

Australian Principals Federation

President's Message—Julie Podbury



A tough weekend!

This weekend just gone has been one of calls and emails from a disturbing number of angry, frustrated and anxious members. The level of bungling and incompetence that has been displayed in handling school COVID-19 infections has been staggering. From no communication to cross communication with opposing and/or confusing messages often very late at night regarding school closure for the next day.

I don't claim to understand what the problem is, but believe that the DHHS must be completely under resourced and manned by people who are exhausted and not functioning fully or do not understand what a school is and how it operates. It seems, according to media reports, we are managing this pandemic using outdated bureaucratic processes, when a military style operation is needed. My recommendation would be to have DET take over all communications with schools to avoid this poorly executed messaging by DHHS.

According to the Operations Guide, update issued 27 July you are required to do the following if you have a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 at your school.

The Department of Education and Training has comprehensive procedures in place with the Department of Health and Human Services to manage suspected or confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in schools. Contact the Department of Health and Human Services on 1300 651 160 to discuss what to do next if a student or staff member:

is a confirmed case

has been in close contact with a confirmed case.

This is not the experience of frustrated members. Phones are not always answered and DHHS advice is not forthcoming and often utterly confusing, with completely conflicting guidance about what to do next. One principal when asking DHHS about deep cleaning was helpfully told to spray disinfectant around. (NOTE: DET looks after the Deep cleaning not DHHS)

Schools should also inform the Department by making an [IRIS incident alert](#).

Department of Health and Human Services defines 'close contact' as someone who has either:

had at least 15 minutes of face-to-face contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19)

shared a closed space for more than two hours with someone who is a confirmed case.

Unless you have a student or staff member in one of the two above categories, you do not need to take further action, unless directed to do so.

Principals are required to determine close contact, with little or no idea of what exactly transpires in the classrooms or out of class unless they interrogate staff. The information required for the DHHS is extensive and takes an age to assemble and requires you to provide names, mobile numbers, DOB, Parents names and mobile, date of last contact, nature of contact and information about symptoms and testing re individuals who are likely close contacts. In one school there were hundreds of individuals to be listed, based on the criteria provided.

Contact tracing does not appear to be happening swiftly or at all and often schools are being asked to contact families and let them know that a contact from DHHS is coming, and then this doesn't occur. Further anxiety is created unnecessarily.

Staff, parents and students are frightened. Principals are weighed down with anxiety.

In this Issue

Managing COVID-19 is beginning to unravel for school leaders which is covered on the first two pages.

The issue of deep cleaning of closed schools highlights some issues on P3

APF communicate to Regions about a way to build the positive messages about flexible learning and manage complaining parents on P3.

Given how unhappy many individuals are at present we look at managing microaggressions on P6

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.

Once advised of a school closure they are given no further information. The lengthy silences are deafening and principals are not permitted to make contact with their community, until they receive the official communication and the letters for parents from DET.

When there is no, slow or limited communication parents fill the gaps with their own assumptions and accusations in writing or via social media.

I have included a sample of communications from our Principals over this past weekend to give you a sense of their justifiable frustration with trying their best to deal with dysfunctional bureaucratic processes. Our Principals feel as if they are being put at risk and failed by the system.

“.....Saturday (yesterday) evening, I received a call from DHHS asking for the contact list. I asked why, as I was told by DET that the student wasn't contagious. They stated she was, but she would check with her manager. Two call-backs later, the news is yes, she was contagious, the school would need to shut down for cleaning, please provide us with the contact list. I did that and made all the required calls and emails to DET region staff and Incident Management.....”

“....Meanwhile, we have been at school for 9 days and are now being told to close for deep cleaning.... I haven't told staff yet as I'm waiting on the approval to shut the school from DET. My trust in the process is gone. The trust parents and staff have in me will be significantly eroded.....”

“See below an email I just received from a parent. I absolutely agree with her! Unfortunately this slow and poor communication (Scripted DET & DHHS comms..APF edit) is causing unneeded angst. When this is all over and done I still have to have a relationship with the parent community that, I fear, will have been irreparably damaged.” (Email criticised the official comms because it was vague and did not name the individual teacher...and parents demanded to know who it was. APF)

Another school was asked why they had not returned the DHHS spreadsheet identifying close contacts, 2 weeks after the event. The school had never received it.

