



**State Board of Education**

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**Richard Corcoran**  
Commissioner of Education

March 26, 2021

Melinda Miguel  
Chief Inspector General  
Office of the Chief Inspector General  
The Capitol  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Ms. Miguel:

In accordance with Section 20.055(6)(h), Florida Statutes, attached is the six-month status of corrective actions taken in response to Auditor General Report #2021-029, Operational Audit - Office of Safe Schools and Prior Audit Follow - Up.

If you have any concerns regarding this status report, please contact Mike Blackburn by phone at 245-9418 or by email at [Mike.Blackburn@fldoe.org](mailto:Mike.Blackburn@fldoe.org).

Sincerely,

Richard Corcoran

**Attachment**

cc: Mike Blackburn, Inspector General  
Suzanne Pridgeon, Deputy Commissioner, Finance and Operations  
Andre Smith, Deputy Commissioner of Innovation, Division of Technology & Innovation  
Time Hay, Executive Director, Office of Safe Schools  
Mari M. "Miki" Presley, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Finance and Operations  
Joint Legislative Auditing Committee

Department of Education  
Office of Inspector General – Internal Audit  
Six-Month Status Report on: Office of Safe Schools and Prior Audit Follow - Up  
Report # 2021-029 Issued: September 28, 2020  
Status as of March 28, 2021

**Finding 1: Administration of Statutory Responsibilities** - The Department’s implementation of the school safety and security requirements of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act did not promote the Office as the central repository for compliance oversight in all matters regarding school safety and security as provided in State law.

Recommendation: We recommend that Department management consult with the Legislature and identify the resources and actions needed to ensure that the school safety and security responsibilities assigned to the Office by the Act are executed in accordance with legislative intent.

Response as of September 28, 2020: The Florida Department of Education (FDOE or Department) does not concur with this finding and has already exhaustively demonstrated the inaccuracy of this finding during the audit process. It is to say the least troubling that this finding persists. This finding demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of state agency operations. Moreover, this finding underestimates the necessity for FDOE’s “all hands on deck” approach to implementation of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act during fiscal (school) year 2018-2019.

The implementation of Senate Bill 7026, which provided for three full-time equivalent positions, was of paramount importance to the health, safety and welfare of Florida’s students and school employees, necessitating a coordinated and persistent cross-divisional support by FDOE’s leadership in order to set up the Office of Safe Schools (OSS or Office) for success. Recognizing the challenges that any new office would face to “hit the ground running” before and during a new school year, OSS collaborated with a wealth of experts within the Department, bringing all resources of the Department together to bear various responsibilities and expectations laid out in law, and took the leadership role to ensure every component was being addressed accurately and timely. OSS held weekly, if not more frequently, meetings with all who played a role in these tasks. OSS was consulted and kept abreast of the status of each facet of the programs under its guise. Though the statute may specify the responsibilities under OSS, the statute does not abrogate FDOE’s responsibility to its offices or undermine the necessity for the Department, as a whole, to support those offices. With the creation of this new office, FDOE recognized the urgency to scale up existing operations in a narrow window and, with OSS taking the leadership role, delegated certain responsibilities to offices with subject matter expertise with respect to the Office’s statutory duties. For example, the Division of Technology and Innovation (DTI) was given the role of contracting with a vendor to create the Florida Schools Safety Portal. This is a technologically based system and required the experience and expertise DTI could provide.

During this time, the Executive Director of the Office of Safe Schools was also serving as the face and voice of the Office, traveling non-stop throughout the state to impress upon superintendents, school and school district leaders, sheriffs, and other law enforcement representatives the role of the Office and the expectations for full compliance with statutory requirements at every level. Furthermore, the Executive Director represented the Office at monthly meetings of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) High School Public Safety Commission to provide updates on the progress made, as well as challenges faced with ensuring statewide compliance. Similarly, the Executive Director and his staff met frequently with numerous legislative members and staff to address questions, conduct presentations, and engage in conversations surrounding current and proposed legislation to enhance school safety.

In addition to the face-to-face promotion of OSS, the website resources for the Office continue to grow and serve as a meaningful tool for accessing information relevant to the work of the Office. The web page features an up-to-date list of best practices (<http://fldoe.org/safe-schools/best-practices.stml>). Likewise, the Office is in constant communication with district School Safety Specialists to share best practices and provide guidance on the requirements and expectations. As a result of the relationships built between OSS Safety Specialists, the Office is able to conduct frequent surveys for vital information which addresses questions by the MSD Commission, Department Leadership, or various members of the Florida Legislature, to determine compliance with legal requirements and best practices.

Despite these challenges that were analogous to “building the plane while flying it,” FDOE successfully supported OSS’ growth and implementation. Moreover, the Department, Executive Office of the Governor and ultimately the Legislature recognized the long-term need for additional resources, allocating funding for additional staff, now totaling 17, plus an additional contracted staff member. The increase in staff adds visibility, compliance oversight, and training support across the state. This expansion has greatly enhanced OSS’s ability to conduct timely school site visits, respond to needs within a particular district or region, and provide training as needed in a timelier manner.

