

Social and Emotional Climate

The **Social and Emotional Climate** of schools can provide the support and structure that students need to feel safe and build relationships that facilitate their learning. A focus on social and emotional climate incorporates methods to reduce chronic absenteeism; positive approaches to addressing behavior without excluding students from school; and policies related to the prevention of bullying, dating violence, and hazing.

This analysis explores the extent to which a sample of local education agency (LEA) policies from the 2017-2018 school year addressed social and emotional climate. The analysis explores both the content students learn and the professional development teachers receive. 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 Social and Emotional Climate domain, we assessed 14 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 (< 35%), moderate (35% to < 70%), or comprehensive (\geq 70%).

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 14 social and emotional climate 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](#).

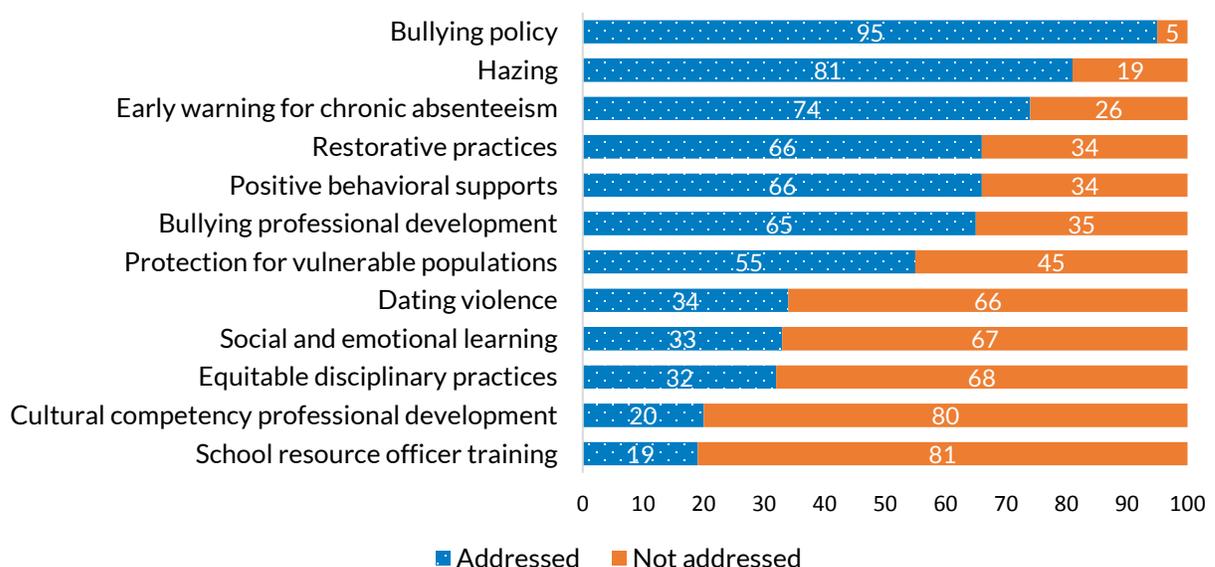
In 15 of the 20 states, district policies had moderate coverage of social and emotional climate topics.

- **District policies in CA as well as the District of Columbia, on average, comprehensively cover the social and emotional climate topics examined (range: 71% to 79%; average: 75%).** Districts in 15 states have moderate coverage (range: 39% to 60%; average: 47%), while districts in ND, NE, and SC have low coverage (34%) of the social and emotional topics examined in this study.
- **Nearly all public school districts in the 20 selected states (95%) had policies addressing bullying prevention (see Figure 1).** Twenty-one percent of district bullying policies addressed all elements of the

U.S. Department of Education’s bullying policy recommendations.^{2,3} However, only 65 percent of districts addressed professional development for school personnel on bullying prevention and response. Furthermore, just over half (55%) enumerated protections for groups of students who may be more likely to be targeted by bullying, including protections based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

- **Seventy-four percent of districts studied established early warning and intervention systems to address truancy and chronic absenteeism within their policies.** Fifty-two percent of districts went beyond parental conferencing and notification to provide comprehensive student supports to help keep students in school.
- **Two-thirds of districts analyzed (66%) addressed positive behavior supports; additionally, while not necessarily the same districts, the same percentage addressed using restorative practices.** Both sets of policies emphasized interventions that work to reinforce good behavior and limit exclusionary discipline measures.
- **While 81 percent of districts in the selected states had policies on hazing, only 34 percent had a policy related to dating violence.** Attention to the dangers of hazing largely emerged in the early 2000s, whereas attention to teen dating violence has been much more recent.^{4,5}
- **One-third of districts studied had policies specifically addressing social and emotional learning (33%).** However, many districts may include social and emotional learning as part of health education requirements.
- **Few of the districts in the selected states had policies relating to professional development for cultural competency (20%).** Such policies help ensure that teachers are equipped with the skills to teach a diverse group of students and to recognize their own implicit biases.⁶
- **Few districts analyzed had policies related to specialized training for school resource officers (19%).** These policies typically require officers working in schools to gain a broader set of knowledge around early intervention and adolescent development, which are not covered in typical law enforcement training.⁷

Figure 1. Percent of public school districts in 20 states covering selected social and emotional climate topics in policy.



Across the 20 states, only one state (Idaho) had district-level policies that were more comprehensive than state law.

