

Schalmont Central School District

Mental Health Training Component of the New York SAVE Act

JUNE 2022



OFFICE OF THE NEW YORK STATE COMPTROLLER
Thomas P. DiNapoli, State Comptroller

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Report Highlights

Schalmont Central School District

Audit Objective

Determine whether the Schalmont Central School District (District) used District resources to provide the mental health component of the New York Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE Act) training requirement to staff.

Key Findings

The District did not provide mental health training as required to all staff for the 2020-21 school year by September 15, 2020.

- Eighteen of the 42 employees' records we tested showed the training was not completed by September 15, 2020, as required by New York State Education Department (SED) regulations.
- Four of the 12 recommended components of mental health that educators should know were missing from the District's training.

Key Recommendation

Provide mental health training to all staff and ensure it is completed by September 15, as required. Such training should address recognition of the warning signs, whom to turn to for assistance, and how to access appropriate services.

District officials agreed with our recommendation and indicated they will take corrective action.

Background

The District is located in Albany, Montgomery and Schenectady Counties and is governed by an elected seven-member Board of Education (Board).

The Board is responsible for the general management of the District.

The Superintendent serves at the Board's direction and is responsible for day-to-day management.

The Superintendent is the Chief Emergency Officer and is responsible for coordinating emergency plan training for staff.

Quick Facts

2020-2021 School Year

Staff	410
Students	1,750
Staff Training Records Tested	42
School Buildings	3

Audit Period

July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021

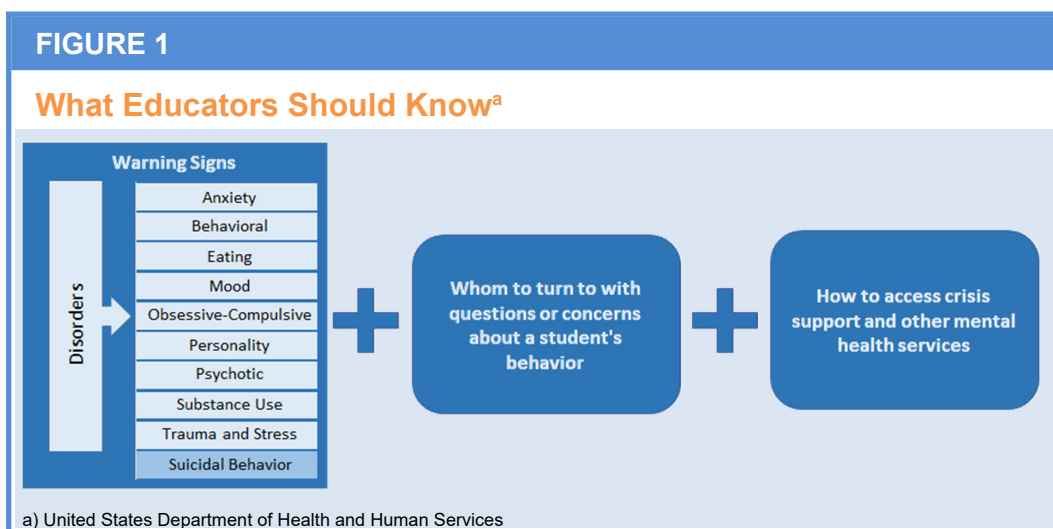
Mental Health Training

The SAVE Act was introduced to help improve school safety. The SAVE Act requires school districts to develop a comprehensive district-wide school safety plan (safety plan) that addresses crisis intervention, emergency responses and management. The safety plan developed by each district must include, among other things, policies and procedures for annual school safety training for staff and students. School districts must certify to the SED Commissioner that all staff have undergone the school safety training, which must include a component on mental health.¹ SED requires that the certification to the SED Commissioner states that all staff have undergone the annual training by September 15 of each year.

What Is the Mental Health Component of the SAVE Act Training for All Staff?

The SAVE Act requires all districts to provide staff annual emergency response plan training with a component on mental health. School personnel are often the first to notice mental health problems, and, to support the mental health of a district's students.

While the SAVE Act and SED requirements state that the annual school safety training must include a component on mental health, neither the SAVE Act nor SED requirements directly address what topics should be included within the mental health training component. Rather, SED issued guidance to all school districts that included resources relating to mental health. Included within the resources was information from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) addressing “what educators should know” regarding warning signs of mental health problems, “whom to turn to,” and “how to access crisis support and other mental health services” (Figure 1).