Additionally, in early 2019 the new Commissioner of Education brought into office a command focus on FDOE’s successful implementation of school safety initiatives, setting the expectation that any division might be called upon to support the OSS, as the health, safety and welfare of students and staff cannot be limited by the number of full time equivalents on a piece of paper. It would be an excessively naïve thought to separate the responsibilities of OSS from FDOE in this analysis, because they are inherently one in the same. To put this in a different context, had FDOE failed to fulfill any statutorily required school safety tasks, no objective observer would accept an explanation that FDOE is somehow divorced from the shortcomings of OSS.

Therefore, it is only rational to accept that in the successful implementation of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act, FDOE and OSS shared in faithfully executing the statutory responsibilities.

**Response as of March 28, 2021:**

Although FDOE continues to hold its original position that the department will support its constituent offices, structural changes have occurred, namely the addition of staff that allows OSS to take direct programmatic control of the hardening grant and OSS has hired regionally based program specialists with the primary role of compliance monitoring, technical assistance, and training for schools and school districts in all matters regarding school safety and security.

**Anticipated Completion Date & Contact:**

January 4, 2021—Brooks Rumenik

**Finding 2: Evaluation of FSSAT Service Organization Controls** - The Department contracted with a service organization to provide the Florida Safe Schools Assessment Tool (FSSAT). However, the Department did not take steps to reasonably ensure that service organization controls relevant to the

Department of Education  
Office of Inspector General – Internal Audit  
Six-Month Status Report on: Office of Safe Schools and Prior Audit Follow - Up  
Report # 2021-029 Issued: September 28, 2020  
Status as of March 28, 2021

services performed on behalf of the Department were suitably designed and operating effectively. In addition, the Department did not evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of controls established by the subservice organizations responsible for hosting FSSAT information.

**Recommendation:** To ensure the security, availability, processing integrity, and confidentiality of the FSSAT and the data contained therein, we recommend that Department management make or obtain independent and periodic assessments of the effectiveness of the service organization and subservice organizations' relevant internal controls.

Response as of September 28, 2020: FDOE concurs with the finding and recommendation during the audit period. Subsequently, FDOE has taken steps to come into compliance, will validate those controls through a third party and will ultimately leverage financial penalties against the vendor if there are any breaches of compliance.

**Response as of March 28, 2021:**

OSS coordinated with FDOE Information Security Manager's Office to develop a plan to document the system security enhancements put in place since 2018 and obtain an independent assessment of the service organization and subservice organizations' relevant internal controls. The third party review contract for a System and Organization Controls 2 audit was executed on February 1, 2021 with an anticipated start date of April 1, 2021. The audit is due to be completed by January 2022.

**Anticipated Completion Date & Contact:**

January 2022—Sylvia Ifft

**Finding 3: (Confidential) FSSAT Compliance with Florida Cyber Security Standards** - Certain security controls related to the FSSAT need improvement to ensure compliance with the Florida Cybersecurity Standards (FCS) and the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of FSSAT data and related information technology (IT) resources.

**Recommendation:** To ensure FSSAT compliance with the FCS and the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of FSSAT data and related IT resources, we recommend that Department management work with the FSSAT vendor to improve FSSAT security controls.

Response as of September 28, 2020: FDOE concurs with this finding as to the audited period, fiscal year 2018--2019. Since then, FDOE has already taken the necessary steps to come into compliance.

**Response as of March 28, 2021:**

OSS has implemented additional controls within FSSAT, to come into full compliance with FCS, which is anticipated to be completed by September 2021.

**Anticipated Completion Date & Contact:**

September 30, 2021—Sylvia Ifft

Department of Education  
Office of Inspector General – Internal Audit  
Six-Month Status Report on: Office of Safe Schools and Prior Audit Follow - Up  
Report # 2021-029 Issued: September 28, 2020  
Status as of March 28, 2021

**Finding 4: FSSAT User Access Privilege Controls** - The Office did not conduct periodic reviews of FSSAT user access privileges.

Recommendation: We recommend that Office management establish policies and procedures for conducting periodic reviews of the appropriateness of FSSAT user access privileges and ensure that the results of such reviews are documented in Department records.

Response as of September 28, 2020: The Department does not concur with this finding. The FSSAT state administrator did in fact conduct periodic reviews. However, FDOE concedes this was not adequately documented.

Additionally, since the end of the audit period, FDOE has already executed additional requirements for its vendor, Haystax, to add support for Single Sign On (SSO) authentication to FSSAT. The SSO security feature places responsibility of provisioning user accounts (i.e., to create, update, or disable a user's access to FDOE resources according to published FDOE SSO specifications) on the district administrators. Users must now adhere to FDOE SSO login specifications to access FSSAT.

