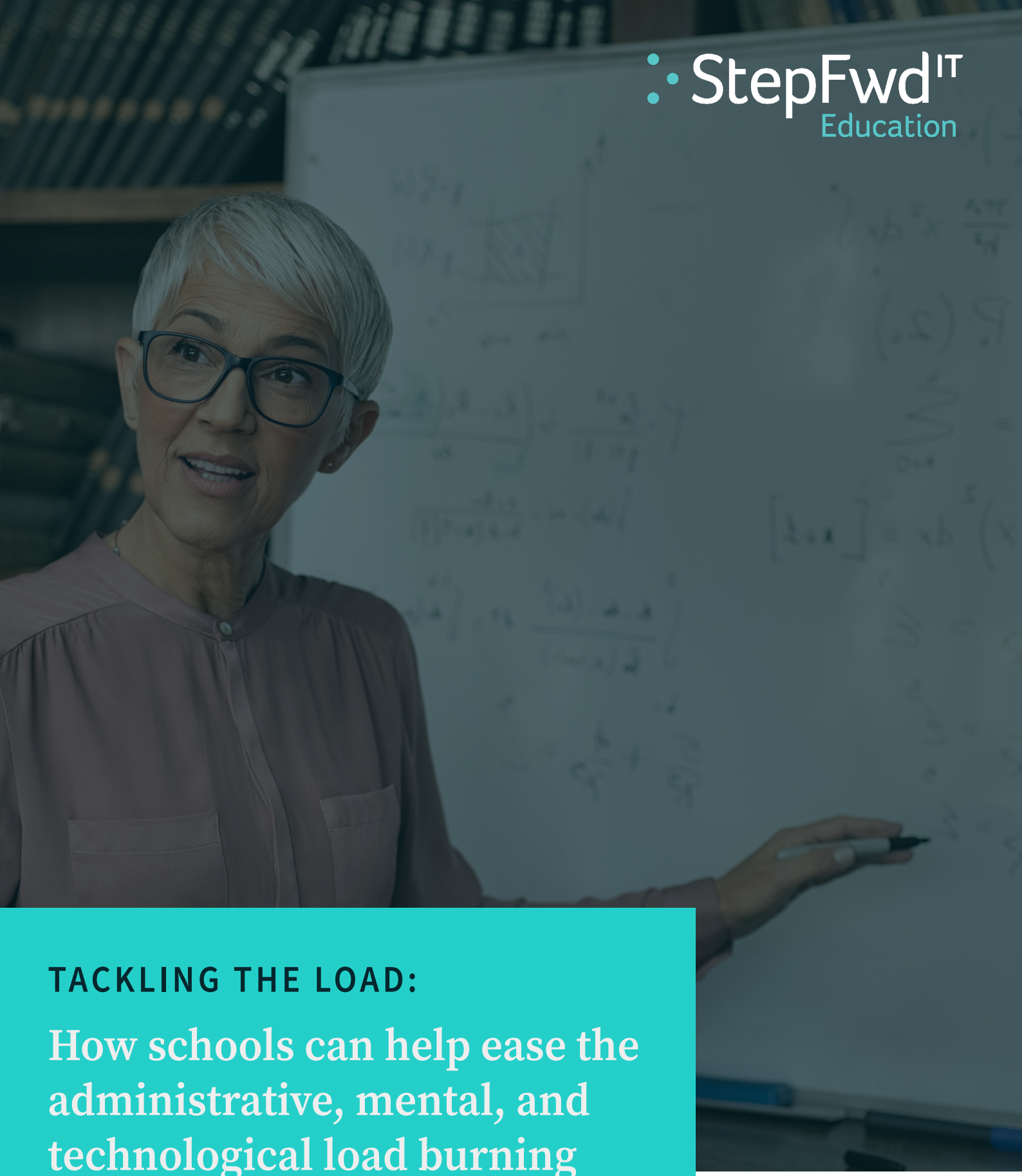


StepFwd IT Education

TACKLING THE LOAD:

How schools can help ease the administrative, mental, and technological load burning out leaders & teachers

Step Fwd IT

1300 131 679
hello@stepfwdit.com.au
stepfwdit.com.au

StepFwd IT Education

Australian teachers and Principals now work an average of more than ***50[1] and 62[2] hours a week.*** ***78% admit to feeling physically and emotionally exhausted*** *at the end of the day[3].*

There's no denying it - educators are tired

Being an educator has always been a challenging job. But the demands on teachers and school leaders have been growing steadily over the last few years, and the impact of COVID has now pushed many to their absolute limit.

