Facing the Facts about expectations of public educators



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Western Teacher volume 53.5 August 2024



In *Facing the Facts*, Dr Carmen Lawrence told us that teachers and school leaders feel undervalued, disrespected and insecure, that the sheer volume of work is exacerbated by growing complexity, that burnout must be addressed - and that more system support is needed: ”The cumulative impact of frequent policy changes, including the increased isolation of

schools generated by the IPS initiative, has steadily increased both the intensity and complexity of workloads, lowered morale, increased burnout and created an environment where teachers feel undervalued and disrespected. Many teachers, particularly in disadvantaged schools, are paying a high personal price for staying in the profession."

In *Understanding and Reducing the Workload of Teachers and Leaders*, Viviane Robinson and Peter Hamilton told us that the core work of teachers and school leaders has expanded, that expectations are out of hand, that misunderstanding, fear and over-conscientious compliance must be addressed - and that more system support is needed: "It is the cumulative impact and relentless nature of all the tasks and requirements that drives the problem of workload intensification."

Both reports, one commissioned by the SSTUWA and the other by the Department of Education, told us that the expectations imposed on public school teachers and leaders have exploded in response to disadvantage and growing diversity and complexity of student need.

The burden borne by teachers and school leaders is made worse by changes in parenting, growth in mental health issues, the impact of social media, and contemporary cultures of entitlement, complaint in the community and risk management in the system.

"Our analysis indicates that the problem goes to the more fundamental question of whether the job of teaching as currently performed and organised is doable and sustainable" (*Understanding and Reducing the Workload of Teachers and Leaders in Western Australian Public Schools*, p6).

Community research has told us voters believe the job of teachers is more difficult, students are more complex, school resourcing and staffing are less equitable and class sizes are too big.

Members have told us their workload is high or very high, stress levels are high and many have considered leaving the profession.

We know class sizes need to be addressed. We know unnecessary compliance needs to be addressed.

It's time adequate levels of local support were provided. Support services must be reviewed to ensure they are more accessible, more responsive to local needs and better resourced to adequately support schools' educational and administrative needs. Human services across government need to fully play their part.

"The profession is at breaking point and requires immediate steps to improve education delivery and morale" (*Facing the Facts: A Review of Public Education in Western Australia*, p107).

The centralisation of services in public education has not met the needs of schools for educational and administrative support.

Teachers and school leaders are over-burdened and students are missing out. Well-resourced support services, both within schools and based in district offices, are essential to ensure relevance and timely access.

Other agencies need to step up, especially in relation to disability, health, mental health, community safety, family support, child development, child protection and justice – and they need to work together!

The implementation of further change in public schools should be based on more effective system-level planning, including prior consultation with teachers, school leaders and unions, to prevent imposing ever-growing and competing workload demands on staff.

It's time everyone, not just teachers and school leaders, faced the fact that pondering red tape and digitising forms is not going to cut it.

We can take heart from the first steps taken in the most recent industrial negotiations and place hope in the Workload Ministerial Taskforce enshrined in the Agreement – but it is going to take vigilance and persistence.

Teachers and school leaders must be allowed and enabled to focus on their core business of teaching and learning.

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