

# WHAT THE PROFESSION NEEDS NOW FOR THE FUTURE



## DISCUSSION PAPER ONE: WORK IN VICTORIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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# Work in Victoria's Public Schools

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FIONA LONGMUIR, TIM DELANY, JO LAMPERT, JANE WILKINSON

This paper is the first of a series that aims to generate important discussions to achieve significant positive change that addresses the needs of Victoria's public school workforce and describes the characteristics of the current work of teachers, principal class staff, and education support staff. The project that has informed this paper includes a survey of more than 8,000 AEU Victorian Branch school-based and school-focused members, as well as engagement with research and policy from other national and global settings.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Employment arrangements

- Further diversification of the workforce – to generate an appropriate mix across teaching, leading and support capabilities – holds potential for a healthier and more sustainable and effective Victorian public school sector.
- Women in the school workforce continue to face different and greater challenges and barriers, particularly in their mid-career years.
- Flexibility of work arrangements, specifically in terms of access to part-time work, should be part of the considerations to support women in school workplaces, but also holds potential for the entire workforce.

### Intentions to remain in Victorian public schools

- Only 3 in 10 staff members intend to remain working in Victoria's public schools until they retire.
- Almost 40% of respondents are uncertain about continuing to work in Victorian public schools.
- Mid-career staff are most likely to intend to leave, and most likely to be uncertain about staying. This points to a significant loss of expertise, which would have detrimental impacts on resources to support teacher preparation, early career teachers, future school leadership, and student learning attainment.
- Excessive workloads are the most prevalent reason for intending to stop working in Victorian public schools.

### Workload

- Excessive workload concerns are prevalent for teachers, school leaders, and education support staff.
- All three cohorts are working a substantial number of unpaid hours in order to manage the demands of their work and provide high-quality education for students.
- Administration and compliance activities, and meetings, take disproportionate time, and are often not seen as valuable for teaching, learning and wellbeing.
- Respondents report that they do not have enough time for collaborating with and supporting colleagues.
- Teachers state that they need more time for planning curriculum, assessing students' work, and giving feedback to students.

### Salary and conditions

- All staff are acutely concerned with their salaries and their workloads.
- Excessive administration and compliance tasks, time spent in meetings, and inadequate planning time, were identified as challenging conditions.
- The inflexibility of time use and leave provisions are concerning for school staff.
- All staff are concerned about the escalation of challenging student behaviour and associated safety concerns, and the lack of support and resources available.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Focus on retaining teachers, school leaders and education support staff

Investment is needed to support all staff currently working in Victoria's public schools to stay. This is crucial to mitigate rising attrition and particularly as a measure to address the shortage of teachers.

### Increase teacher, school leader and education support staff salaries

Salaries should be increased by an amount that provides adequate compensation for the critical and demanding work. Salaries need to reflect the importance and value of the work, including in the context of salaries available in other states and territories and other sectors.

### Enhance flexibility in time use

Increasing flexibility in the way that education professionals are able to determine their time use will demonstrate greater respect for the profession, enhance capacity to manage workload demands, and will support work-life balance.

### Reduce administration, compliance, and meeting requirements

A reduction in requirements for documentation and attendance at meetings will support education professionals, particularly teachers and school leaders, to better manage their workloads and prioritise teaching and learning activities.

### Review leave provisions

Leave provisions that better respond to the stressors on education support staff, teacher, and school leaders and provide some flexibility, will support health and wellbeing and enhance capacity to manage workloads.

### Review conditions for education support staff

Ensuring appropriate compensation and support for education support staff - particularly the provision of extra time to work with students and collaborate with other staff - will increase the diversity and quality of support in schools, enhance the productivity of the Victorian public school workforce, and improve student learning.

### Increase support for school leadership

Increased resourcing and support for school leaders will help retain principal class staff, attract new leaders, and enhance their capacity to support teachers and education support staff.

## 1. Introduction

This paper is the first of a series that aims to generate important discussions to reimagine Victoria's public school workforce. Since the upheavals in Victoria's education landscape in the 1990s, much has changed for teachers, school leaders, and education support staff in our public schools. These changes, which have been framed by changes in digital technologies, globalisation, neoliberal education policy approaches, social and political transformations, commodification of education, and evolving climate and health emergencies, have radically altered school work and community expectations of school employees.

The project that has informed this paper includes a survey of over 8,000 AEU Victorian Branch school-based members, including teachers, principals, and education support staff, as well as engagement with research literature and policy from other national and global settings. Full detail of the methods for this paper are available in Appendix B.

Students at public schools across Victoria are supported by 85,246 teachers, principal class, and education support staff (Victorian Department of Education, 2023). Victoria's public school system is the second largest in Australia. As at June 2023, approximately 654,000 students attended the 1,566 government schools across the state (Victorian Department of Education, 2023).

This first discussion paper describes the characteristics of the current work of teachers, school leaders, and education support staff. In this paper, we consider work in Victoria's public schools from a range of perspectives, structured through the themed sections below: employment arrangements; intentions to remain working in Victorian public schools; workload; and salary and conditions.

## 2. Employment arrangements

This section presents the responses to the survey that describe the employment arrangements of the participants and considers the trends, challenges and opportunities of these arrangements for the Victorian public school workforce.

### 2.1 ROLES IN VICTORIAN SCHOOLS

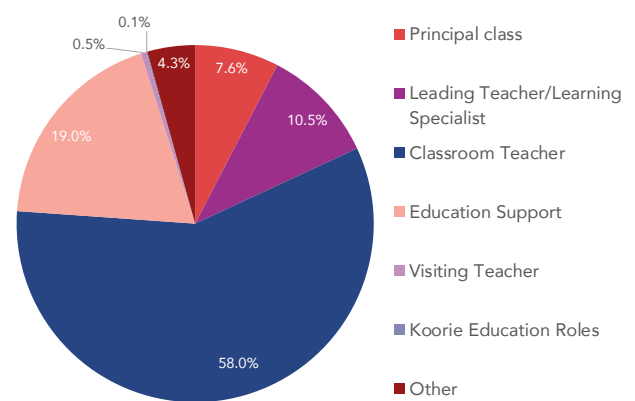


Figure 1: School Role

Figure 1 shows the diversity of school roles. The majority of respondents (69%) indicated that they worked as classroom teachers, leading teachers or learning specialists, 19% indicated that they worked in education support roles, 7.6% in principal class roles, and more than 4% self-classified their role as 'other'. Those who selected 'other' were asked to describe their roles, and these included: casual relief teachers; preservice teachers with permission to teach; careers advisors; school psychologists; tutors; and specific education support roles, such as business managers, technical officers and maintenance staff.

The provision of differentiated and specialised skills and roles in schools has been a feature of modern educational workforces in order to meet the varied range of social, cultural and educational needs of communities (Victorian Department of Education, 2024a). In an Australia-wide study, Longmuir et al. (2022) found that teachers recommended that the provision of more specialised staff (including education support roles, and allied health roles such as psychologists) should be part of a solution aimed at managing increasingly complex workload demands.

## GLOBAL INITIATIVES TO DIVERSIFY ROLES IN EDUCATION WORKFORCE

The Education Commission has looked at global trends in education workforces. Their *Transforming the Education Workforce* report (Jones et al., 2020) argues that “the design of the workforce must evolve to keep pace with the rapidly changing world” (p. 3). To this end, they promote a vision of a ‘diverse workforce: teaching, learning, student welfare and inclusion professionals with different skill sets and experience levels, working together in teams to provide differentiated teaching and welfare support tailored to students’ individual learning needs. New workforce roles, drawing from other sectors and the community, would provide learners with a greater connection to the world outside to ensure that there is alignment between the skills that students are learning and their relevance in the real world’ (p. 3).

### 2.1.1 GENDER

As well as a diversely skilled workforce, diversity and representation across gender and cultural and linguistic backgrounds is also an important consideration for a modern, equitable public education system. This study engaged with considerations related to gender representation and these findings were of note:

Table 1: Role by gender

|              | Principal class | Teacher | Education support | Other | Total |
|--------------|-----------------|---------|-------------------|-------|-------|
| <b>All</b>   | 8%              | 69%     | 19%               | 5%    | 100%  |
| <b>Women</b> | 7%              | 66%     | 23%               | 4%    | 100%  |
| <b>Men</b>   | 11%             | 77%     | 8%                | 4%    | 100%  |

Table 2: Role by workplace

|              | Primary | Secondary | Specialist | CRT | Other | Total |
|--------------|---------|-----------|------------|-----|-------|-------|
| <b>All</b>   | 43%     | 42%       | 6%         | 1%  | 8%    | 100%  |
| <b>Women</b> | 49%     | 36%       | 6%         | 1%  | 8%    | 100%  |
| <b>Men</b>   | 28%     | 57%       | 4%         | 1%  | 10%   | 100%  |

- Those who identify as women are more likely to be education support staff than men, and more likely to be working in primary schools.

- Those who identify as men are more likely to be principal class staff than women, and more likely to be working in secondary schools.

The Victorian government’s 2021 *Workplace Gender Audit* of the public school workforce identified similar trends. While 76% of the government teaching service identify as women, only 44% of executive class employees working as a principal and 56% of principal class employees identify as women. Further, in the education support workforce, 90% of lowest paid classification and 70% of highest paid classification staff identified as women (Victorian Department of Education, 2021).

### 2.1.2 EXPERIENCE

The survey reveals an experienced workforce as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Years of experience by role

|                          | Less than 5 years | 6–10 years | 11–20 years | 20+ years | Total |
|--------------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------|-----------|-------|
| <b>All staff</b>         | 21%               | 22%        | 30%         | 27%       | 100%  |
| <b>Principal class</b>   | 0.5%              | 6%         | 36.5%       | 57%       | 100%  |
| <b>Teacher</b>           | 23%               | 23%        | 29%         | 25%       | 100%  |
| <b>Education support</b> | 26%               | 25%        | 31%         | 18%       | 100%  |

Table 3 shows that experience levels were reasonably well distributed, but principal class employees were likely to have had more experience, and education support staff were more likely to have had less experience. Further examination of the data revealed some additional insights into the years of experience of public school staff in different contexts:

- Respondents with the least experience were more likely to report that they worked in schools with high proportions of disadvantaged students (42% of those with less than five years of experience; 38% of those with more than 10 years of experience).
- Primary (59%) and specialist schools (59%) had higher percentages of respondents with more than 10 years of experience than secondary schools (54%).
- Casual relief teachers were most likely to have had more than 10 years of experience (58%; 6–10 years 11%; less than 5 years – 30%).

