

RE-1 VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

\$200K grant to help RE-1 Valley with substance abuse prevention

District starting new HEADS-UP program

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Sixth through ninth grade students in RE-1 Valley School District will benefit from an additional mental health professional this upcoming school year thanks to a \$200,000 School Health Professionals Grant the district has received from Colorado Department of Education.

"We are really thrilled," said Superintendent Dr. Jan DeLay, noting RE-1 was one of many school districts to apply for the limited grant funds.

The grant program is intended to help schools provide substance abuse and mental/behavioral health care to students who have substance abuse or other mental/behavioral issues; implement substance abuse prevention education and provide evidenced based resources to school staff, students and families; and reduce barriers for secondary students at risk for substance abuse to access services provided by community-based organizations for treatment and counseling.

RE-1's grant application was submitted by Michelle Long, district mental health professional; Dr. Lois Christiansen, district psychologist; Kris Schell, district social worker; Laurie Kjosness, director of student services; and Ronda Conger, YouthLink coordinator.

Funds from the grant will allow RE-1 to hire a full-time mental health professional, either a counselor or social worker, to work with sixth through ninth grade students at Sterling Middle School, Sterling High School and Caliche Jr./Sr. High School for the next three years. This individual will help launch the HEADS-UP (Health Education, Adolescent Development and Substance Use Prevention) program, which will prepare students to increase self-esteem, critical thinking skills, resiliency, confidence, and self-direction while focusing on substance use prevention and behavioral health education that will result in students being able to successfully handle challenging situations.

The HEADS-UP program will use Botvin Life Skills Training (LST) program, which focuses on normative beliefs about substance use and substance use refusal skills, violence and delinquency, and substance use (alcohol, tobacco, inhalants, marijuana, and polydrug). It addresses multiple risk and protective factors and teaches personal and social skills that build resilience and help youth navigate development tasks, including the skills necessary to understand and resist drug influences.

As part of the HEADS-UP program, there will be trainings for staff, students and parents.

The grant application notes that since the legalization of marijuana in Colorado, while Logan County itself does not have any dispensaries, there are many located in nearby communities, which has increased access to marijuana, as well as other illegal substances. RE-1 has already established a collaborative working relationship with community resources and supports, but state in the grant application that the grant funds are needed in order to continue to build those relationships and implement a comprehensive school-based program in an effort to reduce the risks of alcohol, tobacco, drug use and violence in the community.

According to the grant application, RE-1 is in great need of an additional health professional to meet the needs of the increasing number of students with substance abuse and behavioral health care issues.

The Center for Disease Control's Healthy People 2020 recommends one school nurse for every 750 general education students, the National School Social Worker Practice Model recommends one school social worker for every 250 students, the National Association of School Psychologists recommends one school psychologist to every 500-750 students and the American School Counselor Association recommends one school counselor to every 250 students. RE-1 serves just over 2,100 students from preschool to age 21 and employs one school nurse, one school psychologist, one social worker and three high school counselors.

Included in the grant application are comments showing how the attitudes and actions of students in RE-1 have changed since the legalization of marijuana:

- "There's a shift in culture; kids see their parents smoking marijuana and see it marketed everywhere, and they think it's normal and OK for them to do."
- "At our elementary and preschool school, we have noticed an increased number of parents showing up at school, high."

- "Kids have brought marijuana to school to show their friends."
- "They go off campus and smoke during lunch with friends."

The grant application notes that 10 years ago it was rare to see incidents of drug-related disciplinary actions given to students, but those actions have increased dramatically. In Aug. 2015, 188 school counselors in Colorado participated in a survey concerning the legalization of marijuana in schools. They were asked a number of questions including since the legalization of marijuana, what impact has there been on marijuana-related incidents at your school? 69 percent of counselors reported an increase in incidents, 30 percent reported no change in incidents and 2 percent reported a slight decrease.

When asked what the most predominant marijuana violations by students on campus were, 51 percent of counselors said being under the influence during school hours, 30 percent said possession of marijuana, 9 percent said possession of marijuana-infused edibles, 6 percent reported sharing marijuana with other students and 5 percent said selling marijuana to other students.

RE-1 states in the grant application that these Colorado statistics are reflected in RE-1 and Logan County. Since the legalization of marijuana, RE-1, as well as law enforcement, has seen a substantial increase to the number of marijuana related incidents. The Sterling Police Department reported that in 2016, they responded to the following youth referrals: 33 referrals for drug use and/or possession including paraphernalia possession, five referred to drug abuse in-patient program, 20 jail screens involved drug use issues, 10 alcohol possession and consumption, and nine were required to attend Alive At 25 for drug/alcohol incidents which involved sitting in a car.

Also, Logan County Department of Human Services reported out of 147 child protection investigations, 53 involved concerns with substance use or abuse. Youth requiring in-patient/residential treatment for substance abuse through an open case at human services totaled six in both 2015 and 2016.

Additionally, current counselors at SHS have reported 40 percent of the referrals have concerns that are drug-related with the individual or a family member. Referrals are addressed through RE-1's school based mental health providers and only occur when concerns are brought to their attention.

In order to address these incidents, RE-1 has already developed two health/safety-based teams to help students at-risk or in crisis. The Student Care and Recovery Team (SCRT), which makes sure students' and staff's needs, regarding prevention, preparation, intervention and recovery, are met throughout a crisis situation (suicide, threats, deaths, etc.) and provides ongoing training to teachers and administrators before a crisis occurs.

The Student Support Services Team (SSST) works to help students and their family with issues related to school such as attendance, substance use, family issues, failing grades, homelessness, etc., as well as providing strategies and support for teachers and administration. In the past year, the SSST has attended to over 430 referrals of at-risk students (preschool through high school) from teachers, parents, administrators and outside agencies. Students in grades six through nine account for 37 percent of the total referrals.

The additional mental health professional will serve on both teams.

"Although we are confident that we are meeting the needs in the area of mental/behavioral health, we still need personnel to specifically focus on the substance issues in our schools," states the grant application.

According to DeLay, the new mental health professional position will be posted July 18. They hope to get the individual trained as quickly as possible, but they may not be fully trained before school starts.

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