



STATE OF VERMONT
JOINT FISCAL OFFICE

MEMORANDUM

To: Joint Fiscal Committee members
From: Sorsha Anderson, Senior Staff Associate
Date: November 23, 2022
Subject: Grant Request – JFO #3134

Enclosed please find one (1) item, which the Joint Fiscal Office has received from the Administration.

JFO #3134: \$4,833,025.00 to the Vermont Agency of Education from the U.S. Department of Education. The Stronger Connections Grant Program is a grant component of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. A minimum of 95% of funds are to be focused on high-need Local Education Agencies, as defined by the State of Vermont. This is a four-year grant program through September 30, 2025. FY23 distribution is \$1,228,394.00.

[Received November 14, 2022]

Please review the enclosed materials and notify the Joint Fiscal Office (Sorsha Anderson: sanderson@leg.state.vt.us) if you have questions or would like this item held for legislative review. Unless we hear from you to the contrary by December 9, 2022, we will assume that you agree to consider as final the Governor's acceptance of this request.



State of Vermont
 Department of Finance & Management
 109 State Street, Pavilion Building
 Montpelier, VT 05620-0401

[phone] 802-828-2376
 [fax] 802-828-2428

Agency of Administration

**STATE OF VERMONT
 FINANCE & MANAGEMENT GRANT REVIEW FORM**

Grant Summary:		The Stronger Connections Grant Program (SCG) is a formula grant component of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. A minimum of 95% of funds will be designated for competitive sub-grants to LEAs, 1% will be used for administration, and up to 4% may be used for state level activities via contracts. No new positions are anticipated, the agency does expect to award several personal services contracts.			
Date:		10/31/2022			
Department:		Agency of Education			
Legal Title of Grant:		Stronger Connections Grant Program (SCG)			
Federal Catalog #:		84.424F			
Grant/Donor Name and Address:		US Department of Education, Washington, DC 20202			
Grant Period:		From:	To:		
		9/15/2022	9/30/2026		
Grant/Donation		\$4,833,025			
	SFY 1	SFY 2	SFY 3	Total	Comments
Grant Amount:	\$1,228,394	\$2,376,237	\$1,228,394	\$4,833,025	
Position Information:		# Positions	Explanation/Comments		
		0			
Additional Comments:		DFM made manual correction to AA-1 (Appropriation DeptID) following confirmation with agency. 9/30/26 end date is inclusive of the 12-month Tydings period.			
Department of Finance & Management		Adam Greshin	Digitally signed by Adam Greshin Date: 2022.10.31 15:05:11 DocuSigned by: (Initial)		
Secretary of Administration		Douglas Farquhar (Initial)			
Sent To Joint Fiscal Office					Date



STATE OF VERMONT REQUEST FOR GRANT (*) ACCEPTANCE (Form AA-1)

BASIC GRANT INFORMATION					
1. Agency:		Education			
2. Department:		Federal & Education Support Programs			
3. Program:		Consolidated Federal Programs			
4. Legal Title of Grant:		Stronger Connections Grant Program (SCG)			
5. Federal Catalog #:		84.424F			
6. Grant/Donor Name and Address: US Department of Education, Washington, DC 20202					
7. Grant Period:		From: 9/15/2022	To: 9/30/2026		
8. Purpose of Grant: The SCG is part of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act passed by Congress and signed into law by Pres. Biden on 6/25/22 as the first step toward reducing the risk of gun violence in US schools and communities. It includes several components including the Stronger Connections Grant Program (SCG). A minimum of 95% of the SCG funds are to be used for a competitive grant program intended to be focused on high-need LEAs (as defined by each state). The SEA may reserve 1% for administration and up to 4% for state level activities in support of the purposes of the grant. Allowable uses include: provision of additional mental health services and supports, including educator supports; teacher training; social-emotional-behavioral learning and community engagement activities; enhancements to physical safety of facilities; and other uses that support improved school climate and reduce the risk to students of self-inflicted harm (e.g., suicide, drug use, etc.) and other forms of harm that detract from learning (e.g. bullying, harrassment, behavioral disruptions, and physical violence). Beneficiaries include students, educators, and school communities. These funds have a long period of performance (4 years - through 9/30/25 plus the Tydings period) which enhances their ability to be used strategically by LEAs.					
9. Impact on existing program if grant is not Accepted: While the allowable uses of these funds overlap with those of several existing federal (e.g., Title IVA, ESSER) and state (e.g., Act 112) grant programs, they are not the same. Furthermore, because of both the dollar amount and lengthy period of performance, these funds extend the ability of high-need LEAs to engage in strategic planning to develop sustainable systems of support for students that reduce the risk of gun and other forms of violence in schools and communities.					
10. BUDGET INFORMATION					
	SFY 1 FY 23	SFY 2 FY 24	SFY 3 FY 25	Comments	
Expenditures:				no new AOE positions envisioned but expect to award several PS contracts	
Personal Services	\$79,550	\$79,550	\$79,550		
Operating Expenses	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000		
Grants	\$1,147,844	\$2,295,687	\$1,147,844		
Total	\$1,228,394	\$2,376,237	\$1,228,394		
Revenues:					
State Funds:	\$	\$	\$		
Cash	\$	\$	\$		

