



2024-2025 Stronger Connections Grant

Competitive Grant Application: Due 11:59 p.m. CT, July 18, 2023

NOGA ID

Application stamp-in date and time

TEA will only accept grant application documents by **email**, including competitive grant applications and amendments. Submit grant applications and amendments as follows:

Competitive grant applications and amendments to competitivegrants@tea.texas.gov.

The application **MUST** bear the signature of a person authorized to bind the applicant to a contractual agreement

Authorizing legislation: PL 117-159 Bipartisan Safer Communities Act Title II School Improvement Programs, BSCA

Grant period: From 11/15/2023 to 09/30/2025

Pre-award costs: ARE NOT permitted for this grant

Required attachments: N/A

Amendment Number

Amendment number (For amendments only; enter N/A when completing this form to apply for grant funds):

1. Applicant Information

Name of organization Freer Independent School District

Campus name Norman Thomas Elementary CDN 066903 Vendor ID ESC 2 UEI V2CEX8UQA

Address 905 S. Norton City Freer ZIP 78357 Phone 361-394-6025

Primary Contact Conrad Cantu Email Ccantu@freerisd.net Phone 361-394-6025

Secondary Contact Frances Martinez Perez Email fperez@freerisd.net Phone 361-394-6025

2. Certification and Incorporation


I understand that this application constitutes an offer and, if accepted by TEA or renegotiated to acceptance, will form a binding agreement. I hereby certify that the information contained in this application is, to the best of my knowledge, correct and that the organization named above has authorized me as its representative to obligate this organization in a legally binding contractual agreement. I certify that any ensuing program and activity will be conducted in accordance and compliance with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations.

I further certify my acceptance of the requirements conveyed in the following portions of the grant application, as applicable, and that these documents are incorporated by reference as part of the grant application and Notice of Grant Award (NOGA):

- Grant application, guidelines, and instructions
 Debarment and Suspension Certification
 General Provisions and Assurances
 Lobbying Certification
 Application-Specific Provisions and Assurances
 ESSA Provisions and Assurances requirements

Authorized Official Name Conrad Cantu Title Superintenden Email ccantu@freerisd.net

Phone 361-394-6025 Signature  Date 7/18/2023

Grant Writer Name Stella Uribe Stevens Signature  Date 7/17/2023

Grant writer is an employee of the applicant organization. Grant writer is **not** an employee of the applicant organization.

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3. Shared Services ArrangementsShared services arrangements (SSAs) **are not** permitted for this grant.**4. Identify/Address Needs**

List up to three quantifiable needs, as identified in your needs assessment, that these program funds will address. Describe your plan for addressing each need.

Quantifiable Need	Plan for Addressing Need
Providing mental health support for the school community: students, families and staff members.	The need will be addressed by providing mental health support/services. 1) training, coaching, utilizing curriculum available from the Texas Center for Support Services, 2) parent education support on mental health 3) contracting additional support staff (counselors, case managers , programming staff, etc).
Providing a safe school environment for all students will impact students positively. Moreover, a reduction in destructive behaviors such as self-harm, bullying, suicide, and violence will change the school culture.	A safe school plan will be developed with collaboration from ESC2 and the Texas Center for Student Support. School and program personnel will collaborate to ensure all campuses are safe and conducive to learning. Education on key components of a safe school will be presented to all stakeholders.
Addressing attendance - Attendance in school is vital for students to feel successful, safe and included. Students are surrounded by their peers and support systems when attending school.	Forming a partnership with parents to support school attendance will be established. In addition, incentives, learning fairs, and engaging student programs will be explored to address attendance. Data collection: attendance records, data on student achievement /discipline correlation to attendance.

5. SMART Goal

Describe the summative SMART goal you have identified for this program (a goal that is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely), either related to student outcome or consistent with the purpose of the grant.

Freer Independent School District's "Stronger Connections Grant" will provide concentrated wrap-around support services on mental health, safety in the school and attendance during year one to ensure students make personal connections to the school and feel included in their educational success.

