

**STATE OF FLORIDA AUDITOR GENERAL**

**Operational Audit**

Report No. 2026-175  
May 2026

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Office of Safe Schools



Sherrill F. Norman, CPA  
Auditor General

## Commissioner of the Department of Education

Pursuant to Article IX, Section 2 of the State Constitution and Section 20.15, Florida Statutes, the State Board of Education supervises the system of free public education and is the head of the Department of Education. The State Board of Education appoints the Commissioner of Education who serves as the Executive Director of the Department. Manny Diaz, Jr. served as Commissioner of Education during the period of our audit.

The Auditor General conducts audits of government entities to provide the Legislature, Florida's citizens, public entity management, and other stakeholders unbiased, timely, and relevant information for use in promoting government accountability and stewardship and improving government operations.

The team leader was Travis Lampinen, CPA, and the audit was supervised by David Cain, CPA.

Please address inquiries regarding this report to Christi Alexander, CPA, Audit Manager, by e-mail at [christialexander@aud.state.fl.us](mailto:christialexander@aud.state.fl.us) or by telephone at (850) 412-2786.

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# DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## Office of Safe Schools

### ***SUMMARY***

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This operational audit of the Department of Education (Department) focused on the Office of Safe Schools (Office) and included a follow up on Findings 1 through 10 noted in our report No. 2021-029. Our audit disclosed the following:

**Finding 1:** Office processes for ensuring that security risk assessments are completed for all applicable schools continue to need enhancement. Absent effective processes, the Department cannot reliably identify the population of schools required by State law to be inspected.

**Finding 2:** As similarly noted in our report No. 2021-029, the Office did not conduct periodic reviews of Florida Safe Schools Assessment Tool (FSSAT) internal user access privileges nor obtain assurances from external users regarding the continued appropriateness of access. Additionally, FSSAT internal user access privileges were not always promptly deactivated when users separated from Department employment.

**Finding 3:** Certain security controls related to FSSAT and Florida Safe Schools Portal user authentication need improvement to ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of Department data and related IT resources.

**Finding 4:** Office records did not evidence that school safety specialists had satisfactorily completed required Federal Emergency Management Agency training courses.

### ***BACKGROUND***

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Pursuant to State law,<sup>1</sup> the Department of Education (Department) is to assist in providing professional leadership and guidance and in carrying out the policies, procedures, and duties authorized by State law or by the State Board of Education or found necessary by it to attain the purposes and objectives of the Florida Early Learning-20 Education Code.<sup>2</sup> Under the direction of the State Board of Education and executive oversight of the Commissioner of Education (Commissioner), the Department plans, administers, and delivers its programs and services through 9 divisions and 4 offices, including the Office of Safe Schools (Office).

The Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act (Act)<sup>3</sup> was enacted in March 2018 in response to the February 14, 2018, tragic shooting that took the lives of 17 students and educators at the school. Among other safety measures, the Act established the Office to serve as the central repository for best practices, training standards, and compliance oversight in all matters regarding school safety and security, including prevention and intervention efforts and emergency preparedness planning.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 1001.20(2), Florida Statutes.

<sup>2</sup> Chapters 1000 through 1013, Florida Statutes.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 2018-3, Laws of Florida.

As outlined in the adjoining graphic, Office statutory responsibilities to keep students and educators safe are significant. The Office has four major functional areas to support Statewide school safety efforts:

- Compliance
- Training and Communication
- Grants and Contracts
- Data and Analytics

As of March 2026, the Office had 36 full-time positions, including a Vice Chancellor and an Executive Director, to fulfill its statutory duties. Nineteen of the 36 positions are located throughout the State and are responsible for overseeing compliance, technical assistance, and training as it pertains to the safety and security requirements of the Act. The remaining positions are assigned to the Department's Tallahassee headquarters and provide general support to the Office at large, as well as content- and technology-specific support for School Environmental Safety Incident Reporting (SESIR) and the Florida Safe Schools Assessment Tool (FSSAT).

As part of our audit, we evaluated the efficacy of the Department's and Office's administration of the requirements of the Act during the period July 2023 through January 2025, as well as management's actions to correct Findings 1 through 10 noted in our report No. 2021-029.

