

# Supporting Survivors

## Trauma-Informed and Survivor-Centered Responses to Sexual Assault for Washington Public Schools

### Submitted to

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Summary Report

# Executive Summary

**Supporting Survivors** was a six-month collaboration between the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Seattle co-design firm Do Big Good, and Washington public school students\* to generate recommendations for trauma-informed and survivor-centered school responses to sexual assault. This report summarizes the project's six deliverables.

## Listening Sessions 13



Students do not feel schools are meeting their needs as survivors.

After a sexual assault, they want compassion, protection, privacy, and choice.

Yet when they disclose to staff, they experience victim-blaming, denial, and reporting without their consent.

They want information about supports in annual assemblies, in class, on pamphlets, and on bathroom posters.

## Model Protocols 16



Student accessibility and input are needed.

Precise legal language holds districts accountable, but is inaccessible to the students who are directed impacted.

Students want protocols better aligned with their definitions of harassment and assault and their needs as survivors.

We recommend plain text versions be created and greater student input on content.

## Best Practice Research 18



Clarity, collaboration, and consistency enable effective response.

A whole-school approach based on tiered supports, caring adults for students to disclose to, cross-sector partnerships, and clear behavior codes, well-implemented works.

Confusion, denial, and lack of coordination are barriers.

Lack of staff training, minimization, harmful gender norms, and working in silos doesn't.

## Training Plan 20



Training to improve staff responses to student disclosures is a priority.

1) Don't Interrupt, Support: Receiving a Disclosure of Sex-Based Violence (All Staff)

2) Stand for Children: Bystander Intervention Into Employee Sexual Abuse (All Elementary School Staff)

3) Administrators Supporting Survivors: Decision-Making, Bias, and Resources (All Administrators)

## Mandatory Reporting 21



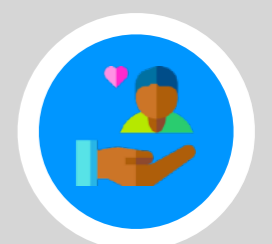
Teen students and some policy experts believe reporting should be by consent, not mandatory.

Fear of being reported is a barrier to students seeking school support.

Mandatory reporting is in tension with trauma-informed and survivor-centered values of privacy and choice.

CPS will not screen in an assault by a peer or school employee except to inform law enforcement of a crime.

## Consultation 24



Adult stakeholders also want change.

Many expressed frustration that schools are not well-integrated into their work to support young survivors.

A disagreement — while students want choice, some in child welfare support the mandate.

## Appendix 26

Trauma-Informed Care

Survivor-Centered Care

The HEARTS Model

# What if we put students at the center of decision-making on school response to sexual assault?



# Welcome to Supporting Survivors.



**Co-design** is a method for solving problems with directly-impacted stakeholders by sharing knowledge and power.

Supporting Survivors used co-design to implement Proviso ESSB 5693 § 501(4)(ee)(i), a piece of legislation to assist sexual assault survivors in Washington's K-12 public schools through six deliverables: (1) conducting student listening sessions, (2) updating model protocols, (3) reviewing best practice research on trauma-informed and survivor-centered school response, (4) developing a training plan, (5) reviewing mandatory reporting requirements, and (6) consulting with adult allies. This deck is a summary of the results of that work. Full text reports on the first five deliverables and a log of the adult consultations are also available from OSPI or Do Big Good.



# We co-designed these recommendations *with* student survivors and their peers.

Between October of 2022 and March of 2023 we talked to 70 current (96%) and former (4%) Washington public school students one-on-one and in groups about school responses to sexual assault. Their voices are the center of this report.

- Of the participants, 29% were survivors, 34% peers, and 37% chose not to disclose their status.
- Their ages ranged from 11 to 20, with a median of 15.
- They were from\* Eastern (32%) and Western (68%) Washington, with identities that were rural, low-income, disabled, and LGBTQ+, including transgender, non-binary, gender-fluid, and gender-nonconforming students.
- Across the sessions, 56% of participants were Black (30%), Indigenous (9%), and other people of color (17%), including Asian and Pacific Islanders and Latinx and Hispanic identities.

“We’re the rape school. It’s a well-known thing. ... You can walk through the halls and name them, like him and him and him and him and him and him.”

