

# South Australian Secondary School Leaders' Experiences of Negative Media Coverage

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Research Report  
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**SASPA**

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Association



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Education Futures

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## Introduction

In an era of instant mainstream media and social media amplification, schools find themselves increasingly vulnerable to negative media attention. This report examines the multi-layered impacts of adverse media coverage on school leadership, staff, students, families, and the broader education system. The SASPA survey of 94 serving secondary senior leaders not only reveals concerns about unfair media coverage but evidences the potential for systematic damage to educational institutions and the professionals who work within them. As one principal observed: "The constant barrage of negative media has a significant impact on psychological safety in the workforce, as well as a significant impact on personal health." The survey results show a potential crisis of confidence in public education driven by sensationalised reporting that damages professional wellbeing, erodes community trust, and compromises educational outcomes.

This report elaborates and evidences these points. The report is divided into three parts. The first is a summary of the survey results. The second reports the full data analysis. The third, an appendix, is an account of the survey and how it was administered.

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## Summary

94 South Australian secondary school leaders responded to the SASPA survey and reported their experiences with negative media coverage and its impacts on them and their schools. The respondents included 47 principals (just over half of the state's secondary principals), 31 assistant principals or senior leaders, 13 deputy principals, and 2 other education leaders.

### Media encounters and critical incidents

The most commonly reported types of negative media coverage that leaders saw in the media were stories about violence (92 respondents), staff misconduct or issues with teachers (85), poor academic performance (77), coverage of disciplinary actions or controversies with teachers (61), and reports on budget cuts or financial issues (40).

Around half of respondents (52%) reported that critical incidents in their schools had been taken up by commercial media. Violence-related incidents dominated the reported critical incidents, including student fights, assaults, and weapon-related events. One principal described an incident where "a student pulled a knife on another student after a verbal and physical altercation," while another reported violence that was captured on video and shared widely. Bullying incidents also featured prominently, with parents often being the source of media contact. Several leaders reported tragic incidents that attracted media attention, including student deaths from road accidents, drowning, and suicide.

The media typically learned about incidents through parents contacting outlets directly, students sharing footage or information, social media posts, or emergency service responses. As one respondent noted, "Students filmed the incident, forwarded the footage to others, and it eventually found its way to television." Another described how "someone leaked footage to the newspaper."

Most school leaders reported having little opportunity to respond effectively to media coverage. One principal explained they had "time yes, but not the opportunity" to respond, while another stated the "media seems to get this information very quickly and then give the department very little time to respond to their questions before going live with the story."

### Social media amplification

Social media consistently amplified and prolonged the impact of negative incidents. The survey revealed that, in most cases, social media was important in how incidents were perceived, experienced and managed. One leader observed that "social media was dreadful, only inflamed the situation," while another noted that "social media always makes things worse."

The amplification occurred through multiple channels. Community members created what one respondent called "community chat boards" where "the comments are often nasty and biased against the school." Students also contributed to the spread through posting videos and commentary, with one principal noting that "students posted all over social media about it. They made up stories and parents/carers believed these rumours." Social media also enabled the creation of dedicated negative campaigns. One leader reported that "a Facebook group was created that spread misinformation and portrayed school in an extremely negative light," while another described "multiple petitions calling for the principal's dismissal." Leaders were aware

that these social media storms were started and perpetuated by a small minority and were frustrated that they were not representative of the school community.

The permanence of social media content created ongoing challenges. One principal reflected that "it is everywhere once recorded. It is replayed every now and again, when ever the TV news wants a shocking video." Another observed that footage "was out and will be out there forever."

### **Impact on school leaders**

The survey revealed significant impacts on school leaders' wellbeing and professional capacity. When asked how negative media coverage affected their leadership work, 82 respondents indicated it reduced their job satisfaction, 74 said it heightened risks to their reputation and career aspirations, and 69 reported it posed threats to their safety and wellbeing.

Leaders described profound emotional and psychological impacts. One principal wrote about experiencing "mental health, including death threats, asked to resign by some individuals in staff, parents, community in the hope that I take the fall and protect everyone else." Another described how "the constant barrage of negative media has a significant impact on psychological safety in the workforce, as well as a significant impact on personal health."

The stress extended beyond work hours and affected personal relationships. A leader noted that negative coverage "reduces my feelings of safety and wellbeing to such a point that I reduce my socialisation and will travel further to run errands so as not to be identified by my students and their families." Another described how it "affects my family and social relationships."

Many leaders reported that the coverage influenced their career decisions. As one respondent stated, "as someone from a school that has been targeted over the years it has made me lose interest in being a leader and or teaching." Others mentioned seeing "colleagues leave the profession because of the stress and pressure placed on them personally."

### **Impact on staff**

The effects on staff were similarly significant. The survey showed that 92 respondents believed negative coverage decreased staff morale and job satisfaction, 90 indicated it increased stress and pressure, and 73 said it prompted risk-averse or cautious approaches to teaching.

Teachers faced challenges both professionally and personally. One leader observed that "staff morale is undermined when their professional efforts are overshadowed by public scrutiny. The stress caused by sustained media focus can erode job satisfaction, leading to increased anxiety, burnout, and a more cautious, less confident approach to teaching and student support."

In smaller communities, the impact was particularly acute. A respondent noted that "for many of our staff who live in the local community, there is an added burden of facing questions and assumptions outside of school hours. This can be deeply uncomfortable particularly when they are trying to shield their own families – especially their children – from the same scrutiny."

Multiple leaders mentioned that negative coverage also affected recruitment and retention. For example, one respondent observed that negative media "makes it difficult to retain staff and to

attract new staff", while another said that it "makes recruitment more challenging and reduces the number of people choosing teaching as a new profession."

### **Impact on students**

Leaders reported that negative media coverage significantly affected students. The survey found that 91 respondents believed it fed negative perceptions of the school, 69 indicated it made students feel unsafe, and 50 said it made students more aware of potential issues and risks.

Students experienced direct harassment from media representatives. One principal described how "media representatives have followed students on social media, attempted contact through private accounts, approached them at school gates, filmed near or onto school grounds, and even followed them in public spaces such as shopping centres."

The coverage also affected students' sense of pride and belonging. A leader noted that "students at my site often refer to us as being 'poor' and have a low sense of pride in the school," while another observed that negative coverage "makes students feel they are second rate. It is difficult for them to feel proud of themselves and the school."

Some students became angry about unfair representation. One principal reported that "students were angry about their school being portrayed in this way, as they knew that it was only a small group of students who were behaving in an unsatisfactory manner."

### **Impact on school communities**

The survey revealed that 80 leaders believed negative media coverage had a significant negative impact on school reputation, with an additional 13 reporting some negative impact. The effects extended throughout school communities, affecting relationships between schools and families.

According to school leaders, parents' perceptions and behaviours changed following negative coverage. Leaders reported that it "makes parents not want to choose our school, nor any other public school for that matter" and that "parental expectations/beliefs about schools are already tricky and negative coverage in the media makes it even more difficult to maintain a strong, positive relationship."

The coverage also seemed to encourage some community members to make unreasonable demands or threats. One leader noted that it "emboldens parents and students to act in ways to gain notoriety to gain media attention. i.e. assaults and threats on staff." Enrolment impacts were also reported, with several leaders noting effects on student numbers. One principal stated that "our enrolments have been impacted for years now because of these reports."

### **Leaders' responses to negative media reports about other schools**

Leaders described strong emotional reactions when seeing other state schools negatively depicted in media. Common responses included frustration, anger, empathy for affected staff, and anxiety about their own schools potentially being targeted. Leaders frequently mentioned feeling anxious about their own vulnerability. As one respondent put it, "I worry our school will be next. It feels like we are intentionally being targeted by media to find a negative story." This

created what another described as "pressure, anxiety and stress, as it feels like it could be just a matter of time before your school becomes a headline."

Many expressed concerns about the broader impact on public education. One leader wrote, "I feel frustrated to see the public system and teachers being attacked again. I also anticipate public backlash as these media stories tend to incite anger, outrage and hate towards teachers and schools." Another noted, "it feels damaging to all public schools."

### **Sources of support and their effectiveness**

When facing negative media coverage, leaders most commonly sought support from Education Directors (85 respondents), mentors and close colleagues (58), and the DfE Media Unit (mentioned frequently in open responses). Professional associations like SASPA were used by 37 respondents, while 11 turned to the Australian Education Union.

The DfE Media Unit was frequently praised for its effectiveness. Leaders described it as providing "clear instructions and directions on processes" and being "wonderful" in formulating responses. Education Directors were valued for both procedural guidance and emotional support, with many describing strong working relationships.

However, support experiences varied considerably. Some leaders reported feeling abandoned during critical incidents. One described being "largely left to work it out ourselves" while another felt they had received "insufficient support." The quality of support often depended on individual relationships and the specific circumstances of incidents.

### **Suggestions for improvement**

Leaders offered numerous suggestions for addressing the challenges they faced. Many called for more proactive positive promotion of public education. As one respondent suggested, "DfE need to buy a weekly page or two in the written media that is all about students and the good things schools do to counteract the negativity. Flood the media with positive stories and photos."

Others wanted the Department to take a stronger stance against unfair coverage. One leader argued that "the Department should be pursuing legal action and support its staff (including with legal support) to challenge slanderous/defamatory action by students, parents and the media."

