



RANDOLPH BRAINTREE BROOKFIELD

RANDOLPH UNION HIGH SCHOOL

15 Forest Street
Randolph, Vermont 05060
802-728-3397

To: VT House Education Committee
From: Caty Sutton, RU Co-Principal
RE: Proposed Amendment to Bill S.103

May 3, 2023

Good Afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today on this important topic.

My name is Caty Sutton, Co-Principal at Randolph Union Middle & High School.

I testify today to provide you all with information that can help to elucidate our HHB processes as applied to the school setting, and to help to inform your understanding as you consider the proposed amendment to bill S.103.

What we would like you to know and understand is that we take our legal, moral, and ethical obligations to enforce our HHB policies as they are currently stated, very seriously. In fact, we are so earnest and committed to this endeavor that we have worked very hard, through countless VSBIT trainings and through close consultation with our District's legal counsel, to fully understand the related processes and to follow through with all aspects of these procedures with fidelity.

At any time throughout the school year, it is possible to have several concurrent investigations occurring at any one time. In order to determine whether we move forward with an HHB or Title IX investigation, we gather preliminary data through student interviews, consider any evidence and/ or documentation that has been provided to us, make our determination to launch a formal investigation based upon whether the alleged student behavior has limited or denied another student's access to their education, and if so, we communicate with families through letters, and phone calls, and meetings, we put supportive measures into place and communicate with teachers and staff members, we formally conduct and document student interviews, we fill out comprehensive investigative reports, we make our determinations based upon the gathering of information from interviews and the evidence and documentation that

was uncovered throughout our process, and we follow through with our determination and communicate again, by letter and phone, with the students and families involved; they are then given an opportunity to appeal our determination.

We do this important work in addition to our other significant and meaningful responsibilities as school leaders, such as leading curriculum, instruction, and assessment efforts in our schools through planning thoughtful meeting agendas and professional development, observing our teachers and providing them with feedback, amplifying student voice and providing student leadership opportunities, to name just a few other crucial and impactful aspects of our work.

We thoughtfully use our resources to provide students and families with the education and support that they need to better understand our policies to prevent a recurrence of the behaviors at question; this preventative work has moved to the forefront of our planning as we get closer to the end of this school year and we anticipate the professional development and training that our staff will benefit from next year.

An important consideration to factor in is the steep increase in behaviors that are manifestations of the significant mental health concerns among our students, staff, families, and community members, which have all considerably impacted the behaviors that we are seeing and attending to on a daily basis, and were only exacerbated by the conditions that the ongoing pandemic has presented. We are seeing a wide range of behaviors that stem from mental health disorders, and the substance use that is often, unfortunately, used as a coping mechanism.

It should also be noted that even if we determine that a student behavior or behaviors that have been reported to us do not violate our HHB policies, we still apply appropriate consequences and effective intervention in order to prevent the behavior from recurring, and we use this as an educational opportunity to educate students and families about what does and does not constitute harassment or bullying in the school setting, which is different from other contexts.

We urge you to consider what we are already doing to prevent students from violating our HHB policies, and to support us in continuing to adhere to our legal, moral, and ethical obligations as educators as our policies are already and currently stated, but with greater funding and support to provide more professional development and training for our students, families, and colleagues.

Thank you.

Signed,

Catherine M. van Eyck-Sutton
Co-Principal
Randolph Union Middle & High School