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Media Release

Schools Receive \$5M Grant for Mental Health Services

Office of Strategy and
Communications

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Charleston, SC – Charleston County School District (CCSD) will receive almost \$1 million a year for five years to expand mental health support for children through a [Project Prevent](#) grant from U.S. Department of Education.

“The need for additional social-emotional and mental health support has been recognized and supported by the CCSD Board of Trustees and the Superintendent,” said Jennifer Coker, Executive Director of Alternative Programs and Services for CCSD. “The school district has adopted Mission Critical action items to address community needs. This grant allows CCSD to expand resources in our highest-need schools.”

This summer, while gun violence in North Charleston made the news, a group of educators gathered to do something to help children who are traumatized by community violence.

This group of educators, while on summer break, met with the North Charleston Police Department to review crime data to identify neighborhoods where children are most likely to be exposed to violence. They identified three neighborhoods: Charleston Farms, Chicora, and Dorchester Terrace.

The 3,500 school-aged children who live in these neighborhoods attend school at Chicora Elementary, Dunston Primary, Mary Ford Elementary, North Charleston Elementary, Morningside Middle, Northwoods Middle, and North Charleston High.

The team of 43 educators met with community organizations including Dee Norton Child Advocacy Center, National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI), Charleston-Dorchester Mental Health Center, MUSC National Crime Victims Center, and others to figure out how to better serve children exposed to violence.

The group realized that school staff needs to know how to detect trauma in children, schools need counselors and staff trained to treat trauma, and schools need to teach children skills to prevent violence.

"Our educators experience first-hand the negative impacts that exposure to trauma can have on students' learning," said Lisa Allison, Director of Intervention and Psychological Services. "The Project Prevent grant will greatly enhance the mental health supports available to children and families in our neediest communities."

U.S. Department of Education offers this funding to school districts every five years. The first wave of funding was given in 2014 to only 22 school districts throughout the U.S. Now, in 2019, U.S. ED just released the second wave of funding to even fewer school districts – 13 throughout the U.S.

The rigorous application process involves making the case why a community needs the funding, how the community will spend the funding to make a difference in the lives of children, and how they will demonstrate return on investment.

The grant funds will create a multi-tiered system of support by:

1. Building district and school-level capacity to identify, assess, and serve students exposed to pervasive violence through professional development, screening, and progress monitoring tools
2. Implementing school-based strategies such as social-emotional learning curriculum, small group interventions, and individual counseling
3. Ensuring affected students receive supports through school-based mental health providers and referrals.

The anticipated outcomes include increased student engagement, school safety, parental involvement, collaboration between school-based staff and mental health clinicians; and, decreased disciplinary referrals and student absences.

"Receiving funding for mental health and teaching our youth how to resolve problems without using violence will greatly enhance our students' social and educational achievements," said Principal Henry Darby. "What a marvelous project - a project which is greatly needed."

According to Allison, professional development on trauma-informed practices will equip educators with ways to mitigate that impact in the classroom.

"Our families can often experience difficulty navigating access to mental health services," said Allison. "Having school-based coordination of those services reduces barriers to access and enables educators to provide more timely help to students and their families."

For more information contact the Office of Strategy and Communications at (843) 937-6303.

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD), a nationally-accredited school district, is the second largest school system in South Carolina representing a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 87 schools and specialized programs. With approximately 6,100 employees district-wide, CCSD is the fourth largest employer in the region.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, charter, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), and Montessori schools, and is divided into three Learning Communities. Options include specialized programs in science, engineering and mathematics; liberal arts; music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military and other public service enterprises.