

Australia among world's top nations for teacher admin load and stress

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More than half of Australian secondary teachers report high levels of administrative work, which takes time away from preparing for classes and is a major source of stress, an international survey has found.

And almost one quarter of the Australian teachers surveyed said they experience “a lot of stress” at school.

The poll results for Australian teachers are above the OECD average for those categories and among the highest of those nations that were surveyed.

The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), an international survey of school teachers, school leaders and the learning environment in schools, released in March, also revealed that these were significant factors behind teachers leaving the profession.



Federation has long campaigned for the dismantling of the NSW Government's Local Schools, Local Decisions policy. It has resulted in rising, excessive workloads for teachers and principals — brought on by managerial obsessions with compliance regimes and data collection without systems support — which is taking them from the core business of teaching and learning.

The proportion of Australian teachers who said their attention to core business was compromised by too much administrative work causing stress stood at 55 per cent — the 10th highest in the OECD where the average was 49 per cent. Too much administrative work was identified as the major source of stress among Australian secondary teachers.

This result was borne out in Federation's landmark report *Understanding Work in Schools: The Foundation of Teaching and Learning*, a survey returned by more than 18,000 Federation members.

More than 97 per cent of them reported an increase in administrative duties over the five years up to 2018, the same period as the TALIS report.

“There has been significant growth in overall hours, with 87 per cent of survey respondents reporting an increase over the past five years since the implementation of devolved schooling through the Local Schools, Local Decisions policy,” the report stated.

“Classroom teachers most commonly report working upwards of 50 hours per week, which places teachers' work in the category of ‘very long’ working hours.”

The OECD's TALIS paper revealed 24 per cent of secondary teachers in Australia reported experiencing "a lot of stress" at work — compared with 18 per cent for the OECD — which was the seventh highest percentage among the responding nations.

The survey also revealed Australian teachers believe they have less professional autonomy over classroom content and assessment than in other OECD countries, but the survey indicated there is more professional collaboration in our schools than a majority of countries.

However, a majority of teachers in the OECD do not believe their profession is valued by society.

Whether a career is seen as prestigious or not can have an impact on the kinds of candidates that enter the profession and the job satisfaction of those already in it, the TALIS report stated.

"An average of only 26 per cent of teachers in OECD countries and economies participating in TALIS think that the work they do is valued by society," it said. "Longer-serving teachers are also more likely than their younger colleagues to say that the profession is undervalued, suggesting a degree of professional disillusionment as teachers progress along the career path."

On this issue, 45 per cent of secondary teachers in Australia believe their profession is held in high esteem, much higher than that average.

The Australian proportion is the third highest in the OECD, behind Korea (67 per cent) and Finland (58 per cent), and has increased from 39 per cent at the previous survey in 2013.

Administrative work and stress were identified as factors influencing teacher mobility and attrition in the profession.

National convenor of the Save Our Schools lobby Trevor Cobbold said the loss of teachers to the system can affect student achievement by disrupting the school climate and the curriculum.

"Attrition can also lead to significant financial costs for education systems because of the need to replace qualified teachers in affected schools," he said.

Of the teachers in Australia who reported to the TALIS, 22 per cent said they would like to leave teaching within the next five years compared with the OECD average of 25 per cent. Also, 25 per cent of our secondary teachers said they would like to move to another school if it was possible, compared with the OECD average of 20 per cent.

On average across the OECD, teachers who report experiencing stress in their work "a lot" are twice as likely as colleagues with lower levels of stress to report that they will stop working as teachers in the next five years.

In Australia, teachers who report experiencing stress at their work "a lot" are 90 per cent more likely to want to leave teaching in the next five years.

Australian teachers also reported lower levels of professional autonomy over determining the content of courses and student assessment than the average for the OECD. In Australia, 73 per cent of teachers reported having control over course content in their class, compared with 84 per cent on average across OECD countries.

Eighty-seven per cent have control over student assessment compared with 94 per cent for the OECD. However, 96 per cent have control over teaching methods, which is the same for the OECD.

Professional collaboration provides a foundation for effective teaching practices and although it is low across OECD countries, it is higher in Australia than in most OECD countries. In Australia, 39 per cent of teachers report participating in collaborative professional learning at least once a month compared with the OECD average of 21 per cent. This is the fourth highest percentage in the OECD.