

# Australian Principals Federation



## Acting President's Message—Tina King

We once again find ourselves in the midst of another circuit breaker lockdown. Following the Acting Premier's announcement last Thursday, and in the absence of prompt communication from the Department, school principals scrambled to make decisions in the best interests of their respective school communities.

The absence of formal communication resulted in mixed messaging being received by principals, particularly in relation to the announced pupil free day. Furthermore, operational guidelines were not received until just before 7:00 pm Thursday evening and needless to say, contact received from many members last week was indicative of high levels of disdain and scorn in the lateness of the communication.

The following email communication from a member respectfully encapsulates what many of our school leaders are feeling...

*"...As a school leader I know how important rapid and accurate communication is for my school community to quell their fears, keep them calm and let them know the most pertinent facts that impact them. I understand that there are often complex political and regulatory factors at play after the announcement of new restrictions and this can delay DET communications. However, this does not stop DET from sending simple, short and sharp comms confirming what is known currently, what decisions are still to be made and what timeframe those decisions are likely to be made in.*

*Yesterday (Thursday 27th May) there was mass confusion amongst principals about the pupil free day and SEILS and principals had to piece together their own sources of information. Some still did not feel comfortable to confirm this to their school community until after the DET comms that was sent shortly before 7pm. This is very disconcerting, stressful and confusing for school leaders and parents alike and all could have been remedied with some simple communication.*

*2020 was a tumultuous year, but despite the challenges, I along with a number of my colleagues have seen many positives within our school communities. Teachers have improved their teaching skills and have become more adaptable and much more efficient. School communities have grown in resilience and have improved communication and school connectedness. Parents have more appreciation of the complexities of teaching after seeing it through Remote Learning.*

*Finally, school leaders have improved their capacity to innovate and shift at a moments notice to ensure the best for our communities. However, the DET seem to have not learnt a thing from 2020. They are slow, bogged down in bureaucracy, compliance heavy but compassion light and out of touch with what is happening in schools. This pandemic has much more to play out, the DET must do better."*

Principals cannot effectively execute their duties without relevant and key information from their employer. In this regard, the Department failed many of our school leaders last week. This is by no means a condemnation of DET staff, merely expressed disapproval of a system that is dependent upon stringent bureaucracy, mechanisms and procedures. Current departmental systems and processes adversely impact upon the timely execution and delivery of key information that is fundamental and crucial to operations at the school level, especially at times of need and crisis.



### In this Issue:

The report from Tina includes eloquent feedback from a member about the recent lockdown communications from DET.

On P2 is a report on the **Victorian Budget 2021-22**.

Also on P2 is advice about available **Strategic Finance Management Support**.

**Bridging the Digital Divide** is on P3

A possible solution for the **CRT shortage** is on P4

The third in a series of three articles written by Frank Handy from the Independent Office commences on P4. This one discusses the **debriefing process after dealing with a Parent Complaint** to a school which could not be resolved.

On P6 is an article that some schools might like to include in their school **newsletter on Social Media**

**APF Website**

<https://apf.net.au>



We have lodged our concerns with the Department and the Minister, seeking urgent review of current processes, ensuring the expeditious and timely communication of information to our school leaders.

The strength and resolve that Victorians have shown throughout this pandemic will once again see us through this circuit breaker. Our school leaders will continue to prioritise the needs of others and we ask that you take the time for some self-care and pay due attention to your own well-being.

Stay well and stay safe.

*T. King*

## Victorian Budget 2021-22

The recent state budget highlights ongoing commitment to the educational sector and we commend the state government on recent announcements. With a combined investment of \$716 million, ongoing commitment has been demonstrated in the key areas of student wellbeing, teacher development and school infrastructure.

Of particular interest and note is the \$12.2 million allocated to reducing the administrative and compliance burden placed on principals. Members will know that this is an area the APF has been strongly advocating as part of our EBA log of claims. This is indeed welcomed support and we look forward to hearing more about the specifics of this announcement.

The announced Victorian Budget investments and commitments, as they relate to education, can be found at [The Victorian Budget 2021-22](#)

## Strategic Finance Management

To assist leaders with the management of the school SRP and general financial planning, the Department has established the role of Strategic Financial Management Adviser (SFMA), previously known as Technical Leadership coach (TLC).

SFMAs do not have a line management function, therefore allowing for open and frank conversations in relation to what support is needed by principals in order to develop their technical knowledge and skills.

The complexities of developing workforce plans can be compounded by many factors and must accommodate potential budget changes such as enrolment variations, staff salary increments and staff returning from leave.

