

Conference 2017 - “Relationships Matter”

Notes are as captured by Parents Victoria and are not notes provided directly by the speakers.

Day 1 Monday 23rd October

PV President Sharron Healy, did an acknowledgment to country and then expressed Parents Victoria’s appreciation for the opportunity that the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education, James Merlino MP afforded us by coming to conference and acknowledging that family partnerships help to make us the Education State.

Conference Opening

Deputy Premier and Minister for Education, James Merlino

The Minister welcomed Sharron, Gail and the Executive Team and acknowledged Parents Victoria’s foremost representation of partners in children’s education. Also that parents are of paramount importance in the education of their students, parent voice is appreciated and his thanks for the invitation to attend the conference.

The Minister flagged :

- How can his office, DET, Government improve parent engagement in our system – play a greater role? Always happy to hear from Parents Victoria.
- Parent teacher interviews are important but how do we go beyond?
- How can we engage parents in learning at home and in school?
- How can we give parents the confidence to get involved? To make them feel welcome as an entire school community. Schools at the heart of community. Connections – and a sense of wellbeing and pride.
- Engaging parents promotes pride.
- An Education State target is to see a 20% increase in parents reporting a high level of confidence by 2025.
- Relationships between schools / parents – it’s a partnership.
- Relationships do matter! Active families, teachers and students.
- We want outcomes of healthy, happy, independent, successful adults.
- The school system needs to reflect an attitude where parents feel welcome.
- Encouragement to parents to put up their hand for their parent group or school council

- You are here today giving your time. It's not always easy. Therein lies the challenge.
- As a parent of 3 young children, the Minister is a dad "first and foremost".
- Kids love seeing parents during school hours but recognise that's not possible for many parents.
- The day often starts after you finish "work"!
- Parents often feel there is no time to do more than you already do.
- Regardless, parents need to know the value of their engagement.
- Parents Victoria recognises the value of parent engagement and has worked hard and successfully to promote and support. That's why the current government provided an increase in funding to support the expansion of Parents Victoria's services.
- We can all do more – that's the challenge for us.
- In an effort to "ask the parents themselves" there are plans for a 2018 bi-yearly parent forum so parents can express their ideas. In 2017 there will be several small events which are currently being planned. We want to send the message that we are listening.
- Policies and initiatives will have lasting benefits.
- In this third year of government we want to put to the community next year – how can the Education State better engage with parents?
- We have appreciation for what parent clubs do.
- In regards to the new Education Regulations – we understand some parents have questions. DET is listening. Better financial regulation will see parent club spending exactly as parent clubs want it. Parent Clubs maintain independence and they play a key role.
- Parents Victoria campaigned for years for the setting up of an independent dispute resolution process. We listened and the Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution was launched in March 2017. They will deal with the toughest issues. Frank Handy is the Chair of the Office and you will hear from him this afternoon. The Office is effective as an independent circuit breaker.
- The Respectful Relationships program you will hear about later today. The Minister values this initiative – and as a father. All children will grow up and experience a better / safer world.
- We all have a stake. We value the positive and productive relationship between the government and Parents Victoria.
- Looking for new ideas, initiatives, commitments and policies. Keen to hear your ideas – soon.

Knowing Yourself, Knowing Others - Mark McKeon, Specialist – Sustainable Peak Performance, Resilience and Workplace Wellbeing

- Mark noted at the outset that his own blood type is **B positive!**
- Mark's background as a high performance coach for Collingwood Football Club saw him fascinated by sustainable peak performance.
- Mark noted over the journey and including working with corporate teams – how often relationships get in the way. It's often about the communication. But it starts with **self awareness!**
- Some things which people value about leadership are - proven track record and work ethic, team building and interpersonal skills, and being able to communicate effectively. But - some people just don't "get" their impact on others.
- Look out for *working too hard* but not *unlocking the value of communication*.
- Mark took delegates through an activity to rate descriptors according to what they feel describes them best. This was an exercise in self awareness. Mark described that the results are not "good or bad" – they are a tool to understand your ability or your affect when dealing with other people. Mark did also acknowledge that diversity is necessary – i.e. bringing all "types" to the table!
- We then looked at "people-type compatibility". Mark explained the theory that our underlying principles and preferences do not change through life. It's more about the awareness or to learn from this, which is helpful. He explained that it's not just about personalities; it's about respecting and appreciating differences and being able to understand people and value them for where they sit. (Looking at a classroom of students from this perspective is interesting. It's difficult for teachers.) Self awareness allows you to shift and integrate. Some people have it and can adapt it. Some people go through their whole life and don't adapt. There are benefits for a whole-team approach.
- Important are: having empathy and tolerance. Empathy and tolerance are universal. Be empathetic and tolerant and your relationships will flow.

“ NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPACT YOU HAVE ON OTHER PEOPLE “

Doctors in Secondary Schools

Claire Tobin – Principal Medical Advisor, DET

Healthy children and young people learn better. There is a link between health and education outcomes.

This program offers a range of health and wellbeing services.

Secondary school aged students are the least likely to seek help (GP or health care).

Many face barriers – cost of consultation, not knowing where to go, sometimes lack of parental support.

Program Aim

- To make primary health care more accessible to students.
- To provide early support in identifying health problems.
- To reduce pressure on working families.
- The service is currently aimed at 100 Victorian government secondary schools.

Once the program is up and running – 70,000 secondary students will have access.

Recruiting quality, adolescent-health trained GPs

Bulk billed to Medicare (so no cost to student or school)

Program doesn't replace the existing family GP. They will work together.

Attention to confidentiality policy and consent.

DET recognises that parents want to be involved.

The needs of the student must be met and balanced with parent involvement.

Generally, any student who wants to go to the GP can attend. The GP will assess if a young person is mature enough to provide consent for the medical treatment. This is the 'mature minor' test.

This is a pilot program and is being assessed. It's an Australian first and aims to reduce pressure on families. Claire hopes that by PV conference 2018, there will be some rich data available to present.

DET works closely with stakeholders – including Parents Victoria. Claire thanked PV for their advice, support and input into the program.

For further information via the DET website:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/doctors-secondary-schools.aspx>

Our Journey Continues

Parent Ambassadors – Broadmeadows Valley PS.

The Broadmeadows Valley PS Parent Ambassadors (PAs) presented at Parents Victoria's 2016 conference and they expressed that it's great to be back!

Along with Kirsten, Coordinator of the community hub the PAs informed that the school benefits by having the diverse talents and ideas of the parents, shared with them. In turn the parent ambassadors benefit as they are highly valued and have great opportunities to learn. The school is committed to supporting the aspirations of the parents and the level of investment by the school in seeing them thrive as a group and as individuals, is appreciated.

The schools makes the PAs very welcome, provides them with opportunities and experiences, utilising their strengths and at times stretching and challenging them to step outside their comfort zones. The school provides:

Pathways into employment and education.

Supports them to develop transferrable skills.

Acknowledges collaboration and teamwork are important.

Opportunities such as event management, chairing and minute taking at meetings, time management, written and verbal skills, public speaking, personal challenges – are all part of the experience.

The BVPS PAs then shared their journeys with conference delegates and here are some snippets and special comments:

- Parent relationships with the school are formed via the children.
- There is a "learning for life" culture at the school.
- A key was recruiting parents – tapping them on the shoulder – drawing a group together and crucial was having a dedicated person to work with them (Kirsten).
- A priority is looking at how to engage those parents for who there might be barriers; and with that awareness, targeting specific groups with programs to encourage them to come into the school.
- Journey began with attending schools events such as working bees, reading to young students, joining the dedicated parent association.
- Enjoyed and benefitted from part time employment at the school.
- Assisting at the school cafe, barista training.
- With low self esteem this was a challenging journey but things have changed – the staff and Principal are there, we have Kirsten's guidance and we all have each other's backs!
- If the school community needs parents – we are there.
- School is supportive with part time work.
- Our ideas and opinions are heard.
- The kids learn but so do we.
- We feel wanted by the school.

- We wanted to bring culture into the school community. The school was supportive.
- We are all passionate about the learning and future of our kids.
- Our journey is rewarding but it's about learning alongside our kids.

During question time, an observation was made that in the past there was a DET role as a **school council liaison officer** – working with parents / parent clubs across schools. These were valued roles and perhaps they need to be brought back. Here we have a level of investment from the Broadmeadows Valley PS – support for the parent ambassadors to come out of their comfort zones, to learn new skills and everyone benefits from that participation. This is a model which is working so well. It needs to be replicated.

Schools and families working together – how to successfully navigate relationships

Mary Louise Hatch, Spectrum Partners; Frank Handy, Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution; Tony Fell, The ZALT Group; Natasha Belmont, Relationships Australia Victoria & Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner and Child Consultant

Delegates enjoyed this role play presentation which portrayed the story of a father's complaint to the school re his son's four day suspension from the local school. It demonstrated how things can escalate, how relationships matter and how things can become tricky when conflict happens.

