



# INVISIBLE LABOUR: PRINCIPALS' EMOTIONAL LABOUR IN VOLATILE TIMES

**REPORT FOUR:**  
"HUNG OUT TO DRY"

MARCH 2026

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emotional labour

noun

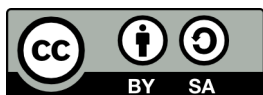
1. the mental activity required to manage or perform the routine tasks necessary for maintaining relationships and ensuring smooth running of a household or process, typically regarded as an unappreciated or unacknowledged burden borne disproportionately by women.

2. the management of one's emotions in order to present oneself and interact with other people in a certain way while doing a job. (Oxford Languages, 2025)

**This research project is dedicated to the 6,727 public schools and their educators across Australia.**

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We acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we work and live. Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people, communities of the Kulin Nation, who are the ongoing custodians of the lands on which Monash University now stands, the Ancestors and Elders of Wadawurrung Country, Eastern Maar Country and Wurundjeri Country, where Deakin University's physical campuses are located and the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation on which the University of Sydney now stands.

#### THE RESEARCH TEAM

This four-year project (2022–2026) is funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant (DP230100594) led by Monash University in collaboration with Deakin University and the University of Sydney. The research team comprises Lead Investigator Professor Jane Wilkinson, Chief Investigators Professor Lucas Walsh, Professor Amanda Keddie, Dr Fiona Longmuir and Dr Christine Grice, and Research Fellows Dr Philippa Chandler and Tim Delany.

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# Executive Summary

The findings of this report are based on an Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Grant (DP230100594) research project: *Invisible Labour: Principals' Emotional Labour in Volatile Times*. A collaboration between Monash University, Deakin University and the University of Sydney, this report details public-school principals' feeling "hung out to dry" and explores their emotional labour in the context of schooling and education systems.

This fourth report in the series investigates how systemic conditions within Australian public education intensify the emotional labour of school principals. Drawing on 298 critical incident testimonies from 256 public-school principals, stakeholder interviews, case studies and a policy audit, the study reveals a pattern of neglect, overwork, and emotional strain that is pushing principals to the brink—physically, mentally and professionally.

## KEY FINDINGS

- 1. Principals "Hung Out to Dry":** Principals report feeling abandoned by education departments during crises. Their emotional labour includes managing trauma, violence, and community grief – often without support. In describing a critical incident, over a third of principals (88 of 256 respondents, 34.3%) who responded to our survey were critical of their employer's response or support. Systemic neglect leads to burnout, resignation and moral injury.
- 2. Psychosocial Hazards and Moral Injury:** Emotional stress manifests physically: insomnia, illness, anxiety and depression. Principals face conflicting legal obligations (e.g., student safety versus inclusion), creating ethical dilemmas. Perceived betrayal by employers undermines principals' sense of integrity and purpose.
- 3. Declining Interest in Principalship:** Surveys show a sharp drop in teachers aspiring to become principals. Emotional dissonance, isolation, and lack of support deter educators from leadership roles. Market-driven policies and accountability pressures erode the care-based ethos of public education.
- 4. Systemic Failures:** Bureaucratic structures isolate principals and increase psychosocial risk. Inadequate induction and support for new principals exacerbate vulnerabilities. Cultural safety for Indigenous and minority principals remains under-addressed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Macro*

*(National Level)*

1. Establish an independent observatory to monitor educator health, safety, and career sustainability.
2. Update the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan to include actions to address principal workforce, health and safety needs.
3. Implement and fully resource professional/clinical supervision for all principals across Australia, with a properly qualified and trained support person who is not their line manager<sup>1</sup>.
4. Conduct a public education and awareness campaign about appropriate conduct and treatment of school staff, including principals.
5. Education Ministers Meeting to sponsor a working group to develop strategies such as “public media campaigns focused on respect and legislative measures to address inappropriate behaviour from parents and carers such as the Victorian School Community Safety Order” (Mison, 2025).

#### FOOTNOTE

<sup>1</sup> See examples of potential programs such as the Victorian pilot of a principal peer clinical supervision program, and the pilot in Reflective (Professional/Clinical) supervision (University of Sydney) supported by the School Leadership Institute: NSW Department of Education.

### *Meso*

*(State/Territory Level)*

1. Undertake a significant reduction in principals' workload in consultation with principals' associations and unions.
2. Reduce workload added in relation to principals' increasing accountability for youth justice outside of school.
3. Develop a strong system 'service first' culture towards schools, shifting from the current focus on policing and compliance.
4. Build system infrastructures and support for principals to report psychosocial risks and hazards without fear of judgement.
5. Increase support for principals more broadly to reduce workload stress and improve wellbeing. Tailor supports to rural and remote and highly disadvantaged schools.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Micro*

*(School Level)*


1. Deploy media management strategies during critical incidents to protect principal wellbeing.
2. Fund school-based support roles (e.g., psychologists, youth workers, community liaison, services for students with special needs).
3. Foster respectful school-community relationships through legislative measures and public campaigns.
4. Provide targeted coaching to principals aimed at managing challenging staff and other key stakeholders.

### IN SUMMARY

Australian public-school principals are navigating increasingly volatile environments with limited systemic support. Their emotional labour is essential to the wellbeing of students, staff, and communities—but it is largely invisible and unacknowledged. This report calls for urgent reform at national and state/territory levels to protect principals' physical and psychosocial safety, restore trust in public education systems and ensure the sustainability of public-school leadership.

# 01

## INTRODUCTION



Australian principals and teachers' physical and mental health, wellbeing and safety is seriously at risk. There are increasing physical and psychosocial hazards associated with being a principal.

In a 2024 survey of the Australian principal class, 55% reported that they had been threatened with or subjected to physical violence, and that violent incidents had increased by 78% since 2011 (Dicke et al., 2025). Younger and less experienced principals are over-represented when it comes to risk of burnout and self-harm (See et al., 2022). Equally, Australian teachers' safety, health and wellbeing are declining (Longmuir et al., 2024).

Australian schools face a major principal recruitment and retention crisis. This is due to a range of factors. These include excessive workloads, unsafe working environments, the challenges of under-resourced education systems supporting increasingly complex student populations, and the emotional labour of nurturing more fragmented and polarised communities (see details below). A 2023 survey of 50,500 Australian teachers reported that only 26% intend to stay in the profession, down from 58% in 2018 (AITSL, 2025a). This is reflective of broader international trends.

