

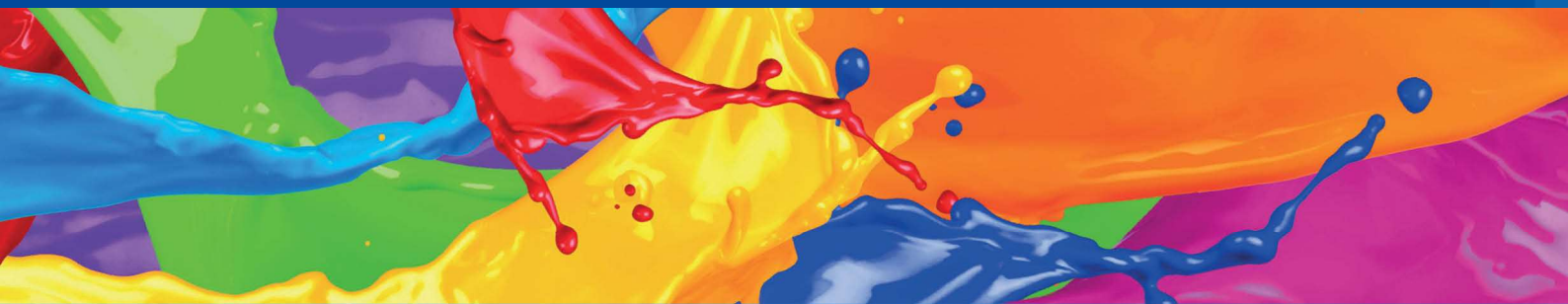
Teachers at breaking point

Why working in South Australian schools is getting tougher

Report to the Australian Education Union
South Australian Branch

Joel Windle
Anne Morrison
Sam Sellar
Rachael Squires
JohnPaul Kennedy
Claire Murray

November 2022



University of
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Centre for
Research in Educational
and Social Inclusion

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Contents

| | |
|---|-------------|
| List of tables | vii |
| List of figures | viii |
| Acronyms and abbreviations | ix |
| Executive summary | 1 |
| Key findings | 1 |
| Recommendations | 3 |
| 1. Introduction | 5 |
| Previous research | 5 |
| The changing conditions of teachers' work | 6 |
| Report structure | 7 |
| 2. Methodology | 8 |
| Survey | 8 |
| Interviews | 9 |
| 3. Demographic profile of respondents | 10 |
| Age | 10 |
| Gender | 10 |
| Professional role | 10 |
| Security of employment | 11 |
| Employment setting and time fraction | 13 |
| Site location and socioeconomic status | 14 |
| Years of teaching experience | 14 |
| Teaching out-of-field | 15 |
| 4. Workload and its distribution | 17 |
| Hours worked | 17 |
| 5. Changes in teachers' work over the past five years | 22 |
| Increasing complexity of work | 23 |
| Excessive administrative work | 24 |
| Increasing diversity of student needs and differentiated learning | 25 |
| Government responses to increased complexity | 28 |
| 6. Perceptions of working conditions | 29 |
| Competing demands from above | 31 |
| Workplace satisfaction | 31 |
| Professional standing | 35 |
| Commitment to equity and diversity under adverse conditions | 36 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 7. Impact of workload on health and wellbeing..... | 38 |
| Sources of stress | 39 |
| Attrition | 42 |
| 8. The impact of COVID | 45 |
| 9. Priorities for change | 47 |
| 10. Conclusion | 49 |
| 11. Recommendations | 50 |
| References..... | 52 |
| Appendix A: Group interview participants | 57 |
| Appendix B: Full tables..... | 58 |

List of tables

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 1: Age distribution of respondents..... | 10 |
| Table 2: Gender of respondents..... | 10 |
| Table 3: Employment status..... | 11 |
| Table 4: Employment status and teaching experience | 12 |
| Table 5: Employment time fraction..... | 13 |
| Table 6: Years of teaching experience - teachers and principals | 14 |
| Table 7: Out-of-field teaching by career phase..... | 16 |
| Table 8: Hours worked per week - teachers..... | 17 |
| Table 9: Hours spent on tasks other than face-to-face teaching | 18 |
| Table 10: Hours spent on tasks other than face-to-face teaching by site SES | 19 |
| Table 11: Reported changes in working conditions over the last 5 years | 22 |
| Table 12: Working conditions - teachers and principals | 29 |
| Table 13: Workplace satisfaction - teachers and principals | 32 |
| Table 14: Perceptions of equity and diversity at current site | 36 |
| Table 15: Workplace wellbeing - teachers and principals | 38 |
| Table 16: Sources of stress – teachers | 40 |
| Table 17 : Sources of stress – principals | 41 |
| Table 18: Reasons for considering leaving | 42 |
| Table 19: Intention to leave the profession | 43 |
| Table 20: Intention to leave teaching by career phase - excluding principals | 44 |
| Table 21: Impact of COVID-19 on the workplace | 45 |
| Table 22: Priorities for change - all respondents..... | 47 |
| Table 23: Profile of interview participants | 57 |
| Table 24: Reported changes in working conditions over the last 5 years (full table) | 58 |
| Table 25: Working conditions - teachers and principals (full table)..... | 59 |
| Table 26: Workplace satisfaction - teachers and principals (full table) | 60 |
| Table 27: Perceptions of equity and diversity at current site (full table)..... | 61 |
| Table 28: Workplace wellbeing - teachers and principals (full table) | 61 |
| Table 29: Sources of stress - teachers (full table)..... | 62 |
| Table 30: Sources of stress - principals (full table)..... | 62 |
| Table 31: Impact of COVID-19 on the workplace (full table) | 63 |

List of figures

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1: Position | 11 |
| Figure 2: Employment setting..... | 13 |
| Figure 3: Years of teaching experience - teachers..... | 15 |
| Figure 4: Time (in hours per week) spent on tasks related to stress..... | 20 |
| Figure 5: Reported changes in working conditions of the last 5 years..... | 23 |
| Figure 6: Working conditions - teachers and principals | 30 |
| Figure 7: Workplace satisfaction - teachers and principals | 33 |
| Figure 8: Perceptions of equity and diversity at current site | 37 |
| Figure 9: Workplace wellbeing - teachers and principals | 38 |
| Figure 10: Sources of stress - teachers | 40 |
| Figure 11: Sources of stress - principals..... | 41 |
| Figure 12: Reasons for considering leaving | 43 |
| Figure 13: Impact of COVID-19 on workplace..... | 45 |

Acronyms and abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| AITSL | Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership |
| ATWD | Australian Teacher Workforce Data |
| FTE | Full Time Equivalent |
| IESP | Inclusive Education Support Program |
| ITE | Initial Teacher Education |
| NAPLAN | National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy |
| NCCD | Nationally Consistent Collection of Data |
| NIT | Non-instructional time |
| OCOP | One Child One Plan (also called One Plan) |
| PISA | Programme for International Student Assessment |
| QDTP | Quality differentiated teaching practice |
| SEQTA | Saron Education Quality Teachers' Assistant (software package) |
| SES | Socioeconomic status |
| SSO | School Services Officer |
| TALIS | Teaching and Learning International Survey |

Executive summary

Teachers are at breaking point. This is the message sent loudly and clearly over the course of this research with nearly 1600 South Australian teachers and principals working in public education. The intensification and growing complexity of their work has been accompanied by loss of professional autonomy and satisfaction. The joy of teaching is diminishing, with significant risks for the sustainability and efficacy of the teaching profession. Yet political and media discourse largely ignores teacher wellbeing, reducing teachers to economic inputs.

Teachers report that growing bureaucratic requirements and a proliferation of top-down initiatives reduce time for the core work of teaching: interacting with students and collaborating with colleagues to support student learning. At the same time, there has been a sharp increase in the complexity of student needs in South Australia's public schools.

Teacher frustration with this situation is compounded by feeling that their voices are not heard and their professional expertise is undervalued. The devaluing of teachers is related to system-level promotion of student test performance as the central mechanism for managing and evaluating teachers' work. Substantive democratic and collegial participation by teachers in organisational, pedagogical and policy decisions is needed to bring consistency and coherence to the work of schools.

Key findings

1. Teachers work well above the hours for which they are paid. South Australian teachers work on average over 50 hours per week, including 30 hours of tasks beyond face-to-face teaching.
2. There have been major changes to the nature of teachers' work over the past five years, including increased complexity of student needs and growing focus on student test data.
3. The proportion of teachers satisfied with their profession overall has almost halved since similar data were collected in 2018 (from 90% to 52.9%). In terms of overall satisfaction, South Australian teachers now sit below all other countries participating in the TALIS 2018 survey (OECD 2020).
4. Satisfaction with wages is also considerably lower than reported in previous research. Sixty-seven percent of Australian teachers reported being satisfied with their wages in the 2018 TALIS survey, but this has dropped to 37.6% for South Australian education workers in 2022.
5. The proportion of teachers reporting being stressed 'a lot' is twice as high as in 2018 (47.3% compared to 24% in TALIS data).
6. Fewer than one in 10 (6.8%) teachers feel that their views are valued by policy makers in South Australia. Only one in five teachers views departmental policy demands as reasonable. Respondents overwhelmingly see school leadership teams as juggling excessive and competing demands for change.

7. Over a quarter of teachers (27.3%) are teaching outside of the area for which they have formal training and a majority of this group (56.9%) have not received sufficient support to do so.
8. Close to half (45.1%) of early career teachers do not receive sufficient team support or mentoring in their initial years in the profession, and a majority work on temporary contracts.
9. Almost half of all respondents intend to leave teaching within five years (45.5%), double the rate recorded in 2018 (Thomson & Hillman 2019b).
10. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed a system running on empty and without the capacity to adequately meet additional workload. The most widely felt impacts have been student absences (strongly felt by 84.9%), increased workload (by 79.1%), staffing shortages (by 70.9%) and negative effects on teacher social/emotional wellbeing (by 66.9%).

The findings presented here point more widely to the undermining of principles of professional collaboration, collegial decision-making, inclusive education, and innovation. The costs of adverse working conditions are borne not only by teachers, but by students, and ultimately by society as a whole.

Teachers are at breaking point, with big classes and many students with so many different needs! (Survey participant 245)

We are all at breaking point. (Survey participant 699)

I've been in this profession for more than 15 years now and I can see some really good people at breaking point. (Survey participant 699)

Recommendations

Five high-level recommendations for improved working conditions arise from this research, each accompanied by a set of practical actions.

Recommendation 1

Increase time and support for teachers to manage increasingly complex student needs.

Practical actions:

- a. Reduce class sizes.
- b. Provide more student support officers and other administrative support.
- c. Provide more specialist teacher support for students with special needs.
- d. Reduce out-of-field teaching.
- e. Provide more leadership support for teachers.
- f. Streamline funding mechanisms for students with additional needs

Recommendation 2

Reduce administrative demands on teachers to make workloads healthy and sustainable.

Practical actions:

- a. Reduce bureaucratic expectations for accountability and reporting.
- b. Increase time available for planning and other required activities beyond face-to-face teaching.
- c. Undertake more effective system-level planning to eliminate competing workload demands on schools and/or unrealistic time frames.
- d. Reduce supervision duties, such as bus and playground duty.
- e. Ensure administrative systems and tools are fit for purpose and sufficient time and resources are provided for implementation.

Recommendation 3

Increase the voice of teachers and leaders in decision-making and co-construction of policy.

Practical actions:

- a. Reduce the number of top-down initiatives and enhance local decision-making.
- b. Halt the growth of school success metrics and accountability systems that are narrowly driven by test data.
- c. Consult prior to any significant change, reform or initiative to ensure it has educational value and the time and resources to support effective implementation.
- d. Discontinue initiatives that teachers and school leaders do not find efficient or effective.
- e. Simplify compliance requirements for school leaders.

Recommendation 4

Address shortage of staff to reduce workload pressure.

Practical actions:

- a. Employ more teachers, particularly in key areas of shortage.
- b. Increase salaries to reflect the value of teaching professionals and cost of living.

Recommendation 5

Increase support for early career teachers to sustain the profession.

Practical actions:

- a. Provide more professional learning and development for staff during school hours to support collaboration and mentoring.
- b. Provide more opportunities for permanency in order to retain early career teachers.

1. Introduction

This report, commissioned by the Australian Education Union (South Australian Branch), examines the shifting nature of teachers' work in public education, pointing to growing complexity and increasing professional demands. This research is the first of its kind in South Australia and provides new insights into the impact of increased demands upon teachers' wellbeing and ability to focus on their key responsibilities for teaching and learning. Data were collected in August and September 2022 using an online survey and group interviews, through a research design that builds on the existing research literature and on recent investigations in other Australian jurisdictions (Fitzgerald, McGrath-Champ, Wilson, et al. 2019; McGrath-Champ, Wilson & Stacey 2017; McGrath-Champ et al. 2018; Rothman, Ingvarson & Matthews 2018; Rothman et al. 2017).

Previous research

Despite signs of impending crisis, there has been limited research into teaching conditions in Australia until quite recently. A key reference point is provided by the 2018 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), conducted by the OECD and also used in publications of the Australian Teacher Workforce Data Initiative (ATWD), managed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Non-government bodies and policy actors have also conducted research on teachers' work. Teacher unions have collected and analysed data from their members in New South Wales (McGrath-Champ, Wilson & Stacey 2017), Queensland (Rothman, Ingvarson & Matthews 2018), Tasmania (Rothman et al. 2017), Victoria (Weldon & Ingvarson 2016) and Western Australia (Fitzgerald, McGrath-Champ, Wilson, et al. 2019). The Australian College of Educators also recently surveyed teachers (NEiTA Foundation & ACE 2021), while various think tanks have been active in surveying teachers or interpreting existing published survey data (e.g. Fahey 2022; Hunter & Sonnemann 2022).

Prior research shows that teachers in Australia and overseas are experiencing unsustainable levels of stress and demoralisation that threaten their livelihoods, their mental and physical health, the welfare of their families, the functioning of schools, and the educational outcomes of students (Hargreaves, Washington & O'Connor 2018). This crisis in wellbeing comes at a time when Australian governments are becoming increasingly concerned that there will soon be a shortage of teachers, at least in some learning areas, year levels and geographical regions (Australian Government 2022a).

The working conditions of teachers and school leaders influence both the attractiveness of the profession to new recruits and the retention of existing staff. If for no other reason (such as duty of care and occupational health and safety obligations), predictions of a teaching workforce shortfall (Australian Government 2022a) should prompt governments and policy makers to focus on the working conditions of educators in order to identify strategies for mitigation. Across the nation, enrolments and completions in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses declined between 2017 and 2020 (Australian Government 2022a). Furthermore, research using 2018 data showed that 22% of in-service teachers would like to leave teaching within the next five years (Thomson & Hillman 2019b) – a figure which climbs to 45.5% in the data collected for the present report.

The changing conditions of teachers' work

Sitting behind the crisis in teacher wellbeing is a long-term shift in education policy internationally towards a narrow focus on education as an economic good. In the space of a few decades, education has been reconceptualised from 'an intrinsically valuable shared resource which the state owes to its citizens, to a consumer product for which the individual must take responsibility' (Gavin et al. 2021, p. 112). In the process, teachers have been 'recast from being trusted professionals to workers who must be closely monitored, managed, and made "accountable" through purportedly objective measures' (Gavin et al. 2021, p. 112). Finnish educator Pasi Sahlberg (2011, 2016) uses the term 'Global Educational Reform Movement' (GERM) to characterise these recent shifts. This movement prioritises:

- Standardising teaching and learning, with performance standards set externally by educational authorities;
- Focusing on literacy and numeracy, at the expense of other learning areas;
- Teaching for pre-determined results
- Appropriating corporate 'reforms' around competition, efficiency and productivity;
- Intensifying test-based accountability policies that hold teachers and schools to account for students' achievement; and
- Increasing control of schools via data collected from various aspects of the teaching and learning process.

(adapted from Sahlberg 2011, Table 1)

Referring to contemporary schooling in Australia, Reid (2020) describes a system of 'remote control', in which "'experts" from outside the school establish the goals of schooling, the specific policy interventions to achieve them, and the ways to assess them; while school-based educators are charged with the task of implementing it all, and are held responsible for the outcomes' (p. 57).

In Australia, NAPLAN and the *MySchool* website, where results are made publicly available, have been used as tools of accountability, managerialism, performativity and comparison at a national level (Acton & Glasgow 2015; Hardy & Lewis 2017; Stacey, Wilson & McGrath-Champ 2020). In addition, students' results in international standardised testing regimes, such as the OECD's PISA, are often construed as proxies for teacher and school quality (Barnes 2021; Thompson 2021), guiding policy agendas (e.g. Gonski et al. 2018). Internationally and nationally, school performance data has become 'fetishised' (Hardy & Lewis 2017) to such an extent that 'data-driven practices and logics have come to reshape the possibilities by which the teaching profession, and teaching professionals, can be known and valued' (Lewis & Holloway 2019, p. 48).

