Facing the Facts on a sustainable public education system

Excessive workloads, administrative burdens and lack of support continue to drive public school teachers and leaders away. Without respect, resources and renewal for its professional workforce, an effective and sustainable public education system will continue to slip away.

Facing the Facts laid bare the systemic challenges facing our public schools — from underfunding and unsustainable workloads to inequitable access and absent leadership. Now, with the Department of Education (DoE) preparing its next strategic plan and both the next state budget and Log of Claims on the horizon, what must come next?

The answer is clear. We need direction. We need implementation. We need accountability. And above all, we need investment in people, not just policies.

The Australian Education Union's (AEU) *Investing in Australia's Future 2025* reminds us that full and fair funding is not a luxury; it's a necessity. Every public school must be resourced to meet the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) in real terms, not through accounting sleight-of-hand.

Public schools educate the majority of students and the vast majority of disadvantaged students and those with complex needs. Without adequate funding, we cannot reduce class sizes, support students with special and complex needs, or retain the educators who make learning possible.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) *Education at a Glance 2025* confirms what educators already know: Australia's public schools face above average class sizes and increasingly complex student needs. Teachers are managing diverse learning profiles, behavioural challenges and mental health concerns, often without the support they need. The *TALIS 2024* survey adds that Australian teachers report some of the highest levels of stress and administrative burden among OECD countries.

The WA Council of Social Service (WACOSS) has echoed the AEU's call, urging government to prioritise social infrastructure (including education) as the foundation of a fair and thriving society.

Their message is simple: investing in people builds our future. That means recognising public schools as community anchors, not just educational institutions. It means supporting wraparound services, early intervention and truly inclusive education. It means valuing the workforce that holds it all together.

Every dollar invested in public education yields long-term economic and social returns. WACOSS reminds us that social infrastructure drives economic growth and education is central to that.

Early childhood education, inclusive schooling and vocational pathways are critical enablers of participation and innovation.

Funding must be needs-based, ensuring equity for students with disability, for Aboriginal students, for culturally and linguistically diverse students – no matter how near or remote. Our shared values demand responsive local support, place-based and child-centred services and access to quality early learning for every child, wherever they live.

For students with disability, inclusion must be more than a principle. The SSTUWA has made clear that the current funding model, which hinges on formal diagnosis, disadvantages students who cannot access assessment. Functional need, not paperwork, should determine resourcing.

Public school educators are not asking for more rhetoric, reviews and reports. We are asking for measurable progress. *Facing the Facts* documented the issues. The Agency Capability Review of the Department of Education and Understanding and Reducing the *Workload of Teachers and Leaders in Western Australian Public Schools* added substantial weight.

The Agency Capability Review spelt out the need for the DoE to "exercise its system leadership role to make explicit expectations on key policy and strategy matters."

We need transparent implementation plans, clear timelines and public reporting. We need to know how and when the

system will respond to the challenges that are universally recognised.

The DoE needs to be explicit in its instructions to both school and system leaders and reinforce those instructions if there are school or system leaders who ignore them. Consistent application of the Schools General Agreement and DoE polices would go a long way in containing workload intensity, stress and burnout.

Facing the Facts was about truth-telling. Now we need some truth-following. The future for our colleagues and their schools, our students, their families, communities and for our state depend on it.

This is not about blame. It's about partnership. Teachers and school leaders must be part of the solution. We bring expertise, insight and commitment. We need to be heard and trusted.

The facts must be faced. We need: Increased funding, smaller class sizes, quality infrastructure, regional services and support, system leadership and effective change management.

Without them, current trends can only be expected to continue.



By Lindsay Hale
School leader consultant

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
ABN 54 478 094 635 © 2026