

# Australian Principals Federation

## Acting President's Report—Tina King



As we crawl to the finish of another challenging term, members continue to make contact expressing concern, frustration and sheer disbelief at the recent changes to the [Parent Payment Policy](#).

The number of emails and calls on this particular policy change has far exceeded any previous communication on other topical matters. It also appears that concern is not subsiding with recent webinars on the matter not alleviating concerns.

On another key item, EBA negotiations continue to take place and next week, the APF bargaining team will hold a webinar with members providing an update on current progress. As we are currently continuing to engage in negotiations, as per the principles of good faith bargaining, we are not in a position to publish information, however can provide a verbal update on progress thus far.

Information for the webinar will be sent directly to members via email and we ask that you do not share details with others as this is a member only event.

*T. King*

### APF update to members re EBA Negotiations

Via Webinar – Monday 6 September 4:00 – 5:00 pm

Details to be emailed directly to members

### School Review Process – changes announced

Commencing Term 2, 2022 there will be changes to the School Review approach. The new model will include the following features:

- School reviewers will no longer assess schools' compliance with the Minimum Standards (including Child Safe Standards), allowing them to focus solely on school improvement, teaching and learning.
- Instead, a dedicated central expert team within People and Executive Service (Elly Gay's team in OPSEC) will undertake the Minimum Standards Compliance Assessment with schools once every four years.
- Assessments will generally occur around 6 to 12 months before their scheduled school review term.
- Schools will be provided with hands-on support to help them address any areas of non-compliance identified during that assessment.

This is a positive development on two fronts – it provides a stand-alone focus for schools in meeting minimum standards. Secondly it frees schools to give due diligence and attentiveness to school improvement through the review process.



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**APF Website**

<https://apf.net.au>

## The Union exclusively for the Principal Class

## DET Performance Advisors

Principals are often required to deal with a range of challenges including workplace conflict, complaints, misconduct and under performance. When such matters are brought to the attention of the principal, it is incumbent upon them to follow up irrespective of whether a formal complaint has been submitted.

It is up to the principal to determine the appropriate action and apply professional judgement to decide whether or not the matter should be dealt with as a complaint, misconduct or unsatisfactory performance. This is often tricky and can result in fractured relationships as it places the principal front and centre of the matter at hand and subsequent process.

When applying judgement and determining course of action, it is important to contact the Employee Conduct Branch for support and advice, particularly if the matter involves alleged serious misconduct and underperformance. The best way for principals to get in touch with the performance advisors is either via email [employee.conduct@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:employee.conduct@education.vic.gov.au) or call them on 7022 0005 and they will be more than happy to assist wherever needed.



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***Our  
membership is  
soaring!***

***Thank-you for  
your advocacy for  
the APF. I am  
enjoying entering  
new members to  
the database.***

## Australian Principal Health & Wellbeing Survey

The Australian Principal Health & Wellbeing Survey is a confidential survey, independent of employer groups, professional associations and unions. Data and recommendations from previous surveys have instigated and supported policy reform relating to the wellbeing of school leaders. An invitation to participate in this important research has been sent directly to previous participants. New participants are invited to complete the survey by registering at <https://healthandwellbeing.org.au>.



Gemma Needs  
APF Executive  
Officer

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## Parent Payments Policy

The reforms to the parent payments policy continue to be a topical item of conversation and the source of much concern and distress for many schools. As communicated previously through the newsletter, the Education & Training Act 2006 requirements (Division 2 Instruction to Government Schools) seem to be the same as they have always been. Nothing in The Act has changed:

1. Instruction in specified learning areas to be free to students under 20.
2. Parents are not required to contribute to cost of additional support.
3. Voluntary Financial Contributions:
  - a. The school council of a government school may ask parents to make a financial contribution to the school.
  - b. A school council may use voluntary contributions for any purpose unless the contribution is made for a specified purpose.
4. The following principles apply in relation to financial contributions:
  - a. A school council should clearly explain how contributions will be spent when making a request for a contribution,
  - b. Each contribution is to be voluntary and obtained without coercion or harassment,

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*Forms can be  
completed on-line.*



- c. A student at the school is not to be refused instruction in the learning areas specified because the student's parents do not make a contribution,
  - d. A student is not to be approached, coerced or harassed for contributions,
  - e. Any record of the contribution is confidential.
5. If the school council asks the parents of a student enrolled at the school to make a financial contribution, the school council must tell the parents about the principles that apply in relation to financial contributions.

Recent amendments to the Department's policy relating to parent payments extend beyond refinement and simple modifications. As one secondary school principal has shared...

