CCNETWORK Regional Comprehensive Center Midwest

Supporting Student Engagement: Practical Strategies for State Education Agencies

Creating Conditions for Student Engagement

Student engagement is foundational to student success, influencing attendance, academic achievement, school connectedness, and overall well-being. When students feel valued and respected in supportive, inclusive learning environments, they are more likely to be motivated and actively engaged in their learning.[1] State education agencies (SEAs) play a critical role in creating the conditions that support engagement by providing leadership, guidance, resources, and opportunities for collaboration across education systems and partner agencies.

This resource highlights practical strategies, lessons learned, and state examples shared by the Midwest Comprehensive Center's Student Engagement Community of Practice participants. The strategies presented in this tip sheet are intended to help SEA leaders strengthen statewide supports for student engagement, provide actionable guidance to districts and schools, and promote learning environments where all students can thrive.

Systems Thinking in Action

Student engagement efforts are most effective when they are coordinated across

- attendance initiatives;
- school climate efforts;
- family engagement strategies;
- mental and behavioral health supports; and
- trauma-informed practices.

Reducing silos and aligning initiatives can increase efficiency and strengthen impact.

Six Ways SEAs Can Support Student Engagement

Whether your state is beginning a student engagement initiative or building on existing initiatives, these six strategies can help guide planning, implementation, and continuous improvement efforts to support student engagement.

1. Elevate Student Voice in State Decision Making

Voices From the Field

"Student voice conversations can extend beyond attendance and wellness to include literacy, mathematics, and graduation success."

–Midwest Comprehensive Center Regional Student *Engagement* Community of Practice participants

Students offer critical insights about their educational experiences and can help shape more responsive policies, programs, and supports.

[1] University of Maryland, Baltimore, Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning, Student Engagement.

SEA Actions

- Establish student advisory councils or statewide student voice workgroups.
- Create reoccurring opportunities for students to provide input on policy and program decisions.
- Engage students in discussions about academic and non-academic topics.
- Include student feedback in policy and program development.

Implementation Tip

Keep surveys focused and actionable. A small number of meaningful questions often generates more useful information than lengthy questionnaires.

State Spotlight Ohio

Ohio's Statewide Student Voice Workgroup recruits a representative cohort of students through a statewide nomination process. Students participate in virtual and in-person meetings, learn about education policy, provide feedback, and help inform SEA decision making. The workgroup has expanded conversations beyond attendance and wellness to include literacy, mathematics, and graduation success.

2. Use Data to Understand and Strengthen Student Engagement

Voices From the Field

"Student engagement data are strongest when schools gather input from students, staff, and families."

–Midwest Comprehensive Center Regional Student Engagement Community of Practice participants

Student engagement is difficult to improve without understanding how students experience school.

SEA Actions

- Support districts and schools in collecting student perception data.
- Support districts and schools in selecting and adapting existing survey tools before developing new instruments.
- Promote the collection and use of feedback from students, staff, and families across state and local contexts.
- Analyze attendance and school climate indicators.

State Spotlight Minnesota

Minnesota uses the Minnesota Student Survey to better understand student experiences and inform decision making at both the local and state levels. The survey gathers data on students' educational experiences, sense of safety, well-being, and other factors that influence engagement and success, helping schools and communities identify needs and target supports.

3. Build Leadership Capacity to Support Student Engagement

School and district leaders play a critical role in creating positive conditions for student engagement.

SEA Actions

- Offer district and school leaders professional learning opportunities focused on improving student engagement, including strategies for fostering belonging, strengthening school climate, and using engagement data for continuous improvement.
- Support district and school leaders in interpreting and using student perception, attendance, and school climate data to understand student engagement.
- Embed student engagement priorities into existing leadership development, school improvement planning, instructional coaching, and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) initiatives.
- Provide tools and resources that help district and school leaders identify, prioritize, and implement high-impact student engagement strategies.

State Spotlight Minnesota

Minnesota provides professional learning and technical assistance through its COMPASS School Climate and Culture initiative, which supports educators and leaders in creating safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments. Professional learning pathways help district and school teams use data to assess school climate, identify improvement priorities, develop action plans, and build capacity in areas such as trauma-informed practices, student and staff well-being, and positive school culture.

4. Build Systems Through MTSS and Tiered Supports

Voices From the Field

"Engagement efforts are most sustainable when they are embedded within existing systems and improvement structures."

–Midwest Comprehensive Center Regional Student Engagement Community of Practice participants

Student engagement efforts are most sustainable when integrated into existing improvement systems rather than implemented as stand-alone initiatives.

SEA Actions

- Align student engagement efforts with MTSS frameworks.
- Strengthen universal Tier 1 supports that foster positive relationships, supportive learning environments, and active participation in school.
- Use Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring Systems data to proactively identify and support students at risk of disengagement.
- Provide resources that help districts and schools implement student engagement strategies across all tiers of support.

State Spotlight Minnesota

Minnesota's MnMTSS Attendance Guidebook provides practical guidance for integrating attendance and engagement efforts into existing MTSS structures. The guidebook helps districts and schools use data, strengthen family partnerships, implement tiered supports, and coordinate improvement efforts to promote student engagement and consistent attendance.

