

AEU Education Committee - Policy Development

School Workforce Health, Safety, Welfare, and Wellbeing Policy

Acknowledgement of Country

This policy was developed on the various lands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of the Nations across Victoria and includes the voices and contributions of First Nations educators. We acknowledge and pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Traditional Custodians throughout Victoria, including Elders past, present, and emerging First Nations leaders.

Introduction

1. The professionalism of the school workforce, the contributions they make to society, the complexity of their work, and the daily challenges they face in their roles must be recognised and respected, as this is integral to their health and wellbeing¹. The AEU recognises and respects the expertise and the value of the work done by all workers² in Victoria's public education system.
2. Every school employee is entitled to a safe and healthy workplace, and a profession in which the conditions of work and support structures are in place at all levels of the education system (centrally, regionally, and locally) to protect their health, safety, welfare and wellbeing. The public education system must be structured in such a way that enables school employees to experience the joys of education work and to meet the needs of students without their own health, safety, and wellbeing at risk.
3. As one of Victoria's largest employers, the Department of Education (and by association the Victorian government) has a duty to be an exemplar employer when it comes to positive workforce health, safety, welfare, and wellbeing. Ensuring a healthy and safe workforce is a key basis for a strong public education system that enables school employees to deliver high quality public education.
4. Governments and the Department must prioritise the core activities that contribute to employees feeling the intrinsic joys and rewards of education work, such as time spent fostering positive relationships with students and colleagues. Without these core activities, and the associated positive flow-on effects to wellbeing, the psychological weight placed on staff due to the relational nature and complexity of their work, as well as systemic constraints, can negatively impact their health and wellbeing over time and affect the provision of educational programs to students.
5. Education workers must be central to any decisions made that affect their health, safety, welfare, and wellbeing. This includes consultation with employees and health and safety representatives (HSR) to assess and address any health, safety, welfare and wellbeing implications that may arise from existing work requirements, new initiatives, policy reform, work and workload changes, emergencies and other disruptions to usual work patterns.
6. The extra demands placed on staff in an under-resourced public school system have a direct and significant impact on their health, safety, and wellbeing. The responsibility of the employer is to protect, promote, and support worker health, safety, and wellbeing and to ensure that the system, including working conditions, is structured in a proper way to achieve this. To this end the employer must demonstrate their ongoing commitment to employee health, safety, welfare, and wellbeing by actively monitoring the working environment, and make the systemic changes needed.
7. Making work processes and workloads reasonable is the most effective way to reduce stress for employees and retain them in the profession. Unmanageable workloads, underpinned by increasing work complexity,

¹ For definitions of terms used throughout this policy, refer to the Definitions section of this document and to [WorkSafe Victoria](#) for further safety, health, welfare and wellbeing related concepts.

² Throughout this policy we use the term "worker" and "employee" to refer inclusively to any person employed in the Victorian public school system. This includes school leaders, teachers, paraprofessionals, and education support employees.

undermine the provision of quality teaching and learning in schools. Excessive workload is a critical problem that contributes to substantially reduced health and wellbeing, as well as to unnecessary attrition and staffing shortages.

8. While employee health, welfare and wellbeing needs to be a key consideration in the design and management of the public education system at all times, the Department must place greater focus and introduce increased measures during times of uncertainty and instability to address the amplified demands and stressors placed on all employees.
9. The health and wellbeing of every school employee can be systemically and holistically supported through the careful design and implementation of supports and policies that address:
 - the health, safety, welfare and wellbeing of the profession, the workplace, and individuals
 - the differing demands faced by workers in various roles and employment mode
 - all levels of the public education system, i.e., at the level of the individual, schools, regions, and the system
 - retention as well as attraction
 - cultural safety, workforce diversity, equity and inclusion
 - the ongoing and evolving demands on employees over time.

Supports and new policy initiatives are most effective when they are designed together with school workers.

10. Positive and meaningful relationships form a cornerstone of employee health and wellbeing, including those between school employees, students, parents, the local community, and regional and central Department employees. Every person involved in the public education system has a responsibility to work in a way which contributes to and enhances the working environment of school employees to enable them to provide high-quality education to their students.
11. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees have a vital and valued role in Victoria's public education system. Their proud, rich, and diverse cultures, knowledges, experiences, and histories must be recognised, acknowledged, and celebrated at all levels of the system. Authentic action is needed to build workplaces for First Nations employees that genuinely address longstanding barriers to their health, safety, wellbeing, and retention, including cultural load, identity strain, cultural safety, and the continuing impacts of colonisation on Australia's first peoples.
12. The AEU recognises the importance of the Victorian OHS Act in improving the health and safety of school employees and will continue to work to maintain and improve the entitlements in the Act for all staff.

