Strategic approach delivers budget wins

Whilst the SSTUWA may never be fully happy and will always seek more for public education, there is reason to be satisfied with the re-elected Cook Government's budget.

Your union commenced a long-term strategy when Dr Carmen Lawrence and her team were appointed to undertake what became the *Facing the Facts* review into public education.

Even though public schools educate nearly three-quarters of primary pupils and over two-thirds of secondary students, public education was often missing in action when it came to election campaigning. The contradiction was that in pretty much every post-mortem of campaigns, education was cited as a top priority by voters.

This contradiction needed to be addressed and *Facing the Facts* was the answer. The review was conducted rigorously; submissions came from a range of community groups and crucially were dominated by people with experience in the classroom.

This resulted in a detailed review that did not just list problems, but suggested properly researched and carefully crafted solutions.

Facing the Facts looked at the errors of the past but most crucially of all put forward detailed plans to address them. The review prompted the Department of Education to initiate its own study. Perhaps it was intended to undermine *Facing the Facts*, but instead it underlined every finding. There was now no denying the crisis facing public education.

This was not an easy process. It involved focusing on negatives so we could seek out the positive alternatives. It also required assessing the community's views on public education. This qualitative and quantitative research gave us the evidence we needed to show politicians just how important public education was to voters.

This review and research culminated in lobbying documents – Facing Facts – which clearly identified the paths that whomever wished to govern in WA should follow if they had a genuine interest in fixing public education. One was produced for schools and another for TAFE.

The results have been spectacular – and we are not done yet!

In the state budget there are specific commitments for infrastructure. The SSTUWA asked for a fully-funded replacement program for evaporative air conditioning units in all schools. The state budget includes $93.8 million for the first part of a program to upgrade air conditioning in 45 schools, the first part of the program to address issues in **all** schools.

We devoted an entire section of our budget submission to Government Regional Officer Housing (GROH). The budget delivered $103.8 million to deliver more GROH. (To read more on GROH, turn to page eight.) We lobbied hard on the increasing demands made on the School of Isolated and Distance Education. With an extra $30.3 million now attributed to that area we hope it assists a sector that is facing ever-increasing demand from pupils whose schools do not have specialised teachers available.

The SSTUWA asked for a focus on groups that need extra assistance, whether because of medical, behavioural, cultural or economic disadvantage. A number of budget commitments have responded, at least in part, with extra targeted funding that includes increased support for students with disability, more funding for pupils with English as an additional language or dialect and additional investment for the School of Special Educational Needs.

Right back to the SSTUWA's TAFE Works campaign of a decade ago we have urged governments to recognise the crucial role the institution has to play in supporting WA's economy.

That campaign, driven by our TAFE members, has had an enormous legacy. From the verge of being dismantled TAFE is now fully acknowledged by the state government as a key economic tool.

We will always want more, especially around lecturers' working conditions and addressing the issues we see develop

among school students but which then come into TAFE.

However, the $331 million committed to TAFE this year is acknowledged.

There is still an enormous amount of work to be done. We are only beginning the battle to restore respect for the teaching profession. We need clarity about full-time kindy, which Senior Vice President Natalie Blewitt discusses on page 11.

Above all we need a clear and targeted use of any new investment delivered from the federal and state governments' deal to deliver full funding to WA's public schools.

This needs to be done within a properly developed strategic plan – like the one we have followed from the inception of *Facing the Facts*. It requires full and proper consultation and above all, actual implementation of investment and plans. The SSTUWA is ready to do our part.



By Matt Jarman
President

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