



White Paper Analysis

What Are the Best Policies That Change Student Behavior?

A Study of 1,000,000 Tardies Over a Three-Year Period

eCampus Systems
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What Does a Three-Year Study of Over 1,000,000 Tardies Reveal About Changing Student Behavior?

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

- What are the different school tardy policies?
- How are those policies classified?
- Which policies produce the best results?
- How do school “terms” affect the policies?

This is the third Special Report in the series analyzing data for 1,026,777 tardies over a three-year period. The data was collected by schools that had implemented the rules-based software application system provided by eCampusUSA™. The first report deals with the issue of holding students accountable. The second report answers the question of whether student behavior can be influenced. Download and read the reports by visiting <http://eCampusUSA.net> and clicking on Special Reports.

Historical Background

In 1998, three independent school districts (ISDs) met with eCampusUSA™ representatives to discuss how to deal with their problems concerning student tardiness. Initially, the discussion focused on the best way to track students who were late by using the latest technology. However, the conversation soon turned to the more serious question of “How can we influence the behavior of the students and get them to class on time?”

A lively discussion ensued, and two basic principles emerged that were believed to be necessary to influence student behavior. These principles had not been tested and, perhaps more importantly, it was not known how they should be applied to get results, or how long those results would last. The two principles were:

1. A student must be held immediately accountable for their behavior, and the consequence had to be both immediate and consistent.
2. The parent should be involved, because they strongly influence their child’s behavior.

Afterwards, the discussion turned to how technology could be implemented to automate these principles in a consistent, efficient, and cost-effective fashion. At that point, it was determined that sending an email to the parent at the same time a tardy slip was issued was one step in the process. This made eCampusUSA™ the first student discipline system capable of immediately notifying a parent by email of their student’s specific consequence, getting them involved to help solve the

problem. Another step was to automate the printing of customized parent letters for each student, showing the history of disciplinary action – again designed to get the parent involved.

Additional functionality was added, such as escalation of consequences. The ability to escalate discipline automatically was an important step, since it was agreed that the consequence had to be immediate and consistent, something only a rules-based system could provide. It was also agreed that, if necessary, the ability to get the parent involved during the discipline was an important part of improving the student’s behavior.

The process was untested, and it was not known if it would be effective. But today and millions of tardies later, real-world results have confirmed what was suspected in the beginning, supported by additional insights from the educators involved in the process.

What are the Different School Disciplinary Policies?

Disciplinary policies, especially regarding tardy students, vary from school to school. Some schools can be very strict and less tolerant of unacceptable behavior, while other schools can be very lenient. The challenge in analyzing the data was to devise a realistic comparison of the disciplinary policies of the schools which used the software to issue 1,026,777 tardies over the three-year period.

The objective was to define a standard that would establish a scale for schools with policies from “most lenient” to “strictest.” When broken down, the data indicated that some schools issued only one warning before assigning a student detention, while others issued up to four. When the policies for each school were compared, a pattern emerged. The schools that issued only one warning escalated disciplinary action quickly (the strictest) and involved school administration and/or the teacher at an early stage.

The schools that issued up to four warnings (the most lenient) before taking any type of disciplinary action tended to wait longer before either an administrator or the parent became involved. When disciplinary action was escalated for each subsequent offense, the pattern of leniency held true. The escalation of action was much slower than at the stricter schools.

Using this method, each school was categorized based on the number of warnings issued before detention or some other type of corrective action was assigned, especially since warnings were directly related to the rate at which disciplinary action was escalated.

When the schools were placed in a category, it did not mean they had *exactly* the same policies, since every school is unique and designs guidelines to suit its culture and environment. The following table is an example of two schools thought to be similar enough in policy to place in the same category. Both issue only one warning before escalating disciplinary action, which occurs at about the same rate for each school. They have been assigned to **Category 1** – which is considered the **Strictest** in handing out disciplinary action.

Category 1 – Strictest			
School A		School B	
Tardies	Discipline	Tardies	Discipline
1	Warning	1	Warning
2	Detention	2	Detention
3	Detention	3	Parent Meeting
4	Principal Meeting	4	Detention
5	Parent Meeting	5	Principal Meeting

The most important factor is that only one warning is issued before disciplinary action takes place. In examining how quickly disciplinary action was escalated, it was found that it followed the same pattern for all schools placed within a single category, even if they were not identical. In the table, the number of detentions, parent meetings, and principal meetings *are* identical. However, the *order* in which they are administered is different. Regardless of the type of disciplinary action, the escalation is similar between both schools.