*I understand the DET's view and mantra that the policy isn't new, but the implementation and articulation are new. The fact remains the accounting system in CASES21 and many previous policy decisions recognise parent payments. Just one example exists in the CSEF. If schools weren't collecting funds for camps, sport and excursions to cover the incurred costs, why would there be funds to support the financially disadvantaged?*

*I accept there is a legal underpinning for the new implementation of the policy. I inherited a system of parent contributions that seemed equitable and functioning. Now that this has been brought to the fore, what are the risks this poses to principals who have acted in good faith? Essentially, we have raised money via parent contributions on behalf of DET, to subsidise the funding shortcomings. We are not gold lining our facilities, we are providing curriculum programs that our community expects and deserves.*

@ @ @

## **The Law of Unintended Consequences may contribute to the residualisation of Victorian Government schools. Current DET School Principal**

A Department of Education and Training bulletin advising Principals and School Councils about the "strengthening" of the advice and guidelines regarding voluntary contributions by parents to resourcing and school programs has caused a great deal of exasperation, concern and upheaval among school leaders and councillors.

At first glance, many principals breathed a sigh of relief and looked heavenward in an appreciation of support for one of the fraught issues linked with the start of a new school year.

It would be fair to say that a majority of Victorian Government Schools pre-purchase exercise books, pens, pencils, protractors, rubbers and other stationery items that, when distributed to students on Day 1, allow for an egalitarian and immediate commencement of optimum teaching and learning arrangements.

Common practice has been to then pass on a "Book-List" invoice for parents to "re-pay" the school while benefiting from the discount price that bulk-purchasing was able to achieve. Depending upon the school community, schools were able to re-coup, probably between 40% to 100% of the substantial amount outlaid by the school in its upfront payment to retailers.

Over time, the rules surrounding the policy have become more prescriptive with regard to a school trying to "balance its books" by reminding parents that their child's education was certainly free, but that the consumables their children used, and were using, were theirs to keep or wear-out and needed to be funded by parents in a similar fashion to the understanding that parents fund school uniforms and shoes.



## **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.



Preceding the recent strengthening advice, schools were advised that a maximum of one reminder invoices could be issued in any one school year.

Generally, parents were used to paying ‘fees’ at kindergartens and, later on, at university. Secondary schools often required parents to purchase texts from a retailer in the same way that uniforms were purchased.

While the actual Education Reform Act 2006 was quite specific with regard to parental contributions and the prevention of coercion to achieve compliance with requests for payments, there has been a historical blend of folklore, precedent, local agreements and creative accounting that could well be a carry-over from a belief that schools were self-managing. This belief has been fuelled by relativity mismatches between the SRP algorithms, Consumer Price Index increases and pressure to perform better than everyone else on whatever achievement levels Victorian schools achieved in the previous year.

Victorian schools are less well funded than other Australian school systems to the tune of 6.7% lower than the average funding for all Australian Government Schools. Our schools are required to operate within the constraints a finite bucket of financial resourcing that is determined by an algorithm that few are familiar with, or privy to.

It would be no surprise to anyone that school councils in many schools want their schools to be “like” the private schools that many aspire to, but few can afford. The pressure on principals to create facility points of difference, design and support specialist or intervention programs above and beyond what could be underwritten from the standard, formularised bucket can be immense. The “vision” applicant principals talk about as part of the interview processes are often pursued relentlessly following substantive appointments.



An example of a specialised program might be an Instrumental Music Program, where students benefit from options to learn to play a range of instruments purchased by the school but averaged-out to a cost that parents might be expected to pay for in order for their children to benefit from that program. So, rather than a parent purchasing, say a saxophone for their child and the child then being taught how to play it by a teacher employed through the SRP, this strategy allows many children to be able to access a saxophone for lessons during a school week and take it home, like their own, for practice while they are in the music program. The same would be true of other expensive and sought-after instruments purchased to support the program. Parents pay a low fee like a rental to schools allowing students access to instruments they could never have afforded otherwise.

Many innovative and valued programs are only able to be offered in many schools if parents continue to pay for them. In some schools parental contributions make up half the expenditure on resources as opposed to teachers or support staff.

This situation seems not to be common knowledge among policy-makers in the Department of Education and Training. The strengthening of the rules around parental contributions is essentially to add and stress one key adjective – voluntary contributions. Parents clearly do not have to pay for consumables or special programs that children are expected to participate in as part of the regular curriculum at a particular school.



### 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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**Ring us direct**

**“We can try to return to the pre-pandemic status quo, or we can decide to do better. Let’s choose wisely.”**

Kevin Gannon

**“If you have a principal who knows there’s a poor-performing teacher and chooses not to evaluate them effectively, who’s really the incompetent person?”**

Rob Weil

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

Just in case there was still any doubt about the status of parental contributions, schools have been instructed that parents are not to be invoiced at all under any circumstances.

Now, I don't know about you, but if I read that my local Council rate levies were voluntary but remained vital to the provision of services within my community, I would probably think two or three times about whether or not I would bother to pay. And, if I subsequently found that a lot of residents had chosen not to volunteer, I would be even less likely to pay in a subsequent year.



