

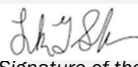
Application for Funding – Cover Page

Applicant Agency

Business Name	Central Regional Education Association	Street Address Including City, State, and ZIP Code	1929 N Washington, Suite A, Bismarck ND 58501,
Contact Person	Luke Schaefer	Title	CEO
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Authorized Representative	Luke Schaefer	Title	CEO
Phone	701-751-4041	Email	Luke.schaefer@k12.nd.us
Federal Employer Tax Id #	83-3594823	Unique Entity Identifier #	DFS5WKMDXLN8
Dates of Active Registration in System for Award Management			10/29/2025

Targeted Intervention(s) to be Implemented	Mentoring, assessment, peer-to-peer
Total Amount of Funding Request	\$200,000
Willing to Accept Less Funding (Y/N)	Yes, but would change scope of services
Evidenced-Based Program/Services (Y/N)	Yes
Name and Source of Evidenced-Based Program/Services	Following OJJDP recommended best practices for mentoring
School(s) or School District to be Served	CREA schools located within 25 miles of Bismarck and Minot
Estimated Number of Youth to be Served	150
Estimated Number of Minority Youth to be Served	75

Signature



Signature of the Person Submitting this Form

Name

Luke Schaefer

Name of the Person Submitting this Form (print)

Date of Signature

01/23/2025

Connected Communities: Strengthening Youth Engagement through Community and School-Based Mentoring and Assessment

Submitted By: The Central Regional Education Association (CREA)

Program Narrative

a. Description of the Project (15%)

CREA is seeking funding to implement the Connected Communities initiative, which would support a partnership between Youthworks and consortium schools within 25 miles of the Bismarck and Minot communities. The Connected Communities initiative aims to implement meaningful interventions, using a mentoring model, that address non-adaptive student behavior, enhance school engagement, and support students' social-emotional development. By focusing on the whole student, the program emphasizes building relationships, developing life skills, and fostering connections within the school.

CREA supports schools throughout central North Dakota, including districts in largely rural communities with few local resources that target youth. The BIPOC student community in CREA exhibits lower graduation rates (20-50 points lower) and behavior/emotional engagement (5 points lower), and higher rates of students who are habitually absent (15-25 points higher) than their counterparts in the last three years, underscoring the critical need for targeted interventions.

Student Group	Sub-Chronic Absenteeism 3-yr avg	Graduation 3-yr avg	Behavior/Emotional Engagement 3-yr avg
White	18%	80%	45%
Black	32%	59%	40%
Hispanic	31%	65%	42%
Native American	42%	33%	39%
Military	17%	84%	48%

CREA has provided programming such as Sources of Strength, Check and Connect, and Restorative Practices, increasing the number of caring individuals in schools and creating a culture of strengths-based accountability and relationships. Having trained hundreds of school staff and provided structure for thousands of students, CREA consistently provides programming to decrease non-adaptive behavior.

The Connected Communities initiative seeks to 1) identify students who are disconnected from their schools and beginning to struggle within the traditional school setting; 2) assess the whole student through an in-person assessment process at Youthworks; 3) connect youth to mentors who can provide support both in the community and in the school; and 4) provide students with the opportunity to receive mentor training, promoting a peer-to-peer mentorship program within

CREA schools. CREA anticipates that these services will directly benefit two groups of schools; two large city districts where the vast majority of students live, and 13 small, rural districts who are lacking supports. Rural districts will be invited to programming regionally and approximately 150 students will be directly impacted. This partnership will not only provide support to individual school districts but will also enhance the crucial infrastructure youth struggling with academic and behavioral challenges need to be successful.

b. Project Planning, Design, and Implementation (35%)

In January 2025, CREA had a preliminary meeting about the proposed scope of services with the regional Superintendents and received overall support for the project. If funded, CREA and Youthworks will roll out the Connected Communities initiative to consortium schools located within 25 miles of Bismarck and Minot. The roll out will include a CREA-facilitated workshop and informational session that helps identify common themes regarding student behavioral needs, student barriers to successfully engaging, and additional outcome goals for the Connected Communities initiative. Schools that fit the geographical area will have the choice to opt in to services following the workshop and informational session. Once schools are selected, Youthworks will collaborate with administrators and staff to develop tailored action plans that align with the unique needs of each school community. These plans will include identifying School Champions, promoting whole school buy-in, identifying target populations, and exploring how the Connected Communities Initiative can enhance current school efforts. Schools choosing to opt in to services will sign an agreement that they will leverage this resource before considering disciplinary action and citation whenever possible.

