

AWARE 2023 – Newark Public Schools Project AWARE Abstract

Project name: Project AWARE Newark

Newark Public Schools is New Jersey's largest school district serving one of the most racially and ethnically diverse and under-resourced communities in the state. Students and families in Newark experience significant inequities in accessing vital health, mental health, economic, and social/community resources. District staff recognize the need to create an affirming, equitable, culturally- and linguistically-relevant, trauma-informed learning environment to promote the wellness and resilience of their students. Therefore, Project AWARE Newark will enhance equitable access, experience, and outcomes for students (37,911 Year 1; 47,000 unduplicated students Years 2-5 in 64 schools), including those from historically underserved racial/ethnic communities, LGBTQI+ students, and students with severe emotional disturbance/severe mental illness (SED/SMI).

Strategies/Interventions: Newark Public Schools will deepen their relationship with the NJ SEA, NJ SMHA, and Newark community mental health agencies to build a comprehensive tiered system of equitable mental health supports. Equity will be embedded in research-based tiered systems of support. Specifically, Tier 1 – a culturally aligned, affirming socio-emotional universal curriculum will be implemented and ALL students will access, including students with SED/SMI. Resources will be dedicated to empowering messaging through school assemblies and safe spaces such as after school clubs that promote affinity spaces for historically marginalized youth. Tiers 2 & 3 – Partnerships with various community organizations specializing in mental health will bring in school-based mental health clinicians trained on how to provide affirming small group and individual mental health care for LGBTQI+ youth, SED/SMI youth, and youth from historically underserved racial/ethnic communities. Research-based wellness and resilience interventions that will be implemented include: *Sources of Strength, Question. Persuade. Refer, Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools, Trauma-focused CBT, and Signs of Suicide.*

Project Goals and Measurable Objectives: There are 18 goals and 71 objectives for this project. Goal 1: Increase access to mental health services for youth with and without SED/SMI. Goal 2: Establish collaborative community relationships through a Newark AWARE Advisory Board. Goal 3: Conduct a mental health needs assessment. Goal 4: Develop an implementation plan for a three-tiered system of supports. Goal 5: Implement a socio-emotional learning curriculum. Goal 6: Establish a safe and empowering school climate for marginalized youth. Goal 7: Establish suicide awareness training policy. Goal 8: Implement prevention program for suicide and substance use. Goal 9: Train adults on mental health awareness. Goal 10: Implement a school safety and violence prevention program. Goal 11: Implement Tier 1 & 2 screening for students with and without SED/SMI. Goal 12: Implement Tier 2 mental health services. Goal 13: Establish a referral pathway for mental health supports for youth with and without SED/SMI. Goal 14: Establish a research-based crisis intervention response plan for students with severe behaviors. Goal 15: Develop a sustainability plan for grant activities. Goal 16: Promote staff wellness. Goal 17: Train clinicians on affirming therapeutic practices. Goal 18: Promote healthy relationships for youth with and without SED/SMI. Through this project, over 37,911 students will receive increased access to culturally and linguistically competent and affirming mental health supports and services that will be organized under district's tiered system of supports.