



American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)  
School Mental Health Workers  
Grant Program

Interim Report - February 2025

**Connecticut State Department of Education**

**Charlene M. Russell-Tucker**

**Commissioner**

## **ARPA School Mental Health Workers Grant Program**

### **Purpose**

To assist Connecticut local and regional school districts in hiring and maintaining additional school mental health staff to support student social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health.

### **Authorization**

[Public Act 22-80](#) - *An Act Concerning Childhood Mental and Physical Health Services in Schools* established the School Mental Health Workers Grant Program, which authorized the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to provide grants to school districts to support onboarding school social workers, school psychologists, school counselors, and school nurses.

[Public Act 22-116](#) - *An Act Concerning Assorted Revisions and Additions to the Education Statutes*, added licensed marriage and family therapists to the original list of positions eligible for the use of grant funding.

[Public Act 23-167](#) further updated the program by uncoupling the three-year funding from state fiscal year deadlines. This permitted grant recipients to utilize and carry-forward funding for the full allowable use period of performance in accordance with the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

### **Grant Program Announcement**

September 23, 2022

[Request for Proposals \(RFP\) 836 ARPA School Mental Health Workers Grant](#)

### **Grant Award Announcement**

February 2, 2023

[Governor Lamont Announces Recipients of School Mental Health Workers Grants](#)

### **Grant Award Process**

The CSDE awarded the appropriated \$5 million in ARPA grant funding to 20 school districts to be used over three years for the purpose of hiring and maintaining school mental health workers for school years 2023, 2024 and 2025. Awards ranged from \$37,768 to \$120,000 in each of the first two years and reduced to 70 percent of that amount in year three in accordance with the statute.

This grant was highly competitive, with 92 districts submitting completed proposals. Priority was given to districts with a high ratio of students to school mental health workers and a high rate of student use of school mental health services, as defined in Public Act 22-116. Additional consideration was granted for districts with greater than 40 percent of students eligible for free

and reduced-price school meals and town populations less than 13,000. The applications were scored by two independent reviewers using a 58-point scoring rubric. The rubric measured the merit of the applications in three primary areas:

- 1) District needs assessment of the number of students and level of student social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs;
- 2) Existing number of school mental health workers on staff; and
- 3) An aligned budget describing the effective and efficient use of funds.

### Positions Requested in Funded Proposals

Positions – Full time and Part time	
School Social Workers	16.75
School Psychologists	2.4
School Counselors	2.2
School Nurses	0
Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists	0
<b>Total Positions Requested</b>	<b>21.35</b>

### Positions Hired to Date (November 2024)

Positions – Full time and Part time	
School Social Workers	17
School Psychologists	2
School Counselors	2
School Nurses	N/A
Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists	N/A
<b>Total positions Hired</b>	<b>21</b>

### Program Expenditures

The program funding operates on a reimbursement basis. School districts submit fund requests as needed to reimburse the district for costs incurred to support positions. Allowable costs include salary and fringe benefit outlays as well as minor amounts to support the necessary supplies for the position (i.e., computer). The CSDE has provided \$2,328,147.96 in reimbursement funding as of November 2024.

School Mental Health Workers Grant Program				
New Staffing School Year - 2023-2024				
District	Student Enrollment	New Position	Number of Students Served by New Position	Average Caseload per Position
Bethany School District	445	Social Worker	150	40
Bethel School District	3296	Social Worker	550	40
Booker T. Washington Academy District	420	Social Worker	210	50
Common Ground High School District	208	Social Worker	69	34
East Haddam School District	999	Social Worker	500	500
East Hampton School District	1,768	Psychologist	707	50
East Haven School District	2,885	Social Worker	320	20
Eastford School District	172	Counselor	172	20
Hebron School District	696	Psychologist	174	18
Mansfield School District	1,027	Social Worker	171	20
Middletown School District	4,542	Social Workers (2)	283	40
Oxford School District	1,620	Social Worker	270	141
Portland School District	1,220	Social Worker	244	244
Preston School District	451	Social Worker	250	250
Regional School District 10	2,115	Social Workers (2)	423	35
Regional School District 17	1,770	Social Worker (Contracted Services)	1,770	1,770
Stonington School District	1,762	Social Worker	489	489
The Bridge Academy Charter School District	280	Counselor	140	140
Wethersfield School District	3,584	Social Worker	325	35
Woodbridge School District	887	Social Worker	591	35

