

U.S. Dept. of Education: Dept. awards nearly \$1 billion to 56 states and territories to provide students with safer and healthier learning environments

Posted on Thursday, Sep 29, 2022

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The U.S. Department of Education announced awards totaling nearly \$1 billion through the *Bipartisan Safer Communities Act* (BSCA). The Stronger Connections grants will help schools provide all students with safe and supportive learning opportunities and environments that are critical for their success.

Through the BSCA, and under the leadership of President Biden, Congress provided \$1 billion in Title IV, Part A formula funding to state educational agencies (SEAs) to develop state grant programs to provide students with safer and healthier learning environments. Earlier today, Secretary Cardona informed chief state school officers of their allocations under the BSCA Stronger Connections grant program. SEAs must award these funds competitively to high-need local educational agencies (LEAs), as determined by the state, to fund activities allowable under section 4108 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

“We have years of evidence that demonstrate the value of building safe and supportive schools. These efforts improve academic achievement, promote emotional well-being, reduce disciplinary actions, and increase positive behaviors,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. “Safe and supportive schools help our children and youth overcome trauma and provide a strong foundation of emotional and physical safety. These grants will provide *real* benefits to *real* students in *real* schools.”

Safe and supportive schools are proven by decades of rigorous research to be most effective in supporting academic success as well as meeting the social, emotional, physical, and mental health needs of students. These funds can also be used to support school and community partnerships that pursue multifaceted solutions to more effectively prevent and respond to acts of bullying, violence, and hate that impact members of our school communities at both individual and systemic levels.

As part of the Department's announcement, Secretary Cardona sent chief state school officers a [Dear Colleague Letter](#) outlining three principles that SEAs are strongly encouraged to consider when designing a competitive grant competition and providing LEAs with direction for how they use these funds: (1) ; create positive, inclusive, and supportive school environments; and increase 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 (3) Designing and implementing policies and practices that are responsive to underserved students, protect student rights, and demonstrate respect for student dignity and potential. These policies are consistent with the Administration's previous position on these issues.

Funds can be used to provide all students with safe and supportive learning opportunities and environments that are critical for their success. For example, funds could support the kind of work underway in Saint Paul Public Schools in Minnesota where they are spending almost \$13 million in American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds to support the mental health and wellness of students and staff. This approach includes: hiring 32 additional counselors, social workers, and psychologists; partnering with community organizations to offer mental health support for students; training staff on how to handle trauma; and creating calming spaces for staff and students. More information about the BSCA Stronger Connections grant program can be found [here](#).

Allocations for the Midwest region:

Kansas	\$6,450,520
Illinois	\$40,627,885
Indiana	\$14,216,829
Iowa	\$5,988,079
Michigan	\$27,899,224

Minnesota	\$10,481,264
Missouri	\$15,082,238
Nebraska	\$4,833,025
North Dakota	\$4,833,025
Ohio	\$35,078,494
South Dakota	\$4,833,025
Wisconsin	\$12,509,470