

**TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO: Senate Education Committee**  
**FROM: [Karin Edwards, Director, Pre-K through Middle School Division, Agency of Education**  
**TOPIC: H.67**  
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### **School Climate**

*Information on school climate work and the Bullying, Hazing and Harrassment Task force was supplied by Stephen Tavella Safe School and School Climate Coordinator.*

A school community that exhibits a sustainable, positive school climate in which all members of the school community feel safe, supported, and challenged in non-threatening and social learning environments, is more likely to foster student development and is less likely to engage in negative disciplinary action. A school climate that is collaborative, communicative, and responsive to the needs of the student and their families is indicative of the school's readiness to become a fluid system of personalized learning; thereby creating the cornerstone from which proficiency-based education may take place. The Education Quality Standards Stated Board Rule 2000 (EQS) defines what high-quality PK-12 school systems must do. The school climate survey is designed to illuminate the degree to which students, teachers, and parents perceive their school as being a safe, supportive, and trusting environment. The Agency of Education is currently conducting a pilot survey in five supervisory unions / districts across the state. The results of the survey are designed to help inform the priority components of EQS implementation. The school climate survey is one aspect of building a comprehensive accountability system in support of continuous improvement.

The Harassment, Hazing, and Bullying Advisory Council envisions inclusive, healthy, safe and collaborative learning environments for all Vermont schools that are free of bullying, hazing, and harassment. The state values 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.

Per [Act 129](#) of 2012, the Secretary of Education established an advisory council to provide advice and recommendations on harassment, hazing, and bullying prevention strategies and resources, and to coordinate statewide activities related to the prevention of and response to harassment, hazing, and bullying. Currently, the Agency of Education is piloting a school climate survey in selected districts and supervisory unions. The main objectives are:

- provide a standardized way of measuring school climate through a reliable, valid and evidence-based survey tool;
- facilitate how to make the school a better place to learn;
- inform the process of change and decision-making – continuous improvement process and balanced accountability;
- assess perception by different constituencies;

Upon completion of a statewide implementation of the survey, the agency and schools will have a standardized, comprehensive and informed view of school climate through the eyes of each district and supervisory union's students, parents and educators. The Advisory Council hopes to provide recommendations and guidance based on this empirical research and analysis that informs and responds to the needs of the ever-changing environment of our schools.

### **Tiered Systems**

Since 2007 the Vermont Agency of Education in collaboration with the BEST team members at UVM have provided training, support and resources to Vermont schools, SUs and SDs for implementation of evidence based practices that are based on a framework of providing effective initial classroom instruction and accommodation for all students, readily available interventions for students who need additional supports in order to be successful in their classrooms and individualized intensive supports for those few students who need these. This is referred to as a tiered system of supports. Positive Behavior interventions and Supports(PBiS) is a tiered framework for behavior and Multi-Tiered System of Supports(MTSS) is a tiered framework for both academics and behavior. Research supports tiered systems as evidence based practices that improve outcomes for all students.

### **PBIS**

The VTPBiS Report that was sent to you summarizes the work through the end of last school year. Here's information to pay particular attention to:

Page 1. The graph at the top left shows the growth in schools and SU/SDs participating. There are currently 128 schools in 50 SU/SDs. The training and support that is given, as well as, the on-going training provided by the BEST team is intended to build capacity for additional schools within the SU/SD to join the PBiS work.

Page 2. The bar graph shows the percentage of participants who were satisfied or highly satisfied with the trainings offered during SY '13/14.

Page 3. All participating schools are required to complete fidelity assessments of whether the PBiS work is being done as it is intended to be done. This page gives information about that.

Page 4. PBiS measures student outcomes primarily through office discipline referrals(ODRs). A reduction in ODRs means that students have more time for learning, teachers have more time for teaching, and administrator time is freed up for purposes other than discipline. The graph at the top right shows ODRs for the past three years.

The last two pages give information about program sustainability and schools participating in the work.

Additional information about VTPBiS can be found at

### **MTSS**

In 2013 the AOE received a 5 year State Professional Development Grants (SPDG) from the federal Office of Special Education. The grant funds training and coaching for Early(Preschool) MTSS and K-12 MTSS. Year 1 of the grant was a planning year. At the end of that school year the first group of schools(Cohort 1)interested in participating were recruited and signed on to participate. They began work in the fall of 2013. A second cohort of schools began work in the fall of 2014. We will be recruiting Cohort 3 this spring. There are currently 78 schools from 19 SU/SDs participating in the work described below.

Year 1: In the fall leadership teams at each school work with a systems coach hired, trained and supervised by AOE staff to assess what is in place that will support implementation of MTSS and what needs to be done before beginning implementation. With coaching support they work on what is not in place and also use a structured process for looking at school level data to determine whether the MTSS focus will be behavior, literacy or math.

Data collected: Are the necessary components in place for successful implementation?  
(Implementation Rubrics)

Year 2: Work in the chosen content area begins and systems coaching is cut back. Schools that choose to focus on behavior participate in the established PBiS training and coaching sequence. Literacy training and coaching is provided by staff from the Vermont Reads Institute through a contract with AOE. Math training and coaching is provided through a contract with American Institute for Research. Training is provided by national experts with coaching provided by local math experts.

Data collected: Are the components of MTSS being implemented with fidelity?(Implementation Rubrics) In addition each content has measures of fidelity to the evidence based practices that are trained and supported.

Years 3-5: Content work continues with decreasing support each year. Systems coaching is available on an as needed basis.

Data collected: Local and state student assessment data is collected and analyzed in addition to the previously collected data about fidelity of implementation.

## **SWIFT**

Vermont is one of 5 states chosen to participate with the national School Wide Integrated Framework for Transformation Center. A description of the Center's work was sent and more information can be found at [www.swiftschools.org](http://www.swiftschools.org).

Four Vermont SUs are participating. One component of the SWIFT framework is MTSS with emphasis on both academics and behavior. Other components of the SWIFT model are administrative leadership, integrated education framework, family and community engagement and inclusive policy structure and practice.

