# PRINCIPAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY

# DISCUSSION PAPER

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# FOREWORD

I am excited to release this Discussion Paper on principal mental health and wellbeing. We care about principal mental health and wellbeing and believe in supporting our principals to be their best. We are committed to building a culture that reduces the stigma around mental health.

Our principals are at the forefront of the Education State. A great education starts with capable, confident, committed and passionate leaders. Healthy principals are central to creating a positive climate for teaching and learning. If school leaders understand how to look after their own mental health and wellbeing, they are then better placed to be wellbeing leaders for their teachers and students. An essential element in the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes is to develop a whole-school approach to health, wellbeing, inclusion and engagement.

Collectively, we also need to ensure the profession reinforces positive approaches to mental health and wellbeing, and that as a sector we lead through the complex external stressors that affect us on a daily basis.

The Department of Education and Training (the Department) is developing a Principal Health and Wellbeing Strategy (the Strategy) and the mental health and wellbeing of principals is a critical component of this Strategy. This Discussion Paper addresses the challenges and opportunities for our school principals with regards to their own mental health and wellbeing. We have intentionally started the Strategy at the principal level, as a commitment from leaders helps to instigate cultural change and increase the safety levels for discussing mental health and wellbeing.

To demonstrate the importance of this work, the Victorian Government is investing an initial $4 million to pilot early intervention strategies for mental injuries; to enhance expert, specialist advice services to reduce pressures on principals; to provide professional learning to develop mental health awareness and literacy; and to pilot coaching panels of persons including retired principals trained in psychological health.

Concurrently, we are seeking your feedback via this Discussion Paper to ensure we fully identify and understand all the opportunities for sustained improvement in principal mental health and wellbeing.

Let’s work together to help improve the mental health and wellbeing of principals across Victoria. The Department welcomes feedback on the Discussion Paper from principals across all Victorian government schools, their representative bodies, and central and regional Department employees who support principals. Your opportunity to engage with the Discussion Paper is through a number of avenues: individually at a time that suits you through a dedicated website; in small groups through localised network or school leadership meetings; and as part of programmed area forums in Term 4 where the focus will be on ‘Developing Self and Others’.

Your insights and expertise will help shape this most important agenda to create positive school climates across Victoria, which in turn will improve outcomes for all children and young people in the Education State.

**The Hon James Merlino MP**

Deputy Premier

Minister for Education

Minister for Emergency Services

# OVERVIEW

## VISION

Our vision is to have safe, healthy, resilient and connected school leaders leading positive school climates, supported by strong collaborative partnerships with peers, areas, regions and central colleagues and management.

The first focus of the Strategy is principal mental health and wellbeing. Health is ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’. Mentally healthy individuals realise their potential, cope with the normal stressors of life, work productively and fruitfully, and contribute to their community (WHO, 2016).

Our vision is to:

* ensure alignment with the Whole of Victorian Government (WoVG) Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter which suggests a balanced focus on strategies that help:
  + protect against mental health issues
  + promote positive mental health and wellbeing
  + address mental ill health by taking action to support recovery
* develop the skills and confidence in principals to proactively manage and promote positive mental health in themselves and others
* provide wellbeing support and strategies to respond to the individual mental health and wellbeing needs of principals across the wellbeing spectrum (i.e. those who are struggling, coping or flourishing)
* ensure higher utilisation and promotion of current and future support mechanisms available to principals through proactive engagement and communication with principals and their representative bodies
* build capability amongst principals, the region and central management to create a culture that promotes positive mental health and reduces stigma.

## STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Delivery of the Education State and the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO) requires safe and healthy school leaders leading positive school climates for teaching and learning. Research shows ‘improving school leadership has a significant, positive effect on the quality of teaching, learning and outcomes for students’ (DET, 2016).

The extent to which pressures within the school environment affect the mental health and wellbeing of principals varies based on individual differences. This project takes a balanced approach in modifying and minimising risks within the environment while simultaneously lifting the capacity for principals to manage and respond effectively to challenges they face in their roles.

## ROLE OF A PRINCIPAL

School principals are pivotal to ensuring successful outcomes for students. The role of the principal has two aspects: education leader and workplace manager. Principals require both broad technical expertise and strong leadership skills. In our changing society, a principal’s role is rewarding but also comes with unique pressures. They are required to lead and manage educational reform on behalf of the Department and to manage changing societal expectations around individualised, responsive and tailored education. They are ambassadors of social issues for their school community, both offline and online. This environment requires distributive leadership skills and collaboration across schools (Bevington Group, 2016). It also requires different approaches that meet context-specific requirements.