With ever-growing workloads, a lack of appropriate support, and the resulting damage to mental and emotional health, reports show that in the last year, **83% have considered leaving the profession[4].**

It's become clear that while this is an industry-wide issue, it is the individual teachers, leaders, and students that are feeling the impact. While there is a culmination of things that have brought us to this point, research show **there are three major factors causing a large amount of the damage:**

An "always on" environment

Technology, especially during the pandemic, has enabled wonderful learning opportunities. But the introduction and reliance on technology has also blurred the line between teachers "being on" and "switching off". Teachers and leaders can now be contacted anywhere, anytime and it's leading to an increase (and in some cases, expectation) to complete more work out-of-hours.

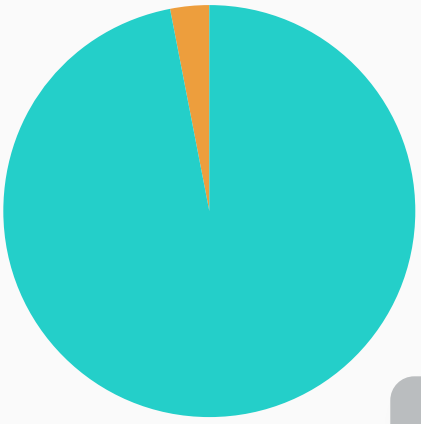
Process overshadowing purpose

Australian teachers now have less and less professional autonomy over classroom content and assessment.[5] The introduction of teaching and learning KPIs, multiple strategies, and reporting has meant more time focusing on following the process and less time planning for and executing lessons.

Admin overload

55% of Australian teachers say they have too much administrative work[6], with Principals carrying an even larger burden. This means school leaders can't spend more time supporting their teaching staff. Too much admin work and related stress is also linked to teacher attrition, impacting student achievement, plus school culture and financials.[7]

[1]Madigan, N 2019, 'The effects of administrative overload: a deeper dive', Education Review, 21 March, accessed March 2022
[2]Henebery, B 2021, ' How is principal health and wellbeing tracking in 2021?', The Educator Online Australia,12 August, accessed March 2022
[3]Terada, Y 2021, 'Defending a Teacher's Right to Disconnect', Edutopia, 27 August, accessed March 2022
[4]Carey, A 2021, ''Rewarding', but four in five teachers consider quitting in pandemic', The Age, 29 October, accessed March 2022



97%

of Principals admit to regularly working overtime.[8]

60%

of Australian teachers report that their professional development is curtailed by their work schedule.[9]

33%

The time Australian teachers spend on administration is 33% higher than the OECD average.[10]

[5]Cobbold, T 2020, 'SOS: Teachers say there is too much administrative work and stress in schools', The State School Teachers Union of WA, 30 March, accessed March 2022
[6]Cobbold, T 2020, 'SOS: Teachers say there is too much administrative work and stress in schools', The State School Teachers Union of WA, 30 March, accessed March 2022
[7]Cobbold, T 2020, 'SOS: Teachers say there is too much administrative work and stress in schools', The State School Teachers Union of WA, 30 March, accessed March 2022
[8]Henebery, B 2021, ' Federal taskforce needed to tackle 'mental health crisis in school leadership' – major report', The Educator Online Australia, March, accessed March 2022
[9]'Australian teachers have higher workloads, fewer resources: OECD report', The Australian Education Union, accessed March 2022 < https://www.aeuvic.asn.au/australian-teachers-have-higher-workloads-fewer-resources-oecd-report>
[10]'Australian teachers have higher workloads, fewer resources: OECD report', The Australian Education Union, accessed March 2022 < https://www.aeuvic.asn.au/australian-teachers-have-higher-workloads-fewer-resources-oecd-report>

It's time to tackle the root of the problem

There are many initiatives that can be implemented to treat these issues, and many schools have already tried putting measures in place. But this approach only focuses on individual factors and doesn't fix the core issues or prevent them from occurring.

