CCIP Note # 530

Re: Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) Award Announcement
Date: July 11, 2023
To: Superintendents, Treasurers, Authorized Representatives, Fiscal Representatives and Consolidated Funding Application Contacts, Nonpublic School Principals

Stronger Connections Grant
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 received an SCG award of $35,078,494 on Sept. 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 State Education Agency (SEA), the Ohio Department of Education, defines as "High Need" for school health and safety. LEAs can find additional details in the United States Department of Education letter and in Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plan (CCIP) Notes 506, 514, 515 and 521.

Competitive Application Process
The Department made a competitive grant application available to eligible Local Education Agencies (LEAs), including public districts and community schools, in the Department's CCIP e-grants system from March 1 - April 1, 2023. The Department pre-scored LEAs on Tier 1 and Tier 2 health and safety factors collected from the Electronic Management Information System (EMIS) data, including rates of poverty, chronic absenteeism and exclusionary discipline. The Department then loaded an estimated award amount into the CCIP application for each eligible LEA.

LEAs had to complete the Stronger Connections Grant application and submit in Authorized Representative Approved status to receive a Stronger Connections Grant award. LEAs that did not apply within the application window had the Tier 1 and Tier 2 base amounts removed from the Stronger Connections Grant Allocation page and reallocated to LEAs that demonstrated the highest need as a part of the Tier 3 scoring process. In total, 747 out of 924 eligible LEAs applied for the Stronger Connections Grant. All LEAs that applied for the Stronger Connections Grant received an award of at least the base award that was loaded in the CCIP.

Stronger Connections Grant Awards
The Department is pleased to announce the LEAs that received a Stronger Connections Grant Award. The grant award document includes Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 award amounts and a total award amount. The grant award document matches the allocation amounts in the Stronger Connections Grant application within the Comprehensive Continuous Improvement Plan (CCIP) system. In addition, the Superintendent/Authorized Representative for LEAs that receive a Stronger Connections Grant award will receive confirmation of this award through an email grant award notice.

Tier 3 Scoring
Eligible LEAs that demonstrated the highest need on the Stronger Connections Grant competitive application received an additional Tier 3 amount. The Department's Frequently Asked Questions includes more information on the scoring process and a Tier 3 scoring rubric.

- LEAs indicated on the competitive application if they had additional health and safety needs beyond the base amount loaded in the CCIP.
- The Department competitively scored all LEAs that applied and indicated a health and safety need beyond the base amount.
- The Department determined that a quality cut score for the Stronger Connections Grant is 34 out of 40. If an LEA scored 34 or higher, it involved stakeholders, established partnerships, and indicated it will use evidence-based practices.

- A total of 227 LEAs received a Tier 3 allocation and were awarded the amounts requested for additional health and safety needs. The Department awarded up to $50,000 for the public district and nonpublic schools consistent with the amount recommended in the Stronger Connections Grant application and guidance. A small remaining amount was distributed to the LEAs with the highest Tier 3 scores and unfunded needs.
- The Tier 3 funding amount was loaded on the Reallocated line of the Stronger Connections Grant Allocations page.
- LEAs that received Tier 3 funding will need to submit a CCIP application revision to budget the additional funds. These LEAs must also adjust the Budget Details page to describe the Stronger Connections Grant needs, activities and budget items for these additional awarded funds.
- It is important to note that the Department awarded Tier 3 funds to LEAs above the cut score based on the expressed need in both its public and nonpublic schools, however the equitable service proportional share for nonpublic schools is still calculated based on Section 8501 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The CCIP will recalculate the equitable service proportional share for participating nonpublic schools that receive a Tier 3 amount.

Reminders

As LEAs implement their Stronger Connections Grant activities, they should consider the following grant requirements:

- Stronger Connections Grant funds must be used to supplement, not supplant existing state or local programs. Activities may not supplant activities required by state or local law or that have been funded through state and local funds in the prior year;
- If the Stronger Connections Grant participating in-district nonpublic schools do not align with the funded schools on the nonpublic school service page, the district will need to manually calculate the equitable service amount. For assistance with the calculation, please contact Chantelle Carter, Nonpublic Ombudsman at Chantelle.Carter@education.ohio.gov;
- Stronger Connections Grant funds are supplemental Title IV-A funds. They should be reported with the 584 Fund Code but must be tracked separately using a job code or similar unique identifier; and
- The LEA cannot submit a PCR until the application or application revision is in a Final Approved status.

Additional Resources

Stronger Connections Grant Awards
Ohio Department of Education Stronger Connections Grant Website
Stronger Connections Grant Frequently Asked Questions
U.S. Department of Education Resources

If you have questions, please contact strongerconnections@education.ohio.gov.