

Feedback on DoE Health and Well-Being Plans

The Principals Federation of WA is supportive of any initiative by the Department of Education to enhance the health and well-being of its employees, and while it recognizes considerable time, effort and thought have been invested in developing the Health and Well-being Plans, the PFWA considers there is still a lot of work to be done in addressing the health and well-being needs of members of the Principal Class. Principals, supported by Deputies and Associates, are responsible and accountable for implementing strategies to address the health and well-being of all other staff. It is the Principal who is charged with the responsibility of assessing risk to the health and well-being of staff, including psychological risk. So, the expectation is that Principals will support the intent of the Plan for general staff by implementing strategies at the school level. However, responsibility for implementing strategies to support school leaders' health and well-being rests with the employer, and, as a result this Plan asks more questions than it answers in terms of strategies the employer might implement. The danger is the Plan for school leaders becomes just another "glossy" that creates an image of something being done, when in reality, nothing tangible is being put in place. The fact that there is an intent to have a plan is a positive, but these documents do not actually constitute what one would expect from a plan. A plan requires a strategic approach to implementation, and the log of claims the PFWA has submitted to the EBA process, outlines some key focus areas which the DoE should support.

- How is the Principal being supported so they can go about their core business without being distracted by the need to be a builder, an electrician, a roof tiler, and OSH expert, a medical professional etc?
- Being "trusted to lead" thrusts a responsibility on the stewards at all levels to do just that, and provide support for the authority of the Principal, not push back, question, direct and butt cover.
- Where is the performance management process that recognizes, respects and supports the authority of the Principal?
- The solution is self-care? This is nothing more than a patronising brush stroke across the issue of Leader and staff wellbeing and we suspect butt covering. It says nothing specific about the major contributing factors in Principal health and well-being:

Crazy workloads

Staff who are challenging or underperforming.

Parent harassment issues

Social media harassment

Unreasonable expectations

Lack of genuine value/care for Principals within the system.

Country teachers poor support/housing

Staff shortages adding to workload.

- The word “support” is used extensively with little or no detail. What is ignored here is that we work in a human enterprise but are treated as robots - with toolkits, policies and frameworks put in front of people.
- The document is silent on CULTURE - importantly the culture of DoE. Aspects of it are purely operational - with the mindset that - if we load the Principalship up with information, toolkits, policies, frameworks, reflective rubrics - it will make things better.
- There is NOTHING about personal relationships (apart from possibly Collegiate Principals). Again, it seems like an “all care, no responsibility” approach for the employer, - while it’s an All Care AND All Responsibility expectation that is placed on the Principal.
- What baseline data has this document been based on? What is the real understanding of the system - regarding the stress points in schools and for school leaders?
- How many times have we heard of “streamlining process”? The result usually is that some deck chairs get shifted with no tangible improvement.
- Return to Work programs in an environment where there are known staff shortages and high levels of emotional distress of staff involved, resulting in an increased burden on school leadership who are ultimately responsible for the health and well-being of the staff member, and accountable for the outcome for the person, the school and the system.
- For a document that purports wellbeing, its aloof in tone, provides no authentic and supportive connection between the Principal and their line manager, nor the Principal to DoE.
- The underpinning values which are embedded in the Code of Conduct tell a tale. Teamwork, truth-telling, care, etc – are all values that need to permeate through all levels of the DoE.

It is all well and good to have a glossy brochure outlying good intent, however if there isn’t anything tangible re supporting and promoting Principals’ Health and Wellbeing, other than a document containing a lot of statements, then it doesn’t achieve a lot. The lack of any articulated tangible support means that self-care then becomes the foundation for Principals’ health and well-being, without considering all of the external factors which impact on the Principal day to day. The PFWA is ready to contribute to any discussion, commencing with the EBA, on how to articulate an employer response to what has become a pressing problem for the system, and to investigate further possibilities for development.



Bevan Ripp
President, on behalf of PFWA Council and Members