STATE OF VERMONT REQUEST FOR GRANT (*) ACCEPTANCE (Form AA-1)

In-Kind	\$	\$	\$	
Federal Funds:	\$	\$	\$	
(Direct Costs)	\$1,218,284	\$2,366,127	\$1,218,284	
(Statewide Indirect)	\$	\$	\$	
(Departmental Indirect)	\$10,110	\$10,110	\$10,110	14% indirect rate, taken over course of 3 years, not per year
Other Funds:	\$	\$	\$	
Grant (source)	\$	\$	\$	
Total	\$1,228,394	\$2,376,237	\$1,228,394	

Appropriation No:	5100070000	Amount:	\$1,228,394
			\$
			\$
			\$
			\$
			\$
			\$
		Total	\$

PERSONAL SERVICE INFORMATION

11. Will monies from this grant be used to fund one or more Personal Service Contracts? Yes No
 If "Yes", appointing authority must initial here to indicate intent to follow current competitive bidding process/policy.
 Appointing Authority Name: _____ Agreed by: DF (initial)

12. Limited Service Position Information:	# Positions	Title
Total Positions		

12a. Equipment and space for these positions: Is presently available. Can be obtained with available funds.

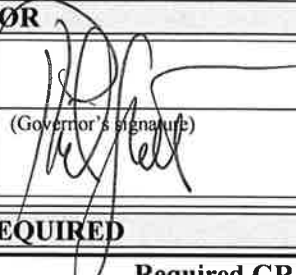
13. AUTHORIZATION AGENCY/DEPARTMENT

I/we certify that no funds beyond basic application preparation and filing costs have been expended or committed in anticipation of Joint Fiscal Committee approval of this grant, unless previous notification was made on Form AA-1PN (if applicable):

Signature: <u>Sean Cousins</u> <small>DocuSigned by: 72E671A5C78C467</small>	Date: <u>10/28/2022</u>
Title: Deputy <u>CEO</u> , Agency of Education	
Signature: <u>Daniel French</u> <small>DocuSigned by: 7D9C2D7960AD43B...</small>	Date: <u>10/28/2022</u>
Title: Secretary, Agency of Education	

14. SECRETARY OF ADMINISTRATION

STATE OF VERMONT REQUEST FOR GRANT (*) ACCEPTANCE (Form AA-1)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Approved:	(Secretary or designee signature) <i>Douglas Farnham</i> <small>4194881C0A36415</small>	Date: 11/1/2022
15. ACTION BY GOVERNOR			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Check One Box: Accepted		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rejected		Date: 11/10/22
16. DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED			
Required GRANT Documentation			
<input type="checkbox"/> Request Memo <input type="checkbox"/> Dept. project approval (if applicable) <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Award <input type="checkbox"/> Grant Agreement <input type="checkbox"/> Grant Budget	<input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Donation (if any) <input type="checkbox"/> Grant (Project) Timeline (if applicable) <input type="checkbox"/> Request for Extension (if applicable) <input type="checkbox"/> Form AA-1PN attached (if applicable)		
End Form AA-1			
(*) The term "grant" refers to any grant, gift, loan, or any sum of money or thing of value to be accepted by any agency, department, commission, board, or other part of state government (see 32 V.S.A. §5).			

