

Community Involvement

Community Involvement in schools can promote resource sharing and coordination to more effectively meet diverse student needs and enrich opportunities in the learning environment.

This analysis explores the extent to which a sample of local education agency (LEA) policies from the 2017-2018 school year, representative at the state level, addressed community involvement. The analysis explores how policies promote community engagement in school governance, the formation of school and community partnerships, and the shared use of school facilities. The LEAs studied are a sample of 432 agencies, spanning 19 states and the District of Columbia (hereafter “selected states”; see maps below and [Methods Appendix](#) for more details on the state selection), and include both public school districts (“districts”; n = 368) and charter LEAs (n = 64).¹

Within the Community Involvement domain, we assessed three topics (see [Coding Appendix](#)) for the districts and charter schools in each of the 20 states. In this brief, we present data separately for public school districts and charter LEAs.

Public School District Policies

The district sample included 368 LEAs in 20 selected states, weighted to be representative of districts at the state level. For these data, we determined the percentage of the topics addressed, on average, across the districts within each state and across all districts studied. To support easy comparisons in the comprehensiveness of district policy across states, percentages were given one of four designations: none (0%), low (< 40%), moderate (40% to < 80%), or comprehensive (≥ 80%).

Notably, this assessment does not speak to the prescriptiveness of LEA policies; policies that included firm mandates and policies that merely encouraged activity counted equally in this measure of comprehensiveness. (See [Methods Appendix](#) for more information on our coding process.)

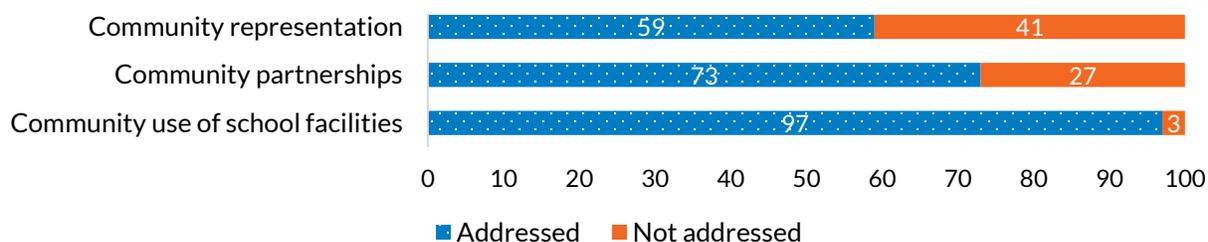
For each of the 20 states, we also present a comparison between district data and state statutes and regulations for the same three community involvement topics. The same categorizations of none, low, moderate, and comprehensive are used to present the state data. Note that the state data presented herein only represent a subset of the state law data compiled and presented in our companion [state law report](#) and the state law data included in the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) [State Policy Database on School Health](#).

Across all 20 states, district policies at least moderately covered community involvement topics.

- **District policies in seven states were comprehensive (range: 83% to 99%; average: 91%).** District policies in the 13 remaining states addressed a moderate amount of community involvement topics (range: 41% to 79%; average: 67%).
- **Almost every district (97%) included in this study addressed community use of school facilities (see Figure 1).** These policies may address open access to school spaces for recreation or other community uses. At times, policies establish detailed plans for use and/or payment.

- Just over 12 percent of districts studied encouraged school-community partnerships within their policies and just over 60 percent required that schools create partnerships within the broader community. Community partnerships often address student needs in ways that are beyond the resources of an individual school district.
- Just over half of the districts studied either encouraged (32%) or required (27%) community member representation on governance councils, advisory boards, or committees. Research indicates that greater stakeholder involvement leads to more well-rounded policy making.²

Figure 1. Percent of public school districts in 20 states addressing selected community involvement topics in policy.



States are mixed regarding whether district policies or state laws addressed community involvement more comprehensively.