A diversity of experience levels in the public school workforce is an important consideration for effective teaching and learning programs and the sustainability of the workforce. Context-based differences in experience profiles of school staff have impacts at local school levels. For example, this data shows that schools serving disadvantaged communities are likely to have less experienced staff. Preston (2023) also found that schools serving lower advantaged communities commonly have less experienced staff.

Further, Preston (2023, p. 32) noted that private schools have “competitive strength in the teaching labour market” enabling them to recruit teachers after they have had some experience in public schools, leaving public schools, and particularly those considered harder to staff, with higher proportions of less experienced teachers.

### 2.1.3 PART-TIME WORK

The Victorian public school system predominantly employs full-time staff, with some differences in rates of part-time employment evident according to role and gender.

- 71% of all respondents are employed in full-time roles.
- Respondents who identified as women were more likely to be part time (33% of all women; 13% of all men).
- Education support staff were the most likely to be working part time (55%).
- 26% of teachers are in part-time roles.
- Only 4% of principal class employees are part time.

Other research shows similar patterns. Preston (2023), whose analysis of the Australian teacher workforce was based on the 2021 ABS Census data, found that 28% of teachers across all sectors worked part time, with 18% of male teachers and 31% of female teachers working part time. Preston (2023) also showed a lower-than-average level of work flexibility for the teaching workforce when compared to the Australian workforce as a whole, where 59% of all workers (70% of male workers and 47% of female workers) report working full time.

The most recent Victorian Government Schools Agreement (VGSA 2022) enhanced opportunities for part-time work for principals, demonstrating an important willingness to support flexible work arrangements for Victoria’s public education workforce. More opportunity for flexibility in work arrangements for all school-based employees is an issue that should be attended to by the Department of Education.

## 2.2 PERMANENCY IN VICTORIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Figure 2 shows that survey participants are overwhelmingly working in ongoing positions (~90%), with a further 5% employed on contracts longer than one year.

Further findings about the nature of those staff members permanently employed include:

- Respondents who identified as men were slightly less likely to be employed in ongoing roles (88% men; 89% women).
- Respondents were least likely to be employed in ongoing positions if they were in the youngest age group (20–29-year-olds – 78%) or oldest age group (70+-year-olds – 68%).
- The distribution of casual (~2%), contract (~8%) and ongoing (~90%) employment rates was consistent across the various regional areas

## FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS IN THE UK

In a recent UK report that looked at part-time and flexible work options for secondary school teachers, authors found that providing more opportunities for part-time and flexible work may be one solution to teacher shortages (Sharp et al., 2019). They found that 36% of secondary school teachers and leaders would like to work part time compared to the 17% who actually did so. Leaders interviewed in this study identified a number of benefits for part-time and flexible work, including staff retention, positive staff wellbeing, and retaining specialist expertise.

In a review of flexible working practices for teachers in England since the COVID-19 pandemic, Harland et al. (2023) found that these arrangements contributed to:

- wellbeing and job satisfaction;
- attendance, productivity, and motivation;
- capacity, expertise, and diversity;
- career progression, succession planning; and
- reducing the gender pay gap.

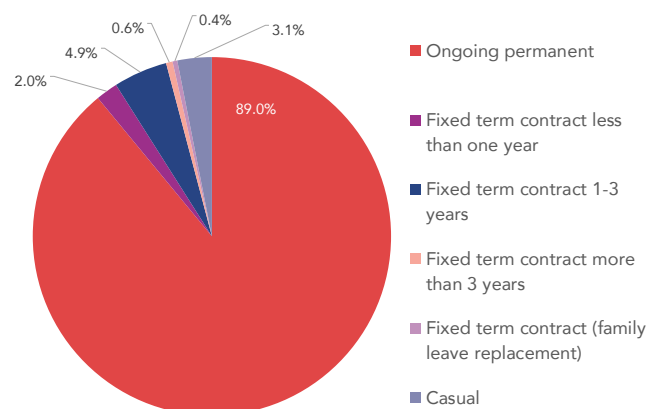


Figure 2: Employment type

(major city – 90% ongoing; inner regional – 90%; outer regional – 91%).

- Across the various roles, those in principal class (96%) and education support (95%) positions were more likely to be ongoing than teachers (89%). By way of comparison, 2022 data reported that 82% of staff across all classifications worked in ongoing positions (Victorian Department of Education, 2023).

This data indicates a high proportion of school employees are in permanent employment. This runs counter to longer term concerning trends toward precarious forms of employment in schools. For example, Stacey et al. (2020) show a growth in more fixed-term forms of employment in NSW schools in the decade before the COVID-19 pandemic, and detailed the detrimental workload and relational implications of these more precarious arrangements. In a Belgian study of teachers who had recently left the profession, Amitai & Houtte (2022, p. 9) showed that early career teachers “struggled with a high workload in addition to the high level of job insecurity on the way to a tenured position”. Longmuir et al. (2022) found connections between permanency and teachers’ feelings of belonging at school, which is thought to protect against burnout.

The change in direction toward more secure employment in Victorian public schools reflects two recent events. Firstly, the Victorian Government Schools Agreements of 2017 and 2022 tightened both policy and expectations of school leaders to justify the use of short-term contracts. This has resulted in more than 17,000 fixed-term employees converted to ongoing employment.

Secondly, the current global school staffing shortage has shifted some power from employers to employees who are seeking security. For example, in response to recent staffing challenges, the New South Wales Department of Education (2023) converted almost 17,000 fixed-term school staff to permanent positions with the aim of supporting their retention.

### 2.3 SECTION SUMMARY POINTS

- Further diversification of the workforce – to generate an appropriate mix across teaching, leading, and support capabilities – holds potential for a healthier and more sustainable future public school sector in Victoria.
- Women in the school workforce continue to face different and greater challenges and barriers, particularly in their mid-career years, as will be further illustrated in the sections below.
- Flexibility of work arrangements, specifically in terms of access to part-time work, should be part of the considerations to support women in school workplaces, but also hold potential for the entire workforce.

## 3. Intentions to remain working in Victoria’s public schools

Attrition of education staff has become an increasing concern across Australia (Australian Government Department of Education, 2022) with staff shortages having considerable impacts on Victoria’s public schools (AEU, 2024). Victorian Department of Education (2024b) reported that, in 2022, the attrition rates exceeded pre-COVID-19 levels, and AEU Victoria (2022) reported that almost 90% of public school principals were concerned that they would not have enough teachers to staff their schools.

### 3.1 INDICATIONS OF RETENTION RATES

In order to contribute to the important conversation on adequate staffing for Victorian public schools, survey respondents were asked a number of questions about their intentions to remain working in public schools. This included questions about: any intentions to stop working before retirement; if so, how much longer they plan to work in public schools; and, if relevant, selecting reasons for their plans to leave the profession.

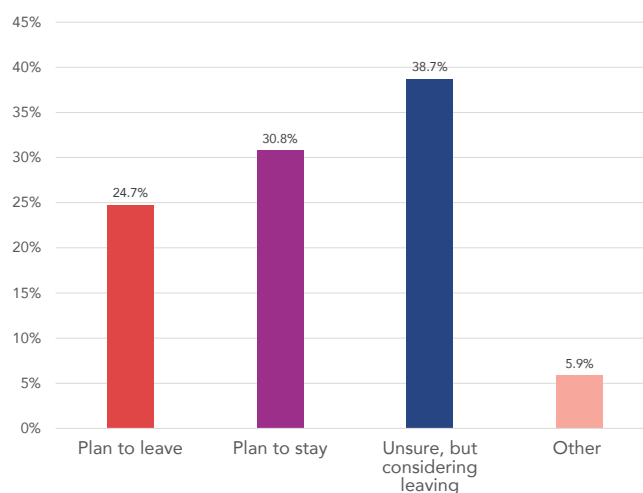


Figure 3: Intentions to leave public schools before retirement

Approximately 3 in 10 respondents answered that they intend to remain working in public education until retirement. Figure 3 also shows that 25% of survey respondents indicated that they plan to stop working in public schools before retirement, and 39% indicated that they were unsure, but considering leaving.

The retention rate of 30% is similar to that being reported in other significant Australian surveys. The *Australian Teacher Workforce Data* (AITSL, 2024) reported that, in 2022, the retention rate was the lowest recorded in the five years of data collection (2018–2022) with only 30.8% of the 38,500 respondents indicating they would stay in the profession until retirement. Similarly, the *Australian Teachers Perceptions of their Work in 2022* project surveyed 5,500 Australian teachers and found that only 28% indicated that they would stay in the profession until retirement (Longmuir et al., 2022).

These consistent findings – that only 3 out of 10 teachers intend to stay in the teaching profession – highlight the recruitment and retention crisis and suggest that without significant and urgent action, it will worsen as staff act on their reported intentions to leave the profession. With the Victorian Department of Education (2024b) reporting 2022 attrition rates of only 5.2% in primary schools and 7% in secondary schools, this evidence that future attrition is likely to be considerably higher paints a concerning picture for staffing Victoria’s public schools.

Those in education support roles are least likely to intend to leave before retirement (14%), followed by principal class (21%), with teachers being the most

likely to intend to leave (28%). Although only 1 in 5 of those in principal class roles indicated that they would stop working in Victorian public schools before retirement, 55% of principal class respondents reported that they think about relinquishing their principal role (which includes leaving the profession or returning to a teaching role). This is potentially a significant loss of the leadership workforce in Victoria's public schools.