1. A Healthy and Well Profession

Recognition and Respect

- 1.1. Government and Department led reforms are needed to achieve higher levels of respect and recognition for school employees. The right reforms will further enhance status of the profession by demonstrating trust in employee's expertise and professionalism, and ensuring suitable pay, working conditions, and career opportunities. Public school workers deserve recognition, respect and appreciation for the complex work they do and to work in a profession that is afforded respect and valued widely within society.
- 1.2. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organisations involved in the discourse about public education, including politicians, policymakers, and the media, to proactively and positively promote the professionalism, expertise, and achievements of public schools and their employees. These representations need to reflect the Victorian context.
- 1.3. Inaccurate representations of schools and public education workers must be purposefully and systematically challenged by politicians, senior Department personnel and other system leaders, particularly when conveyed by those who have business, political or cultural agendas that benefit from

denigrating the profession and with it, the value, and values of public education. Evidence shows that challenging these negative representations supports the profession and makes individuals feel more valued rather than less and reduces the likelihood of workers leaving the profession. Positive support for the profession also improves the way students, parents, carers, and the general public view and engage with public schools and employees.

Job Control³ and Professional Autonomy

- 1.4. The professional autonomy and expertise of school employees must be trusted, supported, and valued, as evidence shows job control, autonomy, psychological safety and having a genuine opportunity to influence decisions are essential elements for health, safety, and wellbeing.
- 1.5. Activities undertaken by any employee that negatively impacts on job control and autonomy are to be eliminated. This includes activities that are redundant, needlessly burdensome, or where the direct benefit to the employee or students is not tangible. Levels of job control and autonomy are negatively impacted by measures such as unnecessary accountability, standardised testing used for public dissemination and school ranking, increased administrative tasks and narrow approaches to the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and reporting. These all add to the workload and stress-levels of school employees over time.
- 1.6. It is the responsibility of Governments and the Department to avoid a one-size-fits all approach when seeking to implement system wide initiatives which aim to align practice in schools with research evidence of “what works”. Effective implementation demands clear recognition and respect of the deep knowledge of school staff about the local context in which they work and must protect against them being relegated to a simple role of “implementers” of ideas from elsewhere.
- 1.7. Schools require the flexibility to decide which Department led initiatives can be implemented in any given time period as determined through industrial consultation with the Department and that takes into account the needs of the school and the workload involved for all employees. Regular evaluation of initiatives during implementation is essential, with the option to remove or adjust them if found to be ineffective or overly burdensome for employees.

Professional Learning and Mentoring

- 1.8. The Department and schools are to provide all employees with access to relevant professional learning, including the provision of proper resources and paid time to undertake in-service development. Building and maintaining employees’ self-efficacy in this way is essential and it is linked positively to employee engagement and satisfaction at work. Examples could include providing sufficient time and opportunities for regular collaboration with colleagues, mentoring, and coaching.
- 1.9. The Department is to support every staff member, irrespective of role or employment mode, to identify and access effective, evidence-based accreditation, professional learning, and/or mentoring and coaching that meets their specific professional needs, in addition to whole-school programs and training required to work safely. Casual employees require access to these through centralised support. Stress and anxiety are reduced when employees are provided with supports to navigate the common challenges that can occur in the education profession and in their particular role.
- 1.10. Early career teachers (ECTs) are to be equipped, during their initial teacher education, mentoring programs and in the early stages of employment, with strong knowledge and skills in the areas of

³ Job control is a person's ability to influence what happens in their work environment, in particular to influence matters that are relevant to their personal goals. Job control may include control over work tasks, control over the work pace and physical movement, control over the social and technical environment, and freedom from supervision.

student wellbeing, student behaviour management, and approaches to ensure adaptability to the changes experienced daily in schools. ECTs must be allocated a clearly reduced workload to enable their initial development. Employer investment in these areas is critical to avoid negative impacts on pre-service teachers and ECTs wellbeing and their desire to stay in the profession.

Job Security and Career Pathways

- 1.11. Every school employee has a right to secure ongoing employment, as job insecurity can lead to lowered perceptions of job control and increased stress levels. Insecure employment must be further addressed by the State Government, particularly for casual and fixed-term contract staff and early career teachers, who are more likely to work under short term arrangements. Where sought, Education Support workers should be supported to access full-time hours wherever possible.
- 1.12. The State Government must provide meaningful and structured career pathways for all school employees, which utilise their expertise and demonstrate that they are valued. This will generate opportunities for the widespread community recognition they deserve, the allocation of responsibilities to match their expertise, and suitable remuneration.

