



AEU – ACT Branch Briefing The School Autonomy Agenda

VICTORIA

Information provided by Peter Hendrickson, former school principal and currently Principal Officer with the AEU Victorian Branch.

Despite the failure and eventual axing of Kennett's "Self-Governing Schools", Victoria continues to have a relatively high degree of school autonomy.

This had led to major workload issues. The AEU Victorian Branch is currently working with principals to establish a working party to develop strategies that the Department of Education can implement to address the principal workload issue.

The issues they would like the Department to address include:

- Lack of coordination of Department requirements of Principals
- The process for dealing with unsatisfactory performance is unworkable
- Increasing number of Department and Regional and other bulletins/emails
- The increasing number of initiatives requiring action by principals
- Meetings held by networks and regions are often excessive in time required of principals
- Staffing is a major stressor where a school or subject area is hard to staff
- There are significant budget inequalities between schools
- Small schools, particularly those where the principal teaches, have very limited support
- The "excess process" is arduous and morale sapping
- The policies of Department often require detailed and time intensive implementation
- There is no available mechanism to manage, external to the school, vexatious and litigious parents and other members of the community

AEU Vic Branch Principal Workload Submission 2010

Background:

Retirement rates and the age profile of school leaders suggest that the demand for principals and assistant principals over the next decade will be higher than the long term average.

There are schools in Victoria that are unsuccessful in filling principal class vacancies because of difficulty in finding suitable applicants from very small fields of applicants. This is particularly true in schools that are geographically remote or schools that are perceived to be challenging.

Research by the Hay Group lists these as some of the factors that work as disincentives for potential applicants:

- Sense of efficacy
- Their values
- Family circumstances
- Perceptions of the principal role
 - Diminishing responsibility with increased accountability
 - Expanded, intensified and more complex role
 - Focus on managerial rather than educational tasks
- Salaries and benefits
- Recruitment processes
- Levels of funding and resources
- Circumstances of the particular school
- Increased parental pressure

[Underlining by AEU - ACT Branch]

The research "The Privilege and the Price" (2004) found that:

"While increased flexibility, devolved responsibility, and new technologies hold potential for improved satisfaction and wellbeing in the workforce, fears have been raised that these trends are resulting in a variety of potentially stressful or hazardous circumstances, particularly in relation to increased work demands. After more than a decade of accelerated change within Victorian government schools focused on improving learning and teaching outcomes, the associations which represent principal class members have echoed these concerns in relation to workload and perceived adverse health and wellbeing effects."

Since the time that this was written it can be demonstrated that the rate of acceleration of change in Victorian government schools has not slowed.

What we are asking for

No-Cost Items:

1. Recognition. The DEECD needs to formally recognise that the workload of principals is increasing both in volume and complexity, and that this is an issue that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
2. Consultation. In the development of National, State and Regional education policies and priorities there must be consultation with key stakeholders. This consultation needs to be done in a timely manner.
3. Mandated School Policies. The DEECD should provide template policies to schools. This will ensure that school policies comply and save time and outsourcing. Policies should also be accompanied by process charts.
4. Strategic Planning. Increased, proactive support for strategic planning, annual implementation plans and school improvement. This support should be provided by regional staff and be targeted at inexperienced principals.
5. DEECD Requirements. The department should subject all of its requirements of schools/principals to an efficiency and risk test. e.g. Workcover return to work

requirements. Any additional requirements of principals should have an estimated cost and/or workload analysis attached.

6. Workcover. Re-examination of the support required in complex Workcover cases especially given the possibility of significant financial penalties incurred in a failure to comply with the legislation.
7. Principal meetings. Principals must have the right to prioritise the meetings that they attend. The number of mandated meetings needs to be monitored. Principals must also have the right to refuse to participate in 'pilot programs' and other initiatives if their workload is excessive. There needs to be consistency between regions in the number and type of meetings that principals are required to attend. Mandated meetings need to be designated at the beginning of the year.
8. Perception of Principal Role. There is an attitude of 'who would want to be a principal?' that is pervasive among teachers. This works against getting a sufficient number of quality applicants for principal class vacancies. The DEECD needs to develop strategies, in consultation with principals, to improve the profession's perception of the principal's role.
9. Recognition. There should be greater recognition given to principals who contribute significantly to regional and state-wide programs. The DEECD needs to develop strategies, in consultation with principals, to develop appropriate recognition for these principals. This could be a cost item.

