

Introducing Vermont Project AWARE

What is Project AWARE?

The Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Project AWARE grant (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education) supports local education and mental health leaders to engage in a multi-tiered system of support that:

- Uses data-driven decision-making to understand the local needs and resources related to mental health and wellness;
- Uses universal screening of social, emotional, and behavioral needs and strengths to improve referral processes;
- Increases access to mental health supports; and
- Provides mental health awareness trainings for youth and adults.

What are the Project AWARE goals?

- Increase awareness of mental health, substance use, and co-occurring disorders among school-aged youth.
- Increase the mental health literacy of individuals who interact with school-aged youth to understand and detect the signs and symptoms of mental illness, substance use/misuse, and co-occurring disorders.
- Promote and foster resilience building and mental health well-being for all school-aged youth.
- Provide positive behavioral health supports; targeted services to those who need more support; and intensive services to those who need them.
- Connect school-aged youth who may have behavioral health issues, including serious emotional disturbance (SED) or serious mental illness (SMI), and their families to needed services.
- Increase and improve access to culturally relevant, developmentally appropriate, and trauma-informed school and community-based AWARE activities and services.

Why Vermont Project AWARE?

Students in Vermont are experiencing increased mental health concerns, especially students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender and/or students who experience health disparities related to their race/ethnicity and have less access to timely mental health supports.

Vermont will establish structures for the scale-up and sustainability of mental health and wellness supports within the VT Multi-Tiered System of Supports (VTmtss) throughout the identified districts/Supervisory Unions, which can also be shared across all districts in the state.

What will be accomplished through Vermont Project AWARE?

Vermont Project AWARE will support three Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and Designated Mental Health agencies (DAs) to increase awareness, identify need, know the supports, create processes for access, increase use of supports, reduce stigma, use data, develop community teams/partnerships, and enhance the system to transform trauma.

Grant Highlights

- Vermont will receive \$1.8M per year, for up to 5 years
- Grant period: 09/30/2023 to 09/29/2028
- The Department of Mental Health (DMH) is the recipient of the award in partnership with the Agency of Education (AOE)
- Vermont Project AWARE is focused in 3 LEAs with partnership of local public mental health agencies

Vermont Project AWARE Sites

LEAs	DAs
Barre Unified Union School District (BUUSD)	Washington County Mental Health (WCMH)
Caledonia Central Supervisory Union (CCSU)	Northeast Kingdom Human Services (NKHS)
Southwest VT Supervisory Union (SVSU)	United Counseling Services (UCS)

Vermont Project AWARE Goals for Each Site

The Project AWARE Local Needs Assessment and Implementation Plan are informed by and in service of the LEA's own Comprehensive Needs Assessment and Continuous Improvement Plan, specifically their Safe and Healthy School goal, both requirements of the Agency of Education for all LEAs. By connecting the Project AWARE goals, objectives, and activities to this state-level requirement, LEAs will be better able to integrate Project AWARE within their structures and sustain the approaches. Each LEA/DA will form a District Community Leadership Team (DCLT) composed of district-level leadership, administrators, and local mental health leaders to engage in the systems-level work toward meeting their Safe and Healthy Schools goals.

LEA	Goal
Barre Unified Union School District (BUUSD)	By June of 2026, we will decrease the average number of days students are absent from 22 to 17.
Caledonia Central Supervisory Union (CCSU)	In 2024-2025, students in CCSU schools will be supported in their social-emotional well-being as evidenced by a decrease of 5% in reported student behaviors and by an increase of 5% in attendance (SY 2023-24 will be used as baseline data). This data will be collected and analyzed at the school and SU level.
Southwest VT Supervisory Union (SVSU)	By June 2027, all schools will have high fidelity rates (80% or higher) of universal implementation efforts as evidenced through the Treatment Integrity/Social Validity Survey (TI/SV), and at least 70% of students will be responding successfully (i.e. low risk) to primary prevention efforts as evidenced by Student Risk Screening Survey-Internalizing and Externalizing (SRSS-IE).

Activities of Vermont Project AWARE

To help meet each LEA's specific Safe and Healthy Schools goals, they will assess need and develop capacity in the following areas:

- Mental health awareness training for staff (including Youth Mental Health First Aid and Teen Mental Health First Aid Training of Trainers)
- Suicide prevention and awareness
- Centering student voice by empowering students as agents of change
- Transforming trauma in schools
- Providing Gender-Sexuality Alliance student group supports and training of the workforce on supporting LGBTQ students.

Supports Available

Technical Assistance provided by UVM's Center for Disability and Inclusion (CDCI). The team at CDCI will provide coaching, training, and support on the implementation of tools and concepts to enhance the social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health approaches within the Vermont Multi-Tiered System of Supports (VTmtss) at state and local levels.

- Lead Contact: Cassandra Townshend, cassandra.townshend@uvm.edu

Evaluation support from WestEd. WestEd is the evaluator for VT Project AWARE and will help monitor progress toward project goals. WestEd will provide tools for data collection, offer support to LEAs, agencies, and trainers on the tools and submission process, collect and analyze local and state data related to Project AWARE activities and training events, share data summary reports, and assist with federal reporting requirements.

- Lead contact: Sarah Guckenberger, sgucken@wested.org

Teen and Youth Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Training provided by Vermont Care Partners (VCP).

- Lead contacts: Eric Ruiz, Eric@vermontcarepartners.org and Sunny Naughton, sunny@sunshinesilverlining.com

Umatter Suicide Prevention Training and Policy Development provided by Center for Health and Learning (CHL).

- Lead contact: Kirk Postlewaite, Kirk@healthandlearning.org

Training and Facilitation of Youth-Adult Teams to Engage Students in Analyzing Local Data provided by UP for Learning.

- Lead contact Lindsey Halman, lindsey@upforlearning.org

Training on Transforming Trauma in Schools provided by NFI.

- Lead contact: Dave Melnick, davemelnick@nafi.com

Supporting LGBTQ Students Training and Gender Sexuality Alliance Student Group Supports provided by Outright VT.

- Lead contact: Courage V Pearson, courage@outrightvt.org.