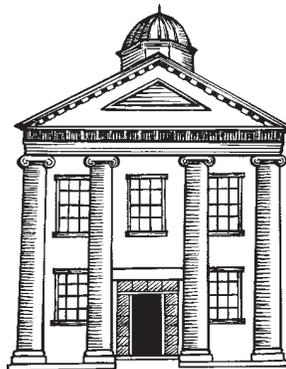


Secondary School Conference on  
Gender-Based Harassment and Violence

**REPORT OUT**  
**&**  
**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**



**HOSTED BY PHILLIPS ACADEMY'S  
BRACE CENTER FOR GENDER STUDIES**

Friday, April 10, 2015

## Conference Overview

On Friday, April 10, more than 100 educators from New England and beyond gathered at Phillips Academy to discuss the problem of [gender-based harassment and violence in secondary schools](#). [Keynote speakers](#) included Soraya Chemaly, Cori Field, Aaminah Norris, Amy Richards, and Rosalind Wiseman. A panel of current students and young alumni also offered their perspectives and advice. After a full day of presentations and workshops, the gathering concluded with a screening of *The Mask You Live In*, the new film from [The Representation Project](#).

Hosted by Phillips Academy's [Brace Center for Gender Studies](#), the conference provided an opportunity for educators to come together to identify the tools and resources needed to develop a comprehensive and systematic approach to combating gender-based harassment and violence at the secondary-school level. Although the issue has become a priority for colleges and universities, it's clear that the most important and foundational work of education and prevention must start much earlier.

Throughout the day, attendees sought to understand the spectrum of gender-based violence and the ways that people experience these issues differently according to their identities. They also discussed the need to identify and challenge existing institutional frameworks, leadership structures, and systems of power that perpetuate gender-based harassment and violence in our schools. Participants repeatedly underscored the tremendous need for clear, accessible policies and procedures, and for sustained, comprehensive training for and dialogue among all members of a school community.

While it would be impossible to capture the richness of the day's conversations in all of their dimensions and perspectives, the following summary aims to represent the most specific and most frequently cited areas of concern and opportunity. Many conference participants expressed a deep interest in developing a shared action plan and are committed to moving these conversations forward collectively.

# Summary Report: Key Takeaways and Priority Actions for Secondary School Faculty and Administrators

## ■ 1. Support Survivors

Every school needs to **create a safe network that will support survivors**. We need to think broadly about the range of survivors who might require support; students who have directly experienced assault, harassment, or pressure are a clear first priority, but it is also critical to include those members of the community who have witnessed—as bystanders or upstanders—these situations, as well as students and adult members of the community who might be survivors of past trauma.

Every school should **have well-defined and easily accessible protocols and policies available in adolescent-friendly language**. Survivors need to feel that they retain a substantial measure of control throughout the process of reporting and investigation, and they need help understanding and processing the trauma they have experienced. Many adolescents are very anxious about the potential of peer backlash that might result from bringing forth a complaint. Because every community member is a potential resource for a survivor of gender-based harassment and violence, schools must make sure that both adults and students are empowered to help meet survivors' needs.

## ■ 2. Support and Engage Student Activists

Every school should **recognize students as our best agents of change**. By supporting and empowering student activists who are working to challenge gender-based harassment and violence, we can develop authentic and sustainable programs and models that resonate with their peers. Student initiatives and pressure have driven much of the progress on this issue in post-secondary education; the power of their voices and actions should continue to be at the fore of these activities.

Several conference participants spoke positively about the effectiveness of student groups on their campuses. Many faculty who have experience co-teaching with students or partnering with students in curriculum and program design are convinced of the merits of this type of collaboration.

## ■ 3. Educate Parents

Every school should **offer resources and guidelines for parents** who are interested in supporting their children and their schools in efforts to end gender-based harassment and violence. Parents are important potential advocates and allies in this work; many have also expressed a need for more education on certain aspects of gender and sexuality.

Parents of gender-nonconforming and transgender youth may be especially appreciative of schools' efforts to partner in this way. Schools can work with parents to provide shared vocabulary and strategies for challenging gender binaries and heterosexism, teaching children to recognize and call-out gendered double-standards from a young age, and talking openly about values, sexuality, and healthy relationships.

## ■ 4. Implement a Comprehensive Sex Education Program

Every school should design and **implement a comprehensive four-year curriculum in sex education** that includes violence prevention and provides students with the tools, strategies, and vocabulary to discuss consent, power dynamics, and healthy relationships.

The program should engage students in ongoing dialogue about the ways in which the following issues contribute to gender-based harassment and violence: gender norms and limited gender expression; rape culture, rape myths, and victim-blaming; pornography; and images of gender and sexuality in the media and in popular culture.

