



## TASMANIAN ASSOCIATION OF STATE SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS INC.

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# MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019

## Excessive Suspensions Cause Psychological Harm and Don't Improve Educational Outcomes

The article by Mr. Rex Gardner in the Sunday Tasmanian, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019 - *A little discipline goes a long way... and Sorell High principal was on right track*, is lacking accurate reporting, has no quantifiable research supporting the claims made, is disrespectful to students, families and members of the school community, and to complete the picture Mr. Gardner displays contempt for the current Tasmanian Education Act 2016 and for all the consultation, research and debate that was used to formulate the Act before being passed by the Tasmanian Parliament and the creation of subsequent supporting documentation and processes.

If the school community support the Principal, why was there such an unsupportive uproar on social media, 11 000 comments within 2 hours? The majority were not supportive of the actions to be taken for lateness. Unsupportive comments were made by past students, who have gone on to further education and good careers, past principals and teachers also strongly opposed the Principal's actions as did many parents. If the correct Departmental procedures had been followed at Sorell School all members School Association Committee would have been aware of the actions to be taken and the issues leading to suspension being the best alternative for first offences. There are laws in the workplace that prevent people being sacked on the first offence of tardiness and processes to be followed in order to address the issue and work towards a positive resolution for all.

The Principal's past sporting achievements as a player and coach should have taught him to play by the rules, yet he has failed to play by the rules of the Department of Education, the Tasmanian Education Act 2016, resultant Regulations and Instructions and display a knowledge of current Department procedures.

Mr. Gardner asks the questions, “What about students showing respect for teachers, fellow students and school rules?” Which is a fair question, unfortunately the rules of the Department of Education and the Tasmanian Education Act 2016 have been broken by the Principal and possibly other staff, they have shown disrespect for legislation and its subsequent supportive guidelines and processes, will they be suspended with no questions asked? TASSO President Nigel Jones stated that, - “It is hoped they would not be suspended but rather offered the training and support necessary to assure this sort of thing does not happen again, whether it be at Sorell School or other Tasmanian Government Schools and Colleges.”

Punitive punishment such as suspension and exclusion of students has been widely researched. Australian research as reported by Professor Linda J. Graham in The Conversation showed the following:

### ***Why do increases in suspension matter?***

*Research shows suspension is associated with an increase in anti-social behaviour and contact with the criminal justice system, due to a lack of adult supervision and greater freedom to associate with deviant peers. Contrary to popular belief, suspension does not promote behavioural change.*

*This is because inappropriate behaviours need to be replaced, and replacement behaviours need to be explicitly taught. Sending kids home doesn't give them the skills they need to do better next time or help solve the problem that led to the suspension.*

*There is conclusive evidence suspension leads to academic failure and school dropout, even after controlling for prior achievement. This is because suspension weakens students' sense of school belonging and makes gaps in achievement worse by taking vulnerable children away from teaching and learning, rather than providing them with the support and positive guidance they need.*

Research like this, the Department of Education's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan and their 2018-2021 Child and Student Wellbeing Strategy does not support suspension or punitive punishment as a means of producing good attendance and or improved educational outcomes. They all address supporting the student and their family.

The suspension of students at will potentially have long-term consequences economic, social and academic consequences and of utmost importance an impact on student wellbeing and mental health. This is supported by a resource compiled by Hemphill S.A. & Hargreaves J. School suspensions - a resource for teachers and school administrators, Centre for Adolescent Health, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, Melbourne 2010:

*School suspensions reduce the chances of students completing their education. School suspensions can also impair employment opportunities and negatively affect a student's future. By excluding students from school, suspensions shift the problem from the school to the community. Unsupervised adolescents are free to engage in activities that can lead to*

- *property loss*

- *physical injury*

- *increased medical, police and juvenile justice costs.*

*A common misconception is that school suspensions benefit other students and staff. However, research shows that in schools that make frequent use of suspensions, students and staff experience*

- *a lower sense of security*
- *a less positive school climate*
- *poorer academic results.*

Mr. Gardner stated that Mr. Jones said Sorell School was draconian which is not correct, Mr. Jones stated that the Policy was draconian, another indicator that Mr. Gardner is not conversant with current legislation. Unlike Mr. Gardner TASSO President Nigel Jones said, -

*“...Sorell School, may need extra support to be able to better handle what is seen as inappropriate behaviour, it must re-evaluate this policy [being done] and methods for developing positive relationships with families and students.”*

Mr. Gardner has spent a vast amount of words on being negative about parents, students, the Department of Education and TASSO. Yet proposes no solutions other than allowing the failure to abide by legislation to continue. If Education Department Instructions had been followed the school Principal and the staff leadership team would have consulted with the School Association and a consensus would have been reached on what actions needed to be taken to enable all students and staff to be in an environment where they feel safe, supported and engaged so that they can learn to their fullest potential.

“It is pleasing that Learning Services South have stepped in to support the school and it is hoped that they will also include the School Association Committee in inclusive, consultation regarding school-based policies, as Department procedures state.” said Mr. Jones.

Decades of research in Australia and globally has proven that when schools, families and communities work together, and genuine relationships are fostered positive outcomes for all are achieved.

School and family engagement is the vision of the Australian Government Department of Education and Training:

### ***The Family-School Partnerships Framework***

#### ***Vision***

*Families, schools and communities actively work together as partners to support learning, development and wellbeing of children and young people.*

The Family-School Partnerships Framework was developed to promote and guide partnership building.

The core principles of effective family-school partnerships are:

- parents and families are the first and continuing educators of their children
- learning is lifelong and occurs in multiple settings
- partnerships, schools and school communities flourish when the diversity and strengths of families are valued and leveraged
- community engagement expands responsibility and resources
- partnerships grow from mutual trust, respect and responsibility
- partnerships need committed, collaborative and creative leadership.

TASSO President Mr. Jones stated that, "TASSO is fully supportive of open and genuine consultation and communication between families, schools and communities and it is the best way to achieve a supportive and positive results for all. TASSO have offered to support the school association committee and Department of Education."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nigel Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping 'N' and 'J'.

**For further comment contact**

Nigel Jones President

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