

Public Forum 06-13-2022

Response to [REDACTED]

Thank you for asking these questions. We hope the information included here can clarify some areas. There seems to be some confusion about what is actually included in the Second Step curriculum materials. Second Step does not have surveys for students to respond to as part of the program.

All guidance/mental health/social emotional learning programs recommend some type of screener information for students who may need additional support from a guidance counselor for a specific small group or other supports the school and district make available to students and their families. The District is still investigating these tools, but currently uses teacher and parent recommendations for additional support.

Bennington Public Schools participates in Students Surveys through Cognia-AdvancED for our school climate data. All data is collected anonymously and students may opt out from participating in these surveys. The District also participates in the Gallup Student Poll for students in grades 5-12. Parents are provided the opportunity to opt students out of the survey and may preview all the questions. These surveys are completed anonymously.

Here are the responses to the questions.

- 1. Will Bennington teachers be able to raise concern if they identify lessons and activities within Second Step that make them uncomfortable?**
 - a. Bennington teachers may share concerns about lessons and activities within a curriculum that make them uncomfortable. This is a sign to the District that additional training is needed to support teachers as they present lessons.
 - b. Teachers will have time to prepare and review lessons as part of inservice with building counselors and principals.
 - c. Teachers are currently previewing the lessons and writing a scope and sequence/pacing guide for implementation in the 2022-2023 school year.
- 2. Will teachers be required to give Second Step lessons that conflict with their personal/moral/religious values?**
 - a. Teachers are required to teach District curriculum and lessons.
 - b. Bennington promises equity across our classrooms in regard to curriculum and programs available to all students.
- 3. What will happen if a child discloses highly personal, confidential information during a group activity in which children are encouraged to share their feelings? Will parents be notified? How will the school handle privacy concerns?**

- a. This may happen on any given day in a classroom. Teachers work very hard to build a rapport with students so that there is a safe and caring learning environment for each student.
 - b. Teachers and all school personnel are mandatory reporters if they have information or concerns about a child's safety.
 - c. Parents may be contacted about something a student says to a teacher. It really depends on what a student says. A counselor, teacher, or principal may contact a parent about a concern a student shared.
 - d. The Second Step curriculum's lesson plans encourage teachers to acknowledge when a student shares something that might be sensitive and let the student know they will follow up with them. (Sample lesson plan responses included.) All school personnel are able to refer a student to the guidance counselor or principal to make sure students have the support they need.
- 4. Is Bennington collecting surveys from teachers to find out if they are comfortable with this program?**
- a. The Bennington Curriculum Process includes representatives from each school building and across all grade levels. These representatives share information about programs being considered and bring questions and comments back from their buildings to the District Committee. This Committee carefully evaluated thirty-six programs to make the final selection for the district.
 - b. This process is used for all curriculum material adoptions from math, to science, to art, to social emotional learning.
- 5. Will parents have access to Second Step lessons and activities before they are administered to their children?**
- a. Parents may review any of the District's curriculum materials by making an appointment with their building principal. Curriculum guides will lay out lesson content in general, but for detailed lesson materials, a parent would need to come in to review the materials.
- 6. Will parents have full disclosure as to the themes/topics of Second Step and be proactively told they can opt out?**
- a. Curriculum Guides will lay out lesson themes/topics for each unit and lesson.
- 7. Will parents have access to the surveys being administered to their children?**
- a. Yes, parents are sent announcements about upcoming surveys in school and district newsletters. The Gallup Student Poll and the School Climate Survey are both available for parents to review.
- 8. How will the survey responses be stored?**

- a. Survey responses are anonymous and are stored as grouped data in district computer files.

9. Who has access to the survey responses? With whom is this data ultimately shared?

- a. Designated school and district staff have access to survey responses as grouped data (i.e. grade 6, boys, school). Survey results are reported to building administrators, building staffs, Board of Education, and to district patrons as summarized results in our Annual Report.

10. Are there potential private right of conscience or 1st Amendment violations with regard to Second Step?

- a. The District Committee which reviewed Second Step and other curriculum materials did not find concerns in this area. Public schools may not instruct students with the intent to influence religious beliefs. Public schools may instruct on health, safety, history, science, and many other topics as outlined in state/national standards regarding content and skills.

Grade 1 Examples for responding to students.

When talking about situations that can cause people to feel frustrated, children might say something that could indicate they're dealing with a serious issue that needs adult attention, like abuse or neglect. It's important to respond calmly and clearly so the child doesn't feel blamed or shamed. You might say, "That sounds upsetting. Let's talk more in a few minutes." Then, follow your school's reporting procedures.

The Check section gets kids sharing personal examples of feeling frustrated. Depending on their backgrounds and home lives, kids may bring up different sources of frustration. Validate their responses, and model empathy and respect for their experiences. For example, "I can see you look frustrated when you talk about _____." Follow up with individual students if you have concerns about more serious situations.

Discuss with kids that asking, "Are you okay?" might lead to someone saying, "No." The person may share that they have a serious problem, or they may not feel comfortable sharing what's wrong. Strongly emphasize the importance of telling an adult if kids ever think someone is hurt or in danger.

Depending on their home contexts and cultural backgrounds, kids may feel different degrees of comfort or confidence asking for or offering help. Model being accepting and supportive of these differences and reassure kids that the way they do things is okay.

Kids may interpret the problems in the scenarios differently. For example, one child may notice that the characters are not sharing, while another may focus on the characters being frustrated with each other. The ways that kids perceive interpersonal problems may depend in part on their family and cultural backgrounds. Model acceptance of various answers and reinforce that responding to problems respectfully is a kind act.