

'See yourself as part of the big picture'

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The introduction of release from face-to-face teaching for infants/primary teachers in the late 1980s is a memorable moment for Paul Regan, because it changed his working conditions for the better.

"That two hours per week became very important," the administrative secretary of the Retired Teachers Association said. "It was foundational in improving teaching and learning conditions. It allowed me to become a better teacher in lesson preparation and marking, and gave me time to talk with my colleagues."

The improvement was secured due to Federation members' strong commitment to the campaign over a decade, including strike action on several occasions.

Another successful Federation campaign that Paul said changed his working life for the better was the introduction of the four-term school year (previously three terms) from 1987, reducing terms to about 10 weeks.

"This made the teaching and learning cycle easier to manage," Paul said. "It also made teaching more effective, as students' concentration was difficult at the end of a 13 to 14 week term."



Paul said all Federation members have a responsibility to work together to improve working conditions as they play a part in improving teaching and learning outcomes.

"Member participation in Federation workplace committees is crucial," he said. "A strong union presence makes it easier to resolve problems at the local level."

Paul also recommends that members attend their local association meetings. "Often what's happening in another school is crucial in your school and you can network with other Federation members."

Get more involved in Federation's campaign activities, he added. "See yourself as part of the bigger picture."

He fondly recalls participating in union activities alongside like-minded people.

"There was a one-day strike in the first week of the 1981 school year followed by a two-day stoppage a week later, over wages. The magnitude of support affirmed my ideas and feelings. It took me away from the singular and gave me a sense of the plural — that my colleagues felt the same way."

In 1988, teachers filled the Domain along with parents and students to oppose the Greiner/Metherell government's plans for schools and TAFE: axing teaching and office staff positions, increasing class sizes, selling assets and cutting capital works funding. "The rally was wonderful. You knew you were not the only one who was angry. There was unity of belief, and on that day, unity of action."

Paul joined the union when it was compulsory but said he would have joined regardless, for altruistic reasons. He taught in western and south-western Sydney schools between 1979 and 2014. During that time he was a Fed Rep for at least 15 years, attended association meetings and participated in Federation activities.

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Retired Teachers Association

Teachers who have been financial members of Federation until their date of retirement have 12 months from their retirement date to join the Retired Teachers Association. Colleagues who wish to join but have been retired for longer can apply, in writing, to the General Secretary.

The association meets regularly at Teachers Federation House, 23-33 Mary Street, Surry Hills to discuss issues relating to teaching, unionism and social justice. A light lunch is served at 12.15pm before a guest speaker at 1pm and then the general meeting starts at 2pm. The association also organises excursions and luncheons.

Visit <http://rtansw.blogspot.com/> for the next meeting date.