

Stronger Connections Grant Program



September 2023

Connecticut State Department of Education



Stronger Connections Grant Program

- In 2022, President Biden signed into law the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA), in light of the recent spate of mass shootings in the United States, including in Uvalde, Texas
- Through the BSCA Stronger Connections Grant Program, **Connecticut was awarded \$8.66M** in funding under Title IV (Section 4108) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 **to distribute competitively to “high-need” LEAs.**
- Connecticut has defined “high-need” to mean any LEA with 1. **high rates of poverty** (at least 30 percent of students receiving Free or Reduced Price Meals) AND 2. **high rates of chronic absenteeism** (at least 25%) OR **high or disproportionate rates of suspension/expulsion**
- The USED strongly encourages SEAs to use the funds to 1. **implement evidence-based strategies** that meet students' needs, 2. **engage families, students, educators, and community members in the design of the program**, and 3. **design and implement policies that advance equity** and are responsive to underserved students
- **Funding must be obligated by September 30, 2026**, and includes an additional 1-year period of fund availability.
- Applications are due no later than Friday, November 3rd, at 5:00PM EST.



District Grant Amounts (\$8.66M available)

| District | Allocation (3 years) | District | Allocation (3 years) | District | Allocation (3 years) |
|--|----------------------|---|----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Achievement First Bridgeport Academy District | \$39,024 | Explorations District | \$3,348 | Norwich School District | \$120,528 |
| Achievement First Hartford Academy District | \$37,476 | Goodwin University Educational Services (GUES) | \$41,040 | Plainville School District | \$82,476 |
| Amistad Academy District | \$40,176 | Great Oaks Charter School District | \$23,904 | Plymouth School District | \$47,016 |
| Ansonia School District | \$83,952 | Groton School District | \$147,744 | Putnam School District | \$42,660 |
| Area Cooperative Educational Services | \$62,640 | Hamden School District | \$196,848 | Regional School District 01 | \$11,736 |
| Ashford School District | \$13,248 | Hampton School District | \$2,412 | Regional School District 11 | \$8,100 |
| Bloomfield School District | \$73,980 | Hartford School District | \$603,864 | Scotland School District | \$3,492 |
| Booker T. Washington Academy District | \$15,984 | Highville Charter School District | \$18,180 | Sprague School District | \$9,936 |
| Brass City Charter School District | \$12,960 | Interdistrict School for Arts and Comm District | \$10,116 | Stamford School District | \$581,688 |
| Bridgeport School District | \$696,132 | Killingly School District | \$88,200 | Sterling School District | \$11,628 |
| Capital Preparatory Harbor School District | \$27,792 | Learn | \$50,760 | Stratford School District | \$243,432 |
| Capitol Region Education Council | \$321,912 | Lisbon School District | \$15,732 | The Gilbert School District | \$14,760 |
| Common Ground High School District | \$8,136 | Manchester School District | \$222,912 | Thompson School District | \$33,372 |
| Connecticut Technical Education and Career System | \$402,588 | Meriden School District | \$310,680 | Torrington School District | \$139,788 |
| Cooperative Educational Services | \$29,592 | Middletown School District | \$158,904 | Unified School District #1 | \$4,464 |
| Derby School District | \$47,412 | Naugatuck School District | \$156,132 | Unified School District #2 | \$2,592 |
| East Hartford School District | \$230,112 | New Beginnings Inc Family Academy District | \$14,616 | Waterbury School District | \$673,236 |
| East Windsor School District | \$37,080 | New Britain School District | \$349,812 | West Haven School District | \$215,136 |
| Eastern Connecticut Regional Educational Service Center (EASTCONN) | \$14,544 | New Haven School District | \$689,400 | Willington School District | \$14,328 |
| EdAdvance | \$9,972 | New London School District | \$106,128 | Windham School District | \$116,064 |
| Elm City College Preparatory School District | \$28,188 | Norwalk School District | \$414,504 | Windsor Locks School District | \$55,764 |
| Enfield School District | \$176,868 | Norwich Free Academy District | \$75,816 | Windsor School District | \$120,132 |



Eligible Grant Activities (Title IV, Section 4108)

1. **Drug and violence prevention** activities and programs that are evidence-based
2. **School-based mental health services**, including early identification of mental health symptoms, drug use, and violence, and appropriate referrals to direct individual or group counseling services
3. Programs or activities that **support a healthy, active lifestyle**, including nutritional education and regular, structured physical education activities
4. Programs that help **prevent bullying and harassment**
5. **High-quality training and professional development for school personnel**, including specialized instructional support personnel
6. **Child sexual abuse awareness and prevention** programs or activities
7. Designing and implementing a locally-tailored plan to **reduce exclusionary discipline practices** in elementary and secondary schools
8. Implementation of **schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports**
9. Designating a **site resource coordinator at a school or local educational agency** to provide a variety of services
10. Sponsoring **community and family engagement activities** that bring more members of the school community into the fold
11. School resource officers and other school-based officers, surveillance cameras, metal detectors, and other minor physical or infrastructure-related security equipment

Funds may not be used to arm teachers, train in the use of weapons, provide medicinal services or drug treatment or rehabilitation to students, or support major school construction/renovation/repair projects.



