

Australian Principals Federation

President's Message—Julie Podbury



What we have learnt!

Over recent years we have observed the manner in which the DET have dealt with schools. The deep oversight, lack of autonomy and constant audits for all manner of things has led to an environment that feels very much like Big Brother. Many of our newer Principals were taking their lead from DET and there was a sense of learned helplessness underpinning leadership. Some were fearful of making a mistake and/or getting it wrong and the resultant repercussions.

However, during our recent COVID-19 undertakings we encouraged our members to take the lead on the decision-making process in respect to their school. To use common sense and their own judgement about what was best for their particular school. That did happen. It happened for two reasons. In the first instance because much of the advice and guidelines from DET were issued later than most of us would have liked, causing people to make decisions and move ahead of the game. Secondly, and even more importantly, there was a semblance of a return to a relationship of trust. Trust in leaders to run their schools and get things right, just as Principal Class trusted their staff to get on with their job of teaching, engaging and monitoring their students from home.

This is a very good thing, and it is a cultural shift we would like to capture in our return to normal school operations.

One member wrote the following which captures the same view.

There has been a great deal said about the positives that have emerged from remote learning; student independence, increased teacher efficacy, anxious students thriving whilst working from home, the list goes on.

From a principal's perspective there has been another positive to come from this, the realisation that we are incredibly competent, resilient, adaptable, flexible and, you guessed it, able to actually do the job we were employed to do! This pandemic required strong leadership and measured decision making and guess what? Principals stepped up, and guided their communities through a very difficult time.

Principals can competently do the job they were employed to do without being weighed down by micromanagement from the micromanagers. There was no choice, advice was lagging and decisions had to be made. The paralysis to make decisions for fear of reprisals disappeared in the crisis of COVID. That's what came out for this for principals.

Another wrote to me over the weekend:

Did you work out why they (DET) send us briefings and advice after the close of business before a weekend or holidays or Easter, when we have already informed the community of our strategy? It is very infuriating and stress inducing.

This simply reinforces the need to get out in front and lead....don't wait for someone to tell you what to do, and how! While I would never suggest you ignore DET communications, the majority of those who forged ahead got it right, and didn't have to play catch up. Good judgement, finely honed risk management, and a proactive approach combined with local knowledge will never let you down.



VALE

Debbie Locco



The APF mourn the death of our friend and fellow member, who was tragically killed while cycling on Beach Road, Beaumaris on Sunday afternoon.

Debbie was a great educator and her compassionate leadership made her an outstanding Acting Regional Director.

APF Website

<https://apf.net.au>

Members only sections requires log-in. This is the same as was previously used.

If you need this information please text Gemma or Julie. Gemma can respond Mon, Thur & Fri only.

Human & Cultural Leadership coming to the fore! John Handley, APF Advisor



A staged ‘return to normal’ for our schools is an interesting concept as it is difficult to imagine what, from each individual’s perspective, this ‘new’ normal will look like. Assuming most of our students and staff are onsite, the logistics of managing the where and how of learning and playing for students, and the teaching and working on site for teachers, will be first and foremost on the minds of school leaders. DET is providing guidelines and advice on the management of this return. However, it is at the local level any such advice needs to be interpreted and appropriately enacted.

That said, it’s important for our School Principals to remember they are not alone in their schools. There is access to a team of teachers and Ed Support who are available to share the thinking and glean ideas about the better ways forward. These same people have adapted to remote learning, have in many cases shown leadership, worked brilliantly in collaborative teams, and established genuine meaningful relationships with their students and colleagues.



One of the ‘thinking tools’ we can use is ‘imagineering – the implementing of creative ideas into practical form’. In effect, it is an opportunity to think about what the ‘ideal’ return to school might look like and how in the real world we can best make it happen; focussing on enabling students, staff and parents to transition back with confidence and positivity in this surreal time.

It is hard to imagine any such return being a success without sharing the discussions and decision-making amongst a wider group of people. As much as anything, the disruption of this virus on our lives and schools has reminded us of the importance of valuing each other as people; being understanding and empathic of others as we look to re-establish the world to our collective liking; being conscious of the concerns and anxieties of others, and sharing a commitment to minimise them through mutual support and ongoing communication and consultation.