Voice

- 1.13. Every school employee must be given a say in how their own work is organised, including how hours are allocated across the week for part-time staff, and be actively involved in decision-making that directly impacts their health, safety, welfare, and wellbeing. Staff meetings need to be accessible and allow genuine input by all employees, particularly Education Support staff who are not always included in these meetings. Consultation obligations under the Victorian Government School Agreement and the Occupational Health and Safety Act must be in place in each school and across the system as relevant.
- 1.14. School employees must be supported so they feel they can voice their opinion without fear of negative consequences and be able to see that speaking up can make a positive difference in how their school and the education system operate. This is important for both the prevention of harm and promotion of health, safety, and wellbeing.
- 1.15. To enable this, staff at all levels are to be encouraged by the Department, system leaders and school leaders to offer their ideas and suggestions and act on feedback where appropriate. This contributes to a healthy work culture by reducing the likelihood of incidences of quiescent silence - where employees choose to say less due to fear - and acquiescent silence - where employees do not speak because they have given up hope for improvement.

2. A Healthy and Well Workplace

Workload

- 2.1. The complex nature of educational work and increasing workload pressures on staff caused by societal shifts, developments within the profession, and systemic reform over time must be recognised and addressed by employers and system leaders.
- 2.2. School employees require the time, support, and respect they need to carry out their professional work and focus on the core activities of teaching and learning, and student welfare, within paid hours of work. Staff must also be provided with the time and support required to meet complex student needs, such as to ensure child safety and to develop inclusive supports for students with additional needs. Extraneous workload during busy times of the year, such as during student report writing periods, can be reduced using strategies developed and implemented at school and system-levels.

- 2.3. It is the responsibility of the employer to ensure that all employees have manageable workloads and that they are working within the limits set by the Victorian Government Schools Agreement, such as ordinary hours of work, class sizes, face-to-face teaching time allocations, teacher directed time for planning and preparation, the allocation of other duties, and reduced workload for a teacher in their first twelve months of teaching.
- 2.4. Employee workload must be actively and regularly assessed and managed, especially for early career teachers. Where work tasks are found to be essential yet are not accounted for within existing time allocations this must be addressed. Where tasks are found to be excessive, unnecessary, or have no identifiable benefits for students, these must be reduced or removed.
- 2.5. Job role descriptions need to be created and regularly updated. In addition to outlining an employee's core role, they should clearly identify each of the added responsibilities that a school employee may take on, e.g., extracurricular activities, leadership roles, or non-typical duties. This enables employees to know what is expected of them and reduces stress.
- 2.6. Every staff member must be able to exercise choice about work prioritisation and have the right to disconnect outside the ordinary hours of work, to enable them to achieve a healthy, safe, and sustainable work-life balance without the need for frequent or extended duties outside of the hours of their employment.
- 2.7. The Department has a responsibility to set clear boundaries with parents, carers, and the community that ensures that school employees are not required or expected to respond to communications outside of the required hours of work.
- 2.8. The impacts on employee welfare and wellbeing of emergencies, remote learning, and information and communication technologies (ICT) need to be better identified and addressed at the school and system levels. This will respect the private time of employees and protect work hours from increases in work pace and mental load, e.g., due to an increased use and delegation of tasks or responsibilities via email.
- 2.9. The appropriate use of ICT by school employees must be subject to the oversight principles set out in the AEU's Technology and Teaching policy (Section 4. Email; Section 11. Impact of ICT on professional /personal lives of school staff; and Section 14. Workload) to avoid any potential negative impacts on workload.
- 2.10. The Department must recognise that the introduction and implementation of new initiatives adds to the workload of school employees. The implications for employee workload must be a central consideration in all school change proposals and any state-wide mandated requirements. This can be achieved through a workload impact assessment and encapsulated in an appropriate workload impact statement which incorporates and addresses industrial and OHS obligations and issues. This workload impact statement will:
 - identify the impact of existing policy and procedures and ways of reducing the associated workload risk, and
 - accompany any change to policies and procedures.

Workplace Violence, Bullying and Incivility

- 2.11. Clear definitions, policies, and programs on workplace violence, bullying and other psychosocial hazards, including gendered violence and sexual harassment, are to be easily accessible at the school and system level.

