



Worcester Public Schools

Worcester, Massachusetts



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Worcester Public Schools Receive Health Foundation Grant to Build Resilience in Students

Worcester, MA—The Worcester Public Schools is pleased to announce it is the recipient of a \$401,050 grant from The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, to help build resilience in children in five schools, which the School Committee accepted at its meeting on February 4, 2016. The initiative is titled Worcester HEARS: Healthy Environments and Resilience in Schools and is a collaboration with WPS, the Worcester Education Collaborative and additional community partners. The program will help individual schools shape their climate and practices, and support all students.

“The Worcester Public Schools approached The Health Foundation in 2014 with concern about the prevalence of children’s exposure to adverse childhood experiences and the resulting stresses which impact their learning. The Foundation responded by providing a planning grant last year to the Worcester Public Schools to develop, in collaboration with the Worcester Education Collaborative and other community partners, a comprehensive set of strategies to address the concern,” explained Dr. Jan Yost, President of The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts. Yost added that, “Their solid plan was well received, and the Foundation has awarded a \$401,050 grant to the Worcester Public Schools to implement in five schools a model designed to enhance the learning environment and help all children thrive, and thus, achieve academically.”

The Worcester HEARS grant will bring additional resources to each of the five schools (Worcester East Middle School, Rice Square School, Grafton Street School, City View School and Roosevelt School), and staff from Lesley University will provide the WPS teachers with high quality professional development in the area of learning, and resilience. School leaders and staff will implement a universal intervention called *The Flexible Framework*, an organizational tool that enables schools and districts—in collaboration with families, local community organizations, and outside providers—to maintain and develop compassionate schools, address toxic stress and work to develop social and emotional skills in children.

Worcester Mayor Joseph Petty states, “Worcester HEARS is an important initiative that will help the Worcester Public Schools provide a safe and supportive environment for all students. This grant will provide the North Quadrant with valuable resources and opportunities for collaboration. The Worcester HEARS initiative is strengthened by the strong showing of support from community organizations throughout the City of Worcester. “

Community Partners are as follows:

Worcester Educational Collaborative
Community Healthlink
Family Health Center of Worcester
Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center
YOU Inc.
Clark University
Worcester Police Department
Worcester Community Connections
Latino Education Institute
City of Worcester
United Families of Change
Becker College

“Worcester HEARS, will provide the district with enhanced behavioral health resources, increased student support services, and stronger connections to a number of community agencies,’ says Interim Superintendent Dr. Marco C. Rodrigues. “We will build on the successful planning period, and implement a strong program with a great coalition of partners. The Worcester Public Schools has an opportunity to become a leader throughout the state and country in creating safe and supportive schools. We look forward to continuing our work with The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, and continuing our mission of delivering high expectations and outstanding results for all students. “

Worcester HEARS will also address the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) on students. ACES may include stressful experiences such as abuse, neglect, family dysfunction, poverty, homelessness, disenfranchisement, or witness to violence. They can cause feelings of helplessness, fear, or vulnerability, particularly in children.

A growing body of evidence demonstrates a strong correlation between children's experience of ACES and negative consequences for their intellectual, social, and emotional development. As a consequence, children may have difficulties with trust, forming relationships, perceptions of threat, expectation of harm, regulation of emotions, decision-making, concentration, language, or behavior. ACEs harm children’s developing brains so profoundly that the effects show up decades later; they cause much of the chronic disease, most mental illness, and are at the root of most violence. “ACEs” comes from the CDC-Kaiser Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, a groundbreaking public health study that discovered that childhood experiences may lead to the adult onset of chronic diseases, depression and other mental illness, violence and being a victim of violence. Subsequent research has indicated that an effective means of mitigating the effects of ACES is the development of resilience—the social and emotional tools and capacities to address life’s stressors.

"Schools have traditionally been charged with the development of the head, the hand, and the heart. This is the work of the heart--the work to build resilience in children,” says Jennifer Davis Carey, Executive Director of the Worcester Education Collaborative.

Full implementation of the Worcester HEARS program will begin in September of 2016.