

Attendance Study

Local District Attendance Strategies and Resources

WINTER 2024

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 strategies districts use to address student absenteeism and additional resources that may help districts enforce attendance policies.

State Guidance

In 2024, the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce released “Ohio’s Attendance Guide: District and School Practices in Early Intervention.” The guide lays out best practices for improving attendance at the district and school level.

At the district level, the guide recommends using a systemic approach to begin:

- Changing attitudes and beliefs about attendance.
- Strategically using data for proactive solutions.
- Creating a capacity-building infrastructure.
- Implementing evidence-based strategies.
- Assembling a cross-departmental district team to facilitate these functions.

At the school level, the guide recommends the following strategies for improving attendance:

- Prioritize attendance and engagement.
- Promote a schoolwide climate of attendance.
- Shift the focus to prevention and early intervention.
- Take a positive, problem-solving approach versus relying on legalistic and punitive actions.
- See students and families as an important part of the solution instead of the problem or people in need of rescue.
- Take a data-driven team approach led by the building administrator.
- Engage every person in the school building.
- Assemble school level teams to organize and facilitate a multi-tiered attendance strategy.

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

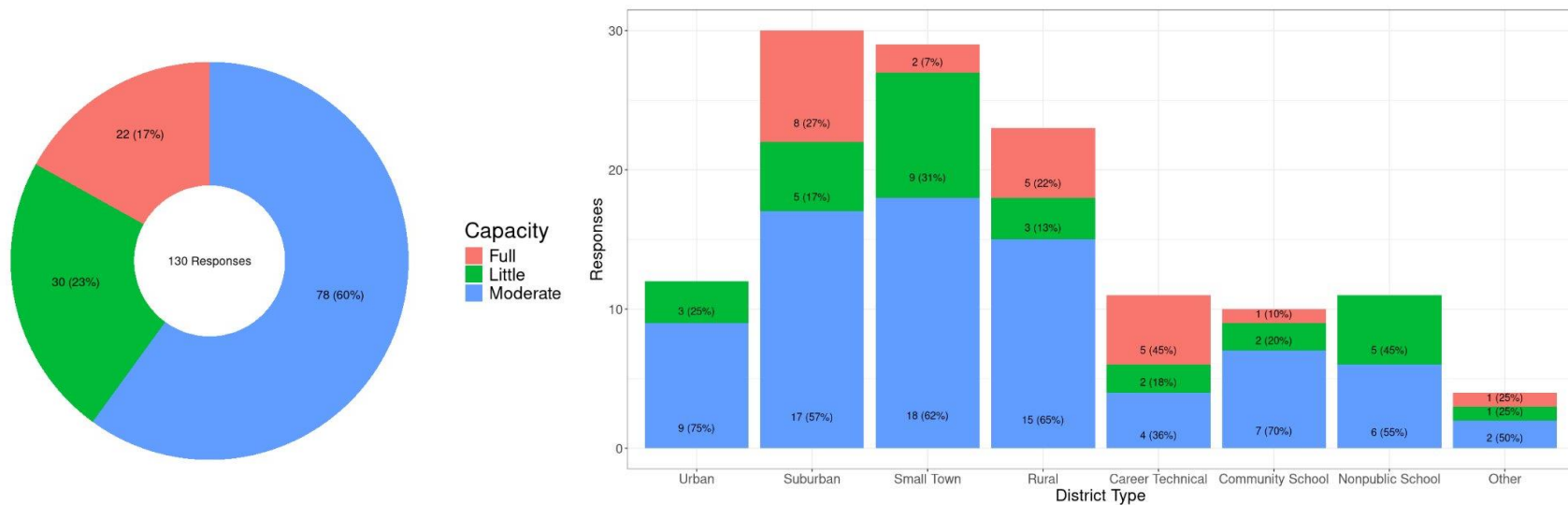
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Major Findings

District Strategies to Prevent Student Absenteeism

Survey respondents (n=130) were asked how much capacity their district or community school has to effectively implement tiered interventions to prevent student absenteeism. The visual on the left shows the breakdown of the overall survey responses and the bar chart on the right shows these same responses broken down by district type. Most districts (60%) indicated having moderate capacity to effectively implement tiered interventions to prevent student absenteeism. No urban or private schools reported having full capacity to effectively implement tiered interventions.