The most recent OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) report reveals that Australia ranks amongst the worst performing countries for teacher shortages (third worst performer and double the OECD average), particularly in public schools with high levels of disadvantage and special education needs (OECD, 2025). These are the "very schools that rely most on stable, experienced teaching staff" (AEU, 2025). Retention of teachers matters because quality schooling systems require a pipeline of strong, capable and well supported teachers into the principalship. Public-school principals wrestle daily with issues associated with a severely underfunded system which lacks the resources to fully support educators to care for the most disadvantaged students in Australian society.

A crucial part of principals' work is emotional labour – managing their emotions and that of others (Hochschild, 1983; 2012). The intensified emotional labour demanded of principals must be seen as part of a broader issue of educators' (principal and teachers') health, safety and wellbeing. Emotional labour is typically unseen by others and unrecognised in state and national policy and role descriptions of the principalship (Wilkinson, 2021). Yet it is crucial work in times of increased social and political volatilities. It calls on less visible, but important leadership skills: trauma-informed leadership, community building and the emotional management capacities to connect across diverse demographics in holistic and socially just ways (Wilkinson et al., 2020).

However, these new dimensions of principals' work are largely invisible in education policies, principal role descriptions and workforce development. This is despite these skills and capacities being indispensable in fostering the kinds of necessary conditions for students, schools and their communities to thrive (Walsh et al., 2020). When principals feel supported in meaningful ways by education systems, communities and families, emotional labour is what sustains and nourishes them, such as when they see the positive outcomes of their emotional labour (e.g. when they support a child through a difficult period and the child goes on to succeed). As one principal remarked to our research team, "without emotions, it is just labour".

Principals' work historically has been stressful, involving a constant juggle of often-conflicting demands of multiple stakeholders. However, what is new is the intensified emotional management work required in the principals' role. Principals are navigating increasingly diverse and often volatile school settings and communities. These volatilities include: the increasing polarisation of communities exacerbated by social media, a widening division in Australia between the rich and poor, reflected in an intergenerational divide in wealth between the young and old, global tensions associated with more volatile international settings, and the climate crisis (Howie et al., 2021; Keddie et al., 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2018; Zembylas, 2020).

Moreover, there has been no 'snapback' or return to 'normal' for Australian schools since the COVID 19 pandemic. Instead, a new 'normal' has emerged. It is characterised by the highest-ever recorded levels of burnout and cognitive stress amongst school leaders (Dicke et al., 2025; Victorian Auditor General Office [VAGO], 2023); record levels of mental health issues for children and youth (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025; Brennan et al., 2021), rising levels of student absenteeism, school disengagement<sup>2</sup> and violence<sup>3</sup> (Dep. of Ed., Australia, 2023), and excessive workloads<sup>4</sup>. These combined factors negatively impact the attractiveness and retention of educators in the profession.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>2</sup>Year 10-12 full-time apparent retention rates reveal that between 2014-2024 Catholic and Independent sectors have had little change. In the government sector there has been a decline from 78.6% in 2014 to 74.3% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024). In Australia in 2022, "The proportion of the Year 12 population that met the requirements of a Senior Secondary Certificate or equivalent was 76.3% ... Year 12 certification rates ... were higher in major cities (79.4%) than in inner regional areas (67.6%), outer regional areas (69.2%) and remote/very remote areas (55.5%)" and "for the population living in high socio-economic status areas (82.9%) than those in medium and low socio-economic status areas (75.2% and 69.7% respectively) ... the gap between Year 12 certification rates in high socio-economic status areas compared to low socioeconomic status areas has widened" (ACARA, 2024a, p. 2).

<sup>3</sup>From 2022 to 2023, the largest increase cited by educators intending to leave the profession was student behaviour (+9 percentage points) and parent behaviour (+5 percentage points). Between 2019 and 2023, there was a large percentual increase in student behaviour as a reason to leave the profession (rising from 30 to 42%) (Australian Teacher Workforce Data, 2025).

<sup>4</sup>Analysis of 2021 Census data report the following:

Female classroom teachers worked longer hours than males at all ages ... School teachers worked extraordinarily long hours compared with workers in comparable occupations. They worked particularly longer hours than individuals with school teaching qualifications working full-time in other occupations. Similarly, full-time school teachers with highest qualifications in selected fields of study worked much longer hours than individuals in other occupations with highest qualifications in the same fields of study ... The incomes of public sector classroom teachers were on average lower than their counterparts in the private sector, especially in the peak career age range 45 to 49 (Preston, 2023, p. 2).

In addition, “administrative tasks, compliance obligations and government initiatives are disproportionately contributing to principals’ workloads” with excessive workloads identified as the most significant cause of poor principal health and wellbeing (VAGO, 2023)<sup>5</sup>. These factors, along with increased market competition, have intensified relational tensions within and between schools and school systems. Our study investigates the dire impact of these factors on principals’ occupational health, safety and wellbeing. It reveals that when systems ignore or minimise the consequences of these trends, it has severe impacts on the pipeline of quality teachers into the principalship and on principal retention.

Through critical incident testimonies, interviews with key education stakeholders, case studies of principals’ emotional labour and a policy audit of principal role descriptions, our large-scale qualitative research provides in depth examples of principals’ emotional labour in practice. The data provide a rich understanding of the emotional impact that leading in volatile times is having on principals’ work. It highlights the specific material, economic, social, political and cultural conditions that sustain principals in their role, or that undercut them and may lead to their departure from the workforce.

By recognising and understanding the emotional labour of principals, we can begin to advocate for the necessary support, training, and changes to legislation that our reports highlight. The advocacy we seek for Australian principals working in public schools highlights the importance of government school education for equity and social justice. In turn, the reports foreground the strong and relentless commitment and expertise of Australian principals.

The project focuses on the work of Australian public-school principals. Principals in public schools must lead and manage concentrations of increasingly complex student populations and their communities. They do so under major funding constraints. Since 2009, government funding increases have favoured Catholic and Independent schools over government schools (Cobbold, 2024). This has led to severe underfunding of public education systems across Australia, with only the Australian Capital Territory [ACT] meeting the School Resource Standard [SRS] for students (Department of Education 2023). This matters because Australian public schools enrol most students from the lowest SEA quartile – the most disadvantaged students in our society (Cobbold, 2025). Just over 80% of low SEA students attend public schools compared to 11.8% in Catholic schools and 7.7% in independent schools (Cobbold, 2025, p.7).