One school was given notification by DET to reopen because deep cleaning and contract tracing had been completed and yet the school is aware of no students that have been contacted by DHHS. Today, Tuesday 28th July, they are closed again so contact tracing can begin.

One school had been contacted by WorkSafe and was told they would be required to produce Policies, Process, Training and Information re COVID-19 for an investigation as to why there had been an outbreak at that school. Fortunately, DET stepped in and stopped that from happening. As if there is not enough stress and anxiety for the Principal.

There are so many more examples, however, it is a repeating story.

The APF members are demanding 2 things.

- 1. Take DHHS out of the picture. Let DET deal with school closures, communication and school level contact tracing. In collaboration with schools DET can manage this best themselves.***
- 2. For the sake of the wellbeing of staff, students and principals let VCE classes return to remote and flexible learning.***

What is happening now is an increasingly unmanageable nightmare for schools. We need authoritative action to be taken now!



Podium 2,
Tooronga Village,
766 Toorak Road,
Glen Iris, 3146.
Tel: 0412 584 002

***Welcome to
all the new
members.***

**** 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

gnaylor@apf.net.au

Join the APF

<https://apf.net.au>

*Forms can be
completed on-line.*

The Union exclusively for the Principal Class

Deep Cleaning

Many have been caught unaware when a school is abruptly closed because of a COVID-19 infection. When a school is closed you cannot get back in to get your laptop or teaching materials.

I am informed that the deep cleaning process is pretty invasive. An anonymous teacher wrote the following”



“We have been closed now for approximately 7 days. No access at all. Can't get anything out.

Any spaces that the infected person has gone the cleaners have been brutal. They have thrown posters in the bin, they throw any paper that is lying around in the bin, they literally throw anything that might have been in contact with the person in the bin. You have no say as to what goes in the bin. On top of that ,they spray chemicals everywhere. They sprayed people's clothing , decks, cups, materialseverything.

Some advice for teachers

1. Every night you leave, leave with the knowledge that you might not be allowed back in for days or weeks.
2. Take your laptop charger home....very hard getting extra ones. Take anything off the server you MIGHT need.
3. Take your chronicle and any work that you need for the next two weeks at minimum. We were told we were locked down for 72 hours....it's been approximately 7 days and DHHS haven't started tracing so we don't know when we will be back in.
4. Keep your desk clean, put away stuff that is important to you as it will be sprayed
5. Lock up any material in cupboards so they can't be thrown out..eg paper, supplies , glue sticks etc.”

Communication to Parents from Regions

Some of our members have recently expressed their deep concern about the number of parents complaining about schools in flexible learning mode. Many of these complaints went straight to the region, with no attempt to even raise the matter at the school level. Of course this arises where parents compare school A with school B, and start thinking well hang on my kids are getting duded because school A is running the sort of program I want for my child.

We were concerned about the additional pressure on members answering to these complaints, when there is enough to do. We also believe that the message to parents should be consistent across the state, and the DET should praise schools and their leaders, for the amazing job they are doing. Because every school is different and they are all doing an amazing job.

This is what we wrote to the Regional Directors:

Dear Jeanette, Terry, Wendy & Angela,

As we move into the next phase of remote learning it is becoming more prevalent for Principals and Regions to be fielding concerns from parents.

It is our belief that Principals and their staff have been extraordinary in their efforts to meet the needs of students and their communities throughout this pandemic. Such effort is no doubt being undertaken by



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

industrialofficer@apf.net.au

many Regional and Central office staff as well.

With increasing pressure being brought to bear with this second phase of remote learning, it is important that schools, and particularly Principals, are explicitly supported by the Department. One of the big takeaways from the earlier phase of remote learning was the increased trust built up between schools and Regional/Central office. The greater empowerment of Principals, and they with their staff, was such a strong feature.

It is vital that such trust is further fostered now.

One avenue for this to occur is with how the Department, usually at Regional level, responds to Parent Complaints/Concerns about school practices. An opportunity is presented that is so important not to miss.

