

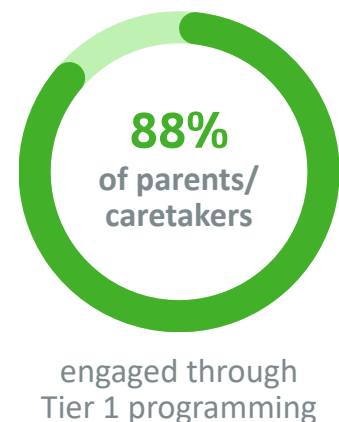


Overview

One of the most frequently discussed themes across grantee reports was the central role of parent and caregiver engagement. An estimated **4,782 parents and caregivers** participated in services across the 29 CSWI grants. Recognizing that meaningful family involvement is foundational to children’s behavioral health, grantees were encouraged to design intentional programming that **met caregivers where they were**, ranging from light-touch awareness activities to intensive clinical supports.

To this end, programming typically fell into one of three tiers:

- **Tier 1 – Broad engagement:** Outreach in community settings, such as sharing information during parent-teacher conferences or school events.
- **Tier 2 – Ongoing group engagement:** Regular gatherings such as caregiver connection groups over coffee, discussing stress management or related topics.
- **Tier 3 – Clinical engagement:** Family therapy or clinical interventions with behavioral health partners.



Most engagement fell in the Tier 1 category, demonstrating the importance of accessible, low-barrier entry points. It also became clear that deeper forms of engagement were essential to building trust and strengthening the partnership between schools, families, and behavioral health providers. These relationships often proved critical in facilitating consent for youth to participate in behavioral health services.

Bright Spots

The CSWI initiative demonstrated that strengthening families therefore strengthens their schools and communities. Through direct and indirect supports, families were connected with case management, housing resources, Medicaid enrollment assistance, and even community donations to meet daily needs of all children served.

Catholic Charities highlighted a particularly promising model: hiring a bilingual clinician and alumna of the local elementary school to lead a parent/caregiver support group. This dual connection of linguistics and lived experience in the community created trust and sustained engagement.

Meanwhile, **Juvenile Protective Association** emphasized the ripple effect of engagement strategies. Parents and caregivers not only participated in support groups, but practiced behavioral health techniques at home, reinforcing what children learned in school. Enhanced parent-teacher communication further amplified the benefits for students.

Additional promising practices included:

- Hosting family nights, themed presentations, and field trips to build community.
- Embedding caregiver liaisons within school buildings to create trusted connections.
- Leveraging social media channels to increase visibility and access to resources.

Barriers & Proposed Strategies

Despite clear progress, many partners cited recurring challenges in sustaining consistent engagement over the grant period. Common barriers included:

- Time constraints: Parents or caregivers balancing multiple jobs or after-school shifts.
- Language access: Limited multilingual staff for families with diverse linguistic needs.
- Family structures: Youth living with extended family members or housing instability.
- Consent hurdles: Lower levels of parental engagement created barriers to youth participation in mental health services.

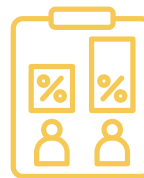
To address these challenges, grantees piloted new engagement strategies, including:



Providing
childcare
on site and
flexible hours



Offering gift
cards, raffles,
food, and
refreshments



Surveying
community
needs and
availability

Lessons Learned & Summary

A key lesson from the CSWI grants is that parents and caregivers are not just participants but **essential partners and co-leaders**. Their voices, alongside those of youth, must help shape decisions about children's behavioral health. Several grantees modeled this principle by embedding parents and caregivers into advisory bodies, ensuring that solutions were informed by lived experience.

The overarching insight is clear: when families are actively included, schools and behavioral health systems experienced enhanced collaboration. By embracing diverse parent/caregiver engagement approaches, from light-touch community events to sustained clinical involvement, CSWI grantees experienced both the challenges and the **transformative potential of centering families in this work**.