



Rural West Texas Mental Health Educational Learning Partnership (HELP)

Education Service Center Region 15 has been awarded \$2.3 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE): Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant Program. 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.

The project pulls from research-based practices clearly showing effective applications in school counseling to help inform what can work to increase access, success, and completion for K-12 students. School counselors are expected to deliver comprehensive school counselor programs that promote student achievement in academic, social, emotional, and career competencies, as outlined in the Texas Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Programs.

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. In addition, the project will fund a Mental Health Specialist position at ESC Region 15 to provide consultation and training services to area school district counselors. These efforts are designed to allow students more access to a comprehensive school counseling program and assistance with personal-social concerns, as well as academic and career planning.

State mandates and increasing student enrollment, with little to no increase in funding, has caused an issue for many rural districts to employ adequate student services personnel. Utilization of intentional strategies to provide additional school counselors to these schools, while expanding the services offered through ESC Region 15 will help address these critical issues. The proposed interventions address the critical areas of need in rural districts with high student-to-counselor ratios, lack of supervision and resources for supervision and mentoring in crisis situations, and training and professional development for prevention, intervention, and postvention in needed topics

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