

Attendance Study

Purpose

A primary purpose of this study was to learn more about local district's attendance policies and tracking procedures. The findings in this guidance document present information on local district's student information system (SIS) capabilities and district student attendance data.

Background Information

Student information systems (SIS) manage and store a variety of student data, including enrollment, grades and attendance records. There are four primary SIS school districts in Ohio use: InfiniteCampus, PowerSchool, ProgressBook/DASL, and eSchoolPlus. These SIS vary in terms of features, user interface and customization offerings. Each SIS also offers different modules depending on the specific needs of the district, meaning the features included with the same SIS may look different by district. The cost of each SIS is dependent on the size and needs of the district.

Most Ohio school districts use ProgressBook/DASL. This SIS is generally seen as more affordable for smaller districts and schools. In some cases, districts may contract with Information Technology Centers (ITC) to host and maintain the SIS on their behalf. In these cases, districts may have more limited ability to access their data and run customized reports for analysis.

Research Notes

Methods

This mixed methods study utilized quantitative and qualitative data sources. Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze survey data, EMIS records and local districts daily attendance patterns. Content analyses were conducted on open ended survey responses.

Data Sources

- Ohio Attendance Survey (2023)
- EMIS
- Local District Attendance Data

Contact

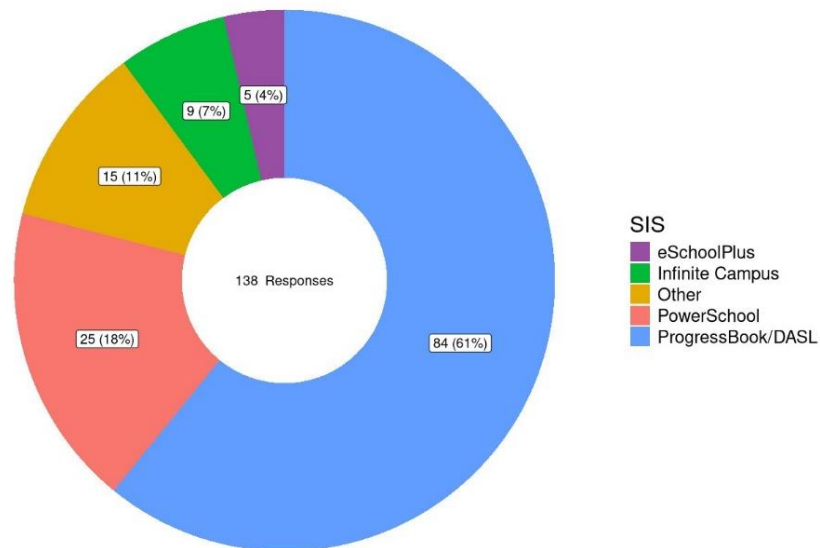
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Major Findings

Student Information Systems

Survey respondents (n=138) were asked which student information system they use for tracking absenteeism. Consistent with statewide data collected by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, most survey respondents use ProgressBook/DASL.

Figure 1. Student Information System Type



This study included a component where the research team at the Ohio Education Research Center entered into data sharing agreements with a sample of local school districts to analyze the more detailed data around student attendance that is collected and tracked at the local level, as compared to the higher-level data that is reported to the state via EMIS. This component of the study revealed limitations to how ProgressBook reports student absence hours. Specifically, student absence hours are rounded up to the half-day or full-day level and not reported by the hour to EMIS.

Those districts that reported using systems other than the four dominant SIS were primarily private schools.