S424F220047
Katy Preston
Vermont State Agency of Education
1 National Life Drive, Davis 5
Montpelier, VT 05620

S424F220047

Daniel French
Vermont State Agency of Education
1 National Life Drive, Davis 5
Montpelier, VT 05620 - 2501



**US Department of Education
Washington, D.C. 20202**

GRANT AWARD NOTIFICATION

10

PR/AWARD NUMBER: S424F220047
RECIPIENT NAME: Vermont State Agency of Education

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- (1) THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CONTACT PERSON FOR THIS PROJECT IS CHANGED TO THE PERSON NAMED IN BLOCK 3.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James F. Lane".

James F Lane
Acting Assistant Secretary

09/20/2022

AUTHORIZING OFFICIAL

DATE

EXPLANATION OF BLOCKS ON THE GRANT AWARD NOTIFICATION

For Discretionary, Formula and Block Grants (See Block 2 of the Notification)

- 1. RECIPIENT NAME** - The legal name of the recipient or name of the primary organizational unit that was identified in the application, state plan or other documents required to be submitted for funding by the grant program.
- 2. AWARD INFORMATION** - Unique items of information that identify this notification.
 - PR/AWARD NUMBER** - A unique, identifying number assigned by the Department to each application. On funded applications, this is commonly known as the "grant number" or "document number." The PR/Award Number is also known as the Federal Award Identifying Number, or FAIN.
 - ACTION NUMBER** - A numeral that represents the cumulative number of steps taken by the Department to date to establish or modify the award through fiscal or administrative means. Action number "01" will always be "NEW AWARD"
 - ACTION TYPE** - The nature of this notification (e.g., NEW AWARD, CONTINUATION, REVISION, ADMINISTRATIVE)
 - AWARD TYPE** - The particular assistance category in which funding for this award is provided, i.e., DISCRETIONARY, FORMULA, or BLOCK. If this award was made under a Research and Development grant program, the terms RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT will appear under DISCRETIONARY, FORMULA OR BLOCK.
- 3. PROJECT STAFF** - This block contains the names and telephone numbers of the U.S. Department of Education and recipient staff who are responsible for project direction and oversight.
 - *RECIPIENT PROJECT DIRECTOR** - The recipient staff person responsible for administering the project. This person represents the recipient to the U.S. Department of Education.
 - EDUCATION PROGRAM CONTACT** - The U.S. Department of Education staff person responsible for the programmatic, administrative and businessmanagement concerns of the Department.
 - EDUCATION PAYMENT CONTACT** - The U.S. Department of Education staff person responsible for payments or questions concerning electronic drawdown and financial expenditure reporting.
- 4. PROJECT TITLE AND CFDA NUMBER** - Identifies the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) subprogram title and the associated subprogram number.
- 5.* KEY PERSONNEL** - Name, title and percentage (%) of effort the key personnel identified devotes to the project.
- 6. AWARD PERIODS** - Project activities and funding are approved with respect to three different time periods, described below:
 - BUDGET PERIOD** - A specific interval of time for which Federal funds are being provided from a particular fiscal year to fund a recipient's approved activities and budget. The start and end dates of the budget period are shown.
 - PERFORMANCE PERIOD** - The complete length of time the recipient is proposed to be funded to complete approved activities. A performance period may contain one or more budget periods.
 - *FUTURE BUDGET PERIODS** - The estimated remaining budget periods for multi-year projects and estimated funds the Department proposes it will award the recipient provided substantial progress is made by the recipient in completing approved activities, the Department determines that continuing the project would be in the best interest of the Government, Congress appropriates sufficient funds under the program, and the recipient has submitted a performance report that provides the most current performance information and the status of budget expenditures.
- 7. AUTHORIZED FUNDING** - The dollar figures in this block refer to the Federal funds provided to a recipient during the award periods.
 - *THIS ACTION** - The amount of funds obligated (added) or de-obligated (subtracted) by this notification.
 - *BUDGET PERIOD** - The total amount of funds available for use by the grantee during the stated budget period to this date.
 - *PERFORMANCE PERIOD** - The amount of funds obligated from the start date of the first budget period to this date.
 - RECIPIENT COST SHARE** - The funds, expressed as a percentage, that the recipient is required to contribute to the project, as defined by the program legislation or regulations and/or terms and conditions of the award.
 - RECIPIENT NON-FEDERAL AMOUNT** - The amount of non-federal funds the recipient must contribute to the project as identified in the recipient's application. When non-federal funds are identified by the recipient where a cost share is not a legislation requirement, the recipient will be required to provide the non-federal funds.
- 8. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION** - This information is provided to assist the recipient in completing the approved activities and managing the project in accordance with U.S. Department of Education procedures and regulations.

