



Opening Access to Services in Schools (OASIS)

Education Service Center Region 15 has been awarded \$3.3 million in funding over five years from the U.S. Department of Education's School-Based Mental Health grant program. With funding provided by the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA), these investments help advance the President's Mental Health Strategy, which directly implements his Unity Agenda priority to tackle the mental health crisis in our school communities. These investments will begin the important work of broadening access to critical mental health supports by increasing the number of health care providers in schools. These funds also will help with strengthening the pipeline of certified mental health providers who are ready to work in schools with the greatest needs. These competitive grants are the first in a series of awards the Department will make over several years and constitute the largest investment in school-based mental health this country has ever made.

This grant is a collaborative partnership between ESC Region 15 and ASU's Master of Professional School Counseling program to increase the number of school counselors employed and retained within the region, as well as to increase the training and professional development opportunities for school counselors and other mental-health professionals in the region related to intervention, crisis, suicide, trauma and grief, school counselor advocacy and collaboration with administrative personnel, and other topics as needed. There will be a specialized focus on rural areas that lack access to mental health services and personnel.

This project is expanding the capacity of high need districts through a partnership with ESC Region 15 and ASU to train professional school counselors with the goal of placing these candidates in high-need elementary and secondary schools to address the shortages and high student-to-school counselor ratios. **This is done through a grow-your-own program in which districts identify teachers to move into school counselor positions while they are obtaining their school counseling degrees.**

Even before the pandemic, the wellbeing of many students was unmet due to insufficient access to high-quality mental health care. For years, schools have struggled to meet the recommended ratios for school-based mental health professionals, and this is especially true in schools with more underserved students. Now, the mental health crisis facing students has reached a critical point with more than [one in three high school students](#) reported experiencing poor mental health during the height of the pandemic. [Research](#) shows that children and young people learn more, report feeling safer, and develop more trusting relationships with their peers and teachers when their social and emotional needs are met with certified and accessible mental health professionals.



“As the President outlined in his State of the Union address, we must do more to tackle our nation’s growing mental health crisis, which is particularly acute among our youth,” said Domestic Policy Advisor to the President Susan Rice. “These new awards will help connect more students in need to school-based mental health services now and ensure a pipeline of trained professionals to support students in the future. Integrating mental health services into our schools is a key component of the President’s Mental Health Strategy and will help fulfill a key component of the President’s Unity Agenda.”

“Even before the disruption, isolation, and trauma of the pandemic, youth rates of anxiety and depression, and other mental health challenges were on the rise, and too many students suffered in silence,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. “Mental health and wellness have profound implications for our students, their academic success, and their overall outcomes, and we know that youth facing mental health challenges are more likely to receive services in a school-based setting. The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act represents an unprecedented opportunity to raise the bar for our support of our students, to improve learning conditions in our schools, to expand access to school-based mental health care, and to supercharge efforts across the country to train and hire a pipeline of professionals committed to the wellbeing of our students.”

These historic awards are made possible because of funds secured as part of the 2022 Omnibus and BSCA. Over the next five years, BSCA will invest \$1 billion in these programs, helping us to make substantial progress towards the President’s goal, as part of his [Mental Health Strategy](#), to double the number of school counselors, social workers, and other mental health professionals. These funds have the potential to meaningfully change lives by building a mental health infrastructure in schools and communities across the country.

“Following countless conversations with Connecticut parents, educators, and district leaders, as Chair of the subcommittee that funds the Department of Education, I created the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program to help districts increase the number of qualified, well-trained mental health professionals working in schools,” said Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Committee Rosa DeLauro. “Disruption in schools due to COVID-19, economic anxiety, job losses, and learning challenges have exacerbated pre-existing mental health challenges. Our youth need help, and this is a burden that teachers, administrators, and parents cannot alleviate on their own. These grants will expand the program’s reach, helping to move us closer to my goal of ensuring every child goes to a school that has a qualified mental



health professional on staff. I want to thank Secretary Cardona for spearheading efforts to get this funding to our schools and improve the health care of our children.”

Through SBMH, the Department is investing more than \$141 million to 103 states and school districts to increase the number of qualified mental health services providers delivering school-based mental health services to students. These funds increase the number of school psychologists, counselors, and other mental health professionals serving our students through recruitment and retention efforts, the promotion of re-specialization and professional retraining of existing mental health providers, and through efforts to increase the diversity and cultural and linguistic competency of school-based mental health services providers. These investments will allow more students in school buildings across the country to access mental health supports through trained professionals they can trust, and without shame or stigma.