

Monday 17 January 2022

Premier's plan for teachers: Unworkable, insulting, unsafe

The Independent Education Union rejects calls by the NSW Premier to rely on retired teachers and fast-track professional accreditation for final-year students and support staff. Governments both state and federal are scrambling to fill workforce gaps for which they failed to plan.

“Yet again, the Premier has made a media announcement without any genuine consultation with school staff through their representative unions,” said IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Acting Secretary Michael Wright. “Our members are angry and are calling out the cavalier attitude of the NSW Government.”

The Independent Education Union of Australia (NSW/ACT Branch), which represents over 32,000 teachers and support staff in non-government schools, believes returning retired teachers to schools is expecting a vulnerable group to step into the frontline.

“Fast-tracking accreditation is also fraught,” Wright said. “Support staff undertake work that is essential for schools to function – rushing them into classrooms will only create different shortages.

“There is a clear risk here of undermining the teaching profession, and the consequences will only fall on students. New teachers would be thrown in the deep end without support.”

As we await further details from National Cabinet this Thursday, the IEU will be considering all options. We will continue to discuss the implications of the Government's constant policy shifts with bodies such as the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) and employers, including Catholic Schools NSW and the Association of Independent Schools. We expect employers to put staff and student health first before the political imperatives of the State Government.

“Instead of posing far-fetched ideas for filling staff shortages the NSW Government knew about well before Omicron emerged, the government should be focusing on a safe return-to-school plan that facilitates proper ventilation and easy access to free rapid-antigen tests and booster vaccinations,” Wright said.

The IEU is also joining the ACTU today for an emergency meeting of unions throughout Australia to consider actions to keep all workers, including school staff, safe.

“This proposal to return retired teachers to classrooms is unsound,” said IEUA NSW/ACT Branch President Christine Wilkinson. “Many are immunocompromised and at high risk of severe illness if exposed to COVID-19. It is especially concerning in the case of primary schools as countless young children have not yet received their vaccinations.

“To call retired teachers back into service creates a dangerous environment not only for the teachers, but also for the students and their families. It is a disgrace to ask some of the most vulnerable members of our society to cover for the failings of the NSW Government.”

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The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents over 32,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post-secondary colleges.

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