The impact of these changes is significant. In Australia, studies of educators and school leaders in early learning and compulsory schooling settings regularly identify that staff are struggling with stress and wellbeing issues (see, for example, AITSL 2021a; Carroll et al. 2021). Data from TALIS 2018 showed that 24% of Australian teachers reported experiencing a lot of stress in their work, compared to an average of 18% across the OECD (Thomson & Hillman 2019b, p. 23) and compared

to 47.3% in the present study. Data collected through the ATWD from New South Wales, Northern Territory and South Australia found that, for school leaders and teachers intending to leave the profession prior to retirement, the three most common reasons reported were related to workload and coping: 'to achieve a better work/life balance', 'the workload is too heavy' and 'too stressful/impacting wellbeing/mental health' (AITSL 2021a, p. 195).

Report structure

The following sections begin with an overview of the research methodology. Findings are then presented in nine sections: demographic profile of the respondents; workload and its distribution; changes in teachers' work over the past five years; perceptions of working conditions; impact of workload on health and wellbeing; the impact of COVID-19; priorities for future change, conclusion and recommendations.

2. Methodology

The project sought to answer three key research questions:

- What demands are placed on South Australian teachers and site leaders as professionals?
- How are teachers and site leaders managing these demands?
- How have these demands changed over time and what is the impact of these changes?

In order to answer these questions, we undertook a state-wide online survey of teachers and site leaders, covering public primary and secondary schools and early learning sites. We also conducted targeted interviews involving teachers from a range of school types and locations. Data collection addressed the following areas:

- Demographic profile of the teaching workforce
- Workload and its distribution across teaching and non-teaching tasks
- Changes in teachers' work over the past five years
- Workplace satisfaction and professional standing
- Perceptions of working conditions
- Impact of workload on health and wellbeing
- The impact of COVID-19
- Priorities for future change

Survey

An online survey collected quantitative data using closed questions and Likert scaled items. The survey items were modelled on questions asked in other published surveys that have investigated the working conditions of educators, including the OECD's international TALIS survey (OECD 2019a, 2019b) and recent surveys of Australian teachers' working conditions conducted in other jurisdictions (McGrath-Champ et al. 2018; Rothman, Ingvarson & Matthews 2018; Rothman et al. 2017; Weldon & Ingvarson 2016). Where possible, scales tested in previous research were used or adapted. The survey was emailed to the membership of the Australian Education Union South Australian Branch in August 2022. A total of 1594 responses were received. Demographic characteristics of respondents are similar to those reported for all 36,318 teachers registered in South Australia in 2018 (AITSL 2021b). Other workforce characteristics of respondents are also in line with previously reported data for South Australia, except for the proportion of permanently employed staff, which is higher in the present sample.

Quantitative analysis was undertaken through descriptive statistics using R software, focusing on measuring general trends, changes over time and differences between groups of teachers based on their work settings and conditions, and their demographic characteristics. In the analysis, 'respondents' is used to refer to all employment categories, including teachers and principals. Some analyses separate classroom teachers from principals.

Interviews

A total of 294 survey respondents volunteered to participate in interviews. A smaller group were contacted, and of these, 14 ultimately participated in group or individual interviews, a lower number than planned due to the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Those contacted were representative of the wider sample, and saturation of key themes was achieved. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically. The interviews provided more in-depth and contextualised understandings of issues facing teachers and leaders, including interrelationships between these issues. A profile of the participants is provided in Appendix A. An open-ended question at the end of the online survey, completed by 589 respondents, also provided qualitative data that have been included in the thematic analysis.

3. Demographic profile of respondents

Age

The largest group of participants are those aged 50-59 years (26.1%) (Table 1). In total, just under 42% are aged 50 or older, while just 10% are aged under 30, a finding consistent with institutional data (AITSL 2021b). This profile points to a highly experienced workforce. Many teachers are approaching retirement age, and the impact of a wave of retirements will also be felt on teacher education and mentoring.

| Age | n | Percentage |
|-------|-----|------------|
| 20-29 | 154 | 10.2 |
| 30-39 | 363 | 23.9 |
| 40-49 | 366 | 24.1 |
| 50-59 | 396 | 26.1 |
| 60+ | 237 | 15.6 |

Table 1: Age distribution of respondents

Gender

In keeping with previous surveys and institutional data (AITSL 2021b), close to three quarters of survey respondents are female, compared to a quarter identifying as male, and smaller numbers reporting non-binary and different identities, or preferring not to say (Table 2).

| Gender | n | Percentage |
|-------------------|------|------------|
| Female | 1118 | 73.7 |
| Male | 383 | 25.3 |
| Non-binary | 4 | 0.3 |
| Prefer not to say | 11 | 0.7 |

Table 2: Gender of respondents

Professional role

The majority of respondents are classroom teachers (62.1%) or specialist teachers (14.2%). Teachers with leadership responsibilities (11.8%), principals (4.1%) and those in other roles (7.7%) account for the remaining respondents (Figure 1). These data are consistent with the 2018 ATWD survey (AITSL 2021b). Given their different duties, principals are separated from other respondents in some analyses below.

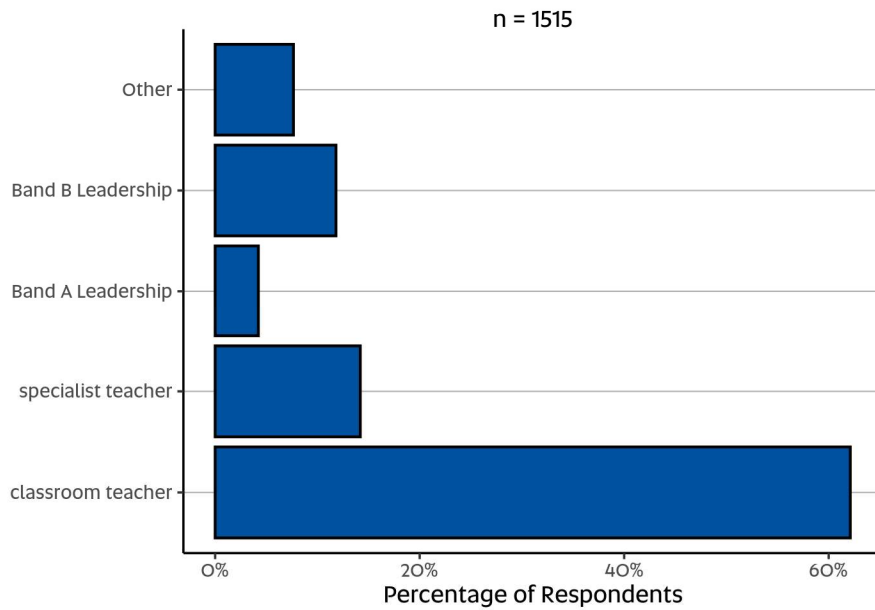


Figure 1: Position

Security of employment

Most respondents were in permanent positions (79.1%), with a large group also employed on temporary contracts (18.2%) and small numbers employed casually (2.6%) (Table 3). These figures may reflect a higher response rate amongst those with stable employment, as earlier institutional data showed 61% of government school teachers in permanent employment, 28% on contracts and 11% employed casually (AITSL 2021b).

| Employment status | n | Percentage |
|-------------------|------|------------|
| Permanent | 1199 | 79.1 |
| Contract | 276 | 18.2 |
| Casual | 40 | 2.6 |

Table 3: Employment status

Early career teachers (i.e. those in their first five years in the profession) had more precarious employment conditions than their experienced peers, with a majority employed on contracts or casually (Table 4). A lack of permanency among early career teachers is widespread across Australia (Mercieca 2017), but more prevalent in South Australia compared with other

jurisdictions (AITSL 2021b). Early career educators were significantly more likely to have a contract or casual employment status than experienced educators, in the present study.¹

| Employment status | Early career (n=147) % | Experienced (n=893) % |
|--------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Permanent | 44.3 | 83.4 |
| Casual or contract | 55.7 | 16.6 |

Table 4: Employment status and teaching experience

Not only is insecure work inherently stressful, it also means that some contract teachers feel they need to work harder and are unable to say ‘no’ to taking on unpaid work (such as volunteering for out-of-hours activities).

More permanent roles for teachers that have been on contracts for 5 plus years. It's ridiculous how unstable and stressful each year is not knowing about what you'll be doing. (Survey participant 44)

At times as a contract [teacher], your workload increases significantly as you can't say no, as you always have the fear that if you do, you won't be considered for your contract the next year. (Survey participant 418)

Thompson (2021) reports that, globally, ‘[t]he status of teaching as a secure career choice has been destabilised by a shift to casual and short-term contracts’ (p. 9). Australian teachers are significantly more likely to be casually employed than those in other occupations (Preston 2019).

Temporary employment can have significant professional and psychological consequences for teachers, and particularly for early career teachers who are attempting to establish themselves in their career. Stacey et al. (2022) reported that some temporary teachers feel the need to ‘jump through hoops’ and ‘do more’ than permanent teachers in order to ‘prove’ themselves to leadership and hopefully secure a renewed contract or permanency (pp. 62-63).

Positioned on the ‘edge of employment’ (Charteris et al. 2017, p. 514), temporary teachers often do not receive the induction, mentoring and collegial support enjoyed by permanent staff. Moving from school to school can inhibit the development of professional relationships, and opportunities for professional learning are more limited as school leadership may be reluctant to invest in staff who are not permanent. The lack of permanency is a major factor in the failure to attract new teachers, and for qualified teachers to contemplate leaving or leave the profession.

¹ A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between career phase and employment status. The relation between these variables was significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 970) = 130.89, p < .001$. This relationship was stronger in the primary schooling sector ($\chi^2(1, n = 537) = 117.26, p < .001$) than in the secondary sector ($\chi^2(1, n = 498) = 42.39, p < .001$).

Employment setting and time fraction

Most respondents were employed in primary school settings (41.5%) or secondary schools (40.8%), with others working in R-12 combined schools (6.6%), preschools (3%), area schools (2.8%) and special schools (2.6%) (Figure 2).

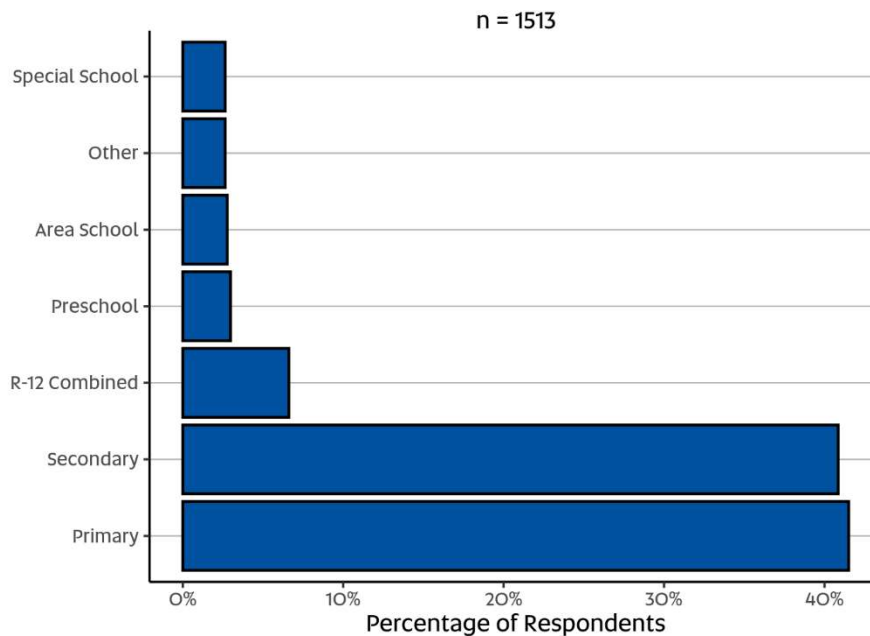


Figure 2: Employment setting

Just under three quarters of respondents were employed full-time (Table 5). Of those who work part-time, most were employed at 0.8 or 0.6 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) fraction. Casually employed respondents worked on average 3.6 days per week. The proportion of full-time respondents was higher than in 2018 workforce data (73.2% to 62%).

| Employment time fraction | n | Percentage |
|--------------------------|------|------------|
| Full Time | 1080 | 73.2 |
| Part Time (>0.5FTE) | 345 | 23.4 |
| Part Time (<0.5FTE) | 50 | 3.4 |

Table 5: Employment time fraction

Site location and socioeconomic status

Most respondents reported working in metropolitan Adelaide (69.3%), with the remainder identifying their workplace as regional (28.3%) or remote (2.5%). A majority of teachers reported working in sites that are predominantly socioeconomically disadvantaged (42.5%) or very disadvantaged (17.5%). A third reported working in sites that cater primarily to socioeconomically advantaged students, and just under 4% in sites that have a majority of very advantaged students. This is a reminder of the sharp socioeconomic divide between public and private school sectors in Australia, where public schools enrol the vast majority of students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds (Kenway 2013).

Years of teaching experience

The majority of respondents had been teaching from 5 to 15 years (Table 6), with an overall average of nearly 20 years of teaching experience ($M=18.84$, $SD=13.83$). Considered together with age, this points to a system in which older and more experienced teachers make up a large proportion of the workforce, many of whom do not intend to remain. The low levels of wellbeing outlined elsewhere in this report cannot therefore be attributed to a lack of skills or experience amongst teachers, as noted by many in their comments. Rather, experienced teachers report that they are confronting demands and stress well above levels they encountered previously. These highly expert professionals are the best equipped to face complex demands, and it can be anticipated that a turnover in the teaching workforce will result leave behind a higher proportion of novice teachers, who will be less able to manage the current intensification of demands.

| Teaching experience (years) | n | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|-----|------------|
| 0-5 | 185 | 12.4 |
| 5-15 | 539 | 36.2 |
| 15-30 | 457 | 30.7 |
| 30+ | 306 | 20.6 |

Table 6: Years of teaching experience - teachers and principals

Excluding school principals, 14% of teachers had five years or less experience (Figure 3), a proportion that is likely to grow even without attrition due to burnout.

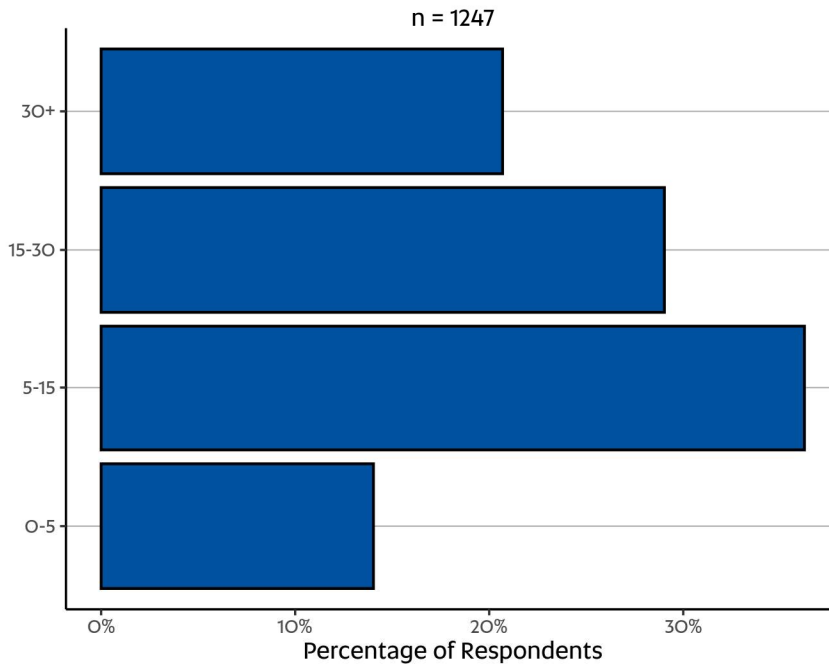


Figure 3: Years of teaching experience - teachers

Even with a small proportion of early career teachers, the system does not currently provide adequate induction. Just 55% of early career teachers reported receiving sufficient support and/or mentoring.

As a teacher and leader with over 20 years' experience, the complexity of the job has significantly increased. The workload has rapidly increased with many administrative tasks – unnecessary, but required by higher up. (Survey participant 351)

Ever increasing expectations over the last 15 years has slowly but surely destroyed my work/life balance ... I'm too young to retire, and too old to change careers. (Survey participant 829)

Teaching out-of-field

The current survey indicates that over a quarter of teachers (27.3%) were working outside of the area for which they have formal training, and a majority of this group (56.9%) had not received sufficient support (e.g. additional time, mentoring and professional development). Out-of-field teaching occurs when there is a 'mismatch between a teacher's disciplinary background and the subject, year level or specialist role that they teach' (Hobbs et al. 2022, p. 23). It is indicative of an existing shortage of qualified teachers in South Australia.

