Burnout and workload a concern



This issue of Western Teacher contains a summary document of the SSTUWA's Review into Public Education.

It is the culmination of over 12 months of hard work, consultation and analysis into the current state of public education in WA.

We want to thank all the school leaders across WA who made submissions to the review – your feedback and thoughts were invaluable and we hope you read the review's findings with interest.

More recently, the SSTUWA conducted its State of our Schools survey, and the results, as always, were informative and alarming.

We polled union members across the state, with separate sections for teachers, school leaders* and principals.

Principals and school leaders overwhelmingly said they were burnt out from workload and work/life balance issues and more than half said they had concerns about their personal health and wellbeing.

More than 22 per cent said they had concerns about salary issues, which was a jump from the previous survey. Thirty per cent of principals cited salaries as a key issue.

All of this led 73 per cent of school leader respondents to state that they had considered leaving the profession in the past four years. Of principal respondents that figure was 63 per cent.

In terms of workload, among school leaders about 95 per cent said it was high or very high, with 40 per cent working over 40 hours a week, 37 per cent working over 50 hours a week and almost 16 per cent working more than 60 hours a week. Over 20 per cent of principals were working more than 60 hours per week and 39 per cent more than 50 hours per week.

This meant 92 per cent of school leaders surveyed reported high to very high stress levels, a figure matched by principal respondents.

The teacher shortage is impacting on school leaders, with 44 per cent having to teach more hours than timetabled in the classroom due to shortages, while 58.2 per cent of principals are having to teach regularly in classrooms.

Almost 58 per cent of school leaders say their school is inadequately staffed, with 60 per cent stating there were shortages of specialist teachers. About 38 per cent said they did not have enough IT staff and 50 per cent were short in the area of student services.

About 95 per cent of school leaders stated there had been a violent incident involving students at least once a term this year, with that figure at 89 per cent among principals.
Interestingly, almost a third (32.8 per cent) of school leaders stated they had not been offered professional learning on the School Curriculum and Standards Authority curriculum support materials.

Almost 88 per cent stated that smaller class sizes would benefit them and their students through better learning outcomes, improved classroom behaviour and more time for individual students.

Regional principals and school leaders agreed that the main issues in their schools were staff turnover; lack of transfer opportunities back to metro areas, teacher shortages, lack of specialist teachers, GROH housing and community violence.

These findings are all very disturbing and we implore authorities to listen earnestly to the concerns of our school leaders and principals and work with them and us to come up with solutions.

Many thanks to our school leader and principal members who completed the survey. The results will be used in our continued negotiations on the new Schools General Agreement and to ultimately improve the state of public education in WA.

*For survey purposes school leaders were defined as deputy/associate principals, heads of department, heads of learning area and program coordinators.



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