

MARCH 22, 2016

# Black Lives Matter II

By Robbie Maher

Following a Dec. 1 demonstration by the Black Lives Matter VT group, the Mercury has been continuously researching ongoing events.

Efforts to interview an active member of the Black Lives Matter Vermont group were made. An unnamed representative was reached by the Mercury through the Black Lives Matter VT Facebook page.

The representative responded to questions asked by the Mercury through Facebook.

The unnamed Black Lives Matter Vermont representative believes that the Bellows Free Academy (BFA) "administration, curricula, culture, and policies" are all unfair, unjust and biased toward

think that as a matter of fact that if we don't include these policies, it violates the laws as written, so we have to do those things.... Our policies are basically derived from the state of VT, and the Agency of Education."

Mosca also indicated that the Black Lives Matter Vermont representative choosing to refer to BFA as "outdated" was farfetched. "We (as a school) have an obligation to always stay current. Whether it is cultural issues, academic issues, or physical plan issues," Mosca said.

Mosca made it apparent that he doesn't necessarily agree with some of the accusations made against the school by Black Lives Matter VT.

Even so, Mosca also wanted to make it extremely clear that both he and the school

er. We have to teach tolerance. Actually in many ways this state does a pretty good job of that. However, there are always going to be people who do not preach tolerance, and we have to deal with those things as they come up," Dirth said.

The truth of the whole matter though is that we might not be having this conversation at all if the Black Lives Matter VT group had no factual bases behind some of their claims.

The group does have a factual basis to prove their claim that minority students are suspended more frequently than white students, and from numerous sources.

One source in particular comes through. A 2011-2012 work titled "Kicked Out! Unfair and Unequal School Discipline in Vermont's Public

system, the state pays more money for police, court hearings, and juvenile detention. Currently, it costs nearly \$40,000 per year to house a juvenile in the Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center... Vermont spends up to \$50,000 per year for each inmate in the custody of the Department of Corrections."

In other words, the work suggests that by being suspended from school at an early age, a trickle down effect of negative events can start early in life, that can ultimately wind up costing taxpayers money, lots more than if the child remained in school.

This scenario is obviously a situation that all schools including BFA want to avoid, and Mosca made a clear comment on this. "I struggle sometimes

politicians out there modeling poor behavior all the time, you

in a general sense.

In a December, 2015 letter to the St. Albans

**“ I always believe the best way to get a point across is through dialogue, and I haven't necessarily seen any dialogue”**

— Kevin Dirth



Image Courtesy of Kymela Sari

minority students.

The representative also went on to state that they feel that BFA as a school is "outdated" in many aspects.

Black Lives Matter Vermont's belief that BFA's "administration, curricula, culture, and policies" are unfair and unjust, along with the belief that BFA is "outdated" were the main reason why the group decided to protest on Dec. 1, 2015, and then again on Feb. 27, 2016.

The group representative feels that both protests were extremely effective.

"The December protest was extremely successful, we received reports from all over the world! The second action (in February) was to mobilize people and show that we won't be afraid of racist people."

In order to determine BFA's official response, Principal Mosca was interviewed on March 3. Mosca made his views on the accusations extremely clear.

When speaking to the groups's belief that "administration, curricula, culture and policies" were unfair and unjust, Mosca stated; "I struggle with that, because we are getting the best advice that we can to ensure that they are fair, and I

as a whole are taking numerous steps toward addressing these alleged issues.

The effort that Mosca specifically mentioned is an organized collaboration between the New England Anti Defamation League and BFA, set to be held on April 27th. This process will center around diversity and acceptance in a school.

With the pending introduction of this program, Mosca feels that he has taken action to address many of the concerns brought forth regarding racial equality.

"I think we have got a very clear path forward, relative to our review of statistics, our reach out to family, and our ongoing work with students," Mosca said.

F C S U Superintendent Dr. Kevin Dirth has a similar belief and mindset of the future as Mosca does.

In a March 15, 2016 interview, Dirth explained his view.

"I think it is really really crucial that we continue as much as we can as an educational institution to teach all kinds of tolerance. There are differences, whether it is black and white, or gay and straight, whether it is whatev-

Schools" was created and administered by Vermont Legal Aid.

Through this study, information was gathered from schools within the state of Vermont (including Franklin County) from mandated suspension information requested by the Federal Government.

The work reveals that: "Black/African-American and Native American students were two to three times more likely than white students to be suspended."

On top of that, the work also reveals that "Students with disabilities were nearly three times more likely than students without disabilities to be suspended."

With those statistically significant pieces of information, "Kicked Out" also provided details on financial consequences for students who were suspended from school.

