



## VPA Position Paper

### Student Engagement Guidelines

The Victorian Principals Association (VPA) was approached to comment on the Draft Student Engagement Guidelines distributed for comment by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Department in December 2008. The VPA position has been determined in the following context:

#### Rationale

The VPA recognises the complexity of the government education system, and the need for student engagement guidelines to exist across Victorian schools.

#### Background to the VPA Position

Issues in relation to the Guidelines were raised at local, regional and statewide forums. These included:

- Expulsion following extreme and dangerous behaviour is often the last and only effective tool a school leader has to break the pattern of behaviour
- Reducing the number of days or the option for the regional director to overturn a principal's decision is noted as a weakening of authority at the school level
- Inclusion of a regional presence may lengthen the expulsion process
- Expulsion for extreme behaviour is a means of protecting both staff and students on site. Undermining this option may seriously affect student and staff morale
- Complex personal and family issues which lead to extreme behaviour often cannot be solved with current levels of resources
- An assumption is made that a school will suspend a child over minor issues without extensive consultation with family, support agencies and other professionals
- The time element to assemble all necessary personnel for SSG meetings and the requirements of the school for in-house suspensions
- Suspension can be a pro-active measure where students benefit from 'time out'
- Lack of alternatives for students who are unwilling to attend in-house suspension
- Lack of incentives for school-refusers to attend in-house suspension

#### VPA Position

- Appointment of a Student Wellbeing officer in every primary school.
- Appointment of Student Assistant officer in every primary school to address student absences.
- More alternative settings and pathways for students with extreme behaviours.
- Increased support to individual schools approached by DEECD to enrol students with behavioural issues.
- Five (5) day expulsion and suspension processes to be available to principals for extreme circumstances.
- Regional support provided to those individual school communities recording high levels of suspensions/expulsions.
- DEECD recognises the OH&S / Workcover implications to PCO's, staff and other students when dealing with complex student behaviours.
- Principals to manage the expulsion processes within their school setting with appropriate regional support.

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- Recognition of the growing number of students who need regular expert intervention and support beyond the capabilities and training of school staff through resource provision.
  - Non-Government schools to be made more accountable with their school engagement processes, especially in relation to expulsions.

The *VPA Student Engagement Guidelines* Position Paper was initiated by VPA Council Members in February 2009. Further work on this document was undertaken by the VPA Board, President and Executive Officer.