UEI/SSN - The UEI, issued in SAM.gov, is a unique 12 character organization identifier assigned to each recipient for payment purposes. The SSN, issued by the Social Security Administration to individuals, is a nine character identifier for individuals. The Department assigns the SSN as an identifier to individuals who are recipients of Federal financial assistance for payment purposes.

***REGULATIONS** - Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations(CFR), Part 200 as adopted at 2 CFR 3474; the applicable parts of the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR), specific program regulations (if any), and other titles of the CFR that govern the award and administration of this grant.

***ATTACHMENTS** - Additional sections of the Grant Award Notification that discuss payment and reporting requirements, explain Department procedures, and add special terms and conditions in addition to those established, and shown as clauses, in Block 10 of the award. Any attachments provided with a notification continue in effect through the project period until modified or rescinded by the Authorizing Official.

9. LEGISLATIVE AND FISCAL DATA - The name of the authorizing legislation for this grant, the CFDA title of the program through which funding is provided, and U.S. Department of Education fiscal information.

FUND CODE, FUNDING YEAR, AWARD YEAR, ORG.CODE, PROJECT CODE, OBJECT CLASS -

The fiscal information recorded by the U.S. Department of Education's Grants Management System (G5) to track obligations by award.

AMOUNT - The amount of funds provided from a particular appropriation and project code. Some notifications authorize more than one amount from separate appropriations and/or project codes. The total of all amounts in this block equals the amount shown on the line, "THIS ACTION" (See "AUTHORIZED FUNDING" above (Block 7)).

10. TERMS AND CONDITIONS - Requirements of the award that are binding on the recipient.

***PARTICIPANT NUMBER** - The number of eligible participants the grantee is required to serve during the budget year.

***GRANTEE NAME** - The entity name and address registered in the System for Award Management (SAM). This name and address is tied to the UEI registered in SAM under the name and address appearing in this field. This name, address and the associated UEI is what is displayed in the SAM Public Search.

***PROGRAM INDIRECT COST TYPE** - The type of indirect cost permitted under the program (i.e. Restricted, Unrestricted, or Training).

***PROJECT INDIRECT COST RATE** - The indirect cost rate applicable to this grant.

***AUTHORIZING OFFICIAL** - The U.S. Department of Education official authorized to award Federal funds to the recipient, establish or change the terms and conditions of the award, and authorize modifications to the award

FOR FORMULA AND BLOCK GRANTS ONLY:

(See also Blocks 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9 and 10 above)

3. PROJECT STAFF - The U.S. Department of Education staff persons to be contacted for programmatic and payment questions.

7. AUTHORIZED FUNDING

CURRENT AWARD AMOUNT - The amount of funds that are obligated (added) or de-obligated (subtracted) by this action.

PREVIOUS CUMULATIVE AMOUNT - The total amount of funds awarded under the grant before this action.

CUMULATIVE AMOUNT - The total amount of funds awarded under the grant, this action included.

* This item differs or does not appear on formula and block grants.