1 8 NYCRR Section 155.17[c][1][xiii]

Based on SED guidance, as a best practice, at a minimum staff should be trained on the DHHS recommended mental health components of “what educators should know.”

District Training Did Not Include All Recommended Mental Health Components

The Superintendent certified to SED that by September 15, all staff received the training on the emergency response plan, which must also include training on a component of mental health.

We reviewed the District’s “Annual Training for Hazard Communication/Right-To-Know, Universal Precautions, Personal Protection, Emergency Response Procedures, Violence Prevention & Mental Health” training module (SAVE Training) and found eight of 12 recommended mental health components were included. Missing from the training module were warning signs for obsessive-compulsive disorder, psychotic disorders, and substance abuse disorders, as well as information on how to access crisis support and other mental health services (Figure 2).

Figure 2: District’s SAVE Training Module

Mental Health Components	Included
Whom to Turn to	✓
How to Access Support and Services	✗
Warning Signs	
Anxiety Disorders	✓
Behavioral Disorders	✓
Eating Disorders	✓
Mood Disorders	✓
Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder	✗
Personality Disorders	✓
Psychotic Disorders	✗
Substance Use Disorders	✗
Suicidal Behavior	✓
Trauma and Stress Related Disorders	✓

The Chief Emergency Officer told us that the District contracted for training services to comply with the SAVE Act mandated training. He told us he did not review the content but relied on the vendor to ensure the training was sufficient to meet the requirements.

The District Did Not Provide Training to All Staff by September 15

The Chief Emergency Officer told us all staff were required to complete the District’s SAVE Training. Substitute teachers were excluded from the District training, as they should have received the same training when screened through

the District's Board of Cooperative Educational Services. The Chief Emergency Officer told us noninstructional employees were notified in early August for in-person training to be held on August 20, 2020. Instructional staff were notified on their first day of Professional Staff Development and were allotted time over a one and a half hour period during staff development week to complete the virtual training. Employees were given a deadline to complete the training by September 15.

We tested District records for 42 of the 408 staff to determine if the SAVE Training that included mental health components was completed by September 15, 2020, as required. Records showed 24 of the 42 employees' SAVE Training was completed by September 15. However, the other 18 employee's records, which included an Administrator, Principals, Counselors, Teachers, Technology staff, Maintenance staff and a substitute showed the SAVE Training was not completed by September 15. The Chief Emergency Officer told us that the District did not have a good process in place for monitoring and oversight to ensure all staff received the training.

It is imperative, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, that staff be provided training on warning signs that may be an early indicator of mental health issues and concerns. Training staff can assist in identifying mental health issues in students early on to get help when needed and potentially avoid having to react to crisis situations or emergencies.

What Do We Recommend?

District officials must:

1. Provide mental health training to all staff and ensure it is completed by September 15, as required. Such training should address recognition of the warning signs, whom to turn to for assistance and how to access appropriate services.

Appendix A: Response From District Officials



District Office

4 Sabre Drive
Schenectady, NY 12306
(518) 355-9200
FAX: (518) 355-9203

**Superintendent
of Schools**

Dr. Thomas B. Reardon
Ext. 4001

Business Office

Joseph Karas
Assistant Superintendent
for Business
Ext. 4002

Special Education Office

Shari Rosato
Director of Pupil
Personnel Services
Ext. 4018

High School

1 Sabre Drive
Schenectady, NY 12306
(518) 355-6110
FAX: (518) 355-8720

Middle School

2 Sabre Drive
Schenectady, NY 12306
(518) 355-6255
FAX: (518) 355-5329

Jefferson

Elementary School

100 Princetown Road
Schenectady, NY 12306
(518) 355-1342
FAX: (518) 357-0293

Transportation Office

5 Sabre Drive
Schenectady, NY 12306
(518) 355-9200 Ext. 4201
FAX: (518) 355-0972

January 14, 2022

Ms. Julie Landcastle, Chief Examiner
Statewide Audit
Binghamton State Office Building, Suite 1702
44 Hawley Street
Binghamton, NY 13901-4417

Dear Ms. Landcastle:

The Schalmont Central School District is in receipt of the OSC Mental Health Training Audit. We appreciate the time and energy spent compiling this information, and subsequently, your recommendations for future success. The District is in full agreement with the findings of this audit.

