APPA Australian Primary Principals Association

Workforce Shortage: Addressing the Human Cost

What APPA is advocating for

A robust conversation with the profession about barriers and enablers to be attracted to and being retained in this vital profession. This includes 'fit for purpose' strategies that see teachers and leaders engaged and happy in the purposeful work they signed up to do.

1. **Targeted Investment for Country & Complex & 'Hard to Staff Schools'**
   - Incentives that attract and retain skilled teachers in these communities. Create partnerships between hard to staff (HTS) and those with full complement of staff to generate possibilities (Tele-teaching, tele-mentoring, short term teaching blocks in HTS schools
   - Recruit Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers to HTS schools with financial incentives or a 'grant' to undertake professional learning or study
   - Ensure recruitment and planning better reflect Australia's commitment to both equity and excellence
   - Shift the responsibility for ensuring teacher coverage from individual school leaders to the system, where appropriate, as many leaders are overburdened by excessive paperwork.
2. **Relational Recruitment & Induction Models**
   - Fund partnerships between schools, universities, and communities for culturally responsive, place-based recruitment. **Relationship-based recruitment works where transactional fixes fail**. Partnerships between schools, Elders, and ITE programs can create moral purpose and lasting teacher commitment to community, proving that sustained cultural induction is as important as professional preparation.
3. **Resource Leadership**
   - End the normalisation of principals covering classrooms as a staffing "solution." Fund the additional workload this creates and acknowledge that when principals teach by day and complete administration after hours, it amounts to unpaid labour. Employers must meet their obligations in good faith.
4. **Invest in increased leadership density in primary schools**
   - Ensure that growth and support for teachers is given priority in school operations and increase the pipeline for the principal role.
5. **Reform Relief Teacher Systems**
   - Improve reliability, accountability, and equity in casual staffing.
6. **Protect Intervention Programs and Curriculum Breadth**
   - Safeguard intervention and specialist programs from being the first casualties of shortages.
7. **Effective preparation for sustainability**
   - Teacher and leader preparation needs to reflect the diversity of Australia's primary schools. A one-size-fits-all approach is not enough. Induction must be purposeful and aligned to the specific role and community context, ensuring educators are equipped to succeed in the schools where they are most needed.
8. **Streamline 'Permission to Teach' Approvals and management of PTT teachers**
   - Maintain quality standards while reducing unnecessary delays. This must be viewed as a short-term measure only. Have agreement from ITEs about what effective support for PTT teachers is and standardise it so leaders are not responding to multiple expectations and templates from the various universities

9. **Address the workload and occupational violence issues** that impact teacher and leader willingness to remain in the profession. Without a full and fair description of the problems we are trying to solve, solutions and strategies will continue to be piece meal and will fail to address the barriers to job satisfaction in contemporary education.
10. **Accurate data of the current workforce**
    - Bold, measurable goals are needed to attract, prepare, and retain the teachers and leaders our children deserve. This requires an honest account of the current workforce, where staff are plentiful, where shortages bite hardest (including the data of classes short of a teacher and filled internally) and where retention is fragile. Without capturing this reality, we risk building strategies on partial data and leaving the most disadvantaged schools behind.
11. **Ensure exit interviews occur** when teachers and leaders leave the profession and use insights for strategic workforce planning.
12. **Attend to leader wellbeing.**
    - **Professional supervision,** as advocated in APPA's position paper, provides a confidential, structured space for reflection, decision-making support, and emotional processing. Embedding funded, external professional supervision for all principals allows them to maintain wellbeing, particularly when they are stretched by workforce shortfalls and the additional pressures of "holding the line" for staff and communities.
    - **Workload triage and delegated authority**: workforce shortages magnify workload by forcing principals into classrooms or routine administration. Drawing from APPA's workload paper, a triage model could be implemented where:
        - Non-critical administrative tasks are suspended or streamlined during workforce crises.
        - System-level directives prioritise *teaching and safety first*, with other compliance tasks delayed or absorbed elsewhere.
        - This recognises principal workload as finite, protecting wellbeing from burnout.
    - **Dedicated wellbeing safeguards:** embed clear system policies that trigger automatic wellbeing safeguards for principals during prolonged shortages, such as: additional leadership support days (assistant principals or system staff secondments); access to "just-in-time" wellbeing resources, including coaching, peer networks, and respite opportunities, recognition of overtime demands and consideration of compensatory measures.
    - **Community and public acknowledgment;** APPA has consistently argued that principal wellbeing is not only a professional issue but a societal one. A communication strategy that acknowledges the extraordinary demands principals face during shortages and frames them as leaders sustaining schools under duress—helps reduce isolation, lifts morale, and builds community empathy.

The Call to Action

Our leaders are not asking for praise. They are asking for the tools, people, and resources to ensure every child has a qualified, caring teacher - every day.

Without urgent system-level action, we risk burning out the very people who keep our schools, and our communities, strong.

This new plan is our chance to set bold, measurable goals for attracting, preparing, and retaining the workforce our children deserve, so that every child, in every postcode, can learn well and live well.

"The future of every child, in every postcode, depends on the choices we make for our workforce today."

Angela Falkenberg
APPA President
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