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SDE gets \$3.6 million, five-year grant for youth suicide prevention

(BOISE) – A new federal grant, awarded in January to the State Department of Education, will greatly expand Idaho’s Sources of Strength program to include trained behavioral health case managers and peer-to-peer groups for survivors of suicide attempts.

The Garret Lee Smith grant will total more than \$3.6 million over five years. The first group of 10 schools will launch peer-focused suicide prevention programs next fall, and 10 more schools will be added each year. The application process for schools will be announced soon, with schools selected based on their need and readiness to benefit from the program.

“This grant offers a great opportunity to advance our efforts to reduce youth suicide rates and address students’ social-emotional and mental health needs,” Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra said. “Suicide has a devastating effect on our school communities, and it is vitally important that students have trusted, caring adults and peers in their lives.”

Improving conditions for learning is a key initiative for Superintendent Ybarra, and her public schools budget request for the coming year seeks \$1 million to develop and implement strong, flexible training to help Idaho educators recognize and respond to students’ emotional needs.

Under the Garrett Lee Smith grant, the SDE and its [Idaho Lives Project](#) will provide professional behavioral health clinicians to assess, refer and provide follow-up care for youth with suicidal thoughts or attempts, especially in rural areas where access to services is limited. Behavioral health case managers will be provided, one for each of Idaho’s seven geographic areas with public health districts.

Program goals encompass prevention, early intervention, assessment, referral and follow-up across Idaho to address the needs of public school students and young adults. In addition to

school-based efforts, the grant calls for establishing peer-to-peer groups for young adult survivors of suicide attempts. Grant-funded efforts will include:

- training for licensed professionals and college students in medical and health programs to assess and treat suicidal clients in culturally appropriate ways;
- Gatekeeper training for adults in schools and other youth-serving organizations to prepare them for intervening and supporting students who may be considering suicide;
- Increasing text and chat services at the Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline;
- Providing early intervention materials to Idaho elementary schools to augment their social and emotional learning programs; and
- Building and maintaining partnerships with youth-serving organizations and agencies.

Idaho has one of the highest suicide rates among all states, ranked fifth in the nation in 2017, according to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare’s 2019 [“Suicide in Idaho” fact sheet](#).

In the 2019 Idaho Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 22 percent of surveyed students said they had seriously considered attempting suicide – about the same as in 2017 but up from 14.2 percent in 2009. In addition, more students reported feeling sad or hopeless (39 percent) than any time in the past decade.

Sources of Strength and other efforts are helping to increase communication and reduce youth suicide in the state, but there is still much work to be done, Superintendent Ybarra said.

Sources of Strength has been established in 105 Idaho middle and high schools since the state implemented the peer-based youth suicide prevention project in 2013. With peer leaders and adult advisers, the program cultivates supportive relationships, builds protective factors and makes it easier for students considering suicide to seek help.

The Idaho Lives Project is a collaboration of the State Department of Education and the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. The Garrett Lee Smith grant is funded by the Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

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