

Report to Hazing, Harassment and Bullying Task Force

The AOE is strongly supportive of the work the Task Force has done to raise awareness and identify possible action steps to address the challenge of bullying in VT schools.

The AOE's work on this issue will be framed by our commitment to sustainability and to proactive strategies. In particular, we are motivated by a substantial body of research that suggests school environment and climate play a critical role in the shaping student behavior, including behavior related to bullying. Specifically, when students perceive the school climate as an unhealthy and unsupportive school climate (e.g., negative relationship between teachers and students, positive or passive attitudes towards bullying), bullying is more likely to occur. In addition, our understanding of the literature suggests that top down strategies to impose change are rarely effective. Addressing bullying is culture work, not technical and compliance work.

To that end, our goal is to develop measures that will provide schools with school climate data, so they can intervene early to promote a more positive school climate.

Our understanding was that the process we were involved in was a fact finding mission, not an opportunity to propose a budget request.

In addition, given the heavy anticipated burden on many taxpayers in the current budget year and the general request by the Governor that we all be as fiscally responsible as possible, we do not feel it is appropriate to request additional funds to support this work at this time. Instead, we will work within our current budget to try to address these priorities.

Thus, we do not support the previous budget request for HHB activities that was presented to this committee.