- **Nine of the 20 states analyzed had laws that were more comprehensive than district policies in those states (see Figures 2a and 2b).** The remaining ten addressed social and emotional climate similarly at the state and district level.
- **Bullying was the most commonly addressed topic in the domain of social and emotional climate at both the state and district levels.** All 20 states and 95 percent of the districts within the 20 states had a bullying prevention policy. Further, 85 percent of the states and 65 percent of districts included provisions for teacher or school staff professional development on bullying-related issues.
- **Only a handful of states and districts addressed provisions related to school resource officers (SROs).** Forty percent of the 20 states encourage specialized training for SROs as compared to only 19 percent of the district policies. Further, only 20 percent of the states and only 8 percent of the districts in the 20 states required clear guidelines for referring students to law enforcement.

Figure 2a and 2b. State law (left) and public school district (right) comprehensiveness of social and emotional climate 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: 8; district panel: 2), [▲●] **moderate** (state panel: 11; district panel: 15), [●] **low** (state panel: 1; district panel: 3), or [-] **no** (state panel: 0; district panel: 0) coverage of social and emotional climate 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.

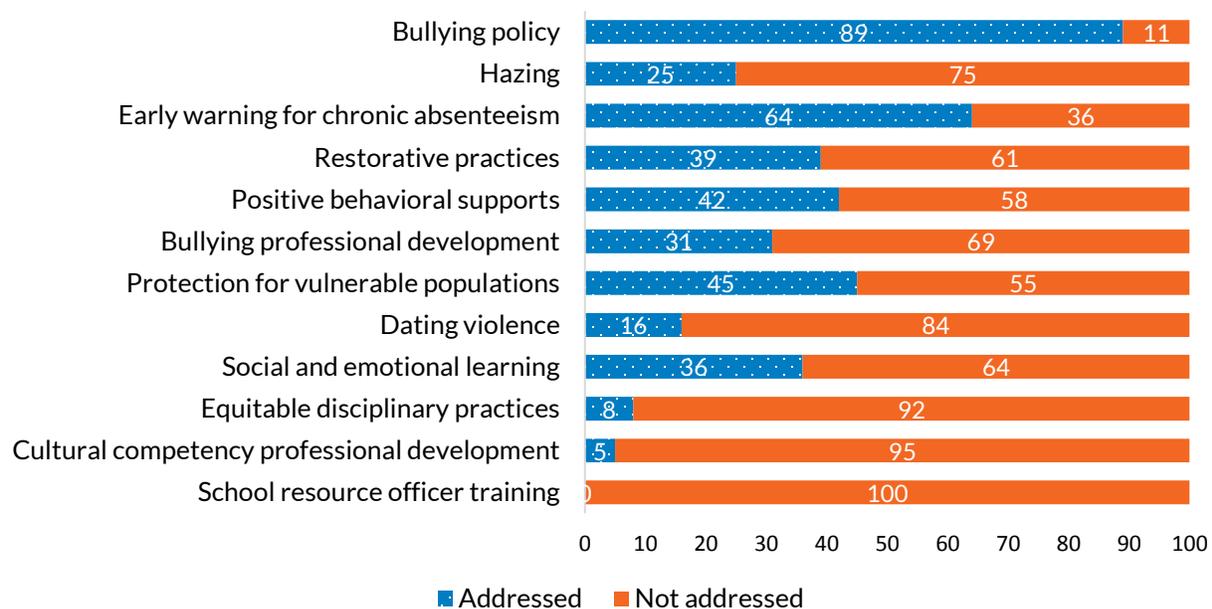
Charter LEA Policies

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 social emotional climate when compared to 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.

Charter LEAs had considerably less coverage of social and emotional climate topics compared to public school districts.

- **Much like districts, most charter LEAs have bullying prevention policies (89%; see Figure 3).** Thirty-one percent of charter LEAs addressed professional development for teachers on the topic of bullying, 25 percent had hazing policies, and 16 percent had dating violence policies.
- **About two-thirds of charter LEAs (64%) addressed early warning systems for chronically absent students in their policies.** Around one-quarter of charter LEAs (27%) specifically provided for student supports to reduce absenteeism.
- **Few charter LEAs addressed equitable disciplinary practices (8%), professional development in the area of cultural competency (5%), and training for school resource officers (0%).**

Figure 3. Percent of Charter LEAs covering selected social and emotional climate topics in written policies.



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 Preventions' 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 U.S. Department of Education. *Anti-Bullying Policies: Examples of Provisions in State Laws*. 2010. Retrieved from: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/secletter/101215.html>.

³ Stuart-Cassel, V. Bell, A. Springer, J.F. Analysis of State Bullying Laws and Policies. (2011). Retrieved from: https://www.emt.org/docs/EMT_Analysis-of-State-Bullying-Laws-Policies.pdf.

⁴ Taylor, K.R. (2001). Is hazing harmless horseplay?. *The Education Digest*, 67(2), 25.

⁵ Mulford, C., & Giordano, P.C. (2008). Teen dating violence: A closer look at adolescent romantic relationships. *National Institute of Justice Journal*, 261(1), 31-40.

⁶ Colombo, M.W. (2007). Developing cultural competence: Mainstream teachers and professional development. *Multicultural perspectives*, 9(2), 10-16.

⁷ International Association of Chiefs of Police. (2011). *Juvenile Justice Training Needs Assessment: A Survey of Law Enforcement*. Alexandria, VA.