

Education Minister's Meeting Presentation

Friday 26 April 2024

Angela Falkenberg, President of the Australian Primary Principals' Association

Andy Mison, President of the Australian Secondary Principals' Association

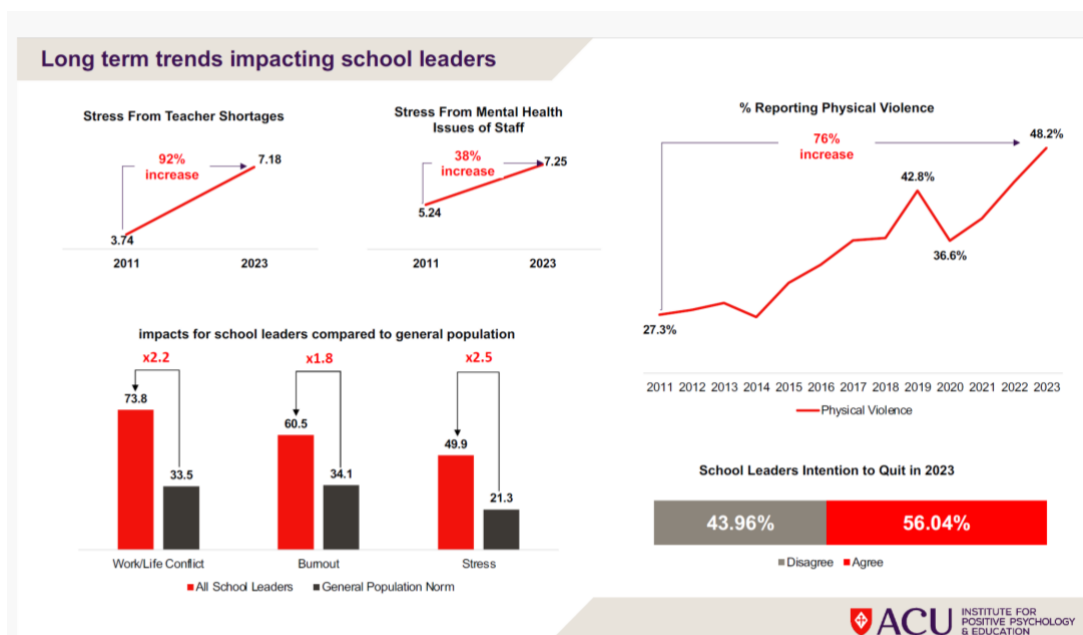
Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you about the wellbeing and efficacy of our principals and school leaders.

As you know, effective school leaders are crucial to achieving the outcomes we want for Australia's learners.

But we know the workforce shortage includes the challenge of attracting, retaining and sustaining school leaders as well as teachers.

Most of our Principals and school leaders are managing well and achieving good outcomes for our children and young people. They care about the role and derive great job satisfaction. It can be the best job in the world! However, whilst our principals love their job, in many cases it is harming them.

Every year since 2011 about 25% of them have completed the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey. The longitudinal data from 13 years of this survey shows worsening results, despite every state and territory having strategies in place. Though this is not the whole picture, we need to pay attention to it.



- Stress has increased: arising from teacher shortages, the lowered wellbeing of students and staff and the increased work intensity. This stress, along with burnout, impacts school leaders more than twice than is considered normal in the general population.
- Over the years of data collection, the violence experienced by leaders has increased by 75% and more than half of principals surveyed are thinking about quitting or retiring early.
- Most of our education workforce is female. They are our greatest asset for a sustainable principal pipeline, but they need assurance that their workplace is a safe one.

We are keen to be involved in developing pragmatic solutions and working with you on projects to make a real difference for our people, for the trajectory paints a grim picture. Though principals will put on a brave professional face when visited by their local Director General or Secretary, this data is legitimate feedback from the people tasked with looking after our children and young people every day. And this is an issue for catholic, independent *and* government school systems.

We can't afford to lose school leaders. We need effective action. If not now, when?

We're asking you to partner with us on behalf of our profession. To consider what's working, what isn't working, and what can be done to sustain and retain our leaders. The people we represent need to be part of the plan. Included in the design of the strategies that affect them.

We know that Ministers have already included principal wellbeing and workload in the scope of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan. Thank you. ASPA and APPA have other suggestions that we're keen to share and develop with you.

For today though, we propose the following two specific actions for EMM:

Action 1:

Make a public statement of support explicitly for Principals and School Leaders.

- Much of the public narrative and policy effort is rightly focused on classroom teachers. A strong acknowledgement from you, our nation's policy leaders will signal respect and boost morale for our professional school leaders all over Australia.
- Therefore, we ask that EMM issues a statement of support acknowledging the importance of meaningful action on improving principals' occupational health, safety, and wellbeing, and that you will work on solutions in partnership with the profession represented by the national peak bodies ASPA and APPA.

Action 2:

Establish an EMM sponsored working group to develop effective strategies.

- Our school leaders are well placed to assist in the design of improved policies that affect them and their school communities. We know that the issues and solutions will be similar in every jurisdiction.
- We ask that a sub-group of the Australian Education Senior Officials Committee facilitated by the Federal Department of Education be established to work in partnership with APPA and ASPA. This working group would develop detailed proposals to address principal wellbeing and efficacy.
- We ask also that you provide support for ASPA and APPA to undertake our part of that work.
- The group would report back to EMM later this year.

Some of the strategies for consideration might include:

- Uses of the Workload Reduction Fund to pilot initiatives to deal with principal workload and improved school operations.
- Establishing a mechanism for ongoing monitoring and research into Principal & School Leader wellbeing and efficacy, with annual reporting accountabilities.
- We could investigate ways to strengthen legislation and its implementation around the country that better supports student, staff, and school leader safety on the ground.
- We could build on your excellent collaborative model, and design a national “Safe, Respectful and Inclusive Behaviour” campaign similar to “Be That Teacher”
- The group could initiate and design other innovative pilots that support principal, staff, student and community wellbeing and safety.

Most jurisdictions have had Principals’ wellbeing strategies in place for years. The data suggests that these have had limited impact. Meanwhile we’ve had COVID, ongoing teacher shortages and intense pressure on school leaders in a fragmented, contested, and increasingly segregated education system. We need to start telling a more optimistic story. We recognise the solutions aren’t going to be fast or clear cut. We don’t want to waste this opportunity and rush into short term fixes. That’s why we’re asking for a clear statement of intent that you’ll work with us.

We’re just asking for a bit of resourcing and time to develop some sensible options for us to take forward together.

If you want happy, healthy, successful schools, you need happy, healthy, enabled school leaders.

Thank you for your time today, we look forward to working with you in the co-design and implementation of strategies that will help solve some of the bigger problems we are all facing, and hopefully retaining and sustaining our dedicated school leaders in the process.