"Exclusionary discipline is expensive. Vermont spends about \$16,000 per year to educate a student, and the amount is paid whether the student is suspended from school or not. Because frequently suspended students are more likely to end up in the juvenile justice court

that folks think that we are being unfair in removing people, because that is not our intention. We have to insure a safe and secure environment, or otherwise, nobody learns. But I think we are very mindful of who we suspend and for what reason and why, those are not decisions that we take lightly," Mosca said.

Meanwhile, Dirth believes that the issue

**“ If it's broken, I'm gonna fix it. If it's not broken, we got to find out what is broken and fix it”**

— Chirs Mosca

is more than just a local issue, and that the issue is on more of a national stage.

"What concerns me the most is not specifically what is happening at BFA where I think people are trying very hard, but what is happening in the world. When you have

have got the students here for seven hours a day, and you can only do so much. What happens when they go home and hear politicians using inappropriate words, and committing inappropriate actions? I think we have to look into this as much more than BFA, and really a societal issue," Dirth said.

Recognizing that Black Lives Matter VT protestors do have valid points, Dirth believes that protesting is not the worst thing in the world.

"I have to tell you, protests don't bother me, this country was founded on protest... I haven't seen any violence, I have seen certain things that I didn't like. Specifically the confederate flag, but that wasn't them," Dirth said.

Even though Dirth suggested he was supportive of the rights of a group to protest, Dirth also believes that there could be a better manner of communication.

"I always believe the best way to get a point across is through dialogue, and I haven't necessarily seen any dialogue," Dirth said.

The Black Lives Matter VT representative claimed that both

Messenger, Mosca left a phone number and contact information for all those interested in contacting him to further discuss the alleged issues regarding race.

"I am always open to meet with anybody. If somebody wants to come in and meet with me as a member of the public, and they want to have a conversation, I am always open to conversation.

As a matter of fact in my letter to the editor I put out my phone number, and asked for people to contact me if they wanted to continue the conversation further regarding race," Mosca said.

Mosca's ultimate goal is to provide a quality education for all students, no matter what their ethnicity is.

"If you look at this school, and say 'yeah it is a predominantly white school' then you are missing the point. We have kids who learn in different ways, we have to differentiate our instruction for individual students, we have a variety of kids with multiple learning needs, physical handicaps, we have to reach them all," Mosca said.

When asked whether or not he would feel comfortable in the BFA environment if he was a student of color, Mosca responded by stating: "I don't know that I could say with any level of certainty how I would respond if I were in anybody's shoes, but I can tell you as the principal, I need to be empathetic and supportive to a wide range of kids who have multiple needs."

Mosca went on to add: "I hope that we can make kids of color feel that BFA is a place where they can grow and thrive."

If an environment somehow existed at BFA in which minority students did not feel welcome and comfortable, Mosca has one simple tactic designed to correct the issue.

"If it's broken, I'm gonna fix it. If it's not broken, we got to find out what is broken and fix it," Mosca said.



## 2,500 hours+ of service

By CJ Brown

BFA seniors have numerous things to focus on at once. Among these things to focus on, seniors have to meet the requirements for class credits and final exams. However, there is one that is less recognized than the rest.

Community service is vitally important for graduation.

As a matter of fact, BFA students need at least ten documented hours to graduate. The individual organizing this, Geoff Murray, is current Director of Community Service.

service," Murray said.

This is Murray's first year as director. Mr. Murray took over from the previous director, Larry Trombley.

Trombley was the director of the program since 1990. Trombley was the leader of the organization from its inception, until his retirement in 2015.

"This is my first year. I've got big shoes to fill. I think I'm doing alright," Murray said.

An important and recurring question has been raised as to whether or not 10 hours is enough volunteer hours for seniors.

you put it all together and you have two hundred and fifty seniors all doing 10 hours, that's 2500 hours plus in one year of community service that our seniors at BFA do, so that's a substantial amount of time," Murray said.

Currently, the window of time seniors have to complete the 10 hours of service begins in the summer of senior year, and ends precisely on June 1.

Even with community service being a requirement at BFA, it is often times enjoyed by the majority of students.

"We have students that have done forty plus hours, a couple students have over a hundred hours, so the figure of 2500 hours for the year is probably the minimum," Murray said.

According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, a study found that getting involved in volunteer work in the community for at least four hours boosts both physical health, and contributes to creating a good mood in participants. By involv-

ing themselves in the community, seniors are not only helping themselves, but also

helping the residents in the community.

Certain locations are

much more popular for seniors to complete their hours than others.

"A lot of the senior girls participate in the Powder Puff football game. That's a big one for some of the football players as well. Humane Society is a popular organization to work for. Around the holidays Operation Happiness. General work for churches is another popular one. The local homeless shelters," Murray said.

For seniors, community service should be a time of realizing what the community is capable of. It should also allow them to have experiences that the students normally would not encounter.

