

Monday 26 August 2024

Media alert: School staff meet with Minister to welcome new right to disconnect

Teachers and school staff will this morning join with the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Murray Watt, at St Francis Xavier College in Florey, ACT, for a press conference at 8.45am to mark the new right to disconnect coming into force.

"Clocking off used to mean something, but now technology means that many teachers are feeling pressured to respond to emails late into the night," Minister Watt said.

"The Albanese Government's new legislation means workers can't be punished for not responding to unreasonable requests at work. A well-rested educator is a better educator."

Teacher and IEU member Jacob Betts, who is also the Science Coordinator at St Francis Xavier College, said: "Professional obligations and expectations have been encroaching on our personal time for many years, and this ramped up during the pandemic period.

"Teachers are already carrying heavy workloads. We need the right to disconnect to protect our wellbeing so we can in turn look after our students. It will help prevent burnout by enabling a better work-life balance so we can enjoy uninterrupted time with our own families and friends in the evenings and on weekends."

The Independent Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch represents more than 32,000 teachers and professional, administrative and operational staff in non-government schools.

"Unions have fought for the right to disconnect, and we congratulate the Labor Government today as the new laws come into force," said IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews.

"As of today, school staff will not have to be available to respond to calls or emails from parents or students in the evenings or during weekends, and they will not have to respond to non-urgent emails from their principal or employer.

"When they are not performing an allocated or rostered duty, school staff also have the right to downtime – they should not have to be on call at 8pm on a weeknight if a parent or student wishes to contact them."

The right to disconnect was passed in February this year as part of the 'Closing Loopholes' changes to the *Fair Work Act*, aimed at enhancing the rights of working people. The changes also include stronger rights for union delegates. An earlier tranche of industrial relations changes, known as 'Secure jobs, better pay' was passed in 2022 and came into effect during 2023, promoting greater job security and gender equality. Women represent more than 75 per cent of the IEU's membership.

"Teachers and school staff welcome the new right to disconnect," Betts said. "Not being obliged to monitor our emails and phones at all hours without fear of repercussions will really help ease some of our workload pressure so we can better focus our energies on what we do best: teaching."

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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.

Authorised by Carol Matthews, IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary