



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

April 14, 2023

The Honorable Bill Cassidy, M.D.
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cassidy:

Thank you for your March 30, 2023, letter regarding the increase in gun violence in schools and the March 27th shooting at The Covenant School in Nashville. What happened is a national tragedy and will have devastating and long-lasting impacts on children and families. Shootings should never happen in any of our schools or communities. Schools must be safe environments for students to learn and grow, and no student, parent, or teacher should worry about their physical safety at or around school buildings. We must urgently do more to protect our young people from gun violence, and I appreciate your shared prioritization of this important work.

I am grateful for your efforts to include robust funding under the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) and for your commitment to addressing the safety and mental health of our children and youth in schools. The historic investments through BSCA are providing critical resources to schools as they do the important work to create safer and healthier learning environments.

Earlier this week, the Department provided updated guidance in the [Bipartisan Safer Communities Act Stronger Connections Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions](#) (BSCA Stronger Connections FAQs) on the use of BSCA funds for State and local educational agency (LEA) officials to establish safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments. This guidance includes questions and answers related to the specific issues you raised in your March 30th letter and makes clear the range of measures and funds available to address the physical security of schools under BSCA, consistent with section 4108 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). It also reiterates positions the Department has previously taken on how BSCA Stronger Connections Grants may be used for emergency operations and comprehensive and evidence-based school safety measures, including:

- ***Emergency operations plans:*** Our guidance encourages LEAs to use funds for activities that foster safe, healthy, supportive, and drug-free environments, including the development and implementation of emergency operations plans (question C-1 of the BSCA Stronger Connections FAQ).
- ***School-based police officers:*** Our guidance specifies that schools may use funds for school-based police officers, law enforcement, or school resource officers (SROs). Districts that choose to include or expand the presence of school-based police must

comply with federal civil rights laws and should implement high-quality practices in the training and use of SROs in schools, consistent with the [Guiding Principles for SROs](#) published by the U.S. Department of Justice (question C-21 of the BSCA Stronger Connections FAQ).

- ***Surveillance cameras, metal detectors, and other physical security equipment:*** Our guidance specifies that funds may be used for equipment such as surveillance cameras, metal detectors, and other physical or infrastructure-related security equipment or minor remodeling, including minor remodeling that may be related to the installation of this equipment (question C-22 of the BSCA Stronger Connections FAQ).
- ***Threat assessment systems or teams:*** Our guidance specifies that LEAs may use funds to implement threat assessment systems or to establish multidisciplinary teams that comply with all federal civil rights and disability laws and encourages LEAs to pursue an evidence-based, multifaceted, comprehensive approach to improving student safety, health, well-being, and academic development (question C-23 of the BSCA Stronger Connections FAQ).

The Department [has posted](#) this BSCA guidance on a page dedicated to BSCA [on our website](#) and has distributed this guidance to State educational agencies and stakeholders.

In addition, under my direction, the Department has provided timely technical assistance, resources, and supports to address school safety and student well-being. For example, the Department hosted a webinar series from November 2022 through January 2023, on the implementation of the BSCA Stronger Connections program, which included experts who highlighted promising practices to address safe, supportive, and healthy schools. Last fall, I issued a [Dear Colleague Letter](#) outlining guiding principles and evidence-based strategies to address school safety and encouraging school officials to engage families, educators, staff, and community organizations in this critical work. Furthermore, the Department has provided additional resources and technical assistance specifically focused on school safety to States and schools through the [Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center](#), the [Safer Schools and Campuses Best Practices Clearinghouse](#), the [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#), and the [Center on PBIS](#), among other resources. Consistent with our role as a service agency, the Department is committed to continuing to provide technical assistance to chief State school officers, superintendents, and others on the effective use of BSCA funds to improve the safety of schools.

As a parent and an educator, I remain deeply committed to ensuring that schools are safe places that promote the academic, physical, social, and emotional well-being of students. I also believe that leaders in government and beyond must redouble efforts to end, once and for all, the scourge of gun violence in and around our schools. It is abhorrent and occurs in no other nation on the planet. Therefore, I join the President in calling on Congress to enact commonsense gun reforms that a strong majority of Americans want, including banning assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, requiring background checks for all gun sales, requiring safe storage of firearms, and repealing gun manufacturers' immunity from liability.

Thank you for your shared commitment and partnership in keeping our schools safe. Should you have further questions, please contact the Department's Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs at (202) 401-0020.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Miguel A. Cardona". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Miguel" being the most prominent.

Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.
U.S. Secretary of Education