We have drafted a 'Sample Response Letter' that reinforces both the importance of each Principal's responsibility to engage effectively with their community, and the Department's trust in School Leadership. It also provides explicit detail of Department guidelines as presented to schools.

We believe such a response, or similar, will be of enormous value to unity building, and the sense of support and confidence the Department has for Principals and their schools. I trust this tool may be of some use in the next few weeks for CLO's and SEIL's

Kind Regards, etc.

What follows is the Sample Response Letter.

Dear Parent

Thank you for your communication regarding your concerns about

In the first instance, it is preferable that any concerns are communicated to the School Principal who is in the best position to understand their context. I have contacted Principal of with our expectation being that he/she will communicate with you as soon as possible.

With the pandemic of the COVID-19 virus, schools, parents and students are being impacted and challenged in ways most of us could only imagine. We are all grappling with the best ways to normalise learning for the students in our school system and we recognise there are differences in context and environment for schools and homes across the expanse of Victoria. We are also cognisant of the impact of these circumstances on the mental and physical health and well-being of all concerned.

A common thread for schools continues to be in optimising a sense of community during these times. The Department of Education has created guidelines for schools to support the provision of learning. These include:

1. All students will be learning from home, except for students in the following categories

- a. Students enrolled in Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) or Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) programs and those students enrolled in specialist schools
- b. Children on days when they are not able to be supervised at home and no other arrangements can be made. This will be available for children of parents who cannot work from home, any student with a disability and vulnerable children, including:
 - children in out-of-home care
 - children deemed by Child Protection and/or Family Services to be at risk of harm
 - children identified by the school as vulnerable (including via referral from a family violence agency, homelessness or youth justice service or mental health or other health service).

2. On-site provision

- a. On-site provision will be available at all government schools, but only for students in the categories listed above, for the purpose of providing continuity of teaching, learning and support.
- b. When on-site learning is provided, temperature checks will be conducted (see Section 4), hand



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.



sanitiser will be available at the entry points to classrooms and education will be provided on hand hygiene. Physical distancing will be implemented in classrooms to the extent feasible and unwell students will be excluded from attending. The Chief Health Officer (CHO) has not recommended the use of face masks in schools.

- c. The learning program delivered on-site will be the same as the learning program delivered to students undertaking remote learning. Students learning on-site will be supervised by school staff on-site but follow the teaching and learning program provided by their classroom teacher.
- d. Students attending on-site must be supervised at all times by staff with either current Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registration or a Working with Children Check. Education Support staff can provide direct support to and supervision of students, provided they have access to support from a VIT registered teacher.
- e. It continues to be the principal's responsibility to make the school-based decisions required to deliver Government education objectives

3. Home and On-site Learning Programs

- a. The learning program delivered on-site will be the same as the learning program delivered to students undertaking remote learning.
- b. The following are the daily minimum guidelines schools are expected to meet for students in Prep to 10:
 - For students in Prep to Grade 2, schools will provide learning programs that include the following:
 - ⇒ literacy activities that take a total of about 45-60 minutes
 - ⇒ numeracy activities of about 30-45 minutes
 - ⇒ additional learning areas, play-based learning and physical activity of about 30-45 minutes.
 - For students in Grades 3 to 6 and Years 7 to 10, schools will provide learning programs allocated as follows:
 - ⇒ Literacy: 45-60 minutes
 - ⇒ Numeracy: 30-45 minutes
 - ⇒ Physical activities: 30 minutes
 - ⇒ Additional curriculum areas: 90 minutes
- c. English language schools and English language centres, Tech schools, KIOSC and Maths and Science Specialist Centres in these areas should offer remote learning opportunities

4. Access to teaching and learning resources for students at home

- a. For students who do not have access to digital technologies at home, schools will loan existing devices, including those previously provided by the Department of Education and Training (DET).
- b. Where additional devices are required, these will be provided by the Department where schools have used a range of funding sources, including equity funding and CSE funding, to purchase equipment to be loaned to students free-of-charge.
- c. The Department will also provide network access to the extent possible for students who may not be able to connect at home.
- d. Schools are also able to provide hard copies of learning resources in the event of an internet outage or in cases where it is not possible for students to have any digital access.
- e. Schools must follow e-safety policies and procedures.

