

Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting  
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### DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

**Committee Members Present:** Xusana Davis (Chair); Lynn Currier Stanley (Vice Chair); Sarah Robinson, Amanda Garces, Heather Lynn, Chelsea Myers, Jay Nichols, Sparks, Jeff Francis, V Pearson, Cammie Naylor, Rebecca McBroom.

**AOE:** Heather Bouchey, David Kelley, Meghan Jaid, Tracy Watterson, Emily Simmons, Suzanne Sprague, Maureen Gaidys

**Members of the public/others:** Chris Young, Elaine Collins, Big Hartman, Representative Elizabeth Burrows, Representative Mary-Katherine Stone.

Note Taker: Amanda Garces

The meeting was called to order at 9:04 a.m.

#### **Resources Shared:**

[AOE Webpage on Data Collection](#)

[Harassment, Hazing, and Bullying Prevention Help Request](#). This form is used to organize information but is not a data collection.

[AOE Webpage on School Climate](#) - Our School Climate webpage includes our resources regarding Harassment, Hazing, and Bullying Prevention.

[Vermont Narratives for Change - A Storytelling Campaign Against Harassment & Bullying](#)

#### **Next steps:**

Xusana suggested creating a plan and sending it to the group for the next meeting, which would involve a collaborative whiteboarding session. Additionally, they proposed collecting feedback if anyone had access to individuals willing to share their experiences. Finally, they discussed the possibility of signaling a potential need for an extension to the committees of jurisdiction but decided to wait until the next meeting to decide on that matter.

#### **Opportunity for Public to be Heard.**

##### **Chris Young – North Country H.S**

Chris Young, the principal at North Country Union High School in northern Vermont, explains his involvement in a conversation with Heather and Elaine regarding the HHB work at his school. With over two decades as a principal in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, he recalls the early days of the HHB law from 2006 and how it has evolved significantly over time, especially after the pandemic.

The increased screen time during the pandemic caused unforeseen challenges, resulting in a surge of reports of concerning behavior. Despite proactive steps like reinforcing advisory systems and conducting in-depth sessions on mental health, the volume of reports continued to rise, which became more demanding to manage.

The existing process for handling these reports involves detailed investigations that, despite following the protocol diligently, often lack tangible reparations for the harm caused. Although the school does employ measures like suspension, restorative work, and collaboration with external organizations, the extensive administrative time spent on investigations could be more effectively channeled into developing supportive systems for students.

To address these challenges, the school hired an HHB coordinator, offering a more structured and efficient response system. The coordinator's role involves immediate documentation of incidents, conducting investigations, and providing follow-ups to both the offenders and the affected parties, fostering a more proactive and supportive environment for students.

Chris emphasizes that this enhanced approach has shown promising results in creating a supportive and proactive system, where students are guided to address issues before they escalate to formal procedures. This, in his view, is more effective than the administrative paperwork and investigations conducted previously.

### **Elaine Collins**

Elaine Collins is the superintendent for North Country Supervisory Union (SU). They have 12 sites and 12 schools in their SU. She described the structure and challenges of the supervisory union, highlighting the independence of each district within it. Chris, who spoke prior is in one of those schools and he is lucky to have been able to hire an HHB coordinator. She emphasized the strain on principals, especially in smaller schools, regarding the implementation of HHB (Hazing, Harassment, and Bullying) coordination. Post-COVID, both students and adults are struggling with dysregulation. And pressure to comply with policies, impacting their ability to follow timelines effectively.

Collins stressed the importance of proactive approaches in healthy systems, advocating for educational leaders to focus more on proactivity rather than reactivity. To alleviate the burden on principals, she proposed the idea of creating HHB coordinators at the supervisory union level to support smaller schools, allowing administrators to concentrate on their leadership roles.

She highlighted the cost implications of such a move and urged support for proactive measures to maintain mental health support for all individuals in the educational system. Collins emphasized the need for a shift towards proactive support for mental health and connection with students, expressing the current pressure faced due to potential expansion of HHB and the demands of policy adherence.

In essence, Collins stressed the need for a shift from reactive HHB investigations towards a more proactive and supportive approach for the mental well-being of all individuals within the educational system.

Question from a working group member: Feedback they have received is that there is too much legalese and is not developmentally appropriate specifically when talking about elementary or middle school kids who are learning their ropes and their families are getting these legal letters that do not have humanity in mind. What would be your recommendation and what are the pitfalls around this conversation? Chris shared that the problem is that the language is in the statute.

