Stronger Connections Grant Program

Student Support and Academic Enrichment: Title IV, Part A

The overall purpose of the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (Title IV, Part A) program is to improve students' academic achievement by increasing state and LEA capacity to:

- Provide all students with access to a well-rounded education;
- Improve school conditions for student learning; and
- Increase the use of technology to enhance the academic achievement and digital literacy of all students.

For the 2022–23 school year, Washington received $20 million. OSPI distributes funds via formula allocations to all eligible local educational agencies (LEAs).

The second purpose listed above, known as the Safe and Healthy Students goal, is intended to fund activities that foster safe, supportive, inclusive, and culturally responsive learning environments. To advance this goal, Title IVA funds can be used to create Safe and Supportive Learning Environments or to support Student Physical and Mental Health. When students are healthy and feel safe and supported, they are more likely to succeed in school.

Stronger Connections Grant Program

OSPI recently received additional funding for Title IV, Part A through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) of June 2022. The US Department of Education posted some guidance documents related to this funding on its [website](#).

The BSCA bill language includes a requirement for states to distribute funds, to high-need LEAs, to implement allowable activities; aligned with the Safe and Healthy Students program purpose. OSPI anticipates that there will be a Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) competition in spring 2023 to award $15 million. Grants will support implementation for approximately three years.

OSPI's goal for this funding will be to award subgrants to LEAs, or consortia of LEAs, to fund proposals that directly address the Safe and Healthy Students goal of Title IVA. Successful applicants will propose to develop and sustain districtwide systems to implement and maintain comprehensive, evidence-based strategies that build capacity and provide direct services to:

1. Meet each student's social, emotional, physical, and mental well-being needs.
2. Create positive, inclusive, and supportive school environments.

In the interest of supporting systems change, rather than just funding disconnected activities and services, the SCG program application is set up to mirror the essential components of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS):

- Team-based leadership
- Continuous data-based decision-making
- Student, family, and community engagement
- Delivery of a continuum of evidence-based instruction and support

Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

SCG Eligibility

- Applicants must be LEAs or consortia of LEAs (smaller districts are strongly encouraged to form a consortia).
- LEAs can only submit one application and/or be included in one proposal.
- LEAs may not transfer funds and there is no provision for REAP Alternative Fund Use Authority.
- Applications must be fully submitted in iGrants by 4pm on Monday, May 22, 2023.

In addition:

- LEAs must participate in, or agree to participate in, the Washington Healthy Youth Survey.
- LEAs must incorporate the use of some type of evidence-based school climate survey that includes the staff, student, and family perspectives.
- For grant-funded activities, the LEA must select an evidence-based self-study or survey and evaluation instrument (e.g., Tiered Fidelity Instrument (TFI), School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation (SHAPE) system).

LEAs, or consortia of LEAs, that meet the following criteria are eligible:

- High percentages of students living in poverty (e.g., at least 40 percent poverty average) AND
- Documented areas of need that will be mitigated through grant funded activities

Award amounts

OSPI anticipates awarding approximately 8–15 grants.

As part of the development of the proposal, LEAs should carefully consider the level of funding needed. Costs must be fully justified, and direct administrative costs must be clearly defined and are limited to 2% of the budget.

Successful applicants must be prepared to begin implementation no later than Fall 2023.

The first year of implementation will be June 2023 through July 2024. LEAs should establish a budget for the initial year as part of the application funding for additional years will be available based on satisfactory progress in July 2024.

The grant period extends to no later than August 2026. There is no carryover provision beyond that date.

In addition to the federally negotiated indirect costs rate, applicants may charge up to 2% of grant funds as direct administrative costs. Direct administrative costs are costs associated with the administration of a program. These costs are administrative in nature, but they can still be tracked, charged, and allocated directly to the grant. Direct administrative activities may include, but are not limited to:

- Overall program management, including salaries and related costs.

- Activities concerned with paying, transporting, exchanging, and maintaining goods and services.
- Activities concerned with establishing and administering policy, preparing reports, etc.
- Activities related to the program requirements of grantees.

