



ACPPA and CaSPA Combined Position Paper

Addressing School Leaders' Occupational Health and Wellbeing

Audience:

National Catholic Education Commission

Diocesan Directors

State and Territory Catholic Education Authorities

RI PJP Governing Bodies

Introduction

The Australian Principals' Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey, initiated in 2011, continues to provide critical insights into the challenges faced by school leaders. The data underscores the necessity for a united and consistent approach to address these challenges. This data has been collected for a long time without action and it is now time to act. As highlighted in the 2023 report:

“We need to foster open communication between government, employers, researchers, and school leaders to identify and address emerging stressors.”

(The 2023 Principals Health & Wellbeing Report, p.2)

Recent commitments, including those made by Education Minister Jason Clare at the ASPA 2024 National Education Summit, affirm the urgency to act. However, to make meaningful progress, collaboration among all key stakeholders is essential. This position paper proposes a pathway to align efforts, share best practices, and implement a unified framework for supporting the occupational health and wellbeing of school leaders across Australia.

Current Context

The 2024 Education Ministers Communique highlights early progress in supporting teacher and leader wellbeing:

“Ministers agreed to initial work proposed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership and the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority to

develop or adapt support materials under the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)... The Australian Government will invest \$360,000 to undertake this work.”

In parallel, discussions within the National Catholic Education Stakeholders Forum, involving the Catholic Secondary Principals Australia (CaSPA), the Australian Catholic Primary Principals Association (ACPPA), and the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC), have identified principal wellbeing as a priority area requiring collective action.

From the 2023 data:

- **43.9%** of **ACPPA** Leaders experienced physical violence and **43.9%** experienced threats of physical violence.
- **26.4%** of **CaSPA** Leaders experienced physical violence and **35.9%** experienced threats of physical violence.

The top sources of stress for both associations were listed as:

- Sheer quantity of work
- Lack of time to focus on teaching and learning
- Mental health issues of students
- Teacher shortages

Additionally, spending time dealing with the mental health of staff and students contributes to the decline in the mental health of principals. Upon completion of the 2023 survey, 31.8% of ACPPA Leaders and 25.5% of CaSPA Leaders were sent a ‘red flag’ email highlighting the increased psychosocial risk identified from the responses.

In the Catholic school, the principal is also the leader of the faith community, and this is an element that every principal takes seriously. Principal shortages, staff shortages and future workforce development are impacted by the wellbeing of principals. If people aren’t well, they aren’t attracted to the role.

Call to Action

To address the ongoing challenges faced by school leaders, we propose:

1. A Collaborative Meeting of Stakeholders:

- Include representatives from peak principal associations (CaSPA, ACPPA), the NCEC, and other relevant bodies.
- Share insights and effective initiatives already in place, with the aim to refine these approaches using recent research, including data from the Australian Catholic University (ACU).

2. Development of a Principal Wellbeing Framework:

- Build a cohesive and actionable framework that jurisdictions can adopt, ensuring consistency and equity across the country.

- Integrate data-driven strategies to address the highest stressors identified in research, such as workload management and autonomy in decision-making.

3. Implementation of Evidence-Based Initiatives:

- Leverage successful programs and processes already in use and evaluate their outcomes to scale impactful solutions.
- Focus on reducing administrative burdens, a need strongly emphasised in the Productivity Commission Report.

Next Steps

To progress these efforts:

- Nominate appropriate persons to attend a webinar/meeting to discuss principal wellbeing.
- Submit details of current programs and initiatives, including measures of their effectiveness.
- Prepare to participate in collaborative discussions aimed at reaching agreement to develop a unified framework.
- Share the created framework with key stakeholders and peak bodies
- Develop agreed strategies that would address principal wellness

Closing Statement

“Every year, the sheer quantity of work is consistently the highest stressor for school leaders. It is important to empower school leaders with decision-making autonomy and provide dedicated resources for reducing unnecessary tasks.”

(The 2023 Principals Health & Wellbeing Report, p.2)

We believe this collaborative effort can deliver practical solutions to improve the occupational health and wellbeing of school leaders, ensuring they are supported in their vital roles within the education system.

Signed



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