Young mentions feeling restricted by specific procedures when handling reports and receiving guidance from the Agency of Education (AOE) and the legal team, which leaves little room for flexibility. He reflects on a previous approach of crafting more personalized letters to address student behavior, particularly when he was a principal, acknowledging the complexity in communicating both support for students and the potential consequences for those who've violated policies. However, due to changes in societal norms and legal requirements, Young now feels compelled to strictly adhere to the established protocols, feeling unable to deviate from the letter of the law. There's a reference to seeking more humane approaches to handling such situations, likely suggesting a desire for a more empathetic or compassionate response.

### **Data presentation by the Agency of Education**

Interim Secretary Bouchey wanted to highlight the [Vermont Education Dashboard](#) which is a compendium of all the data.

Tracy introduced herself as the Assistant Director of the Division for Student Support Services and the previous Vermont Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) Program Manager. She mentioned working with her colleague MJ Laird, who is taking over responsibilities related to harassment, hazing, and bullying prevention.

David Kelley presented about issues related to data collection, specifically challenges in reporting incidents due to concerns about negative perceptions, reluctance to launch investigations, and the need for more guidance on defining harassment and bullying. He delved into data breakdowns, highlighting disparities in incidents concerning free and reduced lunch students, males, students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs), and different racial backgrounds.

Kelley addressed actions taken by schools in response to incidents, mentioning the complexities in data collection, especially in categorizing 'other' actions. He notes the impact of the pandemic on reporting rates and the challenges in identifying online harassment. He then covered protected class breakdowns, emphasizing the overrepresentation of certain groups as both offenders and victims, indicating a need for equity.

The conversation touched on the limitations of reporting hazing incidents, the significance of conferences in addressing behaviors, and the discrepancies in reporting across various protected classes. David Kelley transitions to discussing other data collection methodologies, such as the Office of Civil Rights data and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Meghan (MJ) Laird, from the Vermont MTSS team in the Student Support Division of the Agency of Education (AOE), explained their role in managing inquiries and concerns related

to harassment, hazing, and bullying (HHB). Their work involved facilitating communications between families and school leadership, seeking resolution without direct intervention.

She explained the AOE's approach in collecting information using the HP request form, ensuring families' concerns were addressed within the current model policy and procedures. Meghan emphasized that while they gathered information from families and field-related queries, it was not traditional data but rather anecdotal evidence that helped identify trends in the field.

The AOE assisted in clarifying policies and procedures for families, aiming to help resolve concerns. The information they gathered was intended to aid in identifying themes or trends in the field. The process involved iterative steps and coordination with school leadership.

Heather Bouchey explained the purpose behind their engagement in this work: primarily responding to increased direct outreach from both schools and parents. They aimed to facilitate existing processes, not oversee them.

Meghan added that they received around 90 submitted forms within the last six months, helping families with questions, concerns, and communications with schools. Anecdotal insights highlighted various family queries, including transparency in investigations, guidance for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and definitions of harassment and bullying.

She mentioned the emotional involvement from families seeking resolutions and safety for their students, adding that schools also required clearer, accessible language and guidance on policy and procedure definitions.

The aim was to address confidentiality issues, clarify definitions, and incorporate restorative approaches within school communities. They had introduced measures to efficiently gather and update contact information, anticipating model policy and procedure updates.

This overview provided insight into the AOE's supportive role in handling inquiries and assisting in the resolution process for families and schools dealing with HHB incidents.

Heather Thomas Lynn shared key observations and insights during the discussion. She emphasized the importance of comprehending the outcomes of harassment investigations and non-findings. Heather encouraged considering the broader impact of behavior in school environments, stressing that, even if certain definitions aren't met, appropriate actions should be taken to address disruptive behaviors.

She also noted the disparity between the number of investigations and substantiated cases. Heather suggested that a comprehensive approach might result in more matters being investigated than those fully meeting definitions, aiming to capture essential cases, thereby impacting data reporting.

Others in the conversation acknowledged the value of contextualizing this data. There was a discussion about the timing of data submission to the agency and the future potential for daily reporting to better understand the nuances of investigations and their outcomes. The

conversation also touched upon the need for more comprehensive technology to report school-related incidents.

### **Presentation by Heather Lynn:**

Heather Lynn covered a comprehensive range of topics in her discussion. She initially addressed the definitions of hazing, harassment, and bullying, emphasizing that behaviors might overlap and not to overly focus on meeting exact standards. She discussed the necessity of considering the broader impact of behaviors in an educational environment and encouraged a user-friendly approach in data reporting, even if they don't precisely fit the definitions.

