For months, the pandemic has not only put students’ learning in jeopardy but also left them socially and emotionally fragile. A recent Education Trust–New York poll found that nearly 9 in 10 parents in the state worry that their child’s social, emotional, and cognitive development will suffer as a result.

As state policymakers make plans for safely reopening schools, it will be important to enact policies that can better support student and educator well-being during and after the pandemic. They also ought to review current wellness and school safety policies to ensure that what is on the books does not prevent such progress from occurring. Luckily, NASBE’s fully redesigned State Policy Database on School Health can help.

First developed in 1998, the database has long been a trusted tool for policymakers, researchers, advocates, and school communities to access state-level school health policy information in one convenient location. NASBE partnered with Child Trends, the Institute for Health Research and Policy at the University of Illinois-Chicago (UIC), and EMT Associates, Inc. to update the database in 2017 so that it comprehensively documented codified state education policies aligned to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model.

That update was a vast improvement. But the database was not easy to navigate and was limited to codified law. Our latest update, in February 2021, captures statutes, regulations, and now noncodified policies such as state board or agency guidance related to 200 school climate, health, and safety topics through September 2019. This redesign gives users multiple options for searching and interacting with the data. For example, a user can quickly scan and tally the number of states requiring, encouraging, or not addressing a particular policy, or indulge further by looking at a policy detail or a state’s full policy record across a certain topic. For more precise searches, users can filter by keyword and search across multiple states. As before, the database features an interactive Tableau dashboard to generate state maps.

So, what is trending in the data, you ask?

In a companion analysis, Child Trends, UIC, and EMT Associates, Inc. found that the number of states with policies encouraging or requiring schools to provide professional development on trauma-informed care increased from 9 to 30 from September 2017 to September 2019. In addition to professional development for trauma-informed care, policies supporting professional development for mental health and school resource officers saw the biggest change from 2017 to 2019 among the 200 topics examined: 33 states now have policies supporting professional development for mental health (up from 18 in 2017), and 35 states have policies supporting professional development for school resource officers (up from 16 in 2017).

These changes are not in response to the pandemic, of course, but the analysis shows that states have been making important strides toward ensuring that schools are safer, more supportive learning environments for educators and students. It is also a starting point for states plans for safe reopening of schools and prioritizing lasting systemic change that draws schools and communities closer together.

To access NASBE’s State Policy Database on School Health, visit https://statepolicies.nasbe.org/. ■