Figure 1. Capacity to Effectively Implement Tiered Interventions



Survey respondents were asked to identify all Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions their district or community school implements from a list of options. The most reported Tier 1 interventions were: multiple forms of personal communication with families, notify parent or guardian of student absence, and regularly monitor student attendance data. The most reported Tier 2 interventions were: arranging conferences with

families, developing and implementing student absence intervention plans, and using absenteeism data to identify students at-risk of reaching excessive absence thresholds. Finally, the most reported Tier 3 intervention was connecting to intervention programs available through juvenile authorities.

Respondents were also asked to describe their district or community school's plan and approach to support regular student attendance. Analysis of this open-ended question revealed districts are reporting using more preventative and proactive approaches, instead of punitive approaches, to support student attendance, as illustrated by the response below:

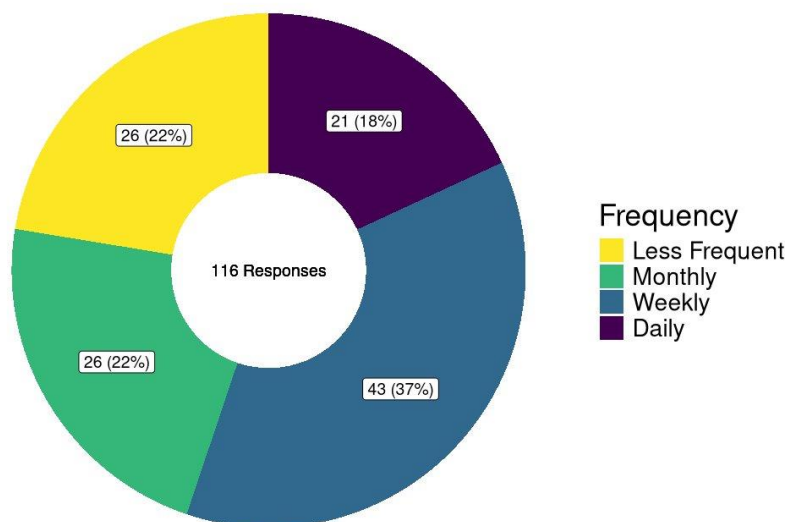
“We have moved away from a punitive perspective and taken a more educational and supportive approach. Our goal is to speak with students and families to understand any potential barriers to regular attendance and then devise a plan to help remove those barriers. We are also focusing on making personal phone calls to better educate families on student attendance and HB410 laws.”

Districts and community schools reported using PBIS to encourage student attendance and offer incentives (e.g. “We use PBIS strategies and incentives;” “We have implemented a PBIS program to reinforce good attendance behaviors.”)

Student Attendance Data Review

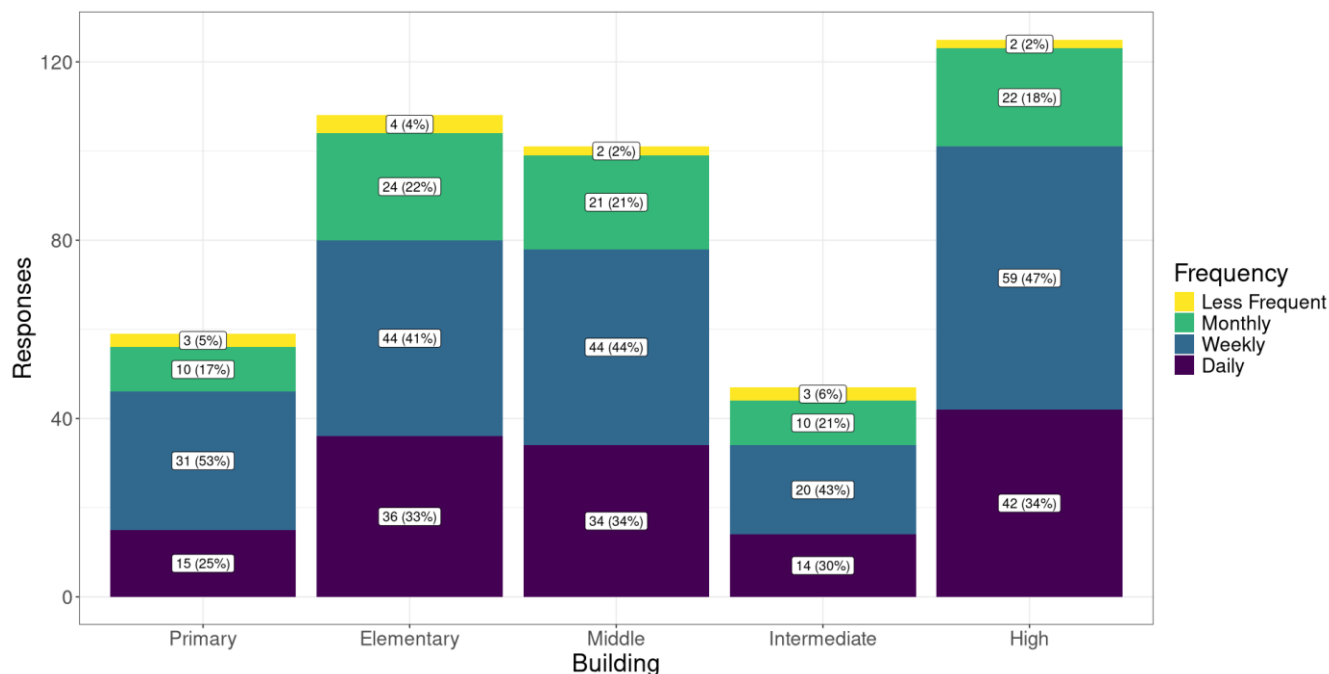
Survey respondents were asked how frequently their district or community school personnel review student attendance data. 22% of respondents reported district personnel review attendance data less than monthly. Most (37%) reported district personnel review attendance data on a weekly basis.

