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**
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> 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. 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 school and graduate with a regular diploma.

DISTRICT CONTEXT

This district, located in southwestern Ohio, has one high school serving students in Grades 9–12. According to the School Districts Typology, this district is classified as a small town with high student poverty and average student population size:

- Students (Grades 9–12): 820
- Students with disabilities (Grades 9–12): 148
- English learners (Grades 9–12): 10
- Students economically disadvantaged (Grades 9–12): 290
- Racial makeup of high school (Grades 9–12): White (635), Black(13), Latino (23), Asian (10), Native American (<10), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (<10), Multiracial (17)
- Percentage of students with disabilities graduating with a regular diploma in 2020–21: 83%
- Roles represented on the DLT: assistant superintendent, director of student services, education management information system coordinator, high school principal, alternative school contact

Note. Context data are from Ohio Department of Education websites (retrieved July 2023) (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. Most recent publicly available typology data is from 2013, all other data are from the 2022-23 school year.

Getting Started With Each Child On Track

> "We want to talk about doing what's right for kids and keeping it student-centered in order to [increase] efficiency and to be . . . successful."
> —District Leader

This district began Each Child On Track knowing it would need to address challenges related to limited staff size and capacity to take on new work. In particular, the DLT wanted to avoid placing an additional burden on the two high school counselors, who have large caseloads and are responsible for a significant amount of data entry. The limited size of the school staff also meant that the DLT needed to focus on creating processes for collecting and analyzing data as these responsibilities were often carried out by individuals operating independently without formalized processes in place. To help with these challenges, the district identified and built on similarities between Each Child On Track and work it had done to implement Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

The first year of Each Child On Track implementation focused on bringing together the right team of individuals, establishing meeting processes, and defining common goals for the work. The DLT began by analyzing data holistically to identify overarching needs rather than looking at individual points of data separately. The team also began identifying the available resources to address student needs, including efforts to build partnerships with community organizations and ongoing work to improve student attendance and engagement, including the use of electronic hall passes.

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 improved collaboration among the DLT, established buy-in and readiness among school personnel, and improved district data systems. Impacts so far are as follows.

Established buy-in and readiness

The DLT leveraged connections between Each Child On Track and PBIS implementation to build buy-in and support among school personnel. Rather than presenting Each Child On Track as a new initiative, the DLT presented the work as building on and strengthening existing efforts to support positive student behavior and engagement.

Enhanced DLT meeting processes

The DLT committed to and followed through on meeting regularly to focus on the Each Child On Track work. Engaging in the work regularly as a team provided opportunities to collaborate, break down barriers in communication, and develop processes for analyzing data and using data for decision-making.

Improved data systems

With SST support, the DLT has begun to use a data dashboard (created by the SST) to organize its early warning data and ensure that the data are in a user-friendly format. The data dashboard has enhanced the DLT's ability to look at multiple data points at once to have a more complete understanding of student needs. In addition, the DLT used the data dashboard to identify patterns and trends in the data, which resulted in the team identifying attendance as an ongoing area of need.

Next Steps

Planning for and building sustainability starts early and continues throughout implementation. The DLT is working toward systemic implementation of the district's early warning system and is continuing to focus on improving team practices and collaboration.

In the next year, the district plans to:

- Focus on student attendance, including understanding trends in student attendance data and root causes of attendance challenges. In addition, the DLT will work to ensure that effective interventions for improving attendance and student engagement are in place.

- Expand implementation of the early warning system into the junior high school by improving coordination between the high school and junior high school building leadership teams.

- Use the early warning dashboard consistently to identify students in need of additional support, implement interventions for those students, and monitor the success of those interventions.

- Focus on developing practices for conducting root cause analysis to inform decisions about appropriate support and interventions for students.

Conclusion

This Success Story highlights the work of one district to improve its DLT 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 have occurred to the district-level collaboration and practices needed to implement an early warning system and improve supports for students with disabilities. District staff have come together to break down barriers, share responsibility, and begin formalizing processes that create systemic and sustainable practices. In the next year, the district will build on this early progress to improve school-level implementation of the early warning system, including the use of interventions for students in need of support.