Out-of-field teaching is associated with lower student engagement, participation and achievement (Vale, Hobbs & Speldewinde 2022) and has been reported to impact on teacher burnout, turnover, wellbeing, and attrition (Du Plessis & McDonagh 2021).

From the perspective of workload, teaching out-of-field can place extra demands on teachers as they familiarise themselves with both the content and the pedagogies associated with the new learning area(s).

In my 45-year career I have never taught English as a subject and now I have 3 English classes. (Survey participant 260)

I'm currently teaching across years 3 to 10 in 3 subject areas. I have little training in one and no training in another ... yet I'm expected to complete all documentation. (Survey participant 929)

Prior research shows that out-of-field teaching is more prevalent in Australia than in other comparable countries (Vale, Hobbs & Speldewinde 2022). In 2016, approximately 26% of Year 7 to 10 teachers and 15% of Year 11 to 12 teachers were teaching out-of-field (Weldon 2016, p. 1). Vale, Hobbs and Speldewinde (2022, p. 5) note that schools in remote locations are more likely to use out-of-field teachers than metropolitan schools (41% compared to 24% respectively), and low SES schools are more likely to do so than high SES schools (31% compared to 22% respectively) (p. 5). This uneven distribution indicates that there is a social justice dimension to out-of-field teaching.

The impact on early career teachers is particularly problematic, given that they are still 'finding their feet'. Across Australia, more than one third of beginning teachers are teaching out-of-field (Weldon 2016, p. 1), a finding similar to the data reported here (Table 7). Vale, Hobbs and Speldewinde (2022) describe this 'initiation' as untenable, 'especially since this practice is contributing to the attrition of teachers early in their career' (p. 15). Although the South Australian data show a higher proportion of early career teachers working outside of their field of training, the difference in relation to experienced teachers was not statistically significant (Table 7).²

| Are you teaching outside of the area for which you are trained? | Early Career (n = 174) | Experienced (n = 1058) |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|
| Yes | 33.3% | 27.5% |
| No | 66.7% | 72.5% |

Table 7: Out-of-field teaching by career phase

² Chi square is not significant $\chi^2 (1, N= 1228) = 2.21, p = .137$.

4. Workload and its distribution

Hours worked

Full-time teachers reported working on average 52 hours in the most recent full week of employment (Table 8). Working hours varied little across settings and career phases, and are consistent with 2018 data (AITSL 2021b). For those nominally working full-time, a mean working week of 52.07 hrs with an SD of 10.78 indicates that 68% of respondents worked between 41.30 and 62.84 hours. Given that a standard full-time week is 38 hours, these figures indicate that most respondents worked excessive hours in order to achieve required outcomes. As the survey was conducted in August, some tasks that are concentrated in other times of the year and contribute to longer working hours, such as examination preparation and marking, were not captured in the survey data.

| | | n | M | SD | SE |
|------------------------|---------------------|------|-------|-------|------|
| All | | 1117 | 48.50 | 12.95 | 0.39 |
| FTE Fraction | Full Time | 781 | 52.07 | 10.78 | 0.39 |
| | Part Time (<0.5FTE) | 42 | 29.55 | 16.34 | 2.52 |
| | Part Time (>0.5FTE) | 294 | 41.73 | 12.69 | 0.74 |
| Teaching Phase | Early Career | 159 | 49.75 | 12.55 | 1.00 |
| | Experienced | 958 | 48.29 | 13.01 | 0.42 |
| Teaching Status | Permanent | 894 | 48.47 | 12.75 | 0.43 |
| | Contract | 223 | 48.63 | 13.77 | 0.92 |
| Location | Metropolitan | 786 | 48.20 | 13.20 | 0.47 |
| | Regional-Remote | 331 | 49.20 | 12.34 | 0.68 |
| SES Status | Very Advantaged | 46 | 50.30 | 13.87 | 2.05 |
| | Advantaged | 384 | 47.85 | 12.70 | 0.65 |
| | Disadvantaged | 501 | 48.65 | 12.80 | 0.57 |
| | Very Disadvantaged | 184 | 48.93 | 13.71 | 1.01 |

Table 8: Hours worked per week - teachers

Teachers spent an average of 21.53 hours per week on face-to-face teaching time. A total of 980 participants (excluding principals) contributed full breakdowns of the time they spent on various tasks beyond face-to-face teaching. These task items were derived from the 2018 TALIS teacher questionnaire (OECD 2018). The largest amount of time was spent on lesson planning and preparation, followed by grading and teamwork with colleagues (Table 9).

| Task | M | SD | SE |
|---|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Lesson planning and preparation | 9.95 | 6.37 | 0.20 |
| Marking and/or correcting of student work | 4.72 | 4.13 | 0.13 |
| Teamwork and dialogue with colleagues on-site | 4.05 | 3.58 | 0.11 |
| General administration | 3.55 | 3.25 | 0.10 |
| Counselling students | 2.74 | 3.92 | 0.13 |
| Professional Development activities | 1.85 | 2.11 | 0.07 |
| Communication or cooperation with parents/guardians | 1.64 | 1.96 | 0.06 |
| Other required work tasks | 1.60 | 2.78 | 0.09 |
| Participation in site management | 1.01 | 2.03 | 0.06 |
| Engaging in extracurricular activities | 0.55 | 1.47 | 0.05 |
| Total non-teaching time | 31.67 | 15.61 | 0.50 |

Table 9: Hours spent on tasks other than face-to-face teaching

Of tasks beyond classroom instruction, general administrative work was most frequently raised as adding little or no value to teaching, as evidenced in responses that will be detailed later in the report. Such work occupied an average of 3.5 hours in the week preceding the survey.

It is noticeable that at sites with greater student socioeconomic disadvantage, teachers reported spending more time working in teams and in dialogue with colleagues, counselling students, communicating with parents and guardians, and contributing to site management (Table 10). In order to create time for these tasks, teachers spent less time marking and correcting student work than their colleagues at more socioeconomically advantaged sites.

| Task | Very Disadvantaged (n=168) | | Disadvantaged (n=441) | | Advantaged (n=331) | | Very Advantaged (n=38) | |
|---|---------------------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|---------------------------|-------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| | Lesson planning and preparation | 9.57 | 6.14 | 10.20 | 6.62 | 9.79 | 6.03 | 9.50 |
| Teamwork and dialogue with colleagues on-site | 4.34 | 3.86 | 4.08 | 3.59 | 3.91 | 3.54 | 3.55 | 2.40 |
| Marking/correcting student work | 4.04 | 3.55 | 4.60 | 3.99 | 4.99 | 4.17 | 6.97 | 6.30 |
| General administration | 3.92 | 3.12 | 3.34 | 3.25 | 3.56 | 3.32 | 4.24 | 3.25 |
| Counselling students | 3.44 | 4.15 | 2.85 | 4.16 | 2.37 | 3.57 | 1.84 | 1.95 |
| Professional Development activities | 1.91 | 2.09 | 1.94 | 2.23 | 1.74 | 1.99 | 1.47 | 1.87 |
| Other required work tasks | 1.83 | 2.83 | 1.52 | 2.67 | 1.59 | 2.89 | 1.21 | 2.07 |
| Communication or cooperation with parents/guardians | 1.80 | 1.73 | 1.57 | 2.08 | 1.65 | 1.93 | 1.53 | 1.78 |
| Participation in site management | 1.46 | 2.93 | 0.98 | 1.82 | 0.85 | 1.79 | 0.82 | 1.29 |
| Engaging in extracurricular activities | 0.60 | 1.41 | 0.53 | 1.47 | 0.56 | 1.54 | 0.53 | 1.25 |
| Total non-teaching time | 32.92 | 16.07 | 31.62 | 15.83 | 31.02 | 15.20 | 31.66 | 14.97 |

Table 10: Hours spent on tasks other than face-to-face teaching by site SES

Based on qualitative data, it appears that many of the activities that take up more time in disadvantaged sites are in response to the complexity of student needs, and some, such as conferencing with other teachers, are seen to be of high value.

Overall, the data on hours worked appear to indicate stability over time when compared to 2018 survey results (AITSL 2021b). However, increased demands for particular types of work go beyond the categories used in the TALIS-designed items shown in Tables 9 and 10. Moreover, different types of work appear to generate stress at different rates, a phenomenon consistent with international findings (Jerrim & Sims 2021). Increases in time spent on non-teaching tasks were strongly correlated with increased stress in the South Australian cohort (Figure 4). For example, of the teachers who spent 3 hours on administration tasks, 53% of them reported being stressed ‘a lot’, while 89% of teachers who spent 5 hours on administration tasks reported being stressed ‘a lot’. Interestingly, time spent on teaching and teamwork was not as strongly associated with stress.

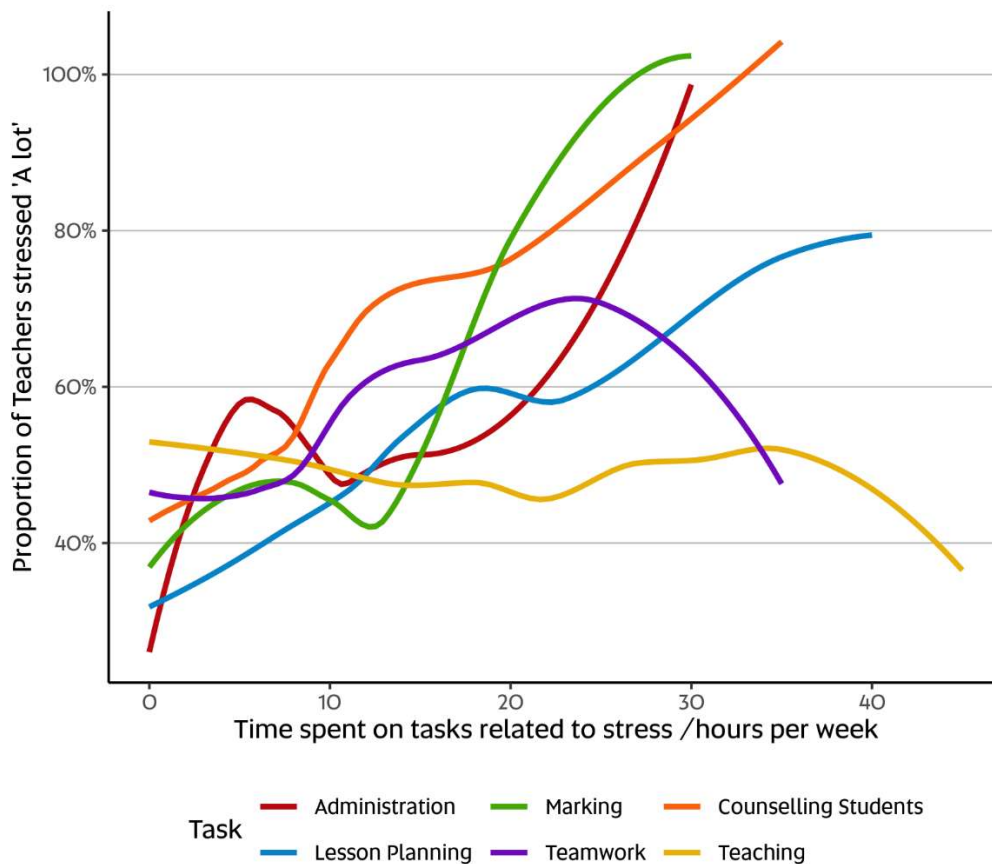


Figure 4: Time (in hours per week) spent on tasks related to stress

The findings presented here confirm earlier research showing that, across Australia, teachers and school leaders work exceptionally long hours (Deloitte 2017; McGrath-Champ et al. 2018; Rothman, Ingvarson & Matthews 2018; Rothman et al. 2017; SSTUWA n.d.; Weldon & Ingvarson 2016). The most recent TALIS survey found that Australian lower secondary teachers work on average a total of 45 hours per week (Thomson & Hillman 2019a, p. 93), which exceeds the OECD average by approximately 5 hours per week. Full-time teachers participating in the ATWD survey reported that, during term-time, they worked an average of 56.2 hours per week, while leaders worked an average of 58.8 hours per week (AITSL 2021a, p. 178).

Many teachers find that they are unable to keep on top of their workload, and may need to 'triage' their work, knowing that some tasks will be ultimately left uncompleted (Stacey, Wilson & McGrath-Champ 2020). Those tasks that *are* completed may not meet the standards expected by stakeholders, or by the teachers themselves. The number of hours worked, however, is only part of the problem. Thompson (2021) makes a distinction between 'how much work there is to do (workload) and how difficult, complex, and demanding that work is (intensification)' (p. 7). Furthermore, teachers need to see value in the work that is required of them (McGrath-Champ, Wilson & Stacey 2017). For those teachers who value face-to-face time teaching, it is the non-teaching component that has the biggest impact on their perceptions of workload.

Much of the time it feels as though we are overloaded with 'busy-work' that ticks boxes for leadership/partnership/local area goals, but is not resulting in actual positive impact on the real growth or well-being of our students. (Survey participant 413)

I am working a lot harder than I ever have before and it's not sustainable long term. I'm looking into further education to allow me to move to a different career with a more manageable workload. (Survey participant 1362)

There's never enough time. If I want to analyse the work that students have done in my class, if I want to give feedback, if I want to actually work with a kid and work out where their misunderstandings and misconceptions are from previous years there's just not enough time to do it when you consider all the other things that are piling on. (Kaye – Group interview)

Numerous studies have shown that the non-teaching component of teachers' work is a significant driver of increased workload (see, for example, Fitzgerald, McGrath-Champ, Stacey, et al. 2019; Lawrence, Loi & Gudex 2019; Stacey, Wilson & McGrath-Champ 2020). The recent ATWD analysis (AITSL 2021a, p. 23) reported that full-time teachers 'spent on average, 1.5 times as many hours on non-teaching tasks as they did on face-to-face teaching' (p. 10), a finding similar to the present study in which full-time teachers can expect to spend 20 hours on face-to-face teaching and 30 hours on other tasks.

5. Changes in teachers' work over the past five years

Survey respondents who were experienced teachers were asked about the changes in their working conditions over the last five years. Items in Table 11 are listed in order from the highest proportion of respondents reporting an increase (summing 'increased' and 'significantly increased') to the lowest. There is near unanimity on increase in complexity, but little endorsement of an increase in wellbeing (three quarters of respondents experienced decreased wellbeing).

| | Increased % | Significantly Increased % | Total Increase % |
|--|----------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| The complexity of my work has: | 26.1 | 71.4 | 97.5 |
| My administrative tasks have: | 38.1 | 57.2 | 95.3 |
| The diversity of students'/children's needs has: | 22.8 | 72.5 | 95.3 |
| The range of activities I undertake in my work has: | 45.3 | 49.9 | 95.2 |
| Expectations to differentiate learning and produce personalised learning plans have: | 22.9 | 71.2 | 94.1 |
| The collection, analysis and reporting of data has: | 27.9 | 66.1 | 94.0 |
| Expectations to communicate and liaise with parents or guardians have: | 34.1 | 50.0 | 84.1 |
| Requirements to use Department sanctioned curriculum resources have: | 40.6 | 34.9 | 75.5 |
| The demands to participate in professional development have: | 40.0 | 23.5 | 63.5 |
| The role played by commercial curriculum packages has: | 40.2 | 15.3 | 55.5 |
| My ability to get to know students/children has: | 16.7 | 10.0 | 26.7 |
| My overall feeling of wellbeing in my workplace has: | 7.6 | 5.9 | 13.5 |

Table 11: Reported changes in working conditions over the last 5 years ³

³ See full spread of responses in Appendix B, Table 24.

