

Australian Principals Federation

President's Message—Julie Podbury



A difficult week or two



I have struggled over the last 2 weeks, feeling deeply sad. I have been left assessing how my life and work intersect and the point of it all. Others have reported similar thoughts. Such is the impact of the loss of a friend and colleague, Colin Simpson, who I have known for over 30 years. It is an appropriate time to review your contribution to the world at large and it's impact on your life and health and reflect on the passing of our APF Councillor and colleague.

In line with this we have had communication from **Prof Phil Riley** about a new project he is about to commence with **A/Prof Phil Atkins** re work they are both doing in H&WB. This will be really useful for all prin class, however, feedback is needed. **Venue:** Brunswick Business Incubator, Level 1, in the Gravel Room at 420 Victoria St, Brunswick **Time:** 9:30am - 4:00pm **Date:** 28th Nov 2019. If interested contact info@prosocialinstitute.org or call 0412 922 482. A brochure is attached with this newsletter.

Election Results

Phase 2 of the elections have now been completed and the following Federal Office and Victorian Branch Executive positions have been finalised with the term of office commencing 1 January 2020 for 3 years. Thank you to all successful nominees.

Federal Office	President	Senior Vice President	Junior Vice President	Treasurer
	Julie Podbury	Bevan Ripp	Rod Kendall	Bronwyn Morgan
Vic Branch	President	Vice President	Treasurer	Secondary Rep
	Julie Podbury	Andrew Cock	Wendy Powson	Phil Rogers
	Primary Rep	Comprehensive Rep		
	Steve Durkin	Meagan Cook		

Student Excellence Program

On 24th October Minister Merlino announced the Student Excellence Program. Headlined, **SUPPORTING HIGH ABILITY STUDENTS IN EVERY CLASSROOM**, the program was aimed at High ability students at all Victorian primary and secondary schools who will be supported to strive for excellence with extension programs through a \$60.2 million investment by the Government. Details of the program were sent to schools and released to the press.

However the APF has had considerable angst raised about aspects of this program, not the least is the **complete lack of consultation** about this, which is enshrined in our current agreement, but was by-passed completely, in this instance. Once again the DET make government **schools look like aimless organisations with no capacity to make such decisions**, in spite of the fact that SEAL and other programs of excellence, catering for high ability students have been in place in Victorian schools for more than 20 years. We repeat our concerns about the **lack of autonomy** for our Principal Class Employees.

While this is possibly an excellent idea and program, there is currently far too little detail to make a reasoned judgement. We ask why there is no Selection Criteria just a vague role statement? We also note that once again schools will be seeking another specialised staff member in an environment where there is a vanishing pool of talent available. **Last of all, this represents yet more work for drowning school leaders.** This is what the consultation clause in the 2017 VGSA was designed to prevent!

In this issue:

The **Phase 2 Election results** are on this page.

The APF passes comment and concern about the [Student Excellence Program](#).

On Page 2, two of our members air their concerns.

The first [comment is on the InfoSafe](#) announcement and other matters.

The second member wrings her hands at the [lack of support she is feeling from the system](#) and we attempt to explain how and why this is occurring.

On P3 Interesting research from the University of New England exposes [the elephant in the room, when it comes to NAPLAN scores](#): That students genes above all else determines their performance. Who would have thought?

On P5 **Mark McKelson**, delivers **Blog 13** and discusses his strategic approach for [dealing with challenging parents](#).

Member feedback: InfoSafe

It is laughable the notion of us being 'InfoSafe' when – as part of a government system nonetheless – we are not provided software platforms for Content Management (ie Sentral) reporting (Compass) class formations (Class Creator) and sharing between schools (G Suite).



This was one element of the feedback given when I attended a Network Forum recently. The opportunity to feedback about enablers and barriers to 'school improvement' was incredulously heard by private industry consultants not understanding our system of silos and minimal support: writing policies but expected to follow policies eg: Mobile Phone policy, (not to mention sometimes finding out about these via the press first!); managing clunky software systems (such as edupay for PDPs); working to changing and unrealistic timelines (eg. AIP, with a delay on data sets); managing the ever increasing demands of society (emotional expectation) and crowded curriculum (swimming – without full funding)! We all attended with the same motivation – to express our concerns: a future where there will be no skilled applicants to principal positions due to poor wellbeing prevention (rather than the band-aid of intervention) and little understanding of those in positions of power about what really happens in schools – especially when there are SEILs & AEDs without school leadership experience! Whilst being impressed with the suite of resources for teachers as a part of the Education State agenda, school improvement and data is not the only thing that happens in our communities (as you well know); and for those of us striving there is a cost to us professionally and personally. When asked for a 'wish' to make school improvement more of a reality, the group were unanimous in the need for greater power over 'quality teachers' as we are hamstrung by the current industrial award (and minimal support for the process) with this too significant a burden for even the most experienced school leader.