### Office Responsibilities

- Serve as a central repository for best practices, training standards, and compliance oversight for school safety and security, including prevention and intervention efforts and emergency preparedness planning.
- Establish and update as necessary a school security risk assessment tool.
- Provide ongoing professional learning opportunities to school district and charter school personnel.
- Provide technical assistance and guidance.
- Develop and implement a School Safety Specialist Training Program.
- Review and provide recommendations on the security risk assessments.
- Coordinate with the Department of Law Enforcement (DLE) to provide a unified search tool, known as the Florida School Safety Portal.
- Provide data to support the evaluation of mental health services.
- Provide technical assistance for school environmental safety incident reporting.
- Award grants to schools to improve the safety and security of school buildings based on the recommendations of the security risk assessment.
- Disseminate, in consultation with the DLE, awareness and education materials on the School Safety Awareness Program to schools.
- Develop a Statewide behavioral threat management operational process, a Florida-specific behavioral threat assessment instrument, and a threat management portal.
- Develop in coordination with other entities a model family reunification plan.
- Develop and adopt a Florida school safety compliance inspection report.
- Publish an annual list detailing the total number of safe-school officers: in the State; disciplined or relieved of their duties; involved in disciplinary incidents; and who discharged their firearm outside of a training situation or exercise.
- Maintain a current directory of public school-based diversion programs.
- Notify all administrative and instructional personnel annually of the school safety requirements outlined in Section 1006.07(6)(f), Florida Statutes.
- Evaluate the methodology for the safe school's allocation and, if necessary, make recommendations for an alternate methodology.

Source: State law.

## ***FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS***

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### **Finding 1: School Security Risk Assessments and School Safety Inspections**

To assist school officials in identifying threats, vulnerabilities, and appropriate safety controls for the schools that they supervise, State law<sup>4</sup> requires each school district and public school site in the State to conduct an annual school security risk assessment using the Florida Safe Schools Assessment Tool (FSSAT). Each school district must annually report to the Office by October 15 that all public schools within the school district have completed the FSSAT and, by December 1, the Department must report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on the status of implementation across school districts and schools. Effective August 2024, State law<sup>5</sup> expanded Office responsibilities to include the conduct of unannounced inspections of all public schools, including charter schools, while school is in session, triennially and to investigate reports of noncompliance with school safety requirements. The Office determines the schools requiring inspection based on the schools with completed security risk assessments.

In our report No. 2021-029 (Finding 5), we noted that the Office had not established a reliable method to ensure that required security risk assessments were completed for all schools. As part of our follow-up audit procedures, we inquired of Office management and evaluated the steps taken by the Office to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the schools in the FSSAT with a completed annual security risk assessment. Our audit procedures found that the Office still had not established a reliable method to determine whether the FSSAT included and evidenced the completion of annual security risk assessments by all schools. Specifically, our audit found that, although the Office was working to enhance the FSSAT to maintain a real-time inventory of facilities that meet the definition of a school<sup>6</sup> for purposes of completing security risk assessments and undergoing required unannounced inspections, the Office continued to rely solely on compiled lists developed in coordination with school districts. Other methods to independently assess whether all schools completed required security risk assessments and thus were subject to required inspections could include reconciling FSSAT data to the Department's Master School Identification (MSID) listing,<sup>7</sup> determining whether all identified schools completed risk assessments, and accounting for facilities included in the MSID listing that are not required to complete risk assessments or be inspected, such as district administrative buildings and adult education and VPK providers.

While Office management indicated that it is the responsibility of each school district to determine which schools under its jurisdiction are required to complete security risk assessments and that school districts are to confirm by October 15 each year that all public schools, including charter schools, have completed a risk assessment, the Office is statutorily charged with compliance oversight in "all matters" regarding school safety and security. As such, the Office would better demonstrate that this charge is being fulfilled

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<sup>4</sup> Section 1006.1493, Florida Statutes.

<sup>5</sup> Section 1001.212(13), Florida Statutes.

<sup>6</sup> As defined in Department Rule 6A-1.0018(1)(m), Florida Administrative Code.

<sup>7</sup> Pursuant to Department Rule 6A-1.0016(1) and (2)(b)1., Florida Administrative Code, the Department assigns unique identifiers to all public schools, including charter schools, for official tracking and accountability purposes.

by taking steps to independently and reliably assess whether all schools in the State are completing required annual security risk assessments. Such verification procedures would also further promote school safety by ensuring that all schools are subject to unannounced inspections for compliance with school safety requirements.

