



# Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) Stronger Connections Grant Program

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Updated: November 2, 2023

### How do I ask questions about the Stronger Connections grant?

Please review the grant writers webinar and grant guidance document to establish a foundation of knowledge on the Stronger Connections grant. Questions can be submitted to [StrongerConnections@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:StrongerConnections@dpi.wi.gov). Responses will be added to this FAQ and posted on the [Stronger Connections website](#) to ensure equal access to information by all applicants.

[Application and Grant Information Questions](#)

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### Application and Grant Information Questions

#### **NEW** What data point will be used to determine the enrollment based funding levels for our Local Education Agencies (LEA)?

LEAs will be placed in two categories for funding determinations, Large >3,000 (eligible for up to \$400,000) and Small <3,000 (eligible for up to \$300,000). DPI will be using the September 2022 enrollment count as our determining data point in placing LEAs in the large or small category.

#### **NEW** What if a private school is not responding to the LEAs attempts to consult?

LEAs must make a good-faith effort to consult with each private school within their boundaries. Attempts should start early and should include at least three (3) attempts to contact each private school with the request for consultation, along with clear deadlines. If the private school does not respond in three attempts, information on each attempt should be summarized on their equitable services form. This document provides [guidance on private schools that do not respond](#) under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which is the Statute that guides Stronger Connections.

#### **If an LEA chose to fund strategies solely at the high school level, would the LEA only be required to provide an equitable services consultation with private schools that offer programming at the high school level vs. all private schools within the LEA boundaries?**

No, the strategies selected by the private school can be different from those of the LEA. The LEA would not be able to make the decision to limit programming at the private schools without input from the private schools within the LEA boundaries. Question E-3 of the [BSCA Stronger Connections Frequently Asked Questions](#) provides more information.



### **Where can I view the contents of the application?**

The content of the application can be viewed in the section-by-section detail within the guidance document. This will take applicants through each section of the application, including questions and corresponding benchmarks. The section-by-section detail can be transferred into a google document so a team of people can work through the questions together.

### **Are consortium applications allowed?**

Consortium applications are not allowed under this funding opportunity.

### **How was my Local Education Agency (LEA) selected as a high need LEA?**

High needs LEAs for the Stronger Connections grant are defined as:

1. LEAs with 500 or more students who are economically disadvantaged or 40 or greater percentage of students who are economically disadvantaged, AND
2. one of the following criteria:
  - 10 percent or greater chronic absenteeism, or
  - 250:1 or higher student to School Based Mental Health (SBMH) professional ratio, or
  - 1 or greater per capita shortage of SBMH professionals, or
  - 2 or more exclusionary discipline incidents per 100 students/year, or
  - 2 or more students with IEPs subject to seclusion or restraints.

### **Are the character limits per section or per question?**

The character limitations listed in the guidance document are for each question.

### **Will LEAs need to apply for the funds?**

Yes, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act requires that the Stronger Connections grant be administered as a competitive grant. Eligible high-need LEAs must submit an application by 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, November 15th.

### **When will we receive the funding?**

DPI anticipates having grant awards in place by February 1, 2024. Successful applicants will be required to complete a budget in WISEgrants.

### **What is the timeline for using the funding?**

Funds must be expended by September 30, 2026. This is inclusive of the Tydings period for these funds.

**Is the Stronger Connections application the same as the School-based Mental Health Grant that was eliminated in the Biennial Budget?**

Because of the uniform grant requirements established by DPI, the Stronger Connections grant appears similar to the school-based mental health grant, but note that they are not identical. Applicants will want to review the rubric closely to identify differences. The Stronger Connections grant also includes equitable services for private schools.

## Allowability Questions

**Does the United States Department of Education (USDE) have a Frequently Asked Questions document?**

Yes they do, it can be accessed here: [USDE FAQ](#)

**NEW Can funds be used to purchase and install new playground structures?**

No, this is considered a form of construction as most installations will require cement footings and possibly some form of excavation.

For the cost of installation for equipment to be considered allowable, the installation must constitute minor remodeling under [34CFR 77.1](#) and not require construction, renovation, or repair, which is a prohibited use of Stronger Connections funds. Minor remodeling means minor alterations in a previously completed building and does not include building construction, structural alterations to buildings, building maintenance, or repairs.

Playground supplies such as balls or games may be allowable if it is inline with furthering safe and healthy students.

