



VPA Position Paper

Reducing Red Tape in Victorian Schools

Introduction

The VPA recognizes 3 phases of burgeoning school documentary requirements. They are:

1. Compliance documentation
2. Planning Documentation
3. Accountability documentation

This position paper addresses *only* the issue of the tremendous imposition of multitudinous and repetitive planning demands from:

- School requirements
- Network requirements (RDs, RNLs, Coaches, Regeneration “Teams”, and special-purpose managers or coordinators)
- DEECD “Central”
- State Government
- Commonwealth Government

The VPA advocates for self-managed, autonomous schools as an organizational strategy to best deliver world-class, personalized learning for the 21st Century in Victorian Government Schools. Professor Brian Caldwell has developed a model based on what constitutes an Effective School that sets out a sound argument for individual school self-management. The VPA understands the need for Accountability and for performance deliverables for Victorian students, but argues that school self-management is the best way forward.

The nature of Leadership in Victorian Schools is that of a rapid response capability to respond to a multitude of organizational and student variables. Research confirms that the differences in student learning outcomes between classes in individual schools are greater than the differences between schools. Inherent in this proposition is the notion that the variables within schools are greater than the variables between schools! Principals need to be able to respond to these variables in timely and appropriate ways.

The VPA accepts that planning is important in terms of Technical leadership, but cannot continue to support the plethora of administrivia linked to endless and repetitive plans. The VPA rejects the consequent workload increases that seems to emanate from a “silo mentality” where various non-school-based stakeholders may attempt to “command and control” through ensuring that everything that principals do as part of their leadership role is captured and enshrined in some sort of documented plan.

Currently we have:

1. Performance plans
2. Strategic Plans
3. Annual Implementation School Plans
4. Strategic Network plans
5. Annual Implementation Network Plans
6. National Partnerships Plans

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7. Data Plans
 8. Pedagogical “Masterplans”
 9. Emergency Plans
 10. Workforce Plans
 11. Professional Development Plans
 12. Pupil-free days Plans
 13. Ultranet plans
 14. Transport plans
 15. E-learning plans
 16. Drug education plans
 17. Literacy plans
 18. OH&S Plan/Registers
 19. Numeracy plans, and, *finally*
 20. “Bold and Ambitious Plans”.

The VPA is of the view that the gradual proliferation of “plans”, and their accompanying paperwork, is detrimental to the proper delivery of leadership in Victorian Schools. The time spent in preparing and re-hashing up to 20 different planning documents would be much more effectively spent on doing what the plans promote as needing to be done. Many of our members report that they complete the massive documentation associated with these repetitive plans and then file them until a “silo representative” feels the need to address a related accountability issue that is often part of a tiered, performance- plan hierarchy.

The VPA believes that the current “plan dependency” devalues the professionalism and the varied, and variable, work of Victorian Principal Class Officers. The VPA rejects the notion of overlapping, multiple plans with similar intent or targets. There is an inordinate dependence on documentation as “proof of intended performance”.

The VPA proposes a limit on the number of words that Principals are required to devote to planning on an annual basis.

The VPA Supports:

1. A single accountability document containing ONE cohesive and easy-to-read plan.
2. An emergency management Plan
3. A Transport plan (Rural bus routes)

The VPA Believes:

- That the three categories of plans should be able to inform the system of the intent of an informed, effective and accountable school leader. Even then, we advocate for easy-to-understand pro-formas and generic advice as to the initiatives that DEECD believes should become components of any plans.
- That planning that compliments the reality of the role of principal and which has been agreed following genuine consultation with professional associations will be effective and valued planning.
- That planning should be linked with performance goals identified through periodic school review processes.
- Planning should be flexible to recognize the variability of schools and the vagaries of individuals and groups of individuals in terms of their behaviours and needs.
- Planning should be constantly evolving but not constantly monitored.
- Planning should be practical, incorporating reasonable, realistic and achievable goals.
- Generic plans for systemic, non-negotiable requirements, e.g. Ultranet, performance and Development Culture implementation should be available.
- School leaders should “own” school plans.
- There should be reciprocity, where planning is supported by the guarantee of the necessary resources with which to implement plans.
- Plans should be developed collaboratively by school-based teams.

We Do NOT Believe:

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- In “High-stakes” testing, improvement plans; because they promote unhealthy competition between schools within the very networks that PCOs are supposed to be working in to lift the overall network performance
 - In Plans being used as a contrived process of compliance.
 - In plans having to be “signed off” by RNLs. Principals have been selected on the basis of a panel judging them to be competent, experienced and capable as LEADERS. Leading implies independence, autonomy and risk-taking. “Planning” is a low-level requirement to try to channel and control leadership.
 - In the inclusion of targets with descriptors such as: 100% , or “ALL” if they are meant to relate to any “population” or “cohort” subject to the laws of a statistically “normal” distribution of behaviours or traits.
 - In any attempt to persuade principals that they should strive to shift the bottom 50% of an arithmetically distributed array of scores into the top 50%, so that 100% are above the mean.
 - In repetitive planning involving significant overlapping of intent.

Conclusion

It is impossible to plan for every curriculum area, HR eventuality, learning outcome, workforce construct, leadership profile, emergency response, or resource requirement, of even a small school. The VPA urges DEECD Bureaucrats to review the requirement for so much “red tape.”

The VPA does not support principals being accountable for plans. The VPA supports principals being accountable for outcomes!