National education and union news



Rebuild literacy programs in schools

The Australian Education Union (AEU) and the Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) are jointly calling for English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) education in schools to be made an equity priority in the next National School Reform Agreement (NSRA).

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said a renewed focus on prioritising high quality English language education and literacy provision in Australia was crucial to enhancing the skills of students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

“Targeted and supported specialist English language programs are not only essential for developing English proficiency and meeting literacy standards, but also to make sure each student from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, migrant or refugee background has the opportunity to thrive academically on a level playing field,” she said.

“Over the last two decades, Australia’s national commitment to EAL/D education has disintegrated, resulting in lack of transparency and accountability for the allocation of needs-based English language funding, downsizing of professional support and the absence of national workforce planning for specialist EAL/D teachers.

“Consistent underfunding of public schools and the devolution of responsibility for EAL/D service provision to state and territory governments has resulted in increased casualisation of EAL/D teachers and unqualified, out-of-field EAL/D teaching. This must be addressed.”

ACTA President Anne Keary said the exclusion of EAL/D learners as a national equity cohort from education declarations has left English language learners behind.

“This has been a failure of policy,” she said.

“Despite Australia’s diversity, there is no national education policy or planning to ensure that these English language

learners meet the academic English language and literacy demands of the Australian curriculum and succeed in school.

“There are over 600,000 English language learners from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, migrant and refugee backgrounds in Australia that need targeted and supported specialist English language programs.

“The next National School Reform Agreement is Australia’s best opportunity to reform and revitalise specialist English language provision for these students.”
AEU and ACTA will work together with all governments to secure pathways to support English language learners through EAL/D provision in schools.

AEU victory in school camps time dispute

The Australian Education Union Victorian branch has achieved a significant win that will see the Victorian government providing an additional $130 million for school budgets over four years to resolve the school camp time in lieu “off duty” dispute heard before the Fair Work Commission.

This win means that public school teachers and education support staff attending a school camp overnight will be regarded as being at least “on call” for eight hours and receive a payment for this time.

In addition, for the remaining hours on a school camp, outside of the overnight hours and normal hours of duty, employees required to attend as part of the student supervision ratios will accrue time in lieu for being either on call or performing duties.

Critically, the Victorian government has provided the additional funding schools will require for these overnight payments.

These arrangements, including the overnight on call payment, will apply to all school camps, other than overseas school camps or any period of a school camp occurring during a school holiday period.

“This important win has been achieved as a direct result of the actions of AEU members, including those who lodged local grievances, and builds on the improved entitlements achieved in the Schools Agreement last year,” said Victorian Branch president Meredith Peace.

“It means that when a teacher or education support staff member is required to attend a camp overnight or to meet student supervision ratios, they cannot be deemed to be ‘off duty’.

“The significant new funding will reduce the pressure on schools to provide time in lieu to staff where they are required to work outside of their normal hours of duty while enabling schools to plan their camps programs with certainty.

“The outcome respects and recognises the huge contribution teachers and education support staff make to enable students to attend overnight camps.”

The AEU Victorian Branch lodged a dispute with the Victorian Department of Education in the Fair Work Commission after it issued school time in lieu operational guidelines stating that teachers and education support staff required to attend school camps could be “off-duty” overnight and would therefore not be eligible for the time in lieu entitlements provided for in the Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2022.

The AEU successfully settled the dispute with the department and has won funding for an “on call” overnight payment, funded by the state government, for public school teachers and education support staff for each night on camp, which will apply from
1 January this year.

Teacher input call for respectful relationship education

The AEU has welcomed the establishment of the National Respectful Relationships Education Expert Working Group to support the implementation of the federal government’s Consent and Respectful Relationships Education Program.

“Improving the safety of women and children in Australia is the responsibility of all members of our community, but teachers, principals and education support personnel play a particularly important role,” AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said.

“By starting early and including specific consent education curriculum initiatives designed to teach students the underlying beliefs and attitudes that lead to gender-based discrimination and violence, there is a critical opportunity to help prevent

violence against women and children.

“We must as a nation work together to prevent the kind of sexual harassment and assault between students that advocates, such as Chanel Contos, have so bravely shone a light on in recent years.

“However, we note with concern that the Working Group does not include representation of the teaching profession through the union.

“It is public school principals and teachers who will ultimately deliver respectful relationships school education. But effective curriculum development can only occur if teachers are involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of programs from the very beginning.

“We urgently encourage the Albanese Government to rectify this oversight and appoint a representative of the teaching profession through the voice of the union to the Working Group as soon as possible. Further, consultation mechanisms must be set up to ensure that teachers are actively involved in the national collaboration process as outlined in the announcement.”

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