**FY 2022 Stronger Connections Grant Program (SCG), ALN 84.424F
Table of Grant Awards**

State	FY 2022 Award
ALABAMA	\$15,404,231
ALASKA	\$4,833,025
ARIZONA	\$20,826,927
ARKANSAS	\$9,378,149
CALIFORNIA	\$119,828,943
COLORADO	\$9,356,572
CONNECTICUT	\$9,119,532
DELAWARE	\$4,833,025
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	\$4,833,025
FLORIDA	\$53,737,824
GEORGIA	\$33,444,267
HAWAII	\$4,833,025
IDAHO	\$4,833,025
ILLINOIS	\$40,627,885
INDIANA	\$14,216,829
IOWA	\$5,988,079
KANSAS	\$6,450,520
KENTUCKY	\$15,008,023
LOUISIANA	\$21,279,385
MAINE	\$4,833,025
MARYLAND	\$16,990,815
MASSACHUSETTS	\$15,074,006
MICHIGAN	\$27,899,224
MINNESOTA	\$10,481,264
MISSISSIPPI	\$13,144,640
MISSOURI	\$15,082,238
MONTANA	\$4,833,025
NEBRASKA	\$4,833,025
NEVADA	\$8,866,003
NEW HAMPSHIRE	\$4,833,025
NEW JERSEY	\$20,905,551
NEW MEXICO	\$7,684,976
NEW YORK	\$72,522,705
NORTH CAROLINA	\$29,367,638
NORTH DAKOTA	\$4,833,025
OHIO	\$35,078,494
OKLAHOMA	\$11,776,526
OREGON	\$8,265,004

PENNSYLVANIA	\$41,754,741
PUERTO RICO	\$4,833,025
RHODE ISLAND	\$4,833,025
SOUTH CAROLINA	\$15,353,308
SOUTH DAKOTA	\$4,833,025
TENNESSEE	\$18,804,143
TEXAS	\$93,985,252
UTAH	\$5,100,063
VERMONT	\$4,833,025
VIRGINIA	\$17,246,895
WASHINGTON	\$15,795,771
WEST VIRGINIA	\$5,753,732
WISCONSIN	\$12,509,470
WYOMING	\$4,833,025
AMERICAN SAMOA	\$1,552,350
GUAM	\$1,681,978
NORTHERN MARIANAS	\$938,320
US VIRGIN ISLANDS	\$809,852
Total	\$971,587,500



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

September 15, 2022

Dear Chief State School Officer:

On June 25, 2022, President Biden signed into law the *Bipartisan Safer Communities Act* (BSCA), an important first step toward reducing the risk of gun violence in our schools and communities. Through this legislation, Congress authorized \$1 billion in formula funding under Title IV, Part A of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA) to State educational agencies (SEAs) to provide students with safer and healthier learning environments. Under the BSCA, SEAs must award these funds competitively to high-need local educational agencies (LEAs) to fund activities allowable under section 4108 of the ESEA. The U.S. Department of Education (Department) is pleased to announce your State's allocation of these funds under the BSCA **Stronger Connections grant program** (see enclosure). The Department's approach is intended to ensure transparency and successful implementation, while also providing access to these funds as soon as possible to support the ongoing needs of students, educators, families, and communities.

Research consistently shows that safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments are associated with improved academic achievement and emotional well-being of students, as well as with reductions in disciplinary actions.¹ Accordingly, students who experience a sense of belonging in school are also more likely to exhibit positive behaviors.² This includes learning environments that provide culturally and linguistically responsive practices where students are surrounded by adults they can trust and who are committed to building strong relationships.³ Environments like these also help build connections that make students less likely to bring weapons to school and more likely to report the presence of weapons in school.⁴ Beyond the benefit to the individual student, safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments benefit their fellow students, educators, and the community at large.