If members are requiring assistance with the development of workforce plans and general SRP tips and advice, please do not hesitate to contact APF members Phil Rogers (Principal Rutherglen SC) [philip.rogers@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:philip.rogers@education.vic.gov.au) or Wendy Powson (Principal Lilydale SC) [wendy.powson@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:wendy.powson@education.vic.gov.au)



Phil and Wendy are experienced principals who have good working knowledge and understanding of the SRP and are more than happy to assist on a one to one basis.



To access SFMAs and general advice on managing deficits and workforce bridging, please visit the DET's webpage at:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/finance/Pages/srpmanagedeficit.aspx>



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**We are  
breaking  
records with  
the number of  
new members.**

**Thank you for  
your support.**



Gemma Naylor  
APF Executive  
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Join the APF

<https://apf.net.au>

Forms can be  
completed on-line.

## Bridging the Digital Divide

The Bridging the Digital Divide team is in the process of finalising school contribution calculations and principals of eligible schools will be advised of their individual contribution before the start of Term 3.

This communication will include a detailed breakdown of each school’s contribution calculation using the data entered into the Department’s IT Asset Management system.

Following the confirmation being sent, the contributions will be distributed as a once-off cash payment via the Student Resource Package. The payments will be electronically transferred directly into the school bank account.

In the interim, if you wish to confirm the contribution amount or have any questions or require assistance regarding this initiative please contact the Department at [learning.from.home.technology@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:learning.from.home.technology@education.vic.gov.au).

The Information Management & Technology Division (IMTD) have a small reserve of devices, both computers and Wi-Fi Internet access points, for any schools that have families that have missed out from last year’s arrangements and really need some support to engage in remote learning. Any schools that need support should email the team at [learning.from.home.technology@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:learning.from.home.technology@education.vic.gov.au)



### 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.

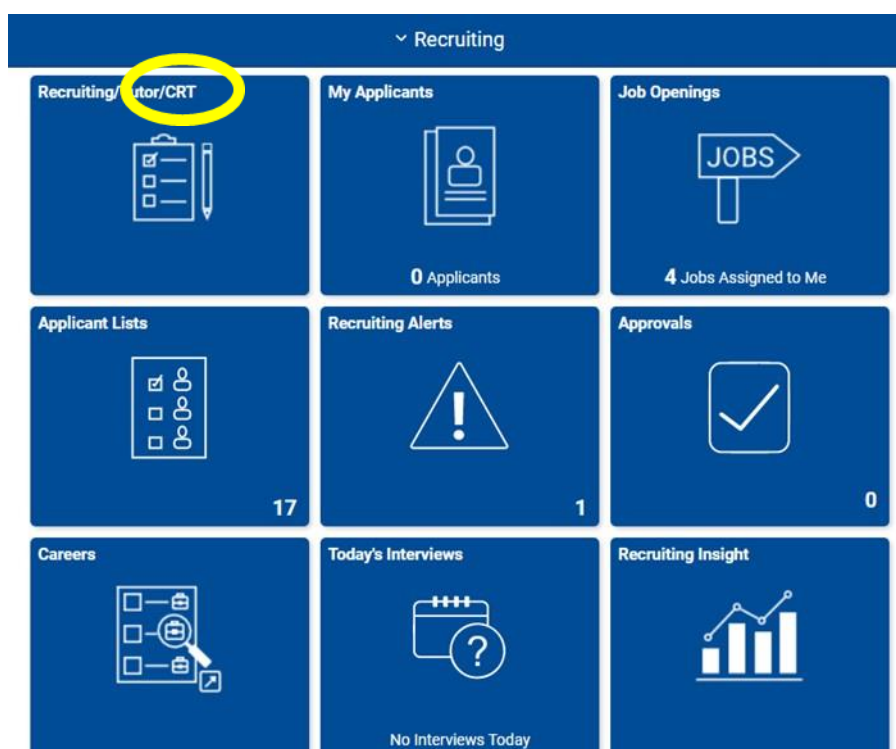
#### Industrial Relations 102

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.

## Casual Relief Teacher Recruitment

Many principals have contacted the APF expressing concern at the lack of available CRTs. A diminished pool is resulting in programs being cancelled, excursions postponed, difficulty in the provision of professional practice days, just to name a few problems and concerns.

We have expressed these concerns to the Department through various stakeholders meetings. In response, the DET has created a pool of CRT candidates that can be accessed by schools via Recruitment Online. Recruiters may access the pool by searching and using the filters in the Job Opportunities tab.



### Declaration of Private Interest

The Department is required to collect *Declarations of Private Interests* from all relevant officers in order to meet financial reporting directions. The declaration is collected on an annual basis, irrespective of whether or not there has been a change of circumstances.

As such, principals are required to make full disclosure of all relevant shareholdings and the employment of family members, friends and associates. Additionally, employees must report on links between family members, friends and associates as they relate to the supply of good and services.