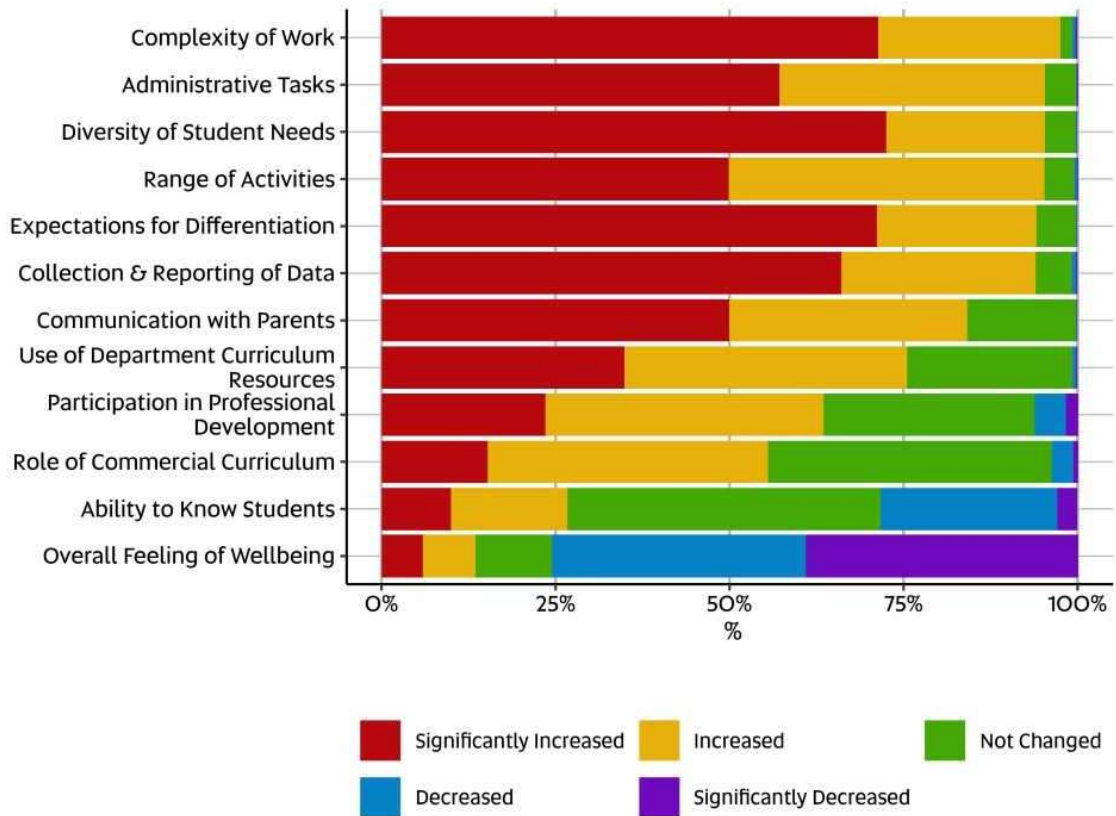


Figure 5: Reported changes in working conditions of the last 5 years

Increasing complexity of work

Virtually all participants reported an increase in the complexity of their work over the past five years (97.5%). For most, this increase has been significant. This complexity synthesises some other items, including increases in administrative tasks (95.3%), the diversity of student needs (95.3%), the range of activities undertaken (95.2%), expectations to differentiate learning and produce personalised learning plans (94.1%), and the collection, analysis and reporting of data (94%).

A similar increase in complexity over time was previously identified in a survey conducted in New South Wales in 2018 (McGrath-Champ et al. 2018, p. 28), suggesting that, across jurisdictions, such changes have been underway for more than just the last five years. The NSW study found that 94.9% of respondents reported that their work complexity had increased over the last five years (McGrath-Champ et al. 2018, p. 28).

Furthermore, a majority of South Australian respondents reported that the *range* of activities they undertake has increased, including expectations to communicate and liaise with parents or guardians. This is also consistent with data from NSW, where 95.1% of teachers reported that the range of activities that they undertake had increased (McGrath-Champ et al. 2018, p. 28).

These increases across a range of demands point to the central contradiction in teachers' work – the structures designed to manage the growing diversity of student needs take time away from dealing with that diversity in a concrete way, draining available time and energy. Since teachers are heavily invested in student learning and wellbeing, they often sacrifice their own wellbeing in order to comply with a heavy regimen of documenting and reporting that is felt to be of limited value.

Excessive administrative work

An increase in administrative work over the past five years gained the second-highest level of agreement amongst respondents. This additional administrative work involves testing, reporting activities, applying for individualised funding, liaising with other professionals, and producing individualised student plans.

This increasing burden of administrative tasks is also widely reported as problematic by teachers and school leaders in other research. Compliance work is 'a major impost on teachers' time' (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment 2019, p. 14) and erodes the time available for the core activities associated with teaching, learning and leading (AITSL 2020; Gavin et al. 2021). Non-teaching workload was found to be a stronger predictor of burnout than teaching-related workload in a study of Australian high school teachers (Lawrence, Loi & Gudex 2019).

For a mass education system that incorporates virtually all young people in society, the individualisation of school administration as part of teacher workloads presents a debilitating barrier to effective teaching. In some settings, a majority of students now require individualised plans and funding requests.

We do an enormous amount of work out of hours just to stay afloat ... Analysing data, writing School Improvement Plans, NCCD data collection, One Plans, Year 1 spelling tests, emotional wellbeing data, SIP step 4 evidence of learning aligned with the SIP. (Survey participant 1570)

Most of my time now is spent putting together portfolios for IESP applications, filling out behaviour matrixes, safety plans, behaviour plans, yard plans, questionnaires, traffic light behaviour recording, recording behaviour on Sentral, following up attendance, communicating with parents through Seesaw, One Plans, One plan reviews, plans for SSOs who work with students, reviewing intervention data, forms from other professionals such as psychologists, OTs, paediatricians, meetings with other professions, TAC meetings, CDU meetings, One Plan review meetings, meeting with deputy/principal around student needs, following up behaviour incidences, CARL reports, following up student wellbeing, completing new government initiatives, and the list goes on. (Survey participant 794)

While some of this work is viewed as valuable, much administrative work is considered to be unnecessary and undermining of teacher professionalism.

There's been a flourishing of paperwork and I guess the idea that accountability is forged in documentation, that the more you write the more accountable you are ... what I feel is happening is actually a lot less accountability. A lot more clinical paperwork which rarefies accountability to being something that's very empty and hollow and sterile. (Pete – Group interview C)

Administrative work includes increasing requirements for data collection. To be clear, teachers and leaders recognised that there is a role for data in education. However, a focus on data is problematic if it results in no positive outcomes for teaching practice or for students' learning. Data collection takes time away from the core tasks that teachers consider to be intrinsic to their role, such as lesson preparation, building educative relationships with students, and guiding learning. There is also a sense that data collection is being undertaken for its own sake, with insufficient time for meaningful analysis. In some cases, data seems to be used for spurious purposes, and at all levels there appears to be a lack of understanding of how issues such as measurement error make individual and classroom-level use of standardised test results a largely futile exercise (Wu 2010).

There is a huge emphasis on data collection. A lot of this data is not used to help teachers plan or improve student outcomes ... Gone are the days where data was used to inform teaching ... gone are the days where teaching and learning were a priority. (Survey participant 670)

The amount of data collected means that our teaching time, preparation for student learning and time for analysis of the data are greatly reduced. This is very top down and teacher judgement about what data is useful is rarely considered. (Survey participant 903)

An overabundance of data, which honestly, a lot of the time we do not have time to then look ... and work out where to next anyway, because you're too busy just collecting it and entering it. (Melanie – Group interview A)

Increasing diversity of student needs and differentiated learning

The growth of administrative work is linked to a growth in the diversity of student needs. But as the numbers of students with diverse and complex needs grows, there has been no effective and efficient adjustment of the mechanisms for gaining additional support. Teachers reported that they are not opposed to differentiation, but struggle with the *level* of differentiation required of them, and the number of students who require significant differentiation.

[Differentiation] is a very noble aspiration and something to strive for, but without necessarily the support and the resources to do that. And the goal posts keep getting shifted there, so what is expected as quality differentiated teaching is much greater, much, much greater now than what it was before. (Pete - Group interview C)

You may have a class where you're catering for kids who might be at year 2 level through to about a year 9 level in the one classroom and that's really hard going. (Kath – Group interview C)

The sheer number of students in a given classroom who need significant levels of support for a range of complex learning, behavioural, social, emotional and mental health issues was of great concern to teachers, who are taking on additional roles beyond teaching in order to provide the support their students need.

The complexity of student needs continues to increase without the appropriate time/resources to manage this ... Administrative/differentiation/behaviour management tasks are taking up an increasing amount of teacher's time, resulting in less time for planning, delivering and assessing teaching and learning. (Survey participant 909)

I've got 22 in my class. 12 of them would have significant learning difficulties, behavioural difficulties. (Melanie – Group interview A)

The mental health of our young people, that's something that over the period of time that I've been a teacher ... [has] increased exponentially and so all of us in schools are trying to juggle that aspect, we're not usually trained to be able to do that, we don't always have the capacity to have onsite psychologists. (Kath – Group interview C)

Focusing on just one dimension of differentiation – teaching students with disability in mainstream classrooms – O'Rourke (2015) notes, 'inclusion is "time hungry"' (p. 538). In addition to 'caring for students' immediate, embodied, local needs' (Gallagher & Spina 2021, p. 1415), Australian teachers are now responsible for actioning the *Nationally Consistent Collection of Data* (NCCD). Introduced in 2013, the NCCD is:

a mandatory data collection process in which teachers categorise and report on individual students' level of additional educational needs. This data is used to determine funding allocations for students with disability. Under this policy, teachers are responsible for assessing students' needs, and for documenting their own teaching practice. (Gallagher & Spina 2021, p. 1410)

In a recent review of compliance 'red tape', AITSL (2020) called for streamlining of the NCCD to 'reduce the burden of multiple reporting of the same or similar information and data' (p. 29). In addition to collecting data for the NCCD, teachers in South Australian early learning sites and schools are required to liaise with students and their families to develop personalised learning plans for:

- Aboriginal children and Aboriginal young people;
- children and young people in care (under guardianship);
- children in preschool with extensive adjustments; and
- students with disability.

A 'One Plan' (or 'One Child One Plan').⁴ is a personalised learning plan that addresses the 'functional needs of the child and the curriculum, instructional and environmental adjustments that may need to be put in place to enable the child or student to access and participate in their education on the same basis as their peers' (Department for Education 2020, p. 3). Each One Plan

⁴ One Child One Plan was formerly called a Negotiated Education Plan or NEP

is reviewed annually and has implications for the funding and resources the site receives to support the student's learning.

Comments from participants show that teachers need much more support and more streamlined funding mechanisms to enable them to provide the quality educative experience that is the right of *all* students.

It is increasingly difficult to obtain funding for students with learning disabilities, resulting in dissatisfied parents, struggling students and teachers who are overwhelmed trying to cater to a range of needs without adequate support. (Survey participant 413)

While welcoming and including students [with special needs] into my class, the constant struggle and paperwork required to get the support these students require has become completely overwhelming. (Survey participant 1523)

Attracting adequate funding, or indeed any funding at all, for students with disability and special needs was a major source of frustration. Funding applications are often unsuccessful, for reasons that are unclear. The documentation around students with special needs, including One Plans, IESP applications and the NCCD, is a major impost on teachers' time, resulting in less time available for the preparation of quality differentiated lessons and teaching.

[One Plans] are a huge amount of work, with many classes at our site having 10-15 students on a One Plan. These documents are repetitive and time wasting - and again, it creates more paperwork where teachers are constantly justifying their work. This administrative workload has significantly impacted teachers' ability to plan and teach high quality lessons. (Survey participant 794)

Student One Plans only take time away from the teacher resulting in LESS time to develop lessons that differentiate and personalise ... The model for student funding is broken. (Survey participant 1463)

We had 55% of our kids identified as requiring additional support to support them either with an intellectual, cognitive, or physical disability, which means that in every class we've got at least 13, 14 kids who are requiring a significantly level of additional support. (Marc – Group interview E)

Expectations to communicate with families have also grown. Where digital systems have been put in place to facilitate communication, this has in some cases actually increased the burden of communication, rather than reducing it.

Having to answer a dozen emails/daymap messages every day just to stay on top of the work is one of the biggest stressors ... Teaching has become massively administrative. It is disappointing and soul destroying. (Survey participant 1403)

And to be honest with you, I am not even sure whether the parents are accessing [online systems to communicate with parents] – we're doing all this work and I don't know that it's actually for anything at the end of the day. I don't know that the parents are really using it. (Libby – Group interview A)

The time teachers have to actually get to know their students – and better meet their academic and socio-emotional needs - is eroded by bureaucratic demands. Teachers reported feeling that relationships are no longer *valued* by a system that places much more emphasis on data and

academic outcomes. Over a quarter of respondents reported that their ability to get to know students had been reduced in the past five years.

It is impossible to spend the time needed to form the relationships with students that are so important to teaching. (Survey participant 686)

It would be amazing to have everything stripped back so we can just focus on our teaching and on getting to know our students again. They need more emotional connection than ever before. (Survey participant 816)

I used to feel like [relationships] were valued ... But now, 'Nah that's, that's not important' ... Is it quantifiable on a piece of paper? And if it's not, then it's not valuable. (Sarah - Group interview E)

Government responses to increased complexity

While individualised plans and funding are intended to make schools more inclusive, other steps have also been taken by state and federal authorities. These include professional learning on new approaches, often presented to teachers as 'evidence-based' or 'high impact'. Teachers are sceptical of some of these claims and developments in professional learning have not always been in forms that teachers value.

Teachers have so many initiatives and PDs to attend, implement and reflect on. We've had 3 or 4 this year, and we seem to drop what we've previously done with alarming regularity. Which one(s) do we focus on? Formative Assessment? Berry Street? Moderation? Poverty? Dylan Wiliam? (Survey participant 705)

Pre-packaged curriculum materials constitute another system-level attempt to reduce the burden on teachers. The role of commercial curriculum packages has increased (40.2%) or significantly increased (15.3%) over the past five years for the majority of participants. Some schools also mandate the use of Department for Education-produced units of work. However, both commercial and departmental materials are sometimes viewed as poor quality, imposed without consideration for local needs and opinions, or unsuitable.

We're using Booker for maths. We didn't get a choice in that. We just got told this is what you're doing. (Melanie Group interview A)

I did not become a teacher later in life to waste time on data entry and delivering commercially produced lock-step curriculum packages that are devoid of cultural responsiveness. (Survey participant 447)

Our partnership is enforcing that we must use the DfE units of work. This is causing a significant increase in workload given these resources are so poorly designed, don't allow for stretch or composite classes. (Survey participant 86)

6. Perceptions of working conditions

A detailed account of respondents' perceptions of their daily working conditions was elicited through the survey (Table 12; Figure 6).

| | Agree % | Strongly Agree % | Total Agree % |
|--|------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Site leadership have to juggle excessive and competing demands for change from different authorities (e.g. Department, partnerships) | 55.0 | 32.9 | 87.9 |
| There are too many new government initiatives to realistically take on board | 50.5 | 34.6 | 85.1 |
| Department-produced curriculum resources need much adaptation to be useful at this site | 51.3 | 27.9 | 79.2 |
| Professional development follows fads rather than addressing real needs | 41.7 | 32.8 | 74.5 |
| Professional development is repetitive with few new ideas | 47.2 | 20.5 | 67.7 |
| I have sufficient opportunities to develop positive relationships with students/children | 53.9 | 6.9 | 60.8 |
| Teachers have autonomy to make decisions about instructional delivery (i.e. pacing, materials and pedagogy) | 50.7 | 4.5 | 55.2 |
| My site offers practical employment arrangements and conditions to help employees achieve work-life balance | 47.6 | 5.6 | 53.2 |
| An appropriate amount of time is provided for professional development | 44.5 | 3.6 | 48.1 |
| Department-produced curriculum resources play a helpful role in teaching at my site | 43.3 | 4.5 | 47.8 |
| Professional development supports teachers to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students/children | 37.2 | 3.6 | 40.8 |
| Professional development supports teachers to meet the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students/children | 36.9 | 3.5 | 40.4 |
| Commercial curriculum packages are an important part of teaching at my site | 33.6 | 4.9 | 38.5 |
| Teachers have an appropriate level of influence on decision making at this site. | 34.7 | 3.8 | 38.5 |
| Commercial curriculum packages have a positive influence on teaching at my site | 33.2 | 1.5 | 34.7 |
| The non-instructional time provided for teachers at my site is sufficient | 29.7 | 2.4 | 32.1 |
| Policy demands from the Department are consistent and coherent | 23.7 | 1.2 | 24.9 |
| Government initiatives are followed-through and evaluated to determine their value | 20.9 | 0.4 | 21.3 |
| Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students/children. | 15.9 | 0.7 | 16.6 |
| Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students/children with minimal interruptions | 12.7 | 0.1 | 12.8 |

Table 12: Working conditions - teachers and principals ⁵

⁵ See full spread of responses in Appendix B, Table 25.