Timeline (tentative)

Initial competition guidance for planning purposes:	February 2023
Application opens in iGrants:	March 2023
Application submission deadline:	by 4:00pm on May 22, 2023
Award notifications:	June 2023

Planning Process

As LEAs, or consortia of LEAs, begin the planning process, it is important to incorporate the following:

- Stakeholder Engagement
- Needs Assessment, including data analysis
- Plan Alignment

Stakeholder Engagement

Engaging students, parents, families, and community members is critical to the successful planning for and implementation of activities supported by Stronger Connection Grant funds. It is essential that local leaders and educators consistently engage students, parents, and community partners, paying close attention to communities who face systemic barriers and how they are experiencing the implementation of selected policies, strategies, and activities. Experts suggest that family engagement may be associated with more positive results when it brings diverse partners together to create policies, practices, and strategies designed to achieve mutually agreed upon outcomes for students, schools, and communities. And particularly in the case of activities designed to support student health and well-being, student voice must be incorporated into the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of the grant.

LEA and school leaders should provide ongoing and meaningful opportunities for educators and staff to be involved in the selection of evidence-based strategies and activities implemented to increase student, educator, and staff safety and well-being. Communication and collaboration between LEA and school leadership and educators and other school staff is crucial to supporting the effective use of funds. District and school representatives may include administrators, educators, specialized instructional support personnel, related service providers, school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, nurses, and family services representatives.

LEAs and schools cannot, and should not, be expected to meet the diverse needs of all students alone. Proposals that thoughtfully engage community partners in order to leverage resources beyond the school are encouraged. These community partners should be involved in the

planning, implementation, and evaluation of the plan and not just invited to submit letters of support.

As with all Title IV, Part A programming, consideration must be given to the needs of students and educators at the private schools located within the boundaries of the LEA applying for funds. Early engagement is important in order to ensure that the proposal reflects the shared focus of all participating private schools. (See Equitable Services for additional information on how this funding opportunity is different than the Title IVA formula funds.)

Needs Assessment

During the Needs Assessment process, planning teams should consider the use of data in order to identify areas where grant funded activities have a reasonable likelihood to create a positive impact. LEAs may include demographic data that describes the school community as part of the proposal, but the identification of needs that will be addressed through the grant should be focused on gaps in services or disproportionate outcomes. The following are examples and do not include all possible options.

Sources of Data
- Healthy Youth Survey data
- School, campus, and family survey results
- Referrals for behavioral health services
- Hate-based and other discriminatory incidents
- Community specific health data
- Calls to community crisis centers
- Attendance data
- School discipline data
- Restraint and isolation data

Identified Needs/Challenges
- Chronic absenteeism
- Access to behavioral health services
- Bullying and harassment
- Disproportionate discipline
- Juvenile justice system involvement
- Substance misuse referrals
- Community violence
- Recent traumatic events
- School climate indicators

Potential Activities to Address Identified Needs/Challenges
- School-based, community-based, and/or remote (telehealth) behavioral health services
- Social emotional learning

- District/school comprehensive school safety
- Positive and fair behavioral interventions and supports
- Inclusive practices (UDL)
- Trauma informed classrooms
- Inclusive and culturally affirming discipline practices
- Anti-harassment, -intimidation, and -bullying
- School climate initiatives
- Recognition, screening, and response to emotional or behavior stress in students
- Threat assessments
- Equity, cultural responsiveness, and anti-racism
- Safety and violence prevention programs

Plan Alignment

During the development of the proposal, please ensure alignment between all sections of the application and, where appropriate, with your school and/or district improvement plan.

- Identified need(s): Informed by stakeholder engagement and data analysis as part of the needs assessment process
- Activities: Evidence-based, high leverage activities that are designed to address the identified need(s)
- Evaluation plan: Measurable outcomes and the data to be used to assess progress
- Budget: Funds are clearly budgeted in a way that supports the grant funded activities

Use of Funds

Capacity building

- Professional learning
- Policies and procedures
- Community and family engagement
- Data collection and analysis
- Behavioral health universal screening processes

Implementation

- Hiring additional staff or adding additional staff time
- Curriculum
- Supplies
- Contracted services

All costs should be described and justified as reasonable and necessary to accomplish the activities outlined in the application.

Equitable Services

LEAs receiving SCG funds must allow for the equitable participation of private school children and educators, and it is expected that this consultation should occur within the context of the planning and stakeholder engagement process. Such consultation allows the LEA to consider the needs of all students and educators—both public and private—in developing its proposal, and to include the projected costs in the application. It is critical that this consultation occur during the planning process as the LEA works with stakeholders to define the scope of the work. Successful applicants must continue to consult with interested private school officials on the specific services the LEA will provide students and educators, consistent with the LEA's approved application, throughout implementation.

Supplement Not Supplant

SCG funds shall be used to supplement, and not supplant, non-Federal funds that would otherwise be used for activities authorized under this grant program.