Several respondents wanted changes to media protocols to allow more school voice in responses. One suggested "it would be powerful to see the embargo on leaders talking to media removed, with clear advice and guidelines. It feels like we have no voice."

Many respondents called for education of media outlets about the impact of their coverage. A leader suggested meetings with "representatives from the newspapers and commercial news stations to talk with them about the damage their actions can have on our community, teachers and vulnerable young people."

The need for better support systems was also emphasised. Leaders wanted more consistent approaches from Education Directors, improved wellbeing support, and recognition that media coverage was an occupational hazard requiring systemic rather than individual responses.

Some suggested legislative changes, with one leader calling for "legislation in place with significant sanctions to prevent or deter careless, unfounded and biased reporting" on schools. Others wanted restrictions on reporting specific behavioural incidents in schools, arguing that such coverage damaged school communities while providing no educational benefit.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the survey shows a profession under significant pressure from media coverage, with leaders, teachers, and students all experiencing substantial impacts from negative reporting. While support systems exist, their effectiveness varies, and many leaders feel inadequately protected from what they see as unfair and damaging coverage of their schools and the broader public education system.

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## The Survey Results

### (1) Who responded to the survey?

The survey was distributed to SASPA members. There were 94 responses, just under a quarter of the membership. However, when the respondents are disaggregated by role, it is clear that **just over half of the secondary principals in the state have participated**. This suggests that the survey results can be seen as robust evidence. It is likely that some of the other responses come from additional schools. However, for confidentiality reasons the survey did not ask for the school to be identified so we are unable to say how many schools in total are represented

Figure 1: Role of respondents

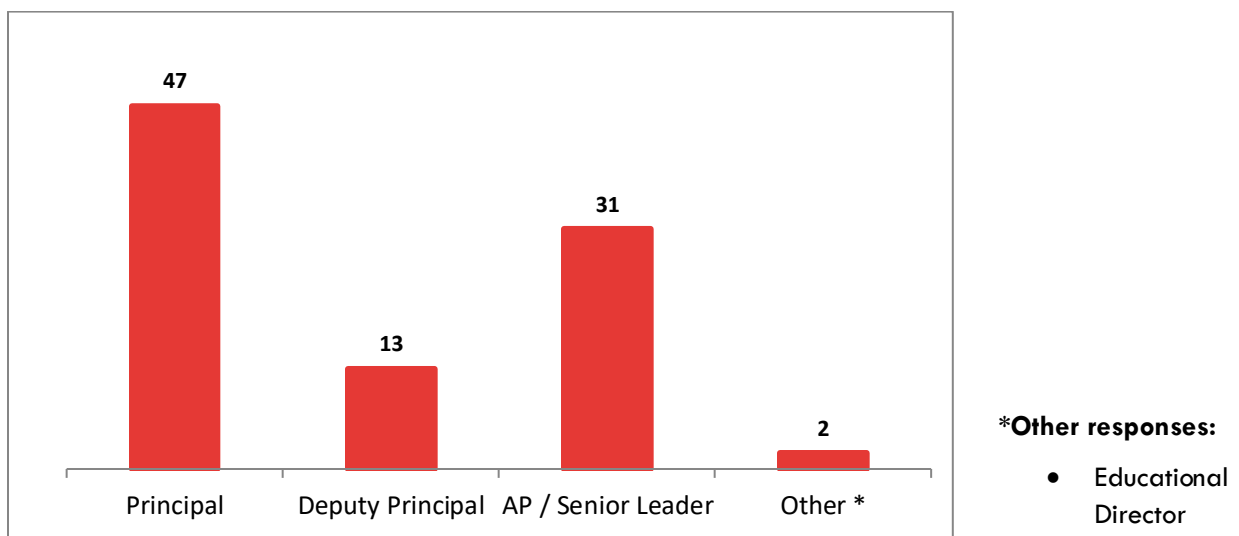
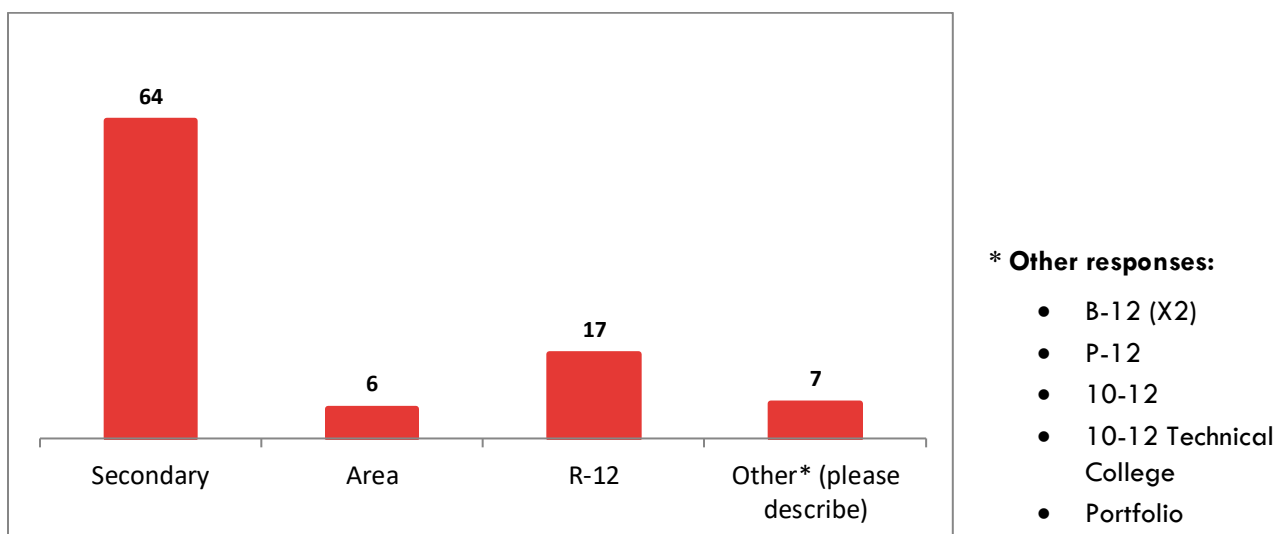


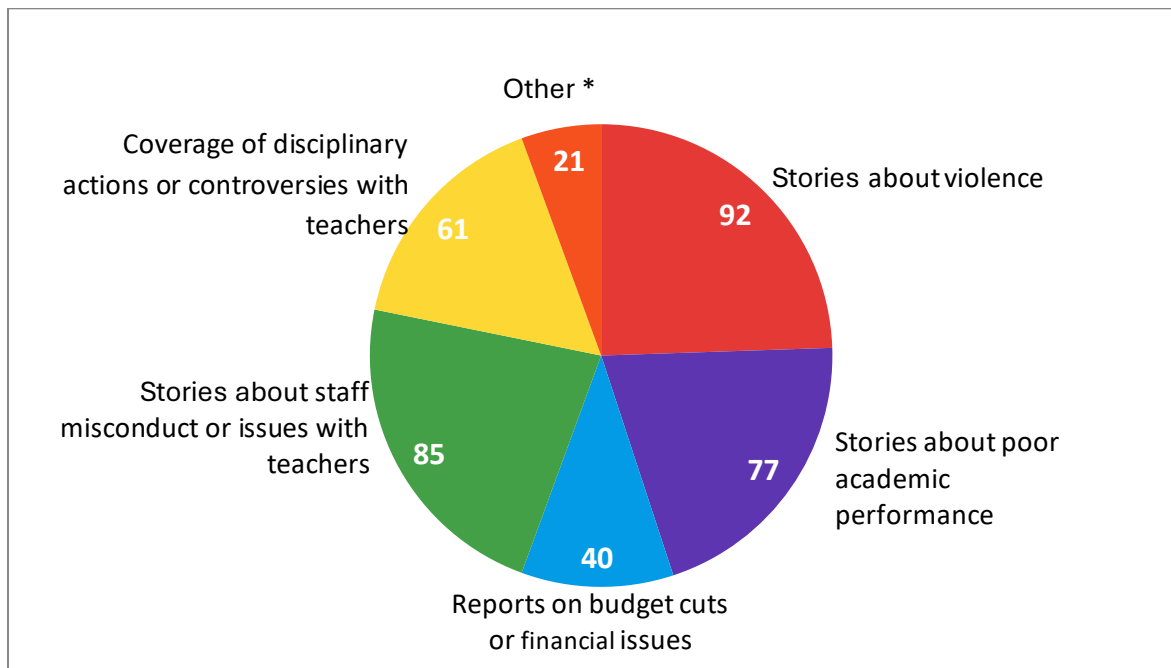
Figure 2: Respondents' school type



## (2) What negative media have respondents seen and experienced?

The survey was premised on the view that school leaders had two kinds of experiences of negative media reporting. The first was reporting about other schools. The second was when their own school was involved. We wanted to ask about both as anecdotal evidence suggests that both have an impact on leaders and their work.

Figure 3: Issues seen in the media



\* Other responses expanded on these broad themes (see table overleaf).

