

# Grant Approval Memo



**Grantee:** Petersburg Borough School District  
**Request Amount:** \$114,082.00  
**Project Title:** Thriving Together: Collaborative Student Wellness  
**Grant Term:** 3/1/2026 to 6/30/2027  
**Fund Source:** FY26 Trust Focus Area Strategy Implementation  
**Trust Staff:** Tina Voelker-Ross

## **Requested Motion:**

*The Program and Planning Committee recommends that the Board of Trustees approve a \$114,082 authority grant to the Petersburg School District for the Thriving Together: Collaborative Student Wellness grant. These funds will come from the Trust Focus Area Strategy Implementation line of the FY26 budget.*

## **Staff Analysis:**

- What does this project do?  
This project will support the expansion of access to mental health supports, professional counseling and social-emotional learning (SEL) for students within the Petersburg Borough School District. Trust funds will cover personnel costs (contracted personnel to increase targeted support for at risk students at the middle and high school & a registered nurse from the Petersburg Medical Center to help identify concerns such as unsafe or unstable home environments, lack of basic resources, and physical symptoms related to emotional trauma), the SEL curriculum subscription, and supplies to support suicide prevention trainings.
- Who is receiving the funds?  
The Petersburg Borough School District is located in SE Alaska and is only accessible by air or sea. Petersburg School District serves approximately 465 students in our three schools: Rae C. Stedman Elementary (206), Mitkof Middle School (115), and Petersburg High School (144).
- Why is staff recommending this project?  
This project builds on initiatives the Petersburg Borough School District has been developing for several years. Partnerships are in place to implement this project in a region with fewer city resources to glean. The project focus is universal for all students who would benefit from prevention, as well as more specialized and direct support services and interventions for students with higher needs, Trust beneficiaries or those at risk for becoming a Trust beneficiary. Data from the Youth Connectedness Climate Survey, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, as well as number of crisis interventions with youth, underscore the urgent need for this project and the support of proactive, school-based interventions that build belonging, resilience, and access to care. This project aligns with the state's behavioral health in schools' initiative as well as the comp plan.
- Will this be a multi-year project?  
This proposal is for a 16-month grant project.

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## **Trust Five Year Funding History**

No previous Trust grants

## **Comp Plan Identification**

Area of Focus	Objective	Comments
Area of Focus 1: Early Childhood & Youth	1.2 Ensure accurate identification and support of social-emotional needs for children and their families, congruent with their cultural identification	
Area of Focus 1: Early Childhood & Youth	1.4 Behavioral health services are easily accessible, timely, and include care navigation and wraparound services	

## **Trust Focus Area Connection**

Budget Area	Strategy	Comments
Early Childhood & Youth	Early Childhood - Ensure accurate identification and treatment of social-emotional needs for children, youth, and their caregivers	

## **Project Description (from grant application)**

Our goal with these grant funds is to reduce suicide risk factors such as chronic absenteeism, isolation, trauma response, anxiety and depression. We've seen an increase in these risk factors and would like to continue to have a system of support staff in place, which includes a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) at our secondary schools, Master of Social Work (MSW) at our elementary school, and a district wide school nurse.

This project aims to reduce mental health and suicide rates in Petersburg by addressing one of the most critical upstream factors: disconnection. In our schools made up of 465 students, we are working to expand access to mental health supports, professional counseling, and social-emotional learning (SEL). Data from our School Climate Connectedness Survey (spring 2024) show that 34% of secondary students reported feeling disconnected from school and others, highlighting an urgent need for stronger systems of connection and care. This same survey will serve as a key tool for evaluating project success, with a measurable goal of reducing student feelings of isolation over time. There are additional indicators of need that reinforce the importance of this work. In the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 34.2% of Petersburg High School students reported feeling so sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks that they stopped participating in usual activities. Furthermore, 18.5% reported attempting suicide at least once in the past year, and 31.5% reported being bullied—on school property, off school grounds, or electronically. These numbers are deeply

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concerning and underscore the urgent need for proactive, school-based interventions that build belonging, resilience, and access to care.

We have a contracted LCSW in our secondary school who is able to provide clinical level behavioral health services to our high needs secondary students, many who are beneficiaries of the Alaska Mental Health Trust, specifically in the substance abuse and mental illness populations. At our elementary school, we provide access to a contracted MSW who primarily sees AMHT beneficiaries in the mental illness and developmental disability populations. The MSW works with tier three students who require long term one-on-one counseling support.

