



The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) Office of Student Support and Well-being (OSSW) coordinates services for the whole child to ensure each student has at least one caring adult that keeps them connected to the school system. “The Project AWARE grant, along with the incredible support from our partners, will greatly strengthen OSSW’s collaborative infrastructure and West Virginia’s community networks to harness resources, best practices, momentum and expertise,” says State Superintendent of Schools W. Clayton Burch.

The WVDE recently received two five-year Project AWARE grants, serving six counties and 18 schools and totaling \$18 million combined. These grants are part of a major national initiative to support students, teachers, schools, and communities in recognizing and responding to mental health concerns among West Virginia's youth. These awards will build on the existing county-wide AWARE programs in Berkeley and McDowell counties, which serve a total of 43 schools.



What does AWARE mean to West Virginia public schools?

- » Increased capacity of West Virginia state and local educational and mental health systems to provide comprehensive, evidence-based services and supports for school-aged youth.
- » Increased access to culturally competent, developmentally appropriate, and trauma-sensitive mental and behavioral health services for school-aged youth.
- » Increased social-emotional skills of school-aged youth in each county to promote resilience, improve mental health, and prevent substance misuse and youth violence.
- » Increased collaboration from partners to provide access to guidance and technical assistance in providing a multi-tiered system of support for students and communities.

Why focus on school-based mental health?

- » Data reveals that West Virginia’s young people face a variety of primary and secondary traumatic experiences, often at higher rates, when compared with other youth in the country.
- » 6,938 children in West Virginia were placed in foster care as of March 2019. Parental substance abuse was a factor in 82% of those placements (KVC WV, 2019).
- » 51.2 out of every 1,000 infants were born with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) in 2014; many of these children entered kindergarten in the fall of 2019 (CDC, 2016).
- » 36.4% of West Virginia students surveyed felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row and 20.9% had seriously considered suicide while 11.2% report attempting suicide (YRBS, 2019).
- » 30% of students surveyed indicated use of alcohol within the last 30 days with 15% of those students indicating their first use of alcohol was before the age of 13. 18% of students reported current use of marijuana (YRBS, 2019).
- » 10% of students reported missing school because they did not feel safe at school or on their way to and from school (YRBS, 2019).
- » Providing a multi-tiered approach to school mental and behavioral health services is critical to effectively addressing the breadth of students’ needs.

How does Project AWARE work?

- » The grant focuses on students in Pre-k through grade 12 in West Virginia public schools. Cabell, Clay, Fayette, Harrison, Logan, and Wirt counties serve as the demonstration sites to guide the development of a statewide sustainable and adaptable model systems approach to improve mental health services.
- » The grant provides funding to employ at least one mental health professional in each grant-funded school. Direct services are provided immediately in the school setting.
- » The grant provides support to the schools to develop and implement a comprehensive plan of evidence-based, culturally competent, and developmentally appropriate school

and community based mental health services.

- » The grant develops and provides a workforce training plan to increase the mental health awareness and literacy of school staff, administrators, parents, and others who interact with school-aged youth.
- » The grant develops and implements meaningful ways to engage students, families, businesses, and community groups to link resources to school-aged youth and their families.



For more information or to request assistance in areas related to supporting schools in increasing wellness and resilience of students, please contact one of the grant partners below.

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