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## Department of Education Support for School Safety Initiatives

Congressional interest in elementary and secondary public school safety and security remains strong. Though public school safety and security is primarily a state and local responsibility, there are federal programs and initiatives that can support these efforts. This In Focus provides an overview of programs and resources administered by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) for improving school safety.

### Currently Funded Grant Programs

ED currently administers two programs that can help state and local educational agencies (SEAs and LEAs) address school safety concerns. Both programs are authorized under Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; P.L. 114-95).

#### Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

SSAE grants, commonly referred to as the “block grant” program, are authorized under ESEA Title IV-A. The purpose of SSAE grants is to improve students’ academic achievement by increasing the capacity of states, LEAs, and schools to provide all students with access to a well-rounded education, improve school conditions for student learning, and improve the use of technology. SSAE grant funds are allocated by formula to each SEA, which must then suballocate the majority of the SSAE block grant funds they receive to LEAs via formula (though they may reserve some funds for state activities to support LEAs receiving grants). SSAE program appropriations were \$1.38 billion in FY2024.

LEAs have substantial flexibility with respect to the use of funds under the SSAE grant program. However, they must use funds for three broad categories of activities: (1) supporting well-rounded educational opportunities, (2) supporting safe and healthy students (including school safety initiatives), and (3) supporting the effective use of technology to improve the digital literacy of all students.

If an LEA receives a grant of \$30,000 or more, it must provide assurances that it will use funds toward activities in each of the three categories, including at least 20% for activities supporting safe and healthy students. If an LEA receives a grant of less than \$30,000, it may choose to use its funds under one or more of the categories of activities. If an LEA uses any funds for “safe and healthy student” initiatives, the LEA determines how much will be used for activities unrelated to school safety (e.g., a health or nutrition education program) and initiatives focused on school safety.

The programs and activities an LEA selects to support in the category of Safe and Healthy Students (§4108) must,

among other requirements, be used to develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive programs and activities that are coordinated with other schools and community-based services and programs; and foster safe, healthy, supportive, and drug-free environments that support student academic achievement. Examples of allowable activities in this category related to school safety include the following:

- drug and violence prevention programs and activities that are evidence-based (to the extent that such evidence is reasonably available),
- school-based mental health services,
- bullying and harassment prevention programs and activities,
- re-entry/transition programs for justice-involved youth,
- mentoring and school counseling,
- school-wide positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS) programs, and
- training for school personnel in trauma-informed practices in classroom management and crisis management.

While drug and violence prevention activities are only examples of what an LEA might choose to support with Title IV-A funds, the Title IV-A program includes a definition of what constitutes “drug and violence prevention” in Section 4102(5). With respect to violence prevention, the term is defined as:

the promotion of school safety, such that students and school personnel are free from violent and disruptive acts, including sexual harassment and abuse, and victimization associated with prejudice and intolerance, on school premises, going to and from school, and at school-sponsored activities, through the creation and maintenance of a school environment that is free of weapons and fosters individual responsibility and respect for the rights of others.

**National Activities for School Safety** are authorized under Title IV-F-3, Section 4631 of the ESEA. The National Activities for School Safety program authorizes the Secretary of Education (hereinafter referred to as the Secretary) to use a portion of its funds for the Project School Emergency Response to Violence (Project SERV) program. Any remaining funds may be used to carry out other activities to improve students’ safety and well-being, during and after the school day, through grants, contracts, or cooperative agreements with public and private organizations or individuals, or through agreements with other federal agencies. FY2024 appropriations for all

National Activities for School Safety programs were \$216 million. Currently funded National Activities for School Safety include the following:

- **Project SERV:** This program was created to provide resources to LEAs and institutions of higher education (IHEs) that have experienced a violent or traumatic crisis disrupting the learning environment, such as a school shooting or hurricane. Two types of grants are awarded: (1) Immediate Services grants, which provide short-term support following a traumatic event; and (2) Extended Services grants, which address long-term recovery efforts following a traumatic event.
- **Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant (MHSPDG) Program:** This program supports partnerships that will train school-based mental health service providers to help address shortages of mental health services in high-need LEAs. In addition to regular appropriations authorized under the ESEA National Activities for School Safety program, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA; P.L. 117-159) provides \$100 million annually for grants under the MHSPDG programs from FY2022 through FY2026.
- **School-Based Mental Health Services Grants:** This program's purpose is to increase the number of counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other service providers who provide school-based mental health services to students in high-need schools and LEAs. Like the MHSPDG program, School-Based Mental Health Services Grants receive funding under the ESEA National Activities for School Safety program, and an additional \$100 million each year from FY2022 through FY2026 under the BSCA.
- **Supporting America's School Infrastructure Grant Program (SASI):** The SASI grant program was created to increase the capacity of states to support high-need LEAs working to leverage available federal, state, and local resources to increase school environmental health and safety by improving public school infrastructure. The Secretary competitively awarded the first cohort of approximately \$37 million SASI grants to eight SEAs in November 2023.
- **Project Prevent Grants:** Project Prevent awards competitive grants to LEAs in communities with pervasive violence to support students and reduce the likelihood that students who have been exposed to violence will later commit violent acts themselves. Recipients of Project Prevent grants are required to provide (1) school-based social and emotional supports to victims of violence, (2) access to counseling services to assist students in coping with trauma or anxiety, and (3) strategies and activities to improve the school environment and prevent future violence.

### Other School Safety Programs

In addition to the ED-funded grant programs that directly support school safety initiatives, there are several ESEA grant programs for which school safety or security is not the program's primary purpose but that permit using funds to

support school safety and security initiatives. For detailed information about these programs as well as the programs discussed in this In Focus and school safety programs supported by other federal departments and agencies, see CRS Report R46872, *Federal Support for School Safety and Security*.

### Other ED Resources on School Safety

In addition to grant programs to support school safety, ED maintains resources that could be helpful to policymakers who want to understand more about safety issues, or parents, teachers, and school administrators who want to explore ways to enhance the safety of their local schools and IHEs. ED operates centers that provide information and technical assistance on school safety and produces reports and data products on school safety and security, including the following:

**The Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance (REMS TA) Center**, which builds the “preparedness capacity” of schools, LEAs, IHEs, and their community partners and provides information, resources, and services in the field of elementary, secondary, and higher education emergency operations planning.

**The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE)**, which offers information and technical assistance to states, LEAs, and schools that receive Title IV-A SSAE grants. NCSSLE also provides listings of grants received by each state, as well as by LEAs within each state, from ED and other federal agencies to support safe and supportive school-based initiatives.

**Indicators of School Crime and Safety**, which is a report produced jointly by ED and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). This report presents federal data on school conditions, school crime, and school security measures, based on information drawn from a variety of data sources, including national surveys of students, teachers, and principals conducted by ED and DOJ.

### CRS Resources on School Safety

- CRS Report R46872, *Federal Support for School Safety and Security*
- CRS In Focus IF12131, *School Safety and Target Hardening*
- CRS Report R45251, *School Resource Officers: Issues for Congress*
- CRS In Focus IF10836, *Department of Justice Support for School Safety Initiatives*
- CRS In Focus IF10882, *Department of Homeland Security Resources for School Security and Safety*

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