New review to elevate public education

By Minh Lam

The SSTUWA will commission a review into the state of public education in WA that will drive the push to elevate the status of public educators and ensure the sector receives the full resourcing that it needs.

The review was announced by union president Pat Byrne during June State Council Conference, held earlier this month.

Ms Byrne said that while the community had expressed a newly found appreciation of the work of public educators over the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, it had not translated into any concrete recognition from government.

She said that with a political alignment at state and federal levels of government, an opportunity was afforded that had to be seized to raise awareness of the issues challenging public education, especially as current funding agreements were due to expire in 18 months.

The review will provide the basis for planning for public education in the medium term that will ensure that the public education system is valued by government through the paying of proper salaries, the addressing of increasing workloads and provision of genuine support for students.

“In particular we will talk about proper recognition and respect for educators, to see them valued not only in terms of salaries but in terms of status and respect,” Ms Byrne said.

“It will look at how to attract high- achieving students into the teaching profession and how to retain classroom teachers who don’t want to take up leadership roles.

“It will look at the relationship between schools and TAFEs and ways to ensure that public education gets a minimum 100 per cent of the School Resourcing Standard as soon as possible – ‘on the pathway’ is far too vague.

“We also want to look at the research into the long-term impact of the disruptions caused by COVID and how best to address student and workforce recovery.”

Ms Byrne said the review would consult key groups in the education community and combine new research with existing research the SSTUWA had already undertaken in recent years.

The aim is to deliver a progress report by the end of the year and for this to be able to provide the basis for cooperative engagement with federal and state government in the lead-up to the new funding round, as well as the basis for the union’s push into the next round of general agreement negotiations.

The announcement of the review was one of the highlights of June State Council Conference, which is the union’s supreme decision-making body.

State Council delegates gathered for the two-day event to participate in professional development and vote on motions directing the SSTUWA’s future activities.

Guest speakers to the conference included Dr Mark Dean from the Centre for Future Work’s Carmichael Centre and Indigenous lawyer, essayist, storyteller and campaigner Teela Reid. AEU Federal Secretary Kevin Bates was a keynote speaker.

Mr Bates said the election of a new federal government provided a new opportunity to continue to campaign to deliver fair and proper funding levels to public schools.

“That is the only way we will deliver outcomes for members. That is the only way we will get the reform that we need to see an education system that the Australian community and the students that we serve deserve,” he said.

Mr Bates said that issues such as integrity in politics, climate change and having a community that respected and valued

women and their role in society were also important to the AEU to campaign on.

Later in the conference State Council Conference delegates also heard a panel discussion on the topic of Climate Education for Sustainability.

Each panellist gave a short presentation before taking questions from delegates about the climate emergency and what public educators could do to prepare their students to enact change.

During the conference, delegates received reports about the SSTUWA's recent activities. The following is a summary of some of those reports.

Member and branch update

As of the end of April this year, membership of the SSTUWA totalled just over 18,000.

Key strategies and projects delivering these results include targeted programs by the SSTUWA Growth Team for new educators, student conversion and re- joins; and campaigning strategies and actions such as the EBA Schools and EBA TAFE.

The union's delegate education and training program and District Council training changes has resulted in recruiting and retention action at the branch levels.

The Member Assist Team has managed critical internal operations that has resulted in member advice and support on COVID-19 and campaigns over the last six months. The phone and email service has ensured any member has someone to talk to for advice, support, debate and direction.

Union engagement amongst members has been excellent, with growth in numbers of District and State Council Conference delegates, since 2021, as well as union/deputy union representatives and women's contact officers.

A strong emphasis has continued this year on the importance of building confident, functioning branches and delegate structures for schools and colleges.

For schools and TAFE, the demands and focus on COVID-19 pandemic issues, the EBA and Public Sector Alliance have driven the work at all levels. These state-wide issues have provided broader membership issues to manage as opposed to worksite-by-worksite issues.

School leaders

The SSTUWA is currently addressing the needs of school leaders, specifically the retention, attraction and support of school leaders. An internal review is underway as to how the union can improve its approaches, which has included a member survey to this point.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education update

Two new annual scholarships will be made to any ATSI member of the union to engage in professional learning that will further develop their career pathways. More details about these scholarships will be made public later.

The Schools Agreement in Principle contains provision for a L7 officer at 0.6 FTE to develop School Curriculum and Standards Authority materials to support Noongar Aboriginal Language framework. It also makes provision for Aboriginal language teachers to be employed on a permanent basis and access all entitlements provided to four and five- year trained teachers.

Education and Training Centre

Over 2,500 members are anticipated to attend the 170-odd online and in- person training events organised by the SSTUWA's Education and Training Centre in 2022. These have covered areas such as Trade Union Training (TUT), work safety and professional development (pedagogy, classroom and behaviour management, personal development and organisational planning).

Events slated for the second half of 2022 include newly revised courses to cover the 2020 Work Health and Safety (WHS) Act (which came into effect on 31 March this year); forums for early childhood educators (ECE), new career teachers and new school leaders. There will also be conferences covering WHS, ECE and for women public educators. The ETC continues to partner with the Teacher Learning Network to offer online courses.

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

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