While all state and territory governments have agreed to lift funding to the SRS within a decade, inequitable funding regimes have grown worse over time. Australia is ranked as having one of the most inequitable systems of education in the OECD (bottom third of schooling systems) (Australian Education Union, 2024). These inequities give the emotional labour of public-school principals a distinctive ‘edge’ associated with high levels of stress and complexity<sup>6</sup>.

Such adverse conditions are amplified by negative media and political discourses about public education, which position some public schools as ‘failing’. Consequently, this project features explicit activist and public advocacy work for public education as a public good that needs to be nurtured, valued and invested in.

Inviting Australian public-school principals to speak out about their experiences is an act of solidarity and support for their commitment to Australian students, families and communities. Listening to their testimonies, closely observing their work, and conferring with stakeholder groups provides a robust evidence base of the emotional investment of principals into their role that goes well beyond their job description. Whilst system support for principals in some states has been well-intentioned and signals some progress, major areas require urgent addressing. We highlight these in Reports Two, Three and Four. This report is the **fourth** in this series that provides new knowledge about the emotional labour of the Australian public-school principal workforce and how it can best be supported for principals, educators, students, families and school communities to thrive.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>5</sup> On average principals work 55 hours per week (Victorian Auditor-General Office, 2023). During school holidays, “weekly working hours remained higher than the standard full-time load of 38 hours, with ... half of senior leaders working between 45 and 58 hours per week across the year” (Australian Teacher Workforce Data, 2025). Analysis of 2021 Census data reports that, “Principals worked much longer hours than classroom teachers, though more than half of all full-time classroom teachers aged from their mid-40s to 60s averaged 45 hours or more a week” (Preston, 2023, p. 2).

<sup>6</sup> Analysis of the 2021 Census on the age profiles of teachers in the private and public sectors shows a

much larger percentage of public school teachers in the younger age ranges. This indicates that the public sector has a disproportionate responsibility for the employment of graduates and their induction into the profession. This is costly for the public sector and allows the private sector to select successful early career teachers without putting resources into their initial development. Resourcing for schools should take this into account. This finding corroborates the position of leading education administrator and policy advisor, Gregor Ramey, more than two decades ago. He argued that the public sector should be recompensed for its disproportionate share of the costly induction and development of early career teachers (Preston, 2023, p. 4).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Our research study examines the following questions:

1. How is emotional labour currently understood and experienced by Australian public-school principals?
2. What broad and specific contextual and personal factors are significant in such understandings and experiences?
3. What theoretical and practical tools can help to better understand, prepare and support principals and systems to navigate the increasingly complex and demanding emotional labour that characterises leaders' work?

### **Our study has three overarching key objectives:**

- (i) Develop a theoretically rigorous conceptualisation of public-school principals' work that addresses the intensified emotional demands of the role in times of heightened social divisions;
- (ii) Generate a robust evidence base to inform scholarship, education policy and workforce development reforms to enable educational systems and principals to recognise and productively manage these new and intensified forms of labour; and
- (iii) Develop theoretical and practical tools to better understand, prepare and support principals and systems to manage the increasingly complex emotional demands that characterise principals' work.

### **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY EMOTIONAL LABOUR?**

The definition we use in our project varies to the standard definition provided at the start of this report. Emotional labour has been defined as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display [that is] sold for a wage" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). It was originally coined as a term to describe service industry work, where workers had to project a different emotion than the one they were experiencing, e.g., a flight attendant tasked with maintaining an air of friendly calm, even amidst passenger complaints or turbulence (Hochschild, 1983). More recently, the concept of emotional labour has been extended to study the 'caring' industries of healthcare (Riley & Weiss, 2016) and education (Steen-Johnsen et al., 2024), as well as management (Bolton, 2009).

Our study documents how emotional labour is currently experienced by Australian public-school principals and how this labour differs from other 'caring' professions. Emotional labour in the principalship is a poorly researched and understood phenomenon (Maxwell & Riley, 2017). What is known is that the nature and characteristics of principals' labour

involves repeated, ongoing interactions with key stakeholders at varied developmental levels versus 'one-off' brief encounters typically experienced in other 'caring' professions such as health (Maxwell & Riley, 2017).

The skills required to manage competing demands, and the emotional capacity to switch seamlessly between stakeholder interactions whilst simultaneously impression managing, can impact on health and wellbeing, e.g., chronic stress, feelings of burn out and lowered job satisfaction levels (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015; Heffernan & Pierpoint, 2020). Moreover, this work is highly gendered, 'raced' and classed, with women viewed as skilled emotional managers (Blackmore, 1996) and over-represented in challenging, hard-to-staff public schools where disadvantaged students are predominantly located (MacDonald et al., 2021).

Understanding the emotional labour of principals matters because it provides key insights into the broader phenomenon of rapidly declining principal and teacher workplace health, safety and wellbeing that is negatively impacting the attraction and retention of Australian educators into the profession.

## ABOUT THESE REPORTS

This report (Report Four) is the **fourth** in a series of our reports that examines key themes arising from an ARC funded (DP230100594) project, *Invisible labour: Principals' emotional labour in volatile times*. Report One provides a technical overview of the study including literature review and methodology. Report Two examines how emotional labour impacts on the individual principal. Report Three examines how schools impact the emotional labour of principals. Report Four (this report) examines the impact of education systems on principals' emotional labour. The reports focus on the principals' emotional labour in relation to these intersecting domains. They cover the following themes:

### Report Two: The Impact of Emotional Labour on the Individual Principal

1. Wearing a professional mask
2. The diverse geographies of emotional labour
3. The bodily impacts of emotional labour

### Report Three: Schools and Emotional Labour

4. The escalation of violence in schools and its repercussions for principals' emotional labour
5. Social volatilities and gender
6. Emotional labour as a collective act of solidarity

### Report Four: Emotional Labour, Schooling and Education Systems

7. Emotional labour and principals feeling "hung out to dry"
8. Who would want to be a principal?

Reports Two, Three and Four are based on extensive analysis of principal critical incident testimonies, drawn from a survey of Australian public-school principals conducted from 2023-2024. These findings are corroborated by close analysis of stakeholder interviews, an extensive literature review, case studies and policy audit (see detailed explanation in Report One). The recommendations at the conclusion of Reports Two, Three and Four are drawn from these research findings<sup>7</sup>.

