

Governor Baker Awards \$4.9 Million for High School Substance Use and Mental Health Response Teams

The Baker-Polito Administration today announced \$4.9 million in grants awarded to six agencies, including hospitals and treatment and behavioral health centers, for the creation of evidence-based and data-driven co-occurring substance use disorder/mental health response teams embedded in high schools in ten communities to offer intervention and treatment services, and provide alternatives to school suspension for substance use.

The six agencies were selected for grant funding based on their ability to provide access to these crucial services, both in school and in the community, as well as virtually due to instances of remote and hybrid learning. The awardees are:

- Heywood Hospital, providing services for Athol High School, Gardner High School, Gardner Academy of Learning and Tech, Ralph C. Mahar Regional School (Orange), Narragansett Regional High School (Templeton), and Murdock High School (Winchendon)
- High Point Treatment Center, providing services for New Bedford High School
- Institute for Health and Recovery, providing services for Malden High School
- North Suffolk Mental Health, providing services for Revere High School
- River Valley Counseling Center, providing services for Holyoke High School North Campus
- The Brien Center, providing services for Monument Mountain Regional High (Great Barrington)

This grant award will ensure these agencies are prepared to offer services to students suffering from co-occurring substance use disorder/mental health issues. The programs will respond to students' and their families' needs, increase collaboration with schools, and provide support to students in crisis.

"Disruptions to in-school learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic have taken a social and emotional toll on many students, and especially those most at risk for substance use and mental health issues," said Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders, who directs the state's COVID-19 Command Center. "This grant will allow much-needed resources to reach students remotely and offer a mental health-driven alternative to suspensions."

The grant will be distributed over the course of 6 years, with each program receiving \$136,864 per year, or \$4.9 million over the life of the award. Funded through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) State Opioid Response grant, the grant will serve to support the Commonwealth-wide adolescent addiction workforce that is specifically trained and certified to provide targeted substance use interventions and treatment to at-risk students, reducing their risk of developing an opioid or substance use disorder. These timely awards will support Massachusetts schools' efforts to effectively respond to student substance use and mental health concerns, as access to high-potency marijuana products increases, rates of on-campus vaping surge, and the overall perception of harm associated with adolescent substance use decreases.

"Massachusetts is taking action to reinforce protections for children affected by substance use and mental health issues in these unprecedented times," said Deirdre Calvert, Director of the Bureau of Substance Addiction Services at the Department of Public Health. "This grant program will ensure that at-risk youth receive the services they need to prevent substance use,

help combat the opioid epidemic, and support families during the COVID-19 state of emergency.”