6. Measurable Progress

Identify the benchmarks that you will use at the end of the first three grant quarters to measure progress toward meeting the process and implementation goals defined for the grant.

First-Quarter Benchmark

Quarter One – November 15, 2023 – April 30, 2024

1) Surveys/questionnaires for students, parents, teachers, and other school staff members will be completed to share their feelings, attitudes and experiences related to their social-emotional skills as well as the social-emotional climate of their learning environments. Surveys will be administered to assess the progress made on program implementation and summative goals. 2) Data in the areas of areas: academic achievement, attendance, and disciplinary incidents will be obtained at the end of the first quarter for progress measurement.

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6. Measurable Progress (Cont.)**Second-Quarter Benchmark**

Quarter Two – May 1, 2024 – October 31, 2024

1) Surveys/questionnaires for students, parents, teachers, and other school staff members will be completed to share their feelings, attitudes and experiences related to their social-emotional skills as well as the social-emotional climate of their learning environments. Surveys will be administered to assess the progress made on program implementation and summative goals. 2) Data in the areas of areas: academic achievement, attendance, and disciplinary incidents will be obtained at the end of the second quarter for progress measurement.

Third-Quarter Benchmark

Quarter Three – November 1, 2024 – April 30, 2025

1) Surveys/questionnaires for students, parents, teachers, and other school staff members will be completed to share their feelings, attitudes and experiences related to their social-emotional skills as well as the social-emotional climate of their learning environments. Surveys will be administered to assess the progress made on program implementation and summative goals. 2) Data in the areas of areas: academic achievement, attendance, and disciplinary incidents will be obtained at the end of the third quarter to assess progress and measurable results

7. Project Evaluation and Modification

Describe how you will use project evaluation data to determine when and how to modify your program. If your benchmarks or summative SMART goals do not show progress, describe how you will use evaluation data to modify your program for sustainability.

Project evaluation data will be used to:

1. Identify what components work/do not work and why.
2. Determine value for the money/allocated resources are yielding the greatest benefit for stakeholders.
3. Enhance the chance that goals and objectives are being achieved.
4. Mid year surveys will provide an opportunity to make adjustments to programming.

If benchmarks or summative SMART goal indicate the "Stronger Connections" program is not showing progress, data on specific program components (surveys, academic achievement, attendance, and disciplinary incidents) , will be obtained and analyzed by the district leadership/teacher/parent team to help drive programming to increase the probability of program success and sustainability. Observation and feedback cycles will be incorporated throughout program implementation and considered in modifying the program trajectory.

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8. Statutory/Program Assurances

The following assurances apply to this grant program. In order to meet the requirements of the grant, the grantee must comply with these assurances.

Check each of the following boxes to indicate your compliance.