- Green\*, 15  
Her high school experience



“Remember when they used to do the **Slap Ass Friday** thing and the other thing, **Touch Titty Tuesday**?... [I]t was two days out of the week, Tuesdays and Fridays, so every other day.”

- Lisa, 18

Her middle school experience



“I remember there was a tree that me and my friend would often climb and that **teacher** would yell at us for climbing the tree, but he **wouldn't do anything** when there was a guy literally touching a girl without her consent.”

- Gardenia, age withheld\*  
His/their elementary school experience





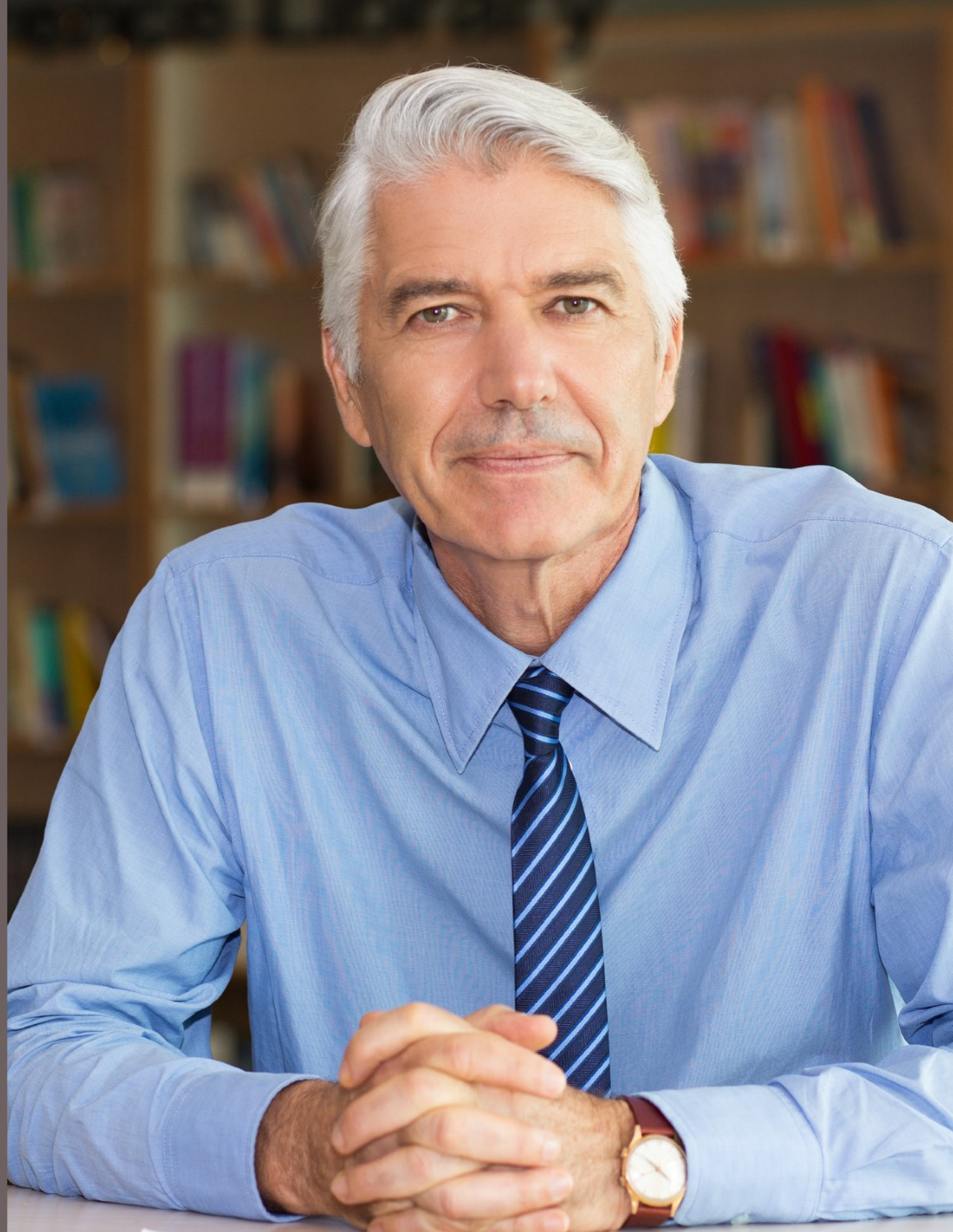
“[A] lot of the issues I’ve had with reporting things to school... administrators don’t always handle it properly. I was with someone who was reporting an assault to one of the coaches and their response was, ‘Well, we know him. He would never do that. That’s not the boy we know.’”

