

Family Engagement

The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model emphasizes that **Family Engagement** is a critical component to student success in the classroom.¹ As a shared responsibility between educators and parents, family engagement involves inclusivity at school, parent participation, and parental support for students, both at home and in the community.

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 family engagement topics. 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).²

Within the Family Engagement domain, we assessed four topics (see [Coding Appendix](#)) for the districts and charter LEAs in each of the 20 states. In this brief, we present data separately for 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 (< 44%), moderate (44% to < 78%), or comprehensive (\geq 78%).

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.)

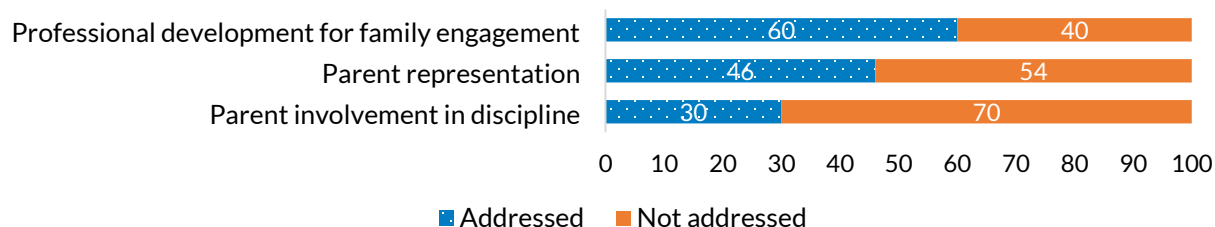
For each of the 20 states, we also present a comparison between district data and state statutes and regulations for the same four family engagement topics. The same categorizations of none, low, moderate, and comprehensive are used to present the state data. Note that the state data presented herein 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](#).

Coverage of family engagement topics in district policies varied considerably between the 20 states.

- **District policies in 4 states (AK, CO, DC, NY) had, on average, comprehensive coverage of family engagement topics evaluated as part of this study (range: 80% to 100%; average: 86%).** District policies in 12 states had moderate coverage (range: 46% to 77%; average: 59%), and four states (ND, NE, NJ, TX) had low coverage of family engagement topics (range: 4% to 41%; average: 31%).
- **Almost two-thirds (60%) of districts in the 20 selected states addressed professional development for staff on the topic of family engagement (see Figure 1).** Often, this professional development was tied into district policies related to federal services under Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, and often specifically focused on training teachers in ways to better communicate with parents and guardians.

- **Just under half (46%) of districts in this study addressed parent representation on local governance councils, advisory boards, or committees.** Federal regulations already require that parents be involved in the periodic development, review, and update of district wellness policies³; however, these policies encourage family engagement in broader school decision making or school improvement planning efforts.
- **Only 30 percent of districts studied addressed parental involvement in student disciplinary action and management, such as assisting in the development of student codes of conduct.** When there is more family involvement in the school setting, fewer students are sent out of the classroom for disciplinary action.⁴

Figure 1. Percent of public school districts in 20 states covering selected family engagement topics in policy.



For the majority of selected states (12 of 20), state laws and district policies addressed family engagement topics similarly.

- **District policies in six states were more comprehensive than their respective state laws** (see Figure 2a and 2b). The laws of two states were more comprehensive than district policies.
- **Professional development for teachers and staff around family engagement was addressed more often at the district than the state level.** Only 30 percent of states addressed providing professional development for teachers/staff on engaging parents as compared to 60 percent of districts.

Figure 2a and 2b. State law (left) and public school district (right) comprehensiveness of family engagement 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: 2; district panel: 4), [▲] moderate (state panel: 13; district panel: 12), [●] low (state panel: 4; district panel: 4), or [-] no (state panel: 1; district panel: 0) coverage of family engagement 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 grey were excluded from this analysis.

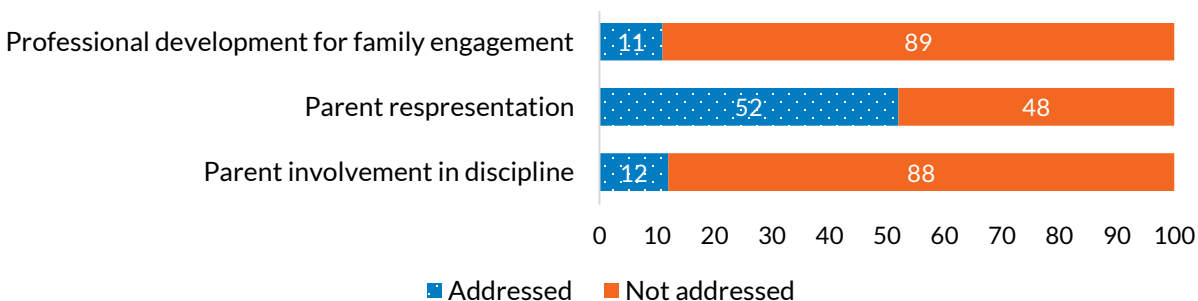
Charter LEA Policies

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 family engagement 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.

Fewer charter LEAs addressed family engagement topics than public school districts in the 20 states.

- Just over half (52%) of charter LEAs analyzed addressed parent representation on school governance councils, advisory boards, or committees (see Figure 3). This is similar to the portion of districts that addressed this topic in policy (46%).
- Fewer charter schools addressed professional development to promote parental involvement (11%) and parental involvement in disciplinary policy making (12%) than public school districts.

Figure 3. Percent of charter LEAs addressing selected family engagement 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 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Components of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child: Family Engagement*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wscs/components.htm>.

² 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."

³ Local School Wellness Policy Implementation Under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, Final Rule, (2016). 81 Federal Register 50151. Retrieved from: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-07-29/pdf/2016-17230.pdf>.

⁴ Sheldon, S.B. & Epstein, J.L. Improving Student Behavior and School Discipline with Family and Community Involvement. (2002) *Education And Urban Society* 35(1).