1. The applicant provides assurance that program funds will supplement (increase the level of service), and not supplant (replace) state mandates, State Board of Education rules, and activities previously conducted with state or local funds. The applicant provides assurance that state or local funds may not be decreased or diverted for other purposes merely because of the availability of these funds. The applicant provides assurance that program services and activities to be funded from this grant will be supplementary to existing services and activities and will not be used for any services or activities required by state law, State Board of Education rules, or local policy.
2. The applicant provides assurance that the application does not contain any information that would be protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) from general release to the public.
3. The applicant provides assurance to adhere to all Statutory Requirements, TEA Program Requirements, and Performance Measures, as noted in the 2024–2025 Stronger Connections Grant Program Guidelines, and shall provide the Texas Education Agency, upon request, any performance data necessary to assess the success of the grant program.
4. The applicant will formally establish a Student Support Program at three district campuses (one elementary, one intermediate/middle school, one high school) to address school climate and establish a student support team structure aligned to the training and support provided by the Texas Center for Student Supports and the regional ESC. If the applicant has few than three campuses or does not have three of the listed types of campuses, the applicant will establish the Student Support Program and the student support team structure at all campuses, up to three, served in the district.
5. The applicant will allocate 6% of awarded funds for contracted services for technical assistance provided by the regional ESC. Complete the transaction with the regional ESC in a timely manner. Time is of the essence in completing the transaction to ensure that the program is implemented efficiently and effectively to successfully achieve the goals of the program.
6. The applicant will allocate 10% of awarded funds for professional and contracted services with a partner approved by the Texas Center for Student Support and TEA. Complete the transaction with the regional ESC in a timely manner. Time is of the essence in completing the transaction to ensure that the program is implemented efficiently and effectively to successfully achieve the goals of the program.
7. The applicant will use the family engagement playbook developed by the Texas Center for Student Supports to partner and build support with parents and families prior to a student support team assessment, and during the student support implementation process to facilitate a student support partnership with families.
8. The applicant will establish a parent, student, and staff advisory committee to provide input on the establishment of the Student Support Program.
9. The applicant will engage in Student Support Program planning activities from the beginning of the grant program through implementation at the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year.
10. The applicant will establish and implement at the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year, the Student Support Program aligned to the content and training provided by the Texas Center for Student Supports.
11. The applicant will incorporate a case management system into the student support team structure aligned to the training and support provided by the Texas Center for Student Supports.
12. The applicant will align the student support team structure with behavioral threat assessment team operation and outcomes to ensure that students are well supported and that the effectiveness of interventions are monitored.
13. The applicant will implement the data collection and reporting system developed by the Texas Center for Student Supports to gather and analyze data to monitor efficacy of the implementation of the Student Support Program, including student support team structure, quality of support leading to positive outcomes, and data related to increases in desired outcomes (e.g. increase in student support team referrals for nonacademic needs, increase in effective supports received by students, reduction in disciplinary incidents, reduction in bullying and harassment, increase in referrals for mental health services, reduction in removals from class, etc.).
14. The applicant will provide timely response to requests from TEA for information and data regarding program development, implementation, and performance and evaluation measures.

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9. Statutory/ TEA Program Requirements

1. Describe how the LEA will identify the campuses that will participate in the establishment of the Student Support Program described in the program description? Include the criteria or considerations that will influence the determination by the LEA.

The district has one elementary school, one junior high school and one high school. All three campuses meet the criteria for participation in the establishment of the Student Support Program.

2. Describe how the LEA will ensure that campus leaders and staff are committed to the success of the Student Support Program.

To ensure all campus leaders and staff are committed to the success of the Student Support Program, all employees will participate in professional development in Student Connections implementation and goals. Contractors will also participate in a 1/2 training on Student Connections implementation and understand how they fit into successful program outcomes. All staff members will collaborate with Student Support Program partners (ESC2, Texas Student Support Center personnel, contractors and grant personnel). During the planning cycle, staff members, parents, and community members will be encouraged to engage in discussion on program plans and decisions. This opportunity will support buy-in from all staff members and stakeholders. All Freer ISD employees will communicate the same goal to all community members and be prepared to answer overview questions regarding the program.

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9. Statutory/Program Requirements (Cont.)

3. Describe how the LEA will engage parents and families to solicit support for the program.

To engage parents and families in the educational process /student programming, the school district will - focus on the positive, find common ground, build social capital, hold special events (learning fair), provide family workshops on understanding the importance of mental health for everyone, introduce a parent liaison who will assist in building connections between the family and the school,

Family engagement with the school is a shared responsibility. School staff are committed to :

- 1. making families feel welcomed
- 2. engaging families in a variety of meaningful ways, and
- 3. sustaining family engagement.

Additionally, the District Site Based Decision Making (SBDM) team will work together to solicit support for the "Stronger Connections " program by prioritizing this initiative for Freer ISD.

4. Describe how the LEA will ensure that there is adequate staff to support the establishment and implementation of the Student Support Program.

To ensure that there is adequate staff to support the establishment and implementation of the "Student Connections" program, the district will provide staff with specialized training in the areas of mental health, safe school climate, bullying, relationship building, parent education, and community engagement. The addition of this human capital is needed to implement a successful program which will provide a lasting impact for program participants, the community and the school district.

