

Request for Application

# Program Guidelines

## 2023-2025 Stronger Connections Grant Pilot

Authorized by PL 117-159 Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, Title II, School Improvement Programs, June 25, 2022, Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA)

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## Introduction to the Program Guidelines

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TEA, as the pass-through entity<sup>1</sup>, is the grantee<sup>2</sup> from the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and TEA awards subgrants to non-federal entities<sup>3</sup> such as local educational agencies (LEAs), including school districts, charter schools, and education service centers, and to a lesser degree institutions of higher education (IHEs), and nonprofit organizations (NPOs) who are the agency's subgrantees<sup>4</sup>. These guidelines apply to all subgrantees of TEA, regardless of whether referenced herein as subgrantee or grantee. For purposes of this document, TEA may use the terms grantee and subgrantee synonymously for its subrecipients.

This part of the request for application (RFA), Program Guidelines, is to be used in conjunction with the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#) and any application instructions. The Standard Application System (SAS) consists of Application Part 1 (PDF – narrative schedules) and Application Part 2 (Excel – budget schedules) to be completed in order for the applicant to be eligible for funding.

For applicants selected for funding, all guidelines and instructions will be incorporated by reference into the Notice of Grant Award (NOGA).

## Reference to the General and Fiscal Guidelines

The Program Guidelines provide information specifically relevant to this grant program. The [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#) provide information relevant to all TEA grant programs. Throughout the Program Guidelines, cross-references are given to applicable sections of the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#). It is critical that you review all referenced sections of the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#) when preparing your application.

## Errata Notices

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Errata Notices.

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<sup>1</sup> Pass-through entity is defined as a non-Federal entity that provides a subaward to a subrecipient to carry out part of a federal program. (2 CFR 200.74)

<sup>2</sup> Grantee is defined as the legal entity to which a grant is awarded and that is accountable to the federal government for the use of the funds provided. The term "grantee" does not include any secondary recipients, such as subgrantees and contractors that may receive funds from a grantee. (34 CFR 77)

<sup>3</sup> Non-federal entity is defined as a state, local government, Indian tribe, institution of higher education, or nonprofit organization that carries out a federal award as a recipient or subrecipient. (2 CFR 200.69)

<sup>4</sup> Subgrantee is defined by TEA to be the same as a subrecipient which is defined as a non-federal entity that receives a subaward from a pass-through entity to carry out part of a federal program; but does not include an individual that is a beneficiary of such program. (2 CFR 200.93) Subgrantee is defined in 34 CFR 77 as the legal entity to which a subgrant is awarded and that is accountable to the grantee for the use of the funds provided.

## Contact for Clarifying Information

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### Grant Program Contact

Hank Weikert, Student Supports Director  
Supportive Schools Division  
hank.weikert@tea.texas.gov  
Phone: (512) 463-9270

### Additional Program Contact

Dr. Amy Blakey, Director of Supportive Schools  
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amy.blakey@tea.texas.gov  
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### Funding Contact

Eleanor Blais, Grant Manager  
Grants Administration Division  
eleanor.blais@tea.texas.gov  
Phone: (512) 463-8525

## US Department of Education and/or State Appropriations

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The following is provided in compliance with the US Department of Education Appropriations Act:

Category	Amount
Total funds available for this project	\$1,000,000
Percentage to be financed with federal funds	100%
Amount of federal funds	\$1,000,000
Percentage to be financed from nonfederal sources	0%
Amount of nonfederal funds	\$0

## Grant Timeline

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For all dates related to the grant, including reporting dates, see the [TEA Grant Opportunities](#) page. If a report due date falls on a weekend or holiday, the report will be due the following business day. All dates except the grant ending date may vary slightly as conditions require.

## Grant at a Glance

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This section provides detailed information about the grant program.