Prohibited Use of Funds

Weapons or weapons training

Section 13401 of the BSCA amended Section 8526 of the ESEA to prohibit the use of ESEA funds, including those under Stronger Connections, to provide to any person a dangerous weapon or training in the use of a dangerous weapon. A "dangerous weapon" as defined in section 930(g)(2) of Title 18 of the United States Code is a weapon, device, instrument, material, or substance, animate or inanimate, that is used for, or is readily capable of, causing death or serious bodily injury, except that such term does not include a pocketknife with a blade of less than 2 1/2 inches in length. Accordingly, funds may not be used, for example, to purchase a firearm or to train teachers to use a firearm.

Construction

Stronger Connections grants are appropriated for carrying out activities under ESEA section 4108. ESEA section 8526(1) prohibits the use of funds "for construction, renovation, or repair of any school facility, except as authorized under [the ESEA]," and there is no specific authorization for construction, renovation, or repair in ESEA Title IV, Part A.

No funds under this title may be used for medical services or drug treatment or rehabilitation, except for integrated student supports, specialized instructional support services, or referral to treatment for impacted students, which may include students who are victims of, or witnesses to, crime or who illegally use drugs.

Mandatory medication

No child shall be required to obtain a prescription for a controlled substance, as defined in section 102 of the Controlled Substances Act (21 U.S.C. 802) as a condition of— (1) receiving an evaluation or other service described under this title; or (2) attending a school receiving assistance under this Title.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports

MTSS is not a program. It is the framework for enhancing the adoption and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based practices to achieve important outcomes for every student. OSPI is committed to the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) as the approach for aligning systems and priorities to tackle Washington's persistent opportunity gaps.

The multi-tiered approach, which has been tested and validated in the education field internationally for three decades, involves the delivery of universal evidence-based instruction and supports to all students, additional supports to some, and intensive supports to those who need them. The Stronger Connections Grant application is designed to help applicants describe the activities and supports currently in place, and then to detail plans to add or enhance services and supports through this funding opportunity. Applicants do not need to describe all supports and activities for each prompt in the application, only those directly aligned with the district needs identified through a stakeholder engagement process.

Continuum of Evidence Based Supports

Using the MTSS framework, instruction, enrichment, and intervention are delivered along a continuum to meet the full spectrum of social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs of all students. In a multi-tiered system of supports, tiers describe the intensity of support provided. Tiers do not define students. Every student has equitable access to universal instruction and supports that are culturally and linguistically responsive, universally designed, and differentiated to meet their unique needs.

Tier 1 is the foundation for additional layers of support and should meet the needs of approximately 80% of the student population. When more than 20% of students need additional support, leadership teams should re-examine the tier 1 supports in place, as it is an indication that tier 1 instruction and supports may be insufficient.

Targeted enrichment and interventions are added to accelerate learning and to remove barriers that prevent students from benefiting fully from universal instruction and supports. Providing students with supports that are integrated, matched to need, and aligned with universal instruction will foster independence and progress in general education universal instruction.

Tier 2 consists of evidence-based intervention programs that have (1) clearly defined entrance and exit criteria; (2) regular progress monitoring to assess their response to intervention; (3) explicit instruction with increased opportunities to practice and receive specific, frequent feedback; (4) gradual release of control and support when students master skills; and (5) increased communication with families to ensure consistency of support in school and at home (Anderson and Borgmeier, 2010; Newcomer, Freeman, and Barrett, 2013).

Students who demonstrate significant risk or do not respond to tier 2 interventions may receive tier 3 intensive interventions that are individualized to meet their needs. Interventions may be intensified across seven domains, including strength of the intervention program, dosage, alignment, attention to transfer, comprehensiveness, behavioral support, and data-based

individualization, to meet the needs of individual students receiving tier 3 supports (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Malone, 2017).

Teaming and continuous data-based decision-making

The number and makeup of district and school teams that support MTSS may vary, but the MTSS leadership team is critical to guide and support the implementation of MTSS. Teams at all levels of the system (district, school, grade) use data to inform decision-making. District and school teams use an agreed-upon process to guide their decision-making and continually improve supports. Teams use multiple sources of data to plan, deliver, and improve supports across the system. Teams can determine the root causes of problems and coordinate supports more effectively when they review academic, social, emotional, and behavioral data together. When possible, data should be disaggregated by grade level, race, eligibility for free and reduced-price meals, and enrollment in special education, Section 504, and English language services to identify disproportionality and inform improvements to ensure systems are supporting equitable outcomes for every student.

