



Australian Education Union

Federal Office

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19 March 2020

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister Morrison

RE: COVID-19

The Australian Education Union is gravely concerned about the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and the implementation of the decisions taken by the National Cabinet with respect to preschools, schools and TAFE.

We note that the National Cabinet has accepted the advice of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) that schools should remain open at this time, that pre-emptive closures are not proportionate or effective as a public health intervention at this time and that further restrictions on social gatherings are in place.

We note that the AHPPC has stated that school closures for shorter defined periods of time may be considered as part of a suite of more stringent distancing measures. Further, that schools should implement a range of other strategies to reduce transmission, including the promotion of personal hygiene measures, frequent handwashing, reducing face to face contact, cough etiquette, physical distancing, reducing public gatherings, reducing the mixing of students, staggered lunchtimes and reduced after school activities and interschool activities.

We wish to raise the following matters for the urgent consideration of the National Cabinet meeting on Friday 20th March 2020.

That:

- at all levels of government, Work, Health and Safety obligations to employees must be met
- identified risks and hazards must have the appropriate level of control to mitigate them
- the National Cabinet and health officials at both a national and state/territory level have provided insufficient information and assurance to teachers, support staff, educators, principals and the AEU about the implementation of COVID-19 decisions and indeed, the safety of workplaces for employees and students
- social distancing requires staff and students to keep a distance of 1.5 metres, a requirement which is practically impossible in the vast majority of public education settings across the nation

- the restrictions which have been placed on non-essential indoor gatherings of greater than 100 people have broad implications for public education settings across the country
- schools are reporting shortages of soap, alcohol-based sanitisers, toilet paper, tissues and infrastructure such as enough sinks and hygiene areas for staff and students to access frequently and systematically
- additional cleaning services must be implemented to ensure that all frequently touched surfaces and frequently used objects are cleaned and sanitized.
- there is widespread concern about the possibility of school closures but limited information available publicly on how such a decision would be made nationally
- the widespread community concern has already led to high levels of student absence in many states and territories
- working from home provisions must be immediately available to public education staff who are considered to be particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 due to their own or family members' underlying health conditions. In particular, those who have chronic illnesses, are immunocompromised, fall into high-risk categories and pregnant staff.
- there are specific workplace health and safety expectations arising from the additional needs of a wide range of students with individual circumstances requiring adjustment
- specific detail must be provided about working in more complex environments such as supporting students and people who have disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, rural, regional and remote locations.
- maintenance of income including leave entitlements and leave arrangements must be guaranteed for all permanent, temporary and casual public education employees.
- we reject unrealistic expectations that alternative (virtual) learning episodes will be provided for students in the event that schools close – such expectations are inequitable in their impact particularly for students who come from low socio-economic backgrounds and regional and remote centres and unsustainable in an education system denied basic resources.

Given the deep ramifications for all public education employees and the 2.5 million students in their care, we formally request that the National Cabinet immediately provides detailed advice about how all public education settings are to minimise the risk to staff and students if they are to remain open.

We expect that governments will directly advise the AEU, our members, parents and the broader community about what actions they will take if the above safety measures cannot be implemented.

Further, the AEU seeks an urgent briefing from the Chief Medical Officer or his representative, and the Federal Minister for Education Dan Tehan to discuss our concerns. We are happy to facilitate this meeting via video conferencing. Please contact Sharon Ardeljan in my office on (03) 9693 1800 or email to sardeljan@aeufederal.org.au to make the necessary arrangements.

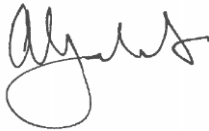
Yours sincerely



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Angelo Gavrielatos
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AEU NT Branch



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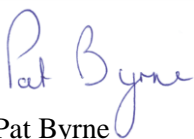
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Cc National Cabinet via Prime Minister's office;
Daniel Andrews, Premier of Victoria
Gladys Berejiklian, Premier of New South Wales
Annastacia Palaszczuk, Premier of Queensland
Peter Gutwein, Premier of Tasmania
Steven Marshall, Premier of South Australia
Mark McGowan, Premier of Western Australia
Michael Gunner, Chief Minister of the Northern Territory
Andrew Barr, Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory

Professor Brendan Murphy, Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michelle Bruniges, Secretary of the Department of Education
Dan Tehan, Minister for Education
Tanya Plibersek, Shadow Minister for Education and Training
Senator Mehreen Faruqi, Australian Greens