## CONTEXT

Principals are at the forefront of changing community expectations and the rapid evolution of 21st century learning. Leading in complexity requires strong leadership teams with devolved responsibilities, yet fewer leading teaching roles are being created. Data shows a decrease in leading teacher roles from 9.5 per cent of the workforce in 2008 to 6.8 per cent in 2017 (DET, 2017c).

Data also shows that principals are at greater risk of mental health injury than other school staff (DET, 2017a). Workers’ compensation claims relating to mental health injury from principals, from January 2011 to October 2016, made up 4.6 per cent of these claims, when principals constitute only two per cent of the workforce.

The average days lost for principals’ mental health injury claims was 55 per cent greater than the Department average (DET, 2017a).

There is growing community awareness of the importance of developing mental health strategies for the workplace. Mental ill health can affect a person’s ability to work productively. The impact of mental health conditions, measured through absenteeism, presenteeism and compensation claims, costs Australian workplaces approximately $10.9 billion per year (PwC, 2014). The average cost of a mental health injury claim, for the principal class, over a three year period is $103,000 per claim (DET, 2017a). A holistic approach to mental health in the workplace encompasses preventative measures from employers as well as employees having self-knowledge about how to promote their own mental health. We need to ensure that the environment for principals is optimal so that they are supported and empowered to achieve their goals.

## COMMITMENT

Our collective commitment is to empower, support and value principals as wellbeing leaders. To do this, principals must be well themselves.

We must all commit to a systematic and proactive approach to leading and reinforcing the health and wellbeing of all of our staff and students, for which principals have a key leadership role.

It is the Department’s aim to ensure that the right supports are in place to help principals perform at their best.

The Department is committed to supporting principals’ mental health and wellbeing. This can only be achieved through collective action and ownership of the resulting Strategy.

## OUR APPROACH

The Department commenced a consultation and research process in late 2016. Phase 1 identified the opportunities for improving principal mental health and wellbeing, which has resulted in this Discussion Paper.

We are now working with principals to commence Phase 2. This is a collective approach to discussing and improving principal mental health and wellbeing across the profession. Implementation (Phase 3) of the Strategy will be announced in early 2018.

The details of the phases are as follows:

**Phase 1: Understanding Key Issues**

* engaging with key stakeholders (principals, the union and peak principal associations, academics, subject matter experts across the Department, organisational psychologist)
* obtaining critical feedback about current services and potential gaps
* identifying suggestions for addressing those gaps and areas for improvement.

**Phase 2: Hosting Conversations**

* summarising findings from Phase 1 in a Discussion Paper
* building principal mental health and wellbeing literacy
* creating opportunities to share good practice
* identifying priorities for the Principal Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

**Phase 3: Embedding New Strategies**

* developing an implementation plan with key milestones
* setting up structures and resources to implement actions
* establish monitoring and evaluation framework to track progress
* celebrating and communicating achievement of key milestones

# AREA OF FOCUS 1: SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS

*“This is a journey and it takes time to become proficient”*

### Key Ambitions:

* create realistic role expectations for new principals
* ensure that principals have the relevant technical and interpersonal skills and capabilities
* provide new principals with relevant orientation and support to help them transition into their roles
* build peer learning and support networks to ensure their long-term sustainability in the role.

## Focus 1, Theme 1: Enhancing principalship pathways to prioritise and support resilience

### What we heard

Some principals reported feeling overwhelmed during the initial stages of their role. The breadth of responsibilities and accountabilities were seen as impacting mental health, as they require considerable technical expertise and confidence.

The need to provide incoming principals with a realistic preview of the role to better prepare them mentally was raised during the consultations. Consideration of additional ways to attract ideal applicants and increase the candidate pool for people with ‘harder-to-develop’ internal resilience and emotional intelligence was also highlighted in feedback from principal consultations.

### Research and analysis

Research shows that building resilience and other individual factors are important in managing wellbeing (Seligman, 2013). ‘Emotional intelligence, empathy, resilience and personal wellbeing’ are paramount for leading a school (AITSL, 2014, p. 23). Good practice focuses on helping leaders develop the skill and capability to manage wellbeing in self and others. Internal resilience and emotional intelligence factors can be hardest to develop (Dries & Pepermans, 2012).

Systematic opportunities to act in a principal role as part of development plans can help to build a sustainable leadership pipeline. This also provides clearer expectations of the role (National Standard of Canada, 2013).

### What we currently do

Currently, aspiring principals are encouraged to access the Unlocking Potential: Principal Preparation program at the Bastow Institute for Educational Leadership (Bastow).There are also acting principal arrangements across Victorian government schools. The Department’s HR Web outlines key aspects of the principal role.