Our current mental health professionals are already responding to significant needs. During the 2024–25 school year, our contracted Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) provided crisis intervention in over 96 emergency encounters involving students experiencing suicidal ideation or immediate behavioral health crises. By expanding direct counseling access and implementing a cohesive SEL curriculum, we aim to reduce the frequency of emergency crises through earlier identification, prevention, and support. Tracking these encounters, along with referrals to the hospital and clinical care, will serve as another data point to measure impact.

The district also currently has a 0.5 FTE contracted nurse who has been very effective in early identification of signs and symptoms of a variety of behavioral health conditions in our students. The nurse helps the student and families navigate to the appropriate counseling staff and support as needed. The district school nurse provides critical health services that include daily health needs, attends to minor injuries, acute illnesses, and other concerns that directly support student well-being and academic success. Beyond direct care, the nurse plays an active role in health promotion and disease prevention. Most importantly, the nurse has a profound impact on the social and emotional well-being of students. She serves as a critical link between physical health and mental health support within the school community. Over the past year, she has referred more than 15 students to counseling services after identifying concerns such as unsafe or unstable home environments, lack of basic resources, and physical symptoms related to emotional trauma. These timely interventions ensure that students receive the comprehensive care and support they need to thrive both in and out of the classroom.

Prior to our district's contracts with the providers of these services, our students and families faced significant barriers to accessing critical support. Billing and insurance requirements often created financial and logistical stress for families, while scheduling conflicts, paperwork, and lengthy referral waitlist times delayed care for students in need. The complex requirements and coordination to connect with outside agencies further discourage many families and students from following through with services or feeling ready to ask for help.

By contracting with a dedicated school nurse, Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), and Master of Social Work (MSW) professionals, our district has been able to bring essential tier-three support directly to campus. This streamlined model removed many of the previous access barriers and allowed for immediate, school-based interventions. Students can now receive timely, consistent care for both physical and mental health needs within a familiar, trusted environment. The collaboration between these contracted providers, school staff, and families ensures a more holistic, responsive approach to student well-being. With these funds we plan to increase access to these providers by having them on-site, providing direct services at a more frequent level to our students. Our contract providers are able

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to coordinate day-of services and referrals to our local hospital and other agencies, reducing wait times and increasing accessibility to these essential services.

While increasing targeted support for those at higher risk, this project is also designed to address both primary and secondary prevention by proactively supporting all students with social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. We have begun to implement Wayfinder, an evidence-based SEL curriculum, district-wide to foster a sense of purpose, belonging, and self-awareness in students from elementary through high school. Wayfinder is built on the principle that when students connect to their values and see meaning in their learning, they are more engaged and more resilient. Engagement and resiliency are key protective factors against anxiety, depression, and suicidality. An independent program evaluation by Stanford University showed that students who completed Wayfinder's high school curriculum demonstrated 150% Increase in key measures of "Purpose," 104% Improvement in "Social Awareness" and "positive social behaviors," and 58% increase in key measures of "Belonging."

Wayfinder provides a structured framework for teaching critical life skills, such as emotional regulation, empathy, and goal setting. These lessons help reduce known risk factors for suicide by building coping strategies and increasing connectedness to peers and to caring adults. In addition to the universal curriculum, this project includes increased clinical level counselor support for students identified as high risk. Counselors will provide small-group interventions, individual check-ins, and safety planning sessions to our highest risk students, ensuring that these youth are receiving the highest level of support possible before a crisis occurs.

The need for this initiative is urgent. 1 in 4 students in our secondary schools and 1 in 3 students in our elementary school have chronic or severely chronic absenteeism. Our district has seen an increase in reported anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, which is similar to national data. Educators are reporting increased levels of student disengagement, emotional distress, and a lack of readiness for life after graduation. Academic instruction alone is no longer enough to meet the needs of today's students.

We will use these grant funds to equip all students with the tools they need to manage emotions and navigate challenges. By also providing higher-level support where it's needed most, we aim to reduce absenteeism, decrease suicidal ideation risk, lower anxiety, and promote long-term mental wellness district-wide. With these grant funds we also aim to increase accessibility to services for students during summer months who would not otherwise be able to pay or access behavioral health support. Please see attached the key data figures that support the need for this project.

## **Performance Measures**

How much did you do?

- a. Number (#) of Wayfinder SEL lessons delivered district-wide during the reporting period. Please provide the location (school) for each lesson.
- b. Number (#) of students participating in Wayfinder SEL activities during the reporting period.
- c. Number (#) of students receiving small-group or one-on-one counseling services during the reporting period.

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- d. Number (#) of referrals to outside mental health resources and/or services during the reporting period.

How well did you do it?

