ACU research reveals acute warning signs for Australian school principals' health, well-being and longevity in the profession



The 2022 annual Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Well-being Survey results were released in full on Monday by the Australian Catholic University.

Key information demonstrates that teacher shortages are a major source of stress for school leaders.

Heavy workloads and a lack of time to focus on the core responsibilities of teaching and learning were the top two sources of stress recorded among almost 2,500 principals surveyed in 2022, according to the annual Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey.

Institute for Positive Psychology and Education (IPPE) co-lead investigator and leading school well-being expert Associate Professor Theresa Dicke said the impact of wide-ranging stressors on school leaders, including ongoing teacher shortages, was becoming acute.

Heavy workloads and lack of time to focus on teaching and learning remained the top two sources of stress for principals in 2022.

She said principals needed support to help reverse the concerning trends detected by the survey.

"The fact that these stressors remain the same as in 2021 indicates the level of importance in addressing these concerns,"

she said.

“We need to progress and implement effective solutions that support and empower principals in their vital roles.

“We have seen how education experts and political leaders can work collaboratively on solutions to the teacher shortage, and now we need to support our principals by heeding their serious and valid concerns.’’

Key findings

- 55 per cent of WA school leaders were subjected to threats of violence.
- 55 per cent were subjected to physical violence.
- 52 per cent of WA school leaders received a “red flag” alert email, up from 28 per cent in 2021.
- The percentage of school leaders encountering physical violence and cyberbullying is at its highest rate since the survey commenced 12 years ago.

The top five sources of stress for school leaders were:

- Sheer quantity of work.
- Lack of time to focus on teaching and learning.
- Teacher shortages.
- Mental health issues of students.
- Mental health issues of staff.

The report contains 14 key recommendations including the development of national workforce training and a recommendation to engage directly with principals to reduce job demands or increase job resources.

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