The likelihood of respondents intending to remain in the profession varied across age groups and years of experience. As might be expected, the age group most likely to be intending to stay until retirement were those aged between 60–69 (57%) and those over 70 (60%). However, those least likely to intend to stay in the profession were 30–39-year-olds (19%). Further, staff in their mid-career stage – those with 6–10 years of experience (26%) and 11–20 years of experience (27%) – were the least likely to report that they intend to stay in the profession.

This data indicates a concerning possible loss of experience and expertise in Victorian public schools. The potential impacts of a loss of experienced staff include a reduced capacity to provide mentoring and support to early career and pre-service teachers, and a reduced pool of future school and system leaders.

With applications for principal roles in Victorian public schools in 2022 falling to their lowest levels since 2015 (Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2023), this concern for the future of leadership in Victorian schools is pressing.

This also illustrates the compounding nature of teacher shortages. The loss of experience and expertise at this mid-career stage will increase the likelihood that public school staff will be working in more demanding and less supportive workplaces, which will contribute to spiralling attrition rates. Given the importance of effective educational leadership for positive student outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008), the implications of the loss of experience from the profession is extremely concerning.

### 3.2 UNCERTAINTY ABOUT A FUTURE IN VICTORIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

As Figure 3 shows, almost 40% of respondents reported that they were unsure, but considering leaving. This is an important finding as it suggests that there are significant numbers of staff whose decisions to remain may be influenced by changes in their working conditions.

In further evidence of the potential loss of educator experience and expertise, those between the ages of 30–39 (42%) and 40–49 (43%) were most likely to answer that they are unsure, and would consider leaving. The importance of this uncertainty for teachers in their mid-careers is further highlighted as those who reported they had between 6–10 years of experience working in public schools were the most likely to be unsure and considering leaving (42%), followed by those with 11–20 years of experience (41%), which was higher than those within their first five years of teaching (38%).

Between the ages of 30 and 59, respondents identifying as women were more likely to be unsure if they would stay in the profession than respondents identifying as men (5–6% more women unsure than men in each age category). Those in teacher roles are the most likely to be unsure about staying in the profession (41%), with principal class (35%) and education support staff (34%) less likely to be uncertain about staying until retirement. Staff working in schools in inner regional LGAs were less likely to be unsure (37%) than those in major cities or outer regional LGAs (both 40%). There were minimal differences in the rates of unsure response between staff working in secondary schools (38%), primary schools (39%), and specialist schools (40%).

### 3.3 REASONS FOR INTENDING TO LEAVE THE PROFESSION

Those participants who responded that they plan to leave the profession before retirement were asked to indicate how much longer they see themselves working in public schools. Most (76%) intend to stop working in public schools within 4 years. Fewer than 6% indicated that they would be staying for 10 or more years.

Participants were also asked to indicate reasons for their intention to stop working in Victorian public schools.

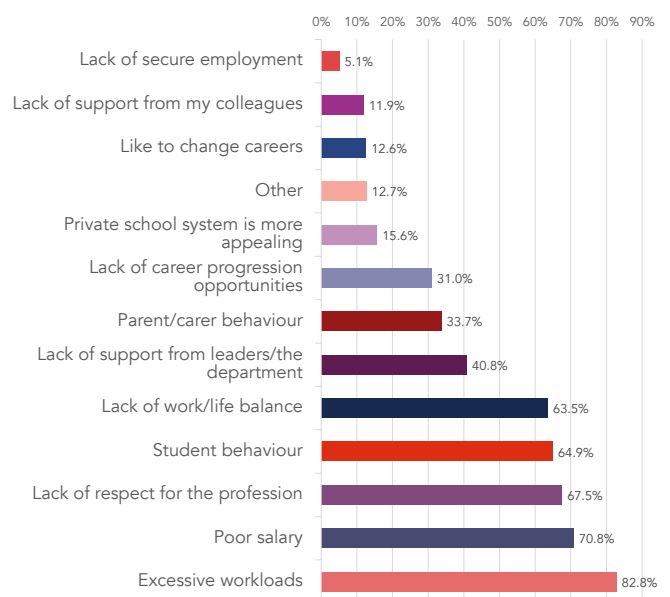


Figure 4: Reasons for intending to leave the profession

Figure 4 shows the percentage of these respondents that selected each of the reasons.

- 'Excessive workloads' was the most selected reason (83%).
- More than 60% identified 'poor salary', 'lack of respect for the profession', 'student behaviour' and 'lack of work/life balance'.
- Few respondents indicated that they would like to change careers (13%) or that they felt a lack of support from colleagues (12%).
- Only 16% of respondents cited the appeal of private schools.



- 5% indicated a concern about the lack of secure employment.

Interrogation of reasons given for intending to leave the profession for different cohorts of respondents revealed some trends of interest.

- Excessive workload remained the most selected reason for intending to leave across any of the cohorts.
- Excessive workload was least cited by 50–59-year-olds (76%) and most cited by 30–39-year-olds (87%).
- Student behaviour was more of a concern for 20–29-year-olds (72%) than it was for 50–59-year-olds (61%), as was parent/carer behaviour (20–29-year-olds – 39%; 50–59-year-olds – 29%).
- Younger respondents were more likely to find the private school system more appealing (20–29-year-olds – 29%) than older employees (50–59-year-olds – 7%).
- Concern about a lack of work/life balance decreased as respondents aged (20–29-year-olds – 72%; 40–49-year-olds – 65%; 50–59-year-olds – 48%).
- Concern about lack of support from leadership increased as teachers and education support staff aged (20–29-year-olds – 33%; 40–49-year-olds – 39%, 50–59-year-olds – 54%).
- Poor salary as a reason for leaving the profession also declined as teachers aged (20–29-year-olds – 85%; 50–59-year-olds – 61%).

When investigating these same trends by years of experience, they are generally confirmed as similar, although, 'excessive workload' increases with more experience (1–5 years – 81%; 11–20 years – 85%) and 'poor salary' is most likely to be a concern for those with 6–10 years of experience (80%).

Respondents who identified as women were more likely to be concerned with:

- excessive workload (women – 84%; men – 81%);
- student behaviour (women – 68%, men – 63%); and
- lack of work/life balance (women – 67%, men – 55%).

Respondents who identified as men were more likely to be concerned with:

- salary (men – 78%; women – 69%);
- lack of career progression (men – 35%; women – 31%); and
- changing careers (men – 18%; women – 11%).

When combined with age, there were few differences of note between those identifying as men and those identifying as women. For those between the ages of 20–39 in particular, there were two important findings:

- 68% of men and 83% of women in this age group cite excessive workload as a concern;
- 68% of women in this group cite a lack of work/life balance as a concern, compared to 49% of men.

### 3.4 SECTION SUMMARY POINTS

- Only 3 in 10 respondents intend to remain working in Victoria's public schools until they retire. This figure is consistent with other significant findings about the potential future attrition in the Australian teaching population.
- Mid-career staff are most likely to intend to leave, and most likely to be uncertain about staying. This points to a significant loss of expertise, which would have detrimental impacts on resources to support teacher preparation, early career teachers, future school leadership, and student learning attainment.
- There is a high proportion of respondents (40%) who are uncertain about continuing to work in Victorian public schools. Changes to working conditions, such as those that may arise from future enterprise bargaining processes, could make important differences to the likelihood that these people stay in, or leave, the education workforce.
- Excessive workloads are the most prevalent reason for intending to stop working in Victorian public schools.

## 4. Workload

Workload has been regularly identified as an important factor in job satisfaction and intentions to remain in the profession for school staff (Caudal, 2022; Australian Government Department of Education, 2022; Lampert et al., 2024; Longmuir et al., 2022; Stacey et al., 2024; Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2023; Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016). As shown in the above section, concerns about excessive workload were cited by 83% of respondents, who indicated that they plan to stop working in Victoria's public schools before retirement. This study asked a range of questions to further understand the complexities of the work that education professionals are doing in Victoria's public schools. This section presents findings related to workload issues.

### 4.1 UNPAID HOURS

All participants were asked to indicate the number of hours that they worked in an average seven-day week during a school term. On average, respondents in full-time roles indicated that they worked 12.5 hours of extra unpaid work each week. This is the equivalent to more than one-and-a-half extra days each week – that is working the equivalent of 6.5 days in a 7-day week.

When considered by role, it is school leaders who report working the most extra hours each week, with an average of 17.5 hours. Teachers worked, on average, 12.4 unpaid hours; and Education Support staff reported working an average 5.5 hours extra.

Figure 5 shows that there were differences depending on setting, with respondents in primary schools reporting an average of 13 extra hours worked. In secondary schools it was 12 hours extra; and, in specialist schools, 11 hours of unpaid work.

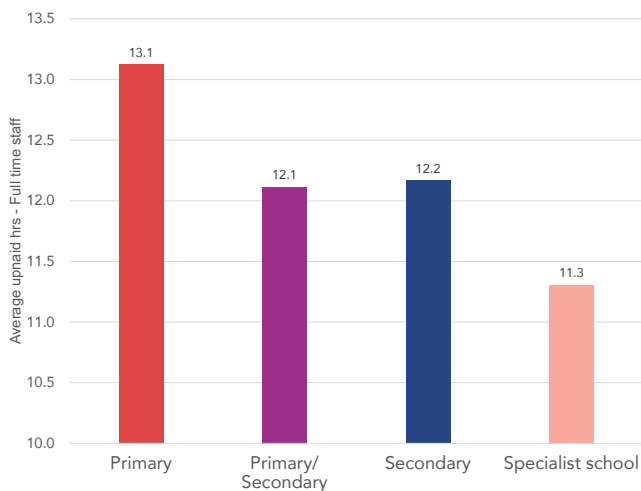


Figure 5: Extra hours worked by setting

Differences in amounts of average unpaid hours were minimal when looking at schools of differing socioeconomic status profiles and for school size. Regional location showed some difference in the numbers of unpaid hours with participants in major city schools averaging 12 hours, inner regional schools 11 hours, and outer regional schools working 14 extra hours each week. There was no difference by gender in the number of extra hours worked.

