Managing the evolving education landscape

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There is constant change in education and as educators we are built to sustain and manage that evolution. In fact, as history continues to show, our members are heavily leaned upon to manage these changes and those that impact our community.

Given this government has been unsuccessful in retaining our most experienced staff and is instead plugging staffing holes with underqualified teachers topped up with expensive taxpayer funded additional payments like no other state in this country, the risks to our students and the wider community are obvious. All this at a time when our most experienced staff are needed to help translate the madness there is in the world and provide reassurance.

We left 2025 with a teacher resignation rate that had grown by 120 per cent in four years. Now the department claims that resignations are down 10 per cent on last year! We will be told there is a teacher in front of every class on day one, even though they may be casual for the day, and in too many cases not fully qualified for the classroom. We will also be told a record investment has been made to WA public school funding.

But where is the benefit of that investment? Our experienced teachers are leaving the profession completely or reducing as much as they can afford. Who will mentor the new and inexperienced? Experienced teachers are the most vital infrastructure component of our public school system.

At the SSTUWA we embrace change as an opportunity to further improve the way we meet the needs of the membership and to ensure the ongoing power and presence of the union.

In 2026 that change will come quickly as we work towards two enterprise bargaining agreements (EBA) – one for schools and one for TAFE.

It is of vital importance for members to play their part in these processes. General Agreements can now last for three years. That means the decisions taken in the next few months will directly influence members' lives to 2030 and beyond. With the current cost of living crisis impacting the WA community, coupled with a less experienced teaching workforce who feel this impact, the importance of EBA engagement is clear.

We started this long and vital process at November State Council Conference. As we move forward we will be engaging members at branch, district and state level. You should ensure you take part wherever you can rather than leaving others to make decisions that impact on your lives.

On a day-to-day basis we are embracing change at the SSTUWA. I welcome our new Executive team as well as General Secretary Sally Dennis and new Senior Vice President Jonelle Rafols.

Sally, a former design and technology secondary teacher, has worked for the SSTUWA in a range of roles, including schools organiser, TAFE organiser, case manager, growth officer and as part of the AEU's *Fair Funding Now WA* campaign.

Jonelle has been a TAFE lecturer since 2004, specialising in language, literacy and numeracy. Jonelle's SSTUWA roles have included being a branch representative, state councillor, joint consultative committee representative, negotiator – TAFE lecturers' agreement, STERC representative and women's contact officer.

The SSTUWA is not the only organisation in WA going through change processes. The Department of Education has appointed a new Deputy Director General Reform and Strategic Services and an associated business unit.

This appointment recognises there is a need for the sort of reforms we initiated with *Facing the Facts*, which were further cemented as being necessary by the state government's own agency capability review.

It will be one of the union's key roles in the coming months to ensure that the very issues identified in that capability review –

a penchant for endless consultation and examinations which result in no actual change – are not repeated.

In 2025 we also initiated a campaign seeking greater respect for our members and the profession and established a key forum with senior levels of government to attend to GROH matters with greater expediency. The work continues and is endless.

In the national arena we all shared the grief and shock of the whole community at the terrible atrocity at Bondi. The AEU will be involved in consultation with the federal government on the Anti-Semitic Education Taskforce as announced by Federal Minister Jason Clare a week after the tragedy. It is crucial we build an accepting and safe school community for all students, no matter their ethnicity, religion or background.

Sadly, we saw more confrontation on the international level with the US intervention in Venezuela. As ever, we urge all educators to be aware of departmental guidelines on the teaching around such issues.

Of course, the AEU will also be focusing on issues, including building on the fairer funding deal for TAFE and schools and striving for genuine 100 per cent funding of schools – not a deal that falls short once all the newly introduced conditions are considered. In particular the AEU is looking to highlight the public infrastructure inequity of our schools.

Having been elected as AEU deputy federal president at the end of 2025 I look forward to further representing and promoting the interests of WA members and our school community members to the best of my ability.



By Matt Jarman
President

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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