



South Australian State
School Leaders Association

SASSLA FUTURE DIRECTIONS 2026 - 2028

The South Australian State School Leaders Association (SASSLA) is a successful, independent and self-funded organisation that represents School and Preschool Leaders working for the Department for Education (the department). Our membership has grown from 60 to over 550 leaders since 2001. This growth reflects the confidence that leaders have in SASSLA's capacity to positively represent and advocate for their professional interests and wellbeing.

SASSLA's range of services and advocacy identifies and responds to the needs of leaders:

- Expert policy, support and legal advice on all employment related matters.
- Advocacy for employment policies and practices that support capable and successful leaders.
- New and creative ways of thinking about the policies and capabilities that are needed to address the challenges leaders experience in their work.

Key elements contributing to the success of SASSLA:

- Representing members on highly complex employment related cases.
- Pioneering and developing new thinking to inform future workforce related policy.
- Building strong and sustainable partnerships and relationships with other Professional Principal and Preschool Director Associations and the Department for Education based on common interests and a commitment to dialogue and problem solving.

SASSLA's successful achievements from 2023 – 2025 include:

- A strong record of representing leaders in complex and high impact employment cases.
- Critical input into the reform of classification and tenure of Principal and Preschool Director roles.
- Achieving improved conditions of employment for Preschool Directors.
- Negotiating improved contract conditions for Education Directors.
- Taking a lead role in raising awareness and understanding about work intensification and the strategic responses needed to confront these challenges.
- Leading and developing future orientated policies for improving workforce productivity.

SASSLA's 2026 - 2028 strategic directions include five program areas:

1. Achieving Positive Results for Members.
2. Improving the Health and Wellbeing of School and Preschool Leaders.
3. Confronting the Endemic Problem of Work Intensification.
4. Building Leadership Capacity and Sustainability.
5. Future Orientated Workforce Policies for Strengthening Public Education.

The SASSLA Story

SASSLA is a registered organisation under the *South Australian Association Incorporation Act 1985*. Our Membership comprises:

- School Principals
- School Leaders including Deputy, Assistant Principals and Senior Leaders
- Preschool Directors
- Non-school based Education Leaders employed under the *Education and Children's Services Act 2019* and *Public Sector Act 2019*

Our story began in 2001 when a small group of public school principals came together to create the Legal Fund of State School Leaders. Their motivation was to create an organisation that recognised School and Preschool Leaders as a distinct class of employees with specific interests and needs.

The hallmarks of our work are independence, integrity and commitment to the ideals of public education, consistent with the objectives first established by the foundation group of members. We have progressively built the range and depth of services offered to members and developed our capacity to influence policy decisions. We continue to adapt our business model and develop organisational capabilities needed to positively support and advocate for members.

Visit SASSLA's [website](#) and read our policy papers [here](#).

Contact us admin@sassla.au or 0412 654 817

1. Achieving Positive Results for Members

The core work of SASSLA is to advocate for members interests on employment related matters and provide general advice and services that add value to the work of School and Preschool Leaders.

In the 2023 - 2025 planning cycle, SASSLA experienced a rapid increase in the number and complexity of member requests for assistance and support. In 2025, we opened 163 case files, which represents a 50% increase in demand compared to the five-year average. There was a notable increase in high risk cases needing legal advice and representation.

Areas where increased demand are most evident:

- Psychological injury
- Vexatious parent and community interactions
- Conduct investigations and unsatisfactory performance

The increase in demand for our services is a barometer of both the current working conditions experienced by School and Preschool Leaders and is also a reflection of the high levels of confidence our members have in the services and support we offer.

Future Focus and Priorities

Priority areas identified through our recent casework are:

- Reducing the length of time to complete conduct related investigations.
- Improving the early intervention processes in relation to psychosocial hazards.
- Reforming the current system for merit selection processes in defined work contexts.

SASSLA operates in a dynamic environment where our relevance and success are determined by continuous development of our service offering to members. To ensure our continuing success, we have identified the following priority areas for the 2026 – 2028 planning cycle:

- Implementing structured and interactive processes which capture member feedback on the quality, range and depth of our services and opportunities for improvement.
- Developing a long-term staffing plan to ensure SASSLA has the internal capabilities to provide the professional services our members need and expect.
- Analysing the issues and trends emerging from our work and presenting the findings to the government and the department.