A critical component of the planning process is ensuring whole-school buy-in. Informational meetings and workshops will be conducted to educate school administrators, teachers, and support staff about the program's objectives and benefits. These sessions will provide an opportunity for staff to share insights, address concerns, and contribute to the development of implementation strategies. Additionally, outreach to parents and community stakeholders will be prioritized to secure broad-based support and foster collaboration. While the project can stand alone with funding exclusively from the North Dakota Juvenile Justice State Advisory Group, individual school districts will have the opportunity to enhance the programming with supplemental funding.

The program will roll out in phases, beginning with a planning and training period in Spring 2025. During this time, CREA will utilize its prior success in coordinating large-scale initiatives such Restorative Practices to ensure readiness for implementation. A brief timeline for implementation can be viewed below:

April 2025 – CREA-led informational session and workshop with regional schools
May 2025 – Individual meetings between Youthworks and interested school districts to explore how Connected Communities can integrate into the district's current services and supports

September 2025 – Participating school districts identify School Champion
October 2025 – services begin for students in participating schools, services will be offered for the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 school years
January 2026 – first quarterly virtual team meeting where stakeholders will review data and provide feedback to ensure that the program remains responsive to the needs of students and schools
Summer 2026 & Summer 2027 – Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Trainings held

Design and Implementation of Connected Communities

The Connected Communities Initiative includes three coordinated interventions, designed to keep students engaged in school and to promote a whole student approach within the school. These components are detailed further below.

Identifying Students

Participating schools will identify a School Champion to act as a liaison, ensuring seamless communication between the school, Youthworks, and families. This advocate will work alongside Youthworks' staff to tailor solutions to meet each student's unique needs and facilitate services. A priority will be given to the BIPOC student community as North Dakota Juvenile Court records indicate a wide disparity for justice-involved youth in the central part of North Dakota.

Assessing the Whole Student

Youth Assessment services will be offered to students who are demonstrating signs of stress or non-adaptive behavior. Generally, these youth will not be connected to other services within the community and will be at risk or suspension or expulsion. Conducted at Youthworks, these assessments will provide a holistic understanding of the youth's needs and identify the student's assets which can be harnessed within the school setting. The Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument, Version 2 (MAYSI-2), will identify behavioral health concerns, while the Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) will evaluate students' internal strengths and external supports. Together, these tools will provide a comprehensive understanding of each student's needs and progress, forming the foundation of the initiative's data-driven approach.

The goal is for students to return to school following the assessment, equipped with actionable strategies for reintegration. Follow-up mentoring can be provided in the school setting to provide specialized support to students and the school. Youthworks' team will work closely with the School Champion and other school personnel to promote a positive transition that focuses on student strengths and opportunities. It is CREA's goal that some of the students who receive mentoring support and assessment will choose to participate in the peer-to-peer mentorship training as they build a positive relationship to and identity within their school.

Mentoring and Mentorship Training

Mentoring is the cornerstone of the initiative, with both mentoring and peer-to-peer mentorship training being offered.

Mentoring focuses on helping students navigate academic and personal challenges, ensuring youth feel connected within their school and community. Mentors will work closely with the School Champion and other school personnel to advocate for student success and align mentoring goals with broader educational objectives. This collaborative approach ensures that mentoring activities are integrated into the school's support framework, maximizing their impact.

Mentors will work with the School Champion to ensure services are provided in collaboration with parents. Family support can include: psychoeducation and/or family therapy and groups at Youthworks. Parent involvement will strengthen the student's success plan, foster accountability, and create a shared vision for success. Together, these partnerships will enhance students' sense of belonging and promote lasting engagement.

Peer-to-Peer Mentorship training has been a practice of Youthworks for decades. This training, which will be offered in participating schools, promotes skill development of students, utilizing the Peer Power model. Participating students will attend a weeklong training and become certified peer-to-peer mentors within the school. These students will have access to support from both Youthworks and the School Champion and will help promote a culture of leadership and mutual support within the school.

c. Capabilities and Competencies (10%)

CREA is a recognized leader in educational innovation, serving 57 districts across central North Dakota and supporting more than 39,500 students. Within this consortium, programs such as North Dakota Full-Service Community Schools have increased services for students related to medical and behavioral support while programming like Succeed 2020 created job shadowing opportunities for students at-risk of dropping out, increasing their graduation rate by 8%. With expertise in behavioral health and whole-person interventions, CREA has successfully implemented initiatives such as Trauma-Sensitive Schools and Full-Service Community Schools.

CREA has significant experience implementing programs that rely on effective strategic partnerships, including increasing the number of school nursing programs in the state by 20%, increasing the number of schools with anonymous reporting for safety management by 30%, and increasing the number of schools implementing trauma-informed practices by 60% through strategic partnerships. These programs demonstrate CREA's ability to integrate evidence-based practices into diverse educational settings, ensuring scalability and sustainability. CREA's collaborative approach, which engages educators, families, and community partners, has consistently delivered measurable improvements in student outcomes.

