

NDPS Certification Program Field Project Report

Mountain Education Charter High School Academic Tracking System (ATS)

65 Kenimer Street
Cleveland, GA

Charles Wayne Lovell, Project Director

706-897-8175
wlovell@mymec.org

Key words: Charter, high school, student progress, growth, tracking system, intervention

Mountain Education Charter High School (MECHS) Academic Tracking System (ATS)

Funding Sources

This project was funded through dedicated technology funds and from site-based budgets.

Project Cost and Budget Narrative

Overall cost analysis is difficult to extrapolate due to the embedded nature of many of the associated expenses. For example, tangible costs can be attributed to the purchase of biometric device for time stamp (fingerprint scanner); however, the MECHS technology department had to develop code and formats within a secondary student information system that MECHS utilizes to support student service support. Additionally, the costs were spread over a period of time that helped to offset any major budget issues. MECHS has an individual that works to support the student information system and to continually provide customized resources/data fields within the student information system.

Scope and Setting

Initially, the ATS was field-tested/piloted at one site with approximately 150 students. During this time, the ATS went through dramatic changes. It began initially as a mail merge document that was extremely labor intensive. I had been charged with the task of creating a system to track student progress and to identify students that were not making adequate academic progress. After the initial field test and modifications, the ATS was embedded into the MECHS SIS. Initially, the ATS was limited to grade sheets that were accessible by staff and included time in module and module grade with a culminating final GPA. At this point, the ATS can provide progress charts for each course that is provided at MECHS. These progress charts include all students enrolled in each course with a bar graph indicating the time (in hours) the student has worked in the course and the percent toward course completion. This allows site directors, teachers, and student service staff (graduation coaches, mentors, counselors, and others) to monitor student progress.

Staffing Pattern

All classrooms within MECHS are equipped with this functionality. The expectation is that every classroom is fully implementing the ATS with fidelity

Population Served

Every student attending MECHS as a full-time student is tracked by the ATS. MECHS is a 9-12 program..

Project Origination

As a reaction to a lack of accountability in regard to student progress monitoring, I was approached to develop a tracking process/procedure that would allow each site to identify struggling students. Initially, the program began as a mail merge document that was extremely labor intensive and required an individual to print out reports and to share these reports in a format that was easily accessed by instructional staff. As the program developed, the ATS became embedded in a primary SIS that supported special student programs such as mentoring. Through a collaborative effort with our technology department, our instructional staff, and our student services staff, the ATS went through a series of modifications to provide real-time grade sheets that included grades and time in each module. A process

of ongoing improvement was implemented and additional functions were added. Today the program will provide real-time course specific information that includes all students enrolled in the specific course and each student's progress as measured by time in course and completion percentage.

Issues Addressed

Prior to the ATS, students often lost their course grade sheets and this presented great difficulty in recreating these documents. In addition, many students were "falling through the crack" in regard to identification of students not making appropriate progress. Additionally, the ATS currently serves as a resource/tool for school leaders at the site level to identify students that need interventions. To that end, site leaders can transition from simply managing instructional programs to becoming instructional leaders. Early intervention allows site personnel to establish a strategic plan for EOC test preparation and individualized student support/intervention.

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives

Early student intervention was the primary outcome that MECHS was seeking. MECHS desired to provide a more data-driven strategic focus that could originate in the classroom and could affect student outcomes in real time.

Strategies and/or Interventions

In relation to NDPC strategies, the ATS is a result of systemic renewal, supports and informs mentoring and tutoring strategies, and involves technology and individualized instructional opportunities. The implementation of the ATS required addressing school culture and the engagement of instructional staff to increase technological fluency, consistency, and fidelity.

Project Timeline

The ATS is an ongoing project that is continually being reviewed and customized/modified.

Special Conditions and/or Expertise Required to Carry Out the Project

The ATS required the expertise and skills of the MECHS technology department and the input of site staff. Additional requirements required FileMakerPro experience/expertise and the use of biometric scanners. Finally, the project would not have been as successful without a great deal of patience on the part of all that were involved.

Outcomes and Achievements

At present, MECHS has a fully implemented student progress tracking system that can provide a wealth of data points that can be useful in customizing an individualized intervention/test preparation plan. The availability of real-time progress charts and grade sheets is extremely useful with the MECHS mentoring program and with parent involvement.

Outcomes Related to School Completion and Graduation Rates

Effective student tracking using ATS provides real-time data on course completion percentages, grades, and student hours logged into course both cumulatively and module by module. Time spent in module has informed the MECHS Curriculum/Instruction team on problematic modules and has allowed this department to become more interactive in the actual classroom setting.

Current Status of Project

The ATS is an ongoing project that is changing the culture within each MECHS site. As such, the ATS is an integral component of the performance-driven culture that is being established within the organization.

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant

Initially, the primary role was to develop a concept, a plan, and a pilot project. This expanded as the ATS became embedded in the SIS. The current role is to ensure 100% staff compliance/fidelity and to be responsive to issues/concerns and modify accordingly.

Lessons Learned

Real-time, accurate student progress tracking is key to early intervention and can affect student outcomes dramatically. Many anecdotal stories have been related that demonstrate the effectiveness of having the knowledge that is provided by the ATS. Additionally, the ATS has helped to initiate a performance, data-driven culture within MECHS.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners About the Project

It is imperative that school leaders find/develop some mechanism to collect relevant and timely student data on key indicators and data points. Interventions cannot happen if students are not identified as in need.