Academic Risk Reporting (ARR) Evaluation Brief

May 2024

Background

Fulton County Schools (FCS) is committed to identifying and supporting students at risk of lagging behind and not graduating high school. Failing to graduate from high school often leads to adverse consequences, such as reduced income, unstable job prospects, diminished health, and shorter lifespans[1]To support the remediation of these outcomes, FCS has created a collection of reports for its staff that encompass student-level data on key academic, attendance, and behavior indicators.

Since school-based staff use these reports to identify and support students at risk of dropping out of school, FCS was interested in confirming and ensuring that the current reports are collecting the information necessary to best inform school staff in their decisions regarding when and how to support students.

FCS contracted with NORC at the University of Chicago to develop and implement a multi-method evaluation.

Evaluation Questions

1. What early warning indicators are most beneficial to FCS staff to identify students at academic risk?
2. Is the data updated frequently enough?
3. Are students who meet or exceed indicator thresholds correctly identified in dashboards and reports?
4. Which staff utilize ARR, and what is their opinion of the current system?
5. How do staff perceive the value of ARR?
    a. Is the dashboard being used?
    b. Who is using the dashboard at schools?
    c. What information is the dashboard presenting well?
    d. Is the dashboard missing any information?
    e. Could the information be presented more explicitly?

Data and Methodology

- The **Academic Risk Report** (ARR) is a web tool that identifies multiple at-risk indicators (e.g., math and reading course grades, state standardized tests, iReady diagnostic tests, and other assessments) for each student in the district, and flags the student if, based on the number of indicators, the student exceeded the threshold.

Qualifier	Qualifier Type	Value	Threshold
i-Ready Percentile[1]	Reading, Math	Percentile	<25%
Early Composition[2]	Reading, Math	Percentile	<25%
MAP Percentile	Reading, Math	Percentile	<25%
GMAS Achievement Level	Reading, Math	Level 1-4	1
Grade	Reading, Math	Score (0 – 107)	69 or below
CBM Reading Percentile	Reading	Percentile	<25%
GMAS Reading Indicator	Reading	Yes/No	No
Total # of Qualifiers	Math, Reading	Sum (0 – 3)	1 = Marginally At-Risk 2+ = At Risk [1]

[1]Only available for Elementary School-level grades 2-5 and Middle School-level grades.
[2]Only available for Elementary School-level grades pre-K-1.

- The **Attendance Report** includes absentee data by zone, school, and student. These data are presented by color-coded levels that represent the extent of absenteeism. For example, green indicates satisfactory attendance (less than 5% absent), yellow indicates at-risk attendance (5%-9.99% absent), orange indicates chronically absent (10%-19.99% absent), and red indicates severe chronic absence (20% or more absent).

[1] Rumberger, R. W. (2001). *Why students drop out of school and what can be done*.

- The **Behavior Risk Report** (BRR) includes the level of "risk" for every K-12 student in the district based on the number of risk behavior indicators. These indicators can include, for example, discipline referrals, suspensions, failing grades, absenteeism, and tardiness. Indicators are compiled into a composite score reflecting each student's behavior risk level. For example, students with a composite score of 10 or more are flagged at risk.

The evaluation team utilized a survey as well as individual interviews with school staff to gather information about these reports' use and perceptions of the risk reporting tools. An analysis of administrative data was also conducted to better understand the information available in each report. The goal of the evaluation was to provide FCS with a broad description of who was using the tools and how and a deep understanding of the utility of the tools for helping FCS staff support students identified as at-risk.

Results

Overall, FCS school-based staff find the Academic Risk, Attendance, and Behavior Risk reports valuable and essential for them to effectively support students at risk of falling behind or not graduating. The table below summarizes the findings for each dashboard by the research question, and a summary of the findings is described below.

Research Question	Dashboard		
	ARR	Attendance Report	BRR
Is it being used?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Who are the users?	• Principals • CSTs • SST Chairs • Grad Coaches	• Principals • CSTs • SST Chairs • Grad Coaches • Social Workers	• Grad Coaches • Disciplinary personnel • PBIS team
Is it updated enough?	Somewhat	Yes	No
Is it accurate?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Is data presented well?	Yes	Somewhat	Yes
Is it missing any information?	**Yes** - more academic data points, dates of assessments, demographics	**Yes** – demographics, more specific absence, and tardy data	**Yes** – excused absences, classroom behavior events, context of disciplinary events
Info needs to be presented more explicitly?	Yes – define indicators	Yes – define indicators	No
Overall perception	**Positive** – easy to use, helpful	**Neutral** – good, but other sources are better	**Positive** – easy to use, straightforward

Academic Risk Report

The survey and interview findings highlight that over 80% of school staff use the Academic Risk Report (ARR), with principals, curriculum support teachers, student support team chairs, and graduation coaches being the most frequent users. Approximately 40% of respondents use the ARR in its entirety to identify at-risk students, while others focus on specific data within it (e.g., MAP, GMAS, iReady scores). Some staff also consider additional indicators, like student grades or notifications from teachers, to identify students at risk. Once identified, the ARR data helps staff create intervention plans through discussions with other teachers.

The ARR is particularly valued at the beginning and end of the school year, especially when transitioning students between grades and school levels. Staff often enhance ARR data with additional information from other tools like *FastBridge* and prior grades to inform decisions about which risk areas to target for interventions. However, some staff noted issues with slow updates, particularly with iReady data.

The analysis of ARR data revealed that the average student in the district is not at academic risk, as most students have fewer than two academic qualifiers. However, middle schools showed slightly higher averages, suggesting that more students may be at risk at this level, indicating that middle school is a critical period for intervention.