The declaration enables employees to identify and address any conflict of interest created by the private interests. In the event, that any private interest gives rise to an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest, employees must in addition to completing the *Declaration of Private Interest*, declare and manage the *Conflict of Interest*.

Principals are required to submit the online Declaration of Private Interest form by 4 June. Members requiring assistance in this area are encouraged to contact us for advice and support.



#### 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.

Tina—0418 478 807  
[TKing@apf.net.au](mailto:TKing@apf.net.au)

Mark - 0418 551 375  
[industrialofficer@apf.net.au](mailto:industrialofficer@apf.net.au)

Ring us direct

### Consent & Respectful Relationships Education in School – Family Planning Victoria

In response to the recent decision by the Victorian Government to mandate consent education in schools, we are reaching out to let principal associations know about the resources, direct delivery, teacher training and support we can offer to help your school communities implement this topic with the greatest success.

The link below outlines our various offerings: <https://www.fpv.org.au/schools/collaborations-and-partnerships/consent-education-in-schools-fpv>

If you require more information or have a preferred way you would like us to engage with your school communities, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me and we can discuss further.

**Natalie Cavallaro**  
Community Engagement & Health Promotion Officer  
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### The Independent Office: Third article in a series: Principal debriefing,



Frank Handy, Chair

*The following article was the third in a series of three written by Frank for the APF newsletter and was first published in April 2018. The first two articles can be found in recent editions this year. (Editor)*

*This is the third article about the Independent Office. The first talked about our philosophy and approach to complaint management. The second recounted an example showing how we differ from most complaint management systems.*

*This third one is about the most difficult task we have: debriefing and learning from the experience of conflict. We debrief with everyone who had a significant role in dealing with the conflict. This article focuses on the debriefing process for the school system.*

Always remembering that many complaints are dealt with and resolved promptly, one of the goals of this Office is to help build the capacity of the school system to resolve complaints, for two main reasons: one, to improve the school system, and second, to reduce the negative

**“Traditional teacher professional development often takes the form of a lecture-heavy workshop disconnected from the day-to-day lessons that teachers lead. By contrast, curriculum-based professional learning is active, ongoing, and focused on improving the rigor and impact of teachers’ lessons.”**

“The Elements: Transforming Teaching through Curriculum-Based Professional Learning” by Jim Short and Stephanie Hirsch, Carnegie Corporation, November 19, 2020

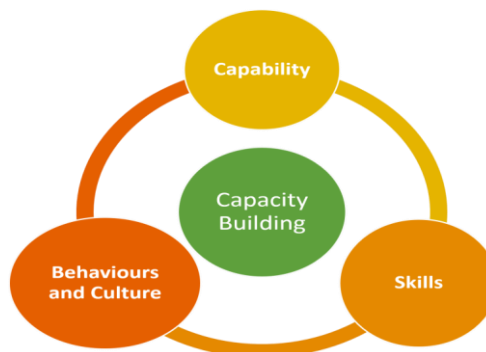
From Hippocampus, an email publication of Principal’s Digest



impacts of unnecessary conflict on all involved.

The matters that this Office deals with are generally ones that have not been resolved at the school, at the Region, and at the State level of handling. They have exploded often out of all proportion to the original issue, and seem to be subject to continuing breakdowns at every stage. At the school level, there has almost always been a breakdown in relationship and communication between the parents and the Principal. We often find mutually negative views among parents and a Principal when we sit down to talk with them separately. These views often create a dynamic in which ongoing reactions and breakdowns in communication mean that the parents and the Principal miss or avoid opportunities to stop the escalation and end the conflict. These elements, common to many of the conflicts that we see, are not causes of the original complaint, but they are often why the complaint turns into a conflict, and then escalates.

In order to build capacity to handle conflicts better within the school system, and to prevent them from escalating, the participants in the school system must learn from their experiences, share skills and techniques, and develop and practise them, focusing on the aspects of the situation for which they are responsible.



Unfortunately, people are not usually able to control or completely eliminate destructive behaviour and reactions by other people in stressful situations. People often don't see these behaviours coming; when they realise they are occurring people either avoid them or defend themselves (fight or flight). Alternatively, they react unconsciously with similar behaviours. All of these responses tend to trigger an even stronger reaction from those on the other side of the issue.

Once people understand and are able to detach from what is happening, they can respond to poor behaviour effectively: they can discourage it, they can eliminate actions that unnecessarily trigger it, and they can manage its impacts. But it is very difficult and often unrealistic to expect people to have this detachment while in the middle of a conflict. In our Independent Office role, we are often able to do these things effectively because we haven't lived the history that the participants have, and are not enmeshed in the dynamic. Also, we are focused on the resolution of the complaint, and not distracted by the many other influences and continuing events in the school setting. Finally, our independence means that we don't have to maintain a specific perspective in the system, and hopefully are not considered as direct opponents by anyone in the conflict, so we are less likely to trigger immediate negative reactions.



