

# **Report on Act 129 of 2012**

## **Section 12: Establishing a Harassment, Hazing, and Bullying Advisory Council**

**REPORT**

**April 2016**

**Report to the House and Senate Committees on  
Education**

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**Chair of the Harassment, Hazing and Bullying Advisory Council**



## Background

[Act No. 129 of 2012](#) directed the Secretary of the Agency of Education (AOE) to establish an advisory council to “review and coordinate school and statewide activities relating to the prevention of and response to harassment, hazing and bullying.” The council is tasked with reporting on their progress annually in January to the House and Senate Education Committees.

By statute, the council must include members from the Vermont Principals’ Association; the Vermont School Boards Association; the Vermont Superintendents Association; the Vermont National Education Association; the Vermont Human Rights Commission; the Vermont Independent Schools Association and other members selected by the Secretary, at least one of whom is a current secondary school student who has witnessed or experienced harassment, hazing or bullying in the school environment. The Secretary, in recruiting discretionary members, sought individuals with direct experience working on equity and civil rights issues.

With respect to student members, the Council has one active student member from U-32 high school.

The membership of the Council is as follows:

Statutorily designated members:

Rebecca Holcombe, Secretary, Agency of Education  
Ken Page, Executive Director, VT Principals’ Association  
Jeff Francis, Executive Director, VT Superintendents Association  
Jeff Fannon, General Counsel, VT-NEA  
Karen Richards, Human Rights Commission  
Mill Moore, Executive Director, VT Independent Schools Association  
Emily Simmons, Director of Legal and Policy Services, VT School Boards Association

Additional Secretary appointments:

Mike Dreiblatt, StandUpToBullying.net  
Lucie Garand, Parent, Government Relations Specialist, Downs Rachlin Martin PLLC  
Bernice Garnett, University of Vermont  
Kathy Johnson, Independent Consultant  
Dana Kaplan, Outright Vermont  
Curtiss Reed, Jr., Executive Director, VT Partnerships for Fairness and Diversity  
Henri Sparks, Equity Director, Burlington School District  
Don Morrill, VSBIT  
Chris Killoran, Student at U-32  
Bor Yang, Human Rights Commission

## **Mission Statement**

The Harassment, Hazing, and Bullying (HHB) Advisory Council envisions inclusive, healthy, and collaborative learning environments for all Vermont schools that are free of harassment, hazing and bullying. We value multicultural learning environments and school communities free of prejudice and discrimination, where all students and adults feel welcome, respected, safe, and empowered to promote fairness and equality on behalf of themselves and others.

## **Work of the Council (2015-2016)**

The HHB Council meets bi-monthly over the course of a 12-month calendar year at the Agency of Education in Barre, VT. All meetings are open to the public and meeting agendas and minutes are posted on the HHB council website: (<http://education.vermont.gov/bullying-prevention-council/meeting-dates>).

## **Professional Development**

To help structure the work of the Council in the academic year of 2015-2016, a smaller work-group of the Council met in August 2015 to outline strategic goals and activities to propose to the larger Council during the September 2015 meeting. In order to help support the implementation of the recently revised model Hazing, Harassment and Bullying policy, the subgroup prioritized professional development and implementation support/resources around the updated investigation procedures outlined in the new policy. The subgroup proposed that the HHB Council could serve as a vetting system to create an inclusive resource of all bullying investigation and prevention trainers/trainings available to Vermont schools. As individuals, many of the council members offer both investigation and prevention trainings of this nature. Therefore, after discussion, it was deemed not in the best interest of the Council to pursue coordination of professional development activities in this arena.

VSBIT has been engaged in trainings and support around bullying, harassment and hazing with the newly released Harassment, Hazing and Bullying Toolkit and related compliance trainings. Ken Page, after a request from a local school, invited a national hazing expert from the National Federation of State High Schools Association, to discuss hazing and hazing prevention with a group of students, faculty, parents and community members in the Fall of 2015.

Outright Vermont has been working with with 12 SU/Districts to improve school climate and culture for LGBTQ+ youth in schools, with grant support from the AOE. They are providing ongoing professional development work with elementary, middle, and high school level staff to make sure adults know how to support some of their most vulnerable students.

## **Harassment, Hazing and Bullying School Policy Update**

Lawyers from the VSBA, the AOE and VSBIT, with feedback from a few administrators, collaborated to develop a new model Hazing, Harassment and Bullying Policy for schools. One primary goal of this effort was to design parallel procedures for investigations of different kinds of incidents. Previously the policy for bullying and the policy for hazing and harassment had different recommended procedures, which meant administrators had to determine what kind of incident took place before beginning the investigation. The HHB Council reviewed the model policy updates and offered suggestions on language and implementation.

On March 15, 2016, all Superintendents and Principals received a copy of the Best Practices for Schools Regarding Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students. These are recommended procedures intended to help school and district administrators take steps to create a culture in which transgender and gender nonconforming students feel safe, supported and fully included. The procedures are intended to help school staff meet their obligations to provide equal educational opportunities for all students. Content area includes Privacy, Official Records, Names/Pronouns, Physical Education and Sports, and Facilities. The AOE worked in partnership with Outright Vermont (LGBTQ+ Youth Advocacy organization) to create these procedures.

## **Student Voice**

The HHB Council has engaged Chris Killoran, a student at U-32, as the student representative on the Council. Chris has made active contributions to the HHB Council meetings and provided insight into the application of many of the council meeting discussions.

HHB Council members, individually in their respective professional roles, actively engage youth in school climate and harassment, hazing and bullying prevention related activities. For example, Kathy Johnson (a member of the HHB Council) and peer leaders from the A WORLD OF A DIFFERENCE PROGRAM® present annually at the Vermont Association for Middle Level Education (VAMLE) Annual Conference. Outright Vermont also hosted a peer education panel at the 2016 VAMLE Annual Conference.

## **Data and School Discipline**

To stay apprised of the most up-to-date state level information on bullying as measured by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS), the Council invited the director of the Vermont YRBSS from the Department of Health to attend the March 2016 Council meeting to provide a brief summary of the bullying, hazing, and harassment related results from the 2015 Vermont YRBSS.

With the support of Secretary Holcombe and the AOE, the Council requested the AOE spearhead efforts to collect the names for the designated employees for all schools in Vermont. As part of an existing survey to school superintendents, the AOE successfully gathered designated employee names and that information is now posted on the [AOE website](#). The AOE has created a survey to collect this information moving forward.

Additionally, Secretary Holcombe has invited the Council to review the AOE's January 2016 Legislative report on Exclusionary Discipline Response, specifically to provide recommendations on ways to improve equitable school discipline that foster a positive school climate.

## **Next Steps**

The Council will continue to meet periodically to further their charge of reviewing and coordinating school and statewide activities related to the prevention of and response to harassment, hazing and bullying.

The Council is making no formal legislative recommendations at this time.