While working hours are an imperfect indication of the complexity of workload strains on staff (Creagh et al., 2023; Longmuir & McKay, 2024), it is essential to be aware of the quantity of hours that public school staff are working. There are significant impacts on their health and wellbeing, including on their capacity to manage a healthy and sustainable work/life balance, which was noted above as a reason by 64% of those who intend to leave (see Figure 4).

The sheer number of hours that educational professionals are working has regularly been demonstrated to be an issue in other research (see, for example, Fitzgerald et al., 2019; Lawrence et al., 2023; See et al., 2022; Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2023). Preston (2023) analysed the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data and showed that teachers worked very long hours compared with those in comparable professions (accountants, ICT professionals, engineers, and lawyers). Preston (2023) showed that on average, rural and remote teachers worked longer than metropolitan teachers, and that principals worked longer hours than teachers, findings that concur with our results. Preston (2023) also showed that female teachers worked longer hours than their male colleagues, which was not evident in this study.

## 4.2 TEACHER WORKLOAD DEMANDS

Teachers who completed the survey were asked to consider the value of a range of teaching-related activities and indicate if they felt that the time required by these aspects of their role was appropriate (on a five-point scale from 'far too little time' to 'far too much time').

Figure 6 shows that many teachers feel that they do not have enough time for work centred on planning, providing communication and feedback to students, and their own professional learning development. This sentiment counters recent policy and media that has suggested that teachers' workloads might be alleviated by the provision of curriculum resources and lesson plans (see, for example, Hunter et al., 2022). In fact, this data suggests that teachers value these activities and wish they had more time for them.

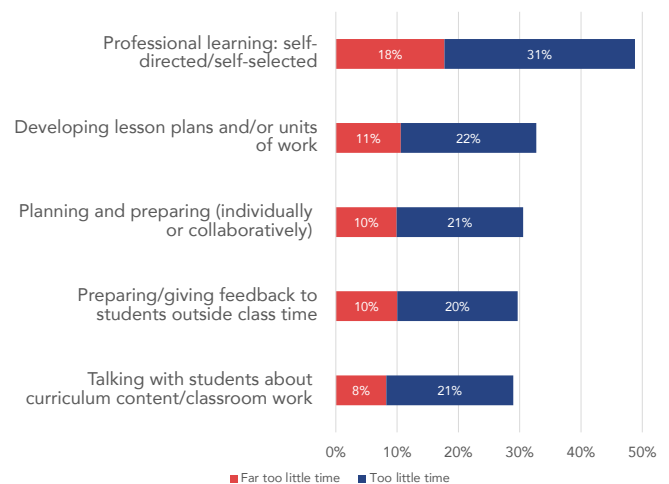


Figure 6: Activities that teachers have too little time for

The activity that teachers most lamented not having enough time for is self-directed professional learning. Professional learning cultures are a feature of Australian schools, with Australian teachers and school leaders having one of the highest participation rates across OECD countries (AITSL, 2023).

AITSL (2023) found that when teachers have the opportunity to source their own professional learning, they are more likely to feel that the development was appropriate for them and their students. Having the opportunity to direct their own learning and development is a component of teachers' sense of choice and agency as professionals (AITSL, 2023). Choice and agency are important to the ability to manage work demands in contexts of increasing standardisation and accountability (Cong-Lem, 2021). Standardisation and accountability are common in Australia, and have been shown to also standardise professional learning (Poulton & Mockler, 2024), therefore reducing the self-direction valued by teachers.

Many teachers in this study felt that they had just the right amount of time for what are often described as 'non-teaching' activities, such as yard duty and extra-curricular activities. In the common refrain to "let teachers focus on teaching", it is assumed that such activities are of lesser value (see Hunter & Sonneman, 2022). What is perhaps missed in this framing is the important relational and community-building work that happens during these activities.

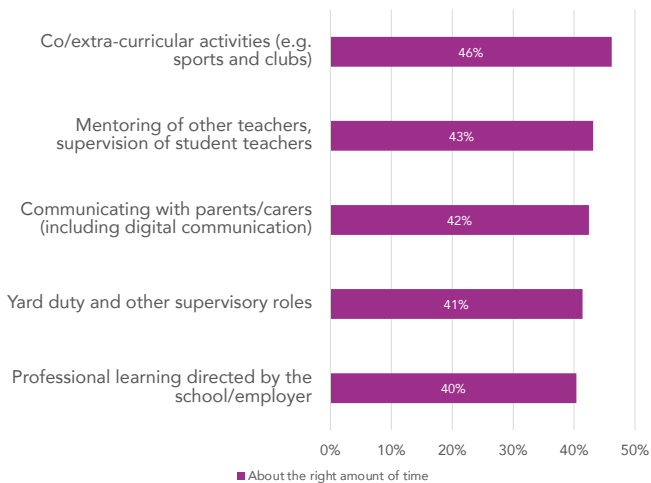


Figure 7: Activities that teachers have about the right amount of time for

In a finding consistent with both prior research (see, for example, Longmuir et al., 2022; McGrath-Champ et al., 2018) and attention in current policy (Australian Government Department of Education, 2022; State Government of Victoria, 2024), Figure 8 shows that administrative activities, meetings, and reporting were the most time-consuming compared to the value they have for teaching and learning work. Calls to reduce the administrative burden on teachers are important in considering workload burden. Excessive requirements related to compliance and administration have also been linked to undermining the teaching profession. They are seen to demonstrate increased surveillance and reflect a reduction in trust in teachers' work (Menzies, 2023; Price & Wetherby, 2017).

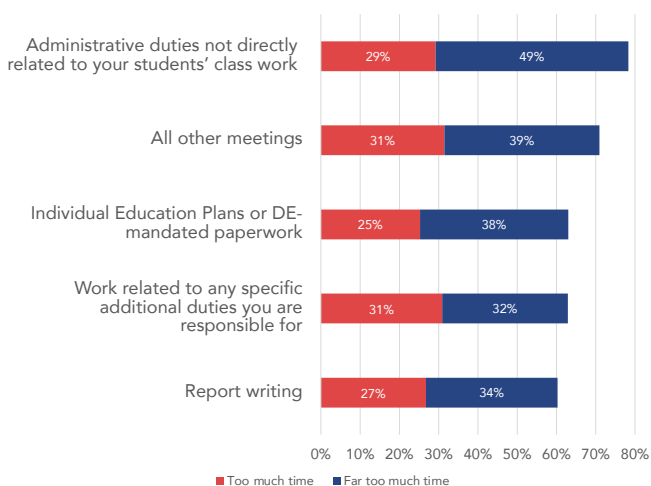


Figure 8: Activities that take too much of teachers' time

To further understand how teachers feel about their workload demands, they were asked to what extent they agreed that they have control over aspects of their work.

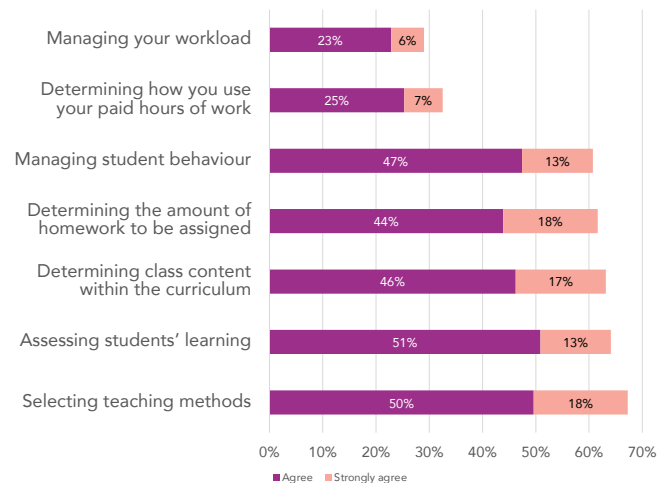


Figure 9: Teachers agreement that they have control over aspects of work

Figure 9 shows that only 29% of teachers felt they had control over managing their workloads, and only 33% had control in determining how they use their paid hours of work. More teachers (60–68%) agreed that they did have control over key areas that constitute their teaching work (class content, selecting teaching methods, assessing students' learning, and managing student behaviour). This suggests that there is little control and flexibility for teachers to manage the *quantity* of work or the ways that time is allocated during their working days.

Although a majority of teachers reported a sense of control over the content of their work, around 4 out of every 10 teachers do not feel that they have agency in these teaching activities. This is an important issue for continued focus, with evidence that teacher agency and autonomy are linked to higher levels of job satisfaction, lower levels of work-related stress, and reduced intentions to leave (Thomson & Hillman, 2020; Toropova et al., 2021).

### 4.3 PRINCIPAL CLASS WORKLOAD DEMANDS

Those participants who indicated that they held a principal class role were asked a number of specific questions in order to understand some of the unique conditions and arrangements that impact their roles and their work.

Figure 10 shows that 81% of principal class respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that 'the majority of my workday is spent managing school administration requirements'. Some 72% of respondents felt that compliance activities are increasing. As with teachers, such tasks and activities are perceived by principal class staff as an excessive burden on their working time.

Worthy of note here is that compliance and administration work was found to take up 50% to 60% of workload for assistant principals and principals in the 2016 AEU Victoria School Staff Workload Study (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016). That the amount of

administrative and compliance work has increased further from these high levels is concerning. This is a key issue that was highlighted in the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2023) report as contributing to principal workloads and resulting in poorer health and wellbeing. This issue therefore deserves the attention it has attracted with the State Government of Victoria (2024) *Independent Review into the administrative and compliance activities in Victorian government schools*.