The attraction and retention of high-quality educators into the principalship and lower turnover accrues significant social benefits: positively impacting teacher retention, school-community engagement and students' outcomes, particularly those from more marginalised backgrounds (Bartanen et al., 2019; Kelchtermans, 2017). The project supports governments to foster healthy and resilient Australian communities by reducing the significant social and economic costs associated with high principal turnover, stress and burnout<sup>8</sup>. This is a crucial benefit given Australia's significant economic investment in its public-school systems. By adopting an activist approach in its methodology, through the publication of critical incident testimonies that foreground principals' voices, our research aims to raise public consciousness and engender dialogue about the hazardous occupational conditions of public-school principals.

## CRITICAL INCIDENT TESTIMONIES

Between July 2023 and October 2024, public-school principals across Australia were invited to contribute a short anonymous testimony (in written and audio forms) in response to the following open-ended questions:

1. Describe a critical incident that has occurred in your role as a principal. What was your professional response?
2. How did the incident make you feel? What do you wish people understood about the incident and what you went through? What did you learn from this experience?
3. Is there anything else you wish to add?

Principals were invited to respond via principal association newsletters, teacher union newsletters and social media. Identifying characteristics in the testimonies such as name and location of the school have been removed. For further details of the survey including the demographics of participants, see Report One. A key aim of the critical incident testimonies was to provide the opportunity for principals to speak about the emotional management aspects of their work in their own words. The urgent need for change is a key message throughout the testimonies.

A selection of anonymous principal testimonies are on our website.

[monash.edu/education/research/projects/school-principals-emotional-labour-in-volatile-times](https://monash.edu/education/research/projects/school-principals-emotional-labour-in-volatile-times)

Further publications will explore our detailed case studies on individual schools. Within this document, you can click on this Weblink icon to access more testimonies and data.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>7</sup> The wording of critical incident testimonies and stakeholder interviews has been slightly changed to protect the anonymity of participants.

<sup>8</sup> When it comes to principal health and wellbeing, "all principals do significantly worse than the general population" (VAGO, 2023). Mental injury was consistently the highest cause of principals' worker compensation claims between 2015 and 2021. It made up almost half (48 per cent) of all claims. By comparison, mental injury makes up an average of 29 and 20 per cent of teachers' and non-teaching school staff claims, respectively (VAGO, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> WorkSafe Victoria reported a 22% increase in claims from educators in 2022-2023, with total costs for the two-year period of more than \$50 million (Al Afreed, F. M., et al. 2022).

# 02

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

In March 2025, the Victorian Allan Labor Government announced a new campaign from Work Safe Victoria (which develops policy relating to workplace health and safety) to address work-related aggression and violence in general Victorian workplaces (Premier of Victoria, 2025).

Asking the community “to not cross the line, and to stop and reflect before tempers rise”, Don’t cross the line “calls on everyday Victorians to consider the toll on workers who may experience yelling, swearing and hostility as part of their day-to-day work” (Premier of Victoria, 2025).

The campaign comes as Work Safe data shows nearly 1,000 workers were seriously injured – including 316 workers who suffered mental injuries – because of suspected work-related aggression or violent incidents in 2024 (Premier of Victoria, 2025). Whilst raising awareness, such campaigns do not address the serious occupational health and safety (OH&S) violations occurring against principals in schools and the support required in the wake of such incidents (see Report Three for further details). It is important to note that WorkSafe’s campaign is the latest iteration of a longer-term campaign across the nation. For example, in September 2021, the Tasmanian government launched a campaign

to encourage adults to think about how they interact with school staff. The key message of the campaign is that disrespecting school staff is crossing the line... simple as that. The campaign has seen success so far and will continue to run into the future (Dep for Ed, Children and Young People, 2023).

It is unclear what “success” constitutes in terms of these campaigns. Our testimonies from public-school principals and stakeholders vividly suggest otherwise. Our data paints a striking picture of carelessness at system level when it comes to addressing the violence, accountability pressures and work intensification in Australian public schools.

Building on Reports Two and Three, this report explores systemic dimensions of principals’ emotional labour and an unfair reliance on the goodwill of principals. It concludes by asking, “who would want to be a principal?”

### THEME SEVEN: EMOTIONAL LABOUR AND PRINCIPALS FEELING "HUNG OUT TO DRY"

This theme recurs throughout our testimonies as a significant finding. The emotional labour carried out by principals is compounded by physical abuse, a perception of neglect/lack of care from their employer, fear, exhaustion, and regular comments in the testimonies

that suggest a sense of devastation and betrayal. In describing a critical incident, over a third of principals (34.3%, 88 of 256 respondents) who responded to our survey were critical of their employer's response or support. We have selected the narrative below as it typified many of the testimonies we received<sup>10</sup>. In this testimony, a highly experienced principal wrestles with intense emotions of anger and betrayal.

The perceived lack of safety and support significantly impacts their physical and mental health.

#### FOOTNOTE

<sup>10</sup> In this theme, the principals typically are responding to survey question two: How did the incident make you feel? What do you wish people understood about the incident and what you went through? What did you learn from this experience?

*"Phone calls and no follow-up [from the department] just don't cut it. We can't remain in perpetual states of fear. I still shake when I recall that and other incidents. I knew I couldn't keep going from helping people through constant trauma. I became hypervigilant about staff and students' safety, my hair was falling out on my desk, my immune system collapsed and I can't remember the last day I enjoyed work. The system treats us like numbers and the people supporting us are either public servants [with] no idea or staff who openly say they don't want to be back in a school.*

*I am passionate about education and making a difference but am resigning my position [a number of] years early. When I let people know some were very upset and tried to talk me out of it but the chain of command is like ok well we have to fill your position and move on. After [a long period] of dedicated service . . . I leave feeling a failure and like I am kicked to the kerb like garbage used and abused. My health is now improving and I sleep better at nights. I still feel sick about my job."*

**(FEMALE PRINCIPAL, RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOL).**

Supporting traumatised students has a substantial impact on principals as they balance duty of care to an individual student with duty of care to other students and staff:

*"A trauma effected [sic] student attacked two other students during a play break witnessed by numerous children. The perpetrator absconded from school, other students were injured and there were a number traumatised. My first response was to ensure safety of students, those injured and traumatised. Secondary response was to find the student who had absconded.*