- 2.12. A whole-school approach, supported by the Department, is needed to build, and maintain a safe, positive, supportive, and inclusive culture and systems for all school community members where disrespect and incivility are not tolerated. Small acts of disrespect and inequality must be addressed early, without blaming the victim, as small acts can lead to more serious acts of inappropriate workplace behaviour.
- 2.13. A whole school approach includes embedding supportive and committed leadership practices across the various levels of school leadership and recognising employee contributions to a positive workplace culture, as these help to build respectful and inclusive work environments.
- 2.14. The Department is to take proactive steps to address the factors that underpin sexual harassment and gendered violence in the workplace, including to eliminate any gender inequalities, segregation, and cultures of sexism and misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia. The Department must also:
- promote the benefits of gender equality and inclusive workplaces
 - have processes in place to ensure that job design and systems of work do not increase the risk of sexual harassment and gendered violence or perpetuate gender inequality, and
 - give specific attention to protecting vulnerable workers.
- 2.15. As well as policies to protect students from cyber bullying, Department policies are required to protect and support employees who have been subjected to cyber bullying whether by parents, students or other members of the school community. This includes providing all workers with appropriate professional learning to be conversant with, and implement, Department cyberbullying policies and programs covering students and employees.
- 2.16. Schools and employees are to be provided with enough time, resources, and professional learning to help build a whole school culture that values strong parent-school engagement and sustains parental engagement in student learning. These have been shown to translate into more positive parent and student behaviours, improved student wellbeing and achievement, and a stronger, more supportive local community.
- 2.17. Effective and sufficient support is necessary to enable employees to manage disruptive or challenging student and parent behaviours, e.g., through shared approaches and language, and established school policies that include clear definitions of inappropriate behaviours. No employee should feel they have to handle these behaviours on their own.
- 2.18. School policies, procedures and professional learning must encompass violence prevention, promotion and reporting approaches that are proactive, raise employee awareness of appropriate behaviours, and provide employees with the tools to address violence when it occurs. This can help lower the number of incidents in the workplace.
- 2.19. All employees must be encouraged and feel able to report all forms of OHS incidents, including workplace violence, bullying, racism, and other psychosocial hazards, as prevention efforts can only be well-designed and effective when these are fully reported. Evidence indicates that physical violence is more often reported than verbal violence, gendered violence can be underreported, and Education Support employees are less likely to report incidents than teachers or principal class employees. Encouragement to report offensive behaviours is needed during induction and throughout employment.
- 2.20. The Department has a responsibility to ensure every employee is aware of how to report psychosocial hazards, including workplace violence, harassment, and racism, including in ways that protect the reporter. Employees will then feel encouraged and able to report incidents, particularly where incidents of workplace violence or other psychosocial hazards are perpetrated by managers or colleagues.

Workplace Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- 2.21. School policies, procedures, supports and professional learning must be provided, and specifically address, the safety, health, welfare and wellbeing needs of diverse populations and marginalised groups, based on active consultation with them, so that:
- schools are safe, equitable environments for all employees, in which diversity is valued and human rights are protected and promoted
 - inclusive language, policies and practices are used widely
 - schools and employees' are knowledgeable about inclusion and have access to guidelines, appropriate referral information, and relevant support organisations, as needed, to support individual staff members and the broader school community
 - workplace violence, harassment, discrimination, bias, marginalisation, and other forms of exclusion are eliminated,
 - all school community members can prepare for engagement with a diverse society
 - schools can attract and retain a diverse workforce.

This includes addressing the needs for employees that are casual, employed fixed-term, visa workers or those who are otherwise insecurely engaged; identify as LGBTQIA+; are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; are migrants or culturally and linguistically diverse; or have disability. The right to recognition, equality and non-discrimination is a fundamental human right protected under Victoria's Human Rights Charter.

- 2.22. The Department is to support system and school leaders to practice inclusive leadership, which includes commitment and the consistent modelling of policies through words and actions. Evidence shows inclusive leadership is highly effective for creating workplaces in which employees from a diversity of backgrounds are welcomed and feel valued.
- 2.23. The Department must regularly engage with employees from diverse backgrounds to understand the drivers for, and barriers to, maximising their health, safety, wellbeing, attraction, and retention in the workplace. Supports and solutions to any identified issues must be developed in consultation with a representative group of minority workers and the AEU and, where possible, based on evidence-informed initiatives that are proven beneficial in practice.

Workplace Health and Safety

- 2.24. The AEU does and will continue to work relentlessly to improve the health, safety, welfare and wellbeing of school employees. The AEU recognises that, as a central part of our industrial work, improvements in the occupational health and safety, and work environment, of public education employees is a key way to improve their overall working conditions. The AEU recognises that Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs), along with other elected union Workplace Representatives, are a key pillar to support members to realise improvements in their working conditions.
- 2.25. A Health and Safety Representative is to be elected at all times in every school and well known and visible to all employees so they know who to raise issues with and have a voice in determining health, safety, welfare and wellbeing issues and outcomes at their workplace.
- 2.26. In line with employer obligations outlined in the Victorian OHS Act, HSRs are to be provided with adequate time to undertake their OHS responsibilities during normal working hours. School employees

are to be similarly provided with adequate time to contribute to, document and report OHS matters during normal working hours.