Nurturing learning environments can also help students overcome challenging and traumatic experiences and provide a sense of emotional and physical safety. When young people feel connected to school and to school staff, they are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, be absent from school, or experience emotional distress and are more likely to earn higher grades. Recent research has also begun to identify specific strategies, such as those that teach pro-social behaviors, that can improve school performance and reduce violence in the community at large.⁵

Therefore, to maximize the positive and lasting impact of these funds, the Department is encouraging States to prioritize funds for LEA applicants that demonstrate a strong commitment to the following:

1. Implementing comprehensive, evidence-based strategies that meet each student’s social, emotional, physical, and mental well-being needs; create positive, inclusive, and supportive school environments; and increase access to place-based interventions and services.

There is a compelling body of research on the practices that are most likely to make for safer and more supportive learning environments, as well as those that can undermine this objective and positive outcomes for students. The ESEA emphasizes the use of evidence-based approaches, including in activities to support safe and healthy students in ESEA section 4108, under which your State is receiving these additional funds. In identifying appropriate evidence-based strategies to promote a positive school climate and student and educator well-being, the Department urges States and LEAs to rely on the strongest types of evidence—*i.e.*, “strong” (Tier 1) and “moderate” (Tier 2) evidence under the ESEA and the Education Department General Administrative Regulations.⁶ Such evidence is backed by rigorous, well-designed, and well-implemented studies with positive results (and without strong negative results) based on a robust sample size that matches the local context.

The Department’s What Works Clearinghouse reviews high-quality research that can help in selecting evidence-based strategies, including Tier 1 and Tier 2 evidence. In addition, evidence-based strategies can be found in the Best Practices Clearinghouse and through the Department’s technical assistance centers. The Department also urges schools to continuously evaluate interventions, strategies, and practices so that they can ensure efforts are leading to improvement and success. Schools should use high-quality measures of student engagement, school climate, and school safety to monitor the outcomes associated with their efforts and make any necessary adjustments to implementation. For example, research on child and adolescent development has established that while adverse experiences (particularly in early childhood) can have profound effects on students, learning environments and conditions can be designed in culturally competent and responsive ways that can help students overcome these effects and thrive.⁷

2. Engaging students, families, educators, staff, and community organizations in the selection and implementation of strategies and interventions to create safe, inclusive and supportive learning environments.

Family engagement is a strong predictor of both elementary and secondary students’ school success and is linked to beneficial outcomes for students, educators, and families alike.⁸ When schools welcome and partner with families in ways that respect their cultures, assets, aspirations, and needs, it has the potential to strengthen the entire community. It is essential that LEA leaders and educators consistently engage parents, families, and community partners, paying close attention to communities that face systemic barriers. Experts suggest that family engagement is most effective when it brings a diverse group of families, educators, and community members together to co-create policies, practices, and strategies that achieve mutually agreed upon school climate outcomes for students, schools, and communities.⁹ These efforts can also extend to parent representatives, nonfamilial caregivers, individuals, and organizations that represent the interests of students and parents with disabilities or who are English learners.

To support strong engagement, schools should implement strategies for all voices to be heard—and families and communities should know how their feedback was incorporated into final decisions to build and sustain trust. This engagement should begin early in the decision-making process and be ongoing and collaborative. This type of engagement should help facilitate selections of strategies based on a community’s values and designed for systemic change that can build long-term buy-in and capacity at the local level.

3. Designing and implementing policies and practices that advance equity and are responsive to underserved students, protect student rights, and demonstrate respect for student dignity and potential.

All students deserve to experience trust and belonging in a safe, inclusive, and supportive school environment. Therefore, the Department strongly encourages States and LEAs to use these funds to design and implement student-centered policies and practices that increase student belonging and provide safe, nurturing, and welcoming environments. While limited infrastructure improvements (e.g., the repair of locks and building entry improvement) are permissible under ESEA section 4108, it is important to note that there is some research that shows that visible security measures alone – and without efforts to promote student learning, growth and positive learning environments – may have detrimental effects, and some of these measures are unlikely to reduce or eliminate serious incidents.¹⁰ For this reason, the Department encourages States and LEAs to increase investments in professional development, comprehensive emergency management planning, behavioral and trauma- or grief-informed mental health supports for students (including addressing hate, bullying, and harassment), and other best practices that increase students’ safety, belonging, and mental health and well-being.

