

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senator Virginia Lyons, Chair, Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

FROM: Sarah Squirrell, Commissioner, Department of Mental Health

DATE: January 25, 2019

SUBJECT: Project AWARE Overview

Please find below, an overview of the Project AWARE grant from the Department of Mental Health. This information is submitted in response to a request for more information about the Project AWARE grant during the Department's Overview and Update testimony on Friday, January 18th.

Question: Please provide a 1-pager on Project AWARE that includes information about the duration of the Project AWARE grant and any positions funded through the grant.

Response:

Grant Project Period: 5 years- 09/30/2018 to 09/29/2023.

First Year Award: \$ 1,582,371.00 to begin 9/30/2018 (pending Joint Fiscal approval).

Positions: This funding will support 1 limited service FTE at AOE. DMH will provide 0.5 FTE in kind and has created a new School Mental Health and Practice Development Coordinator position to focus on school mental health (Success Beyond Six and Project AWARE).

Use of funding: In addition to the 1 limited service FTE at AOE, the funding will also support workforce development for the mental health providers, schools, and system stakeholders; as well as training for families, advocates and community members. Funding for the three local school districts and designated agencies will support local coordinators of the grant activities.

Description: The Vermont Agency of Education was awarded a 5-year grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for **Project AWARE - State Education Agency**. Vermont Project AWARE is a joint effort between the Agency of Education (AOE), the Agency of Human Services, Department of Mental Health (AHS/DMH) and three communities to promote:

- On-going collaboration at the state and local level regarding best practices to increase awareness of mental health issues
- Enhance wellness and resiliency skills for school age youth

- Support system improvements for school based mental health services

The project will establish planning teams with each of three Local Education Agencies and their Designated Mental Health Agency (DA) partners. Target communities include:

- Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union, partnering with Lamoille County Mental Health;
- Addison Rutland Supervisory Union partnering with Rutland County Mental Health Services
- Greater Rutland County Supervisory Union, who will also partner with Rutland County Mental Health Services.

Vermont's Project AWARE will rely on several evidence-based practices to support its success, including: Youth Mental Health First Aid®; Umatter® youth suicide prevention activities; Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS); Interconnected Systems Framework (ISF); and Attachment, Regulation, and Competency (ARC) framework for complex trauma.

Rationale for Grant Application:

- AHS and AOE have a shared commitment to serving children and families and a strong foundation for collaboration around youth experiencing challenges at home, in school and in the community; *Project Aware is an opportunity to expand that collaboration.*
- LEAs, DMH and local DAs have a decades long partnership in providing services to youth experiencing serious emotional disturbance; *Project Aware's purpose and goals are in full alignment with the State's priorities for supporting school-aged children and families.*
- In recent years the importance of screening, early intervention, and treatment has been recognized by schools, state partners and providers, *Project Aware provides resources to increase awareness of mental health issues, providing training for schools and connect youth with evidence-based services.*
- Vermont's current Success Beyond Six (SBS) funding model for 1:1 behavioral interventionists in the classroom is unsustainable given budget and workforce shortages facing local communities, *Project Aware provides TA and infrastructure support to strengthen the SBS school-based mental health program.*
- More effective evidence-based models, such as Interconnected Systems Framework and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports hold promise in supporting Vermont's schools, families and communities, *Project Aware provides TA and infrastructure support to develop and enhance the connection between school-based mental health and school climate models.*