Based on the review of this current administration, the contract (20-812) was executed on August 2, 2019 and an amendment to the contract was executed on January 6, 2020 whereby the SSO for authentication security feature was added as a deliverable (A-1).

**Response as of March 28, 2021:**

OSS updated the SSO process for district FSSAT administrators to specify FDOE and district roles in provisioning and maintaining user FSSAT accounts.

**Anticipated Completion Date & Contact:**

January 1, 2021—Sylvia Ifft

**Finding 5: School Security Risk Assessment Compliance and Oversight** - Office processes for confirming security risk assessments were completed by all schools, for reviewing risk assessments and providing recommendations to school districts to address noted findings, and for ensuring consistent accomplishment of Office compliance oversight responsibilities need enhancement.

Recommendation: We recommend that Department management enhance processes to:

- Confirm that security risk assessments are completed by all applicable schools.
- Review school security risk assessments and provide recommendations to address findings noted in the risk assessments.
- Evaluate school district compliance with requirements of the Act.

Response as of September 28, 2020:

- The Office had not established a reliable method to ensure that security risk assessments were completed by all schools.

The Department does not concur with this finding and it can be objectively said that OSS is continually improving in this regard in excess of the requirements of Florida law. While we agree that inclusion of the school MSID number improves compliance, it is not accurate to conclude that OSS did not have a reliable method to track school compliance with completing the FSSAT during the audited period. At the beginning of August 2018, an exhaustive effort was undertaken to ensure each assessment contained the MSID of each school. This required the FSSAT administrator to manually review each assessment and assign the MSID. This was a necessary step, considering this was the first year every school was to complete the assessment and the safety specialists did not consistently include this information. By this means, the OSS was able to accurately track and verify each school completed the FSSAT. Subsequent to the audit period, additional steps have been implemented in the FSSAT to ensure the MSID is included in the assessment of any new school. Additionally, OSS has added seven regionally-based program specialists with the primary role of compliance monitoring, technical assistance, and training for schools and school districts in all matters regarding school safety and security.

- The Office had not established a process to review school security risk assessments and provide recommendations to address findings noted in the risk assessments as contemplated in State law.

The Department does not concur with this finding. Section 1001.212(5), Florida Statutes, requires OSS to “Review and provide recommendations on the security risk assessments.” The Department disagrees that this statute requires OSS to review every school-level assessment to verify compliance with each standard and to make recommendations for each school site. Such a reading of the statute would be impossible to implement within existing resources. More importantly, such a reading would undermine local responsibility and control over school sites. Local responsibility and control is important in this context because local officials are best suited to make decisions about the safety of their school sites. It is appropriate for OSS to review security risk assessments for the purpose of providing technical assistance, recommendations, and monitoring, and OSS did so.

As to the specific example relating to safe school officers, in 2018-2019 some school districts interpreted the statute to allow one safe school officer to be assigned to multiple schools and the previous administration did not provide definitive guidance on this issue. Based on [EO 19-45](#), the new Commissioner conducted a thorough review of the statute and the Department subsequently required a minimum of one safe school officer for each school site. The Department has since developed a process to survey districts and verify compliance. The Department has also added regional staff, who will be able to provide an even greater level of support to districts on their school-level assessments.

- The Office had not established a process to ensure consistent accomplishment of all Office responsibilities related to serving as the central repository for compliance oversight in all matters regarding school safety and security, including prevention efforts, and emergency preparedness planning.

The Department does not concur with this finding. OSS did in fact serve as the central repository for compliance oversight in all matters regarding school safety and security, including prevention efforts,

intervention efforts, and emergency preparedness planning. Many of the activities of OSS are detailed in the Department's response to finding 1.

The finding that OSS did not track school safety specialist appointment dates or whether school safety specialists attained certification within 1 year of appointment is not accurate. In addition, it is the school district's responsibility to ensure that their designated safety officers were qualified in accordance with law. The Department does have a process in place to require corrective action to resolve any findings of a school district operational audit.

With respect to OSS evidencing the FSSAT assessments were timely submitted and satisfactorily completed, the Office did ensure that the assessments were completed and submitted. While it is accurate to state that in 2018-2019, the first year 3,700+ school campuses had to immediately address new requirements in law, some schools did not submit timely or complete assessments, the Office did in fact follow up with the schools and ensure that the assessments were submitted completely. Finally, the audit period covered the first year of the implementation of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Act; therefore, baseline data necessary for return on investment analysis was not available.

**Response as of March 28, 2021:**

FDOE continues to assert its disagreement with the finding; however, OSS has provided additional efficiencies to the review of security assessments. Subsequent to the audit period, steps have been implemented in the FSSAT to ensure the MSID is included in the assessment of any new school. Additionally, OSS has added seven regionally-based program specialists with the primary role of compliance monitoring, technical assistance, and training for schools and school districts in all matters regarding school safety and security.

