

Each Child On Track Success Story



Introduction

What does it take to ensure that all students, including students with disabilities, have the support and resources they need to graduate from high school with a regular diploma? Across Ohio, students with disabilities continue to graduate at lower rates than their peers. Data from the last 2 years place Ohio within the lowest performing group of states on graduation and dropout rates for students with disabilities. Ohio's percentage of students with disabilities who graduated with a regular high school diploma in 2021–22 was 58%. Given the need to improve graduation rates for students with disabilities, Ohio has begun implementing Each Child On Track, a system-wide effort to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

EACH CHILD ON TRACK

Ohio's State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), Each Child On Track, builds the capacity of regional systems of support to assist districts with implementing an early warning system to identify high school students with disabilities who are not on track to graduate and provide universal, targeted, and intensive supports in the areas of attendance, academics, and behavior. Each Child On Track is implemented through Ohio's state support teams (SSTs). SSTs work with district leadership teams (DLTs) to embed Each Child On Track in the Ohio Improvement Process and support implementation at the building level.

An effective strategy for increasing graduation rates is to implement an early warning system to identify students at risk of dropping out and then provide interventions to support those students. Implementation of an early warning system relies on team-based leadership and processes to collect, manage, and use data for decision-making at both the student and system levels. Many districts and schools face challenges with collecting and using data to make informed decisions about how to best support students. This Success Story highlights the work that one district is doing to build the capacity and infrastructure needed to implement an early warning system and better support students with disabilities to remain in school and graduate with a regular diploma.

DISTRICT CONTEXT

This district, located in eastern Ohio, has one high school serving students in Grades 9–12. According to the [2013 School Districts Typology](#), this district is classified as rural with high student poverty and a small student population:

- Students (Grades 9–12): 225
- Students with disabilities (Grades 9–12): 41
- English learners (Grades 9–12): 0
- Students economically disadvantaged (Grades 9–12): 58
- Racial makeup of school (Grades 7–12): White (156), Black (<10), Latino (<10), Asian (<10), Native American (0), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (0), Multiracial (<10)
- Percentage of students with disabilities graduating with a regular diploma in 2020–21: 66%
- Roles represented on the DLT: superintendent, director of curriculum and special education, middle school/high school principal, math teacher, intervention specialist, English Language Arts teacher, school counselor, Education Management Information System (EMIS) coordinator, career and technical center contact

Note. Data are from Ohio Department of Education websites (<https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Data/Frequently-Requested-Data>; <https://www.edresourcesohio.org/oec/publicProfileSummary.php>) and the external evaluation of Each Child On Track.

Getting Started With Each Child On Track

This district, like many other small districts, has a small number of staff members who fill many roles. Bringing individuals together to meet can be a challenge when balancing the demands of multiple responsibilities, and individuals often work in silos. The DLT felt that operating in silos contributed to a challenge with effectively accessing, analyzing, and using data. Responding to the complex challenges of improving graduation rates for students with disabilities required the DLT to identify strategies to bring staff together to work toward accomplishing this goal as a team.

“This [work] gives us an opportunity to collaborate and create a systematic approach, to put systems in place where we’re being proactive instead of reactive to concerns, whether they be at risk test scores, at risk behaviors, at risk attendance levels.”
—District Leader

The DLT started by considering how the initiative aligns with its One Plan. The team determined that Each Child On Track is a way to work toward the goals the district already has in place through the One Plan. The district was then able to bring together a diverse team of staff around this common goal. In the first year, the DLT focused on making time to meet and on bringing all team members together on a regular basis. As a group, members then developed a more comprehensive understanding of the existing initiatives that support implementation of Each Child On Track and the goals in the One Plan. The team also began examining the district’s processes for collecting and analyzing data to ensure that all team members understand their data systems and have confidence in using the data for decision-making.

The Impact

Each Child On Track is a comprehensive and long-term project. Although it will take time to improve long-term outcomes for students, this district is already seeing positive changes to adult practices and mindsets. In the first year of implementation, this district is seeing an impact in two notable ways: The DLT is more collaborative as a team and is using data more systemically to be proactive about student needs. Impacts so far are as follows.

Being collaborative

Bringing the DLT together has created opportunities to collaborate, develop common goals, and proactively address areas in which the district was previously being reactive and responding in isolation. Collaborating on the One Plan and using Each Child On Track as a catalyst has helped the DLT raise awareness among district personnel of the needs of students who are at risk for not graduating, particularly students with disabilities. Team members have established a sense of ownership of implementing the early warning system and a sense that they can make a difference for students.

Using data to be proactive

Taking the time to understand the district's data systems and the early warning indicators has created space for data-driven conversations and a recognition of the urgency of this work. The DLT has begun to collaboratively analyze data to understand the root causes of student challenges and problem solve as a team. Using the early warning indicator data to look at student needs has forced the DLT to be more analytical and objective about what is happening with students.

Next Steps

Planning for and building sustainability starts early and is ongoing throughout implementation. The district is working toward continued growth and implementation to address the needs it has uncovered through the Each Child On Track work. The DLT has plans to improve district, school, and team practices, as well as to ensure students receive needed support to make progress toward graduation.

In the next year, the district plans to:

- Continue working toward full implementation of Each Child On Track to move student-level data analysis from the DLT to the building leadership team, and begin engaging teacher-based teams in the process
- Adjust the school schedule to maximize instructional time and include an advisory period to help staff implement interventions and graduation plans
- Put success plans in place for individual students based on early warning indicator data

Conclusion

This Success Story highlights the work of one district to improve the functioning of its DLT and capacity to analyze and use early warning data. Although it is too early to see changes in student-level outcomes as a result of this work, important changes to the district-level infrastructure have occurred that are a necessary first step in implementing an early warning system. During the first year of Each Child On Track implementation, this district has strengthened its DLT and its data use at the district level so the district is better positioned to support school implementation going forward. Furthermore, the district developed a common goal and understanding of the work and improved the systems that support successful implementation, resulting in a strong foundation for future success.