Addressing the Impact of Federal Education Policies and Sector Reforms on Teacher Workload

Unsustainable workloads and work intensification in schools remain the primary reasons behind record low levels of teacher recruitment and retention. These challenges demand a wide-ranging response from school employers, educational authorities and governments.

While employers hold primary responsibility for addressing workload issues, the federal government has a crucial role to play. It must ensure that education policies and reforms do not further contribute to the already excessive demands placed on teachers and school leaders.

Initial progress with workload protections: a successful BFSA case study

The development of the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (BFSA) Teacher Workload Impact Assessment Tool in 2024 marks a valuable step toward integrating workload impact assessments across all federal education policies and reforms.

Created in collaboration with the IEU and other education unions, the tool will be applied to all BFSA initiatives, helping to ensure that new measures do not add to the workload burden on teachers and school leaders.

Workload assessments to be extended to all education policy initiatives

Workload impact assessments, modelled on the BFSA approach, should be applied across all areas of education policy to curb the growing burden of excessive compliance, data collection and administrative tasks – many of which duplicate existing work.

Workload assessment processes should be developed in consultation with teachers and their unions to ensure they are fit for purpose across various areas of education policy.

As a general standard, these assessments should include:

- A thorough evaluation to determine the immediate and long-term impact on the workloads of staff before any new initiative is implemented or put into operation;
- An analysis of the additional release time, administrative support, training, or staffing required for effective implementation;
- An evaluation of the impact of the proposed change on the continuity of student learning;
- Confirmation from employers and government that new initiatives will not proceed if detrimental workload impacts are identified and cannot be effectively offset or mitigated through additional time, resources, or support for staff; and
- The establishment of a monitoring schedule to address unintended, unanticipated, or detrimental impacts as the initiative progresses.

School level protections: the case for work assessments in collective agreements

IEU members have successfully negotiated workload impact studies and local level assessments in many collective bargaining agreements across the country.

These agreement provisions, implemented at both system and school levels, serve as a vital complement to federal government workload assessments. The provisions help protect against the frequent rollout of school-level changes that overlook workload impacts and often lead to conflicting priorities and confusion, as multiple agendas compete within the school workplace.

The key elements and principles of national workload assessments should also apply to local school level decision making and be embedded in collective agreements to ensure consistent and enforceable protections for school staff.

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