



PROJECT EVERS

Ending Violence and its Effects in Rural Schools

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* EVERS Introduction

Welcome to a brand-new project in Northwest Kansas – Ending Violence and Its Effects in Rural Schools (EVERS). This program was developed, in its simplest definition, to meet the needs of students living in rural areas in northwest Kansas that have been affected by trauma or violence in their homes and communities.

The five-year project serves 13 counties over 12,000 square miles (Cheyenne, Rawlins, Decatur, Norton, Sherman, Thomas, Sheridan, Graham, Wallace, Logan, Gove, Trego, and Lane) through the Northwest Kansas Education Service Center (NKESC) headquartered in Oakley.

NKESC serves 19 unified school districts with 24 schools having a total base of more than 6,700 students and 900 teachers. The Service Center employs approximately 285 certified and non-certified staff.

Within the EVERS region, High Plains Community Mental Health Center is the only public mental health resource available. As it is located in the southeast quadrant of the region, it is virtually not accessible to the total population. In addition, EVERS recognizes that USD staff have limited access to certified counselors.

The goal of the EVERS project is to help train and equip school staff to recognize and offer quality resources and referrals to address the fallout from any form of violence that may be affecting the population.

* The EVERS Logo

The Project EVERS team chose to use the image of evergreen trees in its logo for very symbolic reasons. The state of Kansas, with its vast prairies, is the only of the lower 48 states without a native evergreen tree.

A Wichita Eagle interview with the Kansas State John C. Pair Horticulture Center in Haysville revealed that, though conifers are not growing locally on their own, some species can be successfully transplanted and nurtured here to become strong, thriving trees. The key, however, is patient and careful care.

“Don’t plant them close together to hurry the process; proper spacing ensures air flow and cuts down on disease,” says community forester Tim McDonnell. “The way you establish a tree will affect its drought tolerance. If you overwater to start with, the tree won’t grow deep roots to go looking for water, and it will then require more water to stay alive. Know the requirements of an evergreen before you plant it.”

In the same way, the schools and communities of Northwest Kansas are seeking to address the effects of violence by planting and nurturing behaviors and a sense of resiliency that may not be already present. By patiently working together and providing quality resources and materials to students and their families, EVERS pledges a long-term partnership working hand-in-hand with schools and community programs to bring about strong, enduring results.

* EVERS Timeline & Goals

Over the life of the five-year project, EVERS will build on existing programs in the region to maximize knowledge and resources expanding the capacity of each partner to collectively:

- ▶ Create and support a trauma-informed workforce
- ▶ Create leadership development opportunities for staff and educators to address and grow knowledge and program expertise
- ▶ Develop and support peer participation among:
 - educators
 - parents, guardians, caregivers
 - student and youth peers
 - community service systems in collaboration
- ▶ Mentors from each of the above audiences will be trained to ensure relevant, on-going program development that specifically meets the needs of each community

The goals of the EVERS Project include:

- ▶ Create safe school climates
- ▶ Ensure implementation of high quality, sustained professional development programs that support strengths-based programs and services
- ▶ Establish pathways for students and families to receive mental health services and supports
- ▶ Expand partnerships to build relationships and engagement among educators, students, and parents

The long-term impact of EVERS is even greater. It will ensure improved opportunities for students and families alike to build life-long, strengths-based skills and resiliency to reduce the impact of trauma, break the cycle of violence, and prepare students for enduring violent-free academic and workforce success.

* EVERS NWKS Demographics

Northwest Kansas includes some of the most beautiful landscapes in the state. The High Plains and Smoky Hills regions include rugged canyons, vast prairies, and towering rock formations. Outdoor enthusiasts thrive in the region with plentiful activities including:

- Hunting (pheasant, turkey, ducks, and deer included)
- Fishing (including two of the nation's top bass fishing lakes)
- Five stunning state parks
- Scenic Byways including Land and Sky, Western Vistas Historic, Smoky Valley, and Post Rock
- Boating
- Hiking trails
- Biking trails

The EVERS service area has a total population of 42,106 people in 13 counties. Most have seen a seven-year population decline. However, there is hope that the region is beginning to thrive. New economic supports, including those from the Dane Hansen Foundation in Logan, are allowing new businesses to gain footing and people in their 30s and 40s are showing interest in returning or relocating to the area.

