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School closure raises COVID advice issues

Today's news that a school has been closed following a case of a teacher testing positive to Omicron has reinforced the need to address issues within the state government's advice regarding school/college operations both now and in the case of wider community spread.

It is important to understand that testing, tracing and quarantining protocols in WA have not changed from those put in place in 2020. The announcement made last Friday does not take effect until a higher level of community spread – as yet unspecified – is reached. This will be determined by the Chief Health Officer.

It is now a matter of urgency for staff to be informed about government policy in relation to the provision of rapid antigen tests and of timelines for delivery to schools and colleges. Staff need to be clear as to the availability and use of RATs.

The SSTUWA has raised a number of member concerns in various forums and will continue to do so. The question of leave provisions for principals and teachers/lecturers required to isolate is a critical one and currently being discussed across government.

We have also written to the Chief Health Officer seeking the reasoning behind allowing unvaccinated volunteers into schools for up to one a day a week.

The union is sending a second letter addressing a broader range of issues including:

- Social distancing protocols for schools and colleges.
- Parent/teacher interviews.
- Definitions of "large gatherings".

It is clear that the 2022 school year will be a disrupted one - there will be individual school closures, in part or in full, and there will be teacher absences and student absences as the number of cases grows. The priority for the SSTUWA will continue to be the safety and health of our members.

The latest guidelines and SSTUWA statements on such issues can be found here.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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