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Keep teachers and support staff at centre of COVID-19 talks

The IEUA NSW/ACT branch is calling for immediate crisis talks with employers representing non government schools and early learning centres about the vexed issue of social distancing and other concerns in the face of COVID-19.

“Teachers and support staff need to be at the very centre of this conversation,” said Secretary Mark Northam. “Any decisions made must be firmly grounded in education and health priorities, not economic concerns.”

The union has been inundated with queries from anxious members about social distancing, leave entitlements, school assemblies, parent teacher nights, incursions and excursions, sporting events, performances, and hygiene in schools.

The IEU represents teachers and support staff in Catholic systemic, independent and other non government schools, as well as early learning centres and post-secondary colleges throughout NSW and the ACT.

Safety first

Work health and safety is a key issue in all schools and early learning centres, especially as teachers and support staff shoulder considerable responsibility for the health of not just students but also the wider community.

IEU members are responsible for a wide demographic: children as young as six weeks in early childhood centres through to adults in their 20s in post-secondary colleges.

The IEU has been representing members intensively since this crisis began unfolding and has successfully secured 10 days’ additional leave with some employers, and we are fighting to secure ongoing employment for casuals.

We call on Catholic systemic school employers and other non government school employers to ensure safety in the workplace for teachers, support staff and students. This includes ensuring school staff have adequate resources needed to maintain hygiene.

At all stages, the IEU must be part of the solution.

The IEU believes alternative approaches to keeping pathways to education open are possible as long as the profession is at the heart of any decisions about changes to how schools are managed. Some independent schools are already implementing new approaches. Various options are currently being explored, and teacher input is critical in this process.

Further comment

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The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents over 30,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post-secondary colleges.

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