

Students at risk due to a lack of school counsellors

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New research highlights the urgent need for more school counsellors in NSW with 98 per cent of teachers and 99 per cent of principals saying the number of students with mental health issues has increased in the last three years.

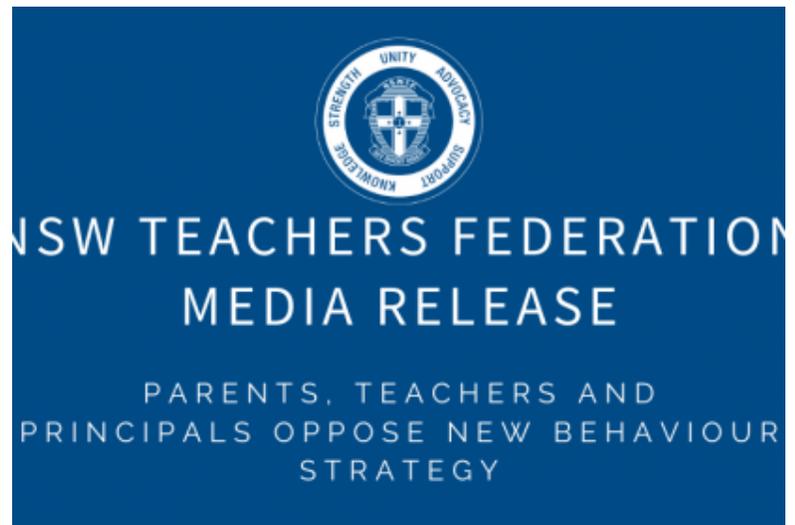
The study also revealed a quarter of students are waiting more than four weeks for counsellor support.

The results are contained in a poll of over 5,300 teachers and principals conducted by the NSW Teachers Federation between September 24 and October 1.

The poll also found:

Only 5 per cent believe the level of school counsellor support at their school is adequate.

Overall only 20 per cent of teachers and principals say a school counsellor is at their school every day - only 4 per cent of primary schools have a counsellor on site daily.



On average, over one quarter of students wait more than four weeks to see a school counsellor. The figure rises to 48 per cent for students in need of support in primary schools.

Bushfires, drought and COVID-19 are significant contributing factors. Ninety-one per cent of respondents said the pandemic has led to an increase in children with mental health concerns at their school.

A total of 98 per cent say reaching the level of one counsellor for 500 students should be an urgent priority.

NSW Teachers Federation President Angelo Gavrielatos said the results were deeply concerning and the NSW Government needed to act.

“This is a totally unacceptable situation. The waiting period for students to get access to a school counsellor must be so distressing for parents,” Mr Gavrielatos said.

“There was an overwhelming response to this survey from our members. Teachers and principals are deeply concerned that students cannot get the level of support students need.”

“Our school counsellors are dedicated, committed professionals doing all they can to meet the increasingly complex needs of our students. Their case load is totally unrealistic, unmanageable and unacceptable.”

“There is only one counsellor, on average, for around 750 students. That is totally inadequate given the

unprecedented increase we are seeing in the number of students with mental health needs.”

“It has been almost 20 years since it was recommended that the school counsellor to student ratio should not exceed 1:500.”

“Furthermore, in 2018 the NSW Government accepted a similar finding by a Parliamentary inquiry, yet there has been no plan and no timetable to reach the 1:500 benchmark.”

“This is a Government that says the mental health of students in schools is its number one priority in education. Reality indicates otherwise.”

“A total of 98 per cent of teachers and principals say reaching the 1:500 ratio should be an urgent priority for the Government.”

“The NSW Budget next month is a test for the NSW Government. It is an opportunity to show it understands the unprecedented situation in which schools and students find themselves.

“It is time for deeds, not words.”

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