Member feedback: Feeling unsupported

After many long years of battle to gain adequate learning spaces for our students at my school we have been fortunate that a passionate labor local minister, school council and leadership, succeeded in gaining funding of substantial funding – well overdue and after 4 master plans, 3 funded by the school.

During so many past years of struggle the school has continued to provide learning opportunities where students are cared for and achieve successful outcomes. We have employed amazing staff and enjoy a parent community who focus on the needs of our students. Seven staff have moved to substantive principal class roles during my time as principal, again showing the work we do to prepare and provide quality DET leadership across many other schools. Who would know this though?

Over the last 18 months the whole school community have been tolerant and respectful of the pain we needed to go through as a building site in order for the end goal to be achieved.

We were blest with excellent architects and builders who achieved an outstanding result. Fortnightly site meetings ensured that the project moved forward – enormous additional workload for Principal class whilst keeping the students, staff and parents cared for and supported.

Never did a Region person ever attend a meeting, or apologise, even though minutes were sent each fortnight.

However after all this success I feel deflated and unsupported by the department. Over the 18 months of building not one regional person (except for SEILs) has contacted me, asked how we were going or visited. One really is an island and without resilience, persistence and stamina some others would go under.

Of course we are thankful for Govt funding and are very appreciative of the Govt input. The opening was hampered by DET and Regional personnel failing to respond to our invitations. On the afternoon before the opening an unknown govt person indicated that he would attend. He had no previous input and had never been to the school before. We didn't even know what he looked like! Programs had been printed already.

Our current and past SEILs were most supportive and interested and attended the opening which we appreciated, along with many of my principal colleagues and wider community. What would we do without the support of our colleagues??

You know me well Julie and I don't complain. I get on with the enjoyable work, which you know I love



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There are many new and Acting Principal Class in the system. Have you asked them to join the APF?

NOTE: Monday, Thursday & Friday are my APF working days. If you need assistance on Tuesday and Wednesday, text Julie or Mark direct.



Gemma Naylor
APF Executive
Officer

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Join the APF

www.apf.net.au

Forms can be completed on line.



doing, to give our students, staff and community the very best.

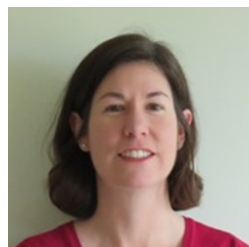
All that would make me happy is for the school community to be recognised by the Govt and DET. Our own community have added value by many \$100,000's for seating, IT equipment in learning spaces, projector in stadium, landscaping and air conditioning in classrooms. This required careful and diligent financial management by School Council.

Thanks for listening. I'm sure my job description and standards didn't encapsulate all that has been achieved in my many decades with DET.

Apologies for my dissolution and disappointment in people.

Did I expect too much, not for me but our wonderful community ?

APF Comment: This email is symptomatic of our system's key problem at the moment. The pace is too fast and far too much is expected of our school leaders, SEIL's and Regional personnel. In the push to complete this work, relationships are being left behind. People do matter! Positive, supportive and understanding relationships are the key to success and happiness. What can we do to fix this? The APF have been asking for some time for the foot to come off the DET accelerator. Now we are asking DET to apply the brake. The 3 R's are the basis of success in our schools. Relationships, Relationship, Relationships. Let's stop now and rebuild these relationship before we move onto the next undertaking. People and their lives matter more than data.



Don't blame the teacher: student results are (mostly) out of their hands, October 24, 2019 [Callie Little, University of New England](#)

Teachers have very little to do with why some kids are better at school than others, our research shows. This contradicts the popular view that [teachers matter most](#) (after genes) when it comes to academic achievement.

Previous research has suggested teacher quality – which includes their qualification level and ability to organise the class – can account for [up to 30%](#) of the reason some students get better marks than others.

But our study of 4,533 twin pairs, published in the [Journal of Educational Psychology](#), found classroom factors – which include teacher quality and class size – accounted for only 2-3% of the differences in students' NAPLAN scores.

Classroom factors differ from school factors, although they overlap. School factors would include the overall socioeconomic makeup of the school and broader administrative policies.

Because our twin pairs generally attended the same school, we were not able to test for school differences. But we can apply our findings to differences between classrooms.

Read more: [Genes can have up to 80% influence on students' academic performance](#)

Nature v nurture

Most children first learn to read via formal instruction that starts in kindergarten or first grade. But they vary in how well and how quickly they learn across the first and subsequent years of instruction. Similarly, differences in numeracy emerge early in school and continue throughout.

