EdSmart

# eGuide: How to reduce teacher workloads

# eGuide: How to reduce teacher workloads

We don't have to tell you that teacher and school administration workloads are increasing. If the global Coronavirus pandemic has taught us anything, it's that educators – already at breaking point – have very little reserves for extra pressures, such as the emergency implementation of remote learning.

The additional responsibilities that are being asked of teachers right across the world are coming at the expense of what they do best: teaching. The good news is there are many options for schools to reduce teacher workloads without compromising on the tasks that need to be done so, when the unexpected does happen, there's still room to move.

At the core of this solution is technology but simply introducing EdTech is not an effective means to an end – there needs to be a considered approach to ensure the processes that a school has refined over many years of experience can be faithfully replicated in an online environment; not to mention meeting the strict requirements of school governance and legal compliance.

There also needs to be a culture of acceptance that teachers are being expected to do too much, so therefore, actions must be taken to improve their situation and protect their mental health. Before looking at the ways to reduce teacher workloads, let's explore the numbers and see where the problem lies.

The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS 2018) asked teachers about their working hours. Below are the average number of hours teachers in Australia reported having spent on the following activities in the most recent calendar week prior to the survey, including during weekends, evenings and other out-of-class time.

**2.5**
Counselling students*

**7.3**
Lesson planning & preparation

**1.8**
Extracurricular activities

**4.1**
General admin work

**1.3**
Parent/carer communication & cooperation

**2.6**
Other work tasks

# A teacher's weekly workload

**1.7**
Professional development activities

**2.4**
Participation in school management

**4.9**
Marking/correcting student work

**19.9**
Teaching

**3.7**
Teamwork and dialogue with colleagues

*Includes student supervision, mentoring, virtual counselling, career guidance, and behaviour guidance

# The impact of excessive teaching sector workloads

**In Australia,** OECD data provides us with some interesting insights into how a teacher's working week can be broken down. From the infographic supplied (see previous page) – and adding marking/correcting, as well as lesson planning and preparation – 32 percent of an Australian teacher's week is dedicated to teaching, with the other 67 percent taken up with activities other than teaching.

**In the United Kingdom,** a similar situation exists. The British survey, The State of Technology in Education 2019/20, found that 81 percent of teachers believe workload is contributing to high levels of stress in schools – an increase of almost 20 percent on the previous survey.

According to Britain's National Education Union (NEU), "Excessive workload and attacks on pay are driving away teachers and deterring new recruits." A survey of over 8,000 NEU members published in 2018, found that 81 percent of respondents had "considered leaving the profession in the last year because of workload pressures."

Declining teacher retention rates are another contributor to workloads in the UK. Britain's Department of Education figures showed, in the 12 months to November 2017, "over 50,000 qualified teachers in England left the state sector – [the equivalent of] one in 10 teachers leaving the profession." The same figures reveal that more than 100,000 potential teachers have never taught, despite finishing their training.

**In New Zealand,** 50,000 teachers went on strike in 2019, in what was one of the biggest industrial actions ever seen in the New Zealand school sector, with 'overwhelmed' staff calling for more pay, more respect and better conditions. Given that teacher workloads are a problem the world over, New Zealand teachers have got a lot to complain about – out of 30 countries in a global survey in 2018, New Zealand teachers were found to have the biggest workloads.
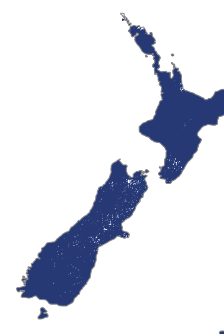
In 2019, a New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) survey revealed that teachers and principals who quit the profession in the previous year had left mainly due to a lack of work/life balance and burnout from high workload. As a result, fewer than 10 percent intended to return to teaching.

If the numbers tell us anything, it's that teachers choose their careers because they want to teach. Distractions from that core task – namely excessive administration and after-hours tasks – are seeing them turn from their profession in droves.