Further, in designing and implementing measures funded by this program, States and LEAs should consider the proposed uses and foreseeable effects of any measures in light of their legal obligations not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, or disability. The Department’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) provides resources that may be helpful in addressing this concern.

More specifically, States and LEAs should recognize that students and families may experience school safety and discipline policies in different ways. For example, research demonstrates that students of color who need mental health supports have been more likely to be met with discipline rather than the appropriate identification, treatment, and supports they need.¹¹ The data show that exclusionary discipline practices can have a disproportionate impact on students of color who are frequently disciplined more harshly than their white peers, especially for minor and more subjective offenses (e.g., willful defiance).¹² Research also suggests that these disparities can be exacerbated by subjective evaluations of students’ actions rather than being the product of objective differences in student behavior.¹³ These disparities in the application of discipline policies have also been reported by and among students with disabilities, English learners, and LGBTQI+ students.¹⁴

The Department encourages States and LEAs to select developmentally and culturally appropriate and trauma-informed emergency training, security measures, and other schoolwide policies. These could include implementing effective approaches to engaging and supporting

students, providing professional development opportunities that build equitable and emotionally and physically safe learning environments for students and educators, developing and implementing inclusive and culturally and linguistically affirming discipline practices, addressing the root causes of any disparities in discipline, and implementing positive behavioral interventions and supports.

Finally, as States consider establishing **criteria for high-need LEAs** consistent with Congressional intent, the Department encourages States to consider a focus on LEAs with high rates of poverty and with one or more of the following characteristics: (1) a high student-to-mental health professional ratio; (2) high rates of chronic absenteeism, exclusionary discipline, referrals to the juvenile justice system, bullying/harassment, community and school violence, or substance abuse; or (3) where students recently experienced a natural disaster or traumatic event. The Department encourages a measurement of poverty that considers LEAs with high numbers of students living in poverty, as well as LEAs with high percentages of students living in poverty (e.g., at least 40 percent). Such a consideration allow for a more accurate reflection of the concentrations of poverty.

The Department is committed to providing technical assistance to States and LEAs to use these funds in evidence-based ways that build the trusting and inclusive learning environments we all want for all students. We know that States and LEAs are managing multiple demands as we enter the school year, and we will remain available to you to provide technical assistance and share resources that are responsive to the needs of States and LEAs for the effective administering of this funding. The Department also intends to issue answers to BSCA Stronger Connections Grant Frequently Asked Questions in the coming months as part of our efforts to support successful implementation of the program.

Your State may begin to draw down its Stronger Connections allocation, consistent with the requirements of your Grant Award Notification that includes assurances related to statutory uses of funds, accountability, reporting, and equitable services. These assurances support a streamlined award process aimed at providing States with funding as efficiently as possible. If you or your staff have questions, please contact your State's Title IV, Part A program officer.

Thank you for your commitment to supporting all students' safety, well-being, and success.

Sincerely,



Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.
U.S. Secretary of Education

Enclosure

¹ Wang, M. T., & Degol, J. L. (2016). School climate: A review of the construct, measurement, and impact on student outcomes. *Educational psychology review*, 28(2), 315-352.

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- ² Allen, K., Kern, M.L., Vella-Brodrick, D. et al. What Schools Need to Know About Fostering School Belonging: a Meta-analysis. *Educ Psychol Rev* 30, 1–34 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9389-3>
- ³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2009). School connectedness: Strategies for increasing protective factors among youth.
- ⁴ Connell, N. M., Barbieri, N., & Reingle Gonzalez, J. M. (2015). Understanding school effects on students' willingness to report peer weapon carrying. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 13(3), 258-269; Watkins, A. M. (2008). Effects of community, school, and student factors on school-based weapon carrying. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 6(4), 386-409.
- ⁵ Valiente, C., Lemery-Chalfant, K., Swanson, J., & Reiser, M. (2008). Prediction of children's academic competence from their effortful control, relationships, and classroom participation. *Journal of educational psychology*, 100(1), 67; Harms, W. (2012). Study: Chicago counseling program reduces youth violence, improves school engagement. *UChicago News*.
- ⁶ Sec. 8101(21)(A)(i)(I)-(II) and 34 C.F.R 77.1(c).
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GAN ASSURANCES – STRONGER CONNECTIONS GRANT