Previous studies show [genes account for most of](#) the individual differences – an estimated 40-75% – in [numeracy](#) and [literacy](#) development among [twins at school](#).

Around 40% of the variability is then left to be explained by environmental factors. These include twins' shared environments, such as parents' educational values and socioeconomic status, and factors that affect each twin differently – known as their unique environment – such as if they learn in different classrooms.



A LEARNING CAREER

It's essential to move toward a career-long talent development system that supports teachers in developing expertise. What would that look like? We cannot force anyone to become an expert, nor can we cram expertise into someone's brain. Rather, it's something that develops over time through continuous learning and working with skilled peers.

Some key steps:

- Select teachers who show passion and enthusiasm for teaching and learning.
- Provide beginning teachers with successful models and lots of support.
- Develop the expertise of mid-career teachers through reflection and peer coaching.
- Create opportunities for veteran teachers to engage in self-directed learning.

Rather than trying to equate teachers' professional learning with checking boxes in an evaluation framework, a talent development system would unleash their potential by telling them that once they demonstrate they've mastered the schoolwide instructional model, they can then guide their own professional learning.

"Debunking the Myth of the Teacher Performance Plateau" by Bryan Goodwin and William Slotnik in [Phi Delta Kappan](#), April 2019

Quoted from Hippocampus, an email publication of Principal's Digest

We wanted to find out how much the classroom environment matters to student achievement.

We used twins because they share either all (identical) or half (non-identical) of their genes, and both types of twins share parts of their environment such as their parents, where they live, and often which schools they attend.

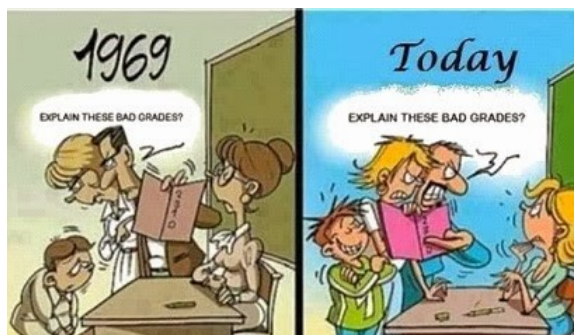
There are also parts of the environment twins sometimes don't share with each other such as their classrooms and friends. We can use what we know to be similar or different about twins to learn about how genes and environments influence achievement for all students, including non-twins.

We examined classroom-level influences on twins' literacy skills in kindergarten through to grade 2, and on literacy and numeracy skills in grades 3, 5, 7 and 9. We did this by comparing the similarity of NAPLAN test scores in twins who shared or did not share classrooms with each other.

We found twins in separate classrooms were almost as similar in achievement as those who were placed together. This was true for all NAPLAN tests – numeracy as well as the literacy components – and as true for high-school grades 7 and 9 as for kindergarten through to grade 5.

Aside from the 2-3% classroom effect, our research (generalised across the sample) established a substantial proportion of the variability among students – on average around 60% – comes down to genetic differences.

Of the remaining 30+%, it appears other environmental factors such as broader school-based influences, or other still undetermined factors, play a larger role than the classroom environment.



The teacher isn't to blame

Reasons for individual differences in reading and numeracy development have often been attributed to environmental factors.

Education policies in several countries reflect this. In the United States the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#), for instance, assumes variation in teacher quality is a major reason for differences in student success, and that teachers should be held accountable when their students fall behind.

Many of us can recall a teacher who had a profound influence on us, for better or worse. But it's important to remember these are individual experiences – ones that could be just between you and that teacher. Our data can't detect these individual experiences, it can only detect the average class influences.

We acknowledge teachers matter. It is because of them all children know more at the end of a year, a week, even a day, than they did before.

But our study suggests teachers are doing an even-handed job of educating our students in the core areas of literacy and numeracy. We don't have data on the higher grades (10-12) where the syllabus gets more demanding and shortages of fully trained teachers in mathematics, say, may begin to show.

But class factors, such as "teacher quality", don't appear to be the driving force for why students differ in their NAPLAN scores. Our results suggest individual differences in how students develop may be based more on environmental influences outside the classroom.

The research was conducted by Katrina Grasby, Callie Little, Brian Byrne, William Coventry, Richard Olson, Stefan Samuelsson and Sally Larsen. This article is from The Conversation, October 24, 2019



Support for members

We are here to support and offer advice to all members at any time.

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Ring us direct



Mark Arkinstall
APF Industrial Officer

"As a school leader, I am aware that the tone of a school is set by what you allow, what you stop, what you ignore, and what you reinforce."