**Anticipated Completion Date & Contact:**

January 31, 2021—Sylvia Ifft

**Finding 6: School Safety and Security Grants Allocation Methodology** - The basis for Department school safety and security grant awards to State university development research laboratory schools was not clear of record.

Recommendation: Should additional school safety and security grant funds become available, we recommend that Department management revise the school safety and security grant allocation methodology to better demonstrate of record the equitable basis for the distribution of funds.

**Response as of September 28, 2020:** The Department does not concur with this finding, and this finding would be a matter for the Legislature to consider, not the Department. The allocation methodology that includes the university developmental lab schools as school districts in the allocation of the School Safety and Security Grants is consistent with the Florida Legislature's past and current practice of allocating categorical funds within the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). Each university developmental lab school has its own "row" in the FEFP calculation and is allocated funds the same as a school district.

Department of Education  
Office of Inspector General – Internal Audit  
Six-Month Status Report on: Office of Safe Schools and Prior Audit Follow - Up  
Report # 2021-029 Issued: September 28, 2020  
Status as of March 28, 2021

Some categorical allocations within the FEFP provide a minimum amount, much the same as the School Safety and Security Grant. The Safe Schools Allocation allocates \$161,956,019 to school districts, and each school district first receives \$250,000 with the remaining balance allocated on the crime index and full-time equivalent students. The Reading Allocation allocates \$130,000,000 to school districts, and each school district first receives \$115,000 with the remaining balance allocated on Base Funding. The Mental Health Assistance Allocation allocates \$69,237,286, and each district receives \$100,000 with the balance allocated on full-time equivalent students. In each of these allocations, the university developmental lab schools are allocated funds the same as school districts. In fact, allocating the funds in a manner that would group university developmental lab schools by university would be contrary to current policy and practice.

**Response as of March 28, 2021:**

FDOE still does not concur and will continue to follow Florida Legislature’s past and current practice of allocating categorical funds within the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP).

**Anticipated Completion Date & Contact:**

N/A—Mark Eggers

**Finding 7: School Safety and Security Grant Funds** - The Office did not participate in the review or approval of applications for school safety and security grant funds, although required by State law. Additionally, in some instances, Department records did not adequately evidence that security enhancements requested in grant applications related to items identified in the school’s security risk assessment.

Recommendation: We recommend that Department management enhance controls for the processing of potential future school safety and security grant applications to include documented review and approval by the Office and all other designated approvers. In addition, Department management should take steps to ensure that Department records evidence the comparison of security enhancements requested in school safety and security grant applications to items identified in school security risk assessments.

**Response as of September 28, 2020:** The Department does not concur with this finding and, like findings 1 and 5, this finding seems to suggest that OSS should operate in a vacuum divorced from those FDOE staff who are charged with ensuring compliance with other state laws. The review of the School Safety and Security grants was a collaborative effort with the OSS, Office of Grants Management, Office of Funding and Financial Reporting and others familiar with fixed capital outlay. Training and support was provided by OSS to the FDOE team managing the grant regarding navigation of FSSAT; running reports in the tool; and locating information to cross reference with the request for applications (RFA). Reviews of applications were conducted under the state standards for contracts and grants management to determine costs to be reasonable, allowable, and necessary under the parameters of the program as instituted by the state legislature and detailed in the request for application.



As the auditor states, the costs outlined in district applications for the grant did not always align with the recommendation section of the FSSAT. However, FDOE vehemently disagrees with the need for this finding and its fundamental oversight that district FSSAT assessments were reviewed in their entirety and compared to their submitted grant application. In other words, the applications were not and should not be just limited to the recommendation section of the FSSAT. The applicable standard during the review process was that the cost outlined in the district's application would align with district determined needs, which could be described in different narrative sections of the FSSAT. Our review considered all of the narratives included in the FSSAT assessment, not only the recommendation section.

Moreover, additional context is necessary to understand both the implement sprint that occurred before commencement of the 2018-2019 school year and continual improvements since then. 2018 was the first year schools were required to complete this comprehensive security risk assessment when the Act became law on March 9 of that year. Schools were required to complete the school security risk assessments by August 1, 2018. Considerable time was devoted to assist school districts in completing the assessment that would enable their application to move forward through the approval process and award the funds necessary to begin the upgrade of school security infrastructures. In the following grant cycles, additional instructions and guidance have been provided to the schools to assist in their completion of the annual assessment. Additionally, checklists or tools have also been developed for the application process to assist schools in cross-walking school needs and where those needs are indicated in the FSSAT. These same tools are utilized by FDOE staff to review the applications.

**Response as of March 28, 2021:**

FDOE continues to assert that grant applications and FSSAT assessments were in alignment as detailed in our original response. It should be noted that as a result of the increase in staffing, OSS has taken full programmatic responsibility of hardening grants.

