

Hardship Policy

Incorporating: Wodonga Primary School, Wodonga South Primary School, Wodonga West Primary School, Melrose Primary School, Baranduda Primary School, Wodonga Middle Years College, Wodonga Senior Secondary College, Belvoir Special School

APPROVED:

Introduction

Wodonga Federation of Government Schools (The Federation) is committed to all students having access to the opportunities to succeed in life, regardless of their background or circumstances, and that no-one is left behind.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is:

1. To ensure all students have access to the standard curriculum program and participation of all students to the full school program is facilitated.
2. To provide guidance to schools in identifying hardship early.
3. To provide guidance in assessing hardship.
4. To ensure all parties are aware of what hardship arrangements are available.
5. To encourage social inclusion of families experiencing financial hardship.
6. To provide a clear statement about the rights and responsibilities of parents.

Policy

The Federation and member schools will be guided by the following principles when managing hardship requests:

Every parent experiencing hardship who approaches the school can expect to:

- Be treated with respect, dignity, sensitivity and without judgement
- Have their circumstances individually considered
- Have their identity and circumstances kept confidential to the relevant school personnel
- Nominate a support person to accompany them to any meetings with parent payment contact persons
- Receive prompt information on the support options available and government assistance programs
- Discuss the amount they can afford and negotiate the terms of payment
- Revisit their parent payment plan at any point during the school year
- Receive free access to a language interpreter service if required.

Every Parent who engages with the school to discuss hardship should be encouraged to:

- Advise the school of their financial difficulties as soon as practicable
- Act reasonably in their negotiations with the Business Manager or Principal and school staff in pursuit of a mutually acceptable outcome
- Be honest and realistic in their assessment of their capacity to contribute to their child's education
- Advise the Business Manager or Principal if their circumstances change as soon as practicable
- Maintain contact with the Business Manager or Principal.

Procedures

Responsibilities

Role	Responsible for
Member School Councils	<p>The School Councils of each member school has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that appropriate policies and procedures are in place to address hardship.</p> <p>The School Council of each school is responsible for delegating authority to the Business Manager to assess and respond to hardship</p>
Member School Principals / Business Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all parents are aware of this Hardship Policy. • Meet with families experiencing hardship. • Assess and respond to hardship requests in accordance with this policy and associated policies.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Hardship	<p>An inability to pay due to financial difficulty or circumstance.</p> <p>Hardship can arise from a variety of situations that can be either short or long term. Hardship is not necessarily related to the income of the family but can result from contributing stressors which can impact a family's ability to make financial payments.</p> <p>Short term hardship is often due to a change in circumstances. This can include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death of an immediate family member or friend • Family breakdown or severe family disruption e.g. divorce/separation of parents; substance dependence and addiction • Illness, including serious illness or mental illness of the parent or family member • Family violence • Homelessness, at risk of homelessness or impacted by transitional housing • Out-of-home care arrangements or temporary foster parents • Unemployment or change in employment circumstances • Financial stress resulting in difficulty paying the bills, providing food or meeting essential costs, such as medical or transport costs • Natural disaster such as drought, bushfire or flood

- Refugee status, including families on a Bridging Visa, Temporary Protection Visa, community detention and asylum seeker families
- Other factors resulting in unforeseen change in the parent's capacity to make payments.

Long term hardship is often due to short term stressor that continue over a longer period of time. Low income families often experience financial hardship.

Identifying Hardship

Parents in financial hardship may identify themselves to the school or be identified by the school.

Assessing Hardship

Parents who are experiencing hardship are encouraged to make an appointment with the Principal, the Business Manager or Wellbeing Team.

Hardship arrangements will be considered for families who are experiencing long term financial hardship or short term crises on a case-by-case basis. Assessing hardship and family difficulties on a case by case basis ensures the approach taken provides for a family-centred focus that is individualised and necessarily requires consideration of each and every situation.

The Principal, Business Manager or Wellbeing Team will use their discretion and act within the mandate of this policy to assess and negotiate appropriate forms of payments assistance.

The family will be contacted as soon as possible with the school's decision regarding the hardship request.

Response to Hardship

Where possible, member schools of Wodonga Federation of Government Schools may offer to reduce the amount or alter the timelines of requested parent payments.

This can include, but not limited to:

- Waiving fees
- Reduced fees
- Extended payment or the extension of payment deadlines
- Flexible payment plans
- Loan –to–own strategies, such as for devices and other hardware

Please see Payment Policy for other supports.

Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the family involved unless there is a risk to someone's safety. The Federation and member schools will have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected.

Everyone is entitled to know how the personal information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will be able to access it.

Reviewing

Every year, a review shall be conducted to assess whether The Federation's Hardship Policy policies or procedures require modification to better assess hardship.

Related Documents

- Parent Payment Policy
- Camps and Excursions Policy