National education and union news



Serious challenges facing Australia's education system

The federal government's new consultation paper for the Review to Inform a *Better and Fairer Education System*, released last month, highlights the extent of the deep inequities in Australia's education system.

AEU Deputy Federal President Meredith Peace said the challenges arising from that inequity required urgent action and equitable funding to alleviate them.

"Australia has, on the basis of socio-economic status, one of the most segregated education systems in the world, and as the consultation paper highlights, it's getting worse," Ms Peace said.

"There are unacceptable gaps between students of different backgrounds, unsustainable workloads for principals, teachers and education support staff in public schools, and growing teacher shortages.

"While the consultation paper includes appropriate measures like early intervention for students who need additional support through tutoring programs, increased specialist staff to boost student wellbeing and additional support for teachers, further action is urgently required.

"Public school students need smaller class sizes, real improvements in one-on-one support, greater preparation time and lower administrative loads for teachers and real action on uncompetitive salaries and career structures to address the workforce shortage and unsustainable workloads for teachers, principals and education support staff.

"But the fundamental issue in our education system, the totally inequitable funding system, is not addressed by the paper. This is a massive oversight and if it remains unaddressed will mean yet another generation of public school students will miss out on full and fair funding for their education.

"It is no surprise that education faces such serious challenges and inequity when currently, 98 per cent of public schools are underfunded to the Schooling Resource Standard whilst 98 per cent of private schools are funded over the standard. This is

the Federal Government's own measure for what's required to adequately educate a student – a measure they are failing to meet.

"If the federal government is serious about building a school system based on equity and excellence, as the consultation paper suggests, they must deliver full and fair funding for every public school student. Resources delayed are resources denied.

"This is the only way we will be able to address the challenges outlined by the consultation paper."

Vale Simon Crean

The trade union movement is mourning the passing of Simon Crean, who died suddenly, aged 74, whilst visiting Europe as part of an industry delegation.
Simon was president of the ACTU from 1985 to 1990 and went on to be elected to Federal Parliament and to become the leader of the Labor Party between 2001 and 2003.

He began working for the trade union movement as a young man and in 1979 became the general secretary of the Storeman and Packers Union (now the United Workers Union), representing workers in the warehouses and manufacturing industries until 1985.

Over this time Simon and the Storeman and Packers Union played a key role in the establishment of Australia's superannuation system.

In 1981 he became a vice president of the ACTU and was elected president in 1985.

While ACTU president Simon served alongside Bill Kelty as ACTU secretary and played a key role in negotiating the Prices and Income Accord.

Substantial gains for workers over this time included the establishment of universal superannuation, new welfare payments, improved skill and employment pathways and improved childcare and health and safety standards.

He represented Australian unions on the governing body of the International Labor Organisation from 1986 to 1990.

Current ACTU President Michele O'Neil said Simon was a respected and loved leader of the Australian union movement and played a significant role in multiple ministries in four Labor Governments.

"He was a great believer in and fighter for fairness and justice for working people in Australia and around the world," she said.

"He was a leader of conviction and courage and was generous and supportive to young unionists and all those who sought his support and advice.

"Simon was a man of courage and principle; he strongly opposed the Iraq war whilst Labor leader.

"His legacy has made a lasting impact on the wages, entitlements, safety and retirement dignity of working people.

"His loss will be keenly and deeply felt across our movement and we send our sincere condolences to his wife Carole and his whole family.

"Vale Simon Crean, a great union and Labor leader."

A big step forward to fairer workplaces

The ACTU has welcomed the passing of the Fair Work Amendment (Protecting worker entitlements) Bill 2023.
The bill:

- Inserts the right to superannuation in the national employment standards.
- Improves unpaid parental leave rights by expanding the number of flexible parental leave days from 30 to 100 days and improve flexibility on how they can be taken and shared between parents.
- Makes clear that the fair work act protections apply to temporary migrant workers and provides casual workers in the black coal mining industry with the same access to long service leave as permanent workers.

ACTU President Michele O'Neil said: "Australia's workplace laws need updating to protect workers from loopholes used by some big business to drive down wages and conditions. The passing of this bill is an important step forward in that process."

"Superannuation has finally been recognised in our workplace laws as a universal workplace right. All workers, with their union, will be able to enforce their superannuation rights and recover super that has been stolen from them.

"Millions of workers have around $5 billion of superannuation stolen each year, this measure will ensure more workers can retire with dignity and security.

"The bill also ensures that migrant workers are entitled to the same entitlements and protections as all other workers in Australia.

"The bill is also great for families, strengthening access to flexible unpaid access to leave means families can better share in caring responsibilities.

"Our workplace laws need to be fair and keep pace with changes in modern workplaces.

"We welcome these updates to our laws that bring increased security to workers."

Registry for respiratory diseases welcomed but further action still needed

The Albanese Government has introduced legislation that will capture, record and share the causes of deadly occupational respiratory diseases like silicosis.

The National Occupational Respiratory Disease Registry Bill 2023 establishes a national registry for reporting of all occupational respiratory diseases, with the reporting of silicosis to be mandatory.

The national registry will aid in the detection of new and emerging threats to workers respiratory health, by monitoring trends and assisting in targeted intervention and prevention strategies.

ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien welcomed the registry but said further reforms were critical if the disease was to be eradicated.

"We need a ban on engineered stone," he said.

"More than 600,000 workers are exposed to deadly silica dust at work in industries including mining, quarrying construction and manufacturing. This deadly and incurable disease is entirely preventable.

"Engineered stone is a fashion product that is killing those who work with it. As many as one in four stonemasons working with engineered stone have been diagnosed with silicosis."

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