

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

<http://www.schoolresolution.vic.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>

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*.

<http://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 – accessible via the following link: [INSERT LINK HERE](#)

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.

Day 2 Tuesday 24th October

Trust, Forgiveness, Integrity, Hope and Compassion enables us to live with dignity in relationships – John Hendry – OAM (education and cricket)

- John began with a meditation session. He explained the importance of having the ability to switch off and go from one problem/task to another. E.g. To be able to “leave your diagnosis here before you go onto the next patient”.)

John spoke about the following:

- We live in an emotional world.
- We are hard wired to be kind. To be cruel we have to override the natural instinct to be kind.
- We need to have a relationship with ourselves and in forming relationships with others, we need to learn how to relate.
- In relationships – first comes **trust**. What does it mean to trust? You become vulnerable. You invest. You give yourself over. Trust is the glue that holds you together. There is no caveat – no grey. “Giving” is important.
- **Forgiveness** is second. If you are in a relationship, you forgive. You forgive your children. If you don’t forgive there would be no relationship. “Give for” is the defining element of resilience.
- Do your teachers forgive you if you stuff up? Students will only learn if their teachers are not cruel. Forgiveness is critical.
- **Integrity** is next. You really try to do the right thing.
- **Hope**. Is so critically important.
- **Compassion**. Empathy - action through care.
- The five elements of a relationship are critical in looking at bullying (and in schools). John encourages schools, parents and students to discuss the five elements of a relationship. (*John referenced Kim Cameron – the business benefits of virtuousness. This is solid research.*)
- Do you trust the school? If it makes a mistake – do you forgive it? If not, why not?
- The Neighbourhood principle. I trust others will care.
- **We need to teach children how to make relationships.**
- We need to be careful of creating trauma.
- Why is there so much depression and anxiety today (a Monash teacher asked this question)? Expectations are high @ the school. Information which was in the past received by an individual over the period of say 1 year, is now received in 5 days. People are having to constantly make decisions. Decisions burn energy (decision fatigue). However, if you’ve had the problem before you can go straight to that experience.
- Emotion is an electrical movement in the brain.
- If you don’t trust the person teaching then you don’t learn. It’s neuroscience.
- We need to develop cultures which are kind and forgiving.
- Adversarial is destructive. What does it teach?
- It’s wise to stay away from people who are not interested in repairing relationships. But sometimes you can’t.
- John referenced Simon Baron Cohen – Zero Degrees of Empathy. Also Sue Gerhardt – Why love Matters.
- 50% of individuals form relationships for the taking. 50% form relationships for giving. (John referenced Adam Grant – givers are winners in the end). The science is fascinating.
- Resilience is a relational thing. The five elements also apply to one’s relationship with self. Do you forgive yourself or not? Do you give yourself a break? Do you always try to do right thing?
- Listening is critical. When someone is talking with you - do nothing else but look them in the eye and listen. (Many are so busy thinking of their potential response that they are not really listening.)
- Resilience is the relationship you have with yourself.
- Forgiveness works everywhere. Resilience is important. Capacity to forgive allows resilience.
- A resilient person will say “yes and ... “. A non resilient person will say “yes but”.
- John referenced the Resilient Youth organisation. <http://www.resilientyouth.org.au/>

John concluded that he sees great importance in schools having the five elements up on their school wall. "Kindness is really important".

Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning – Alex Shain and Esma Livermore

Reconciliation Australia "acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples".

Reconciliation Australia promotes and facilitates respect, trust and positive relationships between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Alex and Esma acknowledged that one National view and one idea is not the case and that one answer to a complex problem is not possible. They explained that the word "Narragunnawali" is a word which may not have a direct English translation but that's OK – not everything is translatable. They explained the pronunciation is – Narra (like narrow), gunna (gunna do it) and wali (you're a wally)!

Narragunnawali encompasses:

**Alive
Wellbeing
Coming together
Peace**

The five degrees of reconciliation are:

UNITY (at the centre)

An Australian society that values and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage as a proud part of a shared national identity.

**RACE RELATIONS
EQUALITY AND EQUITY
INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY
HISTORICAL ACCEPTANCE**

* We are only as strong as the weakest of these elements.

* It's about Opportunities, Respect and Relationships

* People ask "how do I engage with the community". Some people have never spoken with an Aboriginal person. In Victoria, Parents Victoria liaises and has a relationship with VAEAI (Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated).

* Reconciliation Australia has resources to assist community members to raise the discussion re how to proceed to introduce such a program into their school. Sometimes students drive it. Sometimes parents drive it. Use the resources provided by Reconciliation Australia - back at home, in schools and in your communities.