Anthony Ciuffo in "Rethinking Conventions: Keeping Gender-Diverse Students Safe, in Educational Leadership October 2019

Quote
from Hippocampus,
an email publication of
Principal's Digest

DON'T STOP THE LEARNING AT SCHOOL, TAKE THE MAGIC HOME TODAY AND TRY SUPERLOOP HOME BROADBAND NBN FOR FREE.

superloop
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APF-2019

VALID UNTIL 31 DEC 2019 ON ANY SUPERLOOP HOME BROADBAND NBN™ PLANS. AVAILABLE FOR NEW CUSTOMERS ONLY. T&Cs APPLY AND ARE AVAILABLE AT SUPERLOOP.COM.LEGAL

101 Things you need to know about being a principal, Mark McKelson



Blog 13 - Student Behaviour – Wear them down!

It's a bit like the Melbourne Cup, it's a staying race, not a sprint. The strongest and smartest will survive. We have to be three steps ahead of them or they will eat us alive. And are you really going to get them to understand that their child is the problem in the first meeting. C'mon, it's his friends, the teacher or the class' fault. You aren't going to come to an agreeable solution that both parties support in the first meeting. I've been on the end of too many failings when the meeting is over quickly and no follow up is organised. The issue isn't resolved and they are on the phone to the principal, the region or their lawyer in a heartbeat. It's a minimum of three meetings and there is no maximum. Depending how far apart the teacher and the parent are will depend on the length of time required here.

Your first meeting is to listen to the parents concerns or for you to raise the concerns. I'm not talking about the parents who understand and are on board here. You know the ones I'm talking about. They are going to have excuses and it's everyone else's fault. This is where I see 90% of emerging leaders go wrong. They start rebutting the parents and finding themselves in the middle of the argument. You must and I repeat must, paraphrase and question your way out of this. For example, "Do you really think it's his friends all of the time and he isn't involved at all?" Depending on the parent you need to keep probing with your questions to get them thinking from a different point of view. After half an hour or so hopefully you can set some goals and make a plan for the following week. You will need some sort of data tracker for the teacher to fill in for the following meeting. At the end, ask the parents what time best suits them for follow up meetings and lock them in for the next week. Locking the teacher in for follow up meetings also ensures they are more likely to implement the plan effectively.



By the time a week passes and the parents, teacher and student are back for the next meeting, hopefully they are all a little closer to being on the same page. Start the meeting by asking the parent how they felt the week went, paraphrase, question and respond. Hopefully you will have some useful data on how the week has progressed and you can share this with the parents. Their reaction will tell you how many more weeks this is going to take. If the parents are still making excuses you will need to keep bringing them back. Each time refining the triggers and goals in the behaviour plan. The other problem will be the teacher not meeting their end of the bargain. You will need to deal with this at another time.

The great thing here is you now have a strong dialogue going. The parents are coming back for a third meeting and they will want this to end. By this point, they should be talking a lot more positively with their child about behaviour and expectations. Plus, the teacher will be getting sick of being in your office and with the scrutiny and accountability.

I use this strategy for student behaviour, parent complaints about bullying and disability students. It works 95% of the time. Parents see you are giving their child the attention they need and that you are listening to them. Plus, you are taking the pressure off everyone to resolve the situation in a 20 minute meeting. You need to tell the parents that anything like this takes at least three weeks to resolve. My record was 16 consecutive weekly meetings on Tuesday night at 6pm to get Ben and his dad on board. Maybe I'm a glutton for punishment but if I didn't do the work with this family, he was going to disconnect with school and be lost to the system at too early an age.

APF Member, Mark McKelson, has been a member of the principal class at a number of schools across Victoria. He is currently based at Camberwell South PS. He is writing these "blogs" based on his experiences, in support of new or acting principal members of the APF, and has endless topics that he will write about which will appear in future issues of the Vic Branch, APF Newsletter.



MAKING REASONABLE DEMANDS ON STUDENTS

Children aren't just smaller versions of adults.

They are their own kind of being. They need to move, talk, question, and explore more than we do, because they're in the midst of that mind-boggling explosion of cognitive, physical, and social-emotional growth that marks childhood in our species. Because of this, we need to be reasonable in what we expect of them. Teachers who shadow students for a day are often struck by how uncomfortable, even exhausting, it is to be sedentary for an entire class period. It's even worse when students are listening passively to 'teacher talk'. Students need to get up and move, which can take the form of organised movement breaks or class rules that allow students to get up to sharpen a pencil or get a book. Another piece of advice is not to force apologies. When an angry child is told to say, "I'm sorry", the apology isn't sincere and won't be received as such. Turbulent emotions take a long time to settle and we need to give children time.

"4 Things Teachers Shouldn't Be Asking Their Students to Do" by Justin Minkel in *Education Week Teacher*, April 8, 2019

Quote
from Hippocampus,
an email publication
of Principal's Digest

The industrial organisation for the Principal Class