



# Supporting Vail School District Arizona's ECAP Requirements with SchoolLinks



## Key Takeaways

1. SchoolLinks provides excellent support to districts, with responsive account managers and a willingness to meet specific needs.
2. The college application manager and scholarship tracking features of SchoolLinks have been game-changers for students and counselors.
3. When considering switching to SchoolLinks, it is important to gather a team of counselors and administrators to identify specific needs and goals.
4. SchoolLinks helps districts meet the state requirement for Education and Career Action Plans (ECAP) and streamlines the process for students.
5. The platform benefits both students and staff by providing easy access to information and resources.
6. Future goals for districts using SchoolLinks include expanding career exploration programs and creating a solid foundation for ECAP.

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## Executive Summary

During our discussion, Amanda Cook, the lead counselor at Vail School District, offers insights into her journey with SchoolLinks, emphasizing the positive impact of the platform. She underscores the transformative aspects of the solutions, notably its college application management and scholarship tracking capabilities. Amanda elaborates on the transition process to SchoolLinks and provides valuable advice for districts contemplating a similar switch. We delve into the Arizona-mandated Education and Career Action Plans (ECAP) requirement, exploring how SchoolLinks has streamlined this process. Amanda outlines the advantages of SchoolLinks for both students and staff, shedding light on her aspirations for the future.

# Introduction



## Meet Amanda Cook Lead Counselor at Vail School District

Amanda Cook, the lead counselor at Vail School District, is in charge of working and supporting all of counselors K-12 in all of the schools at Vail School District. Situated just south of Tucson, the Vail School District boasted a population of approximately 15,000 students and operated as a high school choice district, allowing middle schoolers the freedom to select their preferred high school.

Reflecting on her experience with implementing SchoolLinks, Amanda remarked on the incredible support she had received over the past five years, a testament to the seamless assistance provided by her dedicated Customer Success Manager (CSM). "I can email or call our CSM, and she is on it and fixes whatever I need," Amanda noted. "She is my go-to with whatever it is. If not, she introduces me to a new person on her team that can help support me if it's something specific."

When asked about the standout features of SchoolLinks, Amanda highlighted the game-changing aspects that greatly benefited both students and the community. "I think the biggest game changer is the college application manager and the ability for students and counselors to manage scholarships," she said. With these features, counselors could efficiently guide students through the college application journey, from exploring potential colleges to navigating the application process step by step. "It just brings it all in-house and our counselors can really truly support our students in their college process," Amanda emphasized. Additionally, SchoolLinks facilitated tracking FAFSA completion, aligning with the state's CCRI data requirements and ensuring comprehensive support for students pursuing higher education. In essence, Amanda's expressed her appreciation for how SchoolLinks has helped painted a empowered educators, where counselors could focus on providing personalized guidance and support to students, ultimately enhancing their college and career readiness.

# Switching to SchoolLinks

Amanda delved into the rationale behind the districts decision to transition to SchoolLinks, shedding light on the shortcomings of their previous system, AzCIS. "So we used the state system, AzCIS. To be honest, it wasn't the most user friendly system," she explained. Amanda highlighted various issues they encountered, including difficulties in tracking student data and cumbersome login processes. "It didn't track students' data as far as the ability to export for what we needed it. Students' information to get in was hard to track and login information was hard to use."

Recognizing the need for a more efficient solution, Amanda recounted how the prospect of switching systems garnered unanimous support from the counseling team. "And so when we were told that we had the possibility of switching, all of the counselors were on board 100% with exploring what was out there," she emphasized. Despite the necessary bureaucratic steps, such as going through the Request for Purchase (RFP) process, Amanda and her colleagues were eager to explore alternative platforms. "So we explored two or three other platforms and then ended up choosing SchoolLinks because it met all of our identified target goals." One of the primary purposes for choosing SchoolLinks was the ability to complete the Arizona mandated ECAP requirements.

## Education and Career Action Plan (ECAP)

Arizona's ECAP is a statewide initiative designed to empower students in their educational and career pursuits. Implemented as a requirement by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), the ECAP serves as a roadmap for students to navigate their academic and career pathways effectively.

The ECAP aims to support students in developing personalized plans that align with their interests, strengths, and goals for post-secondary education and career readiness. The ECAP consists of various components, including academic planning, career exploration, and post-secondary preparation.

