

DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS — REMOVAL OF SENIOR SCHOOL ALLOCATION

Statement

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [5.56 pm]: In the very brief time remaining, I want to make a couple of points that I had intended to make by way of a contribution to the debate on the excellent motion moved earlier today by Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm about the removal of the senior school allocation of funding for years 11 and 12 courses at district high schools. Reading report 27 of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, the thing that concerned me above all else was that when the government was asked to say what options would remain for those students whose courses were effectively being defunded at district high schools, it said that three options were available to students. There were four, but I will come to that in a moment. The three options that the Minister for Education identified were as follows. The first was to attend boarding school. When I read that, I thought it was remarkably like the comment made by then Premier Richard Court at the end of the last century or maybe around the year 2000 when the Liberal government at the time made baby capsules in cars compulsory. It was pointed out to the government that the cost of a baby capsule was around \$75. I clearly remember the Premier saying that if any parent could not afford \$75 for a baby capsule, they should not have children.

Hon Norman Moore: Have you got some evidence that that's what he said?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am sure I can find the quote.

Hon Norman Moore: I'd like to see that.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I have very little time. Let us come back to this. I promise the Leader of the House that that is exactly what the former Premier said.

The first option the government suggested was to attend boarding school, the second option was to catch a bus to the nearest senior high school and the third option was to effectively undertake distance education. As I said, a further option was canvassed by the minister. That was for students to remain at their local district high school. That option was very quickly debunked by the principals of many of those schools during the inquiry conducted by the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations. They said that the courses simply would not be run after they had been defunded. That was removed as an option.

Let us go back to the first two options—to attend boarding school, or to catch a bus to the nearest senior high school. I draw the attention of honourable members to the chart on pages 21 and 22 of this report, where the distances between the nearest senior high school and the affected district high schools are listed. We read in the report that the distances to the nearest senior high school are in the order of 100 kilometres, 70 kilometres, 90 kilometres, and 103 kilometres; Corrigin is 118 kilometres, Wyalkatchem is 104 kilometres and Jurien Bay District High School is 118 kilometres. That reminded me that this week we saw the production of an excellent report titled “National Survey of Young Australians 2010” by Mission Australia. One of the key issues that Mission Australia found to affect young people in Australia today is stress. The numbers are quite alarming, but they are broken down into figures for Western Australia. They indicate that the number of young Western Australians reporting stress as a major factor in their lives is in the order of 25.5 per cent—that is, a quarter of all young people. The figures are much higher when they are broken down into smaller age ranges. We find that almost 29 per cent of people aged 15 to 19 years of age report stress as a major issue in their lives.

I turn to a quote in the committee report in which a principal said —

There is no bus run available and the journey would not comply with policies governing student bus travel time. Having students travel out of town means they miss out on part-time jobs and community sport activities, feel dislocated from their community as well as the exhaustion from excessive travelling periods.