

PETER DRAPER

INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR TAMWORTH

MEDIA RELEASE

Small schools struggle under cuts to administrative staff work hours

June 15 2004

A pay rise for teaching support staff announced by the NSW Minister for Education Dr Andrew Refshauge appears to be nothing more than a smokescreen for cutbacks to their working hours according to Member for Tamworth Peter Draper.

Mr Draper welcomed Dr Refshauge's announcement that teaching support staff would receive a pay rise of between 5.7 and 7.4 per cent from July 1 but said it appeared the boost was being paid for through cutbacks to the actual hours staff worked.

Mr Draper said in recent months school administrative and support staff (SASS) at Bendemeer, Niangala and Mullaley Public schools had each had their hours cut due to falling student numbers at their schools.

"The Government agreed to let the schools retain their teacher numbers under the Small Rural Schools Staffing formula due to circumstances of drought, but then turned around and cut back the teacher's support staff hours," Mr Draper said.

Mr Draper said support staff hours at Bendemeer and Niangala were slashed from two days per week to one and Mullaley, the worst hit, went from five days to two days and 3.5 hours per week.

"Mullaley Public School student numbers dropped from 59 last year to 49 this year when the drought forced three families to leave the district. The school was able to keep its third teacher but they each carry an extra work burden due to the support staff member having her work hours cut in half.

"It's ridiculous the drought exemption does not also apply to administrative staff who do everything from paying accounts to caring for sick children," he said.

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Mr Draper said the schools had been able to claw back some extra administration hours through the SASS Flexible Staffing Scheme that gave Bendemeer an extra 25 days until the end of this school year, however, Mullaley and Niangala were given only eight days each.

“Besides the fact the schools had to qualify for the extra days due to “unique and emerging circumstances” whatever they are, these flexible days still offer no job security or benefits to administration staff as they can just as easily be taken away,” Mr Draper said.

Mr Draper is currently working with teachers, staff and P&C Association members to push the NSW Government into conducting a review of the Small Rural Schools Staffing formula, which it agreed to undertake last year after lobbying efforts by Member for Northern Tablelands Richard Torbay.

Mr Draper regards the cutbacks to SAAS hours as yet another unwarranted impost on education in small communities, and has written to Minister for Education Andrew Refshauge expressing this concern.

End Release

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