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? This Success Story highlights the work one school 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 high school and graduate with a regular diploma.

> **EACH CHILD ON TRACK**
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> Ohio's State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), Each Child On Track, builds the capacity of district and school personnel to implement an early warning system 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 and school personnel to embed Each Child On Track in the Ohio Improvement Process and support implementation at the building level.

District Context

This small district, located in southeastern Ohio, has one elementary school and one combined middle and high school for students in Grades 7 to 12. Given the small number of staff in the district, some personnel serve on both the district leadership team (DLT) and the building leadership team (BLT), including the high school principal and high school guidance counselor. This overlap in team membership promotes ongoing communication between the DLT and the BLT. In addition, the small size of the district means that DLT and BLT members have personal connections with most students.

Participating in Each Child on Track has helped district leaders establish data-driven processes for identifying and assisting students in need of extra support. One important outcome of this work has been increased communication and engagement with families. District leaders have prioritized family engagement and developed processes to enhance family engagement as part of implementing Each Child On Track.

Note. Data are from Ohio Department of Education and Workforce 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.

Using Early Warning Indicator Data to Enhance Communication With Families

Prior to beginning Each Child On Track, district leaders identified family and community engagement as a priority for the district. However, engaging families of high school students can be challenging, and district leaders wanted additional strategies to increase family engagement at the high school level. In fall 2023, the DLT began to develop processes for using early warning indicator data to determine when high school students required additional support. This increased use of early warning data not only helped identify students who were at-risk earlier but also provided district leaders an opportunity to engage families in dialogue and problem-solving.

> "'…we send letters, [make] phone calls, establish meetings, and try to individualize [communication] to the best of our ability per student".
>
> —District Leader

When a student is identified as at-risk in attendance, behavior, or course performance, school leaders initiate communication with the student's family. The school leader first sends a letter home that explains why the student was identified and shares the student's data. Then, a team member, typically the principal, calls the family to begin a problem-solving discussion. During these phone calls, the school leader shares resources that are available to the student, describes the school's plan for supporting the student, and gathers the families' input on strategies to assist the student. If more conversation is needed, the school leader offers the family the option of meeting in person to continue the discussion. The team then designs a student success plan that is tailored to the student's needs and incorporates the family's input.

Establishing Partnerships With Families

To help ensure that this communication with families is successful, school leaders strive to form partnerships and build rapport with families. One key approach is having the school principal, as opposed to a teacher or other staff member, call families to engage in discussion and problem-solving. Hearing directly from the school principal demonstrates that the school is making a serious effort to understand the student's needs and helps build families' buy-in. Furthermore, in communicating with families, school leaders take a proactive and solution-focused approach and show empathy for the family and student. For example, the principal may share information about school supports, such as the school's health clinic and onsite nurse practitioner; help address transportation issues; or describe how the school can adjust the student's schedule to provide more academic support. When communicating with families, school leaders use a positive and collaborative approach to help bridge the divide between home and school. School leaders reported that families appreciate this personalized communication and solution-oriented approach to communication.

> "…that personal interaction on the phone and [in] the school … has been a huge thing and led to success, because buy-in comes from all directions and it's best to start that off with coming together [with families] as a partner."
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> —District Leader

Enhancing Student Engagement

In addition to the focus on engaging families, this district has implemented several strategies for enhancing student engagement in school. One way that the district has promoted student engagement is by expanding career education opportunities. For example, the school now offers an industry credential pathway for 9th–12th grades that allows students to explore career options and build career skills. For students struggling in academics, the school has begun implementing a common intervention period during which students have access to core subject-area teachers. These supports and activities are available to all students, including students with disabilities.

School leaders have also implemented several strategies to improve attendance. School leaders meet regularly with the student council to identify ways for students to promote school attendance among their peers, including using social media. The school has had success engaging students in a range of extracurricular activities, including sports and clubs, which are linked to attendance requirements. Finally, the principal conducts weekly check-ins with students who are struggling with attendance, including those who are habitually truant or habitually tardy.

> "… [we're] trying to get those kids to find their piece of school. Their buy-in [matters] too. [We want them to think] 'it's more than just a place to learn, it's a place I can enjoy these other activities'".
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> —District Leader

Conclusion

This Success Story highlights the work one school 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 high school and graduate with a regular diploma. Through this work, the district has improved its processes for communicating with families and enhanced the quality of outreach and partnerships with families. In addition, the school is implementing several strategies to increase student engagement and promote attendance. Although there is much work to be done, district leaders reported that this work is having a positive impact on family and student engagement.

> "… our parent communication has greatly increased, and that has led to improvements in attendance, behavior, [and] academics".
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> —District Leader