. Her goal was to empower counselors to “work smarter, not harder” by providing a single, streamlined system that could meet all CCMR needs and requirements through an easy-to-use, integrated interface. Instead of using “four programs to do four different things” she sought “one program that does it all.” For Victoria ISD, that system was found in SchoolLinks.

**“One program  
that does it all.”**

- Brandi Henke



# Course Planning that is Accessible, Accurate, and Aligned to Students' Goals

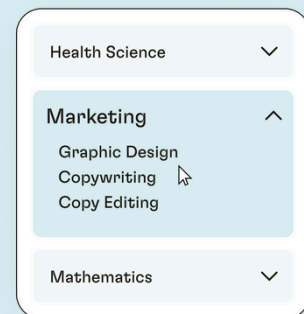
Finding a digital platform that integrated and digitized the course planning process was a high priority for the district. Like many districts, Victoria ISD had long used a paper-based course catalog that required annual editing, updating, and printing along with paper course selection sheets. These forms had to be copied and distributed and were, thus, always at-risk of being lost in transit between school, home, and back to the counselors. The district hoped for a modern, digital system that would eliminate the cumbersome and costly paper-based processes they had used in the past.

The SchoolLinks course planning feature did just that. Henke explained that the system has saved the district critical costs of money and time including the hours that both counselors and secretaries put in for course selection. Students were able to access guidance on course planning via the platform and enter their choices from home or school on their digital devices. This allowed them to make more thoughtful, active choices for their course schedules and see how those choices aligned with their postsecondary progress and goals.

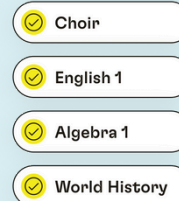
The district has seen huge operational and planning benefits for schools with this implementation, especially in the creation of master schedules that truly reflect student needs and align with their goals. Henke shared that since implementing SchoolLinks, “we’ve been able to begin with the most accurate schedules for students as possible.” This has reduced the number of course changes that are often needed at high rates at the beginning of the school year and instead meant that “kids start on day one with exactly what they need.”

## Helping students plan their future with confidence.

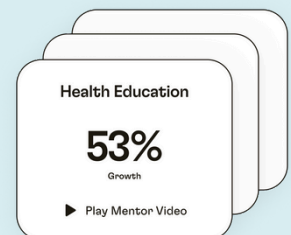
1 Explore career clusters & majors



2 Plan courses aligned with goals



3 Track progress & approvals



**“We’ve been able to begin with the most accurate schedules for students as possible.”**

- Brandi Henke

# SchooLinks Has Strengthened Family Engagement and Support

Educators realize that engaging parents and caregivers in the CCMR process is vital to student success. Doing so across an entire district, however, can be particularly challenging. Henke shared that SchooLinks has significantly strengthened the district’s ability to bring their parent community into these efforts. By providing information directly to parents and guardians through the platform, the district can ensure consistency of information across stakeholder groups and that families have what they need to support their child. This includes on-demand resources “at their fingertips” as well as simple ways to request help or additional guidance through the platform. The platform has also made it much easier for counselors to track state-mandated documentation and notifications that must be sent to families each year, reducing administrative burdens.

The district has especially seen a positive impact on family input in the course selection process. Henke explained that previously counselors would give information to students and rely on students to pass along that information to their families—often leading to gaps in communication. With SchooLinks, the district has been able to directly provide information about course planning to parents. This, coupled with the ability for students to complete course selection online from home, has fostered increased collaboration and communication between students and parents.

## Saving Costs While Providing a More Robust CCMR Program

In an effort to enable counselors—who carry large and often overwhelming caseloads—to provide personalized support for students, the district was excited that SchooLinks streamlined the many facets of counselors’ work into a single place. With the implementation, Victoria ISD was able to replace a patchwork system of many different tools and resources with a more efficient and cost-effective solution. In fact, Henke reported that along with the higher-quality of service for users and time savings, the district has actually saved money with the SchooLinks implementation by eliminating other contracts.

This, along with the platform’s integration with their student information system, has meant that counselors now have a single database to see everything they need to assess student progress at an individual and cohort level, without the time-intensive process of “digging around for information in many different places.” This improved data access means that counselors can explore options and refine plans in real-time which has resulted in higher quality service during student meetings and a reduced need to schedule follow-up meetings caused by inaccessible information or records.

Track progress instantly,  
no more paper slips

Name		Plan Status	Grad Plan	Alerts
JA	Anderson, Johnny 11th — Victoria East High School	Approved	Foundations	1
SA	Abernathy, Sarah 12th — Victoria East High School	Not Started	—	—
EA	Adams, Emily 12th — Victoria East High School	Not Submitted	—	3
PA	Aoki, Pamela 12th — Victoria East High School	Pending	Foundations	1
SB	Beaumont, Samuel 12th — Victoria East High School	Approved	—	—
SB	Bixby, Alisha 12th — Victoria East High School	✓	✓	✓



# “Seamless” Implementation that Resulted in Strong Educator Buy-In

Henke described the SchoolLinks implementation as “one of the most seamless transitions from multiple programs into one” that she had experienced in her more than two decades in education. This was the result of “impeccable” customer service with nearly immediate responses to questions or technical issues. SchoolLinks’s commitment to tailoring the platform to the district’s specific needs enabled the district to quickly streamline operations, automate key processes, and enhance overall efficiency across schools.

Henke noted that educators often suffer from new initiative fatigue and can feel overwhelmed by learning a new system or platform. However, with SchoolLinks, teachers found an intuitive user interface and quickly saw the value. The district introduced the platform to educators in small pieces aligned with tasks they had to complete in their role. This approach, paired with the platform’s ease of use, resulted in quickly generating buy-in: This “helped [teachers] to really get on board because it was easier than what they had been doing previously; it gave them more time back.” Because of this, Henke reflected, “that initial fear of a new program to learn dissipated quickly.”

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- Brandi Henke

## A Beacon for Other Districts

College, career, and military readiness has become a central priority for K–12 districts. The challenge of preparing students for life beyond high school in a way that is personalized to their unique profile of passions, strengths, preferences, and aspirations, however, has become increasingly more difficult and complex. At the same time, the stakes have never been higher, as students face a rapidly evolving postsecondary landscape that demands comprehensive planning and support.

Henke has had the privilege of sharing her experiences and presenting to other districts grappling with this monumental task. During a recent event, she was peppered with questions from other administrators about how Victoria ISD is managing course selection, completing and updating personalized graduation plans, and ensuring that all students are on track to meet graduation requirements. Her answer was clear: “SchoolLinks does all of these things for us in such an easy way.”

As she reflected on the impact SchoolLinks has had in transforming her district’s CCMR initiatives, she remarked: “I’ve been a counselor for 17 years. I was a teacher for 7 years before that. I feel like this program has been the most exciting thing—the most exciting undertaking—that I have had in terms of learning a new program.” Beyond lowering the bureaucratic burden for counselors and simplifying centralized information for students, SchoolLinks has improved the quality of time that students and counselors spend on college and career planning, expanded access to courses and pathways that students are excited about, and moved Victoria ISD closer to fulfilling its commitment to CCMR success. In short, SchoolLinks is helping to make sure all of Victoria’s students can thoughtfully and strategically explore, plan, and make decisions so that they find their “AND.”

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- Brandi Henke

# Request a Demo



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