Facing the Facts about the next General Agreement



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What’s worth fighting for in the next Schools General Agreement



As we prepare for a new round of bargaining, the stakes for public education could not be higher. The Schools General Agreement is more than a pay and conditions framework—it is a statement of what the community and its government

values.

In a state enjoying the strongest economy in the nation, it is time a renewed commitment to public education was aligned to that prosperity - and safeguarding it as sustainable and equitable for all.

The question is not whether we can afford to invest more in public schools, but whether we can afford not to. The cost-of-living crisis is affecting all Western Australians. Educators are no exception.

While salary outcomes matter, the next agreement must recognise that teachers and school leaders are not just employees - they are the backbone of a system the community increasingly views as struggling to meet contemporary demands. Public education is widely acknowledged as less and less fit for purpose. This agreement presents a critical opportunity to reshape the conditions that underpin effective teaching and learning.

The status of teachers and school leaders is central to much needed reform. Respect is not symbolic; it is structural. It must be reflected in manageable workloads, professional autonomy and competitive remuneration that recognises the complexity of modern classrooms and schools.

Without this, attraction and retention challenges will persist and grow.

And this is no longer about particularly hard-to-staff areas – it is increasingly system-wide.

Class sizes remain a defining issue. For too long, the debate has been framed in averages and muddied by dubious “evidence” rather than realities. (You can find more on this in Facing the Facts about class sizes.) Ask yourself, if class sizes really don’t matter, why do so many other nations provide smaller class sizes than Australia, why do so many other states provide smaller class sizes than WA, and why do so many private schools provide smaller class sizes than public schools?

Class sizes must also be considered in the context of the escalating complexity of student needs. Teachers are increasingly supporting students with disabilities and diverse behavioural and social challenges – with inadequate support, if any. Smaller class sizes overall and adjustments that properly account for complexity are essential to improving education outcomes and reducing teacher burnout.

The need for recognition of additional workload arising from deepening disadvantage and burgeoning student complexity is now urgent. This work - planning lessons, making adjustments, managing behaviours, liaising with families and external agencies - is substantial and growing. It must be properly acknowledged in workload allocations, rather than absorbed invisibly by already stretched educators.

Duties other than teaching (DOTT) is another critical pressure point. It must be protected. Sufficient and predictable DOTT is essential for the preparation, assessment and collaboration that teachers undertake as part of their core work. Without it, the system relies on unsustainable levels of unpaid labour, again contributing to burnout and attrition.

Equally, school leader time needs to be respected with more opportunity to focus on their core work of leading, teaching and learning.

Teacher and school leader health and wellbeing must underpin the next agreement. Rising workload intensity has real consequences, from stress-related illness to early career exit. Facing the Facts, Understanding and Reducing the Workload of Teachers and Leaders in Western Australian Public Schools and countless other reports have consistently highlighted this trajectory. Now we need enforceable conditions, not aspirational rhetoric.

Regional and remote school staff still require particular attention. Adequate and consistent incentives are essential, as is available, affordable, safe and secure housing through GROH. So too are professional support and services. Inadequacies in the GROH system and lack of regional support and services undermine workforce stability in these communities.

Finally, systemic support must be strengthened. Schools cannot manage complex needs in isolation. Regional-level support for students with disabilities, behaviour management, attendance and engagement, Aboriginal education and specialised curriculum support is critical. Without it, school leaders and classroom teachers are left to shoulder responsibilities far beyond their primary responsibility.

Every agreement is a moment of choice. This one can, despite what we have achieved in the past, perpetuate a system stretched to breaking point, or it can progress genuine renewal. Let’s face the facts and let’s, once again, bring the community with us. What is worth fighting for is clear: a sustainable profession, decent pay and conditions, and a public education system capable of meeting the needs of every student in Western Australia.

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