

### What is Family Engagement in Schools?

Family engagement involves building trusting collaborative relationships among school staff, families, and community members. It includes recognizing, respecting, and addressing families' needs as well as class and cultural differences, and embracing a philosophy of partnership in which power and responsibilities are shared.

The effects of family engagement are cumulative. Increased engagement improves student outcomes and contributes to a supportive school community by increasing levels of trust and respect between families, the school, and community.

In 2019, the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) developed the [Family Engagement Toolkit and Self-Assessment](#) (Toolkit) as part of the Vermont State Systemic Improvement Plan. The Toolkit can be used as a reference document for schools. The seven Core Principles identified in this brief are described in more detail in the toolkit. In addition, the toolkit provides tools for self-reflection, steps to create a comprehensive action plan, and specific strategies to improve family engagement practices and overcome barriers. Icons used in this brief match the icons referenced in the toolkit.

This brief examines what schools are currently doing related to the family and community engagement activities, procedures, and policies based on the results from the 2018 School Health Profiles (SHP). The SHP is a system of surveys that assess school health policies and practices, including the activities, procedures, and policies that schools are engaging in with families and communities. It is completed biennially by middle and high school principals and a lead health educator at each school.

#### Improving family-school partnerships improve student outcomes.

Regardless of their income or background, when schools improve family-school partnerships, students are more likely to:

- regularly attend school;
- earn higher grades and receive higher test scores;
- pass their classes and move to the next grade;
- have better social skills, including positive behavior at school; and
- graduate from high school and attend post-secondary education.

### Core Principles and Strategies to Engage Families



**Creating a Welcoming Environment**



**Partnering with the Community**



**Building Effective Two-Way Communication**



**Providing Equity and Access**



**Supporting the Success of Students**



**Ensuring sustainability**



**Sharing Power and Responsibility**

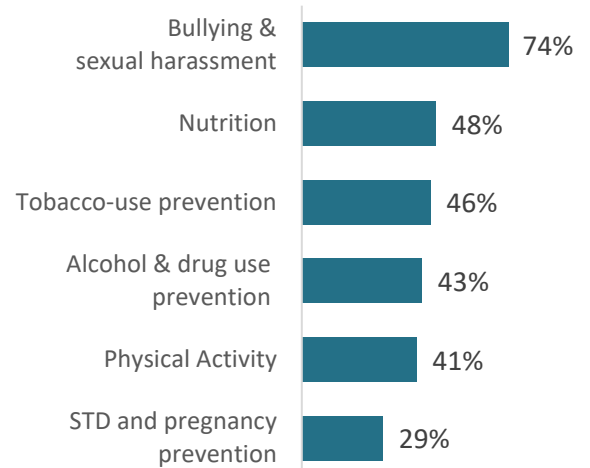
## Improving Family & Community Engagement: Results from the 2018 SHP

Overall, 69% of schools implement at least four of the seven family engagement strategies<sup>1</sup> assessed in the School Health Profiles; 79% engage in at least three strategies aimed to connect schools, families, and communities<sup>1</sup>.

### Increasing Family Knowledge:

Through health education courses, schools work to increase family knowledge on a variety of health-related topics (shown to the right) and 59% provide students with homework to complete with their family. In addition, 89% of schools teach students about advocating for personal, family, and community health.

### Increasing family knowledge through health education



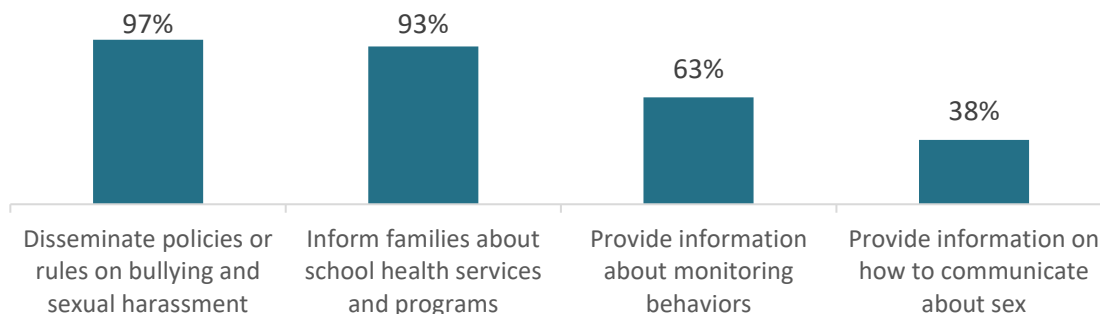
### Involving Families in School Wellness:

During the previous two years, nearly one in two schools (48%) included families in the development or implementation of policies and programs related to school health. Currently, 28% of schools involve families in the delivery of health education programs and services.

### Communicating with Families:

Nearly all schools communicate with families using multiple methods, including electronic, paper, or oral methods, to inform them about policies, school health services and programs.

