National education and union news

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Budget funding reveals what's possible

One of the federal budget's smallest commitments, $40 million to ensure every school in central Australia is fully funded, potentially represents one of the most important steps forward for the future of Australian public schools.

Australian Education Union (AEU) Federal President Correna Haythorpe has welcomed the commitment.

"While $40 million may not be much compared to other federal budget commitments, it's important that we're clear about what it represents," she said.

"For public school students in central Australia, it represents full funding to 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) in the region. That funding will help deliver more teachers, more education support staff, and more one on one individual attention for students.

"For public schools across the country, it is the first, albeit small, step towards the delivery of Federal Labor's 2022 election commitment - to get every public school on the pathway to 100 per cent of the SRS.

"But it cannot be the only step. The Northern Territory has the highest level of student need; 44 per cent of students are First Nations and 26 per cent of students have a disability and receive educational adjustments. However, right now the education of one in five public school students in the Northern Territory is effectively unfunded.

"It's one in 10 public school students across the nation. That is a national shame.

“For Federal Labor to truly deliver Prime Minister Albanese’s vision for Australia, where no one is held back and no one is left behind, this government must deliver 100 per cent of the SRS funding needed for every Australian public school. That is the minimum benchmark agreed to by all governments.

“AEU members will not accept anything less than full and fair funding for public schools.”
The AEU also welcomed the federal government’s commitments to TAFE.

“This budget represents a huge step forward for the nation’s TAFE institutions,” Ms Haythorpe said.

The government has made a $4.1 billion commitment, including $3.7 billion for the next national skills agreement, a life-changing document for our members as it sets up the framework for a strong and vibrant TAFE system for the future.

“We welcome the spirit of collaboration between the Commonwealth and the states and territories that is evident in the negotiations for the next national skills agreement and the Albanese Government’s commitment to ensuring TAFE is at the heart of vocational education, and that it’s supported by long-term, sustainable and stable funding.

“We were disappointed that this federal budget does not include funding to extend universal access to preschool to three-year-olds. This flies in the face of all available evidence that shows two years of high quality, play-based early learning delivered by a qualified teacher helps set children up for a lifetime of benefits in education, health and well-being.

“This funding must be provided for the benefit of all Australian children and their families.”

New payday rule welcomed

The ACTU has welcomed the federal government’s announcement that superannuation is to be paid on the same day as wages.

When super is paid quarterly rather than on the same day as wages, it is harder to track when it is not being paid. Like wage theft, failure to pay superannuation is rife: millions of workers have up to $5 billion a year in superannuation unpaid by employers, and this has serious implications for their retirement.

Mandating for super to be paid with wages will not only make it easier to detect and recover unpaid super, it will also help prevent its non-payment – as quarterly payments will no longer obscure what they are owed.

This announcement comes as legislation is also before Federal Parliament to finally enshrine superannuation as a universal workplace right in the National Employment Standards. This will ensure every worker has the right to recover unpaid super.

ACTU Assistant Secretary Scott Connolly (pictured right) said: “Every worker should have the right to have 100 per cent of their super paid on time, all the time. The union movement welcomes the key steps the Albanese Government is taking to protect workers’ super.”

Urgent action required on NSW teacher shortage

New figures showing 2,172 permanent teaching positions were vacant in NSW public schools in February reinforce the urgent need for action on the causes of teacher shortages – unsustainable workloads and uncompetitive salaries.

The Department of Education figures reveal how widespread the shortages are with every area of NSW affected. In country areas, as many as one in eight positions were vacant in February, with the biggest problems in the state’s west, southwest and the Northern Tablelands.

In Sydney, the highest number of vacancies were in the Liverpool area. The figures also show 92 school counsellor positions were vacant in NSW, further exacerbating the chronic shortage of counsellors across the state.

NSWTF President Angelo Gavrielatos said NSW faced a classroom crisis.

“Thousands of teaching positions are vacant, the number of teachers resigning has doubled in two years and the number of people studying to become a teacher has dropped by 30 per cent. Teacher shortages mean kids miss out and teachers burn out,” he said.

“The Coalition created this crisis by allowing workloads to rise to the point where two thirds of teachers say they are burnt out. Thanks to their wage cap, teachers are earning the same salary as they did a decade ago after inflation is factored in.

“We can’t fix the shortages problem without fixing the wages and workload problem. We commend Labor for their commitment to lift wages and reduce the administration workloads of teachers and we want to sit down and begin intensive negotiations.”

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