



**To:** Senate Committee on Education

**Date:** March 22, 2022

**Testimony:** Final Report of the Act 35 Task Force on Equitable and Inclusive School Environments

**From:** Amy Wheeler-Sutton, Act 35 Task Force Subcommittee Chair, Co-Director, Vermont BEST Project

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony on the Final Report of the Act 35 Task Force on Equitable and Inclusive School Environments. For the record, I am Amy Wheeler-Sutton, Co-Director of the BEST Project, housed at the Center on Disability and Community Inclusion (CDCI) at the University of Vermont.

The goal of the Task Force (TF) on Equitable and Inclusive School Environments is to make recommendations to end suspensions and expulsions for all but the most serious student behaviors and compile data regarding school discipline in Vermont public and approved independent schools to inform strategic planning, guide statewide and local decision making and resource allocation, and measure the effectiveness of statewide and local policies and practices.

An APA review of the research literature found no evidence to support claims that severely punitive disciplinary actions that remove students from schools effectively improve student behavior. Instead, such actions result in decreased academic achievement, more arrests, and incarceration – thus, creating the school-to-prison pipeline (American Psychological Association, 2008). The [Findings section of Act 35](#) has a comprehensive rationale.

As outlined in Act 35, the full TF met six times between August 30, 2021, and March 8, 2022. Recognizing the significant amount of work to be completed, subcommittees were formed. There were 20 subcommittee meetings. Cat Gallagher served as the chair of the TF. All TF members are listed on pg. 4 of the report.

Today in my testimony, I will go over the definitions used in the report, overall recommendations, and then recommendations related to each subtopic. Please see the full report and the slideshow for this information.

Going forward, each year from 2025-2030, the Secretary of Education will submit a written report to the House and Senate Committees on Education on suspensions and expulsions from each Vermont public school and approved independent schools in the prior school year, including the data specified in subdivision (c)(1)(F) of Sec. 2.

The TF hopes the Legislature will consider all recommendations made in the report and if they choose to pursue any, to explore that section of the report for further information. We hope this report will lead Vermont in the direction of limiting exclusionary discipline and creating more inclusive and equitable learning environments. Other members of the TF would be willing to testify to lend their expertise if needed.