

**The Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force  
Final Report and Recommendations to the Legislature  
March 1, 2014**

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The Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force (mandated in H.856) held its inaugural meeting in December of 2006, originally convening as an arm of the *Vermont Approach: A Comprehensive, Collaborative Sexual Violence Prevention Strategic Plan Implementation Project*. The three primary goals of the task force in 2006 were:

- 1) Inventory the sexual violence prevention programs being presented in schools
- 2) Evaluate what is being offered by schools in sexual violence prevention education, and create a “toolkit” of standards, guidelines, resources and evaluation samples; (SJ34)
- 3) Contribute to the current practice and training of professionals who carry out or could carry out sexual violence prevention programs in the schools.

Additionally, the mandate asked that the SVPTF’s work assess knowledge of and educate about the 2006 change in Vermont’s age of consent law. In 2009, with the passage of Act 1, the SVPTF was also charged with creating a “toolkit” to help schools implement sexual violence prevention into their health education curriculum and provide ongoing technical assistance to schools around these issues. This later charge became the primary directive of the group from 2009 forward.

**An Overview of Accomplishments:**

- **A Snapshot of Sexual Violence Prevention in Vermont: Programs offered by K-12 schools and community-based agencies.** An initial survey of current schools programming was completed in the 2007-2008 school year and reported to the Legislature in April 2008.
- **Early Childhood Educator Research Project.** Between August and November 2008, the SVPTF collaborated with state agencies, community partners and UVM to interview 40 registered and licensed early childhood educators, representing both center and home-based environments, regarding the sexual abuse prevention activities in the early childhood sector in order to address this population’s unique challenges and opportunities. Results from this research were published in 2010.
- **Vermont Consent Campaign.** An ad-hoc consent law work group convened in January 2009 and developed a training module on consent that schools could incorporate into their existing health education curriculum. A series of regional trainings were conducted across Vermont in 2010 and again in 2012, reaching almost 100 Vermont schools. Materials are available online on the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence’s website: <http://www.vtnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/VT-Consent-Campaign-Guidebook-and-Appendicies-2nd-edition.pdf>

- **The Technical Assistance Resource Guide (TARG).** A toolkit for schools K-12 incorporating sexual violence prevention information in to their health education curriculum was released in July of 2010 and made available on the Agency of Education's website. Regional trainings were held across the state to assist school teams in utilizing the many tools created by the SVPTF and partners to support Act 1. The TARG can be accessed here:  
[http://education.vermont.gov/documents/educ\\_health\\_ed\\_TARG.pdf](http://education.vermont.gov/documents/educ_health_ed_TARG.pdf)
- **2012 School Assessment.** The SVPTF completed a second assessment of Vermont K-12 schools to determine the impact of Act 1 on school-based prevention programming and identify areas to strengthen technical assistance offerings. Sixty percent of Vermont schools reported on their current sexual violence prevention practices and Act 1 initiatives. *A Summary of Findings and Recommendations* was posted on the Agency of Education's website: [http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/pgm\\_health\\_ed.html](http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/pgm_health_ed.html)
- **Memo to the field.** In November of 2012, a memo to the field was produced titled [Act 1: Sexual Violence Prevention Guidance for Community Prevention Practitioners](#). The goal of this memo was to create cohesion and increase coordination of sexual violence prevention activities happening in schools, presented by community partners. The memo is accessible on the Vermont Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Sexual Abuse's website: <http://humanservices.vermont.gov/center-for-prevention-and-treatment-of-sexual-abuse/social-service-professionals/information-for-school-professionals/act-one-2009/act-1-guidance-for-community-prevention-practitioners/view>
- **Legislative Day Informational Panel:** In January of 2013, the SVPTF and the Vermont Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Sexual Abuse co-hosted an informational meeting on the status of implementation of the 2009 Act 1 at the Statehouse. A panel of educators and youth talked about the impact of sexual violence prevention activities in their schools. The panel was taped and aired on public access channels around the state.
- **2013 Professional Development Survey:** During the fall 2013, a survey was sent through the Agency of Education Weekly Field Memo asking principals to complete a voluntary survey to gain an understanding about what schools were doing for professional development of staff related to sexual violence prevention. Only 42 responses were collected from 373 schools, indicating further efforts need to be undertaken to ensure prioritization of this issue. Data from this latest survey is still being analyzed and will be released in 2014.

### **The SVPTF going forward:**

Though the legislative mandate for the SVPTF has come to an end, the Task Force has made a commitment to continue to meet monthly to develop and sustain technical assistance activities

for K-12 schools. We will be updating the TARG with new materials in 2014 and working to expand our supports for community based prevention partners who are working within school systems. As well as providing valuable resources to our state, the members of the task force have all gained so much from our ability to sit together regularly and be informed by each other's work. We see this as a crucial part of our statewide network to prevent sexual violence and will continue to collaborate and coordinate going forward. We thank the Legislature for their thoughtfulness in creating the Task Force and their support for our future work.

### **Final Recommendations to the State:**

Each year the Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force has made a series of recommendations to the Legislature regarding policy and system changes that would enhance and further our collective ability to provide sexual violence prevention activities in Vermont's school communities. As our legislative mandate sunsets, we submit our final recommendations for your consideration:

1. All professionals listed in the mandated reporting statute should be required to complete eight hours of training on child sexual abuse and sexual violence response and prevention prior to licensure/certification and document completion of two-three hours of continuing education in this content area every three to five years thereafter. Community partners and experts should be part of a collaborative planning committee to determine the content of the training.
2. We recommend the introduction of a bill to prevent and improve the response to teen dating violence. Such a bill could influence the creation of school policies to address teen dating violence and providing prevention education to K-12 students. The bill should also incorporate enhancement of the criminal justice response to issues relating to teen dating violence. The bill should provide minimal funding to agencies tasked with developing needed educational materials.
3. Schools need more support to comply with unfunded mandates like Act 1 to ensure safe learning environments for students. In the SVPTF 2012 School Assessment Report, we found that not all respondents reported having state mandated policies on bullying, cyber-bullying, and harassment, even though it is required by law, and a surprising number of schools had not moved forward with Act 1 requirements even though there had been many resources made available to them. The SVPTF acknowledges that schools are doing their best to fulfil many needs of students and staff. However, as schools think about student readiness to learn, safety and support for trauma stemming from witnessing or experiencing interpersonal violence needs to be integral in those conversations. The AOE must provide guidance to school administrators to ensure that the mandated policies and practices are in place to ensure student safety.

Too often in Vermont, positive and preventative legislation is passed on the heels of a tragedy or high profile issue, like 12 year old Brooke Bennett's murder or Judge Cashman's controversial decision in 2006. We urge Vermont lawmakers to think about what needs to be in place to support the primary prevention of child sexual abuse, dating and domestic violence, and sexual violence before we are grieving the loss of or harm to another victim of violence.

This Task Force recommends that the legislature review and support the recommendations made by the Governor's Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence Task Force, the Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee, and other related state reports. Today's policy makers have the opportunity to take up these recommendations and protect Vermonters in all the ways we can.

*Sincerely submitted by the current members of the Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force.*

**Current Membership of the SVPTF** \* Indicates Co-chair

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