

Welcome back

January 27, 2021

Welcome back to school year 2021. I hope you've had a restful break.

To those teachers beginning work for the first time, thank you for choosing to make a difference in our public schools and TAFEs. There is no more consequential profession, and none more skilled and dedicated than the teachers you will meet and work alongside in your career in our public education system.

I'm sure we are all grateful 2020 is behind us and we can start anew this year. This time 12 months ago, many of you were dealing with the aftermath of a summer of bushfires. In school communities across the state that meant great loss and ongoing trauma. With the lasting effects of those fires still on full display, it was only a short time until schools were shut down by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unfortunately, the pandemic is not behind us yet and it is impossible to know what this year will bring.

What we do know is, the teaching service will be forced to deal with the legacy of the coronavirus for many years to come due to disruptions to student learning and the impact it has had on the mental health and wellbeing of many children and families, including ourselves.

The intensive learning support funded by the NSW Government this year is welcome but it alone is not enough and there remains an urgent, and seriously overdue, need for additional school counsellors and specialist programs.

Federation priorities in 2021

The central focus of Federation in 2021 is our salaries and conditions of work.

It is indisputable that workloads cannot continue at the current unsustainable level and that salaries do not reflect your expertise and responsibilities or the value of your work.

To inform our demands to improve salaries and teaching and learning conditions, in February last year we commissioned the first inquiry since 2003 into the changing nature and value of teachers work in schools.

With extensive input from the profession and education experts, this independent inquiry examined the unprecedented changes that have affected the skills, responsibilities and workloads of teachers, executive staff and principals over the past 17 years.



They include a constant stream of new government policies and prescriptions, unimaginable changes in technology and the curriculum, the rising expectations of parents and society, and the growing complexity of student needs.

We await the findings and recommendations from the independent Inquiry, scheduled to be handed down on 20 February.

The membership is to ready itself for an unprecedented campaign

The need for an unprecedented campaign is only reinforced by the salaries announcement last November by the NSW Government.

Not content with trying to implement a 12-month wage freeze, the Government unveiled a plan to cap salary increases for teachers and all other public sector workers at a maximum of 1.5 per cent for at least the next three years.

This arbitrary cap ignores the need to significantly increase the salaries of the teaching service to recognise the increases in the skills and expertise required and the rapid intensification of the work done every day in our schools.

In addition to a reduction in face-to-face teaching loads and a reduction in administrative burdens, our salaries must reflect the reality that the work of teachers, executive staff and principals is far more demanding than it has ever been.

This is an essential part of making the profession more attractive so we can address the growing shortages of teachers and prepare for an unprecedented growth in student numbers over the next 20 years.

A 25 per cent enrolment increase, much of it concentrated in the west and south west of Sydney, will only add to the needs and complexity of the student population and will require thousands of additional teachers to be employed every year.

Campaigning together

We must speak with one voice, loudly and proudly, if we are to achieve an overdue reset to our salaries and conditions of work and, ultimately, the learning conditions of our students.

We have the opportunity to make a difference not only for teachers and students in schools across NSW now but also for all those who join the profession in the years ahead.