Collective action the way forward

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The first green shoots of recovery in Western Australia's public education system are being seen and the SSTUWA believes the way to maintain that sense of improvement and optimism is in a cooperative way.

Full funding, including the return of the four per cent tax on public schools, is underway; perhaps too slowly, but at least the process has begun.

We are seeing a genuine commitment from the Minister for Education to workload reduction via the Ministerial Workload Taskforce.

But the 120 per cent increase since 2020 of teacher resignations, as reported by the Department of Education (DoE) in its 2024/25 Annual Report, provides a timely reminder to government as to how far we still need to go until public educators feel a difference is being made.

Intense and long-term lobbying by the SSTUWA saw a genuine discussion of education-related issues in the 2025 state election campaign, with that being reflected in the re-elected Cook Government's subsequent state budget across areas ranging from air conditioning replacement, a trial of full service schools, increased funding for maintenance, guaranteed fee-free TAFE and extra (but not yet nearly enough) funding for Government Regional Officer Housing (GROH).

More subtle, but just as important, has been the recognition across government of how intricately linked education outcomes are with health and wellbeing.

I would suggest the roots of these more promising developments are linked to the findings of *Facing the Facts*.

The review, commissioned by the SSTUWA and carried out with a crucial commitment to independence by Dr Carmen Lawrence and her team, has been the absolute blueprint for promising improvements to public education.

As DoE Director General Jay Peckitt wrote to the SSTUWA recently, *"Facing the Facts: A Review of Public Education in Western Australia* report provides a valuable opportunity to strengthen public education".

The great strength of *Facing the Facts* was that it sought input not only from the real experts, those working in our schools, but also from across the community.

The long list of peak bodies and community organisations that made written submissions to *Facing the Facts* included the WA Primary Principals' Association (WAPPA), WA Secondary School Executives Association and the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations (WACSSO).

The submissions were detailed and in keeping with the report looked to make positive suggestions, not just list criticisms.

Constructive engagement with these organisations has followed. We will always have areas where our points of view diverge, but one belief we do share completely is that a better public education system will be produced by cooperation and collaboration rather than through division and empire building.

Sadly, the partly ego-driven approach we fell into a decade ago has, as the recent Agency Capability Review into the DoE said, led to a "lack of clarity about the difference between autonomy and being autonomous".

What we have learned from those experiments is that a collegiate approach to the issues facing public education is by far the most successful way to achieve change and improvement.

When SSTUWA members marched across WA on 23 April 2024, delivering a massively improved government offer on our General Agreement, it was incredible to see parents out there alongside and supporting teachers and school leaders.

There was also considerable support from WAPPA members even though they faced extra challenges leading schools that day.

We have also seen significant contributions by WACSSO members in the fight for full funding.

I am pleased to announce that we have agreed with WAPPA and WACSSO on five key principles to follow in a mutually supportive campaign to keep driving positive change in public education.

These embrace focused funding on key areas, a collaborative and supportive approach to restoring respect for teaching, teachers and school leaders, continued lobbying for the speeding up of the delivery of full funding and combined lobbying in areas such as GROH and workload reduction to retain the teachers and school leaders we have and attract the best people into teaching.

I agree with the words of Mr Peckitt: “Constructive engagement will be essential as we work together to address the challenges and opportunities outlined in the report [*Facing the Facts*] and shape a stronger, more sustainable future for WA public education.”

Collegiate, collective action is the way forward, otherwise we may witness the teacher resignation rate continuing to climb.



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President

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