**The policy-makers who have devised the strengthened advice regarding parental contributions have unwittingly condemned the Victorian Government School system to transition to a residual system; a system of last choice behind private schools, including faith-**

**based schools.**

**Many, many Government Schools will have to discontinue the very programs that have individualised schools to become schools of first choice because of their responsiveness to the needs of their communities. Those same schools will now be in danger of becoming schools of last resort over a period of about two years as a significant element of funding dries up.**

**Unless....**

- ♦ the SRP algorithms are strengthened to offset the book-list and specialist program contributions that have been supported by parents across Victoria. This will probably mean additional funding allocations in excess of just breaking even with other educational jurisdictions.
- ♦ an emergency fund is set up for schools to apply for to offset potential lost revenue from parents who will understand the notion of voluntary; especially without the quasi-contractual impetus of an accompanying invoice.
- ♦ the changed policy advice can be phased-in to give School Councils and principals an amnesty time to develop a new way to deliver the programs and resourcing that has made Victorian schools number 1 across Australia in the 2021 NAPLAN arena.

There is another dimension to the issue of how schools have responded to the pressures to offer more than the SRP can pay for. School-based management as a factor of overall school effectiveness has sometimes

been categorised as school autonomy – self management. For a time, Victoria led the Australian educational sector in terms of autonomy of its Government school system. It might be no coincidence that Victoria topped the other States and Territories. There is evidence based on research in Israel and in some autonomous schools in England that schools that are freer to respond to the specific needs of their communities are more academically effective over time.

**What if we are about to kill-off one of the characteristics of highly effective Victorian schools by directly curtailing an important element of autonomy?**

We have been advised that the policy-advice has been provided 4 months out to provide the time to develop new ways of coping with a looming budget deficit in many schools – particularly small schools. That only reassures school leaders and School Councils that the policy-advisors are operating in sound-proof, silos, and quite-likely at a level in the silos, close to the clouds.



## BENEFITS OF THE DAILY COMMUTE

**Many people liberated from the commute have experienced a void they can't quite name. What was the commute providing that we didn't appreciate before?**

Historically, the amount of time people have been willing to spend getting to and from work has been remarkably consistent: about half an hour each way. Ancient cities like Rome were never more than about five kilometres in diameter, allowing their outermost citizens to stay within that walking or horseback commute time. Modern transport stretched the distance people could travel to work, but the average one-way commute even in the US is 27 minutes. Some people enjoy a longer trip to and from work. Why? The feeling of control in one's own car; time to plan; time to zone out; time to listen to audiobooks; time to read and think on the train or bus. Another hidden benefit of the commute is based on boundary theory. However much we might want to bring our 'authentic selves' to our jobs, we have multiple selves, all of them authentic. Crossing between one role and another isn't easy. The commute is quite an efficient way to effect the physical and psychological shift from one role to another. On the way to work, we gradually deactivate the emotions and thoughts of home and get our heads into our jobs. Vice-versa on the way home. Otherwise, we get what researchers call role spill-over. People who use the commute to engage in 'role-clarifying' report greater satisfaction at work and at home.

*"Admit It, You Miss Your Commute" by Jerry Useem in The Atlantic, July/August 2021*

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

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## Executive Officer's Report, Gemma Needs



The APF election notice and nomination form are now available under the members only section of the website, please contact me should you wish to nominate for a position.

The APF 2020-2021 financial audit has been undertaken by the organisation's accountant, with the full audit report now available under the members only section of the website. At the last State Council meeting the report was ratified and don't hesitate to contact me should you wish to discuss any aspect of the audit.

I would like to thank everyone for their continued support and wish all members the very best for the remainder of Term 3.



## APF Annual General Meeting – Save the date

Planning is well underway for the upcoming 2021 AGM scheduled to take place on **Thursday 21 October at Riversdale Golf Club**. More information to follow, however we invite members to save the date.

## Vaccine Communications Packs

The Victorian Government is strongly encouraging final year students and school staff, in particular staff attending and/or supervising end-of-year exams, to make an appointment to receive a vaccine by the time exams begin.

The DET's Communications Division, in conjunction with the Department of Health, has produced a vaccination communications pack for students and staff, which contains useful resources to share with school communities. These communications packs may be accessed via our website [www.apf.net.au](http://www.apf.net.au) under the members only section.



## LEARNING FROM REMOTE LEARNING

### Ask students:

What are the aspects of remote learning that you've appreciated the most, and would like to see carried back into in-person schooling?

What is really hard about remote learning that you hope you never have to manage again as a student?

After this pandemic, what do you hope adults will do to make in-person school better for this year? What do you hope they don't do in the coming year?

What do you feel like you missed out on or lost in school because of the pandemic?

What are you most proud of from the past school year?

"Healing, Community, and Humanity: How Students and Teachers Want to Reinvent Schools Post-Covid" by Justin Reich and Jal Mehta, Teaching Systems Lab, July 21, 2021

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



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