

Oregon is receiving federal funds to address the critical mental health needs of Oregon's youth.

The \$5.4 million [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\) Project AWARE \(Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education\) award](#) will augment Oregon's Strengthening Mental Health in Education (SMHiE) Initiative by fortifying state and local project management infrastructure and extending the existing \$5.5 million [ESSER III-funded 2-year project period](#) to 5 years (through September 2027).

The [Strengthening Mental Health in Education \(SMHiE\) Initiative](#) addresses the considerable need for a robust, community-driven, linguistically and culturally responsive behavioral health infrastructure in Oregon school communities.

The Initiative consists of 4 primary components:

1. Increasing mental health literacy via [Oregon Classroom WISE](#), an asynchronous digital learning educational program and a large suite of accompanying resources.
2. Developing and deploying credentialed behavioral health courses and professional learning communities.
3. Co-designing and implementing the Community Care Project (CCP) to enhance behavioral health infrastructure and workforce in four school districts that represent the racial/ethnic, linguistic, geographic, and socio-demographic diversity of Oregon.
4. Understanding formative and summative project impact and recommendations for implementation, sustainability, and continuous quality improvement.
 - Measurable outcomes include increased mental health literacy, better identification of youth needing support, improved service referral, augmented suicide prevention, intervention and postvention efforts, enhanced student and staff health and well-being, school climates embodying belonging, care and connection, fewer disciplinary referrals, and improved academic success.

Oregon's school communities need Integrated Model of Mental Health-aligned approaches that fulfill student and staff mental/behavioral health needs. This demands innovative, locally driven solutions that amplify and leverage community assets.

Oregon has assets devoted to school-based mental health; workforce gaps create the need for innovative solutions.

Community Care staff specializing in school-based mental health promotion and family system navigation and increased statewide mental health literacy can strengthen mental health infrastructure and improve access to linguistically and culturally responsive services, and family peer support.

Background

- Child/adolescent mental health has been declared a [national emergency](#).
- Many Oregon youth and families have unmet mental health needs according to a [2020 Oregon Secretary of State Audit](#).
- Oregon's communities identify youth mental health as their number one priority.
- The psychological needs of students and school staff must be met [to create the conditions for learning](#) and development.
- School-based mental health services are critically important. [70% of students](#) nationally receive assistance in schools.
- Oregon faces a considerable [behavioral health workforce shortage](#).

Key Lessons Learned from Community Engagement

- [ODE's Integrated Model of Mental Health](#) and collaborative partnerships with school districts, Education Service Districts, Oregon Health Authority (OHA), community-based organizations (CBOs), affinity groups, professional organizations, [Early Learning Hubs](#), [Early Head Start](#), [Head Start](#) and [Preschool Promise](#), and county and community partners and programs, hold potential for creating innovative, sustainable scaffolding to meet staff and student needs.
- [Student Investment Account](#) (SIA) resources and partnerships with OHA, CBOs, coordinated care organizations (CCOs), and other organizations can be leveraged to develop a sustainable culturally responsive, equity-centered, trauma-informed, school-based [mental health workforce](#).

Solutions: Community Care Model & Mental Health Literacy

- The [100-year-old Community Education Model](#) serves as a framework for a Community Care Model. It builds on Healthier Together Oregon [Behavioral Health priorities](#), including improving families' access to key social determinants of health and reducing health disparities and inequities. Many Oregon school districts already have community-embedded system navigators to address these needs.
- School-embedded Community Care staff may serve the needs of students and families from preschool onward by:
 1. Providing peer-to-peer emotional support to students and their families and promoting [primary prevention](#).
 2. Serving as liaisons and cultural navigators between students/families and staff, school- and community-based mental health and health providers, family resource centers, and local systems of care.
- [School Mental Health Literacy](#) is an effective avenue for mental health promotion, decreasing stigma, better serving youth and families, and providing for the mental health support needs of school staff and leaders.