

Greenport Union Free 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

Contents

- Report Highlights 1**

- Mental Health Training 2**
 - What Is the Mental Health Component of the SAVE Act Training for All Staff? 2

 - District Training Did Not Include All Recommended Mental Health Components 3

 - The District Did Not Provide Training to All Staff. 3

 - What Do We Recommend? 4

- Appendix A – Response From District Officials 5**

- Appendix B – Audit Methodology and Standards 7**

- Appendix C – Resources and Services 8**

Report Highlights

Greenport Union Free School District

Audit Objective

Determine whether the Greenport Union Free 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 all staff for the 2020-21 school year by September 15, 2020 as required by New York State Education Department (SED) regulations.

- Five of the 12 recommended components of mental health that educators should know were not included in the District's training.

District officials did not maintain documentation to support attendance for training and we were unable to determine which staff members participated.

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

Background

The District is located in Suffolk County, and is governed by an elected five-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 Assistant Superintendent of Technology and Administrative Services is designated as the Chief Emergency Officer and is responsible for coordinating emergency plan training for staff.

Quick Facts

2020-2021 School Year

Staff	167
Students	653
School Buildings	1

Audit Period

July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021

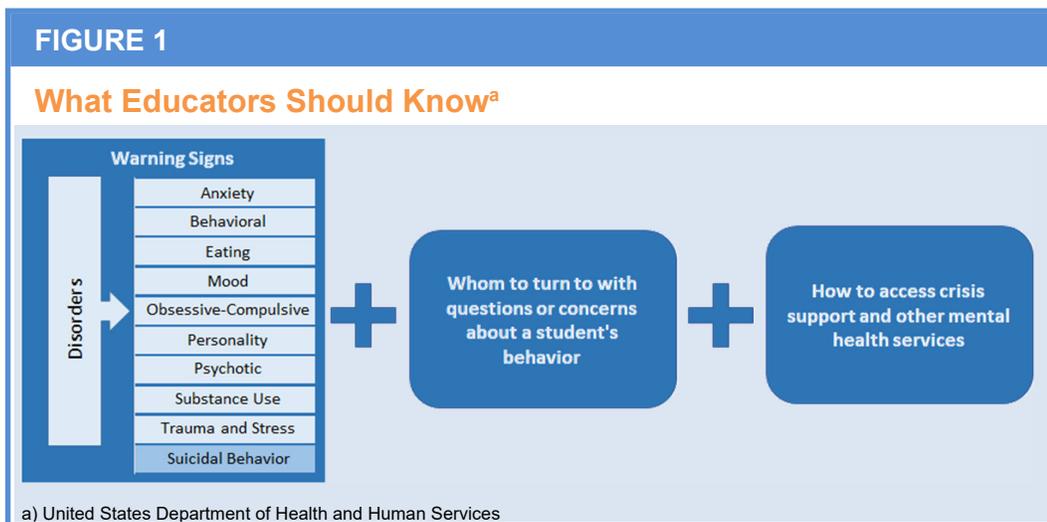
Mental Health Training

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.”

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 11, 2020, which must also include training on a component of mental health.

The Chief Emergency Officer told us training that included mental health content was provided in the District’s “Social Emotional Learning” training.

We reviewed the materials presented for this training and found seven of 12 recommended health components were included. Missing from the “Social Emotional Learning” training were the warning signs for behavioral disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, personality disorders, psychotic disorders and how to access support and services (Figure 2).

The Superintendent told us the staff training did not include all the recommended components of mental health because the SED guidance was not clear on which components staff should be trained on.

Figure 2: District’s “Social Emotional Learning” Training

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

The District Did Not Provide Training to All Staff

The Chief Emergency Officer told us all staff, with the exception of custodians, were invited to attend the training via email and the District’s guidance team provided the “Social Emotional Learning” training to staff through video conference on September 11, 2020. The Superintendent explained that the District did provide mental health training by the September 15th deadline;

however, custodial staff were not included due to the need to prepare the building for returning students during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Regulation related to the SAVE Act does not provide for any exemptions. Furthermore, the Chief Emergency Officer told us it was each Principal's responsibility to ensure all staff were attending the training. However, documentation to support attendance and completion of training by staff was not maintained. Therefore, which staff members participated in the training could not be determined.

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



Greenport Union Free School District

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Marlon C. Small, Superintendent



February 10, 2022

Ms. Julie Landcastle, Chief Examiner

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And

██████████ – **Principle Examiner**
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**RE: CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN RESPONSE – MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING AUDIT
(S9-21-30)**

Dear Ms. Landcastle and ██████████:

We are in receipt of your DRAFT “Mental Health Training Audit” Report of Examination (S9-21-30). We also acknowledge the exit discussion held on Thursday, January 27, 2022 at 10:00 a.m., via Zoom to discuss the preliminary draft findings of your recent examination of the Greenport Union Free School District’s Mental Health Audit.

Pursuant to our meeting, we requested that the DRAFT be reviewed again and rewritten to more accurately and correctly reflect our initial meeting and conversations held regarding this audit.

Further, herein is our response to the recommendations made to the District in your report:

Finding: *“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.”*

Finding: *“The District did not provide mental health training to all staff for the 2020-21 school year by September 15, 2020 as required by New York State Education Department (SED) regulations. Five of the 12 recommended components of mental health that educators should know were not included in the District’s training.”*

Finding: *“District Officials did not maintain documentation to support attendance for training and were unable to determine which staff members participated”*

Corrective Action to be taken: The District will ensure these findings are fully addressed by structuring a plan within our annual calendar, to schedule mental health training to all staff, by offering several different dates and times for them to sign up based on availability. An administrator will check the sign-up sheets against the entire staff roster to ensure that all staff members employed by the District have enrolled in said training. An attendance sheet will be maintained for each training session held. All attendees will be required to check in, show their school picture identification card, and sign the attendance sheet. All attendance sheets will be maintained for future reference.

The District will contact any staff members who fail to attend the scheduled training sessions to make arrangements for them to attend said training, either in-person or virtually. Any staff member who still fails to attend said training will be reported to the Superintendent for further action. Every effort will be made to ensure that all staff members are provided mental health training and the resources related to it. Qualified trainers will perform said training at these scheduled sessions. The qualifications of said trainers will be obtained and retained for reference. Trainers will also be required to submit training materials in advance for review, including all powerpoint presentations, list of any guest speakers, and an agenda of the items and issues to be covered. Included in each training session will be a comprehensive list of resources available to all staff members describing where they can seek additional information, counseling services, and help on issues they may encounter.

Additionally, please be advised that during the 2020-21 school year, the District purchased the [REDACTED] system, which manages registration and attendance for professional learning activities of our faculty and staff.

The District intends to implement this plan now so that it is in full compliance by the deadline date of September 1, 2022.

Please advise if our Corrective Action Plan meets with your approval or requires modification. We look forward to hearing back from you with tentative approval.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours very truly,

Marlon C. Small
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 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 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

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