

# Education at a price

Parents are preparing for a premature end to the school year as teachers look to strike again, reports **JOANNA VAUGHAN**

**A**FTER 10 months, three strikes and countless hours of mediation, the State Government and the teachers union have finally edged closer to an agreement.

However, the threat of public school teachers ending the school year early with "indefinite" strike action still looms.

Almost a year ago today the South Australian branch of the Australian Education Union announced they would approach the State Government to ask for an increase in pay and improved conditions for teachers across the state.

SA teachers, who are currently the lowest paid of their profession in the country, want a pay increase that would at least place them on a national bench mark.

They say hundreds of young and talented graduates are leaving the



## WHAT TEACHERS EARN

- A first year teacher earns \$49,600.
- A teacher with eight years' experience earns \$68,000.

## WHAT TEACHERS ARE CALLING FOR

- A pay increase of up to 21 per cent over three years.
- Revised rules on professional development.
- Revised maternity leave.
- Smaller class sizes.
- For the Government to alter its revised funding model, which the union says will result in about 350 schools losing funding.
- Extra administration time for leaders including principals, deputy principals and assistant principals.

## WHAT THE GOVERNMENT IS OFFERING

- A 12.5 per cent pay rise over three years for 84 per cent of teachers and a 10.5 per cent pay increase for the remaining less-experienced teachers.
- A "per student" funding model from 2010 to replace complex student-to-staff ratio formula.
- 14 weeks' paid maternity leave.
- Extra incentives for teachers who teach hard-to-staff subjects in rural or remote schools.

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**TEACHERS: Thousands have voted on indefinite strikes. Cast yours, see the result.**

state because they can get more money by teaching interstate.

In a move that some say placed more pressure on the Government, teachers in Western Australia were this week offered a pay increase of up to 24.4 per cent.

If accepted, the pay rises and improved conditions would cost more than \$1 billion and take the salary of an experienced teacher to \$88,190 by 2010, a rise of more than \$19,000.

Teachers also want longer maternity leave, smaller class sizes and for the State Government to change its "controversial" funding model that they claim will result in one in three schools losing up to \$250,000 in funds.

On Monday, executives voted to cut the school year short by striking again.

The "unprecedented" action will be put to an emergency delegate meeting on Thursday.

AEU state president Correna Haythorpe said teachers were "fed up" with government inaction and the union was taking the stand to send a message to the Government.

If teachers do strike again, thousands of parents around the state will have to find alternative child care for their children.

## DEAL OR NO DEAL

### South Australia

Teachers have been in mediation with the State Government for about a year and are currently the lowest paid teachers in Australia.

### Western Australia

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rises will take the salary of an experienced teacher to \$88,190 by 2010.

### Victoria

In May, teachers won pay rises that made them the highest paid in Australia. Graduates get a starting salary of \$51,184. Experienced teachers can earn up to \$75,500.

### Northern Territory

Teachers have been fighting with the State Government for higher pay and improved conditions for 14 months and it looks likely to drag on until 2009.

### New South Wales and Queensland

Teachers are expected to lodge a wage increase claim to their governments early next year.

Parent groups have indicated their opposition to another teacher strike, with SA Association of State School Organisations director David Knuckey warning the damage could last for years after the issue was resolved.

Mr Knuckey said further action would drive a wedge between teachers and parents.

AdelaideNOW readers are also split on the issue with some saying the action is justified and the State

Government should give into their demands to keep good teachers in the state, and other readers saying the teachers are being selfish.

The State Government has so far been unable to stop the teachers from taking action, suggesting there is simply not enough money to give in to their demands.

Even a change in the Industrial Relations Minister from Michael Wright to former union boss Paul Caica has failed to resolve the

dispute. But yesterday, in perhaps the most positive indication the dispute could be resolved, Mr Caica said he met with Ms Haythorpe for a very "productive" meeting where the union had "softened" its demands.

Although he would not comment on what the changes to the claim had been, he said he would take the latest offer seriously.

"The fact that the union has moved from its intractable position

is a positive thing," Mr Caica said. "What I will be doing is giving consideration to the issues that have been raised.

"I am very pleased that there has been movement in regards to what they believe is a fair and reasonable offer. What I want to do is resolve the dispute that exists in South Australia. What I want is for South Australian teachers to be the best teachers in Australia."

Ms Haythorpe, who would also not discuss the revised claim, confirmed it was a positive meeting.

"Executive has redefined their salary claim," she said

"We have given the Government the courtesy of time to consider our claim before making that public.

"There are a couple of things that need to happen in terms of a breakthrough (to stop the strike action) ... We need to have further discussions.

"A lot of our members can't believe why the Government is happy for us to be superglued to the bottom of the table."

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