

## Oregon Department of Education – Community Care Development Project

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) Community Care Development Project responds to the urgent need to address the pressing health and mental health concerns of Oregon’s students, families, and school staff.

Launched in early 2022, the Development Project is being designed and implemented in partnership with the Oregon Health Authority, University of Oregon, and four school districts that represent the geographic and cultural diversity of Oregon. These are Hillsboro, Lake County 7, Phoenix-Talent, and South Lane.

The Development Project is partially funded through September 2024 by \$5.5 million in ESSER III Set-Aside funds, and through September 2027 by a \$5.4 million Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education) grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

The Development Project seeks to improve the mental health, education, and overall health and well-being of Oregon’s students and families through four goals.

1. Increase statewide mental health, suicide prevention, and substance use prevention literacy and skill acquisition, and promote staff mental health and well-being in all of Oregon’s 197 school districts.
2. Develop and deploy credentialed mental health, suicide prevention, and substance use prevention-related professional learning opportunities for school staff and community-based organizations.
3. Design and implement a model that embeds Community Care staff in schools to provide students and families with emotional support and health and mental health system navigation.
4. Evaluate the formative/summative impact of these efforts, and make recommendations for implementation, sustainability, and continuous quality improvement.

Goals three and four involve designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating a model that embeds *Community Care Specialists* in school buildings. The primary role of these linguistically and culturally responsive *Specialists* is to provide emotional support and mental health and health navigation services to students and families.

This often involves connecting families with local systems of care to ensure that identified health and mental health needs are met as rapidly as possible. Wraparound supports often include referrals to mental health services, health, vision and dental care, housing/shelter,

food, clothing, and childcare. *Specialists* either provide warm handoffs or accompany families to services.

*Community Care Specialists* also provide other direct support to families depending on their identified needs. Examples include delivering food and clothing, helping with housing applications, providing advocacy during special education meetings, and offering a class regarding traumatic stress and mental health literacy for Spanish-speaking families.

These *Specialists* are directly supported and supervised by district *Community Care Coordinators* that develop and maintain robust partnerships with local systems of care to ensure that students and families can rapidly access needed services and support. *Coordinators* manage referral requests, and quickly connect those in need with *Community Care Specialists*.

Between mid-September and mid-December 2022, twelve Community Care staff in four school districts served approximately 1,442 students and 1,829 families. Many of these students and families required ongoing support. School and district administrators are already experiencing the need for additional *Community Care Specialists*.

To that end, ODE is presently in discussion with local community colleges and other partners to explore the rapid development and implementation of *Community Care Specialist* programs and certification to meet these demands.

### Examples of Community Care Team work

- Referring students and families to school and community health and mental health services.
- Providing warm handoffs to local services and follow-up.
- Offering classes on trauma, traumatic stress, and mental health literacy for Spanish-speaking families.
- Developing local partnerships to provide school-based English-language classes for families.
- Securing large donation to support McKinney-Vento program.
- Delivering food and clothing to families.
- Helping families complete housing applications and hosting housing education workshop.
- Serving on school-based student care, behavioral support, and attendance teams.
- Hosting family events, health fairs, and other events to connect students and caregivers with local resources and school staff.
- Working with local after-school champions program to plan events for families.