Lifting the load that leaders and teachers are carrying requires schools to identify and resolve the root of the problem. It's not an easy fix, and it's not solely the problem of individual schools or leaders. A large responsibility sits with educational process and policy - ingrained, systematic processes and practices that may have been implemented with the aim to improve outcomes, but, in reality, have become detrimental.

But despite this, top-down changes can be made at a local level to truly tackle the cause of these issues and help improve school culture and teaching and learning outcomes. To get started, it can help for leaders to ask themselves and their teams:

Do teachers have a say?

Goal setting and structured teaching/learning strategies are important to ensure desired outcomes are met. But feedback from teachers states that, rather than receiving scrutiny over every requirement, they would be more effective if their professional judgement was valued.

At the AEU annual OHS conference, Ass Prof Michelle Tuckey emphasised the importance of supervisors consulting with staff on their workload, resources, job descriptions and responsibilities, along with providing regular, constructive feedback.[12]

Is all admin *actually* providing value?

Is admin creating clear value for the teachers, leaders, and students? Some admin will always be required for schools to function properly. But is constant accountability and reporting more constructive for education than building relationships with students?

"Data collection requirements at the moment are intruding deeply upon capacity to teach… eliminating processes that are unnecessary, cumbersome, and time-consuming would set the sector on the right trajectory." Dr Susan McGrath-Champ, University of Sydney.[12]

[11]' Technology and workload: stressed out and always 'on'', The Australian Education Union, 2017, accessed March 2022, < https://aeunt.org.au/news/technology-and-workload/>
[12]'Teachers need more support, less admin to deliver quality education', The University of Sydney, 9 July 2018, accessed March 2022 <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2018/07/09/teachers-need-more-support--less-admin-to-deliver-quality-educat.html>
[13]Carey, A 2021, ''Rewarding', but four in five teachers consider quitting in pandemic', The Age, 29 October, accessed March 2022

Is technology fulfiling its promise?

Is your technology actually saving teachers time and simplifying their lives? Generally, the role of technology in schools is seen as positive and helpful. But this is only the case when tech is implemented purposefully to assist with specific goals and needs. **The right tools and tech should create less work, not more.**

It also requires teachers to know how to best utilise the tech available to them and be adequately prepared for changes - like remote and hybrid learning environments - and to consider where burdens might exist, providing coping mechanisms to shut off from tech.

How is emotional support approached?

In the last two years, the mental and emotional health of teachers, leaders and students have taken centre stage. Is this support coming from school-wide initiatives, or relying on the teachers themselves?

The Age reports that in 2021, managing children's behaviour became a bigger part of teacher's jobs, with around 84% spending more time providing emotional support[13]. Are teachers also required to monitor their own mental load and personally make decisions to switch off? And do they feel the expectation to complete work in their own time?

5 ways schools can start lifting the load now

Ultimately, schools need to work together to advocate for government policy reform addressing staff workload, resourcing, and safety at a broader system level to create wider cultural change. However, there are a few practices you can action in your own school to start fighting the impact of technological, administrative, and mental loads and improve working environments for your entire school community.