Cost Items:

1. Hard to staff schools. Hard to staff schools need to be funded so that they can offer financial incentives to attract applicants. Currently hard to staff schools have to select from smaller fields of applicants and have great difficulty attracting very high quality applicants. This disadvantages these schools' capacity to provide the highest quality of teaching and learning.
2. The Compliance Checklist. The DEECD needs to provide resources to support schools. There should be additional regional staff who are qualified in appropriate areas to go in to schools to assist with compliance. This principle could be extended to a range of other areas such as Return to Work, assets register. (Regions already have OHS staff to support schools)
3. Excess Staff. The excess staff process is onerous, time consuming, bad for staff morale and does not always result in a successful referral. Staff who do not accept referrals are an on-going cost to the school budget and may result in the school being in deficit for long periods of time. Referring Principals should have responsibility for appealing to the MPB where they believe that an incorrect decision has been made. (Additionally, regions could be given resources and the responsibility to assist excess staff in finding a position in another school.) Schools HR should continue to manage the referral of excess staff so that schools that accept referrals are given exempt positions.

4. Management of underperforming staff. Where the process has reached a stage where it is clear that a staff member is not going to be able to improve with the resources available in the school, the process needs to be externally managed. It is current AEU policy that an external panel with DEECD and AEU representatives undertake this process.
5. Equal Capacity. The ability of schools to comply with DEECD requirements varies considerably. Resources need to be allocated to schools so that all schools have the same capacity to deal with these matters. (This is especially an issue in small, rural and remote schools). The DEECD needs to accelerate the implementation of Bureaus.
6. Succession Planning. There is a declining leadership profile in schools which has also added to the responsibilities of the principal class members in the school. Where is the incentive for succession planning and devolved leadership in the current SRP funding model?
7. Travel. Travel for country principals is an OHS issue. DEECD needs to provide accommodation for principals who are expected to travel more than two hours (in both directions) or to travel outside normal working hours to attend a meeting.
8. Principals who teach. Small schools need sufficient funds so that the amount of time that a principal is expected to teach is limited. Consideration must be given to the administrative workload that is expected of all principals.
9. School Funding Model. There is an equity issue for students in that some students get less support and resources because they are in a high cost school. The funding model is also flawed in that it does not recognise the elements that constitute the actual costs of running and staffing a school. For example a growing school with a young staff is financially better off than an established school with a constant or declining enrolment which has an increasing experienced staff (due to less opportunity to employ less experienced staff). This could be remedied by access to workforce bridging as an entitlement for these high cost schools.
10. Regional Briefings. DEECD needs to run more briefings in regional areas rather than requiring principals to travel to the centre. The DEECD also needs to make greater use of high definition video conferencing in its communication with rural principals.
11. Principal's Personal Assistant. All schools should get 'tagged' funding to employ an ES staff member to work as an administrative assistant to the principal. The same support should be provided to campus principals in multi-campus schools.
12. Campus Principals in a Multi-Campus School. Campus principals should be recognised and deemed to be principals to enable them to access higher levels of the salary scale. They perform virtually all of the functions of a school principal.

13. Principal Health. Principal health (including mental health) is still an issue. The DEECD has a vested interest in the health of its school leaders and needs to fund an appropriate program to support principal health. An example of an appropriate program is the “Principal Health and Well-being” program being run currently in the Northern and Western regions.
14. Student Welfare. Currently, principals and assistant principals perform much of the student welfare role in schools, especially in primary schools and small schools. All schools should be funded to enable the employment of sufficient welfare staff. (e.g. Primary Welfare officers in all primary schools).
15. SSSO Provision. The DEECD must review the triage model for SSSO provision. We believe that the model does not work effectively and places a greater burden on schools and school principals. There is also a significant issue in attracting quality staff into SSSO positions.
16. Department of Human Services support. The support provided by DHS to schools with extremely challenging students in their care is inadequate. The department needs to work more closely with DHS to improve communication with schools and the quality of support provided to students.
17. Special Settings. Principals of special settings have significant problems in attracting suitably qualified staff. Having to work with unqualified staff creates serious workload issues for these principals. The DEECD needs to expand the training opportunities for these staff and implement an incentive to encourage them to obtain qualifications.
18. Support from Regional Staff. Regions need to be better able to support principals in dealing with vexatious and litigious parents.
19. Principal Essay Writing Competitions. Principals can spend a lot of time writing applications and putting in submissions in order to attract additional funds for their schools. Funds should be allocated to schools according to need, not based on who can write the best submission.