Ben Winchester, Rural Sociologist from University of Minnesota, quoted in Northwest Kansas Today magazine's Summer 2019 issue said, "We don't live in an economy -- we live in a community. I think people don't recognize...the extent to which our place matters more than our job." He explains that rural life appeals to people who want a better quality of life, including more time with family, less traffic and commute time, and more security.

"The sun shone as only a Kansas sun can shine."

~ Catherine Wiggins Porter (1873-1952) - Northwest Kansas settler

* Festive Stress

Feeling more stressed than usual? You're not alone! As wonderful as the holidays are, they bring all kinds of added stress to our already stressed days.

In a study commissioned by the US Highbush Blueberry Council, the term "festive stress" was coined to describe the end-of-the-year madness we all recognize. The study has a combination of good (and a little bad) news. The bad news first – it identified three stages of festive stress:

- ▶ Stage One begins December 13.
- ▶ Stage Two begins on December 18 (when festive stress turns severe).
- ▶ Stage Three peaks on December 25th at 2:05 pm on Christmas Day... or when you're sitting down to dinner (there's the good news!).

The causes of festive stress are not surprising:

- Financial strain
- Gift shopping
- Family
- Crowds/lines
- Extra cleaning, cooking, etc.
- And, of course, the desire to have a perfect holiday season



Make a plan to take time for yourself to better manage your own stress. Your body/mind connections in addition to your family and friends will thank you!

- Listen to music
- Watch a favorite show, movie or Christmas classic
- Nap
- Walk
- Read
- Exercise
- Eat healthy (blueberries, of course!)

You can also talk about your worries and concerns with close friends, family, or your doctor. Getting things out in the open can help you navigate your feelings and work toward solutions.

And one more reminder...the holidays are not happy for all. For many, memories of Christmases past are filled with sadness, trauma and loss. We often do not see what everyone is truly going through, so in all cases be kind and be present.

Keep these tips in mind throughout 2020 as they will serve you well all year long. Happy Holidays!



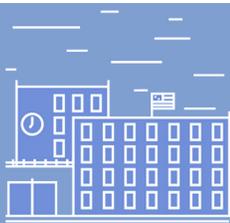


The Kansas Blue Ribbon Task Force on Bullying has just released its recommendations to the Kansas Department of Education to help school boards, administrators, teachers, students, families and communities address the persistent problem of bullying.

Project EVERS is very pleased to see that the goals of the report are in sync with this new project. According to the Task Force, “bullied students usually have multiple school-related problems, including skipping school, feeling unsafe, being distracted, and having difficulty concentrating on lessons affecting school performance. Research has documented that bullied students report higher levels of loneliness and poorer health as well as greater levels of anxiety and depression, with both short-term and long-lasting effects. Bullied students are at high risk for depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, academic difficulties, substance abuse, delinquency and other negative behaviors.”

Bullying is one of the issues EVERS hopes to help Northwest Kansas school districts effectively address. To positively improve the effect of bullying behavior, EVERS will work with area schools focusing on peer and adult-student relationships to promote caring, safe environments. We know that both schools and communities need to learn about bullying and its effects, as well as other forms of trauma, and implement evidence-based, trauma-sensitive programs that can legitimately effect change.

Realizing that educators and school administrators already have a wide array of responsibilities, EVERS is approaching the creation and expansion of communities that care as shared responsibility with parents, families, and community members. We look forward to our journey and moving forward together in Northwest Kansas!



The Kansas Communities that Care 2018 survey data suggests that in Kansas schools, 55.7% of 5th graders, 63.3% of 8th graders, 60.4% of 10th graders and 59.7% of 12th graders self-reported having seen someone bullied. Overall 27.3% of Kansas students in grades 6-12 reported being bullied at school, with 17.9% indicating it was in the form of cyberbullying.

* Contact Us @ EVERS

The EVERS team wants all of your feedback, questions, ideas, and suggestions! Please email director Lora Thomas at EVERSforKansas@gmail.com any time and expect a prompt reply. Every successful project relies upon the participation of everyone. None of us can achieve results alone.