*Pressure from [the department] around supporting student with trauma background (complex case) as well as pressure from the school community to keep students safe.*

*Trauma child is unpredictable and violent, parents are unhappy he is still at school despite a number of violent incidents where staff and students have been hurt . . .*

*Additional meetings with department, social workers and parents adds a great deal of stress and workload. I am very firm in my response with the department and have placed children's safety at the forefront. I wish the department actually considered what life is like in a school, how they would feel as a parent if their child was in danger. I feel as though they are very heavily in the favour of loud parents, and force schools to do things to save parents making a fuss when in fact they should be supporting the school stance."*

**(Female principal, rural primary school).**

The principal reported that the school provided considerable support to the child who was experiencing abuse and other severe challenges at home, "The challenge was about supporting students and staff who were grieving as a result of this tragedy while dealing with narcissistic lunatics in the community took a huge emotional toll." They argued that the system failed to support this aspect of the critical incident, "Education departments and ministers have an objective to minimise fall out to their reputations. The support offered to schools is provided through that lens and is therefore no support at all." The emotion this principal is expressing is abandonment, where they feel that departmental and government concerns about reputational risk take precedence. This is a recurring throughline across our findings.

Building on our findings from Report Two, critical incident testimonies reveal many principals' sense of isolation and being "hung out to dry" by their employer. One principal describes how they were left reeling after two critical incidents in short succession. Firstly, a student at their school was abandoned by their caregivers. With government services slow to respond, she felt responsible for the child's welfare. Later, in an unrelated episode, she received a barrage of abusive emails from a parent. She felt she had little support from the education department:

*"I felt abandoned and isolated. My confidence felt destroyed and I felt hung out to dry, and as though I was expected to do these things as part of my role. I wish people understood that this was expected on top of the daily operations of running a school and managing [many] staff. That this is not included in my job description, my yearly performance development plan, nor my school review. This is the unseen and hidden work that's become intolerable to bear . . . I'm still coming to terms with my treatment from my employer."*

**(Female principal, primary school, regional city).**

This principal's testimony encapsulates many key sentiments from the principals' testimonies, e.g., work being 'unseen', and the sense that their employer is "care-less" (Lynch, 2022) and distant. The feeling of abandonment recurs throughout the testimonies and is captured by the testimony below:

*"I am an experienced Principal with more years' experience than many senior members within [the department] and I pride myself on my integrity, work ethic, commitment to my school and the department. Having this challenged without the opportunity to defend or protect my reputation to this day, makes me sick to the stomach. I had sleepless nights questioning everything about my work. I was unable to express my reaction to the complaints, which was extremely frustrating and impacted my mental health. [Department members] do not support me and are happy to throw me under a bus."*

**(Male principal, primary school, capital city).**

Employers have a crucial responsibility for the physical and psychosocial safety of workers, including principals (Safe Work Australia, 2025). The testimonies provide illustrations of injuries and hazards relating to occupational violence and work-related stress. Whilst states such as Victoria ask principals to report these hazards and injuries via system managed reporting mechanisms, we heard anecdotal evidence that many principals do not do so for fear of being judged as "weak", "not coping" or that they may be held responsible by the department for what has happened (case study male principal). Whilst these fears may or may not be founded, nonetheless they exist, and thus, the underlying causes that trigger them, need to be clearly addressed.

Safe Work Australia's model work, health and safety laws have been updated to incorporate psychosocial hazards (2025b). These hazards are defined as those that can

create stress. This can cause psychological or physical harm. Stress itself is not an injury. But if workers are stressed often, over a long time, or the level of stress is high, it can cause harm (Safe Work Australia, 2025b).

Anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and sleep disorders are cited as examples of psychological harm (Safe Work Australia, 2025b). Nearly half (48%) of all work cover claims from Victorian principals were mental health issues and "all principals do significantly worse than the general population" (VAGO, 2023). The most recent Australia-wide study of principals' occupational health, safety and wellbeing reported that, "Without urgent reforms, Australia risks losing an entire generation of school leaders. The data is clear: workload, violence, and mental health challenges continue to escalate" (Dicke et al., 2025, p. 1).

The notion of "moral injury" clarifies the principals' sentiments noted above about being "hung out to dry" or "thrown under a bus" by their employer. Originally defined as "distress caused by violating deeply held moral values in combat settings" (Oberg, 2025, p. 2), moral injury is now being used in studies of the 'caring' professions such as health and education. A study of moral injury in teaching argues that "these moral conflicts often stem from systemic constraints, conflicting institutional demands, and limited resources that hinder educators from acting in alignment with their ethical and professional responsibilities" (Oberg, 2025, p. 2) Moral injury "is rooted in ethical dilemmas, systemic failures, and perceived betrayals by institutions" (Oberg, 2025, p. 2). For the principals in our study, their pride and sense of integrity in their work is undermined significantly by the "perceived betrayal" of their employer to be unsupportive and in some cases, "to hang them out to dry". This is experienced by principals as the ultimate betrayal.

Principals are hardy. They can endure much criticism and negativity. However, as we see above, the perceived feeling that their employer does not have "one's back" and in fact, is willing to throw one "under the bus" can often be the final blow for principals wrestling with the daily complexities of the role. This theme is a salutary warning that something is seriously awry when so many of our testimonies express a similar sentiment. However, it also offers a beacon of hope, for positive ways forward. The 2024 survey of Australian principal class occupational health, safety and wellbeing noted the following elements as making a key difference to principal health and wellbeing:

We found that elements such as role clarity, a supportive supervisor, and a trusting relationship with system or governance leadership are experienced very differently by those with high and low satisfaction. Similarly, a lack of a supportive environment, or a sense of autonomy and influence are work outcomes that differ substantially for those that express their intention to quit (Dicke et al., 2025, p. 1).

This leads to the concluding theme, *Who would want to be a principal?*

## THEME EIGHT: WHO WOULD WANT TO BE A PRINCIPAL?

Intensified accountabilities in teaching and school leadership work, combined with an increasingly competitive school system and social volatilities, have formed “new emotional and psychic economies” in schools (Blackmore, 2004, p. 440) resulting in new and more intense forms of labour (Blackmore, 2004). Restler (2017) found that contemporary policies erase the care work of teachers in their communities. Research has also shown that teachers working with disadvantaged communities are more likely to report intense emotional conflict (Oplatka, 2012). Those employed in disadvantaged schools struggle to reconcile their altruistic motives and the new performative labours demanded by a market-driven system (Blackmore, 2004). This can result in the types of “moral injury” noted in the previous theme.