School Mental Health Workers Grant Program School District Awards					
Applicant		School Year 2023	School Year 2024	School Year 2025 (70%)	Total Grant Award
1	Bethany School District	\$117,045.00	\$117,045.00	\$81,931.50	\$316,021.50
2	Bethel School District	\$96,978.00	\$96,978.00	\$67,884.60	\$261,840.60
3	Booker T. Washington Academy District	\$67,717.33	\$67,717.33	\$47,402.13	\$182,836.79
4	Common Ground High School District	\$37,768.00	\$37,768.00	\$26,437.60	\$101,973.60
5	East Haddam School District	\$100,300.00	\$100,300.00	\$70,210.00	\$270,810.00
6	East Hampton School District	\$88,193.00	\$88,193.00	\$61,735.10	\$238,121.10
7	East Haven School District	\$59,009.00	\$59,009.00	\$41,306.30	\$159,324.30
8	Eastford School District	\$53,746.28	\$53,746.28	\$37,622.40	\$145,114.96
9	Hebron School District	\$120,000.00	\$120,000.00	\$84,000.00	\$324,000.00
10	Mansfield School District	\$89,500.00	\$89,500.00	\$62,650.00	\$241,650.00
11	Middletown School District	\$120,000.00	\$120,000.00	\$84,000.00	\$324,000.00
12	Oxford School District	\$118,420.00	\$118,420.00	\$82,894.00	\$319,734.00
13	Portland School District	\$117,168.84	\$117,168.84	\$82,018.19	\$316,355.87
14	Preston School District	\$83,821.10	\$83,821.10	\$58,674.77	\$226,316.97
15	Regional School District 10	\$120,000.00	\$120,000.00	\$84,000.00	\$324,000.00
16	Regional School District 17	\$110,000.00	\$110,000.00	\$77,000.00	\$297,000.00
17	Stonington School District	\$73,408.00	\$73,408.00	\$51,385.60	\$198,201.60
18	The Bridge Academy Charter School District	\$75,000.00	\$75,000.00	\$52,500.00	\$202,500.00
19	Wethersfield School District	\$107,777.00	\$107,777.00	\$75,443.90	\$290,997.90
20	Woodbridge School District	\$96,000.00	\$96,000.00	\$67,200.00	\$259,200.00

## Grant Impact Summary

The ARPA School Mental Health Workers Grant Program continues to have a significant positive impact across the 20 school districts awarded these grants. Each district provided feedback on how the mental health worker positions have influenced their schools, revealing several key themes:

1. **Expanded Counseling and Crisis Support:** With additional social workers and psychologists, schools provided more individualized counseling, crisis intervention, and targeted support for students dealing with challenges such as anxiety, trauma, and behavioral issues. This resulted in a decrease in disciplinary referrals and chronic absenteeism.
2. **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Behavioral Development:** The added resources enabled more frequent SEL lessons and proactive behavioral support, fostering emotional regulation and executive functioning. Programs like "Parent Academies" and SEL classroom activities contributed to reduced behavioral incidents, particularly in upper elementary grades.
3. **Support for Vulnerable and Diverse Student Populations:** Social workers conducted home visits and provided individualized plans for students with chronic absenteeism and behavioral challenges, focusing on historically marginalized groups (LGBTQIA+, BIPOC) and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These services also extended to the creation of safe spaces, like "Zen rooms," and mentoring programs.
4. **Family and Community Engagement:** School Mental Health Workers engaged families through events and resources, such as connecting them to food banks, housing assistance, and parent education. This holistic approach helped build stronger school-family partnerships and provided families with resources to support their children's education and well-being.
5. **Reduced Caseloads and Improved Staff Capacity:** The program allowed for reduced caseloads among existing social workers and psychologists, which enabled more timely support for students, especially those in crisis or with complex needs. It also supported multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and special education services, ensuring that staff could better meet the needs of all students.
6. **Crisis Management and Prevention:** School Mental Health Workers played a crucial role in crisis response, providing immediate intervention for students in need and training staff to recognize and respond to mental health issues. This led to a more responsive and trauma-informed school environment.

Overall, the ARPA School Mental Health Grant Program has had a profound impact on creating safer, more supportive, and equitable school environments by addressing mental health needs, building resilience, and strengthening community connections.

