

# Overview of Promoting Student Resilience (PSR) Grant Program

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National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments



Safe Supportive Learning

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## About the Promoting Student Resilience Grant Program

In 2016, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) awarded \$4.75 million in [Promoting Student Resilience](#) (PSR) grants to three local educational agencies (LEAs): Baltimore City Schools (BCS), Chicago Public Schools (CPS), and St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS). The communities in these three LEAs had experienced recent significant civil unrest (i.e., demonstrations of mass protest that involved law enforcement in the 24 months immediately prior to June 23, 2016). Within their applications, each grantee named the source contributing to the civil unrest within their respective cities:

- Baltimore protests began after the death of Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old African American male who suffered a spinal cord injury while in police custody.
- In Chicago, protests began after the Chicago Police Officer who shot Laquan McDonald 16 times, an unarmed 17-year-old, was released on bail.
- St. Louis and the surrounding areas had widespread civil unrest after Michael Brown, an 18-year-old African American teenager, was shot by a white police officer from Ferguson, Missouri.

The funds supported LEAs' efforts to build capacity to address the comprehensive behavioral and mental health needs of their students by supporting system-wide approaches that link schools, mental health service providers, and community-based organizations (CBOs).

## Students and Schools Served by Grant in Partnership with CBOs

In total, the PSR grantees provided **5,858 students** from **53 schools** with school-based and community mental health services to address student needs resulting from exposure to trauma in partnership with **92 CBOs**. Details for each grantee follow (also, see Table 1).<sup>1</sup>

- In **Baltimore**, over the course of three years, 3,624 students in 13 schools received school-based mental health services and 33 CBOs coordinated and shared resources with each other through this grant.
- In **Chicago**, 10 schools implemented the Healing Trauma Together program (HTT), providing 1,335 students mental health services through the program. Four-hundred ninety of them participated in group interventions and 845 participated in one-on-one counseling. During the grant period, 14 schools and CBOs coordinated and shared resources with each other.

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<sup>1</sup> This data was reported by each PSR grantee to the U.S. Department of Education per the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) for accountability purposes.

- In **St. Louis**, 896 students in 30 schools received mental health services for traumatic exposures and 62 CBOs coordinated and shared resources with each other through this grant.

**Table 1. Number of Students and Schools Served by PSR Grant, by Grantees**

Grantee	Number of schools served	Number of students receiving services (GPRA 1)	Number of CBOs coordinating and sharing resources (GPRA 2)
<b>Baltimore</b> <sup>2</sup>	13	3,624	16
<b>Chicago</b> <sup>3</sup>	10	1,335	14
<b>St. Louis</b> <sup>4</sup>	30	896	62

## Grantee Activities

Over three years, the PSR grantees engaged in many activities to build capacity, assess efforts, and support sustainability to address student mental health needs and exposure to trauma, including:

- Developing partnerships with community mental health organizations and hiring mental health specialists to provide support to staff and/or direct services to students;
- Training principals, teachers, other school staff, and community members on trauma-informed practices;
- Establishing district- and school-level teams to lead and coordinate efforts to increase trauma-informed practices among teaching and other school staff;
- Collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data to monitor and support school-level efforts and make timely midcourse adjustments; and
- Working toward sustaining programs through (1) building buy-in among key stakeholders (e.g., educators, district leadership, families, and community members); (2) developing processes and non-monetary resources to support implementation; and (3) securing additional funding sources (e.g., Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s Resiliency in Communities After Stress and Trauma [ReCAST] grant).

<sup>2</sup> The number of students does not include students seen who were receiving services from a school-based psychologist, social worker, or school counselor, nor does it include students who received special education services alone.

<sup>3</sup> No student in the 10 schools that administered the Healing Trauma Together (HTT) program received Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress prior to HTT. HTT schools had reported minimal connections to CBOs that typically provide those services.

<sup>4</sup> Prior to the implementation of PSR, St. Louis did not provide therapeutic services as a district and did not partner with Barnes Jewish Children’s Hospital, Hopewell, or the Little Bit Foundation. St. Louis partnered only with Children's Advocacy Services of Greater St. Louis prior to implementation of PSR, which provided Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools.

## Programs, Strategies, and Behavioral Frameworks Implemented by PSR Grantees

Grantees implemented *programs and strategies* focused on classroom trauma-informed practices; identification, screening, and referral of students to mental health services; telemedicine services; and social emotional learning. Federally recognized evidence-based programs implemented by grantees include Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools. Grantees also used other programs with research that suggests effectiveness in supporting students, such as Yoga 4 Classrooms, Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress, Kognito, Bounce Back, and Connected and Respected. Additionally, grantees employed strategies, such as restorative practices, a whole-child approach, and social-emotional learning to support their work.