### Program Purpose, Goals, and Objectives

#### **The Texas Stronger Connections Grant will provide:**

- Professional development and funding for training for Safe and Supportive Schools Programs
- Technical assistance to support development, implementation, and sustainable practices.
- Development of family and community engagement partnerships.
- External coaching to support safe and healthy development and implementation.
- Trauma-Informed practices, emergency plan development, and site assessments.
- Development of personnel for Student Support Team (SST) framework and implement school-related Initiatives.

### Eligible Applicants

The eligible applicant is Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District (UCISD).

### Shared Services Arrangement

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Shared Services Arrangements.

Shared services arrangements (SSAs) are not allowed.

### Cost Share or Matching Requirement

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Cost Share/Match Requirement.

There is no cost share or matching requirement for this grant program.

## Supplement, Not Supplant

For supplement, not supplant guidance, see the Supplement, Not Supplant Handbook on the Department of Grant Compliance and Administration's [Training and Other Resources](#) page.

The supplement, not supplant provision, does apply to this grant program.

## Limitation of Administrative Funds

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Administrative Costs.

NOTE: Administrative funds include **both** direct administrative costs **and** allowable indirect costs.

### Direct Administrative Costs

TEA limits the amount of direct administrative costs for this grant program to no more than 8 percent of the total grant award.

### Indirect Costs

Indirect costs are permitted for this grant.

For this federally funded grant, the grantee may claim a maximum for indirect costs equal to its current approved restricted indirect cost rate.

To calculate the maximum indirect costs that can be claimed for a grant, complete the [Maximum Indirect Costs Worksheet](#), located on the Grants Administration Division's [Grant Resources](#) page.

## Pre-Award Costs

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Pre-Award Costs.

Pre-award costs are permitted, if requested, from May 19, 2023, to stamp-in date.

## Application Requirements and Assurances

This section identifies the types of requirements in which applicants must comply to be eligible for funding:

- Statutory requirements (requirements defined in the authorizing statute)
- TEA program requirements (requirements defined by TEA program staff)

## Statutory Requirements

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Statutory Requirements.

Per Section 22.0834 of the Texas Education Code (TEC), any person offered employment by any entity that contracts with TEA or receives grant funds administered by TEA (i.e., a grantee or subgrantee) is subject to the fingerprinting requirement. TEA is prohibited from awarding grant funds to any entity, including nonprofit organizations, that fails to comply with this requirement. For details, refer to the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Fingerprinting Requirement.

The following requirements are defined in the statute that authorizes this program. The applicant must comply with each of these requirements in the application to be considered for funding:

1. Implement evidence-based strategies that meet students' social, emotional, physical and mental well-being needs; create positive, inclusive, and supportive school environments; and increase access to place-based interventions and services.
2. Engage 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. Design and implement policies and practices that advance all students and are responsive to underserved students, protect student rights, and demonstrate respect for student dignity and potential.

## TEA Program Requirements

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), TEA Program Requirements.

In addition to the statutory requirements, TEA has established the following program requirements. The applicant must comply with each of these requirements in the application to be considered for funding:

1. The grant program will be funded by reimbursement once the NOGA has been issued and the grantee submits payment requests through the Expenditure Reporting (ER) system. See [Expenditure Reporting](#).

## Program-Specific Assurances

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Provisions and Assurances.

The program-specific assurances for this grant program are listed in the Application Part 1.

## Allowable Activities and Use of Funds

Refer to the [Budgeting Costs Guidance Handbook](#) on the Grants Administration Division's [Grant Resources](#) page for general guidance on allowable activities and use of funds.

