It’s time to Fix Education

When the SSTUWA first discussed the option of commissioning a full review of public education in Western Australia it was with the intent of starting a conversation.

We knew that after every election, both state and federal, every post mortem cited education as a key issue for voters. Yet pretty much every time, the actual election campaigns barely featured education at all.

There is, arguably, no more important area for discussion in our state and our nation.

Education shapes individuals. Education shapes communities. Education shapes Western Australia. Education shapes our nation. Education is the key to equity.

Yet all too often when some politicians talk about education, it is within the context of a culture war. Public versus private. Too woke versus not woke enough. Why is this topic on the curriculum, why isn’t this subject included? Why haven’t teachers stopped kids vaping? Why aren’t teachers doing more to stop crime?

Dr Lawrence and her splendid team – Dr Scott Fitzgerald of Curtin University, Colin Pettit, former Commissioner for Children and Young People and Dr Robyn White, former principal of Perth Modern School, with Pamela Pollard, former principal of Victoria Park Primary School, as executive officer to the panel – have shown us where the truly important debate lies.

It all boils down to this. Do we, as a community, want a fully-funded, thriving, dynamic, responsive public education system that delivers the best possible education to every student in Western Australia, or not?

Do Western Australians want an education system where every child, no matter their religion, creed or background, gets the same chance to be educated properly, to get a good job, with decent pay?

Do they believe people, whatever their background, should have the chance to go to university or TAFE or straight into work on their terms with the fundamental skills they need to be successful?

We know the answer, because when we asked Western Australians if children deserve a quality education, 94.4 per cent said yes. 94.4 per cent.

The Lawrence Review findings have shocked the SSTUWA – and when it comes to education issues we thought we were pretty much unshockable.

There is no escaping that we are at a pivotal point for education in this state and in this country.

The direction we take now, the decisions our leaders make now, direct us either to the position where we can deliver the quality education that 9.5 out of 10 Western Australians believe students should get, or we are forever shackled to a system where some pupils get that education while many more are left by the wayside.

It is as simple as that. At a time of record budget surpluses we either invest wisely and properly in the education of this generation of students and those to come, or we do not.

The Lawrence Review lays wide open the crisis we are facing:

- Not enough teachers.
- Not enough time in the classroom.
- Not enough expert teachers in crucial fields.
- Not enough support for school leaders.
- Not enough assistance for students with difficulties.
- Not enough time.
- Not enough care or respect for teachers.
- Not enough funding.

This is not a situation created by the current government. Every member of every government that has preceded them has

played their part in us reaching this position.

Every politician who has seen education as an arena for political point scoring, for sowing division and an easy target for lazy attacks is at fault.

We need to forgive that, but not forget it.

If we cannot come together across the political divide at a time of record budget surpluses and set aside party v party and federal v state blame games to Fix Education then it will never happen.

Only two groups of people can make that happen. Every parent, every relative, of the 72 per cent of primary students and 66 per cent of secondary pupils educated in the public system needs to let their local politicians know that enough is enough. We then need our politicians to act.

We need to Fix Education and we need to fix it now.

Proper investment, fully developed plans and strategically designed policies are what is required.

The SSTUWA is absolutely committed to ensuring this is not a review that sits forgotten on bookshelves. We are creating an action team to drive forward with the practical, sensible and eminently affordable solutions.

This is not a culture war – we are not asking for private schools to be penalised – we just want public schools fully funded and their staff looked after properly.

Many of you have already made a huge contribution to this process by making submissions to the review.

Let's say: "Yes. It is time to face the facts and to Fix Education, and we will do it now."

Respected educator and public servant to lead SSTUWA action team

Lindsay Hale will lead the SSTUWA action team on behalf of our union's Executive. Lindsay is well respected across education in WA and is a person who can work cooperatively to Fix Education.

Lindsay Hale is a hugely respected educator and public servant. He was recently acting Commissioner for Mental Health WA. Previously he has been acting Deputy Director General, Schools for the Department of Education.

As Executive Director, Statewide Services, Lindsay led provision of support to students and schools across WA to improve the educational outcomes for all students with a focus on teaching, assessment and reporting; attendance, behaviour, engagement, learning and wellbeing; Aboriginal education; and addressing the particular needs of students with complex needs, disability and health issues.

Lindsay has worked in metropolitan and regional public secondary schools including Belmont City College where he was principal. He held a variety of system leadership roles since 2008 and maintains a strong interest in school and system leadership focused on continual improvement.



By Matt Jarman
President

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