Some other factors to consider

The AEU Victorian Branch advises that the current autonomous staffing model is leading to “educational apartheid”. Some schools receive 200 or more applicants for teacher positions in their schools and have “the pick of the bunch”. Meanwhile, some schools receive no applicants. This leads to significant differential outcomes for students in usually outlying, low SES areas of Victoria.

Consider also that teachers at the top of the classroom teacher scale may find it difficult to obtain a position as they are more costly to the school. We know that such teachers transferring from another jurisdiction have experienced great difficulties in convincing a school to employ them.

As the quantum for a school’s single-line staffing budget is calculated on student numbers, schools need to make a decision about their staffing mix. The more experienced staff they have, the fewer teachers they can afford. If they select newer

teachers they can afford more of them. If they have an experienced staff, they can afford fewer teachers. This directly affects class sizes. So, if you teach in a school where there is a high number of experienced staff, your class sizes will be higher. This raises issues of equity and workload. It most certainly disadvantages students in the larger classes who receive less individual attention in their learning.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Information provided by Anne Gisborne, President of the State School Teachers Union of Western Australian (SSTUWA, an AEU affiliate).

Under the conservative Barnett Government's "Unlock Your School's Future" initiative, there are 98 "independent public schools" in Western Australia.

The experience in WA for principals has been increased flexibility and increased responsibilities – and increased workload. There has been no additional remuneration for this increased responsibility.

The following information comes from the SSTUWA website:

The Barnett Government's announcement of the establishment of Independent Public Schools is of major concern to the SSTUWA.

A joint meeting of the SSTUWA, CPSU-CSA and LHMU Senior Officers was held with the Director General Sharyn O'Neill on Friday 14 August 2009. It was evident at this meeting that the "rules/ operation procedures" are in many instances being made up on the run. Further, no real consideration has been made of the impact on industrial instruments or various policy positions agreed between the parties.

Without consultation, this program was expanded in 2010 before any real examination of the initial trial had begun.

It should be of major concern to school communities, parents and the broader community. Why? These are just a few issues:

- Lack of genuine consultation with key stakeholders in the development stage
- Undue haste in nominating to be part of the "scheme", making a farce of the notion of "community consultation"
- Real concerns about the impact on equity and access issues in the public education system
- No discussion on the industrial ramifications for SSTU, CPSU-CSA and LHMU members

Despite Minister Elizabeth Constable assuring the Executive in term 1 2009 that consultation would occur around the Liberal Government's pre-election policy Empowering Local Communities, Government has proceeded without consultation.

In just under 4 weeks, school communities were to have discussed the notion of "Independent Public School" and determined if they will throw their hat in the ring.

What are Independent Public Schools?

AEU – ACT Branch Briefing on The School Autonomy Agenda
March 2011

These schools have operated in different countries since 1988 as independent, self-governing, academy or, most commonly in the US and Canada, charter schools. There are significant differences in how they operate but common features are that they are independently-operated schools that are funded by governments (with corporate, university or parent sponsorship in some cases). Most have control over selection of student population, budgets, teaching resources and in many cases curriculum. They can be new or existing schools. The rationale for change is often that the schools are failing, dysfunctional or in urgent need of additional resources.

Principals will hire and fire and can get rid of students as well as manage schools budget and assets. These schools will also have greater curriculum control. There is no rationale for this approach other than to reduce bureaucracy and free the schools to “innovate”. It is the educational equivalent of the gated community.

Victorian Self-Governing Schools a Disaster

- Similar to WA in that there was none of the preconditions for these type of schools in other countries. Kennett made an incentivised offer to schools to take part.
- Created a two-tier system of government schools with the government abandoning its responsibility to ensure equality of opportunity for all students and shifting responsibility for schools to local school councils. Public polling showed majority opposition and it was viewed as a cost-cutting move with no educational rationale.
- School councils had to become employers taking on administrative, business and industrial responsibilities offloaded by the Education Department. They had to take on legal liability, deal with industrial disputes, workers compensation, salaries, etc. Led to differential salaries for principals, removed award protection, security of employment and introduced minimum conditions significantly worse than those of departmental employees. (AEU Victorian Branch)
- Allowed Government to shift blame and responsibility for juggling budgets to school councils who were encouraged to seek corporate sponsorship and put business people on council. It diverted school principals and senior teachers from educational leadership and teaching to administration, marketing, organizational development and funds management. (AEU Victorian Branch)
- Despite offers of extra funding for those who signed up only 51 out of 1600 (3 per cent) schools elected to become self-governed and the program was axed by the Bracks Government after its election in 1999. (AEU Victorian Branch)

