Stronger Connections Grant

Ohio Department of Education

January 5, 2023

Summary:

The Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) was authorized under the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA), Public Law 117-159, passed on June 25, 2022. The Ohio Department of Education (the Department) received an SCG award of $35,078,494 on September 15, 2022. The SCG is a supplement to the Title IV, Part A, Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) program. The purpose of the SCG is to provide students with safer and healthier learning environments. The SCG must be awarded competitively to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) that the Department defines as "High-Need" for school health and safety. The Department acknowledges that all LEAs have a high need for school health and safety resources, while some LEAs will have a higher or highest need. The Department will make a competitive grant application available to Local Education Agencies in Ohio in early 2023. Eligible LEAs that apply will receive a tiered award based on school health and safety factors recommended by the US Department of Education, including poverty, high numbers of chronically absent students, high rates of exclusionary discipline, as well as health and safety data from the Stronger Connections Grant application.

Application Process:

The Department will make a competitive grant application available to Local Education Agencies in Ohio within the Department's Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plan (CCIP) e-grants system. The Department will provide a base award to all quality applicants using poverty data. The Department will also provide an amount to higher need LEAs that have high rates of chronic absenteeism and exclusionary discipline. Finally, the Department will provide an additional amount to the LEAs that demonstrate the highest need in their Stronger Connections Grant application. The chart below shows the tiers of funding that an LEA may receive under the Stronger Connections Grant:

Priority Tier:	LEA Recipients:	Description:
1. High Need	All LEAs that apply and indicate high health and safety needs.	The Department will use Title IV, Part A poverty data to ensure that LEAs that apply receive a proportional base amount of funds based on the rate of poverty in the LEA.
2. Higher Need	LEAs with high rates of exclusionary discipline and chronic absenteeism.	The Department will use chronic absenteeism and exclusionary discipline data reported by the LEA in the Electronic Management Information System (EMIS). LEAs with high rates of chronic absenteeism and exclusionary discipline will receive additional funds.
3. Highest Need	LEAs that demonstrate an exceptional need on the SCG application.	LEAs that complete the SCG application and indicate the highest need and commitment to evidence-based health and safety approaches will receive additional funds.

Allowable Activities:

The Stronger Connections Grant is a supplement to the Title IV, Part A, Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) program. Local Education Agencies may use Stronger Connections Grant funds for the following allowable activities:

Safe and Supportive Schools

a. Preventing bullying and harassment
b. Relationship-building skills
c. School dropout prevention
d. Re-entry programs and transition services for justice-involved youth

e. Establish learning environments and enhance students' effective learning skills that are essential for school readiness and academic success, such as by providing integrated systems of student and family supports.
f. Child sexual abuse awareness and prevention
g. Reducing use of exclusionary discipline practices and promoting supportive school discipline
h. Suicide prevention
i. Violence prevention, crisis management and conflict resolution
j. Preventing human trafficking
k. Building school and community relationships
l. Culturally responsive teaching and professional development of implicit bias
m. Other programs or activities that foster safe, healthy, supportive and drug-free school environments including direct student services and professional development and training for school staff

Student Physical and Mental Health

n. Drug and violence prevention
o. Health and safety practices in school or athletic programs
p. School-based health and mental health services
q. Healthy, active lifestyle, nutritional education
r. Physical activities
s. Trauma-informed classroom management
t. Preventing use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, smokeless tobacco, electronic cigarettes
u. Chronic disease management

Cross Cutting Authorized Activities

v. Mentoring and school counseling
w. Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions
x. Pay-for-Success initiatives aligned with the purposes of Title IV

Additional Information:

- LEA recipients may obligate Stronger Connections Grant funds until the end of the period of availability of the grant, September 30, 2026.
- LEAs must provide equitable services to students and teachers in nonpublic schools as required under section 8501 of ESEA. The CCIP application will require LEAs to document nonpublic consultation and provide equitable services.
- LEAs may not use funds for the provision to any person of a dangerous weapon 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 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).
- LEAs must utilize SCG funds to supplement, not supplant any existing state or local programs or requirements in accordance with Section 4110 of the ESEA.
- The SCG application incentivizes consultation with community and school health and safety stakeholders and comprehensive, evidence-based health and safety strategies.
- The Department offered a public comment period and engaged with a range of stakeholders to develop the application, including other state agencies, Local Education Agencies, and community partners.
- The Department will be providing a Frequently Asked Questions document, trainings, and hands on support to LEAs to apply for and implement the Stronger Connections Grant.
- For questions, please contact strongerconnections@education.ohio.gov.