The Department has an Organisational Design Guide specifically to help principals create structured and devolved leadership opportunities for teachers and assistant principals as part of strong leadership teams.

For more information about Bastow's courses or to read the Organisational Design Guide, visit [www.bastow.vic.edu.au](http://www.bastow.vic.edu.au).

To access the Department’s HR Web, see: [www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb)

### Work in progress

Bastow is developing an assessment process for principal readiness.

### Key Question

In what ways could aspiring principals be provided with a realistic preview of the role to help prioritise and build their resilience?

## Focus 1, Theme 2: Ensuring systematic orientation processes to break down isolation

### What we heard

Some principals initially felt isolated with no one to talk to or provide feedback. Most principals reported value in the mentoring and coaching provided by Bastow via the Evolve: New Principals program.

Attending a principal induction was reported as being helpful as many principals had limited awareness of the full range of technical and health and wellbeing supports they could access. Acting principals also reported needing some formal orientation or induction.

### Research and analysis

Research points to the importance of a systematic orientation process to inform new staff of the availability of support mechanisms, both practical and psychological (Trach, 2016; Villani, 2006). Coaching and mentorship are also important aspects of orientation (Pennanen et al, 2016; Trach, 2016).

Leading practice suggests that an effective induction process must include social and cultural integration opportunities in addition to skills and technical training (e.g. connections to key technical supports, regional and central personnel).

Supervisory support has also been identified as a key enabler of wellbeing (Sergiovanni, 1982; Kuoppala et al, 2008). Supervision is not as embedded into the principal profession as it is for some other professions.

### What we currently do

The new regional operating model, known as Learning Places, has established 17 local areas across the Department’s four regions. Each area has a dedicated Area Executive Director and leadership team including Senior Education Improvement Leaders (SEILs) and other service managers that can coordinate support for schools from multi-disciplinary teams.

Bastow also offers the following programs to help support principals’ induction and orientation:

* Evolve: New Principals Program
* Strategic Management for School Leaders.

For more information about Bastow's courses, visit [www.bastow.vic.edu.au](http://www.bastow.vic.edu.au).

There is also a Principal Induction Toolkit and the Principal’s Page via the Department’s intranet. To access the Principal Induction Toolkit resource, visit: [Principal Induction Toolkit](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/services/schools/principaltoolkit/Pages/default.aspx)

To access the Principal’s Page resource, visit: [Principal's Page](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/Services/Schools/principal/Pages/default.aspx)

#### Key Question

Which key supports would you include as part of a systematic induction or orientation process to better support new or acting principals and reduce isolation?

## Focus 1, Theme 3: Encouraging peer learning and support networks to support mental health

### What we heard

Principals reported that their leadership role, by nature and necessity, can be an isolated one. There was strong support for building and promoting peer networks (informal and formal). Many principals found that joining a principal organisation or association was helpful.

Talking about challenges and problems rather than bottling them up is important, but there are some barriers to a culture of honest sharing of issues among principals.

### Research and analysis

The benefits of partaking in peer groups are clearly evident in leading practice guidelines. Research shows that opportunities for cohort learning increase group affiliation, social and emotional support and motivation (Barnett & O’Mahony, 2009). Peer groups are also a key source of psychological and social support. They provide meaningful support when wellbeing is compromised (National Standard of Canada, 2013). The 2016 Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey results also support the benefits of engagement in professional networks (Riley, 2017).

### What we currently do

As part of Learning Places, a schedule of capability building forums such as Area Principal Forums and network meetings has been developed to enable principals to build and maintain peer learning and support.

The Department’s Communities of Practice approach encourages principals to share knowledge and experience within their networks with the goal of developing a collective responsibility for driving improvement using the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO).

For more information about Communities of Practice, visit [www.bastow.vic.edu.au](http://www.bastow.vic.edu.au).

To access the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes, see: [FISO](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/improvement/Pages/FISO.aspx)

### Key Question

Wellbeing is a shared responsibility. How can principals proactively support their colleagues’ mental health and wellbeing through formal and informal networks, and what can the Department do to assist?

#### Case Study

‘I completed the Unlocking Potential: Principal Preparation Program in 2015. The course was crucial in allowing me to project into the role of principal, helping me anticipate and prepare for the many challenges associated with the principalship. The course also emphasised self-knowledge and self-care and I feel that I have walked away with greater insight into my emotional reasoning, something which I see as a core wellbeing strategy. Finally, the course established a fabulous “esprit de corps” amongst the participants; the sense of connection to others on a similar journey has certainly stayed with me and I have established strong professional bonds with a number of my cohort.’