*Behavioral frameworks* such as the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support and the Missouri Model for Trauma-Informed Schools helped grantees direct targeted (Tier 2) trauma-focused interventions to students.

## Grantee Highlights

### Baltimore



Baltimore City Public Schools introduced morning check-ins with students called “Gauging the Emotional Temperature in the Classroom.” The goal was to support students in identifying their emotional state when they started a school day, asking them how they felt and why and whether they needed help. In combination with this effort, staff training and other interventions, evaluations indicate that staff recognize the importance of trauma-responsive services and supports and that strengths, such as invested leadership, clear communication pathways, and connections among school, families, and the community, facilitate the implementation of trauma-responsive programming.

## Chicago



Behavioral health teams in Chicago Public Schools identified students whom they thought would benefit from structured psychotherapy and group peer support. Students were taught strategies for managing emotions and coping. An evaluation of the work showed reductions in suspensions and students reporting that they liked the activities, camaraderie, trust, support from their peers, and the relationships they cultivated with staff.

## St. Louis



St. Louis Public Schools experimented with increasing voice and choice while implementing their Promoting Student Resilience grant. Along with providing individual and group therapy, the school district used a *Connected and Respected* curriculum to teach conflict resolution, caring and effective communication, responsible decision-making, and cultural competence and responsibility. The aim of the curriculum was to increase student leadership and voice in the school. Evaluators found that students spent more time in school, did better on tests, and had fewer disciplinary problems.

See also [Innovation Spotlights](#) on how each grantee approached providing high-quality professional development to address student trauma on the National Center on Safe Supportive Schools (NCSSE) website.



## Support Provided to Grantees

NCSSLE is funded by ED to provide resources, training, and technical assistance (TA) to help grantees implement and evaluate their grants. In collaboration with the PSR grants Project Officer from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Office for Safe and Supportive Schools, NCSSLE supported them via the provision of the following resources and services:

Resources	Training	Technical Assistance (TA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trauma-Sensitive Schools Resource Package (NCSSLE)</li> <li>• School Mental Health Referral Pathways Toolkit (SAMHSA)</li> <li>• Building Sustainable Programs: The Framework (DHHS)</li> <li>• Building Sustainable Programs: The Resource Guide (DHHS)</li> <li>• School Climate Improvement Resource Package (NCSSLE)</li> </ul> <p>Grantees could also access resources through NCSSLE’s various dissemination channels, including the States and Grantees section of the NCSSLE website, e-newsletter, and social media.</p>	<p><b>Types of Training Events:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Online learning events</i> to enhance skills and knowledge</li> <li>• <i>Virtual communities of practice (CoPs)</i> to foster peer-to-peer learning and skill-building</li> <li>• <i>Annual meetings</i> to facilitate knowledge transfer and skill-building from fellow grantees and NCSSLE and ED staff</li> </ul> <p><b>Training Topics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grant management and activity planning</li> <li>• Screenings and referral processes</li> <li>• Monitoring and evaluating efforts through GPRA measures and other forms of data</li> <li>• Building buy-in among key school and community stakeholders</li> <li>• Connecting with students’ families</li> <li>• Sustaining efforts through planning, communication, and securing funding</li> </ul>	<p><b>TA Approach:</b></p> <p>Individual TA via phone, email, and local collaborative planning meetings and site visits (Baltimore and Chicago)—and facilitation of peer-to-peer TA among grantees in calls and grantee meetings—to deepen their learning from NCSSLE’s resources and training (<i>topics to the left</i>) and meet other areas of need (<i>topics below</i>). Approach is guided by TA best practices and outcomes.</p> <p><b>TA Topics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program implementation</li> <li>• Sustainability</li> <li>• Mental health</li> <li>• Social and emotional safety</li> <li>• Community partners</li> <li>• Trauma</li> <li>• School climate measurement</li> <li>• Instructional environments</li> <li>• Relationships</li> <li>• Grant use/allowable activities</li> <li>• Needs assessment</li> <li>• Family engagement</li> <li>• Emergency management</li> <li>• Physical safety</li> <li>• Cultural and linguistic competence</li> <li>• Discipline</li> </ul>



## Lessons Learned

Over the three years of working in Baltimore, Chicago, and St. Louis schools, PSR grantees aimed to increase the number of students receiving mental health supports as well as the number of CBOs working together with schools to support student and staff mental health. To achieve these results, grantees leveraged training opportunities and partnerships with community organizations to build schools' capacity to provide mental health services to students and implement trauma-informed practices. Additionally, by beginning and continuing to build buy-in, developing internal and external capacity, establishing and maintained collaborative partnerships, evidencing return on investment via strategic marketing and communication, and pursuing additional funding and partnership opportunities, this work can be sustained into future years.

