

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
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North Dakota Department of Human Services awards Children's Prevention and Early Intervention Behavioral Health Pilot Project

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services' Behavioral Health Division announced today that it has awarded funding for a behavioral health school pilot project to Simle Middle School in Bismarck. The division received 13 applications from schools and districts across the state.

Almost one quarter of all North Dakota middle school students (23.6 percent) and one third of all North Dakota high school students (28.9 percent) participating in the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported feeling so sad or hopeless every day for more than two weeks during the past year that they stopped doing their usual activities. And, 13.5 percent of North Dakota high school students reported having attempted suicide one or more times in the past year (YRBS, 2017).

"The focus of this pilot project on prevention and early intervention is an important one and a great first step. However, the need for treatment and recovery supports in the community is still evident," said Pamela Sagness, director of the Behavioral Health Division. "We look forward to continued opportunities to bridge the gap between the behavioral health and education systems."

During the 2017 legislative session, state lawmakers passed House Bill 1040 appropriating \$150,000 to the department for establishing a children's prevention and early intervention behavioral health services pilot project in a school system. Simle Middle School intends to integrate behavioral health screening and early intervention services into existing educational and support systems for children.

"Early detection and intervention of behavioral health conditions is particularly important to K-12 students and their families, because healthy students are better prepared and able to learn, and healthy families are better equipped to help and nurture them," said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Kirsten Baesler. "Our support of initiatives such as the children's prevention and early intervention behavioral health services pilot project can greatly improve early intervention and prevention and can get us closer to our goal of truly supporting children's behavioral health."

Division officials said the goal is to develop a pilot project that improves children's behavioral health in a school setting that uses an innovative systemic approach to address gaps in the school system related to prevention and early intervention of behavioral health conditions or related consequences. This aligns with recommendations from the North Dakota Behavioral Health Study to invest in prevention and early intervention, expand community-based services, and enhance and streamline the system of care for children and youths.

"The North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders (NDCEL) is tremendously excited about this opportunity. Our school administrators feel it is important to continue this partnership and common vision," said council Executive Director Dr. Aimee Copas. "The importance of educators working hand in hand with the Department of Human Services with the common interest of helping our youth is the most important work our state has to tackle at this time. This is only a very small beginning to the work we have ahead. However, it is a step in the right direction."

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To be eligible for the pilot funding, schools needed to demonstrate the following:

- Leadership support for innovative solutions regarding behavioral health.
- School culture supportive of behavioral health, illustrated by documentation of efforts taken to implement strategies supporting behavioral health of all children.
- Sustained implementation of prevention and early intervention efforts.
- Successful implementation of the Multi-Tier Systems of Support (MTSS).
- Readiness to implement strategies within 30 days of award.
- Ability to develop and implement a sustainability plan.

The Department of Human Services' Behavioral Health Division offers many resources at no cost to schools and community members to support the behavioral health of children and families through the Parents Lead program (www.parentslead.org) and community substance abuse prevention efforts (<https://prevention.nd.gov/get-involved/find-resources>).

The Behavioral Health Division is responsible for reviewing and identifying service needs and activities in the state's behavioral health system to ensure health and safety, access to services and quality of services. The division is also responsible for establishing quality assurance standards for the licensure of substance use disorder program services and facilities and provides policy leadership in partnership with public and private entities. For more information, visit www.behavioralhealth.dhs.nd.gov or contact the division at 701-328-8920, toll-free 800-755-2719, TTY 800-366-6888 or dhsbhd@nd.gov.

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