

Press Release



OVEC receives a \$5.2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education for School-Based Mental Health Services

10 school districts have partnered to improve school-based mental health services

Public Press event will be hosted at OVEC in Shelbyville, KY, on February 21, 2023.

Shelbyville, KY (January 1, 2023) - A recently awarded federal grant to the Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative (OVEC) will help alleviate the shortage of mental health professionals serving K-12 students for several school districts in north-central Kentucky.

OVEC's program is called, "Project R3: Recruit, Retain, and Re-specialize to Support Student Mental Health." *Project R3* will recruit and hire twelve new certified school counselors. The twelve chosen candidates will be distributed among ten districts. This will impact over 47,000 K-12 students in Northern Central Kentucky!

USED's five-year, \$5,281,577 grant provides 80% of the total cost of the project, while 20% (\$1,760,525) will be covered by non-federal funding contributed by OVEC and participating districts.

"As a teacher, I dedicated my career to serving my community from the classroom. In our education first administration, Kentucky's students and their well-being remain top of mind. I applaud the U.S. Department of Education for this funding, OVEC for their leadership and the participating districts for prioritizing their students' mental health," said Lieutenant Governor Coleman.

For the 10 participating OVEC districts, the new program offers much-needed support for schools facing personnel shortages at the same time there is an increase in student mental health needs.

The following districts submitted letters of support and have the opportunity to participate in the project: Anchorage Independent School District, Bullitt County Public Schools, Carroll County Public Schools, Eminence Independent Schools, Gallatin County Schools, Grant County Schools, Henry County Public Schools, Oldham County Schools, Shelby County Public Schools, and Spencer County Public Schools.

“As a former guidance counselor, I feel that a top priority of any district should be to invest in the emotional and mental health of our students,” said Dr. Buddy Berry, Superintendent of Eminence Independent Schools and chairman of the OVEC Board of Directors. “We were already seeing extreme needs in this area nation-wide, but the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have exasperated them greatly. I’m so excited and proud of being a part of OVEC’s vision for being proactive in this worthwhile endeavor.”

Students in OVEC districts, like those around the country, have suffered the consequences of the recent pandemic. A 2022 report found that more than one in five tenth graders in the OVEC region experienced serious psychological distress. A recent national survey found that more than half of middle and high school students felt that their mental health was an obstacle to learning, and only one in five stated that they could access a school-based mental health professional if they had a problem.

The project will seek to hire diverse professional counselors and ensure that at least 60% of their time is dedicated to serving students. Through *Project R3*, OVEC will also create a re-specialization certificate program for community mental health professionals to better understand school-based delivery of services.

“The surge in students’ social and emotional concerns is nothing less than a mental health pandemic,” said Jason Adkins, OVEC’s Chief Executive Officer. “I am grateful for our dedicated team that secured this US Department of Education grant, which will strengthen our efforts to help students.”