Full funding of public schools must be delivered

Western Teacher volume 53.3 May 2024



The Australian Education Union (AEU) has urged the nation's education ministers to make real progress on public school funding, with new research revealing the urgent need for the additional investment to lift results and combat debilitating teacher shortages and declining student and teacher wellbeing.

A new AEU survey of 1,255 principals and teachers in WA in March and April this year shows:

- Teacher shortages affected 70 per cent of public schools in the last year and 83 per cent of principals said it had become harder to fill vacant positions. Two-thirds of teachers taught merged classes due to the shortages.
- Only four per cent of WA teachers said their school is well-resourced.
- Over 70 per cent of teachers reported a decline or significant decline in student wellbeing and engagement in the last 18 months. Nine out of 10 teachers reported a decline or significant decline in teacher wellbeing and morale over the same period.
- Only 13 per cent of teachers think the level of school counsellor support at their school is adequate and 18 per cent said there was none.
- Less than one in five WA teachers are committed to staying until retirement, raising the possibility that acute teacher shortages will worsen without real action by governments.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said only 1.3 per cent of public schools are fully funded and none of them are in Western Australia. WA public schools would have an additional $549 million to spend this year if they were fully funded.

"The challenges are too great and the cost of inaction too high for governments to continue to fail on public school funding," she said.

"We have seen plenty of talk but not enough action. This is despite the national inquiry instigated by education ministers,

warning in December, that there is an ‘urgent and critical’ need to fully fund public schools and it is a prerequisite for learning and wellbeing improvement.

“The challenges in schools have never been greater - more diversity and complexity in student need, increasing wellbeing and mental health issues and acute shortages of teachers.

“Our principals, teachers and support staff are doing an extraordinary job, but they are being asked to do too much with too little and there just aren’t enough
of them.

“Fully funding public schools is the only way to ensure every child gets the support they need to succeed, and we can recruit and retain sufficient numbers of teachers.”

In the AEU survey, over 90 per cent of WA teachers said additional support for students with disability or behavioural issues would be very helpful for them in improving student outcomes. Other top priorities were more time for lesson planning, assessment and reporting within their paid hours and smaller class sizes.

Ms Haythorpe said the statement of intent between WA and the Albanese Government, announced in January, needed to be the first draft and not the final deal because it would still leave public schools significantly underfunded.

“Fully funded means reaching 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) which is the minimum level of funding governments agreed a decade ago was required to meet the needs of all students,” she said.

“WA public schools are only funded at 91 per cent of the SRS now.

“The WA statement of intent ignores the fact that WA’s SRS funding share is artificially inflated by four per cent via the inclusion of non-school spending such as capital depreciation, pre-school and transport costs.

“That ‘additional allowance’ is denying public schools $244 million this year and if it is not removed would deny public schools $1.3 billion over five years.

“Public schools need full not fake funding.

“Principals, teachers, parents, unions and community groups all believe the Albanese Government needs to lift its share of the SRS from 20 to 25 per cent. WA must get rid of this four per cent rort and fund a true 75 per cent of the SRS.

“Short-changing our schools is short-changing our students and it is time for it to end.”

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