



CROSS-SITE EVALUATION OF PROJECT AWARE EDUCATION POLICY PROJECT SUMMARY

THE PROJECT

This project was funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). SAMHSA contracted with ICF from 2023 to 2025 to conduct a cross-program, cross-site evaluation of two grant programs: Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education (Project AWARE) and Trauma-Informed Services in Schools (TISS).

The Policy & Research Group (PRG) served as a subcontractor and supported the design and analyses for two outcome studies that were components of the broader evaluation: the Identification and Referral Study and the Youth Resiliency Study. PRG also formed and managed a youth advisory board and conducted focus groups with youth at some grant-funded schools.

THE PROGRAM

The purpose of Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education (Project AWARE) is to develop a sustainable infrastructure for school-based mental health programs and services. Recipients are expected to build collaborative partnerships with the State Education Agency, Local Education Agency, Tribal Education Agency, the State Mental Health Agency, community-based providers of behavioral health care services, school personnel, community organizations, families, and school-aged youth. The model focuses on mental health-related promotion, awareness, prevention, intervention, and resilience activities to ensure students have access and are connected to appropriate services.

THE EVALUATION

The Identification and Referral Study evaluated how effectively the program identified youth who were in need of mental health support and connected them to appropriate care. To track referral patterns and service delivery, the evaluation team administered a web-based form which was completed by grantee project staff. On the form they answered questions about identification of student mental health needs and referrals to services when needed.

The Youth Resiliency Study assessed how required activities influenced school climate, safety, student resiliency, coping skills, and awareness of mental health supports. To study this, the evaluation team used administrative data from State and Local Education Agencies as well as focus groups with youth and analysis of required reporting measures to evaluate effectiveness in areas like access to services, referrals, training, and policy development.

SETTING

- This evaluation included 32 grantees across 24 states

PARTICIPANTS

- The Identification and Referral Study collected records for 2,106 instances of youth being identified as having a mental health need
- The Youth Resiliency Study included publicly available data from more than 14 SEAs/LEAs
- The studies included focus groups with 10 students in grades 8 through 12 at multiple timepoints

IMPLEMENTATION

- The team from ICF and PRG collected data through surveys administered to students and staff, as well as publicly available administrative data and focus groups with youth at the schools.
- The funding for this project was originally intended to go through the 2026 calendar year but was ended one year early in December of 2025.

OUTCOME MEASURES



Youth access to mental health resources



Youth resilience



Attendance, dropout, and suspension