

# Wellsville Central School District

## Mental Health Training Component of the New York SAVE Act

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**JUNE 2022**

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

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# Report Highlights

## Wellsville Central School District

### Audit Objective

Determine whether the Wellsville 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.

- Training offered did not provide any of the recommended components of mental health that educators should know.

### 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 Allegany 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 School Business Executive is designated as the Chief Emergency Officer and is responsible for coordinating emergency plan training for staff.

#### Quick Facts

##### 2020-2021 School Year

Staff	376
Students	1,109
School Buildings	2

### Audit Period

July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021

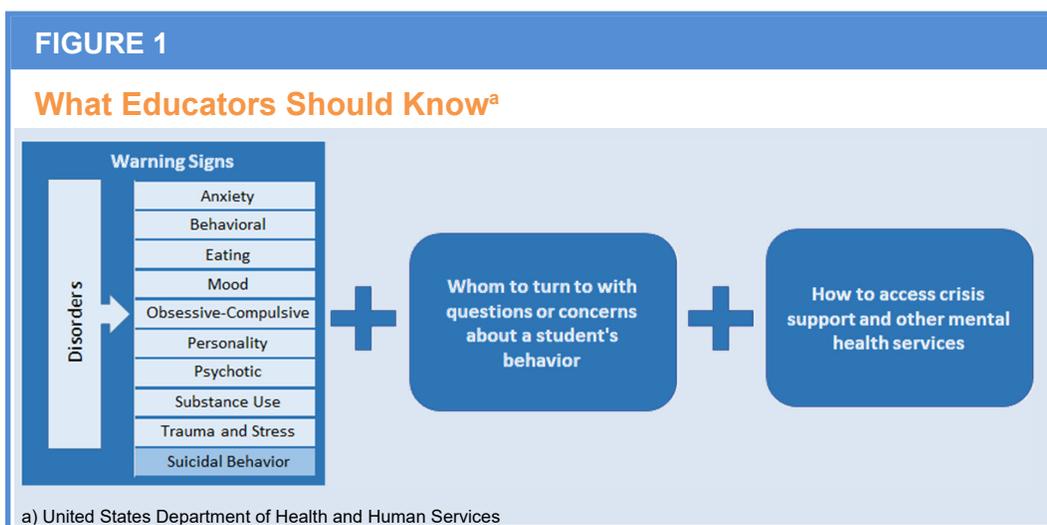
# Mental Health Training

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.<sup>1</sup> 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 all staff received training on the emergency response plan on September 2, 2020, which must also include training on a component of mental health.

Our review of the training materials presented by officials found the District did not provide training to any staff on a component of mental health as a requirement of the annual emergency response plan training.

The Superintendent and Chief Emergency Officer told us the District-Wide Safety Plan (Safety Plan) included mental health content and was provided as a training to staff. We reviewed the Safety Plan and none of the 12 recommended mental health components were included (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: District’s Safety Plan Training**

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

The Safety Plan included content on responsibilities for coordinating disaster mental health resources in response to an emergency, not the recommended mental health warning signs, proactive actions on “whom to turn to” and “how to access crisis support and other mental health services.”

The Superintendent and the Chief Emergency Officer told us that they both interpreted the mental health training requirement to mean providing training on how the District would respond to an emergency based on the guidance provided by SED and the District-Wide Safety Plan checklist.

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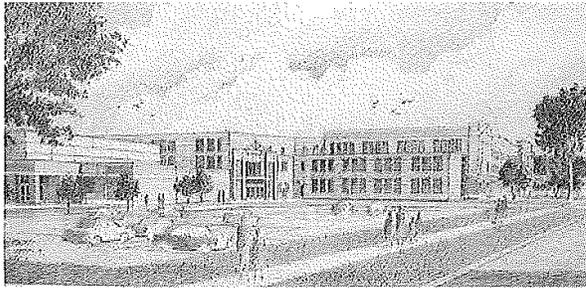
It is imperative, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, that staff be provided training on warning signs that may be an early indicator of mental health issues and concerns. Training staff can assist in identifying mental health issues in students early on to get help when needed and potentially avoid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



## Wellsville Central School District

126 West State Street  
Wellsville, NY 14895  
(585) 596-2170  
[www.wellsvilleschools.org](http://www.wellsvilleschools.org)

Mr. David Foster, Superintendent

February 14, 2022

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

Dear Ms. Landcastle:

The Wellsville Central School District did not include all recommended mental health components as outlined in the New York Safe School Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE Act) by September 15, 2020. The District had and continues to have, multiple trainings with teachers throughout the year regarding the mental health of our students, which did include all the required components of the training referred to by the State.

The District would also like to point out that the audit period of July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021, included reopening plan due to the Co-Vid 19 pandemic, which did pull focus from required training to preparing our buildings for the safe return of students for the 2020-2021 school year.

The District has found an online training that incorporates all the SAVE Act requirements regarding the Mental Health component, and the District will ensure the completion of such training by September 15 of each school year.

Sincerely,

Emily Peavey  
School Business Executive

*Our mission is to prepare our students to be successful, contributing members of their communities through excellence in education.*

## Appendix B: Audit Methodology and Standards

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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 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.

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

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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

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### **Regional Office Directory**

[www.osc.state.ny.us/files/local-government/pdf/regional-directory.pdf](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.osc.state.ny.us/local-government/academy)

## Contact

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[www.osc.state.ny.us/local-government](http://www.osc.state.ny.us/local-government)

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

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