**Recommendation: We recommend that Department management continue efforts to independently and reliably assess whether security risk assessments are being completed by all applicable schools and, thus, a complete and accurate population of schools is identified for the purpose of timely conducting safety inspections in accordance with State law.**

## **Finding 2: FSSAT Access Controls**

Department of Management Services (DMS) rules<sup>8</sup> require State agencies to conduct periodic reviews of information technology (IT) access privileges based on system categorization or risk and ensure that access privileges are removed when access to an IT resource is no longer required. Prompt action to deactivate privileges is necessary to help prevent misuse of the access privileges.

The Department and other school safety stakeholders rely on the FSSAT, and the sensitive and confidential information contained therein, to facilitate the conduct of public school security risk assessments. Although the FSSAT is hosted by a third-party vendor, the Office serves as the application owner responsible for the system and its data. As of May 2025, a total of 10,367 users had FSSAT access privileges, including 64 internal users (e.g., Department personnel) and 10,303 external users (e.g., school district personnel).

As part of our audit, we evaluated Department FSSAT user access privilege controls and found that:

- Due to an oversight, the Office did not review the appropriateness of FSSAT internal user access privileges during the period July 2023 through January 2025 nor obtain periodic assurances from external users regarding the continued appropriateness of access. A similar finding was noted in our report No. 2021-029 (Finding 4).
- FSSAT internal user access privileges were not always timely deactivated upon a user's separation from Department employment. Specifically, our examination of FSSAT access and personnel records for 16 Department employees with FSSAT access privileges who separated from Department employment during the period July 2023 through January 2025 found that 2 employee accounts remained active 5 and 214 days after the employees' separation dates. According to Office management, the request for deactivation for the first employee's access was not received until 2 days after the employee's separation and the second employee's access was not timely deactivated due to an oversight.

Periodic reviews of FSSAT internal user access privileges and receipt of periodic assurances from external users regarding the continued appropriateness of access would promote compliance with DMS rules and provide Office management confidence that user access privileges are authorized and remain appropriate. Additionally prompt deactivation of IT user access privileges limits the potential for unauthorized disclosure, modification, or destruction of Department data and IT resources by internal and external users.

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<sup>8</sup> DMS Rules 60GG-2.003(1)(a)6. and 8., Florida Administrative Code.

**Recommendation:** We recommend that Office management conduct periodic reviews of the appropriateness of FSSAT internal user access privileges, obtain periodic assurances from external users regarding the continued appropriateness of access, and ensure that the results of all such procedures are documented in Department records. We also recommend that Office management enhance controls to ensure that FSSAT internal user access privileges are deactivated immediately when no longer necessary.

### **Finding 3: Security Controls – User Authentication**

Security controls are intended to protect the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of data and IT resources. Our audit procedures disclosed that certain security controls related to FSSAT and Florida Safe Schools Portal (FSSP) user authentication need improvement. We are not disclosing specific details of the issues in this report to avoid the possibility of compromising Department data and related IT resources. However, we have notified appropriate Department management of the areas needing improvement.

Without appropriate security controls related to FSSAT and FSSP user authentication, the risk is increased that the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of Department data and related IT resources may be compromised.

**Recommendation:** We recommend that Department management improve certain security controls related to FSSAT and FSSP user authentication to ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of Department data and related IT resources.

### **Finding 4: School Safety Specialist Training**

Pursuant to State law and Department rules,<sup>9</sup> the Office is to develop and implement a School Safety Specialist Training Program. Within 30 calendar days of appointment, school safety specialists<sup>10</sup> must satisfactorily complete required online Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Independent Study courses and maintain certificates of completion.

As part of our audit, we inquired of Office management and examined Office records for the 75 school safety specialists who were appointed during the period July 2023 through January 2025 and found that Office records did not evidence that these specialists had satisfactorily completed the required FEMA training courses. In response to our audit inquiry, Office management indicated that, while FEMA-issued certificates were previously collected from school safety specialists to support course completion, this practice was not followed for the 75 specialists in question.

Absent retention of FEMA-issued course completion documentation, the Office cannot adequately demonstrate that school safety specialists received required training.

<sup>9</sup> Section 1001.212(4), Florida Statutes, and Department Rule 6A-1.0018(22), Florida Administrative Code.