Neil O’Sullivan, principal Avenel Primary School

# AREA OF FOCUS 2: PROACTIVE CULTURE OF SUPPORT

*“Support that is accessible, approachable and responsive builds a culture of trust and reduces stigma.”*

### Key ambitions:

* increase awareness of and access to the range of specialist supports available for lifting mental health and wellbeing
* strengthen the culture of support by ensuring proactive mechanisms for identifying risks and intervening early
* provide appropriate support systems to promote recovery and return to work
* build better capability and confidence to manage and lead positive mental health and wellbeing across schools.

## Focus 2, Theme 1: Making it easier to access specialist support, including regarding mental health and wellbeing

### What we heard

Principals would like training about available supports, including mental health and wellbeing supports, and how to find these supports online. Good quality ‘just in time’ technical support can provide immediate relief from stressors. All supports available to principals need to be easy to find, up to date, and in one place.

Some principals said that it would be beneficial for the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or Manager Assist providers to better understand the principal role and the school context.

### Research and analysis

Professional support mechanisms can serve as valuable on-the-job resources for principals. Job resources can help buffer the impact of job demands and stressors (Riley, 2017; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Good communication of Departmental supports may help promote principals’ awareness of job resources available to them.

Research conducted by WorkSafe Victoria highlights the importance of health checks in the workplace to improve the health and wellbeing of workers and boost safety and productivity (ComCare, 2010).

### What we currently do

The Department has a number of supports in place through a range of mechanisms, and it is important to ensure that these are effectively promoted and made easier to access. Supports are currently communicated via:

* the Principal’s Page on the department’s intranet, updated via the Principal Support Unit; for more information, visit [Principal’s Page](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/Services/Schools/principal/Pages/default.aspx)
* HRWeb, containing topics in an A-Z list; to access this resource, visit: [HRWeb](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/Pages/default.aspx)
* SouRCe: a centralised, searchable database designed for regional staff to provide up-to-date information to principals, but also with a customised principal view to support self-help; to access this resource, via the department’s intranet, visit [SouRCe](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/source/Pages/Default.aspx)

Principals can proactively access mental health and wellbeing support and technical assistance through:

* Principal Support Unit (PSU)
* OHS Advisory Service via MARSH
* Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
* Manager Assist
* Conflict Resolution Support Service
* Workers’ Compensation Advisory Service
* Medical Advisory Service
* capability building programs at Bastow

The feedback from principals regarding the EAP and Manager Assist is being discussed with the providers.

For more information about mental health and wellbeing support and technical assistance, visit [Employee Safety and Support Services](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/Pages/employeeservices.aspx)

### Work in progress

The Department is refreshing its intranet for schools. The Department is pre-populating supports on the principal’s My Workspace screen, and building new intranet pages that provide general health and wellbeing advice.

The Department is commencing a procurement process to appoint an organisation to provide dedicated confidential health checks for principals which includes a mental health component.

Also, a new workforce strategy includes additional industrial relations specialists to support principals managing unsatisfactory performance of staff.

### Key Question

How can Departmental supports (both technical and health and wellbeing supports) be best communicated and promoted to principals?

## Focus 2, Theme 2: Building a supportive and responsive wellbeing culture

### What we heard

There are roles in the Learning Places model which have the dual responsibilities of supporting principals and monitoring performance (i.e. SEILs). Some principals pointed out a reluctance to discuss wellbeing issues with their SEIL who is also their line manager. Suggestions included better recognising the positive contributions of schools. Some principals reported that trust between principals and the region needs to be strengthened.

It was also suggested that it would be helpful to proactively identify factors that may lead to principal stress and intervene early when injury occurs.

### Research and analysis

Research suggests that building a supportive culture at work can help minimise the stigma associated with raising mental health issues and encourage individuals to seek help early (Harvey, Joyce, Tan, Johnson, Nguyenn et al, 2014).

A growing body of evidence shows that positive leadership approaches that help build psychological capital can help promote wellbeing amongst employees (Luthans, Youssef, Sweetman, & Harms, 2013). Direct line managers have an important role to play. Acknowledgement and appreciation from senior colleagues is important for wellbeing at work. For principals, this would involve recognition outside their own schools (Bloxham, 2013).

There is significant evidence to show that an effective early intervention approach can help prevent psychosocial injuries that are difficult to remediate when addressed at a later stage (ComCare, 2013). A robust early intervention program relies on early identification of risk indicators and adopting a multi-pronged approach to mitigate these risks.

### What we currently do

As well as establishing 17 multi-disciplinary Area teams across the four Department regions, Learning Places has created 150 new roles to enhance services and support for schools across the state. As part of this initiative, Area leadership teams, including SEILs and other service managers, now play an important role in supporting and connecting principals to the broader Departmental supports.

