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STATE OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER

May 8, 2024

David C. Banks  
Chancellor  
New York City Department of Education  
52 Chambers Street  
New York, NY 10007

Re: Mental Health Education, Supports,  
and Services in Schools  
Report 2023-F-34

Dear Chancellor Banks:

Pursuant to the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution and Article III of the General Municipal Law, we have followed up on the actions taken by officials of the New York City Department of Education to implement the recommendations contained in our initial audit report, *Mental Health Education, Supports, and Services in Schools* (Report [2020-N-7](#)).

**Background, Scope, and Objective**

The New York City Department of Education (DOE), the nation's largest school system, serves approximately 907,000 students at approximately 1,600 elementary, middle, and high schools (excluding charter schools). DOE recognizes the importance of mental health well-being in the school setting, stating on its webpage that "Mental health impacts not only our students but our families, schools, and communities" and "Enhanced school mental health programs improve schools' abilities to provide access and support during the school day." DOE also acknowledges that students are underserved, stating that "approximately one in five students who could benefit from additional mental-health supports does not get them."

To help confront the mental health crisis among youth in New York State, the Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc., a non-profit organization, led a call to action for a State law that would require mental health instruction in the kindergarten–grade 12 health education curriculum. With the passage of the legislation, which amended Section 804 of the New York Education Law (Education Law), effective July 1, 2018, New York became the first state to require that health education in schools must include instruction in mental health. The Education Law mandates all schools to ensure that their health education programs recognize the multiple dimensions of health by including mental health and its relation to physical health to enhance student understanding, attitudes, and behaviors that promote health, well-being, and human dignity.

While instruction is the cornerstone for promoting students' mental health, a holistic, comprehensive approach would also include mental health awareness training for school staff and ready access to in-school mental health supports and services for all students (currently,

these are only required if specified in a student's individualized education program). Especially given the ongoing challenges during and following the COVID-19 pandemic and the greater need for mental health support and services, schools are an ideal setting for making this type of comprehensive prevention and early intervention program available for all students.

The objective of our initial audit, issued August 18, 2022, was to determine whether DOE was providing mental health instruction to students as required by law. We also sought to determine the extent to which DOE proactively ensured schools have the mental health supports and services they need, including mental health awareness training for school staff. The audit covered the period from July 2018 through May 2022 and included general education students only. We found that DOE did not monitor whether schools meet the requirement to have mental health instruction as part of the curriculum, and that DOE could make improvements to the implementation of mental health support and services in schools.

The objective of our follow-up was to assess the extent of implementation, as of March 15, 2024, of the five recommendations included in our initial audit report.

### **Summary Conclusions and Status of Audit Recommendations**

DOE officials have made progress in addressing the problems we identified in the initial audit report. Of the initial report's five audit recommendations, four have been implemented and one has not been implemented.

### **Follow-Up Observations**

#### **Recommendation 1**

*Develop a mechanism for monitoring schools' curriculum to ensure compliance with the Education Law.*

Status – Not Implemented

Agency Action – DOE officials stated that they provide information to schools via various means, such as Annual Principals Digest Announcements and Academic Policy Guides, which communicate inclusion of the mental health components from the Education Law. However, they did not demonstrate that they developed a mechanism for monitoring schools' curriculum to ensure compliance with the Education Law.

#### **Recommendation 2**

*Require schools to ensure all staff who interact with students daily attend mental health awareness training.*

Status – Implemented

Agency Action – DOE officials informed us that, per Chancellor's Regulations A-411 and A-755, all school staff are required to attend de-escalation and suicide prevention training. Schools then certify their staff's attendance in the Consolidated School and Youth Development Plan (Plan). We requested these Plans for a sample of eight schools for the 2023-24 school year to confirm the schools' certifications of attendance. DOE officials informed us that one of the eight schools closed on October 9, 2020. For the other seven schools, the Plans show certifications for suicide prevention training and for de-escalation training.

### **Recommendation 3**

*Explore ways to maintain appropriate mental health professional staffing levels at all schools.*

Status – Implemented

Agency Action – DOE officials provided information showing their partnerships with 12 higher education institutions to place 194 social work interns in 145 schools in districts across the City. We received information from eight of the schools and verified that the social work interns from some of these institutions were deployed at those schools. In addition, DOE officials provided information showing they had applied to the New York State Department of Education for a 2023–2025 school program grant to expand mental health services in schools, although they did not receive it.

### **Recommendation 4**

*Explore ways to utilize an information system to collect, document, and analyze mental health-related information, such as referrals, services, and outcomes, which will allow data-driven decision making.*

Status – Implemented

Agency Action – DOE officials provided information, including screenshots, showing their plans to collaborate with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to utilize its data system, called “Partners Connect,” to collect, document, and analyze mental health-related information for New York City public school students. According to DOE officials, this system will be effective starting in the 2024-25 school year.

### **Recommendation 5**

*Promote knowledge sharing among schools, including their solutions for remote mental health monitoring.*

Status – Implemented

Agency Action – DOE officials provided information showing knowledge is being shared among schools through different platforms, including professional learnings, such as trauma-informed practices, Self-Care = Student Success, and Principals Digest Announcements in school year 2023-24. In addition, on its website, DOE offers solutions for remote mental health monitoring, such as the use of telehealth services and NYC Teenspace, a portal for the students to access information on a free mental health support program available to them (i.e., licensed therapists and online mental health exercises).

Major contributors to this report were Rita Verma-Kumar, Leslie Camargo, and Tina Jiang.

DOE officials are requested, but not required, to provide information about any actions planned to address the unresolved issues discussed in this follow-up within 30 days of the report's issuance. We thank DOE management and staff for the courtesy and cooperation extended to our auditors during this follow-up.

Very truly yours,

Sheila Jones  
Audit Manager

cc: Danya Labban, New York City Department of Education  
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