<sup>10</sup> Department Rule 6A-1.0018(2)(q), Florida Administrative Code, defines a school safety specialist as the district school superintendent's designee responsible for the oversight of all aspects of school safety and security within the school district. A school safety specialist must be either a school administrator or law enforcement officer.

**Recommendation:** We recommend that Office management enhance controls to ensure that documentation evidencing that school safety specialists have completed required FEMA training courses is retained in Office records.

## ***PRIOR AUDIT FOLLOW-UP***

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Except as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, the Department had taken corrective actions for the applicable findings included in our report No. 2021-029.

## ***OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY***

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The Auditor General conducts operational audits of governmental entities to provide the Legislature, Florida's citizens, public entity management, and other stakeholders unbiased, timely, and relevant information for use in promoting government accountability and stewardship and improving government operations.

We conducted this operational audit from February 2025 through October 2025 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. 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 objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

This operational audit of the Department of Education (Department) focused on the Office of Safe Schools (Office). The objectives of the audit were to:

- Evaluate management's performance in establishing and maintaining internal controls, including controls designed to prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse, and in administering responsibilities in accordance with applicable laws, administrative rules, contracts, grant agreements, and other guidelines.
- Examine internal controls designed and placed into operation to promote and encourage the achievement of management's control objectives in the categories of compliance, economic and efficient operations, the reliability of records and reports, and the safeguarding of assets, and identify weaknesses in those internal controls.
- Determine whether management had corrected, or was in the process of correcting, Findings 1 through 10 disclosed in our report No. 2021-029.
- Identify statutory and fiscal changes that may be recommended to the Legislature pursuant to Section 11.45(7)(h), Florida Statutes.

This audit was designed to identify, for those programs, activities, or functions included within the scope of the audit, deficiencies in internal controls significant to our audit objectives; instances of noncompliance with applicable governing laws, rules, or contracts; and instances of inefficient or ineffective operational policies, procedures, or practices. The focus of this audit was to identify problems so that they may be corrected in such a way as to improve government accountability and efficiency and the stewardship of management. Professional judgment has been used in determining significance and audit risk and in selecting the particular transactions, legal compliance matters, records, and controls considered.

As described in more detail below, for those programs, activities, and functions included within the scope of our audit, our audit work included, but was not limited to, communicating to management and those charged with governance the scope, objectives, timing, overall methodology, and reporting of our audit; obtaining an understanding of the program, activity, or function; identifying and evaluating internal controls significant to our audit objectives; exercising professional judgment in considering significance and audit risk in the design and execution of the research, interviews, tests, analyses, and other procedures included in the audit methodology; obtaining reasonable assurance of the overall sufficiency and appropriateness of the evidence gathered in support of our audit's findings and conclusions; and reporting on the results of the audit as required by governing laws and auditing standards.

Our audit included the selection and examination of transactions and records. Unless otherwise indicated in this report, these transactions and records were not selected with the intent of statistically projecting the results, although we have presented for perspective, where practicable, information concerning relevant population value or size and quantifications relative to the items selected for examination.

An audit by its nature does not include a review of all records and actions of agency management, staff, and vendors, and as a consequence, cannot be relied upon to identify all instances of noncompliance, fraud, waste, abuse, or inefficiency.

In conducting our audit, we:

- Reviewed applicable laws, rules, and Department policies and procedures, and interviewed Department personnel to obtain an understanding of Office controls for administering the requirements of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act (Act).
- Inquired of Department management regarding whether the Department made any expenditures or entered into any contracts under the authority granted by an applicable state of emergency during the period March 2022 through January 2025.
- Obtained an understanding of selected Department information technology (IT) controls, assessed the risks related to those controls, evaluated whether selected general and application IT controls for the Florida Safe Schools Assessment Tool (FSSAT) and Florida Safe Schools Portal (FSSP) were in place, and tested the effectiveness of the selected controls.
- Examined Office records related to the procurement of the FSSAT to determine whether the Office contracted with a security consulting firm that specialized in the development of risk assessment software solutions and had experience in conducting risk assessments of public facilities to develop, update, and implement a risk assessment tool.
- Examined Office records for the FSSAT to determine whether the Office ensured that school officials at each school district and public school site in the State used the FSSAT as the primary physical site security assessment tool in accordance with Section 1006.1493(1), Florida Statutes.
- Examined the FSSAT contract to determine whether the contract addressed the requirements specified in Section 1006.1493(2), Florida Statutes.
- Examined Office records to determine if, by December 1, 2023, and 2024, the Department reported to the Governor, President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on the status of the implementation of the FSSAT by school districts and schools, and whether the information within the annual report satisfied the requirements of Sections 1006.1493(3) and (5), Florida Statutes.