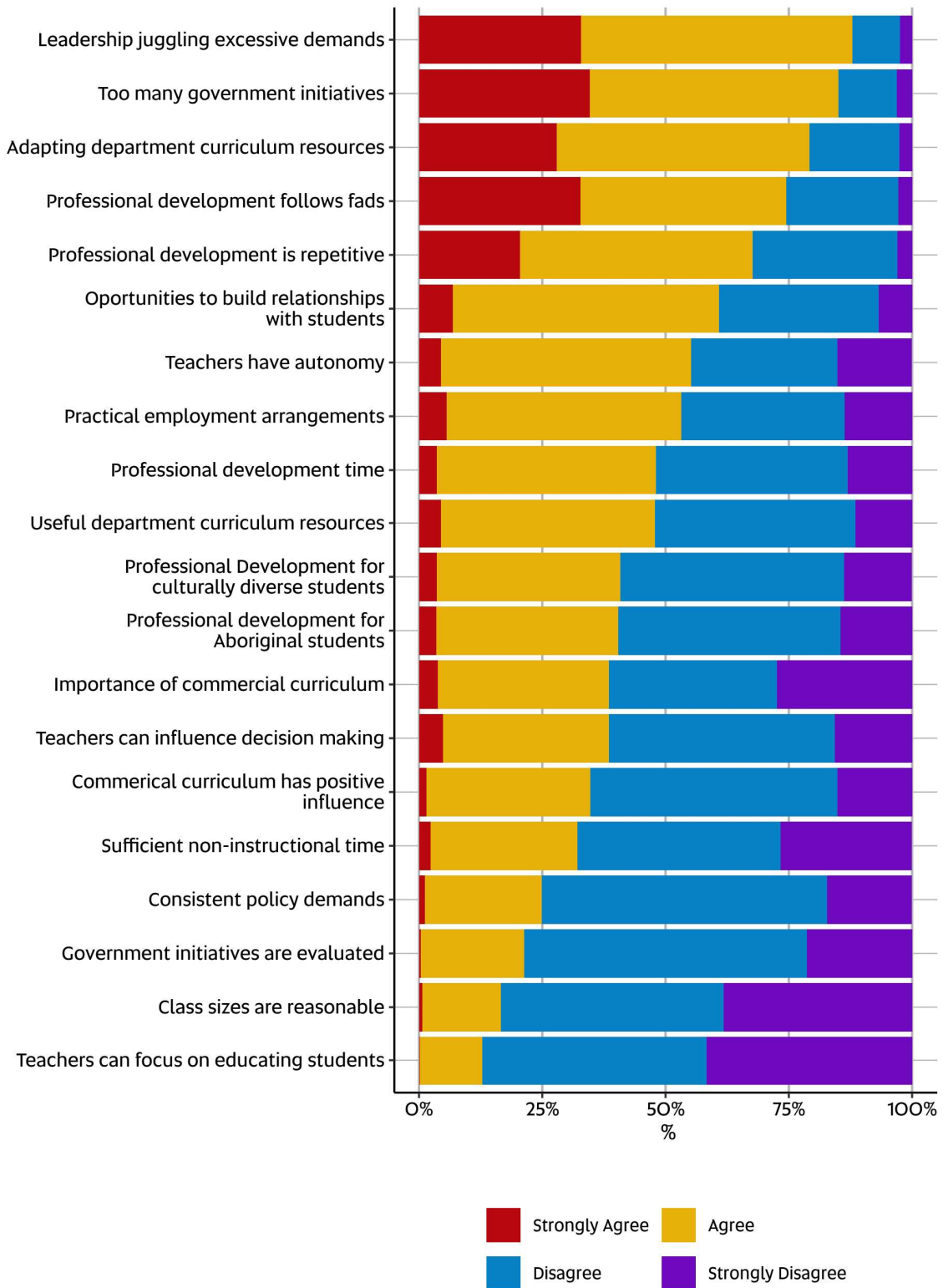


Figure 6: Working conditions - teachers and principals

In the following sections, three key issues connected to working conditions are discussed – competing demands from above, workplace satisfaction and professional standing.

Competing demands from above

Daily work in schools is subject to competing and conflicting demands from above. Respondents saw site leadership having to juggle excessive and competing demands for change from different authorities (87.9% agree or strongly agree). A similar proportion considered that there are too many new government initiatives to realistically implement. As mentioned above, government attempts at support often miss the mark. Respondents considered that Department of Education curriculum resources need much adaptation to be useful (79.2%), and that professional development follows fads (74.5%) and is repetitive (67.7%).

In the current policy environment, emphasis is given to addressing perceived problems through highly visible rapid action, leading to 'fast policy' and 'quick fix' or 'silver bullet' reactions (Lewis & Hogan 2019; Lingard 2016; Thompson, Savage & Lingard 2016). In education, teachers and school leaders (as well as students and their families) are at the receiving end of these rapid policy shifts. This rapid turnover of policies creates change fatigue as educators become less willing or able 'to implement successive reforms as the continual effort to do so depletes their personal resources' (Dilkes, Cunningham & Gray 2014, p. 45). Educators experience 'unceasing change, new initiatives, new programmes, new data reporting, and lack of assessment about which changes and policies work well and which do not' (Stacey, Wilson & McGrath-Champ 2020, p. 10). This process can lead to a sense of cynicism, apathy, futility, exhaustion and powerlessness (Dilkes, Cunningham & Gray 2014).

I feel like teachers are being dragged through one initiative after another with no extra resources or funds ... I stay for the kids. (Survey participant 670)

At my school, teachers are wilting under non-stop government directives which swallow up time after school and seem to do little to change anything. (Survey participant 45)

It's 25 years that I've been a teacher so I am one of those people now that has seen things come and go and come back. Sometimes you feel like you might be a little bit negative because you've seen it already fail once. But you don't really get a say in it, because it's kind of pushed on you, a lot of the change. (Libby – Group interview A)

Workplace satisfaction

Participants were asked about their satisfaction with salary and other working conditions. They were also asked about the extent to which they feel respected as professionals and about the standing of teaching in wider society (Table 13; Figure 7).

Although teachers remain committed to their profession, only a minority (45.7%) believed that the advantages of being a teacher clearly outweigh the disadvantages. This pattern was repeated amongst principals. Fewer than one in twenty teachers and one in ten principals strongly agreed that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages of their profession. If they had to decide again, 56% agreed that they would still choose to work as a teacher.

| | Agree % | Strongly Agree % | Total Agree % |
|--|------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| I feel safe at work | 56.4 | 7.7 | 64.1 |
| I would recommend this site as a good place to work | 46.8 | 15.7 | 62.5 |
| If I could decide again, I would still choose to work as a teacher. | 45.9 | 9.9 | 55.8 |
| All in all, I am satisfied with my job. | 47.1 | 5.8 | 52.9 |
| My salary adequately covers the cost of living | 46.7 | 3.4 | 50.1 |
| The advantages of being a teacher clearly outweigh the disadvantages. | 41.1 | 4.6 | 45.7 |
| Apart from my salary, I am satisfied with the terms of my contract/employment (e.g. benefits, work schedule) | 41.3 | 2.8 | 44.1 |
| I am satisfied with the salary I receive for my work. | 33.1 | 4.5 | 37.6 |
| I would like to change to another site if that were possible | 22.0 | 15.2 | 37.2 |
| I would recommend teaching as a career to a family member. | 27.7 | 3.7 | 31.4 |
| Salary progressions appropriately reflect experience and expertise. | 23.0 | 1.8 | 24.8 |
| I regret that I decided to become a teacher. | 18.7 | 4.8 | 23.5 |
| My salary reflects my value as a professional. | 18.5 | 3.3 | 21.8 |
| I find my workload manageable. | 17.9 | 1.1 | 19.0 |
| Teachers can influence educational policy in South Australia. | 11.6 | 2.2 | 13.8 |
| Teachers' views are valued by policymakers in South Australia. | 6.1 | 0.5 | 6.6 |
| Teachers are valued by the media in South Australia. | 5.9 | 0.3 | 6.2 |

Table 13: Workplace satisfaction - teachers and principals ⁶

⁶ See full spread of responses in Appendix B, Table 26.

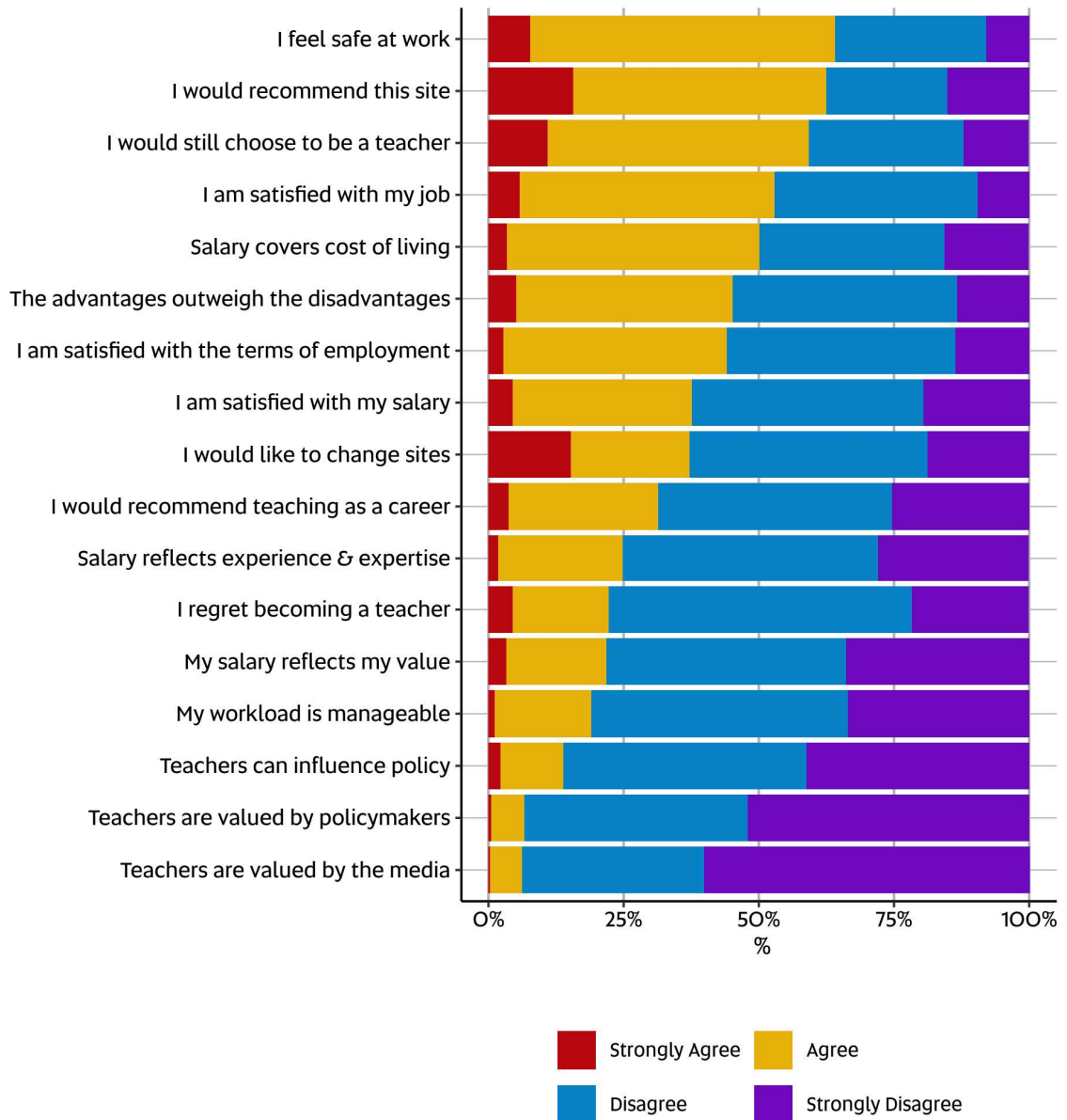


Figure 7: Workplace satisfaction - teachers and principals

Just 52.9% of respondents reported being satisfied with their job overall. By contrast, data from 2018 showed 90% of Australian teachers being satisfied with their jobs (OECD 2020). Of all countries participating in the TALIS 2018 survey, no country had fewer than 70% reporting being satisfied with their job.

Workload is completely unsustainable, burnout is a major factor, teachers are quitting, our salary does not reflect our professionalism nor hours we are required to perform. (Survey participant 750)

I was thinking, if you actually add up how many hours a week you work and divide it into your hourly rate, may as well go and work at the pub and pour beers ... but we don't because we love the kids. (Melanie – Group interview A)

NIT allocations are not enough to cover basic lesson planning and marking let alone trying to fit in parent communication, administrative work, PD and modifying resources for special needs students or those requiring a highly differentiated curriculum. (Survey participant 639)

The current level of satisfaction of South Australian teachers therefore represents a steep decline both historically and relative to international comparisons. Satisfaction with wages was also considerably lower than reported in previous research. Whereas 67% of Australian teachers reported being satisfied with their wages in the 2018 TALIS survey, this has dropped to 37.6% for South Australian education workers in 2022. A similar drop in satisfaction with other employment conditions can be observed, from 78% agreeing that they are satisfied with the terms of their employment arrangements in 2018 to 44.1% in the present survey. Compared with TALIS data, levels of professional satisfaction have halved in a period of five years and are below the OECD average on numerous measures.

Dissatisfaction is reflected in the fact that two thirds of teachers (68.6%) would not recommend teaching as a career to a family member.

I am sad to say that I have actively discouraged young adults to pursue this as a career. (Survey participant 562)

The issues I think are so deeply, structurally embedded that I don't think that they will be solved any time soon and I really can't honestly recommend that anyone go into the profession. (Carol – Group interview B)

Indeed, just one in five teachers viewed their salary as reflecting their value as a professional while half considered that it does not adequately cover the cost of living. On a related point, barely a quarter of teachers considered that salary progressions appropriately reflect experience and expertise.

Workplace satisfaction reflects not only salary, but also workplace conditions. Over a third of teachers did not feel safe at work, and four out of five did not find their workload manageable, forcing them to work out-of-hours. Only 16% of respondents viewed class sizes as reasonable and enabling teachers to meet the needs of all students. Non-instructional time was viewed as insufficient by a majority, and interruptions to face-to-face teaching and engaging with students were a widespread complaint. Qualitative data revealed that many staff had also experienced a sense of workplace bullying – from students, leadership, or among peers. There was also a sense that leadership were not prepared to support teachers who are experiencing behavioural issues with students.

Respect for teachers from students and carers at an all time low. (Survey participant 148)

Students are becoming more violent and abusive- yet no consequences are given. (Survey participant 654)

Workplace bullying is an issue at many sites. (Survey participant 856)

The amount of abuse we are expected to put up with from students is unacceptable and there's no consequences for poor student behaviour. Parents blame the teachers and the learning of other students within the class is then impacted. (Survey participant 1505)

There were numerous qualitative comments about the need to work out of hours in order to keep up with workload. In their interviews with education stakeholders across four jurisdictions, including Australia, Thompson, Mockler and Hogan (2022, p. 98) report that excessive out-of-hours work by teachers and school leaders has become the norm. In Australia, the NEiTA Foundation and ACE (2021) found that 'Three out of ten teachers work an extra 10 hours or more a week outside of their classrooms at school before going home. Once at home, two out of ten keep on working for more than 15 hours over the course of a week' (p. 6). A recent parliamentary report on the status of the teaching profession (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment 2019) identified a need to 'quantify, report and address the "invisible" workload that teachers are absorbing outside of school time' (p. 14).

Professional standing

Workplace dissatisfaction was compounded by a sense that educators' voices are not heard. Just 7% of respondents reported that their views are valued by South Australian policy makers. Similarly, only around one in ten believed that teachers are able to influence South Australian education policy.

Public perception of the profession is also an issue. For those teachers who are striving to do their best for students, public, political and media perceptions of their efforts have the potential to either energise or demoralise. In Australia, some political and media actors have engaged in 'teacher bashing' over recent years (Bahr et al. 2018; Mockler 2022; Shine 2020), which influences public perceptions of teachers and education. Given that 'media can often define public "knowledge" about teachers and schools' (Baroutsis 2019, p. 2), teachers have reported frustration and disappointment that they are so publicly denounced. The success of political and media actors in questioning the quality and integrity of Australian teachers has spurred growing policy interest in interventions to raise the status of the profession (Australian Government 2022a, 2022b; Gonski et al. 2018, Finding 9; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment 2019). In line with reports in other Australian jurisdictions, South Australian teachers are currently feeling particularly undervalued by society in general.

Society and the media constantly view teachers in a negative light, despite the hard work and huge amount of time we put in. (Survey participant 490)

The media frequently blame teachers for a whole range of social problems. Teachers are not widely respected in the community. (Survey participant 562)

Lack of value in teaching work, lack of understanding in complexity of work, lack of understanding of amount of work actually involved in teaching by the public makes the job less and less desirable each year. (Survey participant 1035)

The media's certainly got a lot to answer for right now in the – they know it gets clicks and they know it gets a heck of a lot of comments. And it's very popular to be negative towards schools, that's then reflected in the interactions that we have with families as well. (Marc – Group interview E)

Commitment to equity and diversity under adverse conditions

Despite challenging working conditions, respondents reported an inclusive school ethos in their workplaces (Table 14; Figure 8). Most (85.8%) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that their school emphasises showing respect for all students' cultural beliefs and practices. Around two thirds saw students as being treated equitably and schools as providing quality services to help with social and emotional needs. There was less agreement about the availability of instructional materials and teaching approaches for putting this ethos into practice, and support for special needs or disabilities was viewed as adequate by only a minority of respondents.

| | Agree % | Strongly Agree % | Total Agree % |
|---|------------|------------------------|------------------|
| This site emphasises showing respect for all students'/children's cultural beliefs and practices | 59.2 | 26.6 | 85.8 |
| At this site, all students/children are treated equitably, justly, and fairly. | 51.3 | 17.6 | 68.9 |
| This site provides quality services to help students/children with social or emotional needs. | 50.4 | 17.3 | 67.7 |
| Instructional materials and approaches are responsive to the diverse background of our students/children and community. | 50.4 | 7.1 | 57.5 |
| The programs and resources at this site are adequate to support students/children with special needs or disabilities | 36.3 | 8.7 | 45.0 |

Table 14: Perceptions of equity and diversity at current site ⁷

⁷ See full spread of responses in Appendix B, Table 27.

