Getting public education the support it needs



From the President

By Pat Byrne
President

Over the past few weeks there has been extensive consultation around the 2021 Schools Log of Claims. The feedback has been extensive and much appreciated. We now move onto the negotiation phase.

Every general agreement process is of course important. However, this one feels especially significant.

The SSTUWA is obviously far more aware than the government and broader community that teachers have never been under so much stress, but it was still shocking to learn that 81 per cent of respondents to our State of our Schools survey had considered quitting the profession in the past four years.

Member concerns had informed our Log of Claims ahead of the survey results, but those findings emphasised the absolute importance of addressing what is driving such a high level of dissatisfaction.

It is important therefore over coming months to look carefully at what we as a union are seeking to achieve.

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Obviously, the issue of the salary cap will be crucial. This is addressed on page 7. Salary cap concerns apply to both school and TAFE members.

We also have vital requirements to ensure TAFE can cope with the welcome focus it has been given as a core strategy in addressing skill shortages. Details about the TAFE Log of Claims can be found on page 10.

Among school members the issue of workload is especially important.

Our class sizes are growing all the time as enrolments go up with the arrival both of people returning to WA because of COVID-19 and the resources boom which will bring more and more workers to the state.

The SSTUWA estimates that we need at least 2,200 extra teachers to match the average class sizes in the other states.

Further, the range of issues facing teachers and the levels of bureaucracy required mean that our members are all too often taken away from their primary focus.

For example, within schools we have an unprecedented crisis around mental health issues among students. There are

schools which have over 100 pupils who need to be monitored at all times for their safety and well-being.

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Every teacher and school leader has their own experience of having to address extreme behaviours from students.

They not only have to address the initial issues but then to try desperately to get help for those students, a process which can take months – even years – due to the lack of available staff and suitable programs.

Therefore, at the very heart of our Log of Claims lie a series of asks related to the work of teaching and leading. These are shown on the opposite page.

They include a reduction in class sizes, proper support across a range of specialist areas including Level 3 principals being freed from classroom duties, specified admin time for leaders and HOLAs, compensatory leave for principals who deal with emergencies after hours and a genuine commitment to reduce red tape.

In essence these core claims are about giving teachers the support they need to actually teach and leaders the back-up they need so they can focus on leading.

We aim in this way to ensure we get the changes we need to get public education the support it needs.

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