Table 1: Additional responses to negative media reporting

| Topic                                     | Examples   |
|---|--|
| Infrastructure and resource deficiencies  | School leaders frequently reported coverage focusing on the poor state of school facilities, with multiple references to inadequate buildings and resources. These stories often highlighted maintenance issues and under-resourcing as indicators of broader systemic problems.   |
| Leadership and staff competence           | Leaders reported media portrayals of leadership incompetence, including stories about bullying and mistreatment of staff, poor teaching conditions attributed to school leadership failures, and reports specifically targeting principal mental health. Coverage also included criticism of teachers and schools for not scheduling interviews and events outside work hours, with expectations that they should accommodate all requests regardless of timing. |
| Student support and educational provision | Leaders suggested that media coverage frequently focused on schools allegedly refusing to provide adequate support for students with learning and social/emotional needs. Stories sometimes contained accusations that schools were not meeting their educational obligations with articles stating "that the school should be teaching" specific content or skills.   |
| Student behaviour and violence            | Violence featured prominently in negative media coverage, including extreme violence carried out by students in the community and disruptive student behaviour in public while wearing school uniforms. These stories often extended beyond school grounds to include student conduct in the broader community.  |
| Curriculum and academic standards         | Leaders reported media negativity about curriculum content and quality of teachers, along with stories highlighting disproportionate gender balance in subjects. These stories often questioned educational standards and teaching effectiveness.  |

This question also produced some comments about media more generally. Comments focused on:

- **Media practices and bias** A concerning theme emerged around media practices that actively solicited negative stories. Leaders described requests from the major newspaper asking to "tell us the worst story in relation to schools" and particularly encouraging "parents with horror stories" to contact commercial media. The media bias included giving significant airtime to parents presenting their viewpoints without context or fact verification and actively seeking out "trash stories about schools" while promoting private versus public school comparisons.
- **Manufactured controversies** Several leaders identified coverage of "non-issues and beat-ups," including stories about toilet use and vaping where schools were portrayed as "not doing enough." These stories often transformed routine school management issues into major controversies.
- **Social media amplification** The coverage created catalysts for social media campaigns, with students posting negative opinions about schools, staff, or other students, particularly when in school uniform. This led to "me too" situations where one negative story prompted similar complaints and ongoing community questioning.

- **One-sided reporting** A consistent concern was media presenting only parents' perspectives in negative stories, without seeking school input or providing context. This practice was identified as particularly damaging to parent and student perceptions and created barriers for schools working with families to support student wellbeing and learning.

The cumulative effect of this coverage created ongoing community questioning and suspicion, with leaders reporting constant challenges to their credibility and decision-making based on media narratives rather than actual school performance or practices.

### **(3) Responses to negative media reporting of other schools**

We invited open-ended responses to this question and nearly everyone responded. It is important to note that many of the following questions produced some common themes; there is thus some repetition across them. The responses to this question were organised into twelve themes:

- **Negative emotional responses:** Leaders consistently expressed strong negative emotions when encountering media coverage of other schools. Many described feeling "frustrated and angry," "disappointed," and "disheartened." One leader stated, "I get frustrated and angry about the fact that the media feel it necessary to constantly blame schools for the bad things that teenagers do." Another expressed being "extremely frustrated because the stories are one sided, often untrue and schools are unable to respond with any clarification on some matters."
- **Empathy and professional solidarity:** A significant theme involved empathy for affected colleagues and recognition of shared professional challenges. Leaders frequently mentioned feeling "deeply sorry for the staff and leaders at the schools" and understanding "the impact" of negative coverage. Many expressed solidarity, with responses like "we're all in this together" and "anger is the first response, followed quickly by sympathy." This empathy was often informed by personal experience, with one leader noting, "I work at a school which has had relentless negative media coverage over a number of years and understand the impact."
- **Anxiety and vulnerability** Many leaders expressed anxiety about their own schools potentially becoming targets. Common responses included "pressure, anxiety and stress, as it feels like it could be just a matter of time before your school becomes a headline" and "I worry our school will be next." This created ongoing stress, with one leader stating, "it feels like we are intentionally being targeted by media to find a negative story."
- **Questioning media practices and truthfulness** Leaders consistently questioned the accuracy and fairness of media reporting. Many expressed beliefs that stories were "sensationalised" and that "the truth is not important." One leader noted, "I think there is likely another side beyond sensationalist headlines," while another stated, "I know that the story is sensationalised and that the truth is not important."
- **Impact on professional identity and morale** The coverage significantly affected how leaders viewed their profession and career prospects. Many expressed thoughts like "no

wonder we have a teacher shortage" and "who would want to be a teacher in this day and age." Some reported more serious career considerations, with responses indicating the coverage made them "lose interest in being a leader and or teaching" and question "why do I bother."

- **Systemic concerns about public education** Leaders recognised that negative coverage damaged the entire public education system rather than just individual schools. Many expressed concern that coverage "feels damaging to all public schools" and created broader perceptions that undermined public education. One leader noted, "it feels like schools are forever in the media and that there are never positive media information."
- **Criticism of departmental support** A recurring theme involved frustration with inadequate support. Leaders frequently mentioned wishing "that the Dept would be more proactive and supportive of our schools and staff" and expressed concern about being "gagged by the department" while "the department does not adequately support the actions of schools."
- **Recognition of broader social issues** Many leaders contextualised school incidents within broader social challenges, expressing frustration that schools were blamed for societal problems. One noted, "there are things at home that promote and encourage that behaviour and what is exhibited at school, is a result of learned behaviour from home."
- **Personal and family impact** Several leaders described how negative coverage affected their personal lives and families. Responses included concerns about "effects on my family and my mother's health" and feeling that the coverage had "adverse effects on my family and in particular my mother's health."
- **Professional isolation and support-seeking** Many leaders described turning to colleagues for understanding and support, with responses like "communicate with other educators who understand our work environment" and finding solace in professional networks that understood their challenges.
- **Physical and mental health impacts** Several leaders described significant health impacts, including "not sleeping and anxiety," feeling "sick," and experiencing stress-related physical symptoms. The coverage created what many described as a "constantly heightened state" that was "physically, emotionally and psychologically impacting."
- **Calls for balance and fairness** Leaders consistently called for more balanced reporting and recognition of schools' positive work. Many expressed frustration that positive stories received less attention, and that media focused disproportionately on negative incidents while ignoring the

#### (4) Critical incidents that leaders have experienced

We asked if respondents had direct experience of negative media reporting and about half of them had (52%) We then asked if respondents could describe the nature of the incident, how the media found out, whether they had time to respond effectively, where they went for support, how they would describe their response, and whether social media was involved. Mindful of the need to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, we developed a typology of critical incidents.

Overall, violence-related incidents dominated the reports (representing about 60% of specific incidents mentioned). Parent complaints were said to often trigger media attention and social media amplification was a factor in most incident types. Leaders reported that "beat-up" stories about minor issues that got disproportionate coverage. Leaders also noted seasonal patterns with increased negative coverage during school holidays. See Table 2 for the typology of critical incidents.

Table 2: Typology of critical incidents

| Nature of critical incident     | Examples   |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Student violence and fights     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical altercations between students (most common type)</li> <li>Weapons incidents and threats of violence</li> <li>Group fights (organised fights, bystander involvement)</li> <li>Violence recorded and shared on social media</li> <li>Community violence involving students outside school</li> </ul> |
| Serious incidents and tragedies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student deaths</li> <li>Serious injuries (accidents involving students)</li> <li>Death in facilities</li> <li>Medical emergencies</li> </ul>  |
| Bullying and student behaviour  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bullying incidents reported by parents</li> <li>Disruptive student behaviour in public while in uniform</li> <li>Student misconduct (vaping, toilet issues)</li> <li>Online bullying and social media conflicts</li> </ul>  |
| Threats and safety concerns     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bomb threats and evacuation incidents</li> <li>Online threats to school community</li> <li>Fire incidents including intentional fires in facilities</li> <li>General safety concerns raised by community</li> </ul>   |
| Staff-related issues            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher misconduct or allegations against staff</li> <li>Staff mental health concerns (principal wellness)</li> <li>Disciplinary actions involving teachers</li> <li>Staff member involvement in incidents (road accidents)</li> </ul>  |
| Facility and infrastructure     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor state of school facilities</li> <li>Accidents involving school property</li> <li>Infrastructure failures affecting student safety</li> </ul>   |

*cont*

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Academic and educational issues</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor academic performance stories</li> <li>• NAPLAN results and comparative rankings</li> <li>• Curriculum concerns and teaching quality issues</li> <li>• Gender balance in subjects</li> </ul>                                     |
| <b>Administrative and policy matters</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget cuts and financial issues</li> <li>• NDIS provider access decisions</li> <li>• Scheduling conflicts</li> <li>• Parent complaint handling and communication issues</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Systemic issues</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School comparisons (public vs private)</li> <li>• System-wide issues affecting multiple schools</li> <li>• Government policy impacts on schools</li> <li>• Stories encouraging complaints ("tell us your horror stories")</li> </ul> |
| <b>Historical/ongoing Issues</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Past incidents being rehashed</li> <li>• Persistent negative narratives about specific schools</li> <li>• Long-term reputation damage from previous coverage</li> </ul>  |

The incidents range from genuinely serious matters (tragedies, safety threats) that could be expected to be covered by media to relatively minor issues that receive disproportionate coverage. The common thread is that, regardless of the incident type, schools report feeling unable to provide context or their perspective, leading to one-sided reporting with adverse effects.

