
PRESS RELEASE

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Deekay Fox
Senior Marketing and Communications Director
dfox@uplifteducation.org
661-378-2353

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Uplift Education Has Earned a 5-year, \$4 Million Grant from the US Department of Education

Dallas, TX – Uplift Education was granted \$4 million over five years from the US Department of Education through the Education Innovation and Research competitive grant process. Uplift's award is one of only ten, Early Phase Social Emotional Learning (SEL) awards made nationally and the only award in Dallas-Fort Worth. Uplift's receipt of this award recognizes its innovative and industry leading approaches to SEL and student well-being.

Dr. Miguel Cardona, U.S. Secretary of Education, shared the importance of focusing on the social-emotional needs of our children, especially in K-12 education. "These grants will help to offer rich opportunities to accelerate students' learning and nurture their development," said Secretary Cardona. "I look forward to seeing how Education Innovation and Research Grants help take promising practices to scale."

The US Department of Education grant announcement comes on the heels of U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy's advisory calling for swift action to respond to a growing mental health crisis among youth that has worsened due to stressors related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Uplift is currently the only public school system (traditional or charter) in the US to establish an Office of Well-Being and to elevate its head to the role of Chief. This department also encompasses Senior Directors of Well-Being; Directors of Counseling Services, Restorative Practices, Social Emotional Learning, School Nurses, School Counselors, Family Therapists, Well-Being Coaches, school SEL leads, Athletic Directors and Coaches, and Physical Education teachers.

Across the country, schools are implementing various types of SEL programs to support students' well-being. Uplift's Path to Purpose project is designed to evaluate the efficacy of varying dosage levels of SEL, health, and mental health programming on student well-being, resiliency, and relationships in K-8 grades, with the goal of ultimately improving student achievement and attainment in high-needs communities. The effects of this programming on students will be carefully monitored and evaluated through a gold-standard, random-control trial study. Dr. John Gasko, Chief Well-Being Officer at Uplift

Education, will lead this project. “Uplift’s Path to Purpose project seeks to support students to find purpose and meaning amidst extreme uncertainty in their lives,” said Dr. Gasko.

According to the American Psychological Association, by 2030 it is estimated that the greatest public health epidemic in America will be depression. The challenge will be especially acute for youth. Currently, the American Medical Association cites that, 70% of all primary care visits are stress related.

The pandemic has exacerbated mental health issues for school children and the adults that support those students in schools across the country. Cara Pennington, Manager of Social Counseling at Uplift Education, shares that the caseload of social counselors in Uplift’s network of 22,000 students are full of more extreme cases of depression and other mental health issues. Pennington personally supported a senior at an Uplift school who had to shift during the pandemic from being a full-time student to helping provide income for her family. Already struggling with depression, this student had to bear additional responsibilities at the height of COVID-19. Upon returning to school this year, she has struggled to shift back to her responsibilities of being a student and preparing for college applications. With dedicated support of social counselors and teachers at her school, she has been rewarded with her first acceptance to college and can see her path forward.

“For more than 25 years, we responded to a deep call to transform the lives of young people through academic excellence across one of America’s largest and neediest urban centers,” said Uplift CEO, Yasmin Bhatia. “Our service to a demographic whose complexion is fraught with risk and disadvantages has resulted in a commitment to achieve something uncommon on their behalf: the empowerment of rising generations who take their place in the world and transform it for the good. The need to serve them has not changed and Uplift continues to stay the course in pursuit of our vision and values.”

Dr. John Gasko Bio:

In the Fall of 2019, Dr. John Gasko was appointed Chief Well-Being Officer at Uplift Education. Under the umbrella of “The Well-Being Team,” he currently leads staff and student facing work encompassing well-being, counseling services and prevention, health services, social and emotional learning, restorative practices, and physical education and athletics. In 2016, he was appointed Professor and Dean of Education at the University of North Texas at Dallas and eventually Special Advisor to the President. Earlier in his career, Dr. Gasko served as the Director of Research and Public Policy for the Children’s Defense Fund, worked alongside physicians, neuroscientists, and psychologists as Associate Division Chief of Developmental Pediatrics at the UT Health Science Center in Houston, and CEO and managing director of the University of Chicago’s Urban Education Institute.

Uplift Education is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to changing the lives of teachers, families, and, most importantly, students. With a network of 45 college preparatory, public charter schools in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, Uplift offers students of any background the powerful chance to study within a multidisciplinary curriculum and prepare for the college career they deserve. Uplift is the largest International Baccalaureate district in Texas and the #2 IB district in the nation because of the number of holistic extracurricular and educational programs. The incredible educators in the Uplift network guide and teach over 21,000 students in Pre-K- 12th grades, with the majority being low-income and minority students who will be the first in their family to attend college. For more information Uplift’s mission and their blind lottery selection system, visit uplifteducation.org or facebook.com/uplifteducation.