

PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDING

Branch Conference recognises that quality public education for all is a human right and a public good. As a campaigning union, and the main champion of public education, the AEU will lead the action with members, parents and carers, the community, and trade union movement to realise this fundamental principle of a civil and just society.

Our union's efforts have been critical in securing valuable and increased resources over many years with this work evermore important over the next 12 months to ensure Labor governments at the state and federal levels match their rhetoric, and deliver the resources required to ensure all Victorian children, young people and community members have access to high quality public education and equality of opportunities.

Branch Conference reaffirms our commitment to achieving equitable, sustainable, recurrent government funding of public education across early childhood, schools and TAFE, in order to address the industrial, professional, and provision matters which impact on public education communities. This commitment includes a campaign agenda that addresses workforce shortages, unsustainable workloads, salaries, safety at work, and the need for additional resources to address the increasingly complex and diverse needs of the children, young people and adults we educate.

TAFE

Branch Conference demands that the Allan Labor government invest further in TAFE to address the current unsustainable funding model and provide fair and reasonable salaries and conditions for the workforce through a new single interest employer agreement for TAFE teachers.

Branch Conference notes with frustration:

- that for the last 10 years Victoria has been the lowest funded state for vocational education.
- the two reports on TAFE completed by the state Labor government since their election in 2014, which have both recommended the need for a comprehensively revised funding model. The most recent report *Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy (2020)*, by Jenny Macklin, highlighted the problems of the competitive market model, and called for the Victorian Government to undertake work to produce a fairer VET funding model, that recognised the additional costs carried by public TAFEs and based on the cost of delivering a course or qualification rather than a narrowly focused model reliant on student funded hours.
- the inaction of the Allan Labor government in failing to meet their pre-election commitment to legislate to provide 70% of VET funding to TAFE.

The AEU will continue its public campaigning to ensure that the government's pre-election commitment is met and that our TAFEs are funded at the genuine cost of provision.

Early Childhood

Conference recognises the AEU's significant achievement of expanded and free three- and four-year-old play based kindergarten programs in Victoria, to be rolled out over the next decade, to

2032. The AEU also acknowledges the continued investment in workforce initiatives, to attract the more than 11,000 teachers and educators that will be needed for the expansion.

Conference calls on the Alban Labor government to continue their investment in early childhood education and in the workforce, critical to the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children. Further, to follow that investment with a commitment to investing in the existing workforce through the funding of improved salaries and conditions of work in early childhood bargaining.

Schools

The state and federal governments have committed to 100% of the SRS for public school students. The negotiation of the next NRSA provides an opportunity for the Albanese and Alban governments to meet that commitment and ensure that public school students are provided what they were promised and need.

Branch conference calls on the Alban government to:

- continue to demand that the Federal government increase their contribution to the schooling resource standard (SRS) by at least 5% to 25%
- reach a genuine national funding agreement with the Federal government that ensures public schools are funded to at least 100% of the SRS by 2028
- increase the state's contribution to the SRS from 66.4% to 75%, which includes the removal of the 4% discount for system costs.

The AEU Victorian Branch commits to continue participating in the national For Every Child campaign, including:

- a focus on target electorates (with emphasis on member and community activism)
- working with principal and parent organisations
- hosting community events
- member lobbying in Canberra of Federal government MPs
- continued paid and earned media coverage, social media, and online, print, and billboard advertising

to achieve funding justice for public schools.

In the event that the negotiations for a new national funding agreement does not provide public schools with full funding Branch Conference commits to working with the AEU Federal office and AEU Branches and associated bodies with a view to escalate our national campaigning including consideration of direct political action including rallies that target politicians to realise the benefit of 100% of the SRS for the students we educate, their families, the broader community, and AEU members.

WORKFORCE SHORTAGES

That Branch Conference reaffirms the AEU's call for a decisive, comprehensive, and urgent state government response to the shortage of education staff consistent with the actions outlined in the AEU's *10 Year Plan for Staffing in Public Education*. The plan, launched at the 2022 AEU Branch Conference, focuses on the policies and investment which are necessary to properly address staff shortages across schools, Early Childhood and TAFE.

