

# Australian Principals Federation



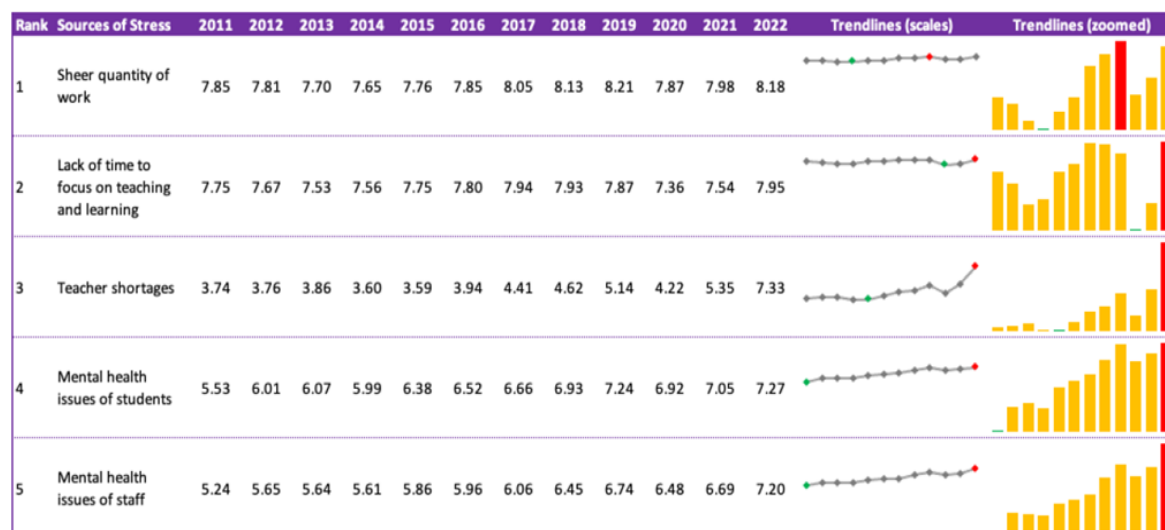
## President's Message – Tina King

As we pass the mid-point of the term, we are hearing of the reserve tanks of school leaders and staff running very low as continued challenges are faced relating to ongoing staffing shortages, increased parental complaints and workload demands.

Recent media coverage that has preceded the upcoming release of the **2022 Australia Principal Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey** has drawn attention to the fact that that heavy workloads and lack of time to focus on teaching and learning are the top sources of stress, making principals wanting to retire early. For those in schools who face these stresses day in and day out, and over cumulative years, these findings are not new or surprising.

*“Our school leaders are clearly overburdened and struggling, the question remains how long can they keep going like this?”*

(Professor Herb Marsh Co-lead investigator of the survey)



A copy of the survey media release can be found [here](#) with the full survey results becoming available next week. We will report more on the findings of the survey, particularly the recommendations and actions needed to reverse the concerning trends which continue to have adverse impact on school leaders.

When resilience is low, frustrations are high and emotions fragile, it is important to take pause and not act on instinct and with haste (unless fleeing a dangerous situation). Over the tenure of my principalship, I have been guilty of penning emotional responses and regrettably at times, putting out communication whilst heightened with feelings of frustration and despair. Penning such a response may have been cathartic at the time, but I quickly learnt that this often created more problems than it solved. As a result, and before pressing the send button, I ensured I sought advice and feedback from a trusted colleague who could act as a voice of reason and offer logic and rationale at a time when mine was low.

In the times in which we live, we know that communication provided via newsletters, parent comms and email, is far reaching and often makes its way to unintended audiences. So, before pressing the send button, take the time to pause and reach for that voice of reason.

*T. King*

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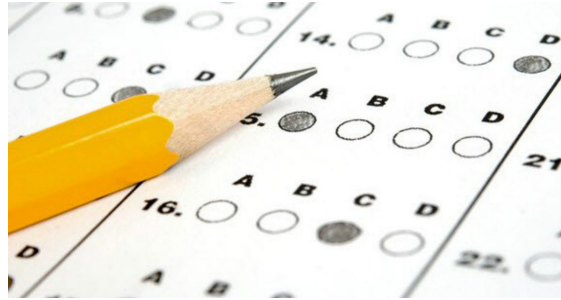
APF Website

<https://apf.net.au>

## NAPLAN

With changes to the NAPLAN testing schedule, schools are in the midst of conducting the tests this week with results to be delivered to schools and parents months earlier than in previous years. Unfortunately, the earlier dates appear to have caused added administrative burdens upon schools, as some of the preliminary work that is usually undertaken by the VCAA was not completed in time and subsequently imposed upon schools to finalise.