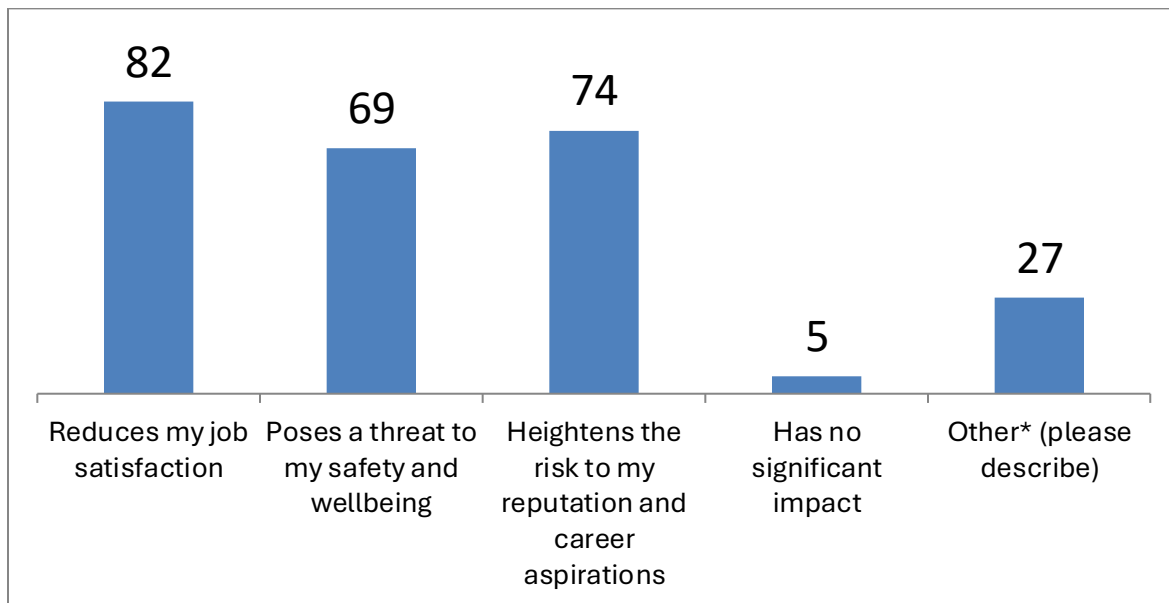
## (5) Impact of negative media reports

We asked leaders to tell us how negative media affected them and their work, students and staff, and the wider community.

### **Impact on leaders**

Leaders reported that negative media coverage was a risk to their reputations, careers and personal wellbeing.

Figure 4: Impact of negative media on leaders and their work



There were also cascading effects that extended beyond the immediate publicity, changing how leaders engaged with their communities, conducted their professional work, and planned their careers. Leaders described three major effects of negative media in their personal lives:

- **Safety and wellbeing:** Leaders reported serious threats to their personal safety and mental health. Multiple respondents described receiving "death threats" and being "asked to resign by some individuals in staff, parents, community." One leader noted experiencing "mental health, including death threats, asked to resign by some individuals in staff, parents, community in the hope that I take the fall and protect everyone else." Others described "not sleeping and anxiety" and living in "a regularly heightened state" that was "physically, emotionally and psychologically impacting."
- **Social isolation:** The coverage forced many leaders to modify their social interactions and community engagement. One leader described how it "reduces my feelings of safety and wellbeing to such a point that I reduce my socialisation and will travel further to run errands so as not to be identified by my students and their families." Another noted that it "changes the way I am able to interact socially with my small community – seems like the only option is to isolate myself if I don't want to have my personal life filled with conversations about work."

- **Family and personal relationships:** There were multiple reports that negative coverage affected leaders' family and social relationships. There were concerns about family members being subjected to community scrutiny. One leader said, "Christmas is tough when others want to chat/gossip about critical incidents, and you can't defend yourself or address misconceptions of."

The intensity of reference to emotions in this question led us to examine the whole document for references to emotions. Figure 5 indicates the frequencies of references to types of emotions.

Figure 5: Emotion word count

**Top 20 emotion words in the document:**

1. frustrated/frustration/frustrating: 47 occurrences
2. stress/stressed/stressful: 31 occurrences
3. angry/anger: 29 occurrences
4. support/supportive: 28 occurrences
5. disappointed/disappointing/disappointment: 24 occurrences
6. anxiety/anxious: 19 occurrences
7. pressure: 17 occurrences
8. upset/upsetting: 15 occurrences
9. concerned: 14 occurrences
10. sad/sadness: 12 occurrences
11. empathy/empathetic: 11 occurrences
12. fear/fearful: 11 occurrences
13. uncomfortable: 10 occurrences
14. worried/worry: 10 occurrences
15. disheartened: 9 occurrences
16. unsafe: 8 occurrences
17. vulnerable: 7 occurrences
18. morale: 7 occurrences
19. wellbeing: 6 occurrences
20. devastating/devastated: 6 occurrences

The overwhelming majority of emotional words are negative (frustrated, stress, angry, disappointed, anxiety). Positive emotional words like "supportive" appear but are significantly outnumbered. The word "frustrated" and its variants appear most frequently, indicating this is the primary emotional response. Mental health related terms (stress, anxiety, pressure) feature prominently. Words related to professional impact (morale, wellbeing) are also common. The emotional language throughout the document suggests a profession under significant stress, with educational leaders experiencing predominantly negative emotions in response to media coverage.

Negative media not only affected leaders' personal wellbeing but also had an impact on their plans for the future through:

- **Damage to reputation and career prospects:** Many leaders expressed concerns about long-term career impacts, describing how coverage "heightens the risk to my reputation and career aspirations." The permanent nature of online content meant that negative coverage could follow leaders throughout their careers, affecting future opportunities and professional relationships. Many described feeling "undervalued and disrespected". One leader noted feeling "that I am not valued by the community."
- **Career planning:** Negative media coverage significantly influenced leaders' career decisions and professional commitment. Many reported "makes me consider leaving the profession" and questioning "why do I bother? Should give up now before it's me." One leader reflected, "as someone from a school that has been targeted over the years it has made me lose interest in being a leader and or teaching."

Media effects were not confined to the personal – the work of leading and managing the school was also altered. Leaders described how media coverage diverted attention from educational leadership to damage control. One noted it "removes the focus from teaching and learning and redirects it into damage control. I feel that I am constantly in defence mode." Another described it as "wastes my time as a strategic development leader, by tenfold!" The coverage created additional work in managing community perceptions and staff concerns. Leaders reported impacts on:

- **Leadership practice:** The threat of media coverage created ongoing anxiety and changed leadership approaches. One leader noted, "I make sure I don't let it dominate my thinking, but it does make me hyper-vigilant and risk averse." Leaders said that awareness of potential risks affected decision-making and interactions with the school community. Leaders reported adopting more cautious and defensive approaches to avoid potential media attention. This included being more careful about communications, avoiding certain activities, and spending additional time on documentation and process compliance rather than educational leadership.
- **Student and staff support:** Leaders reported that the additional stress and time demands of managing media coverage reduced their capacity to support students and staff effectively. The emotional toll of dealing with negative coverage affected their ability to maintain positive school culture and provide effective educational leadership.
- **Community trust:** Leaders described how coverage damaged relationships with parents and the broader community. Multiple responses indicated that negative coverage created situations where "the school community expects me to challenge and reverse this negative coverage and I don't have the funds or advice on how to recover longer term."
- **Recruitment and staffing:** Leaders noted that negative coverage made it harder to attract and retain quality staff. One observed that it "makes teaching look like a bad career choice therefore reduces the number of teachers in the profession making it hard for me to recruit." This created additional challenges in maintaining everyday school operations and realising improvement plans.

Given the impact of negative media attention, many leaders questioned the long-term sustainability of their roles given the ongoing stress and pressure. Responses included concerns about "career longevity in the current climate" and questions about whether the profession remained viable given the level of public scrutiny and criticism. Beyond individual effects, leaders saw negative coverage as damaging the entire education profession. They noted its impact on teacher recruitment, public perception of education, and the overall status of educational professionals in society.

### ***Impact on students***

Students are sometimes directly involved in media reporting. Leaders reported occasions when students experienced direct harassment from media representatives seeking information or footage. One leader described how "media representatives have followed students on social media, attempted contact through private accounts, approached them at school gates, filmed near or onto school grounds, and even followed them in public spaces such as shopping centres." This level of intrusion was described as "deeply concerning" and had "a direct and damaging impact on student wellbeing." Leaders also noted that students wearing school uniforms became unwilling representatives of their schools in public spaces. Leaders reported that "students can also feel pressured for information because of the uniform they wear" and noted incidents of "disruptive student behaviour in public while in school uniform" that then reflected poorly on the entire school community.

Leaders reported that students also became both victims and perpetrators of misinformation spread through social media. Students actively participated in social media discussions about incidents, often without full understanding of consequences. Leaders noted that students "made up stories and parents/carers believed these rumours" and that "students involved used social media to send messages and footage of the incident to peers and community members which increased the spread of misinformation." One leader observed that "students sometimes talk about it and look down on the school/students or they laugh about it – dismissive of how attacking of people who work in the specific school it can be." Students also engaged in "posting in platforms that portray a negative opinion of a school, staff member or other student(s)." This created ongoing challenges for leaders in managing accurate information. Leaders emphasised that social media meant "it doesn't allow us to recover quickly or to have any control of the information" and that once negative content was online, schools had no ability to manage or correct misinformation that affected student perceptions and experiences.