**Anticipated Completion Date & Contact:**

July 1, 2020—Sylvia Ifft

**Finding 8: School Guardian Grants** - The Office had not established a methodology to allocate funds to Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program participants.

Recommendation: We recommend that Office management establish a methodology for allocating Guardian Program funds to ensure the funds equitable distribution and availability to future Program participants.

**Response as of September 28, 2020:** The Department does not concur with this finding and this finding misunderstands the basic differences in local controls and needs to support implementation of the program. Similar to the review of the School Safety and Security Grants, the creation and review of the request for application (RFA) for the Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program (Guardian Program) applications was a collaborative effort between the OSS and the Office of Grants Management. Initially,

the \$67 million in funding appropriated for this program appeared to provide approximately \$1 million for each district for the 2018-19 fiscal year. While most applications did not request funds even close to the \$1 million, a few estimated costs over this amount. Considering the wide variation of needs and interest in the Guardian Program, the Department determined the most appropriate manner to provide for those needs would be allow each applicant to design the program to accommodate local needs and create a proposed budget.

This method was consistent with the unique relationships that exist in local communities between schools and law enforcement and allowed sufficient flexibility for the individual applicants to determine how they would construct the program within the statutory guidelines and the necessities of the local community. Moreover, this allowed FDOE to be consistently responsive to feedback from the Commission. For that reason, the FDOE did not create an allocation schedule for each prospective applicant. Instead, FDOE reviewed the applicants' budgetary request in comparison to the available amount of funds, leading to both efficient, appropriate and locally driven uses of the funds, all while maintaining a healthy fund balance for future growth of the program.

Because FDOE was able to fully fund each proposed budget, the process through which decisions were made for determining how the funds would be approved were based on each line item requested and whether or not the request was reasonable, allowable, and necessary for meeting the demands of the project. If one of these categories was not met, the request was denied. This process ensures the proposed costs are authorized under the terms and conditions of the grant. That methodology was consistent throughout our approval process, and often times, staff had to communicate with the requestor that they needed to adjust their budget to ensure each item met these requirements.

Additionally, within the request for application documents, specific items were clearly listed indicating items that were unallowable, as well as providing guidance as to the purpose of the funding (for screening and training related costs and providing a one-time stipend of \$500 to qualified Guardians). If the criteria was met and the funds were available, it would have been inappropriate for us to deny the requests. When requests did not meet these criteria, they were denied. While the application process involved approving a projected estimate of funding based on the scope of work presented in the application, no actual funds were provided until the grantee provided invoices or receipts for items approved and actually purchased. This portion of the process involved a collaborative effort between the OSS, the Office of Grants Management, and the Comptroller's Office in reviewing items approved, as well as verifying the amount requested for reimbursement.

We respectfully disagree with the finding that the office had not established a methodology to allocate funds to this program, due in part to the fact that there was no finding that any sum awarded was excessive or of an unreasonable amount. This is further evidenced by the fact that \$4,811,722.45 of the appropriated funds were returned to the treasury. In effect, this finding is criticizing FDOE for successfully balancing local control and fiscal responsibility.

Department of Education  
Office of Inspector General – Internal Audit  
Six-Month Status Report on: Office of Safe Schools and Prior Audit Follow - Up  
Report # 2021-029 Issued: September 28, 2020  
Status as of March 28, 2021

**Response as of March 28, 2021:**

FDOE still does not concur; however, the FDOE will consider if a methodology of determining allocations is necessary and/or appropriate in future allocations under the Guardian Program. Currently we are in process of obtaining information from interested sheriff's offices through an Intent to Apply for the 2020-21 funds. This information will potentially frame how funds will be allocated for this project period that will address the local conditions and the experience of a sheriff's office's prior participation while enabling new and expanding usage of the grant program.

**Anticipated Completion Date & Contact:**

N/A—Sylvia Ifft

**Finding 9: Florida Schools Safety Portal** - The Florida Schools Safety Portal (FSSP) was launched 243 days after the December 1, 2018, statutory deadline and, contrary to State law, the Office did not participate in the development of the FSSP. Additionally, the FSSP did not significantly improve threat assessment team member access to timely, complete, and accurate information from the statutorily specified data sources or include a data analytic component that integrated the various data sources or enabled threat assessment teams to identify, evaluate, and address threats or potential threats to school security based on integrated data.

Recommendation: We recommend that Department management enhance the FSSP to include local law enforcement data and data analytic capabilities. Additionally, we recommend that further FSSP enhancements include collaboration with the Office to ensure FSSP processes and capabilities are evaluated for compliance with current best practices by school safety subject matter experts.

