



## New South Wales Teachers Federation

a branch of the Australian Education Union  
AEU NSW Teachers Federation Branch ABN 86 600 150 697



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In reply please quote: 76/2019/JD/jl

Dear Colleague

### **RE: Prioritising teaching and learning: A guide to addressing workload in schools**

In 2018, teachers in NSW public schools engaged with their union through a research project commissioned by Federation and conducted by the University of Sydney and Curtin University. Researchers received 18,234 responses from teachers, executives and principals and findings were reported in the final report, *Understanding work in schools: The foundation of teaching and learning* (search 'Understanding work in schools' at [news.nswtf.org.au](http://news.nswtf.org.au)).

The report leaves no doubt that teachers value teaching and communicating with and supporting students as their most important work. Since the introduction of Local Schools, Local Decisions in 2012, more than 90 per cent of teachers, executives and principals reported significant increases in the complexity of work, and the most significant increases in workload related to the collection, analysis and reporting of data and administrative tasks. Many of these demands stem from the cuts to almost 700 staff employed by the Department to provide systemwide support to schools.

#### **Federation action on the report**

Federation actively pursued the issues raised by teachers in relation to the initial findings (released in May 2018) and the final report with Minister for Education Rob Stokes and the Department. Regular updates on the progress of our representations were reported to members.

Over many months, from June until December, Federation met with the Deputy Secretary, Schools Operations and Performance and the Deputy Secretary, Education Services to address the issues raised in the report and peruse strategies members identified as most helpful in supporting their work, reducing the burden of administrative and compliance tasks and focussing on teaching and learning. Including:

1. Acknowledging the professional judgement of teachers, executives and principals by developing protocols for the collection, recording and analysis of data to eliminate processes that are unnecessary, cumbersome and extremely time consuming.
2. Ensuring there is consultation prior to any significant change, reform or initiative to ensure it has educational value to determine the time and resources necessary to support effective implementation in schools.
3. More effective system-level planning to prevent imposing competing workload demands in schools and unrealistic time frames.
4. Providing more teacher consultancy support for curriculum and other program implementation.

The Minister's response was to write to Federation on 1 June, 2018. "I share your concerns that a teacher's core role of educating children ... can be adversely affected by their administrative burden" and "reducing this burden is one of my highest priorities".

Initial discussions with the Department addressed some urgent issues raised in comments in the survey by members relating to PLAN2, the A-Z tool, HSC Monitoring and VET. The aim was to remove, clarify and/or reduce the requirements so that the activities were managed in a way that was less time consuming, cumbersome or resource intensive.

Resulting from these discussions the Department decided to produce a special edition of *School Biz*, “Reducing the Administrative Burden”, published on 7 December 2018. This edition of *School Biz* acknowledges the concerns raised in *Understanding work in Schools* that high workload from increased administrative and compliance requirements placed on schools has obstructed their focus on teaching and supporting students.

Secretary Mark Scott wrote, under the heading “Reducing the administrative burden”:

*In this special edition, we focus on Helping you optimise time for the work that matters most.*

*As the year draws to a close I want to share with you the work taking place across the department to strengthen and streamline support for our teachers and principals and free up time to do the work that matters most, educations and supporting the children and young people across schools in NSW.*

*Within our department, I have consistently stated there are two types of jobs; those helping the students learn every day and the rest of us who work to support those creating great teaching and learning environments. With this in mind there is a need for those of us supporting teaching and learning to work towards increasing the time for principals and teachers to focus on teaching and learning activities that directly impact student outcomes.*

*This edition of SchoolBiz is focused on our commitment to reducing the administrative burden and better supporting you by delivering systems, solutions and policies that have teachers and principals at the centre. This SchoolBiz will outline what has already been delivered, the work that is in progress and a snapshot of what is coming in 2019.*

*While there has been good progress we recognise there is a lot more to do and I will continue to prioritise this work in 2019.*

In Article 2, the Department describes “a school-centred governance model” based on “eight key principles”:

- Students at the centre
- With schools, not to schools
- Make a difference not a change
- Better than last time, every time
- Common sense
- Do it less, do it better
- Keep it simple
- School time counts.

These principles when taken together make it clear that the professional judgement of teachers, executives and principals must be considered in relation to changes to policies, procedures, educational initiatives and other matters that are “rolled out” to schools. Consultation will be necessary in order to determine that the eight principles are applied prior to the “roll out”.

The “eight principles” of the “schools-centred governance model” should also be applied to the work within schools. The principles are consistent with the concept of developing protocols around work activities such as evidence and data collection recommended by members.

If the evaluation of various work activities in schools points to processes that don’t, for example, “keep it simple”, “do it less, do it better”, “put students at the centre” then these activities should be reviewed in consultation with staff to ensure the principles are applied.

The report identified the problems associated with the volume and rapidity of change imposed on schools. Members identified as a priority the need for “more effective system-level planning to prevent imposing competing workload demands on schools and/or unrealistic timeframes” as identified by members in the survey and final report.

Article 2 states that the Department will phase in “17 weeks of change — free periods during 2019 and 2020”. The details about how this will operate are unclear. However, this process shows the Department has responded to Federation’s call for better system-level planning. The school-centred governance model and the change to free periods are aiming to “improve the quality and reduce the number of roll outs to schools”.

Article 1 of the special edition lists work including the A-Z tool, compliance activities around tree audits, emergency and bushfire management that schools are no longer required to do. There is also a list of improvements related to technological software systems and other processes that the Department claims will “maximise teaching time” and let schools focus “on supporting their core business of supporting improved student outcomes”. The effectiveness of these “improvements” will need to be evaluated by schools in terms of whether they support the eight key principles.

Article 4 of the special edition of *School Biz* lists a range of strategies to support teachers’ professional growth. This includes the appointment of “50 literacy and numeracy advisers and 30 new curriculum consultants” from 2019, acknowledging the need to rebuild system-level support for schools. This additional support responds, in part, to our call for the Department to restore the non-school-based teaching positions that were cut under Local Schools, Local Decisions.

Here are links to the *School Biz* articles, if you are interested in reading further:

Article 1: How are we maximising-time-for-teaching-and-learning?

<https://beta.dec.nsw.gov.au/schoolbiz/issues/year-2018-issue49/special-edition-part-1-maximising-time-for-teaching-and-learning>

Article 2: We are ensuring-students-are at the centre and our school’s time is protected.

<https://beta.dec.nsw.gov.au/schoolbiz/issues/year-2018-issue49/special-edition-part-2-ensuring-students-are-at-the-centre>

Article 3: How has the School Leadership Strategy supported our schools?

<https://beta.dec.nsw.gov.au/schoolbiz/issues/year-2018-issue49/special-edition-part-3-better-services-and-support-for-school-leaders>

Article 4: How are we supporting our teachers in their professional growth?

<https://beta.dec.nsw.gov.au/schoolbiz/issues/year-2018-issue49/special-edition-part-4-striving-for-excellence-progress-report>

Federation continues to participate, along with other groups, in the taskforce established by the Minister in November 2018 to reduce the administrative burden.

Federation will continue to meet with the Department to pursue workload issues raised by members with a particular focus on work that is inconsistent with the eight principles. To this end, we have developed a guide for members raising workload issues as a right and responsibility and how a workplace committee can tackle the issue together.

John Dixon



General Secretary



# PRIORITISING TEACHING AND LEARNING

## A guide to addressing workload issues in schools

### RAISING WORKLOAD ISSUES: A MEMBER'S RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY

The *Understanding work in schools: the foundation of teaching and learning* report exposes the shared concerns of teachers, executive and principals of excessive administrative and compliance workload that is obstructing the focus on teaching and learning.

Consultation is the key to engaging teachers, executives and principals in decision making about their work. Dialogue about policies, procedures and other departmental requirements is important in developing effective school-based processes and prioritising teaching and learning.

#### Right

All teachers in school and non-school-based positions have both a right and a responsibility to exercise and assert their professional opinion.

