

Australian Principals Federation



President's Message—Julie Podbury

Last Newsletter!

This is my last newsletter for the year, and my last as President of the APF. The irony is that it has been such an extraordinary year in which the **Victorian Principal Class** have borne a huge workload and led in such an incredible manner to serve and protect their staff, students and communities. The APF have provided continuous 7 day a week support as always, over this period. It has been an honour for me to serve my colleagues to support and advocate for them during my term, however, this has been even more important this year.

It has been an outstanding privilege to have served with so many exceptional individuals such as those on our Executive & Council. Most important of all, I have been blessed by having the opportunity to work with the incredible **Mark Arkinstall**. Mark is in my view, the backbone of the APF, an honourable and values driven individual, who is not afraid to make the tough call and speak honestly to our members. He never misleads them in giving his fair, firm and frank advice. He is patient and kind and an absolute workhorse in terms of the hours he gives our members. I have worked with a couple of incredible members of the Principal Class over my 45 years or more years in education, but Mark Arkinstall towers above them. I have learnt so much from him in my time as President and feel that he lifted my knowledge and skills to a much higher level over the journey.

Gemma Naylor our Executive Officer has been a joy to work with. Over the past year we have largely worked more than 100ks apart, but have made that work. She has drive, enthusiasm and continues to challenge our practices to drive improvement for our members.

John Handley, Ian Sloane and David Finnerty have also been part of the team and have supported the APF, myself and members in the work they have done. Their generosity and guidance has been incredibly valuable and I am deeply appreciative of their continued support.

The work of the APF has continued and for the last 12 months Mark Arkinstall, John Handley and I have handled more than **550 matters** for members, a third of which have required a great deal of time and effort to support a colleague facing extreme difficulty. While protection and advocacy for the Principal Class remains a key part of the work we undertake, support for members remains the most critical and important aspect of that work. However, I was very proud of the work where we collaborated with **Parents Victoria**, in the production of our booklet **Let's Do it Together**. This was a proactive project designed to try to prevent some of the appalling situations in which our colleagues find themselves in at times, almost at war with parents.

Since January a team of us have worked, under the leadership of David Finnerty, to put together the **APF Log of Claims** which was served on the DET on 13th October, this submission aims to preserve the role of the Principal Class in a way to harness and support their capacity to endure and lead effectively, and not simply burn people out.

Where a group of teachers takes on a Principal or Principal Class, we are left to support the Principals Class member; there have been times when this support becomes a suicide watching brief. We have seen Principal Class members lives destroyed and they, through NO FAULT of their own, are broken so completely that they struggle to function at any level again. Until we, the Principal Class are properly recognised for the work we do, with our own Agreement, and the bulk of Victorian Principal Class are members of the APF, we will continue to be treated as unimportant in the scheme of things. We must endure to achieve this goal and each of you has an important role to recruit members to strengthen the organisation. Failure to do so will leave the Principal Class effectively unsupported into the future.

Working with DET. We have done considerable work with DET over that 5 years and many



In this Issue:

We have packed a huge amount into this issue.

Member feedback on the **Ops Guide timing commences** on P2; Feedback on the **Minister's use of Social Media to make announcements** is on P3; Feedback on the APF fee increase is on P3.

In the column on P3 we provide an **EBA report**.

John Handley provides a **Reflection on Principalship** over the five years since he left his school commencing on **P4**

On P6 is an offer for students (disadvantaged and/or disengaged) related to the film & TV Industry. This comes from **Laura Waters**, producer of **Summer Heights High**.

Attached with this newsletter is an index of the past 12 months of newsletters as requested by some members.

APF Website

<https://apf.net.au>

The Union exclusively for the Principal Class



members of the bureaucracy and regional leaders have told me they are deeply grateful for the input of the APF and the role we play in schools which is not divisive but supportive and solution focussed.

Finally, I have been deeply impressed by Tina King as I have come to work closely with her over recent months and I leave the role of President, comforted in the knowledge that I have done my best to put the APF on a good footing and that Tina will take the organisation to the next level.

Member Feedback—Term 4 Operational Guide Update!

The timing of this sent many members into a spin, particularly in respect to graduations and transition arrangements. We reminded members that this is a guide and not an instruction manual. As leaders of our schools we must evaluate all the elements and determine what is the best in keeping with the safety and wellbeing of the students, the staff and the community in reaching a decision about the changes offered. Some schools made wholesale changes, some made minor adjustments to plans and then stuck with the original arrangements. That said the reaction of our some principals is not unexpected or unreasonable.

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“This government now does not care one bit about principals! Its very clear.

I’ve quickly called an informal prin class meeting tonight to try to work out how to tackle these new announcements.

Despite the fact I am trying to put 2 kids to bed.

