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MEDIA RELEASE

ACT GOVERNMENT SCHOOL CLOSURES SHOW EDUCATION SYSTEM UNDER IMMENSE PRESSURE

The Australian Education Union ACT Branch says the ACT Government's decision to close all public schools from 8:30am to 10:30am on Friday 22 May reflects the extraordinary pressure facing the public education system, and the unprecedented level of concern among educators about the future of public education.

The closures coincide with a planned two-hour stop work action by public school educators as part of the union's escalating industrial campaign during enterprise bargaining negotiations. It is the first time ACT educators have taken stop work action in 15 years, and the first time ever that school assistants will participate in industrial action alongside teachers, school leaders and school psychologists.

AEU ACT Branch President Angela Burroughs said the Government's announcement confirms what educators have been saying for years — the system is being pushed beyond its limits.

"The Government would not be taking the extraordinary step of closing every public school unless it recognised the scale of the pressure currently facing the system," Ms Burroughs said.

"For years, educators have been papering over the cracks to keep schools running and to make sure students continue to get the support they deserve."

"This decision shows exactly what happens when that goodwill is withdrawn, even briefly. It demonstrates just how reliant the system has become on educators constantly going above and beyond."

The union's current phase of industrial actions had been deliberately designed as a measured first step to give the Government the opportunity to address educators' concerns.

"The Directorate should be using this period of action as an opportunity to genuinely engage with the issues educators have put on the table and come back with an offer that reflects the seriousness of the situation," Ms Burroughs said

"The fact that thousands of staff across every part of the public education workforce are taking action together should send an unmistakable message to the Government."

Ms Burroughs said further escalation could be avoided if the Government returned to negotiations prepared to seriously address the union's claims.





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“The ball is now firmly in the Government’s court. They can prevent further industrial action at any time by coming to the table with an offer that actually addresses the issues educators are raising,” Ms Burroughs said.

“Our members do not want this dispute to escalate. They want solutions. They want a sustainable profession and a stronger public education system for students.”

Friday’s stop work meeting will bring together educators from across the ACT to discuss the next phase of the campaign and decide whether stronger action is needed in the weeks ahead. This second phase may include the full range of actions endorsed by members in the protected action ballot, including full-day strikes.

“This is a defining moment for public education in the ACT. The Government now has a choice: work with educators to address this crisis, or face a significant escalation in industrial action across public schools. The clock is ticking,” Ms Burroughs said.

The stop work action will take place from 8:30am to 10:30am on Friday 22 May, with AEU members meeting in person at the Ainslie Football Club.

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