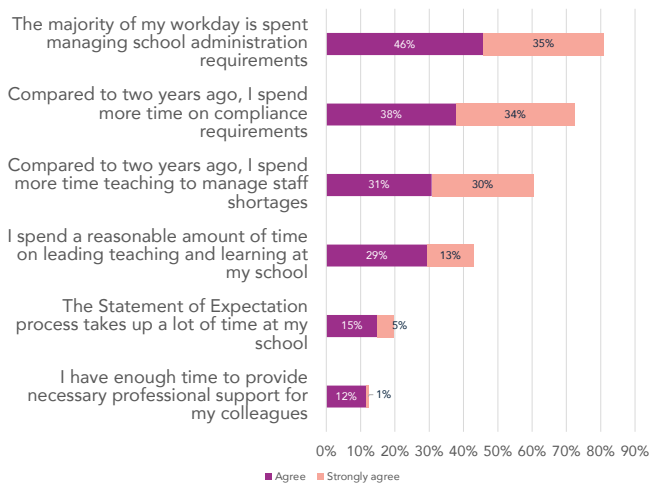


Figure 10: Principal class agreement with statements about responsibilities of their role

However, we note that the Victorian Auditor-General's Office found that, despite the implementation of 22 initiatives focused on supporting health and wellbeing, the overall volume of principals' work has not reduced and, in fact, our respondents suggest that it continues to increase. Future initiatives need to move beyond initiatives that aim to support school leaders' self-management in response to the increasing amount of work and, rather, make real changes to reduce the volume of work required.

The burden of administrative and compliance work should also be considered, alongside the fact that many principals and assistant principals have teaching responsibilities, and that teaching commitments have increased for many school leaders as they manage teacher shortages (Henebery, 2023). Figure 10 shows that 60% of principal class respondents reported that time spent teaching has increased.

A further compounding factor of workload pressures for principal class employees is that their performance is primarily measured against educational leadership activities that seek to improve school outcomes. These include activities such as coaching and mentoring; leading professional learning; and monitoring curriculum and instructional approaches. Figure 10 shows that 43% of respondents either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they spend a reasonable amount of time on leading teaching and learning, and only 12% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they had enough time to provide professional support to their colleagues. Dicke et al. (2024) found that a lack of time to focus on teaching and learning was ranked second highest of 19

sources of stress, behind the 'sheer quantity of work' in the most recent *Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey*.

Somewhat positively, Figure 10 shows that only 20% of respondents felt that the Statement of Expectations process takes up a lot of time at school. The Statement of Expectations process has become an almost universally used alternative to the previously required Performance and Development process. The Statement of Expectation process was introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of a suite of measures designed to reduce school staff workload during the pandemic. This data indicates that principals feel that the reductions in time-consuming work associated with this process have been beneficial in terms of workload management, and are an example of the benefit of a reduction in compliance and administrative work. The importance of the respondents' view can be usefully compared to the response of principals in 2016 (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016), where 81.1% of primary school principals and 69.3% of secondary school principals considered that the Performance and Development process takes up a lot of time and less than half of principals considered that the process improved staff performance.

A further question in this survey sought to understand the work that principal class employees feel that they have been most often able to find time for this year.

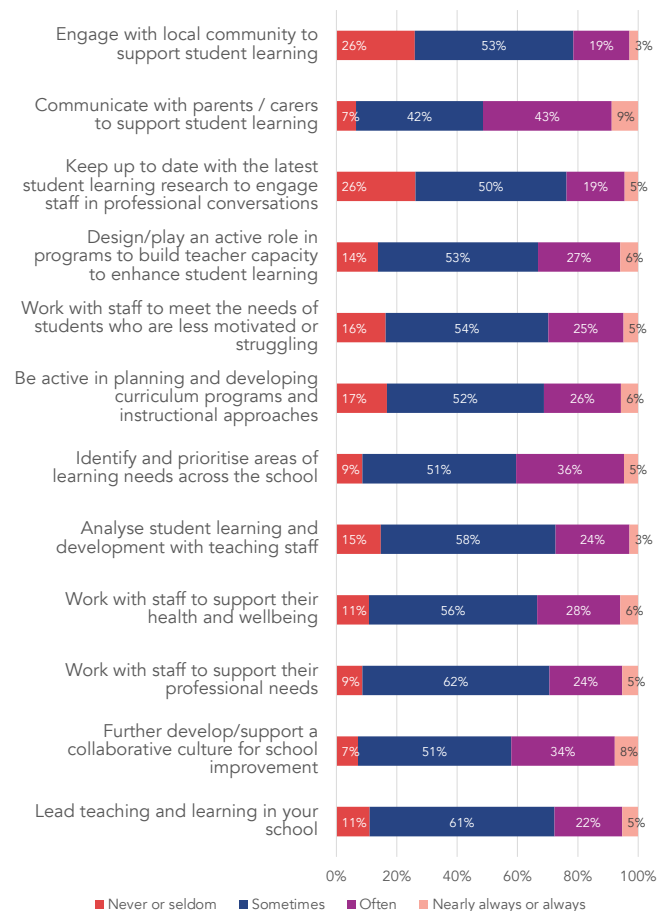


Figure 11: Principal class staff time for activities

Figure 11 shows that the two areas that principals reported that they are most often able to do as part of their work are 'communicating with parents/carers to support student learning' and 'develop a supportive culture for school improvement'. The two areas that they were least able to find time for were 'engaging with the local community to support student learning' and 'keeping up to date with the latest research to engage staff in professional conversations'. Again, this question demonstrates that activities associated with leading teaching and learning (including analysing student learning with staff; leading teaching and learning; supporting staff professional needs; working with staff to meet the needs of students who are less motivated or struggling; and, being active in planning and developing curriculum programs and instructional approaches) were all reported by most principals as 'never' or 'seldom' or 'sometimes' having enough time for in their work.

#### 4.4 EDUCATION SUPPORT STAFF WORKLOAD DEMANDS

The demands of work for education support staff are less well understood, but these important personnel are subject to the same conditions and challenges that are occurring in Victorian public schools as teachers and principal class. Weldon & Ingvarson (2016) found that only 50% of education support staff were able to complete their work during their paid hours, and 70–80% (depending on context) were required to undertake duties additional to their normal roles each day. As was discussed in section 4.1 above, this survey found that, on average, education support staff work 5.5 unpaid hours each week.

Figure 12 shows that 80% felt more time to help students would be beneficial, and 79% felt that more time to collaborate with colleagues would make a difference to their ability to provide high-quality education and promote student and staff wellbeing. With the majority of education support staff working in classroom-based roles, this finding is compelling in its likely impact on teaching and learning in Victoria's public schools.

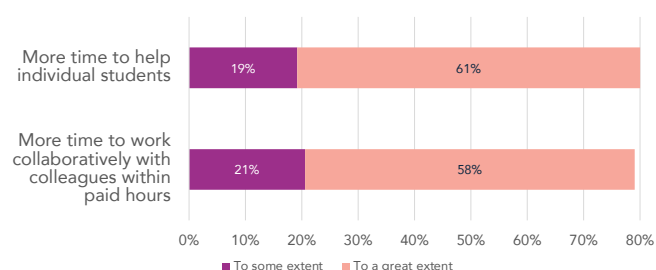


Figure 12: Education support staff extent to which factors would make a difference

This data suggests that education support staff are also challenged by the demands of their work and the time that they have available to manage their workloads. The survey uncovered further challenges and demands related to the employment and working

conditions of educational support staff, which are discussed in more detail in section 5 below.

As was noted in section 2.2 above, the diversification of skills in the education workforce is an important consideration in efforts to ameliorate workload concerns for all school employees. An important part of a diversification strategy is an effective, healthy and sustainable education support workforce. Education support staff work in a wide range of student support, administrative and technical roles in Victorian public schools. The arrangements and supports in place for these key staff can either enable or constrain their contributions to student learning and effective schools.

There is limited research to draw on that has investigated the work of education support staff, but one study in Queensland (Harris & Aprile, 2015) found that teacher aides would be supported by greater role clarity, improved access to professional training and collaboration, and higher rates of remuneration. In an example of where the important work of education support roles has been recognised, the Singaporean government will this year increase pay rates for teacher aides by 15% (Hwee Min, 2024). Pay increases of nearly 27% were achieved in the VGSA 2022 for some of the lowest paid education support staff. However, there is more to be done to improve salaries and career progression so that these education professionals are appropriately valued and the education support workforce is healthy and sustainable.

#### 4.5 SECTION SUMMARY POINTS

- Excessive workload concerns are prevalent for teachers, school leaders, and education support staff.
- All three cohorts of Victorian educational professionals are working significant numbers of unpaid hours in order to manage the demands of their work and provide high-quality education for students.
- Often, the types of work that take significant time, such as administration and compliance activities, and meetings, are not seen as the most useful for teaching, learning, and wellbeing.
- All three groups of educational professionals reported that they did not have enough time for collaborating with, and supporting, colleagues.
- Teachers state they need more time for planning curriculum, assessing students' work, and giving feedback to students.

## 5. Salary and conditions

In Victoria, public schools compete for staff against private schools and other industries. Victorian public schools also compete against other states' public and private schools to attract and retain staff. Appropriate and comparable salary and conditions is an important consideration for attracting and retaining staff in Victoria's public schools. Relevant to issues of competition for labour, Preston (2023) found that school

staff salaries don't increase significantly over time, relative to other comparable professions. Victoria's multi-year industrial agreements (Victorian Government Schools Agreements [VGSA]) have attempted to attend to these pressures for teachers, principal class and educational support staff in the past three decades and remain the most significant industrial instrument available for securing competitive salaries and conditions that reflect and respect the work of school staff. Each VGSA is negotiated within political, industrial and economic contexts.

### 5.1 SATISFACTION WITH SALARY

Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with the statement: 'I am satisfied with the salary I receive for my work'. As figure 13 shows, most participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. These data show that educational support staff are the most likely to be dissatisfied with their salaries with only 12% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were satisfied with their salary. Those in principal class positions were most likely to agree that they were satisfied with their salary, although still only 3 in 10 reported being happy with their salary.

When interrogating the levels of agreement that respondents are satisfied with their salaries by the varied cohorts we found the following:

- No difference between those working in primary and secondary settings (both 17% agreement).
- Casual relief teachers are the most satisfied with their salary (37% agreement).
- Those who identified as women were more likely to be satisfied with their salaries (18%) than those who identified as men (15%).
- Teachers with between 1 and 10 years of experience are the least satisfied with their salaries (only 12% agreement) with 21% of those having between 11 and 20 years of experience agreeing that they are satisfied, and those with over 20 years of experience being the most likely to feel satisfied with their salaries (23% agreement).

