

Stokes prioritises administrative workload reduction

June 07, 2018

NSW Education Minister Rob Stokes says he shares “concerns that a teacher’s core role of educating children in the classroom can be adversely affected by the administrative burden” in a letter to Federation, dated 1 June.

This letter was in response to a briefing provided to the Minister’s Office by Federation’s Senior Officers about the initial results of the survey and research project “Understanding the work in schools — the foundation of teaching and learning”.

The Minister wrote: “Indeed the findings of the University of Sydney study — that 97.3 per cent of the 18,000 surveyed teachers have reported an increase in administrative duties over the past five years — highlights why reducing this administrative workload is one of my highest priorities.”

In addition to administrative demands, 96.4 per cent of members reported significant increases in demands for collection, analysis and reporting of data. These increases have occurred over the past five years since the introduction of Local Schools, Local Decisions in 2012.



The Minister has acted on the research findings stating: “I have instructed the Department to provide me with advice as to the best way in which we can work with stakeholders, including the NSW Teachers Federation to find workable solutions.”

After receiving this letter, Federation met with deputy secretaries Georgina Harrison and Murat Dizdar on 8 June. Federation discussed the initial findings of the research and survey related to administration and data collection.

These findings revealed a high level of concern around data collection, analysis and reporting as well as planning, implementing and providing evidence about departmental policies and procedures.

The researchers provided a sample of comments from the survey which illustrates these concerns:

- “Administrative tasks, box-ticking exercises and data-related menial tasks waste valuable preparation time and get in the way of delivering authentic learning.”
- “An excessive amount of detailed written reports and being inundated with new policies and procedures to understand and implement in a short amount of time.”

- “Paperwork is killing me. I am spending as much if not more time on data collection than on developing differentiated programs for teaching/learning.”
- “So much time is spent on accountability and proving what we are doing as a school that it feels that is the main work we do.”
- “I feel overworked at the expense of my students. Too much time taken to do tasks that do not make a significant difference to the outcomes of students.”

The survey also included a list of strategies, which members were asked to prioritise in terms of what would be most helpful and least helpful in supporting their work.

The findings in relation to this part of the survey, as well as the effect of excessive workload on teachers and teaching and learning, will not be available until the final report on the research is released at Annual Conference.

Although the priorities have not been established at this stage, Federation raised the relevant strategies including the need to:

- ensure that there is consultation prior to any significant change, reform or initiative
- provide more effective system-level planning to prevent imposing competing workload demands
- acknowledge the professional judgement of teachers, executives and principals by developing protocols around the collection/recording and analysis of data.

The Department agreed to schedule a number of meetings to discuss further findings and relevant strategies to reduce the administrative burden on schools.

A first step, from Federation’s point of view, will be for the Department to clarify their present requirements around data collection, analysis and reporting, and the evidence of implementation of policies and procedures.

Annual Conference will consider the final research report and the progress of the discussions with the Department in developing appropriate campaign strategies.

Joan Lemaire Deputy President