- a. Provide a narrative describing the timeline, activities, successes, challenges, and lessons learned during the reporting period.
- b. Number (#) and percentage (%) of students demonstrating chronic absenteeism at the beginning and end of the reporting period, and the net percentage change.
- c. Number (#) and percentage (%) of students participating in the Wayfinder SEL activities who felt the curriculum was delivered in an understandable format.
- d. Number (#) and percentage (%) of student behavior/discipline incidents in the school year 24/25 compared to 25/26 and 26/27, and the percentage change.
- e. Number (#) and percentage (%) of high-risk students receiving timely and appropriate interventions during the reporting period.

Is anyone better off?

- a. Number (#) and percentage (%) of students participating in Wayfinder SEL activities who feel equipped to manage emotions and navigate challenges, measured towards the beginning and end of the project timeline. Report the overall change between the two points in time.
- b. Number (#) and percentage (%) of students demonstrating positive school climate indicators (i.e., sense of belonging, purpose, safety, and peer relationships) at the beginning and end of the project timeline. Report the overall change between the two points in time.
- c. Number (#) and percentage (%) of students self-reporting well-being and connectedness, measured at the beginning and end of the project timeline. Report the overall change between the two points in time.
- d. Two statements from student participants describing the impact (positive or negative) that participating in SEL activities has had on their overall well-being.

## **Sustainability (from grant application)**

We are confident in the long-term sustainability of our project. The project goals align with our district's strategic plan and key focus areas, which strengthens our belief that these efforts will continue to receive support. In recent years, mental health support has been a clear priority for both the school board and district administration. This project builds on initiatives we have been developing for several years. We have partnered with Petersburg Medical Center (PMC) for nearly five years to provide contracted LCSW support. Additionally, PMC has provided nursing support to the district since 2014, initially on an intermittent basis and more recently reinstated in fall of 2023. PMC also offers the Signs of Suicide and Suicide Prevention trainings for both staff and students at our secondary schools.

The Petersburg School District (PSD) is deeply grateful for its partnership with Petersburg Medical Center (PMC). Despite funding uncertainties, PMC has remained committed to providing consistent

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on-site services for our students. Each year, we meet with PMC CEO Phil Hofstetter to discuss available funding. Due to their belief in our low barrier service delivery model, he has assured us that even when we have exhausted our dedicated funding for their contract, PMC would continue delivering the same level of services and absorb the costs.

PMC's grant writing team has also collaborated closely with the district to apply for grants that directly support school-based health services, including nursing and counseling. Their efforts have resulted in successful awards that strengthen our shared work. We are truly fortunate to partner with an organization that consistently puts students first and remains steadfast in prioritizing their well-being. Our project helps reinforce that valuable relationship.

The newest components of this initiative include the addition of a contracted Master of Social Work (MSW) professional at the elementary level and the district-wide adoption of the Wayfinder social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. While we have previously provided limited contracted counseling support for elementary students, this expansion represents a deeper level of service and integration within the school setting. Similarly, although SEL instruction has existed in parts of our system, the implementation of Wayfinder in fall 2025 marks the first time PSD has delivered a unified, evidence-based SEL curriculum across all grade levels. This approach ensures consistency, alignment, and stronger integration of social-emotional learning into everyday classroom instruction throughout the district.

To ensure sustainability, we are actively pursuing ongoing funding through district budgets, community partnerships, and future grant opportunities to maintain and enhance counselor support for high-risk students. In addition, we will collect and analyze data on student attendance, engagement, and well-being to evaluate the program's impact. These outcomes will guide continuous improvement and provide critical evidence to advocate for long-term funding for integration of these essential services.

Please see attached the letter of support from PMC.

## **Who We Serve (from grant application)**

The Petersburg School District in Alaska is the only school district within the Petersburg Borough and serves all families that choose to enroll.

PSD Vision: Inspiring all to become responsible and healthy citizens, positively contributing to our global community.

PSD Mission Statement: Petersburg Schools will advocate for continuous growth, promote a healthy environment, and provide diverse educational opportunities, where all students achieve.

The district is made up of 43 certified teaching staff, 35 support personnel, and 11 administrative staff. The district also contracts out part-time nursing and counseling services.

Many of our students qualify in the substance abuse, mental illness and developmental disabilities beneficiary population. This project is intended to serve the 465 youth across our district, with a focus on supporting the mental health and wellness in our students. Our students are facing growing challenges related to anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, which we are able to measure through the increased number of referrals for mental health and substance abuse support within our school.



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counseling programs, as well as through data collected in the School Climate and Connectedness Survey and the Youth Risk Behavioral Surveys.

