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**Superintendent of Manchester Schools**

Funding for the \$7.6 Million Project AWARE grant, awarded by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in 2023, has been terminated, effective January 13, 2026. The Manchester School District received notification at 2:06 AM on 1/14/26. The original grant was through September 2028 to address student mental health and school safety. Since its implementation, teams have been established in all 20 schools within Manchester School District (MSD) to connect students with behavioral health services that help promote a positive school climate for everyone. Clinicians in collaboration with the Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester have been placed in all 4 high schools and 2 middle schools, and are available in the summer months. With the termination of this grant, MSD will lose \$4.8 million in critical mental health funding, impacting eight staff positions including the full-time mental health clinicians, and an immediate stop to the Mental Health / Safe Schools Campaign. Between July and December of 2025, 1,524 high school students, and 1,029 middle school students accessed services (with parent/guardian consent) paid for with this grant.

**Project AWARE: Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education.** MSD received notification of the termination of the award at 2:06 AM on January 14, 2026. [Project Aware Grant Termination Letter](#) - The amount cut from our original award is \$4.5 Million.

**Background:** The Manchester School District was Awarded \$7.6 Million in funding from September 2023 through September 2028 from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to address student mental health and school safety.

**Overview of the grant:** The goal of Project AWARE is to promote the healthy social and emotional development of school-aged youth and prevent youth violence in school settings. Project AWARE aims to reduce stigma surrounding behavioral health challenges among students in our school district and encourages them to connect with behavioral health services. To improve connection to supports, Project AWARE focuses on building infrastructure through the implementation of a three-tiered public health model, with clear referral pathways to refer students for support (in or outside of) the school setting for behavior, mental health, and social services.

**Purpose:** Through Project AWARE, we are improving access to behavioral health supports and services for students and families, and implementing a violence prevention plan, with a focus on improving outcomes for everyone.

**Work done to date - including Programming and Community Partnerships:**

- Teams have been established in each of the District's schools that:
  - Build a positive school climate and culture
  - Connect students to behavioral health services with parent consent
  - Focus on violence prevention to support school and student safety
- Implementation of "Challenge Day" in the District's 4 High Schools to promote a positive school climate and anti-bullying program
- Development and implementation of M-Power - the District's mental health and safe schools campaign
- Integration of Clinicians in collaboration with the Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester in all 4 high schools and 2 middle schools. Clinicians are available in the summer months and facilitate group support for high school students with parent consent

From July 2025 through December 2025, **1,524** students were referred to the behavioral health intervention teams in schools across the District. Students are then connected to school-based or community supports and services with parent/guardian consent. Referrals include: behaviors such as fighting and emotion regulation, anxiety, depression, grief, exposure to trauma, social/friendship concerns, attendance, suicidal ideation, housing and food insecurity, family concerns, and substance use. **1,029** Middle and High School students self-referred for support over the past year.

By addressing the social-emotional and mental health needs of students, the District is supporting the whole child. This improves access to the student's education and ultimately academic outcomes.

**Impacts of the cut:**

- Amount awarded \$7.6 Million in 2023
- Amount cut \$1,227,100 for the remainder of this award period (now - 9/30/28)
- Amount in Year 4 cut - \$1,799,900
- Amount in Year 5 cut - \$1,778,604
- Total amount cut - \$4.8 million

**Impact for Direct Student Services:**

- Full-Time Mental Health Clinicians in 3 high schools
- Mental Health Clinician split between 1 high school and 1 middle school
- Full-Time Mental Health Support at Parkside
- 1 Full-Time Spanish-speaking Mental Health Clinician in an Elementary school
- Immediate stop to the Mental Health / Safe Schools Campaign

- Immediate stop to future Challenge Day programming

**Staffing impact:** 8 Positions, including the Project Director, 2 Social Workers, and Student Support positions at 2 high schools to support with behavior and reducing suspensions

**Next steps:**

- Review all funding opportunities to cover the eight positions
- The team will reconvene on Wednesday
- Work with the Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester to maintain integration of mental health clinicians in the schools
- Review grants that the District is collaborating on with community partners to leverage funding and resources
- Contracts immediately stopped:
  - Cookson Communications: Mental Health Safe Schools Campaign
  - Keene BHII - grant evaluator
  - Challenge Day - high school programming
  - Pre-School Technical Assistance Network to bridge services between pre-school and elementary schools for the three-tier public health model
- Investigate actions in collaboration with Concord and Laconia regarding the termination letters received today in our respective districts.

The Manchester School District is urgently reviewing all available funding opportunities to cover the eight affected positions and services. We will work closely with the Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester to continue uninterrupted mental health services in our schools. We will maintain contact with our sister school districts in Concord and Laconia, who are navigating a similar challenge.

**Statement of nondiscrimination:** *It is the policy of the Manchester Board of School Committee, in its actions, and those of its employees, that there shall be no discrimination on the basis of age, sex, race, color, marital status, physical or mental disability, religious creed, national origin or sexual orientation for employment in, or operation and administration of any program or activity in the Manchester School District. The Title IX Coordinator is Kelly Espinola for staff and students.*