



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

The Role of Nonacademic Supports and Services in Dropout Recovery Settings: Lessons Learned from the Early College Academy

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Context

- An estimated 7,000 youth drop out of school each day¹
- Only 66-70% of public high school youth receive their diploma “on time”²
- Researchers, policymakers, and school professionals are challenged with the task of encouraging adolescents who have left school without a diploma, or who are not on track for graduation, to stay engaged in formal education and graduate from high school³

One approach to re-engage youth is to tailor funds, resources, and services to meet the specific needs of these youth. This includes creating a more supportive, personalized learning environment for youth at risk of school dropout that also serves to address their complex needs.



Dropout Recovery High School Settings

- Locations for dropout recovery programs can include⁴:
 - Traditional public schools
 - Specially-created recovery-focused schools
 - Alternative learning centers
 - Community-based non-profit schools and programs
 - For-profit schools
 - Community colleges
 - Social service agencies
- Some dropout recovery programs also offer opportunities to take college courses for postsecondary credit (i.e., “early college high schools”)
- Early college high schools encourage students to remain for a fifth year to graduate with both a high school diploma and attain credits toward a college degree⁵



Needs of Youth and Challenges...

- Youth (aged 16-22), who have dropped out of school, often experience complex family, school, and community risk factors which contributed to their dropout decision⁶
- Many youth feel disengaged from learning, have weak ties with teachers, and experience extremely high levels of individual and family stress.
- Youth in dropout recovery programs need more supports than youth in traditional public or private school settings.
- Additional supports include, but are not limited to those for^{4,5,7}:

Parenting/Teen pregnancy	Childcare	Transportation
Mental health	Substance Abuse	Employment
English as second language	Immigration	Family violence
Life skills	Special education	Incarceration
Healthcare	Housing	Legal Services



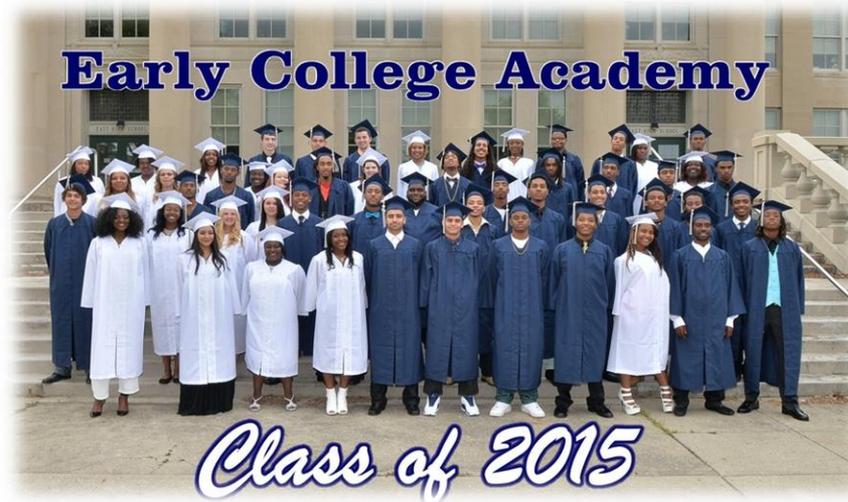
Protective Practices in Dropout Recovery Settings⁸

- High academic standards designed to link youth to future learning and work opportunities
 - High expectations and clear rules of behavior
 - Opportunities for youth to have a voice in the school
 - A shared sense of community and mutual trust
 - Culturally competent staff in multiple roles
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- However, dropout recovery has not been extensively studied, and very little empirical information exists on successful strategies to reengage students.
 - There is a need to examine more closely the strengths and needs of hard to reach youth in order to re-engage them in formal education, while also mitigating risks for school dropout.



Early College Academy

- ECA is an open enrollment charter school for students ages 16-22 residing in Franklin and its contiguous counties.
- In 2016 ECA adopted several nonacademic student support services to promote infrastructure development, assessment, progress-monitoring, and program design.
- Attendance at ECA was 30% prior to the implementation and systematic targeting of student nonacademic needs.





Promote Diversity and Connectedness

Increase awareness and support for clubs, activities, and organizations that look to engage all youth

Meet Student Nonacademic Needs

Improve linkage and coordination of school and community services

Support Academic Learning

Improve attendance



Promote Diversity and Connectedness

Increase awareness and support for clubs, activities, and organizations that look to engage all youth

Interventions implemented:

- Basketball Team: 14
- Poetry Slam: 30
- Yoga Program: 8 weeks/classes
- Student of the Month: 8





Meet Student Nonacademic Needs

Improve linkage and coordination of school and community services

Interventions implemented:

- Hired one year-long social work intern and one part-time intern via partnership with local university
- Partnered with local community supports for youth and families
- Intake assessments to identify student nonacademic needs (1st week of school and at time of enrollment)





Intern Connections

Influence of School Social Work Interns:

- 317 Phone calls to youth and/or parents/guardians about attendance
- Total of 78 individual counseling sessions with 26 students
- 12 referrals made to outside agencies

In-take Assessments:

- 81 surveys collected; identified nonacademic needs including:
 - 45% of students relied on bus transportation
 - *Interest in assistance with:*
 - how to apply for scholarships (29%)
 - help with interview skills (11%)
 - help finding a job (30%)



ECA Assessment Data

Risk factors included:

- Violence in homes or neighborhoods(18%)
- Physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse (22%)
- Witnessed the death of a close friend due to violence (30-42%)
- Bullying (27%)
- Substance use/misuse (30%)
- Difficulty with emotional regulation (43% indicate difficulties controlling anger)
- Difficulties paying attention in class (54%)
- Depressive symptoms (36%)



ECA Assessment Data

Assets included:

- 87% of students report having at least one positive role model
- 86% report having empathy
- 85% report having positive social networks
- 84% of students endorsed a positive self-concept
- 82% stated they enjoy learning new things
- 78% stated they enjoy going to school
- 71% of student report possessing problem solving skills
- 40% attend church or other places of worship
- Over 40% of students report being employed



Support Academic Learning

Improve attendance

According to a recent systematic review and literature review, school attendance can be improved if:

1. Students are aware of the problem^{9,10,11}
2. The school has a culture that supports students^{9,10}
3. Students with the most concern are targeted^{9,10}

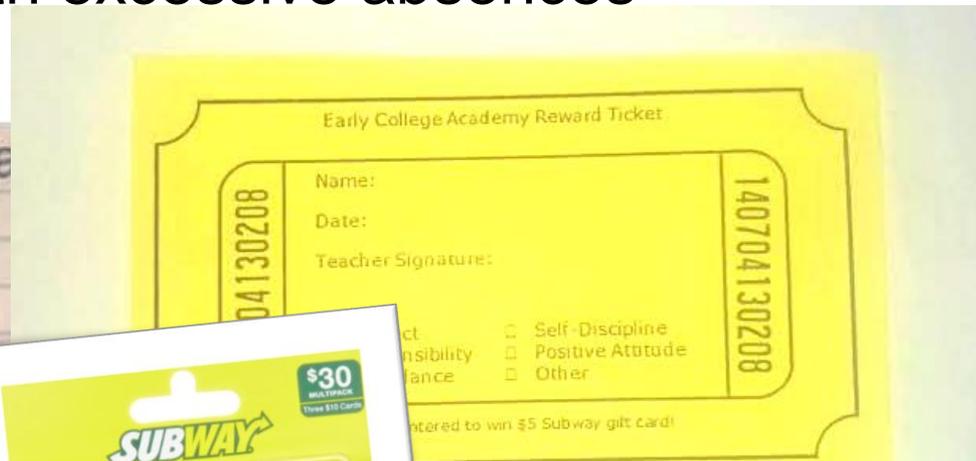
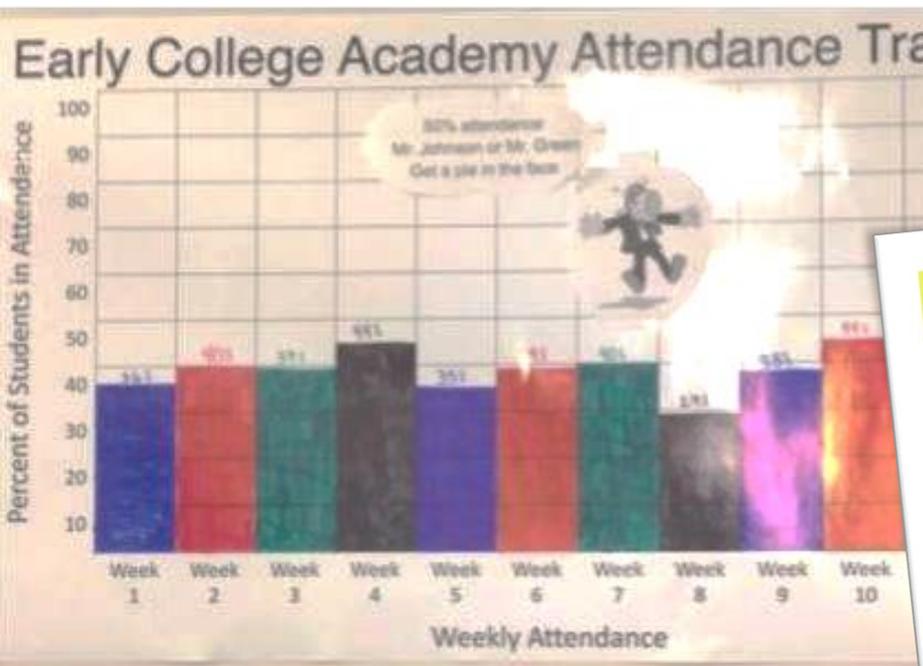
Interventions implemented:

- Overall school attendance goal, tracking, and incentives
- Group incentives
- Individual incentives
- Targeted outreach





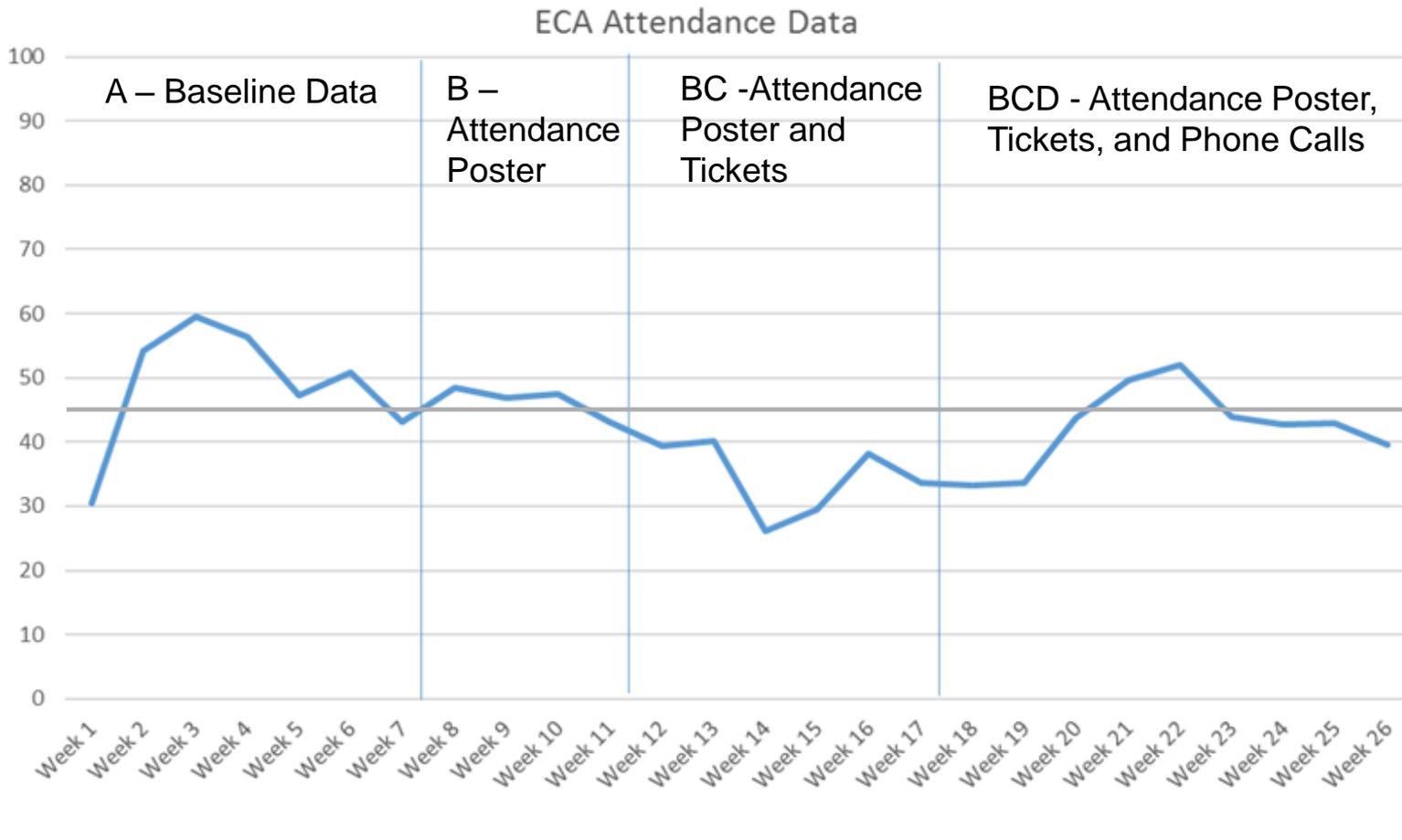
- Poster displaying weekly attendance averages (School)
- Ticket reward system for positive behaviors (Group & Individual)
- Phone calls to students with excessive absences (Individual)





A	48.83%
B	45.76%
BC	34.45%
BCD	42.35%

ECA Attendance Data



Following the provision of these services, attendance increased to 50%; a major milestone in the context of dropout recovery.



Implications

- Recognized high nonacademic needs of students
 - Supported need for two year-long social work interns
- Attendance was low on days when Columbus City was out of school
 - School decided to align days off school with city schools (i.e., students had siblings attending these schools)
- High percentage ride buses; issues getting to school on time were evident
 - School flipped “tutoring period” to first period rather than 4th period
- Youth reported difficulty concentrating in class
 - Began to focus professional development for teachers and support staff on ways to engage youth who have difficulty concentrating in class
- New legislation and infrastructure
 - The overall school, group, and individual attendance tracking aligns with House Bill 410 (any student under 18 must be contacted after missing 40 hours of school)



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