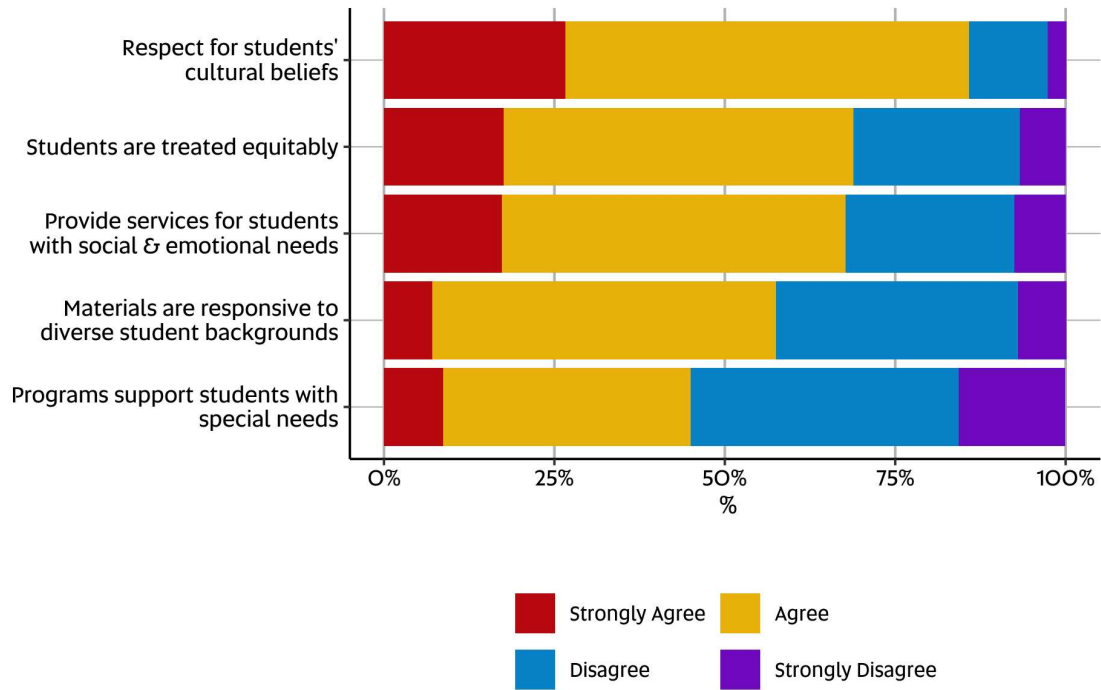


Figure 8: Perceptions of equity and diversity at current site

These data show that there is a clear commitment to, and belief in, working collaboratively to meet the challenges of diversity. As such, there was broad endorsement from teachers of an inclusive response to diversity that marks a clear change from an older model of a more regimented and exclusionary education system. Formerly, many students would have exited the system earlier, or been relegated to separated streams or institutions. The consequences of greater inclusion for teachers' work have been underestimated, based on the findings reported here.

7. Impact of workload on health and wellbeing

Previous sections have shown the clear sense of dissatisfaction and frustration amongst South Australian teachers. In the following section, data on the impact of these conditions is presented, including for health and wellbeing and intentions to leave the profession completely.

| | Quite a bit % | A lot % | Total % |
|--|------------------|------------|------------|
| I experience stress in my work. | 29.8 | 47.3 | 77.1 |
| My job negatively impacts my mental health. | 24.4 | 28.4 | 52.8 |
| My job negatively impacts my physical health. | 22.9 | 20.9 | 43.8 |
| I have taken leave due to the impacts of workplace stress. | 9.5 | 7.1 | 16.6 |
| My job leaves me time for my personal life. | 11.8 | 2.0 | 13.8 |

Table 15: Workplace wellbeing - teachers and principals ⁸

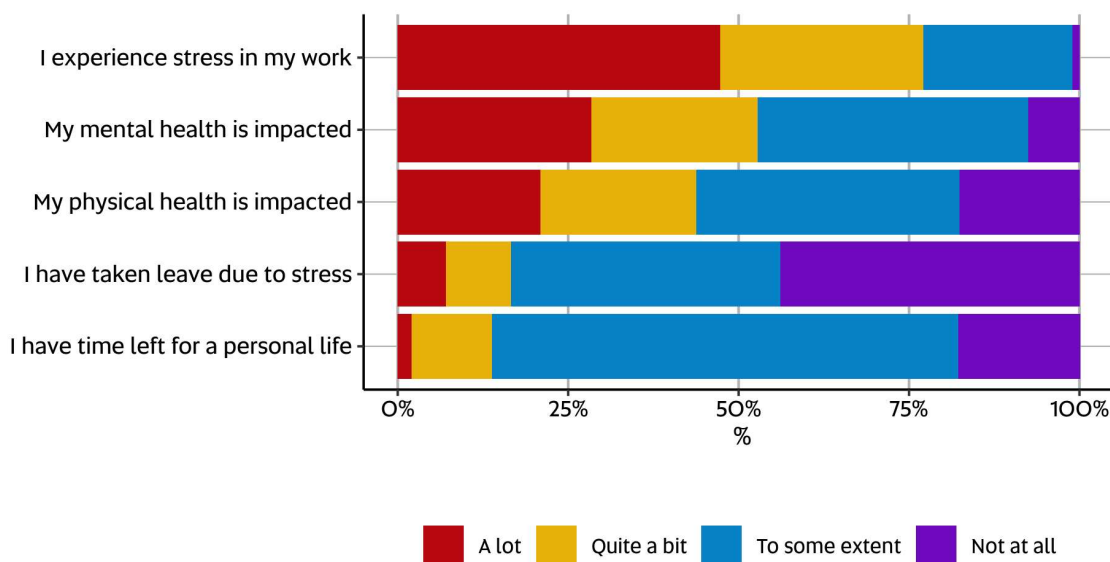


Figure 9: Workplace wellbeing - teachers and principals

Stress was the most prevalent impact of current working conditions, followed by impact on mental and physical health (experienced by 'quite a bit' or 'a lot' by around half of respondents). Work-life balance is also under pressure, as indicated in previous sections, with most teachers reporting their employment leaves them with little or no time for their personal lives.

Close to half of teachers reported experiencing 'a lot' of stress in their work and a further 29.8% reported experiencing 'quite a bit' (Table 15; Figure 9). Relative to 2018 TALIS data (OECD 2020), the proportion of education workers reporting being stressed 'a lot' has almost doubled, from 24% to 47.3%. South Australian teachers in 2022 were more stressed than any national cohort

⁸ See full spread of responses in Appendix B, Table 28.

recorded in 2018 survey results across the OECD. For many teachers, workplace stress has resulted in them taking leave.

I am in tears most days and struggle to get to school because of the workload and conditions. It is too much and I just can't do this for much longer. (Survey participant 758)

After 31 years in the classroom I am currently engaged in receiving counselling for work related stress. (Survey participant 832)

You cannot self care yourself out of the immense pressures that teachers have to face every single day. (Survey participant 1505)

Several teachers reported that they have needed to reduce their fractional working time (FTE), and take a subsequent drop in salary, in order to improve work/life balance. For similar reasons, a highly experienced classroom teacher reported resigning from a permanent position to work as a temporary relief teacher.

My full-time workload was so bad earlier this year that I needed to switch 0.8 to be able to manage my mental and physical health. (Survey participant 138)

This year I decided to go part time. A full-time workload was no longer sustainable to allow for me to spend time with my family. I do not feel staff would need to make this decision if the workload was fair and reasonable. (Survey participant 249)

Resigning was the only way. As I said, I have finally found work life balance. (Mandy - Group interview B, who resigned from a permanent position to work as a temporary relief teacher)

Sources of stress

Common sources of stress (Table 16; Figure 10) included teachers being held responsible for student achievement, and also for behavioural and other outcomes.

High levels of stress appear to be strongly connected to the complex work of differentiating teaching, which – as shown above – is insufficiently supported. Teachers believe that differentiation is valuable, but that they lack the conditions to undertake it with due care and within a sustainable workload.

Stress was also strongly tied to excessive administrative work, which is considered to be a frustrating waste of time. The pressures on teachers to respond to measures of student performance further weighed heavily. Classroom management, shifting professional requirements, the additional workload produced by teacher absences, and excessive lesson preparation were major contributors to stress for half of the respondents.

| | Quite a bit % | A lot % | Total % |
|---|---------------|---------|---------|
| Differentiating teaching for a wide range of abilities in the classroom. | 27.7 | 48.1 | 75.8 |
| Modifying lessons for students/children with special needs (e.g. One Plan). | 30.1 | 40.7 | 70.8 |
| Having too much administrative work to do (e.g. filling out forms) | 31.3 | 39.2 | 70.5 |
| Being held responsible for students'/children's achievement | 28.9 | 40.0 | 68.9 |
| Maintaining classroom discipline | 24.4 | 26.4 | 50.8 |
| Keeping up with changing requirements from regional, state, or national/federal authorities | 27.1 | 21.9 | 49.0 |
| Having extra workload due to absent teachers. | 22.4 | 25.7 | 48.1 |
| Having too much lesson preparation to do | 28.8 | 18.6 | 47.4 |
| Addressing parent or guardian concerns | 26.8 | 12.5 | 39.3 |
| Having too much marking | 20.3 | 15.8 | 36.1 |
| Having too many lessons to teach | 18.5 | 14.6 | 33.1 |
| Being intimidated or verbally abused by students/children | 14.5 | 13.8 | 28.3 |
| Being intimidated or verbally abused by parents or guardians | 12.8 | 8.3 | 21.1 |

Table 16: Sources of stress – teachers ⁹

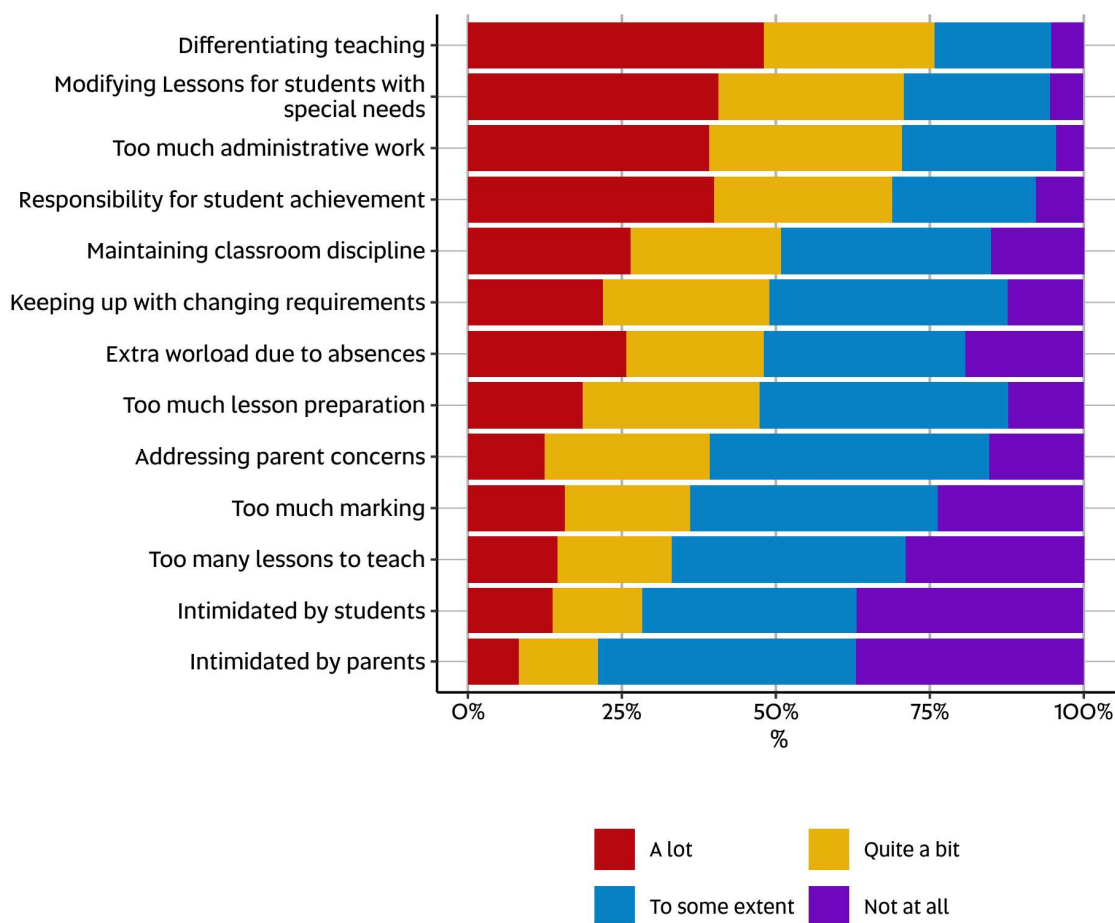


Figure 10: Sources of stress - teachers

⁹ See full spread of responses in Appendix B, Table 29.

Sources of stress for principals were slightly different (Table 17; Figure 11). Staff absences weighed more heavily, as did administrative work and maintaining school discipline.

| | Quite a bit% | A lot% | Total % |
|--|--------------|--------|---------|
| Having extra duties due to absent staff. | 28.8 | 47.1 | 75.9 |
| Having too much administrative work to do (e.g. filling out forms) | 38.7 | 32.5 | 71.2 |
| Maintaining school discipline | 25.1 | 33.0 | 58.1 |
| Accommodating students/children with special needs. | 34.5 | 23.0 | 57.5 |
| Being held responsible for students'/children's achievement | 36.3 | 20.4 | 56.7 |
| Addressing parent or guardian concerns | 27.2 | 17.3 | 44.5 |
| Keeping up with changing requirements from regional, state/territory, or national/federal authorities. | 25.7 | 14.1 | 39.8 |
| Being intimidated or verbally abused by parents or guardians | 16.8 | 11.0 | 27.8 |
| Having too much teacher appraisal and feedback work to do | 18.8 | 7.9 | 26.7 |
| Being intimidated or verbally abused by students/children. | 14.9 | 8.8 | 23.7 |

Table 17 : Sources of stress – principals ¹⁰

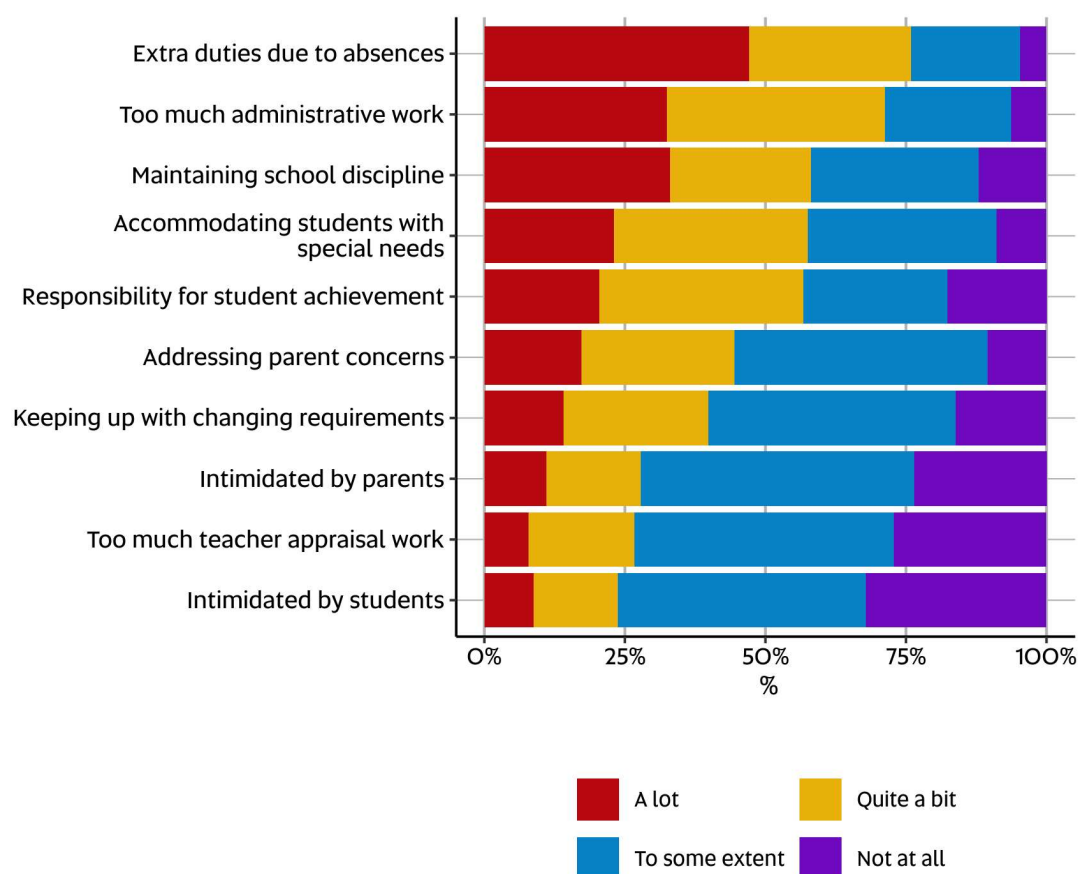


Figure 11: Sources of stress – principals

¹⁰ See full spread of responses in Appendix B, Table 30.

