

Stories from the classroom go straight to the top



SSTUWA members voiced their concerns about issues such as school funding, workplace violence and the Australian Curriculum to the very top WA education decision makers at November's State Council.

Education Minister Peter Collier and Department of Education (DoE) director-general Sharyn O'Neill attended the first day's morning session of State Council to listen to feedback directly from the state's public education classrooms.

Issues raised included:

- Cuts to school budgets despite growth in student numbers and large class sizes.
- Decreases in curriculum support.
- Poor professional development provisions for educators and school leaders.
- Reduction of courses being offered by schools due to budget cuts.
- Inadequate facilities.
- Increasing number of students with diagnosed learning difficulties and behavioural issues and lack of resourcing to meet their needs.
- Workplace violence towards members.
- Workload pressure.
- Inflexible leave arrangements and requirements.
- The decline of languages learning in public schools through poor resourcing and poor promotion.
- Concerns that timeframes for implementing phases of the Australian Curriculum are too ambitious.

Union delegates and members embraced the opportunity to give a frank and raw account of working conditions and the state of resourcing in their schools, as well as ask questions of the minister and director-general.

These questions included queries on staff and IT resourcing for Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (OLNA) testing, as well as training for those required to carry out testing, as well as fairness and equity in staffing processes.

Many members spoke of the stress and poor morale the above working issues and conditions was causing to themselves and their colleagues.

Mr Collier and Ms O'Neill expressed their understanding of the issues facing WA's public educators.

In particular they shared concerns about violence in schools, with a clear message from Ms O'Neill that incidents should be reported and criminal action pursued by individuals when the department was unable to do so on their behalf.

They pointed to various government initiatives and DoE programs in place, such as the new student engagement centres, to tackle some of those issues and expressed their hope these programs would lead to improved outcomes.

Mr Collier invited members to continue the dialogue between himself and the DoE to work through issues.

In the afternoon session of the first day of State Council, AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe gave a briefing to delegates on the pressing education issues facing the country, namely achieving an electoral commitment for the full funding of Gonski, the precarious state of the TAFE sector and the achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.

Australian Services Union branch secretary Wayne Wood also spoke at State Council in his role as White Ribbon Ambassador about the importance of making a stand against violence against women.

He encouraged members to wear a white ribbon on 25 November to show their support and led them in a pledge to speak out and act to prevent male violence towards women.

November State Council: News bites

Curtin University Graduate School of Business lecturer Dr Scott Fitzgerald presented the interim findings of his research project into the impact of the Independent Public Schools (IPS) system on teacher and school leader workloads.

The project has so far interviewed 58 teachers and school leaders in WA and NSW on how school autonomy impacts on their work.

Dr Fitzgerald said school leaders reported a massive escalation of workload and complexity of their roles, which teachers said there was huge pressure to produce results and upskill. These all contributed to greater workplace stress.

Dr Fitzgerald said that the findings to this point suggested that the DoE often overlooked issues related to workload and conditions in favour of a focus on pedagogy and leadership issues.

To read more [click here](#).

SSTUWA President Pat Byrne, in announcing the union's achievement of more than 17,000 members, also noted that that included 1,207 student members. "These are people who have been the foundation of our new educator members and who will be the future of this union," she said.

SSTUWA General Secretary Mary Franklyn noted that union membership growth areas this year were within the new educator and relief teacher groups. A third area of growth stemmed from the Build the Branch initiatives conducted this year, including Union Week activities in Term Three. Ms Franklyn said the Build the Branch project will continue in 2016 and align with the new SSTUWA strategic plan to protect and improve industrial and professional rights.

SSTUWA Vice President Samantha Schofield announced that Phoebe Stoneman from Wiluna Remote Community School would be the recipient of this year's Lynette Virgona Scholarship. "I know Lynette would have been very happy to have awarded this particular scholarship to a young human being, a young teacher out in a really tough environment, wanting to develop her skills in behaviour management and classroom skills as well," she said. Miss Schofield reported that the union had conducted a survey of LGBTIQ members in Term Three and the results would be used to respond to the needs of that member group. She also said SSTUWA had pledged support to the Safe Schools Coalition initiative (see pages 18-19) and encouraged members to join their schools up.

SSTUWA Senior Vice President Lincoln Rose said the union was committed to ensuring occupational safety and health training was accessible to OSH representatives as they dealt with issues in schools such as asbestos management, design and technology training. "Our OSH courses are consistently well attended and amongst best practise in the union movement in WA and in the AEU," he said. Mr Rose noted workplace violence was an important issue and the SSTUWA were equipping members to tackle it through initiatives such as Keeping Our Workplace Safe. "This is about showing that we as teachers are serious about violence against us and that the belief by some that violence is acceptable is going to change," he said.