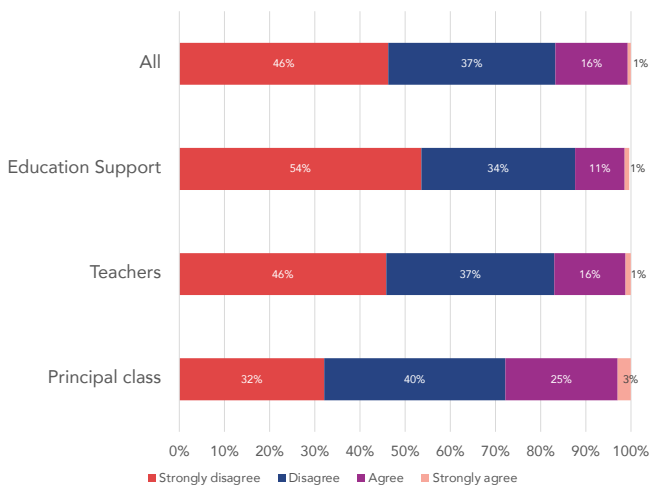


Figure 13: Satisfaction with salary received for work

### 5.2 SATISFACTION WITH EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS

The following item in the survey asked participants to indicate their level of agreement for the statement: 'Apart from my salary, I am satisfied with my employment conditions'. As figure 14 shows, there were notably higher rates of agreement about satisfaction with non-salary conditions of employment. Education support staff were the most satisfied with their conditions (70%), followed by those in principal class roles (58%), and teachers were the least likely to agree that they are satisfied with their conditions (47%).

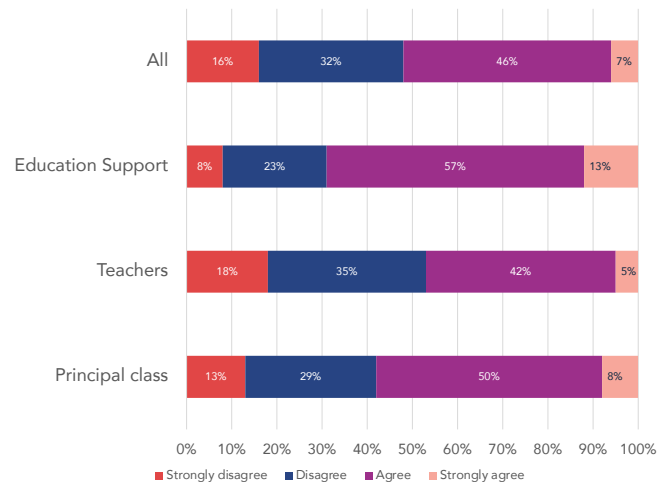


Figure 14: Satisfaction with other employment conditions

When interrogating the levels of agreement that respondents are satisfied with their conditions by other groups, we found the following:

- There were no notable differences by years of experience.
- Primary school teachers were more likely to be satisfied (56%) than secondary teachers (49%), and specialist school teachers were most likely to be satisfied (61%).
- Women were more likely to be satisfied (54%) than men (44%).

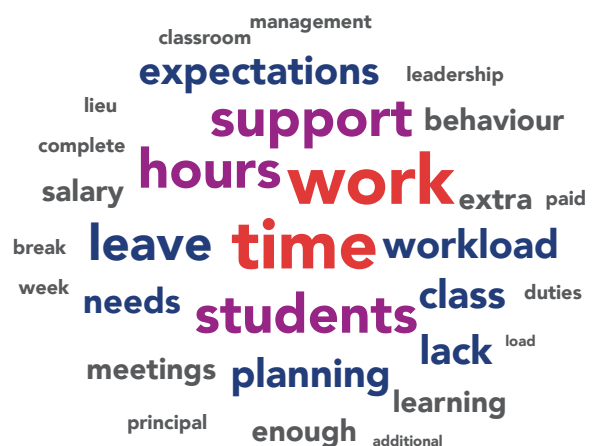


Figure 15: Word cloud of dissatisfaction with conditions

### 5.3 CHALLENGING CONDITIONS

3221 respondents provided an open text comment describing conditions they were dissatisfied with. Figure 15 presents a word cloud of the 30 most used words from across these comments.

A more detailed analysis of these comments identified seven prevalent themes. We note that although these themes are presented separately, there is significant overlap and interdependence across these conditions of concern for the respondents.

#### 5.3.1 WORKLOAD

As has been discussed in section 4 above, workload issues are a high priority concern for government schools' staff. This was again evident as, in their comments, terms such as *work overload*, *extremely high workload*, *excessive workload* and *being exhausted by workload* were regularly used. Many comments reflected on the amount of work: *Expectations of work to be completed in the hours is not sustainable; and: I work from home, through my breaks, on weekends, not because I want to but because if I don't, everything would fall apart*. Many also linked their dissatisfaction with the workload to salary. They described the *unpaid hours* and *working unpaid overtime* (as also evidenced in section 4.1 above) and there is a clear sentiment that: *We have a very high workload compared to our salary*.

There were also references to the burden of administration and compliance activities: *I am happy working part time but the extra hours I need to do planning and admin are crushing. I never feel like I can get it all done and it's stressful trying to squeeze it all in*. Others who commented on workload noted changes to their conditions within non-teaching hours whereby they felt they have less flexibility and that more has been added to their schedules, specifically more meetings. As one respondent described: *Non face to face teaching time is being taken up by meetings and PLC groups. Very little time to actually get done what needs to get done*.

#### 5.3.2 SALARY

Salary was the second most common topic mentioned in comments. Here, as was evident in some of the comments shared on the workload theme above, comments about salary were often connected to the notion of not being paid sufficiently for the hours of work required. There were also many who commented on salary not reflecting the value of the work: *The salary does not match the value and contribution teachers make towards student lives; and: The salary does not match teaching as a professional career with extensive study requirements*.

A further salary-related tension was comparisons to cost-of-living pressures: *Pay for education staff is not equal to the current economic status and living costs; and: Since COVID, our salary when compared to the cost of living is being eaten away*. With recent inflationary pressures in the Australian economy, it is

less likely that traditionally 'middle-class' professions, such as teaching, are able to meet living costs, including housing within reasonable distance to the workplace (Eacott, 2024). As this respondent notes, for them: *Choosing to be a teacher means choosing to not be able to afford to buy a house in this day and age*.

#### 5.3.3 INFLEXIBILITY IN USE OF TIME

Comments that were related to 'time use' seemed to reflect a sense of excessive accountability for, and reduced control over, their use of time – a sentiment that reflects findings in figure 9 above. Comments here suggest that respondents lament their inability to make choices in their use of time at school: *I am sick of being made to stay behind to do time-wasting meetings and 'school organisation'. I would like to return to teaching and planning and being creative in my job again; and: Other jobs have flexible attendance and work from home conditions. I understand you can't teach from home, but if it's the end of the school day and there are no meetings, you should be able to go home to do your work*.

Many respondents noted that the implementation of time in lieu arrangements has been challenging. This is not surprising, given the significant cultural change in moving from a system where staff 'volunteered' for a range of activities out of hours with no compensation, to a system where staff are provided with time and/or payment for attendance at structured school activities in accordance with the VGSA 2022. It also illustrates the inadequacy of school budget arrangements to support the implementation arrangements for time in lieu, even with the AEU's success in winning an additional \$130 million for overnight payments on camps. As one respondent said, these challenges are a consequence of: *...the SRP funding model being out of date for these new conditions*.

#### 5.3.4 ADMINISTRATION, COMPLIANCE AND MEETINGS

Concerns over the burden of administration and compliance demands, and the frequency of meetings, is another theme already discussed in this report (see section 4). Comments such as: *We are required to attend far too many meetings/PD, etc, after school hours and to complete too much documentation; and: The number of meetings are laborious and need to be reduced*, further strengthen the claim that this should be an important focus that could make a difference to workload burden and the associated tolls on wellbeing and attrition from the profession. This comment illustrates the associated pressure for principals, in particular: *Administrative burden – e.g. daily organisation requirements and additional hours worked outside of 38 (I start work at 6am and at times am still completing this at 9pm). Load of OHS requirements, lack of flexibility in working hours (if I'm not here, there's no one else to pick up the things that need to be done – I still work when sick, even when I've been in hospital!)*.

### 5.3.5 PLANNING TIME

Many respondents made clear observations that there is *not enough planning time*. Those who provided more detail explained that there was *insufficient time to plan for lessons; too little time to collaborate on good curriculum; and a lack of time to prepare and assess student work because of admin requirements*. Once again, these sentiments corroborate evidence presented in other sections, particularly in earlier discussions of workload – for example, teachers' experiences of having too little time for these types of activities (see figure 6) and education support staff wanting more time for collaboration (see figure 11). A notable addition to these themes were comments from some participants regarding challenges related to staff shortages: *split classes, forcing students to be sent into a number of other classes; more student responsibility; and a lack of teachers. Not being able to have APT, as [planning] time is constantly delayed; and: Lack of staff to fill permanent roles. No CRTs. Having to teach during planning time which means work just loads up.*

### 5.3.6 LEAVE ARRANGEMENTS

Dissatisfaction with leave arrangements were noted by many respondents. This theme is not one that has already been discussed in the above sections. Some education support staff noted that leave and break entitlements are somewhat demoralising: *Leave entitlements are not the same for ES and teachers, example paid lunch, it's representative of being 'second class' and not valued.*

The other area of comments coded to this theme were general calls for more leave entitlements and more flexibility in using leave entitlements: *Not enough sick leave as this job is quite stressful; and: More carers leave, especially for part-time/working mums. Also: Would like more flexible leave provisions; and: I would love the opportunity to take a day or two off when I choose; I am not eligible for LSL but would like a day to spend at my daughter's kinder presentation.*

### 5.3.7 STUDENT BEHAVIOUR AND SAFETY CONCERNS

The behaviour of students and safety of staff and students were noted by many as a concerning aspect of the work environment. Some respondents related this to what is expected of their roles: *I was never employed to work with violent students and that is what my job is turning into*. Others noted that their salary and benefits do not sufficiently reflect this requirement of their work: *Working at a school with high needs and huge behavioural issues is very challenging and our pay does not reflect this*. The current circumstances of staff shortages, high staff–student ratios, and a lack of appropriate support and resources, are amplifying these concerns: *Staff–student ratios and a lack of support with behavioural issues impact ability to teach; and: Schools need more resources to be able to provide alternative programs/more specialist support when working with students with challenging*

*behaviours. These behaviours are a huge drain on teachers' time, energy and job satisfaction and they negatively impact on the education of other students.*

The inadequacy of support from departmental and policy arrangements was noted: *The wait times for the department who aids schools in management of physically violent behaviour are too long and it is the education support staff who are on the frontline dealing with it, having to be in a potentially dangerous and stressful environment as part of the nature of their day to day job; and: Working in an environment where problematic student behaviour is not managed and the amount of time spent documenting incidents [is concerning]*. Questions from a principal class respondent further highlighted the challenges of managing behaviour and safety with limited support: *How is it that schools can be directed to take highly complex students (behavioural, emotional & academic) but no support be provided? How is it that parents can be abusive & threatening and not be held to account?*

## 5.4 OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGES TO WORKING CONDITIONS

As well as asking participants to comment on their concerns about conditions, a further question asked if changes would support the provision of high-quality public education, while promoting staff and student wellbeing. Figure 16 presents the responses to this question.