Delegates had opportunity throughout the presentation, to have conversations about what was happening and how matters might have been handled differently by all.

Some identified issues were:

- Listening but not understanding.
- Language and tone.
- No acknowledgement of the initial issue.
- Not letting people speak.
- Thinking about – how does this feel for him/her vs what am I going to say to him/her?
- Not validating the emotion. You don't know what's going on in someone's life to make them react they way they do.
- None of us really set out to be difficult.
- Stuff happens!
- Listen masterfully! Don't interrupt.
- Management of expectations
- Processes and procedures have impact but it's more than that.
- Focus mainly on process and not on emotion
- Our expectations are misaligned with how we deal with conflict.
- Lack of recognition of the emotion.
- Traditional process and procedure is for the person who writes it, not for the person on the other end.

- You can ask for anything you want – it's how you ask for it.
- How we deal with assumptions. Assumptions have a huge impact on how we handle conflict.
- Are you listening to respond or listening to hear?
- Stereotyping

Frank Handy, Chair of the Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution, in summing up suggested:

Lessen conflict by using good decision making processes

The underlying thing which is not spoken about is power. Everyone exercising power in un-sharing uncomplimentary ways is not helpful

Policies and procedures sometimes become the mechanisms which stop progress

Hold the commitment until you've had the conversation

Educate self about the situation

5 Steps to Resolution

- Don't React : Go to the balcony
- Don't Argue: Step to their side
- Don't Reject: Reframe
- Don't Push: Build a golden bridge
- Don't Escalate: Use power to educate

www.schoolresolution.vic.gov.au

Respectful Relationships – Justin McDonnell – DET

Justin shared that he feels it's a privilege to work with Parents Victoria as an organisation which is passionate and helps DET to do better work. Hearing the parent voice is important.

Justin acknowledged that Respectful Relationships covers eight topics. The first six are about social and emotional learning and broad respect for peers. The last two focus on gender. Social and emotional learning is not new. It's just been built into formal curriculum as not before.

Respectful Relationships supports schools and early childhood settings to promote and model respect, positive attitudes and behaviours – and to teach our children how to build healthy relationships, resilience and confidence.

Justin spoke about some examples of Leading School and Partners school participation. This is not an added extra – it's just *capturing what we all do*.

www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/respectfulrelationships.aspx

Sex is not a dirty word - Eileen Berry, Journalist

Eileen's interest in issues affecting youth stems back to the early 1990s when her teenage nephew developed a drug-induced psychosis after smoking cannabis. It took her another fifteen years of working with her craft as a journalist before she decided to follow her passion and in 2014 launched the Parent Guide - *Drugs 101*, in 2015 - *Social Media* and in 2016 - *Sex 101*.

The aim of the Parent Guides is to be plain and simple and to provide open, honest information which is candid without resorting to sensationalism. More information can be found at: www.parentsguides.com.au

Eileen advised that if parents read something in the Guides which they would like to discuss, or have updated etc, please contact her as she recognises families are "at the coalface".

Parent Club Operations – Changes you need to know about

Gail McHardy – Parents Victoria

Parents Victoria has been working with DET post the installation of the new 2017 Education Regulations. Together we have developed a FAQ resource – [available online](#).

Gail acknowledged that parents who make up our Victorian government school parent clubs are doing so as an act of goodwill. They do so as volunteers and they raise funds which are public money. Financial compliance, integrity and transparency are key.

Sometimes there is conflict around the spending of parent club raised funds and there are frequently asked questions re how that should happen. Parent Clubs want to be clear about what the parent club has raised and re when and how the funds were expended or where funds are "stored". Parent Clubs feel an obligation to be transparent about these items to the wider school community who have often contributed (financially or by volunteering) to raising the funds. Parents don't receive training on how this should happen, but schools can and do. It is important that Parent Clubs are communicated and consulted with. And that schools work with parent clubs about how to do this going forward.

Schools and Parent Clubs can refer to DET policy in the "Schools Policy and Advisory Guide" (SPAG).

Parents Victoria aims to produce a further FAQ resource on this topic.

Communication between schools and parent clubs is important.

Everyone knowing and working within the rules is essential.

Gail confirmed that Parent Clubs are not part of School Council. A parent club cannot be disbanded unless the proper process is undertaken. Gail encouraged parent clubs and schools to keep the conversation going – to keep talking and to contact Parents Victoria or DET if they require information or clarifications.