

Additional permanent teachers will boost quality teaching and learning

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Increasing the number of permanent teaching positions in the state's public schools was the surest way to provide adequate classroom relief for teachers, address the high number of temporary teachers in the system and address the increasingly complex nature of student needs, Federation's Annual Conference was told today.

Acting Deputy President Henry Rajendra told delegates that increases in recurrent funding in the NSW system — \$1 billion allotted this year — had “not translated to a systemic provision of teaching and learning programs staffed by additional permanent teachers”.

Mr Rajendra said using the additional funding for more permanent teachers would reduce the teaching load of every single primary and secondary teacher and provide a form of “inbuilt relief”.

“The casual teaching shortage is a misleading title...some would think we just need more casual teachers,” he said. “There is no legion of casual teachers in the city waiting to be unlocked and sent to all four corners of the state. It doesn't exist.

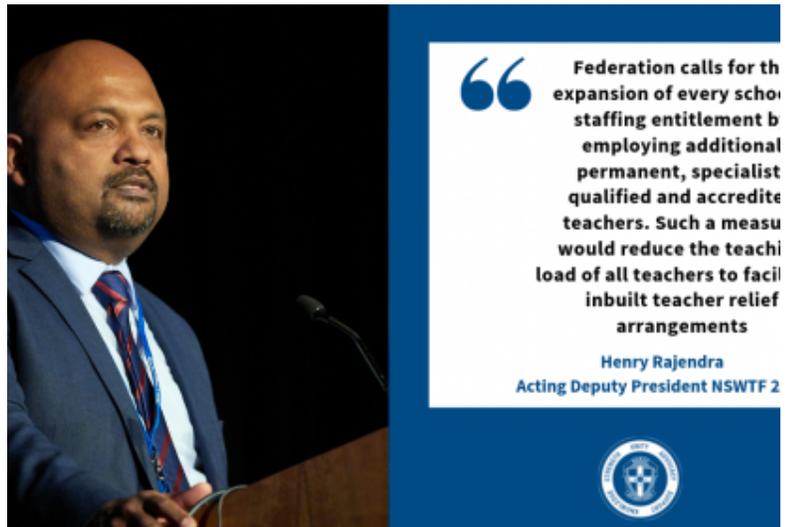
“What we need to do is have the inbuilt relief in our schools by way of additional permanent teachers. I would strongly argue that's a better recruitment strategy than saying, ‘Well here's a temporary block for you for half a year’. We have got to walk away from the notion of day-to-day relief as a way of supporting quality teaching and learning.”

Mr Rajendra told delegates Federation had modelling that showed additional recurrent funding in the system had the ability to drastically reduce workload.

“We showed the Department some of our modelling that shows you can at least double the release from face-to-face for every single primary school teachers in this state,” he said. “The doubling from two hours to four hours for primary and at least reduce the teaching load of high school teachers by two periods per week.

“[The Department has] the capacity, the additional funding within the system to deliver on it. Quite frankly there are too many temporary teachers employed in our system that should be in permanent positions.”

Conference called for the expansion of every school's staffing entitlement by employing additional, permanent, specialist, qualified and accredited teachers, which was a central tenet of a “stable, high quality, high equity” public schools system.



Mr Rajendra's report to conference outlined the detrimental role played by the State Government's Local Schools, Local Decisions policy.

He described the policy as providing a "convergence of pain" for members, with increased administrative and compliance tasks that are extraneous to teaching and learning amid the Department's meaningless preoccupation with data.

"We maintain that as long as [Local Schools, Local Decisions] is a live policy of the Department and this Government that this is the greatest threat to permanency in our system, the greatest threat to the high quality, high equity that we stand for in terms of a public school system," Mr Rajendra said.

He also told Conference that the provision of public preschool education in NSW is among the worst of any state or territory, despite the importance of the sector in identifying disability and disadvantage through early intervention. Of all the early childhood education service types available in the state, government preschools accounted for just 5 per cent, with enrolment following a similar pattern.

"What does this mean for our system? The less we are able to engage our three and four year olds in public preschooling, the greater pressure on primary and secondary [schools]," Mr Rajendra said.

"And you know those kids, those kids that had behaviour issues, the kids that have disabilities, where there was not adequate early intervention. We're setting these kids up for failure. The other extreme, a lot of these kids with disability are ending up in gaol. The pressure is overwhelming and the pressure on Aboriginal kids is unbearable."

It was for this reason, Mr Rajendra said, there was a strong connection between the push to increase the number of permanent teachers and the lack of public preschool provision, because of the pressure the preschool sector can put on primary schools.

He said there was a need for Federation to embark on a deeper broader campaign about better provision of a free public preschool education.

Federation will also seek improvements to the Staffing Agreement, including the protection and expansion of school staffing entitlements to the development of agreed regulations for head teacher classifications that ensure consistency, measures to increase transfers, the restoration of the list of eligible accredited teachers as a reliable, operational means for centrally filling vacancies, and the protection of rural and remote incentives.