

# COVID-19 RELIEF CASE STUDY

Mental Health/  
Social-Emotional Support

Grant Relief for PTAs





# NATIONAL PTA COVID-19 RELIEF SUMMARY

School communities faced an overwhelming level of need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this sustained moment of crisis, National PTA® was there—working for our nation’s students, families, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders. With funding from TikTok and other corporate partners, National PTA awarded \$1,385,000 in COVID-19 Relief Grants to local and regional PTAs across the country.

**\$1,385,000**

total dollars distributed to PTA communities nationwide

**538,000**

people impacted

## Distribution by Key Area



**22.4%**  
Food Security



**14.5%**  
Internet & Device Access

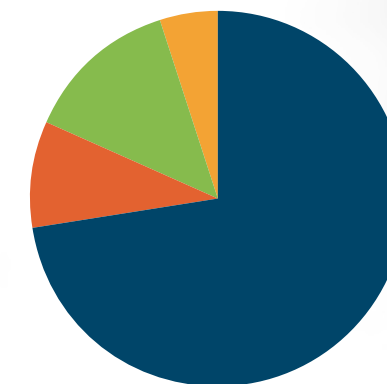


**19.2%**  
Distance Learning



**43.9%**  
Mental Health/Social-Emotional Support

## Distribution by School Level



**72.7%**  
Elementary

**13.4%**  
High

**9.1%**  
Middle

**4.8%**  
N/A (District/Council/  
Region or State PTA)



# DEEP DIVE

## Bonneville Elementary School: Orem, Utah

- 📍 Public Title I school
- 👥 500 students enrolled
- 🍽️ 45% of students receive free and reduced lunch

“Working on this grant has opened up valuable discussions between school administration, teachers and parents about the increased need to address the mental and emotional health of our students.”

– **PTA President Cami Heaton**

Young children often don’t know what to do with stress and other big emotions. In recent years, Bonneville Elementary School leaders had noticed a steady increase in mental and behavioral problems among their students, and a greater need to help them feel safe at school. Utah has one of the highest suicide rates in the nation, and 2017-2018 marked the state’s highest recorded rate of teen suicides—which drove the problem home even more.

“We know we need to address these concerns with children as early as possible, particularly those who lack resources to address them in any other way,” says Cami Heaton, president of Bonneville’s Parent Teacher Association® (PTA).

The COVID-19 pandemic added yet another layer of urgency. Students faced financial stress at home, the loss of loved ones, endless uncertainty—and zero control over any of it. Many struggled socially and academically as a result. PTA leaders anticipated these difficulties would only increase when in-person school resumed in fall 2020.

But they had an idea about how to help—and a \$5,000 COVID-19 Relief Grant from National PTA and TikTok to make it happen.





# THE PROBLEM

**In the past, Bonneville's administration tried to solve behavioral issues in a more traditional way. Students who were not following directions or were being disruptive would be sent to an empty cubicle that served as the behavioral intervention room.**

They would wait there while their parents were called. But the data was clear: These time-outs weren't working. What's more, it was clear that students were struggling with bigger issues of stress, anxiety, depression and even grief.

They added a school counselor and behavioral specialist to work alongside the school psychologist. The new Social Emotional Support Team took a more holistic approach to mental health and wellness.

"Being able to provide for students' well-being beyond their academic needs is an essential goal for Bonneville Elementary in educating and taking care of the whole child," attests Principal Jami Dawson.

The PTA agreed and was willing to dedicate the necessary resources to do it well.

Thank you Mrs.  
Carlson for Being the  
Wellness room Because  
it makes me  
not sad or  
unhappy it makes  
me calm and  
relaxed. from  
Ryleah  
to Mrs.  
Carlson.



# THE SOLUTION

“Having a Wellness Center will give these kids a safe place to go, to take a break and to learn skills that will help them be more functional and happier people.”

– **Laurel Keller, PTA VP of Leadership**

When they were awarded the COVID-19 Relief Grant in June 2020, the PTA was able to significantly invest in the school’s social and emotional programming. “This is what we’d been wanting to do, and it was just the perfect time to do it,” says Heaton.

