Teachers spending own money to keep classrooms running



Australian public school teachers are spending more than $175 million of their own money each year on basic classroom supplies, exposing the personal impact of chronic underfunding of public schools, according to new data from the Australian Education Union (AEU).

The AEU's 2025 *State of Our Schools* survey of more than 10,000 public school teachers found that more than 86 per cent of teachers are using their own money to purchase supplies for their classrooms, spending an average of almost $1,000 each year.

Nationally, this amounts to nearly $177 million annually, with teachers in primary, special and very remote schools spending even more.

In WA, 85 per cent of survey respondents said they spent their own money for their classrooms, with average spend amounting to $1,108.17, the second-highest average in the nation behind NSW. This amounted to an estimated total spend of $23.5 million annually.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the findings revealed an unacceptable reality for the teaching profession.

"Teachers are spending significant amounts of their own money on the basic necessities needed to run a classroom," she said.

"We're not talking about nice-to-haves or personal touches. Teachers are paying for basic items like stationery, books, classroom equipment, and materials to support individual students. These are critical items necessary for teachers to do their jobs properly, but they have been forced to pay for them out of their own pockets."

The survey shows teachers are most commonly paying for stationery and classroom equipment, as well as items to support individual students and library resources. Teachers in remote areas face the highest average out-of-pocket costs.

Ms Haythorpe said teachers' commitment to their students was being taken for granted by governments.

“Teachers do this because they care deeply about their students, but their goodwill is being exploited. When more than 85 per cent of public school teachers are spending nearly $1,000 a year of their own money, that’s not generosity, that’s a system failure,” she said.

“This is especially unfair when teachers in under-resourced and remote schools are spending even more. The teachers who are already working in the toughest conditions are being asked to carry the greatest financial burden.”

With the new bilateral funding agreements that have been struck between the commonwealth and state and territory governments, the responsibility sits firmly with governments to get this funding into schools as soon as possible.

“Governments must prioritise the delivery of this much needed resource to public schools so that teachers aren’t forced to choose between their own household budgets and their students’ learning,” Ms Haythorpe said.

Survey results

The AEU 2025 *State of Our Schools* survey was conducted in late 2025 and surveyed 10,384 public school teachers across Australia.

Teachers were asked: “Do you use your own money to purchase supplies/equipment for your school or students, and if yes how much money do you spend per year?”

National results

- 86.4 per cent of teachers said that they spend their own money on classroom supplies at an average of $988.18 each.
- Averaged across the country this equals $176,976,760 in total per year.
- Primary school teachers spend the most on average ($1,047 each) followed by Special School teachers ($1,013 each).
- Teachers in very remote schools spend an average of $1,197 each.
- Teachers whose schools are in the middle band of socio-economic status spend more ($1,212 each) than teachers in whose schools are in low SES ($949 each) or high SES areas ($768 each).
- Teachers in self-described “under resourced” schools spend an average of $1,119 each, compared to $660 for teachers in “adequately resourced” schools.

What do teachers spend their money on?

- Stationery: bought by 85.2 per cent of teachers.
- Classroom equipment: bought by 84.2 per cent.
- Items to support individual students: 51.5 per cent.
- Library textbooks or library resources: 37.9 per cent.
- Sports or play equipment: 16.3 per cent.
- Study trips or excursions: 5.7 per cent.

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