2. Improving the Health and Wellbeing of School and Preschool Leaders

SASSLA is a people focussed organisation and the health, safety and welfare (WHS) of School and Preschool Leaders is our foremost priority. We also recognise that the wellbeing of all educators is crucial to a capable, confident and successful public education system.

We see firsthand the difficult conditions, high work pressures and emotional loads that are being experienced by leaders.

SASSLA is most concerned about:

- Psychological injury: Our case work shows clear linkages with work intensification and difficult community interactions as primary causes of workplace injury.
- Rising offensive and violent behaviour directed at leaders: This is an Australia wide trend recently brought into the foreground of public interest by the Monash University Report *Invisible Labour – Principals emotional labour in volatile times*¹ and the Australian *Principal Occupational Health Safety and Wellbeing Survey 2025*².

Two significant initiatives instigated by the department are:

- The government's new legislation *Education and Children's Services (Barring Notices and Other Protections) Amendment Bill 2024*. This legislation improves and strengthens the powers available to Principals and Preschool Directors to manage risks associated with misbehaviour of parents and visitors to their site.
- Bringing work health and safety into the foreground of department priorities through the development of a new Work Health and Safety Strategy. The stakeholder consultation and discussion paper released by the department in late 2025 lays bare the current performance of the WHS system and the challenges ahead.

These initiatives represent a positive first step in framing a future approach to improving WHS outcomes. SASSLA recognises that this work must have the highest priority and a sustained effort over time to improve health and wellbeing outcomes across the education workforce.

¹ Monash Education, *Invisible Labour: Principals' Emotional Labour in Volatile Times - Report Four, Hung out to Dry*. March 2026.

² Australian Catholic University Institute for Positive Psychology & Education: *Annual Report 2025. The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Survey*.

Future Focus and Priorities

In late 2025, SASSLA, acting collaboratively with the Principal and Preschool Director Associations (the Joint Associations), developed a submission on the Stakeholder Consultation and Discussion Paper for the department's Work Health and Safety Strategy. The key areas of interest identified by the Joint Associations are:

- Psychosocial hazards
- Unsafe and ageing infrastructure
- Design principles for a contemporary WHS system
- Evaluation methods and measuring success

In addition to working with the Joint Associations, SASSLA is committed to independently:

- Advocating for extending the Workers Compensation Additional Compensation Scheme to education employees. SASSLA has advocated for the additional compensation coverage since 2023 without success. We continue to question why a scheme available to police, nurses, social workers and other employees providing front line services is not available to educators. This is clearly unfair and SASSLA will strongly advocate to government for equitable treatment of educators.
- Identifying and developing practical strategies and approaches for early recognition of high-risk psychosocial hazards, and tailored support for leaders experiencing psychological harm.

3. Confronting the Endemic Problem of Work Intensification

Members consistently report that they are faced with more complex work demands, higher levels of accountability, and increasing time pressures – referred to as work intensification³⁴. SASSLA has been at the forefront of raising awareness and understanding of the impact of work intensification on educators.

SASSLA developed a three-dimensional risk model titled People, Productivity and Sustainability:

- **People:** Detrimental effects on the health, personal relationships, and the private lives of educators.
- **Productivity:** Leaders and teachers are less able to prioritise critical elements of work that promote the growth of teaching and learning.
- **Sustainability:** People making alternative career choices away from educator roles because of excessive demands and working conditions.

These risks and costs represent a generational challenge to public education. SASSLA has made a strong case that traditional managerial and industrial relations responses are less effective in responding to these complex challenges and new thinking and approaches are needed urgently⁵.

In response, the department initiated the Empowering Educators to Thrive initiative in 2024. This initiative is a collaborative process that brings employees, professional associations and unions together to define problems and generate solutions.

The Empowering Educators to Thrive initiative represents a positive step forward in acknowledging and responding to this major systemic risk. For the initiative to have success it must push the boundaries of conventional thinking and build the confidence of educators that real progress can be achieved.

Future Focus and Priorities

The Empowering Educators to Thrive initiative will continue in 2026. An area of specific interest to SASSLA is the funded project Supporting Site Leaders which incorporates pilot programs for improving administrative and operational support to schools. This work potentially provides a pathway for reducing the administrative burden placed on school leadership.

SASSLA will also conduct an independent study that identifies policies and work systems that inhibit or frustrate School and Preschool Leaders from undertaking their core work as educators.