1. Make strategy planning collaborative

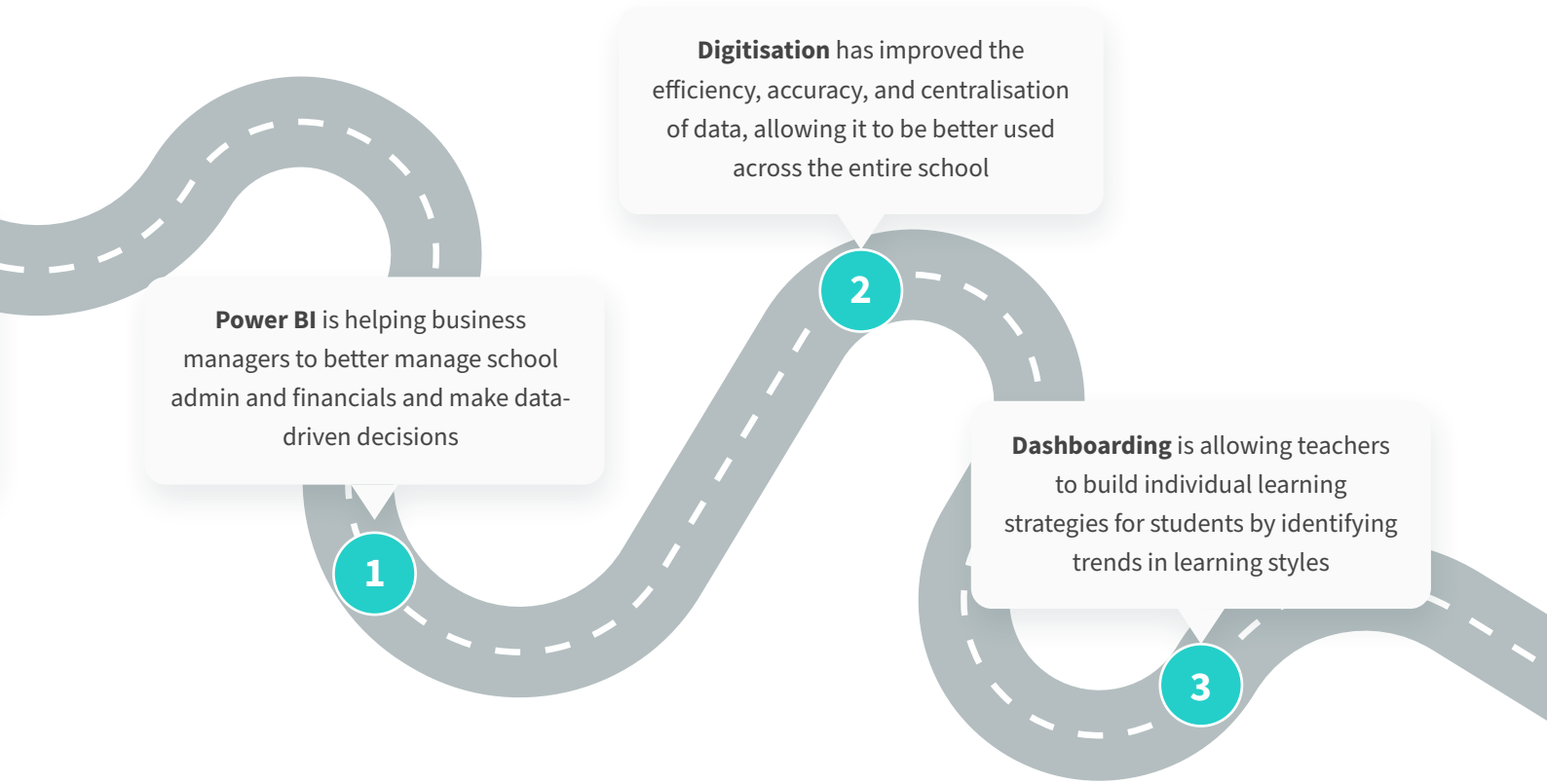
It's well reported that professional collaboration provides a foundation for effective teaching practices. To actually materialise change, leaders and teachers should have an equal voice and role in setting strategies, allowing a collective voice or influence on policy decisions.

- Ensure teaching strategies are built in collaboration with both leaders and teachers
- Utilise feedback from classrooms to inform changes
- Give teachers more control over the work they're doing and the goals they're trying to meet
- Optimise strategies for student needs and school goals, taking into account challenges, capabilities, and teaching/learning styles
- Plan not only for the immediate year but for future years to come, helping teachers buy in and commit to a future at the school

2. Streamline and automate administration

The issue is not with *reasonable* data collection. Rather, teachers are concerned by the volume, processes, and methods by which it is done. For many, it proves much too time-consuming. As the *Understanding Work in School* report puts it, teachers are calling out for the elimination of unnecessary tasks to allow for more focus on working with students in terms of pedagogy and welfare[14]. And the OECD supports this, saying teachers should not be spending more time on administration than on teaching.[15]

There are some powerful data and reporting tools some schools have already put in place:



And there are almost endless tools available to help automate important but repetitive tasks - everything from enrolment to assignment marketing, attendance records and lesson scheduling. To determine which would add the most value, teachers and leaders should discuss which valuable, must-do tasks are most time-consuming or repetitive, and then work with IT support to explore automation and integration options.