Four separate categories were identified, and schools were placed in one of those categories. This allowed the comparison of the effectiveness of schools which escalate disciplinary action more quickly to those that do not. (Note: this study does not focus on the issue of parental involvement. The next white paper in this series deals with how parental involvement influences student behavior.)

The Importance of Matching Policies to Administrative Resources

Another observation can be made when examining the two schools shown in the Category 1 table. At **School B**, a parent meeting is scheduled when the third tardy is issued. This means that someone from the school must contact the parent, schedule the meeting, and then conduct the meeting. This could also require time from either a teacher or administrator, depending on how the school is organized.

School A does not require administrative involvement until the fourth tardy. At that time, in addition to contacting the parents and scheduling the meeting, the principal is directly involved in the discipline. Getting the principal involved at an earlier point could be considered an advantage, but places a greater burden on him or her to address the situation.

Any decision that requires the investment of time and resources should be based on the *return* of the investment. In this case, the return can be measured in the reduction of tardies. If a school can reduce the number of tardies by 75-80% by adopting a policy of early intervention, it may be a

practical decision to make, depending on the school's organization and how much time is available to dedicate to this task.

In the first white paper in this series, the cost was itemized in terms of labor dollars spent by the school for each tardy student. However, this is only part of the cost. When students are late or have a pattern of absence, they cannot learn the material being taught. Classroom absence results in lower performance, not only for the student, but also for the entire school. This in turn can affect funding, the school's ranking, and even the careers of teachers and administrators.

The advantage of a rules-based system is the ability to adjust the policies to achieve the best balance of dedicating resources and optimizing performance.

What are the Four Categories of Policies?

During the analysis, it was discovered that all schools fell into one of the four categories shown in the following table. They ranged from the strictest to the most lenient policies. The primary factor in categorizing each school was based on the number of warnings issued prior to disciplinary action. In every case, schools measured in the study correlated to the rate at which discipline escalated.

Category	Type	Number of Warnings	Escalation
1	Strictest	1	Fastest
2	Less Strict	2	↑
3	Less Lenient	3	↓
4	Most Lenient	4	Slowest

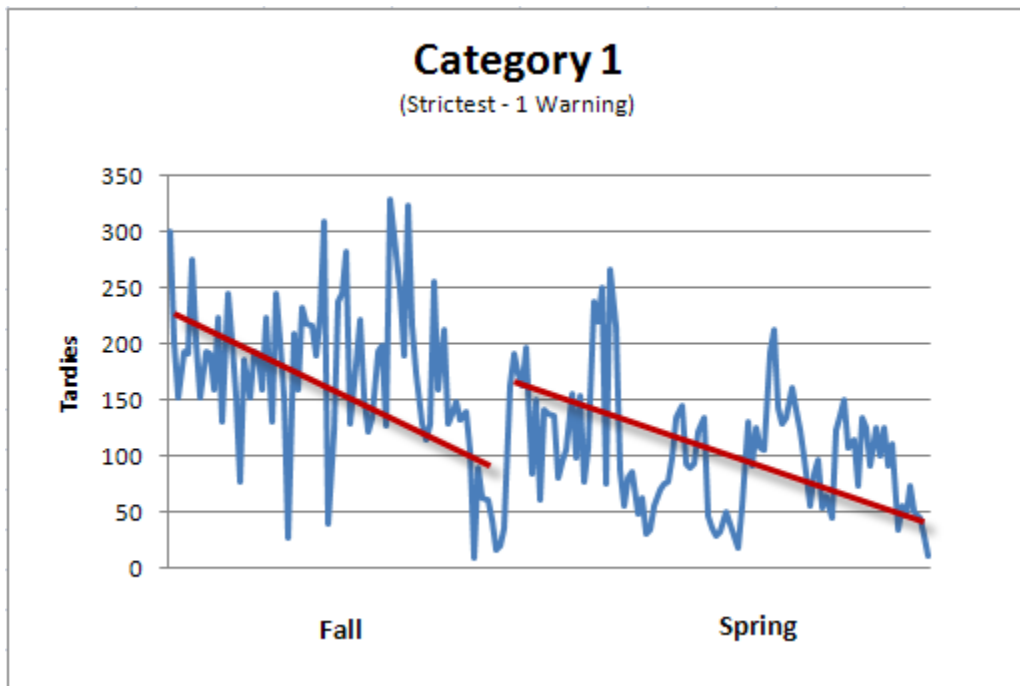
It is important to note that policies are not reflective of the culture of the school. A school may have a very strict policy but can still have a warm and loving environment for the students. In other words, strict policies do not equate with harshness.