By drawing down funds awarded under this Grant Award Notification, the State educational agency (SEA) assures the following:

1. The SEA will award no less than 95 percent of its SCG grant allocation on a competitive basis to high-need local educational agencies (LEAs) as determined by the State.
2. The SEA will reserve no more than 1% of its SCG grant allocation for administration and will use any remaining funds not awarded to LEAs for State-level activities to support section 4108 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA).
3. The SEA will ensure that LEAs use SCG funds for activities allowable under section 4108 of the ESEA.
4. The SEA will ensure that LEAs do not use funds for the provision to any person of a dangerous weapon¹ or training in the use of a dangerous weapon as prohibited under Section 13401 of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which amends section 8526 of the ESEA.
5. The SEA will ensure that LEAs receiving SCG funds provide equitable services to students and teachers in non-public schools as required under section 8501 of the ESEA.
 - The SEA will ensure that a public agency maintains control of funds for the services and assistance provided to a non-public school with SCG funds.
 - The SEA will ensure that a public agency has title to materials, equipment, and property purchased with SCG funds.
 - The SEA will ensure that services to a non-public school with SCG funds are provided by a public agency directly, or through contract with, another public or private entity.
 - The SEA will ensure that equitable services provided with SCG funds are secular, neutral, and nonideological.
6. The SEA will ensure that LEAs receiving SCG funds follow the supplement not supplant requirements in section 4110 of the ESEA.
7. The SEA will track the SCG funds separately from its regular allocation under Title IV, Part A of the ESEA and will ensure that its LEAs will also do so.

¹ A “dangerous weapon” is defined in section 930(g)(2) of title 18, United States Code as a weapon, device, instrument, material, or substance, animate or inanimate, that is used for, or is readily capable of, causing death or serious bodily injury, except that such term does not include a pocketknife with a blade of less than 2 1/2 inches in length.

8. The SEA will submit to the Department, no later than 90 days after the SEA receives its award, the following information:

- The SEA's definition of "high-need LEA" for purposes of the SCG program. The SEA has the authority to define "high-need LEA" and may define the term, for example, as an LEA with a high rate of poverty and with one or more of the following characteristics: high student-to-mental health professional ratio; high rates of chronic absenteeism, exclusionary discipline, referrals to the juvenile justice system, bullying/harassment, community and school violence, or substance abuse; or has experienced a natural disaster or traumatic event.
- Whether the SEA provided the public with notice and a reasonable opportunity to comment and provide input on its definition of "high-need LEA" and a description of any such notice and opportunity.
- Whether the SEA prioritized the use of SCG funds by LEAs in the SEA's competitive subgrant process and a description of any such priorities.
- Whether the SEA specifically prohibited one or more of the allowable uses of SCG funds by LEAs in the SEA's competitive subgrant process in addition to any statutory prohibitions and a description of any such prohibitions.
- Whether the SEA provided the public with notice and a reasonable opportunity to comment and provide input on the design of its competitive subgrant process and a description of any such notice and opportunity.
- Whether the SEA will require LEAs to describe in their application how they have engaged or plan to engage with families, educators, and the local community in determining how these funds will be used.

If the SEA is unable to respond in full to the information requested above by the reporting deadline, the SEA will provide, by that deadline, an update on its status related to these items.

9. The SEA will submit such other information to the Department as the Secretary may later require, such as:

- The identification of the LEAs awarded SCG funds.
- How the SEA and its LEAs are using SCG funds.
- Whether the SEA will evaluate the effectiveness of the SCG program, including the effectiveness of LEA use of SCG funds and, if so, how it will do so.

10. The SEA will ensure that any LEAs that receive SCG funds will participate, as requested, in any Department evaluation of the SCG program and will cooperate with any audit or examination of records with respect to such funds.

OMB Number: 1810-0770

Expiration Date: March 31, 2023

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