It is timely to remember the Ruby Payne quotation - **“students don’t care what you know until they know you care”**. This could be expanded to have broader context in our current circumstance. We might reflect on what might this entail as we plan our approach to leading our schools. And if we accept the premise that relationships and communication are critical components of effective leadership, particularly now, then our planning could be seen through this lens.

As such we can consider continuing or establishing formal and informal practices to model what is most important to us all. These practices can be as much for our staff as for us as Principals. Examples include re-establishing Leadership Team practices that ensure shared, democratic decision-making; consulting regularly with our Agreement Implementation Committee with a focus again on minimising stresses and discontent, and optimising the sense of shared purpose; having a visible presence through regular visitations to the school yard, classrooms, staff rooms, and, at the beginning and/or end of the school day, gateways; continuing with online communications that have worked well during the remote learning phase; meeting with student bodies like the SRC, and ensuring there is regular individual contact with students and staff alike; and through our School Councils connecting with the wider school community. Whilst time consuming, but achievable if shared



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New members aplenty.

Thank you all for your help in spreading the word.

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



Gemma Naylor
APF Executive Officer

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Join the APF

<https://apf.net.au>

Forms can be completed on-line.

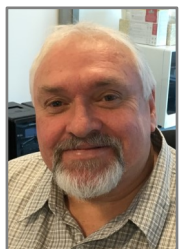
The Union exclusively for the Principal Class

across our Leadership Teams, these practices will be demonstrable to all and sundry that caring for each other is critical to maintaining each other's health and well-being, providing opportunities to understand each other's challenges and ideas to progress, and sharing in establishing the best way forward.

The practical elements and mechanics of the optimal running of our schools to maximise student outcomes will be delivered more effectively with this relationship - oriented approach to school leadership now and for the future.

And never forget, as stated earlier, DET provides us guidelines and advice but School Principals have been appointed to lead, and lead as they see fit.

My advice to Principals is simple - Continue to back yourselves to lead well and to be confident in your ability to do so. You've been remarkable in dealing with the challenges presented so far. Reflect upon and celebrate these achievements, be proud, and be the leader you aspire to be!



The media calls it nepotism: We call it Conflict of Interest. Mark Arkinstall, Industrial Officer

On 20th May, the Victorian Ombudsman Deborah Glass presented her report, *Investigations into Allegations of Nepotism in Government Schools* to Parliament. The report is compelling reading for all School Principals. It can be found at: <https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/our-impact/investigation-reports/>.

She states:

This report draws attention to a problem that has become a regular subject of 'public interest disclosures' to the Ombudsman – nepotism in government schools. It highlights the need for school principals and staff to check and follow integrity obligations, and the need for public authorities to look for effective ways to embed integrity in their workplaces.

Since 2013, the Ombudsman has dealt with more than 20 cases where school principals or staff allegedly gave jobs and contracts to family members, associates or related businesses. Several investigations found that principals failed to declare and in some cases, manage, their conflicts of interest.

The Department of Education and Training has been building a comprehensive policy framework on conflicts of interest since 2010. It provides detailed advice for principals and schools about declaring and managing conflicts of interest.

Despite this, the trend continues. This report discusses three recent investigations into allegations that school principals and staff gave jobs or contracts to family members. In these cases, the principals and staff may have been well-intentioned, but they underestimated the extent of their integrity obligations. Their experiences highlight the need for more work to raise awareness of conflicts of interest in schools.

The Ombudsman decided to table this report to draw attention to:

- the risks for principals, school staff and other public officers who fail to attend to their integrity obligations
- the Department's work to address the problem, and what other public authorities can learn from its experience.

Conflict of Interest (COI) arises in circumstances where an employee's public duty is influenced, or can be seen to be influenced, by a private interest. Conflicts of Interest (COI) can arise for employees at all levels of seniority and in every area of work in the Department. They are an inevitable fact of organisational life and they are not in themselves a sign of wrongdoing, but they create risks which should be identified and managed.



Support for members

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

Julie - 0419 103 664

jpodbury@apf.net.au

Mark - 0418 551 375

industrialofficer@apf.net.au

John—0407 557 862

jjmhandley@gmail.com

Ring us direct

Conflict of Interest

This issue is still causing concerns for some of our members. If in doubt please ring to ask for advice.