Youthworks brings nearly 40 years of experience in providing youth programming to communities across North Dakota and western Minnesota. With offices strategically located in Bismarck and Minot, Youthworks is well-positioned to support schools within a 25-mile radius of these communities. Their extensive portfolio includes mentoring, suspension and expulsion programming, juvenile diversion, youth leadership programming, and crisis intervention, all of which have demonstrated significant positive impacts on youth development. Together, CREA and Youthworks will be able to combine their expertise to deliver a program that meets the multifaceted needs of disconnected students.

d. Plan for Collecting Performance Data and Continuous Quality Improvement (10%)

The Connected Communities initiative will employ a robust framework for monitoring and evaluation, ensuring accountability and continuous improvement. The program's primary objectives include increasing behavior/emotional engagement by 10%, increasing attendance by 10%, and enhancing family engagement by 25%. To achieve these goals, the program will utilize school-specific tools such as attendance tracking systems, office discipline referrals, behavior referral logs, and academic progress monitoring software. These tools will provide real-time data to assess program effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

Participating schools will agree to provide CREA with detailed data on each referred student, including disciplinary actions, tardies, and absences before and after intervention. Youthworks will supplement this data by providing pre- and post-assessment results from the DAP and MAYSI-2, offering a holistic view of each student's development. Quarterly reports will be submitted by CREA to the North Dakota Juvenile Justice State Advisory Group, detailing program outcomes, compliance, and lessons learned.

Regular stakeholder feedback sessions will complement these efforts, ensuring that program adjustments are informed by the experiences of students, parents, educators, and mentors. This iterative approach to quality improvement will maximize the program's impact and ensure its alignment with the goals of the North Dakota Juvenile Justice State Advisory Group.

The Connected Communities initiative represents a strategic, evidence-based approach to reducing juvenile justice involvement and fostering positive youth development across multiple school districts, including rural school districts. By leveraging the expertise of CREA and Youthworks, this initiative will address the root causes of student disengagement and provide schools with the tools they need to support youth in need of connection. Through targeted mentoring, comprehensive assessments, and robust peer-to-peer mentorship training, Connected Communities will create safer, more inclusive school environments that empower students to achieve their full potential.

Budget Summary

Applicant: Central Regional Education Association (CREA)

Project Period: 4/1/2025 -- 7/1/2027

	Grant Request	Match	Total
Budget Categories:			
Personnel	20,000.00	6,950.00	26,950.00
Fringe Benefits	-	7,902.00	7,902.00
Travel	-	-	-
Supplies	-	-	-
Subaward/Contractual	180,000.00	-	180,000.00
Other Direct Costs	-	-	-
Indirect Costs	-	-	-
Total Grant Funds	200,000.00	14,852.00	214,852.00

Budget Detail Worksheet and Narrative

Applicant: Central Regional Education Association (CREA)

Project Period: 4/1/2025 -- 7/1/2027

Personnel				Total Grant Period		
Position	Name	Annual Salary	Grant Allocation %	Grant Request	Match	Total
CEO	Luke Schaefer	139,000	0	\$0	\$6,950	\$6,950
BCBA	Cori Doubek	80,000	25%	\$20,000		\$20,000
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Total Personnel Costs				\$20,000	\$6,950	\$26,950

Personnel Narrative:
 Luke Schaefer, CEO, will coordinate the efforts with the contracted vendor. Cori Doubek, BCBA, will coordinate the efforts between schools and the vendor, providing appropriate referral systems and monitoring assessments

Fringe Benefits				Total Grant Period		
Position	Name	Annual Benefits	Grant Allocation %	Grant Request	Match	Total
CEO	Luke Schaefer	\$50,040	0%	\$0	\$2,502	\$2,502
BCBA	Cori Doubek	\$21,000	0%	\$0	\$5,400	\$5,400
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Total Fringe Benefits				\$0	\$7,902	\$7,902

Fringe Benefits Narrative:
 Fringe benefits for both staff will be paid by CREA. Fringe includes actual FICA, Retirement, and Insurance costs for personnel.