## District Reports

**Bethany School District:** *The school social worker has had a tremendously positive impact. She organized "Parent Academies," covering topics such as anxiety and executive functioning, which were highly engaging and well-rated by parents. Additionally, she has strengthened the capacity of educators by sharing strategies to support students with emotional regulation challenges. She collaborates closely with our team to provide student-focused programming, supports the special education teacher, and leads small groups for students who require the most intensive support.*

**Bethel School District:** *The additional school social worker has allowed us to provide extremely important counseling and crisis intervention services to students in grades PreK-8. In addition, consultation has been able to be provided to parents and school staff, to better address the mental health needs of students. This includes formal and informal consultation.*

**Booker T. Washington Academy (BTWA):** *The school social worker hired for the middle grades through the School Mental Health Workers grant has played a transformative role in creating a supportive and inclusive environment that addresses the unique needs of students, many of whom come from under-resourced backgrounds. By offering counseling for mental health issues like stress, anxiety, and trauma, as well as crisis intervention for both personal and school-related challenges, the social worker has provided essential support to students. This role has also strengthened family engagement, as the social worker connects families to vital resources and facilitates open communication with the school.*

*Additionally, the social worker has implemented programs and strategies to address behavioral issues, helping students build social skills and manage emotions. By collaborating with teachers and administrators, the social worker fosters a more supportive school culture and provides training in social-emotional learning (SEL) and trauma-informed practices. Preventive programs, including anti-bullying initiatives and conflict resolution, further contribute to a positive school environment. Overall, these efforts help reduce social and emotional barriers to learning, improving both academic performance and school engagement for students.*

**Common Ground High School:** *The School Mental Health Worker served the district in three critical capacities throughout school year 2023-24: First, they reduced the caseload size of the existing social workers by approximately 15-20% by providing direct services to a small caseload of 17 students. This additional service capacity resulted in greater student access to social work services on a recurring basis as well as during unanticipated crises. Second, the School Mental Health Worker staffed the schools "Zen room" where students taking scheduled breaks - as mandated by their 504 plan or individualized education program (IEP) - were able to receive social work support to address overstimulation and a range of non-emergency mental health challenges. Finally, as an extension of the school's culture team, the School Mental Health Worker provided urgent mental health and de-escalation support for students needing mediation, facing possible suspension, and dealing with other behavioral or disciplinary challenges.*

**East Hampton School District:** *The school psychologist directly supports students at two elementary schools who are in crises, experiencing mental health concerns and related factors such as absenteeism, office referrals, discipline, homelessness, etc. The school psychologist also supports required individualized education program (IEP) services. This person conducts initial and triennial evaluations at two elementary schools as well as supporting the middle school, high school, and transition academy with completion of initial and triennial evaluations.*

**East Haven School District:** *The School Mental Health Worker has provided direct services to students in need of social, emotional, and mental health support. She has also taken proactive approaches to building all Momauguin School students' social-emotional learning (SEL) and executive functioning skills by integrating SEL activities and circles into classrooms, and more recently, using visual thinking strategies. This approach allows students to share perspectives and express opinions through the viewing and analysis of selected artwork. As a result, there has been a reduction in overall school behavior referrals, particularly in Grades 4 and 5.*

**Eastford School District:** *Being able to support the role of the School Mental Health Worker has had a significant and positive impact on our district. This role has been instrumental in addressing the mental health needs of our students and providing much-needed support. To begin, the School Mental Health Worker has allowed for the accessibility of mental health services. Students now have a dedicated professional they can turn to for help with emotional, social, and psychological issues. This has helped to create better outcomes regarding behavioral problems and has increased the overall student well-being. Secondly, the School Mental Health Worker has worked closely with teachers and staff to create a more supportive and understanding school environment. Our School Mental Health Worker can provide training and resources. The School Mental Health Worker can also equip our educators with the tools they need to recognize and address mental health issues in the classroom. Moreover, the School Mental Health Worker has been pivotal in strengthening the relationships between the school and families. By offering guidance and support to parents and caregivers, the School Mental Health Worker continues to help build a more cohesive and cooperative community. This collaboration has ensured that students receive consistent support both at school and at home. Finally, the School Mental Health Worker has played a critical role in crisis intervention and prevention. Their expertise has enabled the school to respond swiftly and effectively to emergencies, providing immediate support and reducing the long-term impact of traumatic events on students.*

*Overall, the School Mental Health Worker has been very helpful for our district. Their contributions have not only improved individual student outcomes but have also fostered a healthier, more supportive school environment.*