**How do you reduce teacher workloads? According to feedback across the world, you reduce paperwork and administration tasks.**

# Excessive workload taking its toll on school teachers

**In March 2019, the Australian Education Union made a submission to a Parliamentary Inquiry Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training on the Status of the Teaching Profession. One of the biggest focuses in the AEU's submission was on "the escalating workload faced by teachers and school leaders."**

After surveying more than 3,500 of members, the AEU found "nearly three-quarters of respondents felt that they spent too much time on administrative tasks. In addition, nearly half of 478 principals surveyed said that they worked for 56 hours or more per week."

An additional AEU survey of more than 18,000 teachers in NSW uncovered that the average full-time teacher works [approximately] 55 hours per week during term time – 43 hours per week at school on average, and a further 11 hours per week at home."

The report also noted that all teachers spend an average of between 11.5 to 13 hours per-week engaged in work outside of the school day.

As AEU's Federal President, Corenna Haythorpe, said, "Excessive teacher workload experienced during school hours and at home was a significant factor for teachers leaving the profession."

"Our members commonly tell us that not only are they being expected to work too many hours, but the increased work that is asked of them makes little or no contribution to student learning. It's a case of not only too much work, but the wrong work."

**To read the Australian Education Union press release in full, visit**
http://www.aeufederal.org.au/news-media/media-releases/2019/march/060319

# A workload reduction strategy

Running a school or teaching are tough jobs. You didn't get to where you are today by luck alone and you're doing the best you can in (spite of) the circumstances. In many respects, the last thing you need is someone appearing to preach at you. That's definitely not our intention.

The fast pace of a school environment – not to mention the massive pivot to remote learning because of the Coronavirus pandemic – has created a 'survival climate' that, ironically, makes addressing teacher workloads seem impossible due to the workloads themselves. Consequentially, this perpetuates an ouroboros situation where we are, in effect, 'eating our own tails'. It's a cycle that needs to be broken sooner rather than later.

With all of the available information telling us about the negative impacts of teacher workloads on our classrooms and the people in them, it might be worthwhile taking a step back – regardless of whether you have the time or not – and making sure that the processes and policies that may have served you well in the past are still the most appropriate ones.

**What are the systems you have in place? Can you identify how they're contributing to increased workloads? Where could technology be used to ease the burden?**

As much as every place of learning is different, many schools have called 'enough is enough' and attacked the challenge of reducing teacher workloads head-on, as a result, developing a multi-faceted approach to reducing their staff burden.

For the most part, the framework of this approach has been detailed in the British National Education Unit's Workload Reduction Toolkit.

# Workload reduction toolkit

At the core of the British National Education Unit's Workload Reduction Toolkit are three principles to understanding and then reducing your teachers' workloads:

## ▶ Stage One: Identify the Issues

Survey your staff in the most effective method for your situation (literally, a questionnaire, or it could be a round-table kind of workshop event) and identify from where the biggest workload demands derive, through to the actions that have the least demands on teachers' time.

## ▶ Stage Two: Address the Issues

Once you have the information on where the majority of teacher time is taken up, identify ways you might be able to reduce workloads.

Apart from getting technology to do the heavy lifting, an example could be: are there processes that can be shared between staff or delegated in some way? One solution that is popularly cited is involving students in the marking process. Some schools report being able to 'buddy up' teachers covering the same subject to share the workload. But you and your colleagues are the best arbiters of what will and won't work in your school.

Other issues may be best-served through technological means (but more about that later).

## ▶ Stage Three: Evaluate the Impacts

Gather together to discuss which of your strategies are – or are not – contributing to reducing workloads.

Do some strategies need tweaking? Are there strategies you implemented that should be heaved into a bin without delay? Are there strategies that are making an impact that could be adapted and expanded to other processes to reduce workloads even further?

Is any new technology working in the way you envisaged or could improvements be made?

# Technology and reducing teacher workloads

Technology – EdTech – has impacted heavily on the dynamics of today's classroom and the way we deliver lessons to our students.

