



Left to right: Dr. Robin Cochran, superintendent; Kelly Hall, parent; Mandy Sagrecy, principal; and Lee Anne Ater, director of state and federal programs for Washington County, Kentucky, stand in the hallway of Washington County Middle School next to the school's Family Friendly Certification banner. All photos in this report are of district or school staff, parents, and students at certified Family Friendly Schools in Kentucky, but these individuals are not responsible for the comments quoted from the study. The study gathered participants' feedback anonymously. Photos throughout this report are by Jessica Scranton for FHI 360.

Family Friendly Schools Certification Works

WHAT A STATEWIDE VALIDATION STUDY REVEALED

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

APRIL 2026



In 2025, FHI 360 led an independent, mixed-methods study evaluating the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence’s Family Friendly Schools (FFS) Certification program.

The study integrated surveys of more than 650 educators and families, school site visits, focus groups, interviews, application reviews, and analysis of statewide administrative datasets (2019–2024).

Across 100 Kentucky schools, the study examined:

- Effectiveness of the certification process
- Consistency of the results
- Outcomes linked to the program

Overall, FHI 360 found that the FFS Certification process works. The study surfaced five key outcomes. The FFS Certification process:



Identifies schools with strong family engagement practices



Strengthens educator capacity and confidence



Promotes a school culture shift toward family partnership resulting in improved communication and trust



Shows early modest gains in reading outcomes



Provides structure for continuous improvement, reflection, and scalability

Research shows when these conditions for strong family engagement are in place, student outcomes are expected to improve.¹

The following are highlights from each of these key outcomes.

1 Mapp, K., & Kuttner, P.J. (2013). Partners in education: A dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED593896>.

The certification process identifies schools with strong family engagement practices.

WHO BENEFITS AND HOW?

Students gain stronger academic support; families feel more empowered; schools see increased alignment in learning expectations

- More authentic and actionable feedback from families
- Increased family engagement at school events
- Increased parent confidence to support student success

90%

of FFs Teachers say: “I am able to prioritize partnering with families, even when I have a lot to do.”

“Family Friendly has allowed us to look at the bridge between school, home, and the community in a productive way.”
– Elementary school counselor

The certification process strengthens educator capacity and confidence.

WHO BENEFITS AND HOW?

Educators gain skills; schools benefit from stronger engagement practices

- Increased teacher confidence in their ability to partner with families
- Increased teacher confidence in their ability to manage student behavior

FFS teachers gain confidence across all areas of family engagement:

- Communication
- Collaboration for learning
- Partnering
- Honoring families
- Equity

95%

FFS teachers say: “I can confidently talk with families about concerns for struggling students.”

“The changes I have seen are specific to building relationships with families and students from different backgrounds. We have more knowledge and support of different values.”

– High school teacher

The certification process promotes a school culture shift toward family partnership resulting in improved communication and trust.

WHO BENEFITS AND HOW?

Students benefit from more informed families and stronger home-school connections; families gain clarity and access and feel respected; educators experience stronger relationships; schools build cohesive culture

- Families better understand the many ways to get involved at their children’s schools



Left to right: Sophomore Jaye Jones, his guardian Breonna Jones-Albert, and Fayette County Public Schools district family and community liaison Cierra Spaulding, stand in the hallway of Tates Creek High School (TCHS) in Lexington, KY.

- Families feel they have more meaningful relationships with staff members

89%
of FFS families agree that,
“There are many ways I
can be involved with
the school.”

“We have successfully cultivated an environment of trust, allowing us to move past simple communication and truly become partners with our families in their children’s education. This partnership mindset is now foundational to our school culture, and it ensures that the success we’re seeing today will be sustained well into the future.”

– Elementary school administrator



Alicia Kelly teaches her fifth grade class at North Washington Elementary, a Family Friendly Schools-certified school in Willisburg, KY.

The certification process shows early modest gains in reading outcomes.

WHO BENEFITS AND HOW?

Students see academic gains; schools show improved performance

- Approximately 1.7 percentage point increase in reading proficiency when compared to students in non-FFS schools



Jeff Jones, assistant principal, stands in the hallway of Rowan County Middle School next to a mural of the school's Viking mascot.

These data are indicators that improved family engagement practices are associated with gains in student outcomes. While it is still too early to attribute broader student outcome gains directly to the certification process, participating schools are strengthening the research-based conditions that can improve student success.

The certification process provides structure for continuous improvement, reflection, and scalability.

WHO BENEFITS AND HOW?

Educators use reflection and feedback from the Prichard Committee, peers and reviewers to make incremental improvements; schools follow a clear improvement pathway

- Feedback inspires staff to look for more ways to partner with families
- Schools commit to continually improve through annual recertification

87%
of schools in the 2024
cohort were recertified
in 2025

“I’ve witnessed a contagiousness where our school staff is eager and excited to incorporate families into the learning environment and culture.”

– Middle school teacher

Conclusion

Through an external validation study, FHI 360 found that schools engaging in the FFS Certification process with support from the Prichard Committee, are likely to:

- Promote strategic and data-driven family engagement
- Strengthen their commitment to family engagement, voice, and authentic partnerships
- Build educator confidence and capacity
- Nurture a culture of respect and care that results in a sense of connection and belonging
- Create a foundation upon which students can thrive and improve academically

The outcomes from FHI 360’s validation study show that the FFS Certification process indicators align with research on the impact of meaningful family engagement as one of the “most powerful predictors of child development, educational attainment, and success in school and life.”² Continued implementation and refinement of the certification process will likely contribute to future improvements in student outcomes.

For More Information

Read the [full technical study report](#).

Learn more about [the Prichard Committee \(prichardcommittee.org\)](#) and [National Family Friendly Schools \(prichardcommittee.org/nffs\)](#)

Learn more about [FHI 360](#).

² Weiss, H.B., Lopez, M.E., & Caspe, M. (2018). Joining together to create a bold vision for next generation family engagement: Engaging families to transform education. Carnegie Corporation.



Clockwise from top left: Trey Middleton, athletic director, stands in the gym at Rowan County Middle School in Morehead, KY. Dr. Kristy Field, principal, speaks with Jay Jones, assistant principal, at Tates Creek High School, in Lexington, KY. Jessica Elliott, principal, speaks on the phone in her office at Tilden Hogge Elementary School in Morehead, KY. Haneen Abu Zaghrif, school social worker, talks with a student in her office at Tates Creek High School. Center: Daralyn Kirkpatrick and her two sons stand in the field behind North Washington Elementary School in Willisburg, KY. North Washington Elementary, Rowan County Middle, Tates Creek High and Tilden Hogge Elementary are all Family Friendly Schools-certified.

