



Position Paper on Principal Wellbeing

Preamble

The purpose of this paper is to present the position of the Victorian Association of Catholic Primary School Principals (VACPSP). As a professional Body, the Association is conscious of the need to develop strategies that will promote the mental and physical wellbeing of Principals in Victorian Catholic Primary Schools.

Current research into the wellbeing of school Principals indicates that there is a need for supportive strategies to be put into place for this important leadership role within our professional of education (Riley, 2015). There is an inextricable link between the cognitive and non-cognitive elements of learning and thinking. There is also a deep interconnection between Staff Wellbeing, Principal Wellbeing and Student Wellbeing within educational settings (Cross, 2016).

Catholic Education aims to support the growth of all members within the community. It is the responsibility of the system to provide the environment where all people can flourish and grow to fullness of life (Jn 10:10). As members of a faith-filled community, the VACPSP will work in partnership with Archdiocesan and Diocesan agencies to fulfil this important task.

Context:

The VACPSP position has been determined in the following context drawing on the results of the fourth year of the *Principal Health and Wellbeing Report*. Riley, P. (2014).

- the role of Principal is highly complex and demands high level leadership skills
- disproportionate numbers of women are in lower paid roles
- the role demands higher levels of emotional labour than the general public
- community expectations of principals, staff and schools are changing, extremely high and often unrealistic
- parish priest and parishioner expectations are that Principals embody the values and ethos of the Catholic tradition and take responsibility for the Catholic Identity and mission of the school
- the level of accountability is increasing
- the growing demand to be accountable to both CECV and governments, often results in duplication
- workloads are increasing and in order to fulfil the role many Principals work beyond reasonable working hours
- the growing job complexity means that competing work demands are the greatest source of stress facing Australian principals

- principals are concerned about the lack of time to focus on learning and teaching
- bullying and threats of violence towards Principals occur at five times the rate and actual violence at seven times the rate of the general population
- there is a perception that attendance at meetings required by CECV agencies places extra demands on principals which can be unrealistic
- coordination of initiatives across regions and within regional offices is lacking
- the constant demands of change that are system driven from the “top-down” rather than school driven have raised the concern of Principals
- there is a perception of lack of inclusion and meaningful consultation of principals from CECV and its agencies
- there is a reluctance on the part of principals to talk about factors impacting on their health and wellbeing because of concern about how this would be perceived
- there is a perception that there is a need within the system to identify principal health and wellbeing issues and to provide support
- Principals report higher levels of burnout, stress, sleeping troubles, depressive symptoms, somatic stress symptoms and cognitive stress symptoms than the general population (Riley, 2014)

Findings from Research

Work and the culture within workplaces affects our perceptions of self and our wellbeing. The workplace is where many people spend most of their time and develop their sense of self (D’Souza, 2016a). Principals need professional support to respond to work challenges that may have a negative impact on their wellbeing (ACPPA, 2016).

Principals value personal achievement and education for themselves and others. Most Principals are highly qualified and have Masters Degrees or above, mostly in leadership. Principals enjoy engaging in community and regularly practice spirituality. In the main Principals are happy and they enjoy higher job satisfaction than people in other areas of work. The findings suggest that Principals are aware of the need to take care of their physical health. However, they self-rated health, happiness, mental health, coping relationships, self-worth and personal wellbeing as lower than the general population (Riley, 2014; ACPPA, 2016).

Gender, age or family situation may have little negative impact on Principal wellbeing (ACPPA, 2016). Having quality relationships however, at both a personal and professional level are keys to maintaining positive wellbeing. Positive family and partner relationships are a positive source of support for Principals (Cross, 2016, Riley, 2014).

As a Catholic organisation, it is an imperative that Catholic Education in Victoria has the wellbeing of all employees as a priority. In particular, the wellbeing of key leaders, especially principals is of paramount importance. In a companion Paper, the VACPSP has identified a position on the professional learning of Principals. In this Paper, the VACPSP presents a position that focusses on their social and emotional health and wellbeing.

VACPSP Position

The VACPSP acknowledges that the professional demands of the role of principal are not likely to decrease and similarly the role is exercised in a time and within a culture that is constantly changing and challenging. There is an imperative for the CECV to make Principal Wellbeing a priority. The position espoused here is that leaders must be supported to respond appropriately to the demands that are placed on them, both mentally and physically.

The VACPSP supports the development of the whole person, the discovery of human potential and the social and emotional intelligence necessary to lead contemporary workplaces. Leaders who are able to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses, are more likely to be compassionate and to focus on the development of others (D'Souza, 2016b).

The VACPSP values the spiritual qualities of leadership. Research has shown that the style of leadership is greatly influenced by the leader's values and beliefs, capacity for community building and their capacity for creativity and communication. The relationship between spirituality and good leadership is very strong (Bellesini & D'Souza, 2016; D'Souza 2016b).

The VACPSP advocates for:

Principal empowerment through participation in System Direction:

- establishment of systematic preparation for significant leadership roles in schools, particularly principalship with access to continuous professional support
- reviewing of the nature of Principal work its complexity and conflicting demands
- monitoring the conflicting requirements, commitments and accountabilities expected of principals from various sectors and work to lessen them
- providing adequate and appropriate support and resourcing, for the implementation and ongoing management of changes and initiatives
- increasing opportunity for Principal voice to influence and shape system initiatives to improve the Catholic Education sector
- increasing opportunity for Principal networks to be channels for timely consultation with principals on all change initiatives through the trial, refinement, improvement and implementation stages.
- development of strategies, current policies and procedures to address bullying and violence
- provision of system and regional supports for principals experiencing bullying or violence within their school or the wider community.

Provision for principals to be empowered in their role through professional growth:

- formal courses for principals to provide tools to respond proactively to work demands and to reduce work pressures
- opportunity for continuous skill improvement through targeted programs
- coaching and mentoring related to skills and experience.

The support of the existing Industrial processes and the expansion of these to monitor and improve the professional conditions of principals:

- to speak for Principals in enterprise bargaining discussions

- to address issues of gender inequity between Principals
- to investigate an appropriate funding model that removes the Principals from the global budgets and focusses on school need
- to work towards Principal remuneration to be proportional to qualifications, experience and the workload rather than reflecting the number of students.
- to establish a working party to address issues of principal health and wellbeing; this would include a senior person within each CECV agency who understands schools and the workload of principals.

Adopting a holistic approach to the continuous development and support of leaders and improving the wellbeing of Principals by:

- providing sponsorship for continuous learning opportunities beyond Masters level;
- ensuring the effectiveness of professional networks for Principals to enable them to develop professional relationships
- increasing the autonomy of networks to develop agendas in consideration of context, formality and locality.
- encouraging Principals to develop personal strategies to increase life/work satisfaction
- raising awareness of holistic perspectives of human capital and development
- drawing on the Catholic Tradition and increasing awareness of the power of spirituality to influence leadership style for a contemporary educational organisation
- increasing capacity of Principals to exercise emotional intelligence in their leadership style and the exercise of their role.

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