Student, Family and Community Engagement

As organizations work to build systems that benefit every student, they also need to recognize that families are essential to student success throughout MTSS implementation. Family engagement occurs at the district, school, and classroom levels. Garbacz et al. (2019) outline several core features in their guide, "Family-School Collaboration: Tiered Fidelity," including positive relationships, two-way communication, meaningful decision-making, equity access and representation, training, and support options for family, and evaluation of family-school collaboration efforts.

MTSS should also emphasize student voice in decisions about their own education and provide opportunities for choice and designing supports that fit their individual strengths and needs. Input from students is particularly valuable in assisting educators to adapt and scaffold learning opportunities for students from different cultures, English Learners, students who have experienced trauma, and others.

Engaging community partners in multi-tiered supports is also critical for building comprehensive systems. Community partners can serve on leadership teams, establish consistent supports between schools and communities, establish common data measures across settings, and help ensure sufficient intensity of supports.

Stronger Connection Grant Application

Apply in iGrants by 4:00pm on Monday, May 22, 2023

FP 400 – Individual Applicants

FP 404 – Consortia Applicants

When completing this application, please ensure alignment between all sections of the application and, where appropriate, with your school and/or district improvement plan.

- Identified need(s): Informed by stakeholder engagement and data analysis as part of the needs assessment process.

- Activities: Evidence-based, high leverage activities that are designed to address the identified need(s).

- Evaluation plan: Measurable outcomes and the data to be used to assess progress.

- Budget: Funds are clearly budgeted in a way that supports the grant funded activities.

1. ***Student Demographics.*** *Please include the data for each participating LEA in a consortium.*

   a. Percentage of low-income students (by district(s) using the OSPI Report Card (or the Child Nutrition Services data.) Must be 40% or greater to qualify for this funding.

   b. Describe student populations that are disproportionally represented in district(s) student outcome data (e.g., students in foster care, EL students, students identified as BIPOC) if it adds context to your proposal. Please specify the source of data.

2. ***Needs Assessment.*** *Please provide information for each participating LEA in a consortium, if different.* Questions A-C of this section were updated as of 4/18/23 for clarification.

   a. Considering the stated purposes of the Stronger Connections Grant program, what are the greatest challenges/needs to be addressed through this grant?

      NOTE: Successful applicants will be required to develop performance measures that track short- and longer-term progress related to the articulated needs.

      The need should <u>not</u> be what you want to do or provide in terms of activities or supports, but a specific indicator you know is a challenge based on data. Some examples are included below.

      - SEL is not the need, but a strategy that may be used to address specific challenges such as incidences of behavior referrals or students reporting that they are not able to stop or control worrying.
      - School climate may be the need, but please be specific about aspects of school climate that need to be addressed. Are there high numbers of bullying incidences or are students reporting they do not feel safe at school?

- MTSS is not a need, it is a framework to arrange the people and other supports needed to address student challenges such as chronic absenteeism or substance use.
- Providing mental health service is not the need, but the strategy to address the number of students reporting anxiety, depression, and suicidality or the availability or length of time students must wait to receive services.
- Professional learning around cultural competency is not the need, but it is a strategy for addressing disproportionality in student discipline rates.

b. What sources of data did you use to identify those needs? (e.g., HYS data, student and family surveys, attendance data, graduation rates, academic achievement, WA KIDS, etc.)

NOTE: Be specific about the source(s) of data you used to identify the specific need(s) described in 2A above that you will address through this grant. (You do not need to list all data you reviewed in the needs assessment process.) For example, were there particular HYS questions or school climate responses that helped you identify the specific need(s)?

c. What is the primary driver(s) for this challenge? (i.e., what factors are most significant in causing it?) Help us understand what it is that needs to change and why. We will ask you how you will change it in the next section.

For example, the reason for increases in anxiety, depression, or suicidality may be due to a lack of access to mental health providers. Or the reason for disproportionality in discipline may be lack of training on trauma or culturally responsive practices or alternatives to discipline.

d. How were stakeholder groups engaged in the analysis and prioritization of selecting this need? (Students, families, staff, community partners, private schools, tribal government) *For a consortium, there may be one process that incorporates stakeholders in each participating community OR describe the process for each participating district.*

Complete the next two sections, addressing the areas of need you identified and the work you are proposing for this grant. *For consortia applicants, please make sure to provide information for each participating LEA, if different.*

Please refer to the associated application guidance or the OSPI website (https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/support-programs/multi-tiered-system-supports-mtss) for more information about MTSS.