Leaders noted four ongoing effects on students of negative media coverage:

- **Academic and learning disruption:** Negative media coverage created significant disruption to students' educational experience and focus. Leaders reported that negative coverage "causes anxiety, erodes trust and interferes with students' ability to focus on their learning. The pressure and distraction of being under media scrutiny affects both their sense of safety and their educational experience." One leader noted that it "makes students feel like they can't achieve because they're in a public school."
- **Standards of behaviour:** Some leaders reported that negative coverage influenced student behaviour, both positively and negatively. While some students were "surprised by the

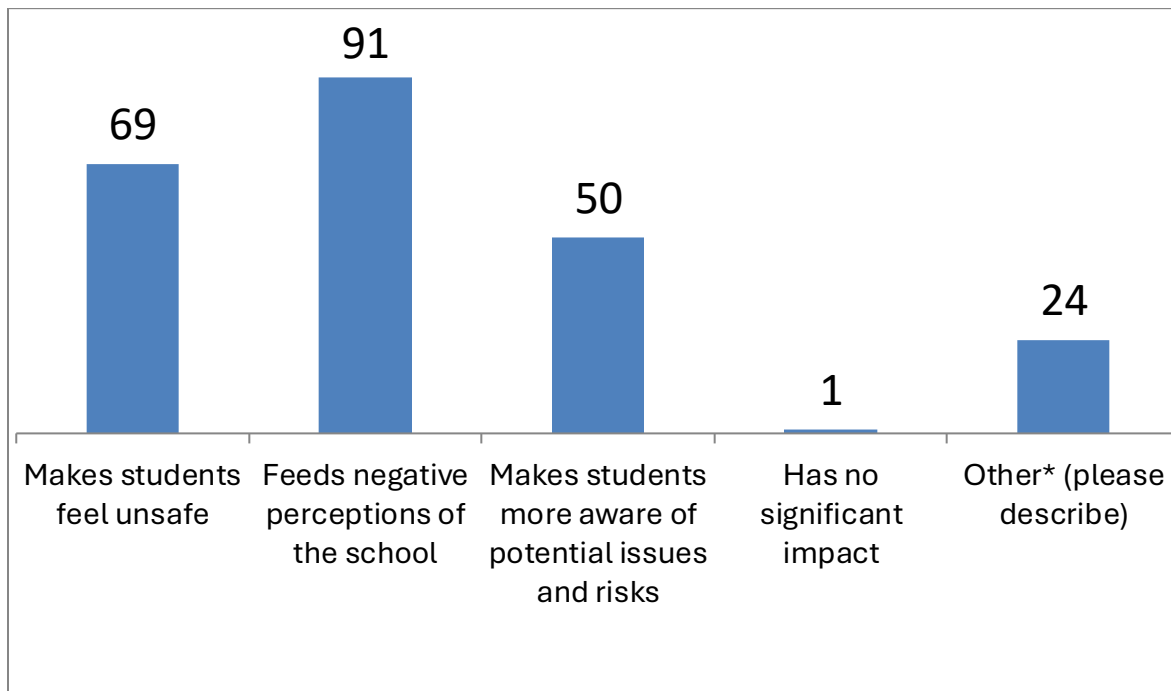
coverage and the impact this would have on their school," others were encouraged to seek attention through inappropriate behaviour. One leader observed that "it encourages students to participate in unsafe behaviour. They love the idea of being on the news, or front page of the paper." The coverage sometimes emboldened students to treat staff poorly. One leader noted that it "contributes to decreased positive relationships to such a point that some students feel empowered to treat their teachers with disrespect, violence and disdain" and "feeds their bias that if they don't like school or a teacher they are vindicated."

- **Student pride and school identity:** Leaders reported that negative coverage significantly damaged students' sense of pride and belonging in their schools. One leader noted that "students at my site often refer to us as being 'poor' and have a low sense of pride in the school," while another observed that coverage "makes students feel they are second rate. It is difficult for them to feel proud of themselves and the school." Some students became defensive about unfair representation, with one principal noting that "students were angry about their school being portrayed in this way, as they knew that it was only a small group of students who were behaving in an unsatisfactory manner."
- **Comparative school perceptions:** Students developed negative attitudes toward other schools based on media coverage. Leaders noted that students would "voice frustration at other schools and can generalise the incidents in the media as either pertaining to all sites or start talking negatively about other sites and their students/location/cohort."

Leaders also reported longer term concerns. They suggested that negative coverage affected how students and families perceived the value of education more broadly. One noted that it "devalues schools and our purpose significantly. Students and families already find it difficult at times to value school – this doesn't help." Another observed that it created "such a negative culture within the school, where students perceive the school as 'bad' and also shapes their view on education to be negative." Some leaders identified that negative coverage created self-fulfilling prophecies where "the student behaviour continues to worsen, the perception of the school doing nothing to support/control is perpetuated, lack of trust in the school and leadership is exacerbated and the divide between the school and its community widens."

Leaders saw adverse media coverage contributing to broader negative perceptions about public education that affected students' understanding of their educational opportunities. Leaders noted that it "keeps fuelling the false narrative that government schools are not good centres of learning" and "gives a false narrative and understanding of schools and potential risks." These perceptions played out in school choice and enrolment. Students and families were influenced in their school choices by negative coverage, with leaders reporting that it "makes parents not want to choose our school, nor any other public school for that matter." This created longer-term impacts on school communities and student populations.

Figure 6: Impact on students of negative media coverage



### **Impact on staff**

Leaders reported that negative media attention extended into teachers' personal lives and affected their families. Teachers experienced significant health impacts from the stress of negative coverage. Leaders indicated both immediate effects like anxiety and longer-term concerns about the impact on staff retention. "When educators feel unsupported and exposed, it becomes harder to sustain the positive and stable environment that every student deserves." Leaders noted "significant impact on staff culture and also in working positively with our parent/wider community" and described how the coverage created personal stress that affected teachers' wellbeing outside of work hours.

Leaders noted three major impacts on teaching:

- Damage to professional efficacy:** The coverage undermined teachers' professional confidence and ability to perform their roles effectively. Leaders noted that "staff morale is undermined when their professional efforts are overshadowed by public scrutiny. The stress caused by sustained media focus can erode job satisfaction, leading to increased anxiety, burnout, and a more cautious, less confident approach to teaching and student support." Teachers modified their professional practices not for educational reasons but to avoid potential criticism or media attention. This defensive approach compromised educational effectiveness and created additional stress as teachers constantly evaluated their actions through the lens of potential public scrutiny rather than professional practice. Teachers became hesitant to follow established procedures, with one leader noting that "teachers and leaders feel as though they cannot follow school-wide policies and processes when it comes to dealing with poor behaviour from students whose parents have contacted the media."

- **Increase in risk-averse professional practice:** The threat of media attention led teachers to adopt overly cautious approaches to their work. Leaders reported that coverage "contributes to lower resilience in the face of negative student or caregiver interactions. Staff enter these already fearful and defensive" and created "a 'teflon coated' demeanour/attitude/behaviour in those who think they're untouchable" among some students whose parents had media connections. Teachers became fearful of implementing necessary disciplinary or educational policies. Leaders reported that staff "fear repercussions if simply doing their job" and that "increased reluctance to contact families due to their reactions – school bullying is a classic for this." This created situations where effective teaching and student management became compromised.
- **Barriers to communication:** Teachers became reluctant to engage with parents and the community due to fear of misrepresentation. One leader described how it "makes it less likely that they engage with the community for fear of misinterpretation of misconstrued interactions (i.e. avoiding talking to parents as we are aware that there are a couple who have recorded every interaction and posted about it – in their own interpretation – on social media)." Teachers faced particular challenges in smaller communities where they lived and worked. Leaders described how "for many of our staff who live in the local community, there is an added burden of facing questions and assumptions outside of school hours. This can be deeply uncomfortable particularly when they are trying to shield their own families – especially their children – from the same scrutiny." In some areas, "regardless if a media article is de-identified or not, almost everyone knows what it is about and makes this very difficult for staff members in the community."

Leaders noted that negative media coverage had particular effects on new teachers. One leader noted that it "can impact confidence and self-esteem, specifically in ECT" (Early Career Teachers), suggesting that those just entering the profession were especially vulnerable to the negative impacts of media scrutiny.

Leaders consistently reported that negative coverage created significant difficulties in attracting and retaining quality teachers. Multiple responses noted "results in high staff turnover," "makes it difficult to retain staff and to attract new staff," and "makes recruitment more challenging and reduces the number of people choosing teaching as a new profession." One leader observed that negative coverage "makes it less likely that they engage with the community for fear of misinterpretation of misconstrued interactions." Additionally, some teachers responded to negative coverage by seeking employment elsewhere. Leaders reported that coverage "contributes to them resigning and seeking employment in other sectors" and made teaching positions in public schools "even less desirable." Negative media thus contributed to broader devaluation of the teaching profession. Leaders noted that "the media is having a massive impact on the wellbeing of teachers. I hear comments all the time when there is negative media, about how it is impacting the teaching profession and comments like, why would anyone want to be a teacher." The cumulative effect of negative coverage raised questions about the sustainability of teaching careers. Leaders reported that the coverage made teachers question their professional longevity and consider whether the stress and public scrutiny made teaching untenable as a long-term career choice.