Along with expanding curricula and the horizons of the contemporary classroom, technology can also play a fundamental role in reducing our teaching administration workloads. With technology, we can free ourselves from the seemingly mountainous pile of minutiae, compliance and daily functions, which then facilitates more time for dedicating to our students and doing the jobs teachers ultimately want to do.

Technology also gives us data, and data can supply us with a multitude of answers as to where our resources could be re-distributed, tweaked and refined. Good data is the kind of powerful knowledge that schools are only just learning to harness.

Instead of broad numbers and ballpark estimates relating to enrolments and their balance sheets, schools that have embraced technology are collecting information to help plan the school year, develop the school's infrastructure to support education programs and inform decisions on where that money gets spent in much smarter ways.

It can also allow schools to see how teacher and administrator time is being carved up across the week.

## Data can answer:

- How many students are dropped at school by car?
- Who are the students rely instead on public transport to get to class?
- Are there any students who ride bikes to school?
- How many students participate in extra-curricular sports?
- Which sports are the most popular?
- What kinds of allergies are prevalent in the school population?
- How does the school perform in terms of diversity?
- How many student permissions have been returned for an excursion and how many are outstanding?

And these are only a few of the infinite questions good data collection can answer so you can make better decisions for your school and reduce your teacher workloads.

# Getting your school's technology solution right

You're ready to make your next move with EdTech. In fact, you may already have different technologies in action across your school – but it's now time to take the next step in reducing teacher workloads and increasing efficiencies.

So, what is your next move? How do you complement what you have, and ensure everything works in harmony? And how do you bring what works in a manual environment into the technological realm?

Here are the steps you need to think through when introducing technology into your school:
- Determine what you want to want to achieve from your system;
- List your priorities in going digital;
- Identify what you currently have at your disposal;
- Define the unique characteristics of your community;
- Determine the bare minimum your system needs to do.
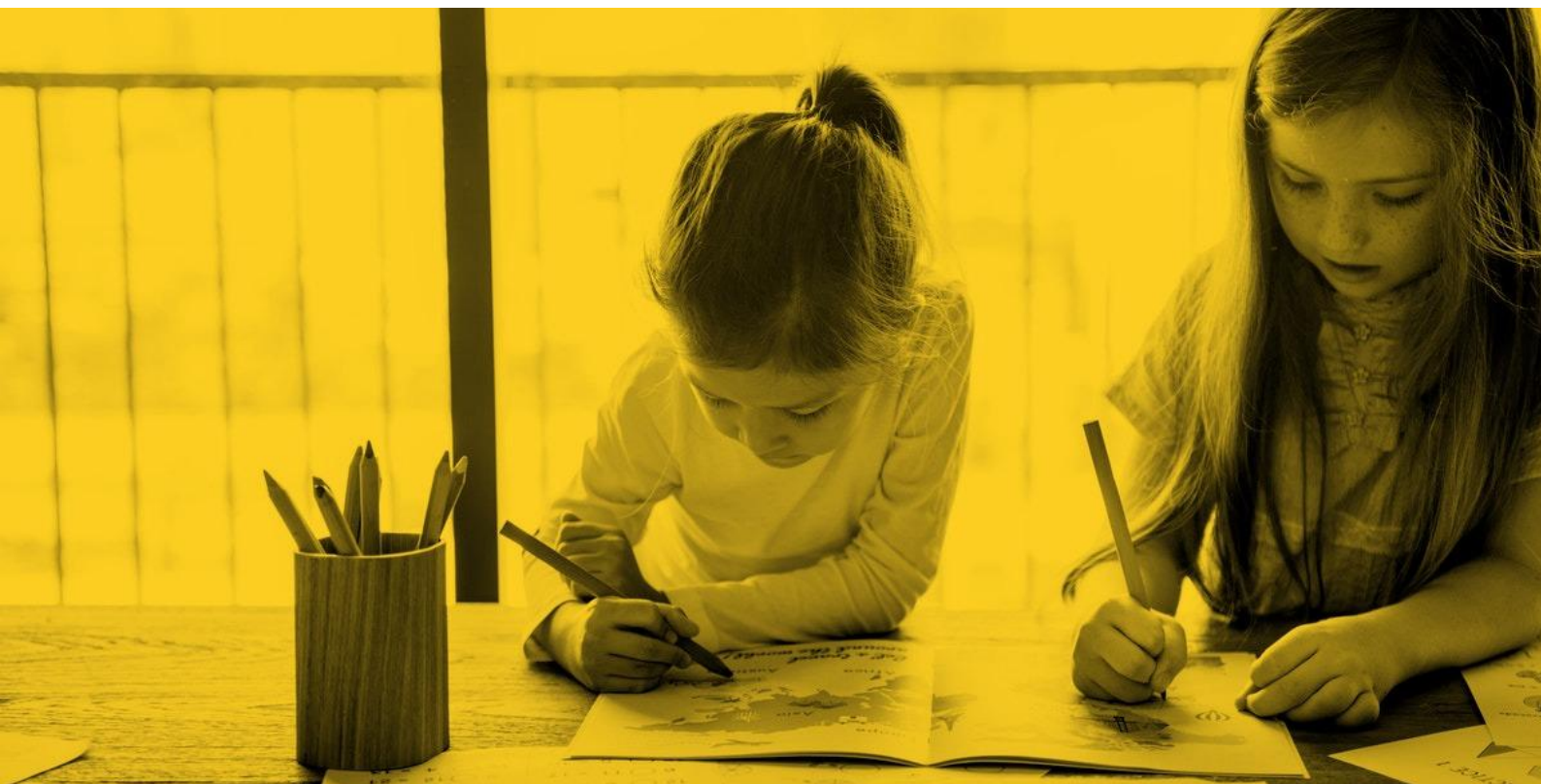


