

One of the biggest challenges for Middletown was to have all stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, students, support staff, parents and community partners, understand chronic absenteeism and its role in student academic achievement. They have taken great strides to create a culture that understands the link between attendance and academic achievement through unpacking the data, providing professional development, engaging parents and partnering with community providers to identify strategies to remove barriers to attendance.



Understanding the Data: Middletown Public Schools formed a District Data Team that included members of the administration, community members and parents to review chronic absenteeism data on a quarterly basis. The team established decreasing chronic absenteeism as one of the district's goals and assigned responsibility for the goal to the District Climate Committee. A comprehensive plan was developed to implement and monitor strategies, provide professional development and resources to schools through each school's data team and climate committee.

Creating a Culture of Attendance: Middletown administrators' first step toward changing the climate and culture around attendance was to provide professional development to help all stakeholders understand the importance of attending school every day. Training was provided to school administrators and support staff on strategies for tracking student attendance and protocol for sending attendance letters home. Trainings stressed the difference between tracking excused/unexcused absences and monitoring chronic absenteeism. The district adopted best practices and resources provided by Attendance Works.

Parent Engagement: Raising awareness of the importance of attendance with parents was identified as a priority for reducing chronic absenteeism. Templates were created for administrators to customize for their schools to use with families. Scripts were produced that provided positive messaging at school events to help parents understand why attendance matters and how it is linked to student success. Messages included what parents can do to ensure students regularly attend school and why this is vitally important. Superintendent Patricia Charles explained, "We want all parents to understand that school attendance matters at all levels. Whether you are a preschool student or a high school student, if you are late to school or absent, you miss valuable instruction. We constantly reinforce the message to be present *on time every day.*"

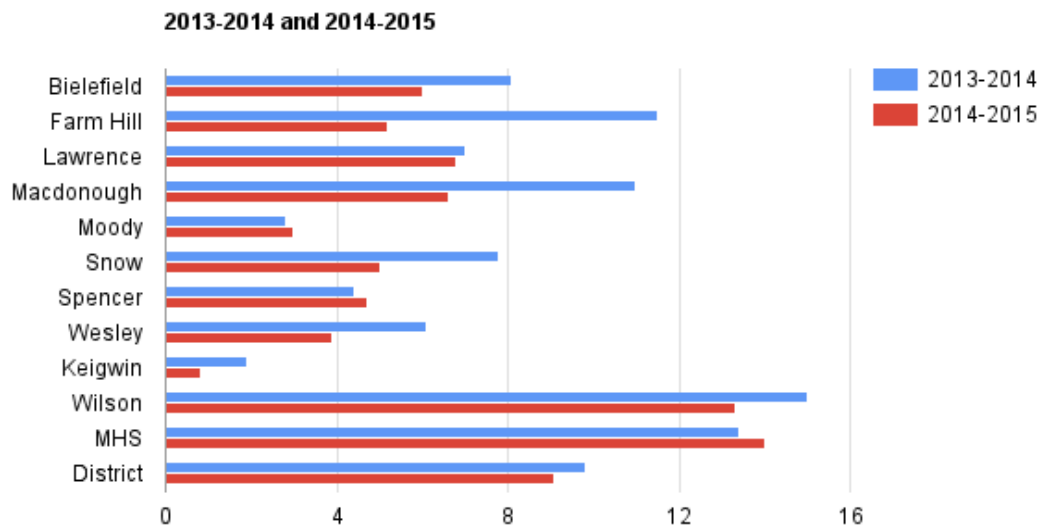
Community Partnerships: Building on its strong ties with community agencies and resources, Middletown collaborated with community partners. Attendance data was regularly shared with partners in order to develop community strategies to improve student attendance. Community members were also included as part of the District Data Team. Middletown has several home-visiting programs including iCare and the Family School Connection program that have integrated the importance of regular attendance into their work with families. Professional staffs from these programs

meet with families to determine the root cause of the attendance issues to determine what community resources could assist the families to ensure that students are in school and engaged.

Safe Schools Healthy Students (SSHS): Middletown SSHS project is identifying and implementing strategies (i.e., parent outreach and engagement, policy change, best practices) to improve attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism through a coalition planning process. This is occurring with the following partners, Middlesex Coalition for Children Family Support Committee, Middletown Public Schools District Data Team, and Family School Connection. Identified district goals and objectives (parent communication and outreach) to address chronic absenteeism and student attendance have occurred using third quarter attendance data (6/1/2015).

Middletown SSHS project is implementing a centralized data system to collect and analyze attendance of students enrolled in Middletown Public School Preschool Program to identify chronically absent students early. This is occurring with the following partner, MPS Preschool Program and the vehicle includes PowerSchool.

Chronic Absenteeism Data Comparison 2013-14 to 2014-15 by School



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