The Department has also launched the ‘7 Values in 7 Months’ initiative in schools to support principals to further embed the DET values of Responsiveness, Integrity, Impartiality, Accountability, Respect, Leadership and Human Rights.

For more information on Learning Places, visit: [Learning Places](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/regionalsupport.aspx)

For more information about the Department’s values and supporting initiatives, visit: [Victorian Public Sector Values](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/workm/Pages/Public-Sector-Values.aspx)

### Work in progress

The Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Accountability Framework establishes a consistent structure for OHS responsibilities and lines of reporting to improve health, safety and wellbeing for self and others.

The Early Intervention and Workers’ Compensation Unit is developing an Early Intervention Model with an Injury Management Framework, which aims to identify mental health incidents and injury early and to help employees stay at work or return to work.

The Department is also developing a Supervision Framework that will foster the development of best professional practice through protected time set aside for focused support.

### Key Question

How can we strengthen a supportive and responsive wellbeing culture, and the supports, resources and processes at a system level, particularly through regions, areas and networks?

## Focus 2, Theme 3: Building capability and awareness through mental health and wellbeing training, and reducing stigma

### What we heard

Principals requested training in psychological health and wellbeing strategies. They emphasised the importance of reducing the stigma of mental health issues.

### Research and analysis

Mental health and wellbeing relies upon effective internal strategies and building one’s psychological capital (Cornum, Matthews, & Seligman, 2011; Adler & Seligman, 2016). A number of studies show that helping individuals build their capacity to be resilient can help improve wellbeing outcomes over time (Seligman, 2011; Bernard, 2016).

Research shows that if leaders are provided with mental health training and support, the result is reduced psychological distress in the workplace. Effective leadership is associated with improved wellbeing outcomes for all (Harvey et al, 2014).

Mental health literacy programs at work not only help build confidence amongst individuals to raise and manage mental health issues proactively, but also help reduce the stigma associated with seeking help (Hanisch, Twomey, Szeto, Birner, Nowak, & Sabariego, 2016). Accordingly, it is important to invest in programs that help build capability and confidence amongst principals to manage their own wellbeing. As principals are also leaders within their respective schools, programs must also help them manage and promote wellbeing in others.

### What we currently do

The development of this Strategy, including the consultation period, aims to support the profession to have a conversation about mental health and wellbeing. It aims to reduce stigma, build confidence, and develop wellbeing leadership champions across the school system. The development of this Strategy supports the implementation in Victorian government schools of the WoVG Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter launched in March 2017.

The Department has established a new Bastow program called Coaching for Leadership Teams. This program enhances the capabilities of teams by providing the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to establish or enhance school climate and a professional learning culture which, in turn, optimises the wellbeing of staff.

All staff can access the Livewell online portal, which provides information and advice to help you maintain a balanced and healthy lifestyle. There are also OHS eLearning modules to help principals with school management requirements.

Bastow also offers a Safety Management for School Leaders module which is part of the Strategic Management for School Leaders course. It includes professional learning about psychological health.

For more information on Whole of Victorian Government Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter, see: [Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/employcond/Pages/MHW-Charter.aspx)

For more information onBastow courses, see [www.bastow.vic.edu.au](http://www.bastow.vic.edu.au)

To access the Livewell online portal, visit: [www.livewell.optum.com](http://www.livewell.optum.com)

### Work in progress

Bastow is piloting a Principal Class Health and Wellbeing course in 2017.

### Key Question

What knowledge and skills would be beneficial for principals to manage their own wellbeing and lead positive school climates, and how do we develop these skills?

#### Case Study

‘I really believe the Principal Support Unit to be a fantastic resource. I had Brian Wheeler and Frank Sal out to my school, just to go through my planner, my budgets and discuss some HR and employment issues. In most cases I knew the answers but I wanted reassurance that my calculations and assumptions were correct. They did this beautifully. HR is such a difficult area, and discussing how to performance manage staff was invaluable. They were also able to show me reports on the SRP page that I never knew existed, but more importantly how to interpret this data. They also showed me how to put the increments into my planner, again invaluable information.’

Stephen, school principal

# AREA OF FOCUS 3: RESPECTFUL AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

*“Building capability and confidence to support students, build relationships and promote a positive school climate.”*

### Key ambitions:

* build safe and respectful school communities that encourage positive mental health
* develop a shared approach to supporting the health, wellbeing, inclusion and engagement of all students within the community
* enable principals to proactively engage and involve key stakeholders in promoting positive behaviours and better student outcomes
* ensure a proactive approach to protecting the psychological and physical safety of principals.