2. *MTSS: Current Practice*

   a. Describe the supports/activities that are currently in place for the identified areas of need, or the Title IVA Safe and Healthy Students focus more broadly. (Either school-based or community-based.)
   Tier I:

   Tier II:

   Tier III:

   b. What is the teaming structure that supports this work? And who (role/position) is part of each team?

   c. What data are used to analyze ongoing needs for support and to track progress?

   d. How do you collaborate with students and families in identification and delivery of supports?

   e. What community-based or regional partners do you work with to plan, deliver, and evaluate supports/activities?

3. *MTSS: Project Plan*

   a. Describe the supports/activities that will be added with this grant funding. If your plan is to continue activities that are currently funded through another source and that funding source is scheduled to end (i.e., ESSER); please address how Stronger Connections Grant funding will improve, enhance and/or systematize what is in place.
   Tier I:

   Tier II:

   Tier III:

   Please respond to all that apply based on the activities you are requesting funds to implement. (Include a statement that the item is out of the scope of your proposal if you opt to skip the question.)

   b. What professional learning is needed, who will it include, and in what format (e.g., coaches, events, on-site) will it be delivered?

   c. How will you use detailed data to track trends and changes? (i.e., data system, indicators, school climate surveys, tiered fidelity index)

   d. What, if any, new or upgraded programs/systems are needed in order to more effectively track meaningful data related to activities?

e.   What community-based or regional partnerships do you plan to develop or improve to collaborate on the delivery of supports/activities?

f.   What policies and procedures need to be developed or revised to better support identification, screening, assessing, and prioritizing supports? And how will the LEA ensure those policies and procedures are trauma informed and culturally responsive?

4. ***Stakeholder Engagement.*** *For consortia applicants, please make sure to provide information for each participating LEA, if different.*

How were the following key stakeholder groups involved with the planning of this proposal and how will they be engaged throughout implementation and evaluation? Students, families, staff, community partners, private schools, tribal government.

5. ***Staffing Plan.*** *For consortia applicants, please make sure to provide information for each participating LEA, if different.*

What is your staffing plan for this grant? Please include staff and roles critical to the work that are already in place as well as staff that will be hired directly or via contract? If this project is to be managed by existing staff, please describe their current role(s) and workload and specify what will be reassigned or eliminated to ensure adequate time and capacity to manage this grant.

6. ***Budget Narrative***

a.   How much are you requesting for Year 1? $_____

b.   How much do you estimate you will need for Years 2 and 3 (combined)? $_____

c.   Please upload a detailed budget narrative for Year 1 of your grant project, and summary information for Year 2 and Year 3 anticipated costs. *For consortia, please include enough information to explain what funds are retained by the lead applicant, and for what purpose, and what funds are distributed across participating LEAs on an equitable basis according to their relative size and need. Expenses to provide services to participating private school should be included.*

ASSURANCES

By drawing down funds awarded under this Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) Award Notification, the grantee assures the following:

The grantee agrees to follow the approved SCG budget and project plan as approved by OSPI. Changes can be made only with advance written approval from OSPI.

The grantee agrees to participate in SCG evaluation efforts and will report on grant activities as specified in the approved project plan.

The grantee will track the SCG funds separately from its regular allocation under Title IV, Part A of the ESEA.

The grantee agrees to participate in, or continue to participate in, the Healthy Youth Survey.

The grantee agrees to adopt, or continue the use of, an evidence-based school climate survey.

The grantee receiving SCG funds will follow the supplement, not supplant requirements in section 4110 of the ESEA.

The grantee receiving SCG funds will provide equitable services to students and teachers in eligible non-public schools and will:
- ensure that a public agency maintains control of funds for the services and assistance provided to a non-public school with SCG funds.
- ensure that a public agency has title to materials, equipment, and property purchased with SCG funds.
- ensure that services to a non-public school with SCG funds are provided by a public agency directly, or through contract with, another public or private entity.
- ensure that equitable services provided with SCG funds are secular, neutral, and nonideological.

The grantee will ensure no funds will be used for the provision to any person of a dangerous weapon or training in the use of a dangerous weapon as prohibited under Section 13401 of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which amends section 8526 of the ESEA.

The grantee will participate, as requested, in any OSPI or US Department of Education evaluation of the SCG program and will cooperate with any audit or examination of records with respect to such funds.