

**Report on Act 129 of 2012: Section 12
Establishing a Hazing, Harassment
and Bullying Council**

Secretary of Education's

Advisory Council

Report to the House and Senate Committees on Education

January 25, 2013

Submitted by:



Secretary's Office

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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 his discretionary members, sought individuals with direct experience working on equity and civil rights issues. With respect to student members, he selected two students from one northern school (South Burlington High School) and two students from one southern school (Mt. Anthony Union High School).

The membership of the Council is as follows:

Statutorily designated members:

Chair, Tracey Tsugawa, Civil Rights Investigator, VT Human Rights Commission
Ken Page, Executive Director, VT Principals’ Association
Nicole Mace, Associate Director for Legal Services, VT School Boards Association
Jeff Francis, Executive Director, VT Superintendents Association
Jeff Fannon, General Counsel, VT-NEA
Robert Appel, Executive Director, VT Human Rights Commission
Mill Moore, Executive Director, VT Independent Schools Association
Lexie Federhen, Student, Mount Anthony Union High School (MAU)
Griffin Thomas, Student, Mount Anthony Union High School (MAU)
Justin Lambert, Student, Big Picture High School, South Burlington
Leah Soule, Student, Big Picture High School, South Burlington

Additional Secretary appointments:

Barbara Crippen, Staff Attorney, Civil Rights Coordinator, VT Agency of Education
Dr. Charles E. Memusi Johnson, Safe Schools Coordinator, VT Agency of Education
Kim Brittenham, Community Access Coordinator, VT Center for Independent Living
Kathy Johnson, Independent Consultant
Saben Littlefield, Education & Statewide Field Manager, Outright Vermont
Curtiss Reed, Jr., Executive Director, VT Partnerships for Fairness and Diversity
Henri Sparks, Equity Director, Burlington School District
Lucie Garand, Parent, Government Relations Specialist, Downs Rachlin Martin PLLC

Vision/Values Statement

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

As of this report, the council has met three times: August 31, 2012 at the AOE Office in Berlin; October 24, 2012 at the Howard Dean Education Center in Springfield; and January 7, 2013 at the South Burlington High School. All meetings are open to the public and can also be accessed (with advance notice to the Chair) by Live Network Video. It is the Secretary's intention to continue to hold meetings in different parts of the state to encourage student and community participation. Minutes and audiotapes of the councils meetings are posted on the Agency's website at: http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/council_bullying.html.

The first council meeting was a discussion of member ideas relating to the council's legislative charge. Secretary Vilaseca stated his understanding of the council's charge: To make sure students feel safe in schools; and to ensure support systems and resources are in place in every school so that students feel safe to report incidents of hazing, harassment and bullying; and to create a clearinghouse of information and resources that can support the field by identifying what is working well and promoting professional development. Given the broad nature of this charge and the preference of council members for concrete outcomes, members identified three main priorities for 2013:

- Training
- Student Leadership
- Data Collection

Council members formed workgroups for each of the priority topics with the understanding that they may participate in more than one group. Workgroup members are as listed in the addendum to this report. Workgroups are encouraged to communicate between council meetings regarding ideas and tasks.

During the second council meeting, members discussed the advisability and content of a vision/values statement, with two members assigned to draft a mission statement for further discussion at the next meeting. This was followed by workgroups identifying priorities and issues relating to training, student leadership and data collection. Workgroups then summarized their discussions for the full council. A reflection of their notes follows:

Training

- There is a continuing lack of understanding among students, parents, and school staff about the differences between bullying and harassment.
- There should be training for all adults who have contact with students at school.

- Training for new teachers, as well as for upcoming or veteran teachers, should include information about hazing, harassment, and bullying.
- The content of all training should include intervention skills and practices, the legal definitions of bullying and harassment, reporting procedures, and should ensure consistency in school responses.
- Some training can be offered online, but some should occur in person.
- There must be a school-wide, district-wide system to support all interventions taking place.
- Schools need to identify inappropriate behavior.
- Student input is vital in order to understand what is going on in schools and to create effective strategies and interventions.
- Identifying bench marks and sharing best practices would provide staff with “how to” information, models and examples.