Conference acknowledges the significant efforts of members over the past two years in campaigning for programs to address shortages, whilst carrying additional workload to fill gaps and ensure the continued provision of high quality education.

Conference notes the AEU's campaign success with the state government allocating additional funding for limited measures to support the retention of existing staff and investment to boost the attraction of new teachers, including:

- scholarships for students undertaking secondary and combined primary/secondary teaching courses (broadly equivalent in value to HECS debts incurred),
- paid placements for students undertaking practicums in eligible rural and regional schools, and metropolitan specialist schools,
- expansion of the Career Start program over 2024/25 to approximately 75 per cent of Department areas, to support first year teachers and their mentors with additional face to face teaching reductions,
- incentive payments to attract teachers to rural/regional/hard to staff schools,
- flexible work options for principal class employees, to allow principals to job share,
- innovative ITE courses, which allow pre-service teachers to undertake some paid work in schools whilst studying,
- the teacher recruitment initiative, to provide a more streamlined recruitment system for schools and applicants,
- scholarships for early childhood educators to attain and upgrade qualifications, including access to fee free TAFE programs for educator certificate and diploma courses.

While the campaign to date has delivered more than \$250 million in extra investment to attract and retain teachers, the existing efforts are insufficient to address the increasing crisis. Students and staff in schools, TAFE, and Early Childhood continue to be impacted by significant workforce shortages, which has resulted in the loss or diminution of programs, and increased workload for existing staff as they go above and beyond to paper over the cracks.

Branch Conference calls on the Allan government to provide urgent and significantly increased funding for short-, medium-, and long-term actions to ensure that the educational and wellbeing programs provided to Victorian children and young people are delivered and/or supported by fully qualified, and well-resourced principals, education support staff, teachers, and educators. Without this, quality provision is at risk, and the problems being experienced now will be exacerbated well into the future.

In the event that further significant and bold investment is not made, Branch Conference

calls on AEU members to join the ongoing campaign of action, including lobbying Labor members of the state government, union members addressing school councils seeking their support to raise concerns with their local member, and participating in political rallies to focus the community's attention on the problems being experienced in the public education sector, and to demonstrate to state Labor government politicians that real action which will end the teacher shortage must be taken.

EDUCATING FOR PEACE

That the AEU stands with the Australian union movement, as a movement of peace for all people and who oppose war, racism, and oppression.

The AEU Branch Conference notes the response of the AEU and as an affiliate of Education International, the ACTU, and the VTHC, all of whom have repeatedly called for a permanent ceasefire and an urgent peaceful solution to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

We stand with the Australian union movement's call for "all community, civil society organisations and faith groups in Australia to build unity, oppose racism and promote cultural harmony and tolerance throughout their memberships".

The AEU has always advocated for the rights of children and young people to be educated, live and learn in environments which are safe and healthy, and free from oppression including war. All wars impact significantly on women and children, and with the destruction of schools, deaths of thousands of children, and many teachers in Gaza, this is starkly evident. AEU Branch Conference condemns the deaths of more than 38,900 civilians since October 7, including 1200 Israelis and over 37,000 Palestinians. Millions of people in Gaza face food shortages, starvation, and little capacity to conduct a life with the freedom and resources we take for granted.

AEU Branch Conference supports and reiterates the April statement from the ACTU calling on the Australian government to increase funding for humanitarian assistance, to use all available measures to achieve a permanent ceasefire, to end all military trade with Israel, and to enact targeted sanctions on Israeli officials, and military and civil servants, who deny the provision of aid and humanitarian assistance to Gaza and the West Bank. To this end, and in the context of ongoing military action by the Israeli government, the AEU Victorian Branch commits to continue to work with the Federal AEU and the broader union movement through the VTHC and the ACTU to consider further actions for the Federal government to enact that apply greater pressure on the Israeli government to agree to a permanent ceasefire. This could include further appropriate sanctions and other economic measures.

Branch Conference demands an end to the occupation of Palestine and a just and sustainable peace in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions. Ending the occupation must include the removal of illegal settlements, the withdrawal of Israel from all Palestinian lands along with the dismantling of the separation wall.

