Teacher shortage problem reveals investment need

The latest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *Teaching and Learning Survey* (TALIS) has made for some disturbing reading.

TALIS revealed that Australia ranks third among the worst-performing countries for teacher shortages, particularly in public schools, posing serious risks to equity and quality education delivery.

As AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said, the findings are a stark warning about the impact of teacher shortages across the country.

The *TALIS* data also showed that shortages were most severe in schools with high levels of student disadvantage and special education needs, which are the very schools that rely most on stable, experienced teaching staff.

The data confirms Australian teachers are working an average of 52 hours per week, well above the OECD average of 40.8 hours, with almost two-thirds of teachers experiencing high stress and more than 80 per cent say their job negatively impacts their mental health.

The *TALIS* report states that: “Teachers are more likely to exhibit effective practices, experience high wellbeing and job satisfaction, and remain in the profession when they have sufficient support to face the challenges at hand”.

The *TALIS* 2024 findings for Australia included:

- Teacher shortages in Australia are significantly above the OECD average. 41.9 per cent of lower secondary principals in Australia report that a shortage of teachers in their school hinders the quality of instruction – almost double the OECD average of 23.1 per cent.
- 58.1 per cent of principals in public schools say they have a shortage of teachers (the third-highest rate in the OECD) – more than double the OECD average of 24.9 per cent.
- Shortages in public schools are 33.3 percentage points higher than in private schools – only 24.8 per cent of private school principals report teacher shortages.
- Teacher shortages are far more prevalent in disadvantaged schools. In schools where more than 30 per cent of students come from socio-economically disadvantaged homes, 66.9 per cent of principals report shortages – second only to Bahrain and more than double the OECD average of 31.7 per cent.
- 64.6 per cent of teachers in Australia say that they experience stress in their work “quite a bit” or “a lot”. This is significantly higher than the average of all *TALIS* 2024 countries of 43.4 per cent.
- 82.4 per cent of Australian lower secondary teachers and 81.4 per cent of Australian primary school teachers said that their job negatively impacts on their mental health, the second highest country.

At the SSTUWA we have been beating this drum for a long time. Our own *State of our Schools* surveys have repeatedly shown the massive impact workload and a lack of respect for the profession is having on teachers and school leaders.

Additionally, the 120 per cent increase since 2020 of teacher resignations, as reported by the Department of Education (DoE) in its 2024/25 Annual Report, provides a timely reminder to government as to how far we still need to go until public educators feel a difference is being made.

Even as teachers are departing the profession more pressure is heaped on those who remain.

The SSTUWA fully agrees that every child has a right to access a quality education and our public schools have a long-standing, proven commitment of inclusion for all.

Our school leaders and teachers will cautiously welcome the intent and principles that the findings from the School Education Act Review released by the Minister have revealed, but like their union will insist on the funding and practical support that is critically required to actually deliver results.

The findings of the review have the potential to be transformative for our public education system if managed and resourced

correctly.

However, the review is also another reminder of the ever-growing complexities in our classrooms and the increased demands being placed on already overloaded systems and people in our schools. Unless there is a substantial investment of new funding into WA public schools, then our public education system is far from being able to accommodate many of the review findings.

There are a growing list of added pressures coming to bear on a creaking public education system that has been hamstrung by over a decade of underfunding and the removal of proper support services that our schools and staff so desperately need.

We must be mindful of the current workload crisis facing our teachers and school leaders when considering the recommendations.

A full, transparent and honest debate across both community and government is needed to ensure issues and concerns are completely understood and that the required investment and support services are fully costed and addressed.



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