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Grants awarded to address challenges of absenteeism

PIERRE, S.D. – Four South Dakota school districts have been awarded Addressing Chronic Absenteeism Grants. These grants were awarded on a competitive basis to high-needs school districts.

Mitchell, Spearfish, Leola, and Watertown school districts each received up to \$500,000 to implement programs to support districts, students, and families with regular school attendance. Money from the grants will fund transportation; mentoring and tutoring programs; student, family, and community engagement activities; and more.

“Districts that have been awarded grants will implement attendance strategies,” said Secretary of Education Joseph Graves. “Then we’ll look at the results and share the successful program models with the rest of the state. Hopefully we’ll build a consensus that works throughout the state that can return us to our pre-pandemic rates, which have been traditionally strong in South Dakota.”

The statewide attendance rate in school year 2022-23 was 86.41 percent versus 85.65 the previous year. The grant funds are made available from the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which was signed into law in 2022.

A first round of grants was awarded to school districts in July. The Sioux Falls, Pierre, Wilmot, Waubay, and Sisseton school districts received grants in that round.