- 2.27. The AEU will continue to work to maintain and improve the entitlements in the Victorian OHS Act for all staff. To this end, the AEU will work to improve the entitlement of HSRs to be notified and informed about hazards and incidents known to the employer or their representative at a school.
- 2.28. It is the duty of the employer, in consultation with employees and their representatives, to design and implement an OHS reporting system which seamlessly informs the elected workplace HSRs of known hazards and incidents so that the HSR can perform their role in ensuring that employees are represented in the development of OHS controls and processes.
- 2.29. In order to carry out their duties, it may be necessary for HSRs to have access to relevant medical information. Access to this information would be provided with the same confidentiality requirements as for the employer or their representative.
- 2.30. All employees, including casual relief teachers and casual Education Support workers, are to be actively encouraged, and have access, to systems (such as eduSafe Plus) to report all incidents, hazards and near misses which have impacted on their psychological health, as well as their physical health.
- 2.31. All employees, including casual relief teachers and casual Education Support workers, require access to the information, resources, induction, professional learning, and systems they need to work safely at all times. The Department must regularly assess the quality and frequency of OHS training so that all employees receive quality professional learning to ensure incidents are adequately identified and reported.
- 2.32. Regular health, safety, welfare, and wellbeing audits are to be conducted, with the outcomes communicated to all employees. Those who report OHS incidents, along with the HSR, are to be consulted with about the controls implemented to mitigate risk, and the outcomes.
- 2.33. School leaders in charge of OHS require proper resources and training regarding the OHS act to address identified work hazards, incidents, and stress factors quickly and effectively. Where an OHS issue cannot be easily resolved at the school level, the Department must address the issue quickly and effectively.
- 2.34. Whilst the prevention of all types of workplace injury - physical and psychosocial - is paramount, it is also imperative that injured workers are able to access fair and comprehensive rehabilitation services, return to work programs and compensation.
- 2.35. The AEU does and will continue to assist members injured at work to gain access to necessary supports and compensation from the employer, as well as further assistance if claims are rejected, in line with the AEU's rules and Legal Assistance Policy. Member Services Officers of the AEU also provide information, support and advocacy for injured members in these circumstances.
- 2.36. The AEU opposes attempts to reduce costs of workers compensation schemes wherever this may lead to adverse outcomes for staff with injuries, for example by reducing eligibility for payments. Such an approach only increases the likelihood of workers exacerbating injuries by remaining at work when it is inappropriate to do so or seeking compensation via litigation. The benefits gained by reducing scheme costs are morally and financially questionable if they are at the expense of injured workers.
- 2.37. Department OHS requirements must not be overly administratively burdensome. Schools are to be sufficiently funded so that all OHS policies can be fully implemented in practice and OHS requirements can be complied with.

3. A Healthy and Well Individual

Stress and Psychological Health Supports

- 3.1. Sources of occupational stress, and ways for the employer to prevent and mitigate this stress, must be continuously and clearly identified, and acted upon by the Government and the Department in consultation with the AEU, due to the many different sources of stress experienced by school employees and the long-term hazards to physical and psychological health when it is sustained over time.
- 3.2. Psychological health hazards in the workplace must be treated as seriously as physical hazards. Education workers experiencing psychological health issues due to occupational stressors must receive the support and/or compensation commensurate with their injury, as is provided for employees who experience physical injuries. This includes recognising that psychological injuries can take longer and be more costly to address than physical ones and there is a reduced likelihood of returning to work.
- 3.3. The Department has a responsibility to provide every employee, no matter their position, with access to comprehensive psychological health, safety, welfare, and wellbeing supports, matched to the responsibilities and stressors unique to their role and employment mode, and to the complexities of work in schools.
- 3.4. The Department must develop a greater understanding of the specific health, safety, welfare, and wellbeing needs of Education Support employees and provide supports targeted to meet their specific needs.
- 3.5. Additional supports are needed during periods of uncertainty, change and emergencies. for employees pre-existing conditions as these workers are more vulnerable to potential negative impacts. Care must be taken about how additional supports are offered so all employees are aware of what is available, to remove any accessibility barriers, and to protect employee privacy.
- 3.6. The Department is to provide clarity to every employee on their role and responsibilities in assisting colleagues with psychological health conditions.
- 3.7. In order to provide relevant and responsive psychological support to school employees, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) must be delivered by psychologists with a detailed understanding of the nature of work and the cultural complexities within schools. The Department is to provide adequate resourcing to the EAP to enable employees in need to access a timely service.