- For the 75 school safety specialists appointed during the period July 2023 through January 2025, examined Office records related to Office training and awareness programs for school safety specialists, school personnel ongoing professional development, and national and state best practices utilized to establish the School Safety Specialist Training Program to assess Office compliance with Sections 1001.212 and 1006.07(6), Florida Statutes.
- Examined Office records to determine if the Office, in consultation with the Department of Law Enforcement, disseminated to participating schools awareness and education materials on the use of the mobile suspicious activity reporting tool pursuant to Section 943.082, Florida Statutes.
- Examined Office records to determine whether the records evidenced the Office's status as a central repository for best practices, training standards, and compliance oversight in all matters regarding school safety and security, including prevention efforts, intervention efforts, and emergency preparedness planning.
- From the population of 4,165 schools identified on the Department's Master School Identification Number listing for the 2024-25 school year, examined security risk assessments received by the Office for 40 selected schools to determine whether Office records evidenced review of the assessments for compliance with the requirements of Section 1006.1493(2), Florida Statutes, and whether recommendations were provided to schools to address findings noted in the risk assessments in accordance with Section 1001.212(5), Florida Statutes. Additionally, we examined aggregate district risk assessment reports for the 40 selected schools to determine whether the school safety specialists Report of School Board Actions in response to findings in applicable school risk assessments were timely submitted to the Office.
- Examined Office records to determine if, at the beginning of the 2024-25 school year, the Office notified all administrative and instructional personnel by electronic mail of the requirements of Section 1006.07(6)(f), Florida Statutes.
- Examined training and certification records for the 75 school district school safety specialists appointed and certified during the period July 2024 through June 2025 to determine whether the specialists received appropriate training and met certification requirements.
- Performed inquiries, observations, and inspections of Department and other State agency records related to the Department's administration of the FSSP to determine whether the Department had adequately designed and implemented controls to ensure compliance with Section 1001.212(6), Florida Statutes.
- From the population of 65 grant applications for school safety hardening funds totaling \$38,667,414, received by the Office for the 2023-24 school year, examined Office records for 15 selected applications for grant funds, totaling \$24,103,032, to determine whether the applications were appropriately reviewed, approved or denied, and whether grants were awarded in accordance with applicable laws, rules, and grant guidelines. Additionally, from the population of 2,226 school security risk assessments submitted by school districts in support of the 65 school safety hardening grant applications, we examined Office records for 60 selected school security risk assessments to determine whether those records evidenced consideration and comparison of critical fixed capital outlay needs identified in the school security risk assessments to the expenditure of funds requested in the grant applications.
- Examined Office records to determine if, by December 1, 2024, the Office evaluated the methodology for the safe schools allocation in Section 1011.62(12), Florida Statutes, and, if necessary, made recommendations for an alternate methodology to distribute the remaining balance of the allocation.
- From the population of 48 school guardian grant applications received by the Office during the period July 2023 through January 2025, examined 10 selected school guardian grant applications to determine whether the applications were appropriately reviewed, approved or denied, awarded,

and monitored in accordance with Section 30.15(1)(k), Florida Statutes, and applicable grant guidance.

