

California Department of Education

Executive Office

SBE-003 (REV. 11/2017)

oab-sftsd-sep23item01

California State Board of Education
**September 2023 Agenda**
**Item 07**

## Subject

Request to Ratify the California Department of Education Grant Application for Federal Supporting America’s School Infrastructure Grant.

## Type of Action

Action, Information, Consent

## Summary of the Issue(s)

The California Department of Education (CDE) requests that the California State Board of Education (SBE) approve CDE’s application for the Supporting America’s School Infrastructure (SASI) Grant Program.

The purpose of this program is to increase state capacity to support high-need LEAs and schools in leveraging other available Federal, State, and local resources to improve school facilities and environments through infrastructure improvements to ensure that their public school facilities are safe, healthy, sustainable, and equitable learning environments for all students. This is the first opportunity of its kind—for CDE to receive federal funding from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) to support school facilities.

The SASI Grant Program is open to all State Educational Agencies. For FY 2023, the USDOE expects to award approximately $40,000,000 in new grants of approximately $3,000,000 to $5,000,000 each on a competitive basis for a project period of up to 60 months. Grants to approximately 8-15 states are expected to be awarded by December 31, 2023. Broadly, applicants were required to submit: 1) one-page abstract (executive summary); 2) project narrative; 3) logic model; 4) budget and budget narrative; and 5) evaluation plan.

The CDE is requesting $4,992,083.00 from the USDOE’s SASI Grant Program. The full narrative explaining the grant proposal is provided in Attachment 2. In summary, this grant will increase the capacity of staff within the School Facilities and Transportation Division (SFTSD) to support high-need small school districts (SSDs) in maintaining and repairing their school buildings. The CDE used three criteria to define high need SSDs:

1. Unduplicated Count above 50 percent: This considers the percentage of students meeting conditions such as being English Language Learners, qualifying for free or reduced-price meals, or being foster youth. The range is 53 to 100 percent, reflecting challenges like limited English proficiency and socio-economic difficulties.
2. Enrollment under 2,500: SSDs with fewer than 2,500 students face constraints in funding and staffing for facility projects.
3. No participation in California’s School Facility Program (SFP) in the last ten years: School districts not utilizing the SFP for construction funding are considered high-need due to their reliance on limited local resources.

The CDE estimates serving approximately165 schools in 105 school districts in 23 counties that meet the above criteria. The SASI grant will provide funding for CDE to provide direct technical assistance in three key functions of school facility management: (1) identifying and cost-estimating school facility needs; (2) contracting for facility work; and (3) identifying and pursuing funding for facility projects. These services will be contracted out initially to subject matter experts (SMEs) in school facilities.

The SMEs will collect information that will support the CDE’s grant project goals to: (1) create asynchronous and on-demand training for high-need districts; (2) develop a website of facility maintenance guidance and tools; (3) collect baseline data for participating schools regarding facility status and needs; and (4) convene ongoing support activities at the county/regional level in collaboration with county offices of education, the Small School District Association and other education partners.

The grant application was due Friday, August 18, 2023, before the SBE’s September 2023 meeting. Through collaboration with the SBE (Attachment 1), the application was submitted on August 17, 2023.

## Recommendation

## The CDE recommends that the SBE ratify CDE’s application for the SASI Grant Program to increase the CDEs capacity to support high-need LEAs and schools with school facilities needs.

## Summary of Previous State Board of Education Discussion and Action

The SBE has previously approved CDE applications for Federal grants. A recent approval was at the January 2020 SBE meeting for funding from the 2020–2023 Federal Charter Schools Program. (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr20/documents/jan20item19.docx>)

The SBE also previously approved a request to ratify the CDE’s grant application to U.S. Department of Education’s *Education Stabilization Fund: Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant* in July 2020. (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/yr20/documents/jul20item22.docx>)

**Background**

The needs of SSDs are significant. Fifty-eight percent of California’s school districts are SSDs, with enrollment levels below 2,500 students. SSDs face numerous facility-related challenges, ranging from aging buildings, deferred maintenance, a lack of modern technology infrastructure or low energy efficiency and environmental sustainability. However, many SSDs often lack sufficient funds to offer competitive salaries to recruit and retain qualified facilities personnel. They often have minimal administrative staff, requiring superintendents to fill a wider range of roles, including but not limited to acquiring the necessary knowledge to finance construction projects, in addition to the continual maintenance projects for their facilities. Limited supports for property-poor districts to access bond funds to minimize existing infrastructure disparities are a significant challenge. According to [*Small Districts, Big Challenges Barriers to Planning and Funding School Facilities in California’s Rural and Small Public School Districts*](https://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/uploads/Vincent_2018_Small_Districts_Big_Challenges_final.pdf) (Center for Cities+Schools, Institute of Urban and Regional Development, UC Berkeley, 2018):

* 72 percent of the school districts in the bottom quintile of capital outlay are small, with average daily attendance (ADA) at or below 2,500 students.

* 59 percent of rural school districts have made emergency repairs in the last five years.
* 51 percent of rural school districts are not able to consistently budget enough each year for facility cleaning, upkeep, and maintenance.

**Fiscal Analysis**

## The CDE is requesting $4,992,083.00 from the U.S. Department of Education’s Supporting America’s School Infrastructure (SASI) Grant Program The project duration covers a five-year period, from January 2024 through December 2028.

## Attachment(s)

* **Attachment 1:** August 3, 2023 Letter: California's Application for the Supporting America's School Infrastructure Grant Program (1 page)
* **Attachment 2:** Project Narrative (29 pages)
	+ Note: The Project Narrative, one requirement of a much larger application packet, provides a comprehensive description of the proposed project. The full application is available upon request)