Each Child On Track Success Story: Washington Court House City Schools

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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 to better support students with disabilities so that they stay 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 led by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce and 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 in participating schools.

District Context

Washington Court House City Schools is a small district located in southwest Ohio with approximately 1,800 students across four schools: a primary school (preschool through grade 2), an intermediate school (grades 3 through 5), a middle school (grades 6 through 8), and a high school (grades 9 through 12). When the district began participating in Each Child On Track during the 2023–24 school year, district leaders recognized that there was a significant problem with chronic absenteeism across the district's four schools. In addition, district leaders found that there was a lack of alignment across schools in how staff collected and reported attendance data. Given these challenges, district leaders decided to focus on improving student attendance and developing consistent processes for staff to follow to identify which students may benefit from additional support. District leaders determined that it would be most effective to implement Each Child On Track as a district-wide initiative in preschool

through Grade 12 due to the small student population and number of staff and a desire to identify students who show signs of risk for not graduating before they get to high school.

SCHOOL SNAPSHOT (2024–25)

- School district typology: 4 (i.e., small town with high student poverty and average student population size)
- Number of students (Grades 9–12): 498
- Number of students with disabilities (Grades 9–12): 82 (16.5%)
- Number of English learners (Grades 9–12): 0 (0%)
- Number of students who are economically disadvantaged (Grades 9–12): 498 (100%)
- Racial makeup of high school: White (n = 406, 81.53%), Black (n = 25, 5.02%), Latino (n = 26, 5.22%), Asian ($n \leq 10$), Native American (n = 0), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (n = 0), and Multiracial ($n \leq 10$)
- Percentage of students with disabilities graduating with a regular diploma in 2021–22: 68.75%

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).

Impacts of Each Child On Track in Washington Court House City Schools

Improving Communication With Families and Students

The district has implemented several strategies that are focused on improving communication with families and students about the importance of attending school. For example, teachers conducted individual orientation meetings with students and families before the start of the 2024–25 school year during which they discussed the importance of attendance and shared an attendance letter from the superintendent. In addition, each school selected a communication strategy to promote attendance, which included sending personalized, handwritten "We missed you" postcards from teachers to students who were absent and making phone calls home.

> "All four buildings in some way selected a communication home [strategy]... a handwritten note or a handwritten letter, postcards, [or other] communication to parents. And what we saw was... less of them chronically absent that quarter."
>
> —District Leader

To further emphasize the importance of attendance, each school established quarterly goals for attendance based on the previous year's data and shared the goals to students and families. Schools that met the attendance goal held assemblies at which students were allowed to throw pie in the face of the school principal and other school or district leaders. District leaders report that these strategies have resulted in fewer students being chronically absent during the current school year compared with last year. As shown in Exhibit 1, the percentage of high school students with disabilities who were off

track in attendance was lower each quarter during the 2024–25 school year relative to the same quarter of the previous school year.

Exhibit 1. Percentage of High School Students With Disabilities Who Were Off Track in Attendance
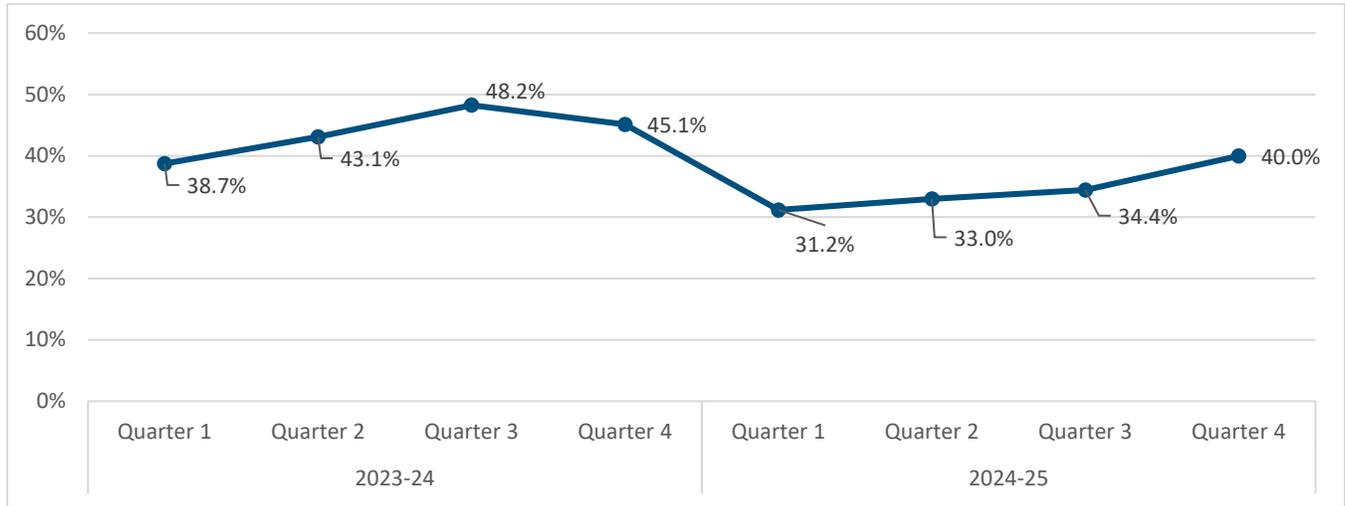
Note. The total number of students with disabilities for each quarter was: Quarter 1 of 2023–24, *n* = 124; Quarter 2 of 2023–24, *n* = 130; Quarter 3 of 2023–24, *n* = 114; Quarter 4 of 2023–24, *n* = 113; Quarter 1 of 2024–25, *n* = 93; Quarter 2 of 2024–25, *n* = 94; Quarter 3 of 2024-25, *n* = 93; and Quarter 4 of 2024–25, *n* = 90.

Improving Processes for Supporting Students

The district attendance coordinator has a key role in helping to support students and families in improving attendance. When a student is identified as being off track in attendance, the attendance coordinator leads a team meeting with the student and the student's family to discuss barriers to attendance and the ways that the team can help to address those barriers. In cases where more than one student from the same family is off track in attendance, the team may include administrators from more than one school building to better support the family. During these meetings, the team strives to use a positive, solution-oriented approach, rather than using punitive strategies.

> "The tone of those [attendance] meetings is much more positive [than in previous years] where it's more of a 'how can we help you?' instead of a negative tone."
>
> —District Leader

District leaders also report that Each Child On Track has helped remove silos and improved communication among staff. For example, during attendance meetings, as the team uses data to determine the root causes of a student's attendance challenges, they may also review information about the student's academic needs and identify available supports to address those needs. This comprehensive approach has helped staff to be more effective in determining the root causes of chronic absenteeism.

> "I think the other piece of Each Child On Track is opening up the dialogue between special education [staff], curriculum [staff], and our student services team because we are so intentionally focused on those three specific areas of academics, behavior, and course completion."
>
> —District Leader

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In addition, district leaders report that Each Child On Track has enabled more dialogue between special education staff and general educators, resulting in greater alignment and more coherent supports for students, particularly students with disabilities.

Conclusion

This Success Story highlights the work educators and leaders in Washington Court House City Schools are engaging in to improve student attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism. The district has implemented several district-wide attendance interventions to promote attendance including improving communication with students and families and improving the processes for supporting students who are identified as being off track in attendance.

Going forward, district leaders plan to address challenges with course failures among students with disabilities in middle and high school, including working on improving academic interventions. In addition, the district plans to use an online platform to give students and parents real-time access to graduation plans, student success plans, and early warning indicator data.