Therefore, branch conference commits itself to organising and promoting an AEU contingent at the Free Palestine rallies in Melbourne. That we aim to organise and grow this contingent on a monthly basis, for example the first Sunday of every month.

The AEU supports the ACTU's call, in line with their commitment to a two-state solution, "on all countries to recognise, without delay, Palestine as a sovereign state with East Jerusalem as its capital. This will confirm the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination in a free and independent Palestine."

Educating for peace

Branch Conference recognises the AEU's (and its predecessor unions) longstanding commitment to peace, which has been realised, in part, through strong advocacy for children and young people and in peace education programs and learning materials. This work seeks to empower students

through teaching them about the importance of building, maintaining, and promoting cultures of peace and eliminating all forms of violence.

Effective peace education relies on teachers having the professional agency to develop and provide teaching and learning experiences which call out the violence and injustice which is at the heart of war and conflict. The agency of teachers and their professional judgement, based on their knowledge, skills, and experience, must be exercised in a way which enables teachers to make decisions and act in the context in which they work. It must be done without AEU members being confined by kneejerk political reactions or limitations on their professional rights.

The conflict in the Middle East shows the critical importance of peace education and the role of educators to help students develop critical thinking skills and media literacy to counter the spread of disinformation, and to achieve communities free from conflict, with peaceful relations at the centre.

The AEU again calls on the Allan government and the Department of Education to ensure that:

- AEU members have the resources, guidance and support they need to educate for peace and to engage in respectful discussions with students and colleagues, without fear of hate and discrimination.
- AEU members have a right to engage appropriately and respectfully with their colleagues about community issues, including the current conflict in the Middle East, and
- teachers and other educators and all those who are enrolled in Victorian kindergartens, public schools, and TAFEs and who are impacted by the conflict are provided with the support they need.

Militarisation of schools

AEU Branch Conference reaffirms the union's commitment to continue to work with the anti-war, peace, and broader union movement to expose and oppose the threat inherent in the rise in militarism and growing nuclear proliferation, as well as a focus on peace education and the role of unions in this movement over many years.

The AEU is deeply committed to peace, opposes militarism, and asserts that war should never be used to resolve international conflict. There have been too many times in history when warmongering and armaments build-up have led to international conflict, death, and destruction.

Branch Conference notes the decision by AEU Federal Executive in March 2023 to oppose the AUKUS security pact. There is no place for a politicised pro-AUKUS curriculum in our schools, alongside other private industries who attempt to use schools as a vehicle for promotion of their own products and profits hidden behind spurious educational benefits for students.

Branch Conference calls on the Allan government to ensure that the Department of Education adheres to its sponsorship policy, with reference to the militarisation of schools. The Department's policy requires schools to determine if sponsorship is appropriate, including ensuring probity. It specifically states, "Schools must not engage in sponsorship that is inappropriate, either through association or activity. The following activities or organisations must not be considered for sponsorship: political parties, tobacco companies, gaming venues,

companies involved in the sale or promotion of alcohol, or involved in the sale or promotion of firearms.”

Branch Conference endorses the efforts of the AEU to support the actions of AEU members to implement the Department’s sponsorship policy so to prevent, in any way, the engagement of weapons manufacturers in our schools.

While governments are ever ready to commit huge amounts of public money on military expenditure there remains a serious underfunding of public pre-schools, public schools, TAFE and higher education, and other areas of the public sector. This has been no more evident in April 2024, when in the midst of negotiations for a new national school funding agreement, the Federal Albanese government committed a further \$50 billion towards defence spending, at the same time as refusing to commit to increasing the Federal government’s contribution to the schooling resource standard (SRS) by any more than 2.5%, which will leave public schools in Victoria at least 5% behind what is required to meet the government’s own minimum finding requirement.

BRANCH CONFERENCE RESOLUTION - BARGAINING

That the AEU Branch Conference notes the significant bargaining processes and campaigning currently underway across early childhood, TAFE, disability and schools.

Critical to improving members' working lives is campaigning for and negotiating industrial agreements that provide salaries and conditions that recognise the value and importance of the work of teachers, education support staff and leaders.

