Nov SC: A growing union

State Council Conference SSTUWA membership numbers continue to grow, with member numbers in all categories increasing to give the union just over 17,700 members.

Union growth strategies for 2021 have been led by the SSTUWA Growth Team, which continues to have the most sustained impact on union membership growth.

Shifting the lens of focus from specifically looking at the needs of early career teachers, to a more broadened view, aligning more closely with the strategic direction of the organisation has continued to be the aim of the Growth Team throughout 2021.

They have continued to build on their successes and the team's work can be divided into four key focus areas: recruitment, retention, engagement and support, leadership and activism.

This year the Growth Team has collaborated closely with school/TAFE organisers and with union rep training. The team's role is slated for expansion with leadership roles in the union's EBA/ wages campaign and new recruitment projects.

The SSTUWA's collaborative union rep training strategy has been achieved this year.

All schools training and TAFE training now have a discrete recruitment strategy component and follow up actions.

The collaborative plan put into place this year by the team from the Education and Training Centre (ETC), Growth Team, school organisers and the legal services case manager has delivered an updated schools training program presented by a team of four staff.

In TAFE, this action has occurred through the work of the TAFE growth officer and the TAFE organiser.

It has resulted in progressive recruitment strategies that incorporate both direct action and longer-term actions e.g. EBA campaign and special campus union days.

The union's schools and TAFE EBA campaigns and the Public Sector Alliance wages campaign have proven to be extremely important recruitment and retention opportunities.

The nature of this round of negotiations provides the right environment for union activism and leadership.

The teams working on this campaign have directed attention to this opportunity and a new recruitment plan will soon start to maximise growth.

Union staff and union reps are to be acknowledged and commended for their effort in achieving positive results in the retention and growth outcomes seen this year.

Education and Training

It is anticipated that the ETC will have hosted formal learning opportunities for approximately 1,600 participants by the close of the 2021 school year.

The opportunities include industrial and professional courses, conferences and forums, OSH and union rep training, online learning, as well as District Council events and the Instructional Intelligence Project with Barrie Bennett.

The most popular professional learning events covered behaviour management topics and included courses on the impact of trauma in the primary classroom; selfregulation; behaviour education; brainbased strategies for effective teaching and dealing with difficult people and situations.

For 2022 the ETC will continue to consolidate and expand professional support for teachers and lecturers by reviewing all professional learning opportunities offered and to ensure that each holiday period offers at least two new events within each schedule.

Any events centered on behaviour management are always in high demand will continue to be offered and expanded upon in 2022.

The goal for 2022 will be to expand the suite of courses on offer to cover a wider range of member groups including education support, TAFE members and secondary teachers. The ETC will also aim to incorporate a range of Instructional Intelligence strategies sessions conducted by specialist coaches across the holiday events.

Online learning will continue, through the partnership with Teacher Learning Network (TLN), with a greater variety of topics presented in different formats.

School leaders

Over the past 12 months school leader membership in the SSTUWA has risen by approximately 15 per cent.

Principal consultants David Lee and Chris Booth continue to work collaboratively with the union's school organisers to help resolve school-based challenges.

Given the increasing pressures leaders face, this is critical work for both member health and well-being and for collaborative schools.

David and Chris are currently providing point of difference contributions for school leaders to consider across the union's various campaigns in wages, other areas from the log of claims and school funding.

The SSTUWA has just begun engagement in the collegiate principal review following an invitation from the Department of Education (DoE) as is stated in the General Agreement.

The expectation is this review will be concluded by the end of Term 1 2022, a year following the start of the initiative.

The DoE has indicated there are funds available in forward estimates for the continuation of the initiative; this implies a merit selection process for the next group of collegiate principals may be conducted in 2022 for 2023, given the current cohort are working on contracts expiring at the end of 2022.

The role of collegiates is to help build system capacity by supporting principals; 2021 bargaining has highlighted their value and what they should not be utilised for, as well.

The support collegiates have provided so far across the system reflects the collaborative approach to school leadership both the organisers and principal consultants continue to recommend, and the union looks forward to seeing how this SSTUWA-led initiative continues to grow.

The SSTUWA is engaged in consultation with DoE on the development of a performance management tool for principals and also the redesign of a new merit-based selection system.

The 2020 collegiate principal merit process experimented with new approaches attempting to reduce the workload of the overall process whilst not impacting the integrity of the result or process.

Both programs of work are scheduled to be completed by the end of 2021.

During the consultancy process for the development of the 2021 Log of Claims it has become apparent the SSTUWA needs to play a leading role in the investigation into both the new workloads of head of departments/head of learning areas and deputy principals, as well as their challenges and career development opportunities as they currently exist.

The SSTUWA is pleased to be initiating this in 2022 and working with these critical leaders and members with the view to strengthening their voices across the public education system.

Regional education

With General Agreement bargaining underway a significant focus has fallen on the needs of regional and remote teachers, students and school communities. Other issues of high importance have the union and DoE in multiple discussions.

The president and senior vice president have expressed concerns to the Minister for Education Sue Ellery regarding the Government Regional Officer Housing (GROH) scheme, who referred us to the Minister for Housing, John Carey.

Minister Carey's pre-budget response was to both blame the previous government and to suggest a record boost in housing was to be delivered. And it was – for public housing and homelessness.

Whilst this funding was well overdue and welcomed by the SSTUWA, no detail has been forthcoming on any funding planned to improve the supply of GROH, address the crippling maintenance operations and deal with the declining professionalism our members consistently report.

The GROH concerns have left teachers to not only question why they would move outside of Perth but also, in some cases, why would they stay in the profession if this is how they are valued and will be treated.

This issue of Western Teacher contains stories from members about their problematic experiences with GROH. You can read those from page 17. The SSTUWA remains committed to assisting its members redress these issues.

Earlier in the year the Department of Communities reported through the GROH discussion forum attended by the SSTUWA and the Principals Federation of WA (PFWA) that a new measure for the air conditioning subsidy was being considered across government.

The old model, Relative Strain Index, did not take into account wind relief unlike the proposed model.

State Council Conference heard that the new model – known as UTCI (Universal Thermal Climate Index) and recommended by the Bureau of Meteorology – has not been supported by the DoE and other agencies after learning the new model would reduce the amount of subsidy available to government employees across the state.

A claim for the air conditioning subsidy has been put to the DoE in the most recent bargaining and the union awaits a response.

The state government wages policy is affecting teachers in country schools. This point was strongly made to government representatives during the salary cap consultation process by members currently working in regional locations.

Their examples of utility, grocery and medical costs, the impact on savings, depreciation values and running costs of vehicles, rising rental and housing costs and more were precise and inarguable, leaving a clear impression on the government representatives.

The examples also extended to the attraction and retention of country staffing, GROH issues and much more, leaving those present with a deeper understanding of how the wages cap is now damaging the profession.

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