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

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 northeast Ohio, has one high school for students in Grades 9 to 12, one middle school, and one elementary school. The small size of the district allows district leaders to engage in implementation efforts at all levels, including as members of the district leadership team (DLT), building leadership team (BLT), and Each Child on Track team. Prior to joining Each Child On Track, district leaders wanted to improve the use of shared leadership and data-based decision making among personnel and they saw Each Child On Track as a way to support these goals. In addition, district and school leaders wanted to formalize their processes for identifying and supporting students who are at risk for not graduating, including students with disabilities.

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).

Promoting Shared Leadership with Data-Based Decision Making

Each Child On Track has provided an opportunity to enhance shared leadership in the district by bringing together a diverse group of staff to engage in data-based decision making. District leaders first assembled an Each Child On Track team that included diverse representation across roles, buildings (middle and high school), and existing teams. This team includes members of the DLT as well as other school and district leaders. The Each Child On Track team shares early warning data and recommendations to the larger DLT. District leaders reported that Each Child On Track is helping create a culture of data use in the district and has helped highlight the value of using data to understand and meet student needs.

> "Our primary area [of focus] was to build effective [early warning] systems and then to use those early warning systems to better utilize our resources in the district and … to meet the root cause of the issues that we're seeing."
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> —District Team Member

The team began by examining early warning data and ensuring that they had accurate data to inform decision making. Initial data pointed to the need to improve student attendance and to establish systems for providing attendance interventions for students who are at risk. While attendance interventions were in place, there were no systematic processes for assigning students to interventions based on individual need. In addition, a small number of staff were responsible for identifying students with attendance challenges, providing interventions, and monitoring students' progress in interventions. The team wanted to establish a process that would (a) allow more staff to share responsibility for supporting students with attendance and (b) enhance collaboration among a wider group of personnel in the district.

Building a Systematic Process for Providing Attendance Interventions

The team first drafted an intervention inventory that documented the attendance interventions that were in place, as well as interventions that could be put in place with some additional work. While this first step was important, the team wanted to move beyond the intervention inventory to establish a process for assigning students to interventions based on individual needs. In addition, the team wanted to make sure that the attendance interventions documented in the inventory would be impactful for students with disabilities.

> "The work we're doing through Each Child On Track is really bringing to light how we build the system … so being able to use data-based decision making to build that system. So we're not just throwing something at the wall, but we're being intentional about how those systems are being built and what data we're using."
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> —District Team Member

To address these needs, the team developed a student self-assessment to gather feedback from students with disabilities who were identified as at risk in attendance. Team members met with students with disabilities who had been identified as chronically absent and asked the students for their perceptions about what was contributing to their attendance challenges. These interviews helped the team to better understand the root causes of the students' attendance challenges. The team analyzed their available interventions to determine which root causes described by the students could be effectively addressed by available interventions. As a result, the team created an intervention menu for each root cause or barrier that the students identified. The team expects that this intervention menu will allow them to be more systematic and efficient when assigning attendance interventions rather than starting from scratch with each individual student. Although the team began this process with students with disabilities, they plan to eventually include all students who are identified as at risk in attendance.

> "We went from one person doing a lot of the interventions, [to] being able to delegate and pull in counselors and case managers and having conversations and asking them to do some of these things since they already have the relationships with the students."
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> —District Team Member

In addition to the intervention inventory and menu, the team created a flow chart to visually represent the process of assigning students to attendance interventions. The flow chart details the process of completing the self-assessment with the student, identifying an intervention based on the student's needs, monitoring the student's progress in the intervention, and determining what actions to take if the intervention is or isn't working. The flowchart assists personnel with using a consistent process when supporting students.

Engaging Students and Families

The district has prioritized engaging students and families in the attendance intervention process. For example, when conducting the student self-assessment, the team asked students to reflect on a range of issues that may impact attendance, including transportation, their feelings about school, academic challenges, conflict in school or at home, and friendships, among other areas. In addition, if the student receives an attendance intervention and does not make expected progress, the team gathers feedback from the student's family about their perceptions of the root cause of the attendance challenges, as well as how to intensify the student's intervention.

The team has had success by engaging in conversations with families regarding how to support students' attendance. In one case, the team noticed that middle school attendance data showed that some students were identified as at risk due to frequently being tardy to school. To address this finding, the team made phone calls to parents and asked about the barriers to arriving at school on time. Talking to family members of students who were regularly tardy revealed that some family members were dropping off students at the school start time, so their students were regularly late to first period. Taking the time to understand what was contributing to the tardies and clarifying that the start time is when first period begins has led to a reduction in students who are tardy.

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. Each Child On Track has helped district leaders build on existing priorities of improving shared leadership and data-based decision making. In the first year of Each Child On Track, the district developed systems and processes for assigning and monitoring attendance interventions and focused on improving how they engage students and families in the intervention process. Although more work can be done to ensure these systems are efficient and effective, district leaders reported that these efforts have a positive impact on their systems for using data to support all students, including students with disabilities, to stay on track for graduation.