- Examined Department records related to the Youth Mental Health Awareness Training program to determine whether the Department had adequately designed and implemented controls to ensure compliance with Section 1012.584(1) through (3), and (5), Florida Statutes.
- Examined Department records to determine whether the records evidenced the provision of data to support mental health services, including, for each school, the number of involuntary examinations as defined in Section 394.455, Florida Statutes, initiated at each school, on school transportation, or at a school sponsored activity and the number of children for whom an examination was initiated.
- Made inquiries of Office management and examined Office records related to the Behavioral Threat Management Program to determine whether the Department had adequately designed and implemented controls for the Program to ensure compliance with the requirements of Section 1001.212(11), Florida Statutes.
- From the population of 73 school districts with active schools during the 2024-25 school year, examined 15 selected school district behavioral threat management reviews to determine whether the school districts' use of the behavioral threat management process and instrument was in accordance with Section 1001.212(11)(d), Florida Statutes, and Department Rule 6A-1.0019(4), Florida Administrative Code.
- From the population of 712 charter schools during the 2024-25 school year, examined 24 selected charter school behavioral threat management reviews to determine whether the charter schools' use of the behavioral threat management process and instrument was in accordance with Section 1001.212(11)(d), Florida Statutes, and Department Rule 6A-1.0019(4), Florida Administrative Code.
- Examined Office records to determine whether the Office developed a family reunification plan for use by childcare facilities, public K-12 schools, and public postsecondary educational institutions that are closed or unexpectedly evacuated due to a natural or manmade disaster, and reviewed and updated the plan as applicable in accordance with Section 1001.212(12), Florida Statutes.
- From the population of 931 school safety inspection reports issued by the Office for the period July 2024 through January 2025, examined 40 selected reports to determine whether the inspections were conducted in accordance with Section 1001.212(13)(b), Florida Statutes.
- Examined Office records to determine if the Office, by August 1, 2024, developed and adopted a school safety compliance inspection report to document compliance or noncompliance with school safety requirements mandated by law or rule and adherence to established school safety best practices.
- Examined Office records to determine whether Office monitoring for compliance with requirements related to school safety by school districts and public schools, including charter schools, pursuant to Section 1001.212(13)(b), Florida Statutes, included unannounced public inspections of all public schools, including charter schools, while school was in session, triennially, and investigative reports of noncompliance with school safety requirements.
- Examined Office records for the period July 2024 through December 2024 to determine whether the Office provided quarterly reports to each school district superintendent and school safety specialist identifying the number and percentage of schools, including charter schools, inspected or reinspected during that quarter and the number and percentage of inspected schools that had no school safety requirement deficiencies.
- Examined Office records to determine whether the Office referred any instructional personnel as defined in Section 1012.01(2), Florida Statutes, and any administrative personnel as defined in

Section 1012.01(3), Florida Statutes, who knowingly violated Section 1006.07(6)(f), Florida Statutes, to the district school superintendent or charter school administrator, as applicable, for disciplinary action upon receipt of the school safety compliance inspection report.

- Performed inquiries of Office management and examined Office records relating to school environmental safety incident reporting responsibilities to determine whether the Office had adequately designed and implemented controls to ensure compliance with Section 1001.212(8), Florida Statutes.
- Examined Office records to determine if the Office annually published a list detailing the total number of safe-school officers in the State in accordance with Section 1001.212(14), Florida Statutes.
- Communicated on an interim basis with applicable officials to ensure the timely resolution of issues involving controls and noncompliance.
- Performed various other auditing procedures, including analytical procedures, as necessary, to accomplish the objectives of the audit.
- Prepared and submitted for management response the findings and recommendations that are included in this report and which describe the matters requiring corrective actions. Management's response is included in this report under the heading **MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE**.

## ***AUTHORITY***

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Section 11.45, Florida Statutes, requires that the Auditor General conduct an operational audit of each State agency on a periodic basis. Pursuant to the provisions of Section 11.45, Florida Statutes, I have directed that this report be prepared to present the results of our operational audit.



Sherrill F. Norman, CPA  
Auditor General

# MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE

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Commissioner of Education

May 20, 2026

Sherrill F. Norman, CPA  
Florida Auditor General  
Claude Pepper Building, Suite G74  
111 West Madison Street  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1450

Dear Ms. Norman:

Please find attached the Department of Education's response to the Auditor General's preliminary and tentative findings of the operational audit of the Department of Education, Office of Safe Schools.

If you have any questions, please contact Mike Blackburn, Inspector General, at 850-245-9418.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'AK', written over a light blue circular stamp.