³ Crea S., Thompson G., Mockler N., Stacey M., & Hogan A. 2023, *Workload intensification and time poverty for teachers and school leaders: a systematic research synthesis*. Educational Review. Routledge.

⁴ Deloitte, 2017. *Principal Workload and Time Use Study*. NSW Department of Education.

⁵ SASSLA, 2020. *Education Leader Workload: A Discussion Paper*.

4. Building Leadership Capacity and Sustainability

SASSLA has been proactive in raising awareness on the crucial role Leaders play in building and sustaining a successful public education system. An important catalyst for raising this awareness was the joint work undertaken by SASSLA and the South Australian Secondary Principals' Association (SASPA) on *Reconceptualising the Principal Role*⁶. In 2024, the department, recognising the need for a clear sighted and long-term strategy for reform of Principal and Preschool Director roles, established the Band A Reform Reference Group.

Significant policy outcomes achieved in 2025 were:

- Improved security for Principals and Preschool Directors by enabling appointments for up to 10 years.
- The design of a contemporary classification and remuneration structure that will be fully implemented in 2026.

The work of the Band A Reform Reference Group is the first major project where the professional associations and SASSLA have come together as Joint Associations to present a consolidated position on a major policy initiative. It is a model that offers a pathway for collaborative engagement on future workforce policy challenges.

Future Focus and Priorities

The work of the Band A Reform Reference Group will continue in 2026 with the focus moving to role design, position descriptions, and selection processes. SASSLA will continue as an active member of the Reference Group and will also make independent submissions on selection processes and evaluation of Band A reforms.

SASSLA's new priorities in the 2026 - 2028 planning cycle are:

- Completing the review on leadership capacity and resourcing of school-based preschools. This work is being undertaken in partnership with the South Australian Primary Principals Association (SAPPA) and will be released in 2026.
- Continuing to advocate for improved conditions of employment for non-award based SASSLA members working in Central and Education Offices.
- Undertaking a review of the Band B school leadership classification structure to align with the contemporary needs of schools and preschools.
- Developing a submission to government on employment related reforms for consideration in the forthcoming 2027 enterprise bargaining negotiations.

⁶ Reconceptualising the Principal Role, jointly developed by SASSLA and SASPA, 2023. This work was further developed and published as Rethinking and Redesigning the Role of the Principal – The SASPA/SASSLA Case for Change.

5. Future Orientated Policies for Strengthening Public Education

An important and unique feature of SASSLA's work is our interest in developing policy approaches for managing workforce risks and improving conditions of employment and productivity across public education. Our work is providing new insights on policies that address contemporary opportunities and challenges in the education workforce.

SASSLA has made a significant contribution on these important workforce policy areas:

- **Evaluation of teacher labour markets:** In the current open teacher labour market, schools and preschools in more desirable locations have a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining high quality teachers and leaders compared to low SES and regional schools. In the tightening labour market post COVID, this disparity has become more evident and now presents a specific challenge to public education. SASSLA has named this issue in submissions to the department and the state and federal government and made a clear case for improved labour market risk analysis and policy settings that enable equitable distribution of human resources⁷.
- **Reform of the paraprofessional workforce:** Principal and Preschool Director members invited SASSLA to work with them to identify opportunities for improving the productivity and career progression of School Services Officer (SSO) and Early Childhood Worker (ECW) staff working with students and children. The two major projects SASSLA has been associated with are:
 - Designing organisation structures and roles that improves productivity and enables SSO and ECW staff to achieve reclassification⁸.
 - Providing assistance and ongoing support to a country secondary school to develop a pathway for paraprofessional staff in the school to undertake a supported teaching degree.

SASSLA's work brings new perspectives and practical wisdom on understanding and responding to workforce related challenges. Our work offers new possibilities for innovative and practical solutions to the complex challenges facing public education.

Future Focus and Priorities

SASSLA will continue to leverage the direct relationship we have with School and Preschool Leaders to identify opportunities for positive change and to foster a culture of policy thinking from the ground up.

SASSLA's immediate priority is identifying strategies to further advance our work with respect to teacher labour markets and reform of the paraprofessional workforce.

⁷ SASSLA Submission to the Commonwealth Government's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System, August 2023.

⁸ SASSLA letter to the department, 27 May 2025, Future Reform of the Paraprofessional Workforce.