

National survey highlights need for action on principal health

The results of the 2017 Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey present a stagnating set of figures and continue to highlight ongoing challenges for schools, school systems and governments, says Australian Primary Principals Association President, Dennis Yarrington.

In commenting on the survey report, Mr Yarrington said the report points to a growing number of leaders reporting violence and threats of violence, and the increasing hours of work expected of principals to meet the mounting demands of managing a school.

“Running any school is a complex and demanding responsibility that naturally brings with it a certain level of stress. Principals accept that. However, we don’t need to look far to know the serious consequences when workload and work demands impact on personal health. The results are simply not good for principals, staff, students or parents.”

“The survey data, released today, makes it clear that our school leaders are having to deal with increased levels of stress, unrealistic demands, limited resources and less time to focus on what is their core business – the education of students within their school.

“As a national association representing primary principals, we draw on the experiences of our members leading Government, Catholic and Independent schools. The message is that we need a coordinated response that is more than just providing a health and wellbeing program for principals.”

Mr Yarrington pointed out the need to change the trend that being a principal means abuse, threats and assault.

“It is simply not acceptable. We need policies and practices in place that give a clear message of what is acceptable and what is not. APPA calls on all Education Ministers and employers to lead this message and then back their principals through action.

“The report highlighted the passion principals bring to their role. It warned though that when passion becomes obsessive, then stress, burnout and poor health begin to appear. Principals working over 55 and 65 hours a week is far too common and cannot be helping anyone – students, teachers and themselves.

“School community support, resources to manage the workload and employer practices that provide trust and assistance form the social capital that sees school leaders report better health, lower stress and greater job satisfaction.”

APPA further welcomed the report recommendations calling for a national strategy and review of the work practices of principals and deputies.

APPA is the professional association representing over 7,200 Government, Catholic and Independent primary school principals across Australia.

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