Allowable activities and use of funds for this grant include only the following:

To develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive programs and activities that—

- (1) are coordinated with other schools and community-based services and programs;
- (2) foster safe, healthy, supportive, and drug-free environments that support student academic achievement;
- (3) promote the involvement of parents in the activity or program;
- (4) may be conducted in partnership with an institution of higher education, business, nonprofit organization, community-based organization, or other public or private entity with a demonstrated record of success in implementing activities described in this section; and
- (5) may include, among other programs and activities—
  - (A) *drug and violence prevention activities and programs that are evidence-based* (to the extent the State, in consultation with local educational agencies in the State, determines that such evidence is reasonably available) including—
    - (i) programs to educate students against the use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, smokeless tobacco products, and electronic cigarettes; and
    - (ii) professional development and training for school and specialized instructional support personnel and interested community members in prevention, education, early identification, intervention mentoring, recovery support services and, where appropriate, rehabilitation referral, as related to drug and violence prevention;
  - (B) in accordance with sections 4001 and 4111—
    - (i) *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, which may be provided by school-based mental health services providers; and
    - (ii) school-based mental health services partnership programs that—
      - (I) are conducted in partnership with a public or private mental health entity or health care entity; and



(II) provide comprehensive school-based mental health services and supports and staff development for school and community personnel working in the school that are—

(aa) based on trauma-informed practices that are evidence-based (to the extent the State, in consultation with local educational agencies in the State, determines that such evidence is reasonably available);

(bb) coordinated (where appropriate) with early intervening services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.); and

(cc) provided by qualified mental and behavioral health professionals who are certified or licensed by the State involved and practicing within their area of expertise;

(C) programs or activities that—

(i) *integrate health and safety practices* into school or athletic programs;

(ii) support a healthy, active lifestyle, including nutritional education and regular, structured physical education activities and programs, that may address chronic disease management with instruction led by school nurses, nurse practitioners, or other appropriate specialists or professionals to help maintain the well-being of students;

(iii) help prevent bullying and harassment;

(iv) improve instructional practices for developing relationship-building skills, such as effective communication, and improve safety through the recognition and prevention of coercion, violence, or abuse, including teen and dating violence, stalking, domestic abuse, and sexual violence and harassment;

(v) provide mentoring and school counseling to all students, including children who are at risk of academic failure, dropping out of school, involvement in criminal or delinquent activities, or drug use and abuse;

(vi) establish or improve school dropout and reentry programs; or

(vii) establish learning environments and enhance students' effective learning skills that are essential for school readiness and academic success, such as by providing integrated systems of student and family supports;

(D) *high-quality training for school personnel*, including specialized instructional support personnel, *related to*—

(i) suicide prevention;

(ii) effective and trauma-informed practices in classroom management;

(iii) crisis management and conflict resolution techniques;

(iv) human trafficking (defined, for purposes of this subparagraph, as an act or practice described in paragraph (9) or (10) of section 103 of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (22 U.S.C. 7102));

(v) school-based violence prevention strategies;

(vi) drug abuse prevention, including educating children facing substance abuse at home; and

(vii) bullying and harassment prevention;

(E) in accordance with sections 4001 and 4111, *child sexual abuse awareness and prevention programs or activities*, such as programs or activities designed to provide—

(i) age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate instruction for students in child sexual abuse awareness and prevention, including how to recognize child sexual abuse and how to safely report child sexual abuse; and

(ii) information to parents and guardians of students about child sexual abuse awareness and prevention, including how to recognize child sexual abuse and how to discuss child sexual abuse with a child;

(F) designing and implementing a locally-tailored plan to *reduce exclusionary discipline practices* in elementary and secondary schools that—

(i) is consistent with best practices;

(ii) includes strategies that are evidence-based (to the extent the State, in consultation with local educational agencies in the State, determines that such evidence is reasonably available); and

(iii) is aligned with the long-term goal of prison reduction through opportunities, mentoring, intervention, support, and other education services, referred to as a “youth PROMISE plan”; or

(G) *implementation of schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports*, including through coordination with similar activities carried out under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.), in order to improve academic outcomes and school conditions for student learning;

(H) designating a site resource coordinator at a school or local educational agency to provide a variety of services, such as—

(i) establishing partnerships within the community to provide resources and support for schools;

(ii) ensuring that all service and community partners are aligned with the academic expectations of a community school in order to improve student success; and