Personal Wellbeing Supports

- 3.8. It is the responsibility of the employer to provide the supports and to make the systemic, holistic changes needed to ensure workplaces and working conditions in schools are safe, healthy and sustainable. Health, safety, welfare, and wellbeing initiatives that focus on personal, individual strategies are not sufficient to address the demands placed on the workforce in an under-resourced public school system.
- 3.9. In addition to implementing systemic, holistic changes that school staff need, the Department is to provide and promote resources including professional learning that can support the personal wellbeing management strategies of all employees. This is to be informed by research about the specific issues workers can encounter in schools and strategies that work in practice, e.g., the evidence-based stress management approaches used by teachers to navigate teaching-specific stressors.
- 3.10. The Department should regularly assess the suitability of emerging personal, health, safety, and wellbeing technologies for promotion to, and use by, school employees, such as fatigue trackers, duress buttons, positive thinking applications, etc. Consultation with the AEU is required to determine if new

technologies could genuinely be useful to support their personal wellbeing without creating additional workload.

4. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Employees

- 4.1. While there are a range of benefits to introducing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused initiatives into the workplace, such as measures to eliminate racism, improve cultural safety and increase employee retention, these initiatives must be assessed prior to implementation to prevent untoward pressures being placed on First Nations workers through increased cultural load. First Nations staff and/or advocates cannot be expected to be wholly responsible for the delivery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused activities in schools, such as celebrating NAIDOC week, or for the wellbeing of all First Nations students.
- 4.2. The Department must genuinely move from words, plans, and strategies to meaningful actions in the workplace so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are culturally safe, valued in the workplace and treated equitably. This requires critical and ongoing examination of the public schooling system, its programs, and its work practices in order to determine pathways to effect real change. First Nations employees have higher levels of job satisfaction, intentions to stay, and make positive employment recommendations to other First Nations people where the Department authentically commit to action.
- 4.3. The Department must engage regularly with First Nations employees to understand the drivers for, and barriers to, their health, safety, wellbeing, and retention in the workplace, including their experiences of cultural safety and cultural load. Solutions to any identified issues, along with the best ways to implement and evaluate them, must be developed in participation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and the AEU.
- 4.4. Evidence-based initiatives that are proven to address the health, safety, welfare, wellbeing, and retention of First Nations employees are to be implemented by the Department, for example by developing, regularly reviewing, and promoting racism complaint procedures and providing all employees with anti-discrimination training.
- 4.5. The Department is to provide all employees with professional learning about how to communicate and collaborate in all-inclusive ways with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to reduce and eliminate racism, discrimination, cultural load, identity strain and further forms of exclusion or bias in the workplace.
- 4.6. Sustainable career development opportunities are a necessity for all First Nations employees. This could include additional time for professional learning, tailored leadership development programs, financial support to allow Education Support employees to undertake teaching degrees whilst working in schools, and a suitable mentor. Culturally safe consultation, which avoids assumptions by the employer about the characteristics of suitable mentor, is required with each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employee to identify individual mentoring needs and the ways to meet these needs.
- 4.7. Specific operating principles, guidelines, and frameworks, developed by the Department, are needed to:
 - demonstrate respect for the cultures, knowledges, experiences and obligations of First Nations employees
 - guide the Department and schools as they develop culturally safe policies, practices and working environments to address unconscious bias, racism and discrimination
 - explain the practices, knowledge and skills that all employees need to work in culturally informed ways to create culturally responsive workplaces

- establish a baseline from which to evaluate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees health, safety, and wellbeing and determine workforce development needs, and
 - clearly define pathways to empowerment, self-determination and decolonisation. This includes the ways in which First Nations school staff are to be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives that impact directly on them and/or relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- 4.8. Policies and programs developed centrally by the Department, particularly workforce initiatives, must be informed by the perspectives and expertise of First Nations employees through direct consultation as well as via representative bodies. Both the core right of First Nations peoples to self-determination and the potential impact of initiatives on First Nations employees must be considered and addressed during development processes.

5. Emergencies and Remote Learning

- 5.1. The health, safety, welfare, and wellbeing of the school workforce must be recognised and supported by Government and the Department as a key priority during emergencies, such as natural hazard events, pandemics, and periods of remote education, due to the extra demands, psychosocial hazards and other OHS risks placed on all employees and students at these times.
- 5.2. To acknowledge these additional demands, the Government and the Department are to increase practical, psychological and wellbeing supports, and adjust administrative requirements and timelines that apply to schools and workers during emergencies, remote learning, and transitions to and from remote learning.
- 5.3. Schools and employees require continued access to increased supports and reduced expectations for an extended period of time after emergencies. This will give employees time to recover, address the longer-term elevated risks of burnout and psychological health issues, and enable workers to continue to support students experiencing any long-term negative impacts.
- 5.4. These increased supports could include more resourcing to schools, additional psychological, welfare, and wellbeing supports for all staff, developing clear guidelines and protocols for school communities that are timely and easy to understand, adjusting administrative requirements and timelines in recognition of increased work demands, adequate time to respond effectively to presenting challenges such as student psychosocial health rather than prioritising learning catch up, and additional leave. Suitable supports must be designed and determined in consultation with school employees, the AEU and HSRs.
- 5.5. Shifts in workflow and workload, as a result of emergencies or remote learning, require whole school policies to be developed with the AEU. Emergencies, and teaching and learning remotely, can significantly increase staff workload, disrupt collaboration and connectedness with colleagues, raise stress levels and impact on psychological health.
- 5.6. Shifts in technology use by any employee during emergencies and remote learning must be subject to the oversight principles set out in the AEU's Technology and Teaching policy (Section 10. Technology and Remote Learning).
- 5.7. It is the responsibility of the employer to address the physical impacts that employees can experience when there are shifts in their working patterns and locations when operating remotely, e.g., by providing timely ergonomic assessments and equipment in any setting employees are located in regularly or over sustained time periods.