- Blue, 16



**“We took it up to the principal, the vice principal, and we were trying to have it handled and nothing came of it and it felt like all of the staff members avoided me from there on out.”**

- Poppy, 14  
Her middle school experience



“I do think that sexual assault complaints don't get taken as seriously as other complaints.... [T]here were **no consequences** for what was happening so it kept **going.**”

- Cherry Blossom, 18



# Proviso

## Deliverables

1. Listening Sessions
2. Model Protocols
3. Best Practice Research
4. Training Plan
5. Mandatory Reporting
6. Consultations

# Listening Sessions

**Project Task\*** Conduct listening sessions across the state for the purpose of assessing challenges with responding to sexual assault and supporting survivors in schools.

## Findings

- **After a sexual assault**, students want compassion, protection, privacy, and choice.
- **Students want emotional support.** They want that support to come from a “team of helpful people,” including peers, who believe them, will not judge them, and whose response to a disclosure is compassionate, rather than procedural.
- **Yet when they disclose, they experience victim-blaming**, denial, and minimization from school staff. They do not feel schools are meeting their needs as survivors.
- **Not a single student wanted their case reported** to social services, though reporting is now mandatory for all professional school personnel. Likewise, no student expressed a preference for their case to enter a criminal process.
- **Students expressed an intense need for confidentiality**, both from peers and school staff and from parents and family. In many cases, this need for privacy from family was driven by concerns about their own safety.

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## Findings (continued)

- **Students often do not trust school counselors** to receive their disclosures. This gap in trust is based on the lack of confidentiality due to mandated reporting as well as a perceived lack of competence and availability. Without these protections, students will not seek help.
- **Students know little about response procedures** in place to protect them. They want to know the reporting process, who to report to, who and where they can get support, and the effect of their report on the person they are reporting. They also want to be educated about healthy and unhealthy relationships as part of sex education curricula.
- **Students want to be informed** about their options. The most common request was for an annual assembly. They also asked for information to be shared in class by teachers, on pamphlets available in administrative and counseling offices, on posters or take-away cards in bathrooms, and on the school or district website.
- **Students want policy change.** They want reporting to be by choice, rather than mandatory, and to change the age limit and time constraints. They want to replace the term “complainant” with “reporter” in policy documents. They want to shorten the time administrators are given to respond to their reports.

## Activities

- 1 virtual and 7 in-person group sessions conducted from November 2022 through March 2023 with 60 students aged 11 - 18.
- 10 virtual one-on-one interviews conducted from October 2022 through March 2023 with current and former students aged 14 - 20.



“[F]irst off, you need to go through the emotional processing and the mental processing of what happened to you.... Sometimes it’s more important having **emotional and mental help** than actually getting help-help”

- Oliver, 16



# Model Protocols

**Project Task** Update model protocols for responding to sexual assault and supporting survivors in schools.

## Findings and Recommendations

- **Accessibility** Precise legal language holds districts accountable, but failing to also have plain text explanations for students makes current policies inaccessible to those directed impacted.
- **Alignment** Students want protocols better aligned with their definitions of harassment and assault and their needs as survivors.
- **Student Input** We recommend plain text versions be created and greater student input on content.

## Activities

- Detailed student markup of WSSDA's\* 3205: Sexual Harassment of Students Prohibited — Policy and 3205P: Sexual Harassment of Students Prohibited — Procedure
- Preliminary student feedback on OSPI's Discrimination, Discriminatory Harassment, and Sexual Harassment and the definition of sexual harassment in OSPI's Students' Rights: Discriminatory Harassment





“I feel like schools can go a bit too far to the point that it’s uncomfortable. Some people don’t want their parents to find out. They would tell their **parents or even get the police involved.**”

- May, 14



# Best Practice Research

**Project Task** Research best practices for a victim-centered, trauma-informed approach to responding to sexual assault and supporting survivors in schools.