We were told to organise a virtual graduation - we did, it took a few meetings and some hours of planning by our grade 6 teachers. We thought our kids were worth more than a Facebook live event so hired a professional mob to do it properly. Now is this planning all null and void? I don't know but we will certainly have plenty of phone calls and some disgruntled parents if we stick with our plans.

We have spent time doing virtual meetings for prep parents. Organised groups of 10 kids and an entire timetable that has thrown many things into chaos for prep transition....but wanted to run a prep transition as we were allowed. Now I will be opening the school up on Saturdays so our parents can "tour our school". If I was a parent I'd want to tour the school if I could too!

Our Christmas celebrations have been organised and some have been filmed (since we were organising it virtually). Where does all this planning sit now?

So, needless to say, myself and AP's cop more sleepless nights, strained relationships with parents and planning that will need to be thrown out the window despite the hours put into it.

I'll rock up to work tomorrow with a smile on my face.....but.....I'm close to breaking.

Thanks again for your advocacy and ongoing support as always!”

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“Hi Julie – I am writing this at 7.01pm in frustration while trying to get my three kids ready for bed.

This email tonight is nearly the straw to break the camel's back. To receive it at 6.30pm and CHANGE EVERYTHING to do with transition and graduation after WEEKS of stressing and planning to make these things happen for our community. There are just over three weeks of the year to go. Graduation in two weeks. Parents breathing down our necks as how we can do it and make it 'wonderful' for their children. We feel we have done it. NOW they will be demanding to come on site to watch the graduation and we have no idea how we are going to make this happen. Yet here I am, now stressing about how we are going to adjust graduation when the note has gone



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**Thank you for
advocating for
the APF—our
membership
growth is
fantastic.**

**I am available to
assist you
Monday to
Friday.**



Gemma Naylor
APF Executive
Officer

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Join the APF

<https://apf.net.au>

Forms can be
completed on-line.

out.

This is on top of ‘briefings’ being thrown at us at a days notice, that actually tell us nothing.

Recruitment that needs to be done with only a few weeks to go.

I am really sorry to send you such a negative email – and in no way does this have anything to do with you. It’s just so frustrating – normally I go with the flow and just filter things out and get the job done but I, just like a few other principals I have been speaking to, are feeling overwhelmed and this is just crazy. With a couple of weeks to go could they just not leave it as it was... parents are used to not being on the school site.... COVID-19 is not over....”

Member Feedback—Keeping devices - Minister’s announcement via Facebook.

The Loan computers program seems to me to be the worst thought-through initiative in recent history. There are so many issues with this that will create major headaches and disadvantage for schools that I can’t believe it got through any scrutiny at all.

Here are but a few:

Example 1: We loaned out hundreds of devices that were previously a large portion of our classroom fleet. Many were older. Almost all were leased with payments still owing and with insurance still owing. If we get a reduced amount in return for aging computers, we face a 3:1 price disadvantage. i.e. if we get compensation for 200 computers at 1/3 of the cost, we face, not only continuing insurance and lease costs, but only enough money paid to the school to buy 63 computers! That not only commits us to ongoing payments but reduces our classroom fleet dramatically. That’s just one of so many issues that schools will face.

Example 2: We are currently trying to convince our year 3 parents to buy into our Years 4-6 BYOD program. We have the lowest take up in 5 years to this program because of the disincentive of this “get one free” program. It’s destroying a highly successful program that has been running in the school for 8 years now.

Example 3: Who repairs and maintains these computers? Not my techs, I hope. What happens with the software on them? Until the lease is finished, these computers are school-owned. Who is responsible for security, repairs, theft, damage..... the list goes on.

Example 4: There is no way we will allow these devices to be brought to school because the security issues are horrendous. What then, do we gain? What do students gain other than a cheap gaming machine.

This vote winner for the government, is a disaster for schools. I’m prepared to say, “Keep your money and I’ll keep my computers.”

Unless they are prepared to give me a “new for old” deal, this will put our computer program back 5 years in terms of student ratios.”

Member feedback—Membership fees.

Just wanted to let you know that I would gladly pay double the membership fees for the outstanding support, and understanding ‘ear’ that the APF provides.

You are all appreciated and deserve every dollar (plus more) that you receive.

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The support I receive is well worth it...!!!Thanks

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There is no need to apologise for the price increase. The value of APF membership is well worth it. You all did an amazing job. Thank you!

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We certainly do get value for money, so I’m happy to pay the extra few dollars ☺

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The APF saved my life. I’ll be happy to pay whatever you charge!



THE EBA

The bargaining process has begun for our next Agreement.

The preliminary meeting was held on 2nd December, and protocols agreed to.

