



Bipartisan Safer Communities Act Stronger Connections Grant Program Profile

Program Overview

The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA), signed into law in June of 2022, allocated Federal funds to the U.S. Department of Education (ED), among other organizations, to expand vital mental health services and support state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) with initiatives to promote safer, more inclusive, and positive school environments for students, educators, and school staff.¹ ED has awarded a designated portion of these funds to SEAs to distribute to high-need LEAs through a competitive subgrant program called the Stronger Connections Grant Program (SCG).



Program Administration and Allocation

BSCA provided \$1 billion to SEAs to award competitive subgrants to establish safer and healthier learning environments; to prevent and respond to acts of bullying, violence, and hate affecting school communities at individual and systemic levels; and to support other programs and activities.² These funds were distributed through [Title IV, Part A](#) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 for activities under [Section 4108](#). SEAs were required to use at least 95 percent of their SCG funds to make competitive awards to high-need LEAs to support activities related to safe and healthy students. However, SEAs could reserve up to 5 percent of their allocation for state-level initiatives—with a maximum of 1 percent supporting administrative needs.³

States established their own definitions of high-need LEAs.³ ED encouraged states to define a high-need LEA as one with high rates of poverty (e.g., 40 percent or more students living with 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) a recent occurrence of a natural disaster or

traumatic event. High rates of poverty, chronic absenteeism, and exclusionary discipline/ juvenile justice involvement were the top criteria for determining high need among SEAs.

ED further encouraged SEAs to award SCG funds to support LEAs in:

- 1 Implementing comprehensive, evidence-based strategies to meet each student's social, emotional, physical, and mental well-being needs; to create positive, inclusive, and supportive school environments; and to increase access to place-based interventions and services;
- 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; and
- 3 Designing and implementing policies and practices to advance equity and respond to underserved students, protect student rights, and demonstrate respect for student dignity and potential.⁴

Uses of SCG Funds

SCG funds supported the development and implementation of programs and activities to support safe and healthy students as described in [Section 4108](#) of the ESEA. Some of these programs and activities are summarized below.¹

- Activities to prevent drug use and violence (Sec. 4108(5)(A)), bullying and harassment (Sec. 4108(5)(C)(iii)); school dropout (Sec. 4108(5)(C)(vi)); and child sexual abuse (Sec. 4108(5)(E))
- Mental health services provided by school-based staff (Sec. 4108(5)(B)(i)) or external health care partners (Sec. 4108(5)(B)(ii)(I))
- Integrating health, safety, physical education, and nutrition practices into school, athletic, or other programs (Sec. 4108(5)(C)(i-ii))



- Instructional practices for developing relationship-building skills and improving safety (Sec. 4108(5)(C)(iv))
- Mentoring and counseling (Sec. 4108(5)(C)(v))
- Training school staff in on topics such as classroom and crisis management (including trauma-informed practices); conflict resolution; and preventing suicide, human trafficking, school violence, drug abuse, bullying, or harassment (Sec. 4108(5)(D)(i-vii))
- Reducing exclusionary discipline practices (Sec. 4108(5)(F))
- Implementing positive behavioral interventions and supports to improve school conditions and academic outcomes (Sec. 4108(5)(G))

ED particularly encouraged grantees to use funds to design and implement these student-centered activities, policies, programs, and practices to engender safe, inclusive, nurturing, welcoming, and supportive school environments.⁴ Although [Section 4108](#) of ESEA allows for limited infrastructure and security improvements, some research has shown that, in the absence of promoting student learning and growth, security measures alone may result in detrimental effects and little reduction in adverse incidents.⁴ Thus, ED encouraged SEAs and LEAs to invest in mental health supports, emergency management planning, and professional development.⁴



Key Resources



SCG Program GAN Assurances. This Grant Award Notification (GAN) document details statutory requirements for how SEAs can and must allocate, spend, track, and report on use of SCG funds; how SEAs must provide information to ED and limit funds spent on state administrative costs; and how LEAs receiving these funds must provide equitable services to non-public schools, abide by the “supplement not supplant” requirement of Section 4110 of the ESEA, and cooperate with any audits or examinations of records requested by ED. [Another GAN document](#) details the requirements for outlying U.S. areas, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico.

SCG Program Dear Colleague Letter. This letter to Chief State School Officers from the Secretary of Education outlines priorities for the SCG funding, provides recommendations for awarding funds to high-need LEAs, and describes approaches SEAs and LEAs can take to administering funds.

Bipartisan Safer Communities Act SCG Program: Frequently Asked Questions.

This set of FAQs responds to inquiries from SEAs, LEAs, and other stakeholders on SCG program implementation and is intended to aid in the effective dissemination of SCG funds towards program priorities.

ED’s BSCA Webpage. This webpage from ED’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education provides a summary of the SCG program and links to additional informative SCG documents, webinars, and additional BCSA grant information.

Title IV, Part A, Section 4108. The full text of Section 4108 (and other sections of Title IV-A of the ESEA) appears on this webpage.

SCG Table of Grant Awards. This table details how, in September of 2022, ED distributed SCG funds states and U.S. territories, each of which received SCG funds ranging up to almost \$120 million.

References

1. Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. (2022). *Public Law 117-159*. <https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ159/PLAW-117publ159.pdf>.
2. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2023). *Bipartisan Safer Communities Act*. <https://oese.ed.gov/bipartisan-safer-communities-act/>.
3. U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *GAN Assurances - Stronger Connections Grant*. [1810-0770-FY22-BSCA-SCG-GAN-Assurances-Final.pdf](https://www.ed.gov/files/2022/09/BSCA-Stronger-Connections-DCL_9.12_signed.pdf) (ed.gov).
4. U.S. Department of Education. (2022). *Stronger Connections Grant Program Dear Colleague Letter*. https://oese.ed.gov/files/2022/09/BSCA-Stronger-Connections-DCL_9.12_signed.pdf.



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