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Southwest Indiana Schools and Community Collaborative Receives \$5.6 Million Federal Grant

The Southwest Indiana Schools and Community Collaborative has been awarded a \$5.6 million federal grant to promote healthy childhood development and prevent violence and substance abuse. The partnership started strategizing this year about ways to improve the safety of schools, the health of students, and ultimately, academic success and life-long productivity. This work led to a Safe Schools/Healthy Students federal grant proposal, and the award will turn these plans into reality.

The Southwest Indiana Schools and Community Collaborative members are: the Metropolitan School District of Mount Vernon, New Harmony Town and Township Consolidated School, Metropolitan School District of North Posey County, East Gibson School Corporation, North Gibson School Corporation, South Gibson School Corporation, Warrick County School Corporation, Catholic Diocese of Evansville schools in Gibson, Posey and Warrick counties, Youth First, Inc., and Southwestern Behavioral Healthcare, Inc.

“This is a tremendous opportunity to help more students and families succeed in our suburban and rural school systems,” said Parri O. Black, President & CEO of Youth First, Inc. “A collaborative of this size is unusual, but it is also cost-efficient and cost-effective. Youth First is extremely proud of the partnership’s teamwork and our staff’s efforts to develop a strong plan and a successful grant proposal.”

Of the 355 Safe Schools/Healthy Student grant proposals received this year by the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice, only 57 grants were awarded nationwide, and only three were awarded to Indiana sites.

The award means an annual commitment of \$1.4 million in federal funds for four years to accomplish the following goals:

1. Provide and maintain a safe school environment.
2. Reduce the incidence of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use.
3. Develop and sustain student services that promote behavioral, social, and emotional supports.
4. Increase access to mental health services.
5. Increase access for pre-school age children and their families to school readiness activities.
6. Develop resources to sustain and enhance community collaboration efforts.

In responding to the grant award announcement, Dr. Franzy Fleck, Superintendent of the East Gibson School Corporation said, “This is another shining example of school districts collaborating with our community organizations. Each group had a common interest when we joined forces to write this grant. It was founded on building hope and supporting our students and their families.”

The focus of the grant is to incorporate evidence-based strategies to improve school climate and student success. Under the grant, the schools will also address safety needs in collaboration with the juvenile justice and law enforcement providers in each community.

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The Metropolitan School District of Mt. Vernon will serve as the Lead Educational Agency for the grant and manage the fiscal responsibilities.

"We are very excited about this opportunity to provide and expand our services to students and families," said Dr. C. Keith Spurgeon, Superintendent, Metropolitan School District of Mt. Vernon. "This grant will allow us to go even further in helping students and their families cope with problems that often interfere with the learning process. We expect that this grant will make a profound difference in the lives of some of our students."

Youth First, Inc. will serve as the primary coordinator for the grant-funded programs and provide school-based social workers, along with research proven prevention programs such as Strengthening Families and Reconnecting Youth. In addition, Southwestern Behavioral Healthcare, Inc. will increase its case management services for students in Gibson, Posey, and Warrick counties.

As the efforts funded through this award unfold, the collaborative will also involve other community partners, including parents, businesses, juvenile justice, law enforcement, early childhood and other service providers to help insure the success of this initiative.

For more information, please contact Parri O. Black at Youth First, Inc.: 812-421-8336, ext. 1 or pblack@youthfirstinc.org.

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