There are two more meetings this year, with bargaining proper commencing in early 2021.

David Finnerty is leading our team, and he has been on the APF team for our last 4 negotiations.

Tina King, President Elect, as well as Vice President, Andrew Cock, and Treasurer, Wendy Powson will be on the team. At the request of the APF Council I will also remain on the team, as I have participated in the last 2 negotiations.

We will try to provide regular reports to members where appropriate.

The current agreement expires at the end of April 2021.

A Reflection on Principals, John Handley, APF Advisor



I have been reflecting on the life of a Principal today with an eye to what it was like when I was last a practising Principal.

I retired from Principals at the end of 2015 after nearly twenty - five years in the Principal class with the Department of Education. I recall my final years fondly but with some realism for the toll it was taking in balancing my focus as an Educational Leader with the many other aspects of the role. At the time I found there to be a disconnect between my role in building an inclusive

learning community, what was going on in my school with the machinations of the Department. In effect, as I was Principal of a school endeavouring to be sustainably high performing, a school 'on the rise', it seemed I was left to my own devices without advice or interference from the region or central office. I recognised that such relative 'independence' was not the case for many of my peers across the state. This isn't meant to be a criticism but an honest observation.

As I was a member of the APF Executive, I had insights into the challenges of Principals across the system as well as the opportunity to be on Departmental working parties like the SRP group. In the ensuing five years, as an APF advisor I have continued to participate in DET Working Groups including what was the FISO group and the Initial Teacher Education group. This work presented opportunities for APF, VASSP, VPA and AEU to hear first-hand, and provide advice and insights to DET staff as they planned policy, communication and implementation practices. My representative work was complemented by my time supporting Principals. Parallel to this I have enjoyed an opportunity to support Principals through the Bastow Principal Class Mentoring program.

Through each of these roles I have been acutely aware of the rapidly changing expectations and tensions for Principals, and the machinations of DET central office and Regions. Similarly, I have observed the increasing disparities in challenges for schools across the state – increasing inequalities of access to quality teachers and education support staff including well-being personnel, highly varying experience, knowledge and understanding of leadership, amazingly varying school facilities, access to funding especially locally raised funds, and not to mention in students their range of achievement and well-being realities.

These disparities are playing out with a similarly varying approach of SEILs and other regional leaders with our Principals. I've observed some realities and challenges for DET central and Regional staff in their endeavours to lead and support schools.

I'll start with some observations from a DET perspective. More than ever I've come to realise that these personnel are endeavouring to 'read the play' and enact a role more as a 'work with' rather than 'direct to' Principals and schools. What's continuing to be an enormous challenge is the system's capacity to identify, employ and develop personnel with the knowledge, aptitude and interpersonal skills necessary to fulfil these vital roles in leading and supporting schools. These challenges have similarities within schools. Hence, the variations of practices and capacities within and across the state and its regions; and the fact that what's expected of many is to deliver on school improvement without the time and opportunities, and in some cases aptitude and empathy, to actually work with schools, understanding their real needs and challenges, the actualities.

This becomes most obvious when Principals are struggling and undertake their roles in an



Support for members

We are here to support and offer advice to all members at any time. If you are concerned about a colleague, please let us know.

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Email TBA

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John—0407 557 862

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Similarly, I have observed the increasing disparities in challenges for schools across the state - increasing inequalities of access to quality teachers and education support staff including well-being personnel, highly varying experience, knowledge and understanding of leadership.....

imperfect manner. In summary, I would consider, by and large, our non – school based DET personnel are committed to be their best within a system that still comes up short in universally standing side by side with Principals and schools.

For Principals and Assistant Principals, in schools it seems like being all things to all people is just what’s expected. As mentioned earlier the inequalities of access to a range of opportunities, particularly quality teachers and leaders jumps out at me. The size, location and demography of schools as much as anything lead to such inequalities of opportunity. With so much expectation to deliver across a wide range of educational priorities mixed with the challenges in human, technical, cultural and symbolic leadership, it’s not surprising in a few cases Principals come up short. And this is so often the case regardless of their effort and the emotional toll it’s taking on them. Yet so many can weather the storm and come through these challenges successfully.

That said, it is clear that it is much easier to succeed in juggling all these responsibilities and have a ‘sustaining high performing school’ when you have a highly competent, creative and collaborative team around you – a leadership team that’s in sync, where each member displays initiative and enjoys their responsibilities in sharing the leadership challenges presented. Schools and Principals in such circumstance are well placed to flourish in almost all circumstances. Sadly, and for a myriad of reasons, this is not a widespread reality. All too often the weight of responsibility is unreasonably shifted almost entirely on Principals. It is here that, as never before, there is a need for guidance, support and encouragement from non-school based DET leaders.