**Response as of September 28, 2020:** The Department does not concur with this finding and this finding is being made in a vacuum without regards to other state and federal data privacy laws. In May 2018, the Department established three multi-agency workgroups that would work together to facilitate building the centralized integrated data repository, now known as the Florida Schools Safety Portal, or FSSP. Those groups were User and Data Governance, Technology, and Legal. The workgroups included representatives from the Department of Education, the Department of Children and Families, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Department of Juvenile Justice, and the Agency for Healthcare Administration. In addition, the workgroups included members from school district staff and district general counsels' offices.

These groups reviewed existing tools available for data sharing and the laws surrounding data sharing between agencies. Between June 2018 and July 2019 the workgroups met 18 times to discuss available data sharing tools, data sets, state and federal laws, and options and challenges associated with this project. Department technology and legal staff also had many smaller meetings and phone calls with the representative agencies to discuss the specific practical and legal issues that were raised.

In addition, when the new administration was in place the Department hired outside legal counsel to assist with development and implementation of the FSSP, based on the firm's expertise in data privacy, cybersecurity, and healthcare and education law. The workgroups worked through federal and state

laws to provide the current data sources available including Baker Act data, FortifyFL data, and social media monitoring information. OSS staff were involved in many of these meetings and conference calls and provided input on how to structure the FSSP so that it would be useful to district personnel.

The FSSP provides threat assessment teams with access to additional information that they previously did not have access to. For example, before the FSSP, threat assessment teams had limited access to information outside of their student information system. The release of the FSSP provides threat assessment teams access to data from other school districts, including School Environmental Safety Incident Reporting Data (SESIR) data and FortifyFL data, which are now searchable statewide. In addition, threat assessment teams can now search the Baker Act database and social media monitoring data. The social media monitoring tool helps school districts assess threats of violence against students, employees, and schools and helps threat assessment teams to determine the services and supports that are needed to address a threat. The social media monitoring tool scans social media sites to identify signs of bullying, self-harm, or threats of violence against students, employees, and schools. In addition, the tool searches social media postings containing certain keywords that are made near school buildings. District staff receive alerts when posts are found that need to be investigated. Information captured by the social media monitoring tool is searchable and uses a matching algorithm that analytically ranks search results so that the threat assessment team can feel confident that they have access to the right information.

The reality is that even in the last couple of weeks prior to the launch of the FSSP, FDOE leadership had to work with leadership of the other workgroup partners to pay meticulous attention to details to ensure compliance with state and federal data privacy restrictions. The launch of this application was nothing short of legally “threading the needle” to provide increased public safety while also protecting personally identifiable information.

**Response as of March 28, 2021:**

FDOE still does not concur with the finding. The Department created a portal that provides increased analytics to threat assessment teams that followed applicable, and often limiting and complex, state and federal laws regarding the protection of personally identifiable information.

**Anticipated Completion Date & Contact:**

N/A—Andre Smith

**Finding 10: Youth Mental Health Awareness and Assistance Training Program** - Department records did not evidence Department monitoring activities to determine whether youth mental health awareness and assistance training program deliverables were provided in accordance with grant agreement terms and conditions or whether all school district personnel were appropriately and timely trained.

Recommendation: We recommend that Department management enhance Program monitoring to ensure that deliverables are being provided in accordance with grant agreement terms and conditions and all school district personnel are being appropriately and timely trained.

Department of Education  
Office of Inspector General – Internal Audit  
Six-Month Status Report on: Office of Safe Schools and Prior Audit Follow - Up  
Report # 2021-029 Issued: September 28, 2020  
Status as of March 28, 2021

Response as of September 28, 2020: The Department does not concur with this finding. While we agree with the intent of the recommendation, we need to be clear that the Department has already met, exceeded and will continue to exceed the requirements set forth in law. The Department notes that in accordance with Section 1012.584, F.S., the Department's responsibility was to establish an evidence-based youth mental health awareness and assistance training program utilizing a national authority on youth mental health awareness and assistance to facilitate training, using a trainer certification model. To this end, the Department awarded funds to the University of South Florida (USF), to build a train-the-trainer program to certify trainers in local school districts. USF used the grant funds to contract with the National Council for Behavioral Health, a national authority on youth mental health awareness, to provide the certification model program to train up to six Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) Train-the-Trainers in each school district (or a total of up to 450 instructors statewide based on districts' needs). The grant award to USF, established deliverables and were reported to the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEES), which reviewed and confirmed the receipt of those deliverables.

From the outset, it was understood that the process of training over 300,000 school personnel would be a multi-year project. Indeed, while the statute established a beginning date, it does not provide a specified timeline as to when all school personnel are to be trained. In consideration of that circumstance, in March of 2019, the Department announced the release of a supplementary set of online training modules for districts to engage their personnel in addition to the YMHFA program. That having been said, the Department is acutely aware of the need for training personnel to recognize the signs of mental distress and overall mental health and worked to establish a program that would train the maximum number of individuals in the most competent and expedient manner. Our records show that during the initial 2018-19 school year, 705 YMHFA trainers were fully certified to teach the course and 16,013 school personnel were trained in YMHFA. As of June 30, 2020, using the most recent data, the Florida school districts have had 1,383 YMHFA trainers; 38,494 school personnel trained in YMHFA; and 148,976 school personnel who have completed the online training modules.