Automation of Student Information Systems

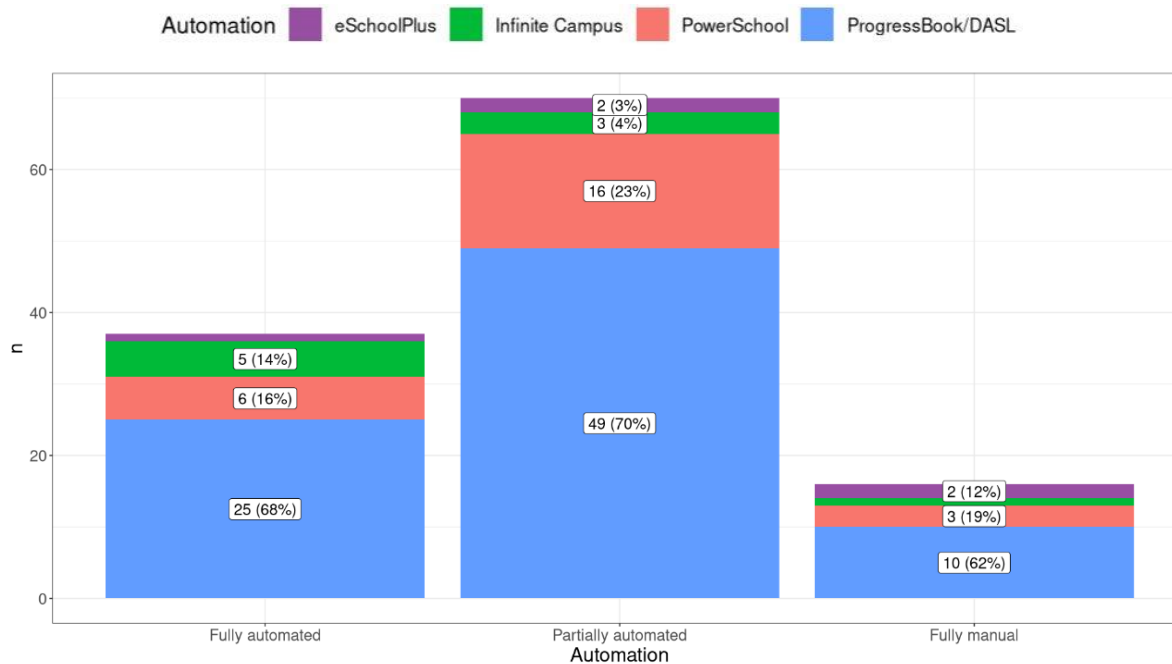
Survey respondents were asked how automated their system is for tracking student absenteeism in their district or community school. Within and across all four SIS, respondents indicated variations in terms of automation. This indicates that districts who adopt the same SIS likely have purchased packages of modules and services unique to the needs and resources of their district. These choices made at the local level lead to varying levels of automation among districts using common SIS platforms.

Figure 2. Tracking Student Absenteeism Automation by SIS type



Similarly, survey respondents were asked how automated their system for generating chronic absenteeism/excessive absence/truancy letters is in their district or community school. Across all four SIS, respondents indicated variations in terms of automation.

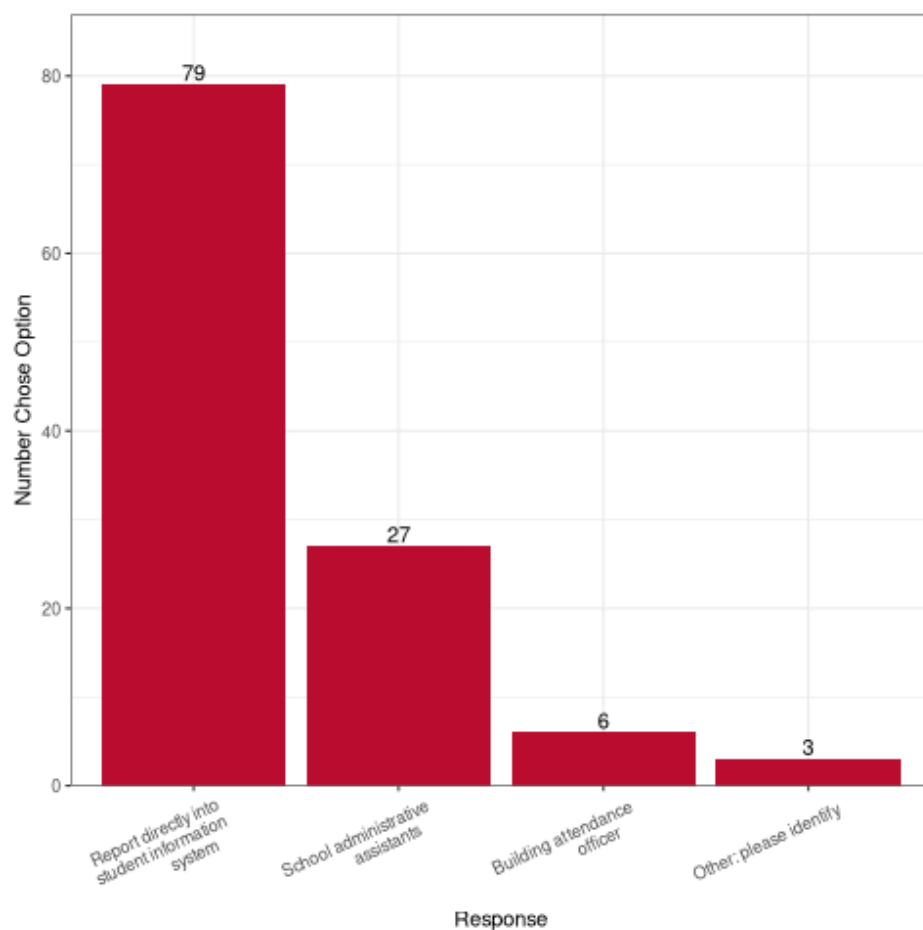
Figure 3. Absenteeism Letter Generation Automation by SIS Type



