



Promoting School Success: Accessing Supports for Your Child



Did you know . . . there are a variety of supports available at your child's school that can help them stay on-track for success, both in school and beyond?

Research shows that three main factors contribute to a child's success at school. These three factors include Attendance, Behavior, and Course Performance (or grades). We call these the ABCs. By regularly tracking a student's ABC data, schools can determine if the child is on-track for school success.

What is school success? School success is more than just report card grades. As we move into middle school and high school, school success is the act of completing high school with the skills necessary to be college- or career-ready. When a child's ABC data is on-track, we can predict things like school engagement, healthy relationships, and academic advancement—all of which will place the child on a path to school completion (graduation). However, if a child's ABC data is off-track, there is a chance that

the child will start to withdraw from their school environment. This disengagement in school can snowball quickly, making it difficult for a student to get back on-track. If this cycle is not broken, and if interventions are not put in place to get the student back on-track, this lack of engagement can lead to school drop-out.

The good news is that schools across Pennsylvania have access to methods to monitor signs of student risk and to intervene when risk is evident. The supports highlighted in the following section are just a few of many your school could use to help students get back on-track with attendance, behavior, and course performance, placing them on a path toward school completion and college/career readiness.

What are the supports that can help your child find success at school?

1. Check & Connect is a standardized mentoring program. School staff are trained in the procedures for serving as a mentor. Some examples of this training include how to be a good listener, how to recognize signs of disengagement (or off-track student behaviors), and how to make connections with students and empower students to set actionable goals toward school improvement and success. The name says it all: mentors “Check” on student ABC data to determine where there is risk, and then mentors “Connect” with students to help get them back on track. Mentors also “Connect” with the family/caregivers of the student, creating a team of support working together for the success of the student. Check & Connect can benefit students showing risk in any of the ABC categories.
2. MTSS, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, is another way of saying there are different levels of help for your child, depending on individual needs. MTSS supports can meet the academic, social/emotional, or behavioral needs of students. Schools often refer to this as an integrated system of supports. All students have some needs in these areas, while other may have significant needs in one or more. A system of tiered supports helps to best match the level of need to the level of intervention. You might hear your child (or your child’s teacher) refer to Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3: this is a way of identifying the level of support that is being provided. Tier 1 supports (also known as “Core” supports) are the supports given to all children in all areas, such as clearly defining and teaching the school rules and expectations, providing grade-level mathematics instruction, or promoting a school climate that is safe, welcoming, and nourishing for all students. If the Tier 1 support is not enough for a child to find success, then an additional layer of support is added, a Tier 2 support. If a Tier 2 support is not enough for a child to demonstrate success, then the next layer of support is added, known as Tier 3. It is important to note the key word when considering additional supports is the word “added.”

Supports are meant to be added or layered, not to replace supports that are provided through previous support tiers. MTSS works together with the monitoring of ABC data. When risk is identified in a student’s ABC data, the conversation turns toward what levels of support are needed to help get the student on-track towards success. (Note: Check & Connect is considered a Tier 2/Tier 3 layer of support or intervention.)

3. SIM (Strategic Instruction Model) is a support for struggling students that utilizes a specific tool or strategy to overcome needs in a specific area. That area of need could be academic or Behavioral/Social-Emotional. For example, a student who has difficulty with organization may benefit from the SIM strategy called the “Framing Routine.” The Framing Routine provides a graphic organizer template that can help a student to track and/or record priority information while avoiding the distractions of the non-essential details that may accompany certain topics of learning. Another SIM strategy is called Word Mapping. This strategy can help with student access and understanding of vocabulary that is essential to understanding various topics of learning. A student with needs that are more in the realm of Social/Emotional may benefit from the SIM module known as Socially Wise. It may be helpful to think about SIM like a toolbox: the more tools you have in the box, the more likely you will be prepared to meet a variety of needs. However, if you don’t know how to use the tools in your toolbox, they are not very helpful. Thus, in our “educational toolbox,” we must have a variety of tools to use when the needs arise, and we must also know how to use the tools so that we can select the right one for the job. When a SIM strategy is determined to be an appropriate tool for a student, a member of the Training and Consultation staff from your local Intermediate Unit can offer training to your child’s school (or teacher) on how to best incorporate that strategy into the learning environment.

4. College and Career Readiness Planning/ Transition Planning: Sometimes, a student begins to withdraw from engagement in school because they do not see the connection between school coursework and long-term career goals; or, perhaps they have yet to identify goals for their future. School guidance counselors play an important role in helping students to explore possible goals for life after high school. Many schools even have courses that are specifically designed to expose students to a multitude of post-secondary opportunities. These services and explorations can help students set long-term career goals, which ultimately help them better embrace their current learning.

Beginning at age 14, students with an IEP engage in transition planning as a formal part of their IEP process. This transition planning follows a more intentional road map for exploring, experiencing, and setting goals for the opportunities that lie beyond graduation. This process is facilitated by your child's IEP team and other members of their instructional team, and it often includes the oversight of a transition coordinator. When planning for a child's future beyond high school, it is important to have a supportive team which is inclusive of the child, the parents/caregivers, the school team, and the community. While transition planning might seem like a targeted approach for individual children, it can also take on a systemic approach as a school system looks to enhance transition planning for all stakeholders. This approach is known as Transition Discoveries.

5. Transition Discoveries promotes collaboration within communities so that the school, child, family, and community stakeholders co-design opportunities for youth and empower all stakeholders throughout the process. Parents and their children play a vital role in this process. The end goal is the empowerment of youth through community-based action planning, so that children are prepared to self-advocate for their future. Throughout the

process, the youth development goals will focus on Self-Awareness, Independent Living Skills, Self-Management Skills, Youth Engagement, Disability Awareness, Self-Determination Skills, Leadership Skills, and the Significant Role of an Adult. For more information regarding Transition Discoveries, consider visiting their website at www.transitiondiscoveries.org).

To summarize, the goal for all students is to graduate from high school with the readiness skills needed to find additional success in the workforce, promote their education and training, and live independently to the furthest extent possible. However, certain factors might cause a student to disengage from school, putting them at risk of graduating. When schools actively monitor student risk factors by tracking Attendance, Behavior, and Course Performance (ABCs), they are equipped to identify early signs of student risk. Once risk is identified, schools provide the necessary supports and interventions to help get the student back on-track. In a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), various levels of interventions can be offered to address risk in academic, social/emotional, or behavioral capacities. A specific example of an intervention used to support students is that of Check & Connect, which is a mentor-based intervention. Another example is the use of various SIM strategies which can promote practices such as organization of information and comprehension of vocabulary. Finally, your child's school can offer various levels of college and career exploration and planning to better help your child set long-term goals for their future, and as a result, find value in the current demands of their coursework.

Your school may have similar or other supports available that were not mentioned in this text, such as PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports), WIN Time (What I Need), peer support groups, and more. If you wish to learn more about what opportunities are available at your child's school, contact your child's teacher, the school counselor, or building administration and ask about the specific supports they can provide.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Tom Wolf, Governor



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