



## VPA Position Paper

### Student Support Services

The Victorian Principals Association (VPA) supports and endorses the provision of Student Support Services Officers (SSS) in government schools. The VPA acknowledges that students are better prepared for learning when they are healthy, safe and happy and that student wellbeing is the responsibility of staff working in a whole school context.

#### Purpose

The Victorian Principals Association (VPA) notes that the 'Strengthening Networks and School Communities: Guidelines for Student Support Services' ([Strengthening networks and school communities: Guidelines for student support services \(Word - 3.2Mb\)](#)) outlines the principles, arrangements and the additional resources provided to strengthen student wellbeing and support services. The Guidelines also address the concepts of 'continuity of care' and 'partnerships between the school and the community' as the key to improving the services provided to students and their families.

VPA considers the role of SSS as essential, therefore increased hours and consistent support according to individual student need is vital for positive student learning outcomes.

#### Background to the VPA Position

The VPA position has been determined in the following context:

- Reduced support hours for some students
- Increased turnover of SSS within DEECD
- Insufficient & irregular SSS availability. NB. New model of delivery prioritises- Critical Incident Response and Student 'at risk' Assessments
- Failure to provide services (anecdotal evidence suggests at least 40% of requests have been refused at least one school). Due to understaffing, it is common for a lengthy referral process to result in SSS suggesting referring clients to external providers and practitioners. School staff can, and do, manage this independently when considered appropriate (e.g. referrals to Child First or GPs). A referral to a SSS for intervention, which then only results in a referral to an external provider, is pointless and inefficient.
- Restructure has dislocated relationship-building within schools
- Leadership / Management roles given too many SSSO's detracts from service time to schools. ie. Additional funds being spent on SSS administration rather than on SSS provision (\*Estimated to be 20% of all SSS funding)
- The online referral system will need to be carefully monitored to ensure claims of greater efficiency simplification
- There is massive understaffing in the area of SSS provision
- There are concerns about the use of funding savings across certain regions
- Wellbeing of SSSO is still a major issue
- Current SSSO remuneration rates are unsatisfactory
- Service provision has not been proportional to the increased number of students recognised with disabilities and impairments
- Statistics still quote 3.5% of school population are in the category of Disabled and Impaired, but this is no longer accurate- the statistics are now higher
- Students with language disorders are a hidden group as the majority do not meet the stringent and behaviourally biased PSD funding criteria. Hence, these students do not receive adequate support.
- Schools' access to services is currently low and highly variable according to location

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- Historical model of funding maintains inequity
  - Regions need to pull back from appointment of staff before the new model is operational in order to avoid over staffing and too many ongoing staff allocated to schools

### **VPA Position**

Following a comprehensive evaluation of current SSS provision model the VPA position on effective SSS service delivery across Victorian Government Schools is consistent with increasing school accountability and responsibility and is as follows:

#### **1. Schools:**

- SSS funding to be allocated directly to a group of schools' so that they take responsibility for employing and managing their own SSSO. NB. Psychologists, / Social Workers and Speech Pathologists. Where appropriate, schools will be encouraged to employ SSS staff on a shared (Split ledger) basis
- There is an obvious need to increase base SSS funding levels for disadvantaged, rural and smaller schools
- There should be an overall examination of the funding levels to address the inequities with consideration to factors such as SFO, Rurality, Growth, Stages of Schooling etc
- Increase in SSS student ratios at the service delivery to student's level
- Consistent individual SSS support of individual students to increase student learning capabilities

#### **2. SSS Networks:**

- SSS staff employed by schools to be formally timetabled to meet at least twice a term to discuss issues of concern, share best practice and partake in appropriate professional learning
- Network schools to readily provide Student Support Services to one another in times of urgent need

#### **3. Regions:**

- Regions to be responsible for management and delivery of 'Visiting Teacher' support services
- Regions to use independent agencies to undertake PSD assessments e.g. Lewis and Lewis
- Regions to ensure transparency of SSS system delivery and report regularly to schools and DEECD centrally.
- DEECD partnerships with SSS service providers increased and targeted for specific times of need e.g. Black Saturday.
- Referral process to be time efficient and response time effective; not delayed by paper warfare.  
NB. Proposed Online Referral System must be pragmatic and time saving
- Program for Students with Disabilities assessments to be funded on top of existing SSS allocation
- Clear DEECD / Regional guidelines re, roles, responsibilities and contacts including:
  - Key SSS contacts in each network
  - Roles and responsibilities of SSS in Regions & Schools
  - Role in PSD timelines, reviews and appeals
  - Complaints processes
  - Critical incidents
  - Autistic Assessments
  - Network responsibilities
- Factors such as rurality, mobility and SES need to be considered for supplementary funding
- Provision of competitive wage levels, administration staff and adequate funding be included in the new model.
- Open and staged transition to the new model is needed

**The VPA advocates strongly for increased funding for Student Support Services in primary schools.**