



NEWSLETTER

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FEBRUARY 2026

BRINGING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT CLOSER TO HOME

WHY ADVOCACY MATTERS IN RURAL MENTAL HEALTH

In rural and frontier communities, decisions made at the state and federal level have immediate and real impacts on students, families, schools, and communities. Knowing who your legislators are—and communicating with them about the importance of mental health funding—is essential.

Mental health resources are essential in rural Kansas. They determine whether students can receive services at school, whether families must travel long distances for care, and whether schools can respond proactively instead of reactively. When rural voices speak up, lawmakers better understand that mental health services are critical infrastructure for our communities.

If you need assistance in reaching out to your representatives, contact us.



THE IMPACT OF PROJECT FRONTIER IN NW KANSAS

Project Frontier supports a wide range of prevention, education, and mental health initiatives across Northwest Kansas. While schools play a critical role in our work, they represent just one part of our broader mission. In this newsletter, we are highlighting one specific area of impact—our work to increase student access to mental health services within schools—while recognizing that Project Frontier serves individuals, families, and communities throughout our entire service area. If you or someone you know has a mental health need or concern, we encourage you to reach out. Our role is to help connect people to resources, support, and services—wherever they are needed.

Because of Project Frontier, we are able to support access to mental health resources in 18 rural school districts across Northwest Kansas.

Funded through a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Project Frontier:

- Funds school-based mental health liaisons who help coordinate and facilitate student connections to mental health services
- Partners with High Plains Mental Health Center to connect schools with licensed mental health providers
- Supports secure, school-day telehealth therapy sessions (including Zoom) to increase access in rural communities
- Assists schools and communities in bringing in mental health presentations, prevention education, and local resources
- Reduces instructional time lost due to travel for services
- Removes significant barriers for families in isolated communities

While Project Frontier does not directly provide therapy services, the program plays a critical role in making those services accessible. School-based mental health liaisons funded through

the grant work within schools to schedule, support, and facilitate student connections to licensed mental health providers—many of which occur through secure telehealth platforms, including Zoom. We recognize that virtual therapy is not the right fit for every student; however, in rural and frontier communities where in-person providers may be hours away or unavailable altogether, telehealth services are often the most realistic option—and far better than no access at all.

Before Project Frontier, many families had to drive 30+ miles each way for therapy appointments—often resulting in parents missing half a day of work and students missing significant amounts of school. When appointments require travel, even a single session can lead to multiple hours of lost instructional time. Over time, these missed minutes add up, impacting academic progress, consistency, and student well-being. By supporting school-based coordination and telehealth access, Project Frontier helps preserve learning time while ensuring students receive the mental health support they need.



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WHY MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES MATTER

In rural communities, mental health is deeply connected to daily life. For farmers and ranchers, long hours, unpredictable weather, financial uncertainty, and isolation are often part of the job. These pressures don't pause at the end of the workday, and without accessible support, stress can quietly build into anxiety, depression, or crisis. When mental health resources are available and close to home, they strengthen not only individuals, but families, farms, and the communities that rely on them.

For children and youth, mental health plays a critical role in how they learn, behave, and connect with others. When students are struggling emotionally, it can be difficult to focus, regulate emotions, or engage in school. Early support makes a difference. When mental health services are accessible—especially within the school setting—students are more likely to receive help before challenges escalate, leading to better long-term outcomes both academically and emotionally.

Ultimately, mental health affects everyone. It influences physical health, relationships, productivity, and overall quality of life. Communities with strong, accessible mental health systems are better equipped to support one another, respond to challenges, and build resilience for the future. When we invest in mental health, we invest in the well-being and strength of our entire community.



SNOW DAY

ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS

FUN FOR ALL AGES

SNOW DAY SURVIVAL KIT

SCAN THE QR CODE FOR ACCESS

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708-672-0765

SNOW DAY TOOLKIT FOR FAMILIES

Snow days can be a welcome break—but they can also disrupt routines and increase stress for families. Project Frontier has created a Snow Day Toolkit filled with printable activities for families to enjoy together.

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BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Mental health support is not only about intervention—it is also about intentionally building protective factors.

The Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE) framework highlights the importance of positive childhood experiences (PCEs) in supporting lifelong mental health and resilience. Research shows that positive experiences can buffer the effects of stress and adversity while strengthening emotional regulation, relationships, and coping skills.

Through Positive Experience, families, schools, and communities can access free, evidence-based tools that help:

- Foster safe, supportive relationships
- Create environments where children feel valued and connected
- Promote resilience and healthy brain development

These experiences are not “extra”—they are essential building blocks for well-being. Learn more and access free resources at: <https://positiveexperience.org/>



TEEN DATING VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH



February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, a time to raise awareness and promote healthy relationships among youth.

Why this matters:

- Nearly 1 in 3 teens experience physical, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner
- Unhealthy relationship patterns often begin in adolescence
- Education helps teens recognize warning signs and build respectful relationships

Project Frontier offers a Teen Dating Violence educational presentation and would be happy to bring it to your school or community. To schedule a presentation, contact Jennifer Mitchell at: jmitchell@nkesc.org.



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SAFER INTERNET DAY – FEBRUARY 11

Safer Internet Day is a global reminder to promote safe, responsible, and respectful online behavior—especially for children and teens.

Early smartphone ownership—especially before high school—can pose risks to children’s mental, physical, and emotional well-being. Research highlights links between early, unrestricted phone use and increased concerns such as poor sleep, anxiety, depression, and difficulty focusing. Delaying smartphone ownership when possible, setting clear boundaries around when and where devices are used, and encouraging screen-free times (like meals, homework, and bedtime) can help protect healthy development.

Families and schools play an important role in teaching moderation and digital balance. Ongoing conversations about online experiences, emotions, and social media pressures help children build awareness and resilience. When adults model healthy tech habits, promote offline activities, and regularly reassess expectations as children grow, kids are better equipped to use technology safely, responsibly, and in ways that support—not undermine—their well-being.



THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING RURAL MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health services in frontier communities exist because people advocate, collaborate, and care. **Thank you for supporting Project Frontier** and for helping ensure that students, families, and communities across Northwest Kansas have access to the care they deserve.

