

AGENCY RESPONSE: DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The Department appreciates the unique nature of investigations conducted by the Educational Professionals Investigation Unit (EPIU) and is finalizing policy and training specific to this work, which will be governed by the Department's existing statutory authority related to abuse and neglect investigations. The identification and oversight of "program concerns" that do not rise to the level of abuse or neglect falls outside the scope of that authority and are better addressed by local Boards of Education. However, the Department will continue to ensure that all information relevant to the determination of abuse or neglect allegations will be included in the investigation protocols, which will be shared with the State Department of Education and the Superintendent for their own independent review and follow up as they deem appropriate and necessary.

Likewise, the Department also appreciates the intent of recommendation #8 related to training and oversight for the EPIU. The EPIU was created in 2020 for the purpose of centralizing all school personnel investigations under one statewide management structure to standardize practice and procedures for these specialized investigations. As the EPIU was launched, all employees selected received initial unique training and orientation to the new unit and modifications were made to the investigation protocol specific to EPIU. Since the initial roll-out, EPIU members have received continuous training on routine investigation procedures through DCF's Academy for Workforce Development. In addition, the Department is exploring a specialized training plan for initial and ongoing EPIU staff that covers all aspects of educational matters related to child abuse and neglect, which may include the specific areas of training and focus recommended in this report. The Department would welcome the opportunity for further discussion with your office as we develop these training plans and curricula.

Agency Response: Vernon Public Schools Action Steps

Vernon Public Schools has initiated the following actions as of a result of the Office of the Child Advocate Findings and Recommendations Report. The following is a summary of our action steps:

- Revised Sexual Harassment Investigation form resulting in better record-keeping
- Professional Learning: Adult Sexual Misconduct (ASM) training provided to all staff and administrators, Fall 2023
- Human Trafficking-DCF, training provided to all staff and administrators, Fall 2023, Additional session of Human Trafficking offered on April 2, 2024
- Title IX Coordinator Training facilitated by Maree Sneed December 12, 2023-completed by Robert Testa
- Updated Student Survey (grades 6-12), administered Fall 2023, the following new questions were included on the survey:
 - If a student is bullied or harassed in school, how difficult is it for them to get help from an adult?
 - How likely are you to report incidents of harassment you are aware of to school personnel?
 - How confident are you in the school/district's handling of complaints of harassment?
- Vector Solutions(Staff and Student Training) All Staff and students in grades 6-12 have access to the online course catalog. Courses include Safety and Compliance, Child Sexual Abuse Prevention, Student Safety and Wellness, Diversity and Inclusion, Cybersecurity Awareness
- Curriculum-Currently piloting Second Step Child Protection units for students in K-5.
- Sexual Harassment Policies and Grievance Procedures are posted on the Vernon Public Schools website.