While the Department established the statutorily required evidence-based program to facilitate the training and we will monitor for compliance, the school districts must own their portions of the responsibilities herein, as the responsibility rests with each district's school safety specialist (Section, 1012.584 (2), F.S.) who is appointed by the school district superintendent (Section 1006.07 (6)(A), F.S.).

**Response as of March 28, 2021:**

Although the department did not concur, in collaboration with the administrator of the program, the following procedures were changed: 1) for this current fiscal year, the allocation process for the districts were changed to a cost-reimbursement model that includes the approval of invoices for allocated dollars. The invoices must include a roster of who was trained for evidence of district training activities prior to being paid. In previous years, reporting of the current training year was done after the allocation was already disbursed, in quarterly reporting. 2) On-going negotiations with the YMHAT vendor to increase data integrity through the creation of a centralized registration process. Once completed, this process will allow administrators to more efficiently determine who has been trained

Department of Education  
Office of Inspector General – Internal Audit  
Six-Month Status Report on: Office of Safe Schools and Prior Audit Follow - Up  
Report # 2021-029 Issued: September 28, 2020  
Status as of March 28, 2021

through one database in less inquiries (data system). 3) On-going district and vendor reporting in addition to the new invoicing process.

**Anticipated Completion Date & Contact:**

July 1, 2020—Dr. Curtis Williams

**Finding 11: (Confidential) Mobile Device Security Controls** - Security controls over mobile device utilization need enhancement to ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of Department data and IT resources.

Recommendation: We recommend that Department management enhance certain security controls related to employee use of mobile devices to ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of Department data and related IT resources.

Response as of September 28, 2020: The department concurs with this finding. We are working on an enterprise solution to close those gaps. The current administration has empowered a more centralized approach to address differences in information technology protocols across some FDOE divisions.

**Response as of March 28, 2021:**

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is currently working with DTI to standardize our security tools and monitoring across the department.

**Anticipated Completion Date & Contact:**

October 31, 2021—Andre Smith

**Finding 12: IT Governance and Policies and Procedures** - Department efforts to monitor the utilization of, and compliance with, Departmentwide IT policies and procedures and to review and approve Division-specific supplemental IT policies and procedures continue to need improvement. Additionally, the Department's overall IT governance structure needs enhancement to ensure risks to the Department's data, information, and IT resources are timely identified and addressed.

Recommendation: We again recommend that Department management establish processes to monitor the utilization of, and compliance with, Department-wide IT policies and procedures and to review and approve Division-specific IT policies and procedures to ensure consistency with Department-wide IT policies and management's expectations. Additionally, we recommend that Department management evaluate the Department's IT governance structure to ensure the structure appropriately assigns responsibility for managing risks to the Department's data, information, and IT resources.

Response as of September 28, 2020: The Department concurs with this finding, and will modify our IT governance structure and procedures to monitor the utilization of, and compliance with, Department-wide IT policies and procedures and to review and approve Division-specific IT policies and procedures to ensure consistency with Department-wide IT policies. Like finding 11, the current administration has empowered a more centralized approach to address differences in information technology protocols across some FDOE divisions.

Department of Education  
Office of Inspector General – Internal Audit  
Six-Month Status Report on: Office of Safe Schools and Prior Audit Follow - Up  
Report # 2021-029 Issued: September 28, 2020  
Status as of March 28, 2021

**Response as of March 28, 2021:**

The department is developing procedures to review and approve department-wide IT policies and procedures to ensure consistency.

**Anticipated Completion Date & Contact:**

March 31, 2021—Andre Smith

**Finding 13: Information Security Manager** - Contrary to State law, the Department's Information Security Manager (ISM) did not report directly to the Commissioner of Education.

Recommendation: We recommend that Departmental management take steps to ensure that the Department ISM reports directly to the Commissioner in accordance with State law.

Response as of September 28, 2020: The Department concurs with this finding, and has since finalized steps to ensure that the Department ISM reports directly to the Commissioner for managing the information technology security program in accordance with state law.

**Response as of March 28, 2021:**

The Department has finalized steps to ensure that the Department ISM reports directly to the Commissioner for managing the information technology security program in accordance with state law.

**Anticipated Completion Date & Contact:**

September 30, 2020—Andre Smith

**Finding 14: Security Awareness Training** - As similarly noted in prior audit reports, most recently in our report No. 2018-083, the Department did not always provide security awareness training to workforce members in accordance with Department policy or applicable rules.

