

How Ohio schools reduced chronic absenteeism

August 13 2024, by Anthony James



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Schools in Ohio, like other schools [across the country](#), are struggling to reduce chronic absenteeism, which [spiked during the pandemic](#). But Ohio may have a head start on dealing with the problem, thanks to a

2018 state law encouraging a positive approach to discipline.

Six years ago, the Ohio Legislature passed [House Bill 318](#). Known as the Supporting Alternatives for Fair Education Act, the law was a comprehensive approach to discipline. It set standards for school safety officers and limited the use of suspensions for children in the early grades. It also encouraged districts to use what are known as "[positive behavior interventions and supports](#)."

This positive approach attempts to improve [student behavior](#) and a school's environment by emphasizing prevention over punishment. The idea is to stop problems before they happen, reward good behavior and give extra help to students who need it the most. At its most basic, an intervention could be a teacher using proximity to students to keep them on task or praising students who behave well. A small number of students may need more extensive support, such as counseling and outreach to the student's family.

Studies have shown that schoolwide use of these positive interventions can [improve children's concentration](#), [boost student achievement](#) and [increase student engagement](#).

Under the [2018 law](#), the Ohio Board of Education must set standards for putting the positive approach to discipline into action. These standards, in turn, must be included in grades K-5 as part of teacher preparation. The law also provides teachers and administrators training on how to use the positive approach as part of their professional development and continuing education. Districts that implement the positive disciplinary method receive extra points on their report card from the state.

Positive approach, fewer absences

According to an unpublished report by a team of scholars from Miami

University, the state's efforts to look on the bright side of discipline have had a happy side effect. Chronic [absenteeism](#)—when students miss 10% or more of school days, regardless of the reason—was more than 4 percentage points lower in schools that implemented the positive behavioral approach than in those that did not. A 4% difference can equal hundreds of thousands of kids statewide.

Persistent absences can result in [reduced academic achievement](#) and [graduation rates](#).

As a [professor and researcher](#) who has studied the use of positive behavior interventions, I was co-leader of the Miami University research team whose efforts showed that policy changes, combined with nuts-and-bolts help on putting the new program into practice, can lead to better outcomes for students. Our analysis demonstrates that Ohio's approach can also be a model for states having problems with attendance.

Funded by a [School Climate Transformation Grant](#) from the U.S. Department of Education, our research sought to determine whether the positive approach reduced chronic absenteeism, one of eight areas in which the state expected improvements. To do this, we examined the impact of the grant from the academic years starting in 2018 through 2023, collecting data directly from school personnel who attended training sessions on positive behavior methods. We also reviewed data from Ohio's [Education Management Information System](#), a collection of statistics on primary and secondary education.

Ohio schools that implemented a positive approach to discipline had lower rates of student absenteeism than those that did not for three out of the four academic years—the exception being the 2021–22 academic year. According to data from the 2022–23 school year, schools that implemented positive discipline had an average chronic absenteeism rate of 27.93%. In the same year, schools that had not adopted the positive

approach reported a rate of 33.33%. While 5.38% may not sound like much, this disparity equates to thousands of children, which has major repercussions for Ohio towns.

Chronic absenteeism was an ongoing problem in Ohio's [K-12 student population](#) before the pandemic. Months of online education and repeated disruptions to in-person classes sent rates through the roof. In academic year 2018–19, the baseline, schools that had implemented positive discipline had a chronic absenteeism rate of just 16.67%, the Miami University team reported. By 2022–23, that rate had increased to 27.93%, a jump of 68%. Schools that had not implemented the approach saw their rates of chronic absenteeism rise from an average of 19.52% in 2018–19 to 33.33% in 2022–23, an increase of 71%.

Positive discipline is only part of the solution

From the 2021–22 school year to the following school year, Ohio's overall rate of chronic absenteeism went down slightly, to a [statewide average of 26.8%](#). Still, it remains a critical issue.

Recognizing the seriousness of the problem, Ohio's Department of Education increased its efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism in schools and districts in 2022–23. The initiative, [the Chronic Absenteeism Improvement Indicator](#), compares a district's rate of chronic absenteeism against benchmarks set for annual improvement. This is all part of the new [star rating system](#).

Ohio's adoption of the SAFE Act and a positive approach to managing student behavior are first steps toward its goal of improving the learning environment and increasing student engagement in school.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: How Ohio schools reduced chronic absenteeism (2024, August 13) retrieved 14 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-08-ohio-schools-chronic-absenteeism.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.