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May 12, 2011

Dear Principals and School Administrators,

Our Departments have worked to develop supports and to provide guidance on the mandates of Act 1 of 2009: *Improving Vermont's Sexual Abuse Response System*. Since Act 1 does not provide much guidance on what "effective on July 1, 2011" means, we hope this letter will clarify some questions you may have.

The legislation states that "the school board of a school district shall ensure that adults employed in the schools maintained by the district receive orientation, information or instruction..."

1. We believe that a plan outlining who will provide the orientation(s), when the orientation(s) will take place, and how a school will insure that all adults be trained by the end of the school year, needs to be in place before the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year.
2. It is important for all schools to understand the sensitive nature of educating school personnel and students about sexual abuse, and to take this into consideration when planning and strategizing about how this process will be rolled out. For example, there will be adults in your schools who are survivors of abuse, and care for their needs should be considered in the overall plan.
3. Strategies for the orientation(s) and school policy/procedure changes should be thoughtful. Meeting the intention of Act 1 cannot happen in a one-time, first day of school type of staff training. The *Commit To Kids* Program was selected by DCF and DOE because it offers a step by step process to accomplish this task. In November, 2010, this resource, was mailed to all building principals.

As schools move through the process of implementation, putting forth information without a thoughtful plan runs the risk of raising emotional issues for staff, as some may have a personal history of abuse or trauma. The training video that is included in *Commit to Kids* should not be shown without preview and preparation as to what supports might be needed, and should be shown to small groups only, after an introduction, and with counseling staff available to support those who have a personal history of abuse or trauma.

Training for school staff needs to happen before instruction is provided to students, in part because bringing outside groups in for one-time presentations on sexual abuse may well lead to student disclosures of their own victimizations. Schools must carefully introduce this topic to students, and must be ready to ensure support for those students who are experiencing this type of trauma. Schools must also have individuals who are trained to make the required reports, and to continue to watch for additional emotional responses from students who are not initially able to disclose.

Thank you for the work you do with Vermont's children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Yacovone".

Dave Yacovone, Commissioner  
Department for Children

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Armando Vilaseca".

Armando Vilaseca, Commissioner  
Department of Education