On-Site Student Tracking

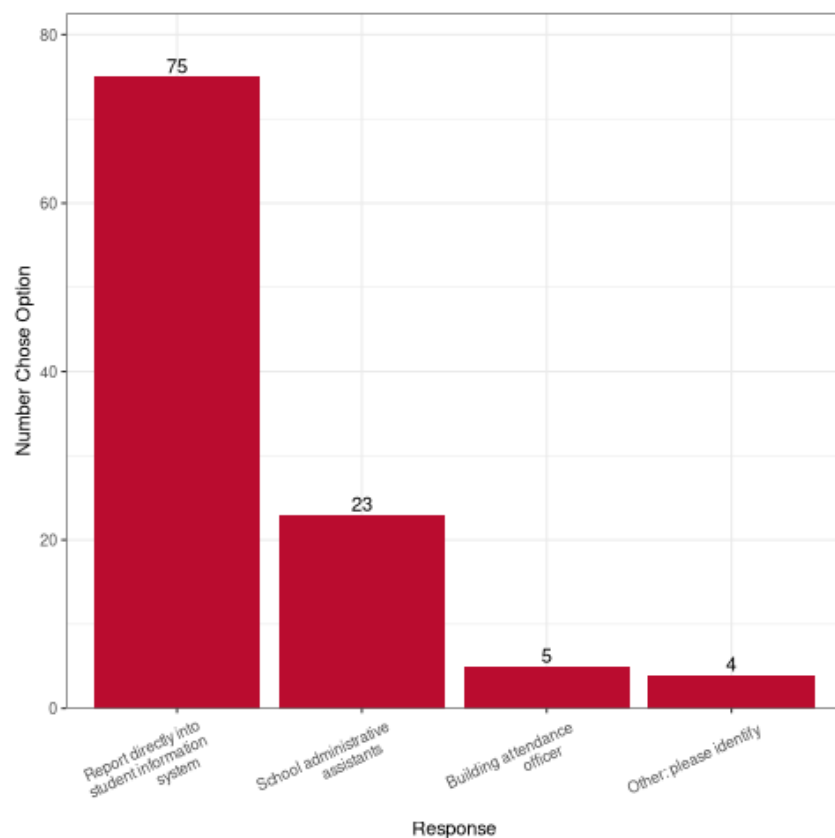
Survey respondents were asked when attendance is taken, who is responsible for taking attendance, and how it is reported for each building level in their district. In most elementary buildings, attendance is taken at the beginning of the day by either the homeroom or classroom teacher. Most elementary classroom teachers report absences directly into their districts' SIS (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Elementary School Attendance Reporting Procedures



At the secondary level, including both middle school and high schools, attendance is taken most often at the beginning of the day and by each classroom period teacher. Like the elementary level, most secondary schools have classroom teachers report absences directly into their districts' SIS (Figure 5). At the secondary level, however, many teachers are responsible for reporting daily attendance due to period reporting. This increases the potential for data entry errors.