**Hebron School District:** *The new School Mental Health Worker grant has had a significant positive impact on our district. It has allowed us to provide timely, student-centered support across both of our schools. Our school psychologists have noted that their ability to manage their various daily responsibilities has greatly improved, thanks to the additional support. With the School Mental Health Worker in place, we've seen substantial improvements in student*



*evaluations, direct support for at-risk and high-risk students facing social and emotional challenges, family partnerships, and crisis response. As a result, our Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and special education services are now more sustainable and well-prepared to meet students' needs.*

**Mansfield School District:** *The addition of a school social worker has had a significant positive impact on our district. We observed a reduction in chronic absenteeism, as children and families could meet with the social worker outside of regular school hours. This flexibility also allowed us to host more targeted events to better support student and family needs.*

**Middletown School District:** *In response to the growing need for comprehensive mental health support in our schools, we were excited for the addition of two new School Mental Health Workers to our district. This role has been critical in ensuring that all students have access to the emotional and psychological resources they need to succeed both academically and personally. These two positions served as a vital resource for students, families, and staff, offering direct support through individual counseling, crisis intervention, and group sessions designed to address various emotional and behavioral challenges that students faced in the district.*

**Oxford School District:** *The social worker hired by the district served as an advocate, ensuring that students' emotional and psychological needs were addressed within the educational environment. She collaborated with teachers, administrators, and families to create supportive plans for students experiencing challenges such as anxiety, depression, or trauma. She also provided individual counseling and therapy sessions, offering a safe space for students to express their feelings and learn coping strategies. By promoting mental health awareness and education, she helped reduce stigma and encouraged early intervention. Additionally, she played a crucial role in crisis management, supporting both students and staff during difficult times.*

**Portland School District:** *This grant enabled us to add 1 FTE social worker for Portland Middle School. Previously, one social worker was shared between Portland High School and Portland Middle School. This grant reduced the caseload and dedicated one social worker to support the mental health needs of our middle school students.*

**Preston School District:** *The School Mental Health Worker is a fundamental part of our Social Emotional Equity Learning team (SEEL), composed of principals, nurses, school psychologists, and social workers. The impact of being available for individualized education programs (IEP), Section 504 assigned cases and a stream of drop-in student and family needs have assisted in keeping students feeling calm, safe, and focused. Parents and professionals also rely on the observations and insights of the entire SEEL team to assist in guiding students through these challenging terms. We are committed to sustaining these positions and steadily assimilating all of them into our standard budget.*

**Regional School District 10:** *The district has been able to improve programming for students in our specialized programs at both the middle and high school. We have provided intensive social work services to support students in crisis and needing case management, connections to services, individual or group therapy, and risk assessments. Family support has increased for 40+*

*families and we have been able to have seven students return from approved private special education program (APSEP) placements. We have been able to increase support for students who have required hospitalization or 211/911 support.*

**Regional School District 17:** *The social workers funded by the School Mental Health Worker grant have made a significant positive impact on student attendance. Students struggling with attendance issues have been provided with targeted support by a community behavioral health clinician, working collaboratively through the scientific research-based intervention (SRBI) process to enhance their engagement and participation in school.*

**The Bridge Academy Charter School District:** *We have been able to provide more counseling for students and been able to give them more instruction on appropriate methods for dealing with frustration and difficulties. This has resulted in a decreased the number of disciplinary referrals.*

**Wethersfield School District:** *The additional social worker provided additional resources to support students who experience or have previously experienced chronic absenteeism from school from factors such as anxiety, depression, oppositional behaviors, sleep schedules, morning routines and/or compulsive tendencies. Home visits were conducted for some students and individual student plans were developed for some students. Data showed that students from economically disadvantaged homes had a higher chronically truant rate, so a focus was on overcoming barriers for these students. Also supported students in the alternative program for students who are under credited and overage. Worked with students and families to provide multi-tiered systems of supports (MTSS) related to behavior/social-emotional learning.*

*In addition, the social worker has conducted risk assessments and follow up counseling, substance abuse counseling, mentor and support BIPOC students and inclusive actions, counsel students who are unable to access counseling outside of school, provide check-ins and monitor the Wellness Room as a tier 1 strategy part of MTSS. Counseling support provided for LGBTQIA+ community.*

**Woodbridge School District:** *Having an additional social worker allows us to complete more social-emotional learning (SEL) lessons for all students and allows for smaller and more individualized caseloads for students with more significant mental health needs.*