### School communication with families

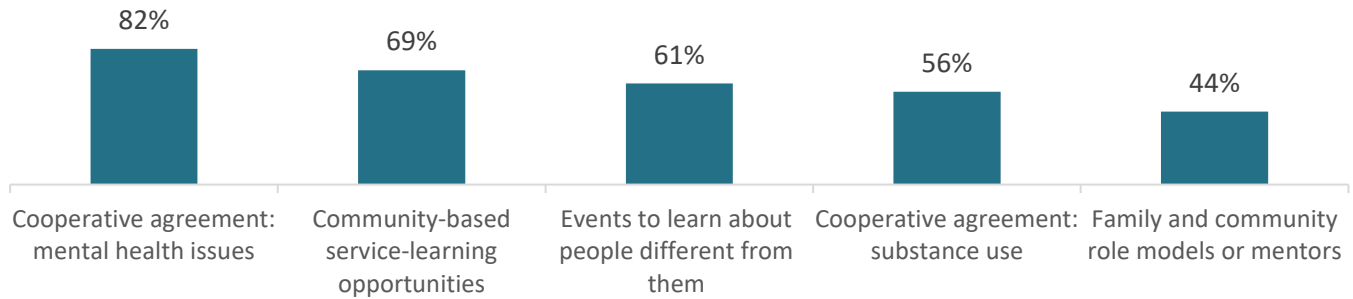


### Community Connectedness:

More than four in five schools link families to mental health services and programs in the community; just over half have cooperative agreements to provide alcohol or other drug use assessment and treatment services for students. Roughly two-thirds of schools provide students with opportunities to work with community partners through service-learning projects and sponsor events for students to learn about people different from them; less than half provide have family and community partners serve as role models or mentors for students.

<sup>1</sup> Parent engagement strategies include: providing parents and families with information about how to communicate with their children about sex; providing parents and families with information about how to monitor their child; establishing one or more communication channels with parents about school health services and programs; involving parents as school volunteers in the delivery of health education activities and services; engaging parents and student in health education activities at home; engaging parents in the development and implementation of school health policies and programs; linking parents and families to health services and programs in the community.

## Partnering with the community

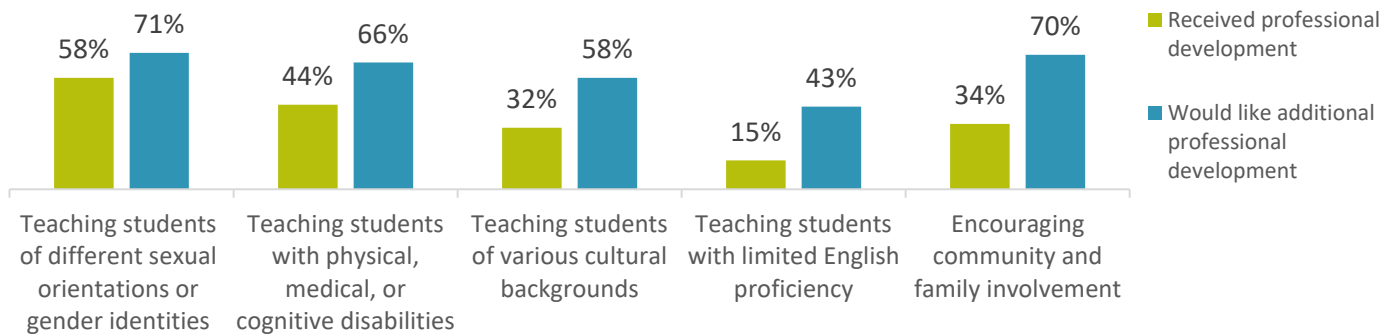


### Working with families and special populations:



During the previous two years, less than two-thirds of lead health educators **received professional development** related to working with special populations or encouraging community and family involvement. Significantly more educators indicated they **would like to receive** such training.

### Professional development: Working with special populations and families

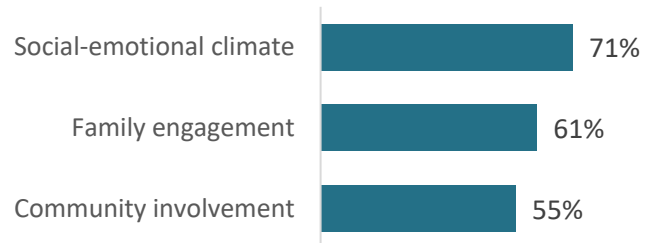


### Assessing the Family-School Environment:



Most schools (82%) review health and safety data such as the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) as part of the school's improvement planning process. More than half of schools have a School Improvement Plan that included social and emotional climate, family engagement, and community involvement.

### School Improvement Plan components



For more information about the [School Health Profiles](#) contact:

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Vermont Department of Health

For more information about the [Family Engagement Toolkit and Self-Assessment](#) contact:

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Vermont Agency of Education

<sup>1</sup> Percentage of schools that implement school connectedness strategies by doing at least three of the following: providing students with opportunities to be involved in mentoring programs; providing students with opportunities to be involved in service learning; providing students with opportunities to be involved in peer tutoring; having a lead health education teacher who received professional development on classroom management techniques during the past 2 years; providing clubs or activities that give students opportunities to learn about people different from them (e.g., students with disabilities, LGBTQ youth, homeless youth, or people from different cultures)