Figure 5. Middle School Attendance Reporting Procedures



Off-Site Student Tracking

Districts with high school buildings (n=115) were asked how attendance is determined for students who are off-site for any portion of the school day. Most districts indicated students' attendance is not tracked when off-site and that the students schedule is adjusted in their SIS to indicate and track only the time they are expected to be physically present in the building.

Districts indicated three primary reasons students would be off-site: college credit plus (CCP) courses, work study, or attending a CTE. For those who tracked off-site attendance, tracking procedures varied based on the reason a student was off-site:

“We are not required to track CCP attendance. Career tech is tracked by another district. Work study is tracked by a teacher;”

“Attendance is not tracked for students once they are off of our campus. We do keep track of work hours for Work Study students to ensure they are working. Grades from college courses and correspondence from college admissions counselors are the only way we know if a student is attending college courses;”

“Students who participate in CCP, attendance is not tracked by the home district. Career Center and home district do communicate on attendance. Work Study requires students to submit pay stubs and mentorship students provide logs of participation that are verified by mentor.”

Attendance Patterns

Using the daily student attendance records provided by partnering school districts, the visuals below show the number of absences by weekday for one partnering district. For this district, as seen in Figure 6, absences tend to be highest on Fridays. During the SY20-21 school year, this pattern was particularly pronounced because students submitted packets of work for their virtual pandemic learning and missing work was recorded as an absence at the end of the week.

Figure 6. Absences by Weekday - Controlled by Number of Days in Session

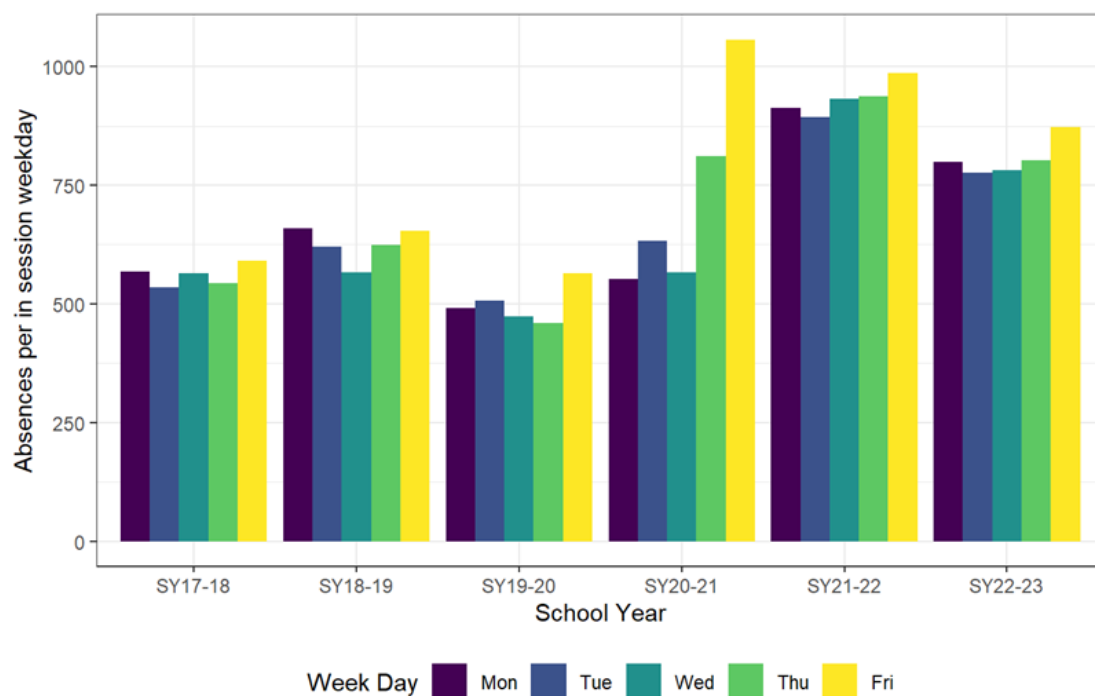
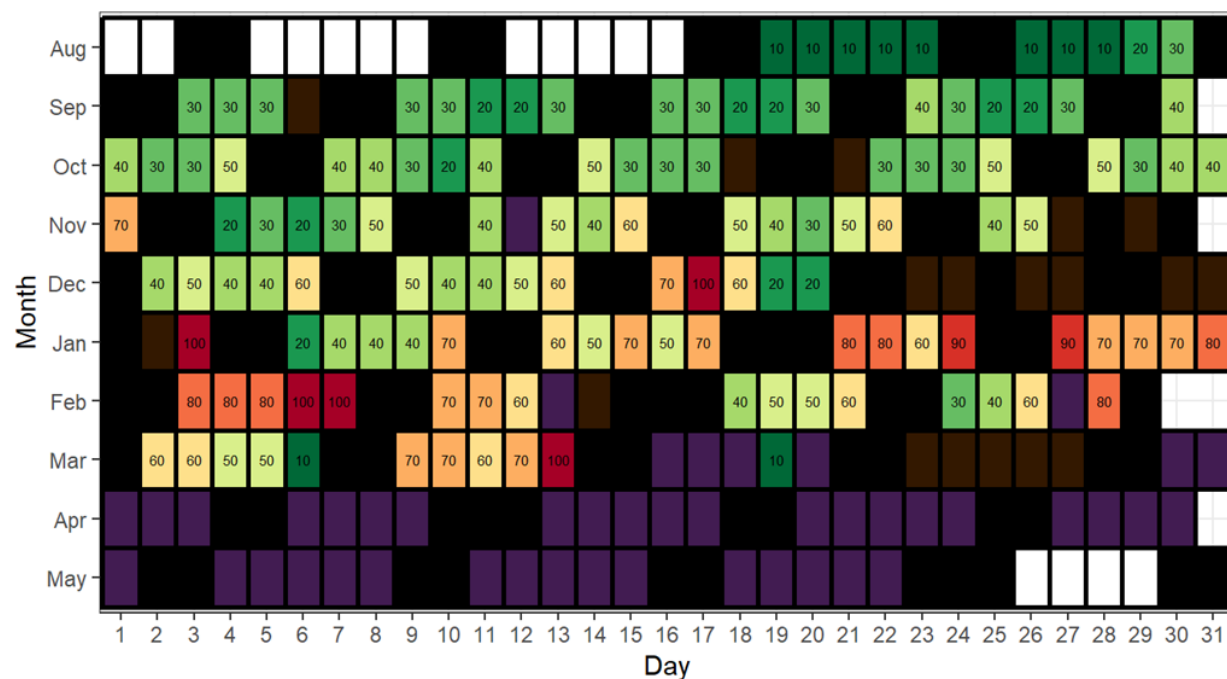