Arizona mandates that all students in grades 9-12 create and maintain an ECAP as part of their graduation requirements. Schools are responsible for providing resources and support to ensure students fulfill this mandate. ECAP provides numerous benefits to students, including increased self-awareness, improved academic performance, enhanced career exploration opportunities, and better preparation for post-secondary education and workforce entry.

SchoolLinks, an online platform used by many districts in Arizona, facilitates the implementation of ECAP by providing tools for academic planning, career exploration, college application management, scholarship tracking, and FAFSA completion tracking. The platform streamlines the ECAP process for both students and educators, ensuring comprehensive support for students' educational and career goals.

# Process of ECAP Implementation

When asked about the specifics of the state requirement for ECAP, Amanda provided insightful details.

**"It's a four-year plan that students really explore throughout their time in high school that has them set goals about academics, their career, their extracurricular, and then their post-secondary," she explained.**

Within this framework, students are encouraged to delineate their aspirations across various domains, including academics, career aspirations, extracurricular activities, and post-secondary plans.

Amanda emphasized the importance of comprehensive planning, guiding students not only in setting academic and career goals but also in documenting their extracurricular activities akin to a resume. "And within that, the idea is to really explore what they want to do during their time in high school as far as academics, and then really teach them to document their

extracurricular activities onto something like a resume," she elaborated.

Moreover, the ECAP aims to ensure that students are equipped with a plan tailored to their individual aspirations, whether it involves pursuing higher education, entering the workforce, or exploring career pathways. "It's not always college, but it may be college and career. It also may be going into the workforce, but really making sure that all of our students, when they graduate high school, have some sort of plan that helps them to achieve whatever their goal is after graduation," Amanda emphasized.

Reflecting on the pre-SchoolLinks era, Amanda highlighted the disparities in ECAP implementation across schools, noting inconsistencies in processes and outcomes. "Prior to SchoolLinks, it was very individualized by school and the processes across the schools looked very different and some were robust and some were just barely meeting needs, but it was very sporadic as far as meeting the needs of the state," she explained.

# Using SchoolLinks for ECAP

Amanda proceeded to share the benefits of utilizing SchoolLinks for ECAP, emphasizing the platform's ability to strike a balance between district-wide standardization and school-level customization.

**"The one thing that we really appreciated with SchoolLinks is it set or it allowed us to set a district-wide scope and sequence that said here are the minimum targets that we need to meet that meets the state requirement for the ECAP," she noted, highlighting the platform's role in establishing essential benchmarks aligned with state mandates.**

In addition to meeting state requirements, SchoolLinks offered flexibility for schools to tailor their approaches to ECAP implementation. "In addition to that, it also allows our schools to also maintain their uniqueness and how they support their

students," Amanda explained. "So some of our schools go really in depth because they have the ability to and some of the schools use it in a different method in a variety of ways and so it allows for that customization in addition to meeting the minimum."

Amanda also noted SchoolLinks' role in providing clarity regarding the outcome tracking of the ECAP process. "SchoolLinks really helped us to understand what the end product looks like," she remarked. Each student's portfolio within SchoolLinks served as the culmination of their activities, effectively representing their ECAP plan. Amanda detailed the streamlined process of uploading these portfolios to the state system to ensure compliance with ECAP requirements. "As the person that uploads it to the state system, I just go in and select a student. I download their personalized plan portfolio and then I black out all of their personal identification information," she explained. "And then I also download our scope and sequence, and then I upload that to the state system, and that satisfies our compliance with ECAP."

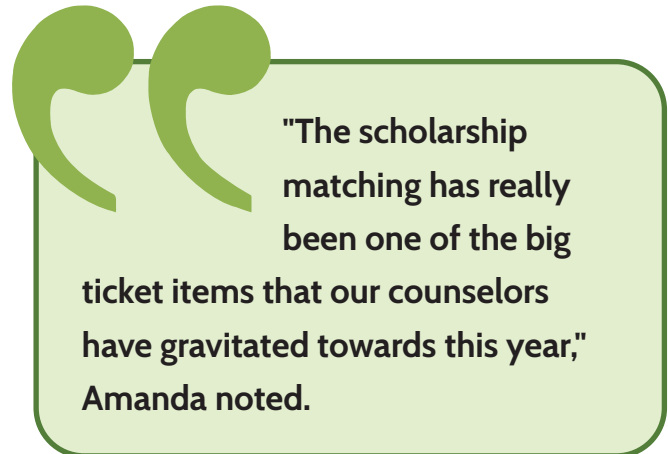
# Benefits for Students

Amanda discussed the tangible benefits that SchoolLinks had brought to students within the Vail School District, emphasizing the platform's role in enhancing communication, promoting awareness, and facilitating personalized support.

