Collaborative action our biggest strength

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Around 150 members, staff and speakers will gather for the second SSTUWA State Council Conference of 2024 on Friday and Saturday, 15-16 November.

This biannual event brings together the union's supreme decision-making body – and it is a key reason that for over 125 years the SSTUWA has been the only voice for educators in Western Australia's public education system both in schools and in TAFE.

This is because State Council sits at the top of a collaborative, democratic union that is directed by its members.

Yes, we have senior officers in day-to-day roles. Yes, we have an Executive Committee that meets regularly to review the work of the union and to ensure the agreed strategies of the SSTUWA are being carried out diligently.

Far more importantly though, we have a structure that gives our members a voice. This voice comes from union reps, deputy reps, women's contact officers and health and safety reps. It comes through workplace branches, it comes through District Councils and State Council Conference delegates, who then direct your Executive and senior officers.

This is crucially important because your voice is crucially important. Members will not always agree with every collective decision or action, that is inevitable. But they know how those positions have been reached – not dictated from above, but instead delivered by collaborative decision-making.

Such a process is absolutely fundamental to the successful advocacy on behalf of educators by the SSTUWA.

Collaborative action is also the absolute bedrock of fixing the issues that confront public education. This is the core, non-negotiable, belief of your union.

The only way to fix the broken parts of our system is by working together – at every level. From the teacher walking,

perhaps nervously, into a classroom for the first time, to the principal who has decades of experience in the role, to the Statewide Services members doing their best day to day, school to school.

The Facing the Facts report identified a system imposed on public schools in 2010 as generating increased isolation of schools and said this system, along with other policy changes “has steadily increased both the intensity and complexity of workloads, lowered morale, increased burnout and created an environment in which teachers feel undervalued and disrespected”.

In its inimitable style Facing the Facts did not stop at identifying the problems; it suggested solutions. What was required, it said, was identifying the key structural changes needed to improve the functioning of the school system in WA to achieve:

- Improved educational outcomes.
- Greater educational quality.
- Equity and probity in teacher and school leader selection and promotion.
- Accountability, including the use of funds for designated purposes.
- Better access to support services and curriculum resources.

That is a handy list of targets for everyone involved in public education. It is one to which the SSTUWA is absolutely committed.

Our road to achieving those goals is one in which collaboration across all levels is key. That is why the SSTUWA is offering targeted professional development opportunities to every member.

From first-year classroom teachers to the most experienced school leaders, the SSTUWA knows that an approach which encourages respect for colleagues and empathy with the challenges faced by different levels is the way forward to a better system in public education.

We need to ignore those who would divide the teaching profession into managers and workers. We are all educators. We all believe in the power of public education; it is our greatest strength and we have a responsibility to fight for it.

Target 27

I thank every member who has taken part so far in our campaign on class sizes – Target 27. At the core to this campaign is the undisputed fact WA has the largest classes sizes in the country and continues to record consecutive budget surpluses.

Every member who has come out to greet our mobile billboard, who has put up a poster, who has spread the word or who has completed our online form outlining the issues they are facing with oversized classes is ensuring that the debate on class sizes becomes too big for the politicians to ignore.

Federal funding

Nationally, federal funding negotiations are still very active. Whilst the ACT, WA and Tasmanian governments have signed deals taking them to 96 per cent of the Student Resource Standard (SRS) under the title of Better Fairer Schools Agreement, Victoria, NSW, South Australia and Queensland at this stage have not. (The NT has an agreement supported by the AEU). Members of the SSTUWA, and across the country as members of the AEU, should anticipate more in this space prior to the start of the new school year as these negotiations continue to escalate.



By Matt Jarman
President

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