



NEBRASKA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM RATIONALE

DATE: September 16, 2021

TO: Matthew L. Blomstedt, Ph.D.
Commissioner of Education

FROM: Zainab Rida, Ph.D.

PROPOSED AGENDA ITEM: Authorize the Commissioner to accept FY2021 COVID Project AWARE-SEA Grant to address the high level of mental and behavioral health needs of school-aged children in Lexington Public Schools, Nebraska City Public Schools, and Valentine Community Schools.

RATIONALE/BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Nebraska's AWARE-SEA Project 2.0 addresses the high level of mental and behavioral health needs of school-aged children in rural schools, including depression, anxiety, suicide ideation, and trauma. Educators statewide have reported feeling unprepared to handle the severity of mental health issues arising daily in schools. Training for school staff to better address students' mental and behavioral health needs has been identified as a critical priority. In response, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services - Division of Behavioral Health (DHHS-DBH) are partnering at the State level to collaborate with the three Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to improve school-based mental health services.

The LEAs of Lexington, Nebraska City and Valentine are demographically and geographically diverse, with varying levels of poverty and scarcity of mental health resources. Two sites have higher free/reduced lunch, indicative of poverty and student mobility. All three LEAs have strong, long-standing track records of successful collaborations with State and local partners, including mental health providers, community organizations, the business and private sector, and stakeholders, including students and families.

The project's goals include: 1) prevention of mental health and behavioral disorders among students by providing positive, supportive, and trauma-informed learning environments; 2) increasing student resilience and pro-social behaviors; 3) increasing availability of school-based mental health services; 4) increasing schools' capacity to identify and immediately respond to the mental health needs of students exhibiting behavioral or psychological signs requiring clinical intervention; and 5) increasing schools' capacity to identify and intervene in bullying and aggressive behaviors of students which may contribute to school violence. Through the implementation of evidence-based, trauma-informed practices in mental health screening, assessment, interventions, and treatment, up to 5,227 students will be served through the project each year, with up to

6,795 served in the schools across five years. Selected practices to enhance school climate, student resilience and pro-social behaviors, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), will be employed in each of the three districts, accompanied by Functional Behavioral Assessment and Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS).

Nebraska is a recipient of the FY 2018 Project AWARE Grant, and the FY 2021 Project will have the opportunity to build upon the successes and lessons learned from the initial grant.

PROPOSED BOARD MEETING (MONTH/YEAR): October 2021

ESTIMATED AWARD: \$8,935,636

FOR CONTRACTS AND GRANTS:

- Indicate the Funding Source: Federal SAMHSA AWARE-SEA grant
- New or Renewal: New