Fixing the infrastructure funding shortfall

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There is a myriad of issues in public education that are demanding more attention and resources, from workload, to teacher shortages and funding.

The funding problem received a huge boost in January with the announcement of a new agreement that would pave the way for public schools in WA to receive 100 per cent of the School Resourcing Standard (SRS). It is critical to highlight that the details of this deal are far from confirmed, whilst other states and the Northern Territory continue to negotiate.

While this reform has certainly been welcomed by the SSTUWA, it would be remiss of the union to stop campaigning for other areas within public education to get the attention it needs.

One of these is new infrastructure funding, which has been below par and in decline for a very long time, and likely not to be covered by the recent SRS negotiations between state and federal governments.

A new report from the AEU – *Ending the Capital Funding Divide in Australia's Schools* – has revealed that nationally there is a $30 billion divide in government capital infrastructure spending between private and public schools.

Five private schools spent more on new facilities in 2021 than governments spent on over half the public schools in Australia, a gap which the AEU and SSTUWA will be campaigning hard to close.

According to the report, in WA the average annual per student capital investment from 2012-2021 was $1,487 public and $2,249 private.

The state government would have had to spend $2.1 billion more over 2012-2021 to match the per student investment of private schools in capital works over that period.

You can read more about the AEU report on page 10 of this *Western Teacher*.

What does this lack of infrastructure funding look like for our public educators and students?

Here in WA, we have received complaints from members about inadequate air conditioning in classrooms, with the extreme heat affecting students' ability to learn.

The scorching temperatures in Perth since the start of Term 1 have also prompted many frustrated teachers to take to social media to complain about trying to teach in sweltering conditions.

Some teachers reported temperatures in their classrooms which exceeded the Safe Work Australia Code of Practice. They have said crayons and glue sticks are melting, with one socials post saying the toilet block was cooler than the classrooms.

Many schools in Perth and the regions still have evaporative systems, some of which were more than 20 years old. We have received complaints from teachers and school leaders that these air conditioning systems are barely functional in the type of weather we've been experiencing lately.

Any parent will know that trying to get children, especially younger ones, to concentrate when they're hot and sweaty is incredibly difficult, and teachers have been telling us that many children are not able to learn in these conditions.

Another issue members have raised regarding old evaporative systems is the noise level. Some members have told us turning on the old air conditioning sounds like a plane taking off, and they have to shout to be heard about the noise.
If students can't hear their teacher above the air con, it's going to affect their ability to learn.

What we need is proper infrastructure funding and a detailed plan to replace old evaporative systems with reverse cycle air conditioning. This is a simple case of wellbeing and safety.

We need public schools, which educate over two-thirds of students in WA at both primary and secondary level to have access to the billion dollars in infrastructure funds that only private schools get to use, so that we can create the proper learning environment for all students in the public school system.

Nationally the AEU is calling for an injection of $1.25 billion in capital funding for public schools, with an ongoing fund that matches the per student investment of the Commonwealth in private schools.

This fight for infrastructure funding fairness rides alongside our efforts to build on the first steps toward funding reform announced by the Minister last month.
We are still seeking the reinstatement in its own right of the four per cent that was absorbed into the state's share after previously being paid as an additional amount.

This four per cent was worth $230 million in 2023 to WA public school students.
The Cook Government needs to move forward urgently to direct funding where it is most needed and to fix public education.

The fight for fair funding is critical and ongoing, and one that will continue on all fronts.

General Agreement 2023

Schools:
As stated in the eNews sent to school members on 5 March, the SSTUWA has received an offer for a replacement General Agreement (Schools), which Executive has subsequently declined.

See page six for a detailed explanation of the enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) process.



Schools and TAFE:
The latest information on the schools and TAFE EBA negotiations will be circulated via **eNews** and **sstuwa.org.au**

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