Nurturing potential: Correna Haythorpe

Over the summer break, I spent a few days by the Murray River, contemplating following in the footsteps of my predecessor, Angelo Gavrielatos.

Angelo is, quite simply, the most dedicated and passionate campaigner for public education that I know. He has led our union campaigns, such as I Give a Gonski and Stop TAFE Cuts, and been a tireless advocate for public education in Australia. He will now take up that fight on the global stage through his new role with Education International, coordinating the teacher union response to the commercial privatisation of education.

As the AEU's new president, I know I will be walking beside a strong public education community dedicated to improving the lives of students in early childhood education, schools and TAFEs.

I became a teacher because I fundamentally believe education changes lives. I've spent 17 years as a primary school teacher, mostly in low-SES schools in northern Adelaide and Port Pirie.

I've seen first-hand the difference we as teachers can make for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the potential these students have that is just waiting to be harnessed.

I grew up in Streaky Bay, South Australia. At that time, my school had no Year 12 curriculum, so I left school halfway through Year 11 to take up a job as a deckhand on a fishing boat. The following year, a Year 12 curriculum was offered and I decided to finish my schooling. The work and commitment of my teachers opened up opportunities for me to further my education and developed my passion for doing the same for others.

Public schools are the only schools with an obligation to educate every child that comes to their doors. We need to protect and recognise that special status by keeping them properly resourced so all children get the opportunities that come from a good education.

I became involved in the union movement because I saw the need for representation, and the need to stand up against threats to public education, and to stand up for educators. Schools can't function without the work of thousands of dedicated and passionate teachers, principals and support staff who are often blamed when things go wrong, and forgotten about when they make things improve.

Inspiring drive

The thing that inspires me most about representing people who work in public education is their drive to make sure the system is going forwards, not backwards. That's why they work late or spend their own money on supplies for classrooms.

The AEU has fought hard for more equitable school funding through the Gonski campaign. We couldn't have done this without the active support of thousands of educators, parents and students. Last year was tough for believers in equity in education.

We saw the Abbott government's failure to honour Gonski agreements beyond 2017 and its shameful broken promise on increasing disability funding from this year. We saw some state governments fail to fully and transparently implement Gonski funding, and others rip the heart out of TAFEs.

However, we also saw real progress as Gonski funding was rolled out to schools and began to make a difference for our students.

What educators do for students every day makes a difference, and what we do as a union also has the power to change things for the better.

I am deeply honoured to have been given the opportunity to serve as your federal president and to be part of a movement that is passionate, committed and dedicated to protecting and enhancing public education.

Correna Haythorpe
AEU FEDERAL PRESIDENT

Correna Haythorpe has spent 17 years as a teacher in public primary schools, mainly in low-SES areas of northern Adelaide and Port Pirie, in South Australia. She became active in the SA branch of the union in the 1990s and served as Women's Officer for the SA branch, focusing on paid maternity leave and better conditions for female teachers, before serving as President from 2008 to 2013.

She led the union through a long-running industrial dispute with the SA Government as well as organising the "I Give a Gonski" and "Stop TAFE Cuts" campaigns. She took on the additional role of Deputy Federal President of the AEU in 2013, working closely with Federal President Angelo Gavrielatos and Federal Secretary Susan Hopgood.

She says her first priorities as President will be to continue the fight for Gonski funding and for the promised disability loading. She has also cited proper funding for indigenous education and stopping TAFE cuts to ensure all students have a post-school pathway as key issues for the union.

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