By following these steps, you're ensuring that any EdTech introduced into your school is working with you, not against you, when it comes to workload. Sure, there will always extra effort that needs to be expended when new systems are put in place – but the benefits of the right technology (read: increased productivity, reduced workloads and more informed decision-making capabilities) will far outweigh any initial labour outlay.

Once you have collected your thoughts and it's time to find the best-fit technology, bear in mind that interoperability is the key to good dataflow and synchronicity. Think of the technology in your school functioning like your kitchen…

You mistakenly buy a whole lot of appliances from different countries, which means they all have varying power plugs. The toaster is still a toaster, the blender is still a blender, and a kettle is still a kettle. Individually and in the appropriate environment, they'll work perfectly. But, in your kitchen with your power points, they can't function.

Therein lies the problem with interoperability with technology in any situation, school or otherwise. If you're establishing an office with a bunch of computers that can't talk to each other, or can't effectively connect, then what you have is data inoperability, rather than interoperability.
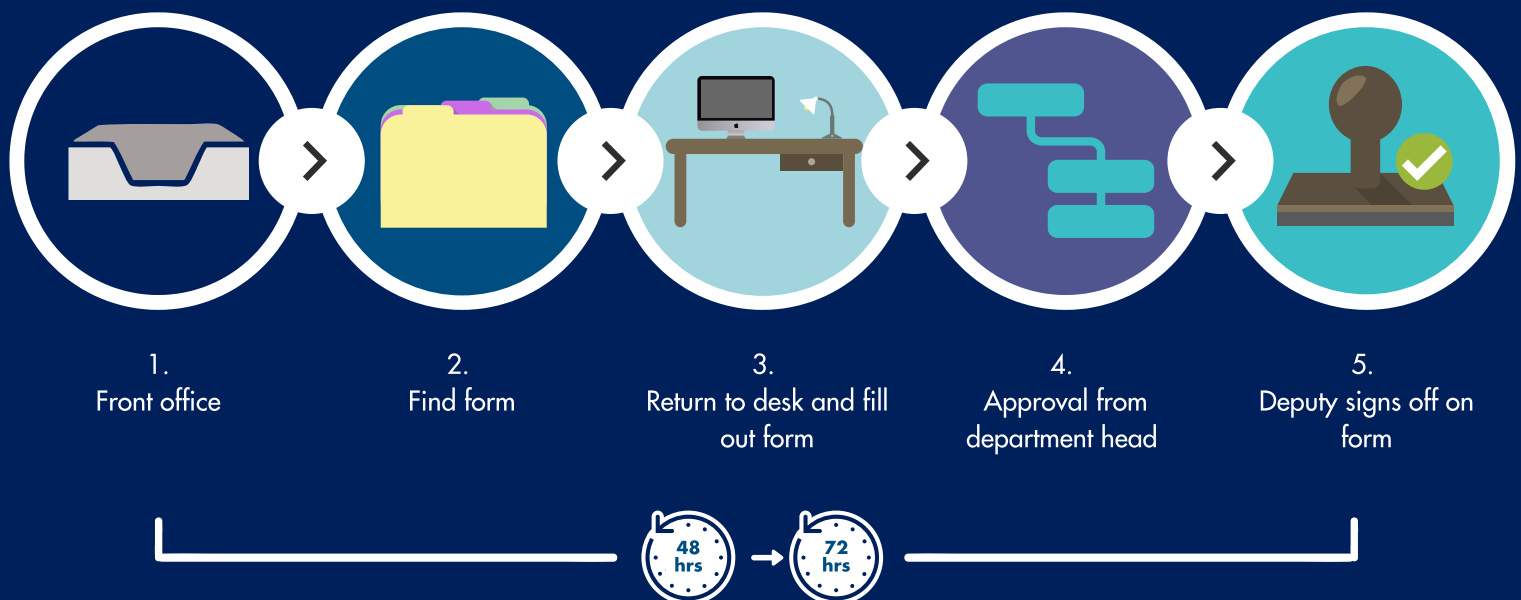
To overcome inoperability issues, ask potential technology providers the following questions:

1. How does it integrate with other products?
2. Does interoperability with their product even exist?
3. Is there an API available (i.e. a programmable interface that enables it to talk to another computer and exchange information)?

Similar to data interoperability, introducing technology into your school should not result in the imposition of one system over another. Instead, your new technology needs to have the flexibility to replicate the processes you've already established over many years of experience into a technological environment. Here's an example…

