

31/7/20

Parents Victoria Submission

PAEC Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Parents Victoria (PV) has represented Victorian Government School families since 1925.

PV has had a longstanding working relationship with the Victorian Government and Department of Education and Training (DET) and this has assisted all parties at the onset and during the pandemic to feedback and contribute suggestions on behalf of families to support schools and the system.

PV's first interface with COVID19 pandemic was just prior to the start of the school year, in late January. We received a call from a concerned inner metropolitan Melbourne Primary School Council parent member in regard to families returning home to Australia from China. The surrounding non-government schools in their area were corresponding with their school families immediately, instructing returning families to isolate for 14 days, before the students were permitted to attend school. For the government school, the initial directive was the relevant families were permitted to send their children to school. This directive soon changed in the coming days. This example was the first glimpse of the importance of timely, coordinated and clear communication that school community members rely on.

By March we believe the Victorian Government responded as best it could to the rising impacts of the pandemic and how everything unfolded thereafter.

PV has emphasised throughout the pandemic and our engagement with parents, schools, DET, media and other education stakeholders, that all communications needed to be clear and consistent in this unprecedented worldwide health crisis. Relationships matter most during these times, including how adults lead with care and a positive approach in dealing with each other in the school landscape. PV has always reinforced that we ALL must comply with the medical advice being provided by the Chief Health Officer.

PV liaised, communicated and collaborated with DET regularly (weekly then fortnightly) and pushed out communications to families wherever able and updated our COVID19 website page constantly <https://www.parentsvictoria.asn.au/covid-19-resources>.

PV provided to DET a School to Home Communication Case Example (NWVR) to highlight that when information from multiple Government Departments is provided to schools, for schools to then share with their wider school community, if this is not done effectively it can create unproductive outcomes.

PV shared this experience to demonstrate that there is a heavy reliance on a Principal to translate and communicate instructions to families in a clear, succinct and timely manner. We all need to support schools on how to do this more effectively for future community communications, to reduce additional workload and impact on everyone's wellbeing. (We

note for this submission, there is option to upload only 3 files, so we are happy to provide the detailed case example upon request).

With the rise in case numbers during the Term 2 school holidays and change to Term 3 schooling arrangements, our weekly check in meetings with DET have resumed.

For the purpose of the Inquiry we have provided you with the attached summary of the **Victorian responses** to our national organisation's (**Australian Council of State School Organisation – ACSSO**) survey results conducted in Term 2, 2020.

https://www.acsso.org.au/application/files/4815/9013/7452/ACSSO_Survey_Summary_22052020.pdf

We also have attached our submission to the Engage Victoria Inquiry - **The Education State: Lessons from Remote and Flexible Learning.**

We held off lodging our submission until the closing date, as the pandemic took a turn for the worse in Victoria in July and this has allowed us to add some additional feedback over the last 2 weeks that may assist the panel in its deliberations moving forward.

What parents are saying now in July:

"Principals are strained, teachers are strained, their families are strained – parents are strained."

"Perhaps the curriculum could be suspended and lessons now rotate around engagement, enjoyment, well-being and connection."

"The Mental health of our students and staff is foremost. We don't know the affects this is going to have. I think VCE and ATAR should be abolished this year and university places offered on previous results. University's will need students!! "

"Constant monitoring of social distancing, sanitising, cleaning, keeping updated with this is all consuming, constantly changing information is wearing thin for many."

" Masks and temperature checks, there's a subset of children not doing the right thing. Dodging temperature checks, not wearing masks, social distancing not being practiced, some students frustrated at poor social distancing, boasting "you can't make me get tested, my parents will say no". Instances of students being sent home for wrestling on the ground on purpose to defy social distancing."

"Schools are putting much time and energy into planning for potential closure, down to how to execute a deep clean etc and disseminate messages. Temporary school closures are anywhere from 3 days to 2 weeks. Some student's getting notice overnight to not attend school the next day. Notice for families in terms of care and work planning is not possible. Speaking from experience school closures are extremely poorly handled, eroding the school community's trust and good-will, relationships become fractured."

"Students are having anxiety and stress around going to school in this environment. There are instances where students are asking to be able to please stay home."

"Some schools trying to make remote learning as similar to onsite learning as possible. Trying to enforce cameras being on to gauge wellbeing. Pushback from

students - not complying. Trying to respect parents' request for this but also give students agency. Some students not logging in for lessons, and not responding to phone calls from school, DET having to be called in for support on this."

"As a parent of a VCE student I understand these years are to them, and the need to be on campus. However, given the current circumstances, I'm not how productive it is for students to be on campus at this time. Both students and teachers are constantly worried about the high possibilities of the virus being brought into their school communities, that it takes away from learning experience and environment, which I believe is not productive."

"The uncertainty is creating havoc in people's lives. From a parent perspective, my daughter struggled with school closure (missed connection with friends and teachers). She needs face to face support to work through some things. Although reports were done differently for semester 1, I noticed a real decline in her performance which I put down largely to school closure. I don't believe school closure is necessary or beneficial for any student (particularly those doing year 11/12 from my perspective."

"Everyone is hysterical at the moment about what's going to happen and numbers rising. Communication and lots of notice are key. If the decision is made to close schools then it should be for such a period of time so people know what's happening and are clear about how long i.e. when schools supposedly closed for all of term 2 then went back before the end of term 2 it became unsettling for everyone. I believe they should have stayed closed with the view to open in term 3.

PV will continue to work collaboratively with DET and other education stakeholders to support families and schools as we all endeavour to work together to flatten the curve.

Gail

Gail McHardy

Executive Officer

For the Executive Committee

Parents Victoria Inc.

www.parentsvictoria.asn.au

Attachments:

Parents Victoria submission to the Engage Victoria Inquiry - **The Education State: Lessons from Remote and Flexible Learning.**

Parents Victoria summary of the **Victorian responses** to our national organisation's (**Australian Council of State School Organisation – ACSSO**) survey results conducted in Term 2, 2020.