Independent Education Union of Australia

Speaks on...

1 April 2025

Pleas from school principals must be heard during this election

The annual study into school principal health, safety and wellbeing has once again highlighted the need for urgent action to better support school leaders dealing with escalating workload pressures and health and safety threats in schools.

The Australian Catholic University (ACU) study included 2182 principals from across the Catholic, independent and state school sectors. The survey confirmed worsening staff shortages – with over 50% of principals intending to resign their positions due to adverse working conditions.

In the midst of the current federal election campaign, pleas from our school leaders for greater support and resourcing should be elevated to top order issues for all political candidates.

The ACU study and media reports confirm the disturbing experiences of many IEU members striving to teach and lead under workload pressures and threats to their health and safety.

Half of principals reported threats of physical violence. Rates of depression and work-related anxiety suffered by principals well exceed rates in the general population and other occupations.

The survey found school leaders work on average 54.5 hours per week, with the highest workloads reported in Catholic and independent schools.

A female Catholic school principal shared this telling response to the survey:

> *"The workload, expectations and stress levels of the Principal job are becoming unsustainable across the board. Something has to change or the system will fall over."*

The study's recommendations call on governments and school employers to address the heavy workloads that are the key driver behind work related stress and career burnout.

The federal election on 3 May provides an opportunity to force these issues to the forefront of the public debate on future education policies. Our teachers and principals deserve no less.

While school employers have the ultimate responsibility to reduce workload, the next federal government must also commit to the deep and widespread reform program needed in schools:

1. The federal government should play a stronger role in tackling excessive compliance tasks and the duplication of administrative work. This can be driven by streamlining requirements from government departments and authorities, as well as imposing more rigorous obligations on school employers to demonstrate meaningful change.
2. Work impact assessments should be extended to all areas of education policy to break the cycle of ever creeping workloads and unsustainable work demands.

The ACU report concludes - *Australia risks losing an entire generation of school leaders without urgent reforms*. The policies of federal election candidates can start the reform process right now.

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IEU - represents 75,000 teachers, principals and support staff in faith based, community & independent schools, pre-schools, kindergartens and early childhood education centres and post-secondary centres across Australia.