For teachers and leaders experiencing challenges to their wellbeing, the usual institutional response is ‘a strong dose of resilience’ (Santoro 2018, p. 15), which purportedly enables staff to ‘bounce back’ from adversity (Arnup & Bowles 2016; Gu & Day 2007). While not dismissing the importance of resilience, Santoro (2018) problematises the emphasis on resilience as a solution: ‘Those who promote resilience in teacher education literature present it as the silver bullet that will enable teachers to keep teaching, against all odds’ (p. 91). Focusing on resilience individualises what is often a systemic problem and places the onus for solving this problem on teachers and school leaders rather than on systems (McGrath-Champ, Wilson & Stacey 2017; Price, Mansfield & McConney 2012; Stacey, Wilson & McGrath-Champ 2020). In relation to resilience interventions in educational workplaces, Thompson (2021) notes that ‘[w]hile such approaches may go some way to helping teachers attend to their own physical and mental wellbeing, they also responsabilise individual teachers for systemic conditions over which they have little or no control’ (p. 8). As one participant observed, ‘you can’t self-care yourself out of a broken system’.

Just hanging by a thread ... I love teaching the kids but workload is unbelievable. (Survey participant 133)

Teachers and leaders are exhausted physically and mentally. (Survey participant 490)

Constantly feeling that you are behind and that it is impossible to complete all tasks has a heavy burden on the mental health of staff. (Survey participant 1491)

I have come to the conclusion that I think I will be leaving education at some point. It’s just a matter of what opportunities there are to exit into, but I got really, really quite distressed one day when I realised it’s actually not possible for me to be able to do my job to the standard expected in anything even remotely approaching the time. (Carol – Group interview B)

Attrition

Close to 9 in 10 teachers (87.4%) have considered leaving the profession for various reasons (Table 18; Figure 12).

| | n (total n=1590) | Percentage |
|----------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Unstable employment | 173 | 10.9 |
| Not considered leaving | 201 | 12.6 |
| Low wages | 292 | 18.4 |
| Feeling undervalued | 701 | 44.1 |
| Frustration with structure | 704 | 44.3 |
| Workload | 770 | 48.4 |

Table 18: Reasons for considering leaving

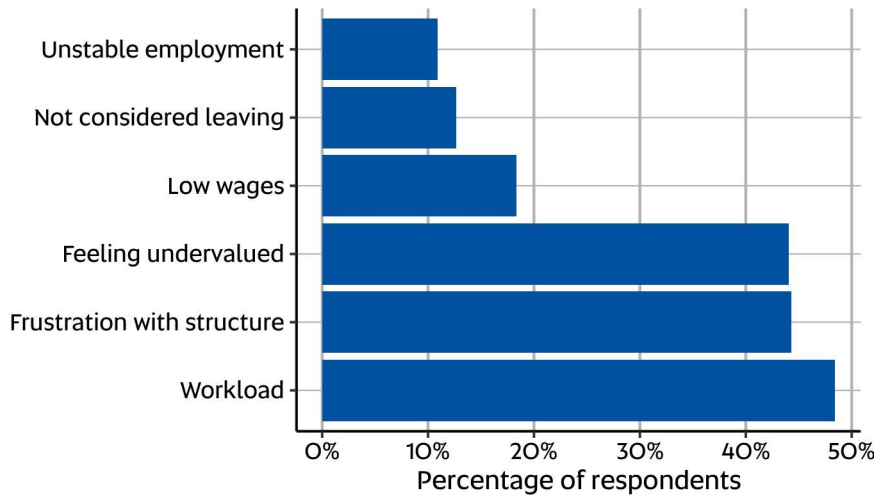


Figure 12: Reasons for considering leaving

Amongst those considering quitting teaching, the most common reason was workload (48.4%), followed by frustration with the structure of the teaching profession (44.3%) and feeling undervalued (44.1%). Elsewhere, Bahr and Ferreira (2018) have singled out seven reasons why Australian teachers want to leave the profession that closely align with the concerns reported here: fixation on teacher competency; obsession with standardisation; lack of autonomy; work intensification; negative public image; ‘teacher bashing’; and poor salaries.

Quality teachers leave the profession as they cannot rely on being recontracted - needing stability particularly with mortgages etc. (Survey participant 938)

The reason I've wanted to leave every year is because every year I don't know if I have a job for the following- it is so stressful with a mortgage and a child- and I've been teaching for 10 years with excellent references and experience. (Survey participant 275)

Asked how long they intend to remain in the teaching profession, almost half of all respondents answered five years or less (45.5%) (Table 19). This is double the proportion reported as considering leaving within five years in TALIS data collected in 2018 (22%) (Thomson & Hillman 2019b). Amongst principals, the desire to leave the profession within five years is slightly more prevalent (48.68%).

| Intended number of years to continue teaching | n | Percentage |
|---|-----|------------|
| 0-1 years | 95 | 13.59 |
| 2-5 years | 223 | 31.90 |
| 6-10 years | 161 | 23.03 |
| 10+ years | 220 | 31.47 |

Table 19: Intention to leave the profession

I totally understand why teachers are leaving the profession. They must be disillusioned with the whole process and want a job where they are not expected to be superhuman. (Survey participant 530)

The workload is unsustainable ... I will be leaving teaching at the end of the year if not sooner, as it has caused significant mental health issues for me. (Survey participant 1114)

The intention to leave teaching can be found amongst both early-career and experienced teachers (Table 20). Close to a quarter of early career teachers did not intend to remain in the profession over the long term. Unstable contract employment weighs heavily on the decisions of early career teachers, in particular. Across Australia, attrition is particularly acute among early career teachers, with estimates of up to 40% to 50% of beginning teachers leaving the career within their first five years (Acton & Glasgow 2015; Heffernan et al. 2022).

| Career phase | Intended number of years to continue teaching | n | Percentage |
|--------------|---|-----|------------|
| Early Career | 0-1 years | 12 | 13.19 |
| | 2-5 years | 25 | 27.47 |
| | 6-10 years | 12 | 13.19 |
| | 10+ years | 42 | 46.15 |
| Experienced | 0-1 years | 83 | 13.65 |
| | 2-5 years | 198 | 32.57 |
| | 6-10 years | 149 | 24.51 |
| | 10+ years | 178 | 29.28 |

Table 20: Intention to leave teaching by career phase - excluding principals

8. The impact of COVID

The impact of the pandemic on teachers has been considerable. Summing together impacts rated as ‘quite a bit’ and ‘a lot’, the most widely felt impacts have been student absences (84.9%), increased workload (79.1%), staffing shortages (70.9%) and social/emotional wellbeing (66.9%) (Table 21, Figure 13).

| | Quite a bit % | A lot % | Total % |
|---|---------------|---------|---------|
| Student/child absences | 32.5 | 52.4 | 84.9 |
| Increased workload | 30.8 | 48.3 | 79.1 |
| Site staffing shortages | 27.0 | 43.9 | 70.9 |
| Your social/emotional wellbeing | 28.4 | 38.5 | 66.9 |
| Concerns about health and safety in the workplace | 27.5 | 37.3 | 64.8 |
| Time needed to manage assessment tasks | 32.8 | 26.1 | 58.9 |
| Simultaneously planning or delivering classes online and face-to-face | 21.0 | 21.3 | 42.3 |
| Lack of sick leave to cover COVID and other illnesses | 15.2 | 25.1 | 40.3 |

Table 21: Impact of COVID-19 on the workplace ¹¹

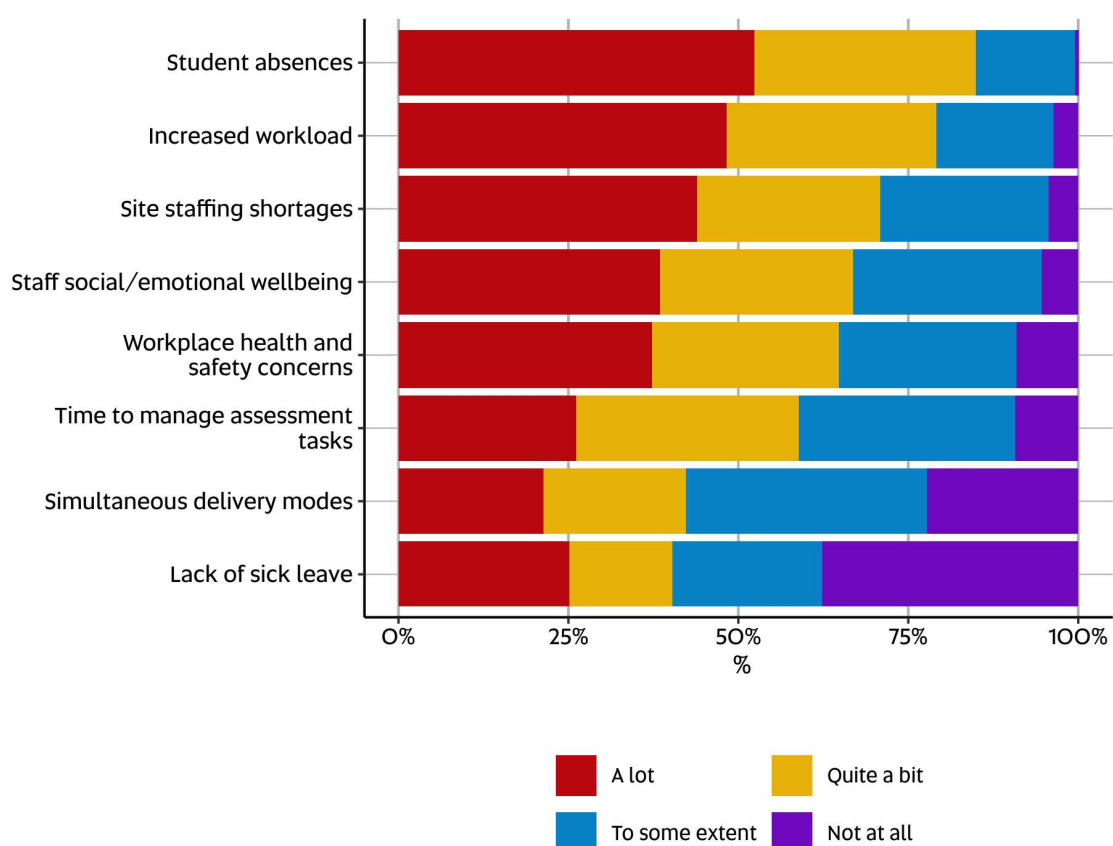


Figure 13: Impact of COVID-19 on workplace

¹¹ See full spread of responses in Appendix B, Table 31.

Teachers also reported that students' needs for social, emotional or mental health support were somewhat greater (26.5%) or much greater (39%) than in previous years.

Support for rapid adaptations to the pandemic was viewed by many as insufficient. In particular, some teachers felt a lack of adequate care was shown by the Department for Education in a series of new expectations that greatly increased workload across the board.

Many stressful confrontations with students occurred while trying to enforce the wearing of masks in schools. We were told to tell the students to wear them but were not allowed to remove students who refused - where does that leave us and our health? (Survey participant 98)

SA is also the ONLY state that does not pay teachers covid leave. (Survey participant 1278)

We were told that we are essential workers. we had to quickly change the way we teach to online, then were expected to teach face to face and online too with minimal training. The expectations placed on our staff to teach live online, upload work, mark work, chase up non attenders, assess work, have time to chat with kids online each day, play exciting games, chase up work not completed or completed by parents - Just crazy expectations. (Survey participant 1570)

All of the uncertainty with COVID and all the negativity is really amping up all the complexities in student behaviour and student mental health issues. (Carol – Group interview B)

But I don't feel like the staff have been cared about with COVID whatsoever. And I think that has really put made it so clear that we're not valued really. (Sarah – Group interview E)

More than two years on from the start of the pandemic, there have now been several published reports on the impact of COVID-19 on the working conditions of Australian educators. As noted in research in other jurisdictions, Australian school teachers were required to shift to online and remote learning at short notice (Fray et al. 2022; Heffernan et al. 2021), while simultaneously accommodating face-to-face learning to cater for the children of workers deemed 'essential'. Where online learning was not possible for some students, teachers also had to prepare and even deliver to homes the equivalent hard copy materials (Fray et al. 2022).

Despite the many negatives of the pandemic, there was a reprieve of sorts in the ways that educators were perceived in the media and among parents and carers (Heffernan et al. 2021). As Gore and colleagues (2020) report, '[d]uring the period of learning from home, we heard outpourings of admiration and respect for teachers, particularly from parents and carers trying to support their children's learning' (p. 70). This sentiment was reflected, to a limited extent, in the present study. However, Fray et al. (2022) comment, 'this apparent lift in status did not last long' (n.p.).

And then I think having the kids at home and the parents having to school them potentially made us feel a bit more valued because the parents worked out how hard it was to try to get them to do stuff. (Libby - Group interview A)

I reckon when COVID first hit and parents were trying to do online learning with their kids at home, I reckon for a little while the respect might have gone up because they realise they are actually struggling to teach their own two kids at home anything because they have got the attention span of an ant. (Mandy – Group interview B)

9. Priorities for change

In this final section, we report on responses to a question asking teachers to rate the importance of nine priorities for change (Table 22). Respondents were in strongest agreement on the need for reduction of administration workload (response options were low importance, moderate importance, high importance). Additional time for working with students with special needs also rated highly, along with reduced class sizes and greater preparation time. All of these changes would enhance conditions for building high-quality relationships with students. Improving salaries was also viewed as important by close to nine in ten respondents.

| | Moderate importance % | High importance % | Total % |
|---|-----------------------|-------------------|---------|
| Reducing administration load | 18.5 | 78.5 | 97.0 |
| Additional time for working with students with special needs | 29.5 | 66.4 | 95.9 |
| Reducing class sizes. | 30.1 | 62.6 | 92.7 |
| Increasing non-teaching time for preparation | 30.3 | 59.6 | 89.9 |
| Improving salaries. | 44.6 | 44.6 | 89.2 |
| Reducing the number of government initiatives | 33.3 | 54.5 | 87.8 |
| Additional career progression points for experienced teachers who wish to stay in the classroom | 29.5 | 57.4 | 86.9 |
| Greater consistency and follow-through in government initiatives | 40.4 | 39.1 | 79.5 |
| Increasing opportunities for professional development | 47.8 | 23.9 | 71.7 |

Table 22: Priorities for change - all respondents

Class sizes are a pressing problem in light of the increasing complexity of student needs, as well as the administrative demands of individualised plans for students. For example, one participant (n. 71) mentioned taking on the additional roles of counsellor, referee and crowd controller. These new roles are not recognised as part of teachers' work, and contribute to stress and burnout. Feelings of frustration are amplified by a perceived lack of respect from the media and wider community, as well as in think-tank reports that dismiss class size as inconsequential (e.g. Fahey 2022).

Remove standardised testing, NAPLAN and admin paperwork and just let teachers teach. (Survey participant 1579)

I just love the kids probably more so than anything. I'd love to be able to have the time to teach as well as I can. (Penny - Group interview A)

You can't work with young people and not care. You can't see the students every day and not grow to have that be really important and matter. (Carol - Group interview B)

As skilled professionals, teachers have strategies for managing the diversity of student needs but also need additional support, including from SSOs. This support is not adequately provided by

bureaucratic systems that increase reporting requirements for individualised management and/or prioritise improvement in test results. Instead, as illustrated above, increased bureaucracy and pressure to raise performance are counterproductive, reducing teacher wellbeing and valuable time needed for face-to-face contact with students and colleagues. Local decision-making in relation to effective strategies is devalued in favour of initiatives that are often perceived to be ‘quick fixes’ and which over-promise in their ability to generate change.