**NEW Can funds be used to fund School Resource Officers (SRO)?**

The USDE has guidance for schools looking to use the funding for SRO positions. The Department encourages school officials to make decisions regarding whether to place school-based police in schools only after receiving significant community input. Schools that choose to use security or law enforcement personnel on school grounds should:

- Conduct a comprehensive vetting process that includes an interview panel that selects candidates from a diverse pool of high-quality security or law enforcement personnel who have volunteered for the position and who have experience working with children and youth, as well as training as outlined below;

- Provide training and ongoing professional development on MTSS, de-escalation, alternatives to arrests, conflict resolution, restorative practices, proper referrals to educators and mental health professionals, child and adolescent development, civil rights, disability, emergency response, and more;
- Establish clear roles for law enforcement to ease the burden on officers so that they do not respond to situations that may not merit law enforcement intervention, such as prohibiting involvement in school disciplinary incidents that could otherwise be handled by school staff. Law enforcement should only be engaged in serious threats to school safety or serious criminal behavior that cannot be safely addressed through the school discipline process or as required by law. Doing so not only enhances public safety, but also public trust;
- Conduct community and family engagement, including by soliciting feedback on how to increase safety, and meaningfully responding to that feedback; and
- Implement accountability measures and data-driven annual evaluations of the program ([See Guiding Principles for SROs](#)), including by collecting, maintaining, and analyzing data and reporting disaggregated data including by a student's race, ethnicity, age, sex, type of offense, English language learner status, and disability, regarding student interactions with law enforcement, including referrals of students, arrests, and citations, to ensure nondiscrimination based on disability, race, color, national origin, gender, or another protected class.

Additional guidance can be found here, [USDE BSCA FAQ](#), C-21. You can also access DPI's guidance around [School Resource Officers here](#).

**NEW** Relating to Capital and Non-Capital Equipment, the guidance uses security camera and vape sensors as allowable expenses. Would the following also be allowable expenses?

- Public Announcement Systems such as exterior speakers.
- Door hardware such as classroom push button locksets.
- Door locking hardware.
- Door access control hardware/systems.
- Frosted window film to help conceal occupants during a lockdown.

These would be allowable costs. Note per the [grant guidance](#), “capital and non-capital safety equipment such as security cameras and vape detectors are limited to 20 percent of the total award.”

Any equipment and installation would also have to meet the definition of “minor remodeling” under [34 CFR 77.1](#). [USDE BSCA FAQ](#), C-22 provides more information.

**NEW Will Davis-Bacon apply for any allowable minor remodeling projects that are completed?**

Yes, if the cost of the installation or remodeling project is over \$2,000. All remodeling contracts over \$2,000 must meet all Davis-Bacon Act requirements.

As is the case with all remodeling, construction, maintenance, and repair contracts using laborers and mechanics financed by federal education funds, an LEA that uses federal funds for minor remodeling, renovation, repair, or construction contracts over \$2,000 must meet all Davis-Bacon Act requirements (40 U.S.C. §§276a to 276a-7). Consult your legal counsel to ensure your LEA is meeting the requirements of the Davis-Bacon Act. Under the Davis-Bacon Act, LEAs are required to:

- Ensure contractors pay wages to laborers and mechanics at a rate not less than the prevailing wages specified in a wage determination made by the Secretary of Labor.
- Ensure contractors pay wages not less than once a week.
- Place a copy of the current prevailing wage determination issued by the Department of Labor in each solicitation.
- Include a provision for compliance with the Copeland “Anti-Kickback” Act (40 U.S.C. 3145), and comply with the provisions of the Copeland Act (40 U.S.C. §276c and 18 U.S.C. §874) in their contract.
- Report all suspected or reported violations to the United States Department of Education.

For more information about prevailing wage, LEAs should visit the Department of Labor (DOL) website: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/government-contracts/construction>

**Can funds be used for Student and Family Assistance Programs?**

Yes, Student and Family Assistance Programs are an allowable cost under the Stronger Connections grant program, with some stipulations. Page 4 of the [School Mental Health Funding: Expenses 101 Quick Guide](#) provides more detail.

**Can funds be used to pay for mental health and substance use treatment?**

DPI is aware of the financial barriers some students and families face when accessing mental health treatment services. Concerns regarding this barrier, and changes in statute and subsequent interpretation by courts resulted in DPI reviewing the previous interpretation which prohibited the use of state or federal grant funds to pay for student treatment costs. This recent interpretation resulted in a change in position on this matter. State and federal grant funds may now, under certain conditions, be used to pay for treatment costs for student mental health and alcohol and other drug abuse treatment services.

State and federal funds may be used for treatment costs when:



- the treatment or service occurs at a school or district building,
- the provider of the services is appropriately licensed to provide the treatment service in Wisconsin,
- student treatment costs are allocable to the state or federal funding source, and
- treatment costs allocated to the state or federal funding do not exceed 20 percent of the total amount awarded.

For more details, please see the [Guidelines](#) for Using State and Federal Grant Funds to Cover Mental Health and AODA Treatment Costs for Youth document. For additional questions see the [Guidelines for Using State and Federal Grant Funds to Cover Mental Health and AODA Treatment Costs for Youth FAQ](#).

### **What is a Comprehensive School Mental Health System (CSMHS)?**

A CSMHS provides a continuum of services and supports to promote student and staff mental health and wellbeing. A CSMHS is not limited to treating mental illness or substance use disorders. Rather, it includes services and supports that promote social and emotional wellbeing, foster positive mental health and school culture and eliminate systemic barriers to wellbeing and success for all students. A CSMHS increases health equity by ensuring all students and staff have access to the prevention, early intervention, and treatment supports that they need, when they need them, free of stigma. See the [Wisconsin School Mental Health Framework](#) and the [DPI School Mental Health Webpage](#) for more information.