

My name is Rachel Smith and I am the Greater Albany Public Schools Health Coordinator and a District Nurse. Our district was fortunate to receive the SHSPG last year and it has had a significant impact on our nursing team and our overarching health services model. The grant process and funds have facilitated conversations about how to best support student physical, mental, social and emotional health needs both within the district and with our community partners. Because of these conversations and with the help of grant funding, in the past year we have increased our nursing team from 2 nurses to 4 nurses; we have built new partnerships with community organizations to provide additional health supports for students; and we have been able to focus on preventative care and health promotion in addition to caring for students with chronic and acute medical needs. This growth has had a significant impact on our students, staff, and the community. By increasing our nursing staff, we are able to do this work better and more meaningfully, moving from one nurse covering 22 schools and 9,400 students to four nurses doing that work. Especially during COVID we have seen the importance of nursing support in schools, whether that looks like providing physical or mental health support for students, creating health plans for students with medical conditions, developing return to school health and safety plans and policies, or training school staff in health protocols and emergency response. This grant has been fundamental for our ability to develop our school health services plan, grow our nursing team, and support all students in their health needs. Health is inextricably tied to student readiness to learn, and health services, especially school nurses, are absolutely necessary for students to stay in and succeed in school. Thank you for your time and consideration.