I think that there need to be more SSOs employed - both for classroom support, but for the admin tasks that are taking up so much time. (Survey participant 1246)

Every primary classroom should have an allocated SSO. This would allow the teacher adequate opportunities to work with students requiring intervention/extension and would ensure that all students requiring support would receive it. This would enable us to get rid of the inconsistent, time-wasting exercise of applying for IESP funding. (Survey participant 1377)

I would like an education department who was supportive of teachers and not continually undermining them. A department who did not continually increase workload. A department that did not follow the latest trend. (Survey participant 1575)

[according to the Department] one size fits all. Context doesn't matter. If you use this strict set of things that John Hattie once said was a good idea, then everybody should be able to be successful. And the reality of that is that it's rubbish. (Marc – Group interview E)

Our classrooms are too complex and something should be done from a systems level to address that, rather than changing the training that happens to allow people to be more resilient and ready for those things that just shouldn't happen in a workplace. (Marc – Group interview E)

10. Conclusion

South Australian teachers care deeply about their students and value the time that they spend teaching them. They are frustrated that so many of the tasks demanded of them take away valuable time to prepare for lessons and to teach to the standards that they expect of themselves.

Teachers also feel under-appreciated and devalued as professionals by the Department for Education, media, parents, and wider community. The reliance on top-down initiatives and standardised test data over teacher-administered assessment and professional judgement serves to diminish the profession. It also under-utilises teachers' skills, since top-down initiatives can require lock-step adherence by staff. Teachers still strongly believe in the importance of teaching as a vocation, but a significant number are becoming unhappy with what it looks like in practice today.

Behind many of the changes to teachers' work in South Australia is the influence of external accountability procedures that Reid (2020) describes as a system of 'remote control'. This system, embodied by standardised tools such as NAPLAN, has driven policy across all Australian jurisdictions for over a decade with little to show except for stagnating student performance and exasperated teachers (ACARA 2021; Thomson 2021). Faith put in student assessments ignores the limitations in what can reasonably be expected of them and the complexities of educational and social context. Research in the USA has shown that student test scores are an unreliable measure of teacher performance (Schochet & Chiang 2010). Further, just 3% to 16% of variance in student test scores can be attributed to teacher influence (Wu 2010). Tests such as NAPLAN are highly inaccurate measures of individual student ability, and measurement error remains high at the level of the class (Wu 2010).

At present, the workplace conditions of South Australian teachers do not provide time and autonomy to undertake high-quality, collaborative planning and research that could better inform practice. Students deserve teachers who can fully exercise their commitment, knowledge of learning and learners in their context, understanding of complex relationships and needs, and love for teaching.

11. Recommendations

Five recommendations for improved working conditions are each accompanied by a set of practical actions.

Recommendation 1

Increase time and support for teachers to manage increasingly complex student needs.

Practical actions:

- a. Reduce class sizes.
- b. Provide more student support officers and other administrative support.
- c. Provide more specialist teacher support for students with special needs.
- d. Reduce out-of-field teaching.
- e. Provide more leadership support for teachers.
- f. Streamline funding mechanisms for students with additional needs.

Recommendation 2

Reduce administrative demands on teachers to make workloads healthy and sustainable.

Practical actions:

- a. Reduce bureaucratic expectations for accountability and reporting.
- b. Increase time available for planning and other required activities beyond face-to-face teaching.
- c. Undertake more effective system-level planning to eliminate competing workload demands on schools and/or unrealistic time frames.
- d. Reduce supervision duties, such as bus and playground duty.
- e. Ensure administrative systems and tools are fit for purpose and sufficient time and resources are provided for implementation.

Recommendation 3

Increase the voice of teachers and leaders in decision-making and co-construction of policy.

Practical actions:

- a. Reduce the number of top-down initiatives and enhance local decision-making.
- b. Halt the growth of school success metrics and accountability systems that are narrowly driven by test data.
- c. Consult prior to any significant change, reform or initiative to ensure it has educational value and the time and resources to support effective implementation.
- d. Discontinue initiatives that teachers and school leaders do not find efficient or effective.
- e. Simplify compliance requirements for school leaders.

Recommendation 4

Address shortage of staff to reduce workload pressure.

Practical actions:

- a. Employ more teachers.
- b. Increase salary to a level commensurate with teacher professionalism.

Recommendation 5

Increase support for early career teachers to sustain the profession.

Practical actions:

- a. Provide more professional learning and development for staff during school hours to support collaboration and mentoring.
- b. Provide more opportunities for permanency in order to retain early career teachers.

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Appendix A: Group interview participants

| Group | Pseudonym | Gender | Age | Role | Employment Status | Setting | Fraction | Location | Site SES |
|-------|-----------|--------|-------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------|--------------|--------------------|
| A | Penny | F | 50-59 | Classroom teacher | Contract | Primary | 1.0 | Regional | Disadvantaged |
| | Melanie | F | 40-49 | Classroom teacher | Contract | Primary | 1.0 | Regional | Disadvantaged |
| | Linda | F | 30-39 | Classroom teacher | Permanent | Secondary | 1.0 | Metropolitan | Very disadvantaged |
| | Libby | F | 40-49 | Classroom teacher | Permanent | Secondary | 0.4 | Regional | Regional |
| B | Mandy | F | 50-59 | TRT | Casual | Secondary | Various | Various | Various |
| | Carol | F | 30-39 | Classroom teacher | Permanent | Secondary | 1.0 | Metropolitan | Very disadvantaged |
| C | Nathan | M | 30-39 | Classroom teacher | Permanent | Secondary | 1.0 | Regional | Disadvantaged |
| | Pete | M | 40-49 | Band B Leadership | Permanent | Secondary | 1.0 | Metropolitan | Disadvantaged |
| | Kath | F | 50-59 | Band A Leadership | Permanent | Secondary | 1.0 | Metropolitan | Very Disadvantaged |
| | Kaye | F | 20-29 | Classroom teacher | Permanent | Secondary | 1.0 | Metropolitan | Advantaged |
| D | Gino | M | 50-59 | Classroom teacher | Permanent | Secondary | 1.0 | Metropolitan | Disadvantaged |
| E | Marc | M | 30-39 | Band B Leadership | Permanent | Primary | 1.0 | Regional | Disadvantaged |
| | Sarah | F | 20-29 | Band B Leadership | Permanent | Secondary | 1.0 | Metropolitan | Disadvantaged |
| | Danielle | F | 50-59 | Specialist teacher | Contract | Special School | 1.0 | Metropolitan | Disadvantaged |

Table 23: Profile of interview participants

Appendix B: Full tables

| | Significantly Decreased | Decreased | Not Changed | Increased | Significantly Increased |
|--|----------------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| The complexity of my work has: | 0.3 | 0.4 | 1.8 | 26.1 | 71.4 |
| My administrative tasks have: | 0.2 | 0.1 | 4.5 | 38.1 | 57.2 |
| The diversity of students'/children's needs has: | 0.1 | 0.2 | 4.4 | 22.8 | 72.5 |
| The range of activities I undertake in my work has: | 0.2 | 0.4 | 4.3 | 45.3 | 49.9 |
| Expectations to differentiate learning and produce personalised learning plans have: | 0.1 | 0.1 | 5.7 | 22.9 | 71.2 |
| The collection, analysis and reporting of data has: | 0.2 | 0.6 | 5.2 | 27.9 | 66.1 |
| Expectations to communicate and liaise with parents or guardians have: | 0.1 | 0.1 | 15.7 | 34.1 | 50.0 |
| Requirements to use Department sanctioned curriculum resources have: | 0.2 | 0.5 | 23.8 | 40.6 | 34.9 |
| The demands to participate in professional development have: | 1.8 | 4.5 | 30.3 | 40.0 | 23.5 |
| The role played by commercial curriculum packages has: | 0.7 | 3.1 | 40.8 | 40.2 | 15.3 |
| My ability to get to know students/children has: | 2.9 | 25.4 | 45.0 | 16.7 | 10.0 |
| My overall feeling of wellbeing in my workplace has: | 39.1 | 36.5 | 11.0 | 7.6 | 5.9 |

Table 24: Reported changes in working conditions over the last 5 years (full table)

| | Strongly Disagree % | Disagree % | Agree % | Strongly Agree % |
|--|------------------------|---------------|------------|---------------------|
| Site leadership have to juggle excessive and competing demands for change from different authorities (e.g. Department, partnerships) | 2.5 | 9.6 | 55.0 | 32.9 |
| There are too many new government initiatives to realistically take on board | 3.1 | 11.8 | 50.5 | 34.6 |
| Department-produced curriculum resources need much adaptation to be useful at this site | 2.6 | 18.2 | 51.3 | 27.9 |
| Professional development follows fads rather than addressing real needs | 2.9 | 22.7 | 41.7 | 32.8 |
| Professional development is repetitive with few new ideas | 3.1 | 29.3 | 47.2 | 20.5 |
| I have sufficient opportunities to develop positive relationships with students/children | 6.9 | 32.4 | 53.9 | 6.9 |
| Teachers have autonomy to make decisions about instructional delivery (i.e. pacing, materials and pedagogy) | 15.0 | 29.7 | 50.7 | 4.5 |
| My site offers practical employment arrangements and conditions to help employees achieve work-life balance | 13.7 | 33.1 | 47.6 | 5.6 |
| An appropriate amount of time is provided for professional development | 13.1 | 38.8 | 44.5 | 3.6 |
| Department-produced curriculum resources play a helpful role in teaching at my site | 11.6 | 40.7 | 43.3 | 4.5 |
| Professional development supports teachers to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students/children | 13.7 | 45.4 | 37.2 | 3.6 |
| Professional development supports teachers to meet the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students/children | 14.5 | 45.1 | 36.9 | 3.5 |
| Commercial curriculum packages are an important part of teaching at my site | 15.7 | 45.8 | 33.6 | 4.9 |
| Teachers have an appropriate level of influence on decision making at this site. | 27.4 | 34.1 | 34.7 | 3.8 |
| Commercial curriculum packages have a positive influence on teaching at my site | 15.1 | 50.2 | 33.2 | 1.5 |
| The non-instructional time provided for teachers at my site is sufficient | 26.6 | 41.2 | 29.7 | 2.4 |
| Policy demands from the Department are consistent and coherent | 17.2 | 57.8 | 23.7 | 1.2 |
| Government initiatives are followed-through and evaluated to determine their value | 21.3 | 57.4 | 20.9 | 0.4 |
| Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students/children. | 38.2 | 45.2 | 15.9 | 0.7 |
| Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students/children with minimal interruptions | 41.7 | 45.5 | 12.7 | 0.1 |

Table 25: Working conditions - teachers and principals (full table)

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| I feel safe at work | 7.9 | 28.0 | 56.4 | 7.7 |
| I would recommend this site as a good place to work | 15.1 | 22.4 | 46.8 | 15.7 |
| If I could decide again, I would still choose to work as a teacher/principal/leader | 12.0 | 28.7 | 48.3 | 10.9 |
| All in all, I am satisfied with my job | 9.5 | 37.6 | 47.1 | 5.8 |
| My salary adequately covers the cost of living | 15.6 | 34.2 | 46.7 | 3.4 |
| The advantages of being a teacher/principal/leader clearly outweigh the disadvantages | 13.3 | 41.5 | 40.1 | 5.1 |
| Apart from my salary, I am satisfied with the terms of my contract/employment (e.g. benefits, work schedule) | 13.6 | 42.3 | 41.3 | 2.8 |
| I am satisfied with the salary I receive for my work | 19.7 | 42.8 | 33.1 | 4.5 |
| I would like to change to another site if that were possible | 18.8 | 44.0 | 22.0 | 15.2 |
| I would recommend teaching as a career to a family member | 25.4 | 43.2 | 27.7 | 3.7 |
| Salary progressions appropriately reflect experience and expertise | 27.9 | 47.2 | 23.0 | 1.8 |
| I regret that I decided to become a teacher/principal/leader | 21.6 | 56.1 | 17.7 | 4.5 |
| My salary reflects my value as a professional | 33.9 | 44.3 | 18.5 | 3.3 |
| I find my workload manageable | 33.5 | 47.5 | 17.9 | 1.1 |
| Teachers can influence educational policy in South Australia | 41.2 | 45.0 | 11.6 | 2.2 |
| Teachers' views are valued by policymakers in South Australia | 52.1 | 41.3 | 6.1 | 0.5 |
| Teachers are valued by the media in South Australia | 60.2 | 33.7 | 5.9 | 0.3 |

Table 26: Workplace satisfaction - teachers and principals (full table)

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| This site emphasises showing respect for all students'/children's cultural beliefs and practices | 2.7 | 11.6 | 59.2 | 26.6 |
| At this site, all students/children are treated equitably, justly, and fairly | 6.7 | 24.4 | 51.3 | 17.6 |
| This site provides quality services to help students/children with social or emotional needs | 7.5 | 24.8 | 50.4 | 17.3 |
| Instructional materials and approaches are responsive to the diverse background of our students/children and community | 7.1 | 35.5 | 50.4 | 7.1 |
| The programs and resources at this site are adequate to support students/children with special needs or disabilities | 15.6 | 39.3 | 36.3 | 8.7 |

Table 27: Perceptions of equity and diversity at current site (full table)

| | Not at all | To some extent | Quite a bit | A lot |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| I experience stress in my work. | 1.0 | 21.9 | 29.8 | 47.3 |
| My job negatively impacts my mental health. | 7.5 | 39.7 | 24.4 | 28.4 |
| My job negatively impacts my physical health. | 17.6 | 38.6 | 22.9 | 20.9 |
| I have taken leave due to the impacts of workplace stress. | 43.9 | 39.5 | 9.5 | 7.1 |
| My job leaves me time for my personal life. | 17.9 | 68.4 | 11.8 | 2.0 |

Table 28: Workplace wellbeing - teachers and principals (full table)

| | Not at all | To some extent | Quite a bit | A lot |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| Differentiating teaching for a wide range of abilities in the classroom. | 5.3 | 18.9 | 27.7 | 48.1 |
| Modifying lessons for students/children with special needs (e.g. One Plan). | 5.4 | 23.7 | 30.1 | 40.7 |
| Having too much administrative work to do (e.g. filling out forms) | 4.5 | 25.0 | 31.3 | 39.2 |
| Being held responsible for students'/children's achievement | 7.8 | 23.3 | 28.9 | 40.0 |
| Maintaining classroom discipline | 15.2 | 34.1 | 24.4 | 26.4 |
| Keeping up with changing requirements from regional, state, or national/federal authorities | 12.3 | 38.6 | 27.1 | 21.9 |
| Having extra workload due to absent teachers. | 19.1 | 32.7 | 22.4 | 25.7 |
| Having too much lesson preparation to do | 12.3 | 40.3 | 28.8 | 18.6 |
| Addressing parent or guardian concerns | 15.4 | 45.3 | 26.8 | 12.5 |
| Having too much marking | 23.6 | 40.2 | 20.3 | 15.8 |
| Having too many lessons to teach | 29.0 | 38.0 | 18.5 | 14.6 |
| Being intimidated or verbally abused by students/children | 36.8 | 34.8 | 14.5 | 13.8 |
| Being intimidated or verbally abused by parents or guardians | 37.0 | 41.9 | 12.8 | 8.3 |

Table 29: Sources of stress - teachers (full table)

| | Not at all | To some extent | Quite a bit | A lot |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| Having extra duties due to absent staff. | 4.7 | 19.4 | 28.8 | 47.1 |
| Having too much administrative work to do (e.g. filling out forms) | 6.3 | 22.5 | 38.7 | 32.5 |
| Maintaining school discipline | 12.0 | 29.8 | 25.1 | 33.0 |
| Accommodating students/children with special needs. | 8.8 | 33.6 | 34.5 | 23.0 |
| Being held responsible for students'/children's achievement | 17.7 | 25.7 | 36.3 | 20.4 |
| Addressing parent or guardian concerns | 10.5 | 45.0 | 27.2 | 17.3 |
| Keeping up with changing requirements from regional, state/territory, or national/federal authorities | 16.2 | 44.0 | 25.7 | 14.1 |
| Being intimidated or verbally abused by parents or guardians | 23.6 | 48.7 | 16.8 | 11.0 |
| Having too much teacher appraisal and feedback work to do | 27.2 | 46.1 | 18.8 | 7.9 |
| Being intimidated or verbally abused by students/children | 32.0 | 44.2 | 14.9 | 8.8 |

Table 30: Sources of stress - principals (full table)

| | Not at all | To some extent | Quite a bit | A lot |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| Student/child absences | 0.6 | 14.6 | 32.5 | 52.4 |
| Increased workload | 3.6 | 17.3 | 30.8 | 48.3 |
| Site staffing shortages | 4.4 | 24.7 | 27.0 | 43.9 |
| Your social/emotional wellbeing | 5.4 | 27.7 | 28.4 | 38.5 |
| Concerns about health and safety in the workplace | 9.1 | 26.1 | 27.5 | 37.3 |
| Time needed to manage assessment tasks | 9.3 | 31.8 | 32.8 | 26.1 |
| Simultaneously planning or delivering classes online and face-to-face | 22.2 | 35.5 | 21.0 | 21.3 |
| Lack of sick leave to cover Covid and other illnesses | 37.7 | 22.0 | 15.2 | 25.1 |

Table 31: Impact of COVID-19 on the workplace (full table)



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