- 5.8. The Department must have comprehensive plans in place for emergencies and for rapid transitions to and from remote learning, particularly as emergencies are likely to occur more frequently and intensely in the future. Supports are also necessary, such as professional learning and resources, to build the capability and capacity for school and system level employees to quickly identify and comprehensively act on potential problems.
- 5.9. Policy development and planning for transitions and emergencies must include clear guidance about the many educational, welfare, curriculum, and pedagogical issues involved, accessible and relevant professional learning, and the necessary supports and resources that meet the diverse needs of all employees, students and school communities.
- 5.10. The Department is to pro-actively recognise and provision employees experiencing the increased personal responsibilities and risks that can occur during emergencies. This can include, for example, additional care responsibilities for those with children engaging in remote learning and the greater likelihood of experiencing family or domestic violence.

6. Role of State Government and the Department

- 6.1. The State Government and Department must allocate the necessary funds to:
- consider employee health, safety, welfare and wellbeing as a key element in the design and management of the public education system, along with student wellbeing
 - provide the public education system with sufficient resourcing to relieve the high stressors experienced by school employees and to allow work activities to be completed during the normal hours of work
 - address employee health, safety, welfare and wellbeing at the individual, school, regional and system levels, and for all role types and employment arrangements
 - provide schools and employees with sufficient capacity, supports, and resources to address student needs relating to wellbeing, psychological health, classroom behaviour and engagement
 - fully fund any new or increased responsibilities or financial costs borne by schools due to emergencies, such as contact tracing or backfill for increased employee absences. This will support the prevention any adverse effects on employee workloads or working conditions as a result of time or budget pressures at the school level
 - prevent employees from having to support students or colleagues in ways that fall outside of the responsibilities of their role, their qualifications or expertise, particularly during and after emergencies
 - set reasonable parental and societal expectations of schools that are informed by an understanding of the constraints schools face, particularly due to funding limitations
 - provide schools and employees with timely and adaptive supports that enable them to address barriers to health, safety and wellbeing as they arise and to meet the evolving demands of their work over time
 - allow all occupational health and safety obligations to be met quickly and efficiently
 - provide appropriate centralised learning resources and software platforms that can help schools to achieve economies of scale and reduce the administrative and preparatory burden on employees.
- 6.2. In line with the OHS Act, employees must not be required to work in sub-standard facilities, including rooms that are overcrowded, inefficiently heated or cooled, roofs that leak, flooring that is damaged, furniture that is broken or teaching resources which are faulty. The built environment has a direct impact on worker wellbeing. Constantly trying to remedy these problems adds to stress and workload and clearly project to employees the message that they are not valued.

- 6.3. The State Government and Department must consult with the AEU, HSRs and school employees on any new policies and decisions relating to, or that will impact on, their health, safety, welfare, and wellbeing and the level of professional autonomy afforded to them.
- 6.4. The implementation of any new system-wide reforms or initiatives must allow for any increased time demands on school employees and professional learning where needed. The timing of implementation requires careful consideration to minimise any potential impacts on employee health, safety, welfare, and wellbeing and workload.
- 6.5. The Department must only place appropriate and necessary accountability measures on schools and consistently focus on ways to reduce red-tape or duplication for schools. Where schools can demonstrate that accountability measures are unnecessarily burdensome, schools must be provided with additional administrative resourcing.
- 6.6. The Department must only implement new policies and programs that are evidence-based, piloted, demonstrated to be effective in a range of school contexts, involve active consultation with the AEU prior to implementation, and are not quickly superseded once implemented. This will prevent employees from unnecessarily investing time in initiatives that do not have longevity in schools.
- 6.7. The design, trialling, implementation and evaluation of any employee health, safety, welfare and wellbeing policies or initiatives in schools must be based on solid research evidence and involve school staff, the AEU and, where relevant, academic experts who can provide independent evidence-informed guidance on what is needed to address complex factors and diverse contexts.
- 6.8. The Department is to provide comprehensive policies to support any employee experiencing known challenges or demands outside of work hours that can impact them in the workplace, both during business as usual and emergencies, such as domestic and family violence or a non-work related injury/illness.
- 6.9. To assess the health, safety, wellbeing, welfare, workload and psychological health effects of Department initiatives, employees must be consulted. This can be achieved by forming a Department School Staff Reference Group, with membership including the AEU and representative employees from across the different roles, school settings, employment types and geographic locations they work in.