## Focus 3, Theme 1: Building an inclusive school community

### What we heard

Principals requested professional development, support and expert advice in relation to building an inclusive school community.

There is increased expectation for principals to provide an individualised, responsive, and tailored service for students.

### Research and analysis

Effective schools help build positive relationships with families and work with them on their child’s learning (FISO) (DET, 2017b). Building positive relationships is a key component of wellbeing (Adler & Seligman, 2016).

### What we currently do

Through the Inclusion, Access and Participation Branch, the Department provides principals with expert advice related to Departmental policy and resources for supporting students with disabilities and behaviours of concern. The Principal Practice Leader (Education), provides specific support and advice regarding complex case management. The Department also has the Inclusive Education Professional Practice Branch, a dedicated professional practice branch that assists with inclusive education. Local area teams also provide multidisciplinary support to schools, including Student Support Services.

There is also School -Wide Positive Behaviour Support, an evidence-based framework for preventing and responding to student behaviour that aims to create a positive school climate.

For more information about the Principal Practice Leader, see: [Principal Practice Leader](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/seniorpractitioner.aspx)

For more information about Student Support Services see: [Student Support Services](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/students/support/Pages/ssso.aspx)

To access School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support, visit [School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/collaboration/RSG/SWPBS/default.aspx)

### Work in progress

The Department is implementing an inclusive education reform agenda that will deliver on the recommendations of the Program for Students with Disabilities Review. The agenda includes reforms to: improve policy and guidance on inclusive education; support workforce development and capacity building; provide resources on strengths-based and student centred approaches to learning; and improve funding and accountability for student outcomes.

The Department is strengthening the Principal Support Unit to provide specialist advice on inclusive education.

For more information on the inclusive education reform agenda visit: [Inclusive education for all students](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/inclusive-education-for-all.aspx)

### Key Question

What specialist advice would provide the most effective support for principals to deliver inclusive education?

## Focus 3, Theme 2: Providing support for dispute resolution

### What we heard

Principals reported that responding to complaints made by parents and other stakeholders can be a challenge. Principals requested further support from the Department in the way that complaints are communicated to principals and investigated.

### Research and analysis

Appropriate training for principals and other school leaders in managing parents and related issues may enable early identification and resolution of disputes (Bevington, 2016). A strategy that may prove useful to principals would be to gather information about common parent-related issues and collate the responses across schools (Bevington, 2016).

Even if risk factors for mental health issues are present in a workplace, organisations with a high psychosocial safety climate that have ‘robust policies and support processes’ in place tend to ‘mitigate the impact of these potential risks’ (Harvey et al, 2014, p.22).

### What we currently do

The Department has in place a Responsive Schools Complaints Framework including a new Independent Office of School Dispute Resolution to help resolve escalated complex disputes.

Bastow offers workshops on the following:

* Have Challenging Conversations
* Dispute Resolution and Mediation

For more information on the Independent Office of School Dispute Resolution, visit: [Independent Office](http://www.schoolresolution.vic.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx)

For more information on Bastow courses, visit [www.bastow.vic.educ.au](http://www.bastow.vic.educ.au)

### Key Question

What proactive support would be useful for managing challenging matters that impact on principal mental health and wellbeing?

## Focus 3, Theme 3: Ensuring psychological and physical safety

### What we heard

Principals identified the need to be treated with civility and respect by their communities, to carry out work safely and not be subjected to the risk of harm from online defamatory, harassing or bullying behaviour.

### Research and analysis

Research highlights the critical role of policies, legislation and resource allocation in addressing defamatory, harassing or bullying behaviour (Fahie, 2014; WorkSafe, 2012).

### What we currently do

The Department provides the following services for principals who may need advice or support in this area:

* Legal Division for advice and information on appropriate responses to unsafe or inappropriate behaviours demonstrated by the school community, including inappropriate online behaviours
* Communications Division for support in flagging or removing alleged cyberbullying content from social media or websites, in situations where the media are involved and for digital issues that are beyond the capabilities of the school
* OHS Advisory Service for assistance with any health, safety or wellbeing issue
* OHS Hazard Management for assistance to identify and manage health and safety hazards including occupational violence
* Security Services in the Emergency Management Division to report an emergency or notifiable incident and for advice on security matters
* Edusafe is an online system for reporting and managing employee incidents and injuries.

For more information about the OHS Advisory Service, visit: [Employee Safety and Support Services](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/Pages/employeeservices.aspx)

Creating Respectful and Safe School Communities is an online toolkit providing principals and school staff with resources to help them work effectively with parents. To access the toolkit, visit: [Creating Respectful and Safe School Communities](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/collaboration/attendanceengagementparentbehaviour/parentbehaviour/default.aspx)

### Key Question

How can we build better support for principals around managing physical, verbal or online behaviour that is unsafe or inappropriate?