Figure 7: Impact on staff

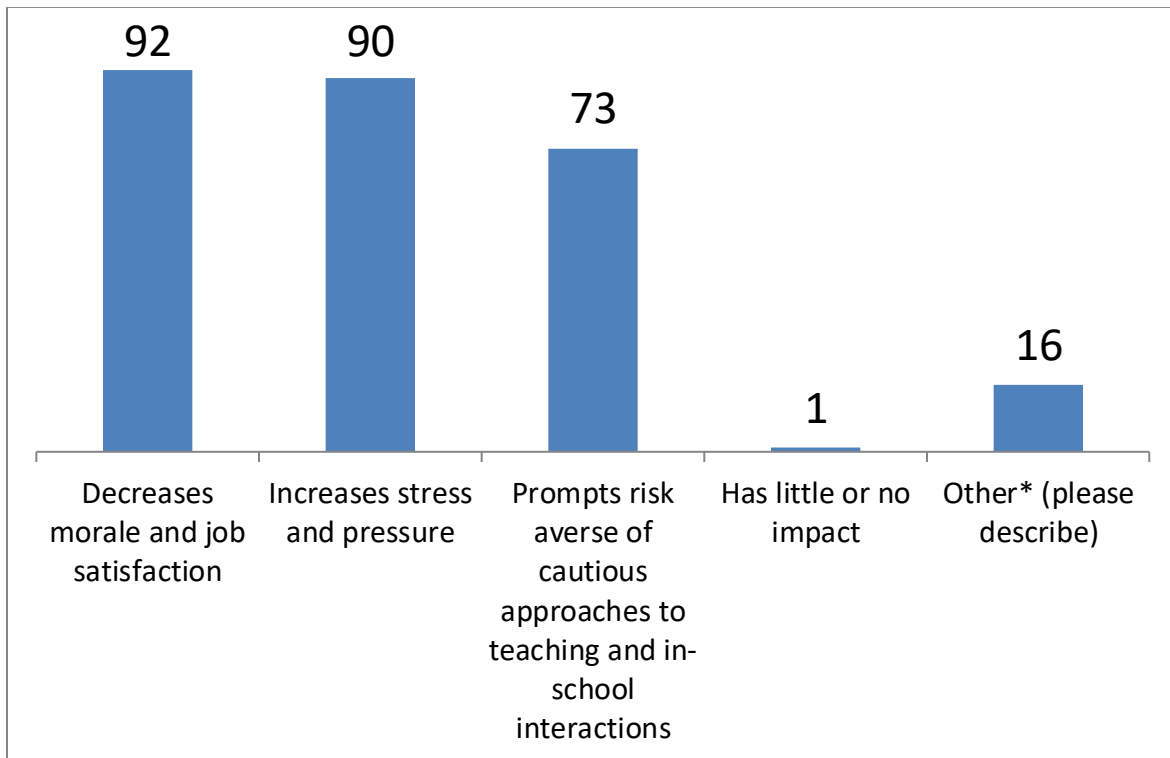
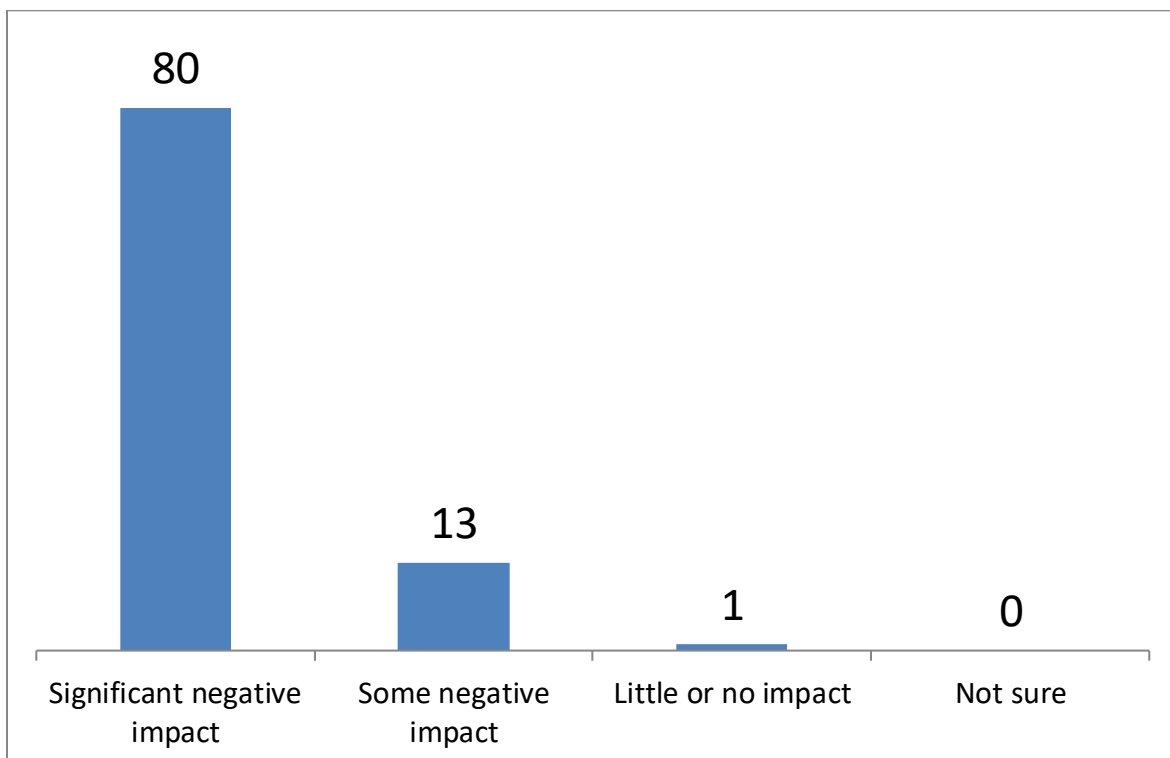


Figure 8: Impact on the school in the community



The open-ended questions in the survey also showed leaders considering a range of wider societal and philosophical issues – see Figure 9.

*Figure 9: Philosophical issues raised by negative media coverage*

**The role and purpose of public education** Leaders reflected deeply on the fundamental purpose of education and schools' role in society. One leader emphasized that "we are not here to solve societal problems or parent children" and argued for clearer boundaries around educational responsibilities. Another noted the importance of educating "the public about the purpose of education" and establishing that schools should focus on education rather than being expected to address all social issues. This theme reflected concerns about mission creep and unrealistic expectations placed on educational institutions.

**Individual vs. societal responsibility** Several leaders grappled with questions of where responsibility lies for student behaviour and social problems. One observed that "generally bullies are not grown out of actions at school, there are things at home that promote and encourage that behaviour and what is exhibited at school, is a result of learned behaviour from home." This led to philosophical questions about "where is our role in fixing this, and where is the government's role in standing up to the negative media about schools and pushing back this learned behaviour to community and family."

**Democratic principles and media freedom** Some leaders wrestled with the tension between media freedom and fair treatment. One respondent stated "I feel it's the right thing to do in an open democracy" when discussing media coverage, while others questioned whether unlimited media freedom was compatible with fair treatment of public institutions. This reflected deeper philosophical tensions about press freedom versus responsible journalism.

**The nature of truth and representation** Leaders expressed philosophical concerns about the relationship between media representation and reality. Many noted that "the truth is not important" in media coverage and that audiences were "not getting the full story." This raised broader questions about how truth is constructed and communicated in public discourse, and whether sensationalised media coverage was fundamentally incompatible with accurate representation of complex educational situations.

**Social justice and equity** Several leaders reflected on the fundamental inequity in how different types of schools were treated by media. They noted that "public education is education for all and we cannot be selective. With that we will always encounter complexities that are not caused by anything to do with the school." This raised philosophical questions about social justice and whether it was fair to criticise schools that served all students in the same way as those that could select their populations.

**The value and status of professionalism** Leaders reflected on what it meant to be a professional in the current media environment. One noted that "no other industry is open to such speculation and judgement from the community" and questioned why educational professionals were subjected to different standards than other professions. This raised broader philosophical questions about professional autonomy, expertise, and public trust.

**Intergenerational responsibility** Some leaders took a long-term philosophical view, considering the impact of current media practices on future generations. One noted that "media companies should consider the wider responsibility of contributing to a solutions-based, respectful culture for the young people who will shape the future of our state and country over the next generations." This reflected deeper concerns about what kind of society was being modelled for young people.

**The relationship between perception and reality** Leaders grappled with philosophical questions about how perception shapes reality, particularly noting that "perceptions are people's realities, and when we remain silent, we accept and condone the words and actions." This raised questions about whether

institutions had a moral obligation to challenge false narratives and whether silence in the face of criticism constituted implicit agreement.

**Community values and social cohesion** Several comments reflected on what negative coverage revealed about community values and social cohesion. Leaders questioned whether the media's approach to school coverage reflected broader social problems and wondered about the kind of community values being promoted through sensationalized coverage of educational institutions.

**The ethics of representation** Some leaders raised fundamental ethical questions about media representation, particularly regarding vulnerable populations. They questioned whether it was ethical to publicly discuss incidents involving children and whether media coverage that damaged entire school communities could be justified by claims of public interest.