[14] Madigan, N 2019, ' The effects of administrative overload: a deeper dive', Education Review, 21 March, accessed March 2022
[15] 'Australian teachers have higher workloads, fewer resources: OECD report', The Australian Education Union, accessed March 2022 < https://www.aeuvic.asn.au/australian-teachers-have-higher-workloads-fewer-resources-oecd-report>

3. Implement a people-first technology strategy

For IT and technology to be truly advantageous, it needs to be built around the strategies and goals of each individual school. Teachers want to retain the focus on the person, and technology should allow them to do that more - not less. Rather than being implemented for the sake of it, technology strategy should be:

People first, tech enabled:

Considering the needs and goals of the users first, and implementing technology that will support them second

Proactive:

Able to support future requirements (rather than reactively fixing issues)

Fully accessible to all in the school community:

Including training for all staff on how to plan and execute learning with technology

This will allow for more agility and adaptability as new or sudden technological requirements come in, ensuring each teacher and leader has the skills to best utilise the technology they're given. Tech strategies should also include active KPIs around work and "switching off". This is particularly important now that hybrid and remote learning environments are set to become more standard.

Your IT Manager and/or team should be brought in to collaborate on ways they can deliver strategy-led, proactive IT and adequate development opportunities for all teachers and leaders.

4. Build planning & development into work hours

A survey commissioned by the NSW Teachers Federation discovered that teachers are "increasingly expected to communicate with students and deal with administration, planning, and bureaucratic aspects of their work outside of classroom time."[16] They desperately want (and need) more time within the school day dedicated to planning.

This doesn't necessarily mean reducing face-to-face teaching time - it just requires some smart planning.

- Advocate for collaboration in planning between teachers to lighten the load
- Enable smart planning for class schedules (eg. teachers who are collaborating have classes in extracurricular activities at the same time)
- Reduce admin and reporting to free up more time for value-add activities
- Utilise dashboarding to determine student competency levels and ensure appropriate support is identified
- Introduce more specialist teacher support for students with more complex needs

[16] 'Teachers need more support, less admin to deliver quality education', The University of Sydney, 9 July 2018, accessed March 2022 <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2018/07/09/teachers-need-more-support--less-admin-to-deliver-quality-educat.html>

5. Share the responsibility

Mental health, wellbeing, and self-care are not up to individuals to manage or provide - they should be supported more widely within the school community. Reducing workloads through the strategies listed above will go a long way to lightening mental load for many educators. But there are a number of other measures schools can put in place[17]:

1. Prioritise the school community's wellbeing, ensuring improvements focus on evidence-based practice and align with school culture
2. Enable and sustain supportive leadership practices that build teacher wellbeing
3. Provide effective induction and mentoring, and meaningful, sustained professional learning
4. Track and benchmark wellbeing priorities, introduce wellbeing and emotional learning KPIs

[17]Cross, D & Falconer, S 2021, School leaders' and staff wellbeing is critical for student success, Our schools – our future research paper, Independent Schools Queensland, Queensland

“The teacher is the most important force in school education”

It’s important to understand that tackling this increasing load is not the job of an individual - leaders do not need to shoulder this burden alone. It will take collaboration from teachers, from IT and business managers, from support staff, from policy makers and boards.

The good news is 90% of teachers are satisfied with their job[18] and feel like they’re contributing to a bigger purpose. Many have stuck around because of this purpose - and because they see a light at the end of the tunnel.

Improving outcomes for teachers and school leaders will ultimately improve outcomes for students, parents, and the entire school community. When we prioritise the experience of educators, we create a place where teachers want to be, where students can thrive, and that school leaders can be proud of.

[18]Cobbold, T 2020, ‘SOS: Teachers say there is too much administrative work and stress in schools’, The State School Teachers Union of WA, 30 March, accessed March 2022

Step Fwd IT

Step Fwd IT partners with schools to identify their biggest long- and short-term goals and strategies. Then we help them achieve these goals by implementing proactive IT and technology solutions.

We have seen firsthand the impact the pandemic has had on teacher and leader workload and student learning outcomes. One of our biggest roles is working with schools to manage and minimise the impact of changing teaching and learning environments.

We are currently working alongside several Victorian schools, their leaders, and their IT managers to empower their workforce and enable future-ready learning and teaching strategies.

If you're looking for further information or guidance around building people-first strategies or reducing the administrative and technological load placed on your school,
contact us for a no-obligation conversation.

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