Agreement in Principle misinformation needs correction

By Matt Jarman
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This article is to provide more detail to SSTUWA school leaders in relation to the Agreement in Principle (AIP) and to address misinformation that is currently circulating.

If the AIP (Schools) is accepted, a 2.1 teacher will return to the second highest paid in the country behind Northern Territory teachers and a 2.9 teacher will return to being the best paid in the country.

Salary grade comparisons for teachers in other states are simpler to express than for school leader salary levels, where there are differences in packages across states.

For instance, in NSW the one-line budget size dictates the salary grade (under their model only Shenton College, Willetton SHS and Churchlands SHS would receive the highest salary grade).

In Victoria, superannuation is included in the state's package, and in South Australia there are contract and permanent school leaders at different salary grades. In Queensland there are a small number of very large sites attracting an executive principal salary that few ever receive but which distorts comparisons.

The WA government wages policy of 2.75 per cent will see a 6.4 principal receive an increase of $4,763 (backdated to December 2021) and a further $4,894 in 2021/2022. This is illustrated in material on our website, which can be accessed at bit.ly/3a3Mh93

We are then back to bargaining from the second half of 2023.

The SSTUWA worked as part of the Public Sector Alliance (PSA) to campaign successfully against the state government's $1,000 salary cap.

We succeeded in giving the $1,000 cap the boot. This campaign success has attracted the WA Police Union to join the alliance. Public sector unions understand any future wages policy change will be won collectively.

Closer to home SSTUWA leader members are now being offered from $6,745 to $9,657 over two years, instead of a total of $2,000 across all grades in the same period.

While recent inflation figures will diminish the appeal of 2.75 per cent, this offer will set the PSA up for a strong negotiation across all future agreements and with a state election coming closer.

Our school leader members appreciate the value of building percentage-based pay increases into salary grades. At this point it may be worth pointing out that the superannuation guarantee increases to 10.5 per cent on 1 July 2022. (This increases by 0.5 per cent each year until 2025, when it reaches 12 per cent.)

A five per cent wages claim cannot be addressed by the WA Industrial Relations

Commission (WAIRC) at the current time. The WAIRC is constrained by legislation to not exceed government wages policy.

The AIP also contains a series of benefits for leader members.

These include compensatory leave for principals. If the AIP is accepted, WA principals will be the first in Australia to have this support. Line management approval for principal leave is not altered from the status quo.

We have a teacher crisis which was emerging before COVID-19 and is expected to outlive the pandemic.

The AIP proposes to shift current policy support for graduate teachers into the General Agreement.

The SSTUWA believes school principals are system leaders well skilled in nurturing a graduate. Leaders and graduates now have confidence they have support in the Agreement. The AIP simply embeds existing conditions.

TOIL (9.6 of the GA) has been modernised, the proposed change better suits what TOIL can be negotiated for against the current demands of teacher workload.

For example, the modern teacher is far more likely to be completing child protection or paediatric assessments than paperwork for drama festivals or performances. Principals have always been able to negotiate TOIL and in doing so, they avoid conflict.

Any suggestion that teachers having a half day at the start of the year will hinder school development planning is professionally insulting to school leaders and teachers.

Access to multiple Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) for education support staff has been a longstanding inequity against staff who work in some of the most difficult environments within our system. Broader consideration for SRAs allows principals to have more selection and engagement from within their staff.

The SSTUWA is committed to the school reclassification review. The SSTUWA will continue to have a voice for our school leader members, with significant contribution by the SSTUWA already made.

The SSTUWA has spoken to members in recent weeks, and those affected by the travel concessions are delighted with these aspects of the AIP.

Our district high schools are also welcoming the proposed funding support. It will enable retention, professional learning and growth and is flexible, allowing our DHS principals to meet the needs of their local environment.

The AIP of the SSTUWA proposes staff transfer discussions, this will include at-level school leaders and is aimed to deliver support to country schools, greater opportunity to return to the metropolitan area if desired and generally more staffing movement within a currently congested staffing system.

To read more detail about what is in the AIP for school leaders and directors visit: bit.ly/3a3Mh93

Voting is now open for the AIP. It is important that all members register a vote. Visit sstuwa.org.au/GA2021

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