



VERMONT PROJECT AWARE

Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education

A brief overview of project goals and components



WHAT IS IT?

WHERE IS IT?

FRAMEWORKS

WHO IS IT?

A partnership between
Vermont's Agency of
Education and Agency of
Human Services,
Department of Mental
Health

What is it?

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) and 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;
- and support system improvements for school based mental health services.

The project will establish District/ Community Leadership Teams within each of three LEAs and their Designated Mental Health Agency (DA) partner.

The award amount for the current year three is \$1,626,437. The grant project period is 09/30/2018 to 09/29/2023, and we anticipate applying for a one year no cost extension that could extend the grant to 9/29/2024.

Goals

1. Improve culturally competent/developmentally appropriate mental health services
2. Develop school-based appropriately staffed mental health programs
3. Increase student and family awareness of mental health issues
4. Connect families, schools, and communities
5. Build student social-emotional skills through restorative practices and trauma informed work
6. Equip schools for immediate clinical intervention
7. Set up infrastructure for sustainable and expandable supports

Why Project AWARE?

- One in 5 youth have a MH "condition" and nationally at least 50%, perhaps 80%, of those get no treatment
 - Nearly 1 in 6 children in Vermont experience three or more types of adversity
- Suicide is 2nd leading cause of death among young adults
 - Nearly 1 in 5 Vermont middle school students ever thought seriously about killing themselves.
 - About 1 in 10 Vermont middle and high school students made a plan about how they would attempt suicide.

Where is this happening?

Project AWARE is in three school districts across Vermont in partnership with the local Designated Agency (DA) for child, youth and family mental health. Each school district identified 1 or more school to begin implementation with the goal to expand to additional schools in later years of the federal award.

1. **Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union**, partnering with Lamoille County Mental Health.
 - a. SY19/20-Hardwick Elementary (PK-6)
 - b. SY20/21- Woodbury Elementary & Lakeview Elementary (in Greensboro)
2. **Slate Valley Unified Union School District**, partnering with Rutland Mental Health Services
 - a. SY19/20 Fair Haven Grade (EEE-8)
 - b. SY20/21 Castleton Elementary
3. **Greater Rutland County Supervisory Union**, partnering with Rutland Mental Health Services
 - a. SY19/20 Wells Village (PK-6) & Middletown Springs (PK-6)
 - b. SY 20/21 Poultney Elementary

Year 3 updates:

Each district-hired AWARE LEA Project Coordinators continue to define their role within their community and supervisory union. They also continue to assemble the District Community Leadership Teams (DCLT) and its role in the community. These teams include people from the community and at least one Peer Specialist from Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. DCLTs meet to identify needs, resources, gaps, and to guide implementation locally. COVID restrictions delayed meetings and slowed progress from spring until late summer. At this time, the Interconnected Systems Framework (ISF) Initiative Inventories have been completed for each LEA participating school, and DCLTs are beginning to analyze results looking for areas of need.

Supervisory Unions have contracted with their DA for school mental health providers (a Masters-level school-based clinician or board certified behavioral analyst [BCBA]) to provide training, consultation, and ongoing coaching to school staff about mental health needs and how it manifests in student behavior.

DA school mental health providers and LEA coordinators are part of the Universal PBIS Teams and work with the PBIS coordinator in each school to provide consultation around behavior response.

Each district identified non-PBIS schools for potential PBIS installation. However, this installation has been delayed until year four due to COVID-19 pressures.

Frameworks

Vermont Project AWARE uses several evidence based practices:

- Interconnected Systems Framework (ISF) provides a structure for schools, community mental health, and policy leaders to develop an integrated approach to connect Positive

Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and mental health systems to improve educational outcomes for all children and youth, especially those with or at risk of developing mental health challenges. ISF provides tools and structure for educators and mental health professionals to work together to decrease behavior problems and increase opportunities for learning.

- Umatter® youth suicide prevention trainings for youth, schools, and communities provide information on risk factors and warning signs for suicide, what to say and do, and resources for referral and support.
- Up for Learning Activities with schools highlight student voice grant activities, providing training and facilitation to youth and an adult advisor through structured programs. Getting to Y teaches students how to read the YRBS or other related data source and self-advocate for change to improve outcomes. Mastermind Mentors (trains students to become mentors for younger kids to build leadership skills and self-confidence.
- Youth Mental Health First Aid® is a training for school staff, other professionals, and community members to increase awareness and teach adults how to help an adolescent (age 12-18) who is experiencing a mental health or addiction challenges or is in crisis.
- Trauma-responsive approaches, including Attachment, Regulation, and Competency (ARC) framework for complex trauma, ensure that students are safe and engaged in school, teachers are supported, resilience skills are taught, and students identified as needing additional support are connected to a trauma-trained mental health provider.

