A new chapter for a stronger SSTUWA

Welcome back and happy new year to you all.

I am honoured and deeply grateful to have been elected as the new senior vice president of our union. This is not a role I take lightly. It carries a clear responsibility to serve, to listen and, most importantly, to act in the best interests of every member we represent.

I thank those who placed their trust in me, and I look forward to working alongside you as we enter an important new chapter for our union.

I am equally excited by the strength and diversity of our newly elected Executive. Together, we bring experience, fresh perspectives and a shared commitment to principled, member-driven unionism.

This Executive understands a fundamental truth: strong unions are built from the ground up through active branches, informed members and leaders who remain connected to the realities of workplaces, classrooms and institutes.

As senior vice president, I will unapologetically demand what teachers need regardless of whether governments label those demands inconvenient or impossible.

For too long, educators have been expected to absorb the consequences of underfunding, escalating workloads and political inaction. That approach ends with us.

A union does not exist to accommodate government limits or manage decline. It exists to organise, apply pressure and win. Real change is never handed down; it is fought for.

This will require resolve and collective strength. I am calling on members to stand together, to be active, engaged and ready to back their union when it takes a firm stand.

When we move as one – visible, united and determined – we become impossible to ignore. That is how we shift the balance of power and secure the respect, conditions and professional recognition teachers deserve.

This year will be a pivotal year. It is the year we prepare our logs of claims and negotiate new enterprise bargaining agreements for both schools and TAFE.

These negotiations will shape pay, conditions, workload, job security and professional respect for years to come. Winning meaningful outcomes will require more than good intentions. It will require an organised, engaged and confident membership prepared to act collectively.

Now is the time to organise your branches. I strongly encourage members to nominate for branch positions, step into leadership roles and ensure your workplace has a strong and active union presence. Click here to access Getting Organised for 2026.

Branches are the heartbeat of our union. When branches are organised and supported, members are empowered and our collective strength grows.

I also urge members to participate in industrial union training. Knowledge is power. Understanding your rights, the bargaining process and how to advocate effectively in your workplace strengthens not only you, but the entire union.

Every member is entitled to five days of trade union training per year so please use this entitlement. These opportunities are an investment in ourselves and in each other.

A key practical priority is ensuring branches are properly resourced. Our Accounts Team will work closely with branches to ensure bank accounts are established and branch operating funds (capitation funds) are accessible, so branches can directly support and engage their members. This is about enabling local action and ensuring resources are used where they matter most on the ground.

My approach to leadership is simple: service, not status. Effective leadership is grounded in empathy, trust and integrity.

It means listening deeply, acting decisively and standing firm when it counts. Strength and kindness are not opposites, they are complementary. Union strength does not come from titles; it comes from collective action and shared purpose.

As we move forward together, my message is clear: Be strong. Be kind. Stay organised.

Our future is built collectively, and together we will shape it.



By Jonelle Rafols
Senior Vice President

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