Restoring respect

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The SSTUWA is taking steps to encourage parents and other school community members to assist in restoring respect in schools.

The 2025 SSTUWA State of our Schools survey has found that 84 per cent of our members have considered quitting in the past four years.

That's from respondents who have stayed in the job. Over 5,000 educators actually left the workforce across a three-year period from 2020-2023. Over 60 per cent of those were young teachers – the very future of education.

Among respondents to our survey, almost 70 per cent of those who had considered quitting cited a lack of respect for the teaching profession as being a key reason.

There are other contributing factors including burnout and workload – but those need government action to solve.

There are encouraging signs, including the Minister for Education Sabine Winton appointing a new chair of the Ministerial Workload Taskforce with clear directions to get the taskforce delivering substantive action as soon as possible.

Meanwhile we think parents and the employer can directly help with the respect issue.

As one member responding to our survey put it:

I pity the new teachers who join the profession. The lack of respect to teachers and the teachers having to manage uncontrolled behaviour rather than teaching in the classroom is a deplorable situation.

Another said:

Parental expectations and lack of parental support for the work that we do is the main reason I am considering leaving the profession. I feel very unsupported by parents – they are too quick to question the skill and decisions of teachers. A total lack of respect that is then passed on to their children. This has been a huge change of the course of my 35+ year career.

We know the vast majority of parents quietly support teachers and school leaders. Unfortunately, there is a growing number who seem unable to interact with teachers politely.

They don't discuss issues rationally. They resort to abuse and even violence.

"...it just might be that your children's behaviour is the issue, not the teacher's."

No level of frustration justifies verbally or physically attacking a teacher or a school leader.

It is worth remembering that while parental concerns about a child are understandable, they are often just one of many that a teacher is educating every day.

Western Australian may have the biggest economy in the country, but it still has the biggest class sizes, too.

While parents are worrying about one child, teachers are often dealing with many in a single class who require extra attention for a variety of reasons. One member told us at State Council that they have over 20 students on individual documented plans in a single class.

It doesn't help when politicians accuse teachers of indoctrination or target specific aspects of schooling that don't suit their

political viewpoints.

During the recent federal election campaign, a politician aspiring to lead this country accused teachers of indoctrinating students. That's a tactic we have seen before, but from a fringe right wing party, not one actively seeking government.

The SSTUWA is calling for a united community effort to bring respect back into schools. We are going to start that process ourselves and we would love to get government buy-in to support us.

Respect is one simple and effective way to help boost teacher morale and retain experienced staff.

If we can foster respect then it will, over time, improve behaviour. It will reduce violence and will lead to better outcomes for students, parents and teachers alike.

Respect is only one part of the solution, but it is one we can address immediately with long-term benefits.

I know it's an old adage, but treat people as you would like to be treated.

The message we are sending to parents is straightforward: please engage with teachers respectfully. Your kids are watching and learning from you.

- Respect the fact that teachers are not available outside working hours.
- Respect teachers on Facebook, WhatsApp groups and other social media channels.
- Respect teachers in front of your children.
- Respect the fact that it just might be that your children's behaviour is the issue, not the teacher's.

We are also asking parents who see others who are not showing respect to please quietly call it out. Doing so can make a real difference to a teacher's day and that in turn can have a long-term impact on public education for your child – and everyone else's.

We hope that if we give parents the information they need then most will be happy to bring respect back into schools.

We have produced a poster that members can print off at work.

We then want these posters in every public area to spread the message that respect is vital in starting to improve behaviour in schools.

We were delighted that the Minister, along with the Director General of the Department of Education Jay Peckitt, endorsed the posters at State Council.

I applaud the Minister's comments to delegates that she wanted to look at what more the department could do to ensure a safe working environment.

"Staff seem to be constantly under attack, particularly on social media, often with no meaningful way of defending themselves," she said.

"As a system, we need to look at how else we can support principals and schools to deal with the barrage of complaints and destructive criticism coming their way."

The Minister also said she was aware of the additional pressures that were distracting teachers from the work they actually wanted to do, and that better communication was needed between the Department of Education and schools to help make the above happen.

Members, you can participate by printing out the posters and putting them up in your classroom or anywhere that parents gather in schools. Find at sstuwa.org.au/RESPECT

Help us take a small step in the right direction.



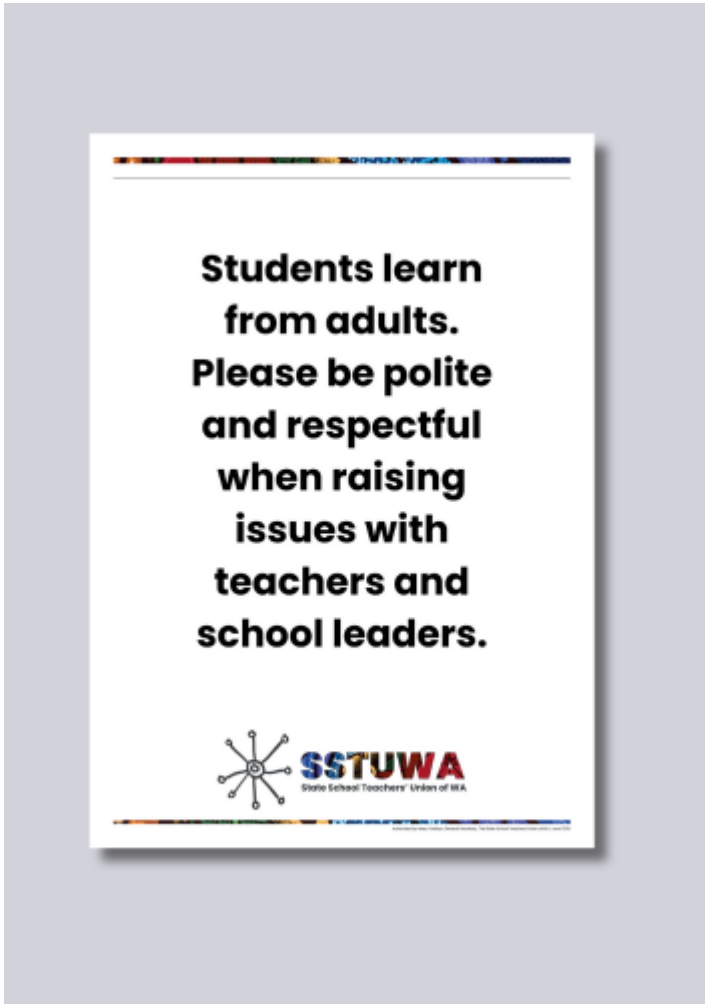
By Matt Jarman
President

What you can do:

>> Pull out the poster on pages 18-19 of *Western Teacher*, or

>> Download the poster from sstuwa.org.au/RESPECT and print it out at work.

>> Put up the poster in your classroom and wherever parents congregate.



Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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