

It's been a busy time in the industrial side of education, with new awards for all School and TAFE teachers currently being settled.

On Thursday December 8, all teachers are called to attend a meeting to hear the terms of a new salaries and conditions agreement. Members attending meetings will then be asked to vote for or against the proposed agreement, which will determine the salaries and working conditions for all public school teachers in NSW.

Federation is instructing schools to offer minimal supervision during these meetings, ensuring that students can arrive at school as normal. Meetings are scheduled to commence at 8:45 AM and are expected to conclude with enough time for teachers to return to normal lessons by 10am.

Attendance at these meetings is crucial, as this vote will not only determine the salaries and conditions of all teachers in public schools, but these meetings will also be debating and voting on propositions for further actions around workload and related issues in schools.

Information has been emailed to Federation Representatives, Women's Contacts and Workplace Committee members, as well as an email to all members, with links to lists of venues and further information on the Federation's websites. Teachers should check with their local Fed Rep for further information.

On the TAFE front, the ballot to agree to the new Enterprise Agreement is due to close at 11:59pm on Thursday, December 1st.

After nearly 18 months of difficult negotiations, with one earlier award being rejected, and a successful vote to endorse industrial action, this proposed award offers TAFE teachers a 2.5% salary increase with no change in working conditions. This agreement has come out of a very difficult, sometime hostile, industrial environment during which time TAFE has suffered at the hands of the NSW Government's Smart and Skilled policy.

While the agreement includes no changes to working conditions, TAFE NSW did send out a copy of the agreement that had changes in the language that affected key working conditions in clause 18. They have since corrected their error with a letter confirming that this clause should remain the same as in previous awards. More information and a copy of that letter can be found online at www.nswtf.org.au/tafeea16

Federation is encouraging TAFE teachers to vote yes in this new ballot, and accept the agreement.

Recently the results of the Trends in International Maths and Science Study, known as TIMSS, were released. If you've seen any media on this story you'll have no doubt read that Australian students achievement in maths and science have declined rapidly, dropping as many as ten places down the international rankings when compared to other countries. A particular favourite of the media has been to point out that students in Kazakhstan are now out performing Australian students in these areas.

Simon Birmingham has used this report to once again state his mantra that extra funding is not the solution to issues in educational attainment, and that we must instead implement teaching practices that have been shown to work.

Well, just as it's a well-known idiom that there are lies, damn lies and statistics, in the world of educational policy, there are also many different ways to read a set of test results.

While Australia may have declined in international rankings, student achievement against the standards used by TIMSS hasn't changed all that much at all. In 2011, the first time Australia participated in this particular international assessment, in the area of mathematics year four students achieved a mean result of 516. In the 2015, this result was 517 – actually a slight improvement.

Meanwhile in Kazakhstan in year 4 mathematics, in 2011 students scored 501, while in 2015 they scored 544 – an incredible leap.

So while Australia's international rankings may have dropped, it's a result of other nations making significant improvements in their education systems rather than a sign of some dramatic and disastrous decline in our own levels of achievement.

Similarly on the funding front – The Gonski review called for billions of dollars in increased funding to Australia's schools to address inequity and inequality that impacts on education attainment – the goal being to continue to achieve growth in student learning outcomes across the country.

But by the time students would have sat the TIMSS tests in 2015, students would have had only one full year of increased funding in schools, being 2014, and then only 3% of the Gonski funding being rolled out, and again only in schools in those states that were actually using that funding for Education. The full funding package not due to be in schools until 2019, and it is these years of funding that Simon Birmingham seems determined to cut – even if it means using a rather creative reading of international test results to justify it.