**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

# Adverse Childhood Experiences in Minnesota: Academic Engagement and Relationships with Teachers and School Staff

Stronger academic engagement is linked to positive outcomes related to academic and career achievement, physical health, mental health, social relationships, risky health behaviors, and substance use (Allison et al., 2019; Gottfried, 2014). Additionally, promoting positive relationships between students and teachers can help promote academic engagement and self-efficacy and improve academic outcomes (Sethi & Scales, 2020; Zhou, 2021). Moreover, academic engagement, self-efficacy, and positive beliefs about one's future can also promote career exploration, and exploration can help youth understand and learn about career options (Jiang et al., 2019). For the most current local data on educational engagement, positive student-teacher relationships, and planning support for post high school goals, please visit MDH's interactive Adverse Childhood Experiences Data (www.web.health.state.mn.us/communities/ace/data/index.html)

There are several strategies that can be implemented to promote academic engagement, positive relationships between students and teachers, and to support students' planning to reach their post-high school goals.

**Relevant indicator(s):**

- Academic engagement

- Positive student-teacher relationships

- Planning support for post-high school goals

Strategies for promoting school safety and positive peer relationships can also promote academic engagement and positive relationships with teachers and school staff.

## Effective strategies

Strategies for promoting academic engagement and positive relationships with teachers and school staff include:

- **Early childhood education programs** to promote healthy cognitive and social-emotional development of young children and encourage academic engagement from an early age (Burger, 2010; Caronongan et al., 2016). Features of high-quality early childhood education programs include positive relationships between educators and children, small group sizes and adult-child ratios, high-quality education for educators, and sufficient resources for educational materials and the physical environment.
- **Programs aimed specifically at improving attendance and/or avoiding dropping out of school,** which may include a wide variety of supports. These can include ongoing monitoring of student progress and early identification of academic concerns, individualized support and mentoring, case management, social-emotional skills training, ensuring schoolwork engages youth effectively and directly connects with employment opportunities, and/or creating smaller learning communities to increase support for students (Rumberger et al., 2017; Tolan et al., 2013).

- **Career counseling and related activities,** such as shadowing opportunities and assessments to help youth understand their strengths, skills, and interests (Reddy et al., 2015).
- **College preparation and access programs** to help students prepare for college and complete the college application and entry process (National College Attainment Network, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). These programs often focus on serving students who may be less likely to attend college, such as first-generation college students. They may include providing individualized and/or one-on-one support throughout the preparation and application process, education and assistance regarding financial aid, preparation for standardized tests, college campus visits, mentoring, and tutoring.
- **High-quality and engaging instruction,** features of which include developmentally appropriate curricula, communicating the purpose and value of schoolwork, providing opportunities for students to practice and apply critical thinking and problem-solving skills, providing opportunities for respectful discussion and debate, and providing positive and constructive feedback on student work to help students understand their strengths and areas for growth (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, n.d.; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2015; University of Pittsburgh Center for Teaching and Learning, n.d.; University of Washington Center for Teaching and Learning, n.d.).
- **Positive and trusting relationships** between students, teachers, and other school staff. This may include promoting empathic listening skills, self-awareness, authenticity, and supporting teachers and school staff to care for their own social-emotional needs (Cacciatore, 2021; Consiglio, 2022; Making Caring Common Project, 2023; National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, n.d.; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2015).

## Examples of Minnesota initiatives

### Carlton County's Summer Credit Recovery

In response to a decline in academic engagement and credits due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Carlton County implemented a new summer credit recovery program in 2021. The program collaborates with public and private organizations, including the Cloquet Area Alternative Education Program and REACH, a local youth mentoring program. Credit recovery opportunities vary widely and may include activities unavailable during the standard academic year, such as sailing.

Watch a video highlighting [Carlton County Summer Credit Recovery Program (youtu.be/HXnJ2DsaKj8)](youtu.be/HXnJ2DsaKj8)

For more information about Carlton County's ACEs work and Summer Credit Recovery program:

- [Carlton County Minnesota (www.co.carlton.mn.us)](www.co.carlton.mn.us)
- [REACH Programming Calendar (www.reachyap.org/programming/girl-woman-mentor)](www.reachyap.org/programming/girl-woman-mentor)

### Northside Achievement Zone

The Northside Achievement Zone is a place-based initiative that aims to promote achievement and end poverty in North Minneapolis, with a focus on serving low-income children of color. They use a whole family approach to support youth and their families, and they provide a wide range of services and resources, including parenting classes, early childhood learning opportunities, academic support, enrichment activities, college preparation services, and assistance navigating career and finance decisions.

More information about the [Northside Achievement Zone (www.northsideachievement.org/)](www.northsideachievement.org/)

## Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start are early childhood programs for young children and families. Early Head Start focuses specifically on expecting caregivers and children up to age three, and Head Start focuses on youth aged three to five and their families. Programs may be based in early childhood centers, childcare centers, or through home visits.

More information about Head Start [Head Start (education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/elsprog/start/)](education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/elsprog/start/)

# Examples of national initiatives

## Families and Schools Together (FAST)

FAST is an evidence-based program that aims to engage families, support youth well-being and learning, empower caregivers to be involved with their youth's education, strengthen family relationships, and connect families to community resources and other families. A collaborative team of caregivers, youth, educators, and other community professionals facilitates the program.

More information about [FAST Program (www.familiesandschools.org/fast-program/)](www.familiesandschools.org/fast-program/)

## Engaging Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE)

ENLACE is a statewide collaborative in New Mexico that promotes family and community engagement, academic engagement and achievement, peer relationships and mentoring, culturally specific curricula, and professional development to ultimately support Latino students and families. It includes a wide range of partners, including universities and community colleges, public schools, nonprofits, government agencies, businesses, and students and families.

More information about [ENLACE Home (enlacenm.unm.edu/index.html)](enlacenm.unm.edu/index.html)

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Minnesota Department of Health
Injury and Violence Prevention Section
PO Box 64975
St. Paul, MN 55164
651-201-4035
MDH_HPCD_5.6-IVPS-Economics_Evaluation_Unit@state.mn.us
www.health.state.mn.us

August 2023