Conference applauds the long term campaign and advocacy of the Australian union movement to achieve fundamental and important changes to federal industrial laws, providing a fairer playing field for working people. Whilst we recognise there is still more change to be made, the Closing Loopholes Bill has delivered improvements and enabled the AEU to bargain for agreements that allow members to bargain together collectively across employers, and with the right to take protected industrial action in support of achieving decent salaries and conditions of work. Changes that allow members to pursue Greenfields agreements and provide the union with improved capacity to replace zombie agreements with updated and improved conditions of work in new agreements, will benefit AEU members in the early childhood and disability sectors.

Early Childhood

The Early Childhood (EC) sector continues to be plagued by multiple employers, and consequently multiple agreements, which result in members in different settings receiving different levels of pay and conditions for doing the same work. The AEU is committed to continuing to advocate and campaign to government, to see a consistent approach to employment across the early childhood education and care sector to ensure members are respected and valued for the critical work they do in developing the emotional, social and cognitive skills of our earliest learners.

With a long term aim to see early childhood education and care provided and funded by governments, in the interim we must see all EC teachers and educators receive at least pay parity with school sector employees. This must be delivered across all settings through collective agreements, allowing members to undertake protected industrial action to achieve their aims, and providing consistent conditions of work which set the industry standard.

Early Childhood education is delivered by highly qualified and experienced staff who provide the building blocks for children in their lifelong learning. They deserve respect because of the value of this work, and this respect must include fair remuneration.

Conference notes the commencement of negotiations in the community and local government sectors for the benchmark agreements, Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement (VECTEA) and Early Education Employees Agreement (EEEE). With more than 11,000 new employees required over the next ten years for the ongoing rollout of 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten programs, it is critical that the Allan government invest in the workforce to ensure staff are attracted and retained in the sector through the provision of decent salaries and conditions.

Branch Conference endorses the decision to campaign to achieve a single interest employer agreement (SIEA) across councils in the local government sector, and urges all EC members to campaign with colleagues to achieve a majority support petition across all councils in the event

local councils refuse to negotiate a SIEA, and deny the opportunity to bargain collectively, with the right to take protected industrial action.

Branch Conference demands the Allan government approves the negotiation of a Greenfields agreement for early childhood teachers and educators to be employed in the 50 new government owned early childhood centres, five of which are due to open in 2025. It is unacceptable that government would allow their own employees to be employed under a Ministerial Order, which is not enforceable in the courts, rather than setting the standard in the sector. In addition, this is inconsistent with their own Industrial Relations policy. The AEU will campaign with members employed in these new settings this year to pursue a Greenfields agreement to cover their salaries and conditions of work.

TAFE

Branch Conference congratulates AEU TAFE members for the stand they are taking in fighting for improved salaries and conditions, in line with other AEU members in the schools and EC sectors, and due respect for the important education they provide. Conference notes that currently TAFE teachers' salaries are approximately seven per cent behind similarly experienced school teachers.

After almost two years since the commencement of negotiations, the Allan government and TAFE employers have failed dismally to invest in their workforce, and acknowledge the value of their work to our community. They stand condemned, as the significant skill shortages across many areas, including disability, aged care, early childhood, and trades areas, cannot be addressed if they don't address the TAFE teacher shortage.

The commencement of industrial action, in mid April, is the culmination of many months of campaigning and commitment by TAFE members. Branch Conference commends TAFE members for standing together to achieve majority support in each of the 12 stand alone TAFEs, for a SIEA, forcing the TAFEs and Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) to agree to the AEU's demands to negotiate an SIEA, which after a successful protected action ballot, has allowed members to commence industrial action in the form of bans and limitations on work and stop works.

Branch Conference supports the TAFE Sector Council's decision to further escalate the campaign throughout 2024 to increase pressure on the Allan government and TAFEs, in the event they continue to put unacceptable offers on the negotiation table.

Branch Conference notes the ongoing negotiations occurring or required in dual sector locations, including Federation University, RMIT and Victoria University. Despite members concerns about inadequate salaries and workload:

- Federation University want to substantially increase teaching hours.
- RMIT put a non-union agreement to teachers which was voted down by AEU members.
- Victoria University staff received a 4% administrative adjustment with the employer dragging their heels rather than starting negotiations.

