

St. Augustine Preparatory Academy

# Ditching Naviance For Personalized and Engaging College & Career Exploration

Deploying SchoolLinks to Help Low-Income and First-Generation College Students Find the Best Post-Secondary Fit to Promote Long-Term Success



Milwaukee

Wisconsin



1.5K

Students



1

Schools



>1

Year with SchoolLinks

## The Problem:

St. Augustine Preparatory Academy was unsatisfied with their prior CCR platform, Naviance, because it was not adequately supporting an effective college and career exploration and planning process.

## The Process:

The school implemented the robust, engaging, student-centered platform, SchoolLinks, to personalize and deepen the career and college exploration and planning process for students and expand capacity of staff.

## The Results:

Students immediately engaged with the platform, which has allowed them to make much more thoughtful and meaningful postsecondary plans based on the alignment with their preferences, interests, strengths, and needs.

# The Problem

## Naviance Did Not Support Effective College and Career Exploration

St. Augustine Preparatory Academy is a K4-12 school on the southside of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The school opened in 2017 and currently serves about 1,500 students across PK4-12th grades. A large majority of the school's students—84.8%—are economically disadvantaged and over 90% of students are from Hispanic backgrounds. The school's mission statement describes that "our graduates will go on to achieve their highest potential and make our city, and ultimately the world, a better place." Postsecondary aspirations and success are fundamentally tied to the core values and philosophies of the school community.

As a critical part of the team responsible for ensuring that St. Augustine Academy's students can transform their dreams into post-secondary realities, Alison Jacobsmeier serves as Director of College Advising and Alumni Engagement. The primary goal of her role is to connect students and families to opportunities and resources that promote not only the pursuit of best fit post-secondary pathways but also persistence through college and entry-level careers. As an initial step when she was new to her role, Jacobsmeier took stock of the resources the school had in place to support this goal.

### The Key Concerns

- 1** The team shared that the Naviance platform did not sufficiently personalize the post-secondary exploration process.
- 2** Educators described frustrations that the system did not support them to efficiently and cohesively manage the college application process for their students.
- 3** Students, parents, & educators described the system as not being engaging for users, leaving the resources it did provide unused.
- 4** Partner schools voiced similar complaints and issues which told them they needed a different solution for their CCR approach.

# The Process

## Finding a Student-Centered Platform that Could Personalize Experiences for Students and Amplify Capacity

The St. Augustine Prep team recognized that it was critical to find a new platform that would better serve their students, families, and educators. This was especially important given that half of the school's population includes first generation college-going students who could not easily rely on their family's experience to guide them through the college planning and application process.

As the team searched for what other college and career readiness platforms might meet their needs, they came upon SchoolLinks and were impressed with the diversity of tools, resources, and capabilities that SchoolLinks offers to students, families, and counselors. It was immediately evident that SchoolLinks provided a student-centered user experience that was engaging for students. Jacobsmeier even explained that the interface was visually appealing in a way that made it inviting for students to explore and use. The St. Augustine Prep team was also impressed by how many of their processes could be managed and automated with the SchoolLinks platform—freeing them up to focus their time and energy on directly supporting students.

During the process of considering SchoolLinks, Jacobsmeier sought feedback from the lived experiences of other schools and districts who have implemented SchoolLinks. She was very impressed by how each person she spoke with was “totally bought in and really excited to share how [SchoolLinks] transformed their work.” She also had an ongoing dialogue with the SchoolLinks team to ensure that it was the right fit to meet the specific needs of St. Augustine Prep. Hearing about the success of SchoolLinks in other schools and districts, and clearly seeing the incredible benefits its features could have for the students, families, and educators of St. Augustine, Jacobsmeier was excited to unleash the power of SchoolLinks in her school community.



# The Result

## Personalized Approach Ensured Student Interests, Preferences, and Strengths Were Properly Mapped

The initial implementation of SchoolLinks required a tight turnaround as the St. Augustine Prep team was eager to get students using the platform as soon as possible. Jacobsmeier was highly complimentary of the personalized and on-demand support the school received from the SchoolLinks team to facilitate a smooth and seamless implementation. She shared that any question that arose received a response within 24 hours and very much appreciated the team of former educators at SchoolLinks who deeply understood the practical challenges of school operations and could draw on their experience to support the St. Augustine Prep community. And counselors were quick to utilize the SchoolLinks capabilities that track where students are in the college and career planning process and provide useful data to guide additional support.

Upon deployment, students at St. Augustine Prep readily engaged with the SchoolLinks platform. School staff immediately saw benefits in how students were exploring post-secondary pathways. Educators reported that the SchoolLinks platform prompted middle school students to think more deeply about their own strengths and interests and how those mapped them onto potential careers, some of which they did not previously know existed. These features in SchoolLinks truly expanded what these students saw as possible futures and helped them understand the requisite steps to get there.

**“[SchoolLinks] is really helping students to think more closely about that best fit piece—that we’re really focused on... Kids are really able to articulate why they are selecting a particular school or why they are selecting a particular major, and we are very confident that, long-term, this will support higher persistence rates for our students, over 50% of whom are first generation college-going students.”**



**Allison Jacobsmeier**

Director of College Advising and Alumni Engagement



# The Result

## Personalized Approach Ensured Student Interests, Preferences, and Strengths Were Properly Mapped (Cont.)

The educators at St. Augustine Preparatory Academy believe that having this capability – for students to start with their specific interests, strengths, and preferences and connect to a potential career or area to pursue as the foundation for the college and career planning process—will transform the postsecondary success of their students. Jacobsmeier explained, “[SchoolLinks] is really helping students to think more closely about that best fit piece—that we’re really focused on... Kids are really able to articulate why they are selecting a particular school or why they are selecting a particular major, and we are very confident that, long-term, this will support higher persistence rates for our students, over 50% of whom are first generation college-going students.” She summed up the impact this is having on her students as “transformational.”

### Key Takeaways



Educators reported that the SchoolLinks platform **prompted students to think more deeply** about their own strengths and interests and how those mapped them onto potential careers.



SchoolLinks has also allowed St. Augustine to **build a more robust alumni network** that will elevate the connections and role models for the student body going forward.



Counselors have appreciated the SchoolLinks features that **automate their time-consuming tasks**, increasing their capacity for more meaningful student support.



All the educators at the school are thrilled to see students expanding the exploration process, mapping goals onto productive next steps, and **forging a post-secondary path that is personalized.**



A formal survey of students about their experience with SchoolLinks and **the response was overwhelmingly positive**—showing the tremendous value they are seeing in the depth and breadth of the offerings.

# Summary

In reflecting on her experience, Jacobsmeier explained that **“it is critical to make sure the systems you have in place are setting you up for success.”** SchoolLinks has become a vital part of St. Augustine’s college and career readiness ecosystem. The school went into this process with a clear intention and articulated objective to find a platform that would reshape what is possible for St. Augustine students, and they found it in SchoolLinks. This has been in stark contrast to their previous experience with Naviance.

With the success they’ve seen in student engagement, It is clear that their investment in SchoolLinks is an investment in their students’ ability to thrive well beyond their high school graduation.

## A note from SchoolLinks

Supporting a wide range of district initiatives and complying with legislation changes doesn’t have to be daunting. See for yourself with a personalized demo of SchoolLinks’ modern platform and tell us how we can help you meet your district’s goals.

Watch the video on this  
case study



Request a demo of  
SchoolLinks

