

1 June 2021

The Hon John Gardner MP
Minister for Education

By email minister.gardner@sa.gov.au

Dear Minister,

Re: Priority COVID vaccinations for staff in SA schools

In February 2021, the Independent Education Union (SA) Branch wrote to the Premier regarding our concerns relating to prioritising COVID vaccinations for school staff and you ultimately replied on behalf of the Premier as the matter fell within your broad area of responsibility.

In the intervening period the IEU's concerns have not subsided, but have rather been reinforced as the rollout of COVID vaccinations has progressed to ever younger cohorts without any recognition that staff in SA education settings are nevertheless frontline workers and worthy of an elevated priority for vaccination.

Schools are unique workplace settings. People from a broad range of backgrounds and of a broad demographic spent extended periods of time at close quarters with little realistic opportunity for consistent social distancing. Children are notoriously unaware of the niceties of personal hygiene and the boundaries of personal space.

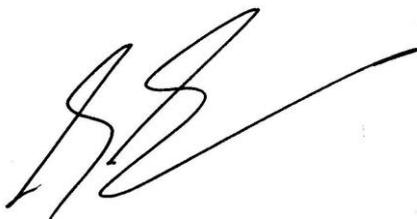
The IEU was heartened by the news that the Tasmanian Department of Health has placed school staff (without age restriction) on the priority list for COVID vaccination. I call on the SA government to follow suit and do likewise but with the added dimension of taking the vaccinations to school sites, or at least initially the larger sites.

The advantages are several. There would be less disruption to teaching and learning with staff missing from their work stations only for relatively short periods of time. Also school communities are relatively stable groups which maximises the likelihood of access to most staff for initial and for follow up doses. If individuals are left to their own devices (in or out of work time) the chance of follow through is reduced.

The advantage to the community is broader and more immediate than the long term benefits to students of an education without disruption due to school closures and/or remote learning. The community relies on education workers filling the additional subsidiary role of freeing caregivers to participate in the broader economy. The economy suffers if schools shut. Students suffer if schools shut. Staff suffer if schools shut.

The IEU, on behalf of the community we serve, requests that you act to make education workers a current priority for vaccinations and give favourable consideration to a model involving taking vaccinations directly to the workplaces. Please act to make schools COVID safe zones.

Yours sincerely,



Glen Seidel
Secretary