Check out the Reconciliation website – www.reconciliation.org.au/narragunnawali

Joan Kirner Parent Participation Award 2018

Congratulations to:

Winner: Raelene Vine, Ouyen P-12 College

Runner Up: Darren Wolchyn, Sandringham College

Tech Schools – Dan O’Brien, Director, Tech Schools, Department of Education Victoria

Dan commented that it’s a changing world. And our education systems need to change. But we also need to know what works. To prepare students for jobs which are not currently there! It’s unpredictable. We need to prepare a highly skilled workforce of students – ready for the future - for the benefit of the students and for industry. We as parents need to change as well – if we are going to prepare our kids. **Career counselling is very important.**

* STEM education (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) says subject knowledge is OK but how to apply it in a multidisciplinary way is key. Creativity and technology – work with it – don’t fear it.

* Using technical capabilities not just as an enabler but as part of what we do. How do we get comfortable with that? (E.g. Virtual reality, 3D printing, artificial intelligence).

* Between primary and secondary school we are seeing declining take-up of science. How long do kids have to wait until they decide or begin to think seriously about where they want to go? Wouldn’t it be good to realise this and be able to “trial” earlier – e.g. in primary school.

* Tech schools are not the old trade-based schools. They are not schools in their own right. Students are enrolled at their regular school and they head out to learn/apply skills in the Tech schools. They work on industry problems. E.g. What should a brick be made of? It’s current make up or should it be made of hemp? A real world assessment of what’s needed and what’s available.

* We need to link learning to future careers. In industry terms we think of skills. In school terms we think of subjects.

* Students don’t go alone to the Tech school facilities – teachers accompany them. The teachers are trained and bring knowledge back to school and introduce the thinking as an integrated model.

Tech schools are delivering unique education programs.

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/learningdev/techschools/Pages/abouttechschools.aspx>

PV Note: See the following website for details of current opportunities to explore STEM with students and including a competition and opportunity currently being hosted by ABC Education - <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/classrooms/Pages/resourcesabcstem.aspx>

Ontario’s Approach to improving Parent Engagement – Dr Mary Jean Gallagher

Students in Canada, Australia or anywhere else, who have parents engaged, are invariably more successful in schools.

A call to Action “When parents are engaged and involved, everyone benefits, and our schools become increasingly rich and positive places to teach, learn and grow.”

Vision: “Students are supported and inspired to learn in a culture of high expectations in which parents:

- Are welcomed, respected and valued
- Have opportunities to be involved
- Are engaged through ongoing communication and dialogue

- Are supported with information and tools

Strategy 1 : School Climate – Fosters and sustains a positive, welcoming school climate in which all parents’ perspectives are encouraged, valued and heard.

Strategy 2 : Eliminating Barriers – Identify and remove barriers to parent engagement that may prevent some parents from fully participating in their children’s learning and to reflect the diversity of our students and communities.

Strategy 3 : Support for Parents – Provide parents with the knowledge, skills and tools they need to support student learning at home and at school.

Strategy 4 : Parent Outreach – Review and expand communications and outreach strategies ... to share information related to supporting learning at home and parent engagement in schools.

Delegates discussed:-

What are some common issues to hold back parent engagement in schools?

Cultural barriers.

Language

Work barriers

Principals as gate keepers

Full calendar (extra curricula activity)

Past experiences (negative)

Fear – nothing of value to contribute (parents can be socially awkward too)

What’s the school’s definition of parent engagement (a lot depends on this)

Transport / distance

Conflict in the home

Our Principal considers parents as “germs”.

Level of dedication (some just won’t get involved)

Gender bias in cultural issues (women outside the home. And men in raising children.)

Lack of relationships between school and parents (no time to develop the relationship)

Rise of emails (information overload)

Fear by being engaged – you will be asked to do something

Schools don’t value parent knowledge or skills (parents as a resource)

What are we seeing that is working well?

The Model @ Broadmeadows Valley PS

Shared expectations (school / home)

Family action teams (have to show how things are working)

School based community officers

Large indigenous community - working well

Social activities

Fathers’ Day breakfast

Parent Teacher interviews – all day

Principals who are on board with the parents

PV working with Principals and parent groups

Principal opening up the gate (inclusive)

Family nights

Doing things for dads

Parent Workshops (speakers)

“Nag” power – kids getting parents onboard

Wave a magic wand – and what’s the one thing you would change if you could?

More open discussion (transparent conversation in communities) (Community conversations)
In every situation - teachers/principals/parents (stakeholders) approach everything from a position of kindness
Respect between everyone
Funding so all programs can be run
Compulsory but effective teacher training in parent engagement
Systemise good practice
Remove the language and cultural barriers between parents and children
Be able to skype child's teachers

Mary Jean encouraged delegates to grab a note pad or their phone and to write a "note to self" re:

What's the one commitment that you will do before end of year to help improve parent engagement at your school?