Amanda highlighted the platform's versatility in communication, allowing counselors to reach out to students in various ways to provide valuable information and resources. "I have counselors at sites that send out information on college rep visits or information on when the military recruiters are in or information on college nights that are here within the Tucson area," she explained. This proactive approach aimed to raise awareness among students and their families about the plethora of opportunities available to them beyond high school.

Within the SchoolLinks system itself, Amanda noted the ability to upload school-specific documents tailored to support the unique needs of each school, further enriching the resource pool available to students. Additionally, the platform leveraged assessments to guide students towards suitable pathways and scholarships. The scholarship matching

feature emerged as a significant asset for counselors, allowing them to identify students eligible for specific scholarships and provide targeted support.



By leveraging SchoolLinks' capabilities, counselors could streamline the scholarship application process and ensure that eligible students received timely support and guidance.

Moreover, SchoolLinks facilitated direct communication from college representatives, enabling students to access valuable information about college opportunities and resources. "Our reps can also post information to SchoolLinks that students can specifically see and so it really just brings the awareness to the whole school which has been really awesome," Amanda emphasized.

# Benefits for Staff

Amanda expressed her profound appreciation for the benefits that SchoolLinks brought to staff members within the Vail School District, highlighting its role in streamlining processes and enhancing accessibility.

From a district-level perspective, SchoolLinks provided a centralized platform for disseminating important information and resources, relieving staff members of the burden of individual communication efforts. "I think our staff really appreciate that from a district level, I can put in district things so that way they don't have to," Amanda remarked. This centralized approach ensured consistency and efficiency in communication.

At the site level, SchoolLinks empowered staff to input site-specific events and initiatives, further streamlining processes and ensuring that relevant information was

readily accessible to students and their families. "And then from a site level, they can input different site specific events that help to streamline processes, whether it's registration, whether it's college rep visits, military rep visits, college event nights, elective fairs, everything like that is just kind of housed in one area," Amanda explained.

This consolidation of information within SchoolLinks not only simplified access for staff but also improved accessibility for students and their families, ensuring that they were well-informed about various events and opportunities.

**"That just makes it easily accessible by all of our students and their families," Amanda emphasized.**

# Advice for other Districts & Future Goals

As our conversation drew to a close, Amanda offered valuable advice for districts considering the implementation of SchoolLinks while also outlining future goals for the Vail School District's utilization of the platform.

Reflecting on her experience, Amanda emphasized the importance of collaboration and strategic planning when selecting an educational platform like SchoolLinks. "One of the pieces of advice I would give is to bring a team together of counselors and administrators from across all of your high school sites that will be using it and come up with what is it that you want the system to be able to do for you," she advised. By involving stakeholders from various levels, the district could ensure that their chosen solution met their specific needs rather than being swayed solely by aesthetics. "That's something that we did and it really helped us narrow down which of the products that are out there would meet our needs versus which just looks shiny and pretty," Amanda explained.

Furthermore, Amanda highlighted the importance of ongoing communication and collaboration with SchoolLinks to maximize the platform's potential. "We haven't been afraid to ask that of SchoolLinks.

And literally every single time we say, can it do this? They say, yes. And that's one thing that we've loved about it," she noted, underscoring the platform's responsiveness to user feedback and requests.

Looking towards the future, Amanda shared the Vail School District's plans to expand SchoolLinks implementation to the middle school level to enhance career exploration opportunities for students. "We actually just implemented SchoolLinks in our middle school level as well to help with that career exploration," she revealed. By introducing students to career exploration early on, the district aimed to provide a solid foundation that would seamlessly transition into the ECAP process in high school. "We're hoping to grow that over the next year to two years to really have a solid foundation for career exploration at the middle school," Amanda explained.

Ultimately, Amanda's insights highlighted the importance of strategic planning, collaboration, and ongoing communication in maximizing the benefits of educational platforms like SchoolLinks. By leveraging these principles, districts could empower students to explore their interests, set goals, and navigate their educational and career pathways effectively.



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