

We the Media

One of the first projects that landed on my desk when I joined NASBE in 2014 was redesign of our popular online resource, the Healthy Schools Database. NASBE first designed it over 10 years ago to help state policymakers learn from each other's student health and wellness policies. If a state board member wanted to know which states had dealt with preventing concussions in student sports or to look for other states' suicide prevention policies, for example, this was her resource. Researchers, advocates, health professionals, and media came to depend on the database for information on state health policy.

Updating such a robust resource required substantial time and money. So we were delighted when research organization Child Trends in 2017 began to partner with us to update the database and align it to the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation made the work possible. WSCC defines 10 areas of a healthy school: 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. Combined, these elements provide a road map for comprehensive policymaking to support student well-being.

The NASBE State Policy Database on School Health, relaunched earlier this year, encompasses policies enacted as of September 2017 for 136 variables across the 10 domains. An accompanying visualization helps users quickly see the state landscape of a given school health policy.

As state boards of education and others consider adoption of policies and

processes that support the whole child, this database can illuminate information on existing statutes and best practices that can inform new work. Take, for example, the topic of school employee wellness. According to the database, only 10 states address staff wellness in policy. Wellness can cover everything from substance abuse and health assessment to flu shot requirements and healthy food policies. Only two states, Louisiana and Mississippi, address stress management in employee wellness policies.

Supporting the well-being of teachers and their aptitude for teaching the social, emotional, and academic skills students need is of increasing concern to the public, according to a recent NASBE survey. Mississippi is the only state that provides comprehensive coverage, addressing all components of employee wellness identified in the NASBE database. It does so by establishing a statewide wellness program for all state employees who participate in the school employee health insurance plan. States looking to adopt more wellness-conscious policies for employees within the school setting could connect with colleagues in Mississippi to learn about implementation and the challenges therein.

Nearly five years in the making, our health policy database is timelier than ever. Policymakers are increasingly focused on issues of student safety and wellness. This database will be a help to all policy actors—be it the state board, education agency, legislature, or governor—as they work together to enact policies that ensure safe and equitable learning environments for all students.

To access NASBE's State Policy Database on School Health, visit <http://statepolicies.nasbe.org/health>. ■



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