It should be noted that the District also recognizes (and has subsequently corrected for the 2021-2022 school year and beyond) the need to ensure training is completed by all staff members of the Schalmont Central School District, and appropriately accounted for in our record keeping. The District is also aware that our training should ensure it covers each of the 12 training module components as per the SAVE legislation, and that such training should address mental distress warning signs, whom to turn to for assistance, and how to access appropriate services. Such modifications have and will continue to be included in training for the current and subsequent school years.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With Gratitude,

Thomas B. Reardon, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Appendix B: Audit Methodology and Standards

We conducted this audit pursuant to Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution and the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article 3 of the New York State General Municipal Law. To accomplish our audit objective and obtain relevant audit evidence, our procedures included the following steps:

- We selected the District for audit using a random number generator applied to a list of districts, broken out by five geographic regions (excluding NYC schools), not currently in the OSC audit process at the time of selection. The list was broken out by geographic region for an even representation of school districts across the State for this multi-unit audit.
- We interviewed District officials to gain an understanding of the process for creating, disseminating and monitoring mental health training for staff.
- We reviewed relevant State laws and regulations, and guidance from SED and the DHHS. We reviewed District policies to gain an understanding of required mental health training.
- We reviewed Board minutes for the 2020-21 school year to determine the Board action taken related to the District-wide safety plan or required mental health training.
- We requested and reviewed records supporting the District's 2020-21 certification to SED that required annual training with a component of mental health.
- We reviewed and tested the mental health training materials provided by the District to determine if training on mental health followed guidance.
- We determined the total number of individuals employed by the District during our audit period by obtaining and reviewing an employee listing.
- Using the District's employee listing we grouped all employees by job type, specific (Superintendent, Principal, Assistant Principal and Counselors), teachers and other staff. We used a biased selection method and random number generator to select a sample of 42 employees (10 percent), consisting of 14 specific, 14 teachers and 14 other staff, to determine whether employees completed required trainings according to job titles. Employees hired after July 1, 2020 were not included in our sample.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards (GAGAS). Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

Unless otherwise indicated in this letter, samples for testing were selected based on professional judgment, as it was not the intent to project the results onto

the entire population. Where applicable, information is presented concerning the value and/or the relevant population size and the sample selected for examination.

The Board has the responsibility to initiate corrective action. A written corrective action plan (CAP) that addresses the findings and recommendations in this report must be prepared and provided to our office within 90 days, pursuant to Section 35 of General Municipal Law, Section 2116-a (3)(c) of New York State Education Law and Section 170.12 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education. To the extent practicable, implementation of the CAP must begin by the end of the fiscal year. For more information on preparing and filing your CAP, please refer to our brochure, *Responding to an OSC Audit Report*, which you received with the draft audit report. The CAP should be posted on the District's website for public review.

Appendix C: Resources and Services

Regional Office Directory

www.osc.state.ny.us/files/local-government/pdf/regional-directory.pdf

Cost-Saving Ideas – Resources, advice and assistance on cost-saving ideas

www.osc.state.ny.us/local-government/publications

Fiscal Stress Monitoring – Resources for local government officials experiencing fiscal problems

www.osc.state.ny.us/local-government/fiscal-monitoring

Local Government Management Guides – Series of publications that include technical information and suggested practices for local government management

www.osc.state.ny.us/local-government/publications

Planning and Budgeting Guides – Resources for developing multiyear financial, capital, strategic and other plans

www.osc.state.ny.us/local-government/resources/planning-resources

Protecting Sensitive Data and Other Local Government Assets – A non-technical cybersecurity guide for local government leaders

www.osc.state.ny.us/files/local-government/publications/pdf/cyber-security-guide.pdf

Required Reporting – Information and resources for reports and forms that are filed with the Office of the State Comptroller

www.osc.state.ny.us/local-government/required-reporting

Research Reports/Publications – Reports on major policy issues facing local governments and State policy-makers

www.osc.state.ny.us/local-government/publications

Training – Resources for local government officials on in-person and online training opportunities on a wide range of topics

www.osc.state.ny.us/local-government/academy

Contact

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