This added to workload pressures already faced by school staff in the weeks building up to the tests. We have raised our concerns directly with the VCAA and have been provided with an undertaking that following administration of the tests, feedback will be captured to determine current pressure points in order to determine areas for enhancement and improvement. The APF will continue to engage with the VCAA as part of this process and principals will have opportunity to provide feedback directly by completing the post-test survey.



### Helping Teachers feel Engaged and Valued

**As research reveals that relational trust leads to engagement and success, we are reminded that teachers hold our students' stories and hopes—and here's how school leaders can lay the foundation for relational trust so that school communities flourish.**

Because administrators, policymakers, students, parents, and community members all play key roles in how society values the work of teachers, positive interactions become critical. How can administration and leaders help the education profession be enhanced and valued, and why does this matter?

**Use respectful language when talking with *and* about teachers.**

How you speak, write, and/or communicate towards educators will shape the culture. The word "respectful" means showing appreciation and giving grace, honouring the noble work that teachers commit themselves to every day. The words that we use reflect our level of respect for the job of a teacher.

Energy spreads, so focus on the ripple effect of respectful communications. Ask questions and encourage authenticity without judgment. Also consider how non-verbal cues convey respect to the teaching profession.

**Make the effort to support teachers' decision-making and professional growth for others to see—and be inspired. (Cont. Column P4)**

## Department Contacts and Supports



Principals are reporting that they are facing barriers in accessing central department services, with phone messages having to be left and lack of timely response. We have raised this as a matter of concern with key Department personnel. If you are facing such difficulties, please contact the Principal Advisory Service either via phone (03) 7034 6777 or via email at [principal.advisory.service@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:principal.advisory.service@education.vic.gov.au)

Staff at the advisory service will offer advice and support on a range of issues and assist in directing your enquiry internally to the correct department unit.

## Parent Complaints – where to seek support

We know that many schools and principals successfully manage and respond to complaints at the local level, we are becoming aware of matters escalating through the actions of vexatious parents. Concerningly, this appears to be an increasing and escalating trend.

Whilst the department has a three-step framework for managing parent complaints, beginning with management at the local level, we are hearing matters being escalated beyond the school and regional level. When this occurs, principals report feeling unsupported and frustrated, particularly when there has been extensive engagement with the complainant but they continue to be unsatisfied with the findings or determination. As a result, they not only escalate the complaint but often go to agencies and stakeholders outside of the department seeking intervention.

**If you find yourself in such a situation:**

1. Contact your SEIL and inform them of the escalating situation. Often, they will be aware of the problem/matter and request their support and intervention.



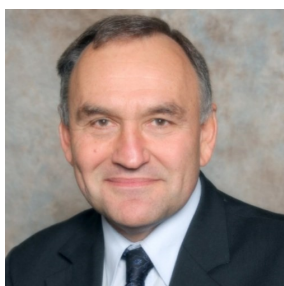
2. The Department's Complaints and Improvement Unit can assist and offer support in the management of complaints that have escalated from the regional level. They can be contacted on (03) 8688 7885 or via email at [school.complaints@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:school.complaints@education.vic.gov.au)
3. The Legal Division can provide advice and support in addressing allegations with legal elements or risks. They can be contact on (03 9637 3146) or via email [legal.services@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:legal.services@education.vic.gov.au)
4. The [Complex Matter Support Team](#) (login required) can provide principals with advice and support when managing complaints involving challenging parent behaviour or communications.
5. Contact us for help and support if needed, particularly if you are at the point of feeling despondent.

The fostering of positive relationships within the school community is conducive to favourable resolutions when matters of concerns arise. Fortunately and for the best part, most complaints are managed and handled successfully at the school level, however, it is the 1% that cause the greatest upset and distress.

**Parent trust / lack of support** – *this one hurts. This will be the reason I will end up leaving the school system... When I have had issues occur, which are, I am lucky to say, rare, they are a toll on a Principal's mental health, and the parent is quite often given the right to be heard and there is no right of reply (or no knowledge of reply) by the Principal. I believe this is the issue that will lead to Principal's leaving the profession and lack of new Principals coming into the profession. As I stated, I know it is a society issue, however Principals need the full support of the Department in incidents with parents.*

*Vic Primary School Principal*

### From the memory box! Henry Grosseck, Berwick North PS



My favourite word is 'nourishing'. There's little better than a nourishing relationship. Of course, relationships come in many forms, depending on with whom, and with how, the relationship exists. They can be everything from shallow and fleeting to deep and enduring. Needless to say, not all relationships are nourishing. Then there is the relationship we have with ourselves, not always one of kindness.