## Findings and Recommendations

- **Enablers of Effectiveness** A whole-school approach, cross-sector partnerships, a caring adult to disclose to, and clear codes, well-implemented are enablers of effective school responses to assault.
- **Barriers to Effectiveness** Lack of staff training is a key barrier to effective response, as are minimization, harmful gender norms, and working in silos.
- **Tiered Response** A multi-tiered system of support\*, grounded in compassion for survivors, well-trained staff, clear and well-enforced policies, prompt intervention for students enacting problematic sexual behavior, and removal of employees committing sexual abuse and misconduct, is the best path forward.

**Activities** Summarized peer-reviewed research, quantitative data, and grey literature on the topics described in the Proviso.



“Let’s say someone were to be sexually assaulted, you know, but it was while they were under the influence.... They probably don’t believe them. And they’re like, ‘Oh, you chose that.’ That happens a lot.”

- Mai, 16



# Training Plan

**Project Task** Develop a plan for deploying victim-centered, trauma-informed training for school administrators and counselors, based on best practices for responding to sexual assault and supporting survivors in schools and informed by the requirements of Title IX of the education amendments of 1972.

## Recommendations (by priority)

1. **Don't Interrupt, Support:** Receiving a Student Disclosure of Sex-Based Violence (All Staff)
2. **Stand for Children:** Bystander Intervention Into Employee Sexual Abuse (All Elementary School Staff)
3. **Administrators Supporting Survivors:** Decision-Making, Bias, and Resources (All Administrators)
4. **Being a Support Person** (Counselors, Community Members)
5. **Technology Assisted Sexual Violence** (Counselors)
6. **State/Circuit Court Specific Requirements** (All Staff)
7. **FERPA + Title IX** (Administrators and Investigators)
8. **Informal Resolution Procedure** (Title IX Coordinator and Facilitator)

**Activities** Conducted consultations with students, adult experts and practitioners, and our team's Title IX compliance expert.



“They were being very pro-active about it, very ‘Let’s solve this problem!’ But I had no idea what was happening. It was very overwhelming.... Everyone was, like, ‘How can we help you?’ ‘How can we support you?’ ‘What do you need?’ I have no idea what I need.... They did a lot and they also didn’t really do what I needed.”

