

Minutes

Meeting Place: Agency of Education
Address: 219 North Main Street, Suite 304
Date: January 25, 2016

Present: Bernice Garnett, Ken Page; Mike Dreiblatt (via telephone); Bor Yang; Jeff Francis (via telephone); Jeff Fannon; Kathy Johnson; Curtiss Reed (via telephone); Chris Killoran; Don Morrill; Emily Simmons; Dana Kaplan; Rebecca Holcombe
AOE: Suzanne Sprague
Visitors: Jean Murray, Vermont Legal Aid

Agenda:

- Update from Vermont School Board Insurance Trust (VSBIT) on bullying, harassment and discrimination trainings and utilization of the toolkit
- Transgender policy update
- Revisit the RFP professional development model for bullying investigations and prevention school based trainings.
- Other

The meeting convened at 2:35 P.M.

Garnett began the meeting by describing the strategic planning group formed this summer, which included Ken Page, Mike Dreiblatt, Curtiss Reed and Bernice Garnett. The group worked to draft an outline of training goals and develop a process to potentially vet resources for schools so they know the resource is credible. The group decided to address the updates first, then discuss this work.

Secretary Holcombe provided an update on the Discipline Report and advised it includes a lot of data, including data on the rates of discipline incidents, including for Hazing, Harassment and Bullying, and disproportionalities associated with gender, disabilities and race. The council needs to work on compliance and proactive work.

Secretary Holcombe reported that the HHB Designated Reporters list is complete and online (2 individuals per school). Reed said the Designated Reporters list has a lot of principals on it. He expressed concern as he thinks principals will be the judge, jury and executioner. AOE will follow up with superintendents on this.

Johnson announced two professional development opportunities and will send the links to the group. The first is the Vermont Association of Middle Level Educators (VAMLE) Beyond Bullying III Conference which is scheduled for Tuesday, March 8th at the Davis Center at UVM. The second is the 22nd Annual Youth Congress to be held on March 18th, 2016, in Boston.

Morrill spoke of the Multi-Line Insurance Program that covers about 85% of schools in Vermont. HHB has been on their radar for years. VSBIT has recently stepped up their focus on compliance. VSBIT produced an HHB Toolkit with tips that include how to deal with situations. The new edition will be available in spring 2016 and will include a checklist and behavior continuum. VSBIT offers compliance trainings free of charge to members. Training sessions can take place at any time. VSBIT will assess needs and match the presentation to the needs. On, April 27th, 2016, there is a centralized training for designees that high-lights compliance and not prevention. They would like to set up a roster of individuals to train for compliance issues.

With respect to recommending other training opportunities, Secretary Holcombe advised that the role of the Council is advisory to the Agency. The Agency doesn't endorse specific trainers. In terms of policies on trainers, policy has the force of law and can have different impacts at different schools in different locations.

Kaplan provided an update on guidance on supporting transgender students. More students are identifying as transgender and they are identifying themselves earlier. Kaplan is working with the AOE to identify practices for serving and supporting transgender and gender non-conforming students that will include a FAQ section dealing with family support and support of students. This should help with questions like "We have a student and we don't know what to do". The work of New York and Washington, D.C. were consulted as they both have wonderful guides dealing with the full gender spectrum along with transgender and gender identity and schools.

Secretary Holcombe said schools must ensure all students feel safe and valued, and the guidance will provide information on how schools can make sure gender nonconforming schools do as well. The guidance will include a set of definitions and suggestions related to discrimination, hazing and harassment, privacy, official records, names and pronouns, restrooms and locker-rooms, sports, rights to privacy and safety, and records.

Dreiblatt asked if it is possible to use the term "promising practices" instead of "best practices" because practice continues to evolve. Page offered that VPA has a policy in place on their website. Secretary Holcombe said the draft procedures reference the VPA documents and contains a link to the VPA resources.

Garnett then addressed the question of providers of HHB training and asked what the HHB could do that would be most helpful and beneficial with respect to identifying trainers. Secretary Holcombe said the Agency won't endorse, but the HHB could recommend criteria schools could use to consistently evaluate proposals from potential trainers. She added that AOE does not have the capacity to review every potential trainer. Garnett suggested that the council provide a set of guidelines, not a recommended list of providers. It was suggested that the bare minimum be provided. Ultimately, the district will decide who to hire.

Morrill said Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) or Human Rights Commission (HRC) training may be necessary on settlement. This gives schools leeway to choose based on the settlement requirement. Johnson asked how many mediated settlements happen in Vermont. Reed said there is one per year. Yang stated that although HRC typically tries to include training as part of the settlement, but this is not always the case. We need to raise awareness and support all cultures. CK asked if there was training statewide. Secretary Holcombe replied that the training does not hit every school and is not required at this time. Johnson added that it is a challenge for teachers to find the time. CK advised that the Youths and Adults Transforming Schools Together (YATST) group presents to teachers.

Secretary Holcombe said we need to identify places doing great work and document progress. A School Climate Survey sent to all students is a goal so students feel appreciated and valued. The survey should be specialized to Vermont with Vermont-specific concerns. Garnett added that the council should set parameters to consider in search of compliance training and training around social climate.

Garnett asked what is next for the group. Is a list the most valued use of the Council's time? We should provide language and parameters. What are the important things to meet minimum thresholds without supporting a specific group? There is more to be done on what we want to ultimately achieve. Page added that if we are an advisory group then we must turn to the Secretary and asked her what she needs.

Secretary Holcombe responded that we need to identify and showcase what works. What have we learned from groups that have grappled with this? An isolated school may care a lot but doesn't know where to start.

Other Business:

Garnett mentioned the next meeting is scheduled for March 28th, 2016. Potential/suggested agenda items include high-lighting bright spots that the HHB is working on, discussing the HHB's role in professional development and Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Systems (YRBSS) 2015 data presented by Christen Murry.

Adjourn:

Garnett moved to adjourn the meeting at 4:10 PM.