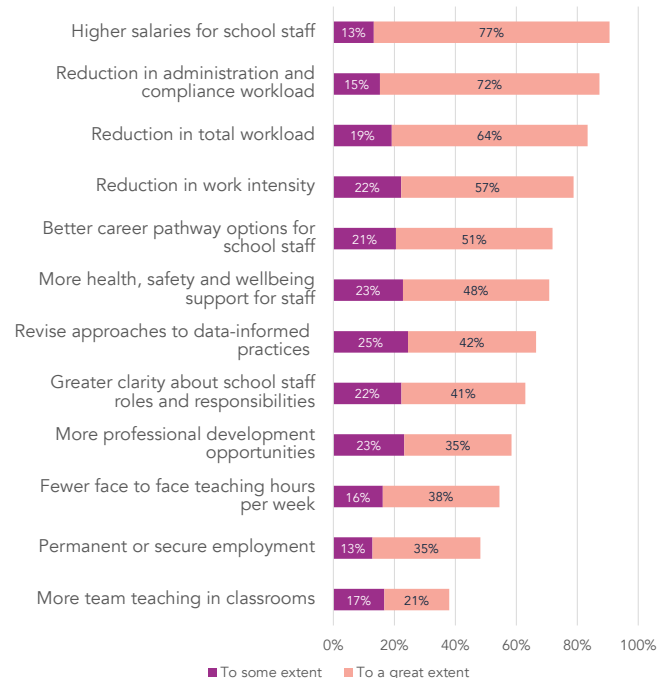


Figure 16: Extent to which respondents feel that changes would make a difference.

As one would expect, these responses reflect the challenges that have been identified in the above sections, with high proportions of participants feeling that changes in most of these conditions would make a difference to their work and the quality of public school



education in Victoria. Almost all participants felt that higher salaries and reduced workload were needed, with a range of other conditions, many related to workload and work intensification, being supported by a majority of respondents.

## 5.5 SECTION SUMMARY POINTS

- Victorian public school staff are most acutely concerned with their salaries and their workloads.
- Excessive administration and compliance tasks, as well as meetings and inadequate planning time were identified as challenging conditions.
- The inflexibility of time use and leave provisions are concerning for school staff.
- All staff are concerned about the escalation of challenging student behaviour and associated safety concerns and the lack of support and resources available to manage these increasing demands.

## 6. Recommendations

The working conditions of education support staff, teachers, and school leaders are the learning conditions of children and young people in Victoria's public schools. The quality and commitment of the education workforce is critical to the quality of Victoria's public schools. It is clear that many committed staff members working in the public sector are struggling with overwhelming workloads, feeling disrespected, and, at times, unsafe in their workplaces. With the current conditions of staffing shortages and competition with other school sectors and industries, positive conditions in the Victorian public education system need to be maximised in order to retain staff. This report, which is primarily informed by the voices of school employees collected through the survey, has presented evidence of areas that should be considered for a future healthy and sustainable Victorian public school workforce. The following recommendations would support this goal.

### Focus on retaining teachers, school leaders and education support staff

As evidenced in section 3, there are significant proportions of staff members working in Victoria's public schools who are either intending to leave or feel uncertain about their future. Given the recent years of attrition and current conditions of teacher shortages impacting the provision of education across Victoria, this should be of significant concern.

Any changes to the employment conditions of staff currently working in Victoria's public schools will impact future attrition from the profession. Therefore, changes that are positive and supportive and improve the working experiences of staff should be a priority. Improvements that make workloads more manageable and that demonstrate valuing the profession will see fewer act on their intentions to leave the profession. It will also support those who are currently uncertain about staying to recommit to their careers. As well, a focus on improving conditions to retain educational

professionals may encourage some who have already left the profession to return, and make the profession more attractive to those considering a future career in Victorian public education.

Importantly, it is clear that retention initiatives need to consider all roles and contexts, and across all career stages. Further, given the evidence that those in their mid-career years are most likely to be considering leaving and the most unsure about their future in Victoria's public schools, specific supports should be considered to ensure that the capacity to prepare and mentor future education professionals, and to take on school and system leadership roles, is not further diminished. Leadership capacity, both now and in the future, becomes a further concern when considered along with the evidence that principal class employees are considering relinquishing their roles.

### Increase teacher, school leader and education support staff salaries

As evidenced in section 5, an overwhelming majority of Victoria's public school staff are dissatisfied with the salary they receive for their work, and are working substantial numbers of 'unpaid hours' each week in order to manage their workloads (see 4.1). Salary rates indicate in part the value given to employees for the job that they do. The important work that education professionals are doing to support children and young people and communities across Victoria is increasingly complex and demanding. Staff are not feeling adequately compensated for their work. Raising salaries for education support staff, teachers, and principal class employees by an amount that not only recognises the value of their work relative to education staff in other states/territories and to other professions, but provides decent and proper compensation for the critical and demanding work, should be a priority. This is particularly important in the context of current staff shortages.

### Enhance flexibility in time use

Issues with the way that education professionals are able to use their time are discussed in several areas of this report. Section 4 showed that teachers feel little control over the way that they use their hours and manage their workloads. There was also evidence that principal class employees feel that much of their time is taken up by administrative requirements and that they are not able to find adequate time for educational leadership activities. Education support staff noted that they would like to have more time to work collaboratively with colleagues and to help individual students. Section 5 elaborated on the issues of time use for staff, with comments from participants noting that compulsory hours of attendance on-site and required administration activities and meetings constrain their ability to prioritise tasks and to have flexibility to manage their work/life balance. Greater flexibility in time use would demonstrate greater respect for the profession, enhance the capacity to manage workload demands, and support work/life balance, which will enhance educator wellbeing.

### Reduce administration, compliance and meeting requirements

Workload demands are the most reported reason to leave the profession (see 3.3) and administration, compliance and meeting requirements were noted as taking too much time, particularly for teachers (see 4.2) and principal class employees (see 4.3). Further, principal class respondents agreed that this aspect of their workload has increased in recent years. The need to collect data and document activity in school settings has continuously increased without appropriate increases in resources or support. This trend needs to be arrested, and further prioritisation, support, and resources need to be invested in Victorian schools in order to mitigate the excessive workload demands and reduce unpaid hours.

### Review leave provisions

Leave provisions provide potential for changes to conditions that may make employees' work arrangements more manageable and therefore are an important area for review. Generally, greater flexibility in access to leave could be a welcome change, acknowledging that, on the whole, educational professionals commit to rigid work hours and work unpaid hours in personal time. Greater flexibility recognises that there are situations where access to leave for personal or family reasons is needed. As well, many respondents in this report felt that sick leave provisions are inadequate for a profession that is exposed to high rates of communicable disease, as well as mental health pressures (see section 5).

### Review conditions for education support staff

Education support staff are critical to the effectiveness and sustainability of the Victorian public school workforce. These staff perform a variety of roles in schools and are a crucial source of support for school leaders, teachers, students and families. Many education support staff receive the lowest salary and have least access to leave and paid breaks (see section 5). Improvements to the salary and conditions for education support staff would bolster respect for the work that they do, improve opportunity for

diversification, and enhance the attractiveness of the role. Ultimately, this would improve the health and sustainability of the entire education workforce.

### Increase support for school leadership

The principal class workforce manages unique circumstances and, when operating well, is essential to mitigating demanding conditions and external threats to effective teaching and learning in schools. The capacity of school leadership has substantive impact on the working conditions of other education staff. As evidenced, principal class staff are burdened by administrative and compliance demands (see 4.3) and are very likely to either be considering leaving the Victorian public school sector or thinking about relinquishing their leadership position (see section 3). The challenges of maintaining a healthy and sustainable school leadership workforce now and into the future are exacerbated by the evidence that mid-career professionals are most likely to be intending to or considering leaving (see section 3). This circumstance will reduce the pool of future school leaders, and also leaves current school leaders without resources to diversify and distribute leadership responsibilities. Increased resourcing to support school leadership work would have widespread benefits for the Victorian public school workforce.

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# Demographics

THIS APPENDIX PROVIDES DATA FROM THE SURVEY FOR EACH OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORIES THAT WERE INCLUDED.

Demographic questions were asked about the individual educators responding to the survey (gender; age; experience). Respondents were also asked to provide demographic information about the schools in which they worked (type; size; socioeconomic profile [SES]; and location).

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander responses

Among respondents, 0.7% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. While low, this number exceeds the total reported by the Victorian Government in 2023 (Department of Education, 2023, p. 51). Low participation numbers limit data analysis for this project and also point to possible limitations with surveys. As an alternative, focus groups, yarning circles or narrative inquiry might uncover relevant and meaningful data about Victoria's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school staff.

