

Submission to the Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria
Parents of Adolescents with Gender Distress – Victoria (PAGD)

Parents of Adolescents with Gender Distress (VIC) is a growing collective of Victorian families, all with children experiencing distress around their gender identity. All have expressed gender distress only after reaching puberty. Most are diagnosed with neurodiversity or display neurodiverse traits. Most have experienced trauma or suffer from mental illness. All of them have our full support to express whichever sexuality they wish to.

All our children have self-diagnosed with the encouragement of peers, school personnel and on-line resources such as TikTok. It is notable that gender distress peaked for the majority of our children during or shortly after the Covid pandemic when their mental health was noticeably more fragile.

In numerous cases, and contrary to the principles of both the **Education and Training Reform Act 2006**¹ and the **Child Youth and Families Act 2005**², school personnel have intentionally excluded and alienated parents from discussions regarding their child's gender distress and mental wellbeing.

We are particularly concerned with the well-intentioned but ill-informed willingness to implement 'social transition' without consulting parents. For the children who are struggling with mental health and identity formation, this intervention compounds their distress and increases their mental instability³. Intentionally alienating parents in the process isolates them from their most important support structure at a time when they need it most. It is also a significant psychosocial intervention that school employees are woefully uninformed about and unqualified to make. The Interim Report of **The Cass Review** in the UK observed that "social transition is an active intervention because it may have significant effects on the child or young person in terms of their psychological functioning".⁴

PAGD VIC also believe that the uncritical acceptance of gender ideology as fact that is championed by the Education Department, lacks evidence and fails to deliver improved wellbeing for our children. The Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships (RRRR) program has been embedded in Victorian Schools at a cost of over \$80M over eight years⁵, with the stated intention of being a 'catalyst for cultural change'⁶. It presents gender ideology in a simplistic and sanitised manner, with the expectation that cross sex identities must be accommodated and respected without question. This creates a significant safeguarding risk, particularly for young girls. Gender ideology is an increasingly contested and personal belief system with no scientific or factual basis. We do not believe it should be taught in schools as fact without critical analysis and the associated health and social risks also being discussed.

The following questions were put to Claire Tobin, A/Executive Director, Wellbeing, Health and Engagement Division of the Department of Education and Training in 2023 by PAGD VIC without satisfactory response, therefore we request that the Legal and Social Issues Committee address them within the Inquiry.

- In light of the principles of secularity stated in the Education and Training Reform Act, why is a contested and personal belief system being promoted uncritically by the Victorian Education Department?
- Research⁷ conducted by the Department of Social Services recognises that the school environment and teachers have significant influence on students, particularly in the early high school years; the years students will undergo puberty. It is also recognised within the research that "*some teachers are particularly passionate about their influence over young people, believing their influence extends considerably further than the mandate of their role*". What is Education Department policy on teachers promoting personal ideology beyond the mandate of

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their role without the consent of parents and families, as has been experienced by many of our families?

- Does the Education Department have a clear policy on dealing with gender distressed students that is informed by global best practice, mental health professionals and aligns with the position of professional psychiatry organisations such as RANZCP and NAPP?
- Has a risk assessment been carried out on the medical and legal risks of school staff promoting psychosocial interventions they are not qualified to enact, without parental consent?

The experiences and interactions of our families with the Victorian Education Department in relation to our children's gender distress have been overwhelmingly negative and devastating. PAGD VIC requests that the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquire into, consider and report on what can be learned and applied from the following examples of best practice in other jurisdictions and educational settings to improve the wellbeing of this vulnerable cohort and their families.

- [Supporting Gender Questioning Students in Canadian Schools](#)
- [School Policy – Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity - Ireland](#)
- [Created and Loved – A guide for Catholic schools on gender and identity](#)

¹ **Child Youth and Families Act 2005 - Best interests Principles.**

- For the purposes of the Act the best interests of the child must always be paramount.
- Consideration must be given to the following,
 - the need to give *the widest possible protection and assistance to the parent and child as the fundamental group unit of society* and to ensure that intervention into that relationship is limited to that necessary to secure the safety and wellbeing of the child.
 - The need to strengthen, preserve and promote positive relationships between the child and the child's parent, family members and persons significant to the child.
 - The child's views and wishes, if they can be reasonably ascertained, and they should be given such weight as is appropriate in the circumstances.
 - That a child is only to be removed from the care of his or her parent if there is an unacceptable risk of harm to the child.
- In making a decision or taking an action in relation to a child,
 - the child's parent should be assisted and supported in reaching decisions and taking actions to promote the child's safety and wellbeing.

² **Education and Training Reform Act 2006 - Principles of the Act**

All providers of education and training, both Government and non-Government, must ensure that their programs and teaching are delivered in a manner that supports and promotes the principles and practice of Australian democracy, including a commitment to:

- equal rights for all before the law.
- freedom of religion.
- freedom of speech and association.
- the values of openness and tolerance.

All Victorians should have access to a high quality education that *allows parents to take an active part in their child's education and training*.

³ Zucker, K. J. (2019). Debate: Different strokes for different folks. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 25(1): 36-37. [\[Link\]](#)

⁴ Cass, "Independent Review of Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People: Interim Report." [Interim report – Cass Review](#)

⁵ National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children [\[Link\]](#)

⁶ University of Melbourne: Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships. [\[Link\]](#)

⁷ Reducing violence against women and their children. Australian Government Department of Social Services 2015