Petersburg School District's student population is 62.6% Caucasian, 3.7% African American, 3.4% Hispanic, 4.1% Asian, 3% American Indian, 20% Alaskan Native, 1.5% Multi-Ethnic, and 1.3% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Families may select only one ethnicity when identifying with the school, which may not fully represent the multicultural backgrounds of many of our students. The student population is approximately 48.6% male and 51.4% female.

The goal of this project is to meet student mental health needs through a district-wide social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum and expanded clinical-level counseling support. By helping students build skills in emotional regulation, problem-solving, and self-awareness, we aim to reduce suicide risk factors and promote mental wellness in a proactive, equitable, and sustainable way. In addition, this project will strengthen Tier 3 interventions for high-risk students experiencing anxiety, depression, substance use, and/or the effects of trauma.

## **Estimated Numbers of Beneficiaries Served Experiencing (from grant application)**

Mental Illness:	124
Developmental Disabilities:	84
Substance Abuse	28
Traumatic Brain Injuries:	2
Number of people to be trained	514

## **Project Budget (from grant application)**

Personnel Services Costs	\$105,000.00
Personnel Services Costs (Other Sources)	\$25,000.00
Personnel Services Narrative	<p>Contract Personnel</p> <p>LCSW from Petersburg Medical Center to increase our targeted support for at-risk students at the middle and high school. (Split between SAPP \$15,000 and AMHT \$35,000, and PSD GF \$10,000 for \$60,000 total)</p> <p>Registered Nurse from Petersburg Medical Center, to help identify concerns such as unsafe or unstable home environments, lack of basic resources, and physical symptoms related to emotional trauma. (\$40,000 AMHT and PSD GF \$10,000 for \$50,000 total)</p> <p>MSW through Grow ToGather LLC or other local contracted counseling or social work support to increase our targeted support for at-risk students at the elementary school. (\$30,000 AMHT)</p>

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Travel Costs	\$0.00
Travel Costs (Other Sources)	\$2,500.00
Travel Costs Narrative	The SAPP Grant supports our counselors attending an annual conference of professional development and networking.

Supplies Costs	\$9,082.30
Supplies Costs (Other Sources)	\$9,082.30
Supplies Narrative	<p>Funding SEL curriculum subscription through Wayfinder(\$8,582.30). We are in the process of implementing Wayfinder, an evidence-based SEL curriculum, district-wide to foster a sense of purpose, belonging, and self-awareness in students from elementary through high school. Wayfinder is built on the principle that when students connect to their values and see meaning in their learning, they are more engaged and more resilient, which are key protective factors against anxiety, depression, and suicidality.</p> <p>In addition, we request \$500 for supplies to support suicide prevention trainings, such as some fidget toys, journals, sensory stickers, and other coping mechanism tools that are handed out as prizes for participation during presentations and lessons.</p> <p>The SAPP Grant supports our counselors attending an annual conference of professional development and networking(registration), as well as the annual SCCS and some PBIS prizes. (\$9,000)</p> <p>The PSD General Operating Fund is projected to support supplies and materials such as hygiene products, clothing, and food for at-risk youth, supplies and materials for SEL lessons, fidget toys, journals, sensory stickers, and other coping mechanism tools that are handed out as prizes for participation during presentations and lessons. (\$2,400)</p>

## Other Funding Sources (from grant application)

Petersburg School District General Operating Fund - PENDING	\$22,400.00
State DEED Suicide Awareness, Prevention and Postvention (SAPP) Grant - PENDING	\$26,500.00
<b>Total Leveraged Funds</b>	<b>\$48,900.00</b>





**Petersburg**  
**MEDICAL CENTER**

907-772-4291  
www.pmcak.org  
PO Box 589  
103 Fram Street  
Petersburg, AK 99833

October 31, 2025

Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority  
3745 Community Park Loop # 200  
Anchorage Alaska 99508

**RE: Support for Petersburg School District's FY26 Funding Proposal**

Dear representatives of the Alaska Mental Health Trust,

Petersburg Medical Center (PMC) supports our partners at Petersburg School District (PSD) in their funding proposal to the Trust. We understand that the proposed project would strengthen and sustain school-based health services, including critical access to behavioral health services, for all students in the District.

PMC is a community-owned, independent Critical Access Hospital serving the remote Southeast Alaska communities in and around Petersburg Borough. Established in 1917, PMC provides the only emergency, primary, Long Term Care, and Home Health services in a 4,000-square mile service area, along with other vital health care including in-person and telehealth clinical behavioral health services. We take pride in our long-standing collaboration with PSD to serve the health and behavioral health needs of Petersburg's youth, including our partnership to provide school-based services delivered by PMC personnel.

