School leader exit fears due to workload pressure

By Minh Lam

The SSTUWA's State of our Schools survey has revealed that two out of every three WA school leaders have considered leaving the profession due to high workload and fears for their well-being and safety.

Ninety-two per cent of school leader respondents to the 2021 survey rated their workloads as high to very high, with 67 per cent stating they had considered leaving the profession in the past four years.

Workload was the biggest reason cited by respondents as to why they would leave the profession, at 77 per cent, followed by concerns about their personal health and well-being.

Safety concerns, around school violence and COVID-19, and salary issues were also listed as reasons for leaving.

The school leader respondent results mirror those of the other roughly 1,700 public educators who responded to the survey.

As reported in last month's Western Teacher, four out of five public educators have considered leaving the profession in the past four years for exactly the same reasons as listed above.

The departure of so many dedicated and experienced educators from the public school system would have catastrophic consequences for state schools and add education to the list of many industries facing a shortage of skilled workers.

"I read new jobs daily, I know my health is suffering but so is that of the majority of my staff. Walking away doesn't help bring about change," one respondent said.

The survey results add further weight to the SSTUWA's campaign calling for an end to the state government's cap of public school teacher and lecturer wages.

"I haven't considered leaving, but the lack of salary increases is a significant issue," another survey respondent said.

Exactly 80 per cent of school leader respondents said they worked more than 50 hours a week, with just over a quarter stating they worked 60 hours or more. This equates to a 10-12 hour working day for school leaders during the working week.

About 81 per cent of school leaders surveyed felt somewhat to very pressured to schedule multiple after-school meetings.

As a result, 84 per cent of respondents said their stress levels were high to very high – which can be attributed to having to keep up with the workload and work hours school leaders currently face.

"I do not have enough hours in the days to complete my work effectively and no longer have the energy to work from home at night other than to answer a few emails," one survey respondent said.

Another respondent said: "The responsibility and accountability of the role is just getting too big. Schools can't keep absorbing all community woes and being the expected fix."

The work items that contributed to workload included:

- Compliance requirements
- Staff selection
- Budget cuts
- Lack of administration staff
- Attendance and behavioural data collection

Working with external agencies, the Student-Centred Funding Model (SCFM), reporting and assessments, a lack of classroom support and one-line budgets were also cited as contributing to workload.

Just over 41 per cent felt schools were under-resourced to deliver programs that students at their school needed under the

SCFM.

Almost 39 per cent of respondents rated as important to very important the funding gained through voluntary contributions and school fundraising (to ensure the school could offer the educational programs students needed).

“Projects completed around the school for the students could not happen without P&C funding,” one respondent said.

Another respondent said: “Public schools should be free and universal and not rely on contributions as it further stratifies public education.”

About 38.5 per cent of school leader survey respondents have considered engaging a collegiate principal, a new initiative won by the SSTUWA as part of the 2019 Schools General Agreement and run by the Department of Education.

The SSTUWA has started the process of negotiating the next schools and TAFE General Agreements and these survey results will undoubtedly bolster the union’s claims.

Member feedback on both Log of Claims were due back at time of publication, with school leadership-related claims, aimed at addressing teacher and school leader workload, forming a vital part of the Log of Claims goal of looking after the people we have and restoring the people we need.

The SSTUWA thanks members for their participation and support in the efforts to improve work conditions and pay through the next General Agreements.

School leader focus

State of our Schools 2021



Two out of three school leader respondents have considered leaving the profession in the past four years

Reasons cited



Workload



Health & well-being



School violence

Workload

92% rated workload as high to very high

Workload contributors

- Compliance requirements
- Staff selection
- Budget cuts
- Lack of administration staff
- Attendance and behavioural data collection

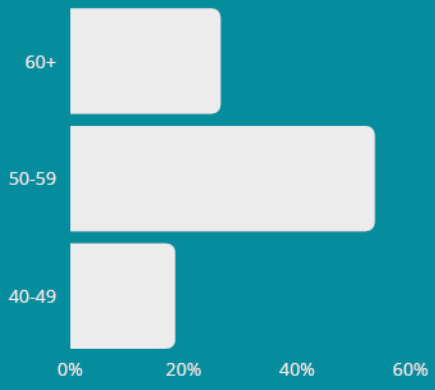
Stress

84% said work-related stress levels were high to very high

> "I read new jobs daily, I know my health is suffering but so is that of the majority of my staff. Walking away doesn't help bring about change."

Hours worked

per week



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