Travel			Total Grant Period		
Purpose	Location	Expense Type (Hotel/Mileage/Per Diem)	Grant Request	Match	Total
Total Travel Costs			\$0	\$0	\$0

Travel Costs Narrative:
 Travel is not expected for this project

Supplies			Total Grant Period		
Item	Quantity	Per Unit Cost	Grant Request	Match	Total
Total Supply Costs			\$0	\$0	\$0

Supply Costs Narrative:
 Supplies are not expected for this project

Subawards/Contracts		Total Grant Period		
		Grant Request	Match	Total
Description/Purpose	Computation			
Youthworks Subcontract for Mentoring, Assessment, and Peer-to-Peer training	See attached for detailed budget	\$180,000	\$0	\$180,000
Total Subaward/Contractual Costs		\$180,000	\$0	\$180,000

Subaward/Contractual Costs Narrative:
 The proposed project includes a subcontract with Youthworks to provide mentoring, assessment, and peer-to-peer training to CREA consortium schools located within 25 miles of Minot and Bismarck, ND (to include these communities). Schools that opt in will have access to these services and will become partners in the project. Youthworks budget is detailed on a separate attachment and summarized here. **Personnel:** Youthworks will provide staff to train student mentors, to provide mentoring in the school/community, and to provide assessment of youth to promote a youth's success within their home school. Personnel costs total \$113,400 for the grant period. **Fringe:** Fringe benefits for full-time staff may include: Social Security (7.65%), Unemployment Insurance (1.85%), Worker's Compensation (3%), Health Insurance (15.5%), and Retirement (7%). However, some staff opt out of health/retirement benefits and, therefore, fringe benefits are calculated at 30% of salary. Part-time staff's (trainer) fringe benefits are calculated at 10% of the hourly pay. Fringe costs total \$31,140 for the grant period. **Travel:** To ensure equitable access to services, Youthworks will offer transportation to youth enrolled in the project and/or will travel to youth's home community/school. Given the geographic reach of the proposed project, Youthworks is requesting \$25,480 for travel during the grant period. Additionally, the Lead Trainer for the peer-to-peer mentor training will require hotel and per diem reimbursement for the four annual trainings that will be provided to CREA consortium school youth. Travel expenses include hotel costs for 16 nights (4 nights/training) and per diem reimbursement for 20 days (5 days/training), using federal reimbursement rates. Total travel expenses for the grant period are \$31,520. **Supplies:** Finally, the peer-to-peer training requires materials and supplies for successful implementation. An annual cost of \$1,970 is projected for these trainings or \$3,940 for the grant period.

Other Direct Costs		Total Grant Period		
		Grant Request	Match	Total
Type	Computation			
Total Other Direct Costs		\$0	\$0	\$0

Other Direct Costs Narrative:

Indirect Costs			Total Grant Period		
			Grant Request	Match	Total
Description	Base	Rate			
Total Indirect Costs			\$0	\$0	\$0

Indirect Cost Narrative:

Youthworks Subcontract Budget

Personnel		Total Grant Period		
Position	Annual Cost Calculation	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Lead Trainer for Peer-to-Peer Mentoring	\$40/hour X 1 staff X 45 hours/training and set up X 4 regional trainings	\$7,200	\$7,200	\$14,400
Regional Case Manager(s)	\$50,000 X .25 FTE	\$12,500	\$12,500	\$25,000
Regional Mentor(s)	\$37,000 X 1 FTE	\$37,000	\$37,000	\$74,000
Total Personnel Costs		\$56,700	\$56,700	\$113,400
Fringe Benefits		Total Grant Period		
Position	Annual Benefits	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Lead Trainer for Peer-to-Peer Mentoring	annual cost x 10% (part-time fringe calculation)	\$720	\$720	\$1,440
Regional Case Manager(s)	annual cost x 31% (full-time fringe calculation)	\$3,750	\$3,750	\$7,500
Regional Mentor(s)	annual cost x 31% (full-time fringe calculation)	\$11,100	\$11,100	\$22,200
Total Fringe Benefits		\$15,570	\$15,570	\$31,140
Travel		Total Grant Period		
Purpose	Expense Type (Hotel/Mileage/Per Diem)	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Mileage to/from regional school districts	50 miles/day X 260 days	\$9,100	\$9,100	\$18,200
Local mileage (Bismarck and Minot)	20 miles/day X 260 days	\$3,640	\$3,640	\$7,280
Hotels for Lead Trainer	\$110/night X 4 nights X 4 trainings	\$1,760	\$1,760	\$3,520
Per diem for Lead Trainer	\$63/day X 5 days X 4 trainings	\$1,260	\$1,260	\$2,520
Total Travel Costs		\$15,760	\$15,760	\$31,520
Supplies		Total Grant Period		
Item	Quantity	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Peer-to-Peer training supplies	Supplies can include print training materials, incentives, experiential activity supplies, supplemental learning materials, etc.	\$1,970	\$1,970	\$3,940
Total Supply Costs		\$1,970	\$1,970	\$3,940
TOTAL COST		\$90,000	\$90,000	\$180,000