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.

This district, located in South-Central Ohio, has one combined junior high school and high school serving students in Grades 7–12. According to the 2013 School Districts Typology, this district is classified as a small town with high student poverty and average student population size:

- Students (Grades 9–12): 413
- Students with disabilities (Grades 9–12): 104
- English learners (Grades 7–12): Less than 10
- Students economically disadvantaged (Grades 7–12): 669
- Racial makeup of school (Grades 7–12): White (464), Black (51), Latino (53), Asian (<10), Native American (<10), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (0), Multiracial (98)
- Percentage of students with disabilities graduating with a regular diploma in 2020–21: 66%
- Roles represented on the DLT: superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of special education, positive behavior interventions and supports, data 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

In this cohort 1 district, the DLT needed to enhance its capacity to manage, analyze, and use early warning data to make informed decisions about how to best support students at risk of dropping out. Specifically, the district needed to improve how it collects and manages student data, as well as improve its processes for collaboratively reviewing the data. In coordination with the SST and a vendor, the DLT developed an early warning dashboard and began using research-based thresholds to identify students at risk for dropout. With improved access to usable data, including data visuals and data filters, the team engaged in targeted, data-driven conversations to identify areas for improvement. In addition, the team developed procedures for having data conversations, using the Atlas Looking at Data protocol. Through this process, the district identified student attendance and loss of instructional time due to disciplinary removals as areas that it needed to address. The team also engaged in outreach and purposeful communication to share the messages and goals of Each Child On Track with school leaders and teacher-based teams (TBTs).

> "You know we're just now learning to … collect that data and . . . how to have those conversations, how to look at the data, how to make sense of the data, [and] what is the data telling us. I know next year is going to be focused on … let's not just admire the data, let's do something with it."
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> —District Leader

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. During the first year of Each Child On Track, the district has developed infrastructure and capacity that has improved its data systems and processes for using data. Establishing a vision and commitment for data use across the district has been a key to its success. Impacts so far are as follows.

> "Each Child On Track has really helped us know what we're looking at. It's one thing to feel like you have a good pulse on where your kids are and but when you really look at the data and you see it, the data tell a different story."
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> —District Leader

Aligned data systems

The focus on data has led the district to improve data collection processes by ensuring that educators and school leaders have a consistent understanding of data collection practices. In addition, the district improved alignment across data systems, including the behavior data system and the student information system.

Enhanced collaboration

Participation in Each Child On Track has enhanced collaboration and helped to remove silos across the district. For example, the district is establishing processes for monitoring the performance of students who attend school outside of the district, such as at career and technical centers or specialized schools for students with developmental disabilities. In addition, the work of Each Child On Track is bringing together personnel who work on other relevant initiatives such Multitiered System of Supports and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports.

Established buy-in and readiness

The district has supported the readiness of school personnel to engage in the work by communicating with building leaders and TBTs about the district's vision and plans for implementing an early warning system. District leaders have been involved in all aspects of Each Child On Track and have communicated the importance of the work through meetings with school staff. In addition, the team has developed plans for professional learning in writing student success plans and using early warning data to plan, implement, and monitor interventions.

Identified systems-level needs

The DLT's data-driven conversations have helped team members identify changes to systems that need to occur to implement an early warning system effectively. For example, the team is reviewing the school schedule to allow TBTs to have more time to collaboratively review data and identify student intervention needs. In addition, the DLT is reviewing attendance policies and practices to determine whether certain changes could improve student attendance.

Next Steps

Planning for and building sustainability starts early and continues throughout implementation. The DLT is working toward continued growth and implementation and has identified several next steps to continue to enhance its implementation of Each Child On Track. Going forward, the DLT will continue to build the capacity of school personnel to begin implementing an early warning system and providing interventions to students.

In the next year, the district plans to:

- Engage the building leadership team (BLT) and TBTs in using data to identify students at risk for dropout, provide targeted interventions to students, and monitor the performance of students

- Offer professional learning to support educators in using data to identify students' needs and plan targeted instruction and supports

- Develop an intervention catalogue to ensure that educators and students have access to evidence-based interventions to improve attendance, behavior, and course performance

- Continue to develop data systems and educators' capacity to analyze and use data for decision-making with gradual release of SST guidance

- Enhance the use of student success plans for students who are identified as at risk of dropout and ensure alignment of success plans, individualized education programs, and career and transition supports

Conclusion

This Success Story highlights the work of one district to improve its data collection and data use practices during the first year of Each Child On Track. 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. Even though the district is still establishing this infrastructure, it plans to begin using the system to identify students who are at risk and monitor the effectiveness of interventions during the next school year.