Teacher departures influenced by workload and lack of respect

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Workload, burnout and a lack of respect for the teaching profession are the key reasons eight out of 10 respondents to the SSTUWA's 2025 State of our Schools survey considered quitting during the past four years.

The survey attracted 1,644 responses in all, with 83.46 per cent of respondents saying they had considered quitting teaching in the past four years.

Of those, 86.6 per cent cited workload, including their work/life balance. Burnout was identified by 83 per cent and almost 70 per cent gave a lack of respect for the teaching profession as their reason.

Workload was rated as very high by 51 per cent and high by 39 per cent. Stress related to workload reached very high for 36 per cent of respondents and high for 50 per cent.

Ten per cent of teachers were working over 60 hours per week, 26 per cent over 50 hours and 36 per cent over 40 hours per week.

Key influences on workload were managing student behaviour, prepping for lessons, reporting and assessments, meetings and dealing with the mental health challenges of students.

Worryingly, teachers faced a range of aggressive behaviours from students; over 50 per cent had personally experienced verbal abuse at least once in the school year. Of respondents 27 per cent reported physical violence at least once in the current school year.

When it came to parents or guardians, in the current school year 22 per cent reported personally encountering verbal aggression at least once. Twenty per cent had experienced psychological aggression at least once.

Asked if they knew directly of instances where mandatory sanctions on violent students had not been applied, over 20 per

cent of respondents said yes.

Teacher shortages were reported as affecting over half of schools. This resulted in increased workload, issues around teachers' DOTT time, staff morale and student behaviour.

Almost 54 per cent of respondents said their school was using teachers who were not fully qualified. A further 31 per cent said covering for the shortage through internal relief had compromised their ability to reach the teaching standards they aspired to, with 28 per cent saying it was affecting their mental health
and wellbeing.

Class size issues were still causing problems. Despite pledges made in the new General Agreement, over 30 per cent of respondents said they were not getting promised extra support if they were teaching oversized classes.

Replying to a separate survey section for principals, 76 per cent reported they had considered quitting their role in the past four years. Close to 80 per cent cited workload and work/life balance as the reason. Burnout and lack of respect for the teaching profession were the other main issues.

Of principal respondents, 75 per cent said their workload was very high, with 76 per cent saying the biggest contributor to their workload was addressing mental health challenges faced by their staff.

Other major contributors to workload were compliance requirements imposed by the department (73 per cent), addressing the mental health needs of students (64 per cent), parental demands (63 per cent) and mental challenges faced by parents/carers (61 per cent).

Asked about staffing levels, 20 per cent said they didn't have enough teachers and 34 per cent said they did not have enough specialist teachers.

In addition, 49 per cent said they did not have enough IT support and 60 per cent said student services was understaffed in areas including psychologists, counsellors and youth workers. Around 67 per cent said they were not receiving enough

support from the department in relation to student services.

Almost 60 per cent of respondent principals had been subjected to verbal abuse from parents/carers at least once and 47 per cent from students, with 39 per cent experiencing at least one incident of physical violence from a student.

Asked if they were confident of support from the department if they sanctioned violent students, 41 per cent said no.

Over 40 per cent of principal respondents said there were teacher shortages at their school, with increased workload, loss of DOTT time and staff morale among the key areas where this caused extra problems at their worksite.

Negative impacts on student behaviour was cited by 54 per cent, while 42 per cent said underqualified teachers were being used to fill gaps.

One principal summed up their feelings saying: "The volume of complex student behaviour and lack of external support is becoming unmanageable. Making everything an individual school problem to fix is a ridiculous approach. We need system leadership to support schools in a range of complex areas."

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