



Harassment, Hazing and Bullying Prevention Advisory Council

Location

Vermont School Boards Insurance Trust (VSBIT)
52 Pike Drive
Berlin, Vermont 05602

May 10, 2023

Present: Henri Sparks, Burlington Schools; Curtiss Reed, Vermont Partnership for Fairness and Diversity; Mill Moore, Vermont Independent Schools Association (VISA); Ken Canning, VSBIT; Amanda Garces (joined at 2:20 p.m.), Human Rights Commission; Sue Ceglowski (joined at 2:38 p.m.), Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA); Xusana Davis, Office of Racial Equity; Secretary Heather Bouchey, Vermont Agency of Education (AOE); Jeff Fannon (joined at 2:57 p.m.), Vermont-National Education Association (VT-NEA); Maureen Gaidys, AOE.

Sparks called the meeting to order at 2:11 p.m.

Davis introduced the plan to do some stakeholder mapping and recent conversations around reviving the previous work around visits to the community/schools and revisiting the enabling statute and its charge and the full charge of this group.

Sparks asked if the group should have a hard reset under new leadership. He suggested that this could be a real opportunity and having some agreements on how the group will operate and identify its common goals before new group members are enlisted would be very helpful. Canning stated that the common goal is keeping kids safe. Sparks added that if HHB is reduced, the climate/culture in the building will change and staff will be able to do their job better. Sparks does not want to chair a group that is not effective; bi-monthly meetings are not working. The legislative charge is the baseline, and that charge is broader than advising the AOE Secretary. The charge is also to support/promote efforts in the field to keep kids safe. The HHB has worked on making the [Designated Employees \(DE\) list](#) prominent and accessible on the AOE website and pushed for field visits that were beneficial.

Moore reflected on having the anti-defamation league and others involved. Sparks said participants have waned because the work of the HHB was not feeling effective.

There was discussion on protecting students, having guests share their real experiences, involving students at one time, deciding on three goals with action steps vs. having more listening sessions, charge includes "review and coordinate statewide activities," and the lack of funding for any activities/efforts. Garces said we must engage

in this conversation with truth and openness about what is wrong. She is in a tough spot because she gets calls from families every day; the trauma is hard, and it will take years for students to get over this if they ever do. She carries all the emotions of the parents that she hears from every day. We have heard their stories and not much is gained from hearing more. She said we need community members that work on the ground with communities to fully understand the challenges and the impact of HHB on students and families. We need to bring the voices of all marginalized communities. If we continue to write policies with VSBIT involved, then this is problematic and there is a conflict of interest, and/or every other organization's lawyer should be included as well.

Davis posed the question of where we are overlapping with each other, who should be at the table and what should be their role?

There was discussion on leaving professional hats at the door and coming here to serve students, families, schools, and communities. If this cannot happen, then there needs to be a conversation. The Legislature determined the composition of this group. There is no shortage of good policies; there is a problem enforcing good policies that exist. We are not following good practice and not hearing from those who have been impacted by adherence to policies. We need to listen and ask questions to move this work forward. This work will need conversation, collaboration, compassion and to uphold the dignity of all the students who have been harmed.

There was discussion on policy and procedures, changing/improving the culture, preventing HHB in the first place, navigating federal and state policies, accountability, policy without enforcement is words on paper, no consequences for schools not following policies, restorative practices and engaging students, responsiveness of schools, policies/procedures are not working, policy is only part of the issue, policy must have teeth, and the only teeth we have now are suing the school district.

Davis asked who "we" is and what hat are "we" each wearing?

This group is the "we" and many HHB council members are not present. She suggested laying out the HHB council and the pieces before deciding how to move them. Moore asked if the elephant in the room is the struggle with the State House and the anti-harassment legislation. Moore said he does not work in the classroom and asked if the problem is everywhere and, in all situations, or in specific places. Ceglowski said the Secretary needs to appoint additional members to the council, per statute; she would like to know that the Secretary is on board with that.

Davis commented that statute was created by people who thought they were doing their best, and maybe they could have done better, and/or the landscape has changed. Davis said she would lead the group in an exercise and shared a document titled, "Toolkit

Activity 1: Who Should Be at the Table” – an excerpt from a larger piece from Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy. This section is from a larger toolkit that speaks to engaging stakeholders and gives a framework for mapping out stakeholders. Because the full group is not present, she would like to send it to the whole group for edits and additions and then move onto other questions that were asked at the meeting.

There was a discussion on identifying stakeholders and data owners vs. data generators.

Davis asked the group to brainstorm the following three stakeholder groups:

Core: Students, HHB Council, AOE Secretary, Senate and House Education Committee (Conlon and Campion), Senate and House Judiciary Committee (Sears and Lalonde), Vermont School Board Association, Vermont Superintendents Association, Vermont Principals’ Association, VT-National Education Association, Vermont Independent School Association, Vermont Council of Special Education Administrators, Vermont School Counselors, Vermont Curriculum Leaders Association, Developmental Disabilities Council, Vermont School Boards Insurance Trust, Office of Racial Equity, Special Education Advisory Council, VT Refugee Resettlement, educators, Designated Reporters, school board, superintendents, principals, behavioral interventionists, school counselors, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, food service workers, custodians, coaches, school resource officers, consultants, and school nurses.

Other Direct: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, AOE (technical assistance), VDH (Youth Risk Behavior Survey), U.S. Department of Education, National Psychology Association, VT Legal Aid/Disability Law Project, Education Justice Coalition, VT Student Anti-Racism Network, New Youth Council, Educators of Color, Outright VT, Pride Center, LBGTQAI Alliance, Youth for Change, Nellie Mae, youth agencies, behavioral threat assessment teams, community thought leaders (non-elected, to be further specified) and school consultants.

Other: VT Chamber of Commerce, Lake Champlain Chamber, VT Business Roundtable, Community Justice Centers, Diversion Programs, law enforcement, VT School Safety Center, School Safety Liaison, courts, States Attorneys and Sherriff, Faith Communities (ECC, Episcopalians, Catholics), PTOs, UVM-College of Education, Snelling Institute, other higher education representation, and Rowland Foundation.

It was stated that this group needs to have access to HHB data. Secretary Bouchey said this is unlikely as most data is suppressed due to small size to protect students’ privacy.

There was discussion on prevention, why HHB is still happening, worsening climate and culture in schools, increase in highly destructive behaviors, and the impact of the national narrative.

Davis said this is an important foundational step. Davis said she will edit this list of potential stakeholders and send it back out to all council members. She encouraged HHB council members to read it and offer any additions. The plan is to have the entire group weigh in at the next meeting. Davis will help the council use this tool to assess stakeholders' interests and map these interests in terms of influence and interest and prioritize stakeholders. This will help the group recalibrate who the appropriate partners are who should make up this council.

There was discussion on needing training on acceptance, how to not marginalize, to make people feel comfortable and safe, and how this council will operate and feel inclusive.

Davis will clean up this list and distribute it to the group. Reed was asked to help with a proposal for training and identify trainers and resources for council members.

Next meeting: On or about the week of May 29, 2023. A Doodle poll is in process. Council members should come prepared to continue this work. Sparks said Davis' work and expertise is appreciated and valued. Garces asked if there was a conclusion that the group would be expanded. Davis said there is no conclusion; the existing council will help determine this.

The meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

Minutes recorded and prepared by Maureen Gaidys.