A 'typical school day' is not likely to be as it was before these periods of remote learning. As our schools do have variability of context, it is each school's responsibility to use these guidelines to provide best possible learning and support experience to their students.

Our schools are well placed to judge the capacity of their students to access the programs of remote learning, and to understand the challenges of families to support their children during this time. Schools will be making every effort to cater for difference, just as has been the expectation in normal classroom learning.

The reality is there is no one way for the learning experience and communication with students and parents to be undertaken.

The Department of Education and its schools have learnt from the first phase of remote learning. We expect the skill sets of schools and their teachers have improved in practice. This includes the manner and

PANDEMIC AFTERMATH

Amid the profound disruptions of the Covid-19 crisis there's a lot of grief.

The emotions that often accompany grief are denial, anger, bargaining, sadness, and acceptance. Not everyone will be at the same stage at the same time... If people seem unusually angry, we should give them space and exercise patience.

Colleagues may include the worried well who may be grieving the loss of normalcy, opportunities, family gatherings, holidays and other joys. They may anticipate future deprivations; some are minimisers, playing down the severity of problems, while others are maximisers – the sky is falling. Work helps each group balance their minds.

Studies have found that one of the most important variables in people's happiness in a workplace is how they are treated in difficult times: *When my loved one died, my supervisor invited me into her office and asked, "How are you doing today? How can I support you?"*

(continued in the next column)

frequency schools interact with students and parents. Learning programs are likely to be more structured with more on-line communication. This will be balanced with freedom for households with working from home parents to adjust the timeframe of the learning day to suit their circumstance.

As a Department we are proud of the enormous commitment our School Principals and their staff are making to meet these challenges.

I hope that this begins to answer your query and that your family stay safe and keep well.

Should you not be able to resolve your concerns with the school, you are welcome to contact me again at your convenience.

Kind Regards etc;

NOTE: DET have subsequently contacted us and advised that as much as is possible they will be attempting to resolve these matters by phone and they should not need to get to the level of letters. While this may be the desired approach, I can name a few members that wish this had been what happened for them.

Microaggressions are so commonplace that it seems hardly worth it to respond. What are microaggressions? The term was coined in the 1970s by Harvard psychiatrist Chester Pierce, and more recently updated in several books by Derald Wing Sue, a professor of counselling psychology at Columbia.

His definition: everyday slights, indignities, put-downs and insults that members of marginalised groups experience in their day-to-day interactions with individuals who are often unaware that they have engaged in an offensive or demeaning way.

If the person is in your everyday life, it's probably a good idea to address it. But it's important to think it through before reacting

THESE QUESTIONS CAN HELP

If I respond, could my physical safety be in danger?

If I respond, will the person become defensive, and will this lead to an argument?

If I respond, how will this affect my relationship with this person (colleague, family member, etc.)?

If I don't respond, will I regret not saying something?

If I don't respond, does that convey that I accept the behaviour or statement?

Having considered these questions and decided to go ahead and speak up, it's important to think about goals. Do you simply want to be heard or are you more interested in educating the other person and letting them know they did something wrong?

THREE APPROACHES

Ask for clarification. For example, *Could you say more about what you mean by that?* or *How have you come to think that?*

Separating intent from impact. For example, *I know you didn't realise this, but when you --- (comment, behaviour), it was hurtful/offensive because ---. Instead, you could --- (different language or behaviour).*

Share your own process. For example, *I noticed that you --- (comment/behaviour). I used to do/say that too, but then I learned ---*

If we want people to hear what we're saying and potentially change their behaviour, we have to think about approaches that will not immediately make them defensive.

Acknowledgement: "How to Respond to Microaggressions" by Hahna Yoon in *The New York Times*, March 3, 2020, Principal's Digest July 2020



Work can become a place where colleagues support one another and where managers take care of their workers and allow them to grieve. The pandemic will be remembered as an extraordinarily difficult time. But the slow process of returning to a new normal – of naming our grief, helping one another reach acceptance, and finding meaning – will continue.

For leaders that moment will be an opportunity.

"Helping Your Team Heal"
by David Kessler in
Harvard Business Review,
July-August 2020

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