Maintaining solidarity vital to success

Western Teacher volume 53.5 August 2024



One of the great things about the half-day action school members took on 23 April was the incredible sense of unity and commitment that shone through.

Whether in the crowd that filled the Matagarup Bridge from end to end, or at one of the regional rallies held across WA, from Esperance to Christmas Island, the people present will never forget it.

It also sent a clear message to the state government and resulted in a host of improvements to the offer.

The SSTUWA will need that same level of unity and commitment in the months ahead as we approach the state and federal elections to be held in the first half of 2025, or possibly later this year, with a clear call to action.

Education must be a central issue in election campaigns at both levels of government.

We know that our member engagement is as high as it has ever been.

Almost half of the eligible members voted in the ballot on the Agreement in Principle. It was a ballot that involved plenty of spirited debate.

Those discussions were conducted in a professional and vigorous way. There was plenty of passion and all of us who attended information sessions in workplaces across the state know there were those who felt particular issues had not been specifically addressed or needed more work.

That is a sentiment shared by your Executive and senior officers. We welcome the backing of 70 per cent of the membership for this agreement and respect the views of those who voted against – but it is only just the beginning.

It has been a long, long time since the SSTUWA, or any other public sector union, was able to engage in collective bargaining. Bargaining is just that; opening asks and offers, followed by negotiations over what can and cannot be achieved.

The collective part of the phrase means you cannot always get everything you want in every area. Sometimes this can lead individuals to focus on a particular element of the agreement that does not suit them personally.

All of that is understandable. In such bargaining though the focus has to be on achieving the best realistic outcome for the most people. Nor does it mean that issues where not all of our claims have been met will be forgotten.

We will be seeking member and community support around the issue of class sizes in particular. Members, both teachers and school leaders, will be essential in helping the SSTUWA secure the information it needs to track oversize classes throughout the public education system.

This will arm the union with the necessary additional information to tackle class sizes at the political level, seat by seat and MP by MP.

It will also empower our campaign to get the community engaged on this crucial issue. You will be hearing more about that in the coming weeks.
It is crucial to realise that general agreement negotiations do not happen in a vacuum.

The SSTUWA commissioned the *Facing the Facts* review of public education not just to start a community conversation, but to seek actual solutions to the problems that were identified.

The conversation is well underway. Without *Facing the Facts* there would have been no department review into red tape – a review which was pretty much in lockstep with the findings of Dr Carmen Lawrence and her panel.

The General Agreement has kickstarted the process of delivering crucial solutions in many areas identified by *Facing the Facts*. Nineteen specific items raised in Dr Lawrence's report were addressed in the Agreement in Principle.

There is plenty of work still to do and the SSTUWA will be directly engaging with community groups and other stakeholders who made submissions to *Facing the Facts* to continue lobbying for solutions to the issues facing public education.

We will continue to remind the state government that over and above the revised funding figures of 77.5 per cent from the state government and 22.5 per cent from the Commonwealth, WA schools still need the return of the extra four per cent that was folded into the state's figure in the previous agreement.

We will be closely monitoring the Workload Ministerial Taskforce to ensure it delivers proper results, not just digitised forms.

We will be working with the community to ensure a portion of the state's massive surplus is used to shrink WA class sizes whilst the improvements secured in the Agreement are monitored to make sure they are applied wherever they are required.

Our priority now is to make sure the Agreement is registered with the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission as soon as possible allowing for back pay and the claims and conditions to begin to flow to members.

The conversation and campaigning are just starting. I urge you to back us in these tasks and to maintain the solidarity we have witnessed to date in 2024, we will need to succeed.



By Matt Jarman
President

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
ABN 54 478 094 635 © 2026