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Why making Mathematics optional in Years 11 and 12 adds up

The Independent Education Union of Australia welcomes today's announcement from the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) that mathematics will not be made compulsory for NSW students in Years 11 and 12.

The former NSW Government had planned to make maths compulsory for all students including those in Years 11 and 12, but now this will not go ahead.

"At a time when teacher shortages are at record highs, this decision is a sensible response," said Carol Matthews, Secretary IEUA NSW/ACT Branch.

There is already a serious shortage of science, technology, engineering and mathematics teachers, with teachers of other subjects taking classes out of their field of expertise. This shortage is particularly problematic with the higher levels of mathematics in Years 11 and 12 and would have been exacerbated considerably if maths were made compulsory.

The IEU, which represents more than 32,000 teachers and support staff in non-government schools, has been opposed to compulsory mathematics since it was proposed in 2019.

In many non-government schools, in Years 11 and 12, Religious Studies is already compulsory, along with the mandatory two units of English. Requiring students to undertake Mathematics as a third compulsory course would significantly reduce a student's choice of subjects.

"Compulsory maths would have effectively made six out of the 10 units of study compulsory in many non-government schools," Matthews said.

"The unintended consequence of limiting student subject choice would mean reduced enrolment in a range of other subjects."

The IEU calls for increased professional development resources for primary school teachers to ensure students get the best possible start to their study of mathematics.

"The IEU commends NESA and the NSW Government for its consultative approach that will ensure positive outcomes for students and teachers," Matthews said.

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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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