Through the grantees' reports and the TA efforts to support the grantees, NCSSE observed the following that could be considered if a similar effort was possible:

### 1. Initial Training and Support

**Allowing an adequate amount of time to build buy-in and a shared understanding of trauma in schools, trauma-informed practices, and the scope and purpose of initiatives is critical.** Training teaching and other school staff comprised large portions of the grantees' work. Trainings offered by the LEAs covered basic information about trauma, specific interventions and strategies, and issues like referrals. Grantees reported that trainings and workshops were useful for increasing staff knowledge of the importance of trauma-focused practices and services. However, these were not "one and done" events. Grantees highlighted that it took a significant amount of time, often longer than expected, to create this shared understanding and form strategic partnerships. Still, they felt that time was well worth the effort. They noted that sharing this information secured staff buy-in, particularly among administrators, and facilitated successful implementation of program initiatives.

### 2. Implementation

**Schools need ongoing support for school and mental health personnel to implement programs and general trauma-informed practices.** Supports needed include targeted coaching provided by staff explicitly hired for this function, resources (e.g., guidance and materials for specific interventions), and follow-up training that provides teaching and other school staff with concrete recommendations and practical skills.

### 3. Planning Ongoing Training and Support

**Strategically planning and implementing a cohort approach can alleviate some of the pressures related to scheduling professional development and subsequent implementation support amidst competing district priorities and related resources, the most precious and scarce being time.** SLPS's cohort approach (i.e., having cohorts of targeted schools that were added slowly over time) seemingly allowed the grant team, its collaborative partners, and training recipients to more comfortably plan for, engage in, and benefit from trainings and follow-up coaching and support. This approach also allowed for necessary adjustments gleaned from lessons learned from previous cohorts training, coaching, and service delivery-wise.

### 4. CBO Partnership

**Community stakeholders and partners, such as mental health providers and local agencies, play a central role.** The grantees primarily partnered with community mental health providers. They sometimes connected with researchers and other community agencies. For example, the BCS steering committee included representatives from local universities, mentoring and family programs, and Baltimore City Recreation and Parks. Partners were key in the successful planning and delivery of grantee activities to supplement and develop school staff capacity to assume a trauma-informed lens. In collaboration with grantees, community partners trained school staff on trauma-focused interventions, provided school- and community-based mental health services to students, and/or participated in workgroups and steering committees. CPS also established a steering committee that included representatives from key city agencies.

### 5. Data Collection and Use

**Providing supports on gathering data, sharing data with stakeholders, and using data to guide efforts would strengthen this type of work.** LEA and school leadership could benefit from more structures and guidance around monitoring implementation and outcomes. Among the three PSR sites, one site (BCS) received a request for monitoring data from focus groups and another site (CPS) collected various data, but it was not clear whether schools could access the data.

### 6. Communication

**Beyond training and resources to implement programs, strategic internal and external marketing and communication are essential components to program sustainability.** For example, CPS effectively used data charts, dashboards, and press releases to keep key

internal and external stakeholders abreast of progress around grant training and service deliverability. This information led to some district- and site-level leaders building key positions into future budgets. Similarly, SLPS's grant lead appropriately and strategically took advantage of her "seat" at important state and local tables by sharing important grant progress updates with key internal and external stakeholders in an effort to maintain and build senses of urgency and the need for sustaining some of the grant related activities beyond the life of the grant.

## 7. Grantee Support

**NCSSLE noted that grantees benefitted from a TA structure that promoted continuity across topics, provided safe forums for sharing successes, struggles, and related strategies, and facilitated "positive peer pressure" through interconnectivity.** TA calls and CoPs were carefully planned and facilitated so that discussions extended across several sessions and allowed for grantees to share progress updates in different areas. Through this structure, they were also able to engage in peer-to-peer TA and problem solving over time. For example, TA Specialist check-in/support calls and CoPs followed up on large convening and cross-grantee online learning event topics and activities. TA specialists help ensure that conversations continued over time (vs. moving on to additional topics each time without assessing and supporting progress on previous activities).