## Gender

|                                 |              |
|---------------------------------|--------------|
| Woman                           | <b>72.9%</b> |
| Man                             | <b>25.3%</b> |
| Non-binary/gender diverse       | <b>0.6%</b>  |
| Prefer not to say               | <b>1.0%</b>  |
| My gender identity isn't listed | <b>0.2%</b>  |

Some 72.9% of survey respondents identified as women. Almost 2% of respondents did not identify as man or woman. These percentages compare to the June 2023 government teaching service data of 75.9% women and 1.4% self-described (Victorian Department of Education, 2023).

We note here that, due to the low numbers outside of those participants who identified as either a man or a woman, it was not appropriate to refer to these cohorts in the report discussion. Discussions of gender in the reports have referred to respondents who identify as women and men only.

## Age

|             |              |
|-------------|--------------|
| Under 20    | <b>0.01%</b> |
| 20–29       | <b>10.0%</b> |
| 30–39       | <b>25.4%</b> |
| 40–49       | <b>26.9%</b> |
| 50–59       | <b>24.9%</b> |
| 60–69       | <b>11.7%</b> |
| 70 or older | <b>1.0%</b>  |

There is relatively even age distribution among survey respondents: 10% of respondents are in their twenties, just under 13% are older than 60; and the three decades in between each represent approximately 25% of school staff, respectively. This age demographic distribution is also reflected in Department of Education data (Victorian Department of Education, 2023) and is a significantly different spread than decades past. For example, Preston (2023) shows that in 1971, 48% of Australian teachers were under 30; 22% were aged 30–39; 15% were aged 40–49; 10% were age 50–59; and 5% were 60 years or older.

## Experience working in public schools

|                       |              |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| This is my first year | <b>3.2%</b>  |
| 1–5 years             | <b>18.0%</b> |
| 6–10 years            | <b>21.8%</b> |
| 11–20 years           | <b>30.1%</b> |
| 20+ years             | <b>26.8%</b> |

Most survey respondents have had long careers working in public schools. Some 57% indicated that they had worked in public schools for longer than

11 years, and a further 22% indicated that they had worked in public schools for 6 to 10 years. Only 3% of respondents were in their first year of working in public schools. This relatively even experience distribution is consistent with Department of Education data, which shows that among teachers employed in all Victorian schools, 20% have less than five years' experience, 20% have between 6 and 10 years' experience, 16% have between 11 and 15 years' experience and 43% have more than 16 years' experience (Victorian Government, 2024). (Note: this data refers to teachers rather than all school staff).

## School types

|                        |       |
|------------------------|-------|
| Primary                | 43.1% |
| Secondary              | 41.5% |
| Primary/ Secondary     | 7.0%  |
| Specialist school      | 5.8%  |
| Regional office        | 0.4%  |
| Casual relief teacher  | 1.0%  |
| Other (please specify) | 1.2%  |

Our survey respondents work in all school settings, in regional offices, and as casual relief teachers. Some 43% and 42% work in primary and secondary settings, respectively; and a further 7% indicated that they work in primary/secondary combined settings. It is possible that this figure is an under-representation, as some combined settings are more deliberate in the way that they organise the primary and secondary education spaces and campuses. Some 6% of respondents indicated that they work in specialist schools, while small numbers of CRTs and regional office teaching service staff also responded to the survey.

## School size

|                              |       |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Fewer than 80 students       | 2.7%  |
| Between 80 and 200 students  | 11.0% |
| Between 200 and 400 students | 17.4% |
| Between 400 and 600 students | 17.2% |
| Between 600 and 900 students | 17.6% |
| More than 900 students       | 34.1% |

More than a third of respondents work in very large schools, with over 900 students. A further 34% work in medium to large sized schools with 400–900 students. Only 2.71% of respondents work in one of Victoria's schools with fewer than 80 students. For further context, 270 schools in Victoria have fewer than 80 students, representing 17% of all schools in Victoria (Victorian Department of Education, 2023).

## Socioeconomic status profile

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Low SES – i.e. school/s with high proportion of disadvantaged students | 40.1% |
| Average SES  | 34.3% |
| High SES – i.e. school/s with low proportion of disadvantaged students | 18.1% |
| Unsure   | 7.5%  |

Teachers were asked to indicate the advantage levels of the school where they worked based on a judgement of the three categories of Low, Average, and High SES. As it is difficult to know what data teachers were drawing on for this assessment, we also asked principal class participants to indicate the advantage levels of their schools based on the four Student Family Occupation and Education index bands. This data is regularly used in school leaders' work, so should be more robust.

The comparison shows that teachers were less likely to characterise their schools as having high levels of advantage (18%, compared to 39% using SFOE – see below). For this reason, we have primarily used SFOE data reported by principal class respondents to understand the distribution of schools represented in the sample, and describe this in more detail below.

|                          |       |
|--------------------------|-------|
| SFOE index bands         |       |
| Low (low disadvantage )  | 39.0% |
| Low–medium               | 36.7% |
| Medium                   | 14.4% |
| High (high disadvantage) | 10.0% |

Among principal class survey respondents, 49% described their school as either high disadvantage or medium disadvantage. Some 39% of respondents described their school as having a low disadvantage, and a further 37% described their schools as having low–medium disadvantage. Thus, a significant majority of survey respondents work in schools with relatively low levels of disadvantage. Only 10% of respondents described their schools as being high disadvantage schools.

Australian Productivity Commission data for 2021 indicates that 27.8% of Victorian students are classified as having low socio-economic advantage (SEA) status (Productivity Commission, 2023) and 48% of Victorian government schools have an Index of Community Socio-economic Advantage (ICSEA) at or below the median for all Australian schools (ACARA, 2024).

## School location

|                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| Major city     | <b>76.5%</b> |
| Inner regional | <b>17.9%</b> |
| Outer regional | <b>4.5%</b>  |

There are 79 municipalities in Victoria. For our survey, 28.2% of respondents work in schools in six large municipalities: Casey, Darebin, Greater Geelong, Hume, Monash, and Wyndham. This confirms the high concentration of families living in these municipalities, and points to possible further research about the extent to which school staff also live in or near these municipalities and are supported by the system to provide inclusive and responsive education, particularly in very diverse communities.

There were 16 municipalities where less than 20 school staff responded to the survey. This compares with 499 responses from the City of Casey. A vast majority of respondents (76.5%) work in Victoria's two largest cities, Melbourne and Geelong. About 18% work in inner regional locations and only 4.5% indicated that their school is in an outer regional location.

# Methodology for Paper One

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## 1. METHODS OVERVIEW

This discussion paper draws from the ‘*What the profession needs now for the future*’ project. This project, instigated by AEU Victorian Branch, and conducted in partnership with Monash University, seeks to identify the nature and scale of the key issues faced by AEU members in public schools and the opportunities for necessary system and school-based reforms.

The broader research project includes: a survey of AEU Victorian Branch members; a literature review; a desktop review of other relevant education systems and jurisdictions; a survey of public school parents; feedback from AEU member forums; and an economic analysis.

This first discussion paper draws primarily on the survey of AEU Victorian Branch members who work in public schools in order to illustrate and understand the work that is occurring in Victoria’s public schools, and the issues that teachers, education support staff and principal class members are experiencing. Findings from the survey are discussed alongside findings from the literature review and jurisdiction scan in each of the sections below and to inform the recommendations developed.

## 2. SURVEY

The survey consisted of 47 questions in total. The survey was designed by the AEU Victorian Branch research team in consultation with Monash researchers. Many survey items were informed by other reliable instruments, such as the *Teaching and Learning International Survey* [TALIS] (OECD) and the *School Staff Workload Study* (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016). The survey was distributed using Survey Monkey and responses were collected by the AEU Victorian Branch research team.

In some questions, depending on role and response choices, participants answered between 30 and 40 questions. The majority of questions were closed multiple choice responses, and Likert response questions (for example, levels of agreement on four- or five-point scales). There were four questions that elicited open responses, which resulted in 12,200 comments.

## 2.1. RESPONSE RATE

The survey was circulated to AEU members and available over a four-week period during Term 2, 2024 (April–May). All AEU Victorian Branch school-based members received an invitation to participate in the survey and follow-up reminders via email and text messages.

For reasons of commercial confidentiality, the total Union membership and the number of respondents by target group have been redacted from this report. In total, there were over 8,000 respondents. The final response rate for teachers was 20%, for principals it was 31%, and for education support staff it was 20%.

## 2.2. PARTICIPANTS

In the papers and appendices, we use these terms to describe the different cohorts of participants. *Teachers* include those respondents who selected ‘Classroom teacher’ and ‘Leading teacher/learning specialist’ to describe their role. *Education support* includes respondents who selected any of the four education support categories for their role (see Appendix A for details of these). *Principal class* includes ‘Principal’, ‘Acting principal’ and ‘Assistant principal’. *School leaders* refers more broadly to principal class and other staff with leadership responsibilities, such as leading teachers and learning specialists. We use these groupings of respondents most commonly, unless there is a particular subgroup of interest where we use the name of the category as found in the survey (see Appendix A).

## 2.3. DATA ANALYSIS

The survey data was cleaned and a preliminary analysis undertaken by the AEU Victorian Branch research team. The data was further analysed and interrogated for specific purposes in the discussion papers by the Monash team. These secondary analyses used Microsoft Excel for quantitative data analysis and Nvivo for thematic coding of qualitative responses.



### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

A national and international review of relevant research and policy literature was undertaken by the Monash University team. This involved an initial process that developed a summative overview of literature related to the three themes of the papers. The search strategy for this phase used an adapted scoping review methodology to scan, search and summarise significant publications. As findings emerged from other research methods for this project – most commonly, the survey – specific literature searches were undertaken to inform the discussion of specific topics.

### 4. DESK-TOP REVIEW OF APPROACHES IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

An initial list of possible jurisdictions of interest was developed by the research team. An overview scan of publicly available internet sources was undertaken to summarise the key points of interest from each jurisdiction. As the papers were developed, we returned to this scan and further investigated those jurisdictions that were relevant to the topics that emerged as important.

Details of additional methods used in the broader research study will accompany the release of further discussion papers.