Data

- There is a need to meet as a workgroup to review actual data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS, an anonymous student survey conducted by the Department of Health), the AOE Combined Incident Reporting Software (CIRS, a school-based reporting system completed by school staff to document incidents), and Human Rights Commission (HRC) reports on substantiated cases of harassment in schools (public documents posted on the HRC website) in order to assess prevalence of hazing, harassment, and bullying in Vermont schools.
- There are gaps in the surveys, particularly with respect to problems of bullying and harassment of, or by, adults in schools.

Student leadership

Any definition of student leadership should keep in mind the following considerations:

- Engagement in peer-to-peer interactions as opposed to “teaching”.
- Student-to-student handling of problems without falling into roles (e.g. victim v. perpetrator).
- The need to organize activities implemented by students with adult supports.
- Keep in mind the maxim “nothing about us without us.”
- Youth should not shoulder the responsibility for ending bullying and harassment.
- There is a need to examine how to achieve the “and” in “students and teachers”.
- There is a need to go beyond the narrow lens of bullying and harassment; if students were trained, they could present workshops and model interventions with broader themes.
- Students need authentic power and authority to actually make decisions - no tokens.
- It includes befriending, confronting, modeling, empowerment, and confidence.

To set goals we need more information about:

- What is currently going on in schools (can we get students to come to council meetings and talk to us)?
- Who really wants to be a student leader, and are some students pushed into leadership roles?

- Do all schools have student leaders?

Are there really best practice models for student leadership given the lack of inclusiveness and failure to take cultural background into consideration? The primary goals are:

- A guarantee of student safety.
- Adult accountability is essential; students give up on reporting to adults when the adults do nothing and there are no consequences for the adults.
- Activities need to be more hands on (as opposed to just talking at students), involve a broader school community and have an emphasis on making the school stronger (a cultural shift). Workshops have gotten old; there needs to be a fresh perspective. What networks exist that we can use?
- There must be more emphasis on helping the perpetrator. Suspension from school equates with “I don’t care about you and your problems” and it doesn’t help. There needs to be some in-school remedies and this needs to accommodate the perpetrator and victim switching roles.
- There needs to be a common language and clear message for school climate change training that is consistent and not piecemeal.
- Can we put together a website of student resources?

Each workgroup then discussed specific objectives and the concrete steps it would take to accomplish these objectives. Each group shared one idea with the full council as described below.

Training

The training workgroup focused its discussion on 1.) initial teacher licensing standards and on 2.) how to provide training for school bus drivers.

At its next meeting, the workgroup will talk with the Agency’s Results Oriented Program Approval (ROPA) Coordinator about how to incorporate information about hazing, harassment, and bullying into existing teacher training curricula in Vermont colleges and universities (ROPA is the review of educator preparation programs offered by state institutions of higher learning). The workgroup also expects to discuss information gathered about transportation contracts with school districts, any existing training requirements for bus drivers, and how to provide additional basic training for bus drivers about addressing and reporting incidents of bullying and harassment on buses.

Data

The data workgroup will focus on inserting some questions on adult bullying into a VT-NEA survey to be conducted this spring.

Student leadership

The student leadership workgroup will contact existing groups with similar missions (such as Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together and the Anti-Defamation League) that hold

youth conferences to discuss organizing a statewide student conference on hazing, harassment and bullying.

Public input

Members of the public who attended the meetings suggested that if resources are an issue, the council should consider finding sponsors for particular activities and allowing volunteers.

At the third meeting on January 7, the council reviewed draft vision and value statements and discussed ways of involving the public in the work of the council. While the purpose of the council is not to take complaints from the public, it would like information about what is/is not working in schools. Since traveling to every corner of the state is impossible, the council discussed various forms of outreach and communication with the public through the media and social networks. This may include the use of the Agency Facebook or Twitter accounts, public service announcements and public appearances by Secretary Vilaseca and Chair Tsugawa.

Next Steps

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

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

ADDENDUM

Training Subgroup members

Jeff Fannon- Work Group Leader
Secretary Vilaseca
Tracey Tsugawa
Sabin Littlefield
Ken Page
Kathy Johnson

Data subgroup members

Mill Moore- Work Group Leader
Nicole Mace
Robert Appel
Jeff Francis
Curtiss Reed

Student Leadership subgroup members

Justin Lambert- Work Group Leader
Leah Soule
Griffin Thomas
Lexie Federhen
Lucie Garand
Henri Sparks
Charles Johnson
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Kathy Johnson
Kim Brittenham