Anastasios Kamoutsas

Enclosure

cc: Mike Blackburn, Inspector General  
Suzanne Pridgeon, Deputy Commissioner, Division of Finance and Operations  
Dr. Paul Burns, Senior Chancellor, Division of Public Schools  
Tim Hay, Executive Director, Office of Safe Schools  
Janice Brown, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Division of Finance and Operations  
Sean Freeman, Educational Program Director, Division of Finance and Operations

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## Finding 1:

**Office processes for ensuring that security risk assessments are completed for all applicable schools continue to need enhancement. Absent effective processes, the Department cannot reliably identify the population of schools required by State law to be inspected.**

### Recommendation:

We recommend that Department management continue efforts to independently and reliably assess whether security risk assessments are being completed by all applicable schools and, thus, a complete and accurate population of schools is identified for the purpose of timely conducting safety inspections in accordance with State law.

### Response:

The Florida Department of Education (Department) continues to focus on school safety and ongoing enhancement of processes, working to implement the most reliable mechanism for identifying the population of schools required by State law to be inspected.

The Office of Safe Schools (Office) has noted that reconciling Florida Safe Schools Assessment Tool (FSSAT) data to the Department's Master School Identification (MSID) is not ideal.

The Office has since defined "school facility" in Rule 6A-1.0018(1)(t), Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C), effective September 23, 2025, so that information regarding specific site locations can be collected:

*"School facility" means a public K-12 school, including a charter school, with a Master School Identification Number (MSID) number as provided under Rule 6A-1.0016, F.A.C., with the following exceptions:*

- 1. Schools with separate MSID numbers that are located at the same physical location and are co-located with each other are a single school facility.*
- 2. Schools that are located at separate physical locations and are not co-located, but share one MSID number are separate school facilities.*

*[...]*

Per Rule 6A-1.0018(14)(a), F.A.C., school districts have a responsibility to ensure all school facilities are populated within FSSAT. And per Rule 6A-1.0018(14)(c), F.A.C., the school safety specialists must annually complete a school security risk assessment on or before October 1 at each school facility in their district using the FSSAT.

This reporting mechanism now allows the Office to more accurately determine which schools must complete school security risk assessments and thereby increase accountability.

## Finding 2:

As similarly noted in our report No. 2021-029, the Office did not conduct periodic reviews of Florida Safe Schools Assessment Tool (FSSAT) internal user access privileges nor obtain assurances from external users regarding the continued appropriateness of access. Additionally, FSSAT internal user access privileges were not always promptly deactivated when users separated from Department employment.

### Recommendation:

We recommend that Office management conduct periodic reviews of the appropriateness of FSSAT internal user access privileges, obtain periodic assurances from external users regarding the continued appropriateness of access, and ensure that the results of all such procedures are documented in Department records. We also recommend that Office management enhance controls to ensure that FSSAT internal user access privileges are deactivated immediately when no longer necessary.

### Response:

The Department concurs with this finding and recommendation during the audit period. The Department has since begun conducting and documenting monthly reviews of the appropriateness of FSSAT internal user access privileges and has conducted and documented its first quarterly assurance from external users regarding the continued appropriateness of access. The Office is in the process of enhancing controls to ensure that FSSAT internal user access privileges are deactivated immediately when no longer necessary by incorporating user access privileges into existing employee onboarding and offboarding procedures and training the appropriate personnel in carrying out those procedures.

## Finding 3:

**Certain security controls related to FSSAT and Florida Safe Schools Portal user authentication need improvement to ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of Department data and related IT resources.**

### Recommendation:

We recommend that Department management improve certain security controls related to FSSAT and FSSP user authentication to ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of Department data and related IT resources.

### Response:

The Department concurs with this finding. The Department is working to improve security controls for both FSSAT and FSSP as soon as possible; security controls for the FSSP have been implemented as of May 1, 2026.

## Finding 4:

**Office records did not evidence that school safety specialists had satisfactorily completed required Federal Emergency Management Agency training courses.**

### Recommendation:

We recommend that Office management enhance controls to ensure that documentation evidencing that school safety specialists have completed required FEMA training courses is retained in Office records.

### Response:

The Office identified a lack of uniformity in records management related to the submission and retention of completed FEMA training certificates for School Safety Specialists. The Office developed a submission and tracking system to document the timely completion of the required FEMA training courses. When a new School Safety Specialist is designated, the Office contacts the individual to outline the FEMA certificate submission process and provides timelines associated with the completion of the FEMA training certificate requirements. Ongoing weekly review of the FEMA certificate submissions is conducted to ensure the completion of the FEMA training certificate requirement. Additionally, a monthly audit is conducted to prevent a lapse in certificate submission.