Category 1 - The Strictest Policies

Category 1 schools have the strictest policies. Only one warning is issued prior to disciplinary action, and discipline is quickly escalated for each subsequent offense.

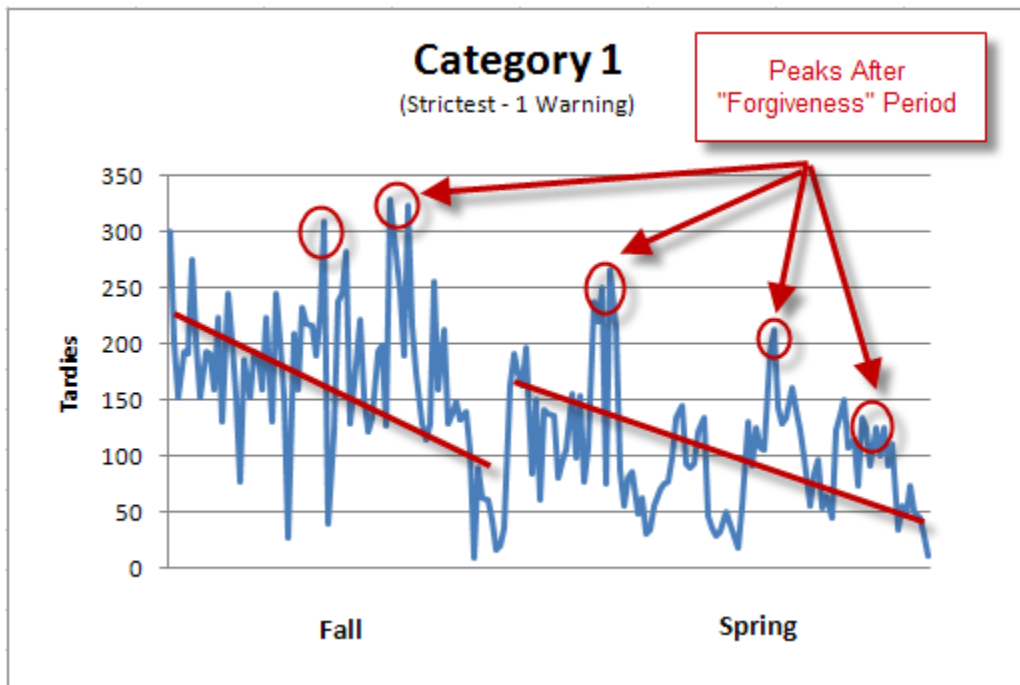
Schools in this category experienced a consistent reduction of 75-80% or more in the rate of student offenses.

The average rate of tardies for the three-year period was compared for the Fall and Spring semesters. A significant downward trend was shown for each school in this category.



An interesting phenomenon was also observed which was not anticipated. Peaks occurred at the beginning of each six- or nine-week period. The explanation? Many schools reset the tardies to zero for each student at the end of the grading period. In the chart, they are called “Forgiveness” periods. Most schools in the study used either a six- or nine-week period.

Based on the data, it appears the students are aware of this fact and take advantage of it, evidenced by an increase of tardies at the beginning of most six-week periods, as shown in the following chart. However, overall performance continued to improve.