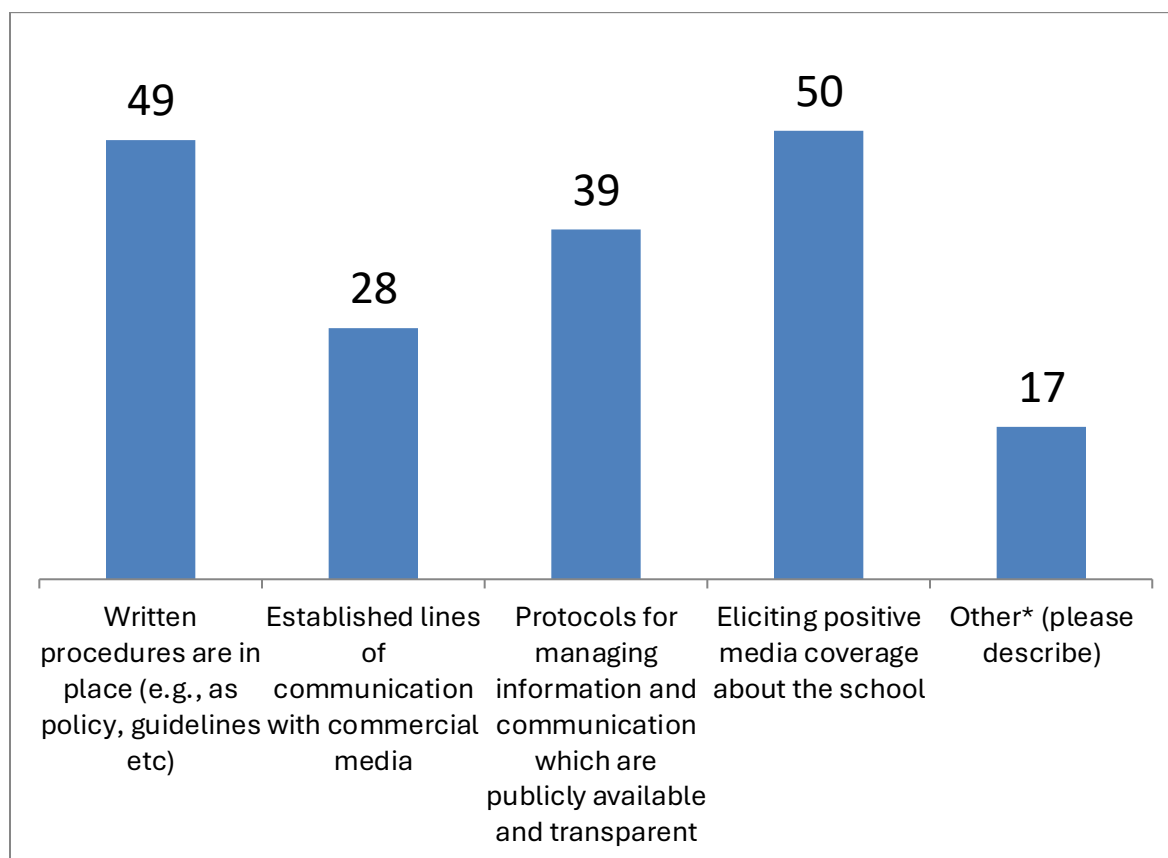
**Systemic vs. individual accountability** Leaders reflected on whether problems in education should be understood as systemic issues requiring societal solutions or individual failures requiring personal accountability. This philosophical tension ran through many responses, with leaders arguing that media coverage oversimplified complex social and educational challenges.

These philosophical reflections reveal that SA secondary school leaders are concerned with fundamental questions about the role of education in society, the nature of professional responsibility, democratic values, and social justice. Their responses suggest that negative media coverage is embedded in deeper questions about the profession's place in society and the values that should guide public discussions about education.

## **(6) Responding to negative media reporting**

Schools have developed strategies to help them deal with media, particularly working to get positive coverage in mainstream and social media. Many schools have policies and procedures in place; leaders emphasised following DfE procedures and immediately contacting their Education Director and the DfE Media Unit when issues arose, with some adopting a "no contact with the media if possible" approach after experiencing situations where "even positive stories have been misconstrued." A few schools had developed more proactive strategies, including establishing clear expectations that "local media contact the principal first regarding any media attention" and regularly revisiting staff understanding of media ethics, particularly in smaller communities with divisive local issues. However, it seems that schools are reactive rather than proactive, with schools heavily dependent on departmental support and guidance rather than having internal systems for media engagement. Some leaders expressed frustration with the limitations of current approaches, noting that departmental restrictions meant schools often had no effective way to respond to or correct negative coverage, leaving them vulnerable to ongoing reputational damage.

Figure 10: School media management strategies



If they were involved in a potential or actual negative media report, schools largely went to the DfE for support, in particular the DfE Media Unit.

### (7) Support

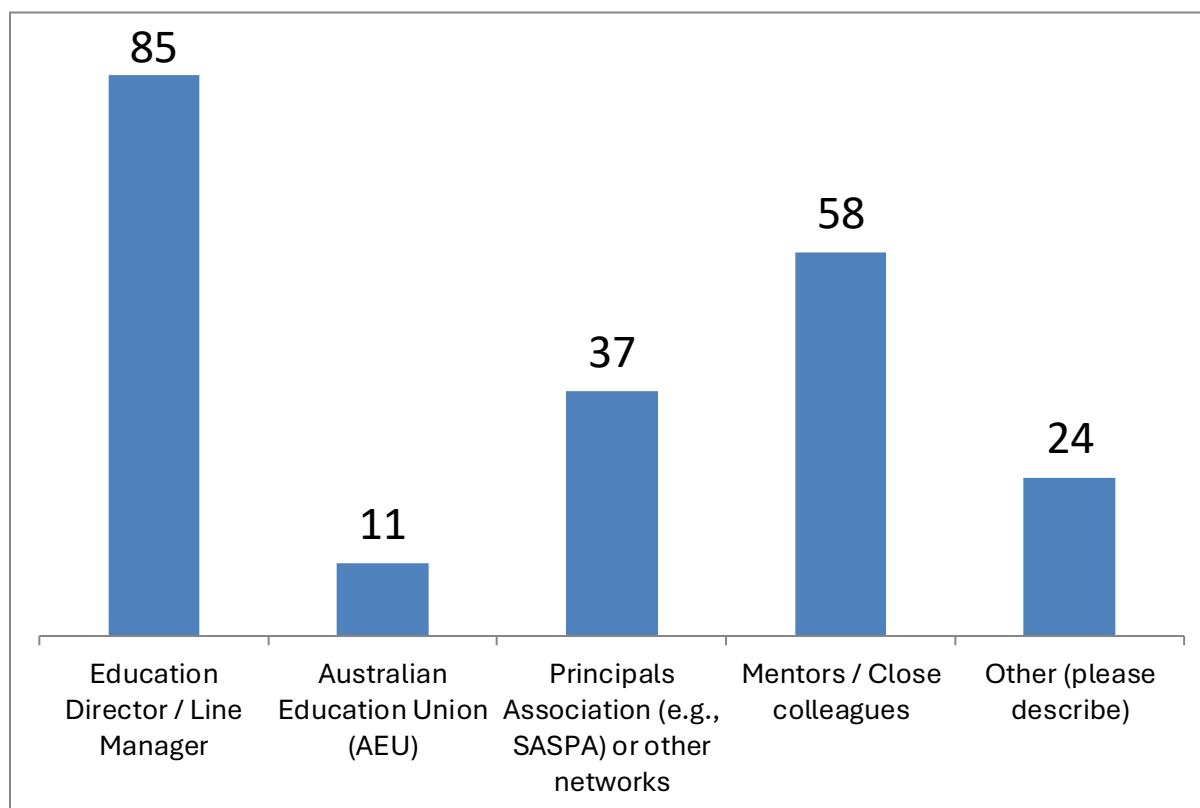
Leaders distinguished between different types of support needed, with some sources providing practical guidance and others offering emotional support. The DfE Media Unit was valued for "process support to ensure I comply with ED/EL" and "formulating responses," while colleagues and family provided "wellbeing and emotional support." Some leaders noted the importance of having both types available. Other leaders emphasised the importance of internal school capacity and self-reliance. Responses included "I'm not sure I have experienced effective support from outside of the school. My leaders and colleagues however have been excellent support" and descriptions of schools working collaboratively with "executive leadership team at the school where we work together and support each other." Leaders described the kinds of support that were most useful as:

- Education Directors:** Education Directors emerged as the most frequently mentioned and valuable support source, with multiple variations including "My Education Director and the DfE Media Unit (X6)," "Educational Director (x5)," and numerous individual references. Leaders valued Education Directors for both procedural guidance and emotional support, with one noting "My ED is always my first point of call to discuss the issue and to talk through the best options for seeking extra support. My ED is extremely supportive, and we have a strong working relationship of seeking and accepting coaching/feedback." However,

experiences varied significantly, with some leaders reporting that Education Directors focused primarily on compliance rather than wellbeing support.

- **DfE Media Unit** The DfE Media Unit was consistently praised for its technical expertise and procedural support. Leaders valued the unit's ability to provide "clear instructions and directions on processes," "scripts/oversee written communication," and "suggested responses." One leader noted the Media Unit was "wonderful" while another described them as providing "clear advice on how to respond." The unit was particularly valued for helping schools navigate the technical aspects of media management and ensuring appropriate responses.
- **Professional associations and union support** SASPA (South Australian Secondary Principals Association) was mentioned multiple times as providing "ongoing advice about wellbeing and how to respond" and supporting principals through difficult situations. Some leaders noted that SASPA was "supporting me" while others mentioned the AEU (Australian Education Union) as a support source, though less frequently than other options.
- **Collegial networks:** Professional colleagues provided crucial emotional and experiential support, with leaders describing how "close colleagues and professional associations" offered "a no blame approach and will provide advice for improvement or reassurance that they have done things correctly." The solidarity aspect was important, with responses like "honestly - it's hard. We are all in the same boat. We just cry together" and colleagues providing "experience-based information that is supportive and helpful." However, some leaders noted limitations, observing that "it feels like the ED is most concerned about impact to their career; whereas my close colleagues know my context and can offer advice from the field."
- **Family and personal support:** Personal relationships emerged as critical support sources, with several leaders mentioning family. One leader simply stated "My family. They listen, they understand," while others described family as providing emotional stability during difficult periods. Some leaders noted the importance of friends, with one mentioning "friends who send flowers" as meaningful support during crisis periods.