Disability

Branch Conference acknowledges the work done to achieve the extension of 11 zombie agreements which helps to ensure that members continue to receive superior terms and conditions compared to the award, and which enable AEU members to try to achieve a new multi-

employer agreement. The supported bargaining application for members in these workplaces and a similar approach for members covered by the NGO MEA provides the union with an important opportunity to bring together members from dozens of workplaces on to agreements rather than rely on outdated single employer agreements or the award.

Conference calls for the federal government to provide sufficient funding so that the work of members in adult disability services is properly supported and respected and that they have pay and conditions which reflect their value.

Schools

Branch Conference notes the commencement of the campaign to achieve the next Victorian Government Schools Agreement, with negotiations set to commence in mid-2025. AEU members are to be congratulated for contributing to the first stage of the year long research project being undertaken with Monash University during 2024/2025. The project, investigating 'What the Profession needs Now, For the Future', will provide further valuable insight into the challenges currently being faced by the profession and suggestions for change, including salaries, conditions of work, staffing shortages, the provision of education, expectations and respect of the profession, and partnerships with parents/carers and the community.

Further opportunity for members to respond to recommendations and ideas throughout the year, culminating in the Log of Claims process in early 2025, will strengthen the voice of AEU members on behalf of their profession. The real knowledge, experience and expertise of AEU members will be essential in an environment where too many armchair experts with no education experience other than their own, are prepared to criticise public schools and public school staff and tell them what and how to teach and support their students.

Since the certification of the VGSA2022, which embedded the first face to face reduction in thirty plus years and brought the face to face maximums of Victorian teachers to the lowest in the nation, as well as the greatest amount of self-directed teacher time in the nation, and the most substantial Time in Lieu entitlements in the nation, there have been significant improvements in salary in other jurisdictions. The Allan government must recognise that responding to the staffing shortage through both attraction and retention must include a wages offer which competes with other states and territories.

The Monash research will be critical in informing the log of claims process with members in early 2025, and for the AEU to utilise earned and paid media and undertake advertising in support of the campaign to achieve further improvements in salaries and conditions of work.

PALESTINE SOLIDARITY IS AEU VIC BRANCH UNION BUSINESS

That the AEU Victorian Branch joins with Australian and international unions in continuing to condemn Israel's ongoing military assault on Gaza. Since October 7, Israel has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and displaced almost the entire population of Gaza, destroying schools, hospitals, homes and other infrastructure, and creating the conditions for famine through the consistent blocking of humanitarian aid. The gravity of these actions was confirmed by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on January 26th 2024, when it ordered Israel to take all necessary measures to prevent the genocide of the Palestinian people, to prevent and punish the incitement to genocide, to ensure the provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance to Gaza, and to ensure that possible evidence of genocide not be destroyed [paragraphs 77-81]. Amnesty International has found that "Israel has failed to take even the bare minimum steps to comply" with this order.

The AEU Victorian Branch recognises that Israel's attacks are a continuation of the ethnic cleansing of the 1948 nakba, and the illegal occupation which began in 1967. This ongoing Israeli campaign has entailed killings, mass displacement, and apartheid discrimination against Palestinians.

The AEU Victorian Branch continues to reiterate state, national, and international calls for a lasting peace in Palestine, which requires a permanent ceasefire, an end to Israel's occupation, and the dismantling of all elements of Israel's apartheid discrimination.

The AEU Victorian Branch condemns the military, political and economic ties between the Victorian and Federal governments and the Israeli government where these ties have provided legitimacy to, and normalised Israel's illegal attacks on Palestine.