Don't Improve Education Outcomes

In June 2009 the first detailed study of charter schools across the US found a wide variation in quality with students overall not faring as well as those in public schools. It found 17 per cent of charter schools reported academic gains better than public schools while 37 per cent showed gains that were worse. 46 per cent demonstrated no significant difference. (Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States, CREDO, Stanford)

Another major study of charter schools in the US found: “There is no evidence that, on average, charter schools outperform regular public schools. In fact there is evidence

that the average impact of charter schools is negative.” (The Charter School Dust Up by M.Carnoy, R. Jacobsen, L.Mishel and R. Rothstein)

Australian researchers looking at school reforms in England, Wales the US, Aus and NZ found: “Similarly, the devolution of decision-making to the school level has shown no necessary consequences for enhancing teacher autonomy and professionalism and appears to be making little difference to the outcome of student learning.” (Devolution and Choice in Education by G.Witty, D. Halpin and S.Power)

Lead to Segregation and Don't Address Disadvantage

American researchers found that charters do not enrol more disadvantaged students but are associated with increased segregation and higher rates of student turnover. (The Charter School Dust Up by M.Carnoy, R. Jacobsen, L.Mishel and R. Rothstein)

And NEW SOUTH WALES?

[Underlining by AEU – ACT Branch]

Secret cuts to schools

Anna Patty

Sydney Morning Herald, March 19, 2011

MORE than \$1 billion in cuts has been targeted in a secret NSW Education Department blueprint that proposes closing more than 100 schools, axing 7500 teachers, selling surplus land and slashing the costs of programs for disadvantaged students.

The blueprint, large parts of which are already under way and which are modelled on Victorian premier Jeff Kennett's education reforms in the 1990s, would save \$800 million a year.

The secret review reveals the department is facing a \$1 billion budget shortfall within two years and provides a template for an incoming state government to reduce spending.

The Education Minister, Verity Firth, said the Boston Consulting Group report was commissioned by Treasury to identify savings as part of the government's Better Services Taskforce.

"It made a number of radical suggestions such as the closure of schools which I found totally unacceptable and rejected outright," she said.

"There are always opportunities to save on administrative costs in a department the size of Education and no cuts were made to schools or teachers."

But principals are involved in a trial recommended by the report to give them greater control over their budgets.

The trial was portrayed as an opportunity for greater flexibility in hiring staff and spending, principals said, but instead could be used to secretly reduce their school budgets.

Taking wage growth into account, the cost of education - almost a quarter of the state budget - will rise to \$13.6 billion by 2012-13 unless there is a cut in expenditure.

Treasury and the department, conferring with Boston Consulting Group, produced the report. It says the department needs to save \$1 billion through lower wage growth and cuts to education services.

Up to \$850 million could be made from the closure of 80 primary and 20 high schools and a sale of surplus land from schools with grounds of more than five hectares, the report says.

Using Victoria as the benchmark, the review says NSW has 7500 additional teachers and blames the state government's long-running strategy to reduce class sizes.

The report also suggests NSW has 1500 too many support staff, costing \$900 million a year.

The proposed cuts, outlined in a confidential document prepared for the state cabinet in January last year, threaten to outstrip the Greiner government's education reforms introduced in the late 1980s.

The Greiner government education minister Terry Metherell scrapped 2500 teacher positions, igniting the fury of school communities who staged the biggest street demonstrations in Sydney since the Vietnam War.

The *Herald* has obtained a copy of the draft final report, *Expenditure Review of the Department of Education and Training - Initial Scan*, which is stamped "cabinet-in-confidence".

The report provides public relations advice on how difficult political decisions such as school closures and cuts to programs for disadvantaged children should be sold to the public.

The review recommends the department give responsibility for school maintenance and cleaning contracts to principals. Forty-seven principals are involved in the trial of that strategy.

The report reveals the initiative was designed to save \$20 million to \$25 million, which was not communicated to principals.

Jim McAlpine, who was president of the secondary principals association when the trial was introduced last year, said principals were told only that it was an opportunity for greater autonomy and flexibility.

"There was no mention of any cutbacks in the resources available. It was never put to us as a cost savings measure," he said.

One principal who chose not to volunteer for the trial said: "The notion of devolving responsibility to principals is a deceit because in reality it is about making principals do much more with much less."

The acting president of the NSW Teachers Federation, Gary Zadkovich, said the plan was "a blueprint for an incoming state government to slash 9000 jobs, cut teachers' working conditions and students' learning conditions, close schools" and sell land.