7. Planning, Monitoring and Measuring Wellbeing

- 7.1. The Department is to provide schools with the capacity and resources to develop an annual school wellbeing action plan. This would make employee health, safety, and wellbeing an integral element of annual planning, enable the identification of attainable goals and the best way to achieve them, and allow time to be built in for workplace change to meet these goals.
- 7.2. Employee safety, health, welfare, and wellbeing is to be regularly monitored by the Department and included as a key measure in the assessment and reporting of school and state-wide performance. If the annual staff opinion survey is used as the mechanism to measure wellbeing, compulsory modules are essential on health, safety, and wellbeing to capture comprehensive data, with all results made available to staff.
- 7.3. Evidence-based measures of employee, health, safety, welfare, and wellbeing are to be determined annually by Government in consultation with the AEU, employees and evaluation experts, and used to ensure school and system level outcomes are:
 - comprehensively and efficiently measured

- equitable, by monitoring and reporting on outcomes for staff from diverse backgrounds or marginalised groups
- informed by employee feedback on existing supports and resources
- tracked over time, to evaluate the effect of any welfare interventions on workers
- presented in useful and relevant ways for schools
- comparable with benchmarks that are set and agreed in consultation with workers and the AEU
- transparently reported to all employees, whilst protecting respondent privacy in smaller schools
- actionable and held accountable, so that any identified issues are followed by actions, determined in consultation with staff, that substantively improve any issues relating to employee health, safety, welfare, and wellbeing.

7.4. Where monitoring reveals substantial differences between schools, the Department must take action to improve the health, safety, welfare, and wellbeing of all employees at schools with poorer outcomes, such as those with lower employee morale, excessive occupational stress levels, higher rates of workplace violence, elevated attrition rates, older facilities, or higher workloads.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Health	Health includes psychological health (Source: Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004)
Employee welfare	Employee welfare means anything done for the comfort and improvement, intellectual or social, of employees over and above wages paid which is not a necessity of the industry (Source: Todd, A.J., Industry and Society: A Sociological Appraisal of Modern Industry, 1933)
Workplace wellbeing	Workplace wellbeing relates to all aspects of working life, from the quality and safety of the physical environment, to how workers feel about their work, their working environment, the climate at work and work organization. The aim of measures for workplace wellbeing is to complement OHS measures to make sure workers are safe, healthy, satisfied and engaged at work. (Source: International Labour Organisation)
Work-related violence	Work-related violence involves incidents in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work (Source: WorkSafe Victoria)
Work-related gendered violence	Work-related gendered violence is any behaviour, directed at any person, or that affects a person, because of their sex, gender or sexual orientation, or because they do not adhere to socially prescribed gender roles, that create a risk to health and safety (Source: WorkSafe Victoria)
Workplace Bullying	Workplace bullying is repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed at an employee or group of employees that creates a risk to health and safety. (Source: WorkSafe Victoria)
Harassment	Under discrimination law, it is unlawful to treat a person less favourably on the basis of particular protected attributes such as a person's sex, race, disability or age. Treating a person less favourably can include harassing or bullying a person. The law also has specific provisions relating to sexual harassment, racial hatred and disability harassment. (Source: Human Rights Australia)
Workplace Incivility	Low intensity deviant acts, such as rude and discourteous verbal and nonverbal behaviours enacted towards another organisational member with ambiguous intent to harm. (Source: Centre for Evidence Based Management)
Psychosocial hazards	Psychosocial hazards are factors in the design or management of work that increase the risk of work-related stress and can lead to psychological or physical harm. (Source: WorkSafe Victoria)
Work-related stress	Work-related stress describes an employee's stress response to work-related factors. These responses may be physical, mental, emotional or behavioural. (Source: WorkSafe Victoria)
Psychological or mental health	Mental health is a state of wellbeing that allows people to realise their potential while coping with the ordinary challenges of life. (Source: WorkSafe Victoria)
Cultural safety	An environment which is safe for people; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning together with dignity and truly listening. (Source: Eckermann et al. 1994 in Williams, 1999)
Cultural load	Cultural load is the (often invisible) additional workload borne by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace, where they are either the only Indigenous person or one of a small number of Indigenous people (Source: Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research and Diversity Council Australia)
Identity strain	Identity strain refers to the strain employees feel when they themselves, or others, view their identity as not meeting the norms or expectations of the dominant culture in the workplace. (Source: Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research and Diversity Council Australia)