I am happy to come to Network or other meetings to present to you on this topic.

Please email me or ring to discuss.



Mark Arkinstall
APF Industrial Officer
Mark - 0418 551 375
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Conflicts of Interest may arise in many everyday activities, including:

Having a family member or friend on staff; Purchasing goods; Recruitment; Engaging contractors; Offers of gifts or benefits; Other employment.

The Ombudsman's report highlights three case studies involving investigations of Victorian government school principals, all of which were referred to the Ombudsman by IBAC between December 2018 and February 2019.

The investigations involved:

- analysing relevant Departmental policies
- obtaining documentary evidence from the Department regarding the relevant recruitment, employment and contracting arrangements
- interviewing the school principals and senior staff members who were the subject of the allegations
- interviewing other relevant department and school staff.



Importantly, the report seeks to protect the identities of those involved.

Some important factors identified in the report include:

- The three cases in this report were not cases of corrupt staff deliberately disregarding their obligations as public officers. They were cases of people who were trying to solve problems quickly, but in doing so underestimated their obligations to avoid, declare and manage conflicts of interest.
- The three cases in this report occurred in spite of the Department's comprehensive policy framework on conflict of interest and nepotism in schools. All of the Principals were unclear about their obligations to declare a conflict of interest when hiring family members. They failed to make the required declarations at the time, and failed to document their plans to manage their conflicts. They often delegated recruitment and management of family members to subordinates, who may feel pressure to follow principals' suggestions. Other school staff interviewed by investigators had not read the Department's policies in their entirety, or at all.
- The Department told investigators it has done more to communicate its policies since 2018, when these cases first came to light, however significant systemic challenges exist. (Eg. Sheer size of the organisation, principals that are time poor and under constant pressure at work, complexity of the policy framework, etc.) Further, the Department acknowledges the issues raised in the report and continues to work towards resolving these.
- Confusion about volunteer and casual employment. To be clear, the same conflict of interest obligations apply for both casual employees and volunteers as for substantive employees.

In a message to principals, the Ombudsman states: ***My message to principals and others is simple: Leadership starts at the top. I would far rather not be using my precious investigative resources to investigate allegations of nepotism. If you can, avoid hiring your partners, children, friends or other associates. In any event, be aware of the rules – and the consequences of getting it wrong.***

We urge you to be aware of your obligations with regard to conflicts of interest and to heed the message from the Ombudsman.

Should APF members believe they may be at risk of an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest, you are strongly encouraged to contact the APF for further advice.



Role of the APF:

Industrial Relations 101

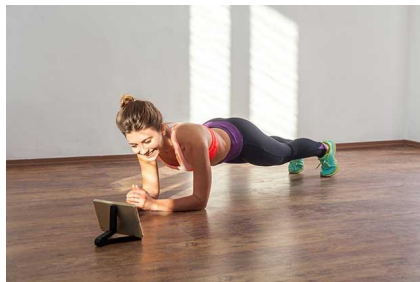
At the APF consistent with industrial relations '101' we are concerned with matters such as your salaries, classification, entitlements, protections, contracts of employment and amongst other matters, the manner in which you are assessed and the consequences thereof.

Further, your access to industrial and/or legal advice, advocacy and support in relation to matters of discipline, conflict resolution, conflict of interest, complaints and/or performance.

Industrial Relations 102

Industrial matters arising from the management and implementation of one's professional role. Specifically as a function of the Principal Class Employee interpreting and performing their accountabilities and obligations as defined by their contract of employment; the operation of industrial agreements, Ministerial Orders and the changing compliance environment determined by legislation, regulations and policy.

Principal Health & Wellbeing- webinars and a virtual gym



A new series of free webinars to support your health and wellbeing has just been launched by the Department of Education and Training. These webinars cover a range of topics designed to provide practical tips and tools to help you with a variety of different issues that you may be experiencing.

There is a 'Leading for Wellbeing' series, designed to empower school leaders to support the wellbeing of their staff through practical strategies and good practice management approaches.