- In nine states, district policies were more comprehensive, while in six states, state laws were more comprehensive (see Figures 2a and 2b). The remaining five states addressed community involvement similarly in their state laws and district policies.
- Districts more frequently addressed community use of school facilities in policies than did states. Ninety-seven percent of districts in the 20 states addressed community use of school facilities, while only 65 percent of states addressed this topic.

Figure 2a and 2b. State law (left) and public school district (right) comprehensiveness of community involvement topics in policy.



These maps show the proportion of states (left panel) and districts (right panel) in each of the 20 selected states that have [■] **comprehensive** (state panel: 9; district panel: 7), [▲] **moderate** (state panel: 5; district panel: 13), [●] **low** (state panel: 5; district panel: 0), or [-] **no** (state panel: 1; district panel: 0) coverage of community involvement topics in state and district policies, respectively. For this report, only the 20 states represented with colored squares were studied (at the state and district levels); states shown in gray were excluded from this analysis.

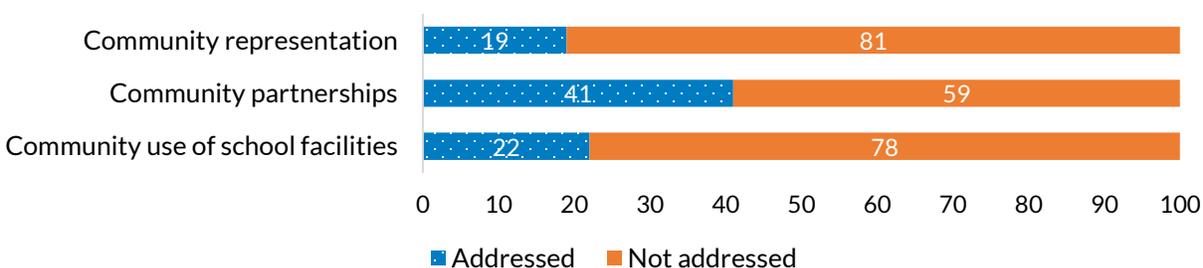
Charter LEA Policies

We also collected policies for a sample of 64 charter LEAs across the 20 selected states. Depending on the structure of charter LEAs in a given state, such policies may be applicable for a single school or for multiple schools run by the same charter provider. Charter policies often addressed different aspects of community involvement when compared to public school district policies. Because the number of charter policies collected in a single state was often small (proportionate to their representation across all LEAs in the state), we chose to look across the full sample of charter schools rather than make generalizations at the state level.

Community involvement was addressed in only a fraction of charter LEA policies.

- **Unlike district policies, only 22 percent of charter LEAs' policies addressed community use of facilities (see Figure 3).** Only 3 percent of charter LEAs encouraged and/or incentivized the practice.
- **Few charter LEAs addressed other community involvement topics.** Thirteen percent of charter LEAs encouraged, and 28 percent required the creation of partnerships with outside organizations that may be able to support students in ways beyond the capabilities of the school. Only 19 percent of charter LEAs addressed community representation on local governance councils, advisory boards, or committees.

Figure 3. Percent of sampled charter LEAs addressing selected community involvement topics in written policy.



The Institute for Health Research and Policy at the University of Illinois at Chicago, in partnership with Child Trends, examined the extent to which 11 healthy schools domains are addressed in local education policies across 20 strategically selected states (including 19 states and the District of Columbia; see Methods section for details on the sampling methodology). 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, WSCC References, addresses the extent to which district policies include explicit references to the WSCC model, or similar language such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Coordinated School Health model. Sub-briefs covering the other domains can be found at <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/the-current-landscape-of-school-district-and-charter-policies-that-support-healthy-schools>.

¹ For purposes of this work, a charter LEA is an LEA listed in the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data (SY 2014-15) as an "Independent Charter District."

² Kehm, R., Davey, C., Nanney, M. (2015) The role of family and community involvement in the development and implementation of school nutrition and physical activity policy. *Journal of School Health*. 85(2):90-9.