Facing the Facts on child poverty

Recommendation 22

The loadings in the Student-Centred Funding Model for disadvantage and concentrations of disadvantage should be increased to better reflect the additional work required of teachers in these schools and to improve student outcomes.

Recommendation 28

Federal and State governments should develop coherent policies to reduce family and child poverty and reduce educational disadvantage.

Facing the Facts; A Review of Public Education in Western Australia

(Lawrence et al, Commissioned by the SSTUWA, 2023)

Late last year the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (BCEC) told us that the number of children experiencing poverty in Western Australia had doubled over the past decade.

Their *Child Poverty in Australia* report revealed that one in six WA children experience food insecurity, poor housing conditions and limited access to healthcare.

BCEC director Alan Duncan said that 103,900 WA children were living in poverty and 30,000 of those children were living in extreme poverty. He said that without meaningful intervention, Australia risked having one million children in poverty within months.

“The rise in child poverty is not a statistical anomaly. It’s the predictable result of housing stress, inadequate income support and policy drift,” he added.

On top of this, WA Commissioner for Children and Young People Jacqueline McGowan-Jones reported that 7,005 children received support from specialist homelessness services in 2023-2024, with most under 10 and the majority fleeing domestic violence.

These children are suffering. If they get to school, they arrive hungry, poorly dressed and lacking the most basic materials for learning. Most of them are enrolled in public schools, often in concentrations that compound disadvantage even further. If they have a disability, a health problem or a mental health problem, these children are unlikely to be diagnosed and supported or treated.

The high cost of living, inadequate income support payments, inadequate funding and support for public schools, compounded by crises in housing, domestic violence, health and mental health care don’t offer us much hope that things will improve soon.

This plays out in our schools. What chance have these kids got? When staff in schools step up – as they do every day – to redress this horrific inequity, it comes at a further cost. It makes a massive contribution to the workload intensity and emotional labour of teaching and school leadership. It often leaves these noble folk burnt out – and lost to the profession and the very kids who most need them.

It is hardly surprising that the AEU’s 2025 State of Our Schools survey found over 86 per cent of teachers use their own money to purchase stationery and classroom equipment, items to support individual students and library resources – at an average of about $1,000 a year.

Worse, this is a modest price to pay when compared with the impact on public educators’ wellbeing.

As public education advocate Jane Caro has pointed out, the pursuit of school choice for some, and the taxpayer funding that subsidises it, has come at a huge cost to public schools, children’s education and society as a whole.

It is a cruel joke to point to “failing schools” when the kids and staff in those schools just don’t get a fair go.

Breakfast clubs in schools have gone from a need, supported by charitable donations, to recognition that it is an essential service funded by government. This is welcome – but it should be remembered the effort undertaken in schools to deliver breakfast clubs is not fully recognised. Breakfast is important – but it is only one piece of an ominous puzzle.

Facing the Facts told us that immediate action is needed to increase funding in schools to address disadvantage. Longer term, coherent government policies need to truly address child and family poverty. The reviewers told us, “The profession is at breaking point.”

Consistent with *Facing the Facts*, Hamilton and Robinson told us that “The guiding principle for resolving the (workload) problem must be relentless pursuit of the proper purposes of schools, by enabling teachers and leaders to focus on the core work that they are uniquely trained to do” and that their “analysis indicates that the problem goes to the more fundamental question of whether the job of teaching as currently performed and organised is doable and sustainable.”

The Agency Capability Review of the Department of Education (DoE) told us that the DoE must step up to “respond to escalating complex student needs at a system and cross government level.”

The facts need to be faced: Child poverty is impacting children’s learning and schools just can’t be left to carry the burden alone.



By Lindsay Hale
School leaders’ consultant

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