I recently had the privilege of viewing a movie that took me to a space within myself, a place in which I engage in deep reflection - all too infrequently. The pity of that is that I do understand only too well the benefits of deep reflection; its therapeutic potential for wellness and self-improvement in general. This begs the obvious question – why?

That space I found within myself brought reflections on my daily work and that of others, shared with me. The common thread – a lack of time for truly deep reflection, predominantly being in reactive mode and hustling oneself to the next task. No room for nourishment there!

This time was different though – a window of opportunity was there for the grasping. Left alone to its own devices, my mind wandered back in time to when I was a young teacher, a metropolitan relieving teacher to be precise. In my two years in that role, I had the benefit of



### Support for members

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

However, from time to time you may be concerned about a colleague. Please do not hesitate in making contact with us so we can offer them appropriate support.

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working in over fifty schools across the then northern metropolitan region of Melbourne. It was the best professional development of my early career.

Of that time, the inspiration of two principals that I encountered, one for simply one day and the other for two, stands tall. Let's call them by their initials – GJ and AF. I've met many other fine principals, and for longer during the early years of my career, yet they remain the only two whose names and schools I remember to this day.

The single day that I worked at AF's school, I arrived early, about 7.30am. The school, unlocked, appeared empty - silent. I found my way to AF's office; the door was closed but with someone clearly inside, shuffling about. In answer to my knock on the door, a voice from within, with a somewhat impatient tone, called me in. There on the floor, on hands and knees, was the principal, AF, poring over a mass of papers – drawing plans as it turned out, for the school's building upgrade.

With introductions over, AF invited me to join her on the floor, which I dutifully did, though somewhat taken aback. There are many ways one could interpret that encounter – mine was one of wonderment and privilege. In those few brief minutes I felt an importance, way beyond my position.

Things were entirely different at GJ's school – they were in the middle of a 4-day school review. Reviews were stressful too back then – etched as it was on GJ's face at morning tea on my first day there. I asked him a question about the review. He called me back after school and spent an hour with me – his passion, generosity and knowledge have been my benchmark for success.

My time in my place of nourishment, this time, ended with a thought, a hope – for what would others remember me, if at all? It's a thought worth daring to embrace.



Effective teachers know that there is clear evidence and data that support their methods. You might point out that pedagogical approaches can be the “how” a teacher uses certain skills or strategies to support learning objective(s). The goals can be viewed as the “what” for educational aims.

Consider the idea that the greater community has a vital role in “recognizing” the efforts and hard work, in addition and with support to the teachers' work, of all school community members: students, bus drivers, custodians, school resource officers, counsellors, administrators, student teachers, parents, and volunteers.

**Model and uphold emotionally safe spaces for teachers.**

Administrators have the responsibility of maintaining and protecting safe spaces. Schools are places that embody a plethora of emotions in these spaces. New friendships are made and the magnificent joy of learning new concepts is discovered.

In particular, a teacher has the special ability and space of planting seeds, from which dreams grow in children's minds and hearts. If we want to change the world, we need to protect and care for the people right here around us. Therefore, community leaders have an ethical responsibility in helping teachers to keep educative spaces safe.

*Acknowledgement: Laura Ascione in eSchool News, January 17 2023*

**PRINCIPALS' digests**

[www.principalsdigests.com](http://www.principalsdigests.com)

## News from the Department's Workforce and Diversity Team

The 2023 diversity and inclusion training session details have been released on the [training page](#) of the [Workforce Diversity and Inclusion](#) collaboration page (login required).

There is a vast range of online facilitated training and self-paced eLearning options available, including Aboriginal Cultural Awareness and Cultural Safety, LGBTIQ+ and workplace adjustment sessions, among others.

We have a couple of sessions available for the remainder of March, including [Aboriginal Cultural Safety Training](#) on Wednesday 22 March and [Trans and Gender Diverse Awareness Training](#) on Thursday 30 March.

Please book into any sessions that are of interest to you across the year. All sessions are free of charge.

For enquiries contact: [diversity@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:diversity@education.vic.gov.au)

### 2023 AWEI Survey – contribute your experience.

[All staff are encouraged to participate in the Australian Workplace Equality Index \(AWEI\) survey, administered by Pride in Diversity \(PiD\).](#)

Your participation will help the department to better understand the lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ staff as well as the impact and perceptions of our LGBTIQ+ inclusion initiatives. The results allow us to track the department's progress on how our LGBTIQ+ inclusion initiatives compare against national benchmarks and other Australian employers and assist in identifying areas for improvement.

The survey takes up to 15 minutes to complete and is open until **midnight Thursday 30 March 2023**.

The survey is accessible to school staff via this link: [AWEI school staff survey](#)

The survey is accessible to corporate staff via this link: [AWEI corporate staff survey](#)

# The Union exclusively for the Principal Class