

Belleville-Henderson 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

Belleville-Henderson Central School District

Audit Objective

Determine whether the Belleville-Henderson 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 to any staff for the 2020-21 school year by September 15, 2020 as required by New York State Education Department (SED) regulations.

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 Jefferson County, 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 Building Principal is designated as the Chief Emergency Officer and is responsible for coordinating emergency plan training for staff.

Quick Facts

2020-2021 School Year

Staff	164
Students	492
School Buildings	1

Audit Period

July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021

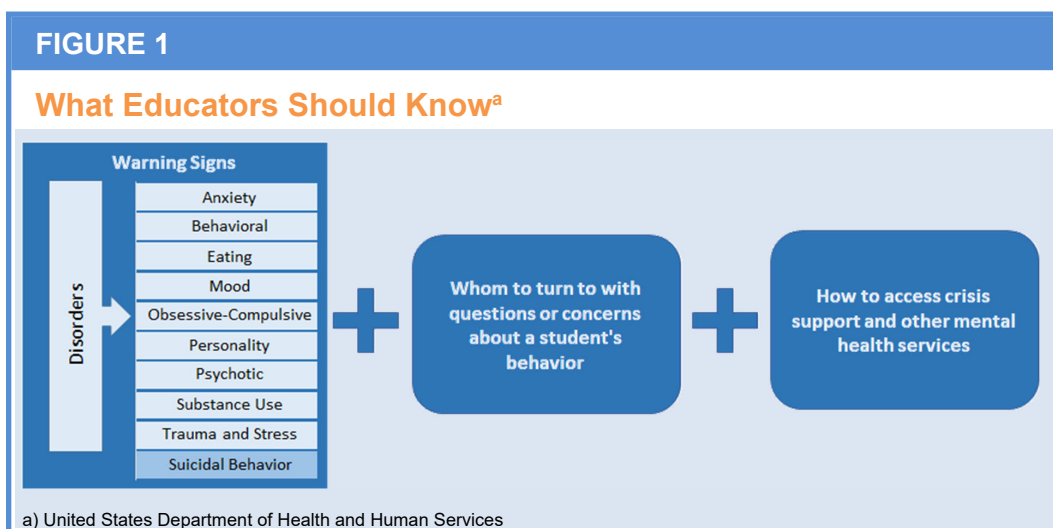
Mental Health Training

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.”

The District Did Not Provide Mental Health Training to Staff by September 15

The Superintendent certified to SED that all staff did not receive training on the emergency response plan by September 15, as required, which must also include training on a component of mental health.

The SED certification indicated the District would provide the training to all teachers through a virtual grade level meeting on October 14, 2020 and to faculty and staff by department prior to this date. The Superintendent told us that she delayed the dissemination and completion of several trainings, which included the mandatory mental health component of the training, because the District was focused on implementing safety protocols related to COVID-19 and did not want to overwhelm staff at the start of the school year. The District Clerk disseminated the mental health training to staff on September 17 to be completed by October 15.

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

Belleville Henderson Central School District

8372 County Route 75
Adams, NY 13605
www.bhpanthers.org
315-846-5411 Main Office
315-846-5825 Guidance Office
315-846-5826 District Office
315-846-5617 Fax



Home of the Panthers

Board of Education:

John W. Allen, President
Adam J. Miner, Vice President
Anthony J. Barney
Roger E. Eastman
Kyle E. Gehrke
Dennis R. Jerome
Kristin J. Vaughn

Administration:

Jane A. Collins, Superintendent
Scott A. Storey, Building Principal
Ashleigh M. Barnhart-Burto, Administrative Coordinator
Stephen T. Magovney, Business Manager

January 24 2022

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

Re: Response to the Belleville Henderson Central School District Mental Health Training Audit Report of Examination No. S9-21-23

Dear New York State Comptroller,

The District concurs with the findings of this report. We appreciate the information provided by this NYSOSC audit that address implementation guidelines and specific content that the Mental Health Training must include. While the district did provide mental health training to our staff, we did not meet the September 15, 2020 deadline.

The District held three Superintendent Days on September 1, 2 and 3, 2020 focusing on implementing COVID-19 safety protocols newly published by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) that require specific instructional expectations during the pandemic. Our teachers had to embrace new remote learning due to the hybrid model the District implemented to ensure that the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) social distancing and student cohort expectations were followed.

The teachers and staff had to embrace a significant amount of new information related to the COVID-19 Pandemic. We had three Superintendents days and multiple meetings. The information included the following topics:

- providing clear instruction on NYS Department of Health mandated health and safety practices with COVID-19 which included:
 - social distancing,
 - mask wearing,
 - proper hygiene with handwashing and respiratory (coughing and sneezing)
 - contract tracing protocols throughout the school,
 - temperature screening,
 - awareness of COVID-19 symptoms,
 - NYSDOH Student and Staff Health Questionnaire,
 - COVID-19 Testing requirements;
 - transportation social distancing and health protocols on buses;
 - a shift for breakfast and lunch from the cafeteria to eating in the classroom
 - cleaning and disinfection protocols for student desks between student groups;
 - signage throughout the school for COVID-19 practices;

- scheduling students in hybrid groupings;
- disseminating Chromebooks to every pupil;
- Shifting from an in-person instructional model to a hybrid model that involves remote learning
- Use of [REDACTED] practices and tools to provide a remote instructional model
- Establishing new communication systems with parents
 - Implementing [REDACTED] for testing messaging, parent email, and voicemail
 - Using [REDACTED] to communicate about student grades and email
- implementing parent drop-off and pick up locations safety protocols, and
- Planning and implementing our first Virtual Parent Open House on September 3, 2020.

Teachers had significant training between September 1 and October 15, 2020 based on the pandemic, NYSED requirements and the NYSDOH requirements. The Mental Health training was completed by October 15, 2020.

The Mental Health Training Audit states that in the 2020-2021 School Year, Belleville Henderson School District staff was 164. The District had a count of 94 regularly employed staff and teachers. The report additional staff count included 63 substitutes (whether they worked one day or more) and 7 coaching staff. The audit count of 164 includes persons whether they worked one day or more.

The District appreciates that this audit clarifies the specific content that the Mental Health Training should address, such as recognition of Mental Health warning signs, who Belleville Henderson staff should turn to for assistance, and how to support students and staff with access to appropriate mental health services.

During the 2021-2022 school year, the District implemented the Mental Health training on September 1, 2021. Staff had an exercise to complete online by September 10, 2021. In future years, our staff will complete training at the first Superintendent's Day in September.

A Corrective Action Plan is being provided to the NYS Office of State Comptroller within the 90-day timeframe. We concur with the New York State Office of State Comptroller's report.

Sincerely,

Jane A. Collins

CC: John W. Allen, Belleville Henderson CSD, Board of Education President

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Syracuse Regional Office, via email at Muni-Syracuse@osc.ny.gov

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 United States Department of Health and Human Services. 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 determined the total number of individuals employed by the District during our audit period, by obtaining and reviewing an employee listing.

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.

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

Office of the New York State Comptroller
Division of Local Government and School Accountability
110 State Street, 12th Floor, Albany, New York 12236

Tel: (518) 474-4037 • Fax: (518) 486-6479 • Email: localgov@osc.ny.gov

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

Local Government and School Accountability Help Line: (866) 321-8503

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