School Level	Math Qualifiers		Reading Qualifiers	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
High School	0.68	0.93	0.59	0.85
Middle School	0.79	1.20	0.80	1.23
Elementary School	0.55	0.84	0.58	1.03

Despite the ARR's usefulness, there were concerns about missing data. Some staff reported instances where specific academic indicators were unavailable for certain students, which they attributed to various factors such as outdated reports or student absences. Missing data was particularly prevalent in state tests and grades at the middle and elementary school levels (12-25% missing), but this was less of an issue for academic risk indicators like MAP percentiles or grades at the high school level, where missing data was under 7%.

To address these gaps, staff combine ARR data with other academic sources like Infinite Campus and allow teachers to recommend students for interventions. Additionally, FCS is participating in a study aimed at improving the transfer of state test data across districts to reduce missing data and provide students with a complete academic profile.

Attendance Report

The Attendance Report is used by FCS staff to track and identify students at risk based on their attendance patterns, categorizing them into color-coded bands (Satisfactory, At Risk, Chronic, Severe Chronic). It helps staff spot trends and determines appropriate interventions such as student conferences, parent check-ins, and case management. Principals, graduation coaches, and curriculum support teachers are the primary users of the report. Still, some staff prefer using other tools like *Everyday Labs* for its ease of use and ability to identify specific attendance patterns, such as frequent tardiness on particular days.

While the report is generally considered easy to use, staff find *Everyday Labs* and other systems more efficient for tracking and communicating with families about attendance issues. Some interviewees noted the Attendance Report's limitations, including difficulty navigating and a lack of detailed features like excused vs. unexcused absences or historical attendance data. Staff also suggested improvements like adding filters for sub-groups (e.g., race, socio-economic status) and contextualizing the data with comparisons to other schools. Despite these issues, the report is valued for its role in identifying at-risk students and providing insights into attendance-related academic concerns.

Behavior Risk Report

The Behavior Risk Report (BRR) is a tool used by FCS staff to track student behavior and discipline. It includes data on behavior indicators such as discipline referrals, suspensions, absences, tardies, retentions, and failing grades. Each indicator is assigned a risk rating (low, moderate, or high) based on its frequency, and the total risk score is calculated by summing these ratings. The report uses color-coded cells (yellow, orange, and red) to highlight students' risk levels, making it easy for staff to identify those at behavioral risk.

Behavior Indicator	Value Type	Risk Rating and Threshold		
		Low	Moderate	High
# of Discipline Referrals	Frequency	1 – 4	5-10	11 or more
ISS Days	Frequency	1 – 4	5-10	11 or more
OSS Days	Frequency	1 – 4	5-10	11 or more
# of Unexcused Absences	Frequency	1 – 4	5-10	11 or more
# of Tardies	Frequency	1 – 9	10-15	16 or more
All-Time Retentions	Frequency	--	--	1 or more
Current Year Failing Grades	Frequency	--	1	2 or more
# of Behavior Indicators	**Sum** (based on weighted value)	--	--	**10 or more**

Survey results showed that 58% of staff use the BRR, with many using it to identify students in need of intervention. The report helps match students to appropriate interventions, such as "Check and Connect," for high school students with attendance or behavior issues. Staff generally find the BRR straightforward and helpful in identifying high-risk students. It is most used in consultation with disciplinary personnel and PBIS teams, and some staff use it to identify broader behavioral trends within schools.

Despite its positive reception, staff suggested improvements, including adding contextual information about incidents, such as the reason behind the behavior or more detailed data on minor behavior incidents. They also recommended including demographic information, attendance data, and a comments section for additional context. Some staff were concerned about the accuracy of the data, particularly with missing or outdated information, and noted that the BRR would be more useful with additional incident details and explanations of risk scores.

Recommendations

The section discusses staff recommendations to improve the utility of the ARR, BRR, and Attendance reports, focusing on district capacity and current research:

1. **Elaborate on Data**: Staff recommend adding specific dates for GMAS, MAPS, and iReady data in the ARR and including a legend for color coding, indicators, and thresholds. This would help elementary principals who find the risk reports challenging to interpret,

especially regarding academic risk indicators tied to unclear timeframes.

2. **Provide Additional Data**: Staff suggests adding more student demographic data (e.g., race/ethnicity, SES, graduation year) to prioritize historically underserved student sub-groups, especially those from minoritized racial/ethnic backgrounds or low socioeconomic status. They also recommend including more detailed course performance data (e.g., grades at each marking period) to better track student progress over time, which research suggests is more effective at identifying students at risk of not graduating.
3. **Expand Access to Early Intervention Programs**: To align with research supporting interdisciplinary collaboration, staff recommend expanding access to early intervention programs (EIP) and other MTSS team members beyond the current limited access. Providing wider access could enhance collaboration and shared responsibility in data-informed decision-making.
4. **Streamline Data**: Staff requested that the ARR, BRR, and Attendance reports be combined into one unified report, recognizing the interconnection of these indicators on student success. Due to FCS's limited capacity, staff suggest providing tools, templates, and training to help staff merge the reports efficiently, thereby enhancing data use without significant additional resources.

Next Steps

The district will establish a cross-functional team dedicated to addressing the key findings of this evaluation. By bringing together diverse expertise from various departments, this team will take a holistic approach to refining and consolidating the Academic Risk, Behavior Risk, and Attendance reports. The focus will be on enhancing the usability and effectiveness of these tools, ensuring they provide actionable insights that support data-driven decision-making. This collaborative effort is designed to streamline reporting processes, reduce redundancy, and improve the clarity and accessibility of information for end users.

We aim to create risk reporting tools that are more responsive to the diverse needs of school and district staff, strategically aligned with broader student success goals, and proactively address challenges and support sustained academic achievement.