- Pink, 16



# Mandatory Reporting

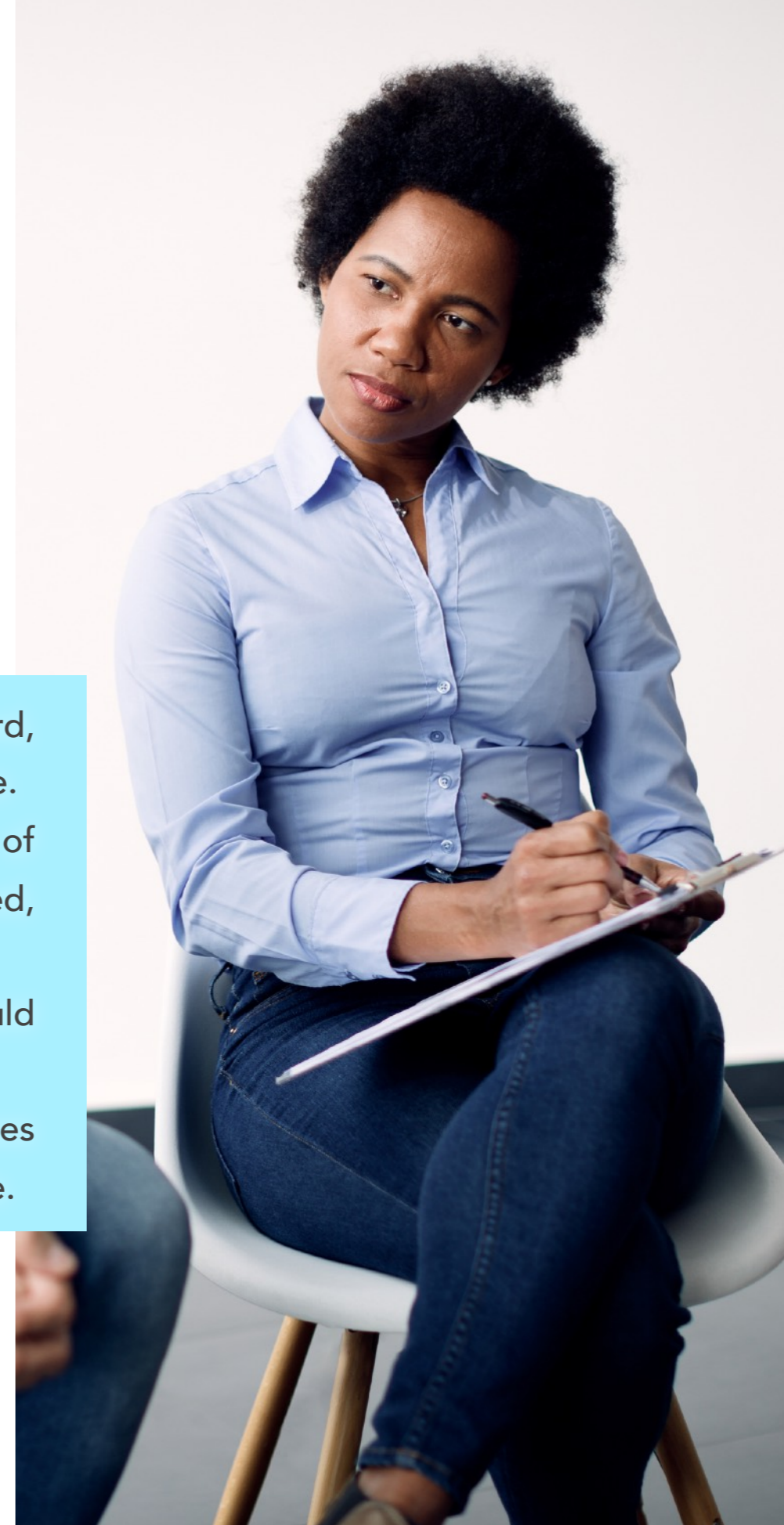
**Project Task** Review current legal requirements mandating that educators and staff report suspected sexual assault and assess whether changes to those requirements should be made to align them with best practices for responding to sexual assault and supporting survivors in schools.

## Recommendations

- **Adopt a Consent-Based Standard:** To replace the current mandatory standard, for students age 13+ (age of medical consent). Teen students want this choice.
- **Remove Criminalizing Penalties:** Mandatory reporting makes elements of survivor-centered and trauma-informed care illegal. If penalties are removed, school professionals can legally affirm student agency and privacy.
- **Use Harm Reduction Strategies:** Until changes are made, reporters should maximize student choice and transparency within the constraints of the law.
- **Train Reporters on CPS Limitations:** Assaults by peers and school employees are “screened out” by CPS ([WAC 110.30.050](#)) and will not result in a response.

## Activities

- Conducted consultations with students and adult experts and practitioners on mandatory reporting law, policy, and lived experience.



“One problem might be, with the school counselor, or really any counselor in general, there wouldn’t be very much **confidentiality** because, say you weren't feeling comfortable to report things yet, they would have to report you because that’s their job.”

- Charles, 13



# Consultations

**Project Task** The office must consult with the department of children, youth, and families, law enforcement professionals, national and state organizations supporting the interests of sexual assault survivors, victims' advocates, educators, school administrators, school counselors, and sexual assault survivors.

## Findings

- **Desire for Change:** Across roles, adult stakeholders largely agreed with students that change in sexual assault response is necessary.
- **Working in Silos:** Many expressed frustration that schools are not better integrated into work they are doing to support young survivors.
- **Disagreement on Mandatory Reporting:** Though students and adults were largely aligned, mandatory reporting was an exception. While teen students want choice, adults in child welfare support the mandate.

## Activities

- Conducted 48 consultation interviews with individuals in the above-mentioned roles between September of 2022 and March of 2023.





