

CHANGE THE STORY

Task Force on Young Women & the Vermont Economy

✓ THE ISSUE

Vermont Works for Women released a sobering report in May 2013 about the state of young women in Vermont related to school, work, and becoming adults. Entitled **ENOUGH SAID: Why We Should Listen and What We Can Do**, the study named barriers young women say they face when envisioning their futures, including: few allies and role models; limited exposure to career options; lack of personal finance skills; and ongoing peer aggression.

✓ OUR VISION

Robust economic growth in Vermont hinges upon tapping the talent of all our citizens; this means addressing the particular challenges faced by women and girls. We are committed to a future in which young women enjoy relationships with peers and adults that support:

- Success in school and work
- Broad exposure to fields that offer growing opportunity
- Tools to make informed decisions involving money
- Careers that engage, challenge, and lead to economic independence

✓ THE TASK FORCE

Out of the Enough Said report, the *Task Force on Young Women & the Vermont Economy* was formed to address these challenges. Twenty-nine Vermont leaders from business, government and community sectors met 18 times this past summer into the fall investing more than 125 hours to develop a range of action-oriented recommendations.

✓ OUR VALUES

Our recommendations value the importance of:

- Engaging young people in this change
- Recognizing the influence of parents, teachers, employers, policy makers – *all of us*
- Harnessing the power of allies, role models & professional relationships
- Providing immersive experiences & opportunities to practice
- Using the power of stories about work to inspire & educate
- Leveraging resources and forging partnerships
- Measuring and reporting results



1 Build Personal Financial Skills

FACT

High School students demonstrate a **limited understanding of personal finance**, averaging correct answers on only 48% of test questions in a national survey administered by Jump\$tart. A 2013 report published by Champlain College's Center for Financial Literacy gave Vermont a "D" for minimal efforts to incorporate personal finance education into high school classrooms.

Let's Change the Story

Young people in Vermont require personal finance education at multiple points, within a range of educational, business and employment settings in order to make informed decisions about the careers they choose, the debt they shoulder, and the choices they make in spending money.

The Task Force recommends that:

- 1 Vermont incorporate personal finance education as a core competency into state educational standards. It proposes that K-12 curriculum implementation be achieved within 5 years, and that the state provide incentives for school districts that do so before 2018.
- 2 Businesses, financial institutions, and nonprofits partner to provide investment and personal finance training to young people in settings outside of school, with a focus on information and skills that are immediately relevant.

2 Promote Supportive Relationships

FACT

By the early school years, most youngsters have experienced unspoken—but not unsubtle—acts of social aggression that shake the carefully laid foundations of their self-image and beliefs about friendship (Whitson, 2011). Nevertheless, according to research by The Bully Project, **adults may miss up to 96 percent of the incidents of bullying carried out by kids.**

Let's Change the Story

Girls and young women need supportive relationships with peers and adults that build confidence and fuel aspiration. We must do more to foster positive connection and eliminate peer aggression among girls as a force in undermining their success.

The Task Force recommends that:

- 1 Adults address peer aggression when it arises and not ignore or dismiss it as a teenage "rite of passage."
- 2 Adults model and promote the kind of relationships they want for young women in schools, workplaces and our communities.
- 3 Leaders in secondary and higher education initiate a statewide conversation about peer aggression to build awareness and develop the capacity of youth and adults to mitigate or prevent peer aggression in and out of school.
- 4 School personnel receive specific training in recognizing and addressing peer aggression.

3 Expand Exposure to Careers & Role Models

FACT

Women have actually been *losing ground* in high-growth fields where they had previously made inroads: **women's participation in civil engineering, for example, declined from 13% in 2005 to just over 7% in 2009.**¹ In 2008, women held only 25% of all professional IT-related jobs, an 11% drop from a high of 36% in 1991.²

Let's Change the Story

Increasing the number of women in high-growth and STEM-related fields is critical to Vermont's economic vitality. Vermont employers have a significant stake in the outcome and a critical role to play.

The Task Force recommends that employers:

- 1 Actively partner with schools and nonprofits to provide greater career exposure to middle and high school students.
- 2 Pursue additional or innovative strategies to recruit young women for internships and jobs in which they are underrepresented.
- 3 Focus new attention on mentoring and leadership development to ensure that women whom they hire stay, succeed, and become leaders in their fields.

¹ Gillibrand, K., *Facts on the status of women in the economy*, 2011.

² *Women in IT: The Facts*, NCWIT, 2010.