The AEU Victorian Branch is concerned about:

- the lack of clarity in the use by the Victorian government of the IHRA definition of antisemitism, which invites a conflation of the criticism of the Israeli government with antisemitism.
- the principles and standards which apply to school employees conduct are not applied consistently or replicated in an appropriate way to non-government organisations that receive government funding to operate programs in public schools.
- the failure of the Department to ensure that school programs and teaching and learning resources, produced by or connected to the weapons companies contributing to the deaths, injuries, and destruction of infrastructure in Palestine, are not running in Victorian government schools, despite the Department's appropriate materials and sponsorship policies stating companies involved in the sale or promotion of weapons, including firearms as inappropriate organisations to sponsor schools.
- the failure to ensure that students and staff (who seek to act within the Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees and the Child Safe Standards), who elevate Palestinian human rights by wearing Keffiyeh and Palestinian symbols at school, or who advance views to support those Palestinian rights with students (in the context of the curriculum), colleagues or

members of the public, are not subject to unnecessary or unlawful departmental scrutiny or discipline.

The AEU Victorian Branch therefore resolves to:

1. Continue to support union members who are taking appropriate and peaceful action to advance the human rights of Palestinians and reject any unlawful employer and government actions that seek to restrict appropriate and peaceful action. The AEU will continue to provide direct support to AEU members where they may be subject to unlawful and unreasonable action by their employer.
2. Continue to work with the broader union movement in Australia and continue to insist that the Federal Government calls on the Israeli government to permanently ceasefire, and to take the steps necessary to end all apartheid structures and settler violence against Palestinians.
3. Support the ACTU's call on the Australian government to take immediate steps to secure peace, by:
 - using all influence, pressure, and diplomatic measures to achieve a permanent ceasefire,
 - ending all military trade with Israel,
 - enacting targeted sanctions on Israeli officials who have called for the denial of aid, and military and civil servants denying essential food and materials to civilians of Gaza, and extend this call to the Victorian government.
4. Call on the Victorian Government to break the 2022 Memorandum of Understanding with the Israeli Defence Force and that it should end co-operation and investments with Israeli weapons companies.
5. Call on the Victorian government to clarify use of the IHRA definition of antisemitism to ensure criticisms of the Israeli government or the Israeli Defence Forces are not considered to be antisemitic by definition, and to give active consideration to the use of the guidelines set out in the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism instead.
6. Call on the Department of Education to ensure the principles and standards which apply to school employees conduct are applied in a consistent and appropriate way to non-government organisations that receive government funding to operate programs in public schools.
7. Call on the Department of Education to proactively communicate to school leaders that programs which are contributed to and/or provided by companies involved in the sale or promotion of firearms are not to be considered as part of any incoming sponsorship arrangement, as outlined by the Department of Education sponsorship policy.

US BLOCKADE OF CUBA

The AEU Victorian Branch, joins with the Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (Trade union Federation of Cuba) and hundreds of other unions around the world in condemning the US blockade against Cuba as an inhumane attack on workers and on the sovereignty and self-determination of the Cuban people. We call for the removal of US sanctions against Cuba and the removal of Cuba from the US State Sponsors of Terrorism List. *These measures constitute a serious and systemic violation of the norms of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.*

Initiated Sixty-two years ago, the US embargo against Cuba is the longest continuous use of sanctions against any country in modern history, with dire consequences for Cuban people in getting access to basic daily necessities such as food, medicine, and supplies often resulting in preventable deaths. It blocks humanitarian aid, financial transactions and trade and denies sovereignty, dignity, and human rights.

The AEU Victoria Branch recognises that Cuba has a long history of providing education and healthcare and saving lives around the world. Since 1963, more than 600,000 Cuban health workers have provided medical services in more than 160 countries, fighting diseases from Ebola to COVID-19. It has also trained more than 31,000 doctors from 65 developing countries at no cost and sent teachers to numerous developing nations.

We commend the Australian Government's support of Cuba at the United Nations *on 2nd November 2023, when Australia, along with 187 other member states voted in favour of the resolution to end the United States' embargo - with only two countries, the US and Israel voting against.*

We call on the Australian government to:

- 1) *continue its support of the Cuban adult literacy program "Yo, sí puedo" ("Yes, I can") which has been successfully used in several remote and rural Aboriginal communities.*
- 2) *continue its support for the integration of Cuban trained doctors into the Pacific Islands.*
- 3) *use all diplomatic means to pressure the US government to abide by the UN General Assembly's resolution to end the US Blockade of Cuba.*