

Colorado Project AWARE Grant

Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education

Health and Wellness Unit



COLORADO
Department of Education

OVERVIEW

Colorado's Project AWARE aims to build a comprehensive, coordinated and integrated school behavioral health services system.

To support communities and schools to increase access to school- and community-based mental health services, Project AWARE increases collaboration between state, local and building-level stakeholders to increase coordination of state and local policy, improve systems integration, strengthen cross-organizational resources and ensure sustainability of programs and funding. The model is based on an MTSS behavioral health framework. Behavioral health promotion is a significant component of the project, therefore, CDE has partnered with Mental Health First Aid Colorado to provide Mental Health First Aid training across the state.

CDE will collaborate with behavioral health stakeholders across the state to improve mental health awareness and response. In addition to broader, statewide activities, Project AWARE has partnered with three local education agencies (LEAs) to build district infrastructure and capacity and support best practices to inform Colorado schools and communities interested in accomplishing similar goals.

FUNDING AND CONTEXT

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) awarded 20 states to build state and local education agencies' capacity to develop a comprehensive, coordinated and integrated program to advance wellness and resilience in educational settings for school-aged youth by:

- Increasing literacy and awareness of behavioral health issues among school-aged youth
- Promoting social and emotional learning
- Connecting children, youth, and families who may have behavioral health issues with appropriate services
- Improving school climate
- Promoting positive mental health among youth and families through social and emotional learning
- Building the capacity and leadership to sustain community-based mental health promotion, prevention, early identification and treatment services
- Providing training for school personnel and other adults who interact with school-aged youth to detect and respond to mental health issues in children and young adults

Available Resources

Project AWARE funds Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) trainings across the state to improve literacy around mental health. These funds are available to train youth-serving adults that interact with middle and high school-aged students.

If you are interested in providing YMHFA training in your school community, please contact Alejandra Venzor at Venzor_A@cde.state.co.us

To learn more about Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) or to find an existing course, [visit MentalHealthFirstAid.org](http://visitMentalHealthFirstAid.org).



PARTNER LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES (LEAs)

- [Aurora Public Schools](#) (about 39,000 students)
- [Fountain-Ft. Carson School District](#) (about 8,000 students)
- [Thompson School District](#) (about 16,000 students)

Why were these partners selected? These school districts had a combination of factors that made them a good fit for Project AWARE. Each district has a strong MTSS framework in place to support grant requirements, yet their district size and needs varied, which allows us to build model systems in differing environments to inform other districts in the state on best practices.

Local Education Agency Approaches include:

- Implement Mental Health First Aid training and other evidence-based programs to improve school climate, safety, substance abuse prevention and/or behavioral health promotion
- Link existing resources based on a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) behavioral health framework to support all students
- Streamline communication
- Leverage local funding
- Strengthen mental health partnerships and referral processes
- Improve collaboration with juvenile justice
- Engage youth and families in mental health promotion
- Collect data to drive efforts

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

At the end of five years of Project AWARE funding, we hope to have a strong, sustainable school behavioral health system to model in other school districts. We have carefully documented lessons learned to provide a replicable mode to provide technical assistance to others interested in strengthening their own systems.

Where can I learn more?

- Office of Health and Wellness
The Colorado Department of Education
201 E Colfax Avenue, Room 300
Denver, CO 80203
 - Program Contacts:
 - Omar Estrada, Project AWARE Program Manager, Estrada_O@cde.state.co.us
 - Sarah Mathew, Director of Health and Wellness, Mathew_S@cde.state.co.us
- To learn more about Project AWARE in the state, [visit the Project AWARE webpage](#).
- To learn more about the Project AWARE initiative, [visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website](#).
- [View all CDE Fact Sheets](#).