First, the PTA paid for the school counselor and behavioral specialist to attend a training on promoting wellness through self-regulation. They brought back detailed materials on how to understand, identify and help children recognize and respond to stress. These evidence-based resources were shared with every teacher at Bonneville.

This training spring-boarded efforts to create a school Wellness Center. This would be a dedicated space for students and families to seek the social and emotional support they need, whether on their own or working with the support team.

The PTA and Social Emotional Support Team worked together throughout the summer to make sure it would be ready in time for the 2020-21 school year.

They transformed a former kindergarten classroom into an inviting, therapeutic space distinct from the academic setting. Only \$100 of the grant went to operating costs—the rest went straight to creating these much-needed resources for the Bonneville community.

A partition separates the Wellness Center into its two main functions:

- In the **Wellness Room**, students can take a break during the school day when they feel stressed or overwhelmed. It is a place to process and connect—and “turn their thinking brains back on,” as Heaton puts it.
- In the **Resource Room**, parents can find materials to help them manage mental health at home and in the community.





# MAKING ROOM FOR WELLNESS

“Using the Wellness Room, in the way intended, means children will no longer feel ashamed of needing to take a break to calm their minds.”

– **Michelle Porcelli, School Counselor**

With the National PTA grant funding, Bonneville PTA leaders helped furnish and decorate the space with comfortable seating, calm lighting and distanced workspaces. Behavioral Specialist Tavia Carlson purchased comforting sensory tools that could be easily sanitized to prevent the spread of coronavirus and other germs. For example, in place of traditional sand tables, sand and shaving cream are in zip-top bags that can be cleaned between uses.

As the new school year started, the PTA promoted the Wellness Center to students and families, even offering tours so they could see it firsthand. The message: This resource is for everyone. Everyone needs it at some point, some more than others. And it’s okay to take care of your mental health.





# HOW IT WORKS

“That room was the best and so calming! I didn’t think it would help, but it did!”

– **Fourth-grade student**

**Sometimes students can’t make it to the Wellness Room or just need a little bit of help. With leftover grant funds, Bonneville’s school counselor purchased a “cool-down kit” for each classroom. The kits include guided mindfulness exercises and sensory manipulatives such as putty, snap toys and stretch strings to help calm anxious students.**

The Wellness Room is available to any Bonneville student at any time during the school day. The room can accommodate up to six students at once. It is also entirely optional—students are never sent there against their will.

Students ask their teacher for a pass to visit the Wellness Room. Upon checking in and out, they tell the teacher monitoring the room how they’re feeling. Once inside, students can use any of the sensory tools to quietly calm down and focus on themselves.

A 10-minute timer tells students when their time is up, though they can leave sooner if they feel ready. They are still responsible for their schoolwork—and when they return to class, they’re usually prepared to do even better.





# A MODEL FOR OTHERS

Bonneville's Wellness Center is the first of its kind in the Alpine School District, and word has quickly spread. Other PTA leaders have come to see the space for themselves and take the research-based ideas back to their own schools. Utah's teen suicide rate has slowly declined since 2018, likely due to interventions such as these.

"This would have been a pipe dream, had [National PTA and TikTok] not been able to give us that start," shares Heaton. "We look forward to the Wellness Room being a part of our school for many years to come and hope the ongoing partnership with the PTA will improve its accessibility to families."