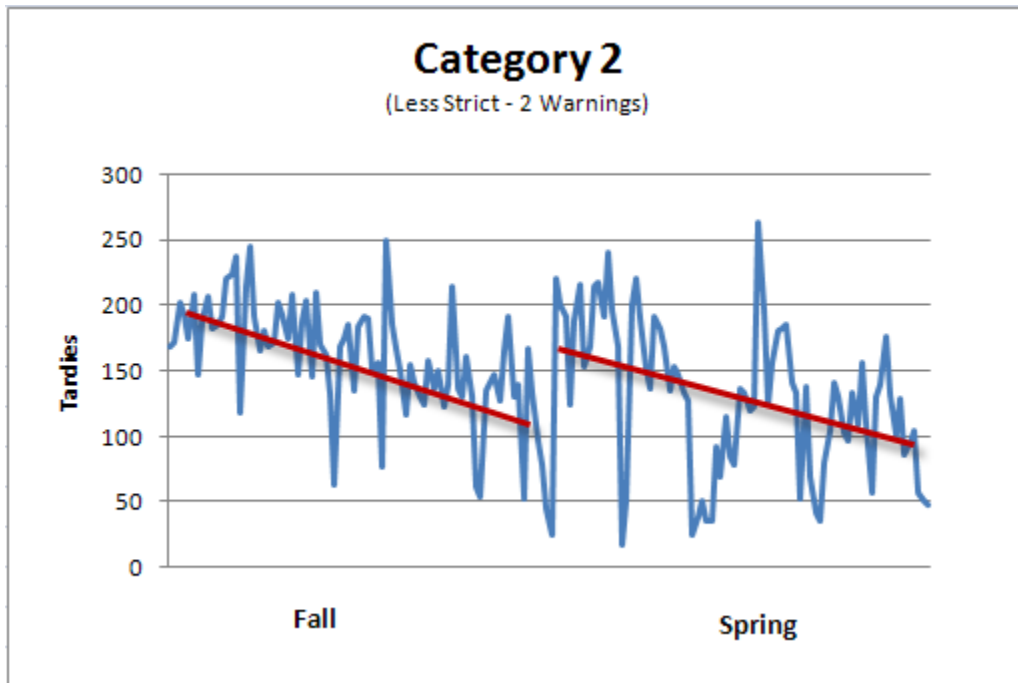
Category 2 – The Less Strict Policies

Category 2 schools had less strict policies. Two warnings were issued by Category 2 schools prior to disciplinary action, and discipline did not escalate as quickly as for Category 1 schools.

Schools in Category 2 experienced a lower reduction in the rate of offenses by students than Category 1 schools. The reduction was in the 60-70% range compared to 75-80% for Category 1.

The data for the three-year period was compared for the Fall and Spring semesters, and the average rate of tardies for the schools were calculated. The downward trend was still significant for each school, as shown in the chart.

Again, the same peaking occurred at the end of each six- or nine-week period, when the tardies were reset to zero. This pattern is consistent with Category 1.

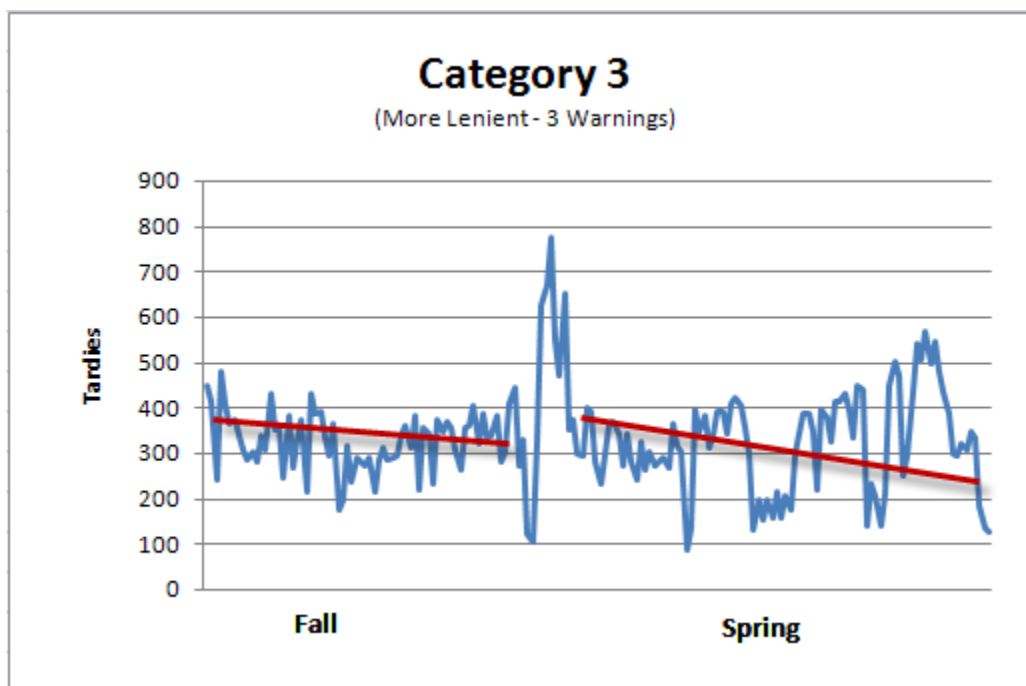


Category 3 – The Less Lenient Policies

Category 3 schools had less lenient policies. Three warnings were issued by Category 3 schools prior to disciplinary action, and discipline escalated more slowly.

Schools in Category 3 saw a much less effective reduction than Categories 1 or 2. The reduction was in the 25-40% range. The downward trend was not as significant, but still represented a reduction.

The peaking at each six- or nine-week period was not as dramatic. The data showed that the peaks lasted a longer time, indicating that the students were taking advantage of the higher number of warnings being issued.