The Department's Code of Conduct clearly sets out the right of all teachers to speak up and their right to be listened to in the workplace:

*In dealing with other people, you should be able to accommodate and tolerate different opinions and perspectives, and sort out your disagreements by rational discussion.*

*Rational discussion presupposes that there is open communication and the freedom to voice another point of view.*

*Managers should be open to constructive questions or concerns regarding their instructions. They have a responsibility to respond appropriately.*

#### Responsibility

All teachers in school and non-school-based positions have a responsibility to listen to others and to speak up about their individual and collective work.

Teachers, as professionals and educators, have a responsibility to share their opinion and raise concerns about decisions in the workplace that affect teaching and learning. This includes considering whether the time spent on an initiative is time well spent. A culture of dialogue and consultation will reduce inefficient or overly burdensome work practices that reduce the quality of teaching and learning.

It is for this reason that speaking out and listening to others is not only a right but also a responsibility of every professional. To undertake an activity or program that is believed or known to be inefficient without speaking up is an abrogation of our professional duty.

The special edition of *School Biz* (7 December 2018) describes the "schools-centred governance model" based on eight key principles:

- Students at the centre
- With schools, not to schools
- Make a difference not a change
- Better than last time, every time
- Common sense
- Do it less, do it better
- Keep it simple
- School time counts.

The stated purpose includes that "our school's time is protected" and that "every minute that our teachers, principals and schools can focus on their core business of supporting improved student outcomes is critical".

These principles should be applied to any proposed initiative or review of current work. Such reviews and initiatives themselves may be generated by teachers. The principles are particularly useful for evaluating and planning to implement any departmental requirement, and guide teachers in exercising their responsibility and right to engage in professional discussions about their work and workload.

It is when the responsibility to speak up and be listened to is circumvented that members, through their workplace representatives, have the ability to organise a union intervention to assert their right to do so.



# PRIORITISING TEACHING AND LEARNING

## A guide to addressing workload issues in schools

### WORKPLACE COMMITTEES — TACKLING WORKLOAD TOGETHER

The 7 December 2018 special edition of *School Biz* commences with a statement from Secretary Mark Scott:

*Within our department I have consistently stated there are two types of jobs: those helping students learn every day and the rest of us who work to support those creating great teaching and learning environments. With this in mind there is a need for those of us supporting teaching and learning to work towards increasing time for principals and teachers to focus on teaching and learning activities that directly impact student outcomes.*

Many of the concerns raised in the report *Understanding work in schools: The foundation of teaching and learning* points to issues arising from excessive administrative demands on schools and insufficient support for schools, obstructing teachers from their focus on teaching and learning.

The report also identified a lack of support from the Department.

This statement and the “eight principles” of the “school-centred governance model” provide a framework to consider all work in schools.

The principles are useful for evaluating and planning, to implement any departmental policy, procedure, initiative or any other requirement where members have raised concerns that have not been resolved within the school.

Federation training for workplace committees recommends a three-step approach to resolving problems. This can be applied to problems associated with workload.

- What is wrong?
- What can we do?
- What will we do?

The role of the committee is to guide people through the process, help them find the information they need and work towards a resolution of the problem.

#### What is wrong?

- What are the details of the problem?
- Do the concerns relate to a particular work activity? Is the activity a requirement of the Department in a policy, procedure, guideline or initiative?
- Where are the requirements set out? Have the requirements been provided in writing to members? Is the activity useful and efficient?
- Has there been consultation around how the eight principles can be applied to the activity? Is the activity inconsistent with any of the principles?
- Is there sufficient support from the Department to the school to address the problem? How could the school be better supported?
- You may wish to discuss the problem with your Organiser.

#### What can we do?

- What are the possible options to deal with the problem? A range of options should be considered as to how the problem may be resolved.
- This could include changing the activity to make it more time efficient and manageable, requesting additional support and/or resources from the Department, or collectively deciding not to undertake it.
- The answers to various questions in relation to policies, procedures and resources, the application of the eight principles will assist in considering the options.
- You should discuss options with your Organiser.

#### What will we do?

- Seek advice from your Organiser.
- Collectively decide on the type of action that will assist in resolving the problem in a way that supports members and is supported by members. Many problems may be resolved within a school by working towards an agreed solution.
- When required, collectively demand more support and/or resources from the Department. If the problem has not been resolved, Federation Representatives should seek further advice from the Organiser in relation to options for action.