

To say this has been a challenging term would be an incredible understatement

March 07, 2022

During this term, I've travelled to many parts of the state and met with thousands of members. I want to thank all members, teachers and principals for the warm receptions I received. Across your faces and in your eyes, I could see and feel the apprehension, concern and exhaustion caused by the ongoing COVID pandemic, unsustainable workloads and the recent catastrophic floods. It left an indelible impression on me, during and after every visit.

Our greatest remedy remains the support we find in our collective, looking after one another in the face of a government that is totally out of touch with our schools and TAFE colleges, and the realities of the contemporary classroom. Let me assure you, we will continue to do everything to move this recalcitrant government to take the action needed in the best interest of the membership, our students and the communities we serve.

Salaries and workload

Regarding the teacher shortage crisis, the Government and the Education Department have reached a new level of denial, spin and cover-ups with a disgraceful attempt recently to censor principals from explaining to parents the severity of the teacher shortage and the effect it is having on student learning.

A senior official at the Department of Education wrote, "I don't want the media or various Members of Parliament picking up on this detail and attacking the Minister with it", in response to a brief regarding the teacher shortage. More concerned about the embarrassment it would cause the Government, their primary obligation to the Minister, not students, is now in writing.

Meanwhile, documents provided to State Parliament, reveal the Government and its Department know full well the terrible impact the teacher shortage is having on students across NSW. Classes are being split or merged on a scale previously unheard of. Students are being subjected to minimal supervision on hundreds of occasions a day due to growing teacher shortages.

The Government and its Department need to pack away the spin and lies. They know the causes of this crisis and therefore, by definition, the solution required. It is as plain as the reports sitting on their desks. We've had government report after government report, inquiry after inquiry, and most recently a Federal Government review confirmed, yet again, that unless we lift salaries and address crippling workloads, we won't be able to attract and retain the teachers we need now and into the future.

At its February meeting, Federation Council, consisting of 250 teachers and principals from across NSW, took the historic step and resolved to suspend industrial action during term 1 to give the Premier and the NSW Government an opportunity to engage in genuine negotiations with the union. This pause and act of good



faith provided the Government with an unparalleled opportunity to resolve the matters regarding teachers' salaries and workload by negotiation and mutual agreement, noting a resolution to these matters is beyond the purview of the Industrial Relations Commission due to restrictive laws introduced in 2012.

But time is running out for the Government; the Premier was advised in February that he had until the State Council meeting on 19 March. The resolution also made it crystal clear that unless the Government demonstrates that it is serious about providing improvements to working conditions and salary justice, noting that all options will have been exhausted, we will consider the full suite of options available to us, including the recommencement of industrial action in term 2.

The membership is to ready itself.

Federal election

By the time you receive this journal a federal election may have already been called. If not, the announcement will be just days away. Recognising the damage inflicted on public education — on our schools and TAFE campuses — there can be no doubt we can't afford another three years of a Morrison Government.

A decade on from the Gonski Review, public schools remain chronically underfunded with no path to receive their full funding level. For every \$1 the Commonwealth provides for a student in NSW public schools this year, \$3 is being provided for a student in NSW Catholic schools and almost \$2.50 to students in NSW independent schools.

Courtesy of the Coalition Governments in both Canberra and Macquarie Street, public schools are funded at only 88 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS). The SRS is not an aspirational target, it is the minimum considered necessary, as agreed by governments, to give every student the best chance to succeed. While private schools are funded at 106 per cent of their SRS, our students are being denied the funding they need and deserve.

Meanwhile, at TAFE, a decade of failed policies and cuts has either removed or made redundant the jobs of more than 6200 teachers and related employees. While this was happening, the Government's fire sale of TAFE campuses continued unabated. To date, they have sold off all, or part of, 20 campuses across NSW, with another 17 earmarked for sale.

We must continue the campaign to rebuild TAFE, support our teachers and ensure students receive the education and skills they need.

Make sure you join the campaign at rebuildwithTAFE.org.au. Stay safe, stay strong, stay union.