5. Co-create Practical Resources and Tools That Support Implementation

Voices From the Field

"Comprehensive guidance is important, but educators also need practical tools that help them take the next step."

–Midwest Comprehensive Center Regional Student Engagement Community of Practice participants

Educators often need concise, actionable guidance rather than lengthy documents.

SEA Actions

- Develop both comprehensive guidance and concise implementation tools.
- Create resources in multiple formats to support different audiences and stages of student engagement implementation.
- Involve educators, administrators, students, and families in developing and reviewing resources.
- Use practitioner feedback to refine resources.

State Spotlight Michigan

Michigan maintains a school mental health resource hub that brings together guidance, tools, and related materials on comprehensive school mental health systems, behavioral health, social and emotional learning, screening and assessment, trauma, and suicide prevention.

6. Strengthen Cross-System Collaboration

Student engagement efforts are most effective when states coordinate initiatives, align resources, and continuously evaluate their systems.

SEA Actions

- Build partnerships across agencies and sectors.
- Coordinate attendance and engagement initiatives.
- Use data to inform resource allocation and improvement planning.
- Establish shared goals and accountability measures.

State Spotlight Michigan

Michigan's Guidance for a Comprehensive School Mental Health System of Supports provides a framework for collaboration among schools, families, and community health and mental health partners. The guidance identifies family, school, and community collaboration and teaming as a core feature of a comprehensive system of student mental health supports.

The six strategies offer multiple ways for SEAs to strengthen student engagement, but states do not need to pursue every strategy at once. The section that follows can help SEA teams build on existing efforts, identify a manageable starting point, reflect on strengths and opportunities, and explore resources to support implementation.

Start Small and Build on Existing Efforts

SEAs and their partners do not need to start from scratch or implement every strategy at once. When time, capacity, or resources are limited, they can help districts and schools build on existing efforts by taking a few manageable first steps:

- Review existing attendance, climate, student perception, and other engagement data.
- Use a small number of focused questions to address gaps in student feedback through student surveys.
- Build on existing MTSS, attendance, or school improvement structures.
- Select one priority area where focused action is both needed and feasible.
- Use what is learned to refine supports and determine next steps.

Reflection and Action Prompts

After reviewing the six strategies, consider the following questions to identify strengths, gaps, and potential next steps:

- How does your SEA currently support student engagement?
- What do your attendance, school climate, student perception, and other engagement data reveal about students' experiences?
- How do students inform decision-making processes in your state?
- What supports do school and district leaders and educators need to strengthen student engagement?
- What opportunities exist to strengthen partnerships that support student engagement?
- Which strategy could your SEA begin implementing in the next 6 to 12 months?

Resources

The following resources can help SEAs, districts, and schools put the six student engagement strategies into practice. The table identifies the strategy most closely aligned with each resource and describes how the resource can support planning, implementation, or continuous improvement.

Related strategy	Resource	How it supports student engagement
1. Elevate Student Voice in State Decision Making	NASBE Student Engagement Collaborative	Shows how state boards can engage students in education policy making through cross-state learning, training in board processes and policy analysis, action plan development, mentorship, and opportunities to present recommendations to decision makers.
2. Use Data to Understand and Strengthen Student Engagement	Office of Safe and Supportive Schools Approved School Climate Surveys	Provides validated tools for gathering feedback from students, staff, and families about school climate, safety, relationships, and connectedness, and helps schools identify strengths and areas for improving student engagement.
	Department of Education School Climate Survey	Supports data-informed decision making by measuring students' perceptions of safety, relationships, learning environments, and school connectedness, all of which are closely linked to student engagement and attendance.
	EdInstruments	Helps educators identify and select high-quality surveys and measurement tools related to student engagement, school climate, social–emotional learning, and other factors that influence student success.
3. Build Leadership Capacity to Support Student Engagement	Wisconsin Trauma Sensitive Schools Online Professional Development System	Provides free, on-demand professional learning and tools to help educators and school leaders apply trauma-sensitive practices that promote safe environments, positive relationships, and student engagement.
	Trauma-Sensitive Schools Implementation and Training Guide	Helps educators and school leaders apply trauma-sensitive practices across school systems, policies, and tiered supports to strengthen student engagement.

Related strategy	Resource	How it supports student engagement
4. Build Systems Through MTSS and Tiered Supports	Essential Components of MTSS Infographic Collection	Helps school teams integrate student engagement into an MTSS by strengthening Tier 1 practices, identifying student needs early, and creating coordinated supports that promote attendance, belonging, and academic success.
	MnMTSS Attendance Guidebook	Supports student engagement by helping schools use MTSS, attendance data, family partnerships, and evidence-based practices to foster school connectedness and reduce barriers to participation in learning.
5. Co-create Practical Resources and Tools That Support Implementation	Ohio Supporting School Wellness Toolkit	Provides audience-specific resources and practical tools that help educators, administrators, students, families, and communities support student wellness and engagement.
6. Strengthen Cross-System Collaboration	Developing a Comprehensive Mental Health Program in Your School-Community	Provides a framework for developing coordinated school–community mental health partnerships that promote student well-being, strengthen school connectedness, reduce barriers to learning, and support meaningful student engagement.

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