The 'Staying safe and well' webinar series is great for all staff and covers topics such as managing anxiety, having wellbeing conversations with peers and building resilience in times of uncertainty.

I encourage you to visit the [Health and Wellbeing webinars intranet page](#) to learn more about the webinars on offer and find the topics that will be most useful for you at this time. There will be a number of sessions available at different days and times, and recorded highlights and tip sheets will become available after the sessions for those who cannot attend.

The Department also recently launched a virtual gym, available for all staff to access. It contains many free video workouts for you to do during your own time, from cardio to yoga, meditation to barre. With new workouts being added every fortnight. There is also a library of healthy recipes and other information and articles to support your health and wellbeing. Find out more about this initiative in the recent [Schools Update](#) article.

For the full range of resources to support your health and wellbeing can be found on the [COVID-19 Health, Safety and Wellbeing Supports for Schools](#) page.

Return to School Bastow Webinar Series for Principals

In partnership with GENOS International, Bastow is presenting the *Leading in Challenging Times* webinar series for principals, leadership teams and teachers. This builds on the very successful webinars series offered earlier this term focused on: *Boosting Psychological Well-being, Remote Control and Leading Remotely* with over 5000 staff participating.

The Leading in Challenging times themes are:

Leading others; Leading learning and re-establishing school community; Leading self

The sessions are interactive, feature principal colleagues are research-informed and provide practical tools and techniques that can immediately be applied to *leading others, leading learning and re-establishing community and leading self*. The webinars are designed as a suite and/or stand alone, with participants selecting sessions relevant to their context and interests. The webinars are also an excellent leadership team activity – we recommend individual registrations to support engagement in the activities.

Each webinar is scheduled on a day/date i.e the **28 May** for 60-minutes and will run twice at **10:00am and 4:30pm** – See the [Bastow website for more information on the sessions and timing](#).

The following may be helpful

DET website <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/coronavirus.aspx>

DHHS website <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>

Ideas - lesson plans <https://www.teritotoi.org/classroom-support/>

Trauma aware approach to return to school https://www.raftpsychology.com/news/gvid0efdvmfmjw4r9xxly04rwrjd0o?fbclid=IwAR3_aKEiDj6ajqaUyJClApSORWcrjUxCml1AHvGslveRE4I-SCHgApixfA

Social story <https://www.teachingresilience.com.au/post/social-story-back-to-school-after-covid-19>

Teaching resilience - blog [https://www.teachingresilience.com.au/blog-1?](https://www.teachingresilience.com.au/blog-1?fbclid=IwAR1rnZnZmiNUmUfSXhiN9wUp5gkSli8S_SPzzDcsgX8ULOLCddPX7YkO95k)

[fbclid=IwAR1rnZnZmiNUmUfSXhiN9wUp5gkSli8S_SPzzDcsgX8ULOLCddPX7YkO95k](https://www.teachingresilience.com.au/blog-1?fbclid=IwAR1rnZnZmiNUmUfSXhiN9wUp5gkSli8S_SPzzDcsgX8ULOLCddPX7YkO95k)

Positive schools series <https://PositiveSchools.webinarninja.com/series-webinars/2271/register>

The Union for Government School Principals

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



Blog 18 - School's Back

Oh gosh, what do we do now? The teachers are back, the kids are back and the parents are locked out the front. Not the end of the world, some of you might be thinking. You've planned your drop off and pick up times, the lunch time is staggered and you've bought so much hand sanitiser that you should've bought shares. (don't forget to fill in your Personal Interests Declaration) So the question now is, what's next? Let's have a look at our stakeholders and think about where things are at.

Staff

Don't know about your place, but my sense was there was a mix of emotions on the return to school. In our morning meeting, there were a lot of questions about cleaning and sanitising. There is a real worry about personal safety and it's going to take time for that to subside. I've deliberately minimised my expectations for the next month. We will worry about reading levels, assessment, data and ILP's after the holidays. Back to building relationships with their class. Some students have missed over a term of school as their parents pulled them out early. My student wellbeing team developed some great check in activities for teachers to use over next few weeks. (happy to share if you reach out)

We laughed about this today, but the alcohol dependency issue is real. Teachers like most of the community will have developed a unhealthy reliance on a glass or 4 of wine at the end of each day. Talking with staff about general wellbeing, but in particular sleep will be important in working through the next month.

