Letter to the Minister - 27 March 20

The SSTUWA has written to the Minister for Education raising a number of issues including calling for pupil free days to start next week, high risk employees to be allowed to work from home, hospital standard cleans of all schools and TAFEs during the holidays, a guarantee of sufficient hygiene products for schools and TAFEs, support services for pupils learning at home, guarantees on pay and leave and realignment of classrooms to meet social distancing requirements. Read the full letter below.

SSTUWA
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Our Ref: PB/la 20-05838

27 March 2020

Email: Minister.Ellery@dpc.wa.gov.au

The Honourable Suzanne Ellery MLC
Minister for Education and Training
13th Floor, Dumas House
2 Havelock Street
WEST PERTH
WA 6005

Dear Minister

The SSTUWA understands the incredibly difficult task being undertaken by the State Government during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is becoming clear that the attempt to coordinate a national response is no longer successful as states and territories increasingly choose their own paths.

In education there is a high level of anxiety and, increasingly, anger about the inability of schools and TAFEs to apply basic measures such as social distancing and hygiene, this is particularly the case.

It is self-evident that if health advice is applicable in one state, then it is applicable in another. Therefore, having schools and TAFEs offering classroom education in any state while others do not simply exacerbates the must be putting educators at risk.

We therefore again request:

To give clarity to educators, students and parents the Western Australian State Government immediately bring forward school holidays by one week to commence 3 April 2020 and bring forward pupil free days by one week to commence 30 March 2020, with provisions made for at-risk students and children of essential workers.

The SSTUWA further requests the following actions be taken:

- All education employees who identify as high risk, vulnerable and/or caring for and/or cohabiting with, vulnerable family members, immunocompromised, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, individuals with chronic health conditions, impaired immune systems, over 60 year olds and pregnant staff are not required to work onsite, effective immediately. These staff must be supported to work from home.
- Establish a working group with union representation to examine ways to minimise learning disruption and situations where staff exhaust leave but are not able to work (Shortening other scheduled holidays etc)

- Every WA state school, support centre and TAFE to be cleaned to hospital standard in the final week of scheduled school holidays, this to include all surfaces, shared equipment and enclosed and outdoor areas.
- Mandatory participation from all school leaders and TAFE managers in a review of OSH resources including PPE, soap, hand sanitiser, paper towels, toilet paper and other materials.
- A guarantee from government that all workplaces will be fully stocked with enough supplies before any schools reopen to all pupils.
- All school and TAFE classes must meet mandatory social distancing requirements. All class numbers to be based on these new configurations (ie if seating allows for 10 students, then that is the maximum allowed). This includes circumstances where classes are combined.
- Urgent development of agreed, nationally consistent, definitions of essential frontline workers and those children who are in vulnerable circumstances.
- Maintenance of income including leave entitlements and leave arrangements must be guaranteed for all permanent, temporary and casual public education employees.
- The establishment of a learning support hotline for concerned students and parents.
- Where necessary, the establishment of a pool of paid casual and relief teachers available to give online and phone support and advice to pupils working from home.
- The establishment of a learning support hotline for concerned students and parents.
- Consideration of adjustments to TAFE Fee Help interest rates to be one percent for students commencing in 2021.
- The waiving of all TAFE fees for remainder of 2020 and 2021 to open avenues to students unable to complete vocational courses during 2020.

We look forward to your response and to working with the education and TAFE departments to achieve positive outcomes for our members and students alike.

Yours sincerely



Pat Byrne
PRESIDENT

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