Is it any wonder that as I interact with Principal Class employees across the state, I observe this too common reality of their need for this ‘guidance, support and encouragement’ in leadership as a whole? PCEs having the time, the freedom and, in many cases, the self-realisation and capacity, to pause, reflect and strategically plan, presents what seems for some an insurmountable challenge. Yet from my experience, their willingness to engage with and gratefulness of such support is heart-warming.

It is so true that our system more than ever is endeavouring to deliver quality outcomes for all students with more and more measurements and accountabilities. There has been consequently increasing government oversight and public scrutiny. The school is at the pointy end of this expectation which explains a lot about how the world has changed for Principals. It is why even the most accomplished Principals and their leadership teams are finding the weight of expectation exhausting. It is now even more important for DET central and regional leaders to understand what’s happening on the ground in schools, not expecting too much too quickly.

Over these past five years through my experiences in the APF I have developed even greater respect and admiration for our Principals who continue to give their very best, often to their own detriment. I wish each and every PCE the very best for Christmas and hopefully a rewarding 2021.

Finally, I’d like to recognise the outstanding leadership provided by our President Julie Podbury. Her unwavering commitment to, and support and advocacy for, our Principals is exemplary. She richly deserves the appreciation of all Principals and the Department of Education and Training.



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An amazing opportunity for students in your School. Julie Podbury



Some of you may be aware that Chris Lilley’s **Summer Heights High**, was filmed at Brighton Secondary College when I was the principal of that school. This happened in 2010 and was a stunning opportunity and experience for students of Brighton who were both observers and participants in the production of this iconic series. It certainly sparked the interest of many students in a career in film and television production.

Laura Waters, pictured below, the producer of all Chris’s creations is the head of Princess Pictures. She and I have remained in touch. She contacted me recently with an idea about an amazing opportunity in the industry for students at secondary level, but still needs your input to flesh is out to a working model, particularly how to identify and attract particular students. She is basing the idea on a scheme set up for disadvantaged school kids in LA and possible careers in the film & TV industry.

Here is the pitch from Laura “A group of producers in Melbourne and Sydney are looking to start a group which would provide mentorship, workshops, training and job placement in the film and television industry. This program would be an offshoot of the Los Angeles group called Film2Future who have worked with dozens of high school students from marginalised neighbourhoods, giving them the opportunity to expand their ideas of what kinds of jobs they could do when they graduate.



Your feedback would be greatly appreciated on the best way to identify and reach teenagers who would benefit from this kind of program. We would also love to hear the kinds of skills you think would be most stimulating and useful for students to have exposure to.”

This is a fantastic opportunity for your less focused or marginalised students, so please don’t let this offer pass them by. You may wish to pass this on to your performing arts and or careers staff for input directly to Laura.

The email address feedback, ideas or input is admin@princess.net.au

From Gemma Naylor, Executive Officer



A very challenging year for all is drawing to a close and I wish to thank every member for their hard work and strong links with the APF this year. After what has been an incredibly difficult and trying year I hope you all find rest and relaxation over the summer break. I look forward to working with Tina King, Acting President elect for the APF and you all in what is hoped to be a happier and safer 2021.

I wish to thank Julie for her mentorship over the last two years. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with her. Working with Julie has taught me many significant attributes and qualities that have had a profound impact on me both, professionally and personally. I would like to thank Julie for taking a leap of faith in hiring me for this position in Nov 2018 which we have navigated our way through together and I am and will be forever grateful.

Julie, I have watched you work so incredibly hard for our APF members, always advocating for their wellbeing and making sure they are put first, even if it has meant you were not. The APF has been incredibly lucky to have your inspiring leadership and dedication since 2015 as President. I wish you all the very best and hope you enjoy the time you have for yourself and your family.



It’s been a huge year for our members! The work you do is amazing and our state and communities are all hugely better off for your efforts. Thank you!

We’ve literally worked with hundreds of principals and assistant principals this year. As a group, you are incredibly admirable and have so much to be proud of. Despite the challenges that come with the job, I still believe being a school leader is the most wonderful work we could choose to do. The positive growth in our students, their smiles when they see you and the knowledge that you’ve made a difference in their lives are what keeps most of us going. Sometimes the challenges and pressures are relentless, but the work you do is unbelievably important and we recognise it and thank you for it. It’s also the sort of job that you have to have actually done to fully appreciate. Others may think they understand your role, but if they haven’t actually done it themselves they really don’t get it. This is one of the reasons why the support principals and assistant principals give each other is so crucial to the wellbeing of the principal class generally. We hope we make a contribution in that space too.

The challenge now is to take some time to genuinely recharge the batteries and do those things you really enjoy.

Merry Christmas to you all.

Mark Arkinstall

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