Recommendation: We again recommend that Department management enhance the Department's security awareness training program to ensure that all Department workforce members timely receive security awareness training in accordance with the Policy and applicable rules.

Response as of September 28, 2020: The Department concurs with this finding, and after the review period, 2018-2019, already modified our procedures to ensure that all Department workforce members timely receive security awareness training with their first 30 days of employment in accordance with the applicable rules.

**Response as of March 28, 2021:**

The department has developed procedures to ensure employees complete security awareness training per statute. Final approval of the procedures occurred February 23, 2021.

**Anticipated Completion Date & Contact:**

February 23, 2021—Stephanie Wilson

Department of Education  
Office of Inspector General – Internal Audit  
Six-Month Status Report on: Office of Safe Schools and Prior Audit Follow - Up  
Report # 2021-029 Issued: September 28, 2020  
Status as of March 28, 2021

**Finding 15: Equity Plan Reviews** - Department controls for administering and timely reviewing educational institutions' Florida Equity Act annual equity plan updates continue to need improvement.

Recommendation: We again recommend that Department management ensure that educational institution equity plan updates are timely obtained and reviewed so that the results can be timely communicated to educational institution management.

Response as of September 28, 2020: The Department concurs with this finding and already addressed the auditor's recommendations in the Division of Florida Colleges and the Office of Equal Educational Opportunity as described below in accordance with the division of responsibilities:

**Division of Florida Colleges Response:**

To improve the timeliness and feedback related to college equity plan submissions, the Division of Florida Colleges (DFC) already implemented the following internal procedures during the 2019-2020 year:

- The DFC reminded equity officers or other assigned college designees of upcoming submission deadlines via electronic correspondence and webinars. Also, the DFC enforced deadlines through reminders and notifications and verified the timely receipt of equity plan updates.
- The DFC documented confirmation of receipt with equity officers or other assigned college designees via electronic mail when colleges submitted equity plan updates. This included communicating any outstanding components needed in the submitted equity plan update.
- The DFC sustained the goal of communicating any issues with the colleges regarding the timely submission of equity plan updates.
- The DFC ensured all reviews of the College Equity Plan Updates were completed before the stated deadline of October 31 and tracked outgoing feedback to the colleges.
- The DFC maintained the goal of accurately tracking any plan submissions and revisions using an internal tracking system to ensure that all equity plan updates met specified deadlines.
- The DFC plans to establish written policies and procedures for tracking and reviewing college equity plan updates before the 2020-21 report cycle.

**The Office of Equal Educational Opportunity:**

To address the auditor's recommendations, the Office of Equal Educational Opportunity (OEEO) already made the following procedural adjustments.

- OEEO modified the tracking spreadsheet to capture information relating to the district's annual equity report from the date received, date reviewed, date sent to administrators, date received back and date mailed out to district. The reports will be completed and returned to districts by January 31 of each year.
- After five days grace period, if a district has not submitted a plan by the deadline, the OEEO will communicate with the district to find a solution to getting the plan submitted. Communication will be done by a phone call and followed up with an e-mail.



Department of Education  
Office of Inspector General – Internal Audit  
Six-Month Status Report on: Office of Safe Schools and Prior Audit Follow - Up  
Report # 2021-029 Issued: September 28, 2020  
Status as of March 28, 2021

- If a district is unresponsive and does not comply after multiple efforts, the Director of OEEO will escalate the case to the K-12 Administrators to discuss next steps to obtain compliance from the district.

**Response as of March 28, 2021:**

**Division of Florida Colleges Response:**

- The DFC reminded equity officers or other assigned college designees of upcoming submission deadlines via electronic correspondence and webinars. Also, the DFC enforced deadlines through reminders and notifications and verified the timely receipt of equity plan updates.
- The DFC documented confirmation of receipt with equity officers or other assigned college designees via electronic mail when colleges submitted equity plan updates. This included communicating any outstanding components needed in the submitted equity plan update.
- The DFC sustained the goal of communicating any issues with the colleges regarding the timely submission of equity plan updates.
- The DFC ensured all reviews of the College Equity Plan Updates were completed before the stated deadline of October 31 and tracked outgoing feedback to the colleges.
- The DFC maintained the goal of accurately tracking any plan submissions and revisions using an internal tracking system to ensure that all equity plan updates met specified deadlines.
- The DFC plans to establish written policies and procedures for tracking and reviewing college equity plan updates before the 2020-21 report cycle.

**The Office of Equal Educational Opportunity:**

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Department of Education  
Office of Inspector General – Internal Audit  
Six-Month Status Report on: Office of Safe Schools and Prior Audit Follow - Up  
Report # 2021-029 Issued: September 28, 2020  
Status as of March 28, 2021

**Anticipated Completion Date & Contact:**

**Division of Florida Colleges**

March 5, 2020—Shanna Autry

**The Office of Equal Educational Opportunity**

December 5, 2020—Lydia Southwell