PSD's funding request will sustain and expand school-based services, including those provided by PMC's embedded part-time Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Registered Nurse. These services have been developed and made possible over years of partnership through continuous in-kind contributions by both PMC and PSD, along with periodic grant funding, and PMC is strongly committed to strengthening and sustaining them. The program reduces barriers to health care – and particularly

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**OUR MISSION** is excellence in healthcare services and the promotion of wellness in our community



behavioral health services – for Petersburg students regardless of their insurance status. It promotes overall student well-being and suicide prevention, and provides care continuity through school-based drop-in resources and individual behavioral health interventions for students needing additional support, as well as a referral point for higher-level services. Our partnership serves the goal of reducing the community’s need for youth crisis response services at PMC’s emergency department and clinic sites through its primary prevention and early intervention supports.

PMC strongly supports our partners at the District in their proposal to sustain and expand school-based health services in Petersburg. Please reach out at any time to discuss our commitment to and support for PSD’s proposed project. We are grateful for all you do to promote the health and wellbeing of Alaskan communities.

Sincerely,

Phillip Hofstetter, AuD  
Chief Executive Officer  
Petersburg Medical Center  
Petersburg, Alaska



## AMHT Partnership Grant - Key Data Figures

**PETERSBURG SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**GRANT APPLICANT**

1995826

**APPLICATION ID**

Thriving Together: Collaborative Student Wellness

**GRANT TITLE**

*We've pulled out some data that we feel is the most relevant to demonstrating our current student populations needs for our proposed program. If you would like to see complete survey results we would be happy to provide them.*

### Respondant Ages

Middle  
School

High  
School

### 2025 SCHOOL CLIMATE & CONECTEDNESS SURVEY

#### Connectedness and Belonging

I feel like I belong at this school

68%

69%

I feel like I am a part of this school

81%

67%

#### Social Emotional Learning

I know the emotions I feel

67%

84%

I know ways I can calm myself down

64%

73%

I know what my strengths are

78%

82%

I know when my feelings make it hard to focus

74%

83%

I think about what might happen before I make a decision

52%

71%

#### School Safety & Peer Climate

Students in the school treat eachother with respect

54%

53%

Students at this school are often teased or picked on

66%

68%

Students at this school often spread hurtful rumors or lies about each other online

56%

67%

Students at this school get into fights with other students

43%

53%

Students at this school threaten or bully other students

38%

59%

I feel safe at school

82%

85%

#### Respectful Climate

This school emphasizes showing respect for all students

89%

85%

Students at this school know where to get help if they are being mistreated

87%

89%

### Elementary Responses (3rd-5th Grade)

### 24-25 PERCEPTIONS OF STEDMAN SURVEY

Always

Sometimes

Never

My teacher cares about me

68.30%

28.00%

3.70%

Our classroom is a safe place to be

55.60%

39.50%

4.90%

My teacher treats me with respect

65.90%

30.50%

3.60%

My teacher helps me understand how to be respectful, responsible, and safe in school

78.00%

17.10%

4.90%

My teacher helps students treat each other with kindness and respect

79.00%

18.50%

2.50%

There is an adult at school who will notice when I am absent

68.30%

29.30%

2.40%

At school, there are adults who care about me

78.00%

18.30%

3.70%

I can use words to tell someone how I am feeling

38.80%

52.50%

8.80%

I am respectful to others

72.50%

26.30%

1.20%

I have a friend at school

76.80%

18.30%

4.90%

### 2023 YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY

### High School Responses

Percentage of students who attempted suicide (one or more times during the past 12 months)

18.5%

Percentage of students who felt so anxious, nervous, tense, scared, or like something bad was going to happen almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that they were unable to do what they were supposed to do (during the past 12 months)

29.6%

Percentage of students who felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities (during the past 12 months)

34.2%

Percentage of students who made a plan about how they would attempt suicide (during the past 12 months)

15.6%

Percentage of students who seriously considered attempting suicide (during the past 12 months)

15.8%

Percentage of students who frequently or almost always are able to control their emotions when they need to

62.7%

Percentage of students who would feel comfortable seeking help from three or more adults besides their parents if they had an important question affecting their life

56.3%

Percentage of students who experienced sexual violence (being forced by anyone to do sexual things [counting such things as kissing, touching, or being physically forced to have sexual intercourse] that they did not want to), one or more times during the past 12 months

12.9%

Percentage of students who were bullied on school property during the past 12 months

28.3%

Percentage of students who were bullied on school property, bullied off of school property (such as on their way to or from school or wherever they spend their free time), or electronically bullied (counting being bullied through texting, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media) during the past 12 months

31.5%