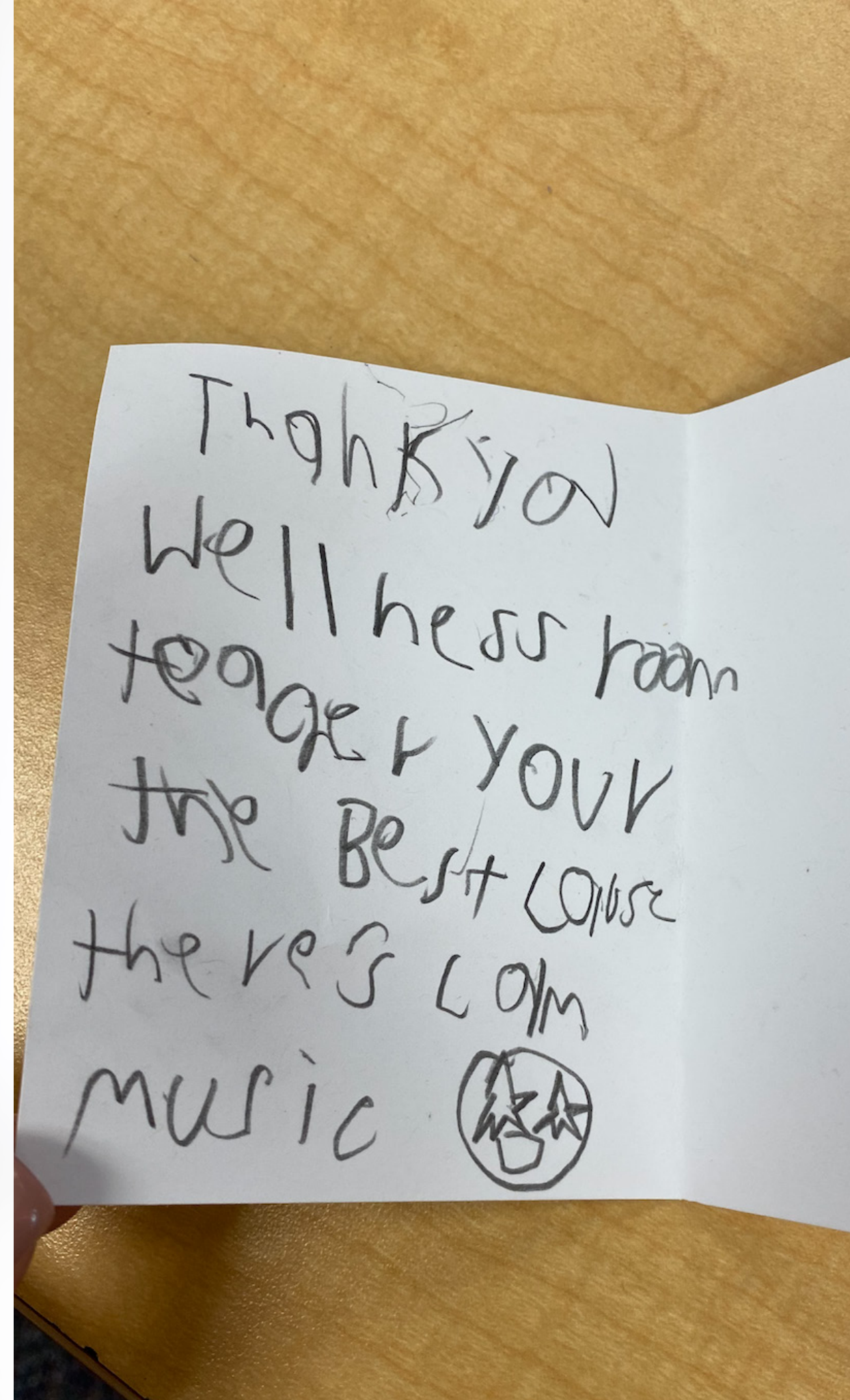
The Wellness Room is in regular use, with positive feedback from students and parents alike. These young children now have a special place to practice emotional regulation and manage the stress that comes with living through a public health crisis, or whatever life might throw their way.

These healthy habits will build resiliency and serve them for a lifetime—and it was made possible by the COVID-19 Relief Grant from National PTA and TikTok.

"It was always a bright spot, hearing these impact stories and talking with National PTA about the great work they were doing ... It brought home that TikTok was really helping our neighbors, our friends, our colleagues, the people we see at religious services and sports, and so on."

– **Eric Ebenstein, Director of Public Policy, TikTok**

If you or someone you know is experiencing suicidal thoughts, please call the **free National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255)**.





Learn more about the power  
of the PTA at **PTA.org**.



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