Community service is an experience where students learn in the present, but could result in learning skills that will guide them throughout their entire lives.



Image Courtesy of growthcommunity.blogspot.com

"I collect all of the proposals and completion forms from all the seniors and input the data into our database. And I approve everybody's community

Arguments have been made for both sides whether it's not enough hours or just enough.

"I think 10 is pretty good because when

“ I think 10 is pretty good because when you put it all together and you have two hundred and fifty seniors all doing 10 hours, that’s 2500 hours plus in one year of community service that our seniors at BFA do so that’s a substantial amount time”

— Geoff Murray

## AWOD effectiveness questioned

By Dan Gregory

All freshman at Bellows Free Academy in St. Albans, VT have to participate in A World of Difference, or AWOD. The sponsored activity meets in freshman advisories every Wednesday and attempts to teach about diversity and unity. However, the message does not always get across.

A representative grouping of seven ninth graders were interviewed in order to get a picture of how the AWOD program is viewed by students. Most students agreed with what AWOD stands for and what they are trying to do, but they feel that AWOD facilitators could go about it in a much better way.

"I don't know how they screen the AWOD facilitators, but the need to improve the process. The people trying to teach me don't know the facts themselves, they are not engaged, and they are too stubborn to hold the role they do. A lot of the AWOD kids are the meanest people I know," said a freshman who wishes to stay anonymous.

Many people interviewed are not happy with the way the AWOD facilitators attempt to teach them. They feel that AWOD meetings should only promote healthy discussion of topics, not force their own ideals onto you.

One freshman student was upset by how closed minded some of the facilitators could be. "A student got kicked out of my advisory

a few weeks ago simply because he disagreed with something that she (AWOD facilitator) said, even though it was a valid opinion. It was ridiculous," the freshman said.

One student interviewed felt that some of the students who lead AWOD are not yet mature enough to run a classroom. "My peers suddenly become some kind of adult figure that I have to listen to when they're just not ready for that kind of responsibility," said the freshman.

Another student interviewed enjoyed AWOD every week, he looks forward to it every Wednesday. "The people in my advisory are great. They do a really good job, and keep their own personal beliefs out of the discussion. I feel that is key," Susan Bosland,

a NWTC guidance counselor and one of the heads of AWOD here at BFA, is a huge supporter of A World of Difference. "I think AWOD is fantastic," said Bosland.

given the opportunity to apply to be peer trainers in the spring. Applications can be found in the Guidance Office. Students answer a few questions

limited screening of students who apply may be contributing to some of the problems freshmen have reported, such as facilitators that are not yet mature enough to lead a class.

When asked why they joined AWOD, the most common answer from facilitators was that it looks good on their college resume. Granted, some of the students interviewed had concrete reasoning backed by their morals, but most people joined AWOD to better their chances at getting into a good college.

AWOD has an amazing message and some great ideas. However, like every organization improvements can be made.



Image Courtesy of Anti-Defamation League

The screening and provide a letter of recommendation from an adult," Bosland said. The

## Should schools be more "uniform"

By Julia Remillard

Over 49 percent of public schools in the

U.S. require uniforms or formal dress codes as of 2013, and this percent continues to rise.

School uniforms are often associated with private schools. As of the year 2000 numerous public schools are changing their policies. Bellows Free Academy (BFA) does not have a required school uniform, but does have a dress code set in place. The dress code is geared mainly toward females, with rules in place addressing spaghetti straps, bottoms being too short, and tops displaying too much. Meanwhile boys have limits on pants hanging too low. In BFA's history, there has never been a required school uniform, there has only been a dress code.

An ASEP study showed that school uniforms actually can have benefits towards schools including

lower violence rates, more class participation, and less bullying. A NAESP survey given to school principals with uniforms at

Nevada that implemented school uniforms and requested the student's opinions on the uniforms. Only 10 percent of

"I think having a school uniform would lessen the rate of bullying because you won't be able to get judged on your clothes," Martell said.

The biggest concern between the two was not having an outlet to express themselves, "Nor being able to express who you are, and your own ideas," Martell said.

The debate of school uniforms in public schools vs. self-expression is ongoing and one currently being addressed all over the U.S.

With two sides to the argument, it remains uncertain as to whether or not uniforms would be beneficial to BFA.

“ I think having a school uniform would lessen the rate of bullying because you won't be able to get judged on your clothes”

— Taylor Martell

their schools reports that 79 percent of the principals felt uniforms made student safety better, raised student achievement 64 percent, reduced peer pressure 86 percent and reduced bullying 64 percent. Researchers in Nevada took three local schools from

students claimed they liked the uniforms, meanwhile the other 90 percent did not approve of school uniforms. Taylor Martell ('19) had a very strong opinion on the subject of school uniforms. She said that she would dislike having a uniform at BFA.