



TITLE IV-A SAFE AND HEALTHY STUDENTS- STRONGER CONNECTIONS GRANT SEEKING PUBLIC COMMENT

Through the [Bipartisan Safer Communities Act \(BSCA\)](#) of June 2022, the Montana Office of Public Instruction was awarded \$4.8 million in additional funding for [Title IV, Part A](#) of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This one-time funding is in addition to the Title IV, Part A funding already allocated to the Montana OPI and 95% of these funds will be made available to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) through a competitive subgrant application. We anticipate the competitive subgrant application to open in the spring of 2023 for program activities to be implemented in the 2023-25 school years.

Through a [“Dear Colleague” letter](#) dated September 15, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) announced this new Stronger Connections Grant (SCG) program is encouraging States to prioritize funds for LEA applicants that demonstrate a strong commitment to the following:

- Implementing comprehensive, evidence-based strategies that meet each student’s social, emotional, physical, and mental well-being needs; create positive, inclusive, and supportive school environments; and increase access to place-based interventions and services.
- 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.
- 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.

The BSCA bill language includes a requirement for states to distribute funds on a competitive basis to “high need” LEAs to implement allowable Title IV, Part A activities aligned with the Safe and Healthy Students program purpose. A DRAFT of the [Montana Stronger Connections Competitive Subgrant Process for review is linked here](#).

We are also seeking public comment on what criteria Montana will use to determine “high need.”

The Montana OPI proposes the following criteria for defining “high need” based on ED Guidance:

- LEAs with high rates of poverty (40 % or more) **AND**
- 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.

Elsie Arntzen, Superintendent

PO Box 202501
Helena, MT 59620-2501
406.444.5643
In-State Toll-free: 1.888.231.9393
TTY Users: 406.444.0235
opi.mt.gov

OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
STATE OF MONTANA

Putting Montana Students First **A⁺**



There are multiple opportunities listed below to provide public comment on the Montana “high need” criteria and to provide input on the [DRAFT Montana SCG competitive subgrant process](#).

1. Please join us for one of the following Zoom Public Comment Session sessions to provide feedback:
 - a. November 3 @ 1:00-1:30 pm
 - b. November 9 @ 4:00-4:30 pm
 - c. November 10 @ 10:00-10:30 am

[Zoom Link to Public Comment Sessions](#)

Zoom Meeting ID: 860 8283 6074

Passcode: 608466

2. [Complete this form](#) to submit feedback no later than November 15, 2022.
3. Send comments via email to: OPIStrongerConnections@mt.gov no later than November 15, 2022.