

Physical Environment

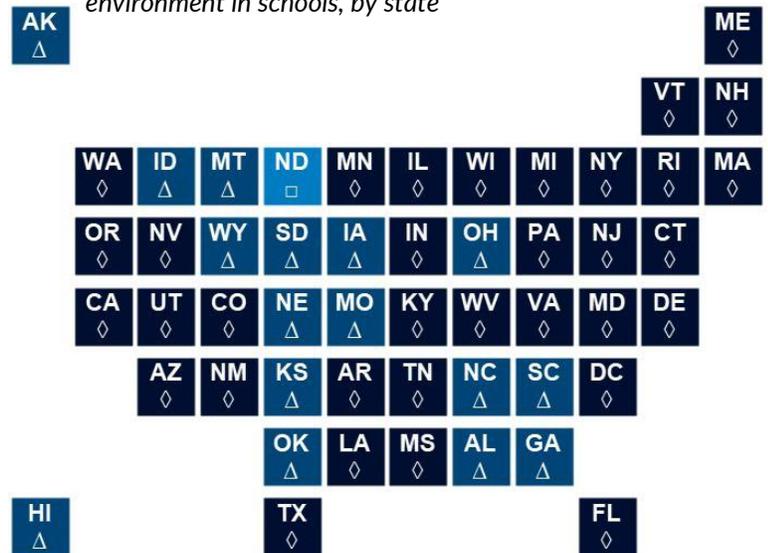
The **Physical Environment (PE)** of schools encompasses the physical conditions students experience at school, including both conditions of the school building as well as policies and procedures related to threats of physical harm. This analysis explores how state policy addresses the environmental health and safety of school facilities and protections from health and safety threats, such as school emergencies or crisis events; alcohol, tobacco, or drug use; or exposure to environmental hazards.

How is physical environment addressed in state law?

- **Most states require school districts to prepare for emergency events on their school campuses: districts in 46 states must develop emergency operations plans, and 36 states require plans to be periodically reviewed and updated.** Districts in 35 states must conduct multi-hazard practice drills, such as disaster or active shooter drills, and 20 states require coordination with first responders.
- **Almost all states either restrict or prohibit tobacco use on school campuses.** Four states require districts to adopt comprehensive tobacco-free schools policies recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)¹ that address multiple components, including access to cessation programs and restrictions on advertising.
- **Forty-one states encourage or require districts to implement alcohol and drug referral, intervention, or treatment services for students with alcohol and drug disorders.**
- **Twenty-nine states prohibit the use of corporal punishment.** Twenty-two states permit it or do not address its use in state law.
- **Forty-four states limit the use of restraint and seclusion, of which thirty-eight states require districts to limit the use of restraint and seclusion and to provide meaningful protections for students, including mandatory training for school personnel.** While federal law does not restrict the use of seclusion or restraint, even for children with disabilities, the federal Government Accountability Office issued a 2009 audit identifying hundreds of instances in which children experienced death or abuse due to the use of these practices.²
- **States vary with respect to coverage of environmental health provisions.** Forty-two states address exposure to chemical hazards through integrated pest management or green cleaning programs. Twenty-nine states address water quality in schools, for example, using potable water standards or testing

Figure 1. Nearly all states address the physical conditions of school environments in state education policies.

Comprehensiveness of policies promoting the physical environment in schools, by state



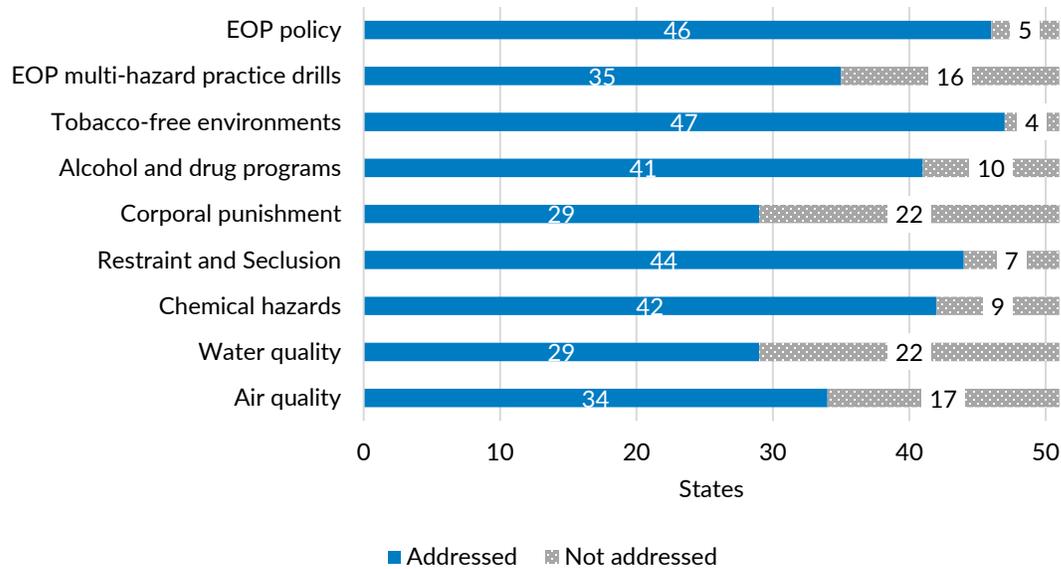
*This map shows states that have [◊] **comprehensive** (34), [Δ] **moderate** (16), and [◻] **low** (1) coverage of physical environment topics in statutes and regulations governing education.*

protocols to ensure safe drinking water. Thirty-four states address the adoption of indoor air quality plans, policies, or routine inspection programs.

How comprehensively do states cover physical environment?

- Thirty-four states have comprehensive coverage of physical environment topics (range: 72 percent to 100 percent), and 16 states have moderate coverage (range: 39 percent to 67 percent). Only one state (North Dakota) has more limited coverage (33 percent) of physical environment topics.

Figure 2. Number of States Covering Selected Physical Environment Topics



Child Trends, in partnership with The Institute of Health Research and Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago and EMT Associates, Inc., examined the extent to which 11 healthy schools domains are addressed in state policy. These domains include the 10 components of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model: Health Education; Physical Education and Physical Activity; Nutrition Environment and Services; Health Services; Counseling, Psychological, and Social Services; Social and Emotional Climate; Physical Environment; Employee Wellness; Family Engagement; and Community Involvement. An additional domain, the WSCC References domain, addresses the extent to which state laws include explicit references to the WSCC model or similar language, such as the Center for Disease Control and Preventions' Coordinated School Health model.

This sub-brief provides an overview of how state policies cover the Physical Environment domain. Sub-briefs covering the other domains as well as the compiled report can be found on the [Child Trends website](#). Definitions of each of the 18 topics are provided in the Appendix of the compiled report. Data from all topics are available through the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) [State Policy Database on School Health](#).

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1994). Guidelines for school health programs to prevent tobacco use and addiction. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 43(RR-2), 1-24.

² Kutz, G. D. (2009). Seclusions and restraints: Selected cases of death and abuse at public and private schools and treatment centers. *United States Government Accountability Office*.