

22 March 2024

School principals at breaking point under oppressive workloads

The union representing over 17,000 principals, teachers and staff across Queensland and Northern Territory non-government schools has called for urgent action to address the health and wellbeing of school leaders.

Independent Education Union – Queensland and Northern Territory (IEU-QNT) Branch Secretary Terry Burke said the findings of the most recent Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey reinforced the need for significant and and urgent interventions by government and school employers.

“Every year, the results from the Australian Catholic University’s (ACU) Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey reinforce the dire situation being experienced by school principals,” Mr Burke said.

“The job school principals do is like no other; demanding and ever-present, and school principals are being asked to do more with less,” Mr Burke said.

“The latest Survey findings are alarming, with nearly 43 per cent of school principals triggering a “red flag” email in 2023, indicating risk of self-harm occupational health problems, or serious impact on their quality of life.”

Mr Burke said unsurprisingly, heavy workloads and lack of time focus on teaching and learning remained the top two sources of stress for principals.

“More than half of Principal survey respondents intend to quit or retire early, concerned with lack of time to focus on their core duties as a school leader.

“This is compounded by the national shortage of teachers unwilling to work under the current workload regime.”

“Like teachers, our school leaders are forced to do too much work unrelated to their core duties, severely impacting their health and wellbeing,” Mr Burke said.

“Both government and school employers need to take urgent action on the issue of workload and work intensification in our schools by putting in place meaningful reforms to tackle the paperwork, red tape and obsession with data which are sucking the life out of our profession.

Mr Burke said the most obvious intervention to be made is an increased provision of other senior administrators and specialist staff across the entire range of what is now seen to be the job of a principal.

“Compliance, student management programs, budgeting functions and the like need urgent additional resourcing,” he said.

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The Independent Education Union – Queensland and Northern Territory (IEU-QNT) represents more than 17,000 teachers, school support staff, principals, early childhood education and VET and RTO employees across Queensland and the Northern Territory. www.ieuqnt.org.au