Application Details

Six primary application sections:

1. Project Description (15 points)
2. Evidence-Based Programming (9 points)
3. Stakeholder Engagement (9 points)
4. Timeline and Objectives (9 points)
5. Sustainability (6 points)
6. Budget (9 points)



ESSA Evidence Tiers

- Tier 1: **Strong Evidence** (highest level of evidence)
 - supported by one or more well-designed and well-implemented randomized control experimental studies
 - intervention leads to favorable results
- Tier 2: **Moderate Evidence**
 - supported by one or more well-designed, well-implemented quasi-experimental studies
 - controlled experiment was conducted with a treatment group
 - intervention shows statistically significant and positive effect on the outcome
- Tier 3: **Promising Evidence**
 - supported by one or more well-designed and well-implemented correlational studies
 - formal study if a relationship exists between intervention and a given outcome
 - intervention shows a statistically significant and positive effect on the outcome
- Tier 4: **Demonstrates a Rationale** (lowest level of evidence)
 - practices that have a well-defined logic model or theory of action
 - supported by research in the field
 - some efforts are underway by a state, district, or outside research organization to determine the effectiveness
 - no formal evidence exists to prove interventions are successful



Exemplar Budget

| Budget Code | Description of Funded Activity | Cost |
|---|---|-----------|
| 100 Personal Services – Employee Salary | 1. One part-time mental health counselor at \$60/hour for 20 hours/week, 36 weeks (totals \$43,200) x 3 years | \$129,600 |
| 200 Personal Services – Employee Benefits | N/A | \$0 |
| 300 Purchased Professional and Technical Services | 1. Staff Training and Professional Development: Training and professional development opportunities for school staff on topics such as recognizing mental health issues, providing initial support, and referring students to appropriate resources. (\$10,000 per year x 2 years = \$20,000) 2. Community Mental Health Organizations: These funds will facilitate partnerships with local community mental health organizations to expand the availability of resources, referrals, and specialized services for students requiring more extensive mental health support. (\$13,000 per year x 3 years = \$39,000) | \$59,000 |
| 400 Purchased Property Services | N/A | \$0 |
| 500 Other Purchased Services | 1. Mental Health Awareness Campaigns: This funding will support mental health awareness campaigns within the school. These campaigns will aim to reduce stigma, educate students about mental health, and promote open conversations surrounding emotional well-being. (\$5,000 per year x 3 years = \$15,000) 2. Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention Services: The grant will allocate funds for implementing an evidence-based crisis intervention and suicide prevention program. This will involve training school staff in recognizing warning signs, establishing protocols for responding to mental health crises, and collaborating with local crisis hotlines or mental health organizations. (\$5,000 per year x 3 years = \$15,000) 3. Data Collection and Analysis: This budget will be used to collect and analyze data related to the effectiveness and impact of the mental health initiatives. Surveys, assessments, and other evaluation tools will help gauge student satisfaction and identify areas for improvement. (\$1,000 per year x 3 years = \$3,000) 4. Program Evaluation and Impact Assessment: The grant will allocate funds to support program evaluations and assess the overall impact of the mental health initiatives. (\$5,000 per year x 3 years = \$15,000) | \$48,000 |
| 600 Supplies | 1. Educational Materials: This budget will cover the costs of purchasing books, literature, and educational materials related to mental health. These resources will be available in the school library or counseling center. (\$1,000) 2. Online Mental Health Resources and Platforms: The grant will support the acquisition of online mental health resources and platforms, including subscriptions to reputable mental health websites or applications. These resources will enable students and staff to access self-help tools, articles, and interactive modules for improving mental well-being. (\$5,000 per year x 3 years = \$15,000) | \$16,000 |
| 800 Miscellaneous | DO NOT PUT ANYTHING IN THIS CATEGORY | \$0 |
| Total | | \$252,600 |

Budget Tips:

- Use sufficient detail** – we want to know how every dollar is being spent. Avoid language like “TBD” or “miscellaneous”
- Budget for three years** – include items for each year of the grant
- Check your math** – ensure each line item adds up to the bottom line correctly
- Only include eligible expenses**