Giving WA the education system it deserves



It may well be that we come to look back on 24 January 2025 as the most significant day in Australian public education – the day that over a decade of tireless campaigning by the Australian Education Union and the State School Teachers' Union of WA finally paid off.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced a new funding deal that delivers 25 per cent of funding through the Commonwealth government, as long as states contribute 75 per cent.

Most significantly of all, the PM said this: "Importantly this new agreement means accounting practices like capital depreciation can no longer be counted as education investment. Instead, every dollar of funding will go into helping children learn."

Read that quote and soak it in.

In January 2024 when WA entered a new agreement with the Commonwealth on funding it was declared that public schools would from then on be getting fully funded.

The SSTUWA continued to point out that such claims would be false as long as what used to be an additional four per cent in funding could still be counted as part of the state government's contribution. It was an accounting trick played on WA's public schools.

That numerical trickery is now a thing of the past.

The Premier of WA Roger Cook, on page 10 of this magazine, confirms that as a consequence of WA joining the new agreement announced by the Prime Minister, the state Labor government "will remove the Morrison Government provision that allowed the State to claim four per cent of public school funding for indirect school costs such as capital depreciation and replace it with four per cent of recurrent funding on eligible expenses, while also maintaining our 75 per cent share of the SRS for public schools".

Now *that* is full funding. That is Gonski.

The SSTUWA will be urging that the full funding plus the complete restoration of the four per cent is delivered at the earliest possible time, as befits the richest state in Australia, boasting the most successful economy.

Timing issues aside, we should not underestimate the significance of what has been achieved here.

As AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said in welcoming the new deal: “It is an absolute iron clad guarantee that our schools from now on will be receiving genuine funding every single year going forward.”

“It’s not contingent on an election, it’s not contingent on a commitment, but it upholds the Prime Minister’s election commitment that we would have a genuine pathway, and this agreement today has cemented that in.”

This announcement is a win for every SSTUWA member who has supported funding campaigns over the years since we first *Gave a Gonski* back in 2012, to those who backed the *For Every Child* campaign in 2024 – this is your triumph. It was all worthwhile.

Whether you came out to meet trucks and trailers carrying the full funding message, travelled to Canberra with us to talk to politicians, sent emails or postcards, joined social media campaigns or lobbied your state or federal MPs, every single one of you shares the credit for a crucial development in revitalising public education in Australia.

At the national level the work of Correna and her team must be saluted. They have persevered when progress looked impossible.

They have never wavered in their campaigning. This is the result they deserve.

Here in WA, the SSTUWA commissioned the *Facing the Facts* review to bring public education to the fore in community and political discussions.

We asked Dr Carmen Lawrence and her team to not just identify issues but to suggest practical solutions.

This additional funding will be crucial in delivering those solutions.

The results have been astonishing with the *Facing the Facts* report being used as a blueprint for the future of public education in Western Australia.

It is a blueprint that is sorely needed. As most people were doing their last-minute Christmas shopping, or packing the car for a well-earned holiday, a report into the Department of Education (DoE) by the Agency Capability Review program was released.

In the words of *The West Australian* newspaper the review was “scathing” and “revealed a litany of serious problems in the agency”.

The consequences of those serious problems were also identified – 5,200 teachers leaving the workforce in just three years.

Resignations per year have more than doubled since 2019, going from 604 to 1,263.

Frighteningly, but sadly not surprisingly, 61.2 per cent of those quitting were aged under 30.

At the other end of the scale retirements went up by 15 per cent between 2020 and 2023.

I would urge all teachers and school leaders to read the summary review – you can find a copy at bit.ly/40yGSi1

You may well get a sense of déjà vu as the findings are so close to those of the *Facing the Facts* review that they might well have been taken straight from the work of Dr Carmen Lawrence and her team.

The agency review findings highlight a range of issues, including the need for better strategies to address the ever-growing complex needs of students, tangible ways to address teacher workload, better cooperation across agencies and long-term solutions to the extra problems facing regional and remote educators.

The review also noted the failure to deal with the clear and obvious faults in the current Independent Public Schools system and a desperate need for more support for school leaders.

Yes, it is a list we are all familiar with.

Above all, the SSTUWA agrees with the need for a cohesive and cooperatively developed long term strategy to address the

sort of issues that have led to 5,200 educators leaving the system over the past three years.

Sadly, the simple fact is that the department's speciality has been generating reports, commissioning reviews and running consultation processes, then doing precisely nothing with the findings.

Is this the view of a biased union? No. Here is a direct quote from the agency review: "The agency has commissioned and invested significant resources in a number of reviews in recent years to strengthen its capability and capacity."

"However, because it has failed to embed many of the recommendations provided, it continues to encounter the challenges that these reviews were intended to address.

"The agency needs to actively consider implementing recommendations from these past reviews including the Statewide Services Form and Function Review and the Strategic Review of the WA Department of Education."

Now, with new and genuine full funding on the way, the SSTUWA is ready and committed to playing its part in developing a strategy.

Almost 18 months ago the *Facing the Facts* report said this in its forty-sixth and final recommendation: "To implement the recommendations suggested in this report a Change Management Steering Committee, led by the Director General and the President of the SSTUWA, should be established to develop an implementation plan, agreed milestones, a timeline and establish a resource approach."

We have a new director general at the department. We have the opportunity for a fresh start, the chance to develop a new approach, one where cooperation, transparency and collaboration are central to recognising that a succession of reports, including *Facing the Facts*, the department's own red tape review and now this agency review, cannot be ignored any longer.

Let's start the process of working together to deliver WA the public education system that people want and deserve by listening to the real experts – our public school teachers and leaders.



By Matt Jarman
President

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