Figure 11: Sources of support



Leaders did comment on **inconsistent quality of support**. The variable quality of support depended on individual relationships and circumstances. Leaders described experiences ranging from "EXTREMELY well supported by both my ED and the DfE Media Team" to situations where they felt "largely left to work it out ourselves." One leader noted receiving "in sufficient support" while another described support as "lack lustre and disappointing." The effectiveness of support often depended on the specific individuals involved and the nature of the incident.

Several leaders noted problems with the **timing and accessibility** of support, describing situations where "they were slow to send out assistance but did come out a day or two later" or where support was needed more immediately than what was available through formal channels. Many responses described **gaps in available support**, particularly for wellbeing and long-term recovery. Leaders noted needs for "greater support" and described situations where they felt abandoned during critical periods. Some mentioned the need for more consistent approaches across different Education Directors and better understanding of the emotional toll of media coverage. Reports included comments about **geographic and contextual variations**. Support effectiveness varied based on school location and context, with rural and regional leaders facing different challenges. Some mentioned the importance of understanding local context, with effective supporters being those who could "appreciate our context and how we know our community, which effects next steps."

In sum, leaders' responses suggest that the support system is highly dependent on individual relationships and circumstances, with significant variations in quality and effectiveness. While formal structures exist through Education Directors and the DfE Media Unit, the most valued

support often came from those who combined professional expertise with personal understanding and emotional care.

### **Suggestions for improved support**

Survey respondents made ten suggestions for improved support. These are:

**Departmental advocacy and defence:** Leaders called for the DfE to take a more active role in defending schools and staff against unfair media coverage. Many wanted the department to be "more proactive in supporting schools and staff members who are targeted in social media" and to challenge negative narratives rather than leaving schools to "wait for it to blow over." One leader argued that "waiting for it to 'blow over' does not work" and resulted in experienced principals resigning due to "relentless bullying they faced from a school group of parents with no empathy or support from DfE."

**Legal support and protection:** Multiple leaders suggested the department should provide legal support to challenge defamatory coverage. One respondent argued that "the Department should be pursuing legal action and support its staff (including with legal support) to challenge slanderous/defamatory action by students, parents and the media." They emphasised that since issues arise "as a result of schools and leaders performing our duties, this should not be relegated to 'personal supports'" but should be addressed systemically with legal backing.

**Leader engagement with media:** Many leaders wanted greater freedom to respond to negative coverage rather than being "gagged by the department." One suggested "it would be powerful to see the embargo on leaders talking to media removed, with clear advice and guidelines. It feels like we have no voice." Others wanted Education Directors to "speak out for us" when schools couldn't respond directly, arguing that current restrictions left schools defenceless against false narratives.

**Proactive positive promotion:** Many leaders called for systematic positive promotion of public education. Suggestions included the "DfE need to buy a weekly page or two in the written media that is all about students and the good things schools do to counteract the negativity. Flood the media with positive stories and photos." Others wanted "strategic marketing to public schooling" to "join the competition for advertising public schooling, just like the other sectors." Several leaders suggested systematic approaches to counter negative narratives - "for every negative report there should be 10 positive stories actively pushed out by the department" and raising "the profile of teachers and education as a profession." They wanted coordinated efforts to challenge the perception that public schools were inferior to private alternatives.

**Media industry education and regulation:** Several leaders suggested direct engagement with media organisations to educate them about the impact of their coverage. One proposed meeting with "representative from the Advertiser and commercial news stations to talk with them about the damage their actions can have on our community, teachers and vulnerable young people." Others called for "legislation in place with significant sanctions to prevent or deter careless, unfounded and biased reporting."

**Consistent support protocols** Leaders wanted more consistent approaches across different Education Directors, noting "significant differences between how each ED will support" and

experiences where "we are guilty and need to prove our innocence." They called for the department to "review how they offer support and ensure that there are consistent approaches" with better understanding of staff impact and support needs.

**Enhanced wellbeing support** Multiple responses emphasised the need for better mental health and wellbeing support for staff affected by media coverage. Leaders wanted recognition that media coverage created occupational hazards requiring systematic rather than individual responses, with appropriate counselling and support services available.

**Faster response times and resources:** Some leaders called for "quicker" response times and "in-house support" rather than relying on external processes that were often too slow to be effective in managing media situations.

**Systemic recognition of impact:** Leaders wanted acknowledgment that negative media coverage was a systemic issue affecting the entire profession rather than individual school problems. They called for recognition of "the human cost of media sensationalism" and its impact on "trust, destabilising learning environments, and chipping away at the safe, respectful spaces we work so hard to build."

These ten suggestions collectively reflect leaders' desire for a more protective, proactive, and supportive approach from the DfE, moving to a model that more actively defends and promotes public education while providing comprehensive support for those affected by negative coverage.

## Appendix

This survey was designed to provide SASPA with anonymised information about members' experiences and views of negative media.

Ethical considerations meant that participation was voluntary. There was no attempt to make to seek out people known to have had negative media experiences. Respondents were not asked for details of their school and had options throughout about what and how much information they provided. The data was further anonymised during analysis to prevent any individual or school being identified.

The survey was conducted between 31 March and 11 May, 2025

Researchers Dolan and Thomson conducted the analysis. They read the data and thematised the open-ended questions. The AI programme Claude was used to provide a comparison summary of the same open-ended questions; some minor adjustments were made to researcher summaries. Survey data has now been removed from the AI platform. The text in the report was written by the researchers.

The survey in full follows on the next page.

# Survey: Media and Schools

**Purpose:** SASPA developed a position paper on media management and support in 2024. This paper is to be reviewed in September 2025. We now want to progress our understandings of your experiences with media. This SASPA survey aims to gather insights on how interactions with commercial media\* currently impact you and your work, and affects perceptions and experiences related to your school and to the wider public education system. Thank you for your participation. Your responses are anonymous and will remain confidential.

\* In the following questions the term 'commercial media' refers to national, state and local newspapers, television, radio, and their associated internet broadcast services. Social media refers specifically to platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, X, Threads, Instagram and so on.

## Section 1: Demographic information

Q1. What is your role in the school?

- Principal
- Deputy Principal
- Assistant Principal / Senior Leader
- Other (please specify)

Q2. In which type of school do you work?

- Secondary
- Area
- R-12
- Other (please describe)

## Section 2: Perceptions of negative media coverage

Q3. What types of negative coverage of schools have you seen in the commercial media? (Please check all that apply)

- Stories about violence
- Stories about poor academic performance
- Reports on budget cuts or financial issues
- Stories about staff misconduct or issues with teachers
- Coverage of disciplinary actions or controversies
- Other (please describe)

Q4. What do you think and/or feel and/or do, when you see another state school negatively depicted in the media?

## Section 3: Critical incidents and the media

Q5. Have critical incidents in your school been taken up by the commercial media?

- Yes
- No

Q6. If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, please describe details of a critical incident that has attracted media interest.

- Nature of the incident
- How did the media find out about the incident?
- Did you have time to respond effectively?
- Where did you go for support in managing the incident? How effective was the support?
- How would you describe your response to the incident? (including its effectiveness)
- Was social media important in how the incident was perceived, experienced and managed? If yes, please provide details.

## Section 4: Impacts of negative commercial media coverage

Q7. How does negative media coverage affect you and your leadership work?

- Reduces my job satisfaction
- Poses a threat to my safety and wellbeing
- Heightens the risk to my reputation and career aspirations
- Has no significant impact
- Other (please describe)

Q8. How do you believe negative media coverage affects your students?

- Makes students feel unsafe
- Feeds negative perceptions of the school
- Makes students more aware of potential issues and risks
- Has no significant impact
- Other (please describe)

Q9. How do you believe negative media coverage affects your teachers and staff?

- Decreases morale and job satisfaction
- Increases stress and pressure
- Prompts risk averse or cautious approaches to teaching and in-school interactions
- Has little or no impact
- Other (please describe)

Q10. How do you think negative media coverage affects the reputation of a school in and beyond the school community?

- Significant negative impact
- Some negative impact
- Little or no impact
- Not sure

## Section 5: Management and support

Q11. What processes and strategies are used to manage the interactions your school has with commercial media? (please select all that are applicable)

- Written procedures are in place (e.g., as policy, guidelines etc.)
- Established lines of communication with commercial media
- Protocols for managing information and communication which are publicly available and transparent
- Eliciting positive media coverage about the school
- Other (please describe)

Q12. Where do you go for support when your school is (or might be) depicted negatively in the media? (please select all that are applicable)

- Education Director / Line Manager
- Australian Education Union (AEU)
- Principals Association (e.g., SASPA) or other networks
- Mentors / Close colleagues
- Other (please describe)

Q13. Who provides you with the most effective support when your school is (or might be) depicted negatively in the media? What type of support do they provide?

Any additional comments or suggestions regarding school / media interaction.