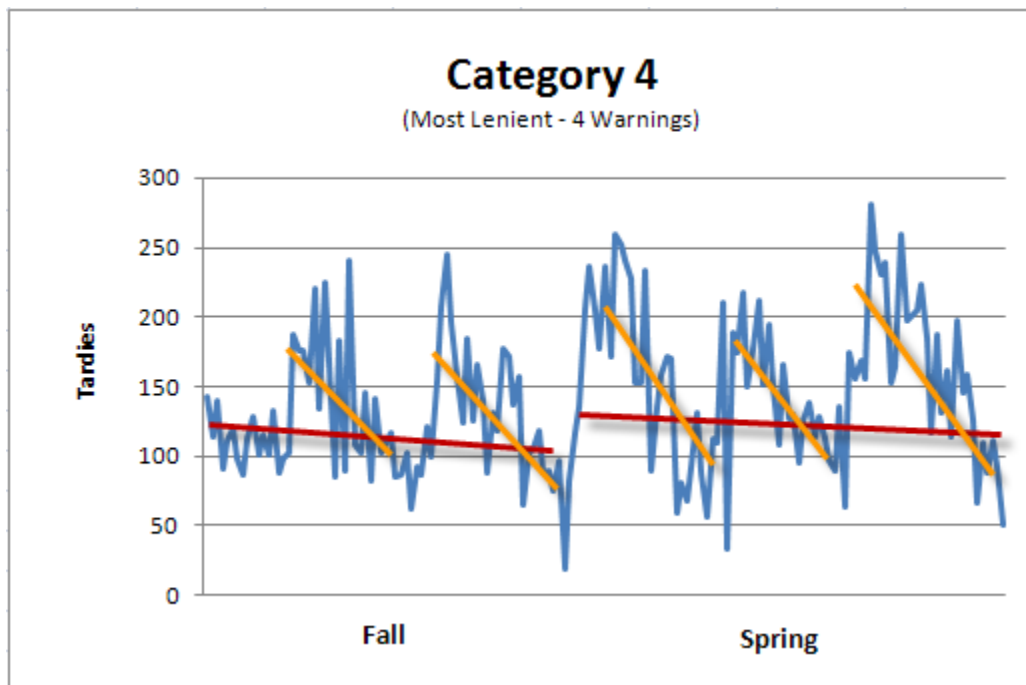
Category 4 – The Most Lenient Policies

Category 4 schools had the most lenient policies. Four warnings were issued by Category 4 schools prior to disciplinary action, and discipline escalated very slowly.

Schools in Category 4 were the least effective in reducing tardies over the year. The reduction was in the 5-15% range.

The peaking at each six- or nine-week period was quite dramatic. The data shows that the peaks lasted longer than in Categories 1 or 2, but when the warnings ran out, student behavior quickly changed to follow the rules.

The clear outcome is that the students rapidly reverted to unacceptable behavior. A seesaw battle takes place which is not effective at either reducing the number of tardies or influencing behavior over the course of the year. In fact, it may be conditioning students to anticipate the beginning of a new period so they can take advantage of the lenient policy.



The Results - Certain Policies are Significantly More Effective

Since the system provided by eCampusUSA™ was rules-based, each school could define their own rules depending on their policies for dealing with tardy students. Some schools were very lenient and escalated disciplinary action very slowly. Others were much more aggressive in their policy and escalated disciplinary action immediately. In conclusion, after analyzing the data for over one million tardies issued through the rules-based system, it was discovered that the best results for schools were seen in those whose policies tend to be stricter, as shown in the tables for Categories 1 and 2.

After examining the data for the three-year period, it was discovered that:

- There are 4 basic policy categories.
- The policies escalate in scale from most lenient to strictest.
- The most lenient policies (Categories 3 & 4) had the poorest results with only a 5-40% reduction in tardies.
- The strictest policy (Category 1) had the best results. It achieved a 75-80% reduction in tardies and did the best job of influencing student behavior.
- There is a consistent reduction in tardies when students are held accountable with immediate consequences.
- Resetting tardies to zero at the beginning of each six- or nine-week term does influence student behavior, but that influence is dampened by the strictest policies and amplified by the more lenient policies.
- The resources dedicated to corrective action can be dramatically affected by the policy, but can be managed to determine the best return on investment and performance optimization by adjusting the rules-based system.
- The increase of tardies after a holiday break rapidly declines and quickly exceeds results for the first half of the year in every category except for Category 4, the most lenient.