(iii) strengthening relationships between schools and communities; or

(l) *pay for success initiatives* aligned with the purposes of this section

## General Allowable Activities and Use of Funds

- Payroll costs
- Professional and contracted services
  - Contracted services for technical assistance provided by the regional ESC or a technical assistance provider approved by the Texas Center for Student Support and TEA
  - Professional and contracted services with a partner approved by the Texas Center for Student Support and TEA
- Consumable and durable supplies and materials
- Costs associated with conference attendance for staff, advisory council members, and other stakeholders in conjunction with training and support provided by the Texas Center for Student Supports
- General costs associated with fulfillment of program requirements

## Other Allowable Operating Costs Requiring Specific Approval in the Grant Application (6400)

### Stipends for Non-Employees Other Than Those Included in 6419

Stipends for non-employees other than those included in 6419 may be funded under the grant program. Stipends for non-employees will require pre-authorization in writing. To access the pre-authorization form for participant support costs, refer to the [Forms for Prior Approval, Disclosure, and Justification](#) page.

## Unallowable Activities and Use of Funds

In general, refer to the Budgeting Cost Guidance Handbook on the [Administering a Grant](#) page for unallowable costs.

In addition, unallowable activities and use of funds for this grant may include but are not limited to the following:

- Debt services (lease liabilities for terms greater than 12 months) — unallowable costs include:

- Subscription-based Information Technology Arrangement (SBITA) – Principal Costs (6514)
- Subscription-based Information Technology Arrangement (SBITA) – Interest Costs (6526)
- Capital Lease Liability — Principal Costs (6512)
- Capital Lease Liability – Interest Costs (6522)
- Interest on Debt Costs (6523)
- Out-of-State travel
- Travel for students to conferences
- Field trips
- Non-employee costs for conferences
- Travel costs for officials such as Executive Directors, Superintendents, or Board Members
- Cost of membership in any civic or community organization
- Hosting or sponsoring of conferences
- Advisory council
- Capital outlay
- Any activity not specified above in the Allowable Activities and Use of Funds section

## Performance Measures

The applicant agrees to collect data and report on the following mandatory performance measures:

1. Quarterly report of the number of students referred for and receiving support for non-academic needs disaggregated by source of referral, type of need, type of support, level of support, time of year, length of support provided as measured through the case management system.
2. Quarterly report on student attendance, behavior referrals, removal from class, and disciplinary outcomes for student referrals.
3. Quarterly report on behavioral threat referrals for harmful, threatening, or violent behavior, threat assessments conducted, and outcomes of threat assessments including hand-off to the student support team. Student support team data will be reported in performance measure 1.
4. Annual report on school climate survey outcomes and action steps taken to improve school climate.
5. Annual report on parent and family engagement efforts including strategies and number of engaged families in alignment with the playbook developed by the Texas Center for Student Support.
6. End of first year summary and reflection of progress towards the establishment of the Student Support Program and next steps to advance the support provided to students.
7. End of project report that includes a summary and reflection of the district Student Support Program, support provided to students and families, and the plan for sustaining the program and expanding it to other campuses within the district.

## Federal Grant Requirements

### Equitable Access and Participation

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Equitable Access and Participation.

This requirement does apply to this federally funded grant program.

### Private Nonprofit School Participation

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Private Nonprofit School Participation.

This requirement does apply to this federally funded grant program.

### Maintenance of Effort

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Maintenance of Effort.

This requirement does not apply to this federally funded grant program.

## Attachments

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There are two types of attachments that may be required to be submitted with your application:

### Required Fiscal-Related Attachments

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Fiscal-Related Documentation Required to Be on File, for a general description of fiscal-related documents that can be required as attachments to the application.

### Required Program-Related Attachments

See the [General and Fiscal Guidelines](#), Required Program-Related Attachments, for a general description of program-related documents that can be required as attachments to the application.

No program-related attachments are required for this grant program.