



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: November 23, 2022
To: Local Educational Agency Leads
Route To: School Principals, School Business Administrators, District Federal ESSA Grant Administrators
From: Kathy Ehling, Assistant Commissioner
Division of Educational Services
Deadline: December 7, 2022

**NJDOE Invites Public Comment on Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA)
Stronger Connection Grant (SCG) Program**

On June 25, 2022, President Biden signed into law the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA). As part of 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 through the Stronger Connections Grant Program. The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) received a \$20,905,551 allocation, 95% of which must be distributed to high-need local educational agencies (LEAs) through a competitive Notice of Grant Opportunity (NGO).

Specifically, to maximize the positive and lasting impact of these funds, the United States Department of Education (USED) is encouraging States to prioritize funds for high-need 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; creating positive, inclusive, and supportive school environments; and increasing 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 that advance equity and are responsive to underserved students, protect student rights, and demonstrate respect for student dignity and potential.

A [September 15, 2022](#) letter from USED requested that SEAs consider establishing criteria for "high-need" LEAs consistent with Congressional intent. This means SEAs are encouraged 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.

Additionally, in its [September 15, 2022](#) letter, USED required SEAs to solicit feedback from LEAs and the public regarding the definition of a "high-need" LEA and the design of its discretionary (i.e., competitive) subgrant process. To that end, the NJDOE has posted the [BSCA-Stronger Connections Grant Program document](#) on its website for LEAs' and the public's review. As part of this comment request process, the NJDOE invites LEAs and the public to submit comments regarding this grant program to TitleIVA@doe.nj.gov no later than close of business, Wednesday, December 7, 2022.

c: Members, State Board of Education
NJDOE Staff
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
Garden State Coalition of Schools
NJ LEE Group
Administrators of a State Facility