

Teachers Shouldn't Feel Afraid to Speak Up About Their Own Wellbeing

Schools need robust policies to manage violence towards teachers.

[GEOFF FLEMMING, GENERAL MANAGER, CRUCIAL DIMENSIONS](#) APR 26, 2023



Teacher wellbeing is the other side of the coin.

The recent incident involving a classroom brawl between a teacher and student at Maitland Grossmann High School is clear evidence that the relationship between teachers and students is at breaking point.

Teaching can be an incredibly high-stress role, with ever-increasing workloads, sometimes disruptive and overwhelmed students, the pressure of parents' expectations, and a hefty and ever-changing curriculum.

The education industry is seeing a tremendous volume of resignations, with 47 per cent of teachers feeling overworked and considering leaving the profession within the next year.

The primary role of the teacher is to lead the teaching and learning process to produce optimal student outcomes; however, on top of teaching, many educators are now expected to support students' mental health, build their creativity and resilience, help tackle social issues such as bullying and manage students with complex needs. All of this coupled with the ongoing Education Department changes in policy and syllabus is detracting teachers from their primary role and making their jobs more difficult. Is it any wonder that our teachers are feeling overstressed, overwhelmed, and under-resourced?

One survey of 38,000 teachers from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership found teachers were spending more time on tasks outside the classroom, with 59 per cent putting in more than five hours a week handling parent issues, up from 49 per cent in 2020.

A recent Victorian survey also found that 47 per cent of teachers said that dealing with parents is the least satisfying part of their job. In order to help our educators overcome this dissatisfaction, we need to equip them with the skills necessary to have those crucial conversations with parents, and to do so in a way that is effective and results in a more collaborative approach.

Without this additional support, we shouldn't be surprised to see more incidents like the one at Maitland Grossmann High School arise, where teachers lose their cool and cave under pressure.

Supporting Wellbeing From the Top Down

Our future adults need reading, writing, and arithmetic, but they also need to be well. Schools play a vital role in facilitating a culture of wellbeing, and this starts by giving teachers the tools they need to speak up and feel supported.

The burden of student and teacher wellbeing shouldn't rest solely on teachers shoulders. Instead, it must be built into the management structure of schools, from the top down.

We can't have mentally well students without first ensuring we have mentally well teachers. In order to get there, schools must give teachers the tools they need to speak up and feel supported.

Speaking up as a teacher can be difficult, especially for those who are already experiencing high levels of stress or anxiety. In order to help teachers find their voice, schools need to provide their teachers with safe, private spaces to air their concerns, whether it be through anonymous reporting channels or regular check-ins with trusted members of the management team.

It's also critical that teachers feel their concerns will be taken seriously and addressed promptly. Schools need to have robust policies and procedures in place to manage incidents of bullying, harassment, and violence towards teachers.

Actions speak louder than words, and it's no good having a policy in place if it's simply sitting in a drawer somewhere. To make sure the message is getting through, schools must clearly communicate these policies to all staff and students, and they should be regularly reviewed and updated.

Training and support programs can help teachers better manage stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues. This can include access to counselling services, mindfulness training, and other wellbeing initiatives that promote healthy habits and work-life balance.

Finally, schools need to acknowledge that the wellbeing of their teachers is just as important as the wellbeing of their students.

The teacher exodus is a huge issue for the Australian education system. Schools need to provide safe spaces for teachers to voice their concerns, robust policies and procedures to manage incidents of bullying and violence, and training and support programs to promote better mental and emotional wellbeing.

By doing so, we can create a healthier and more supportive working environment for our teachers, which will ultimately have a positive trickle-down effect on students.

Geoff Flemming is the General Manager of Crucial Dimensions, the exclusive ANZ licensee of the global Crucial Learnings training programs. Geoff has been working with the South Australian Education Department, The Western Australian Education Department and Melbourne Archdioceses of Catholic schools, where he has been helping teachers and principals facilitate the Crucial Dimensions programs to give educators the tools they need to speak up and have the difficult conversations required to help facilitate a culture of openness and wellbeing. He has also trained education leaders on how to assess their internal cultures to identify areas where their employees are avoiding having crucial conversations.