Figure 7 shows daily absences in relation to the school calendar. Across school years and districts, absences increased leading up planned closures or holidays.

Figure 7. Daily Absences in SY2019-20



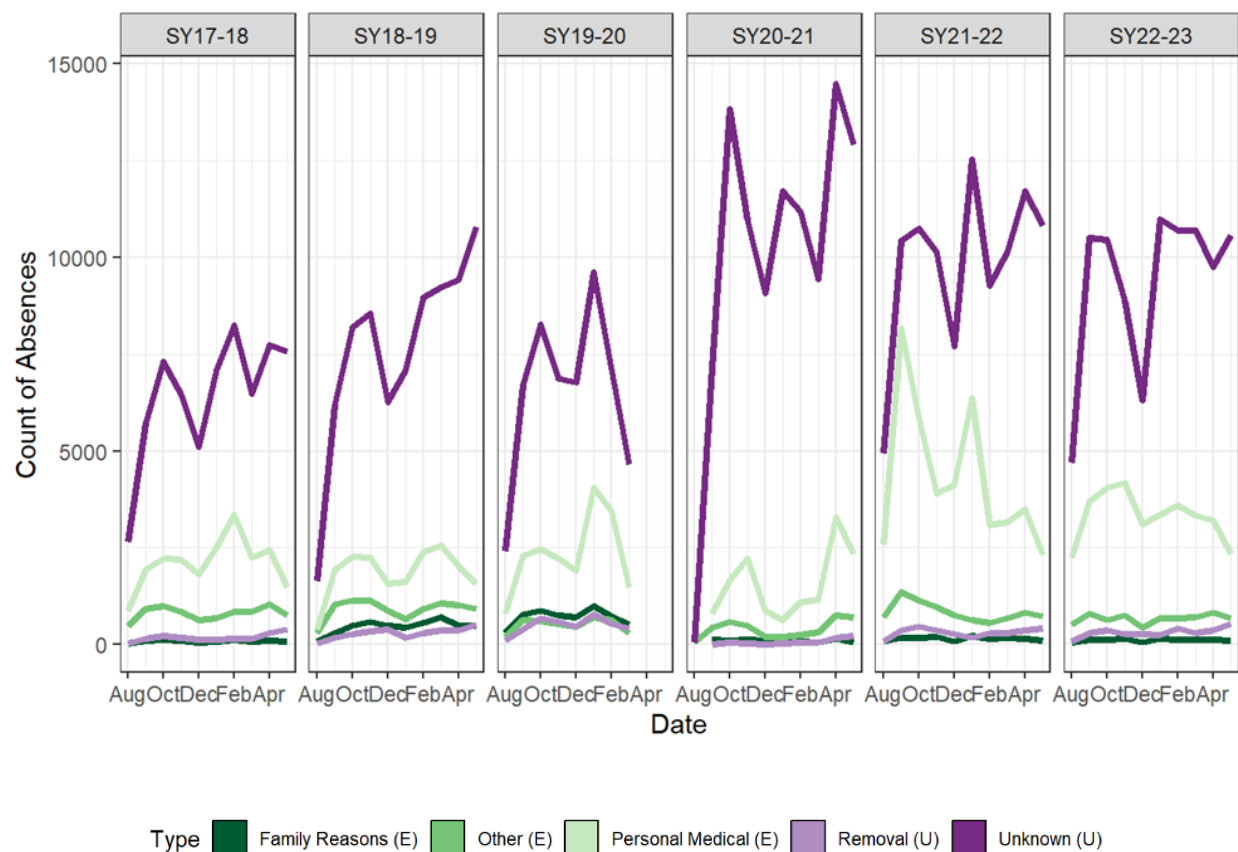
Percentile	Range of Students Absent in Percentile	
1-10	11	468
11-20	469	557
21-30	558	608
31-40	609	650
41-50	651	706
51-60	707	761
61-70	762	822
71-80	823	892
81-90	893	976
91-100	977	1867

Day Info

- Calamity Day
- Holiday or Weekend
- Planned
- <10 students or missing data

Monthly attendance patterns were also analyzed. For this participating district, peaks of excused and unexcused absences co-occur at times throughout the year. Across districts and years, unexcused student absences tend to peak at the end of the school year.

Figure 8. Monthly Count of Absences by Reason



Policy and Practice Considerations

This study found that the variation in how schools and districts report attendance begins with the student information system platforms they purchase to manage their student data. Most districts, particularly smaller ones, report using ProgressBook/DASL. This SIS is programmed to report absences in only half day or full day increments, not by the hour.

Further, districts purchasing the same SIS often have different features and capabilities depending on differences in local preferences and resources. These foundational differences in capacity for tracking, managing, analyzing and reporting student absence data indicate that districts will also have varying abilities to use data to inform decision making around improving student attendance. During the district “deep dive” component of the study, the research team found that many smaller districts did not have the ability to analyze their own data or create custom visualizations of attendance patterns such as those presented in this brief. This on-the-ground reality reveals the importance of intermediary organizations that support schools and districts in their data use, such as Information Technology Centers, Educational Service Centers, State Support Teams, and collaborative efforts such as the Stay in the Game! Network and the Harvard Proving Ground partnership. These partners can help schools and districts uncover patterns of attendance across time and student groups to inform how best to intervene and provide positive support on days with consistently high levels of absences.

This study also found that districts vary in terms of data entry processes, which may contribute to data inaccuracies. For example, when reviewing attendance visualizations created by the study team, one district identified inconsistencies in the data likely due to data entry errors due to ill-defined entry processes across buildings in their district.

An unexpected finding with implications for policy and practice is the extent to which student attendance is not tracked when students are learning off-site. While tracking off-site student attendance would add administrative burden to school personnel, the lack of such data could allow for students who are “off the radar” to fall into patterns of poor attendance. As these off-site experiences are typically at the secondary level, attendance issues for students participating in off-site learning could increase the likelihood of negative outcomes relative to graduation and post-graduation success.