

OhioTIF

More Opportunities for More Kids: Dramatically Improving Circleville's Graduation Rate

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Today, students in Circleville City Schools know the expectation: to graduate from high school prepared for the future. And the district is seeing great success from students meeting this expectation. But a few years ago, that wasn't the case.

Circleville City Schools, located in rural Ohio about one hour south of Columbus, serves approximately 2,200 students across three schools. And, the majority of its kids are economically disadvantaged. In 2008, the district was struggling—the elementary and middle schools were taking part in the Ohio Improvement Process, and the graduation rate of 78 percent was considerably lower than comparable districts.

Clearly, kids were slipping through the cracks.

In response, the district set an ambitious goal to increase the graduation rate and ensure more kids have access to college and career opportunities. This district-wide effort focused on getting students to class and on the path towards graduation and becoming successful members of society.

Circleville City Schools

Mission: To maximize the achievement of each student in a safe environment.

2,200 STUDENTS

Designated as a School of Promise by the Ohio Department of Education

CIRCLEVILLE CITY SCHOOLS—MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR KIDS

78%

**2008
GRADUATION
RATE**



**+17.5% IN
6 YEARS**

95.5%

**2014
GRADUATION
RATE**

Today, the district is proud of its 95.5 percent graduation rate—a dramatic improvement over a six-year period. Think about what this means: more kids are graduating from high school with more opportunities for future success.



This type of success was not by accident. It was the direct result of hard work focused on system-wide improvement. **What contributed to Cirleville's outcome?**

As the first step, the district shifted its mindset from reactive to proactive to:

- Track issues that impact student attendance
- Identify students with a high risk of becoming dropouts and provide early intervention to build confidence in each student
- Partner with these students' parents/guardians
- Strengthen relationships with the court system to work together in the student's best interest

The district propelled itself forward by taking the following steps—all deliberate and intentional—to prevent students from falling behind:

- 1. Create a district-wide focus and involve all stakeholders in efforts.** To ensure all staff are engaged in this work, the district embedded its graduation rate goal into the award model implemented through participation in Ohio Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF). This helped focus all staff on the end result and reward those who played a role in the improvement process.
- 2. Set high expectations for students—and discuss their college and career plans regularly.** Educators expect every single student to graduate, and conversations about this expectation begin in the early grades. In elementary school, students begin a "What do I want to be when I grow up?" portfolio that follows them through grade 5. In middle school, kids participate in career days. And, at the high school level, students prepare career portfolios based on graduation requirements and PLAN test results in grade 10. The district also offers graduation at all levels.
- 3. Locate absent students and safely return them to school.** This goes without saying: For kids to have the chance to be educationally successful, they need to attend school. The district employs an attendance officer to help track student absences. The office staff makes daily calls to locate kids and ensure they are "safe." Then, the attendance officer and school resource officer will bring them back to school.
- 4. Have a planned response for students who miss excessive days of school.** For Cirleville Schools, if students miss more than five unexcused days of school, the district sends a letter to the student's parents. If students miss more than 10 unexcused days, the district meets with the parents. And, if students miss up to 20 unexcused days, the district works with the court system to find a legal solution that will help the family and their child improve attendance.
- 5. Offer additional opportunities for students to receive interventions and earn credits.** As part of the district's credit recovery, students have the ability to take online classes, enroll in a summer program, or receive tutoring to pass the state achievement test. The district also prides itself on afterschool programs. Through the Extra Mile program for grades 3–8 and the Milestone program for grades 9–12, students receive both academic and social interventions. "If it wasn't for this program, my child would not have finished school," said a parent of a 2014 Milestone graduate.

"One of the best success stories has been the afterschool program, which prides itself on academic and social interventions that work to create confidence in each child, which in turn has created increased academic success for each student and the district."

—Jonathan Davis, Assistant Superintendent

It's important to remember that this process was gradual—and did not happen overnight. The district's success towards improving the graduation rate has been a long journey with fierce determination and commitment from administrators, teachers, staff, parents, law enforcement, and students.

"It is not one thing that we do right, it's everything together. Like a recipe for cake, you cannot take out one ingredient and expect the cake to turn out," said Kate Mogan, Project Coordinator, Milestone and Afterschool Programs. "The tricky thing about kids is that everyone needs his/her own special recipe for success. We spend a great deal of time with students, helping them find their individual recipe for success."

"There is not one specific thing that we did to see this increase. We had to identify some key areas of concern and work towards improving them. It was a total group effort of many hardworking individuals that allowed us to reach our goal. All of the staff at Circleville High School contributed to this increase, and we are very proud of these accomplishments and look forward to continuing our success."

—Chris Thornsley, High School Principal



Learn more about Circleville City Schools at www.cirlevillecityschools.org.

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