This need is vital to our school community as we are a district geographically isolated from mental health support programs. Due low-income and lack of transportation, many parents are unable to travel far distances to obtain mental health support. Unfortunately, many children will go through their entire life with out making meaningful connections due to lack of awareness and accessibility of mental health supports.

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9. Statutory/Program Requirements (Cont.)

5. Describe how each of the campuses will be supported by the grant program, if awarded, currently conduct behavioral threat assessments and how the campus will incorporate current systems into the student support team structure.

When a crisis situation occurs, the behavioral threat assessment team will work in tandem with the Student Support team to review available resources for students and families. In addition, each campus principal and counselor will meet periodically with Student Support team members to case manage critical need students and provide parents with options. This creates a true wrap around service program to support the whole child.

Norman Thomas Elementary School - preventive education, program activities, character building relationship importance, counseling support for aftercare support. appropriate cadence for followup as deemed appropriate by case management team

Lucy Aragon Junior School - intervention, program activities, aligned ISS program that incorporates mental health and coping skills, counseling support for aftercare support. appropriate cadence for followup as deemed appropriate by case management team

Freer High School - intervention, program activities, aligned ISS program that incorporates mental health and coping skills, counseling support for aftercare support. appropriate cadence for followup as deemed appropriate by case management team, and exploring mental health options programming - intertwined with student support,

6. Describe how the LEA currently identifies student support needs and how it identifies and establishes partnerships with external mental health and behavioral health providers to meet student needs.

The LEA currently identifies student support needs by the following:

1. Teacher observations/referrals
2. Parent referrals
3. Student Counseling

Freer ISD has limited partnership with external mental health providers and no partnerships with behavioral health providers.

1. Coastal Plains Center - San Diego, Texas
2. Telephone Counseling during the school year.
3. Contracted Psychologist for Special Education Students Only.

Freer ISD is limited to support services and partnerships due its geographic location.

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9. Statutory/Program Requirements (Cont.)

7. Describe how the LEA currently partners with the regional ESC to support improvement in student mental health, behavioral and emotional health, physical health and wellbeing, and improving academic outcomes for students.

Support provided by ESC2 is with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

The LEA partners with ESC2 on a number of TCLAS grants to improve academic outcomes for students.

We are currently seeking partnerships with agencies focused on student mental health, behavioral and emotional health, physical health and wellbeing.

8. Describe how the LEA will use this grant program to supplement current work to improve services and supports for the mental health, behavioral and emotional health, and physical health and wellness of students.

Freer ISD will use this grant program to supplement current work to improve services and supports for the mental health, behavioral and emotional health, and physical health and wellness of students by implementing the following:

1. Provide LPC staff to work with students and their families.
2. Provide education on mental health awareness and support services for students and their families and staff members.
3. Educate all staff members on the correlation of mental health supports and attendance, discipline, achievement, and violence.
4. Supplement the parent education program with a series of programs focused on supporting students' well being and mental, behavioral, emotional and physical health.
5. Provide a character education program on all campuses.
6. Provide a Relationship Building Program District Wide - Capturing Kids Hearts - Flip Flippen and Associates.
7. Support the counseling program by hiring additional counselors for crisis counseling, academic counseling and home counseling.
8. Redesign In-School Suspension to a positive tool for changing behavior -social skills teaching, intervention course

9. Enter the LEA Total Enrollment:

760

10. Enter the Regional Educational Service Center that serves the LEA:

2

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10. Equitable Access and Participation

Check the appropriate box below to indicate whether any barriers exist to equitable access and participation for any groups that receive services funded by this grant.

- The applicant assures that no barriers exist to equitable access and participation for any groups receiving services funded by this grant.
- Barriers exist to equitable access and participation for the following groups receiving services funded by this grant, as described below.