Two decades ago, it was reported that school leaders must also support teachers struggling with this same inner disharmony; in particular, conflicts between what is referred to as the “real work” of teaching and the work required by accountability systems and markets (Blackmore, 2004, p. 440). Nearly two decades later, a heightened performance and accountability culture has intensified these tensions. It has led to a precipitous decline in the numbers of teachers wishing to enter the principalship and to principals remaining in their role. Market-driven systems have forced principals to compromise their altruistic needs in serving their communities.

These pressures, combined with excessive workloads (Preston, 2023) and increasing levels of “violent and threatening behaviours” have led to a spike in principals’ levels of anxiety and depression (Dicke et al., 2025, p. 1). Equally concerning, these factors “not only take an unfair toll on committed and dedicated school leaders, but they reduce the ability for schools to be positive environments focused on student learning” (Dicke et al., 2025, p. 1). This has particularly negative repercussions for the most disadvantaged students who, as noted in the introduction, are disproportionately enrolled in the government sector (Cobbold, 2025)<sup>11</sup>.

There is a decreased desire to be a principal in Australia (ACU, 2023; Heffernan & Pierpoint, 2020; Longmuir et al., 2024; Riley et al., 2021). This echoes a global trend, further exacerbated by COVID, toward a mass exodus from the role of principal, resulting in vacancies, particularly in hard to staff schools (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023; Greany et al., 2022; National Centre for Education Statistics, 2024). A 2022 survey of 38000 Australian teachers reported that only 31% intended to stay in the profession until retirement, down from 58% in 2018 (Heffernan et al., 2022). In the UK, women in their 30s who are in their mid-careers are the biggest single group leaving teaching each year (McShane & Sheppard, 2024). This finding is replicated in Australia (Arnold & Rahimi, 2025). This is devastating as the retention of quality teachers across genders is crucial as part of the principalship pipeline. Our principal testimonials illustrate emotions such as cynicism, defeat and helplessness.

School environments, along with aspects of working with young people, can be highly emotionally charged (Keddie & Bartel, 2020). Sachs and Blackmore (2004) describe schools as “complex emotional arenas” (p. 278), governed by highly regulated emotional rules that can cause some leaders to experience emotional dissonance. This fosters a discord between their internalised emotional experience and how they present to their colleagues. Principals in our findings express emotions of loneliness, isolation, vulnerability and betrayal, alongside pride in their sense of duty and service.

A throughline intersecting our principal testimonies is a keen desire and diligence to meet their service obligations, yet principals contend that policies often conflict between their duty of care to various stakeholders. One long-serving principal shares the conflicting demands of the role whilst managing their emotional labour and the emotional labour of stakeholders.

The child they are referring to has high special needs:

*“I felt unsupported and I felt angry that the some of the support I was getting was making things worse. For example, the information I got from the legal division said I could not discriminate against the child (by suggesting reducing school hours, suspending the child or suggesting a specialist setting – which I did not do) and they said I also had a legal obligation to provide a safe work environment for the staff. These legal obligations were actually in opposition and in doing one, I was not meeting the legal obligations of the other, and this made me feel so stressed.”*  
**(Female principal, primary, capital city).**

Another principal who is in the first five years of the role, shares in their testimony, the need to juggle delegation of some duties whilst bearing ultimate responsibility for all outcomes. This resulted in loneliness as a key emotion in response to these contradictions:

*“The principal’s role is a lonely one. Teachers in a faculty have each other for support and share the load, [middle leaders] have other [middle leaders] and deputies have other deputies. Principals stand alone. As the principal you are expected to be collegial, but you can’t develop any relationships with anyone, with the perception of favouritism. The principal is responsible and accountable for everything, even if you delegate, which you have to, to demonstrate leadership, but with that delegation of responsibility, the principal is still accountable for the actions of others.*

*With the introduction of the new [system directors] to support principals in [our state], the role of these leaders changed from “shoulder to shoulder support” to “line of sight” ... pulling up rogue principals”.*

*The [system director’s] actions in my case totally undermined all of my work and left me vulnerable to violence in the workplace. I was responsible and accountable for everything, yet was hog tied to action policies. I would never recommend anyone to aspire to be a principal.”*

**(Female principal, secondary school, rural).**

## FOOTNOTE

<sup>11</sup> NAPLAN results show concerning outcomes for these groups of students. They reveal “ongoing educational disparities for students from non-urban areas, First Nations Australian heritage and those with low socio-educational backgrounds” (ACARA, 2024b, p. 1).

This principal's testimony confirms their sole accountability as foregrounded in the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership's Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL, 2025b) and principal role descriptions. Further, where system support should be available, the changing role of line managers and regional directors from providing principals with support to monitoring performance in several states constitutes a potential psychosocial risk to principals.

The testimonies from Australian principals, corroborated by stakeholder interviews and case studies, suggest that many principals receive inadequate support and guidance from system leaders. They report dealing with senior system leaders who may not understand the remit of the principal's role or who may be so overloaded with compliance and accountability demands that they cannot provide the individual support needed. The observation from this principal typified the spirit of many of the testimonies:

*"This may sound extraordinarily negative, but, as Principal you really can't rely on anyone, at the end of the day when there is a crisis, you are essentially on your own."*

**(Male principal, secondary, rural).**

Complex bureaucratic arrangements can exacerbate psychosocial risk for principals. System structures can isolate principals and negatively impact their wellbeing. The following testimony explains a sense of increasing mistrust and vulnerability, leading to a severe mental condition and resignation from the profession:

*"A member [of the leadership team] made false and vexatious allegations that I bullied him because I made reference that his relationship with [another colleague] was inappropriate. With no right of reply [I was] removed from my position and placed on alternative duties whilst a needle in a haystack investigation was conducted. This investigation took [a long time]. During this time, I was diagnosed with ... anxiety and depression. Although my claim for worker's compensation was originally declined, the insurance company has accepted liability ... [I am deemed] "not fit to work in any profession again."*

**(Female principal, secondary school, rural).**

The embodied emotional labour the preceding principal experienced included feeling:

*"powerless, shamed, intense distress physical sensations of pain, sweating, nausea, trembling, feeling on edge, panicking when having to leave my home, easily upset, hypervigilance, exhausted, finding it hard to concentrate – including on simple or everyday tasks, jumpy or easily startled, highly anxious."*

**(Female principal, secondary school, rural).**

This is another example of compromised psychosocial risk with the principal feeling that they have not received adequate system support.