#### ■ 5. Provide Bystander Intervention Training

Every school should take a proactive approach to gender-based harassment and violence by providing students with active bystander intervention training. In bystander intervention training, students learn to **recognize situations in which gender-based harassment and violence might occur and develop the tools and leadership skills to intervene** in both virtual and real spaces.

Bystander intervention training is one of the most promising strategies being used to combat sexual violence at the college and university level, and there are several programs and approaches that can be adapted to the developmental needs of younger students. Bystander intervention programs not only empower students to act when they witness potentially harmful situations, but they also help shift community norms in a way that makes clear when a school does not tolerate gender-based harassment and violence and views it as a collective problem that demands collective responsibility.

#### ■ 6. Provide First-Responder Training for Faculty, Staff, and Students

Every school should **develop a mandatory first-responder training program** for all faculty members and for those staff members who work closely with students. This training should be adapted and provided for student leaders (e.g., dorm prefects/proctors, team captains, peer mentors) who are likely confidants for survivors who decide to disclose information.

Adults must know how to respond when an individual discloses an experience with gender-based harassment and/or violence. Compelling research has shown that the behavior of the first responder in situations of gender-based harassment and violence is a major determinant of how the survivor will proceed. Adults and students need to know how to respond to survivors in ways that encourage them to access the resources and support they need.

#### ■ 7. Conduct a Campus Climate Survey on Gender-Based Harassment and Violence

Every school should **implement an annual survey to gather data on students' concerns, experiences, and perspectives** with respect to gender-based harassment and violence in their school community. Surveys also provide valuable information regarding student perceptions of the availability and effectiveness of institutional resources and policies focused on these issues.

Although there are a number of surveys designed for use at the college and university level, **there is a real need for an instrument that is focused on K–12 schools. Designing a survey for this demographic should be viewed as an urgent priority** for secondary-school educators and administrators.

#### ■ 8. Develop Clear Policies and Procedures Regarding Gender-Based Violence

Every school needs to **have clear, easily referenced policies in both the student handbook and the faculty-staff handbook** that show that gender-based harassment and violence are not tolerated by the institution. Policies need to state explicitly that persons reporting incidents of gender-based harassment and violence will be supported and that the school will take prompt and appropriate action to address the situation.

**Policies and procedures to protect the rights and meet the needs of transgender students are an emerging priority.** We should aim to be proactive wherever possible to envision what schools

can do to best support these students in public facilities throughout campus as well as in spaces designated for residential or athletic activities. Schools should revisit the language that is used in all policy documents to make sure that it is inclusive with respect to gender and sexuality.

### ■ 9. Deconstruct Rape Culture

Every school needs to **identify the institutional traditions, physical spaces, and aspects of school culture that rely heavily on gender binaries and stereotypes and reinforce hierarchies of power.** Gender-based harassment and violence are directly tied to the larger issue of gender equity and should be understood within that context. We need to problematize the cultural entitlement that perpetuates gender-based harassment and violence. Students need our help identifying and challenging pervasive attitudes and structures that normalize violence toward women and trivialize gender-based harassment.

This form of education should permeate all aspects of school life, including the classroom. Teachers should work in multi-disciplinary groups to explore ways to incorporate this thinking into the core curriculum. Students need practice in and models for applying the skills of analysis and discernment that they cultivate in the classroom to real-life narratives and landscapes of power asymmetry based on gender and sexuality.

Athletic culture, particularly the male “bro” culture, emerged as a primary area of concern for many conference participants. Coaches need to teach their young athletes that strength and power must not translate into sexual aggression and dominance. Coaches should nurture their athletes’ capacity for empathy and urge them to use their social power for violence prevention.

## Moving Forward

Gender-based violence and harassment are two of the most urgent issues we face today as educators of high school students. If we are truly committed to seeking systemic solutions to these cultural problems and addressing the root causes of these issues, we must do all that we can to challenge our reliance on binaries and hierarchies and to take on the really hard conversations about pornography, slut-shaming, male-perpetrated violence, victim-blaming, and entitlement. We must do this through the creation of curriculum, through mandatory training for all community members, through thoughtful and effective policies that are consistently upheld, and through supporting survivors and empowering bystanders and student activists.

In the words of the late Ted Sizer, Phillips Academy’s 12th headmaster, “The students are watching.” And they need our help.

Again, thank you all for making the time to come together to discuss these issues. We hope that the conference and this summary report will affirm and energize your continued efforts to end gender-based harassment and violence in our schools.

We welcome your feedback and additions to this document and invite you to share your thoughts and efforts with other conference participants. If you are willing to take an active role in the discussion—by leading a workstream tackling a particular issue, convening a follow-up meeting, or sharing the work of your particular school—please be in touch. We look forward to advancing this important work in partnership with all of you.

—Tracy Ainsworth  
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