Workload drives public educators to consider quitting

By Minh Lam

About 81 per cent of respondents to the SSTUWA's State of our Schools survey have considered leaving the teaching profession in the past four years as increased workloads have led to many fearing for their personal health and well-being.

The 2021 WA State of our Schools Survey took in 1,865 teachers, education support teachers, school leaders and school psychologists.

More than 87 per cent of those surveyed who said they considered leaving said their workloads were a reason, with about 60 per cent of respondents stating concerns for their personal health and well-being were another reason for contemplating leaving the profession.

Salary issues (16 per cent) and safety concerns surrounding COVID-19 (8.1 per cent) and school violence (20.95 per cent) were also cited.

Four out of every five public educators who responded to the survey have considered leaving education.

Such a mass exodus would severely weaken public education and add the sector to the long list of industries in WA that are facing a massive skills shortage.

Concerns about teacher salary come as the SSTUWA launches a campaign calling for an end to the state government's cap on public school teacher and lecturer wages (see page 5).

"I've been teaching for almost five years now," one respondent said.

"Ever since I've started, there has been a cap of $1,000 pay increase per year for teachers. This represents a net pay decrease when considering inflation ... This is driving me out of the profession."

About 91 per cent rated their workload high to very high, with more than half (52.35 per cent) of respondents saying they worked more than 50 hours a week, including 18.5 per cent who said they worked more than 60 hours weekly.

About 31 per cent said they worked 40-49 hours a week.

Unsurprisingly, with long working hours and heavy workloads, public educators were feeling the stress. About 89 per cent of respondents said their work-related stress levels were high to very high.

"I have zero work/life balance," one respondent said.

"In order to obtain a tiny amount (of balance) I have taken a $40k pay cut and dropped to 0.6FTE but am still at school every day, working a 40-hour week to cope with the workload.

"My own children are suffering ... seeing specialists because of this."

The areas which contributed to a high workload for survey respondents were:

- Compliance requirements.
- Lack of classroom support.
- Reporting and assessments.
- Attendance and behavioural data collection.
- Lack of opportunity to collaborate with colleagues.

- Technology issues and requirements.
- Staff mental health challenges.

Just over 65 per cent said they felt pressured to very pressured about attending all scheduled out of school meetings.

When it came to resourcing for their schools, 35.24 per cent felt their school was under-resourced under the Student-Centred Funding Model (SCFM) to deliver education programs that their students needed. A further 21.78 per cent said their school was significantly under-resourced.

More than half of respondents (54.36 per cent) said funding raised through voluntary contributions and school funding raising (to ensure their school could offer the education programs students needed) ranged from important to very important.

State of our Schools 2021

Four out of five respondents have considered leaving the profession in the past four years

Reasons cited

- 87% Workload
- 60% Health & well-being
- 21% School violence

Workload

91% rated workload as high to very high

Stress

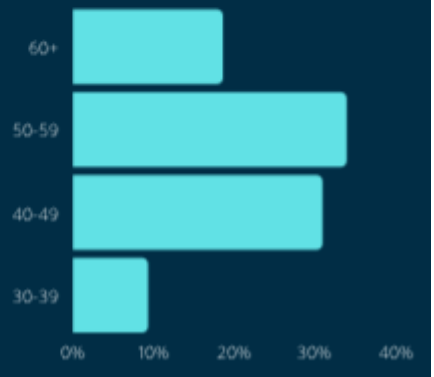
89% said work-related stress levels were high to very high

Workload contributors

- Compliance requirements
- Lack of classroom support
- Reporting and assessments
- Staff mental health challenges
- Lack of opportunity to collaborate
- Technology issues and requirements
- Attendance and behavioural data collection

> "I'm not paid enough for the amount of hours and stress, and I'm too tired to keep a healthy work and family life balance."

Hours worked per week



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