

Thank you to Chair Colon and our Committee for allowing me an opportunity to present H.763
An act relating to the creation of the Youth Participatory Action Research Project

Last summer I partnered with Lindsey Halman from Up For Learning, Addie Lentzer -the Executive Director of the Vermont Student Anti-Racism Network, and Elizabeth Frascoia the Director of the Governor's Institute of Vermont to create a project that would engage student's across Vermont in a conversation about solutions to create schools that are safe, inclusive, respectful, and where students have a sense of inclusion and belonging.

As a former educator, school counselor and now as a member of this Committee, I am growing increasingly concerned about how schools across Vermont are being impacted by a variety of circumstances that are impacting the mission of our schools, the safety and well being of our staff and students, and the education of our children.

According to a study, *The Effect of School Climate on Student Achievement*, by Sabiha Dulay and Engin Karadag, "a positive school climate is important for both the individuals and the organization in terms of having good relationships within the organization and the survival of the organization in a healthy way" School climate is formed by different parts of the school, such as the physical environment that creates spaces where learning occurs, the social environment where communications and interactions among staff, students, parents, and community members occurs, the emotional environment that creates a sense of belonging especially among students, and the academic environment where instruction and learning occurs. In this regard, school climate, which is seen as the spirit and heart of the school's perceived as an important factor student outcomes and overall performance.

In the conclusions of this study the authors state that, "School climate appears as one of the basic factors that are crucial for predicting and increasing student achievement"

The intent of this bill is to provide an invitation to Vermont students in grades 8-10 to bring their thoughts, suggestions, insights, opinions, and voices to the table on what actions and conversations need to occur to continually work towards creating schools that are inclusive, engaging, respectful, safe, and where every student truly belongs.

According to the Quaglia Institutes data, when student's voices are honored and invited, youth are 3x more likely to experience self worth in school, 5x more likely to be engaged in school, and 5 times more likely to have a sense of purpose in school.

Definition of Youth Participatory Action Research

YPAR is an innovative approach to positive youth and community development in which young people are trained to conduct systemic research to improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions intended to serve them. YPAR is a cyclical process of learning and action- research is done not just for the sake of it but to inform solutions to problems that young people themselves care about. (YPAR Hub)

I truly believe that in order for our schools to be spaces where everyone feels safe, included, valued, and understood we need to listen to our youth on how to make this a reality.

