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## **UConn faculty awarded \$2 million in federal funding to support comprehensive school wellness in Connecticut**

(Storrs, CT) UConn is one of 20 award recipients nationwide of a 5-year cooperative agreement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for a project to protect and improve the health and well-being of school-age children and adolescents. Led by Sandra Chafouleas and Marlene Schwartz with assistance from co-investigators Jessica Koslouski and Kathleen Williamson (PhD '17, MA '13), the team has received \$2 million to support their work with Connecticut schools and districts to implement the [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child \(WSCC\) model](#). The WSCC model recognizes that student health and well-being includes many dimensions – physical, emotional, social, and behavioral - and that health and academic achievement are closely connected. The goal of this project will be to help Connecticut school districts develop and implement coordinated and evidence-based school policies and practices to support all aspects of student health and well-being.

The UConn team will work with the State of Connecticut's Department of Education and Department of Health. The project also requires the team to closely partner with one school district, and East Hartford Public Schools was selected.

"We're very excited to partner with UConn's team on this project!" said Tracy Stefano, Supervisor of Health and Physical Education at East Hartford Public Schools. "This opportunity allows us to continue to build capacity and strengthen our systems, structures and policies to promote equity and improve the health and well-being of East Hartford's students, families and staff."

Chafouleas is a Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor in the [Neag School of Education's](#) Department of Educational Psychology at UConn and has expertise in integrated health and learning, school mental health, and behavior assessment. Schwartz is Professor in Human Development and Family Sciences and Director of the [UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health](#) and has expertise in assessing school wellness policies designed to support nutrition and physical activity.



The scholars were connected through networking activities organized by the [UConn Collaboratory on School and Child Health](#) (CSCH), which is part of the [Institute for Collaboration on Health, Intervention, and Policy \(InCHIP\)](#). InCHIP's mission is to bring together individuals with diverse expertise and support innovative interdisciplinary research that impacts public health and well-being.

“The interdisciplinary teams of CSCH and the Rudd Center enable us to bring many different kinds of expertise to the table to successfully lead this project,” says Chafouleas. Schwartz adds, “When Sandy and I met, we realized that we took a very similar approach in working with schools, but in different domains. The WSCC model allows us to combine our areas of expertise.”

Over the past 5 years Chafouleas and Schwartz have been collaborating closely on other WSCC-related projects with colleagues such as Koslouski and Williamson, both of whom are affiliates of CSCH, which Chafouleas co-directs. Koslouski has a background in special education and trauma-informed school practices, and Williamson has a background as a school psychologist and in the implementation of multi-tiered supports.

One product of this interdisciplinary collaboration is a comprehensive toolkit of measures and practical guidance for schools called [WSCC: Think About the Link](#). A main component of the toolkit is the [WellSAT WSCC](#), a school policy evaluation tool developed by CSCH and the Rudd Center. Another component is the [WSCC Blueprints](#) which guide schools through WSCC action planning, implementation, and evaluation.

As a first step in the project, the team has already planned a WSCC Academy, a one-day professional training for school wellness teams. Educators from across the state will learn how to utilize the WSCC Practice Blueprint to strengthen practices in their own schools in August.

“I’m very proud of the work we have been collectively doing at UConn to support the whole child, and I look forward to working with this team to collaborate with our state and district partners to provide these supports throughout Connecticut,” said Chafouleas.

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