Some principals are unprepared for the demands that amplify emotional labour. They report experiencing what they experience as inadequate principal induction processes, specifically in human resourcing, governance, occupational health and safety, and resourcing and maintenance. Some early-stage principals contend that they receive minimal support from the department, leading them to experience emotions of powerlessness and a desire to not continue as a principal:

*"I was acting principal. I walked in ... to do a handover [and discovered that] one of the staff had been molesting one or more of the students and this had just come out ... During [the time] I was at that school I received no support from any one above me. I was a very inexperienced principal and was expected to deal with this on my own ..."*

*I can never forget the look of surprise on a [key stakeholder's] face when they asked me if I would be going for the substantive position and I told them nothing on earth could get me to do that! Once again, no support from the department ... These [incidents] are standouts in my career ... No wonder there is a shortage of principals!"*

**(Female principal, rural primary).**

Practical and emotional system support for principals can make a major difference in their decisions to enter and remain in the principalship. Equally, a lack of support can exacerbate principals' decisions to leave, retire early, or, in the case of teachers, not apply for the principalship (ACU, 2023; Dicke et al., 2025).

# 03

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**E**ducation systems need to move beyond a compliance and advisory role that “steers schools at a distance” to providing practical, hands-on support for schools and their leaders. Equally, the principal workforce and profession should play an important role in responding to the recommendations throughout our reports.

Our data reveals that while there is a role for developing and supporting principals individual coping strategies and building resilience, collectively we need to look beyond individualised, psychological responses to focus on larger scale interventions and responses. Hence, we divide our recommendations into macro, meso and micro levels to capture the complex, interconnected nature of these conditions. The macro level encompasses the federal government and related agencies, such as Australian Institute for Teaching (AITSL), Safework Australia etc. The macro level recognises the need for a national response, which encompasses the meso level of state and territories.

Micro levels encompass schools and their communities, whilst recognising that conditions at micro level are shaped by macro and meso levels of governance. Moreover, the recommendations in this report need to be read in conjunction with the recommendations in Report Three, as there are connecting throughlines between the two reports.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AT THE (NATIONAL)

### *Macro Level:*

1. Establish a collaborative network of universities undertaking research on principal class and teacher occupational health, safety and wellbeing. This cooperative initiative would seek to inform departments involved in research and policy development in all states and territories. The observatory could be modelled on the European Teacher Wellbeing and Career Observatory ([twco.prowproject.eu](https://twco.prowproject.eu)) but with the inclusion of principal class research and a focus on safety, as well as occupational health and wellbeing. It would be independent of governments and statutory authorities.
2. Update the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan to include actions to address principal workforce, health and safety needs. Additional actions would help reduce the workload of principals, focus responsibilities on core tasks of teaching and learning and identify system-level policies to improve health and safety outcomes.
3. Implement and fully resource professional/ clinical supervision for all principals across Australia, with a properly qualified and trained support person who is not their line manager. This needs to be a national standard that applies across all jurisdictions<sup>12</sup>.
4. Conduct a public education and awareness campaign about appropriate conduct and treatment of school staff, including principals. This could include positive messaging about the strengths of public schooling and appropriate community standards. The campaign should include teacher and principal voice.
5. Education Ministers Meeting to sponsor a working group to develop strategies such as “public media campaigns focused on respect and legislative measures to address inappropriate behaviour from parents and carers such as the Victorian School Community Safety Order” (Mison, 2025).

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>12</sup> See examples of potential programs such as the Victorian pilot of a principal peer clinical supervision program, and the pilot in Reflective (Professional/Clinical) supervision (University of Sydney) supported by the School Leadership Institute: NSW Department of Education.

**RECOMMENDATIONS AT THE (STATE)**

State and territory governments, in collaboration with the federal government:

## *Meso Level:*

1. Undertake a significant reduction in principals' workload in consultation with principals' associations and unions. Currently principals spend an inordinate amount of time dealing with compliance and other duties such as infrastructure, safety etc that were previously done by regions and central staff. This reduces principals' key focus on leading the education of the school, increases their stress levels and makes them less able to deal with the heightened emotional intensities of their work.
2. Reduce workload added in relation to principals' increasing accountability for youth justice outside of school (e.g. bail monitoring) and require more concrete active support for principals.
3. Develop a strong system 'service first' culture towards schools, shifting from the current focus on policing and compliance.
4. Build system infrastructures and support for principals to report psychosocial risks and hazards without fear of judgement.
5. Increase support for principals more broadly to reduce workload stress and improve wellbeing. This includes administrative supports and more specialist positions such as behavioural supports, disability, mental health and psychological services for students and staff. Additional supports should be tailored to principal and school needs, including rural and remote schools and highly disadvantaged schools.

**RECOMMENDATIONS AT THE (SCHOOLING)***Micro Level:*

1. Deploy media management strategies during critical incidents to protect principal wellbeing rather than government or system reputations.
2. Fund school-based support roles (e.g., psychologists, youth workers, occupational therapists and community liaison officers).
3. Foster respectful school-community relationships through legislative measures and public campaigns.
4. Provide targeted coaching to principals aimed at managing challenging staff and other key stakeholders.

# Conclusion

**O**ur reports have documented the intensified emotional dimensions of principals' work, including the emotional demands of the role arising from heightened social volatilities manifested in school communities. Principals and other educators face new and serious physical and psychosocial hazards that impact on their health and professional longevity. These hazards are already well understood by industrial relations experts and should inform significant reform in all states and territories.

Principals – and those around them – other educators, as well as the students in their care – have a right to be safe at work. However, our data suggests that they are not and that education departments and state governments are not exercising systematically their duty of care to keep their employees safe. This is having major repercussions including contributing significantly to the crisis in attraction and retention of educators into the workforce. It also reinforces the moral injury experienced by principals who perceive themselves to be let down and sometimes hung out to dry by education departments that are risk averse and unwilling to support their employees. Whether these perceptions are unfounded or not, is irrelevant. The reality that significant numbers of principals expressed a sense of betrayal from their employer when they most needed their support suggests that (to quote Shakespeare) “something is rotten in the state of Denmark”.

