



Victorian Principals Association

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VPA Position Paper

Principal Wellbeing

The Victorian Principals Association (VPA) is concerned about the impact of work and the lack of adequate support on the mental and physical wellbeing of Victorian Government Principal Class Officers.

Purpose

The VPA calls on the State government and DET to acknowledge the complexities of issues confronting principals in government schools and to prioritise supporting them to optimise their health and wellbeing.

The VPA recognises the excessive workload of Principal Class Officers (PCO) and advocates greater support for them. The VPA aims to ensure that principal workloads remain at a realistic level, that adequate and appropriate support is provided to principals in meeting these workloads, and that the department and the government publicly and periodically acknowledge the achievements of principals and schools, and promote the Principal Class profession.

Background to the VPA Position

The VPA position has been determined in the following context:

- The workload of Victorian government PCOs is excessive and unsustainable – the DET publication *The Privilege and the Price* stated 59.6 hours per week – and cannot be achieved in the 38 hour week specified by the Award.
- The fourth year of the Principal Health and Well-being report by Dr Phil Riley has found that the growing job complexity and lack of support means sheer quantity of work is the greatest source of stress facing Australian principals and bullying and threats of violence occur at five times the rate and actual violence at seven times the rate of the general population.
- The number of days out of school required of PCOs by Department of Education and Training (DET) in various contexts was unrealistic.
- PCOs face substantial and conflicting levels of accountability to various sectors.
- There was a lack of coordination of DET departments in the implementation of programs and initiatives.
- There was a lack of clarity and consequently often conflicting messages from DET.
- DET relentlessly pursued multiple layers of change, often simultaneously.
- Community expectations are extremely high and often unrealistic.
- PCOs perceive that the DET focus changed from support to accountability, risk management and school improvement.
- The coaching and mentoring provided to the increasing number of first time PCOs is not satisfactory.
- There was a lack of inclusion and meaningful consultation of PCOs from DET.
- A reluctance on the part of PCOs to talk about factors impacting on their health and wellbeing because of concern about how this would be perceived.

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- No senior personnel in a supervisory role available to identify PCO health and wellbeing issues and no support provided.

VPA Position

The VPA advocates for:

- DET to establish a working party to address issues of principal health and wellbeing.
- DET to consolidate and limit the implementation of changes and initiatives.
- DET to provide adequate and appropriate support and resourcing, additional to the SRP, for the implementation and ongoing management of changes and initiatives.
- DET to adequately consult with PCOs on all changes and initiatives through the trial, refinement, improvement and implementation stages.
- Improved and timely communication from DET.
- DET to internally monitor the conflicting requirements, commitments and accountabilities expected of PCOs from various sectors and work to lessen them.
- A calendar of principal work expectations to be presented at each principal forum and provided to principals in Term 4 for the following year to assist with planning.
- Principal remuneration to be proportional to the workload.
- Coaching and mentoring to be provided to PCOs, with focused programs for specific groups such as first time PCOs.
- DET to provide professional development on health and wellbeing.
- DET to provide an appropriate funding model that allows greater administrative and workload support to Principals, including Personal Assistants, Facilities/OHS managers, Attendance and Compliance Officers and more Assistant Principals and Leading Teacher Positions.
- One support person – a senior officer who well understands schools – in a ratio of 1:20 principals.
- DET to provide greater support and acknowledgement of principal class officers.
- DET to take responsibility to ensure a safe workplace for all PCOs; mental and emotional as well as physical.
- A stated Principal complaints policy which defines avenues and processes for Principals.
- DET to promote the position of PCOs in the wider community.
- DET to fund annual health checks and counselling services, as required, for PCOs.

References

Riley, Dr. P (2012), *The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Survey: 2011-14 Data* http://www.principalhealth.org/2011-14%20Report_FINAL.pdf

Department of Education & Training (2004), *The Privilege and the Price: A Study of Principal Class Workload and its Impact on Health and Wellbeing*, Published by the Victorian Department of Education and Training, Australia