#### Case Study

‘The Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution is independent of the Department. Our role is to sit with all parties to a dispute, see the situation from an impartial perspective and help everyone to participate more effectively in resolving the dispute. Part of our role is to build capacity in dealing with complaints, so after a matter is complete, if appropriate, we are able to debrief with principals, to help them enhance their ability to resolve future disputes at an early stage and keep them from escalating unnecessarily.’

Frank Handy, Chair – Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution

# AREA OF FOCUS 4: EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT AT ALL LEVELS

*“Collaborating, consulting and building leadership capabilities to achieve wellbeing excellence”*

### Key ambitions:

* strengthen leadership teams within schools and collaboration between schools
* ensure clarity of expected outcomes of new initiatives when communicating with schools
* build a stronger collaborative partnership between the regions and the principals and between schools in leading new initiatives
* establish proactive mechanisms for monitoring and managing the workflow of principals.

## Focus 4, Theme 1: Building the capability of leadership teams within schools and collaboration between schools

### What we heard

Developing strong leadership structures, learning to delegate responsibilities and prioritise were identified as critical for the longevity of the principal’s role.

Some principals were not entirely confident in delegating to the next level of leadership. Coaching programs at Bastow were reported as being effective for building leadership teams.

Some principals also reported loss of corporate knowledge when a principal retired and a new principal commenced.

Principals identified that collaboration across schools would be beneficial, particularly for smaller Schools who are without leadership teams.

### Research and analysis

Leading in times of complexity requires devolved leadership models (OECD, 2009). Command and control strategies are less effective than distributing school leadership tasks for improving staff and school culture.

Recent data shows a decrease in the number of leading teacher roles being created across the system (DET, 2017), making the task of devolution more difficult to carry out. There is also a need to reduce the number of staff directly managed by principals by increasing management responsibility of assistant principals and business managers (Bevington, 2015).

Principals should develop leadership teams to grow capability and performance in others (Bevington, 2015). This could minimise the workload currently carried by the principal role.

### What we currently do

The Department has an Organisational Design Guide to assist principals in assessing the effectiveness of their schools’ current leadership design.

Bastow offers the following programs to assist principals in this area:

* Coaching for Leadership Teams
* Coaching for Principals and Assistant Principals
* Coaching Conversations.

The Education State includes the vision that networks and system leaders will adopt a Communities of Practice approach to share knowledge, experience and resources. The Department is currently supporting school networks to implement this approach.

For more information about Bastow courses and Communities of Practice, visit [www.bastow.vic.edu.au](http://www.bastow.vic.edu.au).

### Work in progress

The Department is developing a Small School Strategy to assist in streamlining Occupational Health and Safety compliance obligations.

### Key Question

How can principals build a stronger leadership team to support their functions within their schools and build better collaboration across schools?

## Focus 4, Theme 2: Better coordination and support for leading important initiatives and change

### What we heard

Better explanation to principals regarding reforms and initiatives would make it easier for principals to help lead them. Improved Department-wide coordination and consultation would better point to the additional work generated by implementation of changes.

Principals noted that the Department needs to consider the flow-on impact that new initiatives and changes have on schools and principals.

Some noted that clear and reasonable timelines and expectations need to be considered in light of the varying pressures in schools at different times of the year.

We also heard that roles that support principals (i.e. SEILs) could play a more proactive role in understanding these impacts on principals and schools and feed them back to central office for consideration.

### Research and analysis

Ongoing change can have a significant impact on employee wellbeing and performance as it can add to day-to-day workplace stressors. Research suggests that the impacts of organisational change could include lower levels of job satisfaction, reduced organisational commitment, job insecurity and higher intentions to leave (ComCare, 2013). If organisational changes are not well managed, they have the potential to impact on overall morale and engagement. These have significant health and wellbeing impacts on individuals within the workplace and may lead to reduced work performance, higher levels of absenteeism and the potential for psychosocial injuries that may result in expensive compensation claims (ComCare, 2013).

Good workload management practices are part of a psychologically healthy workplace. ‘Assigned tasks and responsibilities’ need to be ‘accomplished successfully within the time available’ (National Standard of Canada, 2013; Riley, 2014).

### What we currently do

Principals can access the following tools and information to assist in planning management tasks:

* State-wide Schools Planner and related Principal Key Dates online calendar
* School Update weekly newsletter
* Regional Directors’ fortnightly newsletters.