Group	<input type="text"/>	Barrier	<input type="text"/>
Group	<input type="text"/>	Barrier	<input type="text"/>
Group	<input type="text"/>	Barrier	<input type="text"/>
Group	<input type="text"/>	Barrier	<input type="text"/>

11. PNP Equitable Services

Are any private nonprofit schools located within the applicant's boundaries?

- Yes No

If you answered "No" to the preceding question, stop here. You have completed the section. Proceed to the next page.

Are any private nonprofit schools participating in the grant?

- Yes No

If you answered "No" to the preceding question, stop here. You have completed the section. Proceed to the next page.

Assurances

- The LEA assures that it discussed all consultation requirements as listed in Section 1117(b)(1) and/or Section 8501(c)(1), as applicable, with all eligible private nonprofit schools located within the LEA's boundaries.
- The LEA assures the appropriate Affirmations of Consultation will be provided to TEA's PNP Ombudsman in the manner and time requested.

Equitable Services Calculation

1. LEA's student enrollment	<input type="text"/>
2. Enrollment of all participating private schools	<input type="text"/>
3. Total enrollment of LEA and all participating PNPs (line 1 plus line 2)	<input type="text"/>
4. Total current-year grant allocation	<input type="text"/>
5. LEA reservation for direct administrative costs, not to exceed the grant's defined limit	<input type="text"/>
6. Total LEA amount for provision of ESSA PNP equitable services (line 4 minus line 5)	<input type="text"/>
7. Per-pupil LEA amount for provision of ESSA PNP equitable services (line 6 divided by line 3)	<input type="text"/>
LEA's total required ESSA PNP equitable services reservation (line 7 times line 2)	<input type="text"/>

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12. Request for Grant Funds

List all of the allowable grant-related activities for which you are requesting grant funds. Include the amounts budgeted for each activity. Group similar activities and costs together under the appropriate heading. During negotiation, you will be required to budget your planned expenditures on a separate attachment provided by TEA.

Payroll Costs

1.	Payroll - Counselors, social workers, Field Coordinator, Substitutes	\$338,000
2.	Benefits	\$67,000
3.	Substitute Pay	\$10,000
4.		
5.		

Professional and Contracted Services

6.	Required 6% of funds for technical assistance provided by the regional ESC	\$60,000
7.	Required 10% of funds to the Texas Center for Student Supports	\$100,000
8.	CKH Relationship Program/Mentor/Character Ed	\$80,000
9.	Behavioral Health Support	\$163,000
10.	Program Director	\$70,000

Supplies and Materials

11.	Materials - Program	\$40,000
12.	Office materials	\$15,000
13.	Technology/software	\$20,000

Other Operating Costs

15.	Program Incentives - transportation costs for additional counseling (students, teachers), etc.	\$25,000
16.	Family Conference- focus on mental health care	\$50,000
17.		

Debt Services

18.		0
19.		0

Capital Outlay

20.		0
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Direct administrative costs: \$20,000

Indirect administrative costs: \$17,420

TOTAL GRANT AWARD REQUESTED: \$1,000,000**For TEA Use Only:**

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Appendix I: Negotiation and Amendments

Leave this section blank when completing the initial application for funding.

An amendment must be submitted when the program plan or budget is altered for the reasons described in the "When to Amend the Application" document posted on the Administering a Grant page of the TEA website and may be mailed OR faxed (not both). **To fax:** one copy of all sections pertinent to the amendment (including budget attachments), along with a completed and signed page 1, to either (512) 463-9811 or (512) 463-9564. **To mail:** three copies of all sections pertinent to the amendment (including budget attachments), along with a completed and signed page 1, to the address on page 1. More detailed amendment instructions can be found on the last page of the budget template.

You may duplicate this page.

For amendments, choose the section you wish to amend from the drop down menu on the left. In the text box on the right, describe the changes you are making and the reason for them.

Always work with the most recent negotiated or amended application. If you are requesting a revised budget, please include the budget attachments with your amendment.

Section Being Negotiated or Amended	Negotiated Change or Amendment
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

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