Students

They want to see their friends. The excitement will be real, let them talk and let them play (non-contact of course). Lots of our kids will have had minimal contact with their friends, some sadly none at all. We will be going back to the beginning of the year, relationship building will be paramount.

That being said, the need to push ahead with learning is essential. From the first year of school to VCE there will be different a different level of pressure. Our prep teachers will be frustrated they have to teach the group to sit on the floor and listen again, whilst the Year 12 Physics students will be panicking about their study score. As much as we say don't worry and focus on rebuilding relationships, our teachers are too proud and will look at this as a challenge. We need to coach, mentor and support more than ever.



Parents

The only issue with keeping parents out of the school grounds is we aren't really going to see how they are travelling until we get those one on one catch up conversations. With most parent teacher conferences now post-poned until term 3, you want to avoid the anxiety build up. You need to think about what you're parents want and need to know. You might need to think differently about what information you will be sharing. At first they will be happy the kids are back at school, but what next?

- How are their friendships going?
- Have they progressed with their reading levels?
- How did they go in the maths test?
- Are they doing all their homework?
- What are their learning habits?
- Are they focussed?



There needs to be some data sharing with parents in term 3. The modified report is what we need now, but you need to think about how you will communicate progress in term 3. As a parent, I want clear data about where my child is tracking academically, is he behaving himself and is he getting along with his friends? We need to rethink your communications process for term 3 and get something planned. My plan is to develop a modified individual education plan for each child

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that will contain this information and be given out in term 3. Yes, it will be work for teachers, but necessary for parents to maintain trust in your school.

Nothing about this year is normal!

And remember, you have never been a principal in a pandemic before.

APF Member, Mark McKelson, has been a member of the principal class at a number of schools across Victoria and is currently the principal at Camberwell South PS. He is writing these "blogs" based on his experiences, in support of new or acting principal members of the APF, for the APF Newsletter. The opinions expressed are his own and do not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the APF.



Chatham PS students expressing appreciation to their teachers yesterday.



While the past 2 months saw the entire world shelter away from each other in the hope of stopping the spread of COVID-19, I can't help but feel closer to my team due to their amazing efforts. With some very long days and weekend work also thrown in, it feels like we've run a group marathon.

The challenges we all faced were difficult and often without clear guidance. While the federal government made statements, state governments determined the direction and guidelines. This provided an added level of complexity for companies, like us, that operate across multiple borders.

Whilst we were not always given timely guidance from our regulators, we focused on providing clear communication and assurance to our stakeholders. We were certainly blessed to receive many warm messages from our partnered schools thanking us for our ongoing and honest communication throughout this period. We even conducted some group online sessions with Principals so we could both share our plans and provide the opportunity for our schools to question each other and share their insights.

Many of you may have seen communication from our CEO, Michael Abela, who stated *"Our focus during this time was never to make money, it was about sustaining the industry as a whole."* Our goal was to maintain our workforce so that when School based learning resumed our team would provide the continuity of care that is the basis for quality outcomes. During the Holiday Program and the term, despite low attendance numbers we ran services to provide care for essential services workers. Importantly, whilst the commercial conditions have been difficult and some providers have refused to pay, our goal was to continue to make a material contribution to our school partners.

As schools begin the transition back to 'normal', it's hard to know what 'normal' will actually look like. From an operational point of view some of the changes we have made such as mandatory hand sanitisers, more robust cleaning and wiping down of surfaces will stay in place. The importance of providing a space for children to be engaged and have fun has only been emphasised given what they have experienced.

We're looking forward to the time when we can support your community endeavours by throwing another snag on the BBQ to sell at a school fete, sponsoring some fireworks for family open night and donating funds towards some incredible art shows. The challenges of this term has highlighted to many schools the disconnection and gaps with their current OSHC provider. We are always happy to start a conversation with you about improving the quality outcomes at your school and making your life easier.

Kind Regards,

Steve Baldock | National Partnerships
0438 390 300 | steveb@theircare.com.au



TheirCare, your quality out of school hours care provider

Talk to us about how we can make a difference to your School and Community Steve 0438 390 300