To access the State-wide Schools Planner, visit [State-wide Schools Planner](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edrms/collaboration/SLA/AreaProfile/2017-State-Wide-Schools-Planner.pdf)

### Work in progress

The Department continues to embed various initiatives into the State-wide Schools Planner and coordinate the range of activities that affect schools, with a focus on change management.

The Department will continue to work to resolve matters pertaining to principal workload and wellbeing including the impact on system leadership roles.

### Key Question

What strategies could the Department and the Learning Places model put in place to better support school principals to lead important initiatives?

## Focus 4, Theme 3: Managing and reducing administrative tasks

### What we heard

Principals identified the breadth of administrative tasks as a wellbeing challenge. Thought needs to be given to efficiencies in relation to work (i.e. template documents) and consider whether central or regional staff could complete the work with assistance from principals.

Principals noted the challenges faced by smaller schools in managing the full scope of administrative tasks with sufficient resources and supports.

### Research and analysis

Victoria has one of the most devolved government school education systems in Australia, which the research says significantly empowers principals to drive improvement (Caldwell, 2015). However, devolution brings accountability for a range of functions.

Consideration needs to be given to what responsibilities are operated centrally, based on factors such as specialisation (e.g. Legal Division) or efficiency (e.g. eduPay), and what responsibilities remain with principals as the leaders of their school communities.

Principals are known to experience job demands that are 1.5 times higher than the general population. When job demands are this high, they need to be balanced with significant resources to buffer the demands (Riley, 2017). The job demands placed on individual principals could be minimised through effective streamlining of the work allocation process (Bevington, 2015).

There are also legislative obligations that principals need to uphold, as accountable officers, for duties of care in relation to students, managers of school workforces, and occupiers of school land, among others.

### What we currently do

The Department operates an extensive suite of specialist supports available to schools, and has a range of specialist services for complex administrative functions. It also centrally manages many functions in relation to school administration to ensure efficiency across the system.

Bastow also offers many courses that assist school leaders to adjust to managing administrative or compliance obligations as they progress from teaching roles.

For more information about Bastow courses, visit: [www.bastow.vic.edu.au](http://www.bastow.vic.edu.au)

### Work in progress

The Department is redeveloping its compliance checklist for schools, to streamline and simplify obligations. It is also working to better coordinate administrative obligations, such as audit activities.

In relation to smaller schools, South-Western Victoria Region has in place a Local Administration Bureau (LAB) model to provide streamlined administration. The Department is reviewing the effectiveness of the LAB model for smaller schools.

### Key Question

What are the best ways to streamline compliance and administrative obligations so as to reduce their impact as stressors, while ensuring principals remain empowered leaders of their school communities?

#### Case Study

‘The State-wide Schools Planner and Principal Key Dates Calendar have proven to be valuable resources. For technical tasks, for example completion of the census, I am able to plan ahead and balance out each of the tasks because I can see what needs to be done and when. Most importantly, however, these resources highlight the complex role of principals and demonstrate the importance of managing time and tasks so educational leadership can remain at the forefront of our work.’

Phillip Banks, principal Preston North East Primary School

# FEEDBACK OPPORTUNITIES

Your mental health and wellbeing matters. We want to build an inclusive, supportive and positive culture which helps you thrive. We need your active involvement and input to make this relevant. Let’s work together to make this a success.

We would be grateful for your feedback on the Key Questions outlined in this Discussion Paper.

Feedback is possible through the following three avenues:

* Individual principals can provide feedback via an online survey or via the dedicated email address [principal.health@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:principal.health@edumail.vic.gov.au)
* Small groups, such as principal class school leadership teams and school networks, are able to engage in self-directed discussions using the Principal Health and Wellbeing Discussion Paper Summary document on the website and provide feedback via an online survey or via the dedicated email address [principal.health@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:principal.health@edumail.vic.gov.au)
* Feedback from the profession at facilitated workshops as part of programmed Regional Services Group area forums in Term 4 where the focus will be on ‘Developing Self and Others’.

## NEXT STEPS

Once we receive your feedback on this discussion paper, our next step will be to develop a list of prioritised actions for inclusion in the Strategy. It will be important for the Department to focus on a few key actions and implement them well rather than trying to address all the recommendations at once. In prioritising the actions, several aspects need to be considered, including:

* What are some immediate quick wins that could be easily implemented? These refer to refinements suggested to existing services and supports to make them more accessible and relevant.
* What are some of the practical constraints that need to be considered (for example, planning, resourcing)?
* What actions are likely to have the highest impact on improving principal mental health and wellbeing?

The final step in our process will be to draft the Strategy to reflect your inputs and the Department’s commitment to implement a practical and impactful approach to help ensure the mental health and wellbeing of Victorian government school principals.

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