Figure 2. District/Community School Level Attendance Data Review



Similarly, survey respondents were asked how frequently their building personnel review student attendance. In contrast to district level personnel, few reported frequencies less than monthly. Across all building levels, building personnel review data primarily on a weekly or daily basis.

Figure 3. School Building Level Attendance Data Review



Additional Resource Requests

Respondents were asked what additional resources might help support their district in enforcing attendance policies. The most frequent response was a request for additional personnel and funding:

“Our district would benefit from more funding to hire more administrative help navigating our attendance policies and recording the attendance records;”

“Attendance officer on staff who could work with truancy and help us improve attendance. Also to work with our families.”

The second most frequent response was a desire for increased support and consistency from local court systems:

“Consistent steps/procedures regarding HB410 in the county courts. I have students from 4+ counties and each county does and wants something different so I have to make sure I stay up to date on their procedures as well as follow their procedures to have a valid formal filing if/and when needed.”

Survey respondents also indicated policy changes they felt would be beneficial, including exemptions from HB410 for drop out recovery schools and a request to decrease the time it takes to file charges on habitually truant students:

“As a drop out recovery school, the majority of our students are with us due to truancy. Being exempted from HB410 would allow us more time to focus on other aspects of learning. If an exemption is not possible allowing us to implement attendance plans for our students upon enrollment in lieu of waiting for each threshold to be met, would be beneficial based on the transient and truancy levels of these students;”

“HB410 needs to be modified to decrease the time it takes to file charges on the habitual offenders. Parents and students are aware of what school districts are required to do per HB410 and basically treat the process as a game (repeat offenders).”

Finally, some respondents indicated have more automated student information systems would be beneficial:

“More automation within student information system, like when we run a letter that gets logged somewhere so we don’t have to manually enter dates, also save a copy of letter so we don’t have to print and file. Less need to have written documentation to excuse an absence – when we get audited we have to show notes. Our attendance rate hasn’t changed since HB410 came into effect;”

“If the system was fully automated, this would be gained time for district employees.”

Policy and Practice Considerations

The study findings show that school and district personnel report regularly reviewing attendance data, and they desire to increase capacity to collect, analyze, and respond to attendance data. School districts are also utilizing more preventative and proactive approaches to encouraging daily student attendance, including offering incentives through PBIS.

Survey respondents’ desire for more funding and personnel to support attendance efforts along with the request for more robust and automated student information systems align with the findings described in the companion briefing documents, *Attendance Study Guidance Document: Ohio Attendance Law (House Bill 410) Implementation Findings*, regarding the personnel devoted to implementing the requirements of House Bill 410, and the variation among student information systems described in *Attendance Study Guidance Document: Local District Student Information Systems and Tracking Procedures*.