



**Task Force on Equitable and Inclusive School Environments –
Subcommittee #1 - Best practices, defining behaviors, other
states, and services for students under age 8
November 17, 2021, 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.**

Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting
Call In: 1-802-828-7667
Conference ID: 816 593 343#
1 National Life Drive, David 5, Room #514
Montpelier, VT 05620-2501

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Present: Marianna Donnally, Department of Mental Health; Steve Perrin, Vermont Principals' Association; Meaghan Morgan-Puglisi, Vermont-National Education Association; Marilyn Mahusky, Legal Aid Disability Law Project; Karen Price, Vermont Family Network; Amy Wheeler-Sutton, Building Effective Strategies for Teaching Students Project at the University of Vermont; Lindsey Halman, Vermont Restorative Approaches Collaborative; Chris Sheehan, teacher, appointed by the Vermont-National Education Association; Ana Lindert-Boyes, Twinfield Union High School, Vermont Principals' Association/UP for Learning;
Members of the public/others: Kheya Ganguly; Susan Aranoff
AOE: Chris Case; Kate Rogers; Suzanne Sprague

Not Present: Justin Picard, Vermont School Counselor Association; Sandra Cameron, Vermont School Boards Association

Call to Order/Roll Call/Amendments to Agenda

The meeting was called to order at 11:33 a.m.

Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes from November 3, 2021

Discussion/Working Session

Proposed agenda items: best practices, define extreme behavior,

- What to include on exclusionary discipline:
 - Steve Perrin- Survey of VT Principals' Association (polled 5 middle schools, 3 elementary schools)
 - Arson
 - Weapons
 - Possession/distribution of drugs
 - Bomb threats- threats to disrupt school environment

- Fighting was up for debate- maybe by severity of fighting
- Is feasibility considered around “Threats to disrupt school environment”
- Some threats enact an expulsion hearing as mandated by board policy
- Important to have clear definitions so that we limit potential for subjectivity and potential implicit bias:
 - Define intent to distribute drugs
 - Define weapon
 - Define “imminent harm” (in terms of the exclusionary discipline law for kids >8)
- Policy recommendations need to go up to the board policy level
- What happens if the legislature passes laws that conflict with school-board policy?
 - The school board would need to revise their policies, or they would be in violation of state law
- After exclusionary practices (for those exceptions) non-exclusionary discipline practices should still be used
 - Reintegration conferences
 - Behavior plans
- Is there a way to delineate the difference between school needing time to create a safety plan vs. using exclusion as a consequence?
 - This is often the stated reason for excluding a student (and the time can drag on for days) and if they have a disability (or suspected disability) it’s a violation under 504 or Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Statute states every school must have description of action that constitutes misconduct
- Let’s focus on the intention behind threat and the process around how to do that-
 - How is intent determined?
 - How do we reengage the student?
 - How do we communicate with and follow up with staff and peers?
- Concerned about the atmosphere we are putting this out into (the launch and how this is going to happen)
 - Increased behaviors and violence in school
 - Overwhelmed faculty and staff
 - Amy started drafting language to the legislature (at end of document) to ask them to think about the current climate and the importance of this issue, asking them to strengthen what we have rather than adding additional burdens
 - Restorative Practices (RP) can help with roll-out; focuses on staff wellness, shared decision-making, fair process model
 - The policies should give staff increased voice and representation
 - This is here to support us (as staff) rather than an additional mandate
- Should we consider a phased approach?

- Give goals for specific periods of time and what supports will be given to get schools there
 - Some states have legislated that schools will reduce their numbers by a certain percentage (Ohio)
 - Careful about percentages because they encourage schools not to report
- Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) has been helping schools examine their expectations for cultural responsiveness
- Often these behaviors that lead to exclusionary discipline are a part of a pattern leading up, we at Vermont Family Network (VFN) hear from families who have been trying to get supports for their child because their behavior frequently warrants discipline, and they cannot get the supports. It's seldom that there's a behavior that comes out of nowhere. So there needs to be the preventative pieces in place.
- How do we synthesize all the resources and pieces of these recommendations?
 - May be easier to define what we don't want rather than coming up with a definition that would satisfy all
 - Perhaps we don't have to answer all the questions but rather give a rough framework of Possible next step? Considerations and supported practices
- - Look at other states legislation and policy for what aligns with the areas that this group is bringing up.
 - <https://www.ncsl.org/research/education/school-discipline.aspx>
 - <https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Status-of-School-Discipline-in-State-Policy.pdf>
 - What does VT have in place in the school improvement plans around this?
 - Kate Rogers- suggested that this committee also look at Act 35 language to include private PreK programs in the state. Currently Act 35 has created a wider divide in equitable access. Public schools are not allowed to suspend or expel and yet private PreK programs may still suspend or expel PreK students. We have had numerous suspensions and expulsions among private PreK programs.
 - Was language left out of the bill for private PreK as an oversight? There's limited data for private PreK programs which should be discussed.
- Amy Wheeler-Sutton- The goal of the Task Force (TF) on Equitable and Inclusive School Environments is to make recommendations to end suspensions and expulsions for all but the most serious student behaviors and compile data regarding school discipline in Vermont public and approved independent schools (AIS) in order to inform strategic planning, guide statewide and local decision making and resource allocation, and measure the effectiveness of statewide and local policies and practices.
- Next steps-
 - Amy will report out in the full task force
 - Steve to begin drafting language around "most serious behaviors" section

- Amy will continue to work on the best practices portion and how to organize it for the report
- Also, we may get more direction and clarity at the full task force on Friday
- Schedule another meeting for 2 weeks December 1st at this time, 11:30-12:30

Public comment:

- Kate Rogers- suggest this group focus on universal PreK is paramount and needs to be addressed

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:35 p.m.

Meeting minutes submitted by: Marianna Donnally

DRAFT