District/ Community Leadership Teams will be supported to include student and family voice on the team through the regional family support provider who will recruit youth and family members to participate in local implementation activities.

Year 3 updates:

ISF: January 2020 roll-out with ISF/PBIS, contractors, Local Education Agency (LEA) staff, Designated Agency (DA) staff and state staff included an overview of the ISF, PBIS, and collaboration between education and mental health agencies. In June 2020 DCLTa from each LEA attended the ISF strand of the Building Effective Schools Together (BEST) Institute to receive technical assistance and coaching for continued development of DCLTs and completing the Initiative Inventory. Coaching support is ongoing for ISF installation at both the LEA and state level. This includes 'Way of Work' facilitation and communication protocols for the interagency partnership as well as the AWARE contractor partnerships.

Vermont Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (VTmtss) was finalized and distributed to the field in summer 2019 (when Project AWARE was getting underway). We realized that Vermont's version of MTSS, which includes PBIS, is more expansive than the national version and intersects every aspect of our education system. The AWARE project seeks to prove that a broader integration of mental health is vital for students' wellbeing and their community. Therefore, we are examining the intersection of VTmtss and ISF for clarity and efficiency for the districts who are implementing ISF through Project AWARE while required to adhere to VTmtss.

Up for Learning: UP for Learning is implementing two different student programs in each Project AWARE school. The first is 'Getting to Y' which trains a student group on how to perform data analysis at their school to determine the strengths and weaknesses of their school climate and campaign for change. The second is a mentoring program where older students learn to mentor younger ones, teaching them leadership and advocacy skills. Getting to Y teams have been identified and work has begun in each school, while the mentoring program has been postponed until Covid 19 health regulations are less restrictive of student interaction.

Umatter: Umatter has reformatted all of its training to be available online to continue to work toward the goals of the grant during this pandemic. DCLTs are being trained in Umatter Suicide Prevention and will begin to develop/refine these protocols as well as work on communicating these widely. Umatter for Youth and Young Adult (YYA) gives a mental health overview training to student groups and teaches them how to develop an action project. All schools have begun to work with Umatter to identify student groups and begin the training process. Umatter and Up for Learning have integrated their student programs to build off of each other leading students to use their data analysis to determine areas of need and then develop an action project around that need.

Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health: VFFCMH has qualified Peer Support Providers who are partnering with each LEA and engaging with District/ Community Leadership Teams to bring the family's perspective to support implementation of school based mental health programs and support the LEAs to engage parents, students, and community members in their annual Continuous Improvement Planning and Family Engagement Plan as needed. Because of the necessary systems-based thinking required for grant activities, VFFCMH is reassessing the roles of the Peer Support Providers and has renamed the role to Peer Specialist.

YMHFA: MH workforce challenges caused delays in identifying trainer, then impacts of COVID-19 further delayed the trainings as MHFA reworked their curricula to provide remote trainings. Conversations with VTFF continues with identifying appropriate YMHFA trainer in each area and supporting them through a group supervision model across the state.

Trauma-responsive approaches: ARC trainers transformed curriculum for 8-part virtual series to begin December 2020 – March 2021.

Who is involved?

ISF & PBIS: Midwest-PBIS and Vermont BEST Project



Suicide Prevention & Youth Development: Umatter® and Up for Learning



Youth Mental Health First Aid



Family Voice: Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (VFF)



Evaluation



WestEd will work with the local AWARE coordinators and DCLTs to collect data for the project evaluation. Federal reporting will include measurement of:

- Formal agreements between schools and community partners to to improve mental health-related practices
- Number of people trained in mental health promotion and prevention
- Number of professionals trained in mental health practices consistent with the project goals
- Number of policy changes

- Number (and %) of students screened for mental health; referrals made for mental health services based on screening
- Number (and %) of students who received mental health services and specific services received

Year 2 Annual Data:

SPARS Indicator	Annual Goal	Annual Total	Percent of Goal Reached	Reason goal not achieved (if applicable)
WD2 (Workforce Development)	133	94	71%	COVID-19 slowed down partner activity, which slowed down trainings.
TR1 (Training for public, non-MH workforce)	50	114	228%	
R1 (Referrals for MH services)	10	0	0%	We didn't have the mental health staff hired for this. We hadn't implemented this until January, and then COVID-19 shut schools for the remainder of the year. This school year also started late and in hybrid/remote models in some areas.

WestEd will also work with the state and local teams to measure the impact of other grant activities consistent with the project goals.

Year 2 Evaluation Activities:

- Developed and finalized evaluation plan, including project logic model
- Collected ongoing attendance and feedback from ISF rollout including webinars and in person kick off meeting
- Findings from interviews with district teams from each LEA participating in the grant
- Findings from interviews with state team and state partners participating in the grant
- LEA Coordinator monthly calls (began September 2020)

State contacts

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