“I didn’t have a trusted adult to talk to.... I had friends who also went through the experience.... I mean, we only had each other.... I never was taught on any procedure on how to report sexual assault.... I just thought it was just normal... and I was just a little girl.... [S]exual assault awareness, I think if it was taught more I think it would definitely have made me **more aware and more courageous to report.**”

- Cherry Blossom, 18



# Appendix

1. Trauma-Informed Care
2. Survivor-Centered Care
3. Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS) Model

# Trauma-Informed Care



According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), trauma-informed care recognizes that enduring experiences of harm are far-reaching, including social, emotional, and physical effects on the individual and groups they belong to. Below are SAMHSA's six principles of trauma-informed care, placed into a school context:

1. **Safety:** Staff and students feel physically and psychologically secure at school.
2. **Trustworthiness and Transparency:** School operations are conducted with consistency and clarity.
3. **Peer Support:** The help of another student survivor is key to healing.
4. **Collaboration and Mutuality:** Healing happens in relationships of shared power among students and staff.
5. **Empowerment, Voice and Choice:** Preferences of student survivors are centered in response decisions.
6. **Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues:** Schools move past bias, leverage the healing of cultural connection, and address historic trauma.

# Survivor-Centered Care

Survivor-centered care is a type of trauma-informed care for individuals who have experienced sexual violence, including assault. To be survivor-centered means to empower that individual by prioritizing their rights, needs, and wishes. According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Community Cares initiative, there are four principles of survivor-centered care. They are placed into a school context below:

1. **Right to Safety:** Every student has the right to be protected from further physical or emotional violence.
2. **Right to Confidentiality:** Information should not be disclosed at any time to any party without the informed consent of the student.\*
3. **Dignity and Self-Determination:** Sexual violence is an assault on the rights and selfhood of the student. Restoring choice to the student regarding how to respond to the assault is critical to restoring selfhood.
4. **Non-Discrimination:** All students have the right to the best possible assistance without bias.



# HEARTS Model

The Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS) model uses a whole-school approach and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) framework to prevent and respond to student trauma. It could be a model for a statewide approach to the specific trauma of sexual assault in Washington public schools.

<b>Tier 3</b>	<b>Tertiary Intervention - Intensive Supports for Traumatized Students</b>
Students	School-based, trauma-specific individual, group, and family therapy services for students with trauma-related mental health difficulties that include intensive collateral work with students' teachers, as well as consultation around Individualized Education Program (IEP) assessment and plans.
Staff	Brief crisis support for trauma-impacted school staff and referral for more intensive services, if needed.
Parents	Engaging and supporting parents/guardians as part of a child's psychotherapy
System	Consultation around central district office personnel efforts to improve the district-wide Educationally Related Mental Health Services (ERMHS) process
<b>Tier 2</b>	<b>Secondary Intervention - Selected Supports for At-Risk Students</b>
Students	Psychoeducational skill-building interventions for at-risk students
Staff	Wellness (non-treatment) support for school staff that addresses stress, burnout, and secondary trauma (e.g., teacher wellness groups)
Parents	Participating in Coordinated Care Team meetings that address the needs of at-risk students and coordinate integrated responses
System	Consultation to school/district efforts to re-examine/revise discipline policies to be trauma-informed, including suspension alternatives
<b>Tier 1</b>	<b>Primary Prevention - Universal Supports for All Students</b>
Students	Classroom training for students on coping with stress
Staff	Training and consultation for all school staff (e.g., teachers, administrators, support staff, paraprofessionals, medical and mental health staff) around (a) trauma-informed practices, (b) addressing stress, burnout, secondary trauma.
Parents	Psychoeducation and skill-building workshops for parents/guardians/caregivers on coping with stress.
System	Providing a trauma-informed lens to school staff in their implementation of school-wide supports and interventions (e.g., Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Restorative Justice/Practices, social emotional learning).

Chart adapted from Dorado, J., et al. (2016). "Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS): A Whole-School, Multi-Level, Prevention and Intervention Program for Creating Trauma-Informed, Safe and Supportive Schools." *School Mental Health* 8:163-176.

# Thank You

Let's continue this work together.

Our great appreciation to Rep. Tina Orwall for making this all possible, to Sarah Albertson, Mallory Sullivan, and Laurie Dils for their constant support, to Rebecca Estock, Larry Kinread and the other adult allies for their gracious advice. Most of all, thanks to the students, who know better than anyone how to support student survivors.



**Do Big Good**

Do Big Good LLC is a human-centered design firm based in Seattle. We use co-design and social justice principles to help clients create transformative change *with*, not for, directly-impacted stakeholders.

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