

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



Overview

The Virginia Department of Education is pleased to announce the availability of Stronger Connections¹ grant funds to be awarded to eligible school divisions on a competitive basis to provide students with safer and healthier learning environments.

The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) provides \$1 billion in funding to State educational agencies (SEAs) to be distributed under Title IV, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). The BSCA specifies that SEAs must make competitive subgrants to high-need local educational agencies (LEAs), as determined by the SEA, for activities to support safe and healthy students under [section 4108](#) of the ESEA. The BSCA requires an SEA to define “high-need LEA” for the purposes of eligibility for Stronger Connections funds.

Under the Stronger Connections grant program, Virginia’s school divisions will be evaluated and identified as a “high need LEA” based on an evaluation rubric that considers: 1) Incidents of “Early Warning Indicators for School Violence”; 2) The school division’s chronic absenteeism rate; 3) The school division’s student-to-staff ratio of counselors, school psychologists, and social workers; and 4) The school division’s participation in the Rural and Low-Income School Program (Title V, Party B of the ESEA) or the Small, Rural School Achievement Program (SRSA). The following chart reflects the criteria used to determine high needs LEAs based on a point system for incidents of “Early Warning Indicators” from the Student Behavior and Administrative Response (SBAR) reports, division level percentage of chronic absenteeism, student to staff ratio, and participation in either RLIS or SRSA grant programs. While any school division may apply for the school safety Stronger Connections grant, divisions that score 40 points or higher on the evaluation criteria will be identified as high needs by the Department and eligible for a grant award.

¹ The Department has designated BSCA section 4108 funds as the Stronger Connections grant program to distinguish it from the regular Title IV, Part A, Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants program, which funds a broader range of activities, including activities to support well-rounded educational opportunities and the effective use of educational technology. The Department announced allocations and awarded Stronger Connections funds to SEAs on September 15, 2022.

**Stronger Connections Grant Program
Application Evaluation Criteria**

Criteria I: Early Warning Indicators for School Violence**					
Evaluation Criteria	1 Point	3 Point	4 Points	5 points	15 Points
Homicide-Firearm		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	
Sexual Assault		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	
Attempted Sexual Assault		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	
Assault with a Firearm or Weapon		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	
Actual or Attempted Robbery		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	
Kidnapping/Abduction		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	
Illegal Possession of Controlled Drugs and Substances with Intent to Distribute		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	
Aggravated Sexual Battery on a Student		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	
Illegal Possession of a Handgun		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	

Illegal Possession of a Rifle or Shotgun		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	
Illegal Possession of Any Other Projectile Weapon		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	
Illegal Possession of Other Firearms		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	
Malicious Wounding without a Weapon		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	
Assault: Intending to cause physical injury to another person		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	
Assault and Battery: Causing physical injury to another person		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	
Fighting: The use of physical violence between students or on another person where there is minor injury as determined by the school administration		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	
Using an object not generally considered to		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	

be a weapon to threaten or attempt to injure school personnel					
Using an object not generally considered to be a weapon to threaten or attempt to injure students or others		1 incident reported	2 incidents reported	3 or more incidents reported	

Criteria II: Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism		Less than 15%	15.1%-25%	25.1% and above	
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Criteria III: Student-to-Staff Ratios

Evaluation Criteria	1 Point	3 Point	4 Points	5 points	15 Points
Counselor to student ratio	325 to 1				
School Psychologies ratio	1600 to 1				
Social worker ratio	2000 to 1				

Criteria IV: Rural and Low-Income Schools

Evaluation Criteria	1 Point	3 Points	4 Points	5 Points	15 Points
Title V, Part B, Sub-Part 2 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) or					School division qualified for and received funds (in FY 2022 or FY 2023) under Title V, Part B of ESEA,

Small, Rural School Achievement Program					Rural and Low-Income School Program or the Small, Rural School Achievement Program (SRSA).
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** Reporting is based on Student Behavior and Administrative Response Collection (SBAR) submitted by school divisions to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). *Early Warning Indicators for School Violence* include all data reported to the VDOE (through SBAR) under “Behaviors to Determine Persistently Dangerous Schools” and certain/limited “Behaviors that Endanger Self or Others.”

Eligible Uses of Grant Funds

Virginia’s Stronger Connections Grant program will address student health and safety by providing funding to school divisions to promote school safety, including school hardening. School divisions can use Stronger Connections grant funding for the following purposes:

School Hardening: crime prevention through environmental design

Voice and video internal communication systems.

Technology hardware equipment to support mass notifications systems.

Hurricane or Ballistic Security window film.

Motion detection systems.

Technology equipment and software to support security systems.

Classroom security door hardware.

Security door hardware or electronic card access systems for main entrance and other points of entry.

Visitor I.D. badging system.

Security scanning equipment.

Surveillance cameras (mounted on interior/exterior walls and existing site structures)

Site surveillance cameras

Hand-held two-way radios.

Push to talk wireless communications systems.

Security alarm systems.

Security panic systems.

Security lighting systems (mounted on interior/exterior walls and existing site structures).

Uninterrupted power supply to support the security equipment (UPS).

Gunshot Detection System.

Vaping Detectors

Security related devices located inside school buses (interior security cameras, two-way talk radios) that serve bus routes for the school listed in this application

School/Parent emergency or protective notification systems

This list not all inclusive. Any non-construction purchase or upgrade of equipment, systems, or tools that increase school safety will be considered for allowability

Threat Assessment Data and Response

Materials and data collection related to the comprehensive planning of school divisions to address data-based needs in school safety and school climate

School Resource Officer (SRO) and School Security Officer (SSO)

Funding to localities to place either a School Resource Officer or School Security Officer in elementary and secondary schools where none currently exist

Expenses related to the equipment necessary for uniformed school resource officers, school security officers, and other relevant school safety personnel and the enhancement of the school-law enforcement partnership training

Additional Information:

SEAs must use at least 95 percent of Stronger Connections funds to make awards on a competitive basis to high-need LEAs, as determined by the SEA, to support activities related to safe and healthy students under [section 4108](#) of the ESEA and may reserve up to 5 percent of their allocation for State purposes. Specifically, an SEA may reserve up to 1 percent of its allocation for SEA administration of the program and may use any remaining reserved funds for State-level activities to support safe and healthy students.

The VDOE will make \$16,384,550 available to high-need school divisions through this competitive grant program. Typical division grant awards will range from \$300,000 to \$350,000 depending on availability of funds and allowability of expenditures.

The Stronger Connections Grant application will be available on the [Stronger Connections](#) website on June 1, 2023. A technical assistance webinar for completing the grant application will be held June 1, 2023, from 9 a.m. - 10 a.m. Register for the webinar [here](#).

Applications for Stronger Connections competitive grant funds **must be received by Tuesday, August 1, 2023**. The completed application and attachments may be emailed to ESSA@doe.virginia.gov.

Stronger Connections funds are available for obligation by SEAs and LEAs through **September 30, 2026**. This period includes the additional 1-year period of fund availability provided under section 421(b) of the [General Education Provisions Act](#) (GEPA) (the “Tydings Amendment”).

Further information on the Stronger Connections Grant, please visit the Department's website [here](#).

If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Marsha Granderson at Marsha.Granderson@doe.virginia.gov or (804) 786-1993.