Time has come for getting it done

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One of the SSTUWA's key strategic aims when commissioning the *Facing the Facts* review was to prompt greater debate about public education; to ensure politicians understood its importance and the community's support for public schools.

For far too long, public education was a footnote in public debate.

We were keenly aware that pretty much every election post-mortem, state or federal, cited education as a key issue for voters. The puzzling thing was that education barely featured in actual election campaigns.

It seemed a strange contradiction that public education – something impacting directly on the families of nearly half a million students in Western Australia alone – so rarely featured when parties were seeking government.

That needs to change. I am delighted to say that *Facing the Facts* delivered that change. One of WA's leading media outlets in January declared that this was an education election. All parties were suddenly making serious pledges to boost public education.

The SSTUWA delivered to all parties a list of what public education needed to thrive. Many of the items on that list have been ticked off.

The re-elected Labor government has promised an infrastructure fund of $286 million, including provision for new air conditioners in 45 schools – the start of a process for every public school.

There has also been a $104 million commitment to construct more than 100 additional two-bedroom, three-bedroom and four-bedroom GROH homes in regional WA.

TAFE has been promised $68 million for upgrades and new equipment and $58 million for courses focused on construction.

It would be churlish not to welcome those promises and we will work alongside the state government to ensure they are delivered.

A trial of free full-time, school-based Kindy for four-year-olds in 10 schools is also on the way, with the SSTUWA publicly stating the importance of being part of this trial's development.

However, this is just the beginning. There has been an awful habit in WA over many years of always focusing on infrastructure, with far too little attention paid to people.

The SSTUWA has earned some significant wins for members through the 2023 General Agreement process.

We've seen pay rises of nine per cent thus far, with more to come. We have established the Workload Ministerial Taskforce. We have secured a shift from local to district allowances delivering thousands of dollars a year extra to many regional educators.

The process for senior teachers reducing their workload and getting proper recompense is well underway. Many members are anticipating the chance to have a safety net of guaranteed return while they try being a Level 3.3 Classroom Teacher or a principal in the regions.

Class size reduction is well and truly on the government's radar.

We have seen further success in ensuring public education was a key issue in the state election. Working with the AEU we have also had a major breakthrough with the federal government on school funding.

Now it is time to ensure we put people first.

We need to work with the department and government to address the multiple issues raised in the state's own agency review.

We especially need to make this a people-first process.

Let's remove the complications for educators; let's get back to basics so teachers can teach and leaders can lead.

Let's strip away the myths of independent public schools and deliver real autonomy in the areas that truly matter at a school level.

Let's restore the respect teachers, school leaders and the profession deserves.

Above all, let's include teachers and leaders in the discussions about the system and directives which impacts, above all else, on them and their workplaces.

If employers respect teachers enough to take their expertise on board, then the community will follow that example.

The SSTUWA knows that involving frontline staff in shaping policy actually works because that is the way we developed our own strategy – one which has delivered a multitude of wins in the General Agreement process, as well as*Facing the Facts*, which is now a road map for fixing public education.

I am hopeful that under new leadership the department has recognised that the shortfalls listed first in*Facing the Facts*, then in the department's own red tape report and ultimately in the agency review need urgent action, not the procrastination the old department was criticised for in that agency review.

We know what the problems are. We have identified many of the solutions. Let's get this done.



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