Heather explained the procedures and case precedents shaping school responsibility concerning student behavior, highlighting the significance of the school's response when faced with incidents related to harassment, bullying, or hazing.

She touched on transparency concerns and the need for enhanced communication with parents, especially in cases where an incident does not meet the criteria for official disciplinary actions. Heather provided insights into the legal standards guiding the processes but stressed they shouldn't affect day-to-day operations.

Heather extensively covered the stages of the investigation, from intake and assessment to launching an HHB investigation or engaging in follow-up actions despite not meeting the technical criteria for investigation. She delved into the role of administrators, the emphasis on documentation, and the need to address behavior even if it falls short of formal policy violations.

Heather expressed the challenges faced by administrators in the decision-making process, especially the increasing number of appeals, and the importance of educators retaining their problem-solving and preventative roles in addition to disciplinary actions.

Finally, she emphasized the need for additional support and resources for handling these incidents effectively and discussed the benefits of designated personnel for handling cases, offering immediate support to victims and their families.

Overall, Heather's talk aimed to provide clarity on the complex processes involved in addressing harassment, bullying, and hazing in schools while highlighting the challenges and responsibilities faced by administrators, as well as the need for better support and communication strategies for families.

### **Discussion:**

Discussion revolved around the idea of extending their workgroup's timeline to create a more comprehensive and well-thought-out report for the legislature. The group members expressed concern about the complexity of the issue they were addressing and the need for a more thorough, nuanced, and inclusive report rather than rushing to meet a tight deadline.

Heather Bouchey highlighted the complexity of the issue and the necessity for well-crafted recommendations that encompassed all sides of the problem, aiming to ensure the protection of all students. Other participants, like Amanda Garces, emphasized the need for substantial

progress, suggesting the consideration of various recommendations discussed in prior meetings, the incorporation of feedback from the field and parents, and potential additional meetings to collect more input.

There was a discussion about the role of an HHB coordinator in schools, which sparked debates about the existing system's inefficiencies and the need to better understand what wasn't working. Members stressed the importance of clarity regarding broken processes, necessary resources, and the roles of different positions in schools.

Sparks also pointed out the legal complexities and the challenges around language barriers, suggesting that merely adding a new position might not be the sole solution. They proposed that the group should focus on clarifying what was currently broken in the system before deciding how much more time they might need.

The conversation emphasized the need for a more detailed understanding of the problem, as well as the roles of designated employees versus a potential coordinator. It also called for more input from various stakeholders, including students, parents, and administrators, to ensure a well-informed and effective approach before deciding on a specific timeline for their report to the legislature.

The discussion also included more time to craft comprehensive and thoughtful recommendations for the legislature regarding youth safety, education access, and family collaboration in schools. V Pearson highlighted the lack of clarity about group agreements and suggested a review at the next meeting to align on key issues. They also proposed extending the timeline by another two to three months.

Cammie Naylor emphasized the importance of a differentiated response in handling cases where children with emotional or behavioral disabilities are involved in bullying or harassment incidents. Naylor suggested outlining areas requiring differentiated responses and creating specific recommendations to enhance collaboration between families and schools.

Amanda Garces expressed frustration with the pace of progress, advocating for immediate action based on accumulated knowledge and experiences. They discussed issues like legal complexities, the need for more developmental appropriateness in school policies, and the challenges faced by families within the legal framework.

Discussion about various approaches to gathering information, including holding listening sessions or identifying individuals willing to share their experiences.

Heather Lynn proposed focusing on consensus items at the start of the next meeting and then identifying areas that need more input, followed by setting up listening sessions on specific issues to better understand problems before moving to prescriptive solutions.

Desire to hear from various stakeholders, the necessity of not rushing the process but being aware of legislative timelines, the absence of consensus on recommendations, and the consideration of more creative solutions.

Use a collaborative Jam board in the next meeting to assess the group's alignment on various aspects, seeking volunteers to gather more feedback from stakeholders and

acknowledging the potential assistance of associations to connect with the field for further feedback.

Chelsea Myers and Jay offered to help in connecting with the field to gather feedback, while Cammie Naylor volunteered to reach out to families willing to share their stories for better understanding and insights.

Xusana emphasized the importance of planning early if they were to engage the community in listening sessions. V Pearson raised concerns about creating public spaces for airing personal stories and experiences, suggesting that members embedded in their communities gather information and bring it back to the group instead.

Chelsea Myers expressed an interest in examining the comprehensive process from start to finish rather than isolated outcomes to better identify areas for improvement.

### **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 11:16 a.m.

Meeting Minutes recorded by: Amanda Garces

DRAFT