A staff member goes to the front office, gets a form they need and then walks back to their desk. They sit down and fill it out. They then walk around the school trying to find their head of department to sign/approve that form. That staff member (or head of department) then takes the form to the deputy who will sign it off.

Which looks something like this…



| 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Front office | Find form | Return to desk and fill out form | Approval from department head | Deputy signs off on form |

48 hrs → 72 hrs

This entire process can take days at best. When digitising this sequence, school staff can cut time down to 5-15 minutes.

Your new technology should be able to replicate this manual process in a digital environment where, essentially, the same workflow occurs yet at in a much speedier and more efficient manner (5-15 minutes compared to 2-3 days). This results in the cutting down of time, handling and – consequently – workloads. It's exactly the same process that has proven to work in your school but, rather than handled by people, it's handled by technology instead.

If you run through these steps in conjunction with performing an Edtech due diligence checklist before settling on technology for your school, you're well-positioned to introduce a new system that will make the world of difference when it comes to workloads and efficiencies.

## Conclusion

Every school is different. Every school has worked hard to develop their own best-practice solutions to a range of issues but, as the evidence mounts that an increase in teacher workloads is having a detrimental effect on job satisfaction and staff retention, good EdTech solutions are an important big-picture tool that could liberate your school from an alarming global trend.

Be the outlier. Reduce your teacher workloads. Make your school better.

And, if you're a teacher, always remember:

"**You are here for the kids first. If you do right by them then that's all that matters... If you live each day of your career with that in the back of your mind, then you will last as a teacher.**"

▶ **Teacher Burnout: the best advice I ever received, The Edadvocate**, **13th May 2020**

# Get in touch with us today

📞 +61 (0)3 8560 0890        🌐 www.edsmart.com

✉ sales@edsmart.com