Safety also encompasses not only freedom from physical hazards and violence but also psychosocial safety. The proposed psychosocial regulations in Victoria are greatly welcome but given many principals (and teachers more generally) do not feel safe at work currently, it is questionable that these regulations will have the impact they deserve. One area of safety our testimonies was less able to uncover due to the predominant Anglo Celtic whiteness of the principalship (reflected in the demographics of those who responded to our survey) was the cultural safety of members of historically marginalised groups including Indigenous principals and those from minority ethnic groups. However, previous research (Jones et al. 2025; Sullivan et al. 2024) and the powerful Yoorrook report (Yoorrook, 2025) provides compelling evidence that schools are not culturally safe workplaces for many oppressed groups. This is an area for ongoing research as well as action from state departments of education. To state the obvious, efforts to diversify the teaching and principal workforce will not work if people experience their workforces as unsafe.

Working with people as a principal requires significant investments of emotional labour. This labour can contribute to a sense of satisfaction and nourishment for a job well done (Hirsh et al., 2024) when principals feel that their work is recognised, valued and affirmed and when they are supported by their employer when things go awry. Our research suggests that this support is too often experienced as precarious or absent. In many of the testimonies shared with us, principals are made responsible for all that happens in their schools, with negative consequences for their physical and mental health. The data set involved (298 testimonies) combined with longitudinal research into principal health, safety and wellbeing of principals (Dicke et al., 2025) shows that this is not simply a case of ‘sour grapes’ or a few principals who are ‘whingers’. Their testimonies provide evidence of a ‘care-less’ system at work in which workers appear to be expendable.

As the Victorian Auditor-General's Department observed, the Department of Education needs to adopt a duty of care to its principals as employers, emulating a “service culture” that is currently missing (VAGO, 2023). Our data suggests that this is an important lesson for all state and territory education systems.

Critical questions remain about principals' autonomy and agency, and the benefits and drawbacks of increased standardisation and routine in the role. Much of the service work under scrutiny in the academic literature focuses on workers' lack of autonomy, and employers' attempts to ‘routine-ise’ and standardise their work (Wharton, 2009). Principals in our research have frequently articulated a paradox: on the one hand, principals wish to be trusted by their employers to work autonomously and be trusted to make decisions based on their experience and expertise. On the other hand, principals take comfort in following protocols (partly out of fear for the repercussions if they don't) and express frustration that they are responsible for too many facets of school management and leadership (Chandler et al., in press). Principals' concern to ‘tick all the boxes’ and be compliant with protocols suggests that their work is increasingly ‘routine-ised’. The principal voices in our study suggest that they need autonomy, process and voice. All are integral to being a professional.

Finally, the role of the principal involves care, not simply efficiency. We need to take into account the unpredictable amount of time care involves. Governments at state, territory and federal levels need to reframe the role to centre care in policy and principal position descriptions. We need to challenge the ‘lone hero/lone ranger’ stereotype of the principal. As some key stakeholders remarked:

*Education systems need to get better at recognising the tension between helping principals and further burdening principals. Society is complex and so much ends up on the principals' desk. Concrete support is needed for principals in a fiscally tight environment.*

*Public schools are typically the heart of the communities – they have to be supported during and beyond times of crisis.*

*We have a duty of care to young people but if we do not get the support for principals right, we are neglecting that duty.*

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The preceding recommendations are designed to support governments and education systems to work collaboratively with key stakeholders such as principal associations, teacher unions and parent groups. The recommendations are based on recognising the frontline work of principals, redesigning the role and support structures to make the role sustainable, safeguarding principals' safety, physical and psychosocial wellbeing, and attracting and retaining quality principals in a profession worth staying in.

Governments, departments of education and public-school systems taking a stand against violence, abuse and overwork would support the key work of principals across Australia. It is clearly time for education systems and departments to shift the sole locus of responsibility for teaching and learning from principals and their schools to a collective, whole of government, whole of system responsibility. This includes stopping the 'blame-game' of public schools, principals and teachers, departments buffering them so that can get on with the key work that their role entails and giving due respect to their work and the education profession as a whole.

To conclude, we return to the voices and messages of public-school principals.

In their critical incident testimonies, we asked principals,

“What do you wish people understood about the incident and what you went through?” and “What did you learn from this experience?”

Following their testimonies, principals requested three things:

1. Ask me how I feel (and “listen, really listen”).
2. Involve me in solutions.
3. Understand the pressures I am under and the time it takes me.

To illustrate, here are 10 responses from Australian public-school principals. Their words provide valuable insights into what is required next. There are more available on our website.

1. I wish people understood that we were doing everything we possibly could for the best of the child.
2. I wish people understood the level of complexity that I'm dealing with every day. I wish that people understood that the issues that principals manage are complex and often become personal.
3. I wish people would understand what rubbish principals have to deal with. I wish people understood how damaging this felt.
4. I wish that people understood that it is unacceptable to treat others in this way. We do not come to work to be abused.

5. I wish that someone had asked me how I felt instead of leaving me to do all the caring and emotional work for everyone in this situation. I wish that someone knew that I cried all the way home wondering how those students felt that night. I wish [the government] understood that it's frightening for students and staff to feel so at risk.
6. I really wish that people understood that I had to fake how I was truly feeling so as not to look weak.
7. I wish that my superiors (bar my immediate line manager) realised that decisions made by up high create emotional and physical stress and strain for those managing it.
8. I wish people understood how high I hold the respect and connection involved with ensuring any and everything is followed up with integrity.
9. I wish someone had trusted me as a person with more than 20 years of education experience.

10. I wish that the energy and trust that had been put into my emotional intelligence was listened to, and that the system had better supported these students

(extracts from principal critical incident testimonies).

We would like to thank the principals, principal associations, teacher unions, parent groups and department of education personnel who have so generously contributed to better understanding the complex nature of principals' emotional labour and how it plays out in Australian public education. We thank them for their contribution as co-activists for the education profession. Their commitment to the moral purpose of schooling is strong and passionate and must not be ignored.

To find out more, explore our reports on the challenges and rewards of emotional labour on our project website.

🔗 [monash.edu/education/research/projects/school-principals-emotional-labour-in-volatile-times](https://monash.edu/education/research/projects/school-principals-emotional-labour-in-volatile-times)

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