



PPTA TE WEHENGARUA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2018

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

A PAPER FROM THE PPTA AUCKLAND REGION



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THAT the report be received; and
2. THAT PPTA lobby the Education Council of New Zealand to amend Section 1 of the Code of Professional Responsibility to include the words “attending to my own health and well-being, and to the health and well-being of my colleagues” as part of individual teacher’s commitment to the teaching profession.
3. That PPTA lobby the Ministry and Minister of Education to require all schools to provide access to external employee assistance programmes.

1. THE ETHICS OF BEING STRESSED

- 1.1 As we all can attest, teaching is an infinitely rewarding vocation. We get to nurture the future leaders of our world, and we have untold influence on thousands of young minds. This is a great responsibility. Consequently, it is natural that we have a code of ethics governing our behaviour as teachers.
- 1.2 However, as we can all also attest, teaching can be infinitely exhausting and stressful. We look forward to our regular holidays not only because they give us a chance to sleep and spend time with our families and loved ones, but because they give us time to finally catch up on the seemingly interminable marking, paperwork, report-writing, spirals of inquiry, unit planning, and assessment moderation.
- 1.3 The ever-increasing workload of teachers will inevitably impact on the lives of teachers. Teachers can already feel pressured to go the extra mile, to do that little bit more, or to put in extra hours in the evenings or weekends. Of course, with more work comes more stress. Stress in turn itself increases stress, and then we find ourselves snappy, exhausted, burned out, and tired of teaching. Once we are in that state of fatigue and fugue, we do our students, colleagues, families, and ourselves a disservice.
- 1.4 We have all been in situations in schools where we have felt pressure to take on more tasks, or to complete a seemingly insurmountable heap of work by an unrealistic deadline.
- 1.5 Some of us have placed our colleagues in that situation. We might be heads of department or heads of faculty, or deans, or in senior management, and we have asked teachers to do this, that, or the other thing, on top of their teaching load. We have said to them that it must be done, that it must be completed, that the principal needs it, or the board demands it. We have increased the stress of our colleagues with our expectations and imposed deadlines.
- 1.6 Some of us have stood by and watched our colleagues' stress impact their lives and professional practice. We have tried to help where we can, and we have tutted with them over coffee about the impracticality of junior reports being due at the end of the week, and senior reports at the end of next week.
- 1.7 We must take better care of ourselves. We must take better care of each other. We cannot hold it to be professional to needlessly increase the stress of our colleagues. Equally, we cannot hold it to be ethical to stand by and watch a colleague burn themselves out without raising a voice of concern.

- 1.8 Our conduct as professionals is governed by several codes of ethics and conduct, but principally our behaviour and professional practices are mandated by the Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession that are maintained by the Education Council of New Zealand.
- 1.9 The Code of Professional Responsibility has four areas that teachers are obliged to uphold: a commitment to society, a commitment to the teaching profession, a commitment to families and whānau, and a commitment to learners. These four areas are part of a natural whole: we simply cannot be teachers operating at the best possible standard if we are uncommitted to always striving for the very best for our learners, for their families, for our society as a whole, and for our colleagues.
- 1.10 However, we feel there is a fifth area of commitment that the Code lacks: namely, a commitment to ourselves.
- 1.11 In 2017, the World Medical Association promulgated several changes to the Declaration of Geneva. The Declaration was first issued in 1948, and was designed to be a reformulation of the Hippocratic Oath, that centuries-old ethical code for physicians across the globe. The Declaration sought to adapt the Oath's ethical standards in a way that could be understood in the modern world, without the Oath's references to the gods Apollo and Asclepius and the goddesses Hygieia and Panacea. In the 2017 revision, the World Medical Association most notably inserted the following phrase: "I will attend to my own health, well-being, and abilities in order to provide care of the highest standard." We believe it is important that a similar requirement be made of teachers.
- 1.12 It is impossible to maintain good classroom practice if you are exhausted, facing burnout, or stressed to the point that your physical or mental health is affected.
- 1.13 We propose that an amendment be made to the Code of Professional Responsibility. Currently, Section 1 of the Code, entitled "Commitment to the Teaching Profession", states:
- I will maintain public trust and confidence in the teaching profession by:
- i. demonstrating a commitment to providing high-quality and effective teaching
 - ii. engaging in professional, respectful and collaborative relationships with colleagues
 - iii. demonstrating a high standard of professional behaviour and integrity
 - iv. demonstrating a commitment to tangata whenuatanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership in the learning environment
 - v. contributing to a professional culture that supports and upholds this Code

We propose adding a sixth criterion to this section:

- vi. attending to my own health and well-being, and to the health and well-being of my colleagues

2. ACCESS TO SUPPORT

- 2.1 It is one thing to say that we should not cause our colleagues stress. It is another thing altogether to actively do something about stress.
- 2.2 The Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 and associated regulations requires all employers to provide their staff with the highest levels of protection against risks to their physical and mental health. Aside, of course, from ensuring good workplace practices, one way employers can assist their staff in maintaining their mental health is through employee assistance programmes.
- 2.3 Employee assistance programmes (EAP) are offered by several private providers and NGOs throughout the country. Organisations such as EAP Services, EAP Works, Vitae, and the Square Circle provide free and confidential counselling, with costs passed back to employers. Such counselling does not need to be specific or relevant to that worker's industry – it might be budgeting advice, or relationship support. Issues in a person's personal life can easily have an impact on their ability to do their job well, and this is especially true in schools when we as teachers are working daily with young people.
- 2.4 Although there is a legislative requirement for all schools to ensure safe workplaces, there is no requirement for them to provide access to EAP. This is despite EAP being relatively cheap and cost-effective; despite it being a useful way for schools to help manage performance, competence, or misconduct; and despite it being a very good mechanism to help individual teachers deal with the consequences of stress.
- 2.5 We believe that EAP is important, and that all teachers – and, indeed, all school staff – should be able to access free, confidential, and independent support for any issue occurring in their life that is likely to impact their professional practice in any way whatsoever.
- 2.6 It is for this reason that we believe schools should be required to set aside a portion of their funding for employee assistance programmes.
- 2.7 Teaching is a difficult enough job as it is without all the additional work created by reporting,

marking, examining, moderating, conducting spirals of inquiry, and preparing for three-way conferencing.

- 2.8 Schools have a duty to ensure their teachers are able to do their jobs well and to the best of their abilities. Insisting that causing undue stress and over-burdening teachers with work be held to be unethical, and insisting that schools be compelled to provide access to free, confidential, and independent employee assistance programmes would go a long way to making every school an excellent place to be. It would go a long way toward making very certain that every one of us can indeed bring out our best.