## The Debriefing Process

been poor behaviour by parents in a situation, is he or she still able to reflect on what happened, in order to see whether the school's and his or her own reactions contributed to the escalation, to seek to understand and examine the dynamic from the other person's perspective, to understand what other steps might have been taken to resolve the conflict earlier, to see what skills might need to be developed to deal with similar situations more effectively, and finally to integrate the experience as a whole so that it will not cause continuing stress or reduced effectiveness in the future.

These reflections can be difficult. In order for them to be effective, one must reject the excuses that can be created by the bad behaviour of others, and examine one's personal and systemic contributions to the conflict. The Independent Office again has a unique role in this capacity building. We are not performance managers, or supervisors. We can help you by providing our

Debriefing at the school level, the challenge for Principals is to step outside the conflict after it is over. Recognising that there may have



## WHEN TO DELEGATE

### Four questions may be useful for principals

deciding whether they should roll up their sleeves and engage in the myriad possible activities each day – greeting students when they enter school; hallway, cafeteria, and recess supervision; teacher team meetings; data analysis; sports events; chatting with parents at dismissal; and many more:

#### Does it build relationships?

This is the redeeming value in any work that's below your pay grade.

#### Does it develop skills in others?

For example, when principals teach model lessons, it's not because the principal is necessarily the best teacher. It's because when leaders go first, it's hard not to follow.

#### Does it build systems?

Sometimes the best way to learn the kind of system that's needed is to do the work yourself for a spell.

#### Does it provide key information?

Classroom observations, for example, provide front-line insights into the day-to-day work of the school that inform any number of decisions.

"4 Ways to Decide What NOT to Delegate" by Justin Baeder in *Principal Center*,

#### Quote

from Hippocampus,  
an email publication of  
Principal's Digest

# The Union exclusively for the Principal Class

confidential independent observations of what we experienced in handling the complaint, by supporting your reflection process, and by pointing to tools or resources that might be helpful to you. We would do so with the sole goal of helping you to have less stress and fewer unmanageable complaints.

We do not report on debrief processes in any way that would identify any person. Where we discover common issues such as a policy breakdowns or skill gaps when we debrief complaints, we might recommend ideas to the Department to continue to improve its knowledge and understanding of how to resolve complaints. We do not relate any debriefing to a particular person or situation.

**INDEPENDENT OFFICE**  
FOR SCHOOL DISPUTE RESOLUTION

We undertake similar work and make similar recommendations on matters that the Region has handled. The Central Complaints Team level has its own debrief processes.

We have a unique mandate: to help resolve complaints consensually, and to help the DET (at every level) get better at resolving complaints without us. And we provide this help from an independent perspective. If we contact you, please keep this mandate and perspective in mind: it's the foundation of our relationships with everyone, and Principals should be among the main beneficiaries of our efforts. We hope, although the situation and the debriefing conversation may both be challenging, that you will welcome our call and be more skilled and confident afterwards.

For further information follow the link which is current (2021). <http://www.schoolresolution.vic.gov.au/>

### ***HOW HARMFUL IS SOCIAL MEDIA TO MENTAL HEALTH? Newsletter suggestion.***

**How harmful is social media to teenagers' mental health? According to one recent research study, social media is no more harmful than television was for young people in the 1990s.**

**The study looked at more than 430,000 young people aged 10 to 15 in the UK and US. It found no evidence that any link between mental ill health and technology had grown worse over that time.** The research examined TV viewing, social media engagement and the use of digital devices such as smartphones before comparing them with feelings of depression, suicidal tendencies and behavioural problems. It aimed to investigate growing concerns that technology is becoming more prevalent in young people's lives and more harmful to their mental health.

Other studies, however, have suggested a rise in teenage depression. A report by University College London in 2019 found that adolescents were more likely to feel depressed and to self-harm, and less likely to get a full night's sleep, than ten years previously.

The study also found there was no notable difference in impact between boys and girls.

Some may assume, or have anecdotal evidence, that social media or smartphones result in poor mental health, but this is not necessarily the case. While some individuals may be more affected than others, on average research shows the relationship is weak.

**Instead there are other factors that appear to be more strongly related to poor mental health. Sleep, bullying and cyberbullying, and conflict between parents have much greater impact.**

**In the meantime, the wise parent keeps a close eye on the amount of time spent on social media and the material being accessed. When young people know their parents are interested and watchful, they may be influenced to make good choices.**

Acknowledgment: Dr Cara Booker, research fellow in the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex; The Times 4 May 2021; the journal of Clinical Psychological Science.

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2021

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